**Indian Defense Minister Signs Major Logistics Agreement With Pentagon**

PENTAGON — The U.S. and India have signed a key logistics agreement that will enable U.S. and Indian forces to use each other's bases for repair and replenishment of supplies.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter told reporters Monday at the Pentagon that he and Indian Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar formally signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) earlier in the day. The two defense leaders had agreed on the memorandum "in principle" when they last met in India in April.

Carter said the agreement is "fully mutual" and makes joint operations easier and more efficient.

Both defense leaders stressed that the agreement did not allow each nation to set up bases on the other, but to use bases and equipment only for "operating together when we choose to."

"It doesn't have anything to do with the setting up of bases," Parrikar added. "It's basically logistics support."

During Parrikar's visit to the Pentagon, the two defense leaders discussed India's recent designation as a major U.S. defense partner.

The designation was announced during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's June visit to Washington, and Carter said it allows the United States military to cooperate with India's military "in a way that we do only with our closest and most long-standing allies."

Monday’s talks at the Pentagon, the sixth meeting between the two defense chiefs, comes ahead of key annual exercises in India between U.S. and Indian forces.

The joint drills, dubbed Yudh Abhyas, will take place in the mountains of northern India next month, Lt. Gen. Stephen Lanza, who commands the Army's I Corps on the U.S. Pacific coast, told VOA.

Speaking to VOA from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Lanza said the two armies will focus on a variety of tasks, from peacekeeping operations to combined arms maneuvers and tactical training. The two armies also will swap-out troops within formations.

“Not only are we just training together … we’re completely integrated both with the Indian army and our Army working together down at platoon level,” Lanza told VOA.