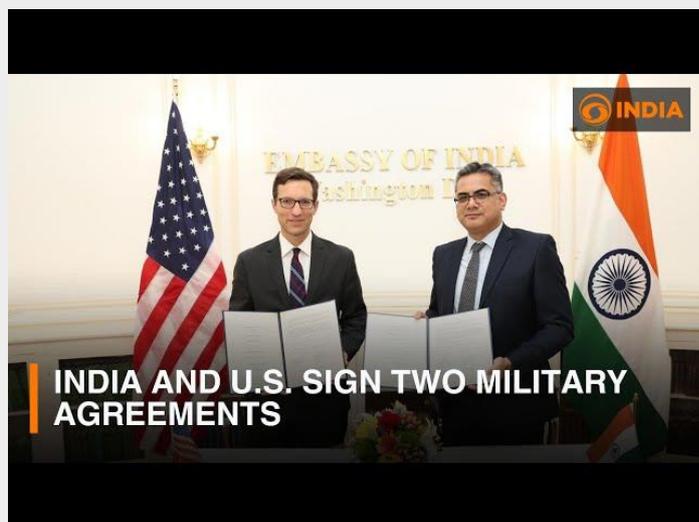


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1. Two new US-India agreements: a short history of growing defence ties

Why in News?



India and the US have signed a Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) and Memorandum of Agreement regarding the Assignment of Liaison Officers, the latest in a series of bilateral military agreements that have enhanced defence and security cooperation between the two countries over the past decade.

During Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's four-day official visit, the partner nations agreed to advance priority co-production projects

including jet engines, unmanned platforms, munitions, and ground mobility systems under the 2023 US-India Roadmap for Defence Industrial Cooperation.

Two new agreements

SOSA: Under SOSA, the US and India will provide reciprocal priority support to each other for goods and services that promote national defence. It will "enable both countries to acquire the industrial resources they need from one another to resolve unanticipated supply chain disruptions to meet national security needs", the US Department of Defense (DoD) said in a statement.

India is the 18th SOSA partner of the US. While SOSA, according to the DoD, are an important mechanism to strengthen interoperability with US defence trade partners, it is legally non-binding. The DoD has been working to conclude another agreement with India, the Reciprocal Defence Procurement (RDP) Agreement, which will be binding.

RDP Agreements are intended to promote rationalisation, standardisation, interchangeability, and interoperability of conventional defence equipment with US allies and other friendly governments. The US has signed RDP Agreements with 28 countries so far.

MOU ON LIAISON OFFICERS: The Memorandum of Agreement regarding the Assignment of Liaison Officers is a progression on a decision taken earlier to increase information-sharing

between India and the US, and to post Indian armed forces officers in key strategic US Commands. India will deploy the first Liaison Officer to the US Special Operations Command headquarters in Florida.

Cooperation milestones

The vision for bilateral defence cooperation was encapsulated in the September 2013 Joint US-India Declaration on Defence Cooperation and the 2015 Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship, in which the two countries committed themselves to increasing cooperation in the sector.

2023 ROADMAP: The roadmap for defence industrial cooperation released last year envisioned the conclusion of SOSA and the RDP Agreement. The US endorsed the integration of the Indian defence industry into global supply chains, and extended support to India to develop naval and maritime infrastructure to create an Indo-Pacific regional hub for ship and aircraft repair and maintenance.

Priority areas of cooperation identified in the roadmap included Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), Undersea Domain Awareness, Air Combat and Support, including Aero engines, munitions systems, and mobility.

iCET: In January 2023, the US-India initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) was discussed to expand the strategic technology partnership and defence industrial cooperation. National Security Advisors Ajit Doval and Jake Sullivan discussed opportunities for greater cooperation in critical and emerging technologies, including co-development and co-production, and ways to deepen connectivity across our innovation ecosystems.

INDUS-X: In June 2023, during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's official state visit to the US, the DoD and Ministry of Defence launched the India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X), which took forward the commitment to build a defence innovation bridge under iCET.

FOUNDATIONAL AGREEMENTS: In 2002, India and the US had signed the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) to facilitate sharing of military information. Between 2016 and 2020, the two sides signed four more agreements.

The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) of 2016 established the basic terms, conditions, and procedures for reciprocal provision of logistic support, supplies, and services between the two militaries.

In 2018, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), an India-specific version of the Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA), was signed to secure military communication between the countries, facilitate access to advanced defence systems, and enable India to optimally utilise its existing US-origin platforms.

The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) of 2020 aimed to facilitate the sharing of military information including maps, nautical charts, and other unclassified imagery and data.

Additionally, in 2019, the Industrial Security Annex (ISA) to the GSOMIA was signed to facilitate the exchange of classified information between the defence industries of the two countries. Other deals and sales

In 2016, the US designated India as a Major Defence Partner. Commensurate with this designation, in 2018, India was elevated to Strategic Trade Authorisation tier 1 status, which gave it licence-free access to a range of military and dual-use technologies regulated by the US Department of Commerce.

Earlier in 2012, the Defence Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) agreement was signed to promote industrial cooperation and defence trade between the two countries.

There is also a Memorandum of Intent between the US Defence Innovation Unit (DIU) and the Indian Defence Innovation Organization-Innovation for Defence Excellence (DIO-iDEX).

Big-ticket Indian military procurements from the US include MH-60R Seahawk multirole helicopters, Sig Sauer Rifles, and M777 ultra light howitzers.

Negotiations are underway to manufacture GE F-414 jet engines in India for the LCA MK 2 fighters, and to procure 31 MQ-9B High-Altitude Long-Endurance (HALE) UAVs. Deliveries of the GE-F404 engines for the LCA Tejas Mark-1A are underway.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

2. Who is Telegram co-founder Pavel Durov, and why did French authorities arrest him?

Introduction



French authorities arrested Pavel Durov, co-founder and CEO of the secure messaging app Telegram, at an airport outside Paris.

Durov was arrested as part of a preliminary police investigation into “allegedly allowing a wide range of crimes due to a lack of moderators on Telegram and a lack of cooperation with police”. In a post on X, Telegram’s official account said that it was “absurd” to claim that a platform or its owner was responsible for the

abuse of that platform.

France and Telegram are the latest in cases of governments and tech companies clashing over the regulation of content posted on social media apps and websites.

Who is Pavel Durov?

Durov, 39, was born in the former Soviet Union and went on to study at the St Petersburg University in Russia. He then co-founded a social media app called VKontakte, which became popular in the country.

According to a Time Magazine profile, Durov left Russia after authorities told him to provide users' encrypted data. Encryption is a method for safeguarding information and making it accessible only to users exchanging said information, not telecom providers or app owners.

On August 14, 2013, Pavel and his brother founded Telegram, an app billed as centring users' privacy. Nikolai designed its encryption. The app also allowed the formation of large groups, allowing one group to have up to 2,00,000 members at present. Telegram also syncs with multiple devices for users. These features gave it an edge over apps like WhatsApp.

Telegram has since become one of the most used social media apps globally, with over 900 million users as of early 2024. Thanks to its success, Durov is now a billionaire. He also holds citizenships of France and the UAE and it is unclear whether he still has Russian citizenship.

What is France's case against Telegram and Durov?

Durov's arrest at the Le Bourget airport was linked to "proceedings accusing Telegram of complicity in numerous cases linked to drug trafficking, support for terrorism and cyberstalking." Telegram's high degree of user privacy has helped some users sell drugs, dupe people through online scams, and engage in other illegal activities through the app across the world.

Telegram's FAQ section lays down its policy on taking down content. It says, "We have to process legitimate requests to take down illegal public content (e.g., sticker sets, bots, and channels) within the app."

However, there are exceptions. "Please note that this does not apply to local restrictions on freedom of speech. For example, if criticizing the government is illegal in some country, Telegram won't be a part of such politically motivated censorship. This goes against our founders' principles. While we do block terrorist (e.g. ISIS-related) bots and channels, we will not block anybody who peacefully expresses alternative opinions."

Durov also allegedly did not cooperate in the investigation, leading to an arrest warrant against him. Le Monde reported, "The OFMIN, an office responsible for combating violence against minors, had discreetly launched an investigation into the dissemination of child pornography on Telegram". Other offences were gradually added to the investigation.

What has been the response to these events?

The issues arise out of balancing the need to protect speech, and to regulate hate speech and illegal activities. Durov's arrest has led to some criticism of the French government for an "overreach".

Former US National Security Agency contractor-turned-whistleblower Edward Snowden said in a post on X, "The arrest of @Durov is an assault on the basic human rights of speech and association."

Earlier in April, Durov said some governments had sought to pressure him, but said the app should remain a neutral platform and not a "player in geopolitics".

Telegram's case has similarities with government actions against Meta (which owns Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram), X and other tech giants. Earlier this year, a judge of the Brazilian Supreme Court ordered X to comply with its orders against accounts spreading false information deliberately. X owner Elon Musk criticised the order for not being transparent and cited his commitment to free speech for not following the order. Finally, X shut down its operations in Brazil.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: Indian Express

3. China-Philippines clash: What is the South China Sea dispute?

Why in News?

Recently, the Philippine government accused China of carrying out "repeated aggressive, unprofessional and illegal" actions in the South China Sea. The statement came after the two countries got involved in a series of clashes and incidents on air and at sea over the past week. The development once again brought the South China Sea dispute to the forefront.

What is the South China Sea dispute?

The South China Sea is situated just south of the Chinese mainland and is bordered by the countries of Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. The countries have bickered over territorial control in the sea for centuries, but in recent years tensions have soared to new heights. That is mainly due to China's rise as a global power. The South China Sea is one of the most strategically critical maritime areas and China eyes its control to assert more power over the region.

In 1947, the country, under the rule of the nationalist Kuomintang party, issued a map with the so-called "nine-dash line" (for a detailed explanation, scroll down). The line essentially encircles Beijing's claimed waters and islands of the South China Sea — as much as 90% of the sea has been claimed by China. The line continued to appear in the official maps even after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power.

In the past few years, the country has also tried to stop other nations from conducting any military or economic operation without its consent, saying the sea falls under its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

China's sweeping claims, however, have been widely contested by other countries. In response, China has physically increased the size of islands or created new islands altogether in the sea, according to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR).

To challenge China's assertive territorial claims and protect its own political and economic interests, the US has intervened in the matters. It has not only increased its military activity and naval presence in South Asia but also provided weapons and aid to China's opponents.



What's the importance of the South China Sea?

There are 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in deposits under the South China Sea, according to the estimates of the United States Energy Information Agency.

Moreover, the sea is home to rich fishing grounds — a major source of income for millions of people across the region. The BBC reported that more than half of the world's fishing vessels operate in this area.

Most significantly, the sea is a crucial trade route. "The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development estimates that over 21% of global trade, amounting to \$3.37 trillion, transited through these waters in 2016," the news outlet added.

What is the 'nine-dash line'?

As mentioned before, the nine-dash line demarcates China's territorial claims in the sea on Chinese maps. It was initially the "eleven-dash line" but in 1953, the CCP-led government removed "the portion encompassing the Gulf of Tonkin, simplifying the border to nine dashes."

The line runs as far as 2,000 km from the Chinese mainland to within a few hundred kilometres of the Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam.

But on what parameters the line has been drawn? China's claim on the waters and islands within the boundary is based on its "historical maritime rights". However, the country has never clearly stated the line coordinates and the line runs many miles beyond what is allowed under the United Nations treaty on maritime territorial issues, which China has signed.

Take the example of the Scarborough Shoal, also known as Huangyan Island. While it comes under the Philippines' EEZ, Beijing claims that the records show "China's sailors discovered Huangyan Island 2,000 years ago and cite extensive records of visits, mapping expeditions and habitation of the shoal from the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD) right through to the modern period".

Similarly, China says it has centuries-old ties with the Paracel and Spratly island chains as they were once an integral part of the Chinese nation. But Vietnam disputes the claim, saying it has actively ruled over both the Paracels and the Spratlys since the 17th Century — and has the documents to prove it.

In 2016, after the Philippines took China to an international tribunal pertaining to the dispute over the Scarborough Shoal, the tribunal in its ruling largely rejected the nine-dash line and said, "China had broken international law by endangering Philippine ships and damaging the marine environment".

Although the tribunal's judgement was binding, there was no enforcement mechanism. China boycotted the proceedings, claiming the tribunal had no jurisdiction and that it would ignore any decision.

How can the dispute be resolved?

It's hard to say. A quick solution to the dispute seems quite impossible, especially after China refused to abide by the international tribunal's ruling.

Some believed that ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) — a 10-member regional grouping that comprises Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia — might find a way to tackle the issue. Due to internal conflicts, the group has largely failed to do so.

Therefore, there is a palpable fear that the South China Sea dispute can soon become the next global conflict, with grave consequences.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

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