



INDIA USA FOUNDATIONAL AGREEMENTS

Four Foundational Agreements

Context

- India and the US signed the Basic Exchange Cooperation Agreement (BECA) on the occasion of the third '2+2' in-person meet held between the Indian and US foreign and defence ministers in New Delhi.

Background

- India-US defence ties predate the strategic congruence that became evident after the Jaswant Singh-Strobe Talbott dialogue in the late 1990s, followed by President Clinton's visit to India in 2000.
- In fact, they go back to efforts to develop defence technology ties during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure between 1984-1989.



1 GSOMIA General Security of Military Information Agreement

- It was the first of the foundational agreements to be signed in 2002 during the visit of Defence Minister George Fernandes to Washington DC.
- It guaranteed that the two countries would protect any classified information or technology that they shared.
- It was aimed at promoting interoperability and laid the foundation for future US arms sales to the country.



2 LEMOA Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement

- It was signed in August 2016.
- LEMOA allows the militaries of the US and India to replenish from each other's bases, and access supplies, spare parts and services from each other's land facilities, air bases, and ports, which can then be reimbursed.
- To put the usefulness of this agreement in simple terms, it is like being able to stop at a friend's garage or workshop to refuel your car or get it repaired when you are far away from your own home or workshop.
- The signing of LEMOA was in itself an affirmation of the mutual trust between the two militaries, and its application will enhance the trust.
- While India had indeed provided ad hoc logistics support to the US in the past — such as allowing the refuelling of American aircraft in Bombay during the first Gulf War in 1991, and letting US warships visit Indian ports during the war on terror after 9/11— the signing of LEMOA has institutionalised this process and made it smoother.



3 COMCASA Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement

- It was signed in September 2018, after the first 2+2 dialogue.
- The pact allows the US to provide India with its encrypted communications equipment and systems so that Indian and US military commanders, aircraft and ships, can communicate through secure networks during both peace and war.
- Again, to take a simple example, it's like being able to exchange messages or communicate with a friend on WhatsApp, Signal, or Telegram in real time and in a secure manner.
- It facilitates "interoperability" between their forces — and potentially with other militaries that use US-origin systems for secure data links.
- Because of the lack of this agreement, India had operated the US-made C-17s, C-130s and P-8I's with commercially available systems for nearly half a decade.



4 BECA Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement

- The BECA facilitates the provision of targeting and navigation information from US systems.
- It will help India get real-time access to American geospatial intelligence that will enhance the accuracy of automated systems and weapons like missiles and armed drones.
- But, of course, having the data by itself doesn't guarantee accuracy; missile navigation systems must also be able to use this highly accurate data.
- Through the sharing of information on maps and satellite images, it will help India access topographical and aeronautical data, and advanced products that will aid in navigation and targeting.
- Besides the sailing of ships, flying of aircraft, fighting of wars, and location of targets, geospatial intelligence is also critical to the response to natural disasters.



Analysis

- The strengthening of the mechanisms of cooperation between the two militaries must be seen in the context of an increasingly aggressive China.
- With these key defence pacts in place, cooperation between the US and India can take place in a more structured and efficient way, rather than in episodic bursts.
- In themselves the agreements are fairly routine and should not be over-hyped.
- They are really about building trust and setting the trajectory for future relations. They are not the end, but the means to get there.
- As of now, all of them would enable cooperation and exchange in a range of sensitive area, but they do not obligate the two countries to provide or service a particular requirement.
- Also, it needs to be pointed out that in all the agreements except LEMOA, the traffic is really one way, i.e. from the US to India.
- India has to worry that by synchronising its systems with those of the US, it will enable Washington to enter its decision-making loop, something that no sovereign country would like.
- These foundational agreements are a product of the American bureaucratic culture and it is particular in ensuring that they all fall into a legal framework.
- US is not obliged to provide any technology that India wants under GSOMIA, neither will it have any obligation to provide geospatial data in every circumstance.
- Likewise, of course, India may not necessarily provide logistics facilitation to US vessels, were they to be involved in a war against, say for the sake of discussion, Iran.
- What these agreements do is to provide a trajectory which may lead somewhere, in this case, a India-US military alliance.
- However, it is undeniable that there is a lot of room for cooperation even short of a formal alliance.