

India May Send Troops to Iraq

By Ninan Koshy | June 30, 2003

Responding to the U.S. request to send troops to occupied, post-war Iraq, India's army is going full steam ahead with preparations for possible deployment. Meanwhile, Indian policymakers are grasping for justifications that the mobilization would be under a UN umbrella and would serve the national interest, neither of which is plausible.

This futile groping would have found no place on India's agenda if the authorities in the Ministry of External Affairs had heeded the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council and the Indian Parliament.

In early May, Washington asked New Delhi to depute a sizable Indian military unit to help restore law and order in Iraq. Both U.S. President George W. Bush and his Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld repeated the request to India's Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani during his June U.S. visit.

In between those dates, on May 23, the Security Council ratified Resolution 1483, making no mention whatsoever of the UN assuming a peace-keeping role in Iraq or offering the proverbial umbrella that some Indian government leaders and critics see as an argument for the country's troop deployment.

The resolution states that the United States and the United Kingdom "as occupying powers under unified command" are the "Authority" in Iraq. "Other States are working now or in the future may work under the Authority," the resolution reads. The declaration is equally clear that "personnel, equipment, and other resources" rallied by willing member states "to contribute to stability and security" shall be "under the Authority." So whatever India's form of engagement takes in Iraq, it will be under the "Authority," the occupying powers. The UN has absolutely no role in the stabilization and security operation in Iraq. By that token, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan voiced his disapproval to India's Foreign Ministry on June 10 of India sending troops to Iraq.

What is also disturbing is that New Delhi does not seem to bother about the most important issue to be considered viz. the risks on the ground in Iraq. The

United States is now engaged in counterinsurgency operations there. Counterinsurgency operations have always proven difficult and trying for both U.S. forces and U.S. politics. The almost daily guerilla attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq have resulted in more than 50 soldiers' deaths since Bush declared the end of major military operations. Indications are clear that combat intensity and its strategic significance will increase with the steadily rising resentment in Iraq against foreign military presence. The political situation in Iraq is highly volatile.

The *London Evening Standard* on June 20 published "confessions" from U.S. soldiers that they had fired indiscriminately and left wounded fighters to die or even shot them. A senior British statesman was quoted as saying that U.S. conduct was creating "a cycle of mistrust, hatred, and revenge reminiscent of Vietnam," adding, "This situation is undoubtedly dangerous not only for the Americans and the Iraqis but for the British forces, administrators, and aid workers." One may add that the situation is dangerous for any other troops that step into the Iraqi quagmire.

Because large-scale reintroduction of U.S. troops in Iraq will expose the misjudgment Washington has made about Iraq and because U.S. military intervention is already so discredited, the Bush administration wants to induct large numbers of troops from other countries—such as India—to assist in Operation Desert Scorpion, euphemistically called a stabilization program. The United States hopes such participation would give the operation the much-needed respectability of an international exercise for the pacification of Iraq.

Indian policymakers seem to be impressed by U.S. statements that the Indian role in Iraq will be very



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significant. In an interview given to the daily *The Hindu* on June 19, U.S. Ambassador Robert Blackwill said that India could play a “major role” and serve on the “inner board of directors” managing the security of Iraq in its “transition to democracy.” India, the ambassador said, would be at the “center of the security side” with a few other countries. This, he added, would “inevitably have consequences for India’s influence on the political and diplomatic side.”

A special correspondent of *The Hindu* reported on June 21 from New Delhi, “Though analysts feel that the possibility of immediate deployment is remote, the Army had started planning for the task immediately after a political conference attended by several countries identified by the Anglo-American combine for contributing to troop duties in Iraq. The ball was set rolling immediately after the conference, following consultations between American and Indian officials from the Ministries of Defense and External Affairs. As a result the Army factored for an overseas mission in its operational plans in early May itself and since then it has been quietly fine-tuning the details and working out the arrangement of ensuring uninterrupted supply lines.”

But what will be the consequences of India sending troops to Iraq? Writing under the byline of B. Raman, one of India’s topmost security experts said

in the June 18 *Asia Times*, “Indian troops would get sucked into a bloody counter-insurgency operation as the surrogates of the U.S., losing whatever goodwill India had earned in Iraq and the rest of the Arab world in the past.” He added, “India would become the target of the new breed of jihadi terrorists born out of the Iraq war thereby making the counter-terrorism task of the security forces in India even more difficult than it is today.”

Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee says that a decision on deployment will be made only after a national consensus is reached. He seems to ignore the fact that a national consensus on the occupation of Iraq already exists. In April the Indian Parliament in a unanimous resolution “deplored” the U.S.-led attack on Iraq and called for a quick withdrawal of coalition forces from that country. Sending Indian troops under the command of the occupying forces will blatantly violate the spirit of this resolution. It will only serve U.S. interests, not India’s, not Iraq’s.

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