Interactive Session with Mr. Ajit Doval, KC, National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister of India

Question: You had mentioned about Statecraft and Conflict of Values. This is a bit of nuts and bolts problem. Some of the press had mentioned that post Ufa, in order to counter the Pakistani backlash you happened to speak to the Pakistani Ambassador Abdul Basit thrice without reference to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). This supposedly had undermined the Ministry of External Affairs and had embarrassed them according to the press reports. Also Diplomats in Delhi had mentioned that your counterpart Sartaj Aziz (Pakistani NSA) would never have done this to the Indian ambassador T C A Raghavan. So when the core is of State security, how do these little issues of protocol straight-jacket you in terms of your deliverance. Because in government, hierarchy plays a very important part and this, as mentioned in the press, has hugely embarrassed the MEA and in turn the Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj.

Response from Mr. Ajit Doval: Firstly, the facts are not right and I am not going to correct them. Secondly, this has got nothing to do with conflict of values. It has got something to do with what you consider as urgent. When at Ufa it was agreed that there will be no border firing and the Pakistanis started firing, it was absolutely necessary to tell them without any loss of time that you stop it, otherwise we will retaliate. We will retaliate with effect. This message was concurrently given to our High Commissioner in Islamabad and to the High Commissioner of Pakistan here in Delhi at five minutes past seven in the morning. It was the time of Ramzan, whatever happened thereafter I am not going into that. When there is an immediacy, you do not go into who should talk to whom. If the Police Commissioner is sitting here and finds that somebody's life is to be saved, it may be the job of the constable, but he will do the job himself. There is no question of any embarrassment to anyone. So there was no embarrassment to anyone and in any case Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj was not there at that time. The impression that the PMO dictates the terms or calls the shots is completely wrong. It is all a team work
and we all work in a very closely-knit team. Sometimes there is a conflict between important and immediate. One does not know whether you should do something which is immediate or do something which is important. When there is a convergence of immediate and important, and you still go through bureaucratic procedure, then I think you do not deserve to be in the place where you are. Because there is no dilemma there, it was both immediate and important. So lead from the front.

**Question:** Two observations – One, Mahatma Gandhi said that tooth for a tooth and eye for an eye will make the world go blind. In today's scenario Pakistanis are engaging in such acts as 26/11 and in spite of our efforts they are not bringing the mastermind to book. What more can we do and how further talks will help so that innocent lives are not lost at the border. Two, our security forces do not have matching weapons comparable to the opponents. They have sten-guns and our forces have rifles.

Also, hanging of Yakub Memon sent a positive signal that anybody harming the State will be punished. Do you really think that we are safe in all respects? Or are we still at the mercy of the terrorists?

**Response from Mr. Ajit Doval:** I do not want to challenge the great doctrine of the father of the Nation about tooth for a tooth….., or retribution whether it is the best policy. But the point is that you can take sufficient steps to see that the enemy realises, it is not a viable proposition for him to make an attempt on your tooth or your eye or yourself. Deterrence: -Is a Nation which has got the strength and credibility that it can use its strength, should it be necessary. That does not necessarily mean that you are working for retribution. The point is that if you make yourself vulnerable for assault or damage by somebody else, then you are also partly responsible for it. Your weakness is a provocation. If your weakness includes your unjustified tolerance, that is you are not able to exercise the power that you possess. Because if you do not have the will to exercise the power, that is as good as not having it. The power is not as good as you have it but as much as you can exercise it. It is just like money –I can have fifty thousand rupees in my pocket and die of starvation, if I decide not to
spend it. India has a mind-set where it punches below its weight. We have to punch not above our weight, we have to punch not below our weight, we have to increase our weight and punch proportionately.

About the weapons for security forces, I do not want to get into the debate of Rifles vs Guns, rifles are not inferior to guns, sten-guns have a smaller range, sniper-rifles have longer range, but they have different type of uses. AK-47s & Sten-guns are automatic weapons, which can fire in bursts. But burst fire also means, you are in automatic firing mode, you fire only five seconds and the magazine is emptied. With rifle, you can engage a target for a much longer time frame with the same amount of ammunition. So there has got to be a combination. All types of small arms are important. Requisite weapons and hardware must be given to our police and armed forces.

**Question:** We are a nation of 100 crore+ population, a huge standing Army, Navy, Air Force, a huge security establishment, still we are not able to handle a threat posed by the son of a former petty constable of Mumbai police, his name is Dawood Ibrahim. Every day we are talking about Dawood being brought here, extradited, what not kind of things. But this gentleman sitting in Pakistan continues to pose a serious threat. He has still got huge assets in Mumbai, he has got his links with the real estate lobby in Mumbai and you know what happened after the funeral of Yakub Memon. Every other day there are threats being issued that India will have to face the consequences. My question is that why India is not able to tackle this threat called Dawood Ibrahim.

**Response from Mr. Ajit Doval:** You have raised two questions. One is about the comprehensive National power and another is about the convertibility of power. Einstein's main contribution to science was that he was able to say that one type of power can be converted to another type of power. Rather it is interchangeable. At the end of it, the entire thing comes from the same source. But in the context of the State, you require power that is one thing, but convertibility of power is always not possible. For example, somebody has picked a pocket, there is a tank battalion, what do you do with that. You will not be able to convert this. So it is with a big Army, Navy or Air Force. Yes if it is a
threat from an F-16 aircraft from Pakistan or missiles from China, then you can say that we have got our arsenal. It is not so with somebody who is a fugitive living under the protection of an intelligence agency in a guarded place. So the inter-convertibility is not always there. You may have legal power, but you cannot automatically convert that legal power into muscle power. There is a due process through which you can do it. So there are two things – We are a country of 100 crore+ people. We are a powerful country, there is no doubt about that. We are an important emerging economic and military power. We will be much ahead in the next few years, I am very sure of that. It is a challenge, and the State must develop those type of powers, if required, to meet the covert threats. Yes, whatever has got to be done should be done. But then, it is not that you just denounce that we have got a big army or a big administrative structure or a defence ministry, they are all useless because there is a particular type of threat which is different. All tools cannot be used to address every type of threat.

**Question:** Sir, there is a gap of 6 to 7 years since the time you retired and now you have become active again. How do you keep yourself abreast with what is happening around even after retirement after a very active life? How do you keep yourself fit and how do you feel after you have come back more actively than what you were when you retired. It will be a message to retired officers.

**Response from Mr. Ajit Doval:** There are lot of assumptions in your question, but I will accept them because they are in my favour. You assume that I am updated abreast with things and am fit. Maybe, may be not. Only time will tell. But, even if I am not, I can definitely tell you one thing. Well, as far as the question of remaining updated and abreast is concerned, your mind is like a sponge, greater the pores of the sponge and less filled it is with muck, greater is its capacity to absorb the water. Keep your mind out of petty jealousies, small personal interests, who's doing what and who's talking what and things like that. You know you are taking away the tremendous capacity of your mind by doing such things, you do not know how much of energy and talent it is sapping out of you with the residual five to ten per cent, if you mop the floor, how much of water will it pick up. Keep the mind free so that you can use it
when it is required. When not required just relax and be a happy man. Just enjoy life, life is meant for enjoyment.

**Question:** There is a feeling that India could not catch Tiger Memon so they have caught his younger brother and executed him. What do you think about that?

**Response from Mr. Ajit Doval:** I think it is completely wrong, I do not agree with that at all. The fact that India should take Tiger Memon to the logical, judicial conclusion, whatever its consequences, is right. But it is not this or that. It is not that if this was right then the other thing is not right. Yakub Memon is a standalone case, Tiger Memon is a standalone case, many others who are standalone, how do they get related? It is not like if you cannot do anything to me, you will slap my grandchild. That is not logic; revenge; or consequence management. So there were certain things against Mr. “X”, he was tried and punished through the due process of law. The same applies to “B”, “C” and to everyone else. So the inter-linkage is not correct. I do not agree with that at all.

**Question:** The recent incident in Punjab, did the media blow it out of context? What is your personal reading? Because if you read some of the newspapers it seems a precursor to lot of things to happen. What's your reading of it?

**Response from Mr. Ajit Doval:** My reading of the media? Well, media is a very interesting entertainment for me. It's a good thing in the morning that it wakes you up and things like that. But not everything they are writing is right. But then how wrongly the right can be projected and how much the people can remain disinfomed. That is besides the point. Probably they also have got their own compulsions. I do understand; after all you know everything has got pecking order of priorities. You are writing a newspaper which can sell. You are airing TV programmes for TRP. I have got my own pecking order of my priorities and requirements. Why should I try to impose mine on others? They can very well say that, well Mr. Doval, National Security is your subject and your problem, you do that. Let's do journalism that is fine, good enough. My
only point is this, at some point National interest is supreme for all of us, because either we will all sail together or we will sink together. The day we sink, all this freedom of press, the freedom of the individual, that will also sink along with that. So that it can remain afloat, the country has got to remain secure and strong. So do not do anything that will create schism between the ranks of the people, cynicism amongst the masses giving them a sense of defeat and helplessness. Make a strong Nation. The Nation is as strong as the National will is, and the National will is what the people think. Let us keep our communities together, let us keep our people in a healthy state and in an intellectual state of mind. The cynicism sometimes that is created makes you start losing respect, faith and confidence in all institutions. That is very bad for a Nation. If you are working in a group, in a company, in an organisation, in a university and everybody thinks that everybody else is incompetent or corrupt or mixed up, that will be something disastrous. Let us have faith in every Indian and that every Indian is giving his best. Everybody is doing his/her duty to the best of their abilities. If you are not able to comprehend it fully, probably give the benefit of doubt to them and I give it to the media. I have spoken and interacted with the media all over the world. We have got some of the finest brains in our media. Their problem is “sab log padhte hi hain”. We are writing about these petty crimes and human weakness stories because that is what is spicy and that is what people read. Now it is a vicious circle; you write it so people read it, people read it they get interested so you write more of it. They get more interested and you are in that circuit. Where is serious journalism? After all, in this country, many things are happening beyond what is something very debasing to others. It is bad that we try to denigrate our own selves and portray the negative part of our character, of our Nation. I think there are lot of positive things happening. Let us all be positive and build the Nation together.

**Question:** The substantive question is will you justify violence to maintain Statecraft?

**Response from Mr. Ajit Doval:** Absolutely yes! There is no confusion. But there are riders. It should be through rightful processes, through a way which is
in consonance with the Nation's law, its Constitution, its established values and is in the national interest. It is not that you approve violence by the State in an indiscriminate way. That is not acceptable, but definitely should it come to protect the supreme interests of the Nation, there is nothing that the Nation should stop at. It should go to any length. There cannot be any compromise on that. All instrumentalities of the State have been made basically to serve it. Why was the Constitution made? It was made to serve the cause of India. It is we the people who gave it. There is a question that who decides it? In a democracy the majority decides it.

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