

Address by NSA at the 9th IISS Asia Security Summit

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“New Dimensions of Security”

Thank you for asking me to speak to this increasingly important dialogue forum on global and Asian security and defence. Singapore is the dialogue's natural home, as the fulcrum of the most interesting and exciting part of the world for practitioners and theorists of defence, security affairs and international relations.

I was asked to speak on new dimensions of security. To do so at a time of unprecedented and rapid change in the international situation, and when we are in the midst of a transition, requires courage and some foolhardiness. But the attempt must certainly be made. The price is too high of not understanding the changes around us and of failing to adapt to or manage that change.

Today's situation

We live in a time when the global and regional balance of power is shifting rapidly, as a consequence of economic shifts and technological change. And the region of the most rapid change is Asia. Uncertainty in the international system is higher than it has been for a long time. We can debate whether the unipolar moment is past, passing, or poised to return, or whether this is a “non-polar” world. But there is no question that Asia is witnessing the simultaneous rise of several powers, each convinced that its position relative to the others will improve rather than worsen in years to come. And this shift occurs when decades of globalization have integrated economies of the major powers and made them, to a degree unknown in history, dependant on the outside world for their continued prosperity and even regime stability. By one account emerging economies, which accounted for about 27% of global GDP in 1995, will now produce a little more than half of global GDP this year. The geopolitical consequences of the world economic crisis include an acceleration of past trends towards multi-polarity, while strengthening the interdependent nature of the present international economic and political system.

What this means in practice is that to a greater extent than before transnational peace and security can be regarded as global public goods, in the sense that no single state can deliver them on its own. We are used to thinking of global public goods as a clean environment, health, knowledge and property rights. But like other public goods, everyone depends on peace and security, and neither the market nor the wealthiest or strongest person can do without them. As power is increasingly widely distributed in the international system between states, and even to some non-state actors, peace and security have become global public goods in the sense that no state can create order or deliver peace and security on their own.

While the new dimensions of peace and security can increasingly be thought of as global public goods, this is not to say that there is less incentive for competition among states for power, influence, and resources, with the goal of determining or affecting the behaviour of other state and non-state actors. The nation-state is still the basic unit of international security. Sovereignty and territorial integrity remain the foundation of the international system, as do traditional security concerns and zero-sum competition between nation states. But such competition continues, with its attendant risks, within boundary conditions imposed by the globalised and interdependent nature of our security. This is more than just

saying that in a globalised world both security challenges and their answers are global. This is to argue that security has acquired new transnational dimensions because of recent geopolitical, technological and economic developments, and that these have to be dealt with differently from traditional security concerns.

New Dimensions of Security

In this light, let us look at some of the new transnational dimensions of security in a little more detail. A listing of the new dimensions of security today would include:

- Thwarting the spread of weapons of mass destruction: The world may now be at a “proliferation tipping point” in terms of both nuclear weapons and the militarisation of space. For India, clandestine proliferation networks in our neighbourhood have already adversely affected our security. The risk of nuclear weapons or of other weapons of mass destruction falling into extremist or terrorist hands is real and must be factored into our thinking. It is clear that a new non-proliferation paradigm is necessary to deal with issues of nuclear security caused by the rise of non-state actors and their links to formal or organized structures in weak states. Today, India is the only nuclear weapon state to announce an unequivocal no-first-use commitment, and to declare that a world without nuclear weapons will enhance our security.
- Fighting terrorism: anarchy on land and sea has been empowered by new technologies, as piracy and cross-border terrorist attacks have shown. The Indian experience of cross-border terrorism shows the complexity of what we are dealing with. The 26/11 attacks on India were planned and organised in one country, where the attackers were trained, the logistics and communications support chain extended over at least seven countries, and the attack was carried out in our country. Terrorist groups are networked to an unprecedented extent and it is no longer possible to segment them by origin or ideology or targets. Located as we are in India beside the epicentre of global terrorism, we are acutely aware of the value of collaborative counter-terrorism efforts and of the need for more to be done.
- Energy security and stability: The politics of energy, which is linked to climate change as well, will be a key to global stability. Limited physical availability of hydrocarbon resources and the high energy import dependence of several major powers is a recipe for resource nationalism and competition. Technological solutions available today have not prevented this competition for hydrocarbon fuels from becoming sharper.
- Slowing climate change: Fortunately, Copenhagen has brought some sanity into the overblown rhetoric about climate change as a global challenge to the very existence of humanity requiring us to transcend inter-state rivalries and narrowly defined economic and trade interests. As each group of states asserted their interests with tenacity in Copenhagen, it became clear that there is no alternative to the heavy lifting of international negotiations within the UN process to arrive at an equitable outcome that takes into account the differing interests of the states concerned.

Some geopolitical and security effects of climate change are becoming apparent, changing the environments in which we will operate, (perhaps even opening up the Arctic passage, for instance), and in adverse impacts on human security. Migration, water stress and food shortages are likely consequences and will most affect the poor and weak and those least capable of mitigating or adapting to climate change. National plans like India's National Missions provide a robust response within the limits of one state. But there is no escaping the need for a matching and equitable international response, based on the UNFCCC. For

countries like ours many proposed international actions sounds like a cap on development or an attempt to perpetuate an unsatisfactory distribution of the limited carbon space. Equity and a cooperative mindset are essential if we are to find cooperative solutions that this problem requires. But to treat climate change as a security issue at this stage, especially after the Copenhagen experience, would be to add an unnecessary layer of complexity to an already difficult task.

- Maritime security: Apart from the 90% of global commerce in goods and 65% of world oil supplies that are carried by sea, today 95% of internet traffic is carried by undersea cables. Over a hundred thousand ships pass through the sea lanes near India each year. We in India had a stark reminder of threats from the sea when Mumbai was attacked by terrorists from Karachi on 26/11/08. Sitting in Singapore beside the Straits of Malacca we need no reminding of the importance of the oceans. I mention these facts because they remind us of the common interest of littoral and other major powers in keeping these sea lanes open and free. And yet most of the debate among strategists on this issue is phrased solely in adversarial terms, as a zero sum game.

Efforts to keep vital sea lanes open from Suez and Hormuz to the US west coast are presumably in the common interest of all the littoral and user states of these oceans. India has begun a process of consultation and cooperation among littoral navies in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium. To be truly effective, this effort needs to encompass the entire Indian-Pacific oceanic domain. India would be happy to work with the other littoral states and naval powers in this domain to see how we can address the threats at sea from terrorists, pirates, proliferators and organized crime. The experience of working together against such transnational threats may encourage the navies concerned to higher transparency and build confidence among them. Such mutual confidence is essential today, when there is such a rapid accretion of strength of several regional navies.

- Managing the security of the global commons: outer space, the oceans, cyber space, and global transport and communication networks. Today there is hardly any aspect of our lives that is not touched by outer space or by IT. As this intensifies, we have seen a steady technological shift in favour of the offense over the defence in both domains. There are major issues regarding the placement of weapons in space and of weapons designed to attack space based assets. Military uses of space based assets for intelligence, reconnaissance and communication are a reality. We are at the point where rules of the road are required as soon as possible.

- Cyber security is also a problem that recognizes no boundaries or rules today, at a time when ICTs are critical enablers in communication, development, infrastructure, security and defence. Cyber security may actually be the exception to the rule that these new dimensions of security require collective international effort. Cyber attacks are global, occur at the speed of light and skip the battlefield. Conventional deterrence or suasion is therefore relatively ineffective in this battle-space, and there is a premium on offence at these high rates of operational manoeuvre. Cyber security threats have reached the stage of undermining public confidence and of sowing distrust among nations. And yet, dealing with this challenge is largely left to effort by individual nations. If there are arms control approaches available to deal with these threats, they are yet to even be widely discussed in the international community.

In effect we are speaking here of the security of the global commons, "that which no one state may own or control and which is central to life". The very definition of the global commons has been expanded by technology to include outer space and cyber space in what

are natural assets beyond national jurisdictions. Cyber security is a good example of national public goods, (and “bads”), going global.

Only collective effort can meet such common challenges. They require new global partnerships involving those powers with the capacity to address the issues. As new powers emerge they are becoming stakeholders in the global system. In each of the areas mentioned above, new paradigms are necessary to cope with the changes wrought by technology and shifts in the balance of power. And not one of them can be addressed satisfactorily without a new paradigm. The world order defined by WWII or Cold War victors no longer suffices.

In this interdependent world of intertwined security, great powers will be defined by their use of power and not just by its accumulation. If the essence of power is to affect the behaviour of your adversaries, today the nature of security makes a degree of cooperation with potential adversaries necessary. Of course, there is space within interdependence for the great rivalries that characterize great transitions; but their form and nature have changed in time, space and nature, and in their effect.

The Asian dimension

We sometimes bemoan the fact that rapid shifts in the balance of power among nation-states in Asia are unmitigated by institutions or collective arrangements for security. And yet that may actually turn out to be to our advantage. While sclerotic Cold War institutions in other regions seek new roles for themselves, Asia is free to build the open, inclusive, plural and flexible architecture required to deal with these new transnational dimensions of security. Whether Asian states will be able to build such a security architecture will be a real test of our wisdom and skill. Asia has shown an ability to create new models of rapid economic growth, and of pragmatic coexistence despite political divergence and pluralism.

The question is whether we can also show such innovation in dealing with the new dimensions of security as well. A promising beginning has been made in the proposed ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting+8 that is planned for later this year. ASEAN must remain the bedrock on which this region deals with these issues. India looks forward to working with Singapore and other partners in ASEAN on traditional and new dimensions of security in the broader region which affect the world.

The Way Forward

It is probably easier to say what we should avoid in the way forward as we try to deal with these new dimensions of security.

We must avoid the tragedy of the commons, where multiple individuals, acting independently and solely and rationally consulting their own self interest, will ultimately deplete a shared limited resource even when it is clear that it is not in anyone's long-term interest for this to happen.

The existing organs of power in the international system should be rebuilt to reflect today's realities. For international peace and security this would require restructuring and expanding the UN Security Council.

We also need to build new structures that can cope with new dimensions of security such as the power of non-state actors. We need to build structures that are inclusive and flexible enough to avoid the inadequacies of existing international organizations. Logically speaking,

these structures would counter the nature of the threats that we face and be networked. As we have shown in responding to piracy off the Horn of Africa, improvisation is often more successful than rigid approaches might have been. The security situation around the Straits of Malacca offers a striking example of the success that results from cooperative effort by like-minded countries.

And, most important, we need to build the habits and experience of cooperation that will enable us to deal with the unpredictable challenges that will certainly confront us. Our navies have made a beginning, showing us the way.

We in Asia are still learning as we go. India will participate actively and constructively in this process.

Singapore
June 05, 2010