

POLITICAL ISLAM: IMAGE AND REALITY

Welcome Address

Lt. Gen. V.R. Raghavan
President, CSA

Chennai is the cultural centre of southern or peninsular India, and one purpose of starting CSA here was to build and sustain the peninsular perspectives on security. We felt that this part of India is unique in the sense that its growth, social cohesion, literacy and governmental patterns are very unique and better than anywhere else in India. It is necessary to include the perspectives of national security from this thrusting, forward moving part of the country. Their perspective on security should get acknowledged and recognised. CSA is happy that progress is being made in this regard. We have put together a number of meetings; workshops and seminars.

Let me introduce you to Dr. Mohammed Ayoob who teaches International Relations in the Michigan State University. A specialist in Conflict and Security in the Third World, some of his earlier books have become definitive reading and classics in the security problematic of the Third World developing countries. He has held faculty appointments at the Australian National University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and has been having visiting appointments at Columbia, Princeton, Oxford and Brown Universities. He is an author of a huge list of articles, books and edited books. His latest scholarly articles include "Inequality and Theorising in International Relations", "Southwest Asia after the Taliban", "Humanitarian Intervention and

State Sovereignty" and "War against Iraq: Normative and Strategic Implications". We must note the fact that he has worked simultaneously on two or three very topical and interesting issues: one being inequality and theorising in International Relations, second on international politics of Southwest Asia and Middle East, and third on humanitarian intervention and international security. The Consulate General of India in Chicago honoured Dr. Ayoob with an outstanding and inspired leadership award. It is in recognition of promoting greater international understanding through University education. Today, he will speak to us on the topic **Political Islam: Image and Reality** and I have no doubt that we will have a stimulating talk from him this evening.

Political Islam: Image and Reality

Dr. Mohammed Ayoob

Dr. Ayoob began by noting that it was essential to reflect on the subject of Political Islam from a relatively objective and knowledgeable perspective because much of the popular knowledge that is being disseminated around the world about Political Islam or Islam as such is based on sensationalized accounts of western journalists and so called experts who achieve instant expertise. In his lecture, he argued that there are Political Islams of different varieties embedded in particular social and political contexts as against the common assumption of a Political Islam.

According to him, there are three often-unstated assumptions that have inspired

much of the discussions in the West regarding Political Islam over the last decade and a half and particularly since 9/11. These assumptions are often internalized without questioning because they dominate the global discourses. These are:-

- Political Islam like Islam itself is monolithic.
- Political Islam is inherently violent.
- The intermingling of religion and politics is unique to Islam.

A look at the evidence would show that none of the above assertions capture the reality of the multifaceted phenomenon that is fashionably called Political Islam. He said that although an argument could be made that there are one or more varieties of trans-national Political Islam, such trans-national manifestations form a very small part of the activity referred to as Political Islam.

Definition

'Political Islam' or 'Islamism' (in some ways a better term to use, i.e., use of Islam as a political ideology rather than as religion or theology.) can be defined as a form of instrumentalisation of Islam by individuals, groups and organisations that pursue political objectives. It provides political responses to today's societal challenges by imagining a future based on re-appropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition. This re-appropriation of the past, the 'invention of tradition' to use Eric Hobsbawm's term, is a romanticised notion of a largely mythical golden age. It is this romanticised, instrumentalised definition of Islam that lies at the heart of Political Islam.

Context Specific

The invention of tradition provides the tools for de-historicising Islam and separating it from the various contexts in terms of time and space in which Islam has flourished over the past 1400 years. This de-contextualising of Islam allows Islamists in theory to ignore the social, economic and political milieus within which the Muslim societies operate. However, context has a way of taking its own revenge in abstract theory when attempts are made to put such theories into practice. Political Islam or Islamism is no exception. In practice no two Political Islams are alike because they are determined by the contexts within which they operate. What works in Egypt will not work in Indonesia, what works in Saudi Arabia will not work in Turkey. The diversity of the Muslim world in terms of socio-economic characteristics, culture including political culture, trajectory of intellectual developments and so on is a pointer to the fact that political manifestations in Islam like the practice of Islam itself is to a great extent context specific. Dr. Ayoob believes that there is something called Indian Islam which is distinct from Islam elsewhere. This context specific Islam is the result of the interpenetration of religious precepts and local culture including political culture.

While accepting the fact that there are Islamic vocabularies that transcend political boundaries, Dr. Ayoob argued that such vocabularies are normally employed to serve the objectives specific to distinct settings. In the process, while the Islamic milieu may continue to appear to be the same to the uninitiated observer, its actual content undergoes substantial transformation. The Islamic vocabulary is used to make claims and counter claims and since the context that accompanies them is normally circumscribed by the borders of the sovereign territorial state, much of the

politics that goes on in the name of Islam is also confined within those boundaries. That Islam's political imagination is determined in overwhelming measure by the existence of multiple territorial states becomes very clear when one looks at the political action of Islamist groups. The Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan is as Pakistani specific as the Islamic Salvation Front is Algeria specific. The strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt with branches in various Arab countries, are equally determined by particular contextual characteristics. Thus the brotherhoods in Egypt, Jordan, Syria and occupied Palestine have different political strategies shaped in response to specific challenges. Therefore, what one sees even in terms of the operation of the Islamist political formations is that they are responding to particular social and political contexts despite what to the uninitiated appears to be a common vocabulary that is being used.

Modern Phenomenon

The political phenomenon that is known as Political Islam is a modern expression. It has very little if anything to do with the ideal Islamic polity, as a vision by Islamists, situated in the seventh century Arabia, especially in the city state of Medina under the Prophet. The roots of Political Islam as we see it today lie in the socio-political conditions of the Muslim countries in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Political Islam is a product of the Muslim people's interaction - military, political, economic, cultural and intellectual - with the west during the past 200 years when western power has been assembled and Muslims have become the objects rather than the subjects of history. It is therefore both a reaction to western domination and at the same time a product of that domination itself.

The very term Islamic state was used in order to reconcile the romanticised vision of the Islamic polity with the existence of the sovereign states that were products of the true processes of colonisation and decolonisation, and were modelled in theory after modern European states. In practical terms, the Islamists preoccupation with the Islamic state has meant the attempt to Islamise the existing Muslim states and not to create the universal Caliphate. So, the search for an Islamic state has led to the emergence of what one of the leading authorities on Political Islam, Oliver Roy from France, has called Islamul Nationalism. One can see many such Islamul nationalist movements from North Africa to Southeast Asia, which were fashioned initially in the crucible of resistance to colonial domination but refashioned in the postcolonial period.

Growth of Political Islam

The attraction and growth of Political Islam in these various settings in exponential terms in the post colonial period is related to the fact that post colonial state elites, most of them secular to begin with, failed to deliver either wealth or power or dignity to their expectant populations emerging from colonial bondage. It is in this stage that Political Islam as we know it today came of age. Abu Kalam Madudidi in Pakistan and Syed Qutb in Egypt became its foremost intellectual standard bearers. As the legitimacy of postcolonial state elites - that had become the successor elites to the departing colonial powers in much of the Muslim world - declined, many post colonial regimes in the Muslim world turned toward authoritarian and regressive methods to maintain control. Consequently, they destroyed or at least severely weakened much of the secular opposition. In the process they created further political space

in which Islamist formations could entrench themselves. Regime strategies of co-optation, competition and suppression in regard to Islamist movements all failed because co-opting them meant giving even more political space. Competing with them in their own terms meant that the rhetoric of political debate began to cater to Islamist sensibilities more and more which gave them an advantage over their secular opponents. Suppressing them was never really possible in the complete sense because although these authoritarian regimes in many of the Muslim countries had become experts in suppressing opposition - particularly in the Middle East they were able to virtually eliminate many of the secular opposition parties and formations - because of the use of the Islamic political vocabulary and the conduit or challenge through which this vocabulary could be politicised it was never possible to totally suppress them. So, at the same time this vocabulary often made such political discourse appear politically innocuous and therefore immune to governmental retributions. Mosques and affiliated institutions and particularly religious sermons could be used to send out political messages dressed up in religious garb. This could be a very important weapon that could be used against incumbent regimes that were oppressive and authoritarian in character. This was especially the case during the Iranian revolution. So, the critical variable that explains the popularity of Islamist political formations in many of these countries is the nature of the regimes that had cleared the political ground for their emergence as the primary exponents of opposition and also the primary standard bearers for human rights.

Neo-Wahabism: Wahabi-Qutbist Amalgamation

There are new coinages as far as the political vocabulary of western discourse was concerned which are contextual in nature. One such term which has attained popularity today is Wahabism. Wahabism as it is witnessed today in the Pakistani Madrassas in the border of Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia has gone beyond the original thrust of Wahabi teaching and is called by Dr. Ayoob as neo Wahabism.

The Saudi ruling house envisioned a form of Islam in the guise of Wahabism that would be socially and culturally conservative while at the same time politically quiet. This was intended to help it retain power and at the same time maintain a flourishing economic and security relationship with the United States. The social contract between the Saudi house and the Wahabi establishment worked well until the 1970s when it began to fail for multiple reasons. One of those was the changes within the Saudi kingdom; the inflow of petrodollars, democratic and educational explosions within them together all leading to changed societal expectations. Equally important was the Saudi policy adopted in the 1960s and determined not by religious considerations but by Riyadh's rivalry with Cairo that headed the Arab nationalist camp. This rivalry led Riyadh to give refuge to radical members of the Muslim brotherhood, then being hounded out by Nasser's regime. Many of those radical members of the Muslim brotherhood were disciples of Qutb who married the extremist philosophy to the socially and culturally conservative ethos of Saudi Arabia, thus concocting a heady brew that appealed to the three critical constituencies of the kingdom - the most socially conservative, the most disillusioned and disempowered, and the most arguist - and joined them in a union, potentially very stabilising for the Saudi regime. Wahabism as the Saudis had envisaged it, constructed

from above, was a pillar of status quo, Wahabism mobilised from below became the mortal enemy of the same status quo. It is this form of neo Wahabism, which is really an amalgamation of Qutbist philosophy and socio cultural conservatism of the traditional Wahabi type, which has produced elements like Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden and so and so forth. Osama bin Laden largely represented the Wahabi strain in the organisation. The leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad Al Zawahri represented the radical Qutbist heritage. It seems that it was Al Zawahri who was the chief ideologue, the leading strategist and intellectual power house within Al Qaeda. Bin Laden was the financier and figure head. What is remarkable about this Qutbist-Wahabist alliance is that it reached its culmination in Afghanistan. Again this is very context specific. Al Qaida's messianic mission may have been couched in universal terms but divorced from its Afghan context it would have withered on the vine. Context mattered hugely in this case. And I have picked out these two cases of Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan to make the point as to how political Islam even in its most extreme variant is hugely context specific.

Jihadi Groups

The extreme variant of Political Islam are elements like the Al Qaida and trans-national groups that have taken to extremist militant activity including groups that have operated in the Indian segment of Jammu and Kashmir. That hit the headlines because they dramatised this extremism. Until the Afghan resistance as it was called in the West, those fighting the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan were referred to routinely in the press and even by leaders in the United States and Europe as Mujahideen - the warriors of God because that was a very positive connotation. But when in the 1990s

the same Mujahideen turned against the West and started operations against the American interests, suddenly the word Mujahideen fell into disuse because of its earlier positive connotation that was given in the western press and they began to be referred to as Jihadis, the extremist elements in a pejorative sense. So, the same people with very much the same ideology were given the name Jihadis in order to demonstrate that they were really a very negative people.

These Jihadi elements, including Islamic Jihadis, Lashkar Jihad in Southeast Asia, Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad in Pakistan, in the overall picture form a very small minority amongst Islamist groups and political formations. The major Islamist political formations such as the Islamic brotherhood in Egypt, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Jamiat ul Islam in Pakistan, the Islamist parties in Turkey whether the Welfare Party or the Justice and Development party by and large played the political game according to the rules established by regimes normally unsympathetic to the Islamist forces. Several of them have in fact done credibly in the elections despite the fact that usually the dice has been loaded against them. They have to function within the parameters set by the authoritarian regimes. They lie low and suppressed, bounce back organisationally and politically when autocracies liberalise under domestic or international pressure. But in all cases they try to keep their constituencies and organisations intact as far as possible. The major point therefore is most of the political activism of the Islamist parties are being channelled through parliamentary democratic or semi democratic means.

State-Religion Relationship in Islam

It is frequently assumed in much of the popular analysis and even in substantial portion of academic discourse that there is no separation between the religious and political spheres in Islam. This is a myth to which Islamist rhetoric has also contributed in considerable measure. Consequently, an image has been created not merely of the indivisibility of religion and state but of religion being in the driver's seat determining the political trajectory of Muslim states including their inability to accept the notion of popular sovereignty and implement democratic reforms. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

In practice the difference between religious and political spheres began to be clearly demarcated very soon after the death of the Prophet in 632 of the common year. This was inevitable because according to Muslim belief revelation ended with the Prophet's death. The fiction of the indivisibility between religion and state was maintained in all the major Sunni Muslim dynasties in order primarily to legitimise dynastic rule and provide the veneer to the reality of not merely the separation of religion and politics but the subservience of religious establishment to temporal authority. It continued throughout the reign of three great Sunni dynasties - the Umayyads, the Abbasids and the Ottomans. The Ottomans from the seventeenth century onwards instituted this subservience superbly by absorbing the religious functionaries into the bureaucracy.

The link between religion and state in Muslim parts of South and Southeast Asia was much more complex and much more distinct, thanks to the greater prevalence of Sufi and syncretic forms of Islam, which allowed religion to carve its sphere distinct from the state. In the case of the Indian subcontinent the presence of a large non

Muslim community over whom Muslim potentates ruled for several centuries at least nominally created a very special situation. In such a context statesmanship demanded greater compromises that turned Mughal Emperors into mere deities for their Hindu subjects through the concept of darshan that was introduced - the Emperor showed himself to the subjects from the balcony - and turned the Hindu Rajputs into the sword arm of the nominally Muslim empire. The Kayasthas simultaneously formed the backbone of the imperial bureaucracy during the Mughal period. It was not well known that even under an Emperor considered to be a bigot like Aurangzeb there are very interesting instances of how he used the Hindu military elites, the Rajputs in particular, to serve imperial ends.

Muslim politics therefore are heirs to the twin tradition of separation of the political from the religious arena and where the two intersect the supremacy of the political over the religious sphere.

It has also been remarked that Islam unlike other religions has become a marker of political identity, that there is something distinct about the Muslim world where Islam becomes the chief factor that determines the political identity of people in these country. This again is a myth as the division of Muslim world into 50 odd states would clearly denote. Zionism as ideology and political project can aptly be termed political Judaism responsible for settling European Jews in Palestine, establishing the Israeli state and defining the political identity of Israeli Jews and indeed many others around the world. In the spread of Christianity outside Europe through the medium of colonialism the cross invariably accompanied the flag, inextricably mixing the political and the religious in the narrative of colonial domination. Currently the

growing power in American politics of the Christian Right particularly the Evangelical Movement estimated at more than 40 million strong is changing the political culture of the US slowly but surely, and it also has tremendous implications for the American foreign policy towards the Middle East. Examples abound from non Judea-Christian traditions as well. Hindu nationalism in India is but political jingoism in whose name various activities are engaged in quite deleterious to the constitutional political fabric of this country. Any one acquainted with the politics of Sri Lanka will recognise the importance of the Buddhist Sangha, the monastic order and therefore political Buddhism.

Islam is singled out, particularly in the West, as the unique culprit that commits the mixing of religion and politics because most other religio-political movements either emanate from the western societies or like the Hindu orchestration of politicised religion do not challenge western hegemony that prefer to form an alliance. It is the dimension of political Islam which stubbornly refuses to accept the current situation of power in the international system as either legitimate or permanent. Islamist movements including the vast majority that works peacefully within the existing political system continue in multifarious ways to challenge not only the domestic status quo but the international status quo as well because the domestic status quo in most of these countries is propped up by those who preside over the international status quo.

In western perceptions Political Islam is therefore unique not because it uses religion for political purposes in order to create national identity or transform society. It was seen as uniquely threatening because it can also be used as an instrument to challenge

sometimes by violent means the west's continued domination over the structures of international power either directly or through plant regimes in Middle East and elsewhere. In other words it has great potential for becoming the ideology of resistance to a hegemonic world order. This is why you see people like Samuel Huntington writing about the clash of civilisations which is primarily the west and the Muslim world which is going to lose, expounding about what went wrong that is what went wrong with Islam and not what went wrong with the American foreign policy. Politicising religion therefore is not the principal crime that Islamist groups commit, it is the potential international consequences of the terms in which Islamists' politicising religion that makes them appear threatening to the dominant parts of international system.

The general perception that is propagated around the world by the western press and the media, does not negate the fact that Political Islam is a multifaceted phenomenon and is in almost all cases context specific circumscribed within the confines of individual states. It also cannot repudiate the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Islamist political activity is conducted through peaceful means within constitutional limits even where such constitutional enforcements are unsympathetic to Islamist thoughts. Trans-national extremist activities including acts of terrorism are the exception not the rule when it comes to political action under taken in the name of Islam.

During the discussion session that followed the lecture, Dr. Ayoob dwelt on the Umma and Jihad. According to him, Umma meaning the community of believers is politically marginal if not totally irrelevant. The fact that it was theoretically used to give

a sense of unity to the Muslim world that politically did not exist and just as the fiction of the Caliph or the Caliphate was maintained and in today's world where having learnt about the concept of nationalism from the west were not so much as positive as negative, the Muslim world like the rest of the developing world was divided into multiple states and national loyalties transcend those of the loyalty to the Umma. In recent years the most bloody and violent conflict was that between Iran and Iraq which if there was any concept of the Umma would not have taken place. So, Muslim countries have no hesitation in fighting each other for political and national reasons which by itself demonstrates that the concept of Umma - although at one level it does strike a sympathetic chord and there is a level of affinity at the religious level - is not translatable into political terms.

On Jihad he said that if you go back to tradition of Prophet there is this famous saying attributed to him when a particular force that has gone out to war during his time returned back to Medina and said it had finished Jihad. He replied that it was only a smaller Jihad. The real Jihad is to struggle

against evil within oneself. So, one could say that the greater Jihad is very different from this concept of going to war against so called infidels. But to put it in political terms, it is true during the classical age of Arab expansion and the later Ottoman expansion, the concept of Jihad was appropriated by the ruling elites to justify going to war in order to expand their territories. In today's context where the political and military actions are determined by the logic of nation state the concept of Jihad is totally irrelevant and should be thrown into the dustbin of history. With wars based on the reason of state and the reason of regimes, the word Jihad is used, like the Ottomans to justify actions that are taken in the interest of particular states and regimes.

UK AND INDIA ON THE WORLD STAGE

Mr. K.V. Krishnaswamy
Founder Member, CSA

We are indeed privileged to have with us a very distinguished diplomat, the Deputy High Commissioner of UK in New Delhi Mr. Mark Runacres. I extend a warm welcome to you on behalf of the President, and members of Centre for Security Analysis and I request Mr. Venuprasad who is the President of the Association of British Scholars (ABS) here in Chennai to preside over the roundtable.

Mr. Venuprasad
President, ABS, Chennai Chapter

Let me take this opportunity to introduce the Association of British Scholars. The ABS was formed in Chennai in 1985 and since then a lot of chapters have been added to it.

Now we have an umbrella organization called the ABS India with as many as 17 chapters across India. ABS is essentially the forum of the returnees from the UK who at some stage in their life have had the opportunity of living, studying, training in the U.K. with the support of the British Government or on their own. The objective

of ABS is to foster Indo-British relationship through the returned scholars by organizing programmes that are intellectual, cultural, educational or social involving various segments of the society. This year 15000 visas, 30% of them from the South, and the target I gather for 2007 is 25000 and ABS India is looking at a membership of 10000. British education, the prospects for business especially in the IT industry, the health care and other sectors are seeing greater cooperation and the future seems to be evermore promising in the coming years. I invite Mr. Mark to give his talk.

Mr. Mark Runacres

I am touched by the coincidence that the CSA was established in the very month that I arrived in India in August 2002. This is my second visit to India as a British diplomat, the first being between 1983 and 1986 which was a particularly exciting period in Indian politics. Today South Asia is a key element in our foreign policy.

In India, a leading country in the region, we have a big network and are very well staffed. We have four Deputy High Commissioners one each for the northern, southern, eastern and western regions. We also have various other offices around the country, not headed by a Deputy High Commissioner and in some cases staffed entirely locally like the one in Hyderabad.

Before I take up the subject of my talk, let me say a few words about the ABS, which has been a fantastic success story. Almost everything that I will talk to you today in terms of linkages between India and UK is underpinned by the flow of people between the two countries and critically by the flow of young students either in their secondary or tertiary or specialist education. When our Prime Minister was here in the beginning of

2002 he suggested that we should be aiming to double the number of students going to the UK in 4 to 5 years time and we have managed to double it within one year. As Mr. Venuprasad was saying we are now heading to 15000 students per year. To give you a measure of comparison, the other big destination which attracts students from India is the United States and they run at about 19000 a year at the moment although they are seeing some decline for all kinds of reasons. We feel we are making strong progress on that through our scholarship programmes and we aim at key areas for cooperation and capacity building such as the environment, governance and human rights. I am grateful to you for the role that ABS plays here in the South.

I mentioned earlier that I first came to India in 1983 as part of my first posting overseas, and that it was a period of tremendous activity in the Indo-British relations. There were an equal number of people moving at the senior level in both directions. Having been here at that time personally, I saw that there was a lot of movement and historians will be able to tell us that at that time we were actually laying the foundations for the relationship we will be developing through the 21st century. This is really the relationship that I would like to talk about in detail. This was the time when we had students moving in and out of the UK and when we were getting to know each other having got over the sort of initial post-independence hump. It was a period when a lot of other things in the world were distracting both of us and the period of Cold War when the perspective of international security was very different from the perspective we have today.

Coming back twenty years later, sixteen years from the time I left after my first tenure, I was struck not by activity and

exchange but by the substance and maturity of the relationship, which had developed. This made me think that I can really talk about some of the issues on the international agenda, some traditional and some forming part of our new agenda. The joint declaration “India-UK: Towards a New and Dynamic Partnership” brought out by our Prime Ministers lays out a menu for the rest of us to make sure that we move deeper into issues we were already collaborating in and broaden the scope of collaboration. The declaration was well timed and was at one of those moments in international history when there was a clear convergence of interests between the two countries. The areas of cooperation were put down very eloquently in the declaration.

Traditional Areas of Co-operation

There are some traditional areas of discussion and collaboration in foreign policy and security issues, defence issues and trade and investment issues, which I think you will expect to find in any major bilateral relationship but even in those rather traditional issues we are finding ourselves in new territory. Let me give you examples from all those areas which I have found extremely striking in the two years that I have been here.

On the foreign policy front we have now reached a level of frankness in our dialogue with India, which we enjoy with hardly any other partner outside Europe and the United States. It is a dialogue which is characterized by straightforwardness, lack of protocol, and intensity, which is unique outside our immediate neighbors and partners. Our foreign ministers have developed the habit of talking to each other when they want to discuss issues not only of regional interest but also of a broader global interest. Below that level, our permanent under secretaries,

you call them foreign secretaries; have discussions on a regular basis. It is really the spontaneity and natural exchange, which I want to highlight. Now there is ease about going into areas which previously quite frankly would have been off limits. By this I mean in particular a dialogue with the Indian government on India-Pakistan, India-Nepal, Bangladesh and all around the region. India is situated in the region of the world which has probably the most trouble at the moment. These are countries in which we have significant interests and whom we have traditionally followed very closely, be it Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan or Sri Lanka, even across into Myanmar. We have had no dialogue about these regions earlier and when we compare that to the sort of easy dialogue that we have now, I think it is evidence of a new maturity in the relationship. Equally, we have straightforward dialogue with the Indian Government and Indian society on some of the difficult issues more closer to home such as the challenging developments in the European Union, Balkans, for example, and Ukraine. So I take that to be a really significant development over the last few years.

On the defence front, defence issues feature firmly in this joint declaration. I had observed over the years something of a ‘tailing off’ of the comfort level in the exchanges between the security experts in the two countries. It must be something to do with the way your armed forces have developed and with the shift in the international security picture, which meant that people did not quite speak the same language. When I arrived here in 2002, it was my broad observation that our defence links were a little underpowered although we have mechanisms like the Defence Consultative Group with India. In the last two years we have seen a more or less

complete turn around. We have had ship visits, all three chiefs of staff have gone in both directions and met each other and now we are planning a major joint exercise with the Indian Armed Forces.

Our Defence Consultative Group, which meets every year alternating between London and Delhi, last year had a much more straightforward air about it and we found our defence secretaries talking very candidly about issues ranging from Iraq, Nepal to the Balkans in a much fuller way than before. Last week we had a landmark event, which was a joint seminar on Peace Support Operations. What used to be known as Peace Keeping Operations is now Peace Support Operations as the notion of conflict and conflict management has changed. We had a large group of military and civilians who came from the UK, who were received at the senior level by the Indian Government and by independent specialists in the field and held two and a half days of substantial discussions which looked at everything from the practicalities of military deployment in support of peace operations.

Next in the traditional area of cooperation is trade and investment, which has always under performed between our two countries. Exports till the beginning of the 90's from the UK to India were not what they should have been. Although investment was high it was not as high as it should have been. In the early 90's with the reforms in India all that changed and we saw a very significant shift leading to a considerable rise in trade balance. If you look at the last two years India has come from more or less nowhere on the international investment scene in the United Kingdom, to be the eighth largest international investor. India as a developing country to be eighth biggest investor is an extraordinary development. The investment includes big operations like pharmaceutical

companies or hi-tech consultancy services, research, development and training centers in United Kingdom and the setting up of medium sized enterprises, many of them in the hi-tech sector. The investors see a natural partnership with the kind of skills and the sort of opportunities offered by the United Kingdom. At the same time, there are companies in the United Kingdom that are outsourcing and setting up parts of their business in India. On any given day I am quite likely to have two or three chief executives or chairmen of major British companies visiting Delhi. There is now a sense that unless you have a part of your business operation in India or if you are in the financial services, unless you have part of your fund invested in India you are missing out a lot and this essentially reflects a steep change in the perception of India globally and in particular in the United Kingdom. The basic new dimension to this is that the companies are sitting very comfortably in both markets and have got away from the traditional 'build here and export there' thinking. A lot of that has been created by the way the services have developed in India. I think that this is an extraordinary benefit to the United Kingdom, effectively what it is doing is giving the United Kingdom access to talent and human resource in India as well as access to financial resources in India. Financial companies in India are reaching the same level as their counterparts in the United Kingdom.

In the coming years we are likely to see an increased understanding with India on issues on global security and global development. With the U.N Secretary General's high-level panel on reorganization you will see a range of different hard and soft security issues which are obvious areas for India-British collaboration. We are now planning talks at the governmental level in the next two or

three months to look into these issues and look at the reaction to it in New York and elsewhere. On the question of UN Security Council reform, everybody knows we strongly support the Indian bid for permanent membership. We strongly support and indeed have committed ourselves to working with India towards the goal of permanent Security Council membership for India.

Newer Areas of Co-operation

Moving from the traditional bilateral cooperative agreements, what I really want to draw your attention to is where the United Kingdom and India are looking at partnership on the world stage. Much of that is in areas which are newer on the international agenda, areas such as counter-terrorism, environment, climate change, energy security, health-HIV AIDS, trade and judicial reform, legal services and other elements of shared democratic heritage which are now increasingly valuable for us to talk about to the rest of the world.

I am visiting Chennai primarily to focus on climate change and renewable energy issues. Our Prime Minister has identified it as absolutely critical to the future of the planet and an increasing number of governments have recognized it. Next year we have a unique role in global leadership, as we will be holding the Presidency of the Group of Eight industrialized countries, the G8, and in the second half of the year we will be taking up the Presidency of the European Union. This is a huge opportunity for those of us working for the British Government in India because the Prime Minister has said he wants India to be closely associated with the work of the G8 on various issues including climate change and energy questions.

The Prime Minister's special envoy on climate change for the G8 is coming to Delhi to talk ahead of our Presidency with the Indian government about how best the G8 can help not just India but the other key players in the climate change field to take steps that are required to assure that the development here is sustainable in climatic terms. They will also look into how India can help the G8 to direct its efforts better than in the past. G8 has agreed to make sure that we target our efforts in a more effective fashion globally in order to make sure that we get on top of what is an absolutely critical question.

Intrinsically bound up with climate change from our point of view is the question of energy security and this is an area where in India we need to do a lot more thinking. Major British corporations are very active in the traditional hydrocarbon energy sector here and also as a country the UK is commercially extremely active in some of the non-conventional energy areas. In particular there is one British company D1 Oils Plc which is now busy cultivating millions of hectares of *Jatropha curcas*, also known as physic nut, which produces oil for bio-diesel, in Tamil Nadu. We are spending quite a lot of money trying to help people develop the market for non-conventional energy, be it solar or wind which a big one in Tamil Nadu or be it more of the organic forms or bio-diesel. We have a dialogue on the collaborative approach with the Indian Government but we are equally looking to cooperate with State Governments directly because many of these issues sit in their hands. I am going to see various players in the Tamil Nadu Government who look after questions of non-conventional energy to see what facilities we can develop and whether we could be doing more in partnership with the State to advance ideas, thinking and awareness in this field. This is a whole new

area and I must say for those diplomats who have traditionally dealt with more straightforward security issues, this new addition means they must run and keep up with the technical and complex scientific base of this issue.

On health I will talk about HIV AIDS in particular. This is an area in which India has an extraordinary involvement and role to play internationally. The statistics about India itself are quite scary, and Tamil Nadu is unhappily a major location for HIV AIDS sufferers. There is a huge challenge for the whole of the country in tackling this epidemic, and we as a government are doing a certain amount. Through our international development programme we have major programmes on HIV AIDS with the Indian Government, AIDS control organizations and civil society. We equally have the need for a dialogue about the global management of this epidemic. The issue of HIV AIDS is obviously socially and politically an extremely sensitive one. I have been involved personally in negotiations and debates at the United Nations about the epidemic in which the international community unhappily is divided and it divides between those who take a conservative or a reactionary approach that this is an issue which has to do with sexual malpractice, with individuals making the wrong decisions and with the status of women: essentially the international community needs just to pull itself together and for people to behave properly so that this epidemic comes under control.

A reactionary and extremely unhelpful approach to the tackling of an issue of this magnitude characterizes what we hear from the other side of the negotiating table from a group of international partners, a group that crosses the east-west divide and also the religious divide. India finds itself on the

right side of this divide. This is a country in which people can face up publicly to the challenges of HIV AIDS, overcome the social stigma. In particular, issues like sexual health and sexual education for children have been addressed in a very direct and necessarily straightforward fashion in which we see the issue of HIV AIDS addressed in a frank and grown up fashion. We are seeing some States that are slightly more upfront about this issue. It takes a certain amount of political courage to really come out in the open about the scale of HIV AIDS in your State, about the methods that are required to stop the spread of HIV AIDS and to make commitments in terms of budgets which are required to deal with the HIV AIDS epidemic, both its causes and consequences. There is variable performance in this country but overall, as I said, a commendably direct and proactive approach to it exists in India and that makes India an extremely important example globally. India has its own challenges in HIV AIDS which give it the credibility in discussing these questions with other countries, the country itself bridges the various religious divides in a way that makes it uniquely credible as a proponent of the right way of handling the epidemic on the international stage. We as two countries have a very important role to play together on the world stage. As representatives of the developed and the developing world, as representatives of extremely different societies and extremely different religious tendencies, we need to demonstrate that across the divide there is an understanding of what the right and sensible approach to dealing with this global epidemic is. This is in terms of being honest and focused on the requirements of the young people and recognizing that this is not an issue to do with misguided morality but with practical life saving. I would hope that we could in the years ahead see a partnership, work and

in practice save hundreds of thousands of lives across the world.

Gender is another important issue. It is an area where emancipation and empowerment of women is promoted by both the United Kingdom and India. But it is not an issue which at the moment is very high on our agenda for our bilateral dialogue. Next year is the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Conference and I have proposed that one of our programmes from within the High Commission should be to focus on gender issues. I hope that over the next few years, we will see gender growing as an issue on which our two countries are active internationally.

I see international applicability and greater exchange on a few other issues such as international trade policy. I think there is a broad understanding in this country of the fundamental British positions on trade policy and international trade policy reforms, which are to do with the strong requirement of the developing countries to reform their systems and agricultural subsidy. The United Kingdom recognizes the challenges that a country like India faces under the existing trade rules but we think that India needs to look carefully at agriculture agricultural subsidy. At the bilateral level, there is a far greater commonality of approach to the basic need for reform, the basic requirement for opening up of markets and ultimately an agreement on the distorting nature of subsidy in both developing and developed economies. India played a very constructive role in the latest WTO negotiations and was critically involved in making sure that we did begin to regain a little bit of momentum in those talks which are now back on the road. The issue of intellectual property rights is an area on which we are beginning to see much more interaction. This is of particular interest to big corporations in both

the countries. When establishing investments it is by definition very critical to major corporations in the United Kingdom to be confident about the intellectual property rights and the same is true of the Indian corporations, in particular the pharmaceutical and biotech companies who are going into the European markets. They should be protected by the same rules as other companies operating in those markets. I expect to see dialogue on this issue. Intellectual property rights of course remains one of the most difficult issues on the international trade policy agenda.

Another unconventional area of bilateral exchange is our judicial and legal practices. We by definition have a shared tradition on the legal and judicial front and our lawyers and judges understand each other's language and legal and judicial systems. There is an incessant flow of senior judges and lawyers in both directions. Our two legal systems are confronting the same sorts of challenges with regard to case delays. It is difficult to believe that justice is being delivered in your country when people are waiting on an average eight years for the outcome in the civil courts. We did not have waiting periods as long as that but we have serious case backlogs and we have moved aggressively to deal with them. Both countries also have to deal with important legal ramifications in the membership of international organizations and in our case the membership of the European Union. With the supremacy of European law in various areas of our legal activity, our systems have to evolve to deal with those, in particular with the incorporation of human rights law into the British legal corpus. India, equally through its multilateral commitments, is finding some practical challenge in incorporating conventions, be it in the SAARC context or the UN context. There are various contextual changes, which are

giving pause for thought for our lawyers and judges. They are finding that there is a lot that they have to learn from each other. My aspiration is that through the joint tackling of the challenges we will be able to develop new constitutional reforms and new ideas about the administration of justice and its integration and interface with the forces of law and order. The Commonwealth is a good organization to help with the transmission of ideas. I have a sense that simply because of the age and the scale of our respective systems, the UK and India are facing up to these challenges ahead of time when compared to the other members of the democratic Commonwealth. Therefore we will probably be able to push some of the ideas.

Certain Dissimilarities

It is good to diplomatically speak about how well everything is going in our relationship but there is some dissimilarity, which we have to face, because of the closeness of our relationship. There are about 1.3 million people of Indian origin living in the UK, large investments flowing between UK and India and a large number of people moving to and fro. There are approximately half a million Indian visitors to the United Kingdom every year, slightly less than that of British visitors to India and with all our exchange, there are a lot of good things but there are bad things going on as well. One area is illegal immigration. We are also increasingly seeing criminal links having their roots in both countries. We have to think through some of these challenges and also think about what can be done jointly to deter such occurrences and punish the people who need to be punished. Sir John Stevens who is the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, the senior-most policeman in the United Kingdom, visited India to celebrate the achievement of the

Sikh community in the United Kingdom. He is the Prime Minister's personal adviser on counter terrorism. So he had this rather fascinating duality in the visit where he attended ceremonies of celebration and then had private discussions about how we can link up our police forces to deal with crimes linked between the communities, what we should be doing about the movement of black money, money laundering, problems of narcotics, and questions of illegal movement of people.

Illegal immigration in the United Kingdom is an extremely sensitive political issue and our Prime Minister is extremely careful in trying to make sure that sources of illegal immigration are staunch. So we are forever actively talking to the Indian Government about how this can be achieved. I am conscious that India has millions of illegal immigrants maybe because this country has the capacity to absorb immigrants. India probably has far more illegal immigration than any other country. Everybody here gets certainly less steamed up about it than we do in the UK and this leads to an imbalance in the dialogue. This requires more concentration.

There is a hunt on for rooting out social crimes, which effectively flow from social practices of the Indian community in some places in India and the UK. A couple of examples lead us into the challenge of forced marriages, where young women and men in the United Kingdom are brought to India under false pretences and forced into marriages against their will. This is quite different from arranged marriages where there is a certain degree of agreement. We have confronted this in Punjab, because of the number of Punjabis there are in the UK, but this is not to say that it does not happen in other parts of the country. This has happened in South India as well. We as a

mission work hard to try and help victims of forced marriages and we are critically dependent on the Indian authorities, the police authorities to help us in that job. There is another marriage issue, on which I have been quite active in the last week. This is a terrible crime where men of Indian origin living in the UK find brides in India accompanied with dowries, and then they take the money and run away. The brides just wake up a day after the wedding to find that their supposed husband has disappeared and run off to the UK with the money. Punjab Police has to confront a lot of these cases. Rather more tragically, brides who are taken to the UK find themselves in a victimized situation. They find that these men are either already married and were actually not interested in getting married but in getting the dowry and having some woman to stay with them for a while. There are also some extreme cases of men being homosexuals and the girls get abandoned in the UK. They often fall into terrible circumstances being exploited and finding it very difficult to return to India because their families are ashamed of what has happened or their families have spent more than what they have in funding the marriage and they cannot afford to bring their daughter back. Therefore, this is a very difficult issue to tackle because there is a certain amount of social sensitivity around it and there are practical issues of jurisdiction and enforcement, which are tough challenges.

I highlighted those because I think it is easy to say very diplomatically that everything between the countries is well and there are no down sides. But there are down sides and I am pleased to say that we are collaborating in tackling them. Like all bad experiences, there are good lessons to be learnt. I believe that we will draw from our experience of this kind of cross-country, cross-cultural challenge and lessons, which

we can then pass on internationally. Even developed countries have a tremendous requirement for innovation to keep up with their economic and social balance. We are going to see a lot of such social and cultural challenges due to the establishment of criminal links between the countries in the years to come. I think this is a major challenge for the international community to confront and we can work in a country like India to see how, at the policy, legislative and practical level, co-operation between police forces and governments can draw some lessons and can have some useful experience to pass on. This can be done in terms of practical lesson learning or in terms of international discussion and awareness raising at international forums. These are real human challenges.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with a final thought that, if we look back on 20 years of the Indo-British partnership and you look now at the sort of menu that I have touched upon, the Indo-British relationship is now on a scale and intensity that sets it apart from most of our other international relationships. I do not think there is any doubt that India is going to emerge as a key strategic power in this century. Many people talk about India as a super power of the 21st century. There is the United Kingdom, which is a medium-sized influential European power and has this sort of a close relationship with India, which it would like to maintain and develop over the years. There is every reason to think that this relationship will be one of the cornerstones of our foreign policy in the 21st century. We have a very famous and occasionally notorious “special relationship” with the United States, and I believe that in 40 years time we may have another “special relationship”, just as important, with India.

Discussions

1. Mr. K.N. Arun

On climate change, will you insist on developing countries responsibilities?

Response

Our fundamental position is that everyone has a responsibility here. We have explicitly recognised that it is the industrialized countries which bear the responsibility for the position we currently have on climate change and that is why we as a Government have said that the G8 grouping, the most industrialized countries, must take the lead in taking action on climate change. However, we feel that whatever efforts we make, if the major developing economies such as India, China and Brazil, do not themselves engage in sustainable development and climate change, the rest of us might as well not bother. So I think that depending on how you look at the word 'responsible' we think that everybody has a responsibility to act and unless you do get action from all the key players, be it developed or developing, we are not going to hit the sort of levels of fish in the sea and climate change reduction that we need in order to preserve our planet for our future generations. The facts are of course that whatever the scene within India, there is enormous challenges ahead. We just spent three years doing a major Climate Change Impact Assessment with the Indian government on the impact in India. To mention a few, a slow rise in sea levels which flows from the increased temperatures in the melting of ice caps will have a most dramatic impact on Indian

agriculture. You have a large amount of agriculture concentrated along the coastline of the country and depending upon the rise of the sea level, the impact in terms of agricultural productivity of climate change in this country is really quite frightening, in the next 25 years. Another area, which I feel people do not often think about, is health. In a country where you have fought to roll back the incidents of malaria, the rise in temperature means we will lose a significant amount of the progress.

2. Mr. K.N. Arun

What projects do you propose to take up in collaboration with the State Governments?

Response

With the State Governments, we have three propositions. We have a fund in the United Kingdom, known as the Global Opportunities Fund, that is divided into different strands and one of them focuses on climate change. We are looking for partnerships; these can be with state Governments, civil society organizations and the Central Government. We are looking for partnerships to develop projects in combating climate change, which will make a significant impact on policy and are replicable across the state and across India. So one of the things I would be talking to the Tamil Nadu Government about is whether there are projects of that sort. There is no specific sum that is set aside for these funds. It is a global sum and we do not know about how much will be funded. Secondly, there is a partnership, which was launched by the UK Minister for Environment at the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development called the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership. That is now an international, multi-lateral

organization with an international secretariat based in Vienna, and it essentially offers people who join it access to the best practice of all the other members in it. So if you work through the Vienna Secretariat you can join and then say that this is the particular problem that we have got and let us talk to other members of this partnership about how they would tackle this problem. This helps develop far better sharing of practice. We think it would be a very good thing if States could confront major challenges in this area by joining together. Thirdly, there is a separate funding mechanism within the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership and we will be talking to them about what projects might bring some important prospects in this country. I am not quite sure if we have any in Tamil Nadu. We have a project in Andhra Pradesh. There are currently 5 projects funded around India, but then I am quite keen to see something more coming out of it because of the importance of the issues.

3. Mr. P.M. Belliappa

Climate change initiatives are so closely linked to energy issues. What has been the initiative between the EU and the UK government to rein in the USA? I think this is very critical to the whole issue as it is not mainly developing countries that need energy.

Response

This is clearly one of the challenges that we confront, to have the major emitter in the world in the fold. But what would bring it in? The answer to that is we are doing an enormous amount. One of the great things about a special relationship is that you can have discussions, which many other countries cannot. We have had a running

dialogue with the United States, initially to see if we could reposition the whole thing to get them on board. But to be honest, the parliamentary logic is against it. Even if the administration puts it through, the Senate, in particular, reminds us about the parliamentary reality. We at the same time are moving beyond Kyoto and looking at other regimes which might bring the United States on board. We have conducted a series of high level exchanges and about three months ago, our Minister for Environment who was in Washington discussed just this question.

I think we see progress in two senses. We see various States in the US taking matters in their own hands. This is quite interesting as these are not just Democrat-controlled States; there are a few Republican States also. Individual States have brought into operation emission schemes and exactly Kyoto-derived instruments, which have not found acceptability at the Federal level. The sale of emissions in the States is itself an extremely welcome step. The G8 process is one in which the Americans find themselves firmly in the centre of the picture and it is a very important moment. We will aim to put together a scientific consensus on Climate Change and the best way of tackling it is getting top level scientists from across the world including India and the United States to produce some readily understandable conclusions for the issue, so that at the end of it we can say to the leadership of the G8: here are the problems and here are the recommendations and we need you to do something about it. That kind of pressure in a group like the G8, we believe, is likely to be more effective. It is a question of shifting the theatre a little out of the way and then getting a rather separate multilateral discussion in an area where the Americans are comfortable. There is a consciousness of the significance of these issues and just the

other day in Hyderabad I was at the Green Business Centre, which has developed into a centre of excellence on the technologies, and business practices which promote a cleaner society. It matters that the USA did the primary funding. The truth is there is a huge agenda, the Climate Change threat is only the beginning, and we undoubtedly have to try to make sure the Americans are on board.

4. Mr. P.M. Belliappa

You gave us a very graphic account of the various issues and one is very excited that the dialogue between our two governments at various levels is good. But what really is (the sweetener) the cause for this take off?

Response

I think one key trigger is the economic growth. The British economy has had a strong performance over the last decade and it has focused on how to invest back into India. More importantly, the two economic surges in India also had contributed to the growth rate and the rise in our trade. And now in the last 18 months as part of development, India has been operating as a back office for big companies in the UK as well as everywhere else and there is an interest in people investing in IT and biotechnology. With that I think comes recognition that here is a country, with which we have bilateral relations and which is in a strong position to take a leadership role in the 21st century. From that comes a whole lot of political will and I would say two things, one at the personal level, having spent 20 years telling people in the UK that they should be paying more attention to India and now am wholly gratified that people are doing just that; and secondly that there is an enormous increase in the flow of parliamentary visits out to India and a major

flow of Indian parliamentarians to the United Kingdom in late June and early July - which happens to coincide with the Cricket test match and Wimbledon. Now, over the last two years, we have seen a lot of parliamentary interest coming out here. Three major groups in the British Parliament were in India and they have all been out, at least once in the last two years. One of them has been here twice and we have interacted with the development committee, the foreign affairs committee and we have had committees looking at economic issues. There have also been a lot of individual parliamentarians coming across which is the same with the Indians in the UK because in particular labour politicians who have inner constituencies so that the Indian vote is an important vote in a way it was not before. I dare say probably because of Indian funding, political activists play an important role as well.

5. Ms. Visa Ravindran

How can the two countries work on gender issues?

Response

There are two things I would list; I do not know the detail of it, to be able to give you a full account. I would like to spend a certain amount of money on individual projects here focused on gender issues. My guess is those would be primarily with civil society and will be primarily to do with women's engagement in governance of economic and political issues in this country. I have a programme management team in Delhi and I told them I want to put together a 'basket of projects' to mark this anniversary. Secondly, I would hope that on the international scene India and the United Kingdom would find themselves together in trying to make sure

that there are more effective gains of the Beijing Conference on health, and on critical issues, mainly HIV/AIDS and gender, reproductive health and sex education, in particular women's rights in the whole reproductive health field. We will find ourselves in the same camp, fighting 'the forces of darkness' internationally and taking a very different view and there is a challenge down there and we need every ounce of Indian influence. These international processes, particularly in the field of women's activity and women's rights, are characterized by a very strong civil society engagement and that impacts not only on the formal negotiations but also at home. Indian women's groups have always played an important role and I hope they will next year as well.

6. Ms. Amudhavalli

Are there any specific scientific or science and technology collaboration between India and the UK?

Response

Yes, there is but I did not touch them, as in my mind it does not have an international application as some others. What we have is a joint council on science and technology headed by our Chief Scientific Advisor, Dr. David King on our side and another person on the Indian side. Our Prime Ministers have now taken a far more direct interest in this and they have said that they want the body to work out a programme of activity which focuses on science and technology application with a commercial interest, hi-tech, nano technology and collaboration in the fields of biotechnology and science and technology in the fight against climate change. That is the agenda, which they have set out in strategic terms. Dr. David King is here in February and at that point will try to

take forward that agenda. We run this program mostly from Delhi and Bangalore, we have a strong Bangalore team on this and one of the most interesting areas that we have been supporting or activities that we have supported has been the establishment of a Young Scientist Network. We have brought out from the UK, for two years now, quite a big team of about 30 or 40 young scientists who are acknowledged national leaders in their fields of expertise to interact with our Indian counterparts and that is taking place in Delhi. We have provided the platform and then they get on with it.

7. Mr. K.V. Krishnaswamy

What would you say about the UN Security Council and India?

Response

I am slightly surprised that the panel had decided to set out a couple of alternatives. I suppose that they felt that they could get agreement from the whole panel if they have those two alternatives, but I believe that there are some dissenting members. What I am particularly surprised about is the fact that the panel has said that it is not necessary to talk about changing the status of the existing permanent membership. It is very surprising that the panel should turn around and say that. Our position has long been that the Security Council needs reforming. We have actually been quite instrumental in trying to move the process of representation forward. However, there is this huge problem of competition for places and that needs to be worked out by the people who are competing. We will now see how the discussion goes and hope that reform will follow and for our part, we will continue to play our role as a permanent member quite effectively. I have served in New York and that seems to be the general view in there.

We hope that the Security Council would be more effective.

8. Mr. K.V. Krishnaswamy

Would there be limits?

Response

There are always going to be limits to its effectiveness, limits to the Security Council's effectiveness, limits to the UN's effectiveness generally. It is only the product of its member states.

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