

# India tilts still closer to Washington

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3 October 2014

The lengthy “Joint Statement” issued by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Barack Obama at the conclusion of their summit meeting earlier this week signals that New Delhi is aligning itself still more closely with US imperialism’s predatory strategic agenda.

The statement outlines a raft of measures to expand collaboration between the US and Indian militaries and national security apparatuses so as “to bolster national, regional and global security.” For the first time in a joint communiqué from the US and Indian heads of government, it makes explicit reference to the South China Sea, where the US has been encouraging its regional allies, like the Philippines, to aggressively pursue their territorial claims against Beijing. The statement’s emphasis on “safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight” in the South China Sea region conforms with Washington’s campaign to label China an “aggressor.”

The US political elite and military-security establishment have long viewed India as pivotal to their plans to strategically isolate and encircle China. To that end the US, first under George W. Bush and now Obama, has sought to dramatically expand military-security ties with India; pressed for trilateral and quadrilateral cooperation with its other key Indo-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia; and pledged to assist India’s ruling elite in realizing its great power ambitions.

For Washington, Modi’s maiden visit to the US as India’s prime minister was viewed as the occasion to press for a “reset” of Indo-US relations after a period of mounting frictions with India’s previous Congress Party-led government. These frictions were largely attributable to unrelenting US pressure for India to adhere more fully and openly to Washington’s strategic agenda and to remove all remaining barriers to US investment.

Modi—an extreme right-wing figure who until this year was barred from entering the US because of his role in the 2002 anti-Muslim Gujarat pogrom—was feted and flattered by the Obama administration, the Republicans and the US national-security establishment.

On Monday night, as Modi was arriving for a private White House dinner with Obama, the two leaders released a

“vision statement” titled “Chalein Saath Saath” (Forward Together We Go), and on Tuesday the *Washington Post* published an op-ed that had been “co-written” by Modi and Obama. The *Post* piece enthused about the breadth of the Indo-US “strategic partnership,” while stating that “the true potential of our relationship has yet to be realized.”

All of this adulation of Modi and hypocritical prattle about the strength and coincidence of US and Indian “democratic values” was given with the expectation that India’s new Bharatiya Janata Party government would bind India still more tightly to the US.

Modi did not disappoint in this regard. India’s ruling elite remains wary of being reduced to a US satrap—of having India’s relations with China and its longstanding strategic partner Russia dictated by Washington. However, the Indian ruling class is desperate for US and Japanese investment to revive India’s flagging economy. It also calculates that US support is essential if India is to realize its great-power ambitions.

The Joint Statement announced that Washington and New Delhi have agreed to renew their 2005 Defense Framework agreement. Under this agreement there was an exponential increase in US-Indian military ties, with the US supplanting Russia as India’s largest source of foreign armaments and weapons systems last year. The Pentagon has staged more joint exercises with India’s military than that of any other country.

New Delhi and the US also reaffirmed their commitment to “treat each other at the same level as their closest partners” and to begin the co-development and production of weapons.

Obama and Modi also agreed on a further expansion of “military-to-military partnerships,” including “expert exchanges,” “joint training and exercises,” sharing of “civilian and military intelligence,” and intensified cooperation between their navies in ensuring “maritime security” and “freedom of navigation.” The US will also play an active role in the establishment of an Indian National Defence University.

The statement notes India’s “Act East policy” and the United States’ “rebalance to Asia” (that is its anti-China

“pivot”) and pledges that New Delhi and Washington will “work more closely with other Asia Pacific countries” in upholding “regional peace and stability”—that is, the current US-dominated geopolitical order.

In this regard the statement “underlined the importance” of the two countries’ “trilateral dialogue with Japan”—the US’s most important Asian ally and an imperialist power—that has its own predatory agenda—“and decided to explore” having regular trilateral meetings of their Foreign Ministers.

Modi later spoke of the US being an active participant in India’s “Act East” policy. The policy aims to greatly expand India’s economic and military-security ties with Japan, and also with the ASEAN countries—which are the subject of intense economic and geo-political competition between Beijing, on the one hand, and Washington and Tokyo on the other.

Both the statement and the Modi-Obama *Washington Post* piece also pointed to the benefits that would accrue to India from the US plan for a “New Silk Road” that would link Central Asia and its plentiful energy resources to South Asia and ultimately the West (and thereby bypass Russia).

In a nod to New Delhi’s strategic concerns, the section of the Joint Statement on increased intelligence cooperation between the US and India in combating terrorism named several anti-Indian Pakistani-based Islamist groups as targets, as well as the Haqqani network.

In recent weeks, Modi has ratcheted up pressure on Pakistan, including refusing to meet the Pakistani Prime Minister on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, on the grounds that Pakistan is not doing enough to oppose anti-Indian “terrorism.” As part of this campaign, New Delhi is demanding Pakistan cease consulting with officially tolerated anti-Indian groups in Jammu and Kashmir, although such contacts have long been sanctioned by New Delhi.

The US is reported to have asked India to join its new war coalition targeting Iraq and Syria, but India declined. After the talks between Modi and Obama, Vikram Doraiswami, Joint Secretary (Americas) in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, said that India would not join “any coalition” for the “war on terror” in the Middle East.

This is unsurprising. India has not participated in a US-led war since independence in 1947, and were it to do so now, it would constitute a sea-change in world geopolitics. However, New Delhi has given the US its tacit support. Moreover, the Joint Statement includes a reference to Iran that toes the US line that Iran must abide by all UN Security Council resolutions concerning its nuclear program—no matter that these resolutions are based on fabricated and unsubstantiated claims.

Modi and Obama spoke of their summit taking Indo-US

ties to “a new level.” While on the military-security front this indeed is the case, with India tilting ever more in Washington’s direction, the US did not reciprocate with either substantial fresh investments or by making any concessions to India on their economic disputes.

The summit resolved that the two countries would direct their “officials to consult urgently” over their dispute about the new World Trade Organization treaty. They also announced a new group to try to resolve their longstanding dispute over civilian nuclear trade.

In what could lead to significant concessions by India, especially over drug patents, the statement said that the two countries “committed to establish an annual high-level Intellectual Property Working Group.”

During his US visit Modi met numerous business leaders. Many CEOs expressed their pleasure at Modi’s pledge to press forward with neo-liberal reform. However, no new investments were announced, suggesting that the American ruling class intends to ensure that India’s new government meets its demands for “big bang” pro-investor reform before signing on to Modi’s “Make in India” scheme to make India an alternative hub of cheap-labor production to China. (See: “Modi promotes India as world’s sweatshop”)

The day after the Modi-Obama summit, the *People’s Daily*, the mouthpiece of the Chinese government, published an article that argued India will never join Washington in its “pivot to Asia.” Among other things, the newspaper noted that during Chinese President Xi’s recent visit to India the two countries pledged to forge a “closer development partnership,” and that India has not been invited to join the proposed US-led anti-China trade bloc, the Trans Pacific Partnership, or TTP.

This is wishful thinking. As it is, the Indian elite’s ever more pronounced tilt toward Washington is encouraging the US in its aggressive and reckless drive against China—a drive that threatens to produce a conflagration of incalculable consequences for the people of Asia and the world.



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