



India, US and 2+2 Dialogue Format

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Abstract

India and United States enjoy a comprehensive global strategic partnership covering almost all areas of human endeavour, driven by shared democratic values, convergence of interests on a range of issues, and vibrant people-to-people contacts. Regular dialogue between the Leaders is an important element of the expanding bilateral ties. The outcomes of these visits have been instrumental in strengthening the multifaceted bilateral ties. There is regular high-level interaction between Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and President Biden. The respective leaders had several bilateral meetings and met on side-lines of multilateral events. Prime Minister also participated in virtual Summits convened by President Biden including Quad, I2U2 (India, Israel, USA and UAE), Summit for Democracy and other events.

PM Modi made his first State Visit to the US from 21-23 June 2023 at the invitation of President Biden. In addition to a bilateral meeting with President Biden, he addressed a Joint Meeting of US' Congress and interacted with business and thought leaders. PM Modi had visited the US in September 2021 for the first in-person Quad Leaders' Summit on 24 September 2021 and had a bilateral meeting with President Biden. President Biden visited New Delhi from 8-10 September 2023 to attend G-20 Leaders' Summit. President Biden and PM Modi had a bilateral meeting and co-hosted a group of G20 leaders to accelerate investments in high-quality infrastructure projects and development of economic corridors through the India Middle East Europe Economic Connectivity Corridor and the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGI).

Keywords: Dialogue, corridor, i2u2, vibrant, summit, multilateral, democratic values

Introduction

No two countries together can shape the future of global politics in a better way than perhaps the US and India. While the US is a declining (yet not completely decimated) power, according to many scholars, the stature of India has grown manifold in last three decades and is continuously growing, especially under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. PM Modi has taken personal interest in reshaping India's Foreign policy and has been pretty successful in placing India at high tables where every major power of the world looks towards India for becoming its partner. The US too is no exception to it. Since coming to power in 2014, PM Modi has pushed harder in bringing India closer to the USA, yet remaining multi-aligned and privy to its own interest. His personal friendship with the US Presidents and the impact it had on the relation between the two states is something that has been highlighted by the global media too (Baig and Alyan 2022, p. 20)^[1]

At a time when polarisation in the domestic politics of the US is all time high, there is a bipartisan consensus among the Republicans and the Democrats, the two major political parties in the US, to have a friendly relation with India. PM Modi has had a cordial relationship with all three Presidents of the US since 2014, be it Barak Obama (Democrat), Donald Trump (Republican) and with incumbent President Joe Biden (a Democrat). Similarly, in India too both the major parties (the BJP and the Congress) share similar view of having an enhanced relationship with the USA. However, the element of suspicion for each other among foreign policy makers of the two countries still remain quiet high and despite the bonhomie, thorny issues have refused to die down. India's refusal to criticize Russia or impose sanctions

on it over Russia-Ukraine Conflict is a case in point where the countries stood diametrically opposite to each other (Obsever Research Foundation, p.-11)

However, still there are lot of things that both countries share in common and therefore have an important role for each other. Both countries are part of several multilateral groups like the G20, I2U2, Quad etc. and the recently perceived the IMEC (India Middle East Economic Corridor) and also need each other very much to counter and balance their common adversary, the People's Republic of China, a country whose hegemonic rise has created both ideological as well as territorial conflicts for both the countries. While India is indispensable for the success of USA's Indo-Pacific Policy, India too needs the economic and military support in order to fulfil its ambition of becoming an important global player in geo-strategic arena as well as a five trillion dollar economy by 2027. In order to strengthen their relationship, several high level meetings have taken place and 2+2 Dialogue format is one of them. India has held various 2+2 meetings with other countries as well, such as Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and Australia. This article first explains about 2+2 Meeting format and then looks at the trajectory of all these meetings that have taken place between India and the USA since 2018.

What is 2+2 Dialogue Format?

Two prominent ministers from each of the two countries' defence and foreign portfolios participate in the 2+2 meetings with the goal of enhancing the level of communication between them. With the use of such a mechanism, the partners can gain a deeper understanding of each other's strategic concerns, so contributing to the

development of a more solid and cohesive strategic partnership. Recently, on November 11, 2023, Rajnath Singh, Indian Defence Minister, and S Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister met with the United States Defence Secretary and the Secretary of State of the United States in New Delhi for the fifth 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue. Since the year 2018, five 2+2 meetings have taken place with the United States leaders. The United States is India's oldest 2+2 dialogue partner. According to analysts, initially India was reluctant to agree to a 2+2 format with the US, as it was seen as symbolic of close political, military, coordination on regional and global issues. But since 2000, deepened dialogue with the US, changed the context on a wide range of issues (Sharma 2015, p. 6) ^[14].

First 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue

The year 2009 saw the start of a strategic discussion between the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and the U.S. Department of State. This was enlarged to a U.S.-India Strategic and Commercial Dialogue in 2015, involving the foreign and commerce ministers of both countries. However, a "recast" into the current 2+2 format occurred in 2018 because to persistent differences in the approaches taken by U.S. leaders in defence and diplomatic policy.

India and the United States of America established a 2+2 Ministerial dialogue in June 2017, during PM Narendra Modi's visit to Washington DC. During the Trump Administration, the United States and India held their first 2+2 Ministerial dialogue. In September 2018, US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and Secretary of Defence James Mattis met with Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and the late Sushma Swaraj. The gathering was seen as a stand-in for the Strategic and Commercial Dialogue that the US and India's foreign and commerce ministers had during the previous Obama administration (Puri and Jyotika p. 32).

On September 6, 2018, the two sides convened for the first round of the 2+2 talks in New Delhi. During this meeting, they signed a historic security agreement, agreed to establish hotlines between their foreign and defence ministers, and discussed difficult topics like India's purchase of S-400 missiles from Russia and its import of Iranian crude oil. In addition to discussing important topics, the US and India inked the historic COMCASA deal, which grants India access to encrypted US technologies, during their first 2+2 meeting. Although the majority of the talks focused on the Indo-Pacific area, the two nations also decided to collaborate in order to have India admitted to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Increased agreement on security and strategic matters characterized the event. Acknowledging each other as significant and autonomous global players and strategic allies, the US and India agreed to collaborate on regional and global challenges in a variety of settings, including bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral (Suri 2023, p. 7) ^[4].

Second Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue (2019)

Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh and Minister of External Affairs Dr. S. Jaishankar went to Washington, D.C. for the second annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue on 18th December 2019 and were joined by the U.S. Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo and Secretary of Defence Mark T. Esper. One of the key highlights of the dialogue was the signing of the Industrial Security Annex (ISA), which aimed

to facilitate greater defence technology sharing and cooperation between the two nations. This agreement was a crucial step in strengthening defence ties and promoting joint research and development in defence technology.

Additionally, the ministers addressed shared concerns regarding regional security, terrorism, and the need for a free and open Indo-Pacific region. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to uphold and promote the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and a rule-based international order in the Indo-Pacific. This shared vision underlined the growing strategic convergence between the United States and India in the Indo-Pacific region (Kumaraswami 2022, p. 16).

Counterterrorism cooperation was another significant aspect of the dialogue, with both countries reiterating their commitment to effectively combat global terrorism. The ministers discussed efforts to disrupt and dismantle terrorist networks and reiterated the importance of denying financial and logistical support to terrorist organizations. The dialogue also provided an opportunity for both sides to review and strengthen their defence and security partnership. The ministers discussed ways to enhance military interoperability, promote defence trade and technology cooperation, and bolster joint military exercises and training. Moreover, the ministers recognized the importance of people-to-people ties and cultural exchanges in fostering a robust U.S.-India relationship. Both sides expressed a commitment to further expand economic ties and enhance bilateral trade and investment (Research Observer Foundation 2023, p. 18).

The Second Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue was a crucial platform for both countries to reaffirm their commitment to a strong and enduring partnership. It served as a forum to address shared interests, concerns, and priorities, while laying the groundwork for deeper cooperation in the years to come. The dialogue underscored the importance of the U.S.-India relationship in promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

The Ministers reiterated their commitment to a free, open, inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region and appreciated the convergence in their respective Indo-Pacific visions, while reiterating their support for ASEAN centrality, peaceful resolution of disputes, rule of law, freedom of navigation, and sustainable and transparent infrastructure investment. That closer U.S.-India cooperation is extremely instrumental for promoting security and prosperity in the broader Indo-Pacific region and beyond was also reaffirmed. The United States reaffirmed its strong support for India's permanent role in a reformed U.N. Security Council and for India's early entry to the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Third Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue

Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh and Minister of External Affairs Dr. S. Jaishankar were joined by the US Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo and Secretary of Defence Mark T. Esper of the Trump Administration for the third annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in New Delhi, India on October 27, 2020. The two nations welcomed the elevation of the U.S.-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, which was argued to be vital to security and stability in the region and the world.

According to the Press release by the US Embassy in New Delhi, The Secretary of States reaffirmed the increasingly

close U.S.-India relationship and the shared goals among like-minded Indo-Pacific countries for regional security and prosperity. The two nations welcomed the second Quad meeting, Secretary of State Pompeo and his counterparts reaffirmed U.S.-India healthcare collaboration to develop vaccines, therapeutics, and essential medical equipment. They welcomed an initiative to collaborate through an International Centre of Excellence in Research focused on infectious diseases, including COVID-19 and other emerging threats.

They looked forward to an overarching Memorandum of Understanding to enhance health cooperation. Discussion also took place about increasing cooperation on energy, space, sustainable financing for infrastructure development, cyber-security, and counterterrorism, and new collaboration in those areas. Both sides reaffirmed the close bonds between the citizens of the two countries and welcomed the inaugural Parliamentary exchange that was to take place later that year. Ways to advance the 21st century defence partnership was also discussed. In this context, the increased cooperation between the U.S. and Indian militaries by expanding information-sharing, defence trade, joint service coordination, and interoperability was also welcomed by the two side. And so was the case for the increased bilateral and multilateral cooperation, including the MALABAR naval exercise. Both sides also welcomed the conclusion of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) to expand geospatial information sharing between the armed forces of the two states and dedicated to the exchange of additional liaison officers.

Fourth Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue (2022)

Since no summit could take place in 2021, therefore Minister of Defence Rajnath Singh and Minister of External Affairs Dr. S. Jaishankar went to Washington, D.C., and had the fourth U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue on April 11, 2022. They were welcomed by the US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Secretary of Defence Lloyd J. Austin III. The Ministers reviewed mutual efforts to respond to the worsening humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and assessed its broader implications. They urged an immediate cessation of hostilities. The Ministers unequivocally condemned civilian deaths. They underscored that the contemporary global order has been built on the UN Charter, respect for international law, and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states. The Ministers reiterated their commitment to work together in close coordination at the UNSC and in. The United States reaffirmed its continued support to work closely with India at the UN as well as in other international organizations and for India's permanent membership in a reformed UNSC and India's entry to the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (Agnihotri 2023, p. 14).

They declared that they will continue to be involved with the Blue Dot Network and the Build Back Better World (B3W) Initiative, and that they were interested in extending their efforts to support resilient and sustainable infrastructure throughout the Indo-Pacific region. The United States was grateful for USAID's chance to co-chair the Governing Council of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI). Both parties reiterated their intentions to work together via CDRI to assist nations most affected by natural disasters, especially those brought on by climate change. The announcement made by India at COP26

to further up its climate efforts, including its long-term goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070, was warmly received by the US. They praised the rise in two-way trade that has exceeded \$113 billion in commodities between the two nations over the past year. The importance of safe, robust, dependable, and varied supply chains for Critical and Emerging Technologies (CET) was emphasized by the ministers, as was the necessity of fostering both local and international innovation.

The Ministers made the decision to establish a framework to promote collaboration in CET fields such biotechnology, semi-conductors, quantum science, advanced communication technology, and artificial intelligence. The Ministers took note of the significant advancements made in the negotiations for an Investment Incentive Agreement (IIA) between the United States and India. This agreement establishes a framework that allows DFC to keep increasing its investment in India, specifically for projects led by the private sector in vital sectors like SME financing, healthcare, and renewable energy.

Fifth Annual India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and U.S. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin met with Indian Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar and Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in New Delhi on Friday, November 10th, 2023 marking the fifth U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue. The dialogue discussed a broad range of issues, including Indo-Pacific security, the Israel-Hamas conflict, and the conflict in Ukraine, emphasizing the increasing importance of the bilateral partnership for joint defence efforts and global supply chain securitization. Central to the meeting's agenda was the effort to maintain a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (Observer Research Foundation p. 22).

India and the United States not only reaffirmed this commitment, but also finalized the Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) to strengthen both countries' supply chain independence, as well as the 2023 Roadmap for U.S.-India Defence Industrial Cooperation, setting a baseline for defence cooperation and coproduction. Additionally, the two sides agreed to start joint production of armoured infantry vehicles. Another major topic for discussion were the ongoing conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine. During the meeting, India and the United States jointly declared support for a political solution to the conflict between Israel and Hamas. The two countries further called for a humanitarian pause and the continuation of diplomatic coordination with key partners in the region. Both sides pledged humanitarian support for Palestinian civilians in Gaza (Navdeep 2023, p. 12).

Regarding the war in Ukraine, both India and the United States similarly cited mutual concern over the war's emerging humanitarian crisis. Notably, the two countries took similar stances on the conflict, drawing attention to the economic impacts of the war in addition to its social consequences. Both India and the United States also pledged humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian citizens. Political developments in Afghanistan and Bangladesh also came up in the meeting. Finally, the two sides discussed strengthening the partnership between India and the United States on semiconductors. Blinken emphasized collaboration in the semiconductor production sector, calling for closer educational cooperation between the two countries.

Conclusion

Never since the end of Cold war has the world been so divided than in the contemporary times, with the threat of wars, pandemic, global terrorism, rise of populism, and climate change posing an existential problem for the entire human kind. The peace of Westphalia is under severe threats with the increasing military and economic might of countries like China that not pose a challenge to rule based world order, but also act as revisionist power who intent to shake the status quo. The contemporary world order is far from perfect and is heavily tilt towards the preservation of the interests of the western and developed countries, but is still better than the new world order sought by China which would be supportive of the principles of dictatorships, human rights abuse, might is right policy etc.

Under these circumstances, it is imperative that both India and US must evolve mechanisms that would reduce the differences in bring them closer to each other. The mistrust that has recently cropped up between the world's oldest democracy (USA) and the World's largest democracy (India) due to several issues like Russia- Ukraine conflict, Khalistani terrorist activities etc. needs to be addressed at the earliest and with an attitude of bridging the divide, instead of inflating the egos of the policy makers of the two countries. Even from the perspective of global peace and development the strong partnership between India and the US is a must as it would be of great utility for several developing countries as they found get an alternate route for their military and economy support. Otherwise, they would have no better choice than to gravitate towards China for their own interest, which would be detrimental for the interests of both India and the USA.

It has been argued that India-US partnership is the most defining relationship of twenty-first century as both countries share a lot in common, be it the values like democracy, rights, justice, peaceful existence of different communities etc. or their giant movie industry, large number of people speaking English language, craze of developing technology, IT, Space innovation, start-ups etc. Indians constitute one of the largest diaspora in the US and has a decisive say in the policy and politics of the US, and which is continuously growing. The need of the hour is to bring in the high tables topics of mutual convergence and benefits like co-operation in the fields of defence, drones, artificial intelligence and machine learning (AIML) technology, green energy, IT, space, disaster relief and mitigation and create a conducive environment for talks.

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