

MAYANKOTE KELATH 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, could you take over? Douglas mentioned the AUKUS agreement. He did not mention the Quad, which is Japan, India, Australia and United States. MK, the floor is yours.

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

Let me briefly touch on the economic growth of Asia, and I start on a very optimistic note. I think Asia has emerged as an economic powerhouse by the end of the first quarter of the 21st century. Asia's mosaic of diverse nations, culture, and economic systems has helped create a vibrant continent that includes manufacturing powerhouses, such as China, alongside rapidly growing economies, such as India. I may not be too wrong if I were to say that Asia's profound transformation is shaping today's global economic dynamics.

Two nations of Asia have captivated the imagination of the world more recently, namely China and India. China is already acknowledged to have the capability to become a global manufacturing hub. However, lesser known is the fact that India, with the world's largest and aspiring youthful labor force, is beginning to challenge China, and in the process, the rest of the world. Already a world leader in information technology and business process outsourcing, India is a force to reckon with as the world enters the second quarter of the 21st century. I would also like the audience to realize that India today has a very significant cadre of highly educated scientists and engineers, and, if I may say so, an arsenal of nuclear weapons.

Allow me to take a few minutes to highlight India's progress. It has probably the world's most youthful population, the median age of which is around 25 to 26 years. Its economy has been expanding steadily, averaging 6.7%. It is today acknowledged to be the fastest growing among the large economies, and has overtaken Japan to take the second place after China. It has hence earned the right to claim to be an independent pole of global power and a leader among developing countries. After many decades, the West and India appear to be in sync on many aspects of economic determinism. The US is India's largest export destination and its largest trading partner. A little over two years ago, India and the United States took what I describe as a significant initiative to enhance cooperation on critical and emerging technologies for the benefit of not only the two countries, but also for the world. Even more pleasing to the West would be that, apart from democratic affinity and economic opportunity, given the shared concern about China worldwide, India has since shed its ambivalence and decided to participate in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, better known as Quad, which includes the United States, Japan, and Australia apart from India. Though short of a security

alliance against China, it is an integral step which binds the two countries that have a similar approach and concern.

Coming to the geopolitical challenges that India faces, it is evident that the continent faces a host of geopolitical challenges. Many date back to the Cold War era. Some have intensified during the post-old War period. The most important, perhaps, is the rise of China. While there is not enough time here to dilate on all the security concerns that plague the region, I might mention the overweening threat that China poses to Asia, apart from the West. Much is, of course, often made of the India-China conflict. However, as somebody who has been a practitioner of the art of geopolitics for many years, I would like to say that I do not see a hot war taking place between India and China in the near future. The India-China conflict is essentially a conflict over civilization and civilizational politics. The threat that China poses to East and Southeast Asia, however, is far greater in nature, and I would say that this merits a little more dilation.

I refer to the South China dispute, which involves the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan, with China intent on making the most expansive claims across the region. China's nine-dash line, for instance, lays claim to nearly 90% of the South China Sea. Next, the Taiwan Strait and cross-strait relations, I do not think I need to dilate very much on this to this audience. Third, the Korean Peninsula: the simmering dispute and the serious dimension can exacerbate geopolitical tensions in Asia, further enhancing North Korea's nuclear capabilities. North Korea's hostility towards South Korea and Japan contains the seed of an enduring conflict. There are, again, some other instances which have the potential to widen the arc of conflict. Quite a few, such as the India-Pakistan conflict and Afghanistan, have, however, reduced in intensity in recent years. Suffice it is to say that Asia's geopolitical landscape harbors a complex array of challenges that have profound implications for global stability.

I want to assess the fact that there are certain hidden challenges that we need to think of in this context. Countries across Asia have varying talents. Talent is today a critical factor in navigating the shores of technology in the 21st century. However, it may not be enough for most nations of Asia, other than a few, such as India, Japan and Vietnam. In a world where Artificial Intelligence is being touted as the key to the future, we see that AI is proving to be a divisive element given the lack of talent available to the less-endowed countries of Asia. These nations face real threats from AI and threats posed by augmented cyber warfare, sophisticated disinformation campaigns and geopolitical instability, apart from newfangled autonomous weaponry and the like.

Finally, I think I would be right in saying that no country or continent can alone forestall or contain the impending threats that are present on the horizon. China's global trade surplus, for instance, is a systemic problem for Asia and for the rest of the world. It needs a coordinated response. This is not yet available. Anything else will not meet the needs of today, as Xi's China continues to rely on a surge of exports, especially to developing countries to revive China's growth. There are many other threats on the horizon, including global warming, that demand coordinated responses from countries across the globe, but there is little evidence of a joint strategy to counter and combat such threats. I rest my case at this point. I hope that the



discussions we have here today and in the ensuing couple of days will provide a glimmer of hope for Asia and for the rest of the world. Thank you very much.

John Andrews

Thank you very much, M. K. Thank you. It is interesting that you mentioned China's ambitions in the South China and East China Sea. You could also have added China's ambitions in the Indian Ocean, because of Sri Lanka and Mauritius. You have a lot of Chinese interests there. Later on, yes, absolutely. Thank you very much indeed.