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INDO-US SECURITY TIES: 2+2 Dialogue

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India and the US held their fifth Annual 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in New Delhi on November 10, where Antony Blinken, the US Secretary of State and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin met their Indian counterparts.¹ This meeting has come at a time when the world is grappling with geopolitical tensions due to the Israel-Hamas conflict and the Ukraine invasion. However, the meeting primarily focused on emerging security challenges in the Indo-Pacific and concerns over China's expansionist behaviour.

The framework known as the '2+2 Ministerial Dialogue' entails the strategy and security ministers of India and its strategic partners meeting with their counterparts. It was introduced in 2018 to enhance defence cooperation and harmonise Indo-Pacific regional policy objectives. The purpose of the conversation is to forge solid bonds in a geopolitical landscape that is undergoing rapid change by getting to know one another's strategic decisions and worries while considering both sides' political interests.

The defence cooperation between the US and India has developed into a strategic alliance marked by similar principles, mutual trust, and an increasing awareness of shared interests in preserving regional and international security. During a Ministerial meeting, the parties discussed issues related to China's assertive actions, as well as security challenges in the region, such as those arising from the conflict between Israel and Hamas and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.² With the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and Industrial Security Agreement (ISA) in place, US-India defence trade cooperation is still growing.

Semiconductors and improved cooperation on space-related matters were some of the other significant elements of the 2+2 Dialogue.³ Furthermore, both nations focused on their collaborative production of armoured infantry vehicles and they also have plans for co-producing General Electric's F-414 jet engine.⁴ Additionally, insiders have revealed that the two defence ministries intend to jointly introduce an innovation bridge, as initially announced during the launch of the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) by both national security advisers last year. In addition, India intends to spend approximately US \$3 billion purchasing 31 MQ-9B armed drones from the United States to improve general surveillance along the China-India border and in the Indian Ocean.⁵ The India-US Civil Space Joint Working Group has a fifth sub-working group focused on space commerce, which is another way that the two countries are enhancing their space cooperation.

India and the US have started exploring new arenas of cooperation by pursuing defence and industrial engagement, resilient supply chains, easing of technology restrictions and maritime security cooperation. In the context of the region, increasing connectivity, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, Quad

cooperation, the Indo-Pacific partnership, and India's leadership in the Global South were the main points of emphasis. Furthermore, Union Minister Rajnath Singh stated that one of the main tenets of the bilateral relationship between the US and India is defence and that the two countries' cooperation is essential in maintaining a free, open, and rules-bound Indo-Pacific region.⁶

To counter China's assertiveness, India has been able to take advantage of cutting-edge defence acquisitions from the US, such as a range of sophisticated maritime patrol aircraft to protect its maritime approaches and deliberate lift to replenish troops stationed around the mountainous Line of Actual Control.

With India's recent enlistment in the Combined Maritime Force and the launch of Quad's Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness, the two nations are moving closer to their shared goal of safeguarding the Indian Ocean commons. Blinken outlined US initiatives in the Indo-Pacific area, stating that the US was strengthening maritime domain awareness and exchanging commercial satellite data with neighbouring nations to increase their ability to combat drug trafficking, piracy, and phishing.⁷

Way Forward

There are differences between the United States and India regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The United States is still firmly in favour of Ukraine, while India has declined to denounce the Russian invasion. Beyond defence sales, the United States prioritises its relationship with India, particularly because the Russian invasion of Ukraine has increased European purchases by tens of billions of dollars just in 2022. More operational cooperation is what the US wants from India to share the burden of preventing aggression by any Great power, including China. Despite these points of contention, Washington and New Delhi have managed to keep strengthening their strategic partnership.

More sophisticated military drills, more frequent use of logistical arrangements, increased presence in various theatres, increased access and overflight, and constant surprise tactics are all necessary for more effective collaborative deterrence for both the US and India and to keep China guessing.

In light of China's growing aggression, which poses a threat to many nations in its neighbourhood and beyond, and has been undermining several long-standing international relations conventions, the two militaries' cooperation mechanisms must be strengthened. The India-US 2+2 Strategic dialogue suggests that the US is preoccupied with both Europe and the Middle East, however, it is aware of what needs to be done in the Indo-Pacific region.

Notes:

¹ Ministry of External Affairs, Joint Statement: Fifth Annual India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, November 10, 2023, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/37252/Joint_Statement_Fifth_Annual_IndiaUS_22_Ministerial_Dialogue. Accessed on November 15, 2023.

² Ibid

³ Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, “India-US 2+2 Strategic Dialogue Keeps Indo-Pacific in Focus”, *The Diplomat*, November 20, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/11/india-us-22-strategic-dialogue-keeps-indo-pacific-in-focus/>. Accessed on November 20, 2023.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ “India, US bolster defence cooperation in response to China: Joint production of combat vehicles, drones in focus”, *Economic Times*, November 11, 2023, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-us-bolster-defence-cooperation-in-response-to-china-joint-production-of-combat-vehicles-drones-in-focus/articleshow/105143129.cms>. Accessed on November 16, 2023.

⁶ Shubhajit Roy, “Back humanitarian pauses, need to prevent the spread of Gaza conflict: Indo-US statement”, *Indian Express*, November 11, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/back-humanitarian-pauses-need-to-prevent-spread-of-gaza-conflict-indo-us-statement-9022261/>. Accessed on November 18, 2023.

⁷ Ibid