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**SUMMARY OF THE 2014 K. SUBRAHMANYAM MEMORIAL LECTURE  
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LEE KUAN YEW SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE  
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**“Can India be Cunning?”**

It is truly a great honour for me to deliver the K. Subrahmanyam memorial lecture for 2014. Few men have contributed to the development of strategic thinking in India as much as he has. Few doubt today that India will emerge as one of the great powers in the world. His hard-headed and tough-minded thinking helped to pave the way for this to happen. It is this hard-headed and tough-minded thinking that I hope to replicate with my lecture today on the provocative topic of “Can India be cunning?”

This lecture will have three parts. In part one, I will explain how and why all countries, especially the great and major powers, are cunning. In part two, I will argue that India is about to sail into a geopolitical sweet spot. The danger it faces is that it could sail through that geopolitical sweet spot without taking full advantage of it. Thirdly, I will suggest some areas where India can deploy more cunning.

Let me begin with part one. All great powers are cunning. The United States has been amazingly successful in preserving its image as a beacon of freedom and liberty, even though it has supported countless dictators and monarchs and even reintroduced torture. China has been very cunning in taking advantage of 9/11 and the U.S. invasion of Iraq to grow peacefully. [Note: please see pp. 225 to 226 of my book *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East* for more details.] The United Kingdom and France have been cunning in preserving their permanent seats on the UN Security Council (UNSC) even though they have long passed their “sell by” dates as great powers. In theory, they support Germany’s permanent membership claim. In practice, they are using Germany’s case to block UNSC reform.

One point is worth emphasizing here. I am not passing moral judgment when I describe countries as being cunning. All nation states are designed to defend and promote their national interests, not push moral causes. I am not saying that there is no morality in foreign policy. However, when given a choice between national interests and moral causes, countries and leaders put national interests first. This is why the United States blocked UN intervention in Rwanda. Let me also emphasize another point: when countries are cunning, they can produce good moral results. China has been very cunning in isolating Taiwan while cultivating the Taiwanese people. As a result, the prospect of war across the Taiwan Strait has diminished significantly. It is good to use cunning to prevent wars.

In part two, I will highlight the fact that India is going to sail into a geopolitical sweet spot. It is clear that several powers, including the United States and Japan, and perhaps also Russia

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and Europe, are concerned about the rise of China. This is an undeniable fact. As a result, these countries are looking for countries to balance China. As they look around China's neighborhood, several have come to the conclusion that India is the best candidate to provide such a balance. This is why, for example, both the United States and Japan have begun courting India. The Indo-American nuclear deal was a geopolitical gift the United States gave to draw India to its side.

How should India respond to this new courtship? The simple answer is that India should be cunning in its response. It should welcome the courtship and take advantage of all the offers that come. Hence, it should welcome Japan's proposals for closer trade and investment links. Similarly, it should welcome a trade agreement with the United States, although this is unlikely to surface soon. However, even while it accepts all these offers, India should not allow any of these great powers to assume that they can take India for granted. The best way for India to demonstrate this is to develop equally close relations with China, especially on the trade and economic front. China too has no desire to alienate India. Hence, India should maintain a steadfast policy of developing good relations with all great powers without giving any of them the opportunity to take India for granted. As National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon said recently of India's shifting geopolitical landscape: "It would be convenient to allow the traditional listing of threats and dangers to frighten us back into autarchy. It would be equally lazy to choose alliance and try to shirk our responsibility for our own fate. But that would hardly solve or eliminate the threats. If anything the scope and nature of the changes that we see suggest that the answer is more multi-pronged engagement with the world not less."

In part three, I will suggest some ways in which India can be especially cunning. Firstly, India should use this opportunity of great courtship by great powers to push its case for a permanent seat on the UNSC. No great power wants to say no to India at this moment. However, India cannot get in alone. India's entry will have to be part of a package deal that also adds a permanent seat for Africa and Latin America. These two regional groups will block reform if they are not included. Hence, India should reconsider its policy of working with the G4 group (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan). Brazil's chances of getting in are strong. However the chances of Germany and Japan getting in are slim. Hence, instead of working with the G4 group, India should promote the 7-7-7 formula that I have explained at great length in my book, *The Great Convergence*.

Equally cunningly, India could apply pressure on the P5 members of the UNSC by hinting that India will reconsider the wisdom of accepting the mandatory decisions of the UNSC if it remains excluded from permanent membership. Such a hint will have an explosive effect.

Secondly, India could be as cunning in its policy towards Pakistan as China has been in its policy towards Taiwan. In a column I published in June 2009, I explained how it would serve India's interests to distinguish government-to-government relations from people-to-people relations. Even at the height of China's annoyance with the pro-independence government of Lee Teng-hui and Chen Shui-bian, China never stopped cultivating the Taiwanese people. Since India has a lot of "soft power" to deploy, especially through Bollywood, it can use it to win the hearts and minds of ordinary Pakistanis even if and when it has difficulties with the Pakistani government.

In short, India is entering a moment of extraordinary opportunities to enhance its global standing and to improve its diplomatic and geopolitical opportunities. Since we cannot tell the future, we can never tell how long this moment will last. Hence, India should seize this moment while it can. In the spirit of Mr. K. Subrahmanyam, India should engage in a new round of hard-headed and tough-minded thinking to take advantage of this window of opportunity.