

## 2+2 IS LESS THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS?

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - USA

The much heralded [2+2 Dialogue between the U.S. and India](#) finally fructified on September 6. The 2+2 format, involving the Defence and Foreign Ministers of the two countries, unconventional though it may be from an Indian standpoint, is a familiar tactic employed by the U.S., intended to align the military, strategic and diplomatic policies of the involved countries. It is often intended to signify a 'special relationship' between the U.S. and the concerned nation, even as it seeks to underscore the U.S. dictated 'rules-based global order'.

2+2 = ?: On India-US defence relationship

In the past, India was chary of endorsing the 2+2 formula, considering it alien to traditional diplomatic and strategic intercourse between nations. However, the U.S. has been persistent, and exploiting the current state of 'special relations' between the U.S. and India, it succeeded in overcoming the inhibitions of India's political, diplomatic and strategic community. It went out of its way to assuage many of India's concerns in the run-up to the talks and there was, hence, a great deal of expectation about possible outcomes.

Some forward movement has taken place, but it would seem that the U.S. has been the main beneficiary. With this Dialogue, the U.S. also seems to have succeeded in co-opting India into the U.S. strategic framework aimed at the containment of China. The moot question for India is whether in the 21st century it wishes to play such a role, notwithstanding the obvious advantages stemming from access to state-of-the-art U.S. defence and security technologies.

The principal takeaway from the 2+2 Dialogue was the signing of the Communications, Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) that is expected to facilitate India's access to advanced U.S. defence systems, and "enable India to optimally utilise existing U.S. origin platforms". It is also expected to help the armed forces of both countries to enhance interoperability.

COMCASA is part of four foundational agreements the U.S. believes are critical to establish a foolproof security relationship. It has for years persisted in its efforts to get India to sign the four agreements. So far, it has succeeded in getting India to accede to three. The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) was signed in 2002. The Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) was signed in 2016. COMCASA has now been finalised, and the deal has been sweetened by the U.S. offering to transfer specialised equipment for encrypted communications for U.S. origin platforms like C-17, C-130 and P-8I aircraft.

Far more than the other two foundational agreements, COMCASA entails greater integration with the U.S. military. The implications of this can be far-reaching. Having been earlier accorded the status of a major defence partner, and with COMCASA now affording access to advanced defence systems and U.S. origin platforms — that involve obligations to share operational intelligence in real time — India risks going down the 'slippery slope' of becoming a U.S. acolyte in conflicts not of its choosing.

First 2+2 Dialogue 'defining moment' for Indo-U.S. relations: Mattis

Among the more important advanced defence systems and platforms that India hopes to secure are: state-of-the-art items such as the Weaponised Sea Guardian (a high altitude long endurance Drone), the Armed Predator-B, and cutting edge military and encrypted

communication technologies. These can be expected to tie India firmly into the U.S.-driven military-security-intelligence grid.

As part of the exercise to integrate India with its objectives, the U.S. once again reiterated the importance and significance of India as a 'strategic partner and a major and independent stakeholder in world affairs'. This is further sweetened by implicit references to the role of Pakistan as an incubator of terrorism. There is also a mention of further expansion of bilateral India-U.S. counter-terrorism cooperation. A new offer on display is of facilitating closer relations between the U.S.'s Defence Innovation Unit and India's Defence Innovation Organisation, intended to progress joint projects for co-production and co-development under the aegis of the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative.

It is not clear at this time whether all this would earn India a reprieve from U.S. sanctions directed at countries trading with Russia and Iran. India is interpreting U.S. affirmations that it would not be sanctioned for its 'legacy platforms', to mean that the purchase of the S-400 Missile Defence Systems from Russia would not be affected. New purchases would, however, come under the purview of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). *Vis-à-vis* Iran, there are even less signs of a 'give' in the U.S. stance. Meanwhile, it is certain that India will come under further pressure from the U.S. to sign the fourth foundational agreement — Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation (BECA).

What benefit does India derive from this 2+2 exercise? By its offer of a string of state-of-the-art defence items under 'controlled conditions', the U.S. is seeking to reinforce its claims to becoming the principal defence supplier to India, and in the process displace Russia from this perch. This is hardly an unmixed blessing. Russia has been steadfast in its defence commitments to India, and is not likely to take kindly to its displacement as India's No.1 defence supplier. Any counter moves by Russia, such as seeking out Pakistan as an outlet for its defence items, will not be to India's benefit.

When the military fights with democracy

Our tilt towards the U.S. is also taking place at a time when the world sees the U.S. as a 'declining power'. This is not 1991, when the Soviet Union had collapsed, China was not a dominant economic power, the U.S. had just demonstrated its unassailable military strength in Iraq, etc. Exhausted by a succession of past interventions, the U.S. is currently seen, in Asia at least, as largely in retreat.

On the other hand, the world today confronts a post-Cold War situation. This features China as the second biggest world power and possibly among the biggest military powers. Considerable parts of Asia are already tilting in its favour. There is also the phenomenon of the re-emergence of Russia. At the same time, everything points to a weakened Europe.

The U.S. image in Asia further stands tarnished thanks to some of its 'strategic retreats' in the recent period, viz., the failure of the 'pivot to Asia' and U.S. President Donald Trump's 'America First' policy. The U.S. threat to use force to impose its diktats has again lost much of its meaning due to its inability to rein in China's aggressive postures in the East and South China Seas. It has also been unable to effectively contain China's ambitions to emerge as a key naval entity in the Indo-Pacific region. At this time, for India to be tagged with the label of an U.S. acolyte is hardly the best, or the next best, option.

India has struggled for long to maintain its strategic integrity, apart from its strategic autonomy and independence. There were several occasions in the past for it to be strategically aligned

with the U.S., but India was not willing to accept the terms of such alignment. China is a matter of concern, but not an imminent threat as far as India is concerned. The entire 2+2 Dialogue, on the other hand, seemed to centre on the threat posed by China and the need to contain Chinese aggression through force, or display of force, under a U.S. umbrella. Pakistan is the more immediate threat for India, and not solely on account of incubating terrorism. We have real concerns about Pakistan's emergence as a nuclear threat, engaged in increasing the numbers of its nuclear warheads, developing several new delivery systems, creating new plutonium production and uranium enrichment facilities, etc. Pakistan's threat to build new short-range nuclear capable weapon systems is again a real danger. None of this seems to fall within U.S. purview at present.

U.S. blandishments should not, hence, blind us to current realities. There has to be a limit to what we seek from other nations in terms of arms. In any case, there can never be any compromise with our strategic autonomy or the strategic direction that we have chosen to follow all these years.

*M.K. Narayanan, is a former National Security Adviser and a former Governor of West Bengal*

Sign up to receive our newsletter in your inbox every day!

Please enter a valid email address.

**END**

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](http://crackIAS.com)

© **Zuccess App** by [crackIAS.com](http://crackIAS.com)

CrackIAS