

US has made 'the long bet' on India: Nisha Desai Biswal

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Washington: The US has made "the long bet" on India as an important partner in advancing their collective security interests in the South Asian region, according to a senior Obama administration official.

"In the South Asia region, we have made the long bet on India as an important partner in advancing our collective security interests," said Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Nisha Desai Biswal at an event here last week.

"The United States and India have a unique ability and opportunity to shape this region's future for good," she said at the annual meeting of the Association of the United States Army, according to the transcript of her address released by State Department Monday.

And, to that end, earlier this year President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid out a Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region, Biswal noted.

"This landmark document affirms the importance of safeguarding maritime security, ensuring freedom of navigation - especially in the South China Sea - and peacefully resolving territorial and maritime disputes," she said.

"We're also building India's capacity through our defence trade - like that C-17 they brought their soldiers to Washington in, or the C-130s they used to deliver relief supplies after Nepal's earthquake," Biswal said.

Last month, the Indian Air Force finalised a \$3 billion deal for Apache and Chinook helicopters, she noted.

US was also helping India develop aircraft carrier and jet engine technology as part of their Defence Technology and Trade Initiative launched back in 2012.

US and India are also "increasingly cooperating in countering the threats posed by non-state actors through increased counter-terrorism cooperation in the region," she said.

The recently-signed Joint Declaration on Combating Terrorism paved the way for greater intelligence sharing and capacity building.

The US, she noted, conducted "more military exercises with India than any other country and we are fast becoming India's biggest defence partner".

"Great examples include Exercise Yudh Abhyas, an Army to Army exercise that brought 150 Indian Army soldiers to Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state where they arrived aboard an Indian Air Force C-17, and MALABAR, currently underway with India and Japan."

"Together with 225 American soldiers, our armies practiced working together in peacekeeping and counter-terrorism operations," Biswal said. "They also exchanged views on regional security and emerging challenges in the Indo-Pacific."

The US and India have also reached a major announcement on peacekeeping cooperation and the two countries are going to jointly train peacekeepers with several countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

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