



**Islamabad
Policy Institute**
Supporting Dialogue for Peace & Development

Pakistan & BECA Threat

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5 Nov 2020

Islamabad Policy Institute, Pakistan

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On October 27, 2020, India and the United States signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA). This agreement is the fourth and final foundational agreement of strategic nature concluded between two countries since they forged their strategic partnership in 2005. It builds on earlier agreements namely General Security of Military Information Agreement (2002), Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (2016), and Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (2018).

An overview of previous three agreements:

The first of the four agreements was General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) signed on January 17, 2002. The agreement allowed both countries to share military intelligence and stipulates that both countries will protect each other's classified information.

Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, the second in the series of accords, was signed on 29 December, 2016. This enabled militaries of both sides to use each other's bases for re-supplying or repairs. The agreement covered four areas - ports calls, training, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief or joint exercises.

Third agreement i.e., Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) was signed in 2018. It is valid for ten years. It provided India access to advanced communications systems as well as allowed both countries to share secure information.

Some of these agreements have been fully implemented, while the rest are being implemented.

BECA in a nutshell and its benefits for India:

The US has in the past concluded agreements akin to BECA with its closest defence allies. In some ways BECA has lot of symbolism, which exhibits the degree of closeness between the US and the other partner country.

BECA mainly pertains to geospatial intelligence and sharing information of maps and satellite images for defence. Since, the US possesses one of the largest and an advanced defence satellite network in the world, the agreement enhances capabilities of the allied countries by giving them access to classified military data.

More specifically geospatial intelligence enables close satellite imagery of defence installations, force deployments, navigation systems, precision and accurate targeting from sea-based weapons, and long-range delivery systems.

India, as a consequence of being party to the BECA agreement, will be able to make use of this advanced geospatial data and network for military application. Naturally, accuracy of Indian automated systems and

weapons, such as missiles and armed drones, will improve to a great extent. It would allow India to verify airstrikes through satellite and other sophisticated geospatial intelligence tools.

Access would, moreover, be gained to topographical, nautical and aeronautical data and products that would aid in navigation and targeting.

Normally, in such agreements, sharing of classified data is not included, however, in an uncommon move, both the US and India have agreed to share classified data. Safeguards have been placed under this agreement so that no third party has access to the classified data.

Furthermore, India can now access and acquire more sensitive technology that has long remained on its wish list, such as Predator drones.

With a series of such agreements in its pocket, India is groomed to become a serious military power in the Indian Ocean Region to counter China's increasing influence through building a military and maritime alliance with necessary capabilities.

Implications for Pakistan:

BECA is of serious concern for Pakistan as it undermines strategic stability in South Asia. Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs took note of the development and highlighted Islamabad's concerns about 'military spin-offs' of 'high-technology trade with India'. Pakistan contends that while the Indo-US defence cooperation is aimed at counter-balancing China, the agreement will in effect enable India to utilize newly acquired technologies for access to classified military intelligence on Pakistan. This leaves Pakistan, particularly, in a disadvantaged position without a comparable arrangement with major power.

For Pakistan, the fact that India's proclivity to militarily escalate against it, instead of China, makes BECA a more urgent threat. India is reluctant to escalate militarily against China, while against Pakistan India has a propensity to undertake military action. This is evident from Indian actions and rhetoric during February 2019 standoff against Pakistan, and the Eastern Ladakh crisis against China in preceding months. In February, 2019 India undertook military action and claimed to cross the Line of Control (LoC), indicting political will to employ military force against Pakistan as it threatened Pakistan with further escalation and consequences. In contrast, against China, Indian conducted was diametrically opposite, wherein Indian leadership attempted to underplay the magnitude of crisis, its losses and didn't seek to escalate to pressure China. New Delhi rather sought to address crisis through diplomatic and military talks.

BECA, thus, would enhance Indian capabilities that are more likely to be employed against Pakistan, than China.

BECA would lead to regular sharing of sensitive intelligence by US with India. This would provide India access to hitherto classified data about Pakistan's military installations and positions thereby getting an unprecedented military edge. The agreement is signed at a time when India is being ruled by a fascist regime that has constantly shown a belligerent attitude towards Pakistan, makes the case even worse for Pakistan.

Options for Pakistan:

Pakistan's options for addressing the strategic imbalance are narrow and limited in scope. For a start, Pakistan can apprise the US of its concerns and highlight potential implications of Indian access to highly sensitive intelligence. Islamabad can open a back-channel dialogue with Washington and urging it not to share military intelligence about Pakistan with India. Islamabad needs to underscore the potential for escalation in case India has access to highly sensitive military intelligence about Pakistan. Any India-Pakistan conflagration can undermine regional peace and security, which the US would not like to happen.

Moreover, Pakistan needs to engage China and gain more access to Chinese Bideou satellite system to balance Indian access to US systems. More than that, however, Islamabad needs to engage Beijing in a dialogue on implications of BECA for China and Pakistan, and explore avenues for mutual collaboration for minimizing its impact.

Pakistan can explore possibility of a similar arrangement with China. At the moment, Pakistan has no access to classified data acquired through Chinese military systems and communications hardware. On the face of it, the military cooperation between the US and India is directly aimed at China, and Beijing is aware of it. Therefore, it is a high time for Pakistan to engage with China to sign a similar agreement to counter implications arising from Indo-US security cooperation.

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