

Silicon Valley, Aug 19. (PTI):

India and the United States need to build a strong defence relationship on the lines of NATO, a leading US Congressman Frank Pallone has said. Pallone, who was here for a fundraising event hosted by local activist and Kashmiri leader, Jeevan Zutshi, said, "I believe it is very difficult to develop a true close relationship with another country, unless there is a defence relationship."

"I honestly believe that we are going to see the day when there is going to be a formal defence treaty arrangement, maybe something like NATO. It could be a South Asian alliance, with India leading other countries of the region into some kind of formal military alliance with the United States," Pallone, co-founder of India Caucus, said.

This, the Congressman said, did not mean that India had to give up its sovereignty or give up its position as a country that has always been in the forefront of the Non- Aligned Movement.

"I am very supportive of the fact that India has over the last couple of months said to President George W Bush that we are not going to send our forces to Iraq, unless you put this under the United Nations. "India has to continue its role as a leader of Non-Aligned Movement and also as a very important country within the UN and that doesn't preclude a close defence relationship with the United States. In terms of defence cooperation, India and the US had made significant strides in the recent years, Pallone said referring to the joint military exercises, weapons transfer and the setting up of the two working groups - anti-terrorism and the defense working group.

"India just recently purchased radar system from Israel with US approval and now they are talking about anti-ballistic defence system. "Commenting on the immense success of India caucus, which has now emerged as the largest Caucus in the country, Pallone said when the Caucus was set up, one of its major goal was to ensure that the US policy vis-a-vis India was de-linked from the US policy towards Pakistan.

"Today, US relationship with India is not linked to Pakistan. The bottomline is the defence and security relationship that we have with India today, has nothing to do with Pakistan.

"India is viewed as a country that is a staunch ally that shares values with the United States, whether it is democracy, secularism or war against terrorism, and we see that relationship developing totally independent of Pakistan."