

July 26, 1972

**US Embassy India Cable 9293 to State Department,
'Indian Nuclear Intentions'**

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Summary:

The Embassy acknowledged that India had the “technical know-how and possibly materials to develop [a] simple nuclear device within period of months after GOI decision to do so.” Nevertheless, it saw no evidence that a decision had been made to test a device. Moreover, capabilities to deliver nuclear weapons were limited, with no plans in sight to “develop [a] missile launch system.”

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4. IN ADDITION TO RESERVATIONS ABOUT PROHIBITIVE ECONOMIC COSTS, PRIMIN GANDHI MAY DOUBT MILITARY UTILITY OF NUCLEAR WEAPONRY (NEW DELHI 2288). MOREOVER, SHE SEEMS EMOTIONALLY SET AGAINST ANY SUCH DEVELOPMENT, AND, WE THINK, FINDS PRESENT OPEN OPTIONS POSTURE TACTICALLY USEFUL, BUT HAS NO INTENTION, AS MATTER OF PRINCIPLE AS WELL AS ECONOMICS, TO PURSUE NUCLEAR WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT AS SUCH AT THIS TIME.

5. CONDITIONS MOST LIKELY TO CHANGE MRS. GANDHI'S PUBLIC, AND PRESUMABLY PRIVATE, OPPOSITION TO NUCLEAR WEAPONRY FOR INDIA INCLUDE: (A) ASIAN PROLIFERATION, PARTICULARLY PAKISTAN; (B) CHINESE BOMB WAVING, INCLUDING PERHAPS MISSILE LAUNCHES IN INDIAN OCEAN AREA; AND (C) ECONOMIC/SOCIAL/POLITICAL DETERIORATION IN INDIA SUFFICIENTLY GREAT TO TEMPT LEADERSHIP TOWARDS PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST OF NUCLEAR EXPLOSION. HOWEVER, NONE OF THESE CONDITIONS CURRENTLY OBTAIN OR APPEARS LIKELY TO EMERGE IN NEAR TIMEFRAME.

6. COUNTRY TEAM SEES NO EVIDENCE THAT AS PART OF OPEN OPTIONS APPROACH, GOI IS CURRENTLY PREPARING "PEACEFUL" TEST TO EXPAND ITS MASTERY OF NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY. WE UNDERSTAND IT IS GENERALLY CONCEDED IN INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CIRCLES, AND CERTAINLY ON DIPLOMATIC CIRCUIT HERE, THAT INDIA HAS TECHNICAL KNOW-HOW, AND POSSIBLY MATERIALS, TO DEVELOP SIMPLE NUCLEAR DEVICE WITHIN PERIOD OF MONTHS AFTER GOI DECISION TO DO SO. (PRODUCTIVE CAPACITIES OF INDIA'S PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE NUCLEAR STATIONS, GRADES OF PLUTONIUM BEING PRODUCED, AND EXTENT TO WHICH FACILITIES ARE COVERED BY INTERNATIONAL OR BILATERAL SAFEGUARDS, ARE WELL-KNOWN TO WASHINGTON). WE ARE AWARE FROM OVERT AND COVERT SOURCES THAT WITHIN INDIAN NUCLEAR COMMUNITY, AS ELSEWHERE IN GOI AND AMONG POLITICAL AND POPULAR ELITES, THERE IS BODY OF OPINION ARGUING THAT REGARDLESS OF ULTIMATE GOI DECISION ON WEAPONS MANUFACTURE, OPEN OPTIONS POLICY, TO BE PURPOSEFUL AND CREDIBLE, REQUIRES EARLY TEST TO EXTEND INDIA'S RANGE OF NUCLEAR KNOWLEDGE. THIS OPINION ALSO ADDUCES BENEFICIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SIDE-EFFECTS IN INDIA, AND PERHAPS ON POTENTIAL AGGRESSORS ABROAD. OTHERS IN NUCLEAR ESTABLISHMENT CONSIDER TEST BLAST AT BEST DIVERSIONARY, AND AT WORST LIKELY TO TEMPT GOI TO COMMIT SCARCE RESOURCES IN UNHEALTHY DIRECTION OF WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT. WHILE WE THINK IT POSSIBLE INDIAN SCIENTISTS MAY HAVE WORKED ON THEORETICAL PREPARATIONS FOR ASSEMBLING NUCLEAR DEVICE, WE ARE UNABLE TO DETERMINE WHETHER THEY HAVE ASSEMBLED DEVICE. WE RECALL THAT

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IN JULY 12 PRESS CONFERENCE MRS. GANDHI SAID "THERE IS NO TRUTH WHATEVER" TO CURRENT JAPANESE REPORTS INDIA WILL SOON STAGE TEST BLAST (NEW DELHI 8688).

7. FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE INDIA'S DELIVERY CAPABILITY LIES WHOLLY IN LIMITED-RANGE AIRCRAFT IN INDIAN AIR FORCE INVENTORY--CURRENTLY 4 SQUADRONS OF CANBERRAS (B-58), 8 SQUADRONS OF MIG-21 AND 6 SQUADRONS OF SU-7. DESPITE LIVELY GOI INTEREST IN GENERAL FIELD OF ROCKETRY AND SPACE, AS EVIDENCED, E.G., BY EXTENSIVE SOUNDING ROCKET PROGRAM UNDERTAKEN WITH FOREIGN COLLABORATION, INFORMED INDIANS SEEM TO RECOGNIZE THEY ARE STILL BEGINNERS. SCIATT NOTES THAT IN RECENT CALL ON NEW SPACE CHIEF DHAWAN, LATTER DESCRIBED HIS FIRST PRIORITIES AS COMMUNICATIONS AND EDUCATION, AND IN DISCUSSING REPORTS OF AN INDIAN NATIONAL SATELLITE, HINTED THAT LAUNCHING WILL BE DELAYED BEYOND RUMORED 1974, BECAUSE OF FUNDING AND SOFTWARE COMPLICATIONS, AND DIFFICULTIES IN IMPORTING REQUISITE TECHNOLOGY. ALSO, PROFESSOR M.G.K. MENON, DIRECTOR TATA INSTITUTE FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH, AND HEAD OF INDIAN SPACE PROGRAM FOR INTERIM PERIOD OF ABOUT SIX MONTHS FOLLOWING VIKRAM SARABHAL'S DEATH, TOLD BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER THREE MONTHS AGO INDIA HAS NO PRESENT OR FORESEEABLE CAPACITY TO DEVELOP MISSILE LAUNCH SYSTEM, AND COULD NOT, FOR EXAMPLE, EVEN THEORETICALLY EXPECT TO HAVE INDEPENDENT SATELLITE LAUNCH CAPABILITY FOR 8 TO 10 YEARS. COUNTRY TEAM SEES NO EVIDENCE GOI AND SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY ARE WORKING ENERGETICALLY ON PROBLEM.
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