

# Defense News Conclave

## *Stories on U.S.-India Defense and Security Partnership*

### WORKSHOP REPORT

#### Dialogues on ‘Deliverables to Deliveries’

**Friday, August 4, 2023 Time: 0915 – 1400 hours (IST)**

#### **Hotel Peerless Inn, Kolkata**

**Summary:** With the inauguration of the Age of Reforms in India in 1990, Indian Foreign Policy has been marked by a distinct pro-liberalization stance that manifested itself in altered mutual perceptions on the part of both India and the United States. In subsequent years, India’s designation as a Major Defense Partner of the U.S., signing of foundational defense-related agreements, and a large number of joint military exercises in the Indo-Pacific region have taken the U.S.-India Defense and Security Partnership to new heights.

The shift in geopolitical attention to the Indo-Pacific region and related geo-strategic and geo-economic developments such as the coming together of Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. into a Quad, the initiation of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, have further reinforced this partnership. This is corroborated by the Joint Statement of the United States and India following the Official State Visit of the Indian Prime Minister to the U.S. in June 2023 which highlights the desire to secure a free, open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

**Background & Context:** Under the Defense News Conclave Project, supported by the U.S. Consulate General Kolkata and the U.S. Department of State, CUTS International is organizing five workshops covering consular districts of the U.S. Consulate Generals. They aim to create a group of informed stakeholders in India for strengthening U.S.-India Defense and Security Partnership by generating the necessary awareness of diverse media professionals and other relevant stakeholders. Each workshop will consist of two sessions focusing on good practices of the U.S.-India Defense and Security Partnership in general and its relevance for the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership in the Indo-Pacific region in particular.

Among others, they will look at the milestones set and achieved, and policies and gaps to be addressed in order to secure a free, open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

## **Introduction**

The workshop was flagged off by Bipul Chattopadhyay, Executive Director, CUTS International. He began by referring to the year 1998 when India carried out its first nuclear tests and was dubbed a ‘pariah state’. A series of dialogues between the Former U.S. Secretary of State, Strobe Albott, and Former External Affairs Minister of India, Jaswant Singh followed and ushered in an era of positive diplomacy between the two countries. As the US perception of India changed from a land of snake charmers and naked fakirs to one with booming markets and immense business potential, the size of the Indian economy has grown at a steady pace, so much so that as per a recent report by Goldman Sachs, by 2075, the size of the Indian economy is expected to surpass that of the USA and will be equivalent to that of China. This is reaffirmed by the World Power Index prepared annually by the Lowy Institute, Australia which shows that the power gap between India and other major powers is gradually decreasing.

All this has culminated in encouraging developments including the recognition of India as a ‘Critical Strategic Partner’ by the US ahead of the Official State Visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the U.S. from June 21-24, 2023. Today India is the only developing country that is a member of the Critical Minerals Partnership, Artemis Accords, and Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET). India is also the only South Asian country to be part of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF).

The India-U.S. relationship is poised to grow further in the years ahead. Cooperation between the two countries strengthens U.S. security, bolsters India’s prosperity, and enriches American society. An enormous range of Americans have a stake in the U.S.-India relationship and expects further progress in utilizing the full potential of U.S.-India defense ties as it spans the scope of human endeavor, from sea to space, from security to health, and from energy to education.

## **Key Takeaways**

### **Session I: Significance of U.S.-India Defense and Security Partnership**

Chair: Lt. Gen. Subrata Saha, Former Member of the National Security Advisory Board and Deputy Chief of Army Staff

Panelists:

Shekhar Dutt, Former Governor of Chhattisgarh and Defense Secretary of India

Arun Ramchandani, Executive Vice President, L&T Defense

Chintamani Mahapatra, Founder and Honorary Chairman of Kalinga Institute of Indo-Pacific Studies

Manu Pubby, Senior Editor, The Economic Times

#### **A backdrop of the U.S. India-Defense and Security Partnership**

The 1991 Kicklighter proposals (Lt. Gen. Claude Kicklighter was the Army commander at the U.S. Pacific Command) suggested establishing contacts between the three Services to promote exchanges and explore areas of cooperation. Military-to-military cooperation has been one of the highlights of the U.S.-India partnership.

Eventually, in 1995, the first Agreed Minute on Defense relations was officially signed and soon after this agreement, in 1998, India performed the nuclear tests. In 2000, Former Prime Minister Atul Bihari Vajpayee welcomed the then U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Following the 9/11 twin-tower terror attacks in 2001, India extended its unconditional support to the U.S. in its crusade against global terrorism as India too is a victim of terrorism, sponsored by states across its borders.

In 2005, India signed the New Framework for U.S.-India Defense Relations for a span of 10 years. In 2013 India signed the Joint Declaration of Defense Cooperation in which India, acquired the status of being the closest partner who allowed the exchange of information and technology. Subsequently, in 2016, the United States designated India as a Major Defense Partner.

Despite the progression in relations, bureaucratic hurdles continued to hamper the joint industrial defense cooperation between the two countries. Launching the U.S.-India 2+2 Dialogues in 2018 helped bridge this gap by bringing together for the first time the American

secretaries of state and defense with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Defense. It is only through closer partnership and uninterrupted dialogues that the relationship between the two countries can grow from strength to strength in the future.

### **Indo-Pacific as the center of gravity for stability, and security of the world**

The importance of the Indo-Pacific region as one of the nodal points in the global political economy is being increasingly recognized. With more than half of the world's population, more than two-thirds of the world's economies, and seven of the top ten largest militaries, the Indo-Pacific countries define the nature of the contemporary international world order and have implications for countries far beyond the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This is a region where India and U.S. can together play a constructive role in promoting peace, stability, and inclusive development.

### **Geostrategic Challenge**

India's dependency on Russia for arms and its close proximity with China across an unsettled border raises trust issues for the USA. Given the fact that Russian technology has not seen the infusion of fresh funds in many years, the Chinese have been producing better weapons than Russia. In the event of such dependence on Russia, India may lose out in the conflict with the Chinese.

The U.S. has been India's largest war-time training partner and the knowledge that India is acquiring from the U.S. is significant. The signing of various agreements with the U.S. has provided India with tools for intelligence gathering through real-time satellite imagery.

In times of crisis, such as in the Doklam Plateau in 2016-17 or during Chinese territorial incursion in Ladakh's Galwan Valley along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), U.S. military's spatial and real-time imagery was shared with Indian armed forces and this helped India close the technological gap with Beijing.

### **'One USA, One India is Eleven'**

The U.S.-India dialogue since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been extremely useful because it allows both India and USA to take advantage of each other's presence and willingness. The central aspect is 'willingness' i.e. willingness to enter into social, economic, and security partnerships. They also have the willingness to take on if required a common adversary viz. China. However, it is just not belligerence that characterizes the U.S.-China relations. The U.S. is also trying to talk to Beijing and restore normalcy in its bilateral relations. The U.S. is

nevertheless, finding new opportunities and seizing them in case its dialogue for peaceful relations fails.

It is always in U. S. interests to keep India on their side, share technologies, and part with as much information as they or their companies. A bigger possibility is if Indian companies make joint ventures and become part of the global chain of U.S. companies. This way each sector will benefit from each other's expertise and lead to the bolstering of the U.S.-India partnership.

One USA and one India need not make two countries, one USA, one India is eleven and therefore seize the opportunities of the world.

### **U.S.-India Joint Defense-Industrial Cooperation**

At no point in time has the environment looked so encouraging for strong cooperation between the U.S. and India at the industrial level than now. Despite, a few modest partnerships between some Indian defense companies and their U.S. counterparts, the past has not had much to offer.

A noteworthy development on the side-lines of the June 2023 Official State Visit of the Indian Prime Minister to the USA was the launch of INDUS-X (U.S.-India Defense Acceleration Ecosystem) which underscores the collaboration among start-ups of both countries and co-producing new technologies.

There is a convergence between Innovations for Defense Excellence (iDEX) and INDUS-X. The iDEX initiative is ushering in several Indian start-ups to the defense environment, and offering them an opportunity to build their products for defense applications. INDUS-X, with its broader framework, may form the iDEX environment useful.

However, without control of IP rights, a company remains restricted to being a mere manufacturer and lacking any capability to control the value chain. iDEX and INDUS-X could be good enablers in the co-development of technologies. In this context, both the U.S. Embassy in India and the Indian government (Ministry of Defense) are veering towards solutions to challenges faced by defense start-ups and are providing encouragement for research and development work. However, the lack of standardization, and a common certification system, inhibits the use of technologies produced in India for use in the U.S.

In this regard, a promising step has been taken on MQ9 B's and jet engine technology. This may provide a much-needed boost to the MSMEs along with the entire defense ecosystem.

India's target of US\$ 5 billion defense export to neighboring countries, African nations, and to the Gulf region by 2025 from the present US\$1.9 billion can materialize only with the influx of such technologies.

Delivering the **Keynote Address**, Col. Douglas Hess, U.S. Army Attache, U.S. Embassy, New Delhi thus emphasized that in this modern, global, and interconnected world, India and the US require a robust partnership underlined by mutual trust and understanding. He reiterated the U.S. commitment to work with India for a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

## **Session II: Recent Initiatives on U.S.-India Defense and Security Partnership**

Chair: Indranil Banerjee, Senior Analyst and Freelance Journalist

Panelists:

Air Chief Marshal Arup Raha, Former Chief of Air Staff and President, CENER-K

Partha Roy Chowdhury, Commercial Lead, Lockheed Martin India

Col. Baljinder Singh (Retd.), Director, Aerospace and Defense, USISPF, India Office

Sucharita Bhattacharjee, Policy Analyst, CUTS International

### **Uncertainty in India over U.S.-China Relationship**

The session began with the highlighting of the fact that at a strategic level, there is a broad agreement within India that it needs to engage more closely with the U.S. But it is U.S.'s continuing engagement with China and the ambiguity in U.S.'s relationship with China that has led to some uncertainty within India.

Whether or not the U.S. deepening of relations with India is merely messaging Beijing or something more substantial is yet to be seen. Therefore, a look at the specifics of U.S.-India relations, particularly in terms of defense cooperation and the various aspects of this partnership could be a good start for analyzing the U.S.-India Defense and Security Partnership.

### **Joint U.S.-India Air Exercises**

From the beginning of the Cold War period till about 2004, relations remained taciturn between U.S. and India and after 40 years, the bilateral relations were revived. In 2004 the

first joint air exercise 'COPE Thunder' between U.S. and India was held in Gwalior, kicking off a series of extremely useful exercises.

The latest, sixth edition of COPE 2023 was held in Kaliakunda, Panagarh and Agra. The exercise which lasted for two weeks saw from the Indian side, the participation of LCA Tejas, Sukhoi 30s, Jaguars, and C-17s. The Americans had for the first time then brought in F-15 air superiority Eagle fighter aircraft and brought in B1B Supersonic Strategic bomber. The Japanese Self-Defense Force was observer in these exercises.

Besides, COPE, India has also been invited by the U.S. to participate in various exercises held in the USA. This includes the multilateral air exercise Red Flag in Nevada, USA where the world's best air forces participate.

There are many lessons that India has learned from these exercises. Firstly, interoperability- India learned how to manage each other's logistics and intelligence networks and maintenance activities This has afforded valuable insights into each other's capabilities and boosted India's self-confidence. The resultant friendship, and the camaraderie between the U.S. and India, cemented this bonding in military matters.

Through the joint exercises, India learned the need to induct fighter aircraft, air interception radars, and also the missiles - close combat missiles as well as medium-range and long-range missiles. In the process, the overall confidence and capability of the Indian Air Force got a new impetus.

### **Initiative of Critical & Emerging Technologies**

The joint initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology launched in 2022 and officially inaugurated in January 2023 will help strengthen the innovation ecosystems of both countries, drive defense innovation and technology cooperation, and help in creating resilient semiconductor supply chains.

The iCET initiative will also open new avenues for cooperation in space, nurture STEM talent and bring in next-generation telecommunications. These are the areas where U.S. and India can cooperate on co-development.

Besides, iCET also offers the possibility for the two countries to come together and developing technologies. Thus, the iCET initiative will enable India a stand on Intellectual property (IP) and to build products of the future with the US on an equal footing.

## **The success of the private sector and OEMs in India**

In a Joint Venture with Tatas, Lockheed Martin started manufacturing one of the aircraft empennages (tail part of the aircraft) in India at a plant set up in Hyderabad in 2009. This Joint Venture was Tata's first-hand experience in aerospace and defense manufacturing. It is the only C-130 J empennage manufacturing facility of C-130 J in the world. If production comes to a halt at this facility, the company's manufacturing of C-130 J stops. This speaks volumes about the trust that Lockheed Martin has reposed on an Indian company and the relationship is growing stronger. The company is also manufacturing fighter wings, other than Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), none of the companies makes fighter wings from the same facility. Again, at the Tata Sikorsky plant, the whole cabin of the S-92 is being manufactured. Lockheed Martin is also pushing for indigenization by supporting a lot of start-ups in India.

## **Information Disorder and the U.S-India Defense and Security Partnership**

Although there are several types of information disorders, misinformation and disinformation are among the major ones. While misinformation is false information without an intent to cause harm, disinformation is misinformation with an intent to harm an individual, collective, community, or even country.

A recent incident of misinformation and disinformation was the declaration of the quantity and price of MQ9 or predator drones by the media during the recent official state visit of the Indian Prime Minister to the USA. This was done by the Media even before any official release or letter of intent was signed. Such misinformation on the part of the media can jeopardize the whole process of procurement. The entire issue is a matter of intense discussion and is still under consideration.

The other example is that of the depiction of the image of one's country overseas. The Agneepath Scheme's representation to the global audience through social media was probably not an appropriate one. When such schemes are looked at in a negative light by a global audience, the image of India that has been cautiously and carefully crafted over the years by our leaders stands to get tarnished almost overnight.

With the rising threats of misinformation and disinformation, the government's sanctions and monitoring have also increased manifold, which could also pose a counter-threat by acting as a deterrent to the freedom of speech and expression.



## **Challenges to the U.S.-India Defense Partnership**

Despite U.S. companies being part of the Indian aeronautical space, intense cooperation between the defense companies of the two countries has not taken place in space or outer space. Whether or not the GE-414 engine deal with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) will result in building an aero-engine ecosystem in India remains to be seen.

Indian defense industries have faced numerous challenges in navigating through the U.S. International Traffic in Arms Regulation (ITAR), thus preventing substantial cooperation with the U.S. defense industry. ITAR further discourages joint participation in programs for the Indian market and the international market. The current dialogue between the two countries seeks to break down these barriers, but whether or not the U.S. eases the ITAR regulations needs to be observed.

At a time, when American companies such as Lockheed Martin have established state-of-the-art processes and state-of-the-art capabilities, there is a need for skill development, enhancement, and training, which is yet to be recognized by any policy of the Government of India.

In order to counter the misinformation-disinformation that prevails, there is a need to understand the cycle of its operation- how it is created, recreated, and disseminated. It is also important to identify the key players, and actors, and take stock of the major aspects of misinformation and disinformation.

The cycle of information disorder can only be countered through a strategy of circulating only authentic information; this means engaging, informing, and influencing the audience through a constructive strategy.

Media is the fourth pillar of democracy. The media needs to be integrated in a responsible, timely, responsive, and accountable manner while sharing the information with the larger audience i.e. the masses.

Media also includes social media and digital media and here digital diplomacy and political communication become crucial. For example, in Nigeria which restored its democracy in 1999, and went to elections in 2015, digital communication and Twitter diplomacy played a pivotal role in ensuring the fairness of elections by invoking the power of immediacy that social media implies. In the early days of digital technology, Ms. Nirupama Rao, the Former

Foreign Secretary of India used Twitter to evacuate Indians from Libya then hit by civil strife.

Moreover, the role of civil society organizations or think tanks like CUTS International which has been holding capacity building and training workshops on media literacy not only in India but also in several other countries in the Indo-Pacific becomes vital. Such initiatives stress the leveraging of U.S.-India technological cooperation to build the capacities of media professionals who are the forerunners in sharing information with the masses and can contribute to trust-building between the two countries in no uncertain way.

The session concluded with closing remarks from Adrian Pratt, Acting Consul General and Director, American Center, US Consulate General Kolkata who emphasized the importance of the India-U.S. defense partnership as a pillar for global peace and security in contemporary times.