



## Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

### Interaction with Prof. Dr Stephen F. Burgess

on

## USAF-IAF Relations within the Developing India-US Strategic Partnership

**Date:** December 01, 2017

**M**ajor highlights of the talk held on December 01, 2017 are as follows:

- China's military modernisation, the China-Pakistan relations and the question of how other states in the region are dealing with these evolving dynamics are important factors affecting India's security environment and foreign policy. This is the regional security and strategic landscape which provides room for strengthening partnership between India and the US.
- The two sides could strengthen cooperation and partnership through interactions, joint exercises, development of interoperability, logistics sharing, communication agreements and other agreements between the two militaries. Most importantly, the two air forces need to work together to meet crisis, develop common understanding of the strategic landscape and build capability.
- In the past, relationship between the Indian Navy and the US Navy has grown in the wake of rising concerns about security in the Strait of Malacca, the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. Most importantly, freedom of navigation and the global commons have become common issues for both the sides. Through 'the Malabar

exercises' the two navies have come closer and enhanced understanding on both sides to work together to meet security challenges.

- There are potentials to move forward the relationship between the IAF and the USAF. The US' relationships with Japan, Australia and South Korea are also moving away from dependency. In case of the US-India military cooperation, the relationship is more of quality than dependency.
- The US has offered F-16 and F-18 as possible airframes for the IAF. Besides, the US approach to India must be appropriate and different in terms of India's capability to manufacture Tejas and Sukhoi fighter aircraft and the proud heritage of the IAF. This calls for new approach to deal with the asymmetrical relationship between India and the US to enhance strategic partnership.
- The US and USAF have to understand the IAF to build partnership and engage in more exercises between USAF and IAF for contingencies involving a 'two-front war' in the Indian subcontinent. Moreover, the two air forces and the other air forces can work together on future development of IAF's strategy, operations and planning to meet such challenges. Cooperation between the two sides could be enhanced through more exchanges between the IAF officers and USAF officers for education, training and exercises. In addition, the two sides should work on making the interactions easier by removing delays and red tape in the system.
- Both sides can exchange ideas and experiences on jointness in the armed forces. The US military has imbibed jointness for the last thirty years and the USAF has a strong position in the equation involving army, navy and marines force. This is something that the IAF and USAF can share with each other through exchanges in the process of developing joint framework within the Indian military.
- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue is a potent force involving India, the US, Japan and Australia. When it comes to freedom of navigation operations, Australia has sided with the US and Japan but Australia's economic dependence on China affects its commitment. India is participating in the security dialogue and has been working

together with other members on their common interests, the South China Sea and Strait of Malacca. Also, the US follows a multi-pronged approach in defence cooperation with Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam on South China Sea disputes.

- North Korean nuclear capability has increased with the test firing of the ICBM which can reach Washington D.C. However, the nuclear threat emanating from North Korea aims at providing deterrence and it is not likely to behave differently from other nuclear weapon states. Again, North Korea is not likely to use nuclear weapon to coerce South Korea to a settlement favourable to the Leninist state or separate South Korea from the US as China has not done the same over Taiwan issue. The concern is about more US adversaries having nuclear weapons.
- The Trump Administration has erratic foreign policy and many countries find engagement with the Administration difficult. Nevertheless, the US is basically the same country. In the past, the US hoped that engagement with China through trade and economic cooperation would eventually make China democratic. But that strategy has not paid off. In contrast, China is benefiting from the status quo and, at the same time, China is developing its own status quo. In fact, China has developed the One Belt, One Road (OBOR), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and set new rules as alternative to the existing status quo. It was mainly due to globalisation that the US could not isolate China. At present, engaging China economically and standing up to China for national security without affecting the economic ties remains the key policy challenge for many countries including the US.
- There is possibility of escalation of tension between India and China from the skirmishes into war. The Doklam stand-off was a case in point. In case China comes back with a different approach next summer, the question of India's military preparedness to face any eventuality becomes vital. Amidst such Indo-China tension, Pakistan is becoming more aggressive over Kashmir issue.
- India and the US have signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) that will give the militaries of both countries access to each other's facilities for supplies and repairs. The Indian side hopes that the Communications

and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA) and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) for Geospatial Intelligence should be tailored for the Indian conditions.

- Transfer of technology and co-development under the 'Make in India' in key technology areas such as electromagnetic aircraft launch system, Spike anti-tank missile, avionics and engines are crucial to the strengthening of Indo-US strategic partnership. In terms of technology transfer, the key issue is what is possible and what is acceptable to the two parties.
  - The US tries to monopolise the technology. In addition, transfer of technology is affected by the US' Cold War mindset, and the lack of real partnership. To build a relationship based on reciprocity and treatment on equal basis, the USAF can explore possibility of co-development and buying of the Tejas.
  - Expansion of NATO in Europe has threatened Russia. Moreover, the Ukrainian crisis and subsequent sanctions on Russia by the US have driven Moscow into the hands of China. Under the framework of OBOR, China is strengthening relations with the Central Asian Republics and the Chinese influence in Russia's backyard could lead to marginalisation of Russia. This has potential to impact Sino-Russian relations.
  - China has deep interests in Central Asia to win the great game in the region and the OBOR is pushing it forward. The US has vacated the Manas base in Kyrgyzstan following the withdrawal of large number of troops from Afghanistan. At present, the US has no policy to re-engage the Central Asian region.
  - India's role in Afghanistan should be for India's own interests. Similarly, China has interests in Afghanistan. India is developing the Chabahar port in Iran to have access to Afghanistan via Iran. However, India's position is to have a stable and friendly country in Afghanistan without committing troops on the ground.
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