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# Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping, New Delhi. Keynote Address by Foreign Secretary

August 21, 2003

1. General Nambiar, Director of the United Service Institution of India, distinguished participants and guests,
2. It gives me great pleasure to be amidst you today in the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK), at the inaugural session of the National Seminar. This is my first visit to this institution. In the short span of three years since its inception, the Centre has attained stature and has evolved into a well recognized institution. I congratulate Gen. Satish Nambiar, under whose able leadership the CUNPK has grown, for the meticulous planning and dynamism that he has imparted to the institution.
3. The Centre has been set up as a joint endeavour of the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces. I am particularly happy to see this vibrant example of active cooperation and to see that such concepts can be concretized. We all know that collective pooling of our experiences and expertise, a sharing of our perceptions and perspectives in the different wings of the Government, is a sine qua non for the successful management of critical issues of national interest, especially issues of war and peace. This Centre is an example of how such cooperation and synergy can be achieved. I have been told about what the CUNPK has done so far – visits including by the UNSG, an impressive list of seminars – national and international, training capsules and a building of data and case studies. I am told that in October this year, CUNPK is gearing up to co-host along with the U.N., a training capsule for emerging Troop Contributing Countries. This event, the first of this kind, is yet another step. May I use this opportunity, to express my Ministry's continued commitment to make CUNPK a Centre of excellence on Peacekeeping issues.
4. It is necessary for India to have such a Centre. India is among the longest serving and the largest troop contributors to UN peacekeeping activities. Our credentials in this regard are second to none. We have a formidable track record of having more than 67,000 personnel who have participated in 37 out of the 56 U.N. peacekeeping missions established so far. We have emerged as one of the most dependable and sought-after Troop Contributing Countries in the world. What is more, we have taken up difficult challenges. Starting with Korea in 1950, we have been participating in difficult missions such as in Cambodia, Angola, Rwanda, Somalia etc and now, once again the IAF is in Congo. None of this is without risks. Only two weeks ago, Shri Satish Menon, the Deputy Commandant in the BSF tragically laid down his life while serving in the U.N. Mission in

Kosovo. We solemnly salute this brave officer and also 108 others before him who have made this supreme sacrifice under the U.N. flag.

5. Apart from being a leading troop contributor, we have also been an energetic and influential participant in the U.N. debates on peacekeeping, and have helped in shaping current thinking on many conceptual issues. India has played an important role in the deliberations in the UN on the recommendations of the Brahimi Report, and supported efforts to make the UN more efficient and effective in its peacekeeping functions. It is eminently appropriate therefore that this National Seminar has as its theme the contemporary issue under the title "Complex Peace Operations – Traditional Premises and New Realities". Let me express some thoughts on the theme, in the light of our recent preoccupations and experiences.
6. I would like to emphasize that this is no longer an innocuous, theoretical debate, confined to academic circles. It is a timely issue for discussion also in the public domain. This became abundantly clear during the extensive and animated national debate that took place recently on the question of deploying our troops in Iraq. The debate involved practically all sections of people: parliamentarians, policy makers, analysts, defence forces and the general public. While the advantages and disadvantages of sending our troops to Iraq as a part of the stabilization force were hotly debated, there were some who sought to see the whole issue only in terms of so-called "U.S. pressure" on India. There has been no US pressure on India. US would, of course, like India to contribute to the stabilization force but to say that a request amounts to pressure would be a reflection of an undue sense of vulnerability. We value our relations with the US and whenever possible we should explore issues on which we can work together. I would like to emphasize, however, that to see India as bending to pressure is not to do justice to ourselves. The strength and stature of our country has been demonstrated time and again in the independent stance we have adopted on important global issues and the independent decisions we have taken in matters that concern us. We cannot be pushed into taking any decision that is not of our own making. Our decisions will always be arrived at after careful consideration of all relevant aspects of issues under examination, and will be guided, in the final analysis, solely by our national interests. So was it in this case.
7. Let me share some reflections on the broader theme: "traditional premises and new realities". Our standard approach to 'peacekeeping' is well known to most of you and can be summarized briefly. We believe that the UN has a major responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and that peacekeeping continues to be one of the key tools or instruments available to the UN. We view peacekeeping in the traditional sense of the term as an effort to assist in 'keeping peace' and facilitating a return to normalcy, preferably within a finite, well defined timeframe. We have believed that peacekeeping follows a 'peace accord' between parties to a conflict and a commitment by them for a peaceful settlement. Peacekeeping operations should strictly adhere to the principles of the UN Charter, in particular, the principles of full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and non-intervention in their internal affairs. We have also insisted that peacekeeping operations should be considered only at the request of the Member States involved, and should be under the command and control of the UN. It is also our belief that Chapter VI operations, based on consent of the parties are more likely to succeed and Chapter VII operations which are in the nature of an enforcement operation should be viewed as exceptions.
8. While the above has constituted our approach to peacekeeping, we are nevertheless fully alive and sensitive to the reality of the changing nature of peacekeeping, and the growing complexity and

scale of these operations. In the last ten years the principles and practices in peacekeeping have undergone something of a revolution.

9. These changes have been described and commented upon variously. Let me merely identify a few elements:

Peace keeping, an operation relevant to keeping peace between two or more states has also moved to keeping peace within a state. There is involvement of the UN not only in situations of inter-state conflict but also in the intra-State conflicts.

The objectives pursued in operations have enlarged from assisting in the maintenance of ceasefire to the increasingly detailed stabilization, humanitarian, and civilian police components. UN operations have widened and peace keeping is seen as one element in a larger process of managing a 'post-conflict' situation. Examples: East Timor or Afghanistan. The nature of 'Peace operations', itself a new term instead of the conventional 'Peacekeeping Operations' has therefore changed from being uni-dimensional to multi-dimensional involving a wide spectrum of activities – humanitarian assistance, refugee returns, provision of interim State services, establishment of rule of law, assistance to international criminal tribunals, facilitation of political process, monitoring of elections, and even establishment of transitional governments, etc.

The use of civil police and other civilians is increasing in these operations. We ourselves are getting more and more requests for policemen and have had police contingents in Bosnia and Kosovo.

There are also varying mandates under the UN: from classical UN peacekeeping operations, to UN-authorized multinational operations as in the case of Afghanistan and operations outside the ambit of the UN such as the coalition forces in Iraq.

Another significant evolution is the UN's reliance on regional and sub-regional organizations to support and even carry out missions on its behalf. The recent example is of ECOWAS in Liberia.

This is not an exhaustive but an indicative listing of some of the changes that we see around us today. It is clear that there are new realities. Indeed it is bound to be so since the structure and features of international relations have undeniably changed since the 1990s. India recognizes the changes and the new realities. The question then is how do we respond to them?

For a country like India – with its size, population, resources, a rich and successful experience of handling internal dissensions and problems, well established institutions, a proud record of independence of judgment and action - some of these precepts and practices amounting to erosion of sovereignty and dependence on others for even the essential tasks of governance cannot be but a matter of concern. Our basic approach has been to uphold the principle of sovereignty and of supporting assistance from outside, including the UN, only at the explicit request and consent of the State. Having said this, nevertheless we cannot shut our eyes to the reality around us and of the needs, the vulnerabilities and even the demands of weaker or smaller states which may seek international involvement in the resolution of their conflicts or in the protection of civilian populations. In some cases the Government is simply not functional, in others the institutions have collapsed or are non-existent: in other words the sovereignty cannot be exercised effectively at all. I would not name examples, but these should be clear to you. It is in such cases and only in such cases that we can countenance the question of the role of the international community including the UN, in peace operations in its larger sense as a component of nation-building.

In recent months we have pondered on some of these issues as we have looked at the situations in Afghanistan, in Congo, in Liberia and in Iraq. All these are different situations and let me say that India's interests are also different. Let me identify a few points, which in our view are relevant in determining India's response for requests for assistance.

To start, India's policy on involvement in peace keeping operations continues to be shaped by a commitment to UN, its objectives and a commitment to Peace. The involvement of the UN implies a certain legitimacy, an international recognition and acceptability. In saying this, I am not implying that all decisions of the Security Council are necessarily objective or wise or fair. In the real world we are well aware that the decisions of the Security Council could also be a product of the power politics. Nevertheless, they do confer a certain international legitimacy as distinct from adhoc or unilateral decisions.

We also are influenced by both the goodwill of the countries served by our peacekeepers and by the prospect of minimizing the civilian suffering which is a concomitant to peace.

We should however be failing in recognizing the realities that I described, if each and every of our decisions on peacekeeping is an automatic response to a UN request (and only to a U.N. request). There are too many conflict situations, too many requests and too few resources for India to so respond. Therefore, the bilateral relations and the regional equations and an assessment of India's interests broadly defined have to be a part in determining our response.

The perception about India's involvement in a country or in a region where our troops might go, the public sentiments about the role that India would play and the national sentiment in India about such involvement are also undoubtedly factors which would influence a decision.

Operational questions such as the issue of command and control, the resources for meeting the costs, the nature of the risk and the functions that the peacekeepers are expected to carry out are all relevant factors.

The professionalism of our armed forces, the international exposure and experience that they would get by successfully carrying out a peacekeeping assignment in different parts of the world is no doubt also an input in the Government's decision making.

Therefore, an assessment of India's overall national interests in a given situation has to be undoubtedly the major determinant in deciding on our response.

10. I see from the programme that there are a number of eminently qualified experts who would debate and deliberate on these important issues at greater length. I congratulate the Centre on organizing this seminar on an eminently topical and useful theme. I wish your deliberations all success.



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