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MK-45 Guns Deal:

Manifestation of Growing Indo-US Strategic Cooperation

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MK-45 Guns Deal: Manifestation of Growing Indo-US Strategic Cooperation

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On November 20, 2019, the Trump administration approved sale of up to 13 MK 45 naval guns and related equipment worth an estimated cost of \$1.0210 billion to India.¹ The sale of MK 45 naval guns has two implications: Firstly, acquisition of MK-45 guns will not only enhance India's naval capabilities in Indian Ocean, but will also bolster its dominance in maritime operations against Pakistan and China. Secondly, the anticipated sale will support U.S. national security and foreign policy objectives by enhancing the naval capabilities of its strategic regional partner, India.

The Weapon System

MK 45 is a naval artillery gun designed for use against surface warships and anti-aircraft defense systems and shore bombardment. The gun mount features an automatic loader with a capacity of 20 rounds that can be fired under full automatic control, taking a little over a minute to exhaust those rounds at maximum fire rate.²

- The MK 45 naval gun system is currently being used by US Navy on Ticonderoga class cruisers and Arleigh Burke class destroyers.
- MK 45 MOD 4 guns is a light-weight, but upgraded version of the MK 42 5 inch/54 caliber gun mount.
- MK 45 has a 62 caliber barrel with improved gun and mount subsystems, greater range and firepower, and better control systems. This gun system features Naval Surface Fire Support (NSFS), which has been developed for aiding amphibious operations.³

The gun mount being used for these guns increases the firing range by over 50%, which means higher range and greater speed of the munitions fired by them.

¹ “State Department approves \$1b weapons sale to India,” *The Washington Post*, November 20, 2019. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/state-department-approves-1b-weapons-sale-to-india/2019/11/20/1055d81a-0bab-11ea-8054-289aef6e38a3_story.html.

² Chidanand Rajghatta, “US OKs sale of MK 45 naval guns worth \$1 billion to India” *The Times of India*, November 21, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/us-okays-big-guns-for-indian-navy-worth-1-billion/articleshow/72147583.cms>.

³ “MK 45 - 5-INCH 54/62 Caliber Guns,” *United States Navy Fact File*, January 16, 2019. https://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact_display.asp?cid=2100&tid=575&ct=2.

US has provided these system to some ten ally countries including Japan, Australia, and South Korea also. It is expected that these guns may also be sold to UK and Canada as well in future.⁴

BAE Systems Land & Armaments is the principal contractor of this deal, which also includes provision of ammunition, spare parts, personnel training and equipment training, publications and technical data, transportation, US government and contractor technical assistance and other related logistics support.⁵

Implications of MK 45 Gun Deal for Pakistan

It has been India's longstanding desire to become a strong 'blue water' navy because it considers augmentation of sea power as an essential element of its strategy for attaining the status of a global power. Development of sea power by India is guided by its strategic concept of Indian Maritime Doctrine 2004 and Indian Navy Vision Statement 2006.

The doctrine envisaged Indian Navy becoming a "three dimensional blue water force", which could maintain dominance in the Indian Ocean Region. The force, as per the doctrine, is required for maintaining order at the sea, and serving as a deterrent. Moreover, it is aimed at countering "distant emerging threats and protect(ing) extended 'Sea Lines of Communication' SLOC through and from the Indian Ocean."⁶

Acquisition of MK 45 guns by India will further disturb the military balance in the region that has already been upset by the various steps taken by India to modernize its navy, especially induction of INA Arihant – the nuclear submarine with ballistic missile launch capabilities. India also developed K-4 SLBM (3,500 km). K-5 and K-6 SLBMs, with greater ranges and MIRV capabilities are expected to follow up in the K series missiles. A sea-launched cruise missile called *Nirbhay* (1000 km) was test fired earlier this year. Moreover, induction of *Dhanush* missile (350 km) signals Indian intention to deploy nuclear missiles aboard surface vessels.

⁴ George Allison, "BAE-Leonardo ammunition could triple Type 26 Frigate gun range," *UK Defence Journal*, January 5, 2019. <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/bae-leonardo-ammunition-triple-type-26-frigate-gun-range/>.

⁵ "US approves sale of 13 Naval guns worth \$1 billion to India," *business-standard*, November 21, 2019. https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/us-approves-sale-of-13-naval-guns-worth-1-billion-to-india-119112100091_1.html.

⁶ David Scott, "India's drive for a 'blue water' Navy." *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2008).

The pattern of Indian Naval development clearly shows that it is largely meant to counter Pakistan in its immediate neighbourhood because there is no other Navy in the region, other than Pakistan Navy, that could pose a challenge to Indian Navy. Moreover, the two countries have a long history of conflict. India in 1971 used its Naval force to enforce a blockade against Pakistan in the Bay of Bengal.⁷ It is feared that current Indian naval developments could be again used for imposing a blockade or restricting movement of ships to and from Pakistan during any hostilities in future. India's opposition to CPEC and development of Gawader Port add to those apprehensions.

Acquisition of systems like MK45 guns will push Pakistan to undertake similar development for correcting the growing imbalance in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, it can be rightly assumed that this would aggravate the arms race in the region with both countries buying expensive state of the art and sophisticated naval hardware.

United States and India Military Collaboration

In 2016, the United States Defence Secretary Ashton Carter stated that designation of India as a major defence partner “*would allow the U.S. to cooperate with it in both strategic and technological domains-at par with its closet and most long standing allies.*”⁸ With the tag of a major defence partner; the significance attached to India in the United States' National Security Policy of 2017; and emerging defence and strategic ties between Washington and Delhi clearly suggests that US considers India as the most reliable counterweight to China.

The sale of MK 45 naval guns will take place under the continuing defense cooperation between the two countries.

US-India relations began to grow rapidly, after Obama administration announced the “Pivot to Asia” in 2011. In 2015, during his visit to India, American President said: “*I believe*

⁷ Michael Walter, "The US Naval Demonstration in the Bay of Bengal during the 1971 India-Pakistan War." *World Affairs* 141, no. 4 (1979): 293-306.

⁸ “India's major defence partner tag deepens ties with US: Carter,” *The Statesman*, August 30, 2019, <https://www.thestatesman.com/india/india-s-major-defence-partner-tag-deepens-ties-with-us-carter-162393.html>.

*America can be India's best partner*⁹.” Indian scholars and strategic analysts believe that India's growing economic charm and its geo strategic importance in Asia is the reason behind thriving Indo-U.S. strategic partnership. Former United States diplomat, Nicholas Burns stated that “*there is a tremendous upside to our growing engagement with India. That is why building a close U.S-India partnership should be one of the United States highest priorities for the future. We share an abundance of political, economic and military interests with India today*¹⁰.” Indo-US defence ties are based on two foundations: first, joint research and defence development; second, easing way for strategic cooperation. Global strategists see in the evolution of their bilateral ties an inevitable partnership developing, especially with regard to Indo-Pacific Strategy. This partnership has strong roots in defence, trade and strategic spheres.

Indo-US cooperation was more focused on enhancing military and security cooperation during President Barak Obama's first administration. Subsequently, there has been lot of emphasis on strengthening bilateral economic ties. The establishment of country special unit ‘India Rapid Reaction Cell’¹¹ boosted bilateral defense relations. The purpose of India specific cell in Pentagon was to accelerate and integrate joint development and production of high technology defense equipment in India.¹² In 2014, India was described as the biggest buyer of United States weapons, in an article in Financial Times of India¹³. United States and India's military to military exercises, such as “YudhAbhyas” are another significant aspect of their military cooperation¹⁴. Such military exercises improve interoperability between the forces of participating countries.

The US and India have, moreover, signed multiple military agreements since 2016, including, Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMAO), Strategic Trade

⁹ “US President Barack Obama speech in Delhi's Siri fort: Top 11 Points,” *Financial Express*, January 27, 2015, <http://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/us-president-barack-obama-speech-in-delhis-siri-fort-top-11-points/35356/>.

¹⁰ Nicholas Burns, “Americas Strategic Opportunity with India: The New U. S- India Partnership,” *Journal of Foreign Affairs*, November/ December (2007) Issue, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2007-11-01/americas-strategic-opportunity-india>.

¹¹ Josy Joseph, “Pentagon cell to push India trade ties,” *The Hindu*, September 15, 2015. <http://www.thehindu.com/news/pentagon-creates-india-rapid-reaction-cell/article7655766.ece>.

¹² “Special cell in Pentagon for defense ties with India,” *Dawn*, September 17, 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1207456>.

¹³ Gill Plimmer and Victor Mallet, “India becomes biggest buyer of United States weapons,” *Financial Times*, February 24, 2014, <https://www.ft.com/content/ded3be9a-9c81-11e3-b535-00144feab7de>.

¹⁴ Franz Stefan Gady, “India and U.S hold joint military exercise near Chinses border,” *The Diplomat*, September 16, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/09/india-and-us-hold-joint-military-exercise-near-chinese-border/>.

Authorization (STA), Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA). These agreements have the potential to open more avenues for sale of US military equipment to India.

Impact of Indo-US strategic ties on Pakistan

Defence ties and military-to-military cooperation between U.S. and India can potentially have ramifications not just for India's traditional rival Pakistan and regional states including China, but also for the rest global community. Indo-US partnership will not only enhance risks to Pakistan's security but is also viewed as strategy to counterweight China in Asia Pacific, which in turn has serious implications for Pakistan given its close cooperation with Beijing especially the development of CPEC. With the materialization of defence related agreements and deals, the balance of power in Asia will shift in India's favor and will make it inevitable for Pakistan to bolster its strategic deterrence capabilities. Additionally, Indo-US partnership not only enhances the risks to regional balance of power but also challenges Pakistan's international position because India enjoys status of "strategic partner" and "major defence partner" of the U.S. To deal with the emerging threats, Pakistan should explore new avenues for military co-operation as well as undertake measures to enhance its diplomatic clout to counter India's offensive designs through collective framework of regional and global states.

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NEWS RELEASE

India-MK 45 Gun System



Defense Security Cooperation Agency NEWS RELEASE

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India – MK 45 Gun System

WASHINGTON, November 20, 2019 - The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to India of up to thirteen (13) MK 45 5 inch/62 caliber (MOD 4) naval guns and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$1.0210 billion. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale on November 19, 2019.

The Government of India has requested to buy up to thirteen (13) MK 45 5 inch/62 caliber (MOD 4) naval guns and three thousand five hundred (3,500) D349 Projectile, 5"/54 MK 92 MOD 1 Ammunition. Also included are other ammunition, spare parts, personnel training and equipment training, publications and technical data, transportation, U.S. Government and contractor technical assistance and other related logistics support. The total estimated cost is \$1.0210 billion.

This proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security of the United States by improving the security of a strategic regional partner.

The proposed sale will improve India's capability to meet current and future threats from enemy weapon systems. The MK-45 Gun System will provide the capability to conduct anti-surface warfare and anti-air defense missions while enhancing interoperability with U.S. and other allied forces. India will use the enhanced capability as a deterrent to regional threats and to strengthen its homeland defense.

The proposed sale of this equipment and support will not alter the basic military balance in the region.

The principal contractor will be BAE Systems Land and Armaments, Minneapolis, Minnesota with gun manufacturing in Louisville, Kentucky. There are no known offset agreements proposed in connection with this potential sale. Any offset agreement required by India will be defined in negotiations between the purchaser and the contractor(s).

Implementation of this proposed sale will not require the assignment of additional U.S. Government and/or contractor representatives to India. However, U.S. Government or contractor personnel in country visits will be required on a temporary basis in conjunction with program technical oversight and support requirements.

There will be no adverse impact on U.S. defense readiness as a result of this proposed sale.

This notice of a potential sale is required by law and does not mean the sale has been concluded.

All questions regarding this proposed Foreign Military Sale should be directed to the State Department's Bureau of Political Military Affairs, Office of Congressional and Public Affairs, pm-cpa@state.gov.

Source: "India – MK 45 Gun System," *Defence Security Cooperation Agency*, November 20, 2019, <https://www.dsca.mil/major-arms-sales/india-mk-45-gun-system>.