

## The success of Rex Tillerson's India visit will depend on deliverables

United States secretary of state Rex Tillerson's India visit must be seen at the backdrop of US President Donald Trump's South Asia policy — that Mr Tillerson touched down in Kabul and Islamabad before New Delhi proves this.

While unveiling his South Asia policy in August, the US President factored in a large role for India in Afghanistan; Mr Trump was also critical of Pakistan's role in combating terror. This sentiment was reflected by Mr Tillerson when he said: "Too many terror groups find safe haven in Pakistan which is now threatening stability of the Pakistan government." Mr Tillerson's tough words, much on the lines expressed by Mr Trump and US secretary of defence James Mattis, are reassuring.

External affairs minister Sushma Swaraj rightly observed that action "by Pakistan against all terrorist groups without distinction is critical to the success of the new Strategy of President Trump." But the US is unlikely to drastically change its approach towards Pakistan. That 26/11 Mumbai terror attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed's name did not feature in the list of 75 militants the US handed over to Pakistan points towards Washington's reluctance to go for the jugular when it comes to terror.

The challenge will be in how the US balances the geographic necessity of Pakistan with its larger interest in the region. In other words: How will the US make Pakistan behave?

An important takeaway for New Delhi from the visit is the increasing India-US appetite to find points of convergence when it comes to "strategic partnership and collaboration on security and prosperity" in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in matters regarding China. The discussion, as Hindustan Times reported, of an India-US partnership for an alternative to Beijing's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative is an example. This fits into the larger template of the US' relationship with India, echoed by Mr Tillerson in his CSIS address last week.

There is a general stress between narratives and tangible deliverables in foreign policy discourse. Mr Tillerson's visit is high on the former. The success of the visit will be measured in the deliverables — be it on India's expanded role in Afghanistan, reining in Pakistan's terror hubs, or even balancing China's ambitions in the region.

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