



Drive a harder bargain at the Delhi meet

GS II: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Bottom line: The 2+2 would include (According to Mr Pompeo) discussions about how free nations can work together to thwart threats posed by the Chinese Communist Party's exploitation, corruption, and coercion. In contrast, India has maintained that



its membership of the Quad is aligned to its Indo-Pacific policy, and as Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated at the Shangri-La dialogue 2018, "by no means... directed against any country". Any shift in that position at the U.S.'s prompting must also accrue benefits for India while ensuring strategic and diplomatic autonomy of India.

Electoral calculations

The USA's tenuous position must also be considered closely. For one, it is by no means clear that Mr Trump will win the presidential elections or that Mr Pompeo will remain in that spot. In fact, all presidential polls, as well as predictions for the U.S. electoral college point to a probable win for Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden.

In the event Mr Biden wins the election, India will hardly have endeared itself to the incoming administration by making strong statements of solidarity with Trump policy, strategic or otherwise.

China and India's three fronts

As a result, South Block must consider carefully just what it discusses and projects from the Third India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue. China has become an agenda item on the table. Therefore, it is critical to study just how India hopes to collaborate with the U.S. on the challenge that Beijing poses on each of India's three fronts: at the LAC, in the maritime sphere, and in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) region surrounding India.



On the maritime sphere, discussions will no doubt include strengthening ties in the Indo-Pacific, enhancing joint military exercises like the 'Malabar', where the entire Quad including Australia will participate next month in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, and completing the last of the "foundational agreements" with the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Cooperation (BECA).

On the SAARC region: Defence agreements of the USA with Island countries

1. Unlike the past, India has not objected to ceding space to the USA in its area of influence in the Indian Ocean Region, as it will allow the U.S. to counter Chinese influence there.
2. The U.S. aid offer to Sri Lanka will be seen as one way of staving off China's inroads into Sri Lanka, which is good for India.

Indo-China Border

1. The 2+2 provides India with a good opportunity to tackle continental challenges from China: at the LAC. While the Indian Army will defend its borders with China on its own, there is much that the USA could promise, apart from enhancing and expediting U.S. defence sales to India.
2. The USA must, for example, commit to keeping the pressure on Pakistan on terrorism, despite the U.S. need for Pakistan's assistance in Afghan-Taliban talks.
3. A firm U.S. statement in this regard may also disperse the pressure the Indian military faces in planning for a "two-front" conflict with China.

Other key areas

1. The USA should be pushed on resolving trade issues with India, an area the Trump administration has been particularly tough, and perhaps commit to restoring India's Generalised System of Preferences status for exporters.
2. The government could press for more cooperation on 5G technology sharing or assurance that its S-400 missile system purchase from Russia will receive an exemption from the U.S.'s Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) sanctions.



Sooner, better

GS II: Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

GS III: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, Robotics, Nano-technology, Bio-technology and issues relating to Intellectual Property Rights.



Arguments:

1. Indigenously developed tests will allow scaling up of efforts to detect infections. Newly developed tests are rapid, sensitive and very accurate. This will help India to move to more accurate tests from currently used rapid antigen tests which are less accurate.
2. Thanks to the pandemic, scientific institutions in India have been able to demonstrate their ability to rise to the occasion and show why the country should increase funding for science research and development.

Highlights

1. The ICMR's approval, recently, of two indigenously developed tests that are rapid, low-cost and have high sensitivity and specificity provides the much-needed boost to scale up daily testing without diluting accuracy.
2. These are developed by the Delhi-based Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, a CSIR institute, and IIT Kharagpur.
3. The low sensitivity of rapid antigen tests has meant that even people with symptoms were being handed out a negative result nearly half the time, leading to undetected cases. With unrestricted movement, businesses opening up, the festival season beginning and winter around the corner, the requirement for a rapid, low-cost test with high accuracy is crucial in checking the virus spread through early detection and repeated testing of even asymptomatic cases.
4. Having locally developed tests with higher accuracy will now help States to offer tests on-demand — as required in a September 4 ICMR advisory — while keeping costs low.



Limitation of Rapid antigen test

The low sensitivity of rapid antigen tests arises from

1. Not isolating the viral RNA from the swab samples and
2. No amplification of the DNA before detection

Minimum lab Infrastructure is needed

1. The two indigenously developed tests follow these two vital steps, the reason why the sensitivity and specificity are far superior to that of the rapid antigen tests.
2. But, at the same time, both the tests developed locally do require minimum laboratory infrastructure to isolate the viral RNA from the samples.
3. For that reason, India has to still rely on rapid antigen tests in rural areas that have no laboratory infrastructure.
4. But the tests developed by the Indian institutions, once commercially available, can readily replace the rapid antigen tests in places where such laboratory infrastructure is in place.
5. Rapid antigen tests will become less important even in rural areas once research institutions succeed in developing protocols and tests for using saliva rather than swabs, and do not require isolation of viral RNA from patient samples before amplification and detection.
6. Field testing and validation of such protocols are now pending. Relying on saliva samples would mean non-invasive sample collection, and probably even self-collection. Thus, the reliance on trained personnel would reduce and also minimise the risk of health workers getting infected.

Prelims:

1. COVID test science basics
2. ICMR role, the parent ministry, legal status

Mains:

1. Medical research potential in India, need of the domestic research provided the high disease incidence, funding and ecosystem deficiency, regulation and facilitation.



At 75, the UN needs a rebirth

GS II: Important International institutions, agencies and fora - their Structure, Mandate.

Button line: October 24 marks the diamond jubilee of the United Nations. But far from the joyous celebration, it is an occasion to soberly reflect on why the UN is stagnating at 75 and how it can regain its lost lustre. There must be

a global push against the rules that have a privileged rule of the few over the many. The UN is only as strong as its members' commitment to its ideals.



Principle and Power

1. Although much has changed in the international system since 1945, the world body continues to see a tussle between 'principle' and 'power'.
2. On the one hand, the UN represents hopes of peaceful and just world order through multilateral cooperation, abidance by international law, and uplift of the downtrodden.
3. On the other, the institution has been designed to privilege the most powerful states of the post-World War II dispensation by granting them commanding heights over international politics via the undemocratic instruments of veto power and permanent seats in the Security Council (UNSC). However, the collective command model of big powers built into the UNSC is one of the reasons why there has been no third world war.

A model that didn't work

1. But this model has also caused havoc. Almost immediately after the UN's creation, it was pushed to the verge of irrelevance by the Cold War, which left the UN little room to implement noble visions of peace, development and human rights.
2. It was only in the uncontested post-Cold War political milieu, when the liberal sole superpower, the U.S., strode like a colossus, that the UN could spring back to life and embark on a plethora of peacekeeping missions, nation-building interventions and promotion of universal human rights.



The New Cold war

However, that golden age of the UN was too deceptive to last. The phrase 'new Cold War' is in vogue to depict the clash between China and the U.S. Tensions involving other players like Russia, Turkey, Iran and Israel in West Asia, as well as between China and its neighbours in Asia, are at an all-time high.

Problems on non-cooperation

1. The recurrence of the worst habits of competitive vetoing by P-5 countries has prevented the UNSC from fulfilling its collective security mandate.
2. So dangerous are the divisions and their spillover effects that the secretary-general of the United Nations Mr Guterres has lamented that "we have essentially failed" to cooperate against the immediate global threat of the pandemic.

Obstacles to reforms

1. Apart from the rivalries of member states, there is a larger underlying problem. At the core of the paralysis of the UN is the phenomenon of P-5 countries (China, France, Russia, the U.K., and the U.S.) blocking reforms.
2. Why should the expansion of the UNSC require the consensus of the P-5? In the 21st century, why should there be veto power in anyone's hands? If a simple majority voting method could replace the P-5 consensus method, the obstacles to UNSC reforms would reduce.

Conclusion:

On the 75th anniversary of the UN, there must be a global push against ossifying 'rules' which have privileged 'rule' of the few over the many. That is the only way to restore some balance between 'power' and 'principle' and ensure a renaissance of the UN.

Mains:

1. The UN reforms crucial to relevance and existence, considering the background of climate change and pandemic
2. The UN and its organ represent a global order of *global integration without solidarity* which is not working against challenges that humanity is facing today.