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PRIME MINISTER'S REPLY TO DEMANDS  
FOR GRANT OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
For Reference and Record

New Delhi, Vaisakha 27, 1917  
May 17, 1995

The following are the excerpts of the Lok Sabha proceedings containing Prime Minister, Shri P V Narasimha Rao's reply to the debate on the GENERAL BUDGET in connection with the demands for grant of the Ministry of Defence, on May 16, 1995 :

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI P V NARASIMHA RAO) : Mr. Speaker, Sir this debate seems to have been completed to several instalments. It is possible that something of what was said on the first day has been forgotten by today. But I have got all the notes and I find, Sir, that most of the factual details, whatever was asked for, have been given by my colleague, the Minister of State, and if there is anything which is still to be furnished to the hon. Members, we will certainly do so.

I would only confine myself to a few matters, a very few matters impinging on the defence policy of the Government and I would like to take the House into confidence and explain these things to the best possible extent, to the extent I can.

Sir, the first criticism has been rather an extraordinary kind of criticism to say that we have no National Defence Policy. I would like to submit very respectfully that this is not true.

We do not have a document called India's National Defence Policy. But we have got several guidelines which are

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followed, strictly followed and observed and those can be summed up as follows :

1) Defence of national territory over land, sea and air encompassing among others the inviolability of our land borders, island territories, offshore assets and our maritime trade routes.

2) To secure an internal environment whereby our Nation State is insured against any threats to its unity or progress on the basis of religion, language, ethnicity or socio-economic dissonance.

3) to be able to exercise a degree of influence over the nations in our immediate neighbourhood to promote harmonious relationships in tune with our national interests.

4) To be able to effectively contribute towards regional and international stability and to possess an effective out-of-the-country contingency capability to prevent destabilisation of the small nations in our immediate neighbourhood that could have adverse security implications for us.

A mention was made about the recommendations of the Estimates Committee suggesting that the Government should articulate a clear and comprehensive Defence Policy. It may be noted that the Ministry, in its Action Taken Notes on the 19th Report of the Estimates Committee, explained the position very clearly to the Committee. The reply was accepted by the Committee and was treated as acceptance of their recommendations, as

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mentioned in their 41st Report. This policy is not merely rigid in the sense that it has been written down, but these are the guidelines, these are the objectives, these are the matters which are always kept in view while conducting our Defence Policy. I think no more explanation or elaboration is needed than this. And particularly in the context of our own Estimates Committee having accepted it, I do not think that any further question can arise.

A question was raised about the national Security Council. It is true that we had a National Security council, first established in 1990 and it had only one meeting. After that nothing happened. When this Government came into office, the question was raised both in the House and outside. In the Government, a lot of thinking has gone into it meanwhile. I had occasion to promise a National Security Council or some body which takes into account the questions of national security and we have examined the entire gamut of possibilities and options available to us.

I have referred to this important subject earlier and indicated that we were reviewing the orders issued on the subject by the Government in 1990. It is not because a new Government has come that we wanted to change everything. It was because of the experience of the National Security Council as it existed from 1990 was found a little unworkable. A Strategic Policy Group headed by the Cabinet Secretary and including the Service Chiefs, Secretaries of Ministries concerned like Defence, Home, External Affairs and Finance and Heads of agencies was also set up to consider the strategic policy papers. Now, according to the

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decision at that time the National Security Council was to comprise of the Prime Minister as Chairman and Ministers in-charge of Defence, Home, Finance and External Affairs as members as well as some others including chief Ministers as and when needed. Essentially, it was, what is known as, the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, plus one or two added.

It was a kind of mechanical additon. It was not a functional addition. A fairly large advisory board comprising experts, academics, scientists, journalists, former Government officers, some chief Ministers and MPs was also constituted to enable interaction with non-official resource persons. It is this big body which was found to be a little unwieldy and its deliberations tended to become a little diffused in the sense that we could not in matters of national security come to a particular decision or particular conclusion after deliberations in this big body. The Board was to assist the NSC in providing a broad range of informed views and options. My opinion is - after examining the working and whatever happened in that meeting - that this objective cannot be achieved by a body of that size and composition. We have undertaken a thorough review of the above mechanism and come to the conclusion that a number of changes would be required. For one thing, the National Security council as set up in 1990, as I have just submitted, is not much different from the CCPA. Secondly, the advisory board as proposed in 1990 appears to be somewhat unwieldy. Discussions in such a body, large body,

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would tend to lose focus and make the whole exercise blurred and confusing. Consultations with experts outside the Government including Members of Parliament and experts in academic and other institutions are important and advantageous. But such consultation is best done in small well-knit groups with persons having specialised knowledge or expertise of that specific subject concerning national security.

National security is a very wide subject. It consists of so many items and it is better to concentrate on each item and while discussing that item, it is better to have experts in that particular item, in that area, rather than having expert in a big body and losing focus. This is the idea and this is the conclusion we have come to, Sir. The same set of persons to be consulted always in a large advisory board would not serve much purpose. We therefore, feel that instead of having one large advisory board, it would be more appropriate to provide for meaningful interaction with selected experts in each specific field under study or discussion. Such experts can be associated at the stage of preparation of strategic policy papers as well as during discussion of such papers at a higher level. Our review of the system prevailing in other countries shows that different structures exist for dealing with national security issues depending upon the type of system of Government prevailing in that country. Generally, the national security council set-up is found in countries where the presidential form of Government has been adopted. The most notable example being that of the United States. We find

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that it is difficult to have such a system transplanted in India because here the business of the Central Government has to be ultimately transacted in the Cabinet or Cabinet Committee with Ministers in-charge being responsible for their subjects to Parliament. In the United Kingdom, for instance, no single national security council has been set up and the work pertaining to national security matters is considered in different Cabinet committees for example, the committee on Defence and Overseas Policy, the committee on Intelligence Services, etc. In our case, a system more akin to that prevailing in the U.K. might be more appropriate. We are, therefore, veering to the view that specific Committees of Ministers or groups of Ministers could be set up for different aspects of national security whenever strategy or policy papers are brought up for consideration of the Ministers. This flexible arrangement would provide inclusion of the concerned Ministers in-charge as well as other Ministers, the Chief Ministers and persons in public life including Members of Parliament who have specialised knowledge and experience and whose contribution would be valuable. Even though a separate national security council is not in place today, mechanisms and systems do exist for consideration of national security issues. The Joint Intelligence Committee in the Cabinet Secretariat constantly interacts with the concerned Ministries and agencies. There is regular consideration of the defence aspects of national security in the Chiefs of Staff committee who have their own

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Secretariat. The Chairman, Joint Intelligence Committee and Heads of other agencies interact with the Service Chiefs. We have all these working even now. The core group of Secretaries is also there. They look into these matters of internal security. These mechanisms and systems have been working well but this is where the difference comes that we are not satisfied with the present dispensation.

We would like to have an overarching body which looks into the conclusions drawn, the reports sent by these different mechanisms. While these mechanisms and systems have been working well, we still feel that there is a need for strengthening the present arrangement in certain respects. But one thing is that the resource persons including experts from outside the Government need to be associated more in the study and preparation of policy papers. There is also need for having papers prepared from a central point of view instead of from one Department or Ministry. Therefore, the need for an overarching body is felt here.

On many aspects of national security a holistic approach and an integrated action plan involving a number of Ministries and agencies can be better achieved if the paper is prepared in an Inter-Ministerial Group or a nodal agency instead of any one Ministry or Department. So, both aspects, the specialised aspect of a particular area of activity or an item being considered in a specialised mechanism plus the general aspect, holistic aspect from the national security angle by a body which is not unwieldy but which is an overarching body which takes into

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account and coordinates with all these views is necessary. And I feel that we should be able to come to the right conclusions and the right pattern of the committee very very shortly. I am glad that hon. Members have brought up this issue and give me the opportunity of clarifying the Government's stand on this issue. We are in the process of giving a final shape to our proposals and before we take a formal decision, I would solicit the views of hon. Members on our proposals on the NSC. This is what I would like to say. It is more or less ready, in its final stages and before losing any more time, I would come back to hon. Members for their views.

The third point which has been raised prominently, Sir, is on the NPT. We have a very interesting, but rather disappointing situation that for a full month there has been what is known as a review conference on NPT in New York. I would not like to be critical on what happened there. Our position being clear, I have not been able to understand what was achieved in that Conference; may be, I will be enlightened by those who participated in that in due course. But as of now, I find that what was achieved was only the indefinite extension of the NPT as it exists. Right from the beginning, right from 1968 when NPT came into existence, India has taken a view and that view is that NPT as it was drafted, as it was accepted, is discriminatory. It allows vertical proliferation, it divides the world into nuclear haves and nuclear have-nots and NPT is actually meant, in effect, to work

against the have-nots and those who by their own efforts might become threshold States. Their idea is 'we have had it; we will continue to have it but no one else will be allowed to have it'. Simply, sir, this has not worked. This have neither brought in disarmament nor brought in any restriction on countries becoming nuclear, going nuclear. Both the things have happened and both were supposed to be stopped by the NPT. Now, if the both objects have failed, I fail to see why a Treaty like this is being continued indefinitely. It only means that the present situation and worse that can follow should continue indefinitely ; that is what it means.

It goes against the grain of our policy. Therefore, we do not accept it and I would like to say something very pertinent, very significant. While representatives of States were talking about the NPT, what happened during this one month ? The following happened. This is taken from a document of the 'Greenpeace' might be one of the NGOs. I am not vouching for absolute accuracy. But I would like to say what has been happening. this is number one :-

"While diplomats met during the past month at the United Nations Nuclear Non-proliferation talks: Britain sent its newest Trident nuclear submarine on patrol.. On Saturday April 29th, the Vanguard submarine went on its second patrol. Vanguard carries up to 96 100-kiloton nuclear warheads on its complement of new Trident missiles. Each missile has a 4500 mile range

and each warhead has a killing capacity equivalent to 640 Hiroshima bombs."

This has been happening while they are talking about NPT. Number two is :-

"France inaugurated a new above-ground nuclear testing facility. At the end of April, Prime Minister Edouard Balladur inaugurated a laser facility near Bordeaux for simulation testing of nuclear weapons. The facility is estimated to cost six billion French Francs.

On Sunday, May 7th, Jacques Chirac, the elected President of France said that France would resume testing if military experts advised it. "

That was before he was elected. After he was elected,

"He told the New Zealand Prime Minister that France might conduct five to seven tests before concluding its testing programme."

So, everything is business as usual. During that one month when they were talking about whether NPT is to continue or not to continue, whether it is to continue with changes or with no changes, even at that time, there is nothing like a pause, there is nothing like a re-thinking. It is just a matter of taking the whole thing in such a non-serious manner that we go on talking but we go on doing whatever we do on the other side. There is a long list of what Russia has been doing, what the

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United States has been doing, what others have been doing and all this. I do not have to go into details. I only have to say that this is not acceptable to us. Therefore, we have not accepted it. We will try. We will continue our efforts for a genuine nuclear non-proliferation, nuclear disarmament and the only positive document which is there on the Table right now, and which has been lying on the Table for the last seven years, is the 1988 Action Plan given by the then Prime Minister of India, late Shri Rajiv Gandhi in the Special Session on Disarmament. It has not been improved upon. It has not been rejected. It has not even been considered as it ought to be considered. It only means that all this that is happening there is totally against our own view. This needs to be given a new turn. We have to do that. We cannot simply give up and say 'So many people have done it. So we cannot simply stop'. No, We cannot stop. We will have to continue with this. We have a view. That view is the correct view. You cannot have haves and have nots in the nuclear field. They may take 20 years or they may take 15 years, but within a particular time, unless we aim at total and complete disarmament, disarmament is never going to happen, never going to come about in this country. There has been too much of smuggling of nuclear material. This is known. We read it in newspapers every day. It is happening from so many other countries whom I need not name. Is it the right atmosphere for disarmament? Is it for disarmament that the world is really trying for continuing the NPT indefinitely?

We do not think so, Sir. I am sure that all the sections of the House will agree that this Conference has not ended in something which is useful for humanity. We stand for complete abolition of all weapons of mass destruction - nuclear and other weapons also. This is the position and I am sure that the House will appreciate the position of the Government on this.

The other question which was raised was about a War Memorial. I think it has taken a long time. But the position is like this. On 1st March, the Chiefs of Staff Committee recommended construction of a War Memorial at Dhaula Kuan in 32 acres of land opposite Defence Service Officers Institute. As the project is of national importance, designs and models are proposed to be prepared on the basis of an open national competition. After the selection of design and model of the National War Memorial, a decision on the construction of the Memorial will be taken.

Then, about the War Museum also, a question was raised and the position is that the Services Headquarters have been requested to locate an appropriate site for the proposed War Museum. Regrettably, this also has taken too long a time and there have been too many views. There has been some difficulty in coming to a final view. After the site is located, necessary action to establish the War Museum will be taken.

One rather good suggestion which came from one of the hon. Members is that the period of Colour Service be reduced to seven years and on release from the Army, the soldiers be absorbed in para-military forces or State police forces. Now this

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has its pros; this has its cons. But the suggestion on the whole is good. We could make some changes and modification in it. We are taking it up for examination, detailed examination. It has the advantage that the colour service is reduced and at the same time, he is not sent home. He is able to find a berth in the para-military forces while he is still active, still young and still has some experience which he has gained for seven years in the Army. Therefore, the advantage seems to be on both sides. But we have to see that about 20,000-25,000 jobs per year have to be created. Now, whether the total recruitment in police forces in the States can find 20,000-25,000 slots apart from the local aspirations of the youth there who would like to come into the police forces, how much can we accommodate - these are matters on which we will have to consult the State Governments. But the suggestion is good and I would like to say that this will be examined in depth.

Point have been raised about housing shortage. I agree that there is shortage and I understand that this year, the additional allocation will fund the construction. Allocation has been given and it will construct the additional married accommodation for officers 506 quarters, for JCOs 505 quarters and for other Ranks 4215 quarters - 5226 quarters in all. The Service Headquarters are also authorized to hire private accommodation. This has had the effect of reducing the deficiencies and increasing the satisfaction levels. But the ultimate solution lies in

having our own self-contained accommodation, the way we want it, by the design we want it. Rented accommodation will be only a stop-gap.

A question was raised, which is a serious question, about the upgradation of the MiG-21 Bis. There has been some error in the statements made.

Let me put the record straight. The MIG 21(Bis) aircraft was inducted in the IAF in 1977. As of now, the MIG 21 (Bis) has served only for over 15 years. Technological advances over the last decade especially in the field of airborne radar weapons and navigation attack system have made it possible to improve the combat effectiveness of the MIG 21 (Bis) substantially which was not feasible earlier. The current proposal includes adaptation of powerful air interception radar, advance air to air missile, air to ground precision, guided weapons and an accurate navigational attack defence system. I must say that earlier I had not heard about these improvements being possible. I came to know about it only four years back and since then we have been trying to mount these things and get this upgradation done. These improvements were not available ten years ago. The upgradation that is being considered holds the promise to improve the combat effectiveness of the aircraft substantially. So this is the position. We would not like to lose any more time in doing this. I know that all the investigations, all the efforts are being made. They are in final stages and I think it will fructify.

Something was said about Jaguars also. Jaguar aircraft was initially procured without the black box. The same was added subsequently. Now, Sir, the position is that, initially 16 Jaguar aircrafts were taken on loan from the RAF in 1979. These aircrafts did not have a black box as the Royal air Force had not sought the same in their standard of preparation for their aircraft. However, when our own aircrafts were purchased in 1980, 1981, they were with the black box fitted as our SOP required the same, the black box. This is the position. It is not that we just bought Jaguars without the black box. It is not true. We hired the first 16. They did not have the black box because they were not required to have the black box as they were at that time.

I think, these were the important points, points of policy raised in the debate. If there is anything I have missed, I am prepared to answer, if I can, otherwise, I can send the answers to the hon. Members. Thank you very much.

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