

The closed-door meetings promised much more than expected: Antony Blinken's visit to India

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's state visit to India ended on a bitter-sweet note as both India and the US side discussed matters about shared bilateralism, yet diverging in terms of national interests. Antony Blinken met his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar and discussed agendas ranging from Afghanistan to the exploitation of big tech companies on misinformation. There were other attributes apart from these mainstream agendas which might not have been discussed per se but conveyed thoroughly during this meet. Antony Blinken who is set for an Asia tour also met with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and this tour made by the US Secretary of State implies how the US under the Biden Administration is looking at its diplomatic policies especially with Asia and Central Asia. The growing presence of China, which acts like an outright threat to the so-called hegemon can be countered if and only the US's policies towards the East is negated enough to the countries which are the biggest shareholder in the region. However, when it comes to the relations shared between India and the US, it is not new that the bilateral relation escalated during the Trump administration and this bilateral relationship was not the same a decade back. The US has slowly started to take note of and also realize the detrimental position which India hold in the politics of Asia and the Indo-Pacific in particular. The discussion between Antony Blinken and S Jaishankar covered a wide range of agendas and to begin with, the turmoil in Afghanistan could not have been missed.

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Image source: Twitter

The peace process which implied the withdrawal of the US troops from Afghan soil is not particularly going smooth. The plan although set an optimistic tone, the reality today stands in stark contrast, especially after the Taliban's increased activities in the region. The world, including India, have shared discontent at the actualization of the peace process and the violence between the Taliban and the government agents has been unsettling for some time now. The meeting between Blinken and Jaishankar revised these measures and addressed how a comprehensive plan is required to understand and break down each agency involved. Blinken mentioned, *"An Afghanistan that does not respect the rights of its people, an Afghanistan that commits atrocities against its own people, would become a pariah state... taking over the country by force and abusing the rights of its people is not the path to achieve those objectives."* As a response to Blinken's statement, Jaishankar mentioned, *"We don't think that the outcome should be decided by force on the battlefield. We think the peace negotiations should be a negotiation and should lead to peace."* The quest for the restoration of peace and stability in the region continues but the worsening situation in Afghanistan has transcended borders calling upon prompt action.

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Afghanistan's war-like situation has become a pressing issue, but the other war which has exhausted the human race and resources were thoroughly discussed by the two delegations. The COVID-19 pandemic has left a dreadful strain on all countries across the globe and as each of them fight this unending disaster, a shared protocol for the distribution of resources is the need of the hour. The disparities between countries on an economic basis have already led to a dispute for vaccines and the prioritization for equal distribution of vaccines and other pandemic related resources must be focused on. In the joint press conference, Blinken reminisced the aid and assistance provided by India to help the US fight the pandemic in its early days and during the second wave that has left India in an extremely overwhelmed situation, the US was able to pay back which must be considered as the highest gesture of friendship between the two countries. The US Secretary of State also announced another additional \$25 million aid to help India with the COVID-19 vaccination drive.



Image source: Twitter

The emergence of QUAD in the Indo-Pacific region as a military association to counter

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China's presence has always been questioned. Nevertheless, India's association in it shows the position it has acquired to showcase itself as a leading global power and Blinken's visit to India confirmed this statement. Both the US and India have agreed to work along with this framework and uphold the ideals on which the partnership is based upon.

Even so, the meeting with the representative of the Dalai Lama was indicative of the US's policy with India and Asia, at large. The meeting confirmed the US's support in acknowledging Tibet's autonomy upsetting China. The latter has reacted to this meeting labelling it as a violation of 'Washington's commitment' in recognizing Tibet as a part of China. Under the Biden Administration, the US has expressed its support to the ongoing conflicts in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Tibet. Blinken tweeted, "The U.S. and India share a commitment to democratic values; this is part of the bedrock of our relationship and reflective of India's pluralistic society and history of harmony. Civil society helps advance these values."

I was pleased to meet with Prime Minister [@narendramodi](#) to discuss our joint efforts to deepen the U.S.-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership and expand our cooperation on COVID-19 response efforts, regional security, and climate change. pic.twitter.com/Aqv27hRpEV

— Secretary Antony Blinken (@SecBlinken) [July 28, 2021](#)

Source: Twitter

Despite very few details available between the meet between the US Secretary of State and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he mentioned through tweets that the discussion with PM included US-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, responses to COVID-19, regional security and climate change.

As Antony Blinken wrapped up his state visit to India, all the above points culminate into a strengthened bond re-established between the two countries and intensified every aspect of bilateralism. The visit will remain a sign of the mutual respect shared by the two countries for their national interest whilst working parallelly with the shared goals on foreign policy, defence and security, and peace.

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