

'India, Pakistan are both important to U.S. policy'

India and the U.S. are “two bookends of stability — on either side of the globe” and the “emerging Delhi-Washington strategic partnership” has the potential to anchor the rules-based world order for the next hundred years, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has said.

Mr. Tillerson, who will be travelling to India and Pakistan next week, said both countries are “important elements” in the U.S. policy for stabilising South Asia and characterised China a destabilising force. “China’s provocative actions in the South China Sea directly challenge the international law and norms that the United States and India both stand for,” he said, speaking at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) on ‘U.S.-India Partnership of the next 100 years.’

Mr. Tillerson said the new “regional approach” on Afghanistan also involved seeking a resolution to tensions between India and Pakistan. “We intent to work closely with India and Pakistan and we hope to ease tensions along their borders as well... Pakistan has two very troubled borders. We would like to help take the tensions down on both of those,” he said.

“We see it as a regional issue. We solve Afghanistan by addressing the regional challenges. Pakistan is important element in that, India is important element in that,” he said.

Mr. Tillerson’s explanation of the new South Asia policy calls into question the interpretation of it as an acceptance of the Indian line, and a rejection of Pakistan’s position. He was also categorical in his support for the Indian position on China and its aid and financing support for other countries in the region, terming it “predatory economics”.

Repeatedly referring to India’s democratic politics, Mr. Tillerson also referred to India’s Muslim minorities. “India’s diverse population includes more than 170 million Muslims — the third-largest Muslim population in the world. Yet we do not encounter significant numbers of Indian Muslims among foreign fighters in the ranks of IS or other terror groups, which speaks to the strengths of Indian society,” he said.

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