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Questions: Southeast Asian Nations Member Countries and Competition with China

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Questions

In terms of how India views itself for the next 5 10 years, where do you think the line, the balance between competition and cooperation lies as far as China is concerned, especially in Southeast Asia, where India has definitely established itself as a major actor among Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries?

- I think the defining principle that we would apply to our relationship with China is engagement. With engagement you obviously have to think of the dimensions of cooperation involved. You have to see how this engagement obviates the possibilities of confrontation. I think that is a primary focus when it comes to approaching relations with China.
- I referred to the boundary question and the unresolved issues involved in that sphere between India and China. I think if you look at the India/China relationship, and the way it has been managed – if you can call it the management regime for India/China relations – I think it has been quite successful. We have maintained peace on our borders for decades now. We have mechanisms in place to enhance mutual confidence. Our trade and economic relationship have grown beyond all prognostications. It is an imbalanced relationship, but the fact is it is a huge relationship. It is well poised to become one of the most important trading relationships of this century.
- I think the fact that we have been able to achieve so much with China, and I believe there is room enough for India and China to grow, to coexist and to engage with each other. There will obviously be competition in some areas, but that competition need not be self-defeating. It need not be a cancellation process as far as all the other things that we do as much as it may be projected in some sections of public opinion in that fashion. That is nowhere near happening because I believe good sense will prevail on both sides.
- With the temperature rising around the South China Sea, there is a lot of concern about what happens there in security terms. I wonder whether India has a particular point of view with regard to how the current disputes can be addressed if not resolved.

- When it comes to Southeast Asia, when it comes to India's growing profile in Southeast Asia, and the very close ties that we have with countries in that region – all the ASEAN countries, we have obviously watched what is happening in the South China Sea with a lot of interest and close attention. This is a complex dispute that involves a number of countries in the region. Obviously, it has to be solved among the countries concerned and China. Our advocacy has always been for negotiation, for codes of conduct that would prevent conflict, that would again enhance mutual confidence, and that would enable the trade, normal communication and security interests of all concerned to be addressed adequately.
- As you know we are very closely engaged with the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus which we are part of. We are part of the East Asia Summit. We have also welcomed the inclusion of Russia and the United States in that summit. There are various mechanisms for cooperation and dialogue today, for the countries concerned to get together, to build an inclusive, more stable and more lasting security architecture, which does not exclude one country to the advantage of the others because that is not going to work.

Competition with China. Where you think that competition is most likely to arise – in which areas and on which questions?

- I think the world will always compare India and China and seek to attribute competitive paradigms to both countries. There will obviously be areas around the world where India and China transact relations, try to build development partnerships and try to promote economic interests. However, as I said, we need to approach this not just with hindsight of what we have gained in terms of experience from dealing with each other over the last five to six decades, including the difficult years – if I may say – but also with adequate foresight. This is because ultimately, I think our development, our patterns – our political patterns of development in India and China have differed. The manner in which India and China are perceived in many of the countries we cooperate with or transact relations with is different. I think that difference will prevail. There will always be a difference of perception about the way India is seen and the way China is seen.
- I do not think we are getting into a process here where India wants to emulate China in all that it does. I think that is an impractical way of approaching these matters. I think India has its strengths, has its capabilities and has its particularly Indian characteristics that appeal to a lot of our development partners, as you see in Africa where we are delivering on capacity building and where we provide scholarships for people to come and study in India. The whole democratic experience of India is something that appeals to a lot of our African partners, for instance, and in Southeast Asia.
- Therefore, I believe India has unique advantages. China has its own advantages in terms of the burst it has been able to achieve in terms of economic development and

the manner in which it has been able to transform the face and landscape of Chinese life.

- I believe there is a lot that India and China should be engaging with each other about and trying to learn from each other about in this process.

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