

April 20, 1979

Letter from R.J Alston (Joint Nuclear Unit) to P.R. Fearn (British Embassy, Islamabad), 'Pakistan Nuclear Programme'

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Summary:

This document is a letter from Robert Alston of the FCO's Joint Nuclear Unit, to Mr. P.R. Fearn at the British Embassy in Islamabad. In the letter, Alston discusses the recent visit of a US State Department official, Thomas Pickering, to the Foreign Office in London.

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Mr P R Fearn
British Embassy
Islamabad

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to Mr Walter Ayes Staff
1) para 4 only
2) Mr Fullerton PUSO full sent

Your reference

Our reference

Date

20 April 1979

23/4

Dear Fearn

PAKISTAN NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

ee. R. Loves (SAD)
24/4

1. Tom Pickering of the State Department stopped over briefly in London this morning to brief Tony Parsons and others on current American thinking. He recalled Mr Hummel's approach to General Zia on 9 April. This had been made in the light of the recent American reaffirmation of the 1959 security agreement between the two countries. On the nuclear issue, General Zia had taken the line that Pakistan had no weapons programme but did have a research programme for civil purposes. He would be happy to discuss security questions with the Americans, but felt that it would be more appropriate to discuss the nuclear programme after Pakistan's elections in November.

2. On the basis of this the Americans had developed a two stage approach. Postponement of discussion of the nuclear issue until November was unacceptable. The Pakistanis could do too much in the meantime. Moreover the Americans wished to link discussion on the nuclear and security issues and did not wish to delay the opening of a dialogue on the latter for more than six months.

3. The Americans were therefore now proposing to take up Zia's point about a civil research programme and to seek Pakistani agreement that this should be frozen at its present level. On enrichment, the Americans would argue that research alone was inconsistent with what the Americans knew about three separate sites. They would therefore propose that the Pakistanis should stop all activity other than at Chaklala. They would seek an assurance that the Pakistanis would not import equipment or technology, or undertake activity elsewhere. They would naturally prefer this in writing but the Ambassador had some discretion on tactics. At a slightly later stage in the conversation they would seek to put a quantitative ceiling of 50 separative work units (SWUs) at up to 5% enrichment on this. This was well below the cut-off at which IAEA safeguards on enrichment activity become mandatory. (In fact, the Americans would be able to concede in negotiation that the existing machines at Sihala could also operate without exceeding that cut-off.)

4. The Americans would also be seeking Pakistani assurances that they would fulfill their 1976 safeguards agreement with the IAEA in respect of their three reprocessing sites, and that they would import no reprocessing equipment. They would also be seeking formal repetition of assurances that no development work on nuclear weapons was taking place.



5. If these assurances were received, the Administration would recommend a waiver of the Symington amendment. They would also offer to explore with the Pakistanis what more could be done under the 1959 agreement to meet Pakistan's security concerns. (In reply to a question Pickering said that a dialogue on this would be a useful way both of seeking a clear Pakistani statement of what their concerns were, and giving the Americans a chance to comment on them.) The Administration were reasonably confident that they could carry Congress on this. Congress was not anxious to find itself saddled with the responsibility of preventing the Administration from starting a dialogue on Pakistan's security concerns and thereby perhaps losing Pakistan for the West. They thought that they could convince Congress that monitoring of imports plus intelligence sources would enable the Americans to monitor for up to a year whether the Pakistanis were keeping their assurances.


6. There would of course need to be a reasonable chance that longer term arrangements could be put into place subsequently. This would be the second phase of the American plan. Thinking on this was very much less close to firm decisions in Washington. They had concluded that they should not attempt to burden the dialogue with the Pakistanis with formal verification arrangements at present. But they would make it clear that at a later stage they would want to develop proposals for regional political arrangements which (either immediately or subsequently) would involve verification.

7. After considering the points put by Hummel on 9 April Zia had agreed to send Agha Shahi and a team to Washington on 10 May to open the dialogue under the security agreement. Pickering thought it unlikely that Zia would give a substantive answer on the nuclear proposals until this visit had taken place. Zia's strategy seemed likely to be that of making maximum progress on the security issue and doing as little as possible on the nuclear issue. The American strategy would be the converse. There was no evidence that there was any significant opposition to nuclear weapons in the Pakistani establishment though (like us) the Americans knew relatively little about discussion there.

8. Re-emphasising that everything was still open on the long term issues, Pickering sketched a number of points on which thinking was continuing in Washington;

- (a) there was a broad consensus that the Americans should try to pin down the Pakistanis before attempting to bring in the Indians;
- (b) they were sketching out a possible bilateral Indo-Pakistan agreement on no building of nuclear weapons (possibly also including a freeze on any enrichment activity in India);
- (c) there was a feeling that additional conventional arms to those offered last November would be required. The issue of whether these should be sold on non-commercial terms was giving "great agony". There were

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very conflicting considerations relating to the balance with India and America's relations with the latter, regional security, and avoiding too obviously buying the Pakistanis off;

(d) in reply to a question about American reactions to the kind of ideas in Tony Parson's letter to the Ambassador, of 6 April, Pickering said that the Americans shared our concerns about the need to take account of India's worries about China, and to avoid singling out India and Pakistan as "bad boys". Their current thinking on the China point was to suggest something like Protocol II to the Treaty of Tlatelolco. This might not be enough for the Indians, but the Americans thought it would be unrealistic to expect the Chinese to stop nuclear tests. On the geographical scope of a regional arrangement, the Americans would be flexible if the Indians wanted it extended;

(e) discussion was going on with Congress on ways in which America's bilateral relationship with India could be brought in. A possible basis was year by year continuation of supplies provided that India continued the dialogue on safeguards, accepted a CTB, and was prepared to participate in a regional agreement;

(f) some thought was also being given to "way out" ideas, such as the solution of border disputes, non-aggression pacts and arms limitation in South Asia;

(g) UN scenarios were also being looked at with particular attention to the Group of 77 and possible awkward implications for parallel situations in South Africa and Israel.

9. In response to a question about American information on Pakistan-Arab links Pickering said that the Australians had "fragmentary" evidence about Libyan financial help, and there was some conjecture about Iraq. It was pretty clear that the Pakistanis were financing their centrifuge programme (about \$10m per year) from Saudi money and that the Saudis were aware of this. It was not however clear that the Saudi money had been specifically advanced for that purpose. The Saudis had made disapproving noises about Pakistan's nuclear programme in the context of the reprocessing deal. The American Ambassador in Jeddah thought that they might be willing to put down another marker but were unlikely to want to go so far as to threaten withdrawal of financial assistance.

10. Pickering confirmed that the Americans had been in touch with the Chinese who also claimed to have struck a note of disapproval with the Pakistanis but declined to be more specific. The Americans had discussed this problem with the Russians only in the most general terms. We had some discussion with Pickering on why the Russians had not reacted to the publicity about the Pakistani programme. Pickering said that recent evidence suggested indeed that quite friendly contacts had recently taken place between the Russians and Pakistanis. A number of reasons were put forward why the Russians might have been expected to react. They could embarrass certain Western Governments and the Chinese. They could please the Indians. They could strike a



moral attitude on a non-proliferation issue. They could embarrass Zia. On the other hand - and it was agreed that these considerations had probably so far proved more attractive - Pakistan had left CENTO and had been reasonably receptive to Russian pressure over Afghanistan. For the moment therefore the more attractive option for the Russians was to keep open their links with Zia. (It would be useful to know whether Moscow share this analysis and whether there has indeed been any Russian comment on this issue.)

11. On American-Indian contacts Pickering said that Vajpayee would be in Washington next week. The Americans proposed to say (as we had) that they were approaching the problem first through trying to control supplies to Pakistan. They were having some bilateral contacts with Pakistan and had some regional proposals under consideration but not yet ready to put forward. In reply to a question Pickering said that they need to handle this in such a way as to strengthen Desai and his few supporters on this issue against those who took a more hawkish line. The Americans would also try to keep the dialogue going on nuclear supplies (not least to avoid the NRC becoming still more difficult on future shipments). They had commissioned a paper from the IAEA on the impact of safeguards on installations of the Indian type in an effort to dispose of the technical arguments and isolate the essentially political nature of the Indian position. Some thought was also being given to the gradual introduction of safeguards on India's installations.

12. In conclusion Pickering said that he rated the chances of success with the freeze initiative in nearer 1 in 20 than 15 in 20. Some thought would also have to be given to moves in the event of a negative response. Punitive measures were one option. (He thought that the timing of the forthcoming aid consortium meeting could make it a useful opportunity to give signs of unhappiness.) Further thought would have to be given to the possible roles of the Russians and Chinese, and the Americans would undoubtedly want to talk further to us and Pakistan's principal aid donors and trading partners.

13 Much of the above is sensitive information for us as well as the Americans. Particular care is needed not to reveal it outside official British and American officials directly involved.

Turner R J Alston
Joint Nuclear Unit

cc: Mr Cullimore (Delhi)
Mr Weston (Washington)
Mr Norberry (DS11 MOD)
Sir Clive Rose (Cabinet Office)
Mr George (Peking)
Lord Nicholas Gordon Lennox (Paris)
Mr Whitehead (Bonn)
Mr Smart (Canberra)
Mr Fall (Moscow)

bc: PS/TUS
Sir A Parsons
Mr Cortazzi
Mr Murray
Mr P H Moberly
Mr Malleby
Mr White (SAD)