Obama and Singh pledge major increase in US-Indian military-strategic ties

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Following their White House meeting last Friday, President Barack Obama and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh vowed that the US and India will greatly enhance their "comprehensive global strategic partnership," especially geopolitical, security, and military cooperation.

The principal communique issued at the meeting's conclusion gave pride of place to the call for stronger military-strategic ties, including "more intensive defence cooperation."

While boasting that relations between Washington and New Delhi have never been closer, it emphasized the two leaders' commitment to greatly expanding them. They pledged, reported the communique, to make the next decade as "transformative" for Indo-US relations as the last. Obama and Singh, it added, "believe that the United States and India should look to each other as partners of first resort in addressing global challenges."

Breaking new ground, an additional "U.S.-India Joint Declaration on Defense Cooperation" declared that "The United States and India share common security interests and place each other at the same level as their closest partners."

The US long had an adversarial relationship with India, because post-independence New Delhi balked at Washington's demand that it subordinate India's foreign policy to US Cold War strategy. However, since 1991, when the Indian bourgeoisie abandoned its state-led development strategy in favour of full integration into the US-led world capitalist order, and especially since the late 1990s, when the US ruling elite began to become concerned about China's growing economic and geopolitical strength, Indo-US relations have undergone a sea change.

Washington views India as a crucial component in its drive to contain and if necessary militarily thwart China's rise—a drive that has greatly accelerated with the campaign of pressure the Obama administration has exerted on Beijing in the name of a US "pivot to Asia."

With the aim of tying India to its strategic agenda, Washington has offered various inducements to New Delhi, including the 2008 Indo-US nuclear accord and support for India's ambitions to build a blue-water navy and become an Indian Ocean power.

Under India's Congress Party-led government, New Delhi has tilted more and more in Washington's direction, while maintaining that it holds fast to India's "strategic autonomy."

The deepening fault lines in world geopolitics, as US capitalism seeks to offsets its historic decline through aggression and war, and the world capitalist crisis, which has staggered India's economy and laid bare its dependence on inflows of foreign capital, are making this an increasingly untenable balancing act.

The emphasis placed on military-security cooperation at Friday's Obama-Singh meeting very much reflects Washington's priorities.

The US sees "defence cooperation" as a principal means of harnessing India to its agenda, by incorporating it as a junior partner in the US-led alliance system, such as in the policing of the Indian Ocean, and by making the Indian military dependent on US technology and armaments.

Underlining the significance the US places on its defence ties with India, a White House release on the day of the Obama-Singh meeting, titled "Fact Sheet: United States and India–Strategic and Global Partners," said, "The U.S.-India defense relationship remains a major pillar of the strategic partnership between our two countries." It added, "Defense trade has reached nearly $9 billion, and both governments are committed to reduce impediments, ease commercial transactions, and pursue co-production and co-development opportunities to expand this relationship."

Friday's joint declaration on defence pledged the US will treat India on a par with its "closest allies" in respect to "defence technology transfer, trade, research, co-development, and co-production," including in regards to "the most advanced and sophisticated technology."

Under this agreement, India would appear to have been given considerably greater access to US arms and weapons systems, a development that could not but cause apprehension in both Beijing and Islamabad.

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In a subsequent meeting with US business leaders, Singh emphasized recent moves to open up sectors of the Indian economy to foreign direct investment (FDI). In so doing, he noted that provision had been made for exceptions to the 26 percent limit on FDI in defence industries, especially in the case of technology transfers.

Dropping its earlier reluctance to join multilateral military exercises involving the US, India, announced the communique, has accepted an invitation to participate in the US-hosted "2014 Rim of the Pacific Exercises," the world's largest multilateral naval exercise, in Hawaii.

In a further indication of the extent to which the US is seeking to ensnare India in its Asian strategy, the main communique said, "Building on ongoing consultations between India and the United States on East Asia, Central Asia and West Asia, and the trilateral dialogue mechanisms with Afghanistan and Japan respectively, the Leaders agreed to expand their consultations to include a dialogue on the Indian Ocean Region." They also agreed that the US and India will cooperate in working with ASEAN—an agreement expressing their countries' respective priorities. India is anxious to expand economic ties with fast-growing Southeast Asia, while the US is looking to India to assist it in combating Chinese influence there.

The joint communique committed India and the US to quickly concluding "a high-standard Bilateral Investment Treaty that will foster openness to investment, transparency and predictability"—a longstanding US demand. In a further attempt to placate Washington, the Congress government let it be known in the run-up to Singh's meeting with Obama that it is working to exempt US energy companies from a nuclear liability law—even if this means flouting legislation recently adopted by India's parliament.

The Obama administration, meanwhile, gave India backing in its dealings with archrival Pakistan. In their joint statement Obama lent support to India's demand that Islamabad cease all logistical support for the anti-Indian insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir and other anti-Indian Islamacist militias. Washington also gave a strong endorsement of India's involvement in Afghanistan, long a major arena of its rivalry with Pakistan. After a reference to India's "partnership" with the US-imposed government in Kabul, the US-Indian communique said both India and the US will remain active in Afghanistan for the next decade.

New Delhi has pursued ever-closer ties with Washington, even while privately expressing concerns about the legality and explosive global implications of the series of wars the US has unleashed on the peoples of North Africa and the Middle East. Washington's abrupt pullback from an immediate war on Syria made it possible for Singh and Obama to paper over their differences over Syria and Iran. The communique made only a terse reference to the two countries that have been in US crosshairs, calling for "diplomacy to resolve outstanding issues relating to Iran's nuclear program" and "deploring" the use of chemical weapons in Syria but not repeating the White House's lies about their deployment by the Assad regime.

In the days immediately prior to the Obama-Singh meeting, there were further exposures of massive surveillance of India politicians, government officials and diplomats by the US National Security Agency. While such revelations caused the Brazilian president to cancel a meeting with Obama, India's government was desperate to downplay the significance of these revelations so as not to disrupt India's partnership with US imperialism.

Commenting on this turn of events, the *Hindu* noted, "In the face of relentless American demands, the Indian government has yielded ground across a wide range of issues, from civil nuclear energy, the Montreal Protocol, and greater intellectual property protection, to defence purchases, NATO's intervention in Libya, and sanctions on Iran. In return, Washington has only intensified its effort to spy on India, suggesting this relationship is a one-way street."

This, however, is very much a minority view within the Indian bourgeoisie. Facing a deepening economic crisis and mounting opposition from the working class, the Indian ruling class is eagerly entering into US imperialism's embrace, thereby throwing fuel onto its own geopolitical conflicts with China and Pakistan and stoking Washington's global predatory ambitions.

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