

Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics (RELOS) Agreement – India and Russia

Syllabus- GS 2: International Relations- Bilateral relations, agreements involving India and/or affecting India's Interests.

Geo-Optional Paper II: Political aspects- India's role in world affairs, Geopolitics of south Asia and Indian ocean realm).

Why in news:

India and Russia in in bilateral summit signed scores of deals including contract for the manufacture of nearly 6 lakh **AK-203** rifles, but “put off” a **Reciprocal Military Logistics Support Agreement (RELOS)**.

About RELOS:

- ❖ RELOS will be an important step forward in the military sphere as it aims at fostering **interoperability and sharing of military logistics**. The “long overdue” agreement was to have come up for signing in recently concluded Putin's visit but that was put off **pending finalization of its terms**.
- ❖ The agreement has been described as being part of a broader arrangement that **will allow the two countries to scale up their military-to-military cooperation**.
- ❖ Logistical exchange agreements are designed to lay down the administrative framework through which partnering countries can enjoy ease of access to use each other's military facilities like ports, bases, and military installations.

RELOS– Potential Benefits

- ❖ The Indian Navy will be the biggest beneficiary of these administrative arrangements, improving operational turnaround and increasing inter-operability on the high seas.
 - ✚ The air force too will benefit by finding it easier to deploy aircraft for the same purpose.
- ❖ **RELOS** will provide India access to Russian facilities in the Arctic region which is seeing increased global activity as new shipping routes open up and India's own investments in the Russian Far East.
- ❖ It will also boost already flourishing defense cooperation. Recent engagements include-
 - ✚ INDRA-NAVY 2021 in July and INDRA-ARMY 2021 in August,
 - ✚ A contingent of 200 troops from the **Army's 3 Naga Regiment** are currently in Russia for ZAPAD multinational exercise.

- ✚ 200 soldiers from the Sikh LI Regiment will be in Russia for another multinational **exercise Peace Mission**.
- ❖ Russia will also be able to access Indian ports and air bases.
- ❖ Both India and Russia are in talks for expanding cooperation in Central Asia and the “possibility of supplementing bilateral exercises with trilateral and multilateral ones”

More information:

- ❖ India has signed several logistics agreements with all Quad countries (US, Japan, Australia), France, Singapore, and South Korea beginning with the **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)** with the **U.S.** in 2016.
- ❖ Experts says that following the signing of the LEMOA with the US in 2016, “India has become more comfortable in concluding such arrangements with other countries” and is currently pursuing one **with the UK** while exploring arrangement with other partners like **Russia and Vietnam**.

Foundational agreements with US:

- ❖ India has signed all **four foundational agreements** with the **US**, **LEMOA** in 2016, **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)** in 2018 and **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation (BECA)** in 2020.

BECA

- ✚ BECA will help India get real-time access to American geospatial intelligence that will enhance the accuracy of automated systems and weapons like missiles and armed drones.
- ✚ Through the sharing of information on maps and satellite images, it will help India access topographical and aeronautical data, and advanced products that will aid in navigation and targeting.

LEMOA

- ✚ LEMOA was the first of the three pacts to be signed in August 2016.
- ✚ LEMOA allows the militaries of the US and India to replenish from each other's bases, and access supplies, spare parts and services from each other's land facilities, air bases, and ports, which can then be reimbursed.
- ✚ LEMOA is extremely useful for India-US Navy-to-Navy cooperation since the two countries are cooperating closely in the Indo-Pacific.

COMCASA

- ✚ COMCASA was signed in September 2018, after the first 2+2 dialogue during (late) Mrs. Shushma Swarajs' term as EAM.
- ✚ The pact allows the US to provide India with its encrypted communications equipment and systems so that Indian and US military commanders, and the aircraft and ships of the two countries, can communicate through secure networks during times of both peace and war.

✚ The signing of COMCASA paved the way for the transfer of communication security equipment from the US to India to facilitate “interoperability” between their forces.

These agreements “with like-minded partners extend India’s maritime and strategic reach and influence in the Indian Ocean and beyond”.

Way Forward

Russia will remain a key defence partner for India for decades to come. In line with India’s quest for self-sufficiency, such partnerships help curb the reliance of India over other countries. This will thereby curb India’s dependency in near future. But India needs to be deft in balancing bilateral relationships with USA and Russia as recent tensions with USA on S-400 deal present a challenging future for Indian diplomatic community.