India-US: Defence Technology and Trade Initiative

Why in news?

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- American Defence Secretary General, in his speech, **highlighted the centrality of the India-US Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI)** to ties between the two countries.
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- Because of the DTTI, he said, the bilateral defence relationship "has grown to the benefit of both countries". But, notwithstanding the General's optimism about the initiative, it has shown some progress on only two projects so far.
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What is DTTI?

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- The DTTI mechanism was launched in 2012. **It is not a treaty or a law.** It is a flexible mechanism to ensure that senior leaders from our nations are persistently focused on the opportunities and challenges associated with growing our defense partnership. **The DTTI aims to:**\n\n
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  - Transform the bilateral defense relationship into one that is limited only by independent strategic decisions, rather than bureaucratic obstacles or inefficient procedures.
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  - Strengthen India's defense industrial base by moving away from the traditional "buyer-seller" dynamic toward a more collaborative approach.
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  - Explore new areas of technological collaboration from science and technology cooperation through co-development and co-production.
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  - Expand U.S.-Indian business ties.
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- The first four projects under the DTTI were announced during President Barack Obama's visit to New Delhi as chief guest for the 2015 Republic Day celebrations.
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- India and the US are currently working on six projects under the DTTI framework and two more American proposals are under the consideration.
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- The whole idea of the DTTI was to **cut through the government bureaucracies on the two sides.** As a mechanism for defence cooperation, it has to focus on advanced technologies.
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What are the projects proposed under DTTI?

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- "Fifty per cent of the original projects have reached project agreement stage, two are in a limbo, and we are hopeful of progress on the rest," an official dealing with the DTTI framework told.
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- DRDO and US Labs are the lead agencies from the two countries for these projects.
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- *The Next General Individual Protection Ensemble and Mobile Electric Hybrid Power Source* projects reached the agreement stage in 2015.
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- *The Digital Helmet Mounted Display and Joint Biological Tactical Detection System projects* were proposed last year and are currently "at a discussion stage".
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- **The US offer for trilateral cooperation (with Israel) on the futuristic military platform** was made last November but sources said that they are yet to make up their mind on it.
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- The Defence Ministry is likely to convey its decision to the Americans at the next DTTI meeting (march/april), which is scheduled to be hosted at the Pentagon.
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- The Americans feel that three advanced countries can bring their advantage of expertise and economy to the project which, if successful, could then be used by the armies of all the three countries.

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- The American side also proposed bilateral development of *Future Vertical Lift Helicopter (FVLH)* in November under the DTTI.
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- The Pentagon has also proposed to the Defence Ministry that the two sides work on a deal for an *American combat fighter aircraft, whether F-16 or F-18,* under the DTTI. But the **Defence Ministry did not want the fighter aircrafts to be considered under the DTTI.**
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- Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar recently said that the government would chose a single-engine foreign fighter, the American F-16 or the Swedish Gripen, under Make in India to supplement the 36 Rafale fighters in the medium-weight category.
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Conclusion:

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- Donald Trump's victory in the US Presidential polls had left the Indian side concerned about the state of the DTTI because it was seen as Carter's personal project.
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- These concerns were addressed with the passage of the **National Defence Authorization Act of 2017 (NDAA 2017)** by the US government last month, which institutionalised the DTTI mechanism.
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- Despite the General's positive statements, New Delhi remains unsure about the priority the Trump administration may give to defence cooperation. By all accounts, New Delhi will **adopt "a wait and watch attitude".**
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