

Modi declares enhanced Indo-US military alliance “need of the hour”

Deepal Jayasekera
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Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s two-day visit to Washington this week marked a major step toward transforming India into a frontline state in the US drive to strategically isolate, encircle and prepare to wage war on China.

On Tuesday, Modi held his third major bilateral summit with US President Barack Obama in the past 20 months. At its conclusion, they issued a lengthy joint statement elaborating plans to strengthen Indo-US military-security cooperation across the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific regions, in Africa, space and cyber-space.

Modi and Obama announced that their negotiators had finalized the text of a Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), under which the US military will be able to routinely use Indian ports and military bases for rest, resupply and repair, including the forward positioning of supplies. Implementation of this agreement will invariably result in the stationing of US troops in India.

The joint statement also announced that the US has designated India a “Major Defense Partner.” Henceforth, India will be eligible to buy and, under an already existing agreement, in some cases co-develop and co-produce the most advanced weapons and weapon systems that the Pentagon is willing to share with its closest partners.

On Wednesday, Modi used a joint address to the US Congress to promote India as a US ally, noting that Obama has said that the Indo-US partnership could be “the defining partnership of the 21st Century.”

Modi extolled the cheap-labor business opportunities that await corporate America in India, adding, “In every sector of India’s forward march I see the US as an indispensable partner.”

But above all he emphasized the Indo-US military-security partnership. “The need of the hour,” declared Modi, “is for us to deepen our security cooperation.”

“A strong India-U.S. partnership,” he claimed, could “anchor peace, prosperity and stability from Asia to Africa and from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific.”

Employing the code words Washington has used to falsely paint China as the aggressor in the South China Sea while carrying out its own ever-more provocative military maneuvers, Modi said the Indo-US alliance can “help ensure security of the sea lanes of commerce and freedom of navigation on seas.”

To further underscore the Indian elite’s readiness to serve as junior partners of US imperialism, he paid tribute to the “great sacrifices” of the US military in the “service of mankind” and

singled out the US invasion and occupation of Afghanistan for special praise.

The US political elite greeted Modi, the head of the communalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and a lifelong member of the Hindu supremacist RSS, with rapture. On at least eight occasions, Democrats and Republicans rose as one to applaud the Indian prime minister.

For a decade ending only in 2014, Modi was barred entry into the US because of his role in instigating and facilitating the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in which well over a thousand people were killed and tens of thousands were rendered homeless.

But given his readiness to integrate India ever-more completely into the US’s anti-China pivot, the US ruling elite is more than willing to overlook Modi’s past as well as his government’s record of inciting communal strife,

Washington, first under George W. Bush and now Obama, has been seeking to promote India as a counterweight to China and harness New Delhi to its predatory strategic agenda—because of India’s size, rapidly expanding nuclear-armed military, and dominant geostrategic position in the Indian Ocean, the world’s most important ocean waterway and the lifeline of China’s economy.

Under the previous Congress Party-led government, India tilted sharply toward Washington. This included forging a “strategic global partnership” with US imperialism, making the Pentagon the Indian military’s preferred training partner, and making large-scale US weapons purchases.

However, Modi and his BJP have gone far beyond this, dramatically expanding India’s strategic alignment with the US in the two years since they took the reins of power. New Delhi now routinely parrots the US line on the South China Sea dispute, has expanded bilateral and trilateral military-security ties with Japan and Australia, the US’s principal Indo-Pacific allies, and is negotiating a series of agreements, of which the LEMOA is the first, aimed at facilitating joint action and interoperability between the Indian and US militaries.

In mid-May, four Indian warships began a two-and-a-half month deployment in the South China Sea and other parts of the Pacific, during which they will stage a joint exercise with the US and Japanese navies.

Rattled by the world economic crisis and fearing that the window is rapidly closing on its ambitions to become a “great power,” the Indian bourgeoisie is trying to get a leg up by assisting US

imperialism in its reckless drive to offset its economic decline and maintain its global hegemony through belligerence and war.

It is New Delhi's readiness to serve as a US choirboy and satrap that lies behind the surge in "pro-India" sentiment within the American elite. As Senator John McCain, the 2008 Republican Presidential candidate and a leading war hawk, noted in a comment published by CNN, "In all my years in Congress, I recall only a select few countries that rose so quickly to such an exalted esteem."

From the standpoint of US strategists, Modi's visit had a double purpose: to build on the "US-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region" signed by Modi and Obama in January 2015 by pushing for the further integration of India into the US global agenda; and secondly, to demonstrate that the Indo-US alliance enjoys overwhelming bipartisan support and will continue to be a priority whoever sits in the White House after the 2016 presidential election.

Modi, in his address to the US Congress, never mentioned the word "China," nor the name of India's arch rival, "Pakistan." But his speech made repeated thinly veiled references to both.

The US has trashed international law, mounting illegal wars and summary executions by drone strike, but it invariably paints China as threatening freedom of commerce and navigation and Washington as the upholder of order between states. Thus Modi touted India as a country that respects the "global commons" and "international rules and norms," while decrying the challenge to the "security architecture" in Asia.

As for Pakistan, Modi, denounced it in unmistakable terms as an incubator of terrorism, then called for joint international action to isolate "those who harbor, support and sponsor terrorists."

Under Modi, New Delhi has moved aggressively to assert India's claim to be the regional hegemon of South Asia. In so doing, it is seeking to leverage the military-strategic backing it is receiving from Washington in return for its integration into the US's anti-China "Pivot to Asia."

On several occasions over the past two years Washington has intervened, fearing New Delhi's belligerent posture toward Pakistan was damaging the US war in Afghanistan and could spiral into all-out war.

At the same time, Washington has been at pains to demonstrate that New Delhi is its foremost ally in South Asia and that the US is eager to assist India in becoming a "net security provider" in the Indian Ocean, Asia, and even Africa.

Speaking to the Council on Foreign Relations in April, US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said, "We have much more to do with India today...than with Pakistan. There is important business with respect to Pakistan, but we have much more, a whole global agenda with India."

During Modi's US visit this week, Washington again sought to display its readiness to "help" an India harnessed to the US's predatory interests. Obama announced that the US supports India's rapid admission to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which will give it greater access to civilian nuclear technology, enabling it to concentrate its indigenous nuclear program on weapons development. Hitherto, only states that have signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty have been allowed to join the

NSG.

At the same time, there are increasing signs that relations between the US and Pakistan are fraying. With the US blithely ignoring Islamabad's increasingly shrill warnings that its promotion of India has overturned the balance of power in South Asia, Islamabad has increasingly turned toward China for support. This in turn has angered Washington, especially as the proposed China Pakistan Economic Corridor would, if realized, undercut the US strategy to impose an economic blockade on China in the event of war or war crisis by seizing the Straits of Malacca and other Indian Ocean/South China Sea chokepoints.

Meanwhile, with the US war in Afghanistan bogged down, Washington is adamant that Pakistan must bear a greater burden of the war through still more aggressive military action against the Taliban and allied militias in Pakistan.

Significantly, the US press commentary on Modi's visit made no effort to hide that the Indo-US alliance is directed against China. Much of it also pointed to the growing frictions between the US and Pakistan.

This will certainly encourage the BJP government. Speaking at last weekend's Shangri La security conference in Singapore, Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar said that time for Pakistan to take up Modi's reputed offer of a peace dialogue—which is conditional on Islamabad bowing to a series of Indian demands—is fast running out.

Yesterday, as Modi was being feted by the Congress and held up as an exemplar of the alliance between the world's most powerful and most popular "democracies," Pakistan's Adviser on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz was warning that Pakistan would respond to India's recent test of an indigenously produced antiballistic missile. "Massive conventional nuclear and missile development programs pursued by India are now leading to nuclearization of the Indian Ocean," said Aziz.

The US's anti-China war drive is dramatically escalating tensions across Asia, threatening to plunge the region and world into a conflagration between nuclear-armed states.



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