



U.S. Defence Secretary Jim Mattis with his Indian counterpart Nirmala Sitharaman/NDTV

Coming most awaited "2+2" talks between India and U.S. is going to be a challenging issue for both countries. Despite having declared India as the major strategic, defence and security partner in the Indo-Pacific region in 2016, now Washington is warning New Delhi to get a waiver from the punitive CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) that had been imposed on Iran, North Korea and Russia. Since India is about to finalise the defence deal with Russia of buying the state-of-the-art S-400 surface to air missiles, the US is showing its red eyes and trying to turn India into its frontline state for China and Russia. The US doesn't want India's defence partnership with Russia since the US had imposed CAATSA on Russia for the annexation of Crimea and the alleged involvement of Moscow in the US's Presidential election. However, India is looking forward to strengthening its ties with the US and focusing on finding a solution that can preserve mutual interests.

How is this "2+2" dialogue going to circulate around 6 nations?

Despite having the differences in India's relations with Russia, there are many regional issues that will be discussed in this "most important bilateral talk".

China would be the focal point of the whole strategic and defence dialogue since the main concern of the US in the Indo-Pacific region is China's growing strategic and military impression in the region. India also has many political differences with China, mainly, China's continuous objection to India's NSG entry, China Pakistan Economic Corridor and China's growing defence partnership with Pakistan, etc.

Pakistan led terrorism in the region and peacebuilding in Afghanistan are two such issues that both countries need to be agreed upon unanimously and articulate the policies and discuss the concerned issues. The withdrawal of \$300 million in financial aid to Pakistan is the green sign before the *dialogue*.

After the withdrawal of the US from JCPOA, Washington regularly used to urge against Iran and try to minimize the engagements of countries to Iran in terms of trade and defence

sector. On the contrary, India has its major stake in Iran, namely, India is a big importer of Iran’s oil, energy security and the newly developed Chabahar port that connects India to Afghanistan and ends India’s dependency on Pakistan to reach Afghanistan. There is a big issue of disagreement in both camps towards Iran.

How India to solve this polynomial equation:

India and the US both have mutual national interests. Despite the differences on the matters of India’s strategic partnership with Russia and Iran, US very well knows the importance of India to balance the power politics in Indo-Pacific Ocean, countering the Chinese monopoly in the region, and establish last longing stability in Afghanistan. However, its expectation to colour India into NATO fabric is going to fade away.

India’s stand will remain loud and clear as mentioned by the government in Chabahar issue in July this year that our bilateral issues would govern according to our national interests, through our conscience and free foreign policy. However, India will try to ramp up the differences and emphasize on strengthening the strategic partnership in defence technology, trade and commerce, security of the nationals in each other’s territories.

Broadly, I think both countries would follow the flexible approach to settle the differences and the roots of mutual trust will deepen in this first “2+2” dialogue. On the one hand, India cannot wash its bilateral relations with Russia and its assistance in defence technology, on the other US cannot spoil its relations with India and vice versa. Russia’s new anti-missile system S-400 and its assistance in Project 75-making indigenous submarines-have the strategic importance for India, Moreover, India also eyeing the new defence drones from the US and expanding the defence ties strongly. India also has such submarines that have both countries’ technical equipment. So optimistically this summit is going to be historical for both countries.

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