



2+2 is less than the sum of its parts?

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Highlights

- 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'.
- 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.

COMCASA

- 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.
 1. The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) was signed in 2002.
 2. The Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) was signed in 2016.
 3. 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.

COMCASA tipping point

- Far more than the other two foundational agreements, COMCASA entails greater integration with the U.S. military which has far-reaching implications.
- 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.
- 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).

Benefits of 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.
- 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.
- Our tilt towards the U.S. is also taking place at a time when the world sees the U.S. as a 'declining power'.
- Exhausted by a succession of past interventions, the U.S. is currently seen, in Asia at least, as largely in retreat.

Strategic integrity

- 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 Effect.

- 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 Effect

- 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.

Conclusion

- 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.

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