

EURASIA/FUTURE

It's Almost Time For A Chinese-Pakistani LEMOA

Written by Andrew Korybko on 2018-06-26

China and Pakistan should clinch their own Logistics Exchange Memorandum Of Agreement (LEMOA) to use one another's military facilities if India continues with its pro-American pivot, though Beijing and Islamabad should be careful about the timing of this potential decision so that it doesn't precede and thenceforth inadvertently "justify" New Delhi's resolute rejection of Eurasianism in favor of Atlanticism.

The summer 2016 sealing of the "Logistics Exchange Memorandum Of Agreement" (LEMOA) between the US and India laid the foundation for their **unprecedented strategic partnership** by allowing both Great Powers to use each other's military facilities on a case-by-case basis, a game-changing development that has since led to former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson exuberantly praising the two parties' **planned century-long cooperation** with one another. While marketed as a mutually beneficial arrangement that India popularly characterizes as part of its newfound policy of so-called "multi-alignment", the fact of the matter is that the US simply intended for its new South Asian ally to remain a "junior partner" in the broader "**Chinese Containment Coalition**" that Washington wants to "**Lead From Behind**", but this obvious realization only recently dawned on the Indian leadership following the imposition of Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs.

A Rude Awakening

The Hindutva-led state had hitherto thought that its **envisioned vanguard role** in the broader "Indian Ocean Region" (IOR), together with its **LEMOA-like partnership** with fellow "**Hex**"-member France, would make it militarily indispensable to the US' plans and therefore enable New Delhi to entice Washington into encouraging the "re-offshoring" of American companies from China to India. The South Asian state's regional hegemonic strategy under the Modi Administration depends to a large degree on reaching a 1990s China-like neo-liberal economic agreement with the US in order to propel India's domestic "Make In India" growth and its international expansion through the joint "**Asia-Africa Growth Corridor**" with Japan, which is why Trump's recent tariffs were so shocking and instantly triggered **retaliatory punitive measures** as a face-saving response to this unexpected move.

India is now **increasingly aware of its submissive status** in the US' global security architecture and Washington's associated desire to exploit it solely as a military workhorse for "containing China", which contrasts with its previous expectations that the US would also simultaneously invest in its domestic economic development like Prime

Minister Modi had earlier assumed would happen in laying the groundwork for sustainably transforming his country into a strong regional power. Furthermore, the looming threat of **CAATSA sanctions** against India in response to its **planned purchase** of Russian S-400 missiles and “secondary sanctions” vis-à-vis Iran will inflict immeasurable damage to the US-Indian Strategic Partnership in powerfully sending the message that Trump expects Modi to be his minion instead of equal. This might be unacceptable for the Indian government and could lead to it “rebalancing” its grand strategy towards Eurasia through the inroads that were achieved during the informal summits in **Wuhan** and **Sochi**.

Tit For Tat

India’s re-embrace of a Eurasian geopolitical trajectory would naturally be welcome by China and Russia as a stabilizing relief, but it would undoubtedly carry with it very serious consequences when it comes to the country’s relationship with the US. “Balancing” between the Eurasian and Atlanticist “blocs” is no longer feasible because the US is forcing India to resolutely commit to one or the other through its CAATSA threats and “secondary sanctions” vis-à-vis Iran, which is why a clearer picture will probably emerge before the end of the year once New Delhi makes its ultimate decision. In the meantime, China and Pakistan must prepare for either eventuality, with India’s potential Eurasian “rebalancing” allowing both of them to more constructively interface with India **through Russia’s “mediation”** while the continuation of its Atlanticist path would be disastrous for multipolarity.

It’s not always accurate to conceptualize everything in a “zero-sum” manner, nor to reactively “fight fire with fire” every time that one is provoked, but sometimes “win-win” solutions and asymmetrical responses aren’t always the most effective courses of action, which is why China and Pakistan might very well clinch their own LEMOA with one another if India strengthens its military-strategic partnership with the US. This move would unquestionably be politicized by both the US and India to maximum effect in “justifying” their lopsided century-long “partnership”, but it would also achieve very important dividends for China and Pakistan in **facilitating the latter’s naval patrols along the Sea Lines Of Communication through the Arabian Sea-Gulf of Aden (ASGA)** between Gwadar and Beijing’s base in Djibouti. In addition, commercial port infrastructure could also be covered by the agreement in giving Islamabad a greater geographic scope of action in Africa via the Silk Roads.

Timing Is Everything

For as enterprising as this strategy would be in leveling the IOR playing field with the US & India, it should be noted that the announcement of it would forever preclude any possibility of New Delhi pivoting to Eurasia, which is why this scenario shouldn’t be seriously pursued unless it was determined that India’s pro-American path is irreversible. Should that be the case, then the best response that China and Pakistan could give would be to reciprocally clinch their own LEMOA deal in granting Islamabad’s navy access to the Djibouti base and perhaps also non-military Silk Road

commercial ports too in exchange for Beijing being granted the right to dock its ships in Gwadar, Karachi, and anywhere else along the country's coast, to say nothing of using each other's air and ground military facilities on a case-by-case "logistical" basis just like the original US-Indian LEMOA allows for its two parties.

The time hasn't yet come for a Chinese-Pakistani LEMOA, but it could be right around the corner in reaction to India's possible eschewing of Eurasianism and tightened embrace of Atlanticism, which would itself be enough of a provocation to legitimately justify this joint escalatory measure that could more accurately be described as a "responsive rebalancing". Figuratively speaking, the ball is in India's court right now, and the South Asian state has become the **most pivotal** one at the moment in determining the long-term trajectory of Eastern Hemispheric geopolitics and therefore the overall course of the **New Cold War**. Its planned century-long military-strategic (junior) "partnership" with the US would completely upend the multipolar project by turning India into a dual mainland-maritime "forward operating base" for unipolarity's southern thrust through Eurasia and its disruptive activities in the IOR, while turning its back on America would strengthen Afro-Eurasian security for years to come.

Concluding Thoughts

The theoretical "ideal" that Indian policymakers supposedly want to achieve is to strike a perfect "balance" between both world systems through the masterful practice of "multi-alignment", though this is impossible to sustain under the present conditions of heavy American pressure through the threat of CAATSA and "secondary sanctions" vis-à-vis Iran. In a sense, however, India has achieved one globally enviable goal, at least for the time being but for no longer than the end of the year, in becoming the ultimate pivot state who's being wooed by the world's most powerful suitors, though this flirtatious period could never have realistically been intended to be indefinite. As with interpersonal relations, international ones inevitably see one or another partner growing anxious and pressuring the object of their desire into committing more to them because of the insecurity that they feel from competing for their loyalty, which is exactly what's happening with India and why it has to make a decision.

All choices have consequences, however, and India will need to weigh whether it would rather push China and Pakistan into a LEMOA-like agreement with serious military implications after eschewing Eurasianism or if a purely economic trade war with America is more manageable after moving away from Atlanticism. The decision is Modi's alone to make, but the ramifications will be global either way.

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