Strain in the Indo-US ties

What is the issue?

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- In 2017, India and U.S. commissioned the “Finance and Defence Ministers 2+2 format for enhancing bilateral engagement.
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- But a scheduled meet was called off recently and the format remains a non-starter, partly due to the straining of Indo-U.S. ties.
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What are the stress points currently in the Indo-U.S. ties?

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- U.S. administration recently enhanced sanctions against Russia and Iran in addition to pulling out from the Iranian Nuclear Deal.
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- Further, Trump’s toughening stand against countries and entities conducting business with “Iran and Russia” directly affects India.
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- India has, in turn, tightened its engagement with Russia, China and Iran, with PM Modi advocating a course of “strategic autonomy”.
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- Indo-U.S. tensions have also been playing out amply in the context of bilateral trade, and even verbal exchanges are being exchanged.
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- While their strategic relationship was recently upgraded to “major defence partnership”, there hasn’t been much progress here too.
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- The 3 critical “foundational agreements”, which are ideal for enhancing defence ties and procurements haven’t moved ahead.
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How is the South Asian strategy of U.S. evolving?

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- Initially, there seemed to be perfect resonance between the Trump administration's outlook and Indian concerns in South Asia.
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- Trump had gone public in lashing out at Pakistan for being soft on terror and threatened them with suspension of military aid.
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- U.S. also managed to get Pakistan "grey-listed" internationally through the "Financial Action Task Force" for financing terror.
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- Trump's Afghan policy placed emphasised on India's centrality in Afghanistan and sought to enhance India's role in regional security.
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- But presently, there are sufficient indications that the U.S. is resorting to its older doctrine of Pakistan centric Afghan policy.
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- Such change in outlook is likely to constrain India to a mere supplementary role and also deprive India of strategic options.
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What are the perceptible changes in the U.S.-Pak equations?

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- Recent months have seen a sharp betterment in Af-Pak relationship alongside an improvement in the U.S.-Pak ties.
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- Multiple diplomatic visits by government officials of "U.S., Pakistan and Afghanistan" had been organised in successions.
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- Additionally, the politically influential Pakistani military and the Afgani-Taliban have also been kept in the loop throughout.
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- Concurrently, there has been a softening of U.S. line on Pakistan's overall terror record, all of which seems to be clearly coordinated.
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- The U.S. has asked Pakistan to act against all terror groups on its soil, but it seems focused just on groups targeting Afghanistan.
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- More importantly, terror groups and operatives targeting India are being provided a free run and are even fighting elections in Pakistan.
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How does the future look?

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- India has decided to go ahead with its Chabahar Port project in Iran despite U.S.’s position, but sanctions will be surely constraining.
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- Additionally, India is likely to cave in to U.S. pressures on reducing oil imports from Iran, which might strain Indo-Iran ties.
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- While it is a tight rope to thread, India has nonetheless been through such phases in the past and can be expected to manage through.
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- But the fact that Indo-U.S. ties aren’t robust like in previous occasions is indeed a cause of worry.
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- Enhanced engagements with China and Russia are only expected to further strain matters over the next few months.
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- Rescheduling the 2+2 at the earliest is hence vital for both New Delhi and Washington, if ties are to be normalised.
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Source: The Hindu

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