

Welcome remarks by Pradeep S. Mehta, SG, CUTS International at:

“From Handshakes to Outcomes: Taking the US-India Security Partnership Forward”

At the 10th CUTS 40th Anniversary Event in Washington DC, USA on 13th March, 2024 in association with USISPF.

Before we dive into the informative and fruitful discussion, I thank USISPF for co-organising this event and strengthening our long-standing robust partnership.

“We began out of a garage, and today we have a global footprint”

The CUTS 10th 40th Anniversary event was organised as part of our celebrations around the world. The series of events was kicked off by Dr Ngozi Iweala-Okonjo, Director General, World Trade Organization (WTO) at [Geneva](#), Switzerland on 6th April 2023.

Coming to the theme of today’s event, the U.S.-India relationship is a defining strategic partnership and an evolving one. In the mid-to-long term, sustaining a strong, innovative and resilient defence industrial base will be paramount to the security and prosperity of the current world order.

Analysing the US’s first-ever “National Defense Industrial Strategy”, a modern defense industrial ecosystem is “key to integrated deterrence and building enduring advantages” for US’s national security.

Furthermore, this strategy also discusses the need for sustained global partnerships and acknowledges that by working together, “we and our allies and partners can address capacity and capability gaps, enhance production capacity and capabilities, boost economic advantages, and reinforce alliances.”

However, this report highlights a few challenges for the US, including critical workforce shortages in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and advanced manufacturing. Here, a partner or a friend like India which has an abundance of skilled manpower and its youth specialising in STEM-related areas could potentially address this challenge.

India, as a country, has immense scientific talent which is sought by the US and other developed countries to broaden their R&D base and to accelerate their technology development. While, as a developing country moving with a vision of being a developed country by 2047, India looks at the US as a partner for joint innovation and start-ups, facilities for R&D, technical guidance and mentoring, testing facilities, investments, skilling, jobs and economic benefits among others.

Here, I would like to mention that steps have already been taken here and iCET is the right step in this direction with the potential for a quantum leap in the India-US relationship

I would like to reiterate Jake Sullivan's statement at the launch of iCET, "iCET is about much more than technology cooperation, it's a platform to accelerate our strategic convergence and policy alignment".

The initiatives under the iCET pillar are now substantially complementing defense and security as the vital pivot of India's ties with the US. The success of it was evident during the midterm review held at the level of Deputy NSAs in early December 2023. The two sides agreed to include biotechnology, critical minerals and rare earth processing technologies, digital connectivity, digital public infrastructure, and advanced materials. This shows the degree of cooperation, and trust and the long way that we have come.

I agree that India-US technology cooperation aims to harness talent, accelerate technology advancements and broaden the innovation base, through co-research and co-development; making its supply chains resilient with an overall intent to strengthen multifaceted strategic partnerships.

"It's an opportune moment for this relationship but it's taken a while to build this relationship. From buying no defence equipment to gradually buying equipment and now moving towards changing the norms and regulations which apply to India, gives it the status of one of the U.S.'s closest friends.

For instance, the deal for GE 414 jet engines to be manufactured in India, at Hindustan Aeronautics Limited is a great achievement.

Having said that, the tech areas have become one of the biggest growth areas of this partnership, as well with climate change, and clean energy, along with higher education exchanges, and science research from space issues to cybersecurity to plurilaterals such as Quad and IPEF.

Now, India needs to develop its defence and civil industrial base if it is looking to capitalise on the shift away from China as companies diversify their global supply chains, and it should do so fast before the window of opportunity closes.

I agree that technology cooperation is the bedrock for building strategic partnerships, but there are immense challenges and discussions such as this one is one such effort to find and address these.

To mention one, the challenges posed by US export control regimes, such as the International Traffic in Arms Regulations and the Export Administration Regulations need mutual solutions for mutual prosperity.

Lastly, we do hope that the U.S. and India can cooperate in promoting democracy and bridging North-South development. One such step would be assisting African countries under a trilateral development cooperation model, with the participation of the civil society, business chambers, academia etc, for the various issues which can help them to grow and reduce poverty, as most of the African countries are now suffering from huge debt due to conditionalities imposed by China which has invested large amount through loans in African infrastructure.

On a similar note, the QUAD also has certain areas of strategic ties. One is sharing information on maritime domain awareness. Second is to work together on critical and emerging technologies and building resilient supply chains and now is the need to look at creating this alternative technological framework, where we can work together in areas of frontier technology which does provide a strategic element and then there is the economic framework which has been launched that provides inter-country convergence.

I am optimistic about this partnership, and we are only becoming stronger. But this does not mean we will not have differences and divergent solutions but our action should meet our vision.

We see that there are some knee-jerks in the geopolitical cloud. For instance, the recent outbreak of serious hostilities in West Asia threatens to derail initiatives like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). However, now is the right time for both countries to navigate through such issues and collaborate on more subjects that undercut such issues and join hands by cooperating on technology in intelligence gathering, military training, and counterterrorism among others.
