Indo-US: COMCASA Agreement

What is the issue?

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- A U.S. team visited India recently to sort out difference regarding “Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement” (COMCASA).
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- The agreement would facilitate transfer of high-end U.S. technology to India, but there is feared that it would compromise on India’s defence secrecy.
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What is the COMCASA?

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- COMCASA is meant to provide a legal framework for the transfer of communication security equipment from the U.S. to India.
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- This would facilitate “interoperability” between their forces and potentially with other militaries that use U.S. origin systems for secured data links.
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- Importantly, the U.S. has already made some tweaks from its conventional template for agreements in this regard, for accommodating Indian concerns.
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- **Significance -** COMCASA is said to be part of a set of 3 agreements that the U.S. considers vital for a functional military relationship.
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- Previously, India and U.S. signed the “Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)”, for mutual logistic assistance between their militaries.
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- Negotiations on the third agreement, “Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA)”, have not yet begun.
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Why is the U.S. pushing for COMCASA?

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- U.S. officials state that India’s armed forces are currently dependent on less secure, commercially available communication systems for surveillance.
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- These platforms are, therefore a hindrance in real time data sharing with friendly militaries, and seamless interoperability during joint missions.
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- Hence, they argue, COMCASA will facilitate the Indian military to use of high-end secured communication equipment from the U.S.
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- Additionally, COMCASA is also said to be imperative if India is to get the armed version of the Sea Guardian drones from the US.
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What are the stakes?

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- **Benefits -** U.S. granted India the status of “Major Defence Partner” during the Obama’s time, to facilitate transfer of high-end defence technology.
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- Signing of the 3 foundational agreements would underline that status, besides making the transfer of American defence technology possible to India.
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- **Risks -** New Delhi is believed to be concerned about intrusive access COMCASA would grant the U.S. to Indian military communication system.
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- The violation of Indian sovereignty due to visits by US inspectors to Indian bases to inspect the COMCASA-safeguarded equipment weighs heavy.
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- There is also a fear that a lot of Russian-origin and indigenous Indian military platforms may not be compatible with COMCASA.
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- Also, such comprehensive agreements is politically risky for the ruling BJP as even the previous LEMOA (signed in 2016), created a political storm.
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\n**Source: The Hindu**

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