

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India
September 27, 2013

Syria

The President. Well, I've asked for Prime Minister Singh's indulgence to begin my remarks on the issue of Syria. As many of you are now aware, yesterday the United States and Russia were able to hammer out an agreement, partnering with the other members of the P-5 and the Security Council, around Syria eliminating its chemical weapons and ultimately having them destroyed by the international community.

This is something that we have long sought. And the fact that we now have a framework that will be voted on, perhaps as soon as today, perhaps over the weekend or Monday, that would be legally binding, that would be verifiable and enforceable, where there would be consequences for Syria's failure to meet what has been set forth in this resolution, I think is a potentially huge victory for the international community.

Realistically, it's doubtful that we would have arrived at this point had it not been for a credible threat of U.S. action in the aftermath of the horrific tragedy that took place on August 21, where chemical weapons killed over a thousand people, including more than 400 children. But I've always expressed a preference for resolving this diplomatically, and I appreciate all our international partners in working very hard over the past several days to make sure that we could arrive at a resolution that not only deters and prevents additional chemical use, but actually goes beyond what could have been accomplished through any military action, and that is the removal of chemical weapons—one of the largest stockpiles in the world—from Syria so that they can actually be destroyed.

I think it's also worth noting that in the Security Council resolution, there is an explicit endorsement of the Geneva I process to try to deal with the underlying conflict in Syria and the need for a political transition there that can bring about peace and allow the millions of people who've been displaced and harmed by this conflict to return to their homes and try to rebuild their lives and to rebuild a country that's been shattered now by civil war.

So we are very hopeful about the prospects for what can be accomplished, but obviously, there is a lot of work to be done. I think rightly, people have been concerned about whether Syria will follow through on the commitments that have been laid forth, and I think there are legitimate concerns as to how, technically, we are going to be getting those chemical weapons out while there's still fighting going on on the ground.

Nevertheless, this represents potentially a significant step forward and, I think, indicates what I had hoped for when I spoke at the United Nations just this week: that we have an international community that is not just gathering to talk, but also is able to take concerted action on behalf of enforcing international norms and preserving everybody's security, including those in the region and obviously the people of Syria themselves.

Meeting With Prime Minister Singh

Now, I also want to say how glad I am to have Prime Minister Singh here today. He has been a great friend and partner to the United States and to me personally during his tenure as Prime Minister of India. And I think all of us recognize that as the world's two largest

democracies, countries that have for a very long time been invested in the peace and prosperity of their own people, that there is a natural convergence between the United States and India. Part of that has to do with the incredible people-to-people ties that exist. Indian Americans make extraordinary contributions to the United States every single day—businessmen, scientists, academics. Now Miss America is of Indian American descent, and I think it's a signal of how close our countries are.

And what we've been able to do during the time that I've been President and certainly preceding me throughout Prime Minister Singh's tenure, is to try to make sure that our Government-to-Government cooperation matches the great affection and affinity that exists between the Indian and American peoples.

We've made enormous progress on the issue of civilian nuclear power and, in fact, have been able to achieve just in the last few days an agreement on the first commercial agreement between a U.S. company and India on civilian nuclear power.

We have a wide-ranging security cooperation in battling terrorism and something that Prime Minister Singh obviously is deeply concerned about, given the impact of terrorism on India. All of us remember the horrible events that took place in Mumbai, but as recently as the last few days, India continues to suffer from terrorist attacks. And our hearts go out to the families that have been impacted.

We have enormous commercial ties between our two countries. And in fact, bilateral trade between our two countries has gone up by 50 percent just over the last several years, indicating the degree of progress that has been made. And India, as a significant not just regional power, but world power, has worked closely with us on a whole range of issues, from climate change to how we can help feed the world, alleviate poverty, and deal with disease.

We also had an opportunity to discuss the tensions that continue to exist in the subcontinent. We both have a shared interest in making sure that Afghanistan continues on its path to a peaceful, democratic country, and both share an interest in making sure that we help Afghans stand up for the rights of all groups inside of Afghanistan, that the rights of women and minority groups are protected, and that the upcoming election happens in a way that maintains and continues to strengthen stability in that troubled country.

And we had a chance to discuss Pakistan and our shared interest in seeing a peaceful reduction of tensions on the subcontinent, and we want to very much thank Prime Minister Singh for what has been a consistent interest in improving cooperation between India and Pakistan.

So, across the board, Prime Minister Singh has been an outstanding partner. India continues to grow at an amazing rate, but as Prime Minister Singh indicates, obviously, there are a lot of people in India that are still trapped in poverty. His primary priority has been to alleviate that poverty and give all the people of India opportunity. And we want to make sure that we're strong partners in helping him to realize that vision, because we believe that if there's a strong India, that that's good for the world and it's ultimately good for the United States of America.

So, Mr. Prime Minister, welcome. And thank you so much for all your efforts to continue to strengthen ties between our two countries.

Prime Minister Singh. Mr. President, there is very little that I can add to your eloquent statement. I've always believed that India and America are indispensable partners. And during

the time that I have been Prime Minister and particularly during the time that President Obama and I have worked together, I think President Obama has made an outstanding contribution to strengthening, widening, and deepening of our cooperation in diverse fields.

When I came to America in 2005, in addressing the United States Congress, I said there are partnerships based on principles and partnerships based on pragmatism. And I then said that in the case of Indo-American cooperation, both principles of our commitment to democracy, shared values, rule of law, and pragmatism both combine to make us strong, durable partners. And I'm very happy to say that in the last 5 years that I have worked together with President Obama, that process has strengthened in every possible way.

India and America are working together to give our cooperation a new sense of purpose, widening and deepening in diverse directions. We are cooperating in expanding the frontiers of trade, investment, and technology. Our bilateral trade today is \$100 billion. American investments in India are \$80 billion. And they are growing despite the slowdown in the global economy.

And outside the area of trade, technology, and investment, we are exploring avenues of cooperation in new areas—new areas like energy cooperation, clean coal technologies, energy-efficient technologies, cooperation in the field of environment, cooperation in the field of defense and security related, cooperation with regard to intelligence gathering and counterterrorism. In all these areas, India needs the United States to be standing by our side. And I am very pleased to note that President Obama has imparted a powerful impetus to that process of our two countries being on the same page.

The President briefed me about his initiatives both with regard to Syria and with regard to Iran, and I complimented him for his vision, for his courage in giving diplomacy yet another chance. India fully supports these initiatives because 6 million Indians live in West Asia and the Middle East. They earn their livelihood there, which is an important part of sustaining our values of freedom. Therefore, anything that contributes to peace and stability in the Middle East, in Iran, in Syria, is something which is in the interests of the global economy; it is certainly in the interest of people in the region in which I and India is placed.

We also discussed our relations and our approach to dealing with Afghanistan and Pakistan. I explained to President Obama the difficulties that we face given the fact that the epicenter of terror still remains focused in Pakistan. And I look forward to meeting with President Nawaz Sharif, even though the expectations have to be toned down given the terror arm which is still active in our subcontinent.

Overall, I have come here to thank President Obama for all that he has done to strengthen, to widen and deepen cooperation between our two countries. I explained to the President that India is a poor country. Our basic task is to improve the standard of living of our people, to get rid of mass poverty, ignorance, and disease, which still afflict millions and millions of our people. And in that struggle, we want America to stand by our side. And in the President, the United States has a leader who realizes and recognizes the contribution that a resurgent India can make not only to fighting poverty, but also to global peace and prosperity.

President Obama. Thank you so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:40 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Nina Davuluri, winner of the 2014 Miss America pageant. Prime Minister Singh referred to Prime Minister Mohammad Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan.

Categories: Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : India, Prime Minister Singh.

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