

2+2 TALKS TO FOCUS ON CHINA

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Randall G. Schriver, Assistant Secretary of Defence.

The first U.S.-India 2+2 dialogue next week in New Delhi will discuss regional and strategic issues of Asia and “will also have some real outcomes”, said a senior official of the Donald Trump administration. “China and how to respond to it will be front and centre” of the dialogue, said Randall G. Schriver, Assistant Secretary of Defence for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs.

Mr. Schriver was talking at an event at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on the forthcoming meeting. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defense James Mattis will be travelling to India for the dialogue, which has been postponed twice.

Legacy ties with Russia

The Trump administration is mindful of India’s legacy ties with Russia, but does not appreciate its continuing defence cooperation with it, said Mr. Schriver, adding that he was not sure of granting a waiver to India from sanctions if it went ahead with the planned purchase of S-400 missile defence system from Russia.

“We understand the historical nature of Russian relationships and the legacy involved here. We want to have a conversation with the Indians not on the past, but on the future on this. Looking at Russia’s future, that is not a country that you might want to have a relationship in the long run. We will have significant concerns if India pursued purchase of new platforms and new cooperation with Russia. I cannot specifically say what will happen if India continued with new purchases,” said Mr. Schriver. Asked whether the U.S. would offer an alternative missile defence platform, he said: “We are willing to talk to India about meeting its defence requirements and alternatives. I can say we are willing to enter into that conversation.”

Mr. Schriver said the U.S. administration expected some concrete outcomes such as concluding an enabling agreement on communication and expanding the scope of military exercises. He also said that operationalising India-U.S. partnership in Asia would be part of the 2+2 agenda.

Asked by moderator Ashley Tellis how China fits into the India-U.S. ties, Mr. Schriver said the U.S. does “not want to exclude the possibility that this (America’s Asia Pacific policy) is an inclusive strategy”, but China was “demonstrating that they have different aspirations” for the Asia-Pacific.

“In the world that we live in, countries are encouraged by China’s behaviour to coalesce with us,” he said, citing the Belt and Road Initiative and militarisation of the South China Sea. “We also need to have an alternative (to BRI), and we are talking to India on this. The same goes for military strategy. This is the conversation that will have in Delhi,” he said.

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