India Australia Defence Ties

Mains Syllabus: GS II - India and its neighborhood- relations

Why in the News?

Recently Defence Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Australia Richard Marles visited New Delhi.

What are the significances of Australia in India's security landscape?

- **Australia's Strategic Geography** – Australia bridges the Indian and Pacific Oceans with territories and military presence near Southeast Asia, complements India's maritime ambitions.
- **Coalition Operations** - The Australian Defence Force (ADF) is experienced in coalition operations and can effectively enable Indian military capabilities, as seen in the recently implemented air-to-air refuelling arrangement.
- **Pacific Island Relations** - Australia's established relationships with Pacific Island nations align with India's growing interests.
- **Countering China** - Both nations share concerns about China's assertiveness and a common vision for sovereign resilience and regional stability.
- **Balancing America** - Canberra viewing New Delhi as a "top-tier security partner" helps India navigate a world where American security guarantees appear increasingly conditional.

What are the security agreements and partnerships between India and Australia?

- **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)** - In June 2020, India and Australia elevated their relationship from a "Strategic Partnership" to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" (CSP).
- **2+2 Ministerial Dialogue** – Defence and External Affairs ministers of India and Australia regularly meet to discuss a wide range of strategic, defence and security issues.
- **Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA)** - It streamlines logistical support during joint exercises and humanitarian missions.
- **Air-to-Air Refuelling Arrangement** - Signed in 2024, It allows the Royal Australian Air Force to extend the operational reach of Indian aircraft.
- **Military Exercises** - AUSTRAHIND (Army), AUSINDEX (Navy), and participation in multilateral exercises such as Pitch Black and Malabar, demonstrate a decade of careful relationship-building.

What are the challenges in strengthening India – Australia defence ties?

- **Geopolitical Divergences** - Australia's close alliance with the United States contrasts with India's tradition of strategic autonomy.
- This difference sometimes creates hesitation in aligning their geopolitical strategies, especially when it comes to joint military operations or intelligence sharing.
- **Asymmetric Threat Perceptions** - India and Australia do not always perceive security threats in the Indo-Pacific in the same way.
- **Institutional Barriers**- There are gaps in institutional capacity, such as understaffed defense liaison offices and limited people-to-people military exchanges.
- **Reduced Efficacy of Strategic Forums** - Too often, strategic dialogues become exercises in diplomatic niceties rather than forums for hard truths.

How can India and Australia can strengthen regional security architecture?

- **Rebalancing Defence Engagement** - While Navy-to-Navy cooperation has flourished, there is a need to break down service barriers.
- This could be achieved through joint military exercises that reflect real world operations, and moving towards a dedicated forum for joint staff talks.
- **Reflecting Strategic Importance in Defence** - Defence Adviser (DA) position in Canberra can be upgraded to a one-star rank with the addition of dedicated Army and Air Force personnel as assistants to help balance the service participation.

  Defence Adviser (DA) position in Canberra has always been held by a Navy official.

- **Strengthening Discussion Forums** - Including more uniformed professionals with operational insights and creating spaces for classified discussions can generate fresh thinking that both nations need.
- **Building Mutual Understanding** - Simple initiatives such as fellowships for staff college graduates or regular war-gaming exchanges would build the mutual understanding that underpins genuine cooperation.
- **Deepen MRO** - India can explore cooperation with Australia in the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) of naval vessels.
- **Showcasing Joint Intentions and Capabilities** - Joint manufacturing and provision of patrol boats for small island security forces in the Indian Ocean Region and in the Pacific can be undertaken.

References

[The Hindu | India-Australia defence ties]

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