



Mains Practice Question

Q. Signing of various defence agreements will allow India and the US to act together and get into a better position to shape the regional and global environment. Critically analyse in the light of recently signed Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement. (250 words)

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Approach

- Introduce by briefly explaining various defence agreements signed between India and the US.
- State the significance of signing such agreements esp with reference to Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA).
- Analyse associated issues of the signing of the BECA.
- Give a suitable conclusion.

Introduction

- The defence agreements between India and the US allow India to use US expertise on geospatial intelligence and to enhance military accuracy of automated hardware systems and weapons like cruise, ballistic missiles and drones.
- BECA is one of the four foundational military communication agreements between the two countries. The other three being GSOMIA, LEMOA, CISMOA.
 - **General Security Of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA):** It allows militaries to share the intelligence gathered by them. Signed by India in 2002.
 - **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA):** It allows both countries to have access to each other's designated military facilities for refueling and replenishment. It was signed by India in 2016.
 - **Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (COMCASA):** It is the India specific version of CISMOA. Valid for 10 years, COMCASA aims to provide a legal framework for the transfer of highly sensitive communication security equipment from the USA to India that will streamline and facilitate interoperability between their armed forces.

Body

Significance of Signing of BECA

- **Converging Indo-Pacific Strategies:** Signing of BECA will fast-forward the integration of the Indo-Pacific strategies of their two countries.
 - Further, this is in sync with increasing formalization of QUAD, which can be seen in the recent joining of Australia in the Malabar naval exercises.

- India will be able to keep a close watch on the movements of Chinese warships in the Indian Ocean.
- Moreover, its signing comes at a time when India is locked in one of its most hostile standoffs with China along their disputed border in the Himalayan region.
- **Deep Military Implications:** While LEMOA means one partner trusts the other enough to expose its valuable assets, COMCASA means one is confident that it can rely on encrypted systems to connect the two militaries, and BECA means it can share highly classified information in real time without fear of being compromised.
 - All this signals the level of trust that has developed between the two countries and their militaries, faced with an increasingly aggressive China.
 - BECA allows more intensive engagement between the armed forces —from interoperability to intelligence-sharing and joint defence research to production of weapons.
- **Multi-Polar World Order:** Substantive and institutionalised cooperation between the two defence establishments will serve the long-term interests of a rising India and an America that is restructuring its global security burden.

Associated Issues

- **India's Aversion to Alliance System:** Signing of these four foundational agreements would mean India getting strategically more close to US. From the perspective of the US, in order to counter China, it would want India to be getting close to an alliance system.
 - However, one aspect which remains unchanged is the Indian strategic establishment's aversion to the term alliance.
- **Dependence on Russia:** India is one of the world's biggest defence equipment buyers, but around 60-70% of its inventory is supplied by Russia.
 - Further, the US wants India to move away from Russian equipment and platforms, as it feels this may expose its technology and information to Russia.
- **Compromising Strategic Autonomy:** Many foreign policy experts in India are of the view that, by synchronising its systems with those of the US, it will enable the US to enter its decision-making loop.
- **Divergence of Foreign Policy Interest:** There is divergence on foreign policy interests between US and India, especially relating to Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran.
 - On account of Indian Ocean issues, the US would want India's cooperation in the South China Sea, but India's primary naval challenge is in the western and north-western Indian Ocean.

Conclusion

Signing of defence agreements will allow India and the US to act together and get into a better position to shape the regional and global environment in favour of peace and stability. However, both countries must not glamorize this signing as these agreements are not an end in themselves they are a means to a larger end – security and prosperity of its citizens.