

Indo-US joint exercises begin at Agra, Babina

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Indo-US military collaboration has taken a big step this month, with the launch today of Exercise 'Cope India-09', a five-day joint exercise between the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the United States Air Force (USAF) at the Air Force Station, Agra, even as an even bigger exercise between the two countries' armies, 'Yudh Abhyas 2009' rolls on at Babina, Madhya Pradesh, in a 17-day programme which concludes on October 29.

The Yudh Abhyas partnership exercise commenced in 2004, at Chaubatiya in the Himalayan foothills, and was followed in 2005 with US Army contingents coming to train with Indian troops at the Counter-Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School in Vairangte, Mizoram. In Yudh Abhyas 2006, Gorkha troops went to Hawaii for training. In 2009, Indian Army soldiers from the 31st armoured division are working with US counterparts from Hawaii, in a multi-echelon, full-spectrum, combined operation.

"The size and scope of this combined exercise is unparalleled and will be characterised not only by realistic and challenging training, but by regular athletic, academic and cultural exchanges," said Lt Col Jim Isenhower, Commander, 2nd Squadron, of the US 14th Cav Regt.

The two joint exercises are on amid fulsome praise from both sides about each other's military prowess. This year's Yudh Abhyas involves 1,000 military personnel and 17 Stryker vehicles, the largest deployment of these outside of Iraq and Afghanistan for the US Pacific Rim forces. Along with the 17 Strykers, the US will showcase the Javelin Anti-Tank Missile system, employed to defeat current and future threat armored combat vehicles.

During the exercise, participants will engage in a variety of missions, from joint planning and manoeuvre execution, a variety of artillery ranges, to cordon and search operations, as well as search and rescue training.

There is healthy respect in the US military about Indian peacekeeping capabilities, as well as search and rescue capacities, used in counterinsurgency. "The broadened and unprecedented scope of Yudh Abhyas stands as a testament to the growing people-to-people and military-to-military ties of the US and India, one of the key pillars of the expanded US-India strategic partnership," said US ambassador Timothy Roemer.

He also addressed the biggest irritant in US-India military relations — equipment supply — squarely, when he said, "I know some are apprehensive about reliability of the United States as a supplier of military equipment to India. I can tell you that our relationship is far different than it was even a few years back. The Indo-US relationship has come a long way since then and this is a different world today."