

Opening Statement

by



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at

**MGIMO-ICWA Conference on
India-Russia Partnership**

at

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Thank you very much for your warm welcome. It is my privilege to lead the Indian delegation of scholars to the MGIMO-ICWA Conference on 'New Contours of India-Russia Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership' in the beautiful city of Moscow. We bring to you all the greetings and good wishes of India's strategic community which is represented by our members that belong to its different segments. We speak not for the government but for academics, strategic experts and all those interested in fostering Track II links between India and Russia.

2. Our two institutions – Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) and Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) -- are of similar vintage as both were established in the 1940s. They have similar goals and objectives, and they have worked closely in the past. They participated in academic events held in Delhi in November 2008 and December 2010, in Moscow in December 2009, and not to exclude this conference here in May 2013. They have been linked by an MoU on mutual cooperation since 2001, and they intend to renew it. I should add that, besides this conference, we are scheduled also to hold a dialogue with the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), Moscow. Further, I am scheduled to have a separate Interaction at St. Petersburg State University later this week.

3. Thus, our visit, in all its facets, has been structured to deepen and diversify the time-tested and multi-dimensional relationship that happily exists between India and Russia. We are driven by the mission to study, comprehend and analyse its inner core and promote its future potential. In this context, the conference hosted by MGIMO is of considerable significance. We sincerely thank our gracious hosts for extending the invitation to us to undertake this visit. We are grateful for your generous hospitality as well as the excellent arrangements made for our stay.

Our Agenda

4. The agenda for this conference has been crafted with due care through consultations in advance. The basic purpose of our dialogue for the next two days is to enhance our understanding of key aspects of the foreign policies of Russia and India in the larger context of rapidly changing strategic environment, and the historical backdrop of convergences trumping

divergences that mark our bilateral relations. This explains why the agreed agenda has four clearly marked sections, namely contemporary geo-political and geo-economic scenarios; India-Russia partnership in the multilateral fora; regional issues, especially those affecting the regions that are of immense interest to our two countries; and finally the characteristics, constraints and prospects of our bilateral relations.

5. It is our earnest hope that, while designated speakers would make concise and incisive presentations on the specific topics earmarked to them, other experts and delegates as well as members of the audience will have ample opportunities to contribute to the discussions. We should aim to develop broad consensus on key conclusions through our comprehensive dialogue. I should add that we will be happy to cooperate with MGIMO in order to produce a publication containing texts of presentations as well as a report on the conference proceedings and conclusions.

Our Worldview

6. This Dialogue will, we hope, contribute to a better understanding of the worldview, held and articulated by each of our two countries. This, I clarify, should include the perspectives not only of the governments but also our strategic community, media and public opinion.

7. India's worldview encompasses several key elements. Among them figure a commitment to peace and security as essential pre-requisites for economic development – the real priority; reliance on peaceful means and negotiations to resolve inter-state differences; belief that the contemporary world is essentially multi-polar where poles (or pillars) are of varying size and strength and that a working equilibrium among them is crucial for peace and security; and conviction that the world's governance structures should be more representative of shifts in power equations since the end of the Cold War. In this general context, India views Russia as an important world player that has wider international influence and responsibility. Indian leadership considers relations with Russia as 'a key pillar' of India's foreign policy. Hence, friendly and cooperative equations between our two countries have vital global, regional and bilateral dimensions that need to be studied and strengthened.

8. Russia's worldview has changed considerably from the times of the USSR. It has factored in changes in the balance of power in the post-Cold War era; it accords primacy to national interests rather than ideology; and it recognizes that 'the bloc-based approach' for tackling international issues is being replaced by 'network diplomacy.' The Soviet Union of the yore was one of the two super powers, whereas Russia today is a significant member of G-8 as well as BRICS.

9. As evident from the document entitled 'Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation' (issued in February 2013 with the approval of President V. Putin), Russia aims to ensure its national security, create favorable external conditions for a steady and dynamic growth of the Russian economy, promote international peace and 'universal security', and develop mutually beneficial and equal bilateral and multilateral partnership relations with foreign states. It is recognized in Moscow, we note, that an intense competition is now taking place, 'for the first time in modern history', on a global level, denoting that various models of development tend 'to clash and compete each other.' Besides, for tackling challenges it faces, the world seems to need both joint efforts by the international community based on 'the central coordinating role of the UN' as well as effective, regional governance based on 'the polycentric model' of the world. The latter entails emergence of networks, associations and economic agreements as 'instruments to enhance security and financial and economic stability.' Among various tools at Russia's disposal is public diplomacy which it uses to ensure 'its objective perception in the world.'

10. A further step in enhancing mutual understanding may be to examine (i) Russia's view of India's role, and (ii) India's view of Russia's role in world affairs. On the former aspect, a premier Russian Think Tank (RIAC) has recently noted that 'alongside the US and China' India has a rightful claim 'to the status of being a centre of global influence,' but it concluded that India-Russia relations suffered from stagnation. I also came across a thought-provoking analysis by a Russian scholar (Fyodor Lukyanov) who argued that India valued its independence and had the economic clout or capability to pursue an independent policy. Hence, India rates to be 'one of the new poles' in the world order. But he also took the view that India did not dare to pursue 'a really pro-active policy', with New Delhi taking 'evasive positions... hiding behind general

statements.’ He depicted India ‘as a discerning bride desired by all’ and concluded that ‘Moscow still enjoys certain advantages, in the competition for India.’

11. Similarly, we could assess India’s views of Russia’s role. It is noteworthy that Indian analysts cannot help comparing today’s Russia with the Soviet Union of the past. Some of them may even point out that Russia is essentially interested in Europe and in its immediate neighbourhood only. Nevertheless, they all view Russia as a crucial player on the world stage, a fellow emerging economy, and a time-tested friend with which India should continue to strengthen and consolidate its relationship. In fact, one of our key goals in this conference is to try and come up with tangible recommendations on this score for the consideration of policy makers.

Our Relations

12. India-Russia relations have been free from bilateral disputes. They have been flourishing as ‘a special and privileged strategic partnership.’ Their tenor and trajectory are moulded not only by what the two countries do or do not do between themselves, but also by the pattern of relationships involving other major powers such as US, China, EU and Japan. There is a need to study and investigate the impact of this factor on our mutual perceptions and cooperation. In this context, two points may be made regarding the multilateral setting. Firstly, India’s interest in securing the permanent membership of UN Security Council is supported by Russia, but there is now an expectation that our Russian friends need to do more – and be seen to be doing more – in the desired direction. Secondly, concerning three other organizations i.e. RIC, BRICS and EAS Russia and India could consider stepping up their coordination and cooperation, a path that would promote mutual benefit on a large canvass.

13. On the bilateral plane, we shall no doubt go into details in order to examine how and in which specific areas the two countries should endeavour to do better. Defense, energy (including civilian nuclear energy), connectivity and economic relations seem to offer attractive possibilities. In these and other areas, our existing cooperation should rise to meet its optimal potential. On the trade and economic cooperation front, we could consider expanding our academic-level dialogue by and including a few select representatives of business and industry in

future. Besides, more cooperation in the area of public diplomacy media links, tourism, and civil society connections could yield rich dividends, particularly because public awareness in India about Russia of today is highly limited. Above all, dialogue involving strategic communities of the two countries need to be expanded.

14. As scholars, we recognize that India-Russia relations are also influenced by internal political and economic developments. A discussion on this facet may be desirable, but due to the time constraint, it should take place only on the sidelines of our conference.

15. In the end, I express, once again, our appreciation and gratitude to the host institution, MGIMO. We also assure you that our delegation will play an active and constructive role in the deliberations that are about to unfold now.

