


Remarks

by

Ambassador Nalin Surie
Director General
Indian Council of World Affairs



at the
Opening High Level Session of the International Conference
on
**'Strategic Visions of India-Russia Relations
and Changes in the World Order'**

at

Moscow, Russia
12 October, 2017

I am delighted to be back in Moscow at the head of this high level Indian delegation of eight think tanks to participate in this important conference on Strategic Visions of India-Russia Relations and Changes in the World Order. This conference is part of the agreed activities to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of India-Russia diplomatic relations. We are particularly pleased that our partner on this occasion is the Russian International Affairs Council. The Indian Council of World Affairs is quite akin to the RIAC and hence when we brainstormed last June on how to take this conference forward, it was an easy and friendly exercise among likeminded partners.

The task is both easy and difficult. How does one convert a special and privileged strategic partnership into something even more; something which will ensure that the core concerns of our two countries in today's fast changing, and even dangerous, world can be sustained while at the same time ensuring regional and international peace, security and sustainable development.

We have, as has been recognized at the highest level between the leaders of our two countries, similar priorities in economic and social development; and in foreign policy. Our relationship has, in spite of several twists and turns been consistently on an upward trend. Yet, there is a gnawing feeling that there is something missing and that the DNA of the partnership needs to be transformed and a new paradigm established that builds on the political and strategic trust that underpins our relationship.

To my way of thinking, there are several key parameters that define our partnership and it is worth recalling some of these as we look at ways and means of enhancing our partnership in a comprehensive and across-the-board- manner based on each other's needs and mutual interests.

The bilateral relationship is critical for both our countries. This does not, however, mean that this prevents us from developing equally comprehensive relations with any third country. But we also need to be clear that this process should not impinge on the core interests of the other.

Our partnership continues to develop in a steady manner in areas of nuclear energy, military technical collaboration, conventional energy, space and cyber issues. But this is not enough. It must expand to areas of cooperation well beyond these five principal areas to encompass much larger segments of the economy on both sides. This would include infrastructure development, agriculture, ICT, innovation, scientific development and Industry 4.0. Importantly, while doing this even in our current principal areas of cooperation, we need to collaborate in the most modern and frontier areas of technology that would provide an extra edge against what is available from other partners. Commitments once entered into must be fulfilled. This would also strengthen the strategic core of the partnership.

I referred earlier to the very difficult international situation that confronts us and the international community at large. Our approaches to ensuring peace and security and shaping a global architecture that reflects cultural and civilizational diversity are quite similar. Yet, it would appear that our existing dialogue mechanisms on issues pertaining to international relations, including current global hotspots, need to be reinforced, made more frequent, and the issues covered considerably broadened. In this, I would include the situation in West Asia (especially Syria), Yemen, Iraq, DPRK, Afghanistan, the Indo-Pacific, an Asian Security architecture, migration issues, freedom of navigation amongst others.

Our dialogue on counter terrorism, extremism and fundamentalism also needs to be made more result-oriented.

A dialogue on the United States and Europe is another area that requires focus. Far reaching changes are taking place in the USA and in Europe and both our countries have concrete interests in what happens in these critical parts of the globe. Russian and Indian perspectives can not only be fruitfully exchanged on these developments but could also lead to common positions that could have a positive impact on fulfilling our respective core interests with the USA and Europe.

Our two countries are important partners in the G20, in BRICS and now in the SCO. A common and coordinated approach in these organizations would not only be to mutual benefit but also in the interest of bringing about changes in regional and global architectures.

In a similar vein, our collaboration at the UN has over the years been steady but greater coordination and cooperation would be to mutual benefit.

Let me repeat. In effect, our special and privileged partnership requires us to dialogue much more frequently and on a much wider set of issues than we do at present. Meetings such as ours today can be catalysts in our effort to undertake regular consultations on an equal footing and would allow us both to be much more nimble footed in walking over the hot coals of the complex and complicated international situation that prevails today.

The issue of connectivity has bedeviled our partnership for long now. Can we hope for early light at the end of the tunnel in so far as the INSTC is concerned? We certainly hope so. Coupled with our intended FTA with the Eurasian Economic Union and our partnership in the SCO, we believe that not only will our bilateral economic ties improve but our collaboration in Central Asia would become much more substantive and strategic.

We are agreed that the economic leg of our partnership remains weak and major efforts must be made to make this a critical pillar of our relationship. Going back to old methodologies is not a solution. Since the beginning of this century in particular, the Indian economy continues to grow meaningfully and is also on an assured high growth path. In spite of sanctions, the Russian economy remains strong and its potential on account of its scientific and technological achievements remains huge. In spite of sanctions, Russia remains an exporter of capital and we understand that technology sanctions have actually been a blessing in disguise. It is ironic that in spite of these trends, there is inadequate knowledge in Russia about India's achievements and requirements and vice versa. As we were advised by some at the HSE, when we met them last June, in our bilateral economic relations, business as usual is no longer adequate and a self maintaining, self reproducing system needs to be created. In this context, India's participation at the recently concluded Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok was a clear indication of our serious intent. Our delegation was led by the EAM of India herself. The Forum offered a valuable platform for businesses from both sides to meet and the India-Russia Business dialogue meetings exposed Indian businesses to the very substantial opportunities available in the Russian Far East.

I would also like to take the liberty of reiterating on this occasion the suggestions that we have made to the HSE on how we can take the economic partnership forward. This would contribute to making economic cooperation a more critical segment of our strategic partnership. The six suggestions that were made are the following:

- i) Participation in global value addition chains – identification of products and entities
- ii) Collaboration to increase productivity in agriculture – We can jointly contribute to international food security
- iii) Collaboration in the dairy and food processing sectors
- iv) Utilise Indian expertise, financial and management skills to convert scientific potential and scientific technological advances in Russia into commercially viable and marketable products and services
- v) Enhance connectivity especially through the INSTC and
- vi) Investment in infrastructure by Russian companies in India

Perhaps the above suggestions can be discussed in the first session tomorrow morning.

Friends, most of the presumptions that had been made when the Cold War ended have had a very short shelf life. Indeed, it can justifiably be argued that the hopes generated by the end of the Cold War have been vitiated and indeed the world today is in some way more dangerous and complicated than it was before. Advances in technology are contributing to the benefit of mankind. But ironically, they are also creating greater divisions within societies and among countries. They are providing means to terrorists, extremists and fundamentalists to spread their gospel of hatred and adding to the plethora of nontraditional security threats that transcend boundaries. These latter forces launch unexpected attacks, create havoc and then hide in the anonymity of the ether space.

Today there are countries which are militarily and economically very powerful but there is no more a sole super power. The belief that one can act unilaterally is in most cases likely to lead to frustration. The multipolar world is happening. More and more great powers are emerging. The need is for more intense and more frequent cooperation between these emerging great powers and the established ones.

We see today forces at work that threaten the world order based on sovereign equality, independence, territorial integrity, non use of force, non-interference in the internal affairs of states and respect for the principles of justice and international law. The simple point that I am trying to make is that countries such as Russia and India have much in common. Our partnership is vital not only for our own futures, but is also in the interest of regional and international peace, security and development. We thus need to be much more mindful of each other's interests, aspirations, concerns and also to our obligations to the international community.
