

India-US ties: Bilateral Agenda

Anchor:

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Participants:

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Context:

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken begins his two-day visit to India. He will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval. It is expected that the robust and multifaceted [India-US bilateral relations](#) will be reviewed and the potential for further consolidation will be explored.

(This RSTV debate was featured on 27th July 2021 before Mr Blinken's visit to India).

Significance of this meeting:

- The two-day visit will mark Blinken's first trip to India after assuming charge as the US Secretary of State and the third by a high-ranking Biden administration official after it came to power in January 2021.
- It is indeed a very significant meeting as there are many issues that will be discussed during the meeting.
- The timing of the visit is also very important from the point of view of the existing global scenario.
- The geo-political and geo-economic condition at the global level is completely riddled with uncertainties. Hence, this meeting will bring about some important discussions on crucial matters such as bilateral, regional, and international issues including the issue of the [Taliban](#), QUAD, climate change, and so on.

Concerns of India regarding Afghanistan:

Post Withdrawal Strategy of the US:

- There is no clarity regarding the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. Hence, knowing the post-withdrawal strategy is one of the major concerns of India.

Counter-Terrorism role:

- The US has intensified aerial support to Afghan National Defence Force to push back the Taliban. But, the US is also saying that providing this support will not be possible on a regular basis after the end of August as 11th September 2021 is the last date for any kind of military combat in Afghanistan.
- The US is saying that it is going to perform a counter-terrorism role with an exclusive focus on Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

- So, how will they be able to implement their counter-terrorism role within Afghanistan without any aerial base is a matter of curiosity for India and it would like to know how India can be useful in supporting the US in its counter-terrorism role.

Regional Security:

- Although the US has withdrawn itself from Afghanistan, still being a superpower, it seems to contribute towards regional security.
- So, to what extent the US is going to contribute to regional security, is also a matter of concern.

Mutual usage of Air Bases:

- There are various agreements signed between the US and India about the mutual sharing of Airbases and these bases play a vital role in maintaining the balance in Afghanistan.
- The Americans are looking for launchpads from which they can carry over the horizon strike capability to keep the balance on the ground so that it is not totally controlled by the Taliban or any other allied factions.
- India should play a constructive role and offer its support to the US in managing this.
- India would like the US to understand its concerns regarding Pakistan's role in this. Biden's administration is realizing that India is part of the solution and it is not excluding India like the earlier governments in the US used to do in the matter of the Pakistan triangle.

Taliban, Pakistan, and Afghanistan Triangle:

- The Taliban is a radical terror outfit and its brutality has been evident. The condition of Afghanistan will worsen if the Taliban takes control of the country as no other countries are willing to support Afghanistan.
- We all are aware of the fact that Pakistan supported many former Taliban leaders and kept checks on them whenever it was required. This used to have a negative impact on the internal security of India as well.
- At the same time, Pakistan used to hand over the leaders one by one when it came under pressure.
- Hence, the Taliban has realized the fact that Pakistan uses the Taliban according to its needs and it will make sure that Pakistan pays the price for its deeds when the Taliban takes over the control.
- But, it is expected that Pakistan will behave in the way it is programmed to and it will continue its policy of destabilization as it has the support of China as well.
- India has to reckon with the situation and prepare for everything.

Also read: [India – Pakistan Relations](#)

Growing Presence of China in the Indian Ocean Region:

- There is a shift in the balance of power in favour of China. Not only this, China is also using very blunt and extremely aggressive means to enforce its will on weaker countries in the Indo-Pacific region.
- This has become a serious and urgent issue in the present scenario and will be an issue in the coming years as well.

Also read: [India – China Relations](#)

Quad Summit 2021:

The [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue \(Quad\) Summit](#) was held on March 12, 2021. The issues discussed during the meeting were:

China Threat:

- This summit was a signal to China and it saw a major challenge to its dream of a China Centric Asia Pacific, in Quad's call for a free, open, inclusive, healthy Indo-Pacific region that is "anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion".

Covid-19 pandemic:

- Besides unanimity in the need for a free, open rules-based order rooted in international law to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, the key agenda which attracted global attention was a collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of synergizing the vaccination efforts for humanity, with India as a manufacturing hub, assisted by others to roll out one billion vaccines.

Other issues:

- The list of shared challenges to be addressed also includes cyberspace, critical technologies, counterterrorism, quality infrastructure investment, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), some of which echo alleged Chinese involvement like cyber attacks and transparency of the [World Health Organization](#).

India's stand on China's growing power:

- India is fulfilling the vaccine requirements of the neighboring countries and other countries including the US are supporting India. We have seen that China is also supplying vaccines to many countries, especially to the [ASEAN](#) countries but there have been cases of failure in dealing with the virus. Hence, the ASEAN countries have realized their mistake and now their demand for other vaccines such as Pfizer, Moderna, etc. have been increasing. So, India is required to increase its manufacturing capacity of vaccines to fulfill this demand.
- China is also imposing its encroachment on the strategic partners of India such as Sri Lanka. So, India is keen to partner with the US and other QUAD members on the matter of China's growing influence in IOR and beyond.
- India should pick certain countries such as Nepal, Myanmar, Philippines, etc. to form a coalition and jointly do some projects. If India can form a big grand coalition, the Chinese power will be weakened. The strategy of counter-balancing China is there but, India has to show its presence tactically.

Challenges involved:

The world is waiting and watching:

- No country is willing to choose between India and China and even the QUAD countries have their compulsions.

Unsettled borders of India with China:

- India is the only country amongst Quad members which has an unsettled land border with China.
- China has done its best to create some apprehension in the minds of the other Quad members, by keeping China-India relations fluctuating between tension and harmony with incidents like [Doklam](#), Wuhan, Malappuram, and [Ladakh](#).
- The US has concerns about these issues but it does not want the relationship to get out of control.

China's aggressive path:

- China has been using aggressive and blunt tactics to make its presence more powerful.
- China is also trying to create a RED QUAD under which countries such as Russia, Iran, China, and possibly Turkey will come together to form some kind of grouping or regional security dialogue forum.
- It will take time for QUAD countries to move forward in a fashion that will make China feel the heat.

Trump Vs. Biden Government:

- The trade war that the Trump government had started has now been relaxed. There are no excessive trade demands by the Biden government as there were during the Trump administration.

Some important issues that need discussion:

- India wants the [Generalized System of Preferences \(GSP\)](#) to be installed.
- There are some issues regarding imports of raw materials for vaccines. The Serum Institute of India is facing shortages of raw materials even though the US government has removed the embargo.
- There has been a sluggishness in the US commitment in terms of the supply of vaccines. The US has said that it will distribute a large number of its surplus vaccines to Asia but the share allotted for India is very low according to our needs.
- Although there are some issues that warrant discussion, there is no point which can create conflict.
- There can be contentious issues related to human rights and democracy between India and the USA. However, there is less chance of conflict on these issues.
- Currently, the Biden administration is focused on containing China which can be seen in various decisions taken by it. Recently, it has lifted sanctions from Russia and allowed the construction of a gas pipeline between Germany and Russia.

Way Forward:

If there is one word to describe India-US relations, that is 'strategic convergence'. For the past two decades, the relation between the two democracies has greatly transformed. India and the USA will continue to work together on various fronts such as research and development, education, climate change, etc. The canvas is very broad. For big countries like India and the USA, there will invariably be some differences but both countries would sit across the table to resolve them.