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### Pacom Works to Advance U.S.-India Strategic Partnership

By Donna Miles  
American Forces Press Service

CAMP SMITH, Hawaii, Aug. 14, 2012 – As U.S. Pacific Command strives to build stronger alliances and partnerships across the Asia-Pacific region, one of its big focuses is on taking the military-to-military relationship with India to the next level.



Navy Lt. Dan Mitzner, right, discusses combat direction center operations with Cmdr. Ajay Daniel Theophilus, center, and Lt. Cmdr. Madhavdas Ravikant, left, of the Indian navy aboard the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson in the Indian Ocean, April 10, 2012. Carl Vinson and Carrier Air Wing 17 participated in exercise Malabar 2012 with ships and aircraft from the Indian navy. Malabar is a field training exercise conducted with the Indian navy to advance multinational maritime relationships and mutual security issues. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class James R. Evans (Click photo for screen-resolution image);high-resolution image available.

The new defense strategic guidance announced in January resets U.S. priorities toward the region, specifically calling for investments in a long-term strategic partnership with India “to support its ability to service as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region.”

Navy Adm. Samuel J. Locklear III, who took command of Pacom in March, is using that guidance as his marching orders as he implements the expanded Asia-Pacific strategy.

“We hope to partner with [India] to share the strategic landscape as it applies to how we apply security to the globe that allows prosperity and peace, freedom of movement and ... prosperity in the world,” he told American Forces Press Service.

India’s strategic location between West Asia and the Middle East, and its ascent across economic, military, diplomatic and informational fronts makes it an influential leader in the region, said Army Col. Michael Albaneze, director of

Locklear’s India strategic focus group.

The group of six military and civilian experts, one of three “mini think tanks” within the Pacom staff, advises Locklear and his senior staff on a broad range of issues that shape India’s strategic environment, and ways to advance the U.S.-India strategic partnership, Albaneze explained.

It’s a partnership that’s been slow in forming, he conceded. For the past half-century, India has been a leader in the nonaligned movement, and it has an official policy of being “strategically autonomous.”

That said, Albaneze recognized signs of India’s willingness to engage increasingly with the United States as it rises on the world stage. The two countries had their first strategic dialogue in 2010, with two more since then, the most recent in June.

Without a long history of cooperation, Albaneze noted a “maturing process” that could, over time, evolve into a more typical relationship characterized by routine engagement across the board. “We are not quite there yet, but there is a lot of effort in trying to move in that direction,” he said, adding that the relationship is continuing to deepen.

One high point is the exercise program. India partners with the United States in dozens of military exercises every year as it builds an increasingly strong military. Its navy is one of the world’s largest, and its army deploys routinely for peacekeeping operations, Albaneze noted.

Most of the exercises tend to be at the component level. The annual Exercise Malabar involves the U.S. and Indian navies, with several international observers during its latest iteration, in April. The U.S. and Indian armies train together through Yudh Abhyas exercises, frequently weaving humanitarian assistance and disaster response scenarios into the engagements.

The two countries’ air forces train together through Cope India exercises, and the Indian air force participated for the first time in the U.S.-sponsored Red Flag exercise in 2008. Although India has no marine corps, U.S. Marines train with an Indian army brigade that specializes in amphibious operations during Exercise Shatrujeet.

“Those are just the major mil-mil engagements,” Albaneze said, noting a broad array of other military-to-military engagements and exchanges at U.S. and Indian military training centers and schoolhouses.

Both the United States and India hope to increase the complexity of the exercise program over time, he said, and to elevate them into joint engagements that involve more than just one service.

Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta underscored during his visit to India in June, just ahead of the 2012 U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue, that a “close partnership with America will be key to meeting India’s own stated aims of a modern and effective defense force.”

“We have built a strong foundation,” the secretary said. “But for this relationship to truly provide security for this region and for the world, we will need to deepen our defense and security cooperation.”

That, Panetta said, extends to closer collaboration in sharing defense technology and developing future systems. Despite India’s decision not to buy a U.S. advanced jet fighter, U.S. defense sales to India have grown to more than \$8 billion with the potential to increase more.

The secretary recognized legal restrictions that have hampered some sales, and vowed to work to eliminate as many hurdles as possible.

“The United States is firmly committed to providing the best defense technology possible to India,” he told Indian leaders in Delhi while recognizing India’s ambitions to advance its own defense industry

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...and many leaders in both, while recognizing their ambitions to advance to own defense industry. "We are both leaders in technology development and we can do incredible work together," Panetta said.

Deputy Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter followed up that visit in July, encouraging India to move forward in engaging with the United States across the spectrum, from dialogue to exercises to defense trade and research cooperation.

"We want to develop a joint vision for U.S.-India defense cooperation," Carter said. "We want to knock down any remaining bureaucratic barriers in our defense relationship, and strip away the impediments. And we want to set big goals to achieve."

Recognizing the many mutual and converging interests the United States and India share, Albaneze said he's hopeful about their future prospects.

"I am an optimist on the relationship," he said. "Every time there is a hiccup, I just think that it's part of our getting to learn more and more about each other, and how we interact."

"Sometimes it's two steps forward and one step back," Albaneze continued. "But at the end of the day, we still made a step forward -- and that is really what we are trying to do in the region."

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*Navy Ensign Timothy Eick gives a briefing to members of the visit, board search and seizure team assigned to the Indian navy frigate Satpura during a training exercise aboard the guided-missile destroyer USS Halsey, April 12, 2012. Halsey and Satpura participated in Malabar, a training exercise conducted to advance multinational maritime relationships and mutual security. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Christopher Farrington*

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*Navy Lt. Dan Mitzner, right, reviews an exercise scenario in the undersea warfare module in the combat direction center aboard the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson with Indian navy liaison officers Cmdr. Ajay Daniel Theophilus, left, and Lt. Cmdr. Madhavdas Ravikan, center, April 12, 2012. Carl Vinson and Carrier Air Wing 17 participated in Exercise Malabar 2012 with ships and aircraft from the Indian navy. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Benjamin Stevens*

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