

General Studies-2; Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests

India-US 2+2 Dialogue

1) Introduction

- The first 2+2 Dialogue between India and the US was held recently in New Delhi.
- It is also the 10th anniversary of India receiving a waiver from the full-scope safeguards condition of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- The NSG waiver and the subsequent India-US nuclear deal were the most important milestones in the transformation of this bilateral relationship.
- The 2+2 dialogue is another significant step.

2) What is 2+2 Dialogue

- 2+2 Dialogue between India and US was agreed during visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to US in June, 2017.
- It is similar to India-Japan 2+2 dialogue format between foreign and defence secretaries and ministers of the two countries.
- It replaces earlier India-US Strategic and Commercial Dialogue.
- The dialogue is aimed at enhancing strategic coordination between both countries and maintaining peace and stability in Indo-Pacific region.
- It puts strategic, defence and security relationship between two countries at forefront and centre stage.

3) Highlights

- The 2+2 Dialogue was marked by greater convergence on strategic and security issues.
- Comcasa (Communications Compatibility and Security Arrangement) foundational agreement that gives India access to encrypted American technologies was signed.
- Setting up of a hotline between External Affairs Minister and Defence Minister with their American counterparts.
- The two nations also decided to conduct a tri-services joint exercise off the eastern coast of India in 2019.
- The joint statement mentioned that of working towards a "free and open" Indo-Pacific.
- This reflects the growing importance of Indo-Pacific region for both the nations.
- Both nations reiterated their shared principles for the region and agreed to start exchanges between U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) and the Indian Navy in order to deepen maritime cooperation in the western Indian Ocean.

4) Signing of COMCASA

- Signing of COMCASA will enable India to access advanced technologies from the US.
- It would enhance India's defence capability and preparedness.
- COMCASA will provide a legal framework for the transfer of communication security equipment from the US to India.
- This would facilitate "interoperability" between the forces — and potentially with other militaries that use US-origin systems for secured data links.
- It will also allow the installation of high-security US communication equipment on defence platforms being sourced from the US.

- Experts say that it could also reduce the chances of the US imposing sanctions on India for looking to buy Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile systems.

5) Need for India - US Partnership in Present Situation

- The rise of China and its hegemonic tactics, especially in the South China Sea.
- The world today is faced with an authoritarian coalition that doesn't subscribe to the primacy of liberal values and democracy.
- For promoting peace, prosperity and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Expanding fair and reciprocal trade would contribute to the prosperity of both nations.
- Thus the world's oldest democracy and the world's largest democracy must come together to defend a rules-based liberal order.

6) Concerns / Challenges

- The scheduling for the dialogue was marred by multiple postponements and a change in personnel on the US side.
- The entire 2+2 Dialogue centred on the threat posed by China and the need to contain Chinese aggression.
- Whereas Pakistan is the more immediate threat for India.
- Pakistan's threat to build new short-range nuclear capable weapon systems is again a real danger. None of this seems to fall within U.S. purview at present.
- America's current war on trade deficits and imposition of import duties hurt Indian business.
- American sanctions on Iran, especially on the latter's oil exports will cause inconvenience to India.
- India did not receive any assurance on waivers on steel and aluminium tariffs imposed by Washington.
- No public statement was made on what the U.S. will do on India's investment in the Chabahar port once its full sanctions on Iran kick in.
- Our tilt towards the U.S. is also taking place at a time when the world sees the U.S. as a 'declining power'.
- Any counter moves by Russia, such as seeking out Pakistan as an outlet for its defence items, will not be to India's benefit.

7) Way Forward

- While India can play a crucial role in America's Indo-Pacific strategy, the US can help India stand up to China's assertiveness.
- In the present geopolitical situation, India and US can be the two pillars of a rules-based world order.
- Both sides must work together towards entry of India in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- New Delhi must work with Washington in the next few months to ensure that the benefits from the 2+2 dialogue don't add up only on the other side.
- India, on its way to become a global power, will likely have to follow a zigzag course, balancing between American demands, long-term friendship with Russia and its own strategic necessities in the neighbourhood and beyond.