India and US – Maritime Cooperation

What is the issue?

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- In the recently concluded Modi-Trump interface, **maritime security was stressed thrice** by the US president.
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- The joint statement acknowledged the need for both countries to play meaningful and legitimate roles in the **'Indo-Pacific'** and to ensure freedom of movement at sea consistent with international norms.
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What does it mean for India?

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- The term "Indo-Pacific" was first coined by then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2008.
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- The Americans soon shied away from it and put out the more convoluted terminology of "Indo-Asia-Pacific".
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- By using the old term again, it seems that the US recognises India's legitimate role in waters stretching from the **Suez Canal to the waters of the western Pacific.**
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- India is an Indian Ocean Region (IOR) player, but given its size, interests and growing maritime trade, its concerns extend beyond it.
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- So, even though India is not a South China Sea littoral state, it cannot remain excluded from developments that are taking place there.
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- Its inclusion as party to the Indo-Pacific provides exactly that recognition. And, this is fully consistent with our long-term interests.
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How cooperation at sea should be?

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- Cooperation at sea involves not just ships carrying out exercises over a couple of days, but understanding the whys and the wherefores.
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- This can come about only if there is some degree of synergy of doctrines, and for this to happen **information sharing is important**. So, some compromise seems necessary.
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- In the IOR, **India has to become a net security provider** and that will often require joint operations with the US.
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- Also, **the Malabar series** is clearly an Indo-Pacific event and lends credibility to India's aspirations and potential.
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- Meanwhile, these elements must be added the American clearance for the supply of nearly two dozen **Guardian drones** for the Indian Navy.
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- The Indian Navy also has an enquiry ongoing for nearly **five dozen fighter aircraft** to operate from aircraft carriers at sea.
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- Procurement of major military hardware must always be seen through the prism of geopolitical interests more than just financial cost.
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- The dialogue just concluded gives India an opportunity to make the required course correction.
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Source: Business Standard

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