

Govt reviews pacts for US def tech

Deals, Which UPA Rejected, May Give Access To Cutting-Edge Tech

New Delhi: The NDA government is now once again re-examining the two other “foundational agreements” being pushed by the US for over 15 years now, after inking the bilateral military logistics pact in 2016, in a sharp departure from the previous UPA regime that had rejected them.

India and the US will hold fresh discussions on the two pacts — Communications Compatibility and Security Arrangement (COMCASA) and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation (BECA) — at a meeting here on Thursday and Friday.

“The defence ministry is seriously re-examining COMCASA and BECA, and will do a cost-benefit analysis to fully understand the technical implications involved. The US says inking the pacts will allow India more access to cut-

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ting-edge military technologies and platforms with encrypted and secure communications like armed drones,” said a source.

India has for long been interested in acquiring armed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) like MQ-9 Reaper or Predator-B drones, which fly like fighter jets to fire missiles

on enemy targets and then return to their bases to re-arm for next mission, from the US.

But the two countries so far have held formal discussions only on the possible sale of 22 unarmed Sea Guardians, which are high-altitude, long-endurance drones capable of flying non-stop for over 27 hours for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions, at an estimated cost of \$2 billion.

“The US recently announced its new policy on export of armed/unarmed drones to friendly countries. If India at all decides to acquire such expensive drones, then they obviously would be the armed ones rather than ones

used just for reconnaissance,” said the source. The US contends COMCASA is a “technology enabler” to help transfer high-tech avionics, encrypted communication and electronic systems to India as well as ensure secrecy of its C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) systems from leaking to other countries like Russia.

But India has so far been hesitant to ink the pact, despite having bought military hardware and software worth \$15 billion from the US, as there are fears the use of American C4ISR systems could enable the US to keep track of Indian warships and aircraft.