

# Talk by U.S. Ambassador Richard Verma

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## Introduction

Thank you for the kind introduction, Sunjoy, and for hosting me today. I would like to commend the Observer Research Foundation for its commitment to excellence in producing first-rate analysis on world affairs. The Embassy team and I value your insights and counsel.

Just over a month ago, Vice President Biden commemorated the ten-year anniversary of the milestone that unleashed the potential of the U.S.-India relationship, the 2005 Civil Nuclear Initiative. Looking back over the last ten years, I am struck by the substantial progress we have made to deepen and broaden U.S.-India ties. Ten years ago, partnering on nuclear, space, and other forms of high technology were among the most contentious issues between India and the United States. Today those issues are part of the foundation of the lasting partnership we are building.

During President Obama's Republic Day visit, our leaders agreed to over 70 areas of cooperation, setting a new roadmap for our relationship. These initiatives include cooperation on issues such as space, maritime, and cybersecurity, and many are now starting to bear fruit. As we've become used to saying: Chalein Saath Saath, "Forward, Together, We Go." We can now also proclaim we - the U.S. and India - are "stronger together" when we work together. That much has become crystal clear.

But in the midst of signing MOUs, collaborating on defense initiatives, improving economic cooperation, and advancing health priorities, let us not lose sight of the primary goal of our bilateral cooperation. We work together because the summation of our efforts as "Best Partners" makes our citizens and the world more stable, secure, and prosperous.

Because we endeavor for a better world, U.S.-India ties become more necessary by the day. At this moment, the shared values that the United States and India hold dear face profound challenges in a number of areas that threaten global security and the international order. From emboldened terrorist organizations, to attempts to discredit the principles of democratic governance, to aggressive tactics in the seas and skies, the values that define our open, democratic societies are at risk.

Let me pause here to make clear that we condemn in the strongest possible terms the recent cross-border terror attacks, and stand with the people of India - and all free people - in fighting this scourge of terrorism, wherever it occurs. FBI Director Comey has pledged the full support of his agency and our government in supporting India in its investigation. There can be no place, no accommodation, and no justification for those who carry out violence on innocents. As President Obama said when he was here in Delhi, the U.S. and India are united in this fight, and our two countries will continue to focus on building a better future that delivers greater security, prosperity, and dignity for our people.

It is the U.S. -India relationship that can help counter the trend of global uncertainty and reinforce the rules-based international order. In fact, what we do together has the potential to help underwrite global security and prosperity for the long-term. It is for this reason that the United States supports India's aspiration to become what Foreign Secretary Jaishankar calls a "leading power" instead of a "balancing power." To realize this goal, our countries will not only have to work together on our bilateral priorities, but partner on global issues to strengthen the rules-based, international order, in which India has an important stake. Addressing a reluctant public over a century ago, the American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan wrote in his famous treatise that, "Whether they will or not, Americans must now begin to look outward. The growing production of the country demands it." The same can be said of India today.

The way India chooses to define its own role as a leading power can have a profound impact on our shared interests in defending and preserving assured access to shared spaces. As President Obama articulated in the February 2015 National Security Strategy, these shared spaces are the arteries of the world economy and civil society. Assured access to these domains, for all, is critical for the governments of the world to continue to provide their citizens with rising living standards and security. Challenges to assured access to these shared spaces come from increased competition and provocative behaviors, and can compromise the ability of nations to partner on collective security and disaster response. I believe that as leading powers, cooperation between the United States and India to preserve the integrity of this public good can drive our bilateral strategic cooperation for decades and will lay the groundwork for the next big breakthrough in bilateral relations.

### **Freedom of Navigation - Seas and Skies**

The Latin term "Mare Liberum," means "a free sea for everyone," and has been the foundational argument for freedom of navigation since the early 1600s. As transnational commerce has grown, technology has improved, and new frontiers have been explored. Ninety percent of trade worldwide is conducted on the oceans. Our food, fuel, imports, and exports depend on the safe passage of cargo through the world's economic arteries, our shared sea lanes. Today, the safety and security of these sea lanes face genuine threats, including those from terrorists, natural and environmental disruptions, mass migration, and organized criminal activity. Piracy, hostage taking, and extortion on the high seas continues to breed uncertainty. However, we have seen the international community step up to work to address many of those concerns, with the United States and India often in the front.

We are both maritime powers. Our navies engage in regular trainings and joint exercises as partners. Our leaders have explicitly called upon us to work together to strengthen maritime security in both the U.S.-India Joint Statement and our U.S.-India Defense Framework Agreement. We demonstrated what was possible when both our nations helped to found the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia in 2009 that has grown to include over 80 countries, organizations, and industry participants. We can do more, such as increasing our intelligence exchanges and collaborating even further on issues of common concern such as piracy, counter-terrorism, the illegal drug trade, and human trafficking within the Indo-Pacific region.

Another area where our maritime interests align is in our dual commitment to counter the

use of intimidation or force to assert unfounded territorial or maritime claims. Paraphrasing Secretary Kerry, freedom of navigation and overflight are not privileges. They are rights. And these principles bind all nations equally. India has been a leader in showing the world how to peacefully resolve maritime and territorial disputes through international arbitration, as you have done with Bangladesh.

But not all threats to the maritime domain are man-made. Natural disasters also affect the stability of the maritime domain. As leading powers, we must be prepared to react. India has proven itself in this regard. In 2004, India immediately responded to the devastation left by the Sumatra-Andaman tsunami, saving thousands of lives in South and Southeast Asia. There are countless of other examples of India's humanitarian and disaster response capabilities stretching from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea, and beyond.

So how do the United States and India best leverage our strengths to secure the maritime commons and preserve the freedom of navigation? To borrow a phrase from Ashley Tellis, we continue to "make waves." The United States has committed itself to deepening its maritime and security relationship with India across all sectors. In March and again in April, high-level leaders from both our Navies met to discuss how to improve our maritime domain awareness capabilities. We are well into the planning stages for the 2015 Malabar joint naval exercise, and are pleased that, in light of the global impact of maritime security and freedom of navigation issues, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force will visit the Bay of Bengal to participate. We want to see this exercise continue to grow in complexity to better build habits of cooperation among our navies. As announced by Secretary of Defense Ash Carter during his visit to India in June, we have also established a new aircraft carrier working group to support India's indigenous carrier program, a platform that will be critical in India's efforts to project power. And, the first meeting of that group took place this week in the United States, visiting some of the most advanced centers for carrier development and operations.

We have also consulted on how to improve coordination on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Just last month, Dr. Raja Mohan co-led a timely discussion on the future of U.S. - India humanitarian assistance cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. The United States would be proud to increase its support of India's regional disaster response capability through increased coordination preparation, more exercises, and more bilateral information sharing.

Let us not forget that freedom of navigation also applies to, and depends on, the skies. Skies that are safe for flight demand that nations abide by international law and respect overflight freedoms. Protecting such freedoms requires airpower. To this end, the United States is working with India on aircraft development. We have established a Jet Engine Technology Working Group to pursue opportunities for the co-production and co-development of next generation engines to power Indian aircraft. Over the years, India has also added C-17s, C-130s, and P-8Is to its inventories, which has expanded opportunities to share experiences operating common platforms. However, India faces a critical shortage of frontline fighter aircraft to patrol its skies and keep its airspace safe. Expanding our bilateral defense cooperation could help address that challenge. I see no reason why the United States and India cannot build fighter aircraft together, right here in India.

These combined efforts will enhance freedom of navigation in the open seas and skies,

reinforce international law, and will demonstrate our commitment to the U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region. Agile and engaged Indian forces, equipped with the latest technology and information, can play a critical role in ensuring that the international systems and trade routes that have lifted so many out of poverty in Asia will remain in place.

## **Space Security and Cooperation**

Let's transition from the seas and skies to the stratosphere. The world has truly become reliant on space, a domain in which Prime Minister Modi takes a personal interest. Last month, he expressed his immense "pride and joy" in ISRO's successful launch of five British satellites into orbit, and he has been a vocal supporter of NASA's New Horizons Mission to Pluto, calling it a "landmark feat." I would also note that President Kalam - such a towering figure in so many ways - was also committed to deepen our space cooperation. He was a visionary in this field, forging links with NASA during a 1962 visit to the United States.

The pace and scale of space cooperation between our countries has grown rapidly over a short period of time. NASA and ISRO collaborated on the Chandrayaan Mission to explore the surface of the moon, and on India's hugely successful Mars Orbiter Mission, which completed its 100th orbit around the red planet last month. That kind of collaboration would have been considered impossible a decade ago.

But we have only scratched the surface of what we can accomplish in space. The opportunities that lie ahead extend as far as space itself. Partnering on space-based climate research and weather stations to better forecast weather patterns, water supply, and climactic disasters can provide immense benefits to farmers and citizens living in coastal regions. This will become increasingly important as the effects of climate change continue to impact our planet. We welcome additional path breaking work between NASA and ISRO to explore deep space, taking us to the furthest reaches of our galaxy. Part of President Kalam's vision for space cooperation was that the United States and India could help address the world's energy demands by making space-based solar power a reality. The technology may be decades away, but he believed we should pool our scientific capabilities to realize the goal of a clean, space-based energy supply.

As space-based activity increases, important questions must be addressed about how to preserve the space environment for future generations. How will the international community ensure the sustainability and security of outer space? How can the pursuit of scientific exploration in space be guaranteed to all countries? How will we protect satellites and other resources from threats posed by space debris? While a general framework has been set by the UN's Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, there needs to be greater global consensus on how to protect space in the future.

This will require Indian and U.S. leadership. Our Declaration of Friendship specifically references our mutual respect for "an open, just, sustainable, and inclusive rule-based global order." India and the United States can together advance a vision of what constitutes responsible behavior in space based on transparency and international law.

Our governments are engaged in regular dialogues on these issues. The first Space Security

Dialogue took place this year during which we discussed transparency and confidence-building measures, the development of an International Code of Conduct for Outer Space Activities, and how to enhance shared awareness of the space environment. As nations with significant space programs, we are interested in increasing cooperation on space situational awareness and orbital debris monitoring and mitigation.

India and the United States increasingly rely on satellites for communications, navigation, disaster management and relief, treaty monitoring, sustainable development, and national security. We cannot allow our space-based assets to be threatened by entities that pursue disruptive and destructive counter-space capabilities like satellite jamming and antisatellite weapons systems. We need to encourage the international community to refrain from any action that brings about damage or destruction of space objects. Joint leadership in global discussions can increase the likelihood of finding solutions that will preserve the openness of this critical frontier for future generations.

Of course, it is in all of our best interests to protect these shared spaces responsibly. This means, in the maritime domain, setting clear parameters for commercial fishing activities to avoid severely depleted stocks. In space, it means keeping Earth's orbits clear of debris to make it safe for all space-faring and space-aspiring nations. And in the air, it means combatting dangerous pollutants that damage our planet and our health.

### **Internet Cooperation**

Finally, let's turn to the realm of the internet, which has opened horizons almost as unlimited as space, and proven to be a great liberator, providing information and services to those who would not otherwise have access. As Cisco CEO John Chambers said: "The internet brought the world closer together, changed the way we lived, worked, learned and played and gave every citizen of the world a chance to participate in the economic future." The internet is already influencing many aspects of our lives, including our businesses, governments, power grids, homes, healthcare and education systems, and social relationships. Promoting access to the internet, therefore, will be essential to advancing human progress in the 21st century.

Over the past year, there has been a sobering increase of internet misconduct that has caused billions of dollars in economic damage. Criminal networks targeting both the United States and India misuse the internet to steal information and profit at the expense of private citizens, businesses, and governments. Increasingly sophisticated state-sponsored efforts have infiltrated government and commercial networks. Extremist groups such as the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), al-Qa'ida, and Laskhar-e-Taiba also use the internet to disseminate violent extremist propaganda and mislead youth into joining their causes. Cybercriminals grow increasingly skilled in targeting some of the most vulnerable members of our societies.

Recognizing that the United States and India have both been pioneers in the digital domain, we must continue to work together to combat existing and future threats through information sharing. For example, we recently provided information on a high-profile hacking group operating from India, enabling our two countries to take concerted action against these threats. Given the abuse of internet technology by illicit actors, we are also engaged in joint training and other efforts to improve the process through which India and

other countries can obtain bank records and other forms of electronic evidence from the United States, for use in legal proceedings in India.

It is in our shared interest to seek collaborative solutions to the challenges of terrorist recruitment, Internet-based crime and cyber-based threats to our critical infrastructure. I don't need to spell out the grave implications and potentially cascading effects of a catastrophic attack on a power grid, transportation network, or banking system. Perhaps the greatest protection against such threats is the regular and substantive sharing of information on cyber threats and hostile actors' capabilities. To do so, we will have to continue to build information sharing mechanisms through law enforcement and intelligence channels, and within our private sector too, as this is where the bulk of our networks reside - outside of public and government control. We must also continue to work through differences in our legal systems that can sometimes slow the sharing of critical information. Given the risks involved, these are worthwhile efforts.

India's recent announcement of support for a multi-stakeholder model for internet governance was a critical step toward a future where all individuals are able to enjoy the benefits of a free and open internet; and all individuals have incentives to cooperate and avoid conflict. We share the view that the preservation of transformational possibilities of the internet requires all stakeholders to have seats at the table, including the private sector, civil society, academics, engineers, and governments. We look forward to working with the Indian government to continue to support this multi-stakeholder approach, embodied in a myriad of institutions that each day seeks to ensure the reliability of digital spaces.

Our populations are two of the most connected on the planet, which is in part a reflection of our shared values. It is incumbent on us to apply these values in shaping the quality of debates that will determine whether the internet will remain a truly global and open forum that drives prosperity and promotes free speech, or devolve into a fragmented mosaic of discrete national networks. We must demonstrate the courage of our convictions as we address difficult issues and aim to progress on issues that are sometimes seen as in conflict, such as maintaining public security while defending individual liberty.

## **Closing**

In closing, it is clear that the problems and opportunities that confront our countries and the world require a resolute commitment to partner beyond our borders.

The steps we take should not only focus on tangible, realistic wins that serve our interests today, but on how we can cooperate to uphold our common values and project power for decades to come. What we do together can be a force for greater peace, prosperity, and security in the world. Shared spaces offer us a platform to realize this potential. I look forward to your comments and questions.