

**Keynote Address by Shri Shiv Shankar Menon, National Security Advisor at the
Seminar on “India and China: Public Diplomacy, Building Understanding”
co-hosted by the Indian Council of World Affairs and
the Institute of Chinese Studies
at ICWA, Sapru House on 1 April 2010**

Ambassador Devare, Ambassador Zhang Yan, Friends. Thank you for asking me to speak at the inauguration of this seminar on “India and China: Public Diplomacy, Building Understanding” to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of China. This is a useful and timely initiative by the Indian Council of World Affairs and the Institute of Chinese Studies. It will be a significant part of the commemoration of this anniversary in both countries.

It is a pleasure to see so many friends in the audience, and particularly to see our Chinese friends here with us in Delhi.

Sixty years ago, in the international and domestic circumstances surrounding the birth of two new republics in India and China within two years of each other, the rapid recognition and early establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries had a special significance. Asia was taking charge of its own destiny again, and intended to do so on its own terms. That was a moment of promise, a declaration of intent by the two most populous nations on earth, conscious of the role that they had played in history, and aware of the vast gap between their past glory and present condition.

Today, sixty years later, thanks to our separate and collective efforts, both our countries, and Asia as a whole, are beginning to play the roles promised by our mutual recognition sixty years ago.

Today, as our leaders have reminded us, and as was shown again at the Copenhagen COP on climate change, India-China relations have global significance. How have we come to this point and what should we expect from India-China relations in the future?

India-China Relations Today

For ancient nations and neighbours like India and China, sixty years is only a brief moment in a long record of civilisational contact between our peoples. Ours has always been a broader engagement, not just between our states but between our peoples. Throughout history it was the scholars and pilgrims, the traders and travellers, who carried ideas, goods and science from one country to another. It is even argued by some that Buddhism, that great import from India which was so successfully Sinicised, flourished in China until it acquired the disadvantages of state patronage and of being a state religion, and that it was its place in the people’s hearts that

enabled it to survive and flourish until today in China.

It was awareness of the historical contact between the two peoples of India and China that created the basis for the attempt in the fifties to build a new type of relationship based on Panchasheela or the Five Principles. That attempt foundered on the boundary question and the politics that prevailed in the late fifties and sixties internationally and in China, leading to the difficult phase of bilateral estrangement during the sixties.

When we began the process of rebuilding state-to-state relations in the seventies, we tried to learn the lessons of history and to bring into play the strength of people to people links and public diplomacy as your seminar calls it. Beginning with Foreign Minister Vajpayee's 1979 visit to China and culminating in Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's historic visit to China in 1988, Indian and Chinese leaders decided that the difficult and complicated boundary question would be addressed, but would not stand in the way of the expansion of relations in other areas, including the economy and functional cooperation. This approach was taken one step further by the 1993 agreement on the maintenance of peace and tranquillity in the border areas and the 1996 CBMs agreement, which committed both sides to preserving the status quo and established procedures to deal with difficulties that might arise on the ground.

The results of this policy of engagement speak for themselves. Today China is India's largest trading partner in goods, over 3,000 Indian students study in China, and India is one of China's largest markets for project exports. India and China cooperate in international organisations and on global issues. We have established a practice of regular leadership visits and meetings that has resulted in high level political understanding and impetus for the relationship.

By 2003 both countries were confident enough to re-address the most complicated and difficult issue that affects bilateral relations, the India-China boundary question, at the political level. It was decided to entrust the issue to Special Representatives of the leaders. This decision too has borne fruit in the Guiding Principles and Political Parameters for a boundary settlement that were agreed during Premier Wen Jiabao's 2005 visit to India.

In other words, differences in world view, structure, systems and foreign policy decision making have not prevented and will not prevent an expanding engagement between India and China, successfully managing contradictions while building on congruence. The two countries have found a modus vivendi to deal with the fact of the boundary issue and to manage their different approaches to issues where their peripheries overlap. India and China both cooperate and compete at the same time because of their interests and how they perceive the balance of power and situation around them. We have also shown through practice that our bilateral relations are too important to be affected by our relations with any third country.

Both countries can now actively consider together the next steps in the evolution of our bilateral relations; evolve a detailed framework for the resolution of the boundary issue in a manner that is politically feasible for both leaderships; and, seize the opportunities for cooperation that the domestic transformations of our economies and the evolving global situation have opened up.

The Prospect

Today, India has been transformed, China has changed beyond recognition, and the two countries are increasing the well being of their people and contributing to the emergence of a multi-polar world.

The global trend towards multi-polarity and a more even distribution of power has been accelerated by the recent global economic crisis. While the immediate financial aspects of the crisis may have been addressed, its structural causes in terms of global imbalances remain unsolved. Both the trend towards multi-polarity and the financial crisis have actually increased the opportunity and need for India and China to work together on global issues. As the visionary joint statement issued by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Premier Wen Jiabao in January 2008 made clear, both countries share common positions and approaches on several major international issues of long-term significance such as the environment and climate change, energy security, food security, remaking the institutions of global governance, and international support for national economic and social development efforts.

In the immediate region in which both countries are located, Asia, as well, there is common ground between India and China on combating terrorism and extremism, enhancing maritime security, and on the need for a peaceful environment to permit the domestic transformation of the two countries. While there may be differences in method and choice of tools, in most cases there is a marked similarity of goals. Naturally, the bilateral modus vivendi which has been in place for some time may need to be reworked periodically in the light of developments in our countries and around us.

Our experience suggests that there is space in Asia and the world for both India and China to grow and develop, and for us to do so in a way that is mutually reinforcing, if we both wish it. We also have the experience and ability in India and China to continue to manage our relationship successfully.

As India and China continue to pursue their interests, so long as their overwhelming preoccupation remains their domestic transformation, and both understand that this goal requires a peaceful periphery, it is my understanding that the elements of competition in the bilateral relationship can be managed and the elements of congruence can be built upon. As our interests get progressively more complex, the costs of withdrawal from engagement rise.

The larger issue is whether India and China can work together to help to manage the complicated regional security environment in Asia. India's preference is for the open security architecture and the sort of multi-polarity that China too has advocated previously for global issues, and from which we have both benefited in the recent past. To do so, India, China and other rising Asian powers must be willing and capable of contributing to global public goods in terms of security, growth and stability that the region and world require. How will we help to preserve security in the global commons? Asia has proved that she can do the economics. Can she also do the politics

that come with power?

You might ask what this has to do with public diplomacy by India and China, the topic of your seminar. Everything is my answer, for two principal reasons. One is the shrill and over excitable commentary on the relationship that has appeared in both countries in the last year or so. The emergence of “nativist” voices, and the loud expression of opinion as fact in the new media which purports to express public opinion, could introduce volatility in perceptions. We have all witnessed this phenomenon in India-China relations in the last year or so. When the world is changing so rapidly, and when uncertainty in the international system is at unprecedented levels, neither India nor China can afford misperceptions or distortions of policy caused by a lack of understanding of each other’s compulsions and policy processes.

Secondly, in a democracy like India foreign policy has a symbiotic relationship with public opinion; it is both formed by it and needs its support to be legitimate, coherent and implementable.

And that is why public diplomacy by both countries becomes important, to bring issues into perspective and to make clear the context and implications of public policy.

It is only on the basis of informed and supportive public opinion that we will be able to grasp the opportunities and move forward on the ambitious agenda that awaits India-China relations, the pursuit of which would place India-China relations on a sound footing for the twenty-first century, and enable us to realise the potential of the India-China strategic cooperative partnership for peace and development.

I therefore wish you success in your seminar. You have a wide canvas to cover in terms of the relationship and the contribution that public diplomacy can make to it – whether through academic exchanges, journalism, civil society contacts and so-called track two dialogue between Indians and Chinese, all of which are becoming richer by the day. I wish you well and look forward with anticipation to learning the results of your deliberations.

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