

Why did West lie on NATO expansion, asks Russia

Commitment on military hardware not honoured

By [Amit Baruah](#)

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“We don’t have to cheat each other and the rest of the world.” That’s what Russian Ambassador to India Vyacheslav Trubnikov believes to be the “main message” of the February 11 speech made by President Vladimir Putin, lambasting the United States and its allies, at the annual Munich security conference.

Echoing his words, Mr. Trubnikov wanted to know why the West “practically lied to us” on the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Again, he pointed to the “treachery” in going back on the commitment that military hardware would not be deployed in new NATO countries in Europe.

Frank assessment

Pointing out that Mr. Putin’s speech was about Russia’s position in today’s world, Mr. Trubnikov said the President did not mince his words. Though it did not signal a return to the Cold War, Mr. Putin provided a “frank and honest” assessment of the global scene.

Speaking to an invited group of presspersons at his Embassy here, Mr. Trubnikov said the “triangle” of Russia, India and China, whose Foreign Ministers met here on February 14, was being “filled with economic and geopolitical substance.”

He signalled that countries, which are currently “observers” (like India, Iran and Pakistan) in the China-Russia led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation could be offered full membership of the SCO.

Asked whether India would be invited to participate in military exercises under the SCO aegis, the Ambassador said Russia would like other countries to join in. He also pointed to greater outreach in the SCO’s anti-terrorist cooperation initiatives.

Asked whether Russia would go ahead with its plans to construct additional nuclear plants in India even if the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) did not lift its restrictions on nuclear trade with New Delhi, he gave a nuanced answer.

At present, the two sides were engaged in working out an inter-governmental agreement on the construction of additional reactors at Koodankulam in Tamil Nadu and other locations in India. Pointing out there was an “inter-connection” between these new plants and what the NSG did, Mr. Trubnikov said Russia did not want to “explode” the NSG.

At the same time, the NSG should not block India’s efforts at civilian nuclear cooperation. The Ambassador, who said he had read about the concerns expressed by retired Indian

nuclear scientists about the commitment to separate the country's civilian-military nuclear programme, believed that this was "not an easy way" for India.

Mr. Trubnikov pointed out that in both Russia and the U.S. the "same scientists" were engaged in civilian and military nuclear programmes. "You can separate it [the nuclear programme] on the land, but not in the mind." On a possible Indian stake in the Sakhalin-III oilfield, the envoy indicated that Russia had not yet decided how the stakes were to be distributed: whether these would be auctioned or offered to, say, Indian, Russian or British companies.

The two sides had discussed this issue at the political level, but experts from the two countries would have to sit down and talk details.

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