



FREE AND OPEN

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(Mains GS-2: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian Diaspora.)

Context:

- Recent U.S. Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin's visit to New Delhi was significant for many reasons.
- As the first senior ranking official of the Biden administration to meet with the Prime minister, his visit this early in the new President's tenure indicates the place India holds, on a par with the other two countries he visited prior to India: Japan and South Korea.

Greater thrust on India:

- The visit, just after the first ever Quad leaders' summit, confirms the U.S.'s focus on greater maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
- S. Defence secretary's trip preceded an unannounced stop in Kabul where the U.S. is undertaking a major review of its troops pull-out schedule and peace plan.

Ever-increasing cooperation:

All three important and strategic areas i.e. bilateral ties, the Indo-Pacific and Afghanistan came up for discussion during U.S. Defence Secretary's talks with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.

Bilateral ties:

- On the bilateral front, the two sides agreed to boost their defence relationship through the use of three foundational agreements (LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA)

- Both Nations also engage in increasing cooperation in the areas of information sharing and logistics, artificial intelligence, space and build more linkages with the U.S. Commands.

Indo - pacific:

On Indo-Pacific strategy, defence minister of India affirmed India's resolve to maintain a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region with the U.S., as part of the Quad.

Afghanistan peace process:

- On Afghanistan, the discussions are understood to have been consultative over whether the U.S. will stick to its May 1 deadline to pull out all remaining troops, and how to proceed forward in the Intra-Afghan dialogue.
- The U.S. does not thus far appear to have heeded India's concerns on talks with the Taliban, making any talks conditional on a ceasefire, including India in all regional talks where Pakistan is also involved, and prioritising the needs of the government in Kabul.
- Even so, it is important that India expresses its sense of the situation in Afghanistan, given its important role there.

Hurdles in India-U.S. relations:

- S. made it clear that the Biden Administration is committed to CAATSA sanctions against all countries procuring high-value Russian military hardware.
- However, defence secretary stated that the determination on India would only come after New Delhi takes delivery of the S-400 missile system.
- S. also raised the issue of human rights in India, but added that these are part of conversations any two democracies would share.
- Finally, Officials discussed India's challenge from China, U.S. defence secretary was careful not to make any direct reference to Beijing or about the LAC dispute, which New Delhi considers a bilateral issue.

Conclusion:

- The U.S.-India partnership is founded on a shared commitment to freedom, democratic principles, equal treatment of all citizens, human rights, and the rule of law.
- The United States and India have shared interests in promoting global security, stability, and economic prosperity through trade, investment, and connectivity.
- The United States supports India's emergence as a leading global power and vital partner in efforts to ensure that the Indo-Pacific is a region of peace, stability, and growing prosperity.

- While there are stylistic changes in the U.S. approach in terms of moving to build a larger coalition of states to address the China challenge
- The latest Quad leaders meeting and the defence secretary's visit to Asia would appear to be reinforcing the strong U.S. commitment toward the Indo-Pacific.

Key words to know:

- **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) or Logistics Support Agreement (LSA)**
- **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) or Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA)**
- **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA)**
- **The Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).**