

Foreign Secretary's virtual address to the National Defence College on 'India's Foreign Policy Options in the Emerging World Order' (May 15, 2020)

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I would like to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to address the National Defence College (NDC). I have had the privilege of addressing NDC five times in the past in different capacities, and it is indeed a pleasure to have the opportunity to do so again.

2. This is an institution that trains the future leadership of the armed forces. I am conscious that I am speaking to a class of tomorrow's generals, admirals and air marshals. You will be entrusted with the security of our nations in the years to come.

3. Defence and Foreign Policy have traditionally been described as two sides of the same coin. The connection between a Foreign Office and the Armed Forces – and the Defence establishment – is a mechanism that has deep historical roots.

4. Coordination between the defence and diplomatic establishments has, and continues to take place at many levels. It takes place at the level of the cabinet amongst Ministers. It takes place at my level with my counterparts. It takes place at the cutting edge between the soldiers, sailors and airmen and our diplomatic officers who evacuate our nationals from far corners of the globe.

5. Let me share with you a few examples of how this partnership has delivered in the context of COVID-19 pandemic:

Early evacuation of Indian nationals from worst affected countries (China, Iran) by the MEA and the Indian Air Force;

Operation Sanjeevani which delivered 6.2 tonnes of essential medicines and hospital consumables to Maldives;

Deployment to Maldives and Kuwait of Rapid Response Teams comprising doctors, nurses and paramedics from the Indian Armed Forces Medical Corps;

Mission SAGAR under which we have sent Indian Naval Ship Kesari to Maldives, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros and Seychelles carrying on board two medical assistance teams, consignments of COVID-19 related medicines and essential food items;

Repatriation of Indian nationals under the Vande Bharat Mission and Indian Navy's Operation Samudra Setu.

6. I therefore welcome this opportunity to interact with you.

7. The subject of my talk is "India's Foreign Policy Options in the Emerging World Order." The concept of a world

order is an old one in diplomatic and political thought.

8. We are all familiar with the Westphalian system of nation states, the concept of sovereignty and the general principle that one should not interfere in the affairs of other states devised in Western Europe four centuries ago.

9. The four centuries that have elapsed since then have been the most momentous in human history. The historian Eric Hobsbawm divides this period into the Age of Revolution, the Age of Capital and the Age of Empire – broadly corresponding to the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. He described the 20th century as the Age of Extremes. I do not know what Hobsbawm would have called the late 20th and 21st century, but I suspect it would have been something on the lines of the Age of Globalization. Or perhaps, he would have called it the Age of Change. The rate of change that all of us have experienced is unprecedented in human history. This is also an age of unprecedented interdependence. It is marked by globalization and by the explosion of technology that has altered the very fabric of our being.

10. More importantly to the people in this group, the 20th century was a century of total war. The first and second World Wars caused death and destruction on a scale that horrified the world.

11. This Westphalian order, although still in existence, was modified by the creation of a network of international organizations such as the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization, a system of International Courts and tribunals and the emergence of global soft laws or norms. The concept of sovereignty was revisited and concepts as Responsibility to Protect and international human rights law began to appear in international conversations.

12. The current pandemic has provided us an opportunity, unwanted as it is, to take note of the extent of globalization and integration and of the sweeping nature of the transition.

13. This brings me to the next section of my talk today: where does India stand in the "Emerging World Order."

14. How we approach this question, particularly in the context of the current crisis, was articulated by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in his interventions in the recently held virtual NAM and G-20 summits. The Prime Minister underlined that COVID-19 had shown us the limitations of the existing international system. A purely economic agenda had defined globalization so far, and we had cooperated more to balance competing individual interests, rather than advance the collective interests of all human kind. He called for a new template of globalization, based on fairness, equality and humanity in the post-COVID world.

15. We have long been a constructive actor in shaping of such a human welfare-centric international system: by sharing our developmental experience with partner countries in the Global South; undertaking humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations in countries such as Yemen, Nepal, Iraq, as also during the current pandemic; and through initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.

16. We are a country with global interests. We have one of the largest and most able Diasporas. Our economy, and therefore our material well being, is plugged on to global supply chains. We are a powerhouse in the services sectors. We look on the world as a borderless economy with an interlinked marketplace. We require not just safe sea lanes and air lanes but a safe cyber space, safety in conducting business in all its multiple modern dimensions and safety for our nationals and for our interests overseas.

17. We live in a world where much is possible. We also live in a very dangerous world. The current pandemic

underlines some of these dangers. It is a time of disruptions, of the unexpected and of the uncertain. The pandemic, and its consequences, immediate and future, are an illustration of the level of uncertainty that we must live with. We are faced with new and uncertain dangers even as we struggle with existing threats to international peace and security.

18. Terrorism, which many of you here have fought, remains a growing and resistant cancer. It continues to destabilize and weaken states and divert resources. Radical ideologies continue to generate violence and insecurity. As a country which has suffered for long from cross-border terrorism, we have been steadfast in seeking action against those who control, support, fund and shelter terrorists. While our efforts to isolate terrorists and their sponsors have led to increased global support, we need to ensure the world follows an undifferentiated and unambiguous approach to terrorism. There are no good or bad terrorists. We also need to ensure that politicization of global mechanisms such as UN listings is avoided, and the global community finalizes a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.

19. Like the economy, today's battle space is not limited by geographical or physical boundaries. It is interlinked and multi-dimensional. Technology has transformed our lives. It has also exponentially increased the potential for mischief by evil doers.

20. We are facing, if I may say so, a 'Black Swan' moment. A physical microbe has taken us all by surprise. What it also tells us is that we have no idea where the next such event will be. It could come from cyber space, a computer virus, could be a disinformation campaign that produces civilian unrest or could be a major act of terrorism, even financial terrorism. This is only an indicative list.

21. This is also a time of opportunity. Empirically speaking, all crises are succeeded by periods of growth. The Great Depression and the second World War were followed by one of the greatest sustained spurts of economic growth. A similar trend was observed after all the four major recessions in the post-World War II era. Major health crises have led to investments in medical science and public health that have transformed our lives.

22. We hope this will also happen after the present crisis expends itself.

23. There will be change. All crises alter geopolitics. Second World War created the international system as we see it today. The oil shock and the global warming moved the world away slowly and steadily towards a renewable energy economy with its attendant geopolitical impacts. Hard and soft power balances will be altered. New multilateral conversations will emerge. The relative strengths of players and "actors" in this global conversation will change, and power, resources and capacity will continue to disperse around the world.

24. Inevitably, hard and soft power balances will be affected and the roster of global leaders among nation states will show some change.

25. This will also affect the nature of higher decision making in statecraft as well as India's choices, challenges and opportunities in a multilayered and multi-dimensional operating environment.

26. While the close relationship between the diplomatic and security establishments remains very much in existence, we are no longer like a coin. Foreign and security policies are now facets of a many-sided polygon. Definitions of security tend to have a positive aspect and emphasize the presence of well being rather than the absence of danger. This considerably complicates and expands our responsibilities. Bio-security, climate change, safe and reliable cyber commons, and supply chain reliability are just some of the areas where we will have to work together.

27. It is also good to remember that the business of statecraft has never been in binaries. Practitioners like us do not always have the luxury of choosing between black and white. One usually has to make do with suboptimal choices. We are required to be agile and flexible in dealing with situations.
28. That does not mean that we can afford to live in a moral vacuum. We are an ancient nation. We are a people who have gone through ups and downs, through good times and bad. We have endured. Through all this, we have held true to certain beliefs. India's aspirations are not just material in nature. We are a nation that believes in "vasudhaiva kutumbakam" - the world is one. We also believe in the principle of "nishkama karma", that good needs to be done for its own sake.
29. India's role as a "pharmacy of the world" has come into focus during this crisis. We have a world-class pharmaceutical industry that is the producer of choice for critical medications with brand recognition in all geographies and markets. The pandemic produced an explosion in demand for drugs such as Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and Paracetamol produced in India.
30. In a coordinated response involving several branches of government and multiple private sector pharma companies, India was able to supply, after ensuring adequate domestic stockpiles, large volumes of these drugs to friends and consumers across the world. It is also making its medical and public health expertise and capacity available to the entire South Asian region.
31. The lockdown has made the logistics of this humanitarian relief operation extremely complex. A mixture of innovative means is being used to ensure delivery. We have supplied medicines, on commercial and grant basis, to 133 countries (446 million HCQ tablets and 1.54 billion Paracetamol tablets) all over the world - including to several that are already facing severe humanitarian crises.
32. We have not let the pandemic come in the way of our diplomatic engagements. India's wise counsel and the Prime Minister's statesmanship have been sought and appreciated at various bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral platforms. The External Affairs Minister has engaged with dozens of his counterparts.
33. These are not just independent and isolated facts. They weave a narrative. They represent our central beliefs and our aspirations. In line with the Prime Minister's vision of placing humanity at the centre of global prosperity and cooperation, India, in the midst of the pandemic, went out of its way to be a net provider of health security. We decided, in these very difficult circumstances, to be a responsible member of the international community and take a far-sighted view that will stand us in good stead in the post-pandemic world.
34. I would like to end by looking at the future. We know that the future is uncertain. So what do we do about it? I would say that as a Foreign Office and as a Government we have to continuously adapt and innovate. We have to be prepared to do things that we have never done before. We must build resilience and capacity.
35. We would like to run a clear-eyed diplomatic establishment with very swift decision-making structures and rapid reflexes. In a globalized world, distances mean very little. We are trying to building a global diplomatic footprint that reduces these distances further. Our network of embassies and high commissions and consulates are no longer distant diplomatic outposts. They are nodes in a global network.
36. We have traditionally described our policies in spatial terms. Neighborhood First and Act East are central drivers of our diplomatic engagement. Our immediate neighborhood receives the greatest attention and emphasis in our diplomatic

efforts. Special focus is on developmental assistance and on projects for cross-border connectivity and economic integration in the neighborhood.

37. In the last five years, Think West – our outreach to the Gulf and West Asian countries – has become an increasingly important pillar of our foreign policy. Our engagement with Africa, both in political and economic terms, has also intensified as never before. There have been 34 outgoing visits to African countries at the level of the President, the Vice President and the Prime Minister. Over two-thirds of India's Lines of Credit in the past decade have been offered to African countries.

38. We deploy large amounts of resources through development partnerships with our friends. We will presently explore how we can calibrate these partnerships with the changed requirements of our friends. Our approach will nonetheless continue to be to execute viable projects and building capacities in local communities.

39. We have, as I have mentioned earlier, focused on the creation of a capacity to respond to humanitarian situations in any part of the globe.

40. We have a number of key bilateral relationships which require constant tending.

41. We are also multilateralists and believe in a rules based, but equitable and just, international system. The current crisis has established the urgency for transparency and democratization in the international system, and for reform of institutions to make them compatible with the emerging world order. As the Prime Minister underlined during the G-20 virtual summit, we need to strengthen and reform intergovernmental organizations, which continue to be based on the last Century's models.

42. Economic diplomacy, the diplomacy of globalization through regimes such as the G20 and WTO, and linking up with global capital and technology flows is a major focus area. As we remain engaged globally, we also need to become AtmaNirbhar or self-reliant, as the Prime Minister observed in his address to the nation recently, to recover from the current crisis. We do not, however, seek self-centered or isolationist arrangements when we speak of self-reliance. A self-reliant India will automatically be a more internationalist India.

43. And, as a Ministry, we are constantly learning and upgrading our capacities to engage with the emerging world order. We have added new divisions that deal with Counter Terrorism, New and Emerging Technologies, and Cyber Issues. We intend to augment defence cooperation with our partners across the world.

44. I would like to conclude by saying that today, more than ever, we are required to be eternally vigilant. I understand that I am speaking to some of the best in the armed forces. I have interacted with your predecessors in the many diplomatic posts that I have served throughout my career. I have had a very good experience in my dealings with them. Most of you are aware of the need to think "jointly". We need to take that a step further. We need to ensure that we are effective in working together and creating politico-military "jointness".

45. This will go a long way in ensuring a vigilant and capable state structure that can deal with the challenges – and nurture the opportunities – of tomorrow.