



The likely deliverables from Modi's visit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's June 7-8 Washington visit, including summit-level meetings with President Barack Obama and an address to a joint session of Congress, will showcase the notable gains made in Indo-United States relations since Modi took power in May 2014.

It is fitting that Modi will address a joint session of Congress since US Congressional members have played a crucial role in setting the course for better ties. The rare bipartisan consensus in Washington on the importance of improving Indo-US relations has helped spur progress between the two nations. US House Speaker Paul Ryan recently described India-US ties as providing 'a pillar of strength in an important region of the world.'

Congress also has put forward legislation to drive the defense relationship and to elevate India's status when it comes to defense trade and technology transfer. Representative George Holding (Republican, North Carolina) in March introduced the US-India Defense Technology and Partnership Act, which lays out specific steps for enhancing defense ties, including designating a point person to coordinate US interagency policy on defense trade and technology transfers with India.

Even more significantly, the bill aims to amend the Arms Export Control Act to streamline the export control and arms notification process for India, putting it on par with NATO countries and other US treaty allies at least when it comes to the length of time for approving defense transfers.

Some in the US are skeptical of the idea of treating India the same as a NATO partner or treaty ally when it comes to arms trade, pointing to India's continuing close military links with Russia and concerns about technology control.

But Washington must also factor in the evolving security situation with regard to China and the need for countries like India to play a key role in helping to maintain the balance of power in Asia and to ensure freedom of the seaways.

To fulfill its role in helping to stabilize and secure the Indo-Pacific region, India needs adequate defense capabilities and access to advanced military technology, particularly on the naval front.

There is expectation that India may sign in the next 10 days the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement — allowing both countries to access each other's supplies, spare parts, and services from military bases and ports.

The US has sought to negotiate the logistics sharing agreement with India for over a decade. Finally completing the agreement would mark a watershed in relations and help reassure US policymakers of India's commitment to building a strong and stable defense partnership.

The deepening Indo-US defense partnership has been driven largely by Defense Secretary Ash Carter, who holds a strong vision regarding India's future role in helping secure the Indo-Pacific and who has been willing to exercise patience to achieve this goal.

Carter has diligently tended to building relationships in India, evidenced by the fact that he has met four times in the last year with his counterpart, Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar. As Deputy Secretary of Defense four years ago, Carter was responsible for launching the Defense Trade and Technology Initiative that has so far resulted in six 'pathfind-

THE MODI GOVERNMENT MUST EXPLAIN TO THE INDIAN PUBLIC THAT STRENGTHENING INDO-US DEFENSE TIES IS NOT A ONE-WAY STREET, AND CONTRIBUTES TO INDIA'S OWN NATIONAL SECURITY, SAYS LISA CURTIS.

' projects for India and the US to co-produce and co-develop military equipment.

India's hesitation in signing LEMOA may stem in part from its concern about China's reaction. While Modi has prioritized relations with the US, his government also wants to build economic and trade ties with China and seeks to wean China away from its historically close ties with its regional archrival, Pakistan.

India needs China's support to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the next step in New Delhi's goal to become a full-fledged member of the global nuclear nonproliferation regime. The NSG holds its annual plenary session next month. But China has already signaled it will seek to block

peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean.'

Whether or not India can close the deal on LEMOA in the coming days will say something about its geopolitical orientation and willingness to expand its security options in a way that protects and promotes its core strategic interests. The Modi government must explain to the Indian public that strengthening Indo-US defense ties is not a one-way street, and contributes to India's own national security.

There is some hope that Westinghouse Electric and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India will announce the finalization of a deal for building six nuclear reactors in the state of Gujarat. Such an announcement would help remove a significant irritant in the relationship and silence American critics who accuse India of failing to live up to its end of the civil nuclear deal.

India passed a strict nuclear liability law in 2010 that holds suppliers liable for damages in the event of a nuclear accident and essentially shut US companies out of the Indian nuclear industry.

In January 2015, during President Obama's India visit, the two sides announced a 'breakthrough understanding' on the issue with an Indian proposal for an insurance pool to mitigate investment risks.

Another helpful step was India's ratification of the International Atomic Energy Agency Convention on Supplementary Compensation in February. Whether these steps are sufficient to convince Westinghouse to enter the Indian civil nuclear market remains to be seen.

The Indian government has also designated a site for a joint nuclear energy venture between General Electric and Hitachi to build nuclear reactors in India, but the project remains stalled over the nuclear liability law.

Another possible outcome of Modi's visit is US backing for full Indian membership of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation grouping. With India recently becoming the top destination for foreign direct investment and its economic growth rate set to reach 7.6 per cent this year, there is renewed optimism in the Indian economy. In the past, the US has welcomed Indian interest in joining APEC, but has stopped short of publicly backing its formal membership.

Another area that is ripe for forward movement is homeland security cooperation.

The last Secretary-level homeland security dialogue took place nearly three years ago under the previous Manmohan Singh government. The two sides recently made progress on a data sharing agreement to exchange information in their terror databases. The agreement would bring India into the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center, which consolidates several terrorist watch lists from multiple countries. With the agreement, India would become one of 30 countries allowed access to the database.

Modi's visit will highlight the important strides the two countries have made in expanding security and defense cooperation. The robust bipartisan support in Washington for building Indo-US ties gives hope that the next US administration will sustain the progress made during the last two years.



Defense Secretary Ash Carter with Indian Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar, right, and India's new naval chief Admiral Sunil Lanba, second to Dr Carter's right, after a tour of aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya at Karwar, April 11. 'The deepening Indo-US defense partnership,' says Lisa Curtis, 'has been driven largely by Carter, who holds a strong vision regarding India's future role in helping secure the Indo-Pacific and who has been willing to exercise patience to achieve this goal.'

India's bid by linking New Delhi's entry into the NSG with Islamabad's membership, a position that would undoubtedly stall the process.

Last fortnight's visit by Indian President Pranab Mukherjee to Beijing spotlighted their burgeoning economic and trade ties and downplayed border tensions that have flared on several occasions over the last few years.

In another example of how India is carefully trying to balance relations between the US and China, the Indian foreign minister in mid-April signed a trilateral communiqué with the Russian and Chinese foreign ministers that appears to back China's position against internationalizing the resolution of disputes in the South China Sea.

Yet just a week prior, the US defense secretary and Indian defense minister had signed a joint statement declaring the importance of ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight in the South China Sea and affirming support for a 'rules-based order and regional security architecture conducive to

SENIOR MASTER SERGEANT ADRIAN CADIZ

Lisa Curtis is a Senior Research Fellow on South Asia at The Heritage Foundation's Asian Studies Center.