

U.S. STANCE ON CAATSA UNCHANGED

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New equipment:The Defence Acquisition Council recently approved the procurement of 21 MiG-29 jets.
file photo

Despite a change in the ground realities following the deadly clash between India and China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) last month, the U.S.'s message to countries, including India, on sanctions for the purchase of Russian arms has not changed. This message was reiterated in the context of India's planned jet fighter deal with Russia at an estimated Rs. 18,148 crore.

"We urge all of our allies and partners to forgo transactions with Russia that risk triggering sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)," a State Department spokesperson told *The Hindu*.

Last week, the Defence Acquisition Council approved the procurement of 21 MiG-29 fighter jets for the Indian Air Force (IAF), an upgrade for 59 of these Russian aircraft and the acquisition of 12 Su-30 MKI aircraft. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had discussed defence cooperation with Russia while on a visit to Moscow two weeks ago.

The State Department spokesperson said a decision had not been made regarding the specific transaction. "We are aware of reports regarding India's planned defense purchase from Russia. We cannot prejudge whether a specific transaction would result in sanctions. The Secretary of State has not made any determination regarding the significance of any transaction involving India." The statement was made in response to a query from *The Hindu* on whether the U.S. position had shifted due to the conflict between India and China. "There are strict criteria for considering a waiver, and each transaction is evaluated on a case by case basis," an unnamed State Department official told *Janes* (a defence and security magazine) on June 26.

'Monitoring situation'

The U.S. was continuing to "closely monitor" the situation and supported a "peaceful resolution", the spokesperson said.

The U.S. itself has become increasingly wary of China, with which it has an extensive but increasingly strained economic relationship. Two American aircraft carriers recently entered the South China Sea and conducted exercises on July 4, the U.S. Independence Day. "Our military might stands strong and will continue to stand strong, whether it's in relationship to a conflict between India and China or anywhere else," White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows told *Fox News* on July 6.

Indian and U.S. bureaucrats are scheduled to meet at the India-U.S. Foreign Office Consultations on Tuesday afternoon (India time). The CAATSA issue was not on the agenda, but the U.S. was free to raise any issues, said an Indian official.

The U.S. President was given the authority in 2018 to waive CAATSA sanctions on a case by case basis for fiscal year 2019. However, U.S. officials have repeatedly stated that India should not assume it will get a waiver. These remarks were made in the context of India's planned purchase of the S-400 Triumf missile defence system from Russia for about \$5 billion.

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