



US Secretary of State's Visit to India

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Why in News

Recently, in his **visit to India**, the **US Secretary of State** mentioned that **actions by India and the US will shape the 21st century**.

- The visit **reciprocates** the visit by India's **External Affairs Minister (EAM) to the US in May 2021**.
- The US Secretary of State and India's EAM have also had **detailed conversations** in the **UK (at the G7 meeting)** and **Italy (at the G20 meeting)**.

Key Points

- **Major Discussions:**

- **Afghanistan:**

- There is **no military solution to the conflict**, and that taking over the country by force would not help the Taliban gain the international recognition or legitimacy it desires, including the lifting of sanctions and travel bans against the Taliban leadership.

India mentioned **Pakistan was an exception to the consensus for a peaceful political settlement.**

- An **Afghanistan that did not respect the rights of its people**, and an Afghanistan that committed atrocities against its own people **would not be part of the global community.**

Afghanistan **has to be inclusive and fully representative of Afghan people.**

- **Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific:**

- Both share a vision of free, open, secure and prosperous **Indo-Pacific.**
- Highlighted cooperation in the Indo-Pacific as part of the **QUAD (Quadrilateral Framework)** with Japan and Australia, and clarified that QUAD is not a military alliance at all.

- **Covid- Vaccination:**

- Discussed the **Quad's initiative** to provide Indian-made **Covid-vaccines** in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The **US announced a USD 25-million grant for India's vaccine programme**, and promised to strengthen **vaccine supply chains** to enhance production.

- **Climate Change:**

Under the **US-India Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership** launched in April 2021, the two sides intend to launch a new climate action and finance mobilisation dialogue and relaunch the strategic clean energy partnership.

- **US' Stand:**
 - Termed the **Indo-US relationship as one of the most important partnerships in the world.**
 - Both share a **commitment to democratic values** which is part of the **bedrock of their relationship** and reflective of **India's pluralistic society and history of harmony.**
 - Both believe in **human dignity, in equality of opportunity, the rule of law, fundamental freedoms**, including freedom of religion and belief.
 - People deserve to have a voice in their government and be treated with respect no matter who they are.
 - Cited **business cooperation, educational engagement, religious and spiritual ties and ties between millions of families** as some of the **key pillars of the overall relationship.**
 - Referred to the **rising global threats to democracy** and international freedoms and talked about **democratic recession (Human Rights Issues in China)**, noting that it is **vital for India and the US to continue to stand together** in support of these ideals.
 - **Interreligious relations, media freedom, farmers' protests, love 'jihad'** violence and minority rights were part of the discussion that the US Secretary of State had with a group of people, including a representative of the **Dalai Lama.**
- **India's Stand:**
 - India-US bilateral ties have **enhanced to a level that enables the two nations to deal collaboratively with larger issues.**
 - Welcomes **US' strong commitment to strengthen the India-US strategic partnership** that is anchored in shared democratic values and is a force for global good.
 - Responded to the US concerns on the issues with a number of points, making it clear that the **quest for a more perfect democracy applied to both the US and India.**
 - India's policies of the last few years had been to right wrongs done historically, and that **while freedoms are important, they should not be equated with the lack of governance**".

Current State of India-US Ties

- **Defence:**
 - India and US inked **important defence pacts** in the last few years and also **formalised the four nation alliance of QUAD**.
The alliance is seen as an important counter to China in the Indo-Pacific.
 - The **Malabar exercise** in November 2020 portrayed a high point in Indo-US strategic ties, it was the **first time in 13 years that all four countries of QUAD came together** sending a strong message to China.
 - **India now has access to american bases** from **Djibouti in Africa** to Guam in the Pacific. It can also access advanced communication technology used in US defence.
 - India and US have **four foundational defence agreements**:
 - **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Intelligence (BECA)**.
 - General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).
 - Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA).
 - **Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)**.
- **Trade:**
 - The previous US government **ended India's special trade status (GSP withdrawal)** and also imposed several bans, India also retaliated with bans on 28 US products.
 - Current **US government has allowed all the bans by the previous government to expire**.
- **Indian Diaspora:**
 - There is a **growing presence of Indian diaspora in all spheres in the US**. For example the current Vice-President (Kamala Harris) of the US has a strong Indian connection.
 - There are **several Indian origin people holding strong leadership positions in the current US administration**.
- **Covid-Cooperation:**
 - When the US was reeling under a deadly **Covid** wave last year, **India rushed important medical supplies and eased export restrictions to help the country**.
 - Initially the US showed hesitancy in returning the favour when India needed it, however the **US quickly changed its stance and rushed supplies to India**.

Way Forward

- There is a **huge potential to boost bilateral trade between the countries** especially on account of increasing **anti-China sentiment in both the nations**.
- Thus, the negotiation should **focus on the resolution of various non-tariff barriers** and other market access improvements as early as possible.

- In order to counter China in the maritime domain, **India needs to fully engage with the US and other partners in the Indo-pacific region**, in order to preserve the freedom of navigation and the rules-based order.
- In international politics, **there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies, only permanent interests**. In such a scenario India must continue to pursue its foreign policy of **strategic hedging**.

Source: TH