

Significance of India's talks with NATO

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Manifest Pedagogy:

New Delhi held its first political dialogue with NATO in Brussels 3 years back. The talks were attended by senior officials including from the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. The meeting had not been announced by the Indian government so far. However, while it is important for the Indian government to communicate with all major groupings, including NATO, it is vital for New Delhi to be transparent about any major agreement with the 30-nation alliance. It is also critical that New Delhi stays cautious about maintaining its distance from commitments that could limit India's strategic freedom.

In News: India held its first political dialogue with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in Brussels on December 12, 2019.

Placing it in the Syllabus: International Relations

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About NATO

- NATO, or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, is a **political and military alliance of 28 European countries and two countries in North America (USA and Canada)**.
- Set up in **1949** by the US, Canada, and several western European nations to ensure their collective security against the Soviet Union, **it was the US's first peacetime military alliance outside the western hemisphere**.
- Headquartered in Brussels, Belgium, NATO has 30 members. The headquarters of the Allied Command Operations is near Mons, also in Belgium.
- **NATO's collective defence principle**
- Members of NATO are committed to mutual defence in response to an attack by any external party.
- **Article 5** of the North Atlantic Treaty, the founding treaty of NATO- The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them will assist the Party or Parties so attacked including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

The origins of NATO

- At the end of WWII, as battered European nations started to rebuild their economies, the US was critical to prevent the westward expansion of communist USSR.
- The European Recovery Programme, known as the **Marshall Plan** promoted the idea of shared interests and cooperation between the US and Europe.
- The USSR declined to participate in the Marshall Plan, and discouraged eastern European states in its sphere of influence from receiving American economic assistance.
- Later, series of events took place regarding the expansion of territories that led the US to conclude an

American-European alliance against the USSR.

- In 1948, the UK, France, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg signed the Brussels Treaty of collective defence, which meant that if any of the signatories faced an attack, they would be defended by all the others.
- The US Congress passed the **Vandenberg Resolution** which was the stepping stone to NATO.
- Later, the NATO treaty was signed in Washington DC in 1949 with 12 signatories initially.

India's talks with NATO a new development?

- During the past decade, NATO's 'out-of-area' operations have taken it eastwards from the Mediterranean, while India's 'Extended neighbourhood' framework has brought it westwards from the Indian subcontinent.
- This has created a geopolitical overlap between these two actors, most notably in Afghanistan but also elsewhere in the Indian Ocean.
- Unstated potential concerns over China are also a feature in this strategic convergence.
- However, while NATO has adopted a flexible range of 'Partnership' frameworks, India's sensitivity on retaining 'strategic autonomy' will limit their cooperation to informal ad hoc arrangements.
- The US House of Representatives on July 14, 2022 approved an amendment with an overwhelming majority to the National Defence Authorization Act (NDAA) that proposes the deepening of India-US defence ties.

Significance of India's talks with NATO

- India's talks with NATO hold significance given that the North Atlantic alliance has been engaging both China and Pakistan in bilateral dialogue. Engaging NATO in a political dialogue would provide New Delhi an opportunity to bring about a balance in NATO's

perceptions about the situation in regions and issues of concerns to India.

- **China**– Until 2019, NATO had held nine rounds of talks with Beijing, and the Chinese Ambassador in Brussels and NATO's Deputy Secretary General engaged with each other every quarter.
- **Pakistan**-NATO had also been in political dialogue and military cooperation with Pakistan. NATO opened selective training for Pakistani officers and its military delegation visited Pakistan in November 2019 for military staff talks.
- **Maritime security**: It is a principal area of conversation in the future, given a substantial common ground with NATO.
- **Military**– India would derive military-strategic benefits from a partnership with the world's most powerful alliance.
- **Defence**– Although India is capable enough to secure its borders, an alliance with NATO would create deterrence for China and Pakistan to attack India under the provisions of collective defence.
- **Common Grounds**-There is a convergence in the perspectives of both India and NATO on China, terrorism, and Afghanistan, including Pakistan's role in Afghanistan.
- Engaging NATO in a political dialogue would provide India with an opportunity to bring about a balance in NATO's perceptions about the situation in regions and issues of concern to India.

Challenges

- Closer ties with NATO will severely impact India's relation with Russia.
- According to NATO's perspective, the biggest threat it faced was not China, but Russia whose aggressive actions are threatening European security.

- NATO's views on China are mixed, given the divergent views of its members, India's Quad membership is aimed at countering Beijing.
- In its first round of talks with NATO, New Delhi realised it did not share a common ground with the grouping on Russia and the Taliban. NATO saw the Taliban as a political entity, which was not in line with India's stance.
- NATO had faced difficulties to convene meetings of the NATO-Russia Council due to Russian refusal to place issues such as Ukraine and Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.
- Full-fledged NATO members, such as Turkey, have faced US sanctions; so deeper ties with the alliance are not a guarantee of safety from potential punitive moves by Washington.

What are the next steps?

- On its part, the NATO delegation led by Bettina Cadenbach, Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy have expressed keenness to continue engagement with India on a mutually agreed agenda.
- The two sides also discussed a possible second round in New Delhi in 2020, which was delayed due to the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Way Forward

- New Delhi may consider proposals emanating from NATO, if any, on bilateral cooperation in areas of interest to India, based on the progress achieved in the initial rounds.
- In NATO's view, India, given its geo-strategic position and unique perspectives on various issues, was relevant to international security and could be an important partner.

- India must ensure it does not get drawn into conflicts that are unrelated to its own national interests.
- A very tight relationship with NATO would also undermine India's stated goal of working towards a multipolar world, while prompting concern among India's friends in Moscow. India must seek new partners, but only on its terms.