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KAMALNAYAN BAJAJ CONFERENCE ROOM

Discussion | A World in Flux: The Atlantic Community, West Asia, and the Indo-Pacific

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PROCEEDINGS

Dhruva Jaishankar: Welcome to Brookings India, My name is Dhruva Jaishankar. I think I know most of you already. I am senior fellow for foreign policy at Brookings India and it is my pleasure here to being a moderator in this conversation this afternoon on a world in flux: the Atlantic community, West Asia and the Indo-Pacific. This is really an occasion to have this conversation with two people who are colleagues at the Brookings institute and leaders at the Brookings institution in Washington DC. To my left is Strobe Talbott, who has been president of the Brookings Institution for the last fifteen years. He was a journalist at the Times Magazine, then was Deputy Secretary of State in the Clinton Administration. During which time he had almost become a household name. Here in India, for leading the talks with Jaswant Singh after the 1998 nuclear tests. He not just has experience in dealing with India but also with many troubled hotspots all around the world and had much of his career focused on the Soviet Union, Russia and Europe. To my right is the gentleman who will be succeeding Strobe Talbott at the president of the Brookings Institution in just a few weeks' time. General John Allen, who spent forty years in the US Marine Corps, amongst other things he was the deputy commander of US Central Command and was the commander of US's International forces in Afghanistan for a few years before retiring. He

subsequently went on to have a career as a diplomat. He served as a diplomat in the Middle East peace talks, and between Israel, Palestine and Jordan. Then was present as Obama's appointee to lead the diplomatic efforts against the Islamic state. He will be succeeding, as I said, as the president of the Brookings Institution. We would have a conversation here, with the two of them and I start off by just asking them a few questions and after which, we will very soon will bring all of you into the conversation and hopefully give you an opportunity to ask them questions about developments around the world.

Mr Strobe, let me start with you, the first area in this event is about the Atlantic Community and I think for many years, at least for some generations of the people in the United States, the Atlantic community was an article of faith. But today, the things are a little bit different. We have populist movements in Western Europe. We have concerns about the relations between the West and Russia, which have sharply deteriorated since 2014. And we have a President in the United States who is famously and vocally skeptical of the notion of US Alliance commitments, including in Europe. I guess the question to start off is does the Atlantic community exist in anyway today and does it have much of a future?

Strobe Talbott: Fortunately, it still exists. Unfortunately, it is not very good. I sometimes see it as a see-saw. Back in the 1980's or in the early 1990's, the sea-saw loosed like this, the USSR or Russia was down and we know what that meant. It meant that the system well apart , the state disintegrated and that had a profound influence on the western part of the see-saw because all of a sudden the great threat that bought about NATO, and NATO helped bring about the EU, was gone. The American President at that time, George. H.W. Bush said that we now have a Europe that would be Russia-free and that sort of shot the west up, almost to euphoria. So here we are, about quarter of a century later and the see-saw has done this and I would think that in some ways it wasn't just the new and authoritarian government and leader of the Russian federation that brought this about. It was in part, because where in the 80 the west is was all about integration, now the west is about disintegration including the desecration of individual states. We are seeing in the headlines today about the possibilities of a Catalonia's succession from Spain , Brexit is not only something that is going to take or which may take, most people think 'will take' UK out of the European Union or it could strain UK itself. The UK may end up being not such a united kingdom. And that has

given Putin and Putinism a real shot in the arm. Under Putin, Russia is not only reintegrating itself, but it is also expanding using let's say the geo-political instruments of hard power of the early part of the 20th century, which is bad news. I'll stop with just one more hopeful note. All these dynamics describing are very much in the minds of, let's call them responsible and influential leaders in Europe. But as Dhruva suggested, there are a lot of concerns in Europe, particularly among America's allies in Europe. There is concern whether the current President of the United States is committed to that 70 year old legacy that Dhruva mentioned at the very onset.

Dhruva Jaishankar: Just a quick follow up, India has an old and a deep relation with Russia. When the Ukraine crisis broke in 2014, there was view here, a nationalist view here that in part, whatever the means were, whatever the merits of the means that were used by Russia in the annexure of Crimea, at least Europe and the US are partly to be blamed for shifting the goal post on expansion in a way that provoked Russia to respond. Do you think, his view has been articulated by John Mearsheimer and the others as well? Do you give this view any credence?

Strobe Talbott: One of these days, I will maybe find a way of agreeing with John Mearsheimer but let's leave him aside. I think the charge which is part of the Russian narrative, is simply false. There wasn't any changing or moving of the goal post. Back in the 90's, the United States with a lot of support from Germany, in particular felt that it was very important that NATO move east. But it would be a new NATO. In fact it would be interesting to hear John's perspective of that because NATO is of course a security and military part of the western community which is based on values, democracy, open society and that kind of thing. Had we not allowed the member-states of what was then a defunct Warsaw pact? If we had left them in a kind of a strategic vacuum, it would be very likely that a number of those countries would have been very frightened that Russia might turn bad someday which would have been pressuring. And they would also go back to squabbles amongst themselves, including territorial squabble. Whereas if you brought them into a new NATO, which by the way never, at least in the Clinton administration never said that Russia itself would be exempt from NATO, it would be a long time in the future. But it was no longer an alliance in those days to contain Russia, it was to maintain stability and allow for the growth of democracy in countries that had, not had it for a long time. Very importantly, and this is one reason why Germany in particular

wanted to see the expansion of NATO. But, those countries as NATO members would be accepted into the European Union.

Dhruva Jaishankar: Final, quick question with a twitter answer, a 140 character answer. Knowing what we know now, and knowing that you did lots for the cause of disarmament. Did Ukraine make a mistake by giving up nuclear weapons at end of the Cold war?

Strobe Talbott: Absolutely no, now that gives me a couple of more characters. If the Ukrainians refused to let go of their nuclear weapons, that would not have stopped the Russian federation from doing what it did after the Sochi Olympics. Putin would have probably done it long before because he has, Russia had a lot of, let's say assets, that would make those weapons probably unusable for the Ukrainian government.

Dhruva Jaishankar: Thank you very much. Pivot a little bit to the south and to the middle east, which in India we call it West Asia. General Allen, you've served a long time there, you have come to know the region very well. But we find ourselves in a situation where the Middle East is in perhaps more disarray than

anytime in the past 20-30 years, at the very least. With the number of simultaneous conflict, a number of fragile states. Some of that blame, for the state of Middle East is placed in the region on the United States and its involvement there. As somebody who has been involved as the military commander there, what do you think, the US can do if anything but to help stabilize the Middle East?

John R. Allen: First let me make the comment that it is really wonderful being here with Brookings India. It is a marvellous organisation that is doing terrific work. And its work, that in Washington, we are proud to be a partner with you and in undertakings, so thank you for the invitation to be here. And thank you for the opportunity to do this, this afternoon. As with anything, a topic this complex defies a twitter answer, it defies almost any answer. But I will simply say a couple of things, I have been in and out of the Middle East for twenty five years or so. A lot of time in the last few years and you have to understand several that are at work there and almost no external powers policy with respect to the Middle East has been successful. And in some cases, some of those policies have been spectacular failure. But, let's just diagnose what the problem has been. Almost anyone who observes the Middle East today or

Middle East crisis today will make a mistake if perhaps the first stopping point or the first membrane that they are passing through isn't the cold war that has emerged between the Saudi led Sunni nations and the Iranian or the Persian led Shia elements. The weaponisation of the differences within Islam have created an enormous dynamic in the region and almost any problem that you find there , if you scratch it out just for a moment , you will discover that there is some element of that cold war, at work in the process. But that's not it, that's not only it. Hundred years after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which is roughly where we are today. And in the aftermath of the Arab spring, which revealed for us, I think in ways that we had not anticipated; structural weakness across the systems of governance of North Africa and the traditional Middle East and in other areas. What we have found is that, there were enormous structural weaknesses in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire because systems of governance never really were put into place in the manner that supported the populations at large. And if you look back at this, almost none of the people in the Middle East would ever have chosen the borders that were imposed on them by the outside colonial powers in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Versailles Treaty and the mandatory period. The period of mandate where much of the Middle East was turned over to the European powers, who by

the way, couldn't do any better than the Ottomans in controlling the region. They would never have drawn those borders that way, Sykes-Picot come into mind suddenly. They would probably not have selected the leadership, which would ultimately be imposed on them by outside powers. And they would probably have chosen other systems of governance that was more consistent with their traditions, their own histories, their tribal relations, and their faith and in this case their particular convection within the faith of Islam. So, we had multiple opposing force vectors if you will and then in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the end of World War I and those continue to simmer, but they were never under any real pressure from within. They might have been in pressure from without the period of the Arab-Israeli wars but what happened in the late December of 2010 and early 2011, was the uprising of the youthful element of one country after another. Utterly despairing of any future either in a dictatorial regime or in a unresponsive tribal regime and I was at the central command at that time when Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia set fire to himself, it literally threw the match onto the region. We watched the region burn itself down from one end to another. We listened to Al-Qaeda seeking to find justification of their view of Salafi Jihadi , extremism in what was happening and frankly Al-Qaeda tried to sprint out ahead to take credit for this. When in fact, this was a massive failure

of Arab governance, it was a massive failure of societal support and it was the human condition, which revolted in the region. And it revolted, for good reasons that were in many respects local but in many cases were similar. But it was next to the key point; it was really accelerated in way that we have never seen before by social media. And one after another as groups of young Arabs or North Africans across the region saw what was happening in the adjacent countries by virtue of Twitter, Instagram or YouTube, it just exploded. So, today we have several civil wars. And I won't take you through them because everybody is familiar with the agony. But today we have several civil wars, the Syrian civil war being the most symbolic how bad this can be, where the preponderance of the population of Syria is displaced. It has destabilized in many respects, the front line states Turkey Jordan, Lebanon and to some extent Egypt. But now to Strobe's point, because there is a linkage here. The enormous refugee flows into Europe has been in fact destabilized European politics as well. This influx of a new quality of individual, now I don't say quality in the context of good, bad or different but as a different element of society into Europe was responded to often with right-wing politics and nativist politics, polarising the political environment, aided by the way, by a highly sophisticated Russian influence operation to destabilize confidence in democratic system within Europe. And

this is where we see the intersection of what has happened in the Middle East with what is happening with Europe today. And if we don't get a handle on it, it will only get worse.

The most recent conflict in the Middle East of course is between Qatar on one side and the so called quartet on the other which is Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt. And, on any given day you can take side, one side or the other with the grievances of the two elements. But, I think the outcome of this is pretty clear, we are beginning to see some exhaustion creeping into our friend in the region and America has friends on both side of the conflict. We are seeing that Qatar is perhaps moving more closely towards the orbit of Iran, although they very clearly are an Arab state and we are very close relation with them but that's not an outcome that we want to see. We see the reintroduction of Turkish influence into the region, which is not necessarily something that the Arabs want to see themselves. And the potential for turkey and Iran to find common interest and common purpose in the Gulf, and I think worst of all, I think that the GCC may be permanently wounded in this process. So what do we do about it? Well, we need United States to have a policy. Any policy would be good. But a policy soon which puts or gives our precious friends in the region, which gives our European partners in the region , which gives

our allies in the region, which given them some context than for us to take community action or the community of nations to deal with this. In the end, most of the problems in the Middle East, apart from the weaponisation of convectional differences within Islam, are human problems. And the causal factor associated with this is what we have to address. An absence of access to education, an absence of a participatory government, an absence of a functioning judiciary, no equal rights for women and in many cases zero economic prospects for many of the young men and women of the Middle East. And as a direct result of that, since we can't seem to come together as a community of nations and certainly most of these nations can't do it for themselves, the long term effect is the massive wide spread radicalisation of tens of millions of young men and women and that radicalization creates instability within countries but pushes them into the arms of extremist. And pretty soon they are strapping on suicide vests. So my view would be, we have to swim upstream in this crisis, we have to swim upstream and identify the causal factors that creates such distress at the human level and begin as a community of nations to work with these states in the middle east to begin to solve these problems. It is a very complicated issue and it didn't start last Tuesday and we are not going to solve it next Tuesday. This is a generational issue. We have go to take some action in the short term at the near horizon to

defend ourselves and to keep more states from going over the edge. Perhaps 10-15 years out in a concerted effort in the community of nations to work with countries to strengthen institutions of governance, finance and education, etc. To stabilize the population. And then it's a very deep horizon, a whole generation out, just constantly be engaged with the countries of the region to stabilize them over in the long term. Helping them to develop institutions of governance and to provide the kinds of services to the populations that can reduce radicalisation. We are always going to find terrorist, we are always going to find extremist. But we can do something about the causal factors of radicalization. And we can never solve all of them but we can certainly get at many of them, if this think about this in a systematic way. This is the role United States can play, is to help to organize the process.

Dhruva Jaishankar: One more question, pivoting further east to into the pacific, to the region we are in. In some ways, there is great deal of concern about the growing militarization in the region. We have seen a number of stand-offs of late, the number of territorial disputes that have been flaring up. At the same time, I think it's important to keep in mind that we haven't seen a major conflict in this part of the world for some time

now, for over a generation, possibly the China-Vietnam war being the last major conflict in the region. But, the nature of warfare is now changing, could you perhaps talk about some of the changes that are taking place in the military domain in terms of military technologies that will upset this fragile balance.

John R. Allen: There are a couple of things which I will say about this. There is in military theory a concept of nature of war versus character of war. The nature of war is the human dimension of conflict and the human dimension, which has the capacity to understand the geo-strategic environment in which it operates but also to understand other aspect, the character of war, which is typically about the technology associated with war. And when the nature of war and the character of war are in sync then your capabilities are relatively well known and you can actually develop coherent military strategies. But when they get out of sync, you find the results, the perfect example would be when certain leading German military officers in the inter war years recognized that a fast moving armoured vehicle coupled with the new innovation called the radio and supported from the air by radio by flying artillery, created an integration, a capability of warfare one could ever have imagined on the other

side. And it was only the integration of technology that existed, the Blitzkrieg and in the United States case, the Japanese were very attempted to developments to the beginning the WWII. When they saw the German...excuse me the British attack of the Italian fleet in Torontol, the swordfish by-planes coming of a British carrier, dropping torpedoes and taking out much of the Italian fleet. While the United States was engaged in a substantial debate on whether we must have more battleships or carriers. The Japanese ended that debate for us by on the 7th of December, because the American nature of war had not kept up with the integrative capabilities of the technologies of war, and finally the Japanese taught us that problem. We are in a new situation like that today, which is that the Russian capacity to wage hybrid war which by the way, is underway right now, as far as I am concerned in the eastern portion of NATO and central Europe, which is highly sophisticated influence operation which seeks to sow widespread cynicism and concern over system of government and democratic principles. And it really undermines the confidence of populations within states and with states within the EU and with states within the NATO, Hybrid warfare. And it comes in various forms and it relies on many aspects on cyber operation.

But there is a new form of warfare that really worries me and it is the advent of artificial intelligence and high speed computing. And is known as Hyper War. And where in hybrid war, you may encounter the requirement to take a decision in weeks, days and hours. In hyper war, when we find ourselves with commands and control that ingest petabyte of information and can be programed for autonomous decision making. Then with autonomous systems capable of target engagement and target destruction, being slaved to those master commander of control systems which can be done. And we find that the decision making in a hyper war environment occurs in hours, minutes or less than seconds. And so we find ourselves confronting issues associated with the kinds of war, which is very difficult to detect at the hybrid war level. And is essential that you compete at the hyper war level, and we don't really see or we haven't seen, the US's is engaging on this now, I think.; the capacity to create a comprehensive policy and comprehensive strategy that embraces all of it. I think the key point is often the issue is, especially today is less about innovation in war than it is about integrating the existing systems. And just as brilliant strategists and technicians integrated something that ended up looking like Blitzkrieg with all of its effects. We are going to find some brilliant strategists and scientists integrating the capabilities of artificial intelligence with the existing

systems and developing future systems that will lead into a decision action loop that will be measured routinely in less than seconds. This is what we are facing and now how much of that we embrace, how much of that we are going to leave for others for example, our friends, the Chinese and I am not proposing necessarily that they are moving towards their hyper war capabilities but they have just committed \$150 billion into AI research. You know, AI is going to change the world in many respects. Apart from all of the human, governmental and economical dimensions part of artificial intelligence being embraced into the 21st century, it's going to change warfare. And the west invests in that now, and begins the process of formal strategic review and development of strategy, will be side that can prevent itself from being surprised.

Dhruva Jaishankar: I do want to open it up to the people very quickly, but you mentioned hybrid warfare, and the experiences of NATO, Ukraine and Europe. Sitting in India, when we read about these developments, it actually sounds very familiar, the ambiguity, the use of non-state actors, information warfare. In many ways, India has been dealing with a form of hybrid warfare for 70 years. And since you were a commander in Afghanistan and directly involved in dealing with some of the same groups, same

non-state actors. Do you see any commonality and potential for lessons learnt between the experience with what you are seeing in Eastern Europe and what we have been seeing in South Asia?

John R. Allen: I see that there are lessons learnt, I think what I become more concerned about is that the lessons learnt are being shared among the groups. There are lessons that we ought to be learning, one of the concerns I have for example is as we have emerged in the United States after sixteen now, seventeen years of constant conflict. I was commissioned out of the naval academy on the day that 9/11 occurred, and fifteen-sixteen years later, I am promoting to Lieutenant commander and Major, the mid-shipment I was educating at the naval academy. Those young officers have never known a time when we were not at war in the United States. They just think that, my classmate here Gary Stark, he and I were in the same company together at the naval academy right after the American civil war. Our worldview was coloured by the cold war, and most of us didn't go to war except very very few of us for most of our careers. These kids have been at war in multiple theatres or been in very stressful present operation, the whole time they have been in the service. So I think that the challenge that I worry about today is as we have emerged from large scale conflict, as we

attempt to embrace the traditional missions of the Marine Corps, the navy, the traditional missions of the army and the air force. We have got to, it is an essential aspect of our post-war or post conflict era. We have got to remember our obligations, not to forget the lessons that we learnt after over fifteen years of insurgency and counter terror operations. And, one of my biggest concern today is that as Daesh, the Islamic state is defeated physically, it will become a provincial force, it will spread out into small groups into provinces, what they call 'walayats', overseas provinces into North Africa, into the southern Arabian peninsula, into the Sinai, into the Caucasus which continues to make it more difficult for the Russians to govern, into the place called the Horasan, which is the swath of the ancient Islamic map of Afghanistan and Pakistan, into Bangladesh, into southeast Asia, I worry about that. And the other piece I worry about is the growing symbiotic relationship between these terror networks and highly sophisticated trans-national criminal networks. So, we can't forget these lessons as we retool and rearm ourselves in the United States to be ready to answer the call in context of our national security strategy. We cannot neglect these lessons in the preparation of our young officers and soldiers to be ready in the event that a hybrid type warfare breaks out as opposed to a high end hyper warfare scenario.

Thank you very much.
