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Barack Obama

Address to a Joint Session of the Indian Parliament



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Mr. Vice President, Madam Speaker, Mr. Prime Minister, members of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, and most of all, the people of India.

I thank you for the great honor of addressing the representatives of more than one billion Indians and the world's largest democracy. I bring the greetings and friendship of the world's oldest democracy -- the United States of America, including nearly three million proud and patriotic Indian-Americans.

Over the past three days, my wife Michelle and I have experienced the -- and dynamism of India and its people -- from the majesty of Humayun's Tomb to the advanced technologies that are empowering farmers and women who are the backbone of Indian society; from the Diwali celebrations with schoolchildren to the innovators who are fueling India's economic rise; from the university students who will chart India's future, to you -- leaders who helped to bring India to this moment of extraordinary promise.

At every stop, we have been welcomed with the hospitality for which Indians have always been known. So, to you and the people of India, on behalf of me, Michelle and the American people, please accept my deepest thanks. Bahoot dhanyavad.

Now, I am not the first American President to visit India. Nor will I be the last. But I am proud to visit India so early in my presidency. It's no coincidence that India is my first stop on a visit to Asia, or that this has been my longest visit to another country since becoming President. For in Asia and around the world, India is not simply emerging; India has emerged.

And it is my firm belief that the relationship between the United States and India -- bound by our shared interests and our shared values -- will be one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century. This is the partnership I've come here to build. This is the vision that our nations can realize together.



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My confidence in our shared future is grounded in my respect for India's treasured past -- a civilization that's been shaping the world for thousands of years. Indians unlocked the intricacies of the human body and the vastness of our universe. It's no exaggeration to say that our Information Age is rooted in Indian innovations -- including the number zero.

Of course, India not only opened our minds, she expanded our moral imaginations -- with religious texts that still summon the faithful to lives of dignity and discipline, with poets who imagined a future "where the mind is without fear and the head is held high" -- and with a man whose message of love and justice endures -- the father of your nation, Mahatma Gandhi.

For me and Michelle, this visit has, therefore, held special meaning. See, throughout my life, including my work as a young man on behalf of the urban poor, I've always found inspiration in the life of Gandhiji and his simple and profound lesson to be the change we seek in the world. And just as he summoned Indians to seek their destiny, he influenced champions of equality in my own country, including a young preacher named Martin Luther King. After making his pilgrimage to India a half-century ago, Dr. King called Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance "the only logical and moral approach" in the struggle for justice and progress.

So we were honored to visit the residence where Gandhi and King both stayed -- Mani Bhavan. And we were humbled to pay our respects at Raj Ghat. And I am mindful that I might not be standing before you today, as President of the United States, had it not been for Gandhi and the message he shared and inspired with America and the world.

An ancient civilization of science and innovation; a fundamental faith in human progress -- this is the sturdy foundation upon which you have built ever since that stroke of midnight when the tricolor was raised over a free and independent India. And despite the skeptics who said this country was simply too poor, or too vast, or too diverse to succeed, you surmounted overwhelming odds and became a model to the world.

Instead of slipping into starvation, you launched a Green Revolution that fed millions. Instead of becoming dependent on commodities and exports, you invested in science and technology and in your greatest resource -- the Indian people. And the world sees the results, from the supercomputers you build to the Indian flag that you put on the moon.

Instead of resisting the global economy, you became one of its engines -- reforming the licensing raj and unleashing an economic marvel that has lifted tens of millions of people from poverty and created one of the world's largest middle classes.

Instead of succumbing to division, you have shown that the strength of India -- the very idea of India -- is its embrace of all colors, all castes, all creeds. It's the diversity represented in this chamber today. It's the richness of faiths celebrated by a visitor to my hometown of Chicago more than a century ago -- the renowned Swami Vivekananda. He said that, "holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character."



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And instead of being lured by the false notion that progress must come at the expense of freedom, you built the institutions upon which true democracy depends -- free and fair elections, which enable citizens to choose their own leaders without recourse to arms -- an independent judiciary and the rule of law, which allows people to address their grievances; and a thriving free press and vibrant civil society which allows every voice to be heard. This year, as India marks 60 years with a strong and democratic constitution, the lesson is clear: India has succeeded, not in spite of democracy; India has succeeded because of democracy.

Now, just as India has changed, so, too, has the relationship between our two nations. In the decades after independence, India advanced its interests as a proud leader of the nonaligned movement. Yet, too often, the United States and India found ourselves on opposite sides of a North-South divide, estranged by a long Cold War. Those days are over.

Here in India, two successive governments led by different parties have recognized that deeper partnership with America is both natural and necessary. And in the United States, both of my predecessors -- one a Democrat, one a Republican -- worked to bring us closer, leading to increased trade and a landmark civil nuclear agreement.

So since that time, people in both our countries have asked: What's next? How can we build on this progress and realize the full potential of our partnership? That's what I want to address today -- the future that the United States seeks in an interconnected world, and why I believe that India is indispensable to this vision; how we can forge a truly global partnership -- not just in one or two areas, but across many; not just for our mutual benefit, but for the benefit of the world.

Of course, only Indians can determine India's national interests and how to advance them on the world stage. But I stand before you today because I am convinced that the interests of the United States -- and the interests we share with India -- are best advanced in partnership. I believe that.

The United States seeks security -- the security of our country, our allies and partners. We seek prosperity -- a strong and growing economy in an open international economic system. We seek respect for universal values. And we seek a just and sustainable international order that promotes peace and security by meeting global challenges through stronger global cooperation.

Now, to advance these interests, I have committed the United States to comprehensive engagement with the world, based on mutual interest and mutual respect. And a central pillar of this engagement is forging deeper cooperation with 21st century centers of influence -- and that must necessarily include India.

Now, India is not the only emerging power in the world. But relationships between our countries is unique. For we are two strong democracies whose constitutions begin with the same revolutionary words -- the same revolutionary words -- "We the people." We are two great republics dedicated to the liberty and justice and equality of all people. And we are two free market economies where people have the freedom to pursue ideas and innovation that can change the world. And that's why I believe that India and America are indispensable partners in meeting the challenges of our time.



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Since taking office, I've, therefore, made our relationship a priority. I was proud to welcome Prime Minister Singh for the first official state visit of my presidency. For the first time ever, our governments are working together across the whole range of common challenges that we face. Now, let me say it as clearly as I can: The United States not only welcomes India as a rising global power, we fervently support it, and we have worked to help make it a reality.

Together with our partners, we have made the G20 the premier forum for international economic cooperation, bringing more voices to the table of global economic decision-making, and that has included India. We've increased the role of emerging economies like India at international financial institutions. We valued India's important role at Copenhagen, where, for the first time, all major economies committed to take action to confront climate change -- and to stand by those actions. We salute India's long history as a leading contributor to United Nations peacekeeping missions. And we welcome India as it prepares to take its seat on the United Nations Security Council.

In short, with India assuming its rightful place in the world, we have an historic opportunity to make the relationship between our two countries a defining partnership of the century ahead. And I believe we can do so by working together in three important areas.

First, as global partners we can promote prosperity in both our countries. Together, we can create the high-tech, high-wage jobs of the future. With my visit, we are now ready to begin implementing our civil nuclear agreement. This will help meet India's growing energy needs and create thousands of jobs in both of our countries.

We need to forge partnerships in high-tech sectors like defense and civil space. So we've removed Indian organizations from our so-called "entity list." And we'll work to remove -- and reform our controls on exports. Both of these steps will ensure that Indian companies seeking high-tech trade and technologies from America are treated the same as our very closest allies and partners.

We can pursue joint research and development to create green jobs; give India more access to cleaner, affordable energy; meet the commitments we made at Copenhagen; and show the possibilities of low-carbon growth.

And together, we can resist the protectionism that stifles growth and innovation. The United States remains -- and will continue to remain -- one of the most open economies in the world. And by opening markets and reducing barriers to foreign investment, India can realize its full economic potential as well. As G20 partners, we can make sure the global economic recovery is strong and is durable. And we can keep striving for a Doha Round that is ambitious and is balanced -- with the courage to make the compromises that are necessary so global trade works for all economies.

Together, we can strengthen agriculture. Cooperation between Indian and American researchers and scientists sparked the Green Revolution. Today, India is a leader in using technology to empower farmers, like those I met yesterday who get free updates on market and weather conditions on their cell phones. And the United States is a leader in agricultural productivity and research. Now, as farmers and rural areas face the effects of climate change and drought, we'll work together to spark a second, more sustainable Evergreen Revolution.



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Together, we're improving Indian weather forecasting systems before the next monsoon season. We aim to help millions of Indian farmers -- farming households save water and increase productivity, improve food processing so crops don't spoil on the way to market, and enhance climate and crop forecasting to avoid losses that cripple communities and drive up food prices.

And as part of our food security initiative, we're going to share India's expertise with farmers in Africa. And this is an indication of India's rise -- that we can now export hard-earned expertise to countries that see India as a model for agricultural development. It's another powerful example of how American and Indian partnership can address an urgent global challenge.

Because the wealth of a nation also depends on the health of its people, we'll continue to support India's effort against diseases like tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, and as global partners, we'll work to improve global health by preventing the spread of pandemic flu. And because knowledge is the currency of the 21st century, we will increase exchanges between our students, our colleges and our universities, which are among the best in the world.

As we work to advance our shared prosperity, we can partner to address a second priority -- and that is our shared security. In Mumbai, I met with the courageous families and survivors of that barbaric attack. And here in Parliament, which was itself targeted because of the democracy it represents, we honor the memory of all those who have been taken from us, including American citizens on 26/11 and Indian citizens on 9/11.

This is the bond that we share. It's why we insist that nothing ever justifies the slaughter of innocent men, women and children. It's why we're working together, more closely than ever, to prevent terrorist attacks and to deepen our cooperation even further. And it's why, as strong and resilient societies, we refuse to live in fear. We will not sacrifice the values and rule of law that defines us, and we will never waver in the defense of our people.

America's fight against al Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates is why we persevere in Afghanistan, where major development assistance from India has improved the lives of the Afghan people. We're making progress in our mission to break the Taliban's momentum and to train Afghan forces so they can take the lead for their security. And while I have made it clear that American forces will begin the transition to Afghan responsibility next summer, I've also made it clear that America's commitment to the Afghan people will endure. The United States will not abandon the people of Afghanistan -- or the region -- to violent extremists who threaten us all.

Our strategy to disrupt and dismantle and defeat al Qaeda and its affiliates has to succeed on both sides of the border. And that's why we have worked with the Pakistani government to address the threat of terrorist networks in the border region. The Pakistani government increasingly recognizes that these networks are not just a threat outside of Pakistan -- they are a threat to the Pakistani people, as well. They've suffered greatly at the hands of violent extremists over the last several years.

And we'll continue to insist to Pakistan's leaders that terrorist safe havens within their borders are unacceptable, and that terrorists behind the Mumbai attacks must be brought to justice. We must also recognize that all of us have an interest in both an Afghanistan and a Pakistan that is stable and prosperous and democratic -- and India has an interest in that, as well.



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In pursuit of regional security, we will continue to welcome dialogue between India and Pakistan, even as we recognize that disputes between your two countries can only be resolved by the people of your two countries.

More broadly, India and the United States can partner in Asia. Today, the United States is once again playing a leadership role in Asia -- strengthening old alliances; deepening relationships, as we are doing with China; and we're reengaging with regional organizations like ASEAN and joining the East Asia summit - organizations in which India is also a partner. Like your neighbors in Southeast Asia, we want India not only to "look East," we want India to "engage East" -- because it will increase the security and prosperity of all our nations.

As two global leaders, the United States and India can partner for global security -- especially as India serves on the Security Council over the next two years. Indeed, the just and sustainable international order that America seeks includes a United Nations that is efficient, effective, credible and legitimate. That is why I can say today, in the years ahead, I look forward to a reformed United Nations Security Council that includes India as a permanent member.

Now, let me suggest that with increased power comes increased responsibility. The United Nations exists to fulfill its founding ideals of preserving peace and security, promoting global cooperation, and advancing human rights. These are the responsibilities of all nations, but especially those that seek to lead in the 21st century. And so we look forward to working with India -- and other nations that aspire to Security Council membership -- to ensure that the Security Council is effective; that resolutions are implemented, that sanctions are enforced; that we strengthen the international norms which recognize the rights and responsibilities of all nations and all individuals.

This includes our responsibility to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Since I took office, the United States has reduced the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and we've agreed with Russia to reduce our own arsenals. We have put preventing nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism at the top of our nuclear agenda, and we have strengthened the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation regime, which is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Together, the United States and India can pursue our goal of securing the world's vulnerable nuclear materials. We can make it clear that even as every nation has the right to peaceful nuclear energy, every nation must also meet its international obligations -- and that includes the Islamic Republic of Iran. And together, we can pursue a vision that Indian leaders have espoused since independence -- a world without nuclear weapons.

And this leads me to the final area where our countries can partner -- strengthening the foundations of democratic governance, not only at home but abroad.

In the United States, my administration has worked to make government more open and transparent and accountable to people. Here in India, you're harnessing technologies to do the same, as I saw yesterday at an expo in Mumbai. Your landmark Right to Information Act is empowering citizens with the ability to get the services to which they're entitled -- and to hold officials accountable.



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Voters can get information about candidates by text message. And you're delivering education and health care services to rural communities, as I saw yesterday when I joined an e-panchayat with villagers in Rajasthan.

Now, in a new collaboration on open government, our two countries are going to share our experience, identify what works, and develop the next generation of tools to empower citizens. And in another example of how American and Indian partnership can address global challenges, we're going to share these innovations with civil society groups and countries around the world. We're going to show that democracy, more than any other form of government, delivers for the common man -- and woman.

Likewise, when Indians vote, the whole world watches. Thousands of political parties; hundreds of thousands of polling centers; millions of candidates and poll workers -- and 700 million voters. There's nothing like it on the planet. There is so much that countries transitioning to democracy could learn from India's experience, so much expertise that India can share with the world. And that, too, is what is possible when the world's largest democracy embraces its role as a global leader.

As the world's two largest democracies, we must never forget that the price of our own freedom is standing up for the freedom of others. Indians know this, for it is the story of your nation. Before he ever began his struggle for Indian independence, Gandhi stood up for the rights of Indians in South Africa. Just as others, including the United States, supported Indian independence, India championed the self-determination of peoples from Africa to Asia as they, too, broke free from colonialism. And along with the United States, you've been a leader in supporting democratic development and civil society groups around the world. And this, too, is part of India's greatness.

Now, we all understand every country will follow its own path. No one nation has a monopoly on wisdom, and no nation should ever try to impose its values on another. But when peaceful democratic movements are suppressed -- as they have been in Burma, for example -- then the democracies of the world cannot remain silent. For it is unacceptable to gun down peaceful protestors and incarcerate political prisoners decade after decade. It is unacceptable to hold the aspirations of an entire people hostage to the greed and paranoia of bankrupt regimes. It is unacceptable to steal elections, as the regime in Burma has done again for all the world to see.

Faced with such gross violations of human rights, it is the responsibility of the international community -- especially leaders like the United States and India -- to condemn it. And if I can be frank, in international fora, India has often shied away from some of these issues. But speaking up for those who cannot do so for themselves is not interfering in the affairs of other countries. It's not violating the rights of sovereign nations. It is staying true to our democratic principles. It is giving meaning to the human rights that we say are universal. And it sustains the progress that in Asia and around the world has helped turn dictatorships into democracies and ultimately increased our security in the world.

So promoting shared prosperity, preserving peace and security, strengthening democratic governance and human rights -- these are the responsibilities of leadership. And as global partners, this is the leadership that the United States and India can offer in the 21st century. Ultimately, though, this cannot be a relationship only between presidents and prime ministers, or in the halls of this Parliament. Ultimately, this must be a partnership between our peoples. So I want to conclude by speaking directly to the people of India who are watching today.



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In your lives, you have overcome odds that might have overwhelmed a lesser country. In just decades, you have achieved progress and development that took other nations centuries. You are now assuming your rightful place as a leader among nations. Your parents and grandparents imagined this. Your children and grandchildren will look back on this. But only this generation of Indians can seize the possibilities of the moment.

As you carry on with the hard work ahead, I want every Indian citizen to know: The United States of America will not simply be cheering you on from the sidelines. We will be right there with you, shoulder to shoulder. Because we believe in the promise of India. We believe that the future is what we make it. We believe that no matter who you are or where you come from, every person can fulfill their God-given potential, just as a Dalit like Dr. Ambedkar could lift himself up and pen the words of the constitution that protects the rights of all Indians.

We believe that no matter where you live -- whether a village in Punjab or the bylanes of Chandni Chowk -- an old section of Kolkata or a new high-rise in Bangalore -- every person deserves the same chance to live in security and dignity, to get an education, to find work, to give their children a better future.

And we believe that when countries and cultures put aside old habits and attitudes that keep people apart, when we recognize our common humanity, then we can begin to fulfill these aspirations that we share. It's a simple lesson contained in that collection of stories which has guided Indians for centuries -- the Panchtantra. And it's the spirit of the inscription seen by all who enter this great hall: "That one is mine and the other a stranger is the concept of little minds. But to the large-hearted, the world itself is their family."

This is the story of India; this is the story of America -- that despite their differences, people can see themselves in one another, and work together and succeed together as one proud nation. And it can be the spirit of partnership between our nations -- that even as we honor the histories which in different times kept us apart, even as we preserve what makes us unique in a globalized world, we can recognize how much we can achieve together.

And if we let this simple concept be our guide, if we pursue the vision I've described today -- a global partnership to meet global challenges -- then I have no doubt that future generations -- Indians and Americans -- will live in a world that is more prosperous and more secure and more just because of the bonds that our generation has forged today.

So, thank you, and Jai Hind. And long live the partnership between India and the United States.