

M.K. Bhadrakumar: Putin Treated Like a Rockstar in India

Ambassador M. K. Bhadrakumar was a career diplomat for India for three decades. Ambassador Bhadrakumar discusses the BRICS Summit in India and the development of India-Russia relations. Read Bhadrakumar's Indian Punchline: <https://www.indianpunchline.com/> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glennndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glennndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Buy merchandise: <https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. Today we are joined by M.K. Bhadrakumar, a former Indian ambassador and career diplomat who spent three decades in the Indian Foreign Service. And, well, the topic of discussion today is the BRICS summit, which has just finished up in India. So let me first start off by welcoming you back to the program. It's been a while.

#M.K. Bhadrakumar

Thank you, Glenn. First of all, I must begin by heartily congratulating you. I reserved it for this moment, congratulating you for the 1.2 million followers that you have got, your podcast has got. And I think it is most deservedly because this is one of the most thoughtful podcasts in the circuit today. And I know a very wide audience, laymen—not only laymen, which is very important in terms of forming opinion in a country like India—but, you know, intellectuals and, you know, people who are cerebral, thoughtful, they look forward to hearing from you, your programs, you know. So, my hearty congratulations to you.

#Glenn

Well, thank you very much. That means a lot. I appreciate it. I wanted to ask—we'll start off with the BRICS summit, because this is, of course, hosted by India, and it has now finished. And I did want to ask you about, well, I guess a broad question: what is your main takeaway from this summit? Because, well, it has been interesting, especially the geopolitical situation in which this has taken place.

#M.K. Bhadrakumar

You see, there are different perspectives we can take on this in terms of BRICS as a forum and as an organic component in the tectonic geopolitical processes underway in the world. And it's on a growth trajectory. You know, there are many angles to it. I think the best summing up of the prevailing situation was by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said that BRICS has come of age, you know, and this can be put in different ways. You know, like President Xi Jinping said that, you know, that BRICS must wade into a peacemaking role. And that is a stunning response to the kind of impression in the West that BRICS cannot have its act together because of inner contradictions.

Now, obviously, as you can see, we can, down the line, develop this thought that there is a perceptible improvement in India-China relations and a willingness on the part of the two countries to work together. And BRICS is the ideal forum, in fact, you know, which can create the synergy for India-China relations on the one hand, and also in terms of, you know, BRICS's capacity to be a provider of positive thinking, positive approach, creative approach to the international geopolitical processes. So, Mr. Modi's description probably fits the bill, you know, that it has come of age. This is the most important significance of the BRICS summit, as far as I can see. Then, number two, as you mentioned also, the significance lies in that this summit, this event has taken place against the backdrop of an extremely turbulent period in world politics.

When, you know, I mean, so cavalierly, so openly, countries are speaking about, you know, going to war, you know. Like, no country—there was a time up until yesterday, day before yesterday—that no country would have had the audacity to postulate that it is preparing for a war, you know. But that is what, if you look at the West European countries, that is what the major West European countries are openly talking about, their leaderships. And they are threatening to occupy a strip of land on Russia's borders. You know, this is a kind of... So you can see, then there is the talk all the time that, you know, that this is only a step away from a... a nuclear war of some kind or the other, in terms of use of tactical nuclear weapons and so on.

So, you know, we have not really—we have had great tensions in the past in the Cold War era and so on, but there's nothing like it, nothing like what we are seeing today. And the United States under President Trump's leadership has systematically dismantled, discredited, debunked the institutions which had been put as underpinnings for international security in the post-Cold War era. And they had great relevance even for today, although the Cold War had ended. And the task should have been to strengthen them further, these institutions, to cope with the turbulent world situation, to cope with the dramatic changes in the balance of power that is taking place in the contemporary world situation. But instead of that, you know, he's gone about systematically demolishing the institutions, you know.

So, you see, the BRICS has come up now at a time like this when, you know, it has outstripped G7 in terms of its GDP, and in terms of its, therefore, its relevance, because for most of the world, particularly the Global South, it is not just the number of missiles and so on which matter, but in terms of, you know, the impetus it can give to growth and development for the Global South in particular. And from India's point of view, this is extremely important. And BRICS set for itself a goal

that it would, you know, foster economic development for its member countries. And then Mr. Modi said, I am very sure this was uppermost in his mind, that he saw—he was optimistic because he saw a potential opening now for BRICS to play a creative role. Now, there are subplots in this. BRICS may not be going for developing a new currency.

But BRICS can do something which comes to that same thing in terms of, you know, creating a payment system using local currencies, using the currencies of the member states. A lot of experimentation has gone on on this, and Russia and China have shown the way. They are conducting their trade almost entirely today in their local currencies. And my understanding is that India and Russia have moved in that direction also in a significant way. And therefore, you know, if now we go from here a step forward, which is in terms of the interoperability of the clearing systems of the member countries. We have got a clearing system. China has got a clearing system.

Russia has got a clearing system and so on. Now, how can they be made interoperable? Now, when you do that, you know, then, you know, we are going beyond the point—the controversial idea of a BRICS currency and so on—where the discussion had stalled at a certain point, you know, when this came up. And Trump began threatening also that, you know, that it is an anti-American bloc and so on. All this dissipates because we are not against anybody. BRICS is not against anybody. BRICS is not going hammer and tongs with the Americans. BRICS is developing its own currencies and therefore augmenting its capacity to have purchasing power.

And except that in the clearing system, it bypasses the dollar. That's all it does. It bypasses the dollar in terms of its clearing system. So, you know, this is now making the whole controversy built up around BRICS currency completely redundant. It may seem a small step, but to my mind, it is probably one of the most important steps forward for BRICS. BRICS is transforming. And now what will happen is, you know, a number of other things also side by side are happening. A certain type of integration is going to develop also. The Eurasian Economic Union and Iran have developed a free trade arrangement, you know, and they are entering into it.

And India is also expediting that process. So, you know, a kind of huge economic space is also developing, and BRICS can give impetus to that. Now, these are, you know, phenomenal changes. And this is not to undermine anything, but this is to update, upgrade, you know, the processes that are taking place here too. So, evidently in front of us, that is in terms of the shift in the balance of power from the Western world, you know, as it had been going on for four or five centuries, to a new paradigm. And that paradigm shift, you know, is to be contained and is to be worked upon for optimal benefit to the world economy. That is what is happening.

So it's not a... If you look at the BRICS document, it's very interesting. You know, I find, for example, that in the 45-page document, no country—there is no interest in demonizing any country. You know, like the word, you know, this five-letter word, Trump, doesn't occur even once in the document. You know, but he's there. You know, I counted something like 27 times, you know, he's there, whether it's in terms of, you know, completely, you know, rejecting the weaponization of

tariffs and the weaponization of trade and sanctions and so on. A pointed reference, in fact, to the Latin American situation. Now, who's doing this? Who's vitiating the geopolitics of Latin America? It's not China, not Russia, not the European Union. It is, you know, well, who it is. And, you know, there the president of a country is sitting in jail in the United States, you know, kidnapped from that country.

And then the man is clapping hands and saying that, you know, they have added to their reserves so many million tons of oil from Venezuela. And Venezuela's income will be now routed through New York. You know, so you see, this is the kind of thing, you know, this is like, you know, the time of the creation of the United States, you know, lawless, you know, Wild West, you know, that culture has come into international politics. These are rejected here, but there is no rhetoric there at all. So that is another point I need to mention about it, you know, that BRICS is grappling in the dark in a certain way all this while about how to choreograph a new architecture, which is going to be radically different from what existed for the last four to five centuries in terms of democratization of the world order.

But how to do it? And there is a temptation to be rhetorical about it. But this document is very mature. It is not having any rhetorical flourishes about it. And it doesn't mention anyone. It doesn't demonize Trump. It doesn't do anything. But it even supports Cuba. You know, so this is the beauty of it. So when I, therefore, you know, sum up, you know, in an overview, I think this has been a landmark event. And from here, I am exuding an optimism that its gravitas will only deepen and strengthen in the years to come. Now, it is undeniably, it has come of age, as Prime Minister Modi said, and it is now—nobody can be dismissive about it. Nobody can ignore it. It is going to be a presence in the international system.

#Glenn

Yeah, I noticed some people comment that the fact that they're not condemning the US or something, that this is somehow a sign of weakness in terms of not having a common position. But I think it's a position of strength, though, because the whole purpose here of BRICS is not to become an alliance system that is a bloc that is aimed against anyone, that it becomes an anti-American system. Instead, as you suggest, well, it could be conceptualized as anti-hegemonic because what BRICS would do, I guess, is facilitate this shift towards the new distribution of power, which is multipolar. As you said, the power shifted from the West to the East.

The idea that all economic, technological, financial power should be organized by the United States is— it can't be conceptualized as being anti-American to suggest we have to balance this out and decentralize the decision-making of the global economy. I think it's a positive step that BRICS doesn't turn into this anti-American bloc. I think it's better to keep it like this. Again, who knows? In the future, things will be better. Maybe even the US could partake in BRICS, but not yet, obviously. But I take your point that it shouldn't be anti-American. I think that would be a mistake. It'd just revive the bloc politics of the last century.

But one thing that has changed a lot, though, is now... Well, what I want to ask about is the relationship between Russia and India, because after 2014, with the toppling of the government in Ukraine, Russia essentially interpreted this as the West now pushing a proxy war against Russia. And given that you had the rise of the East, Russia effectively ended, back in 2014, its 300-year-long period since Peter the Great of looking towards the West for economic development and modernization. Instead, Russia's looking towards the East. I would say primarily China. However, at the same time, Russia doesn't want its pivot to Asia to be a pivot to China only because it doesn't want excessive dependence only on China.

And India obviously is the key, or a key partner here, to make sure that this Greater Eurasian project works, becomes a multipolar project. And so, again, I think they're betting a lot on developing relations with India. Of course, much work remains. And I guess that's where my question is going. That is, the perception of Russia in India. One gets the impression it's profoundly influenced by Western media, which has a very hostile view towards Russia, as we all know. But I couldn't help but notice at the BRICS summit that as Putin came to give a speech, he was received like a rock star, it seemed. And I was just wondering if you could explain this development of ties between Russia and India.

#M.K. Bhadrakumar

I must congratulate you for being such a perceptive observer of the situation in India, in all its dimensions, virtually, you touched upon, viewed from the Western world as an intellectual, academic, and so on, though you are not an India specialist. My congratulations to you. This is actually—you summed up the situation rather well, in my opinion. The main problem is that, you know, when the Ukraine war came, there was a kind of sudden awareness that the international situation is no longer going to be the same again, and the huge propaganda and the pressure that came from the Western world on India to join ranks with the sanctions regimes and so on at that time.

So the Indian elites—I'm not talking about the popular opinion, because Russia is a very popular entity in the Indian consciousness, always has been, and I think it will remain so. And that is, you know, in large measure, it is the soft power, you know, and the festivals of India, which the previous governments conducted painstakingly, committing so much of resources, year-long festivals of Indian culture and so on for the Russian audience. This sort of a thing is—we are now garnering the benefits of it in a way, you know. So that is there. But you're right. The problem in India is that we have a certain mastery over English language.

#M.K. Bhadrakumar

Due to colonial rule.

#M.K. Bhadrakumar

And the entire picture is handed down to us from London, New York, Washington, etc. So the Western media—and then not really the language media like German or Italian or Swedish and so on, but English media—has created havoc. In fact, this is not an isolated instance. It is all-pervasive in India. And there, what is the narrative? The narrative is of Russian invasion. And now when you look at it, you know, yes, there is merit in that, insofar as the sovereignty of the country has been violated. But then you don't go beyond that to see that the sovereignty ceased to be quite a long time ago. At least 10 years before that, the sovereignty ceased to be there, you know, in Ukraine.

When, you know, NATO had set up shop there. And the genesis of the 2014 coup. And Putin spent a lot of time, in fact, educating the public opinion. And I could see his anxiety to see that, you know, that a proper perspective must be made available to the Indian audience on this. It is not just a war. It goes beyond it. He spoke, for example, I was in the embassy in the run-up to the collapse of the Soviet Union, my second tenure in Moscow as a diplomat. And, you know, even at that time when the Soviet Union was collapsing, the talk had already begun in the cocktail circuit, where the Western diplomats and the American diplomats in particular were asking searching questions for a kind of a survey, a public opinion survey.

How many years would you think for Russia to regenerate and bounce back on the world stage? You see, because, you know, the thing is, in India, for instance, and on the other hand, the propaganda was that Russia is finished. It is extinguished. It is no longer a factor in world politics. And even knowledgeable people holding important positions, I have had arguments with them to justify—to go back to Russian history to find out that a civilization of that kind just cannot be erased. You know, it'll come back. But then, you know, what we saw was that period, you know, a lot of anarchical conditions, and Russia lost, in fact, its sovereignty. The huge transfer of resources from Russia to the Western world, some estimated almost to the tune of \$1 trillion.

You know, the country was still bare, and the resources, financial resources particularly, were taken away from the Russian economy to the Western world. And, you know, this shock therapy which was administered to the Russian economy in terms of what was described as, you know, reform and so on. Then Putin touched on a very important aspect, which those of us who were involved in, you know, Russia and, you know, who were working on Russia knew all the time: that Chechnya was not an accident. In fact, Russia had always had one of the, in my opinion, one of the best approaches, even a humanistic approach, towards the problem of, quote unquote, Islamization. You know, in the sense that it was not—Russia was one of the few countries without a prejudice about Islam.

And Russia experienced it during the Cold War. The American attempt to use Islam versus communism, you know, that kind of a juxtaposition was imposed on the intellectual discourse to see that the Soviet Union was an adversary of the world. And in fact, the truth was very different. And, you know, even at that time—let me borrow a word—you know, even at that time, Primakov was a rock star in the Muslim world. You know, he was a very knowledgeable Arabist, you know, who

crisscrossed that region. And, you know, anyway, I don't want to get into all that now. Now, therefore, you know, this Chechnya war—what is the understanding of the Chechnya war? It is radical Islam exploding into violence and separatism and terrorism.

But nobody really is talking about it, and the Western world will never talk about it, except in bits and pieces here and there. Now, I have seen now in recent times, you know, more outspoken critics of the American support for jihadism. They began talking about it. But Chechnya was, in fact—the CIA had a very big role in Chechnya. And I was delighted to hear Putin speaking about this openly here, that we experienced this. Therefore, what he said was that Russia experienced this right from day one. This aspect that the Western American calculus expected a regeneration, a resurgence of Russia on the global stage, and an agenda to roll it back and to further weaken Russia and to further balkanize the Russian Federation, was afoot right from day one.

And Chechnya was its best example. And then, three, four years down the line, the talk began. Strobe Talbott and Clinton together worked on the expansion of NATO, completely repudiating, you know, the assurances given to the Soviet leadership, Gorbachev's leadership, that now it is acknowledged that an assurance was given there, though it was not written on paper, that they will not move an inch. Why did they do that? Russia had no potential to be an enemy any longer. Russia was not the Soviet Union. And the Cold War had ended. And what did they need for NATO's expansion into the territories of the Soviet Union, creating a sense of vulnerability unnecessarily and creating a sense of confrontation?

#Glenn

You know, NATO needed an enemy image after the expansion.

#M.K. Bhadrakumar

And the demonization, thanks to people like Madeleine Albright and so on, and she in fact worked on a paper for NATO to—how to demonize Russia as the new enemy, the Russian Federation as the new enemy. Now, this is the kind of attempt, you know, which was made in the West. And when it comes to Ukraine, the first Ukraine, the first coup itself had very strong support from the Western world. I'm not talking about 2014. I'm talking about the beginning, you know, what is it called, the Orange Revolution or something at that time, you know.

#Glenn

2004, Orange Revolution.

#M.K. Bhadrakumar

Yeah, even that time. So the program of action was already drawn up at that time, which is to bring NATO and establish it and make it open its shop right on Russia's western borders. Now, Russians didn't know about it. Of course, they knew about it. Even Yeltsin knew about it. Even Yeltsin also weakly protested against it. But they didn't have the capacity to resist. And then in 2014, if you look at it again, as scholars who have studied the subject, like you or I, you and I, we know very well that Yanukovych was prepared to compromise, and he had given a pledge that he would go for a new election and put this to vote, whether Ukrainian people, Ukrainian nation wants to join NATO. And the European powers were part of that deal.

Russia brokered that deal between Yanukovych and the European powers. And what happened the next day? The whole thing exploded into violence. It was orchestrated violence because the machinery was already created and ready there, and fueled there with lavish Western financial assistance. And they created provocation and all that, and bloody violence in the streets. And in the next two days, Yanukovych left Ukraine. And they took over. The neo-Nazi elements took over. And from there, it's been a continuous, steady erosion of Ukraine's sovereignty. So when you come to your question, you know, this huge background is lost on the Indian discourses on this.

And I think that Putin came here with a purpose. Putin realizes probably the importance of rectifying these distortions in the perceptions in the Indian mind. Because, you know, it's unusual for him to spend three days on a foreign visit. You know that, you know, he seldom does visits to foreign countries unless he has some important matters to transact. And that also goes overnight visit and comes back, because there is so much work for him, evidently, in Moscow pending. So he took three days off his time. And here he was really addressing the Indian elites on the ABC of the Ukraine problem.

And that is very important that, you know, therefore, I have a feeling that this is going to be—I characterized this in a recent television interview as a golden moment in India-Russia relations, in an interview with Russia Today, in fact, a few days ago, about 10 days ago or something—that this is going to be a golden moment in India-Russia relations. Because this realization is dawning on the Indian mind that, you know, like John Donne would say, don't ask for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee. You know, what is happening to Russia can also happen to India, another plural country. It once happened to Yugoslavia. You know, all these things are realities that Indians must be aware of.

So, you know, Chechnya was brought in by Putin, and the sequence of events from 2014 leading to 2022, when the Russian intervention took place, actually, that came in. Was this a war? It was not a war. Russia had no alternative. With its back against the wall, an existential threat, it had to fight off. That is what it was. It's a geopolitical struggle. And now, when that struggle is being lost for the Western world, they are contemplating about directly intervening in the war. So, you know, it's all very clear. So, you know, that perception has dissipated. But the second aspect is this, that, you know, there is a paradox here.

The effort to isolate Russia also gave an impetus to Russia to look at the rest of the world, especially the Asian countries, with a heightened level of interest, you know, in terms of creating new markets and so on and so forth. And the fact is that, you know, the Western European markets dominated the Russian agenda all through, in a way that, you know, these were sub-regions, so to speak. But no longer is that the case, you know. And then, along with that, India realizes, for example, that, you know, India's own potential for growth is expanding. It is steadily registering a fairly impressive growth of GDP, and it is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world.

And we need supply chains and, you know, all of that. And we are into that sort of a sophisticated level of operation in the economic sphere. And there is a realization—and these oil sanctions which came, and sanctions which came from the Western world, you know, that really opened the Indian mind about, you know, how these things can be used by India and how Russia can be a seamless potential for Russia to be a partner. Our foreign secretary went to Moscow about three, four weeks ago. Putin received him, and there Putin, in fact, mentioned to him that, you know, that Russia is prepared to meet India's total requirements of

#M.K. Bhadrakumar

fertilizers.

#M.K. Bhadrakumar

It's not a small part. It is a very critical part of India's political economy because, considering that the majority of Indians are involved in the agricultural sector, and this concerns the livelihood in the agricultural sector of millions of people, hundreds of millions of people in India. It's a kind of support which is invaluable. It is much more valuable than big fighters or missiles or anything like that. It is so much more important. Similarly with oil, the Russian ambassador here, in the run-up to the BRICS, he stated that Russia is prepared to meet India's requirements for oil.

And my own judgment is that whatever may be the denouement of the Ukraine war, and even if there is going to be a negotiated settlement, which I don't think—I think we have gone beyond that point—but we can discuss it if you want. But I can tell you, looking ahead, it is going to be—when I said it is a golden moment, I factored that also into this—that, you know, the way the Ukraine war is going to end... the potentials of the Russian-Indian relationship have begun to be realized, and a small step forward in terms of tapping its potential has begun. And that is now already reflected in trade.

And that is already reflected in the sense of urgency in Moscow and Delhi to work out a new payment system. And it is also reflected in the way that active work is going on to create new transportation routes between the two countries. In sum, Russia has also sized up India as a huge market full of opportunities for Russian investment. They are moving towards quickly putting in place an investment agreement, you know, and China is also doing the same thing, investment

agreement. So, you know, the relationship is poised for a big leap forward, in my opinion. And it will be a much more sophisticated relationship than one of buying a few pharmaceutical items and a few tanks and missiles and so on.

It's going to be much more important than that. It is going to be that the two countries are going to be providing underpinnings to each other for their development. Even for Russia, it is very important; it doesn't have to look far beyond India, in fact, you know, as a market for its goods and the capital it generates. And, you know, there is potential to make investments in Russia, and we know from Russian history that their business people are very clever people. And, you know, they know, they can smell where there is money to be made, and they will go there. And that is the way now taking shape in India. And the market forces will take over, in fact.

#Glenn

It's interesting what you said about Putin's comments on Chechnya, because back in those days, often Russia's comments that there was a lot of Western involvement in encouraging Islamic fundamentalists in Chechnya, it was often dismissed in the West. It still is, not in the least. But I guess, after what we saw NATO do in Libya, and also support for the jihadists in Syria, even helping bring to power an Al-Qaeda leader who now sits as the president of Syria, I mean, it's hardly a conspiracy theory to point out that a lot of the NATO countries were willing to partner up with some very unsavory groups, be it jihadists or neo-Nazis, whoever are good fighters, they can be used as proxies. So I don't think it should be as controversial today as it was back then.

But I did want to ask, though, about, again, the American aspect of this whole thing. That is because, at the moment, as this BRICS summit went on, the U.S. is at war with Iran. It's at de facto war with Russia, along with its European partners, and it's engaged in an economic war on China. So those three countries have quite a difficult relationship with the U.S. now. Meanwhile, India seems like it wants to keep its non-aligned, neutral position and, again, avoid BRICS from being seen as this anti-American group. I was just wondering, how did this affect the summit? Because, on the other hand, from my impression, it was also the way the West froze and even stole Russian sovereign assets. It had an impact on India. It shook at least much of the world.

Here in the West, it's not really seen as being problematic, because we dressed this whole theft of Russian sovereign assets up in the clothing of moralism and virtue. So it was just and righteous, essentially. And everyone kind of has to repeat it, and there is zero dissent. But we often here forget that the rest of the world didn't necessarily buy into the NATO narrative. And even, you know, Gulf state allies of the United States are a bit concerned about how all the rules of international finance were just thrown away, you know, justified using some immoral slogans. So how—again, India has to adjust to the new reality of what the West is doing. On the other hand, it doesn't want to join an anti-Western bandwagon. So how did all of this impact India's position? And I guess, is it changing as well?

#M.K. Bhadrakumar

It is some way in the future that India would become proactive on these fronts, you know, because there is a very clear... I am giving my opinion. This is, you know, as I read the official policy, Prime Minister Modi has a very focused mind on this. By the way, I should have mentioned this. You know, he was singularly responsible for the transformation of the India-Russia relationship, you know, in this way, because he takes a hands-on role in it. And why he takes a hands-on role in it? Because he senses the importance of that relationship. But at the same time, you know, we also need the Western countries in terms of technology and so on. Much is at stake there in the relationship. I don't want to go into that. It's there.

And then, most importantly, even to keep them engaged as far as possible in a constructive way so that, you know, things don't degenerate further. I will explain to you, you know, this is a very good opportunity for me because the Western news reports have blocked it out. An American sneaked into India, and he then disappeared, you know. And then our authorities, security agencies, spotted this man coming there, and his antecedents were highly dubious, you know. And then he crossed over illegally through the northeastern region of India, which is a closed region for foreigners. You need special permission to go there because there is insurgency active in that area, and crossed over to Myanmar. And then from Myanmar, he crossed over. It's a porous border. He crossed back into Indian territory.

And then, you know, the alarm bells started ringing, and the authorities nabbed him and interrogated him, and found, I told you, that he had a dubious background, you know, of working on these sort of things in Tibet. What was the agenda? The agenda was to destabilize Myanmar, where there is a civil war condition existing, and to create synergy between the Indian insurgents and the groups on the other side of the border in Myanmar. And because they are more or less, you know, the tribal languages and all are more or less there, so create a volatile situation like it happened in Afghanistan, for example. So, you know, India is supposed to be a defining partnership of the United States in the 21st century, which is how their presidents have spoken about India, and one of the most consequential relationships. And Panetta once mentioned that this is a lynchpin for the U.S. strategy in Asia-Pacific and so on.

Is this a way that you deal with a country of such extreme importance for the United States? So, you know, it's not that we are not aware of it. There is another side to it. And then, so we publicized this man's—this dubious fellow's—activities in India and the details which came out of interrogation and so on. We publicized it, and then we handed him over to the Americans. So, you know, we didn't want to go beyond that, and we didn't want to make it an issue. This will otherwise become an issue because this is a CIA operative. Now, this is the kind of thing which is symptomatic of, you know, the real alchemy of the U.S.-Indian relationship. And occasionally, you know, during tense moments, you know, the Americans speak out like this.

And in the case of the oil purchase from Russia, the Americans blurted out a number of things which are there, you know, boiling in their subconscious, unconscious mind, you know, and a stream of consciousness suddenly appeared. And it clearly showed, you know, that they have no respect for the country. And they have no intentions of treating India as an equal country. And President Trump even openly threatened that if I want, I can destroy Prime Minister Modi. You know, this is a kind of relationship. So what is the alternative we have? One is to, you know, go hammer and tongs at their rhetoric and, you know, create also a rhetoric of our own and so on. But at the present moment, you know, it is a futile thing to do.

And it dissipates our energies. And different countries have different ways of handling it. And we have a civilizational approach towards it. Pretty confident that our country cannot be destabilized anymore. There might have been moments in the past, in the '40s and '50s, when India had a vulnerability, but it is no longer the case. India cannot be trifled with. So we are quite confident of our innate strength, and we don't need to waste breath on unnecessary rhetoric. But the point, Glenn, is this: often it is misunderstood that we are either gullible or we are even hopelessly compromised and so on. That's not the case at all.

And now the recent events in the last two, three years have shown that the will is, you know—there is iron in the will, you know, to hold on to the national interests. And Modi cannot be trifled with that way. And Modi has a total grip on this paradigm, and also that is why the Russians also know. Putin has mentioned this himself, that, you know, he complimented Modi for the decisive role and the great interest that he has taken in the relationship. So, you know, why do we have to otherwise? You know, we don't really know what is happening in the Sahel region, happening in Libya, and what happened in Syria. We all know that, like you and I, we don't have any means of, you know, getting access to intelligence reports and so on. But as intelligent people who have, you know, had an intellectual approach to life, we could make out, we could make out through, you know, cognition, you know, what was happening there and who must be behind this. I think for some time to come, at least India will go on this track.

And, you know, I think China sets a very good example there. China knows so much about what is happening here. And I hope the situation comes when, you know, the intelligence agencies of the two countries could start working together and speaking ahead of time. But that is the kind of thing that we should reach. China understands it, but China doesn't show it and move on. So when Xi Jinping says that BRICS should play a peacemaking role in the world situation, I think he was alluding to seamless possibilities ahead, if, you know, the relationship between China and India develops and if the discords, you know, can be ironed out. And the two leaderships have, by the way, agreed that the adversarial relationship has turned into a partnership now.

So I am sanguine in that. You know, the Indians have the intellectual sagacity to know what is happening. And it's all a matter of how they are projecting themselves in the given situation. And in the given situation, I think we are doing the right thing by not frittering away our energies and, you

know, doing unnecessary grandstanding in situations. Look at the position India has taken towards Myanmar. You know, it is the pragmatism there. It is dealing with the powers that be in Myanmar, the military. And it is not allowing at all any kind of, you know, attempt by the Western intelligence agencies to use Indian territory as a springboard for undertaking the insurgency in Myanmar.

During the peak of the insurgency in Myanmar, they have to now operate almost entirely from Thailand. But India would have been the best way to reach up to the Chinese border. But, you know, despite the differences with China, we have not fallen for that, you know. So these are examples. And the Myanmar general came to India, and we spent two, three days here and discussed with him the common concerns. And, you know, so as I mentioned earlier, you know, John Donne's line is very important, in my opinion. And as a student of literature, I have always, you know, had this thought in my mind that, you know, this is not a freak phenomenon. It can come to haunt India also.

#Glenn

Ambassador, thank you so much for sharing your insights on this.

#M.K. Bhadrakumar

Thank you. Thank you very much for this opportunity, Glenn. And I wish you all the best, and my compliments on your arrival on the world stage in molding intellectual processes. And you go from this position to another position of strength in the period ahead.

#M.K. Bhadrakumar

All the best. Thank you.