

August 1998

Letter, Strobe Talbott to Jaswant Singh (Draft)

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Summary:

Strobe Talbott writes to Jaswant Singh about India's nuclear weapons.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

Monday, August 3, 1998

To MKA

From Strobe

Here's the draft of the letter I'm hoping to get off to Jaswant tomorrow. You'll see that I've evoked your name on Page 2. Let me know if you have any suggestions on how to improve it.

Also, I sent word out to you on the road that Brooke and I are going to have a very small, very informal dinner for Jaswant Sunday August 23rd. We'd be delighted if you wanted to come. If that doesn't work for you, I'd ask that you give him 10 minutes or so on Monday or Tuesday the 24th-25th.

I'll probably see you for the Russia meeting tomorrow – and I really will give some thought over the next 10 days to the Big Question we discussed this morning.

Cheers,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Strobe', written in a cursive style.

ST version of letter, draft Aug. 2, to Jaswant Singh; clear with SA and NSC, get ST's sign-off on any changes, put into final for faxing to Amb. Celeste for promptest delivery to Singh.

August 4, 1995

Dear Jaswant:

I am writing on the eve of a 10-day vacation far, far away from both Washington and New Delhi. Three generations of our family are gathering, under the leadership of my father (an ornithological pandit and master of the wilderness), for an expedition to the Galapagos Islands. While I look forward to a salutary change in scenery and activity, I assure you that, even while treading in the footsteps of Darwin and admiring the finch and the tortoise, I will, in some corner of my brain, be thinking about the enterprise that has brought you and me together for three rounds and that will bring us together again soon.

Before departing, I wanted to put before you some thoughts about our next meeting. What I have to say here is not new; I hope you will find it all totally consistent with my side of our discussions in Rounds 1-3. Rather, it is meant to provide you with a focused and updated reiteration of how I see the challenge of what we both hope will be a conclusive Round 4.

One reason I am inflicting this recitation upon you is that I have some concern that Round 4 will *not* be conclusive. I wouldn't want to see our journey mimic Zeno's paradox: each time we meet, we get half-way to our famous village — and thus never arrive.

What we need, I feel, is what one of your late neighbors to the North might have called a Great Leap Forward.

I've discussed all this with Secretary Albright, who returned home Sunday night. She is glad to have seen you in Manila and has described the ARF session in some detail. On balance, it sounds as though the treatment of the nuclear issue qualified for our favorite adjective — *constructive*. Recalling one of our private discussions in Hyderabad House, I hope that you would use that same word to characterize the American role in Manila.

The Secretary feels that the two of you had a chance not only to renew what I gather was in fact an old acquaintance but also to review, with considerable candor and some specificity, where we are and how we might cover the remaining distance.

As for the less metaphorical journey we are all concerned with — the possible one that President Clinton had hoped to make in November — the Secretary made clear that we must make decisive progress on the four security/arms-control/non-proliferation issues during our meeting later this month if she and I are to be in a position to recommend to the President that he proceed.

I hope my colleagues and I have been convincing that identification of what we agreed at Hyderabad House to call the four legs of the elephant is neither arbitrary nor tactical — nor can the beast be dismembered or otherwise crippled: it needs all four limbs intact in order to move in the right direction. Moreover, our concept of "right direction" takes full account of what you and your Prime Minister have told us about your defense needs and emerging doctrine. Thus, we believe that, taken together, the four benchmarks conform to, and help define, important parameters of India's own

declared strategic posture. Agreement on these elements will help give others — the U.S., your neighbors, and the world at large — confidence that India indeed seeks only a minimum deterrent capability and is committed to avoiding a destabilizing and expensive nuclear and missile race. It will also demonstrate that, notwithstanding strong, continuing differences over the NPT itself, India's chosen strategic posture is, in several important (though not all) respects, compatible with key global nonproliferation norms that are absolutely critical to the United States and to much of the rest of the world.

Let me say a word about domestic politics and public opinion, an important topic when two great democracies are seeking common ground between themselves. You and I have often spoken of the Indian constituencies to which Prime Minister Vajpayee must defend the tough decisions required for progress. The Administration that the Secretary and I serve also has constituencies to which we must answer: the Congress, the public, and other states that are our partners in the global nonproliferation regime and that have, unlike India, forsworn nuclear weapons.

Since returning from New Delhi, I have spend some time with representatives of both the Congress and the arms-control/non-proliferation NGO community. There is strong sentiment in both sectors that India should join the NPT immediately as a non-nuclear weapons state — in other words, that it should renounce the capability it demonstrated in May — and that India should submit to a ban on nuclear-capable missiles or at least on their flight-testing.

Those long-term goals are, as I've made clear on several occasions, still very much to be encouraged. However, you and I

agreed in our first meeting that, as practitioners of the art of the possible, we would concentrate, in the near term, on the task of agreeing to, and implementing, practical and politically sustainable steps that would serve to reconcile the U.S.'s vital national interest in a viable non-proliferation regime with India's concept of its own immediate and prospective strategic imperatives. It is for that reason that we have, for the weeks immediately ahead, aimed at four targets *not* including NPT and a flight-test ban.

I hope very much that you and your Prime Minister, along with your other colleagues, will keep in mind the hard choices we've already made as you ponder what we recognize are some hard choices of your own. If you and I can come to closure along the lines we've discussed, I can assure you that the President and Secretary Albright are prepared to defend the steps *we* are prepared to take together. We are so prepared because we believe the track we are on is in the best interest of both the global nonproliferation regime and the future bilateral relationship between the U.S. and India, with all its promise. But we will only be able to do that if our two governments can reach agreement on a coherent, credible *package*.

With this in mind, let me reiterate what I see as essential in each of the four elements of the package.

1. **Nuclear testing**. In regard to your national statement, we hope your Prime Minister will see fit to issue an unequivocal and public commitment that India will be signing and ratifying the CTBT as soon as possible, but no later than September 1999. We appreciate that the CTBT has been a lightning rod in public and parliamentary debate in India. But we have followed

carefully your Government's skillful efforts to prepare public opinion and, at least from where we sit, the mood seems recently to have shifted toward Indian adherence.

2. **Fissile material production.** Now that neither India nor Pakistan is objecting to the commencement of FMCT negotiations in Geneva, we hope that the multilateral talks can soon get underway. We will work with you closely to ensure that the future Treaty deals only with new production and not existing stocks. But the Treaty will take years to negotiate and enter into force. In the meantime, large quantities of material could be produced. Developments could occur (e.g., the start-up of production of plutonium from the Khushab reactor) that could give one party or another incentives to prolong or even de-rail the negotiations. That is why we strongly favor a moratorium on production pending completion of the Treaty. It is our best estimate that India has already produced a formidable stockpile of weapons-grade plutonium. Indeed, in this connection, I must tell you in all candor that India's continuing resistance to a moratorium could raise questions about its commitment to a *minimum* deterrent. We appreciate your concerns about moving ahead without your neighbors. But our information indicates that China has already stopped producing. And India's decision to stop would put the onus on Pakistan to follow suit — and thus to forgo a plentiful source of plutonium from its new reactor. Perhaps India might announce that it is suspending production for a finite period of time (e.g., six months), but that it would have to review this decision in light of the willingness of its

neighbors to join in such a moratorium. The moratorium is a critical piece of the package.

3. **Nuclear-capable missiles and aircraft.** The non-paper we provided, entitled "Elements of a Minimum Deterrent Posture," assumes that, at least in the absence of a serious deterioration of India's security environment, India can meet its essential deterrence requirements with two types of nuclear-capable missiles, a measured pace of flight-testing carried out with considerable transparency, a limited number of missiles produced, and the location of nuclear weapons components, nuclear-capable aircraft, and missile system elements (i.e., airframes, launchers, and warheads) in such a geographically-separated manner as to provide confidence that they were not actually deployed and would not be ready for use without further preparations. I hope you agree with that assumption. We are not looking for bilateral agreement on the elements in the non-paper. It would be far preferable — I trust you agree — to have them as part of an authoritative expression of India's own defense policy. You had mentioned that key elements might be incorporated in a white paper reporting publicly on the results of your strategic defense review. You also suggested that portions of that paper dealing with the elements might be discussed with us at our next meeting. I look forward to that. If some of the details would not be appropriate for public handling in a white paper, perhaps they could be recorded in official correspondence between our two governments. I repeat: we are not seeking a legally binding commitment along the lines of the CTBT and FMCT. We are speaking instead of a *political* commitment, an expression of

Indian policy and intention. We recognize that, if India's security environment were to deteriorate significantly, you might feel compelled to alter your plans and policies and would be entitled to do so.

4. Export controls. What we are asking for here is the adoption and incorporation into India's legal and institutional framework for controlling exports of the policy guidelines and control lists of the various multilateral export control regimes. We recognize that this will be a lengthy process, especially the development of the necessary laws or regulations and the further strengthening of India's export control mechanisms. We would welcome the opportunity for U.S. and Indian experts to discuss what may be required. For now, we are seeking a public indication of your intention to adopt into your control system the policy guidelines and control lists of the groups (Nuclear Suppliers Group/Zangger Committee, Australia Group, MTCR, Wassenaar Arrangement). It is especially important, in this connection, that India no longer oppose or seek to de-legitimize these groups. The problem here, Jaswant, is that in the past, India has made common cause with some states that have ulterior motives for wishing to see the multilateral export control groups weakened or abolished — motives we trust India itself does not share. If India and the U.S. are truly to become partners in the fight against proliferation, it is essential that we be on the same side of this issue.

As Secretary Albright stressed when you talked in Manila, the four legs must be "sturdy" if they are to support our elephant. Our discussions later this month will be crucial if we are to give them the necessary sturdiness in time for decision-making in early September

on the President's trip. We will need to have a strong package in hand by then to be able to recommend proceeding on schedule. If that does not prove possible, she and I would much prefer to defer the summit and use the additional time to ensure a strong, credible result that would enable the summit, when it does occur, to be the positive, forward-looking one that we originally planned.

Speaking of summits, I will look forward to your evaluation of the two Prime Ministers' meeting at in Colombo. My colleagues and I see it as a positive that the two, along with their foreign secretaries, met at all, and that they discussed the modalities of continued dialogue. However, the public comments of both governments sounded hardly encouraging. Perhaps there was more than met the eye. A specific question comes to mind: is there any chance that Prime Minister Vajpayee might attend the proposed SAARC/ECO economic summit that is planned for this fall for Islamabad, if it takes place as scheduled?

Let me turn to the matter of what's going on in our own government on the subject of South Asia. In recent months, I've become a connoisseur of the Indian press, and I've seen a lot of coverage and commentary on the subject of American sanctions. I also paid close attention to Alok's representations to Dick.

Sanctions are a new fact of life, just as the tests in May were — and remain, in their implications and consequences — a new fact of life. When we announced export controls, as mandated by the Glenn Amendment, in the wake of nuclear testing, we noted that we were obliged to compile an "entity list" so as to provide transparency in the application of export controls. This entity list will name individual entities — governmental, parastatal (public sector

undertakings), and private — that directly or indirectly engage in nuclear or missile activities or other military activities. The list will be published in the Federal Register so that firms will know which entities will be denied specific kinds of exports, including in some cases a total trade embargo for an entity linked directly to the nuclear or missile arena. While publication of an extensive list draws political attention and will doubtless stir up criticism in India, it is our experience that by clarifying publicly which entities are affected by sanctions, the overall adverse effect on trade and investment will be less than it otherwise might be.

After the events of May, we started a process of reviewing existing bilateral programs. In some cases, we have found that programs existed involving either entities directly related to nuclear or missile activities or selected areas of research in those areas. We have terminated some activities. In a few cases, individuals who held visas granted on the basis of specific work commitments have returned to India. Contrary to the vocabulary of the headlines in the Indian press, these are not expulsions. Approximately one dozen individuals have been affected. There has been no attempt to curtail our fruitful overall S-and-T relationship. The activities which are no longer appropriate constitute a minuscule portion of our overall S-and-T undertakings. You will, I hope, understand why we could, for example, no longer permit Indian or Pakistani nationals to be present in certain of our facilities that are related to weapons programs or why it is inappropriate for us to facilitate the travel to the United States of individuals engaged in such programs in India or Pakistan.

As I prepare to leave Washington for ten days, I am working closely with Bruce Riedel and the Department of Energy on the "seminar" we discussed, as well as with Joe Ralston, who looks forward to being your host at a dinner Monday evening (when I'll be airborne heading for London) and at a round-table discussion somewhere in the vastness of the Pentagon on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, my wife Brooke looks forward to meeting you for a less formal dinner at our house on Sunday evening. We will have the backyard spruced up in case the heat permits us to sit out there. In any event, I very much look forward to your visit.

With warm regards,