

January 16, 1973

**H. Daniel Brewster to Herman Pollack, 'Indian
Nuclear Developments'**

Citation:

"H. Daniel Brewster to Herman Pollack, 'Indian Nuclear Developments'", January 16, 1973, Wilson Center Digital Archive, National Archives, Record Group 59, SN 70-73, AE 6 India. Obtained and contributed by William Burr and included in NPIHP Research Update #4. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113907>

Summary:

The interagency group prepared a response to NSSM 156 on 1 September 1972 and it was sent to Kissinger. The summary of the study reproduced here includes the conclusion that an Indian test would be "a set-back to nonproliferation efforts" and that Washington should "do what [it] can to avert or delay" one. Thus, recommendations included a number of unilateral and multilateral actions that the United States government could take, noting that "given the poor state" of Indo-American relations, an "overly visible" U.S. effort would more likely speed up an Indian decision to test a device. Even non-US efforts were likely not to "be per se effective."

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

OPTIONAL FORM NO. 10
MAY 1962 EDITION
GSA FPMR (41 CFR) 101-11.6

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

~~SECRET/EXDIS~~

File

Indian

LNF 5
2.7.73
D. Brewster

TO : SCI - Herman Pollack

DATE: January 16, 1973

FROM : SCI/AE: - H. Daniel ^{HDB}Brewster

1/16/73

SUBJECT: Indian Nuclear Developments

Attached are two papers concerning Indian capabilities and intentions in the nuclear field.

The first one is a summary section of a Nssm paper, which is still being considered at the White House. The key paragraph is the one marked on Page 1.

The second document is a report on the meeting with Sir Eric Norris, Deputy Under Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in which Christopher Van Hollen explained our findings and exchanged views on this same theme.

These are for your background before your session with the Ambassador Designate to India.

Attachments:

- Tab A - Indian Capabilites/Intentions
- Tab B - Indian Nuclear Development

SCI/AE:HDBrewster:lmw
X22432

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 13526, Sec. 3.3

NW 28684
By TAD/DA, NARA, Date 2/10/11

~~SECRET/EXDIS~~

AE to Indian



5010-108

Buy U.S. Savings Bonds Regularly on the Payroll Savings Plan

TAB A

Sept 1, 1972SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLYSUMMARYIndian Capabilities/Intentions

At present India's relatively sophisticated nuclear energy program provides the capability of conducting a test on short notice and of mounting a rudimentary weapons program at relatively low cost in the \$10-20 million annual range. However, India currently lacks either long-range bombers or missiles needed to strike major urban targets in China. India will probably not be able to develop IRBM's before the 1980's and then only at a cost of \$2-2.75 billion.

There is no firm intelligence that Mrs. Gandhi has given a political go-ahead for detonating an underground nuclear device (which the Indians would undoubtedly label a peaceful nuclear explosion) or for developing nuclear weapons and a delivery system. In July 1972, she reiterated that the GOI's nuclear policy was to investigate the possibility of peaceful nuclear explosions, but not to develop nuclear weapons.

Our intelligence assessment is that over the next several years the chances are about even that India will detonate a nuclear device. The arguments in New Delhi both for and against testing are strong. Public opinion, in its present nationalist mood, would probably favor tests, although, in the wake of India's victory over Pakistan, the political pressures for going nuclear are less than a year ago.

Implications of an Indian Nuclear Decision

An Indian test would be a setback to non-proliferation efforts. By itself it would not prompt other near-nuclear powers to follow suit, but would make it easier for them to do so should they decide the acquisition of nuclear weapons was in their national interest. The Soviets would be concerned about additional proliferation, but would probably be wary of hurting their position in

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY~~

2

India. The Chinese would regard an Indian test as a significant development, adding to China's strategic defense problems. In Japan, the hands of those favoring a nuclear weapons program would be strengthened. In South Asia, an Indian explosion would be extremely unsettling for Pakistan.

US Interests and Objectives

Limiting the number of nuclear powers remains a major US interest. Additional interests are our desire for a stable South Asia, and our wish to develop mutually satisfactory relations with India. Since an Indian nuclear decision would probably conflict with all three interests, our objective should be to do what we can to avert or delay an Indian test and, if these efforts fail, to limit the harmful repercussions.

US Options

The choices divide between things we can do before and after an Indian nuclear explosion. In both instances US ability to influence events is marginal. Indeed, given the present poor state of Indo-US relations, an overly visible US effort could hasten, rather than delay, the day India explodes a nuclear device. Multi-lateral and non-US bilateral efforts, especially if joined by the Soviets, have somewhat better prospects of affecting Indian actions, but would probably not per se be decisive.

Possible Actions Before a Decision

Unilateral Actions

We can continue low-keyed efforts to dissuade the Indians by:

- stressing continued US concern over the dangers of nuclear proliferation;
- stressing the US view that peaceful and military nuclear explosive technologies cannot be distinguished;
- pointing out (but not threatening) that Indian nuclear testing would require a review of US cooperation in the atomic energy and space fields, and possible reductions in our programs;

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY~~

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY~~

3

-- stimulating discussion among Indian academics and scientists of problems inherent in developing PNE's, of the high cost of an Indian force de frappe and of its questionable strategic value;

-- maintaining, and possibly expanding, scientific cooperation in the nuclear and space fields to help in channeling Indian efforts towards peaceful applications.

In addition, we could consider offering India PNE services. This could, however, be viewed as weakening the value of our offer to provide PNE services to NPT signatories. In any case, it is unlikely the Indians would accept if such an offer foreclosed the possibility of India's developing its own explosive device.--

Multilateral Actions

-- In the past we have periodically talked with the UK, Canada, Japan and France about the Indian nuclear question. We can continue these discussions, trying to stimulate other countries to use their influence with the Indians to prevent or delay a nuclear decision.

-- We can also try to enlist USSR cooperation. Given the close relationship between Moscow and Delhi, Soviet actions could have a considerable impact on the Indians. While we are uncertain the Soviets will be willing to cooperate, we see no harm in raising the issue with them.

-- We can also discuss the subject with the Chinese to allay their suspicions that we and the Soviets were "up to something" with the Indians and to point out that Chinese actions, such as launching an ICBM over South Asia, could increase public pressure on India to conduct a nuclear test.

-- In the International Atomic Energy Agency, we can continue our efforts to gain wider international acceptance of our view that, since the technology for civil and military nuclear explosions cannot be distinguished, "peaceful" or "non-military uses" terminology in IAEA agreements precludes using IAEA

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY~~

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY~~

4

safeguarded material in explosive tests of any sort. In the past, the Indians have questioned this position.

-- We could also seek more rapid progress on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty if the President should decide to move toward active negotiations on a treaty. India has long favored a CTB and, while it would probably not sign if China continued testing, the fact of an agreement would increase pressures against Indian nuclear testing. (Defense does not believe that the conclusion of a CTB would have a significant effect upon India's decision to conduct nuclear testing.)

After an Indian Nuclear Decision

Proliferation. In deciding on a course of action, we will have to weigh the potential pluses in the non-proliferation field against the losses in the Indo-US relationship. Although penalties against India would be unlikely to have a decisive policy impact on major near nuclear powers (Japan, Germany, and Israel), apparent US acquiescence could lead them, and others, to anticipate nothing more severe if they became Member No. 7 in the nuclear club. The range of choices includes:

1. Relatively Mild Response: This would include some public indication of displeasure, but few, if any, tangible penalties.

2. Some Penalties Against India in Scientific Area: We could terminate the supply of enriched uranium to the Tarapur nuclear reactor and curtail or end other USG cooperation with India in the nuclear energy and space fields. We could urge other nations to follow suit and of course sharpen our public expressions of displeasure.

3. More Extensive Penalties: We could launch a major effort to penalize India by moving beyond the nuclear energy/space field, reducing or terminating all economic and technical assistance programs (assuming we have any) and mobilizing an international campaign to condemn the Indians.

We would expect most other countries would respond relatively mildly. Some would impose penalties against India in the scientific field. (Canada has said it will.)

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY~~

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY~~

5

It is, however, doubtful other countries would join in more sweeping penalties, especially if the Indians label their test a PNE and not part of a weapons program.

Other Repercussions

We would have to consider carefully our handling of Japan, the most important near-nuclear power and the country outside of South Asia where the repercussions would probably be strongest. In South Asia, our problem would be how to steady the Pakistanis. A spectrum of possible actions with the Paks includes:

- Doing nothing.
- Providing Pakistan an expression of support against nuclear blackmail by recourse to the United Nations along the lines of the declaration we gave in 1968 in connection with the NPT.
- Providing a more specific and firmer commitment of US nuclear protection.
- Broadening the 1959 US-Pakistan bilateral to include support against aggression by non-Communist powers (i.e., India).

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY~~