Improving Defence Cooperation

Why in news?

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As part of a defence appropriations bill of over $600 billion, the US Congress passed legislation that designated India as a "major defence partner".

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How well is India-US defence cooperation?

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- Under the newly designated status, India will be treated at par with the US's closest allies when it comes to the transfer of defence technologies.
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- The defence cooperation entered into next stage in 1995 with the Agreed Minute on Defence Relations.
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- However, after May 1998 following the Indian nuclear tests, all such collaboration effectively ground to a halt.
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What are the reasons that hinder India-US defence cooperation?

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- Despite the successful conclusion of this diplomatic minuet, progress on defence cooperation did not materialise.
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- First, India had remained heavily dependent on Russia for its defence supplies.
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- Second, despite the Cold War's end, some within India's policymaking community remained reluctant to turn to the US for substantial defence purchases.
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How was the approach of Obama’s administration?

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- The Obama administration’s initial approach to India appeared lukewarm.
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- Following the assassination of Osama bin Laden and the US decision to drawdown its forces in Afghanistan, Pakistan’s utility dramatically declined.
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- Around the same time, the PRC, which had been boosting its presence in the South China Sea, showed signs of greater assertiveness.
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- Despite past tensions with the US over Modi’s tenure as Gujarat’s chief minister, the Obama administration adopted a pragmatic approach toward the new regime.
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- The P.M proved to be more than willing to reciprocate.
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Whether the defence cooperation is transforming?

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- The US Congress’s willingness to designate India as a “major defence partner” represents the culmination of a process that has slowly but surely brought the two states into a mutually supportive defence cooperation relationship.
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- Along the way, it has also been supplemented with important defence deals.
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- India has become not only the largest foreign purchaser of US weaponry but the US has now transplanted Russia as the principal supplier of weaponry to India.
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- Even though some big-ticket joint projects, such as the building of an aircraft carrier, remain in abeyance, there is little question that the Indo-US arms transfer relationship has undergone a fundamental transformation.
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