

ANALYSING THE FOURTH ANNUAL U.S.- INDIA 2+2 MINISTERIAL DIALOGUE

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



Image Source: The Asian Age ¹

Introduction

On April 11, 2022, the External Affairs Minister and Defence Minister of India met with the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense of the United States (U.S.) for the Fourth U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, in Washington D.C.² The timing of this meeting is very crucial as it took place at the time of the Russia-Ukraine conflict that is overshadowing the U.S.-India relations. The U.S. reportedly weighed in on India to condemn and criticize the Russian invasion of Ukraine and to immediately cease Moscow's Special Military Operation.³ However, perhaps due to geopolitical reasons on March 18, 2022, the White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki made the following statement to a question regarding India's oil purchase from Russia:

- 1 Sridhar Kumaraswami, "India on Russia Oil: We Buy in a Month What Europe Does 1 Day," *The Asian Age*, April 13, 2022, <https://www.asianage.com/india/politics/130422/us-woos-india-with-across-board-tie-ups.html>.
- 2 "Fourth Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," *United States Department of State*, April 11, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/fourth-annual-u-s-india-22-ministerial-dialogue/>.
- 3 Amrita Jash, "Why India's Neutral Stance in the Russia-Ukraine War Works," *Think China*, April 19, 2022, <http://www.thinkchina.sg/why-indias-neutral-stance-russia-ukraine-war-works>.

“We have been in touch, of course, with Indian leaders at a range of levels, not through the President... we made a decision about banning the Russian import of oil, every country has not made that decision, and we recognize that.”⁴

Total imports of Russian crude by India

Million barrels

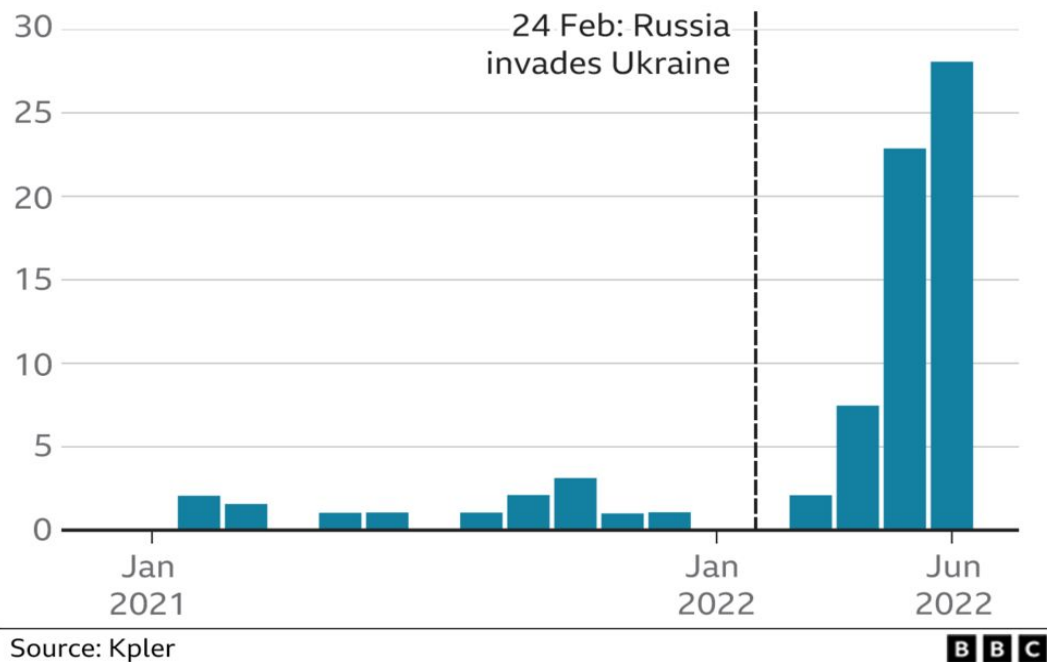


Figure 1: The Indian oil imports from Russia. Note the hike starting in March 2022 just after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁵

Later, on June 28, 2022, following the hike in Indian oil imports from Russia (Figure 1), the White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said that “We have begun talks with India about how a price cap would work and what the implications would be.”⁶

Historically, India remained an ally of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and contemporary Russia.⁷ It was only in 2008 that the Indian Air Force flew its Russian-built Su-30 MKI

⁴ “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki, March 18, 2022,” *The White House*, March 18, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/03/18/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-march-18-2022/>.

⁵ Shruti Menon, “Ukraine Crisis: Why Is India Buying Russian Oil?,” *BBC News*, June 10, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-60783874>.

⁶ Andrea Shalal and Timothy Gardner, “U.S. Talking with India on Russia Oil Price Cap, Small Consumers next -Officials,” *Reuters*, June 28, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/white-house-says-discussions-have-begun-with-india-russia-gas-cap-implementation-2022-06-28/>.

⁷ Harsh V. Pant and Yogesh Joshi, *The US Pivot and Indian Foreign Policy: Asia’s Evolving Balance of Power* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 24–25.

fighter aircrafts to the U.S. Air Force Base in Nellis, Nevada, for a joint military exercise.⁸ It is important to understand that India did not take sides in the Russian-Ukraine conflict and asked both sides to solve the conflict using peaceful means.⁹ Hitherto, India is a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Quad and has signed many security agreements with the U.S. Naturally, it was expected by the policymakers in Washington that New Delhi would side with the West and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

What is the 2+2 format?

The 2+2 format is a continuation of a strategic dialogue that was started by the U.S. State Department with the Ministry of External Affairs of India in 2009. In 2015, Commerce Ministers from both countries were also added and it became part of the U.S.-India strategic and commercial dialogue. The 2+2 format includes representatives from the foreign as well as defence ministries of both nations. Due to the different nature of strategic matters and the distinct national interest of both nations, a 2+2 format was envisaged in 2018 to bring harmony in such endeavours.¹⁰

Newly Signed Agreements in the Dialogue

In the backdrop of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Ministerial Dialogue was dominated by the issue of Russian invasion and the blatant violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. The issue of Asian security was also the topic of great concern and discussion in the security dialogue. Besides this, a new agreement called the "Space Situational Awareness Agreement" was signed.¹¹ The latter likely will enhance the cooperation between both countries in cyber and space domains.

Both sides also agreed to start a Defence Artificial Intelligence Dialogue, the U.S.-India Cyber Dialogue, and also to enhance the "Joint Cyber Training."¹² In the dialogue, it was also decided that both sides will enhance cooperation in Artificial Intelligence (AI), the technology and manufacturing of semiconductors, and quantum computing.¹³

⁸ Air Commodore Ramesh V. Phadke, *Air Power and National Security: Indian Air Force: Evolution, Growth and Future* (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2015), 11.

⁹ Jash, "Why India's Neutral Stance in the Russia-Ukraine War Works."

¹⁰ "Explained: What Is the '2+2' Format of Dialogue between India and US?," *The Indian Express*, April 18, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/everyday-explainers/india-2-2-dialogue-talks-explained-7865401/>.

¹¹ "India, US Finalise Signing of New Space Situational Awareness Arrangement," *Business Standard*, April 12, 2022, https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/india-us-finalise-signing-of-new-space-situational-awareness-arrangement-122041200145_1.html.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "Fourth Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue."

Apparently, the U.S. wants to somehow overcome the monopoly of China in these fields in Asian as well as global markets. That is why the U.S. is also cooperating with other Asian allies such as Japan and South Korea in these fields. The U.S. and Indian policymakers also decided to restart the commercial framework which will further increase the economic cooperation and trade which has already reached the considerable amount of 113 billion USD in 2021.¹⁴

The 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue entailed important strategic and military developments as well. It was agreed that the “use of Indian shipyards for the repair and maintenance of US military sealift command ships” will be materialised, so that the armed forces of both nations could achieve interoperability. It could be helpful for the U.S. forward deployed forces in repairing and supporting the mid-voyage naval ships, especially in the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific. It will also increase defence cooperation in the naval and maritime sectors as well. This military development will also boost the business activities in Indian shipyards. Such defence agreements are poised to further boost up the defence cooperation between the U.S. and India, as they have already signed agreements such as “Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement” (LEMOA) in 2016 and “Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement” (COMCASA) in 2018. It is to be remembered here that both nations are also cooperating in civil nuclear technology since the joint statement made by the U.S. President George Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, in July 2005.¹⁵ Strategically, such agreements are seen by China as calculated attempts to squeeze its action space in the Indian Ocean Region and the Indo-Pacific. However, conceivably the U.S. and India consider China as an aggressive power that is relentlessly seeking expansion of its strategic influence.¹⁶

Analysis and Afterthought

As India has become a strategic ally of the U.S. and is the largest democracy of the world – at least theoretically, the Washington needs New Delhi in its efforts to counter the rising China by using the good old rhetoric of democracies versus authoritarian regimes. For such ambitions to be realised, the U.S. is willingly ignoring the gross human rights violations carried out by the Indian statecraft in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). Hypothetically, if India is sanctioned under the auspices of Countering America’s Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), then it can cause

¹⁴ Richard M. Rossow, “U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, April 18, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-india-22-ministerial-dialogue>.

¹⁵ Michael Kugelman, ed., *India’s Contemporary Security Challenges*, Asia Program (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2011), 89–90.

¹⁶ “Readout of U.S. - India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue,” *U.S. Department of Defense*, April 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2996350/readout-of-us-india-22-ministerial-dialogue/>.

a politico-diplomatic outrage in New Delhi because it has maintained the policy that no one has the right to dictate them on their sovereign decisions.

Furthermore, it is important to note that India has already purchased the S-400 missile defence system and has a long history of relying upon Russian defence equipment, weapons, and supporting systems. New Delhi does not want to strain its relations with Moscow as it is dependent on Russia for military hardware and repairing facilities. Moreover, India is continuously purchasing Russian oil, despite severe criticism from the U.S., as such Indian actions are funding Russia's war effort against Ukraine. However, India defended its position and presented the example of the European Union by stating that "We buy in a month what Europe does in a day."¹⁷

Pakistan's Response on the U.S.-India Dialogue

In the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, the U.S. and India also mentioned Pakistan by stating that "Pakistan must take immediate, sustained and irreversible actions" to ensure that its territory is not used by terrorists. However, such statements and observations are quite contrary to Pakistan's ongoing fight against terrorism and its sacrifices to bring peace and stability to the South Asia region and beyond. It is a good omen that Pakistan rejected such inane ravings by stating that "this is betrayal of counter-terrorism focus" and "it is unfortunate that third country is being targeted by using a bilateral cooperation mechanism for the political purposes and to mislead the public." It is quite disturbing that the U.S. is keeping a blind eye on India's treatment of minorities. Also, it is the old mantra of Indian policymakers by trying and concealing their state-sponsored terrorism by blaming Pakistan.¹⁸

Conclusions

The Fourth Annual U.S.-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue was an important development; however, it is now clear that the U.S. and India are interdependent and are seeking each other's assistance to counter rising China in the region and elsewhere. However, apparently the U.S. has failed to achieve its purpose which was to persuade India to criticize and condemn Russian aggression against Ukraine. Also, it is worthy to probe that by not taking the side of the West against Russia, there could be serious doubts in the West regarding the future trajectory of the Indian foreign relations.¹⁹

¹⁷ Kumaraswami, "India on Russia Oil: We Buy in a Month What Europe Does 1 Day."

¹⁸ "Pakistan Rejects Unwarranted Reference in the Statement Issued by India and the United States," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, April 13, 2022, <https://mofa.gov.pk/pakistan-rejects-unwarranted-reference-in-the-statement-issued-by-india-and-the-united-states/>.

¹⁹ Stephen Manallack, "Cracks in Quad Are Showing, from Doubts over US Pledge to Indo-Pacific to Differences over Ukraine," *News 18*, February 12, 2022, <https://www.news18.com/news/opinion/cracks->

In hindsight, it is encouraging that the U.S. National Security Advisor Jack Sullivan is holding a dialogue with the Indian officials to enforce a price cap on Russian oil imports. However, instead of implementing a price cap, the option of establishing an import cap needs to be explored. The U.S. has also shown little interest in sanctioning India for its unrestricted buying of Russian oil under the auspices of CAATSA.

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