

Big vision, hazy((adjective) – indistinct, unclear, ill-defined धुंधला, अनिश्चित) detail: on India-US relations

India and U.S. have some way to go in **charting((verb) – follow, outline, describe, रूपरेखा तैयार करना) the path to deeper strategic(कूटनीतिक) ties(संबंध)**

Of the seven countries he visited last week, U.S. Secretary of State **Rex Tillerson chose to focus on India** while **spelling out ((phrasal verb) – explain, make clear, elucidate/clarify, बतलाना, स्पष्ट करना) his strategic vision. Just before starting the tour, he gave a speech on India-U.S. ties that was as broad as it was deep, talking of the road ahead together for “the next 100 years”. He reserved his most ambitious((adjective) – determined/demanding, formidable, challenging महत्त्वाकांक्षी.) words for the role of India in the U.S.’s plans in two spheres(दौर). In Afghanistan, as a part of President Donald Trump’s new South Asia policy, and in the Indo-Pacific, as part of U.S. plans to counter (विरोध करना) China’s influence and contain North Korea. On both counts, Mr. Tillerson’s talks in New Delhi with External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Prime Minister Narendra Modi made progress in developing a common vision, but appear to have made little movement on the specifics. For instance, he is said to have “minced no words” ((idiom) – talk/speak straight; call a spade a spade, स्पष्ट) when it came to tackling Pakistan’s support to terrorist safe havens((noun) – refuge/shelter, asylum, place of safety/security पनाह की जगह, शरण.). Yet, the groups he referred to are not those that directly threaten India, but Afghanistan and, by extension, the U.S. soldiers based there. As for Indian hopes of increasing trade and development aid to Afghanistan through the Chabahar route, Mr. Tillerson’s assurance that Washington does not seek to bar((verb) – prevent, forbid, ban/inhibit, रोकना) legitimate trade is welcome. However, it remains to be seen whether India can significantly ramp up((phrasal verb) – increase or cause to increase, आगे बढ़ाना.) cooperation with Iran to further((verb) – promote, advance, develop/stimulate, बढ़ाना) its interests in Afghanistan at a time when the U.S.**

maintains its policy of *isolating*(अलग रखना) the Iranian leadership.

1. Finally, both Indian and U.S. officials spoke in detail, and in public state ments, about building an **alternative(विकल्प) coalition(गठबंधन) to counter China’s Belt and Road Initiative as well as its aggressive(अति महत्त्वाकांक्षी) moves in the South China Sea — yet Mr. Tillerson did not add clarity on where the funding would come from. For its part, India desisted((verb) – abstain, refrain, stop/cease, दूर रहना) from any clear commitments on joint patrols(सैन्य-दल) to ensure freedom of navigation in the SCS, or even on the foundational agreements the Indian and U.S. militaries must conclude to deepen cooperation in the region. While India and the U.S. have taken great strides((noun) – progress, proceed, move, उन्नति) in aligning (सीध मिलाना या बाँधना) their vision and their hopes for future partnership, reality often trips up((phrasal verb) – disconcert, unsettle, discomfit नाकाम बनाना, बिगाड़ना) such lofty((adjective) – high-minded, grand, magnificent, घमण्डी, असाधारण) goals. One reason is geography — while American troops remain in Afghanistan, it is difficult for the U.S. to completely disengage((verb) – remove, separate, disconnect संपर्क तोड़ना) from Pakistan. For India, while a maritime((adjective) – of or related to the sea.) relationship with the U.S. is desirable, geographic proximity((noun) – closeness, nearness, adjacency, निकटता) to China makes a very close alliance(संधि) with the U.S. difficult. The other issue pertains((verb) – concern, relate to, be connected with संबद्ध होना) to the strategic confusion within Washington and Mr. Trump’s withdrawal from U.S. commitments in Asia, Europe and at the UN, drawing questions about its reliability as a partner. Given this, it may have been too much to expect more than the warm handshake and the encouraging words of hope Mr. Tillerson delivered.**