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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Logistics Without Alliances: On RELOS and Strategic Autonomy

THE HINDU

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Logistics Without Alliances: On RELOS and Strategic Autonomy

 **The Hindu**

19 June 2026

GS2

GS3

 Source: ujjyari.com — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped


INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Can a country deepen military interoperability with rival powers, the US and Russia at once, without compromising strategic autonomy? Where is the line between access and alignment?"

 Source: [Original editorial](#)
[The Hindu](#)
 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources** (<https://ujjyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

India has moved to **operationalise the RELOS logistics pact with Russia**, even as it already holds the **LEMOA** arrangement with the United States and similar pacts with France, Japan and Australia. For an aspirant, this is a GS2/GS3 case on the heart of Indian grand strategy: can a state deepen **interoperability** (<https://ujjyari.com/terms/interoperability/>) **with rival powers** without losing **strategic autonomy** (<https://ujjyari.com/terms/strategic-autonomy/>)?

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Reciprocal logistics agreements give mutual access to bases, ports and supplies for **refuelling and replenishment**, extending **military reach** cheaply. They are **not mutual-defence treaties**: no obligation to fight a partner's wars, no foreign bases. Holding such pacts with **both Russia and the US** shows a diversified, issue-based autonomy. The risk is that dense interoperability slides toward **alignment**; safeguards keep access from becoming alliance.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

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ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
RELOS	India-Russia reciprocal logistics agreement	Extends reach using Russian facilities
LEMOA	India-US logistics agreement (2016)	The template; access, not basing
Reciprocity (https://ujijari.com/vocab/reciprocity/)	Mutual, reimbursable access	Keeps the pact balanced, not dependent
Strategic autonomy	Freedom to choose, bloc-free	The tradition these pacts must protect

THE ANALYSIS: WHY ACCESS IS NOT ALLIANCE

- ❶ **Logistics multiplies reach.** Access to a partner's ports and depots extends operational range far more cheaply than overseas bases.
- ❷ **No defence obligation attaches.** These are sustainment pacts, not treaties to fight together.
- ❸ **Diversification preserves manoeuvre.** Pacts with both the US and Russia signal issue-based cooperation, not camp membership.
- ❹ **But interoperability has gravity.** Shared procedures and supply reliance can pull toward alignment unless safeguards hold.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

RELOS (*Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement, India-Russia*); **LEMOA** (*Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, India-US, 2016*); similar agreements with **France, Japan, Australia, Singapore, South Korea**. The US “foundational agreements”: **LEMOA, COMCASA** (*communications*), **BECA** (*geospatial*). **What they are not:** mutual-defence treaties; they involve no permanent foreign bases and no automatic alignment. **Concepts:** strategic autonomy; non-alignment / multi-alignment (<https://ujijari.com/terms/multi-alignment/>); interoperability; sustainment and operational reach; the Indo-Pacific. **Frame:** access as a tool of autonomy, *calibrated* (<https://ujijari.com/vocab/calibrated/>) cooperation over bloc membership.

THE DEBATE

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Argument that this serves autonomy: Reciprocal, non-binding access extends India's reach without basing or defence obligations, and holding pacts with rival powers proves a diversified, choice-preserving posture.

Argument that it erodes autonomy: Dense interoperability, supply-chain reliance and political signalling create dependence and perceived alignment, blurring the line between access and alliance.

The balanced verdict: Logistics pacts **enhance autonomy when kept reciprocal, diversified and free of basing or defence terms**, and threaten it only if those safeguards lapse. The instrument is sound; the discipline around it is decisive.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

A weak answer equates "military cooperation with the US/Russia" with "abandoning non-alignment." The strong answer separates what the pact obliges (access, reimbursable) from what it does not (defence, basing), then asks whether safeguards keep the two apart. The move, "read the obligation, not the optics," applies to trade pacts, defence deals and diplomatic groupings like the Quad.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Reciprocal logistics pact (RELOS + LEMOA + others) -> access to ports/bases/supplies -> extended reach at low cost. The line to hold: access + reciprocity + sovereignty safeguards stays on the autonomy side, while defence obligation + foreign basing + supply dependence would cross into alignment. India's posture: diversified pacts across blocs -> issue-based cooperation -> strategic autonomy preserved.

THE WAY FORWARD

- ① **Keep pacts reciprocal and non-binding**, with no mutual-defence or basing terms.
- ② **Diversify partners** across blocs so no single relationship dominates.
- ③ **Embed sovereignty** (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/sovereignty/>) **and data safeguards** in every agreement.
- ④ **Treat access as leverage** (<https://ujjiyari.com/vocab/leverage/>) **for autonomy**, not as a path to alliance.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

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*“Reciprocal logistics agreements allow India to extend military reach while preserving strategic autonomy.”
Critically examine with reference to RELOS and LEMOA. (250 words)*

“Access is not alliance; reciprocal logistics, kept non-binding and diversified, lets India project power without surrendering the autonomy that has long defined its strategic culture.”

RELOS (India-Russia) · LEMOA (2016) · COMCASA · BECA · foundational agreements · strategic autonomy · Indo-Pacific.

Can a state deepen interoperability with rival powers at once without compromising autonomy, and where is the line between access and alignment?

Connects to GS2/GS3 PYQs on India’s defence cooperation, strategic autonomy and the Indo-Pacific; a probable question is the access-versus-alliance framing above.

static GS2 on India’s foreign and defence policy; the Hormuz and energy-security editorials in this edition.

Sources: *The Hindu* (<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/>), *Ministry of Defence* (<https://www.mod.gov.in>)

Source: Logistics Without Alliances: On RELOS and Strategic Autonomy — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS
Editorial Analysis

KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

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Operationalising the India-Russia Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS), alongside the LEMOA arrangement with the United States and similar reciprocal pacts, shows how logistics access can advance India's military reach and sustainment without alliance entanglement, even as it tests the balance between interoperability and the non-aligned tradition of strategic autonomy.


SUPPORTING

- Logistics agreements provide reciprocal access to bases, ports and supplies for refuelling and replenishment, extending operational reach far more cheaply than building overseas bases.
- Crucially, they are about access and sustainment, not mutual-defence obligations, so they enhance reach without binding India to fight another state's wars.
- Holding such pacts with both Russia and the United States demonstrates a diversified, issue-based approach that preserves manoeuvre rather than locking India into a single camp.


COUNTER

Some argue that dense interoperability and reliance on a partner's logistics create dependence and signalling that erode genuine autonomy, blurring the line between access and alignment.


WAY FORWARD

Keep logistics pacts reciprocal and non-binding, diversify partners across blocs, protect data and sovereignty safeguards in each agreement, and treat access as a tool of autonomy rather than a step toward alliance.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

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QUESTION

"Reciprocal logistics agreements allow India to extend military reach while preserving strategic autonomy." Critically examine with reference to RELOS and LEMOA. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Reach in modern military operations is decided as much by fuel, ports and spares as by platforms. The decision to operationalise the India-Russia logistics pact, while India already holds a similar arrangement with the United States, is a study in how access can serve autonomy.

BODY

A reciprocal logistics agreement lets the armed forces of two states use each other's bases, ports and depots for refuelling, repair and replenishment on a reimbursable basis. The Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS) with Russia parallels the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) signed with the United States in 2016, and similar pacts India has concluded with France, Japan, Australia and others.

The strategic point is what these agreements are not: they are not mutual-defence treaties. They create no obligation to come to a partner's aid in war, no permanent foreign bases on Indian soil, and no automatic alignment.

What they create is sustainment, the ability to operate farther, longer and more cheaply than building overseas infrastructure would allow. By holding such arrangements with both Washington and Moscow, two rivals, India signals an issue-based, diversified posture that is the modern form of strategic autonomy: cooperation calibrated to interest, not membership in a bloc.

The genuine counter is that interoperability has gravity. Dense military cooperation, shared procedures, reliance on a partner's supply chain, and the political signalling that accompanies it can pull a state toward alignment whether or not a treaty says so.

That risk is real, which is why the safeguards matter: reciprocity, sovereignty clauses, data protection, and a clear refusal of basing and mutual-defence terms. Managed that way, logistics is leverage, a way to extend reach across the Indo-Pacific and beyond while keeping the freedom to choose.

CONCLUSION

Access is not alliance. Reciprocal logistics, kept non-binding and diversified, lets India project power without surrendering the autonomy that has long defined its strategic culture.


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