

India, US boost military-strategic drive against China

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The “Chief Guest” at India’s January 26 Republic Day parade, US President Barack Obama returns from a three-day visit to India with a series of agreements that dramatically enhance the Indo-US “global strategic partnership.”

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi—with whom the US had refused to have contact until early last year because of his role in instigating and facilitating the 2002 Gujarat anti-Muslim pogrom—lavished Obama with pomp and circumstance.

The US president replied in kind. In a break with Secret Service protocol, Obama appeared in an open public venue for a full two hours in order to oblige Modi’s request that he review the entire Republic Day parade. However, he did so in the comfort of the most extensive security operation ever seen. A security operation that included the mobilization of 50,000 Indian security personnel in New Delhi and its environs, a thousand snipers positioned along the parade route, a no-fly zone with air defenses co-manned by Indian and US military personnel, and, as its seventh and final “layer,” US warships in the Indian Ocean.

The smiles and embraces notwithstanding, behind all the bonhomie between Obama and Modi was cold calculation. The US is determined to make India the south Asian anchor of its “Pivot to Asia,” that is, its drive to strategically isolate, encircle and, if necessary, wage war on China.

Rattled by the near halving of India’s growth rate since 2011, the Indian bourgeoisie is desperate for US investment. And with ambitions to regional and world power status that far outreach its economic and military-strategic grasp, the Indian elite is eager to take Washington up on its cynical, self-interested offer to “help India” become a great power.

As expected, Obama and Modi announced that they had agreed on a new 10-year military cooperation agreement to replace the first ever such Indo-US agreement, which was set to expire later this year. Under the “2015 Framework for the US-India Defense Relationship,” the two countries have agreed to more intensive joint military exercises. The Pentagon, it should be noted, already stages more joint exercises with India’s military than any other. The agreement also calls for increased collaboration in maritime security.

Washington has long expressed support and promised assistance for India’s navy assuming a major role in policing

the Indian Ocean, which not coincidentally is the conduit for much of the oil and other resources that fuel China’s economy.

Obama and Modi also announced that they were moving forward with four “pathfinder” projects under the India-US Defense Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI), including coproduction of the Raven unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and an “intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance” module for the Lockheed Martin-manufactured C-130 J transport aircraft. To move forward with these and other projects, the Pentagon is establishing a DDTI “dedicated rapid reaction team.”

Developed by Ashton Carter, who is to succeed Chuck Hagel as US Defense Secretary, the DTTI offers India the possibility of coproducing and co-developing weapons systems with the Pentagon and US arms manufacturers. Its true purpose is to make India’s military increasingly dependent on the US. A further aim of this policy is to undermine the longstanding Indo-Russia military-strategic partnership. Just days before Obama’s India visit, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited New Delhi to try to remove hurdles in actualizing an Indo-Russian agreement to develop a fifth-generation fighter jet, as well as a plan to build 400 advanced helicopters in India per year.

Commenting on the military agreements he had reached with Obama, Modi said they take the “growing” Indo-US “defense cooperation to a new level.”

No less significant were the foreign policy positions India adopted in an Obama-Modi “Joint Statement” and in a “U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region.” Many of them parroted US positions chapter and verse. Thus India criticized North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs and said the onus is on Iran to prove to the “international community,” i.e. Washington, that its nuclear program is “exclusively peaceful.”

Most importantly, India, as reported by the *New York Times*, adopted *in toto* the US-proposed text on the maritime territorial disputes that the US has encouraged between its East Asian allies and China. The “Vision” statement affirms “the importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight throughout the region, especially in the South China Sea.”

Obama and Modi also announced that they had broken the six-

year “logjam” in actualizing nuclear commerce between the US and India. The details of the agreement are far from clear. But India has indicated that it will take steps to insulate US nuclear-power companies like General Electric and Westinghouse from having to pay damages in the event their faulty equipment or other malfeasance leads to a catastrophic nuclear accident. Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government will set up an insurance fund to pay limited compensation to accident victims. It will also issue a “memorandum of law” to clarify (in reality reinterpret and with the express aim of circumventing parliament) India’s nuclear liability law so as to make India’s government-owned nuclear power company solely liable for compensation claims.

Obama, for his part, has apparently abandoned the US’s claim to exercise control in perpetuity of all US-supplied nuclear equipment and parts, agreeing that IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) oversight will suffice.

According to news reports, a decision was taken at the highest political level in both countries to prevent the nuclear issue from interfering with the desire of both governments to “qualitatively reinvigorate their strategic ties.”

While Washington and New Delhi have claimed that the 2008 Indo-US nuclear accord, which paved the way for the US to negotiate India a unique position within the world nuclear regulatory regime, only concerns civilian nuclear energy, it in fact has huge military-strategic implications. Now able to purchase nuclear fuel and technology from abroad, India can concentrate the resources of its indigenous nuclear program on weapons development.

When not currying Obama’s favor, Modi was courting the large delegation of US businessmen who accompanied him to India. Addressing meetings of the US-India Business Council and the India-US CEO Forum, Modi promised the assembled business leaders that his government is at their disposal. He promised a “welcoming environment,” a “predictable and competitive tax regime,” and a government that will work to realize their projects, “protect” their intellectual property” and expunge the “excesses of the past.”

Obama, meanwhile, chided India for not doing more to open its economy to US investors. “There are still too many barriers, hoops to jump through,” he declared.

According to the *New York Times*, Obama and his aides were elated by the outcome of his India trip and particularly by the extent to which Modi shared the US’s attitude toward constraining and thwarting China’s rise. Reportedly at Modi’s initiative, China dominated the first 45 minutes of the discussion when he and Obama had their first sit-down meeting. An unnamed senior administration official told the *Times* that Obama’s conversation with Modi about China was “really qualitatively different” than those the US president had had with Indian leaders in the past. Said the official, “I really was struck that he took a similar view to us.”

The official was particularly pleased that Modi appeared

ready to revive formal quadrilateral military-security cooperation with the US’s other key Asian-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia. In 2007, the four countries established a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue but Beijing objected strongly and the following year it was abandoned.

This week’s heightening of Indo-US ties, which follows on from their collaboration in the successful US-led campaign to unseat Sri Lanka’s president because he was deemed too friendly with China, has not been lost on Beijing.

China’s President Xi Jinping issued a Republic Day message in which he repeated his recent proposal that Beijing and New Delhi take their relations to a higher level. But in the government-owned Chinese media there was a spate of commentary questioning India’s intentions toward China.

A comment published Monday in two papers with close ties to the government, the *People’s Daily* and *Global Times*, warned New Delhi not to fall into a US “zero-sum trap.” Pointing to the US’s anti-China “Pivot to Asia,” the comment noted that the US has “ulterior motives” in depicting “the ‘Chinese dragon’ and the ‘Indian elephant’ as natural rivals.” It urged New Delhi to beware it not be maneuvered into becoming a US pawn so as to ensure Sino-Indian relations not take on the character of “a life-or-death struggle.”

While Obama was being feted by Modi, Pakistan Army chief General Raheel Sharif was visiting Beijing to meet with China’s foreign minister and other senior political and military leaders. A Pakistani spokesman said that during the talks China’s leadership reiterated that Pakistan is its “irreplaceable all weather friend.” Considered by India to be its archrival, Pakistan is currently facing a military-diplomatic campaign on the part of India’s Hindu supremacist BJP government to change the “rules” of their toxic bilateral relationship in its favor. The Indian press has carried reports from Indian army commanders in Indian-held Kashmir in which they boast that the new BJP government is encouraging them to inflict “unacceptable consequences” on Pakistani forces during cross-border firing and incursions.

By moving ever more tightly into Washington’s strategic orbit, the Indian bourgeoisie is assisting and encouraging US imperialism in its reckless and ruinous offensive against China—an offensive whose logic is war and nuclear conflict. It is also creating conditions in which the reactionary Indo-Pakistani military-strategic conflict, which is rooted in the communal partition of the subcontinent, becomes ever more entangled with the US-China divide, adding an explosive new dimension to each.



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