

Opening Remarks by Pradeep S. Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International – DNC DAY 01

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct honor and privilege to welcome you to the first day of the “Prime Time: Dialogues on ‘Deliverables to Deliveries’” Conclave. I am Pradeep Mehta, Secretary General of CUTS International, and we are delighted to host you for this significant event.

This conclave, organized under the Defense News Conclave Project and supported by the U.S. Department of State through the U.S. Consulate General, Kolkata, is a testament to the enduring and evolving U.S.-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership. We are fortunate to have collaborated with the United Service Institution of India (USI) and the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) to bring together this assembly of experts, media professionals, and relevant stakeholders.

The theme of today’s event highlights the U.S.-India relationship as a defining strategic partnership. This relationship, while evolving, has reached new heights over the years, with India’s designation as a major defense partner of the U.S., the signing of foundational defense- related agreements, and a substantial number of joint military exercises in the Indo-Pacific region.

Our objective today is multifaceted: our aim is to act as a capacity-building initiative for media professionals and other relevant stakeholders, facilitate meaningful dialogues between experts and participants, and develop a better understanding of good practices in the joint development of advanced defense-related technologies. This is particularly crucial in promoting a positive narrative on the U.S.-India defense and security partnership, especially in the context of the evolving geopolitical, geo-strategic, and geo-economic developments in the Indo-Pacific region.

As we delve into today’s agenda, we are reminded of the significant milestones that have been set and achieved in the U.S.-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership.

The shift in geopolitical attention to the Indo-Pacific region and the associated developments, such as the coming together of Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. into the Quadrilateral group, and the initiation of the Indo-Pacific Economic

Framework for Prosperity, have made this partnership even more robust. This is underlined in the Joint Statement from the United States and India following the Official State Visit of the Indian Prime Minister to the U.S. in June 2023.

The future status of this partnership will be a deciding factor in shaping security dynamics in the world, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, it is crucial to highlight that among other deliverables, the U.S.-India defense and security partnership is key to securing a free, open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. This will ensure a better exposition of ‘deliverables to deliveries’ on this vital partnership.

In the mid-to-long term, sustaining a strong, innovative, and resilient defense industrial base will be paramount to the security and prosperity of the current world order. The U.S.’s first-ever “National Defense Industrial Strategy” outlines that a modern defense industrial ecosystem is key to integrated deterrence and building enduring advantages for U.S. national security.

Furthermore, this strategy discusses the need for sustained global partnerships and acknowledges that by working together, the U.S. and its allies and partners can address capacity and capability gaps, enhance production capacities and capabilities, boost economic advantages, and reinforce alliances.

We stand at the inflection point in this relationship, one that has been painstakingly built over time. From a point where India bought no defense equipment from the U.S., to gradually increasing purchases, and now moving towards changing norms and regulations to reflect India’s status as one of the U.S.’s close friends, we have indeed come a long way.

Technological areas have become one of the biggest growth areas of this partnership. In addition to defense, we see significant collaboration in climate change, clean energy, higher education exchanges, and scientific research spanning space issues to cybersecurity. This collaboration also extends to plurilateral frameworks such as the Quad and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF).

As we navigate these complex and dynamic times, it is imperative for India to develop its defense and civil industrial base, especially as companies diversify their global supply chains away from China. India must act swiftly to capitalize on this window of opportunity before it Closes.

In this effort, U.S. should recognize India as its strategic partner by extending all such privileges as it does to treaty allies. We may not be treaty allies as we will continue to maintain our own foreign policy status as a strategic autonomy but it does not prevent the US to treat us at the same level.

I would like to mention that India and Russia's deep ties are in no way adversely affecting that with the U.S. Russia is an all-weather friend of India and it also act as a counter weight to China so therefore our relationship with Russia will remain as it is and we'll continue it. I mean, today it stands as our biggest equipment supply defense equipment.

But this is not an either or situation but a balancing act where there other global partners that India allies with to fight the common enemy. India's relations with Russia are beneficial to India to counter the adversaries on its northern border which is no reason for the U.S. to feel uncomfortable.

In closing, I would like to express my gratitude to all our distinguished speakers, panelists, and participants for participating and contributing to this conclave. Your insights and perspectives will be invaluable as we work towards strengthening the U.S.-India defense and security partnership.

Special mentions must be made to Mahaveer Singhvi, Joint Secretary, NEST (New Emerging & Strategic Technologies) Division, Ministry of External Affairs and Vishwesh Negi, Joint Secretary (International Cooperation) Ministry of Defense. Their presence is a testament to government of India's commitment and emphasis to this bilateral relationship.

I look forward to the engaging discussions that will take place today and am confident that our collective efforts will lead to meaningful outcomes that will further fortify this vital partnership.

Thank you.