

April 4, 1994

**Cable, US Embassy Islamabad to the Secretary of
State, 'India-Day 2; On to Islamabad'**

Citation:

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Summary:

Strobe Talbott summarizes a meeting with P. V. Narasimha Rao, the Prime Minister of India.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

NODS-01000



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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM TALBOTT

S/S-O PLEASE REPEAT TO NEW DELHI

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: PREL, PARM, IN, PK, US
SUBJECT: INDIA - DAY 2; ON TO ISLAMABAD

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1. SECRET - ENTIRE TEXT.
2. OVERCOMING HIS OWN NERVOUSNESS ABOUT THE CURRENT STATE OF U.S.-INDIAN RELATIONS AND CONTRARY ADVICE FROM SOME OF HIS OWN AIDES, PRIME MINISTER RAO HAS DECIDED TO ACCEPT PRESIDENT CLINTON'S INVITATION TO VISIT WASHINGTON THIS SPRING. RAO INFORMED ME OF HIS DECISION IN A ONE-HOUR ONE-ON-ONE MEETING TODAY. HE WANTS TO USE HIS TRIP TO WASHINGTON AND HIS MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT TO PUT THE RELATIONSHIP ON A NEW FOOTING. HE EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE FRUSTRATION THAT EVEN WITH THE COLD WAR OVER -- AND THEREFORE WITH SOUTH ASIA NO LONGER AN ARENA OF THE U.S.-SOVIET GREAT GAME -- WE HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO GET U.S.-INDIA RELATIONS "RIGHT." HIS MESSAGE WAS VERY PERSONAL AND VERY DIRECT. "I AM 73 YEARS OLD," HE SAID. "I DIDN'T ASK FOR THIS JOB AND I DON'T NEED IT. THE ONE THING I WANT TO DO IS TO PRESIDE OVER A QUALITATIVE IMPROVEMENT IN INDO-U.S. RELATIONS. UNFORTUNATELY, THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A SENSE OF AFFINITY BETWEEN OUR TWO DEMOCRACIES. IT GOES BACK TO JOHN FOSTER DULLES ON YOUR SIDE, WHO USED TO CALL NONALIGNMENT IMMORAL, AND TO KRISHNA MENON ON OUR SIDE. NEVER MIND WHO IS TO BLAME. THE FACT IS THAT WE'VE NEVER LIVED UP TO THE POTENTIAL OF OUR RELATIONSHIP. I WANT TO BE THE FIRST INDIAN PRIME MINISTER TO DO SO IN A MEANINGFUL MANNER."
3. RAO PROMISED TO GET BACK TO US EARLY NEXT WEEK ABOUT THE SPECIFIC DATES OF HIS VISIT. (WE PROPOSED MAY 6, BUT RAO'S ADVISERS SAY HE MAY ASK TO COME A FEW DAYS OR A WEEK LATER TO COINCIDE WITH A MAY 9TH COMMITMENT AT HARVARD.) HE REMEMBERED FONDLY THAT IN THEIR FIRST PHONE CONVERSATION THE PRESIDENT HAD REMARKED THAT THEY ARE BOTH "SOUTHERNERS." RAO URGED THAT THE CENTERPIECE OF BOTH HIS PRIVATE TALKS WITH THE PRESIDENT AND THE SPIN ON THE VISIT BE THAT A NEW ERA IS NOW POSSIBLE IN U.S.-INDIAN COOPERATION. HE ASKED FOR SOME VISIBLE DEMONSTRATION OF THAT POINT. I SUGGESTED A JOINT STATEMENT MIGHT BE ONE WAY TO LAY OUT A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR OUR GLOBAL AND REGIONAL COOPERATION. THIS SEEMED TO PLEASE HIM AS THE KIND OF SYMBOLIC STEP THAT WOULD GIVE THE RELATIONSHIP A JUMP-START. "PERHAPS WE WILL HAVE TO SETTLE FOR JUST A GRADUAL

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IMPROVEMENT," HE SAID, "BUT A QUANTUM LEAP WOULD SAVE US TIME."

4. HE WAS GENERALLY MUTED ABOUT THE F-16/PAKISTAN INITIATIVE. CLEARLY, HIS MINISTERS AND ADVISERS WITH WHOM I'D MET YESTERDAY HAD BRIEFED HIM ON MY APPEAL THAT WE BE GIVEN SOME RUNNING ROOM TO WORK THE PROPOSAL QUIETLY WITH ISLAMABAD. BUT RAO DID IMPRESS UPON ME HOW DIFFICULT THE F-16 ISSUE IS FOR HIM POLITICALLY. HE URGED US NOT TO UNDERESTIMATE THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT ON AVERAGE INDIANS THAT THE PLANE TRANSFER HAS. "IT BRINGS ALL THE RAW NERVES TO THE SURFACE," HE SAID. "REMEMBER THAT PAKISTAN USED PATTON TANKS AND SABER JETS AGAINST INDIA IN TWO WARS. IT WAS OK FOR YOU TO ARM PAKISTAN WHEN YOU SAW US AS A SOVIET STOOGES, BUT ITS NOT OK NOW." ALL THE PRESS ATTENTION (INITIALLY TRIGGERED BY SEN. PRESSLER'S PUBLIC COMPLAINTS AFTER HAVING BEEN BRIEFED ON OUR PLAN) FUELS SUSPICIONS IN INDIA OF A NEW U.S. "TILT" TOWARD PAKISTAN. WHILE RAO DOESN'T SEE THAT AS A DANGER, RAO IS CONCERNED THAT PERHAPS WE ARE TRYING TO "BALANCE AND EQUATE" INDIA AND PAKISTAN, RATHER THAN RECOGNIZING INDIA AS THE REGIONAL HEAVYWEIGHT. HE ALSO FEARS THAT WE ARE NOT TAKING INDIA'S CONCERNS ABOUT CHINA SERIOUSLY ENOUGH. I REITERATED A MESSAGE I'D ALREADY DELIVERED TO HIS MINISTERS: THE U.S. IS DETERMINED TO GET BEYOND THE ZERO-SUM GAMES AND "TILTS" OF THE PAST AND DEVELOP RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN AND INDIA EACH IN ITS OWN RIGHT. HE WELCOMED THIS THEME.

5. ONE INSTRUCTIVE POINT: RAO UNQUESTIONABLY ACCEPTS THE PROPOSITION THAT AN UNFETTERED PAKISTANI NUCLEAR PROGRAM POSES A FAR GREATER THREAT TO INDIA'S SECURITY THAN 38 F-16S. HE SUPPORTS OUR OBJECTIVE OF CAPPING THE PAKISTANI PROGRAM -- BUT WOULD LIKE FOR US TO FIND SOME OTHER CARROT WITH WHICH TO ACCOMPLISH THAT OBJECTIVE. WHEN I ASKED HIM IF HE COULD SUGGEST ANY ALTERNATIVES, HE SAID HE'D BEEN THINKING ABOUT IT BUT HADN'T BEEN ABLE TO COME UP WITH ANY CONCRETE SUGGESTIONS. QUITE TELLING, I THINK.

6. PART OF RAO'S CURRENT FRUSTRATION -- AND PART OF HIS ANXIETY ABOUT HIS TRIP TO WASHINGTON -- IS HIS FEELING THAT INDIA FIGURES TOO MUCH IN AMERICAN MINDS AS THE ANTIPODE TO PAKISTAN, HALF OF A TROUBLESOME REGIONAL RIVALRY. "THIS INDIA-PAKISTAN THING GETS ON MY NERVES," HE SAID -- AN ALMOST POIGNANT, AND CERTAINLY IRONIC-SOUNDING COMPLAINT FROM AN INDIAN PRIME MINISTER. IN HIS VIEW, INDIA IS NOT ONLY MANY TIMES LARGER THAN PAKISTAN. IT IS ALSO A STURDY DEMOCRACY, WHILE PAKISTAN IS ONLY A VERY PRECARIOUS ONE.

7. IN CLOSING, HE MADE A PLEA FOR INDIA AS A MAJOR FIGURE IN THE WORLD, BY VIRTUE NOT JUST OF ITS SIZE BUT ALSO OF WHAT IT STANDS FOR -- SECULARISM, DIVERSITY AND DEMOCRACY. "IT IS ONE OF OUR DEFINING FEATURES THAT INDIA HAS NEVER CONFINED HER

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ATTENTION TO DOMESTIC AFFAIRS. WE HAVE ALWAYS HAD SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT THE WORLD AT LARGE. LOOK AT GANDHI, LOOK AT NEHRU," HE SAID. "WE, IN INDIA WANT TO HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE WORLD. THIS IS OUR COMMON TASK. LET'S ADDRESS IT TOGETHER." HE LEFT NO DOUBT THAT THIS WAS WHAT HE HOPES WILL BE ONE OF THE CENTRAL POINTS TO BE UNDERScoreD AT HIS MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CLINTON.

8. I'VE NOW MOVED ON TO ISLAMABAD, WHERE PM BHUTTO HAS MADE THINGS NO EASIER BY POURING COLD WATER OVER OUR INITIATIVE IN A PUBLIC STATEMENT TO HER PARLIAMENT. THIS MEANS IT WILL BE EVEN HARDER FOR HER TO KEEP THE DOOR OPEN TO FURTHER DIALOGUE -- HARDER BUT NOT, I SUSPECT, IMPOSSIBLE. SHE CANNOT BE SEEN TO BE YIELDING TO AMERICAN PRESSURE. BUT SHE DOESN'T WANT TO BE SEEN STRAINING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S. TO THE BREAKING POINT EITHER. THE ACTUAL TEXT OF WHAT SHE SAID IN THE PARLIAMENT IS LESS CATEGORICAL AND PREEMPTIVE THAN THE PRESS ACCOUNTS WOULD SUGGEST. I THINK WE STILL HAVE SOME ROOM. MY INTENTION TOMORROW, WHEN I MEET WITH HER AND HER MINISTERS, IS

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TO SEE IF SHE WILL DUPLICATE ON PAKISTAN'S BEHALF WHAT PM RAO HAS PERMITTED ON INDIA'S: LOWER THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC CONTROVERSY ON THE F-16/CAPPING ISSUE AND BUY SOME TIME AND LEEWAY FOR QUIET, U.S.-LED DIPLOMACY.

9. AN ATHLETIC FOOTNOTE: ROBIN AND I WENT FOR A WORLD-CLASS JOG IN THE HILLS OUTSIDE OF ISLAMABAD THIS AFTERNOON -- PERFECT TEMPERATURE, BEAUTIFUL SCENERY, FRESH (AND REFRESHING) AIR -- AND WE WERE LED BY BILL MILLER, AN EMBASSY SECURITY OFFICER WHO WAS PART OF YOUR DS DETAIL WHEN YOU FIRST CAME INTO OFFICE AND WHO JOGGED WITH YOU ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS. HIS PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT: THAT THE SECRETARY OF STATE HAS BETTER RUNNING FORM THAN EITHER THE DEPUTY OR THE SA A/S. MONJO

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