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Brookings Cafeteria Podcast:
India's foreign policy

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DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, a podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. Today's episode features conversations with the authors of two recent books from the Brookings Institution Press. First up, a really interesting discussion with Shivshankar Menon on his book, *Choices Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy*. Ambassador Menon was India's Foreign Secretary and national security adviser. *Choices* offers answers to questions about how one of the world's great rising powers makes its decisions on the world stage and the difficult choices that sometimes had to be made.

And then part three of a fascinating conversation with Greg Clark, author of *Global Cities: A Short History.* In this piece, Clark talks about the political dimensions of global cities. You can listen to part one about the history of global cities in our November 4th episode and part two our discussion of cities to include Singapore, Vienna, and San Diego aired on December 9th. As always these book interviews are done by my colleague in the Brookings Institution Press, Bill Finan. Here's Bill with Shivshankar Menon.

MENON: Thank you Fred and hello to you.

FINAN: Ambassador Menon thank you for joining us today.

MENON: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

FINAN: I want to begin with a very broad question. How is foreign policy made in India?

MENON: Well it's it's a tough question, but as in most other countries foreign policy is the one area which is very much the function of the sovereign. I think in all our constitutions, in fact our constitution draws very heavily from the US Constitution, we've

tried checks and balances, we've distributed powers between the executive, the judiciary, the legislature, but foreign policy is one thing that the executive does in all our countries and most democracies.

And in India, it is centralized around the prime minister, just as in the U.S. it's centralized around the president. But as it's got more and more complex over time I think now we you know you need more of more domestic actors involved in foreign policy. In the last few years even in the provinces, states as we call them in India, are now very involved in it. Apart from the central bureaucracies and diplomats, the military, the civil service, economic interests, which don't drive a lot of foreign policy, NGOs, other civil society organizations. So actually if you ask who makes foreign policy, it's really a combination of all these. But the decisive voice ultimately is the prime minister and the group around him, the cabinet.

FINAN: So it's much as you said would find in any democratic state. Because often Indian foreign policy has spoken in a sort of a monolithic stance and I think especially in American press, and so just having that analogy in mind would help.

MENON: We've actually had a lot of political argumentation within India about foreign policy, right from the start. I think most states maintain this myth of consensus at home about foreign policy, that partisan politics ends and the U.S. says at the water's edge, we say the water's edge in the mountains, but that's really stretching the truth. Foreign policy has always been contentious, and I think in today's world, because foreign policy has so many effects within our societies, you know climate change negotiations abroad, it affects your own energy security around manufacturing, how your economy runs. So it will be domestically discussed and debated.

FINAN: Your book is entitled *Choices*, about making hard decisions about foreign policy issues. But I want to ask about you, because you're one of the people who helped make these choices for India. You've served as a national security adviser, foreign secretary to prime ministers, and also is India's ambassador to a number of countries, China and Pakistan. What drew you to the Foreign Service?

MENON: Well I actually got in, I think sideways, as it were, I was studying ancient India and China, and I was doing a Ph.D. on Kingship in modern India and China in third century BC. And I wanted to see China, because I'd studied China and China was in the middle of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-60s, in the late 60s, and the only way of seeing China for an Indian in those days was as a diplomat, and I chose the easy way. So I thought I'd become a diplomat, see China, and then go back to university to finish my Ph.D.. I got hooked. I loved the job. I loved the excitement. I liked the work. I like the fact that it took you into contact with so many people, most of them intelligent. So I enjoyed it. Never left.

FINAN: And your time within the Foreign Service in India has also spanned that time when India began to look outward in many ways.

MENON: So we were really in many ways a blessed generation because this was also the time India, I think, transformed itself in many ways. It acquired power agency in the international system and really it was a time when you could innovate when there was a lot to be done in foreign policy for the first time. It was creative work, it was good work.

FINAN: You argue in the book that personalities matter in the making of foreign

policy, not theory not abstraction, but people. One of the examples you gave is of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the making of Indian foreign policy with Sri Lanka. You say he guided policy in both life and in death. How did he do that?

MENON: Well in life because I think he tried very hard while he was alive to try and help Sri Lanka to resolve its own internal crisis and the Civil War basically, by finding a solution within which all Sri Lankans, Tamil or any other ethnicity could live within the framework of a united Sri Lanka, rather as we do in India, as a plural multi-lingual, multi-religious society. He tried very hard, colluding you know, sending in troops to keep the peace. It was only in 1987 and he said it didn't quite work.

As a result of that because he was the one who sent the troops into Sri Lanka, it was actually a terrorist LTTE Tamil Tiger terrorist group suicide bomber who killed Rajiv Gandhi, and in a sense that made it inevitable that India adopts certain positions in the future in dealing with the 26 year civil war. I try and describe in the book how that war ended and the difficult choices that it presented to us in India and how we tried to manage it.

In fact I think it’s a good example of what I'm trying to say in the book which is that you make choices in government with incomplete information, under the pressure of events and that it's very rare that you have a pure good, pure bad choice or black or white, in terms of describing the situation or knowing the consequences of what you're choosing. So you try and minimize Harm, maximize gain for as many people as possible, so that what you do then endures. And I think that's the point I try and make, that it's not about winning or losing or being right or wrong or being good or bad entirely, because you're operating really in the fog of circumstances.

FINAN: There's one thing that did come through to me in reading through the book and the stories and in the chapters that you present, that there's lots of gray area obviously. And these are hard choices to make and people make the best decision they can. I mean they aren't subscribing to an abstract international relations at the moment that they're making a decision too. One of the chapters discusses the 2005 agreement between the U.S. and India on civilian nuclear commerce. This comes after India in 1998 declared itself a nuclear weapons states. It was a major change in U.S. Indian relations. And this was negotiated under the George W. Bush administration.

And the reason I wanted to bring it up is because you describe again here how personalities really mattered. Prime Minister Singh and President George W. Bush seemed to mesh and seemed to be able to work together. What also interested me too is the portrait you paint of George W. Bush as a man who was very engaged, very interested, and decisive too when it came to this.

MENON: Well it was I think it was really transformational moment in India U.S. relations and the decision to try and deal with the toughest issue, the issue on which really relations that soured in the late 70s early 80s, the nuclear issue and to try and remove it and make it an issue where we could cooperate both for the energy, for the clean energy that he promised and for what he did for the relationship. And I think it took President Bush certainly, and it also took Prime Minister Manmohan Singh together to see the potential and to push it through.

I don't think it was an easy thing to do and I was very impressed by the way in which President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh actually set a clear goal and then went after it, at a time when the final steps for that were really done in 2008,

when the world economy was crashing, when at the same time we were going to Congress with one, two, three agreements between India and the US, and Congress is also being asked to pass the TARP economic recovery program. And that that really says something for commitment and for seriousness of purpose.

FINAN: Right the TARP program was very controversial in this country, the program bailed out banks assets. And 1, 2, 3 agreement again was what?

MENON: It was the bilateral cooperation agreement on nuclear energy between India and the US.

FINAN: In another chapter, you discuss issues not just so much personalities, but also hard choices as the Mumbai attacks which occurred in November of 2008. That's when terrorists from the Lashkar-e-Taiba, a terrorist group based in Pakistan, attacked Mumbai and killed nearly 200 people over the course of two days. What I found fascinating in this chapter is the question in your mind of how to retaliate, what was the best way was to retaliate. And can you talk a little bit about that because it was interesting to me.

MENON: I think it's you know the immediate and I think emotionally satisfying sort of response of many Indians at that time would have been, oh they've hit us let's hit them back. But actually in some ways when we thought about it, that is exactly what the terrorists who attacked Mumbai wanted. They wanted to provoke India-Pakistan hostility, and their sponsors in Pakistan also wanted a much higher level of violence between the two countries, they wanted possibly by attacking Mumbai to also provoke violence within India.

I found it fascinating that the Indian public, they obviously said that things have to be done. When we were within six months of a general election, so I thought this was going to be politically divisive, it would be raised in the campaign. But when the opposition parties tried to raise it, the public pushback was very strong, saying why are you playing politics with something that is a national problem, that is a national tragedy and that we need to deal with it as a nation rather than taking party political advantage out of this, which I thought was a remarkable public response. Very mature.

We actually did the calculus. What happens if we do retaliate overtly militarily? What happens if we don't? And I came to the conclusion that actually an overt military response while it might be satisfying emotionally and might satisfy some public demand for revenge and so on, actually wouldn't either degrade terrorist capabilities or stop their ability to do this again. And in fact it would only give the opponents of better India-Pakistan relations an excuse to carry out their agenda.

So, frankly, on balance we decided that it would be better to try and get the international community involved, strengthen counterterrorism work, and try and isolate those elements in Pakistan which were actually doing this to us, whether it was the jihadi Tanzim, this Lashkar-e-Taiba, or their sponsors in the Pakistani establishment.

FINAN: And in the end, there were these discreet attacks or counterterrorism events where those people who were responsible were found and arrested, right?

MENON: Well, some of that some of them, I think the main perpetrators are still, the trial is still supposedly going on in Pakistan. I'm not sure if they'll ever carry it through.

FINAN: Right. It's very different than what happened after 9/11 in the United

States in the sense that it is a political action and military action.

MENON: I think that's one of the questions the book raises. Because the reason terrorists do what they do is not because of the amount of kinetic damage they can cause but by the disproportionate response that they can provoke. That's what they want. They want the publicity, that's their oxygen, they need the publicity, they need to arouse hate. They need to get you to respond in certain ways. Without that the terrorists loses his act, loses all meaning. Right they want to magnify that. They want you to magnify it for them right.

FINAN: I want to ask the larger question again to you, why are relations between India and Pakistan so fraught. Or maybe that's too strong a word. Why are they so difficult?

MENON: Well three or four reasons, I think. Of course, one is that India got its independence from the British but Pakistan got its independence from India. So I think that's one reason. The other problem is Zia Al-Huq the former president of Pakistan used to say that if a Turk stops being Muslim, he’s still a Turk, if an Egyptian stops being an Muslim he's still an Egyptian, if a Pakistani stops being a Muslim he becomes Indian. So there's an identity problem there, which I think it's been 60 years, but I'm not sure that it's fully resolved. It is a struggle within Pakistan for the soul of Pakistan between.

I mean you see extreme religious elements. You know some of these jihadi groups and so on. Who have one version of what an Islamic Pakistan should be. And there's much more moderate elements civil society who have a different version of what kind of Pakistan they want to build. And since for most of its existence Pakistan hasn't

been a democracy, that's a problem they haven't solved. So it serves the interest of those who were in power in Pakistan to have a certain managed level of hostility with India because it strengthens their sense of their hold over the levers of power and the budget and so on within Pakistan.

I think some of it is also because it's not just an identity problem or the nature of the state or the weakness of the state and its institutions in fact, some of it's some of it is also built into the situation. I think we used to be one market, where we're very familiar with each other. So in some ways quarrels between brothers are much harder we know the bad thoughts and the other ones minds those are in some ways much harder to solve. At the same time when you see individual Indians and Pakistanis together they get along like a house on fire. So that gives hope well there's hope. But I think it will take time to work itself out.

FINAN: One of the chapters in the book deals with Sri Lanka again, we were talking about with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and this is where I think I can really feel the sense of difficult choices that had to be made. This is how India had to respond to the emergence of the Tamil Tigers guerrilla slash terrorist group that wanted to create a homeland for the Tamil in Sri Lanka. And you describe it with great detail and also with a lot of what I think of restrained emotion what happened with the eradication of that group at the end. Did you find that one of the more difficult moments?

MENON: For me, yes. And also personally because I had served in Sri Lanka three years as high commissioner earlier, long before the events that we described in the book because the Tamil Tigers were really eliminated militarily at the end of 2008, beginning of 2009. I'd been there 10 years before 97 to 2000 and had a lot of friends

Tamils, Sinhalese across all the divides. And it really I mean Sri Lanka is you know the word serendipity comes from Sri Lanka and it really is the beautiful island with really very talented, cultured, civilized people and it was a real tragedy.

I think our problem in early 2009 was that you could see the incoming militarily. It was clear that the state was going to prevail over this terrorist group, the Tamil Tigers. But there was a humanitarian crisis that came along with that, because this was a fairly brutal ending to a war. So we had a humanitarian interest in the Tamils. We have 60 million Tamils on our side of the border, within India and there was an election going on. There was also a strategic interest in making sure that Sri Lanka didn't become such a mess that you know other parts started playing in what amounts to an aircraft carrier 14 miles off the coast of India, an unsinkable craft carrier actually.

So we had all these interests: humanitarian, strategic, domestic, political, all of them are working at cross-purposes. And it was a very difficult task therefore to reconcile them. Quite apart from the emotions that you know the assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi arose within India that the Tamil Tigers were prescribed group in India still are actually, as a terrorist group even though their military effectiveness has been wiped out. They have been completely eradicated from the island at least on military terms. There might be sympathizers and so on but they're not an organized group.

FINAN: At the end of the book you talk about whether India should be a great power. Why can't we think of it as one now and what has to happen for it to become a great power?

MENON: Well I think it has very great influence and that's a natural function of its

position, and its geography, its history, its size, its weight, and it matters. There's no question, it has tremendous influence, but I think as a country, as a state it has only slowly accumulated hard power and the attributes of hard power. And also it has to think through how far it wants to use that power abroad in an expeditionary sense.

So long as India's primary task is to transform itself because there are too many poor, too many illiterate, too many diseased people. There is still so much to do in terms of solving India's own problems. The primary task of India's foreign policy will be actually to help the transformation of India to create an enabling environment to broad work with partners to that end, rather than an expansionists you know projecting an expedition in kind. So in that sense the classical definition of great power includes all those aspects. And that's why I don't use the term.

India is a great country but I don't think it needs to act like a traditional great power today because it has other priorities and that's why I end up by saying that India will be a different power because it will have influence, it will weight in the system. It will count on issues that matter to India. It will certainly participate very actively in the international system because the international system matters to India's transformation but it will act differently from other parts.

FINAN: Ambassador Menon, I want to thank you today for coming by to talk about the book. It's a book with a lot of lessons for those who practice foreign policy outside South Asia and anywhere. Thanks again.

MENON: Thank you.

DEWS: You can learn more about choices inside the making of India's foreign

policy on our website. And also find a conversation between Ambassador Menon and U.S. Ambassador Nicholas Burns that was held on October 7. And now here's Bill Finan again, with part three of his conversation with Greg Clark.

FINAN: So we have these global cities which are economic powerhouses. There's also a political side to this discussion too. There's a tension between the global city and the nation state that's existed through time ever since nation state came into being. Can you talk a little bit about that today?

CLARK: Sure. Well I think it is the big challenge we identify by the way that there are three key challenges that global cities face moving forward. And the one you've just mentioned is the third. But for completeness let's mention that the first one of course is learning to compete and competing successfully. Becoming a global city means competition and not all cities are ready to compete. Not all cities know how to compete, building both a competitive mindset and building an analytical framework that enables you to compete with confidence is very difficult. The second challenge of course is that global cities produce their own unintended consequences.

The consequences of success is usually population growth. The consecration of population growth is usually overcrowding, infrastructure stress, inflation in housing markets, tensions over land uses, many other kinds of difficulties that go along with growing rapidly which is what happens to a globalized city. But the third one is the one that you raise, which is the frictions and tensions as it were between the interests of the global city and the interests of the nation state. And this I think is perhaps the biggest challenge as we move forward. Many authors are currently writing about a new era of city states emerging.

I have to say I don't see that. I see a huge spectrum of cities wanting, wishing, and becoming more global, but I don't see those cities acquiring the institutional frameworks of states. They don't become fully autonomous self-governing bodies, they don't become independent of their nations, they don't have their own armies and their own currencies, unless they happen to be you know Singapore and perhaps Hong Kong. So it's necessary I think for the successful global city to negotiate a deal with the nation state.

This involves I think resolving and in an apparent dilemma, I'd put it very much like this: that on the one hand global cities are able to add a huge amount to their nation states, they are able to raise productivity. They're able to increase the stock of jobs, they're able to add hugely to tax revenues and resources that can pay for amenities and public services and infrastructures all over the country. They're able to do a huge range of things that grow the economy. On the other hand as they do that, they tend to have the unintended effect of sucking in to the global city, all of the talent, all of the capital, all of the opportunity as it were.

The unintended consequences of the agglomerated effect of these cities is that they are perceived by the nation states to be denuding the other cities and regions and towns within the nation of their opportunity. So a new kind of strategy and settlement is required to really address this issue. And I think it involves several elements: the first one is obviously that proper accounting and analysis needs to be done about the costs and the opportunities of the advantages and the disadvantages that come with a global city.

You need a clear balance sheet so that a nation state can see it clearly and can promulgate real information. Second thing is that you need to help the other cities and regions in a nation where you have one or more globalizing cities to develop firstly connectivity to that city so that they can see it as a customer, see it as an opportunity, see it as a place in which they can also find prosperity. And that needs to be improved with connectivity and with what we might call complementary strategies. And then the third thing you need of course is for the nation state to be a proactive state in thinking about how it can support the development of cities that are not the global city and that might mean reallocation of public assets. It might mean adopting very different strategies in different places.

So I suspect this is the agenda for the coming era. Bill, and I expect to see many more cities of this kind negotiating new deals as it were with their nation state, where there's much more clarity about the costs and benefits of the global city, and a clearer path as it were to managing those tensions so that the nation can really benefit

FINAN: You sketched out a trajectory for a global citizen globally, but at the same time we're at this moment of Brexit and then we have this political season in the United States where globalization is being called into question. Is there a tension there that puts into question that trajectory of the global cities?

CLARK: Well certainly you're absolutely right that there's a politics not just here in the United States or in the UK, where I live, but all over Western Europe and it's happening in certain parts of Asia and Australasia as well. Essentially it looks like this, that because the global economy is seen to accelerate and exacerbate forces of change which are happening anyway to do with how technology changes the labor market, how

talented labor becomes very mobile, how capital chooses its locations carefully, people begin to understand that globalization has losers as well as winners.

And the losers, or the people who perceive themselves to be losers from globalization, obviously want to exercise their right to protest against it and to improve things. So, you face I think, an interesting policy dilemma. Do you as a national government in that context try to reverse globalization in some way, try to move into a protectionist policy, try to raise tariffs, try to reduce access, increase visa restrictions, those sorts of things?

Or do you go back to these more primary observations that we make in the book about trade and connectivity, about diverse populations and entrepreneurism, about innovation and influence, discovery in new markets and geopolitical opportunity, and think instead about how to be wiser in this next cycle of globalization to manage those opportunities to take advantage from them. But to do them in ways that really invests in the ability of people and places to participate.

That presupposes a different kind of government that invests much more in skills, invests much more in infrastructure, particularly transport infrastructure and invest in building cities where there's less segregation and more integration and invest in creating regions and nations which deliberately manage the way assets and resources are deployed to create an economy which is much more participative. So, I suspect you will see some progressive states moving in that direction. But the politics over the next decade or two are going to be extreme, and it's going to be very difficult I think for people to find their way to that kind of new settlement easily.

FINAN: Greg thank you very much for coming by today to talk about your new

book, *Global Cities: A Short History*. Thank you very much.

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