

India, U.S. 2+2 Dialogue on July 6

Nirmala Sitharaman with the U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis in New Delhi in 2017. R.V. Moorthy

The inaugural U.S.-India 2+2 Dialogue will take place on July 6, both countries announced on Thursday.

Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo and Secretary of Defense James Mattis will host External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Washington, D.C., for the dialogue that “will focus on strengthening strategic, security, and defense cooperation as the United States and India jointly confront global challenges,” the U.S. State Department said in a statement.

The new dialogue format was agreed to between the two sides during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington D.C. in June, 2017. “The two sides are expected to share perspectives on strengthening their strategic and security ties and exchange views on a range of bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual interest,” the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement.

The meeting takes place amid considerable divergence between the two countries on several strategic and trade issues. The Donald Trump administration has been reassuring Indian interlocutors that it will shield India from anti-Russia third party sanctions required by a U.S. law. How this will be achieved remains unclear, and this issue will be top of the agenda in the dialogue.

Tina Kaidanow, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, who visited India recently, asked New Delhi to desist from conduct that might invite sanctions. The U.S. is pressing India to scale down its defence cooperation with Russia. There are visible contradictions within the Trump administration on its Asia strategy also, as trade nationalists in it have little patience for long-term strategic goals.

Negotiations on India’s proposed purchase of Guardian Avenger armed drones from the U.S. is dependent on the progress of talks on the Communications, Compatibility, Security Agreement (COMCASA) between the two countries. Both countries are exchanging notes on an India-specific agreement, according to sources familiar with the developments. India has found the text of the standard agreement that the U.S. signs with many countries too intrusive.

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