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U.S.-India Maritime Security Cooperation

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Findings of the Track II Dialogue on Accelerating the Momentum of Defense and Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, Washington, D.C. April 24, 2019

No area of United States-India defense cooperation holds more promise than maritime cooperation. India is increasingly concerned about the Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean, particularly when viewed through the prism of China's steady escalation of tensions in the South China Sea. Both the United States and India are critical responders in the region in case of humanitarian disasters. Both nations are active in counterpiracy initiatives in the Indian Ocean. The United States is a natural partner in helping India to expand its technological and planning capabilities; deepening this partnership will help the United States share the burden with India, reducing the strain on U.S. forces.

Despite the historical roadblocks to deepening defense cooperation that exist in both the United States and India, recent progress has been striking. The two nations established a baseline set of shared maritime security principles in the 2015 "Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean Region." Recent agreements such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the renewed Defense Framework Agreement, and the Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) are important markers of progress. The expanded Malabar naval exercises and the announcement of a new bilateral tri-services exercise are tangible outcomes of the deepening partnership. As former defense minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated, defense cooperation has become "the most significant dimension of our strategic partnership and as a key driver of our overall bilateral relationship."

With support from the Boeing Company, the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Delhi Policy Group convened a series of five videoconference meetings among experts from both nations over many months, followed by a one-day concluding workshop on these issues in Washington, D.C.

on April 24, 2019. The event brought together public and private-sector experts to look at the pathways and impediments to expanding defense cooperation. After the discussions, the participants offered the following policy recommendations to the U.S. and Indian governments. Following the structure of the workshop, the recommendations are divided into three sections: defense and security challenges, in-theater operational cooperation, and defense trade and technology cooperation.

Section I: Defense and Security Challenges in the Indo-Pacific

Participants agreed that the Indo-Pacific faces serious security challenges that include humanitarian, governance, and, most critically, coercive, elements that affect all in the region. They also noted that these challenges cannot be tackled by any one country and will require a cooperative approach that is not limited to a security architecture but also includes political, diplomatic, military, and economic cooperation.

The participants articulated shared concerns about China's steady escalation of tensions in the South China Sea, and its implications for the rapidly expanding Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). They argued that given China's focus on blue water areas beyond its neighboring seas, a coercive challenge from China already has emerged in the IOR. They agreed that the United States and India do not have a joint structure to address such a coercive challenge. There needs to be a new structure that integrates the strategic, policy, and working-level engagement between both countries.

Participants also emphasized the areas of opportunity for collaboration between the United States and India in the Western Indian Ocean. Although they recognized that both countries define the geography of the Indo-Pacific differently, U.S. observers pointed out that despite this lack of alignment on geography, the United States does engage in the Western Indian Ocean from a Pacific vantage point. They referenced the deployment of naval troops to the Middle East, which often come from San Diego, rather than Norfolk, as a sign that the United States logistically engages this area from the Pacific. Participants agreed that, despite these opportunities and shared concerns, the United States and India are not coordinating thematically, and that there is a need for a comprehensive approach from both countries toward this region.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- The governments of the United States and India need to craft a broad and comprehensive architecture for the Indian Ocean and the broader Indo-Pacific region to manage the coercive challenges emanating from an increasingly aggressive China and its proxies in the Indo-Pacific. Such a structure should look beyond the governance and humanitarian issues, focusing on challenges such as terrorism, underwater and underground cables, pipelines, sea lines of communication, and freedom of navigation, and take into account gray zone threats from a growing Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean.
- The governments of the United States and India should deepen intelligence cooperation focused on the Indian Ocean. There is a need to overcome existing bottlenecks and develop an effective mechanism that can leverage the CENTRIX system loaned to the Indian Navy and used by the combined maritime forces within the Fifth Fleet, or the Asia-Pacific Intelligence Network that facilitates the exchange of finished intelligence products.
- India and the United States should take advantage of existing groups that promote maritime security cooperation. India has observer status at the Western Pacific Naval Symposium and should consider extending a similar observer status to the United States at the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium. Moreover, India should consider joining the South East Asia Cooperation and Training Exercise as an observer, where it can experiment and test standard operating procedures for maritime domain awareness (MDA).

- The Indian Navy and the United States Navy should craft a memorandum of understanding establishing an institutional relationship between both navies. Such an institutional relationship should be further enhanced by the creation of an MDA working group that includes relevant staff at all levels. The institutional relationship also can include education and training, codevelopment and acquisition of underwater domain awareness, and joint acoustic processing.
- The governments of the United States and India should jointly plan and design tabletop exercises that are aimed at sharing capabilities and monitoring sea lines of communication into and out of the Indian Ocean. Other tabletop exercises can be designed to deal with possible threats and challenges across the conflict spectrum, including potential closure of sea lines of communication.
- Both governments should make strengthening the capacity and capability of littoral nations a key focus for their future collaboration. Such collaboration can be focused on developing effective mechanisms for inter-state cooperation on maritime law enforcement in domestic zones in the Indian Ocean. Opportunities for planning and exercises around Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) exist particularly with South East Asia, as it offers Indonesia, Myanmar, and other countries in the region a comfort level for engagement.

Section II: Areas of “In Theater” Operational Cooperation

Participants agreed that the emerging power balance in Asia over the next ten years will be defined by growing competition between the United States and China, particularly as it intensifies over coming years. They noted that China sees the period up to 2030 as a strategic opportunity to create a Sino-centric Asia through military and technological domination.

Participants emphasized that a key focus for China is to break out of its continental constraints and become a global power with a blue-water capability. The Indo-Pacific region faces serious, persistent threats that include humanitarian, governance, and, most seriously, coercive challenges.

Given this context, the participants articulated how emerging competition with China would be focused in the maritime domain. They shared concerns about repeated forays of People’s Liberation Army Navy offensive platforms like submarines, including nuclear attack submarines, into the Indian Ocean; the likely presence of a Chinese carrier battle group in the Indian Ocean as early as 2021; and China’s headway in securing access points and cultivating partnerships in the region. Participants pointed to China’s progress in exploiting rising aspirations of states in the region by using economic tools and agreed that the United States and India needed to make long-term political, financial, and military commitments in the region to compete effectively.

Participants said that the United States and India should cooperate on MDA and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). On MDA, they called for greater intelligence sharing and geospatial cooperation, negotiation of White Shipping Agreements, and collaboration on underwater domain awareness. They recognized the importance of concluding a Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) for deeper MDA cooperation. They also emphasized the need for both countries to maintain a dissuasive operational presence and effective logistics support in the region in order to facilitate a synergized response. The participants noted that the goal of such cooperation should be a combined qualitative military edge in the maritime domain.

Participants recognized the need for both countries to build reliability and overcome political pressures. One way forward would be to take advantage of established mechanisms for navy-to-navy cooperation, as well create new ones. New mechanisms should build on precedent, particularly reestablishing exercises

that have been discontinued and focusing missions on areas identified in India's National Maritime Strategy of 2015. The participants noted that although the United States-India navy-to-navy relationship is relatively new, it has achieved much in a short time and that there remains abundant future opportunity. They reiterated that the focus should be on convincing Beijing that the United States-India relationship will counter China's coercive ambitions in the Indo-Pacific, particularly if those ambitions resemble those in the South China Sea and present revisionist challenges to a rules-based order.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- The governments of the United States and India should update and expand a list of in-theater exercises and operations. These can include a bi-annual HA/DR exercise, the first of which would be a Non-Combat Evacuation Operations exercise, and the second would be an HA/DR operation to bring medical, material, and humanitarian aid for disaster relief. Both countries also should define combined patrols to interdict illicit weapons systems in the IOR and bring India into ongoing exercises such as the Cutlass Express to counter illegal fishing in the region.
- India and the United States should conduct high-end exercises as a means of strategic signaling and optics. Such exercises should enhance U.S.-India defense cooperation in the Indian Ocean in maritime security, counterterrorism, counterpiracy, and humanitarian assistance and should expand the geographic scope of Malabar to include joint military activities between relevant U.S. commands and the Indian military in the Western Indian Ocean. Both countries also should consider launching a new amphibious exercise involving France and Australia in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) or U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) areas of responsibility.
- The governments of the United States and India should consider relaunching bilateral naval exercises held between both countries before Malabar, such as those on HA/DR, diving and salvage operations, explosive ordnance disposal, amphibious and submarine rescue exercises. Both countries should plan exercises on missions and tasks identified in India's National Maritime Strategy, such as MDA and anti-submarine warfare.
- The governments of the United States and India should jointly pre-position HA/DR supplies, as well as launch a bilateral HA/DR working group to deepen coordination on planning, common doctrine, and standard operating procedures.
- The government of India should consider negotiating a memorandum of understanding between Pacific Fleet (PACFLT) and the appropriate counterpart Indian operational fleet to build an institutional and operational relationship. Such a relationship would include networking existing maritime operations, such as the Indian Fusion Center-Indian Ocean Region to the combined maritime forces and U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT), as well as appropriate counterparts in Singapore, Hawaii, and U.S. Naval Forces Europe (NAVEUR).
- Both governments should employ international liaison officers in a more robust manner. India should place a liaison officer in PACFLT and host a U.S. liaison officer at the Indian Fusion Center-Indian Ocean Region.
- The United States government should consider establishing an Indian Ocean Squadron based in the U.S. military base at Diego Garcia or expanding the Fifth Fleet to assume responsibility for the entire Indian Ocean. A secondary option is for both the United States and India to establish a Joint Task Force-Indian Ocean Region that is based at Diego Garcia or another mutually agreed location.
- The governments of India and the United States should ensure more robust MDA coordination by leveraging the logistics cooperation agreements that India has signed to expand the reach of

reconnaissance assets. Such coordination should include joint or coordinated patrols using the P-8I Neptune advanced maritime patrol/anti-submarine warfare platform. India also should deepen MDA cooperation with France and Australia, which would involve sharing assets, information, and operating bases.

- Both governments should focus on strengthening the capacity and capability of littoral nations. Such collaboration can develop effective mechanisms for inter-state cooperation on maritime law enforcement in domestic jurisdictions in the Indian Ocean. Opportunities for planning and exercises around HA/DR exist, particularly with South East Asia.

Section III: Defense Trade and Technology Cooperation

Participants agreed that significant progress has been made in concluding defense-related enabling agreements. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), and the Communications, Compatibility, and Security Agreement (COMCASA) already have been signed and are being operationalized. The participants emphasized the need for early progress on the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) and the Industrial Security Annex (ISA). They also noted significant purchases by India, such as military transport aircraft, helicopters, maritime patrol aircraft, assault rifles, and potential future acquisitions of drones, fighter jets, and naval utility helicopters from the United States. However, participants also noted that the United States and India needed to go beyond just a buyer-seller or a transactional relationship to ensure strategic and tactical alignment.

The participants stressed the importance of the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) as a mechanism. They noted that despite the previous impasse over trade preceding technology for the United States and technology transfer being a pre-requisite for India, there seems to now be an understanding to promote joint manufacturing and codevelopment, which would make DTTI the most functional mechanism and a silent enabler of the United States-India defense relationship. Participants cited the Aircraft Carrier Technology Joint Working Group and the joint working group on naval systems as the model for future cooperation. They also noted the success of these working groups, such as the approval of radars for the light combat aircraft and operationalization of the Indigenous Aircraft Carrier I (IAC-1).

Participants recognized differing perceptions on technology and trade. They noted that the United States believed that the creation of a “major defense partnership” and the DTTI should give the U.S. industry preferential treatment on acquisitions, and that defense trade would be a significant part of the strategic relationship. India, on the other hand, expected that it would get access to major packages of technology and that interoperability would mean a military manifestation of political intent to work together rather than just purchasing common platforms. The DTTI should not be regarded as merely providing a privileged route for Indian acquisitions from U.S. industry. The participants underscored that overcoming these impediments and coming up with a set of common operating principles in defense trade and technology will be crucial to moving the relationship forward.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- The governments of the United States and India should deepen ongoing efforts under DTTI. In particular, collaboration on the domain-based working groups, namely the Land Systems, Naval Systems, and Air Systems working groups, should be deepened since they have been making practical suggestions for future cooperation. The DTTI could consider long-term projects in intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISTAR), vertical lift enabling technology, and advanced technology for ground combat vehicles.

- The governments of the United States and India should begin to discuss strategic technologies that have been banned, such as antisubmarine warfare, potentially leading to cooperation on nuclear propulsion technology, areas where India has had to look elsewhere.
- Following the signing of foundational agreements, DTTI should work to equip already-delivered P-8I maritime reconnaissance aircraft or C-130 military transport aircraft with technology that was not available to India on initial delivery because the foundational agreements were not yet signed.
- The governments of the United States and India should create a best practices guide on defense trade and technology cooperation under DTTI, based on project experiences. Such a guide should be offered to private defense companies in both countries, particularly after the signing of the Industrial Security Annex, thereby bolstering DTTI's industry-to-industry framework, especially DTTI's Industry Advisory Committee.
- The governments of the United States and India should expand the defense cooperation and trade presence in their embassies in New Delhi and Washington, D.C. Higher levels of day-to-day engagement from both countries should lead these offices to facilitate conclusion of pending agreements and initiatives.
- India should develop a strategy on defense acquisition that prioritizes the purchase and induction of enabling technologies such as sensor technologies, deep-sea networks, and multiple, independently targetable reentry vehicles to tackle key operational challenges. This path is preferable to a strategy of incremental modernization, which involves acquiring and integrating platforms over time and is too time-intensive given the challenges India faces.
- India and the United States should institutionalize military-to-military training opportunities for Indian personnel whenever India purchases U.S. platforms, particularly by deputing Indian personnel to embed with their counterparts in the United States. One key opportunity is the acquisition of the MH-60 Seahawk helicopter, with Indian pilots training alongside U.S. MH-60 Romeo teams.

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