



PRIME MINISTER MODI WAS QUICK TO MAKE A BREAK WITH THE PAST AND RESPOND TO THE US INTEREST TO PARTNER WITH HIS GOVERNMENT TO REALIZE THE GOALS THAT HE HAD SET FOR INDIA'S RAPID TRANSFORMATION.

HE EXPANDED THE CANVAS OF OUR INTERACTION WITH THE US BY GIVING FULL PLAY TO THE INDIAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY WHO WERE THE FOCUS OF HIS ADDRESS AT MADISON SQUARE GARDEN IN 2014 AND AGAIN AT THE SAP CENTER IN 2015.

THERE IS A LOT OF INTEREST IN THE US CONGRESS ABOUT INDIA, AND NOBODY IS BETTER PLACED THAN THE PRIME MINISTER TO ADDRESS THE MEMBERS ABOUT INDIA AND OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS.

Arun Kumar Singh is one of the Indian Foreign Service's finest diplomats.

In his 37-year career in the IFS, Ambassador Singh has served in Moscow, Addis Ababa, Tokyo, at India's permanent mission to the UN in New York, and, of course, in Washington, DC, where he first served as Deputy Chief of Mission during those critical years in the India-US relationship, October 2008 to April 2013.

Before returning to Washington as Ambassador on April 30, 2015, he served as India's envoy to France from April 2013 to April 2015. His first posting as ambassador was to Israel from April 2005 to September 2008.

Few diplomats are as qualified to discuss the trajectory of the current India-US relationship as Ambassador Singh and this exclusive, rare, interview reveals unusual understanding of how this geo-strategic, economic and military association between the world's largest democracies is transforming our times.

How would you describe the current status of US-India relations two years into Prime Minister Modi's administration? And how would you define the partnership today?

Is it still an envisaged strategic partnership or a full-blown strategic and commercial relationship in all of its facets?

India-US engagement in the first two years of Prime Minister Modi's government has moved with great intensity and purpose in the entire spectrum of bilateral cooperation and international coordination. India's relations with the US had stalled somewhat in the previous few years due to unmet expectations of the two sides on a number of issues.

Prime Minister Modi was quick to make a break with the past and respond to the US interest to partner with his government to realize the goals that he had set for India's rapid transformation.

He expanded the canvas of our interaction with the US also by giving full play to the role of the Indian-American community, who were the focus of his address at Madison Square Garden in 2014 and again at the SAP Center in San Jose in 2015.

Another visible symbol of our new terms of engagement with the US was Prime Minister Modi's invitation to President Obama as the first-ever US President attending India's Republic Day function as the chief guest.

By working together in a problem-solving manner, our two governments in the last two years have addressed lingering differences on nuclear liability and food subsidies, injected new energy into defense and economic cooperation and found ways to tackle climate change without affecting our developmental space.

Bold new initiatives have been taken — be it the first-ever regionally focused Vision Statement on the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region, or cooperation in the development of an aircraft carrier or jet engine technology in India.

Close to two dozen new institutional mechanisms have been established in the last two years, ranging from infrastructure, IPR, civil nuclear energy to oceans, maritime security, diplomatic policy planning and space security.

Greater synergy has been achieved in the strategic, commercial and other dimensions of our engagement with the



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INDIA'S AMBASSADOR TO THE US SPEAKS TO INDIA ABROAD EDITOR AZIZ HANIFFA IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW.

US by upgrading of the existing Strategic Dialogue of the foreign ministers into a Strategic and Commercial Dialogue of the foreign and trade ministers.

The character of our partnership and its rich global and strategic content has been fully articulated in the two joint statements, two vision documents and a Declaration of Friendship issued at Prime Minister Modi's two summits with President Obama.

With India increasingly playing a larger role in the Indian Ocean Region and the Asia-Pacific, the premium on partnership for provision of security, humanitarian and economic assistance in our region has risen for both India and the US as well as other like-minded countries, as you can see in the institutionalization of India-US-Japan Malabar Exercises and the first-ever trilateral meeting of foreign ministers of these three countries.

We are partnering for progress and development in many regions, from Afghanistan to Africa. It is evident that ours is

today a full strategic partnership with a truly global outlook and objective.

Prime Minister Modi will be on his fourth visit to the US and will have his third working summit with President Obama, which could perhaps be the last before the end of his Presidency.

What do you see as the legacy of these meetings and the perfect rapport they have developed vis-a-vis US-India relations at this time in their administrations and also going forward?

A lot of what has been achieved in the last two years in India-US relations owes to the personal commitment and investment by Prime Minister Modi and President Obama.

Besides their visits to each other, they have frequently met on the sidelines of other international and multilateral events. The personal rapport between the two leaders that you have referred to have been reinforced by their shared vision of many global issues and a conviction about the importance of the role that India and the US can play in realizing that vision.

Prime Minister Modi's idea of proactively addressing the challenges of climate change through an ambitious renewable energy program and pragmatic, convenient action forged in alliance with other countries was critical to the success of the Paris Conference of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in December.

The shared vision for Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region that the two leaders unveiled last year reflect their interest in an open, inclusive, consultative, rules-based regional architecture and have shaped our frequent policy consultation and coordination on issues of particular regional interest.

The DTTI initiative that has blossomed under their watch has shaped an ambitious agenda for new type of defense engagement, going beyond buyer-seller relations and introducing an element of strategic purpose into our defense interaction.

The forthcoming summit between the two leaders will allow them to take stock of these developments and to take measures that will consolidate our relations further in the years ahead.

A significant manifestation of Prime Minister Modi's visit this time around will be his first address to a joint meeting of Congress, where there is so much support and bipartisan expectations for the continuing exponential growth of US-India ties.

How significant is this address in terms of getting out the India story out to all of America and Americans?

Prime Minister Modi's visit and his address to a joint meeting of the US Congress is a reflection of the widespread bipartisan support in the US for relations with India.

It is a testament to the popular basis of the coming together of the world's largest and the oldest democracies. The occasion is also significant as an opportunity to bridge the understanding of the American people about India through their representatives in Congress.

This will be an occasion for him to authoritatively articu-



Arun Kumar Singh

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late his vision for India's place in the world and our partnership with the US. There is a lot of interest in the US Congress about India, and nobody is better placed than the prime minister to address the members about India and our bilateral relations.

The prime minister has addressed large and impressive gatherings in the US earlier, but this has its own significance as it directly reaches US lawmakers and policymakers, and as it is viewed in millions of American homes. His address would also be watched with avid interest by more than a billion people in India and many more throughout the world.

Of course, not everything is in sync, and the challenges and concerns do remain — from trade, economics and negotiations over BIT, etc, still to come to fruition.

What's your take on these issues in terms of forward movement in the last few months of the Obama Presidency? Is the election fervor and fever in the US too much of a distraction for anything tangible on these issues to not just move forward, but be institutionalized?

Our economic and commercial relations have moved steadily forward through rapidly expanding trade, increasing investments and deepening financial and regulatory cooperation between the two sides.

However, I recognize that there is room to further expand trade and investment between us, and for policies that make it possible. The government of India has taken a number of very important initiatives such as 'Make in India', 'Digital India' and 'Skills India', which offer new business opportunities for US companies.

The India-US Investment initiative has laid the roadmap for cooperation on reforms that promote greater financing of investment into India and development of debt and capital markets.

Similarly, the US-India Infrastructure Collaboration Platform is promoting enhanced market access and financing to increase US industry participation in sectors that support Indian infrastructure. The government of India is committed to protecting the rights of taxpayers and has taken several steps for quick resolution of tax disputes.

The government of India has recently approved the national IPR policy, which reiterates our international obligations while safeguarding our developmental concerns. We are also discussing issues related to a Bilateral Investment Treaty.

India, as the fastest growing major economy in the world, at a time of global economic headwinds, provides opportunity for deepening US-India economic engagement.

In this regard, the nuclear deal is still in limbo, notwithstanding the contact group and the optimistic outlook in the negotiations, etc.

Can some movement forward in terms of Westinghouse and GE be expected during this summit between the prime minister and President?

I would not like to characterize the nuclear deal as being in limbo. All the government-level policy issues have been resolved through frequent meeting of the Contact Group on Nuclear Energy set up by the two leaders in 2014.

We have satisfactorily answered all questions and doubts internationally expressed about the compatibility of India's nuclear liability regime with relevant international regimes.

As a final demonstration of that, India ratified the Convention for Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage earlier this year, which was welcomed by the US government.

Last year, we also successfully negotiated the Administrative Arrangement to enable implementation of the bilateral Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement. Currently, negotiations over cost, pricing and techno-commercial viability are going on between private sector partici-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi appears to thank Ambassador Arun Kumar Singh for helping a successful visit, New York, September 28, 2015.

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pants.

The government of India remains committed to nuclear energy as a source of clean energy and welcomes US companies in our nuclear energy market.

In the House of Representatives last month, no doubt in appreciation of the burgeoning US-India defense trade and military partnership, bipartisan legislation to further bolster defense ties with India was passed with a proviso to even bring it on a par with NATO allies and Israel in terms of the sale of defense equipment and technology to India.

Similar legislation introduced by Senate India Caucus Co-chairs Cornyn and Warner is also pending in the Senate.

Does this mean the defense and military relationship with India is now the catalyst and crown jewels of the US-India strategic partnership?

India-US defense relations has certainly come a long way since a defense framework agreement was signed in 2005. This was updated last year to reflect that evolution.

There is robust architecture of the defense dialogue and ministerial-level visits in defense, of which you would have seen three in the past one year.

India and the US currently do more military exercises with each other than they do with any other country.

Under the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative, we have stepped up our co-production and co-development collaboration and have laid the foundation for long-term collaboration in frontier areas of aircraft carrier and jet engine technology.

Defense manufacturing in India by US companies has also begun in a modest way, though the potential remains high in view of our liberalized foreign investment rules and 'Make in India' initiative, of which defense is also an intended focus.

It is, therefore, no wonder that defense and military relationship has emerged as one of the catalysts of our strategic partnership. We are aware of the interest expressed in the US Congress to further advance our defense cooperation with the US. This will add to the confidence about this partnership.

Also in the House, ignoring the protestations of the admin-

istration, a resolution was approved to condition aid to the tune of \$450 million to Pakistan unless Islamabad took concrete actions against the Haqqani network and released Dr Shakil Afridi who was invaluable to the capture of Osama bin Laden.

This comes close on the heels of Congress, particularly the Senate, putting a hold on the sale of F-16s to Pakistan and the administration asking Pakistan to pay for it, which effectively means the sale is dead,

Secretary Kerry and other senior administration officials had earlier argued that this was a 'legacy sale.' These actions by Congress, coming on the eve of Prime Minister Modi's trip to the US, is it unequivocal that Congress seems to be more sensitive to India's concerns than the administration vis-a-vis Pakistan?

Do you agree that the past foreign policy zero-sum equations have to be relegated to the dustbin of history?

I would not like to interpose myself between the US administration and the US Congress, both of which are vital sources of support and strength to the India-US relationship. However, we do share some of the concerns expressed in the US Congress about Pakistan's record on counter-terrorism, many of which I dare say also resonate within the administration.

Eventually, each of us have an interest to see that Pakistan stops being a safe haven for terrorists and an exporter of extremist and violent ideologies as an instrument of its foreign policy goals.

Each of us would like Pakistan instead to embrace and become a part of a commerce and connectivity network that we hope to promote throughout South Asia in our common quest for peace and prosperity.

India has never seen itself as part of a zero-sum equation with Pakistan when it comes to US foreign policy. India has independent global interests and aspirations, which we will pursue.

Of course, it is a matter of satisfaction for us that increasingly the US has shown recognition and support for India's global interests.