

# Defense News Conclave

## *Stories of U.S. - India Defense Partnership*

### Project Brief

#### Background and Agenda

The United States of America (U.S.) has been iterating the need for a ‘Free, Open and Secure Indo-Pacific’ for the past few years. The vision is in sync with the interests of India given that it signifies the U.S.’ recognition of the rising security challenges in the Indo-Pacific.

Recent developments in U.S.-India defense cooperation through inking bilateral agreements, conducting joint military exercises, defense procurement etc., indicate the potential for flourishing defense relations between the two democracies. This holds greater importance for India, in light of the challenging geopolitical scenario in the region, and recent developments in the relationship with its neighbours.

Steps have been taken by both nations to enhance their presence and influence throughout the region, to counter threats of aggression, terrorism, drugs, cybercrime, human trafficking, among others. Such steps not only underpin the stability, but also form the bedrock for continued economic growth of countries in the region.

It, therefore becomes important to amplify the message of the need for a free, open and secure Indo-Pacific, and highlight the importance of a U.S.-India defense partnership for the same. This can be made possible by creating awareness and building the capacity of key stakeholders particularly in New Delhi, who will then build a positive narrative on the subject, for the general public in India, and select other relevant countries from the region.

In light of the above, CUTS International, through this project, will organise a series of workshops for training 100-120 informed journalists, storytellers, media professionals, social media influencers, and community leaders from India, on the subject. Defense experts, government officials, corporate leaders, defense companies, entrepreneurs, and researchers from the U.S. and India would be chosen to impart the training. The workshops would be concluded with a Defense News Conclave.

#### Need for the Project

The ethos of U.S.-India defense partnership is best described in the words of the U.S. Secretary of Defense General (Retd.) Lloyd James Austin III during his visit to India in March 2021. He said, *“India in particular is an increasingly important partner among today’s rapidly shifting international dynamics. I reaffirm our commitment to a comprehensive and forward-looking defense partnership with India as a central pillar to our approach to the region.”* The secretary remarked that the India-U.S. defense partnership will grow

in the coming years and that the relationship is a stronghold of a free and open Indo-Pacific region. Recent developments back-up such words. A few notable examples in this regard include: the trilateral Malabar naval exercise in February 2021, the quadrilateral Malabar naval exercise in 2020 with Japan and Australia, the third 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue led by the Secretaries of State and Defense, combined with USD 20 billion in defense sales since 2008 (including Apache attack helicopters, Chinook heavy-lift helicopters, and M777 ultra-lightweight artillery).

Furthermore, U.S. and India have signed crucial defense information sharing agreements such as: Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) for sharing geospatial information, and the Industrial Security Annex (ISA) to our General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) for sharing sensitive government information which facilitates industrial collaboration. Such U.S. commitments and partnership with India, underpin regional stability and remarkable economic rise of this region, while also deterring any aggressive actions by other countries in the region.

Despite the above, the general perception amongst the Indian populace undermines U.S.-India defense ties in contrast with defense ties with other countries (for instance, with Russia). It, therefore, becomes important to amplify the message of the need for a free, open and secure Indo-Pacific, and highlight the importance of a U.S.-India defense partnership for the same.

## Objectives and Outcomes

This project ultimately aims to create a group of informed stakeholders (journalists from India in particular), who would strengthen the information sharing circuit related to the importance of a robust U.S.–India Defense partnership, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. Wide dissemination of the highlights and future prospects of this defense partnership, through mass media, will help create a positive narrative amongst the general public on this subject.

In this regard, two key expected outcomes from the project are as follows: A) Training and awareness generation, B) Information generation and dissemination- on U.S.–India Defense partnership.

## Activities and Deliverables

- a) Training and capacity-building of 100 to 120 (in batches of 30-40) informed journalists, storytellers, media professionals, social media influencers, and community leaders from India. This will be done through a series of workshops with 25 to 35 defense experts, government officials, private players, and researchers from U.S. and India.
- b) A two-day Defense News Conclave will be organised. The purpose of the Conclave will be to provide participants with different perspectives, access to experts on the subject and a platform to discuss and exchange their experiences. Resource persons will primarily be drawn from among the relevant bodies and think-tanks including media organisations from India and the U.S. Research based-training material and reports will be prepared, which would be disseminated in the Defense News Conclave.
- c) A research-based briefing paper series covering issues such as India's defense procurement from U.S., U.S.-India joint military exercises, U.S.-India defense agreements and cooperation dialogues, etc. will be prepared, and widely disseminated.
- d) Stakeholders will be encouraged to develop around 50 to 75 stories in English and vernacular languages on the subject of U.S.-India defense relations for consumption of the general public. These will be widely disseminated within 6-12 months of the Conclave.
- e) The project will publish and disseminate a series of quarterly news wraps, which will be a compilation of pertinent news on the subject.
- f) A final project report, documenting a compilation of project findings, lessons and way forward will be prepared.