

To target China, US further enhances military-strategic alliance with India

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The dying days of the Obama administration have seen a concerted, bi-partisan drive by the Washington political establishment and the Pentagon to further cement the Indo-US “global strategic partnership.”

Because of its size, proximity to China, commanding geographic position within the Indian Ocean region, and rapidly expanding military power and ambitions, India has long been viewed by the strategists of US imperialism as a key element in Washington’s military-strategic offensive against China.

Under Obama—particularly in the two-and-a-half years since Narendra Modi and his Hindu-supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in New Delhi—Washington has gone a long way to transforming India into a “frontline” state in its confrontation with China.

In August, India allowed US warplanes and battleships to begin making routine use of its military bases and ports for resupply, repair, and rest. The Modi government has adopted the US stance on the South China Sea, parroting Washington’s claims that China is threatening “freedom of the seas and overflight,” and it has dramatically increased Indian bilateral and trilateral cooperation with Japan and Australia, the principal US allies in the Asia-Pacific.

Both the Obama administration and Congress have taken important steps in recent days to ensure that the “momentum” in the Indo-US alliance continues under the incoming Donald Trump administration.

US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter traveled to New Delhi late last week to finalize details of an agreement designating India a “Major Defense Partner” of the US. This will reportedly give India the same right to buy advanced US weapons and weapons systems as Washington’s treaty allies, including NATO countries, and Japan, Australia and South Korea.

A joint statement issued by Carter and his Indian

counterpart, Manohar Parrikar, at the end of their December 8 meeting said, “The designation as a ‘Major Defence Partner’ is a status unique to India and institutionalizes the progress made to facilitate defense trade and technology sharing with India to a level at par with that of the United States’ closest allies and partners, and ensures enduring cooperation into the future.”

Carter and Parrikar exchanged memorandum governing the “end use” of any advanced weapons and technology the US transfers to India. According to news reports, there had been disagreements between Washington and New Delhi in recent months about the “level of technology transfer and cooperation,” with India pressing for benefits akin to those granted the most trusted of US allies like Britain and Australia.

Thursday’s joint statement did not address this issue. But the agreement clearly marks a further important step in making “non-aligned” India a de facto treaty ally of the US.

Underscoring the strength of US-Indian military ties, Carter noted that this was seventh time he had met with Parrikar and that “defense relations” have become a “major driver” in Indo-US “bilateral relations.”

The joint statement also emphasized the “tremendous progress” made in implementing the Indo-US Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), under which the US is working to co-produce and even co-develop advanced weapons and weapon systems in India.

The Modi government, which has ambitions for India to become a major arms exporter, has promoted the DTTI as an important part of its “Make in India” initiative, which aims to rapidly grow India’s manufacturing sector.

The Obama administration views arms sales to India as a key means of harnessing India to its predatory strategic objectives by making it dependent on US weaponry, promoting Indo-US military inter-operability, and weaning New Delhi away from its traditional ally and

principal arms-supplier, Russia. It is also eager to boost the bottom line of American weapons manufacturers.

As Carter was visiting New Delhi, the US Senate was passing legislation, already adopted by the House of Representatives, to promote Indo-US military-strategic ties.

The “2017 National Defence Authorization Act,” that is the Pentagon’s \$618 billion budget allocation, contains a section titled “Enhancing defence and security cooperation with India.” It calls on the US secretaries of state and defense to take the necessary steps to designate India a Major Defense Partner, instructs the administration to designate a high-ranking official to ensure the success of the DTTI, and highlights “defence and security cooperation” with India as a means of advancing US “interests in South Asia” and the “greater Indo-Asia-Pacific regions.”

Speaking following the Senate vote, Mark Warner, the senior Democratic senator from Virginia and co-chair of Senate India Caucus, applauded the “inclusion of forward-leaning provisions designed to strengthen bilateral defense cooperation with India, including expanded military-to-military engagement, increased defence trade, and greater cooperation on technological development.”

The bipartisan push to strengthen the US strategic-military alliance with India comes in the midst of a war crisis between India and Pakistan that has brought South Asia’s rival nuclear-armed states to the brink of war.

October and November saw the fiercest cross-border artillery and gunfire exchanges since a ceasefire was put in place in 2003.

In recent days the firing appears to have abated, however, the countries’ political and military leaders continue to exchange bellicose threats. On Sunday Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh said that if Pakistan “does not mend its ways, it will get splintered into ten pieces.” In August, the Modi government, as part of a new hardline policy towards Pakistan, signaled it is ready to support the ethno-nationalist separatist insurgency in Pakistan’s southwest province, Balochistan.

A huge factor fueling the Indo-Pakistani frictions is the US drive to harness India to its anti-China “Pivot to Asia.” It has overturned the “balance of terror” between India and Pakistan, emboldening New Delhi and heightening the crisis of the Pakistani ruling elite, which for decades sought to offset Pakistan’s strategic imbalance with India by serving as Washington’s principal South Asian ally and mercenary.

Buoyed by Washington’s strategic favors and eager to

pursue the Indian bourgeoisie’s great power ambitions, the Modi government has served notice that it is intent on changing the “rules of the game” with Pakistan. In late September it publicly boasted that Indian Special Forces had carried out raids inside Pakistan, ostensibly in retaliation for an Islamist attack on a military base in Indian-held Kashmir. The BJP government has vowed it will continue to shun diplomatic contact with Pakistan and conduct such strikes until Islamabad demonstrably cut off all logistical support for the anti-Indian insurgency in Kashmir from inside Pakistan.

Eager to demonstrate to New Delhi the benefits of its alliance with Washington, the Obama administration backed the illegal and highly provocative Indian military strikes inside Pakistan, first implicitly, then explicitly.

Even before the current war crisis, Pakistan and China had responded to the ever-burgeoning Indo-US partnership by strengthening their longstanding strategic ties.

Recent developments, including a major campaign jointly mounted by the BJP government and the Indian media to trash Beijing for its support for Pakistan, have only caused them to draw closer together.

The explosive and reactionary rivalry between the Indian and Pakistani bourgeoisies is thus increasingly enmeshed with the US-China conflict, adding to each a further highly combustible element.

Pakistan’s enhanced ties with Beijing are causing its ties with Washington to further fray. The same US defense appropriations bill that enhances Indo-US military ties, stipulates that unless the US defense secretary certifies that Pakistan has taken action to suppress the Haqqani Network—a Taliban faction with ties to section of the Pakistani military-intelligence apparatus—Washington must slash the payments it makes to Pakistan for supporting the US war in Afghanistan in 2017 in half, from \$900 million to \$450 million.



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