

## Newsletter

### India-China Lunch Talks, Mr. Shivshankar Menon, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2017.

Mr. Shivshankar Menon is currently Chairman of the Advisory Board of the Institute of Chinese Studies in New Delhi, and is a Distinguished Fellow at the Brookings Institution, Washington. He is also a member of the Board of Trustees of the International Crisis Group, and on the Council of the Asia Society Policy Research Institute. Shivshankar Menon served as national security advisor to the Prime Minister of India from January 2010 to May 2014, and previously as Foreign Secretary of India from October 2006 to August 2009. A career diplomat, he served as Ambassador or High Commissioner of India to Israel (1995-1997), Sri Lanka (1997-2000), China (2000-2003), and Pakistan (2003-2006). He was a member of India's Atomic Energy Commission (2008-2014). He also served in India's mission to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna and in the Department of Atomic Energy in Mumbai. In 2010, he was chosen by Foreign Policy magazine as one of the world's "Top 100 Global Thinkers." Mr. Menon is the author of "Choices: Inside the Making of Indian Foreign Policy" published by the Brookings Press and Penguin Random House in 2016.



Attempting to impart more nuance to the popular narrative that plots India and China as rivals, Mr. Shiv Shankar Menon argues in the light of his experience and understanding that it does not hold much water for it is not only incompatible for both countries in the realization of their larger objective but it also does not consider the complex relation between the two being

intertwined with a host of factors. And in a larger sense, enlarging these areas of cooperation lies not only in best interests of both the countries but also to the rest of the world as well.

Mr. Menon started off with historical antecedents mentioning figures such as Huan Tsang (玄奘), who travelled for 17 years and ended up in Nalanda one of the great universities of that time; Bodhidharma (菩提達摩) travelled from Southern India and transmitted Buddhism and Zen (禪宗) are wonderful illustrations of exchange between the two coeval civilizations.

Mr. Menon also highlighted the characteristic 'openness' evident between the two civilizations through the contacts between Tang China & Gupta Empire bereft of any political, military or strategic content, the brief exceptions being Srivijaya (between Chola and Song dynasties) and short-lived attempts at coordination to counter threats from a newly ascent Tibetan Empire.

If one were allowed to trace the history of our development stratagems as well, it can be seen that both, under Chandragupta Maurya (孔雀王朝) and Qin Shi Huang(秦朝), within a span of 100 years from each other are unified, imparted as hydraulic societies, with militarized kingdoms and manuals of governance being composed (Kautilya & Han Feizi).

It would also be interesting to note that while the latter had a unified conception, that of a singular universe, the former dealt with a managing plurality and diversity; of multiverses. And though we developed quite different from each other we nevertheless managed to complement each other.

Mr. Menon speaking about the present climate opined that if India's priority now, is to transform itself into a prosperous modern strong nation, China is critical and perpetual conflict would not help. For with an economy whose 40% of GDP realized from the external sector, India is increasingly being more dependent on the global economy, in which China and its decisions increasingly matter. In this context it would perhaps be better off if India is able to harness China's strength and cooperation.

Looking from the other side, China's priority, could be said to be of primarily three - Firstly, regime survival. Secondly, expand ability to control its external environment, along with a stabilized periphery. And thirdly, continuous economic growth. Though having achieved near super power status (as it is the largest manufacturer, trader, and third largest military power et al.) in relation to the latter two objectives, India is nevertheless an important, if not the determinant actor. Hence for the both countries a continuous state of tension does not help serve their larger national interest but acts as an impediment to its attainment.



Interestingly , an implicit awareness of this is made evident in the behavior of these states in the last 30 years , where a modus vivendi have been worked out, as seen in signing of the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement in 1993, where both countries , by committing themselves to respect the status quo and following it with confidence building measures, managed to successfully delineate their differences on the border from affecting rest of the relationship. This resulted in a boundary though not well defined but nevertheless is largely peaceful. Contrast this to one on the west, the LOC, signed by the DGMOs and fenced, yet witnesses frequent cross border terrorism and killings. In this regard our border with China is an under recognized achievement. Here the two countries manage to see, something more than what their immediate positions afford, their larger interests.

But the former National Security Adviser also noted the of late 'fraying' of this modus vivendi , observed as symptoms of what he deems to be a fundamentally larger problem - be it the troop incursions that coincided with the high level visits or kerfuffle regarding the NSG membership and Masood Azhar listing- that of the expanding definitions of each others' interest. When more than 50% of India's trade to the east goes through the South China Sea, freedom of navigation through it becomes of utmost interest to her as it is for China who but regards it now as a 'core interest', thirty years ago whose definitions would have included only Tibet and Taiwan. For China it has now become imperative to control her peripheries and near seas, all the while faced with the world's greatest armada 12 nautical miles off her coast.

As the definitions of 'interest' have expanded it is but inevitable that both the powers will rub up against each other in their peripheries. And both countries are more sensitive today, as seen in the Indian reaction to the inauguration of Karakoram highway in 1979 which was comparatively milder than the one against the CPEC that goes through the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) , as it is, to quote the speaker, viewed as a "permanent chinese bet" on what

India regards as its territory. Issues though not new, but that have managed to acquire an edge as result of our development and expanding definitions of interests. Hence the need of the hour is to develop a new modus vivendi (for eg: a maritime security dialogue, cyber security or a stable Afghanistan).

Mr. Menon further mentioned that our neighbors will inevitably feed our rivalry to get the most out of each other, therefore it becomes even more important to sit down, talk with an open mind and attempt to develop a strategic dialogue on these issues to get a sense of what is acceptable and not, which otherwise would slowly accumulate to become a big trigger for public opinion. The speaker held that the primary challenge for India's external policy is not just to manage the relation between these two countries but the international context which will put to greater stress the relation. Hence it would be very important to establish how the other sees the world, amidst the transition to a new order. And of course, a bit of optimism could help weather many a storm.

