

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT FIFTH IDSA ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON
COOPERATIVE SECURITY FRAMEWORK FOR SOUTH ASIA
Hon'ble Defence Minister, Shri A. K. Antony**

5TH SOUTH ASIA CONFERENCE
COOPERATIVE SECURITY FRAMEWORK FOR SOUTH ASIA
NOVEMBER 15, 2011

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

"I am really pleased to be in your midst for the inauguration of the 5th South Asian Conference being organised by IDSA. Before proceeding further, let me extend a warm welcome to all the participants, who have come all the way from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and also from within our country. Your valued presence at the Conference underlines the fact that geographical boundaries matter little.

The South Asia Conference provides an ideal platform to all the researchers, scholars and experts to discuss and analyse the latest trends and challenges facing the region and also learn from each other's experiences. Such informal dialogues can do the required groundwork to promote regional peace, stability and prosperity.

Our region – and the world, in general faces several common challenges. The gamut of security issues facing various nations is largely non-traditional and asymmetric. Security is today closely dependent on the physical, economic, geostrategic aspects of security, as well as to political developments. With the world population touching the seven billion mark recently, a wide range of issues including food, water, energy security, climate change, human and drug trafficking, migrations, economic instability, pandemics and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction have acquired centrestage.

Terrorism continues to be a menace for civilised nations and societies the world over. Increasingly, non-state actors with cross-national linkages pose critical challenges. Nations need to draw up collective and innovative measures to effectively counter such evil designs. The only alternative to cooperation is – to perish, one that we all can ill-afford. For this reason, the theme of this year's Conference – "Cooperative security framework for South Asia" is particularly relevant and a timely initiative. The challenge before all of us is to translate our well meaning intentions into a concrete action plan.

The ambit of the concept of security today includes a range of other issues affecting human security. Several UN summits have been held in the past two decades on diverse issues pertaining to human security viz - population, food, information, society, environment and climate change. This expansion in the concept of national security has created new opportunities for cooperation between nation states.

In the context of South Asia, cooperative security would imply focusing on issues related to soft security. South Asia could learn a lot from the experience of other regions of Asia, for instance in South East Asia and Central Asia. These regions have made considerable progress in developing a framework for cooperative security architecture. Such a security framework for the South Asian region will require regular consultations and dialogue – both at official and non-official levels. Some of these issues are being discussed at such forum as SAARC and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in the framework of socio-economic development. India too has set up regular mechanisms of dialogue and cooperation with SAARC countries at bilateral level. We must further expand the scope of such discussions to include

issues pertaining to human security. At the non-official level, there is an even greater scope for expanding the dialogue and further intensifying people-to-people contacts.

There is a need to enrich the South Asian Conference by including inter-sessional meetings of scholars and experts on themes related to cooperative security. This conference could help expand these ideas further.

We can ensure regional stability and contribute to each other's growth and all-round development by cooperating on a wide range of issues. Nations must help each other in creating an environment where people are able to pursue their goals without any threat of violence. We must be able to resolve conflicts through peaceful dialogue and cooperation.

We are committed to build networks of interdependencies in our region. South Asia is a region of great diversity and yet, there are more issues that unite us, rather than those that divide us. Most nations share commonalities in history, geography, culture and civilisation. Our people deserve peace, security, education, health care facilities and sustainable development in equal measure. With regard to our neighbours, we have always

demonstrated our willingness to go the extra mile for the sake of peace and security, even on a non-reciprocal basis, if required.

We have always advocated and worked towards enhancing cooperation with our neighbours – both at bilateral and regional levels. We pay special attention to defence cooperation by increasing the frequency of defence exchanges with defence forces from a large number of friendly countries. These defence exchanges are aimed at enhancing capacity building, training and cooperation among friendly nations. Indian defence forces have made a significant contribution towards disaster management and humanitarian relief work and received widespread appreciation for their efforts.

Recently, India signed a Strategic Partnership agreement with Afghanistan. Similarly, a Framework Cooperation Agreement has been drawn up with Bangladesh. Our relations with Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka have been strengthened through exchange of high level visits and expansion of cooperation.

India and Pakistan have maintained a steady comprehensive dialogue. There are already clear signs that Indo-Pakistan trade relations might improve and expand. The expansion in cooperation has created an atmosphere to expand the dialogue on cooperative security. However, we need to change our mindsets, if we really wish to reap the benefits of mutual cooperation. I am sure this Conference will hold intensive deliberations on the concept of cooperative security for South Asia. We can strengthen the process further by implementing the cooperative agreements at SAARC. Asymmetries in size, resources and military capabilities must be used as "building blocks" to enhance cooperation – and not be allowed to become "blocks" to regional cooperation.

I am sure that the Conference will come up with innovative and actionable ideas for policy makers and planners. I wish all the foreign participants a pleasant stay in India and wish you all success in your deliberations.

Thank You and Jai Hind.
