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Cable, US Embassy Islamabad to the Secretary of State, 'Pakistan PM Sharif's Meeting with Depsec Talbott'

Citation:

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Summary:

Strobe Talbott and the Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif discuss Pakistan's possible testing of a nuclear weapon following India's Pokhran-II tests.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

RELEASE IN PART
B1,1.4(B),1.4(D)



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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 05 ISLAMABAD 003611

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DEPARTMENT: PLEASE INCLUDE THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE AMONG
FORWARDING ADDRESSEES

E.O. 12958: DECL: OADR 1.6X6
TAGS: PREL, PARM, MNUC, IN, PK
SUBJECT: PAKISTAN PM SHARIF'S MEETING WITH DEPSEC TALBOTT:
AGONIZING IN THE FACE OF MOUNTING PRESSURE, BUT NO IRREVOCABLE
DECISION... YET

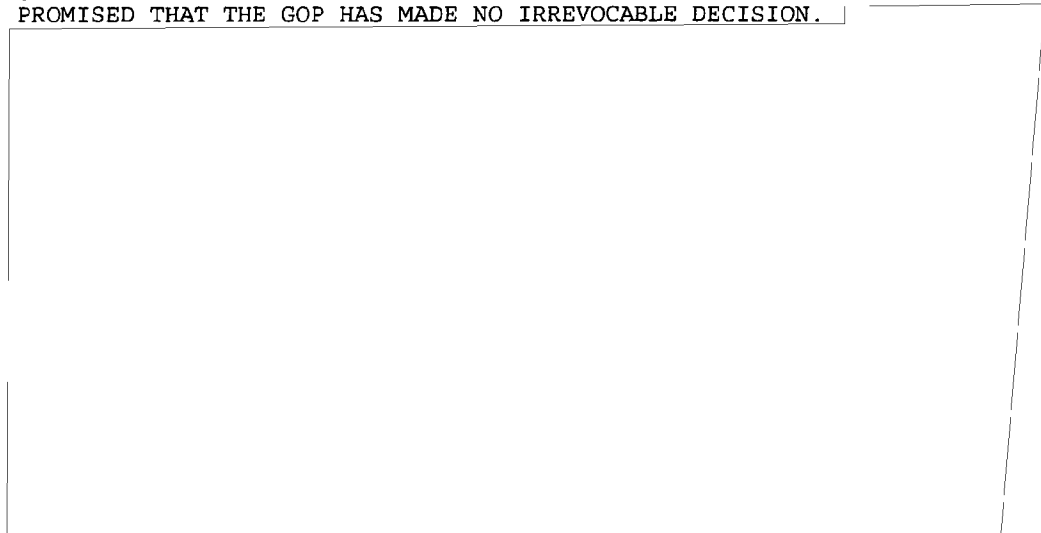
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(U) CLASSIFIED BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE OF SOUTH ASIAN AFFAIRS KARL INDERFURTH, REASON: 1.5 (C,D).

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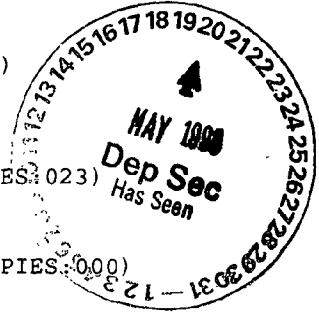
SUMMARY

1. (S) CLEARLY DISPLAYING HIS EXHAUSTION AND THE AGONY OF THE CHOICE HE FACES, PRIME MINISTER NAWAZ SHARIF DESCRIBED TO DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE STROBE TALBOTT MOUNTING PRESSURE TO TEST BUT PROMISED THAT THE GOP HAS MADE NO IRREVOCABLE DECISION.



Classification Extended on : 04/12/2017 ~ Class: SECRET ~ Authority: DSCG 11-1 ~
Declassify on: 05/17/2033

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END SUMMARY

2. (SBU) PAKISTAN'S VISIBLY TIRED AND ANGUISHED PRIME MINISTER NAWAZ SHARIF MET WITH DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE STROBE TALBOTT, CINCENT GEN ZINNI AND DELEGATION IN A MAY 15 EVENING MEETING WHICH LASTED OVER AN HOUR AND WAS FOLLOWED BY A FIFTEEN MINUTE ONE-ON-ONE EXCHANGE. D/S TALBOTT WAS ACCOMPANIED BY CENTCOM CINC GENERAL ANTHONY ZINNI, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOUTH ASIAN AFFAIRS KARL INDERFURTH, NSC SENIOR DIRECTOR BRUCE RIEDEL, DOD DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR NEAR EAST AND SOUTH ASIA ALINA ROMANOWSKI, AMBASSADOR THOMAS SIMONS, AND NOTETAKER. THE PM WAS FLANKED BY FOREIGN MINISTER GOHAR AYUB KHAN, FOREIGN SECRETARY SHAMSHAD AHMED, AMBASSADOR RIAZ KHOKHAR, MPA ADDITIONAL SECRETARY FOR THE AMERICAS TARIQ FATEMI, AND THE PM'S PRINCIPAL SECRETARY SAEBED MEHDI.

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TALBOTT: GOI'S COLOSSAL MISTAKE, GOP'S NATIONAL SECURITY

3. (S) THANKING THE PM FOR ACCEPTING HIS DELEGATION ON SHORT NOTICE, TALBOTT CONVEYED THE PRESIDENT'S AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S GREETINGS, EXPLAINING THAT HE HAD SEEN PRESIDENT CLINTON BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE AND WOULD BE TRAVELLING THE NEXT DAY TO THE G-8 BIRMINGHAM SUMMIT TO BRIEF HIM ON THE OUTCOME. EXPRESSING THE PRESIDENT'S APPRECIATION FOR THE FRANK TELEPHONE CONVERSATION OF MAY 13, TALBOTT EMPHASIZED THAT CLINTON CARES DEEPLY ABOUT THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE SUBCONTINENT AND UNDERSTANDS THE IMMENSE PRESSURE UNDER WHICH THE PM FINDS HIMSELF.

4. (S) TALBOTT EXPLAINED THAT HIS MISSION WAS TO ENSURE THAT WASHINGTON POLICYMAKERS UNDERSTAND GOP PERCEPTIONS IN LIGHT OF THE DISCUSSIONS AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY (SEPTTEL), HE NOTED, UNDERScoreD THE DIFFICULTY OF THE CLUSTER OF DECISIONS FACING THE GOP LEADERSHIP. THE GOP'S CANDOR, WILLINGNESS TO DISCUSS THE CRISIS, AND RECEPTIVITY TO AMERICAN VIEWPOINTS WERE APPRECIATED. WHILE USG CONCERNS IN THE WAKE OF THE NUCLEAR TESTS WERE MULTIPLE, WE HOPED THAT GOP NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS WOULD DRIVE THE PM TO SHOW CONTINUED RESTRAINT

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TALBOTT UNDERScoreD USG CONCERN FOR THE MILITARY DIMENSION TO PAKISTAN'S SECURITY, POINTING OUT THAT GEN. ZINNI'S PARTICIPATION IN THE DELEGATION WAS NOT MERELY SYMBOLIC BUT, HE STRESSED, THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF PAK SECURITY COULD BEST BE ENHANCED BY NOT FOLLOWING INDIA DOWN THE NUCLEAR TEST PATH. THE PRESIDENT, SECSTATE, AND U/S PICKERING, WHO ARE NOW IN BIRMINGHAM AND WITH WHOM TALBOTT WAS IN DIRECT TOUCH, WERE WORKING TO FORGE A G-8 STATEMENT WHICH WILL ECHO THE UNSC'S STRONG NEGATIVE STAND.

HOWEVER, TALBOTT ACKNOWLEDGED, THIS WILL TAKE TIME AND UNTIL THEN THE GOP IS BEING ASKED TO EXERCISE PRUDENCE AND FORBEARANCE.

SHARIF: FAILURE OF INT'L COMMUNITY, MOUNTING DOMESTIC PRESSURE

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SHARIF PRAISED HIS FALL 1997 UNGA DISCUSSION WITH THE PRESIDENT AND STRESSED HIS "KEENNESS" TO CEMENT RELATIONS WITH THE U.S., TO

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REMOVE OUTSTANDING IRRITANTS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS, AND TO PROMOTE AN AGENDA BASED ON BETTER ECONOMIC RELATIONS.

7. (S) SIMILARLY, SHARIF NOTED, A CORNERSTONE OF HIS ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY HAD BEEN TO ENGAGE IN A MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE WITH INDIA. DESPITE THE MOST RECENT SERIES OF DISCUSSIONS DEADLOCKING AFTER THREE ROUNDS DUE TO INDIAN INTRANSIGENCE, SHARIF REVIEWED HOW HE HAD GREETED THE ELECTION OF VAJPAYEE'S GOVERNMENT WITH A PERSONAL LETTER SOLICITING FURTHER DISCUSSIONS. VAJPAYEE HAD RESPONDED BY AGREEING, HE NOTED, ALL THE WHILE HAVING SET IN MOTION PREPARATIONS FOR THE NUCLEAR TESTS.

8. (S) HOWEVER, IN RESPONSE TO THE INDIAN TEST, DOMESTIC PRESSURE IN PAKISTAN "IS MOUNTING BY THE HOUR," SHARIF EXPLAINED. ALL OF OUR ACTIONS WILL BE DETERMINED BY NATIONAL SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS.

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TALBOTT: THE CASE FOR RESTRAINT -- PRESSLER, ECONOMY, CLINTON VISIT

[Redacted]

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THE USG DID NOT INTEND TO JUSTIFY INDIA'S ACTION NOR CONTRADICT PAKISTAN'S PERCEPTION OF DANGER. INSTEAD, TALBOTT URGED THAT BOTH COUNTRIES COOPERATE TO FORMULATE AN APPROPRIATE INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY, AND THAT THEY TALK OPENLY AND SOBERLY BETWEEN THEM ABOUT WHAT WAS REALLY IN PAKISTAN'S INTEREST -- MILITARY, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL. IT WAS THE U.S. VIEW THAT PAKISTAN WOULD BE BETTER OFF IN ALL RESPECTS IF IT REFRAINED FROM TESTING.

[Redacted]

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BY ABSTAINING FROM TESTING, TALBOTT ARGUED, PAKISTAN WOULD IMPRESS THE WORLD WITH ITS RESTRAINT AND INDEED WITH ITS OWN STRENGTH, SINCE RESTRAINT WOULD BESPEAK A HIGH DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE IN ITS MILITARY CAPACITY TO DETER AGGRESSION. ACKNOWLEDGING THE DOMESTIC IMPULSE TO DEMONSTRATE CONCLUSIVELY PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR CAPABILITY, TALBOTT ARGUED THAT THE WORLD, INDIA, AND CERTAINLY THE PAKISTANI PEOPLE ARE AWARE OF PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR CAPACITY. BY DEMONSTRATING RESTRAINT, TALBOTT ADDED, PAKISTAN WOULD BE WITH THE TIDE OF HISTORY, IN WHICH A VAST MAJORITY OF COUNTRIES WERE COMMITTED TO MOVE AWAY FROM NUCLEAR WEAPONS RELIANCE. MAY 11-13 DID NOT MARK THE DEATH OF THE CTBT/NPT REGIMES, TALBOTT STRESSED. BY REFRAINING FROM A NUCLEAR TEST, HE STATED, PAKISTAN WOULD MAKE ITSELF PART OF THE SOLUTION, NOT THE PROBLEM, AND ITS OVERALL POSITION WOULD BE ENHANCED AS A RESULT, TO THE BENEFIT OF ITS LONG-TERM SECURITY.



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HE ASSURED THE PM THAT HE WOULD CONVEY TO THE PRESIDENT THE GOP'S MESSAGE THAT SUSTAINED INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE ON INDIA WILL BE CRITICAL IN SHAPING PAKISTAN'S RESPONSE. WHILE VERY LITTLE GOOD NEWS CAN BE DERIVED FROM INDIA'S NUCLEAR TESTS, TALBOTT ELABORATED ON POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO THE GOP:

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-- ECONOMICS: ECONOMIC STRENGTH HAS SECURITY DIMENSIONS, TALBOTT EMPHASIZED. DRAWING A PARALLEL BETWEEN PM SHARIF'S ECONOMIC AGENDA AND THE PRESIDENT'S 1992 MOTTO "IT'S THE ECONOMY...", TALBOTT UNDERScoreD THAT BOTH LEADERS WANT ECONOMICS TO BE CENTRAL TO THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. THIS ISSUE CAN BE ELABORATED UPON DURING THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT.

-- PRESIDENT'S VISIT: IN RESPONSE TO THE PM'S QUERY WHETHER THE PRESIDENT'S SOUTH ASIA TRIP WOULD EXCLUDE INDIA, TALBOTT SAID NOT NECESSARILY, BUT NOTED THAT THE TRIP'S LENGTH AND CHARACTER COULD BE ADJUSTED TO REFLECT EVENTS, AND THE USG'S REACTION TO THOSE EVENTS. THE PRESIDENT STILL WANTS TO TRAVEL TO THE REGION, TALBOTT STATED, AND HE WILL SEEK TO STRENGTHEN PERSONAL RELATIONS, NOTABLY WITH PM SHARIF. (NOTE: THE DEPUTY SECRETARY REPEATED IN HIS PRIVATE SESSION WITH THE PM THAT CURRENT PLANS DO NOT INCLUDE DROPPING INDIA FROM THE PRESIDENT'S SOUTH ASIAN TRAVELS, ONLY THE POSSIBILITY OF "RECALIBRATING" HOW MUCH TIME IS SPENT IN VARIOUS CAPITALS TO REFLECT EVENTS AND U.S. ATTITUDES.)

-- MILITARY: GENERAL ZINNI NOTED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MILITARY-TO-MILITARY RELATIONSHIP AND THE POSSIBILITY OF STRENGTHENING EXISTING TIES. CENTCOM, UPON ASSUMING OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ASPECTS OF MIL-MIL RELATIONS WITH THE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES, WOULD LOOK TO PAKISTAN FOR ADVICE AND INSIGHTS.

-- F-16'S: NSC RIEDEL BRIEFED THE PM ON THE PRESIDENT'S RENEWED DETERMINATION TO RESOLVE THE F-16 ISSUE BEFORE HIS VISIT TO THE REGION, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF RECENT EVENTS. BY APPOINTING RIEDEL AND DEPUTY ASSISTANT FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS MAJ GEN KERRICK TO COORDINATE THE ADMINISTRATION'S EFFORTS, THE USG IS CAPABLE OF MOVING QUICKLY TO RESOLVE OUTSTANDING ISSUES WITH THE GOP TEAM. THE ISSUES FLAGGED BY GOP AMBASSADOR KHOKHAR HAVE BEEN DULY NOTED, INCLUDING THE NEED TO CONCLUDE THE DEBT REDUCTION EXPEDITIOUSLY.

SHARIF: [REDACTED]

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12. (S) IN RESPONSE TO TALBOTT'S QUESTION AS TO WHETHER HE COULD INFORM THE PRESIDENT THAT DESPITE IMMENSE PUBLIC PRESSURE, NO OPTIONS HAVE BEEN FORECLOSED AND NO IRREVERSIBLE STEPS TAKEN, AND THAT THE GOP HAD BEEN GOOD ENOUGH TO LISTEN TO THE USG'S APPEAL, THE PM RESPONDED "THERE IS A LOT OF SENSE IN THIS."

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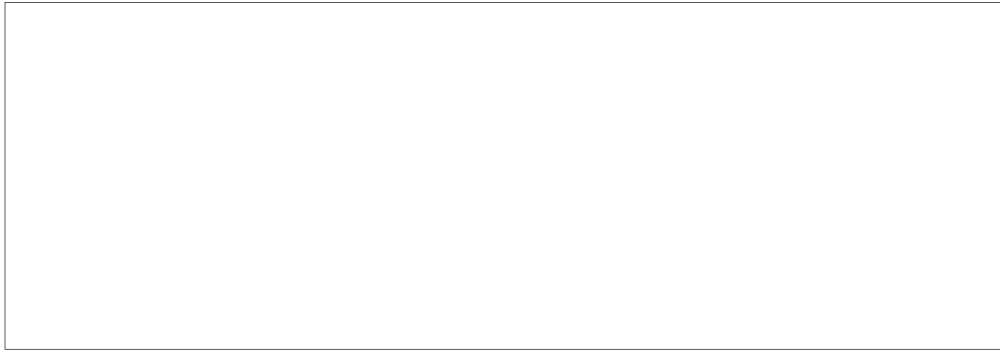


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INTERNATIONAL FORA: INDIA'S BID FOR UNSC SEAT



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WHILE WE MAY NOT SHARE PAKISTAN'S PESSIMISM WITH REGARD TO GOI STRATEGIC INTENTIONS, TALBOTT STATED, HE REGISTERED THE CONCERNS RAISED BY THE MFA AND VOWED THE U.S. WOULD DO ITS UTMOST TO SEE THAT THE PROPHECIES OF DOOM DID NOT COME TRUE.



1.4(B)
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16. (S) IN THEIR FIFTEEN-MINUTE PRIVATE SESSION, THE DEPUTY SECRETARY GAVE THE PRIME MINISTER THE SECSTATE'S HANDWRITTEN LETTER. THE PM READ IT ON THE SPOT, NOTING HE WAS PARTICULARLY MOVED BY HER COMMENTS ON THE FEAR OF AN ESCALATING ARMS RACE IN THE REGION



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18. (S) TALBOTT ASSURED THE PRIME MINISTER THAT THE USG WOULD DO EVERYTHING IN ITS POWER ON FOUR POINTS: 1) TO ENSURE THAT SANCTIONS AGAINST INDIA BITE; 2) TO GALVANIZE AND SUSTAIN EXPRESSIONS OF DISAPPROVAL AGAINST THE GOI IN ALL FORUMS, STARTING WITH THE UNSC AND G8; 3) TO MAKE SURE THAT PAKISTAN GETS FULL CREDIT AND SUPPORT -- AND THAT SHARIF PERSONALLY IS HAILED FOR STATESMANSHIP -- IF PAKISTAN REFRAINS FROM TESTING; AND 4) TO STRENGTHEN AND RECALIBRATE U.S.-PAK RELATIONS. ON KASHMIR, WHILE NOT MAKING ANY SPECIFIC COMMITMENTS AND WHILE REITERATING DIFFICULTIES, ESPECIALLY GIVEN INDIA'S OPPOSITION TO MEDIATION, TALBOTT ASSURED THE PM THAT HE WOULD IMPRESS UPON THE SECSTATE AND PRESIDENT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE TO THE GOP.

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THE INDIAN NUCLEAR TEST AND ITS AFTERMATH HAD FOCUSED THE WORLD -- LIKE A LASER, IN PRESIDENT CLINTON'S PHRASE -- ON THE STAKES INVOLVED. TALBOTT CONCLUDED BY ASKING THE PM TO STAY IN TOUCH AND TO BE RECEPTIVE TO FURTHER DIALOGUE, EVEN TO ANOTHER VISIT, ESPECIALLY IF HE FELT AT A CRUNCH POINT ON THE DECISION OF WHETHER TO TEST. THE PM SAID HE FELT HE ALREADY HAD THE FULL BENEFIT OF THE U.S.'S VIEWS, WHICH HE DEEPLY APPRECIATED AND PROMISED TO KEEP IN MIND DURING THE AGONIZING DAYS AHEAD.

[Redacted]

20. (U) DEPSEC TALBOTT HAS CLEARED THIS CABLE.
SIMONS

~~SECRET~~