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## **Security Challenges for the Next Government**

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Speaking Notes

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Thank you for asking me to speak to you. I had hoped to learn from the vast experience and wisdom gathered in this group. So let me make a few points to start off a discussion and then listen to you.

Let us briefly scan some of our major national security concerns, both internal and external. I would then suggest a few areas where the next government might concentrate its national security effort.

Consider our major security challenges in the last decade:

### 1. Terrorism and Internal Security:

This is where our greatest challenges lie.

We are a society in such rapid change that the social equilibrium that we take for granted is under severe stress. Despite that, the simple indicators of organised violence measured by incidents and deaths of civilians and security force personnel have declined for several years running. In 2013 SF casualties were LWE 115, J&K 52, NE 18. We lost less civilians to terrorism last year than the USA. We are learning how to deal with terrorism. The exception is incidents and victims of communalism which have risen in 2012 and 2013. Communal incidents increased 23% and killings 52% in 2013. UP was the worst affected, accounting for 58% of all communal killings in India.

The Indian state and society may be learning how to deal with organised violence. But that is not true when it comes to crimes against the person, hate crimes and gender related violence. This is truly a disturbing phenomenon, fed by rising aspirations and mobility which remove traditional restraints. Policing, or at least traditional policing and the type of policing we have adapted for LWE/terrorism/separatism, is not the first, best or preferred answer. Given the fact that ours is a unique society, we need to find creative ways to deal with this issue. It worries me that this is not receiving the kind of serious attention that it deserves from our institutions, academics, social scientists and concerned citizens. To my mind this is our greatest security challenge today.

And this is only part of the picture. It does not speak to the declining writ of the state in large parts of Central India due to LWE, to the rampant extortion and co-option of politics and business by armed gangs claiming to be separatists or insurgents in the North-East, and the alienation of a new generation of Kashmiris who do not see either the old separatists or the political parties as representing them. Add to this the diminished capacity of the organs of the state, (the police, public administration and judiciary), to perform their functions throughout the country, whether due to corruption or sheer atrophy or restraints on their powers. Taken together, we are building up to a crisis of internal security, which may not be as dramatic and eye-catching as 26/11, coming as it does as a series of small, individual, apparently unconnected crises, each of which is explained away as an aberration. When a State CM and Cabinet obtain local popular acclaim for deciding to free the killers of a former PM we have truly come to a sad pass that gives comfort to those who mean India harm.

This is a crisis that cannot be solved by technical fixes such as police modernisation, better weapons and pay, or new technologies and techniques. Nor do we need more laws. It needs political, economic, social and administrative solutions. These would include a full time Ministry of Internal Security, empowered to bring together all the relevant government actions and actors. Most importantly, it needs a fundamental change in attitude in our political classes and the people. Sadly the AAP phenomenon is actually making this harder to achieve, unless it scares the Indian public into realising the dangers of expanding the area of anarchy in the name of participatory democracy and transparency.

## 2. China:

First the good news. We have kept the peace and have improved our capabilities and position on the border. Of course we have a long way to go to match the Chinese in terms of military capability or infrastructure on the border. But we do not need to do so. We need to be able, through asymmetric, indirect or direct means to cause him embarrassment, to stop or pause him, politically and militarily. We can do that. And we have the beginnings of nuclear deterrence against China today.

We have brought negotiations on the boundary to the point where it awaits acts of political will on both sides to find a settlement.

China is now our largest trading partner in goods and seeks to invest and use her excess capacity by manufacturing in India and investing in India's infrastructure.

She is also keen to involve us in connectivity, such as the BCIM Corridor and is ready to open up undisputed portions of our border to trade and travel. There are economic opportunities here for us, such as the 96 million Chinese who travelled abroad last year as a potential source of tourists to India.

For several reasons China presently finds it convenient to work with us internationally, even in Nepal and Bangladesh in the aftermath of their recent elections. We compete with China in the periphery we share, and in the world. At the same time we cooperate where we can. Maritime security is probably the best example of this bivalent relationship.

The bad news is that in strategic terms the gap between China and India is growing and could continue to grow in the near future. I personally think this will not continue for long, because internal stresses in China are leading to the increasing concentration of power in Xi Jinping's hands and to what I consider an unstable leadership situation, where Xi is going for broke. He will either be another Mao or a Hua Guofeng. The other consequence of internal stress is that China will be tempted into a much more assertive foreign posture, in the making of which the PLA will play a greater role, as we already see in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. Tactically, their present preoccupation with Japan, the US and Vietnam has led them to seek to maintain the even keel of our bilateral relationship. We owe some of our friends to China's behaviour.

The policy answer to China is to engage with her and with others on her periphery, building up our own strength, countervailing influences, and incentives to moderate Chinese behaviour.

We are today dealing with a China whose accumulation of power is making even the US think twice about confronting her. In 2007 the US economy was four times the size of China's. By 2012 it was twice its size. The balance of economic and political power has shifted. The balance of military power is also shifting as China's area and access denial strategy takes hold in her vicinity. And when you consider that China defines her territorial and maritime disputes as core interests while they are not so for the US, the balance of interests is also in China's favour — she would be ready to pay a price to get her way which the US and other extra-regional powers would not.

Our approach has been to engage, cooperate and compete with China. We both compete and cooperate in the periphery that we share, and in the world. At the same time we cooperate where we can. Maritime security is probably the best

example of this bivalent relationship, where China has responded by agreeing to a maritime security dialogue. We have a common interest in keeping open the sea lanes carrying our energy imports and our trade. But within that larger interest there is the fact that China is building infrastructure, increasing PLA Navy reach, and being politically assertive, leading to reactions in her periphery.

Our most significant response is of course in building up our own capabilities, political, military and economic so as to cooperate and compete effectively with China.

The prospect, to my mind, is of growing internal stresses in China resulting in an increasingly cranky China, touchy and quick to react abroad, insisting on her rights as she sees them. This will not be easy to deal with.

### 3. Pakistan:

Consider where India and Pakistan were ten years ago in terms of security, internal development and international standing, and where we are today. This is an example of consistent policy by different Indian governments producing the best possible outcome out of a bad situation and poor options.

Pakistan's secular decline continues despite the first peaceful constitutional government transition in its history last year and the lessening influence of the Pakistan Army in Pakistan. The threat to us from Pakistan arises from Pakistan's internal condition, namely, her increasing radicalisation, the growing role of the religious right and terrorists, the power of the ISI, the institutional interest of the Pakistan Army and establishment in hostility to India, and her skewed polity.

Since Pakistan's state sponsorship of terrorism became evident in the early eighties, every government of India, whatever its political composition, has dealt with Pakistan with the same mix of public dialogue with back channel diplomacy, restraint in words with firmness on the ground, and similar policies among Pakistan's neighbours in Afghanistan, Iran, Central Asia and Baluchistan. Only the style has varied, depending upon the personality of our leaders.

The problem today is that Pakistan cannot do the things necessary to sustain the semblance of a normal relationship with India. Terrorism is hardwired into Pakistan's society and polity, not just the ISI. She is internally divided, no single political force, not even the Army, is powerful enough to deliver outcomes, and the country is increasingly radicalised. It is hard to see this improving soon.

Given the condition of Pakistan, it can be argued that we have reached the limits of the outcomes that can be produced by normal state policy, (whether of dialogue on all subjects and firmness in substance, or stopping dialogue, or other overt actions). We today lack the power to solve our Pakistan problem, which largely stems from its own condition. We, therefore, have to contain it and manage the consequences.

#### 4. Neighbourhood:

Afghanistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal and the Maldives have evolved in the right direction for Indian interests, away from radical Maoism/political Islam. They may be politically fragile but they are certainly better, from our point of view, than they were ten years ago. And overall, the entire neighbourhood, including Sri Lanka, is more economically integrated with India than since Partition/Independence.

Our Look East policy, by successive governments since it was announced by PM Narasimha Rao in 1992, has been an unqualified success. Look at our present relations with ASEAN, Japan, and South Korea. Over 50% of our foreign trade now goes east, we do over \$ 70 billion of trade with ASEAN and we are now adding political and military content to these relationships.

The challenge now is for us to step up our game, since South Asia and the Indian Ocean region are a new focus of great power rivalry and interest. We see increased Chinese interest in Afghanistan, and see US-China competition for influence and presence in Bangladesh and Myanmar. So long as the Indian Ocean and South Asia were a strategic backwater in geopolitical terms we had a relatively free run in our immediate neighbourhood. During the last decade, the US was content to work with us rather than against us in South Asia. Recently, however, we have not seen the same sensitivity in the US pursuit of a SOFA in the Maldives political turmoil, or in its actions in Bangladesh. China today has the capacity to actually drive her connectivity projects into our immediate periphery, such as railways into Nepal, the BCIM corridor, the Maritime Silk Route idea, the rail and pipeline to the Arabian Sea through Gwadar, and so on. To bemoan the fact and point out that this is not innocent is no answer or policy response. At this stage both the US and China are willing to talk to us and to coordinate approaches to the extent that our interests coincide. We need to show the capability to deploy political, economic and other tools of power in these areas, defining our interests clearly and pursuing them — in other words engaging more effectively rather than whining on the sidelines. We

have natural friends in the desire of the countries concerned to keep their options open and to look for countervailing powers

#### 5. West Asia:

In 2013 over 75,000 people died of armed conflict or terrorism in the “Greater Middle East”, (Morocco to Pakistan), according to the IISS. This was 78% of all conflict related deaths in the world. The geopolitical balance of West Asia was destroyed by the Gulf Wars eliminating Iraq from the equation and leaving a binary Saudi-Iran/Sunni/Shia dichotomy in which unpopular regimes met their nemesis at the hands of the most organised elements, the Muslim Brotherhood and more radical groups or the Army. And this was fuelled by the West, using social media tools and propaganda, and other black arts, all of which Qatar, Saudi and Iran too have rapidly learnt.

The net result is extreme volatility in a region that is critical to our interests. We get 63% of our oil from the Gulf, almost 7 million Indians live and work there, and remittances are of the order of \$ 75 billion a year. And all the fault lines — Shia/Sunni, Iran/Saudi, autocracy/populism, — intersect in the Gulf.

The problem is now acute because of fickle US policies, as on Iran and Syria, threatening war one day and then acquiescing in local realities that they cannot or do not wish to change like Iran’s unused nuclear option or the Assad regime. Faced with uncertainty other states are hedging. Iran is not going to give up her nuclear option. If Iran is seen to be left one step away from a bomb, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and one day Egypt, will ensure they are too. Since the day the US dropped Mubarak, a thirty year loyal ally, in the space of three days, all her allies from Karzai to the King of Morocco through the Saudi King have taken out insurance with other powers, buying weapons from China and Russia.

We have stayed out of these dichotomies, tried to insulate ourselves and our people from the growing extremism and radicalism in the region, and worked with all the major actors to defend our security and economic interests. (We may be one of the few powers able to do so with Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey all at the same time.) This balancing is not easy or pretty but it is necessary.

#### 6. USA:

Our transformed relations with the US have acquired critical mass, helped us to meet India's defence and development needs, and given us strategic room to manoeuvre, enhancing our security.

The challenge is to build upon this at a time when the economic ballast of the relationship is being questioned by an increasingly inward looking USA, which is circling the trade wagons in the TPP and TIPP, setting higher standards and raising barriers through plurilateral arrangements. While these may be directed primarily at China, we are collateral damage, even if unintentional.

Is the US in decline or strategic retreat? It would certainly seem so from her behaviour in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and now on China-Japan tensions. In 2007 the US economy was four times as large as China's. In 2012 it was only twice as large. The shift is changing attitudes and behaviour in both the USA and China.

It is in our interest that the US stay engaged in the Asia-Pacific and West Asia, for by being herself she creates space and opportunities for us. There is a symmetry here. India's rise, per se, serves the US interest in inhibiting the emergence of a peer competitor. We need to build on this, rather than the simple arithmetic of totting up votes in the UN or issues on which we agree. For the foreseeable future the US will remain very important to meeting our energy, development and defence needs, and her behaviour will be a major shaper of the environment in which we operate in Asia and the world

#### 7. Russia:

With familiarity and time we tend to underestimate or take for granted the strategic value to India of Russia. Russia is the source of our major defence platforms and is essential to the building of our defence and strategic capabilities. Equally Russia's stabilising role in Asia, particularly in her 'near abroad' in Central Asia, and her role in bringing balance to the international system, are useful buttresses to our efforts.

#### 8. Other Issues:

The biggest change in the last ten years has been the result of the application of technology, particularly ICT to our lives. The ubiquitous mobile is an instrument of social mobilisation and protest, as Arab Spring and AAP have shown. We saw the effects of social media in summer 2012 when rumour and lies drove tens of thousands of North-Easterners home from Karnataka and Maharashtra, and fed the

violence in the Bodo areas. Terrorist groups now use the internet for recruiting, communication and even (with less success so far) as a weapon.

Fortunately these are domains in which India has the talented manpower, and which suit our disaggregated way of functioning. In cyber security, maritime security, and in instituting credible nuclear deterrence, we have achieved a great deal in the last fifteen years. Our intelligence agencies perform essential functions well and professionally and have silently reformed and modernised.

The new government will also be pleasantly surprised when they review the state of our strategic programme and nuclear deterrence.

All in all I would even dare to say that independent India has never been so secure. We live with a paradox in India. We are both increasingly secure and increasingly paranoid about our national security. And since we live in a rapidly changing world, we need to find new ways of ensuring our security.

Consider how secure India is today compared to the three decades after independence. There is no existential threat to India's integrity. The risk of war is not what it was. The balance of power in our sub-continent is better from our point of view. That is why Pakistan resorts to sub-conventional and asymmetric warfare against us. For two and a half decades he has thrown every form of terrorism and subversion against us, supporting insurgent groups and trying to divide us communally, even printing fake Rupees. And yet these have been the decades when India has done best in terms of accumulating power and raising our people out of poverty.

On broader security issues like food security and energy security too India has done well. Think of where we were when we lived from ship to mouth on PL-480 wheat and observed wheat-less days. Or the effects of the eight day Saudi oil embargo on us in 1974. We have come a long way.

But what worked for us in the past is no longer relevant. It is time to find new ways of ensuring our security.

That is because today's threats are more serious and more complex than before. They are threats as much to our stability as to our way of life, to our quest to modernise, and to our strategic autonomy. And we have much more to lose. This is not to say that we do not face threats. Of course we do. And those threats are serious and more complex than before. There is no such thing as absolute



security. West Asia is in turmoil, East Asia is no longer harmonious, jihadi terrorism has globalised, and the Asia-Pacific is witnessing what may be history's greatest peacetime arms buildup, in quality and quantity. We risk being left further behind by the revolution in military affairs. The global commons is increasingly contested. New threats have emerged in outer space and cyber space. But we are better placed to deal with them, or, are able to mitigate them to an extent that would have been inconceivable just one generation ago. Take, for instance, the balance of power with Pakistan. Or the fact that China must calculate the probability of political and military embarrassment if she were to attempt to repeat 1962.

### What should the next government do?

Each of the challenges that I have mentioned will need to be managed by the next government. They are taking office when it seems to me that the international system is actually at another hinge moment, transitioning from the post Cold War world into the post economic crisis world, where the US is in geopolitical retreat, and is economically circling the wagons, negotiating the TP and TTIP as plurilateral free trade arrangements which seek to raise the standards to suit their comparative advantage. West Asia is in turmoil, East Asia is no longer harmonious, *jihadi* terrorism has globalised, and the Asia-Pacific region is witnessing what may be history's greatest peacetime arms buildup, in quality and quantity. The sole superpower is perceived to be in retreat or disinterested, and China is more assertive and rapidly accumulating power. The global commons is increasingly contested. New threats have emerged in outer space and cyber space. New technologies pose new risks to India. India also risks being left further behind by the revolution in military affairs.

Such changes in the international system are not necessarily negative for our pursuit of India's national interest. Kishore Mehbubani thinks that India is entering "a geopolitical sweet spot", and that China-US rivalry will create unique opportunities for us. If so the next government can benefit not only from the fiscal discipline and reforms of this government in 2012-14, but also from what this government has put in train in defence preparedness and diplomacy.

What does worry me is the fact that we are still to display the ability to deal with the security challenges thrown up by our rapidly urbanising, young and mobile society with high aspirations and expectations. More worrying than all this is the absence of much creative debate or thinking grounded in our own conditions on these issues in the public domain in India.

In these circumstances it seems to me that the next government should begin by concentrating its effort on three clusters of issues out of the long wish lists that will be presented to it. It should build upon what has been achieved, address new, complex and emerging challenges, and concentrate on:

### 1. The National Security Aparat:

Reform of the higher defence command, jointness among the services and their integration into the national security aparat are tasks that are ripe to be tackled. So are our defence production practices and industry which are broken, non-productive and must be fixed. The steps required are well known, from the Kelkar, Rabindra Gupta and other committee reports.

We must also be willing to invest seriously in national security, not only in terms of the amounts we spend but in how we chose to spend it. There is no real process of prioritisation or joint evaluation of budgetary and acquisition choices today. And internal security is grossly underfunded.

We need clarity on our future military needs. This requires the political leadership to set a National Security Doctrine and Strategy within which the Defence forces and MOD will operate in an era of large committed liabilities and shrinking fiscal budgets. Drafts of these documents have been prepared. A thorough review of our preparedness to fight future wars, not WWII, cannot wait, and defence acquisitions must be driven on that basis, not fickle individual or single service preferences.

And most important of all, we need to develop the mechanisms and habits of bringing to bear the full weight of our capabilities on national security issues. Cyber security, for instance, is not the work of one department or agency or even of the private sector but of all of them combined. It is this integration that we seem to find hardest, whether between Ministries or between services or in terms of tapping into the skills and resources of academia, the private sector and society as a whole for national security.

### 2. The State and Society:

In several areas of security the compact between state and society needs reworking. This includes issues like LEA monitoring and data privacy in cyber space; the death penalty; police reform; increasing the efficiency of governance (police, the courts, bureaucracy) in the RTI-Lokpal age; and, border management, integrating civilian and military efforts. AFSPA is an instance of a law that has

become a political football and a prestige issue which could easily be solved. I would suggest introducing a credible review mechanism before the law can be invoked to cover an event or situation.

It also includes issues like whether we trust NGOs and whistle-blowers, whether legislative oversight of security agencies can be effective, and our definition of secrecy and privacy in the age of ICT. We seem to follow Western fashions in most of these issues, assuming that legal and rights based approaches contain the answer when, judging by the Western experience, they have not worked in practice.

### 3. A Debate:

For too long we have left national security issues to the so-called professionals. But experience teaches us that wearing a uniform or holding a post confers no literacy or education in these matters. We need to work on the education of our national security professionals and to generate an educated and rational debate in India on our national security choices and goals, free of emotion. Our strategic culture is something that we should be self conscious about and needs work.

### Conclusion

This is a sizeable task, and I am not sure whether there is an appetite among our political leaders to address these issues. But since you asked, I thought I should reply as honestly as I can. Some of this work has begun in the implementation of the Naresh Chandra Committee report. But there is still much to do and not much time to do it in. I do hope that after the elections we can continue the tradition of treating national security issues as being national, in the true sense of the word, and above party politics.

Of course no government is ever allowed the luxury of dealing only with the issues that it wants to address. I would not be surprised if in reality the next government were not forced by circumstance and events during its tenure to address an entirely different set of issues.

I would be delighted to hear your views.

POST SCRIPT:

Why are We Paranoid?

If we are actually more secure than before why are we increasingly paranoid about our security?

As I said before, we do have reasons to worry. There are real threats to India's security, those threats are more complex, and uncertainty in the international system is higher than it has been for a long time. And this is when India is much more linked and dependent on the outside world and has much more at risk. This is no longer a subsistence game, it is a game for higher stakes. Energy and food security could determine the future of our country. (The Indian middle class knows that their jobs, prosperity and even lifestyle are connected to the outside world — almost every middle class family has someone studying, working or settled abroad. Those who are frightened of interdependence, like Kejriwal, try to turn their backs on the world. The majority doesn't.)

So we have cause to worry and to address the issues that I mentioned before. But why is there a hysterical tone to our national discourse on national security issues?

It is not just because threat inflation is an industry. It always was — a military industrial complex needs an enemy, journalists need a story, and diplomats work crises. There is an industry and economy built on threat inflation, as TV anchors counting up nuclear weapons and missiles reminded us last spring when Chinese soldiers pitched tents in Depsang. But that does not explain the rising paranoia.

There are two relatively recent reasons, linked to each other, which cause people to worry and make our national security discourse sound paranoid at times.

One is an expanded definition of security. We rightly demand more personal security, which faces new threats with urbanisation, increasing social mobility and a society in rapid change. As a society we expect much more from the state while we simultaneously fetter its hands by holding the state to higher standards of behaviour and impose checks and balances on its powers. And we now define national security in the broadest way, including energy and food security, and, some would add, mitigating the effects of climate change.

The expanded definition of security leads naturally to higher aspirations and expectations of the state and society. As the security calculus has expanded so have demands on the security apparatus. Public confidence in the capacity of state organs to provide internal security is low. We have made progress since 2008 in improving our counter-terrorism mechanisms, but not yet the other aspects of internal and personal security — law and order, communal violence, physical security, LWE, police reform and modernisation, and others. Expanded demands, limited public confidence, and the extent to which they are met are now amplified by the new media environment that we are immersed in: social media, the blogosphere, 24X7 TV news and so on.

### The National Security Debate

Secondly, the terms in which the national security debate are framed also feed paranoia.

In China and Japan, and in India too, we see internal debates and political arguments on questions of war and peace, on the use of force and diplomacy. This is most evident in China, where the rapid accumulation of economic and military power is no longer restrained by any pretence at ideology, and is, indeed, fuelled by rising chauvinism. Ideological restraints no longer operate on any of the great powers, if they ever did, — whether it is the use of Al Nusra in Syria by those who started the Global War on Terror, Pakistan's unpunished recourse to terrorism as state policy, or Iran, the USA and China's use of cyber espionage and warfare. The examples are many and known to you.

At the risk of oversimplifying, the debate in China, Japan and India is between liberal internationalists and reformers on the one hand, and ultra-nationalists and conservatives on the other. The reformers seek more international cooperation and are committed to international values and solutions. The conservatives seek to recover lost territory and status, (real or imagined), and seek a position of regional dominance or hegemony, or, in some cases, as a superpower. The ultra-nationalists use a narrative of humiliation, pride, and resentment against limitations of capacity and reality. An essential part of this narrative is threat inflation. And in many countries it is the conservatives with their emotional appeal who are determining public discourse, not the cool reason and compromise of the reformers. Sadly the debate is getting shriller and shriller in all three societies.

There is thus an increasing dichotomy between the reality of how secure we are and our perception of it. One or the other will have to change. Our perceptions

could change, which would be relatively painless though some egos may be bruised. Or else we will see attempts to change reality. This would be harder and could even involve the use of force. To mention one possible instance: There is little reason to believe that China, or Japan for that matter, is skilled enough to use force in a controlled manner in the South China Sea or East China Sea. They have no experience of the kind of power they now possess and their record of using force is not brilliant, no matter how well propagandised.

### Conclusion

We are in a new normal where expectations and publicity increasingly try to drive governments in their security choices, not an objective calculus of the balance of power and how it could serve national political goals. For instance, we now conduct counter-insurgency and counter terrorism in the full glare of the TV cameras. What we did to combat Khalistani terrorism in Punjab in the eighties is not possible today. Similarly, in cyber space we must assume from the open and transparent nature of the medium that what the state does will someday become public knowledge, most likely sooner rather than later, and not just because of future Snowdens.

The new normal has its advantages. Civil society is now involved in security issues. In Nagaland there is a spontaneous civil society movement opposing extortion and “tax” demands by insurgent groups. Unarmed civilians have shown great courage in standing up against intimidation by armed militias, with, I am sad to say, very little support from the organs of state.

We must learn how to operate in this environment. This is not just about media management. It is about learning new ways of working and changing so that we can actually use its characteristics to achieve our own security.