The fourth FICCI- Brookings Dialogue on the India- US Strategic Partnership
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Remarks by Shivshankar Menon, National Security Advisor, Government of India

NSA Menon: Thank you. Thank you Mr. R.V. Kanoria and Strobe. Ladies and gentlemen and friends, thank you for asking me to speak at this dialogue on the India-U.S. strategic partnership at Brookings.

It's an impressive agenda. You seem to have asked all the right questions. I was hoping that you would actually tell me the answers, which is why I chose to come at the end. But you expect me to say what I think first and then maybe you can tell me.

Today as you said, U.S. and India are engaging across the board in every field, as you mentioned, and the U.S., I don't have to repeat the facts for you. But the last decade has really seen a remarkable transformation in the relationship. We've moved well beyond what was bilateral functional cooperation into a true strategic partnership in many ways.

Now what made this possible? I think three objective factors stand out. One is our congruence on several major issues. The other is, of course, the basis of all these relationships. The growing utility of the relationship to each of us. And which I think we tend to underestimate because we like to think we're realists, there is really a shared vision and a shared set of values, which does make it easier for us to deal with differences [inaudible].

But what's more important, I think, is that each of these factors looks like it's going to be strengthened in the foreseeable future. If you look at international developments around us and what's happening with the world economy or in terms of the balance of power that we see in the region, what we see as developments in West Asia for instance, most of these accentuate our commonalities. And where we have differences of approach we have managed to find ways of managing our differences and have actually in some cases rearranging them. We consider, for instance, our increasing ability to work together on developments whether in the Indian Ocean region, the Asia Pacific as a whole, on maritime security, on counter-terrorism, on non-proliferation and so on, and this has been growing, steadily. And the list continues to grow as well. So that's for me very important.

So, then if we have so much congruence, if we've achieved so much in the last ten years and we've done so well, why do we speak of strategic partnership and not of alliance, as some people prefer? I think it's quite clear for two main reasons. There's marked asymmetry and difference in our stages of development and our ability and behavior as powers. The same differences that actually give us complementarity, to create opportunities for us to work together, are also the ones that lead to different approaches on some issues. It's a given. I take it as a given. And I don't think this necessarily diminishes either the value or the prospect of the partnership in any way. It's an interesting phenomenon if you think of it.

Take developments in West Asia, for instance. We share a vision of a region of peaceful democratic moderate states where people decide their own future. I don't think we'd have any argument about that, about what we'd like to see. But we differ on ways to achieve that goal. For some of the

approaches that we see advocated today seem to encourage and empower extremists, fundamentalists, sometimes even terrorist groups in the region, in these societies which are in transition. And yet they don't stand in the way of our working together or separately, each in our own way, to achieve our highest interests and to produce the right outcome. I don't think they should. I don't think we should allow tactical differences, minor differences on tactics, to obscure the fact that we agree on the goals and that we can each work in our own ways to achievement.

Afghanistan is an example, actually, where each of us brought very different capabilities to bear so that there could be a fundamental change in the Afghan economy and to the Afghan people's ability to determine their own outcomes, their own future. It's a good example, actually, of complementarity working.

On Iran, for instance, which is often cited as a divisive issue, we both seek the same end -- a negotiated resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue without the spread of nuclear weapons. We may have different judgments of how to get to that goal or the likely effects of some judgments, but that's normal. As democrats, we know how to deal with those kinds of differences. We talk them through and we seek to persuade each other. But we work together on the issue in the IAEA, we implement sanctions, and we continue to use such influence we have to arrive at the right outcome.

So we have this strange phenomenon where many of the things which might on a conventional reading be seen as dividing us actually give us opportunities to actually move the relationship forward. We are today in the situation where having learned over the last ten years how to do this, we are in a situation where we can actually tackle all these issues.

We were talking earlier, just before coming into this room, about climate change and energy, for instance, as an example. And Strobe said, and it's true. We're doing a tremendous amount together on the practical aspects, whether it's energy, whether it's new and renewable energy sources, in terms of research, in terms of industry-to-industry cooperation. It's remarkable what we're doing. But if you listen to us arguing in international multilateral negotiating forums you wouldn't think so.

So as he said, we agree on the practice. Now let's argue about the theory. We see this strange situation.

But on the core issues of energy I think we've been very successful and I think we need to build on those for the future.

So the lesson that I draw really from this experience over the last ten years is, there are really two of them. One is that we must ensure that the quality of communication between us is maintained and where it's necessary improved. Which is why meetings like yours are so important, what you've done, and what you've done in previous rounds. I'm sure this round is as useful in terms of its influence on public policy and on public perceptions of this strategic partnership and where it's going.

The other lesson is what should we concentrate on, what should we apply our effort to in the future? I would suggest that yes, we need to intensify our strategic dialogues on international developments, looking at the bigger issues. You've got some of them in your list such as the geopolitical consequences of what's happening in energy, in the global energy situation. That's a huge issue, it's a huge transition. It's something that both of us, it's logical that we both actually work together on those issues. Groups like yours can actually play a very important role on those issues.

Secondly, we can actually move our security and defense partnership to a higher level. We are working on trying to see how we move actually into joint development, joint research on technologies, joint production and so on. I think there is tremendous potential there which both sides realize. We're finding ways to do that.

Thirdly, there is still, despite all that we've done, a lot of potential in energy, in education and innovation, in this whole cluster which I think offers great potential.

So to conclude, since I've taken long enough. I am an optimist about this partnership because the world is in transition, making our cooperation partnership even more important and necessary. So long as we are able to build on our successes, continue consulting and discussing issues and finding ways to achieve our common goals, as we have done so successfully for over a decade, I'm confident that the prospects of the partnership are bright. I'm sure that the significance of the partnership for us and for the rest of the world will only grow.

Thank you.