

## MAYANKOTE NARAYANAN

Former Senior Advisor and National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of India (Manmohan Singh), former Governor of West Bengal

**John Andrews, Author, journalist and contributing editor to *The Economist***

Now, MK, I should congratulate you on the performance of the Indian cricket team because I know you are a keen fan.

**Mayankote Narayanan, former Senior Advisor and National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of India (Manmohan Singh), former Governor of West Bengal**

We have devastated Australia and England.

**John Andrews**

I am afraid England have played terribly in the World Cup: we were the champions but no longer and I think India will be the next champions. You have the floor for seven minutes.

**Mayankote Narayanan**

Maybe a couple of minutes more if you do not mind. Thank you for this opportunity to present an Indian perspective on Indo-Pacific security concerns. I apologize at the beginning for being a mere practitioner of security, rather than an expert like the other members of this panel but I hope you will still give me a hearing.

I will begin by making a controversial statement, that notwithstanding the conflict in Ukraine and the war in Gaza, I believe the Indo-Pacific is the pivotal theatre of inter-state contestation and it is important that we realize and recognize that fact. Listening to the previous debate one got the impression that the war between Ukraine and Russia is the centerpiece of world history. I dare say it is important and critical, all nations are important, but I think it is important for us to recognize that the Indo-Pacific has to be maintained in a way so that this area does not become part of China's back border. China is the emerging power in the region and notwithstanding some temporary hiccups it is facing today, it is able to do a great deal.

I will make another controversial statement, with apologies to the Japanese. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made a statement about the Quadrilateral in the Indian Parliament in November 2007 and I feel proud to have been present on that occasion. With your permission, I will set the record straight on that. More to the point, there is a great deal of controversy surrounding India's role and degree of support for the Indo-Pacific. Many see India's partnership in the Quadrilateral security dialogue, or Quad, as indicative of India's willingness to be part of a military pact to contain and checkmate China, definitely as far as the Pacific is concerned. I think this is reading too much into India's intentions, it joined the Quad but I do not think it intends to be a dedicated partner along with the US, the United Kingdom, Australia, France and Japan in a military confrontation with China. I think it is important to stress this point at the outset, that it is really a misreading of where India stands.

I know that many non-Asian countries find it difficult to comprehend India's stance or its unwillingness to be part of any anti-China military and defense pact. I say this, because as I was explaining a while ago to John, I have been around a very long time and the history of Sino-Indian tensions and conflicts is a long one. Nevertheless, while we have occasional shooting wars, I regard them as skirmishes. Both countries believe that their wars or conflicts are civilizational rather than territorial. We have an undulating border and therefore there are skirmishes but I do not think we have any major conflicts, etc.

There is a struggle for influence rather than territory, and I think that is important and people do not understand why we are not part of the Quad or AUKUS, if it is willing to include us. It is because there is this basic issue and I know this is gaining, to some extent because China had basically confined itself to the Pacific, and India basically to the Indian Ocean. India's interests have always been in the Indian Ocean area and literally, while for China it was the Pacific. China has recently started intruding into the Indian Ocean but it has not yet altered India's perspective. I cannot say if that will change in the days to come but at the moment I think it is important to set the record straight that India does not believe in a military confrontation with China on the seas as of now.

Yet, I agree that there are many and differing interpretations of how we achieve the objective of containing China to some extent and not allowing it to run riot in the Indo-Pacific. However, I temper that with one particular reason which is that there is a tendency when talking of China to talk about extreme competition with China, with a this or nothing sort of attitude. I think that is something that certainly India, but also many Asian nations believe that this is not the answer to how we should go about dealing with China. As I said, India needs a strategy to contain China, along with other Asian nations, but we do not see an anti-China military pact as the only way to achieve this. There is a lot of debate but also a great deal of sober realization outside it, that a war could have disastrous consequences for both China and India. China will not provoke a war with India because its target of becoming the number one world power in 2049 will go up in smoke. India can also not afford a war with China because you have just heard Samsung is coming to India, we are the world's granary today, etc., and that would also go up in smoke if there was a conflict with China. Both China and India have deserved those things and also have reserves of belief about what we need to do.

India is now strengthening its integration with many Asian countries, particularly those that are literally part of the Indian Ocean, but most with Vietnam, India and Japan, for example, Japan and India now have ties of friendship that are almost like a military relationship but stop short of being called a military pact. I think that we will collaborate with the United States, we will avoid a military pact with the United States or other countries in the West on that, but in that sense we will be anti-China. However, if you are expecting India to join forces to wage war against China, I think we should be careful.

I am not part of the mainstream of the discussions taking place today but I still have ways to know what is going on. In this context, and given the disorder that exists in the world, India and many Asian countries are not very comfortable with the concept of 'righteousness' that is becoming part of the foreign policy of the United States in particular. It involves a mixture of strong moral feelings coupled with great power, that they are doing the right thing and need to go to this kind of stuff. I do not think that has been the history of international relations the world over. Therefore, we believe it would be a mistake, not only for us but also for the viewers in the West, to think that they can extract concessions from China by using military pressure tactics. We live in close proximity to China and we are well aware of its perfidious designs. China wants to be first, the number one power in Asia and it is the only country standing between it is India, so they will try to belittle India and reduce its sphere of influence. However, we do not see China as a dangerous adversary so much as an imminent threat we



have to face. A presumption of permanent hostility or adherence to a believe that China must be forcefully confronted on every issue is something we find difficult to adjust to.

I would like to end by saying that yesterday I was struck by the forcefulness with which CY Leung spoke about Taiwan. I know that Taiwan is like Banquo's ghost, we keep talking about Taiwan all the time. There is no mistaking the fact that Taiwan is a problem but there is no immediate solution and I think we need to recognize that and we can discuss that in this forum. I believe, and not just me but representative of the monthly discussions we have in the security community in India, time is the best option to arrive at a formula, which means maintaining the status quo for some years. Any attempt to change the status quo with force would not only upset global equilibrium, it would have disastrous consequences for the world. Our understanding is that China can live with the present position with equanimity for quite some time, and I would like to debate this later.

Finally, in my personal view, and I am used to controversy having mostly lived by my wits, I would say that Asia, especially East Asia, needs to avoid the kind of situation that exists in Europe today. Russia has a permanent feeling of danger and threat from Europe and the US, while the West sees Russia as a threat that needs to be eliminated, two sets of people in major conflict. Dealing with China is going to be very complicated but I think patience is important. We need to avoid the threat of war on Taiwan and we should be careful about how we go about. Finding desirable ways to achieve a modus vivendi on Taiwan is perhaps the best way to foster stability in the region. I am sorry if I sound too controversial.

**John Andrews**

Thank you very much, MK.