

BROOKINGS INDIA

KAMALNAYAN BAJAJ CONFERENCE ROOM

Remembering Stephen P. Cohen (1936-2019) – Part 1

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Participants

Ambassador Shivshankar Menon, Distinguished Fellow, Brookings India and former National Security Advisor - Opening Address

Dr. C. Raja Mohan, Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore – Panellist

Mr. Shekhar Gupta, Founder and Editor-in-Chief, The Print - Panellist

Dr. Swarna Rajagopalan, Founder and Director, Prajnya Trust - Panellist

Dr. Anit Mukherjee, Non-Resident Fellow, Brookings India - Panellist

Dr. Tanvi Madan, Director & Senior Fellow, The India Project, The Brookings Institution – Moderator

Watch the event video here:

Remembering Stephen P. Cohen (1936-2019) -
Part 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQP10hxjv0k>

Remembering Stephen P. Cohen (1936-2019) -
Part 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQPBAYeApKg>

The following is an edited transcript from the event.

PROCEEDINGS

Constantino Xavier: Hello, Good afternoon, welcome to Brookings India. My name is Constantino Xavier, I'm a Fellow here in the Foreign Policy and Security program. Welcome to all to Brookings, welcome to the speakers for an event which is a mix of a personal and professional, a mix of an event to remember, celebrate but also look ahead around a figure which has been key to South Asian studies in the United States, in South Asia, and to many people who are present here in the form of a mentor. Professor Stephen Philip Cohen who passed away in October and is really someone who has shaped the lives of many people in these rooms, whether through direct knowledge and interaction or indirectly through his phenomenal work. We have really a variety of speakers who will share a lot about his career.

Let me just restrict my introductory remarks to five key points:

1. I think the first one is we're really remembering a scholar, a first-generation scholar who worked on South Asia and the region as a whole. He had his MA from Chicago in 1959, he was a native to Chicago. He went on to the University of Wisconsin where he got his PhD in Political Science and Indian studies in 1967, you know I was looking at a CV, the last one I had access to when I was his research assistant at Brookings in Washington DC in 2012. His last CV version had listed 15 books, 51 chapters, 54 articles and 30 monographs and reports.

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2. Second, I think professor Cohen left a legacy of inter-disciplinarity. He's done work in Political Science, IR, Security Studies but also anthropology and sociology, for example, disaster management, conflict studies in South Asia. Therefore, if you look at his reading list I'd accessed, he'd given me once his reading list which has around 51 pages of works across South Asia, this was his sort of master list of bibliography, you find everything, you find Quincy Wright on the Study of War, you find Professor Muni's Pangs of Proximity on India-Sri Lanka relations, he had this whole theory of paired minority conflict in Sri Lanka which you adopted, I'm sure also influenced your own work and Hutton's Caste in India for example, the importance of tribes in the Northwest Frontier Province, so he was really a very comprehensive scholar across disciplines.

3. Third, I think he really embodied the importance of fieldwork and area studies, he lived both in India and Pakistan. I remember stories of being on airplanes manned by Soviet pilots in Ladakh in the 1960's and how they slammed the door on him and saying "American, American!" and to take off to Srinagar. I think he was also instrumental in working out I think a more expanded program with the Ford Foundation here in Delhi in 1990's.

4. He was also an institution builder, his Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security [ACDIS] program at University of Illinois was very important thing to cultivate and create an interdisciplinary debate among the Americans, Pakistanis, Indians on a variety of security issues in South Asia. He was also instrumental in setting up the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies [RCSS] for example in Colombo, Sri Lanka, beyond India and Pakistan. And finally, as a think tanker, if you want, as a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C. Professor Cohen was also a practitioner, he served in the State Department's policy planning staff in Washington between 1987 and 1989, a critical period for the U.S role in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

5. And finally most importantly, mainly I think also reflected in the composition of the panel we have here today, he was really a mentor, a mentor to a variety of people, a colleague to many people whether in his academic avatar at the university or in think tank personality at Brookings, he mentored generations of PhD

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students, research assistants and a variety of other students and professionals on South Asia.

So, what we'll do today and I'll end here is I'll just give a quick note on the structure, we'll have an opening on address by Ambassador Shivshankar Menon who is a Distinguished Fellow here at Brookings India to speak a bit about the importance of scholar-practitioners but also the type of scholarship I think professor Cohen got us used to, not the typical political science, you know quantitative analysis but the area studies and ethnographer and the importance of that to current and future scholarship. Then, we'll have a panel moderated by Dr. Tanvi Madan. I'll introduce the panellists a bit later on. For the time being, let me introduce Ambassador Shivshankar Menon who is a Distinguished Fellow here at Brookings India, he served as a National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of India between 2010 and 2014, as Foreign Secretary of India between 2006 and 2009, he served as High Commissioner of India to China, Pakistan, Israel and Sri Lanka. He's currently also the chairman of the Advisory Board of the Institute of Chinese Studies and the author of *Choices: Inside the Making of Indian Foreign Policy*, 2016 and *a Nehruvian Foreign Policy today*, 2015. Thank you, Amb. Menon, up to you.

Shivshankar Menon: Thank you, Tino, thank you very much for your introduction.

Remembering Stephen Cohen, he's been with us for so long and so often guided us in so many ways and especially for a practitioner like me. Stephen Cohen was the academic that one wanted to talk to and that is rarer than it should be but why did one always look forward to seeing Stephen Cohen?

For one, he understood both the theory and the practice of government and their rather tenuous relationship with one another because he understood the practitioner's dilemmas in making policy and how governments and institutions like armies are constrained in their policy choices. This is rare, particularly for those whose object of study is something that is often as irrational

and therefore irritating to neat and tidy theory, something as I said as closed as government policy and political processes of now, Stephen unlike many other scholars who seek refuge in theoretical or methodological purity was willing to look at reality in the eye and study it, warts and all and there was always an empirical basis to his conclusions.

Stephen never told you what others thought nor would he be satisfied with literature review or a mish-mash of secondary sources which is often passed off in strategic studies at least as scholarship. He always spoke for himself as an independent observer, as a scholar making his own judgments and he was willing to tackle the difficult issues. We, the objects of his research in India and Pakistan didn't make it easy for him but despite that, if you look at the studies of the Pakistan army and India and the strategic behaviour in the subcontinent – they met a very high standard of objectivity. The proof – they made their subjects unhappy but not unhappy enough to contradict his facts, to argue with his conclusions perhaps, but that he welcomed, he was quite happy if you did that and he would be the first to say that that is your right, to argue with my conclusions and while he would calmly and rationally defend his point of view and he was also, and this is again rare, open to persuasion, I mean like as Keynes said, you know when the facts change, I changed my mind, what do you do? But Stephen was also open to persuasion, he was ready and his thinking did evolve over time, and I'm sure that panel will later speak to this. For me, he is an example of an engaged scholar public policy should aim at – firm grounding in theory alongside an equally firm understanding of reality and an ability to see the connections between the two.

But, I would also like to make another point, many of you have heard me venting before on my bugbear, why I think it's sad and counterproductive that liberal arts or humanities call themselves social sciences and try to imitate the pure sciences in method and presentation because there's a reason why history, politics, geography, psychology, economics, our liberal arts and humanities, they deal with people and their behaviour in all their glorious variety with all the vagaries and the

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unpredictability that that involves. Social science to me is an oxymoron but by trying to ape the sciences such as data-driven political science, for instance, which is basically politics, we are in the humanities losing touch with the reality but more importantly, we are losing our audience and therefore diminishing our impact which brings me back to Stephen.

What explains the extraordinary impact that his work and his thinking had even though he could never be accused of following academic fashion or of studying topics that had grabbed the headlines? Thinking back on his life, I thought of how decent he was, of how he did not let disappointment colour his outlook and of the great number of students and scholar he mentored and helped, and I realised something that should have been clearer to me earlier, unlike the pure sciences for a scholar and the humanities to be good at what he or she does and to have human impact some human qualities are essential – empathy and ability to see others' points of views and an understanding of how humans act and feel and these were what Stephen always brought to the table. He will be truly missed. Thank you.

Constantino Xavier: Thank you so much, Amb. Menon. I think that was a really nice overview of how we looked at him and how he looked at us in many ways.

On that note of the human quality and the family, let me read out of his CV, this is an April 2012 version of his own CV, it lists under personal, his wife Roberta Cohen and then children by name in his CV, Edward, Jeffrey, Peter, Benjamin, Tamara, Susan, six kids and then in parentheses eight grandchildren so this is shown, I think someone who in academia also transpired in his CV only this family dimension but most importantly I think many people here in the room met him in his Watergate building, were hosted by him. I'm remembering Professor Kanti Bajpai's recent piece where he also looks back and mentions, you know, he remembers how he would share his furniture, his books, many people came out saying that you would meet him and you would always leave with some books under your arm because he'd give them away in the last 10-20 years and the food and the various meetings

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with that larger family which he was part of and I think the family spirit he transpired and passed on to many of us in his career.

[Dr. Xavier introduces moderator and panellists with short biographies]

Tanvi Madan: Thank you all for joining us, just so you know we are also recording this so that Steve's family who are all around the US can see this either live or later, there is going to be a memorial service in Washington this Saturday but I know the family and particularly his wife, Bobby who many of us know would like to hear your thoughts but also the thoughts of the panel and of course, Amb. Menon.

People on this panel knew Steve, as Tino said, in different roles at different times and what we're going to do is talk a little bit about how we knew him as a person but also a scholar, as a mentor, as a colleague, in my case at one point, a boss as well and talk about his contribution to the various fields that we work in but also the way ahead because Steve was always thinking about what lies ahead and hence his interest in policy as well and he did think that you could have an impact but he didn't spend a lot of time, as people do these days, kind of trying to theorise about it but he would just do.

I knew Steve, actually, I was a "grand student" of Steve, he loves that term before I ever worked with him. I was a grand student thanks to Swarna who I, took a class with her and that's how you became a grand student of Steve because you studied with one of his students. I think this is something you do realise over time with somebody like Steve Cohen, just kind of the 'gurukul', as I like to call it, that he created over time and he was a guru in a true sense of the word, but not just that as I said a mentor, a scholar also kind of a very proud family man and would bring you into his family as well and so you did get to know him in that aspect and some of the people who have written about it, also how he enjoyed life, drove fast cars, he used to have a bright red car that would come in, but just in general, enjoy talking about

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politics, explain how he understood Indian politics because he understood Chicago politics.

I then worked with him as a Research Assistant, I always joked that I was foisted upon him because I was hired by somebody else and they said when I joined I could you also maybe help Steve Cohen out and here I was saying "Oh Steve Cohen, this is really exciting" and I met with him and I apologised saying I'm being foisted upon you but he never made me feel that way and the rest, as they say, is history and I always say you know, as much as I'm not quite a social scientist but do think about you know rational and rationalism, that there is something to be said about fate.

So with that, I am going to ask each of our panellists on how they knew Steve and in what capacity and maybe start with Swarna because he was proudest of his students. Swarna how did you know Steve, for how long and in what capacity?

Swarna Rajagopalan: I think a lot of us who follow international relations in this region from the time we were in school, in college, first knew of him through by-lines or interviews or you know actually pejorative allusions. Steve Cohen and people and Americans like that so when I applied to the University of Illinois, I didn't think I would get in and this is something my family can never forget because of other reasons but on March 2nd, 1992, I got this call out of the blue, everyone had gone to bed and the phone rang I answered and he said "I'm Steve Cohen, is that Swarna Rajagopalan? I am calling to offer you a fellowship." You know it could have been a prank call, I did not write any notes for this.

So in a sense, in that most magical sense, some of us are lucky enough that we meet teachers who change our lives and I met several and he was one of them and that was a moment where many things changed for me because I think the hallmark of having Steve as a teacher of me, and I actually still call him Professor Cohen, was actually the confidence he reposed in students.

There were three gifts he gave very generously, he was a very secure person so he set you free, you could follow your instinct, follow your questions, follow your theories and there were never any rules about what was the appropriate subject for your research or the appropriate way to do it.

The second was just generosity, I think everyone's talked about food and time, but just the generosity of spirit, I think that allowed him to come in somewhere and point to you in the middle of a speech and say my student is sitting there. We've all been students so you know what that does for someone who was still trying to build a sense of professional self-esteem.

And I also think that he was a renaissance person, everything was interesting to him. In the middle of my dissertation, he would come in and say "you know you should really be studying the history of rickshaws" Ok, but I want to discuss my literature review on ethnicity. The sense of play that went along with everything, every conversation you had, he was extremely, deathly serious about his work and that comes through in the quality that you talk about but the fact that you don't have to take yourself seriously and be pompous and imagine that there is only one way to do things. These are gifts that, in a sense, when I think about him, and you know we're remembering him, which is something one does everyday with teachers, I think some of the things that stand out for me are really these qualities.

Tanvi Madan: I really do think that people think of him in various ways and I always think of him because half my bookshelf at work is thanks to Steve. As Tino said, everybody who went into office and came out with books. In my case, the ones that stand out are the original set of China-India white papers that he got from back in the 60's but also Mao's Little Red Book that he had an early edition of.

Raja, you've known him for a number of years as well in a different capacity than Swarna but also talked about him as a mentor as well. Tell us a little bit about your thoughts about Steve, how you knew him, any memories as Swarna just shared?

Raja Mohan: I used to be at IDSA in the early eighties and he used to be a regular visitor. In IDSA in the eighties we used to specialise in demolishing any American who walked into the building. As a fresh graduate PhD from JNU, the sense of knowing everything in the world, what is right, so we really had a fairly adversarial relationship because issues that were beginning to come into play, whether it was on the Kashmir question or India-Pakistan, the nuclear proliferation, clearly the bugbear of which, I mean some of them still are, on which we used to have lot of arguments and one of his articles, I think which created a lot of controversy at the time, "The Road to NPT lies through Srinagar" so now you could imagine what the reaction was in India at the time and many of us really contested that argument. But that argument, he was also reflecting a reality of the policymaking system because he had just come out of the State Department Policy Planning. The prospect of India and Pakistan acquiring nuclear weapons and the return of the insurgency led to this grand theory of you know, the world's most dangerous nuclear flashpoint.

That became the animating spirit of US for a long, long time and I think that became a fairly contested thing through the 90's, we had a contested relationship but when I went to Washington in the early 90's as the Washington correspondent for The Hindu, I travelled to Illinois where he was, I discovered a completely different side of him which is really his empathy for the region as a whole, for India, for Pakistan, his generosity to his students, I mean it was like they opened their home and heart for whoever, Indians who showed up in Illinois, the deep cornfields of Illinois, he was there as someone who was willing to support and give all kinds of help and later when he came into Brookings, I got to know him a lot better. We used to meet him quite often in Seema Sirohi's house, I got a fuller personality of his, we also evolved I think,

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Indian discourse from being very suspicious of America to one of actually engaging the Americans. I think there whenever he used to greet me later in the 2000's he was surprised that there could be anyone who could argue that case in India for an India-US strategic partnership because it's almost treason at the time as anybody who argued that was in serious trouble. So, he used to say you belong to the America lobby so that is actually for him he was surprised that 2005 how that marked a fundamental difference in the way India dealt with the US and how the US dealt with India because for the U.S, there was no way out of the Kashmir, as a biggest flashpoint while Bush actually separated the two and in India, a non-aligned, would never deal with the U.S so that was the prevailing dogma in Delhi, if you would say, and I think that we broke through that in 2005. He was very happy that Indians were learning to play Washington, he was also surprised that Indians were willing to argue this in a more easy way.

But, I think one quality I'll remember forever is his humour, irreverent humour, there was one of the first India-U.S. defence dialogues, in 89 or 90, beginning of the Gulf War, we were in Washington, interesting Indian team, and Richard Haas who was then the Senior Director for the Gulf was making the presentation about the new world order to the Indian team who had just came, so Steve at the end of the speech would ask in a very mocking tone, he asked Richard Haas, 'can you tell me what the new world order is? Can you define it for me?' Richard said "if I tell you, I'd have to kill you", so later, of course, he hired Steve back into Washington so I think that's also something for us Indians, we took ourselves too seriously, there was no sense of humour, that the political correctness, the seriousness, the lack of any sense of irony, you can do these things easily, it doesn't have to be absolute, some kind of a definitive, fundamental, you know ideological purity in the way you deal with outsiders. So I think that is a great contribution is really to make Indians a little bit more relaxed, understand how the U.S. works and tell the Americans how to see through the prickliness of the Indian elite. I think a lot has changed some of it remains, so I would say that was a great contribution.

Tanvi Madan: You know along with his humour, he'd use it also to be a really good translator for an American audience and I remember I worked with him on his idea of Pakistan book and one of the themes he talks about is the dominance of Punjabis in the Pakistani establishment, so he had to explain Punjabis, I'm Punjabi, so how do you explain it to an American audience, what Punjabis are like? He decided that the best way to describe it is that Punjabis are a mixture of Texans and New Yorkers, people immediately understood.

Anit, and we welcome Shekhar Gupta who is also here, Shekhar we were talking about how each of us knew Steve and how he kind of, on a personal level, touched our lives and those of others. Anit, I'll go to you and then Shekhar. I know you partly because you were Steve's student but also worked with him. Tell us a little bit more about your experience as somebody who came in, former military guy who came into Washington and decided he wanted to be a PhD student.

Anit Mukherjee: I'm going to tell you two tales about Steve. First is about the way he changed my life, I was still in the army, I was applying to grad schools in the U.S. mostly, I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life, I had no clarity on why I wanted to go in for study, all I knew is that I was fighting my father who was in the Air Force and was saying "you're an army guy, you're leaving the army, why are you leaving the army?" that basically proved that the army was full of pongos who don't have their brains right. So, I was fighting my father trying to get out and establish myself and somehow my statement of purpose and CV reached Steve's email and he saw the statement of purpose I'd written for grad school and I mean unknown to me, without being prompted, he wrote a statement of support to Johns Hopkins SAIS, which thereafter, gave me a half-tuition scholarship that allowed me to attend the school. I didn't know that, he never told that to me, I found out later because I was in the admissions team at Johns Hopkins and then I found out this backstory and it's to the greatness of the man that he never ever told this to me, even though we worked so closely and so that was the way he changed my life and among the sad part I have is that I could never physically hand over my book which owes a lot right,

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which builds on his work, which is inspired by his work. I was his RA, I was his student so that is a big sad story.

But the story I had was about why do we call him Steve, right and I worked for him at Brookings as an RA and very initially on I was ex Indian army, I was like sir this, sir that, sir this sir that, and he was like "no call me Steve" obviously I can't say that right, so I said " no sir, no sir, yes sir, no sir" and then he said " if you don't call me Steve, I'll throw a paperweight at you!" so obviously under threat, under duress even though I thought I was brave, I started calling him Steve and after a couple of weeks or months I got the insight of why he insisted that I call him Steve because when he was doing his book, I could contradict him and say " Steve, I think you're wrong here", " Steve, I think you have got this incorrect" and he used to ask me for that feedback right and I could do that if I said Steve. "Steve I think you're totally missing the point over here" "I think you need to emphasise this or under emphasise this". The insight I got was if you add the "sir", as soon as you add either prefix or at the end of the sentence, it's very hard to say you're wrong. What does that mean for Indian military culture? I would leave that unsaid...

Audience laughs

Anit Mukherjee: I'm not going to bring that up over here. But the other thing I want to talk about was Steve's intellectual institutional building. I mean at ACDIS at Urbana-Champaign he had a hand in building up the careers of most of the strategic experts, he housed them at Urbana-Champaign at a time when India-America had not transformed its relationship so if its Arun Singh, Kanti Bajpai, Rajesh Basru, you talk about the galaxy of strategic studies experts that we have all across the world today at some point of time some of them would, Amit Gupta, at some point of time they had the Steve Cohen act at Urbana-Champaign connection and what he did at a time when Indian American ties was not good was create a community of scholars who got to know each other, create a community of scholars who got to know both countries and actually said listen they are not evil

or we can work together and I think the payoff came in 2005 and afterwards when India and then America started to transform its ties, you had a community of intellectuals who knew both sides and were kind of acquainted with it so the ACTDIS connection, the Urbana-Champaign connection was a great story. It's a great story about his intellectual contribution and the institution contribution and so as other countries think about engaging India, I say look at that model right, create conditions where you can enable scholars, analysts, practitioners in both countries live, work together and understand each other and that would create conditions for engagement.

Swarna Rajagopalan: Can I add a one sentence footnote to the ACDIS point before, [looking at Shekhar Gupta] I think you were also at ACDIS at some point but...

Shekhar Gupta: Not exactly there.

Swarna Rajagopalan: You were visiting.

Shekhar Gupta: I'll talk about that later.

Swarna Rajagopalan: It was actually you know you talk about strategic studies and you think you're talking about this India-Pakistan nuke thing only but ACDIS also had people writing on hydro-politics, on disasters, on all kinds of security issues other than the usual, usual, usual.

Tanvi Madan: Shekhar, I know you, I first met you through Steve when you came in to see him and he was kind of a relationship builder was never kind of, he was very generous with people, he didn't keep his contact list very closed but you knew him in a very different aspect than some of us who knew him as people who were either looking at students or RAs. Tell us how you knew Steve and your thoughts and memories of him?

Shekhar Gupta: Well, first of all, Steve's great strength was that he could get you to defect to his side from journalism to academia so he could pretend that he was your teacher and you could pretend that you were his student. Now, I was never really his student right but I can still go around pretending he was my teacher because he reached out. I think the biggest difference he made to the larger debate was that he made the debate mainstream and how did he do that? He did that by reaching out to journalists and bridging the gap between strategic academia and journalism. So he got people like us who usually would go to an academic for a quote, right and he would catch hold of people like Raja who he knew had a mind of their own but needed a larger platform and a larger audience, so he brought the two together and the very fact that Raja came and worked at the Express for quite some time was in a way directly connected to "if I had not known Steve I would have not known Raja so well". I met Raja in Washington when I had some affiliations with Steve at ACDIS but I wasn't an ACDIS, I had got the [inaudible] journalism award that year and he said "oh you've got this award" about \$10,000 "where will you spend it? Come to the U.S and I'll give you some more money." He just let me do whatever. He never checked with us, people like us, what our degrees were, you know he never bothered about the fact that I don't have a Master's Degree, it's just that every now and then he would pull my leg by calling me, Dr. Gupta.

Audience laughs

Shekhar Gupta: "Dr. Gupta where is your thesis?!" Yet, any time I signed a recommendation to him particularly if it was one of our reporters, he'd immediately accept them and after a while, I said "Steve, I'm not signing anymore because you accept them and they don't come back!" I think Sunil Dasgupta was the last and I threatened him - I said, "If I sign any more and they don't come back, they can't be lost to Indian journalism!" so those were the very special qualities. I think he was the first one who bridged this gap.

The other thing that we don't acknowledge sufficiently is how he bridged this gap between Indians and Pakistanis

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because Indians and Pakistanis worked in the same places, they didn't change, none of them became a jholla-walla, see unlike the usual track 2 where people gifted each other video cassettes or tapes or some kind of, not secret but of Sufi music or Indian classical music, etc. to say that everything is fine. What is called as the moombathi or candlelight gang? He let you be an Indian, he let you be a Pakistani and that allowed a debate to build. It allowed people to people contacts to build so someone like Pervez Hoodbhoy, forget Indian academia, Indian public debate would never have known who Pervez Hoodbhoy and Parvaiz Balcheema]. Among younger people, Ejaz Haider for example, these are all people who worked around Steve and he introduced them to Indian debate just as he introduced us to the Pakistani debate. Raja, you are much younger people, right, I'm not pointing out at you, only at Raja because Raja is my vintage, right. I don't have Steve's gift to sort of level, I run a very young newsroom but Steve had a very special gift there and everything about Steve was some of the same irreverence.

I do remember once, I was in Washington and he came to pick me up and he said "So Dr. Gupta, here is my Ford!" so I said "Ford? I thought it was Toyota Camry" he said, "Yeah I bought it from Ford money!"

Audience laughs

Shekhar Gupta: When he was resident at Ford in Delhi, I had gone to have lunch with him and we were walking across IIC to have lunch and we saw Jagmohan inside, obviously Jagmohan was reading his books as he used to do in the library and his guards were standing outside. Steve's designation then at Ford was scholar in residence. Steve said, "eh Dr. Gupta, scholar in residence - target in residence!" [laughter]. So he could do stuff like that but he was a very serious scholar but also remember he started out being a Pakistan scholar, he started out being seen as a Pakistan scholar. When I take you back to the 80's, no one thought of him as an India scholar. There was much greater, enormously greater, suspicion of American academia in India than in Pakistan because Pakistan establishment quoted American academics.

He was invited for a meal every time he was in Pakistan by Zia-ul-Haq himself who banned his book. When he asked him "why did you ban my book if you like me so much?" he said, "your book is too good for people of Pakistan to read" people of Pakistan are not mature enough, so he asked him what the problem was and Steve later said that I figured what the problem was - there was a line somewhere where he said that "Pakistan has the finest army in the world that never won a war" because they think that they won '65, so it took a long time for the Indian establishment, etc. and even for us younger journalists at that point, I'm taking you back to mid-80's to level with Steve because I remember he was at our home once for dinner and we had called a few people - some of whom you know, some of whom are still the leading lights of sort of liberal India, liberal Left India who usually ride the Congress bandwagon because the Left can't give them much. The Left gravy train has no gravy on it so they ride the Congress, and one of them walked into my home - my tiny home in Saket and turned around and said, "Yeh CIA agent hai. You've called a CIA agent, how can I come for dinner at your home?" So this was that period of suspicion. Also because he'd written about the Indian military, the Pakistani military, "how does he get access there? Does he get gifts from the Pakistanis?" All that stuff would go on. So I think he built quite a cadre and he knew one art which I've not seen any American academic possess to that degree - that is, to reach out to the journalistic community. So he turned more scholars into journalists and more of you scholars into public debaters than I think all the other American strategic scholars put together. And that's why his influence transcends so many generations.

Tanvi Madan: And I think that was key because this idea that you always had to go out - it wasn't scholarship, it wasn't an ivory tower and he wanted to keep himself contemporary. And not only would he be on your TV screens on any given number of channels, but he also at time when there was still a lot of resistance among scholars - he joined Twitter under Abu Cohen and actually really enjoyed it and there were lots of people who still would say, "this is not serious enough," but he said this is how new people are going to debate and he would kind of join in. Anit, you wanted to jump in.

Anit Mukherjee: Shekhar's point – I had actually got a slide prepared on Steve's intellectual contribution and so I did a Google Scholar count of his hits and I have taken the liberty to actually put it out there in part because I think you're right to a partial extent Shekhar, which is Steve was identified as an American, as a CIA agent but if you see his first real book, his thesis was...

Shekhar Gupta: He wasn't identified as a CIA agent.

Anit Mukherjee: Identified, sorry as in thought of – he was like imagined as and I want to talk about this because I think his thesis was on the Indian Army and that is a very good historical book. "The Indian Army" which he wrote and that was his thesis but after that, '72 onwards when America was thought of as the evil one with Kissinger's thing – he was basically denied a visa to come and work here. And so from '71 to '77 until the Janta Government years, he had to go to Japan and he explained it in his book, he said he felt really sad because the first time he came to India was '63 to '65 and he had amazing access at that point of time.

Shekhar Gupta: He lived in the outhouse of B.P. Maurya who was a minister.

Anit Mukherjee: Yes, right. In the mid-'60s, he came to India and he had amazing access. He could go to Army cantonments, he could meet everybody and he has actually got those interview notes which are a goldmine. He interviewed B.M. Kaul, he interviewed Krishna Menon and they're like really good interview sources. And India was really open then. '70s it closed up and I think we lost a generation of American scholars working in India at that point of time. Then they started opening up again.

In Pakistan, his book was adored. So he went to Pakistan on a tourist visa. Zia-ul-Haq heard him give a press conference, invited him home impromptu for dinner and he

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said, "I love your book on the Indian Army. Do one on the Pakistani Army." So Steve wrote the book on the Pakistan Army and Zia promptly banned it.

Audience laughs

Anit Mukherjee: (continues): He did him a favour and he said, "It'll be read if I ban it" and he promptly banned it.

Tanvi Madan: So that's where Bollywood gets the idea from - create some controversy, threaten to ban it and it'll sell a lot.

Anit Mukherjee: But I think this story tells you a lot -

Shekhar Gupta: Can I just add something. See '62, '63 in some ways was a very short-lived golden period of Indo-U.S. strategic relations. '63 is when the U.S. Army had a 2 Star Major General sitting in Delhi, running a mission in Delhi because, after the war with China, Nehru had reached out to Kennedy. And then, obviously, Kennedy died and Nehru died and all that stuff happened. But '62-'63 was an aberration. So, even the scholars who came in '62-'63 and wrote about India were then viewed with great suspicion by Mrs. Gandhi and her people.

So people like Leon Rose, Myron Weiner - all of them suffered because of this and all of them were denied visas for a very long time. So some managed it -

Anit Mukherjee: So, if I could end that story. On that count, 2013. Not too many people know this but Steve Cohen came and spent 10 days in Delhi after getting clearance from the Indian embassy to come and engage with the Indian military and defence establishment. And I was there at IDSA at that point in time. He was waiting at the U.S.I. guesthouse for 10 days saying, "Abhi phone call aayega, abhi phone call aayega." And he did not get

a phone call because the M.O.D. and the services did not want to engage Steve Cohen on his book. Why I tell this story? Because I think this sort of attitude of ours which is prevalent across establishment of not engaging scholars is self-defeating. You are losing a wonderful opportunity of not just to engage people who shape opinions but to also actually get the real story out. And it continued till 2012. And I think it'll still continue to this day. And so I would make a fervent plea that looks, I mean here's where I get into my bugbear which is not just about scholarly access but there's a mountain of declassifying job that needs to be done, which cannot be done and which stifles the growth of strategic studies in this country.

And you might think, that's a very simple bureaucratic procedure - it's a very simple bureaucratic job which nobody does. There is not official whose job it is to do it. And so if you really have to honour Steve Cohen and K. Subrahmanyam and Arun Singh... who's still alive obviously but people who are interested in the growth of strategic studies, let's start doing that. Because, and I'll end on this topic and then we can move on because I don't want this to be a monologue; among the things that he said in his book was, "studying India toughened you up. By comparison, the rest of the world was easy." Which I think is great training.

Tanvi Madan: But I do want to ask Raja and Swarna about this because despite all these issues he really did in many ways change kind of what we think of South Asia studies and strategic studies and maybe kind of talk about that kind of scholarship. Sunil Dasgupta, who was one of his former students and his research assistant wrote a piece about -

Shekhar Gupta: Among the reporters, I lost to -

Tanvi Madan: That's right, also a former reporter - wrote about, despite Steve turning away from political science for the reasons Ambassador Menon said, nonetheless his contributions to political science ... but for both of you, talking about the fields you work in

now ... could you talk about how Steve changed that field that you're in.

Raja Mohan: Just a word about the suspicion. I think the tragedy was deeper. Steve himself was a product of the '40s and '50s when India studies flowered in the United States. Almost every major university, every Ivy League university had a fairly flourishing India studies department. There was expansive engagement between the academic institutions. In fact, the I.S.I.S. (The Indian School of International Studies) had a lot of American professors teaching. You had a fairly robust relationship. I think the breakdown of the relationship in the '60s, India's turn towards more populist - a word that is back in fashion, I would say xenophobic direction - which is distrusting outsiders. We shut our doors not just to the Americans but to everyone. So barring our Soviet and the East European friends, nobody came here by the '70s and the '80s. So I think Steve's contribution was to persist, to keep up the studies but I think it had tragic consequences as well. The two levels and I think one because we drove away so many scholars by working on India by denying visas and China studies was just opening up. China was, as they say, a closed economy, a closed country with an open mind and they opened their doors for the Americans. So the dramatic shift and the advantage of doing Chinese studies while the harshness and the difficulty of doing India studies are really setters in the two directions that you see happening in the 1970s. But the second part of it - while Steve persisted, I think his focus shifted more and more to the security studies because the only guys who were interested in paying for South Asian studies were the Nuclear-wallahs. DTRA, you name it - I mean every single fund. The only guys who were interested in India and Pakistan - because economy there was nothing, there was no other social engagement - it is the danger of a nuclear war. So I think in a way, Steve's work - quite a bit of it in the '90s: looking at the crisis between India and Pakistan, looking at the Kashmir question, looking at promoting a dialogue between India and Pakistan, I think it also had begun to limit his own possibilities because there was no funding for anything else. India was still not open and that led to a number of consequences and I would say: one, of limiting South Asian studies to India and Pakistan, of limiting Indian studies to the nuclear

question, to limiting the possibilities of imagining for the subcontinent in an economic sense, of the natural flows that exist in the subcontinent and I think we got tied down to that. It was only after 2005 economic growth opens a whole new door, the political cooperation in a larger sense opens a lot of places but Steve who was a product of the '50s in the US was I think constrained similarly like most of his cohort was in the '80s until well into the '90s and even later where the access to the Indian system was limited so I would say that his persistence, therefore, was critical. But today as we look ahead, the important thing is to see that we need to think of our own security, our own relationship with the US in a much broader sense than the limited manner in which we have framed it. Because as we discussed earlier, I met Steve actually on the eve of July 18, 2005 when the nuclear deal was signed in the afternoon. Steve was quite surprised. In fact, I'll tell a story - Brookings' Strobe had convened a meeting of the South Asia-wallahs and the Nuclear-wallahs. He wrote a brilliant 800 word Op-Ed after that, saying how bad the deal was and why the deal won't work. It was the best critique of the deal and being a journalist, he could produce 800 words. I think the entire community in Washington was disappointed, surprised by what could happen. That I think is an important thing. The U.S. was changing. The people who came to the U.S. - India relations were not prepared for the change internally. Nor were they prepared to accept that India was changing and that India could do things it did not do before, it was fundamental change that has taken place. And I think our security studies or larger will have to be informed by how India itself is changing - there shouldn't be any doubts about that these days and how India's relationship with the rest of the world is changing. And the U.S. - for example, all of us have been involved in the India-U.S. relation, we constructed around Indo-Pacific, trade but those premises are under great shaky ground in Washington today - that is, if you don't understand the U.S. as an entity, because after all these years, there are no U.S. studies in this country. Forget Americans studying us properly, we have no - 5 million Indians perhaps but no centre to study the United States and I think that unless we see what a messy, complex mechanism the U.S. is, our ability to deal with it is going to be again constrained by slogans, or by potential problems that might arise on trade, on immigration, on a range of issues. But as Steve would

have said, keep an open mind, persist and engage with societies that are beginning to change.

Swarna Rajagopalan: I want to go back to something that Ambassador Menon talked about – you talked about humanities and I think that one of the hallmarks of Professor Cohen's scholarship is that he was actually a historian at heart. I think his earlier degrees were in history, his first publication – that list of publications is a one-track mind list but his first publication was on Ruler-Priest relations in Indian literature. And then he went on in the '70s. He was in Andhra at the time of the cyclone, he did a book with his graduate student which is one of the earliest books on disaster studies and then later on when we came in, I was part of the Security technology arms control workshop that he did in 1993. There were a series of them that happened for a while annually for a while after that so then there was a set that began in '96 in Kandy and I happened to be part of both. But at the very first one, it was centred around nuclear issues – it was essentially about non-proliferation and there were Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese, there was one person from Nepal and one from Sri Lanka and in the evening, there would entirely accidentally be a group of women that got together in one of the rooms. We would chat, sing, share and one of the themes that we would come back to was that nothing that was being said in the day was reminiscent or remotely resembled our own everyday realities. And for those of us who were already feminists and were thinking about these questions, this was the beginning of trying to relate our politics to this completely, and which remains really a masculine field. The boys talking about the boys talking about the machines that the boys make. Moving from that, I began to write about this and we put together a panel, just a bunch of graduate students in '96 at a Mid-West conference that Steve agreed to Chair. Now, you think about Steve Cohen and you think about all these boys talking about boys' things but he had the openness of mind and heart and politics to understand that there was something substantial we were talking about here that needed to be given the support of a senior scholar. He took it seriously, he read what we wrote, he quoted what we wrote and this was enormously important to us. At ACDIS there were projects on hydro-politics, there were projects on energy security long

before security studies began to take cognizance of them in a sort of mainstream way. And I think, to discuss his academic contributions without looking at these other dimensions that he actively encouraged – these were not things he put up with from maverick graduate students out of an act of kindness. He was genuinely engaged – if I wrote about the Ramayana, he really wanted to know about it, if we wrote about feminist critiques, he really wanted to read them. He had one very important test though that everybody except Aristotle failed. He would say, "what is the shelf life of this work?" We would get hooked on something contemporary and hip and you "know this is such an important new work," and he would listen, "what is the shelf life of this work? Will it last as long as Aristotle's politics" and I, well –

Tanvi Madan: That's quite the bar to meet, right.

Swarna Rajagopalan: It is, it is.

Tanvi Madan: I think, on that subject – one of the things that struck me, especially having gone from India where you didn't disagree with your bosses and you were supposed to kind of say yes, you didn't question professors – is that you could disagree with him. On this question, one thing I said is that I didn't want to work on India-Pakistan, there's too much work on that and he was okay with that. But also, I remember that the book that I have, it was once upon a time my dissertation and he read it – and it's really about how too much attention is paid to US-India-Pakistan, that we should look at US-India-China. He reads the whole book and he says, "there's not enough Pakistan in it," and I say, "Steve! That's the point!" And he was very open about it and it didn't really I think – and that's a lesson for those moving forward for those of ours who now have mentees which is, it is okay to disagree and encourage difference in disagreement and healthy argument which he was always up for.

Shekhar, one of the things in the kind of spirit of Steve and I'm going to ask each one of you is, as we look ahead because he used to look ahead, what's next? Is it yes,

history looking back and the importance of that but what's next and are there lessons that we can learn from his work and the way he approached life or scholarship or working with others that you would take away and you would say that we kind of need to think about the way ahead, the Steve way?

Shekhar Gupta: One, about his own adaptability, how he adapted to the changing situations in India because '60s was a tough decade in India. I am a child of the '60s so: four wars, five separatist movements, death of Nehru, death of Shastri, famines, PL 480 – '60s was a very tough decade. So for an American academic to – a pre '60s academic to ride that out and to bounce back needed a lot of resilience. And he evolved over time: from being a pure political scientist he moved towards militaries and then strategic issues and then foreign policy issues. So that was his profession. The other thing – personally and professionally that I saw about him was like we say in Cricket, somebody plays fast bowling with a lot of time. Say, watch Rohit Sharma playing now. A lot of time. Inzamam-ul-Haq. So he always seemed to have a lot of time. So one, he was very large-hearted: he never said no to a call, or to meet anybody or to read anything that you sent to him but he always finished all his work. He always had more output or efficiency than all of us. So it tells you that he was a brilliant manager of time. And what you said about disagreeing with you – I never worked as a scholar so I never had to agree or disagree with him but I did find that he never meddled with anybody's views except occasionally to challenge something to make you finesse it further and not make you change it. So I think a lot of the teachers, mentors, they have a problem that when they argue with people who are junior to them or younger than them, they come across as bullies. Or at least people who work with them, they feel or they get the vibes that this is a bully and then there is pullback. With him, there was no need to do any of that.

Tanvi Madan: Anit?

Anit Mukherjee: Thanks, great question – I think the history of his intellectual contribution needs to be written. I completely agree with you points right now

that that was just focused on books and security - but he's done a vast ... I didn't even go down the route of journal articles because I think 50 plus journal articles: everything from caste in the Indian Army and he acknowledges that was a field that he wanted to look at but because of data and access he couldn't do it so perhaps that's one project that somebody who has time to do a PhD would look at, which is you know, the intellectual biography of -

Shekhar Gupta: Don't mention that paper now - the untouchable soldier, because if you did it would be banned forthwith.

Anit Mukherjee: I think that's an interesting story to ask about Steve and even K Subrahmanyam. I mean, both of them are people who engaged with each other from the mid-'60s onwards, differed with each other on a variety of issues but kept a respectful disagreement. And the third thing I would say is ... where to move ahead? I think Steve Cohen played such an important role and in some ways, the intellectual engagement between the U.S. & India, creating the enabling conditions for that: through ACDIS, through his workshops, through his students, through his mentorship of us. I think that's something that needs to be built on, whether: you think of a Steve Cohen lecture series somewhere, or a Chair, or a K. Subrahmanyam chair which is actually building to look deeper into his work because his work actually goes up deep in its history right. And I think people look at his, you know India book or his Pakistan book but his work is much, much deeper - on the Andhra Pradesh cyclone for instance. It's very rich, it's really amazing that needs seriously scholarly attention.

Raja Mohan: Three quick thoughts. One of the tragic legacies of the last 25 years and no disrespect to all of you who studied with Steve - all the Indian grad students who went to the U.S. ended up studying India, South Asia, India-Pakistan ... I can't think of many who actually studied the U.S. One of the tragedies that's happened is that because they were interested because of nuclear issues, we ended up focusing on it so much that we didn't really ... even today there is really very little

investment in understanding the U.S. Well, you go back to the Soviet Union, or today China – the number of institutes devoted to the study of the U.S. and the U.S. engagement is ... so I think we need to do more. And given the importance of this area, we need to invest a lot more and that's where I think Brookings or Carnegie, or a whole lot of institutions that have come up ... we're still not doing enough understanding the U.S. and there's a danger. We need to break out of the beltway in a way to see how the changing U.S. will change the world and will affect us.

And second is, that Steve's work – if you take away the nuclear stuff, the crisis studies that he did ... was also about you know, deep historical work as you said. There's one on Subhash Bose I ran into because he studied the India Army, the I.N.A., Subhash Bose and what Subhash Bose's role was. I think we need to bring our history into the study of our foreign policy, our possibilities. There I think there has been too much political science. I agree with Ambassador Menon and too little historical sensibility. For example, on Afghanistan – you can use the American model and arguments if you don't understand the Pashtun question and how it has evolved over the last 100 years and which India was deeply involved in. I don't think we'll get the dynamics of Afghanistan. If you are looking at a critical issue in South Asia, that the centrality of history and understanding this is critical. And finally, partition. We pretended all these days to study India-Pakistan like two states like Germany and France and their problems: nuclear weapons, three wars, four-and-a-half kind of you know, communal riots with nuclear weapons or whatever it was called; Steve called it communal riots with tanks. But I think the legacy of partition, the bitter legacy of partition endures and if you don't come to terms with it ... and that's where some of the work Steve has done – we need to delve deeper back in, how the bitter legacies of partition continue to haunt us today. Current debates in what we're doing today – we've overcome some, not all of them in the resolution of the India-Bangladesh boundary dispute – that is just one of them. The whole host of problems that were left by dividing what was a single space into fragments and that problems it has left, that we as South Asians, Indians – I think we need to work with Pakistanis, Bangladeshis to look at this collectively. I would say, Steve's empathy

for the subcontinent - the only way of commemorating it is actually to go back to the basics, the formation of modern South Asia and not just as Indians, which we must do in any case - but also Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans. I think that will produce new ways of thinking about our region which will be a definitive contribution to Steve's legacy.

Swarna Rajagopalan: Thank you. Professor Muni is here. I met him first when I travelled to be the rapporteur at the inauguration of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies [RCSS] and Professor Cohen's engagement with projects like that, which were actually beyond the whole confidence-building India-Pakistan. The idea that there must be collaborative projects that need not even involve India and Pakistan: it could be Bangladesh - Nepal, Bangladesh - Maldives, Maldives - Burma, whatever. I think the fact that projects like that, initiatives like that have somehow become unfashionable says something about the times we have come to live in since the late '80s and early '90s when there were a lot of creative ideas around the region. But you know, thinking about Professor Cohen in the last few months, as we knew he was not well ... I think the thing that stands out for me, again and again, is really his role as a teacher and I use that in the simplest way possible. I reflected that great teachers teach you how to live and great teachers grow people.

We talk about Banyan trees not allowing anything else to grow but if you think of Prof. Muni, Prof. Cohen - and I'm not saying this because you're here Prof. Muni but these are people whose students remember them over a lifetime and now that we are talking about things to do to remember Cohen and to continue or build on his legacy, more and more it seems to me that we should be taking this field which is esoteric ... it's sort of, you have to be part of the Delhi gang, you have to be a guy... I'm sorry, I say this over and over because I'm a Bombay kid. The first time I got a job and came to C.P.R. and I went to Sapru House library, someone sat at the table next to me and asked, "where did you come from?", and assumed I'd come from J.N.U. and I said I'm from Bombay University - "how did you get a job at C.P.R.?!"

Audience laughs

Swarna Rajagopalan: You know, really - 30 years later we are still there. Hemant is here, he worked with me a few years ago and he now works in Delhi. He came to Delhi as a LAMP fellow but this journey for an Indian kid to come from even other Indian metros into a circle where you talk about these questions is just really difficult and it shouldn't be. Nor should the conversations be happening in Delhi. I mean, really what do you know?!

Audience laughs

Swarna Rajagopalan: What do you know? What do you know about what insecurity means to somebody living in a coastal area dependent on fishing, ten minutes away from the Kudankulam reactor in an area that is being dried up because there is no water. What do you know about insecurity in a way that is meaningful for the people of this country? Unless you have this conversation happening in other places and other people coming in to join you here, it's going to be a dry, dying, makes me happy to be in this A/c room kind of subject and so for me as I think about this, I'm thinking what can I do to take this conversation and plant it, nurture it, grow it in other places because that is where the rest of India lives ... the rest of the region lives, really. It is easier to talk from Chennai to Colombo and Chennai sometimes, even to Islamabad or Karachi than it is to reach somebody here. Then, if that's the way the connections can grow - so be it. Singapore is closer to Chennai than Delhi is, Professor Suryanarayanan likes to point that out at every seminar. That is sort of where my heart is going. I mean, it's not in another lecture, another book, another project.

Tanvi Madan: I think, my kind of two lessons related to that - I think one is ... there's a quote in a John le Carre novel that "The desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world." And I think, Steve's kind of dedication to picking up, with family, some of these kids

who were born in India at time when it didn't even have all the accoutrements that we have today and go and continue and learn, do field research - the importance of research when everybody is churning out blogs every second. ... everybody has an opinion. Steve didn't write too many opinion pieces but he did research and wrote analysis that has that shelf life. If you go into policymakers in the U.S. including young foreign service officers who have never been to India - the two books they have on their shelves are the India book, 'India: Emerging Power' and the 'Idea of Pakistan' book because that's kind of the base - they remain those kind of books. So that's the kind of work we should aspire to, which is there is value for that research and for going and spending time on the ground, talking to people, learning.

I think the second is collegiality. I think all of us remember Steve Cohen so fondly not just because he was a good scholar and he had impact, because I think you can say that about a number of people even though it's not so widespread. He was just a really good human being. I think in some version, every kind of obituary or memory that I've heard of him has some version of that word "generosity." And I think that, as all of us think about our contributions - the contributions we'd like to make, is not just to be good scholars or important, kind of in terms of having policy impact but to really, kind of - what are you going to leave in terms of a legacy, what people say about you and not just about your work.

Tanvi Madan: With that, I'd like to turn to the audience. If you have thoughts about Steve and would like to kind of express them, if you have questions for our panellists, please identify yourselves - not just for the audience here but for those of our audience - particularly Steve's family who will be watching later.

Thank you very much.
