

February 8, 1999

Cable, US Embassy New Delhi to the Secretary of State, 'Deputy Secretary Talbott's February 1 Meeting with Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee'

Citation:

"Cable, US Embassy New Delhi to the Secretary of State, 'Deputy Secretary Talbott's February 1 Meeting with Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee'", February 8, 1999, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Case Number F-2017-13804, Doc No. C06770995, US Department of State Virtual Reading Room.
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/301053>

Summary:

Talbott and Vajpayee discuss Indo-US relations, India's military and nuclear policy, and New Delhi's concerns about Pakistan and China.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

RELEASE IN FULL

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DECLASSIFIED

SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY TALBOTT'S FEBRUARY 1 MEETING WITH
INDIAN PRIME MINISTER VAJPAYEE

CLASSIFIED ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ BY AMBASSADOR RICHARD F. CELESTE FOR
REASON 1.5 (B AND D).

1. ~~(C)~~ SUMMARY: DEPUTY SECRETARY STROBE TALBOTT AND PRIME MINISTER A.B. VAJPAYEE REVIEWED THE "DIFFICULTIES AND POSSIBILITIES" OF THE INDO-U.S. DIALOGUE DURING A FEBRUARY 1 MEETING IN NEW DELHI AT THE CONCLUSION OF THREE DAYS OF DELEGATION-TO-DELEGATION TALKS. THE PRIME MINISTER AGREED THAT PRESIDENT CLINTON'S "WELCOME AND USEFUL" TELEPHONE CALL TO HIM HAD HELPED CREATE A POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE FOR THE TALKS. HE SPOKE OF HIS DESIRE FOR A "BROAD-BASED" INDO-U.S. RELATIONSHIP, AND RESTATED HIS VIEW THAT THE TWO ARE "NATURAL ALLIES." VAJPAYEE REAFFIRMED THAT INDIA DOES NOT WANT TO ENGAGE IN A SUBCONTINENTAL ARMS RACE AND SEEKS ONLY A "MINIMUM CREDIBLE DETERRENT." THE DEPUTY SECRETARY VOICED SUPPORT FOR INDIA'S SECULAR, DEMOCRATIC TRADITION. HE OUTLINED RECIPROCAL STEPS HE HAD AGREED WITH FOREIGN MINISTER JASWANT SINGH FOR THE PHASED ELIMINATION OF SANCTIONS, BUT WARNED THAT WITHOUT SERIOUS ENGAGEMENT ON THE ISSUE OF INDIA'S DEFENSE POSTURE (WEAPONIZATION AND DEPLOYMENT) THE TALKS COULD END IN "BREAKDOWN." THE TWO TOUCHED BRIEFLY ON INDIA'S SECURITY CONCERNS VIS-A-VIS CHINA, RENEWAL OF MILITARY-TO-MILITARY COOPERATION, AND THE PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVING INDO-PAKISTANI RELATIONS -- INCLUDING VAJPAYEE'S NEW PROPOSAL FOR A MEETING WITH HIS PAKISTANI COUNTERPART AT THE MIDWAY POINT OF THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED DELHI-LAHORE BUS ROUTE. END SUMMARY.

2. ~~(C)~~ PRIME MINISTER ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE OPENED HIS 35-MINUTE DISCUSSION WITH THE DEPUTY SECRETARY AND MEMBERS OF HIS DELEGATION FEBRUARY 1 AT HIS RESIDENCE (FULL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AT PARA 20) BY STATING HOW WELCOME AND USEFUL HE HAD FOUND HIS TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT CLINTON THREE DAYS EARLIER. IT "GAVE US AN OPPORTUNITY TO REFER TO OUR COMMITMENT FOR A MUTUAL DIALOGUE -- THE PROCESS WHICH HAS ALREADY STARTED AND WHICH I HOPE WILL CONTINUE," VAJPAYEE SAID.

"NATURAL ALLIES"

Declassification Authority: Geoffrey W. Chapman, Senior Reviewer, A/GIS/IPS
1/6/2020

3. ~~(C)~~ VAJPAYEE NOTED THAT FOREIGN MINISTER JASWANT SINGH HAD BRIEFED HIM ON THE CONTENT OF THE JUST-CONCLUDED EIGHTH ROUND OF TALKS WITH THE DEPUTY SECRETARY. HE REFERRED TO THE JOINT STATEMENT ISSUED AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE THREE DAYS OF TALKS AS A "GOOD DOCUMENT," POINTING TO ITS FINAL PARAGRAPH AS ITS "MOST IMPORTANT." THE PARAGRAPH TAKES NOTE OF THE LENGTH OF TIME BOTH SIDES HAVE DEVOTED TO THE TALKS

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AND STATES THE BELIEF OF BOTH SIDES THAT THIS HAS BEEN TIME WELL SPENT IN LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A NEW, BROAD-BASED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

4. ~~(C)~~ VAJPAYEE STRESSED THAT IT IS JUST THIS TYPE OF BROAD-BASED RELATIONSHIP THAT INDIA SEEKS -- ONE GOING BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THE "FOUR SUBJECTS" UNDER DISCUSSION IN FOREIGN MINISTER JASWANT SINGH'S DIALOGUE WITH THE DEPUTY SECRETARY. "AS I SAID IN MY SPEECH IN NEW YORK," VAJPAYEE RECALLED, "THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND INDIA ARE TWO NATURAL ALLIES, SO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THESE TWO COUNTRIES, THESE TWO DEMOCRACIES, HAS TO BE VIEWED IN WIDER PERSPECTIVE, WITH A WIDER VISION." THE INDIAN PEOPLE AND

"ALMOST ALL POLITICAL PARTIES EXCEPT THE LEFTISTS" WANT GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. "THEY WANT OUR RELATIONS TO BE NOT ONLY NORMAL BUT TO IMPROVE," VAJPAYEE WENT ON. "WE WANT TO BE PARTNERS IN PROGRESS."

NO ARMS RACE, JUST A "CREDIBLE MINIMUM DETERRENT"

5. ~~(C)~~ TURNING TO THE NUCLEAR ISSUES UNDER DISCUSSION IN THE DIALOGUE, VAJPAYEE SAID HE "WOULD LIKE TO ASSURE" THE DEPUTY SECRETARY "THAT WE DON'T WANT AN ARMS RACE IN THE SUB-CONTINENT. ALL THAT WE WANT IS A MINIMUM DETERRENT." VAJPAYEE RECALLED THAT IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE POKHARAN TESTS IN MAY, INDIA HAD COMMITTED TO A "UNILATERAL MORATORIUM ON FURTHER TESTS. WE ALSO SAID THAT WE WOULD NOT BE THE FIRST TO USE NUCLEAR WEAPONS, AND THAT WE WOULD JOIN ANY MEANINGFUL EFFORT" TO FURTHER GLOBAL NON-PROLIFERATION.

EIGHTH ROUND "THE LONGEST AND MOST INTENSIVE"

. ~~(C)~~ RESPONDING, THE DEPUTY SECRETARY THANKED VAJPAYEE, ON BEHALF OF THE PRESIDENT, FOR THE PRIME MINISTER'S "RECEPTIVITY" TO THE IDEAS EXPRESSED BY THE PRESIDENT DURING THEIR TELEPHONE CONVERSATION. THE CONVERSATION, THE DEPUTY SECRETARY SAID, CAPTURED THE ESSENCE OF WHAT THE PRESIDENT HOPES TO PURSUE WITH THE PRIME MINISTER IN PERSON.

7. ~~(C)~~ DEPUTY SECRETARY TALBOTT TOLD THE PRIME MINISTER THAT HIS EIGHTH ROUND OF TALKS WITH JASWANT SINGH HAD MADE CLEARER BOTH THE DIFFICULTY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF THE DIALOGUE. HE SAID HE WOULD LEAVE DELHI MORE OPTIMISTIC THAT THE U.S. AND INDIA COULD MEET THE GOALS THAT PRESIDENT CLINTON AND THE PRIME MINISTER HAD SET. THIS ROUND HAD BEEN THE LONGEST AND MOST INTENSIVE OF THE EIGHT. IT WAS ALSO ONE IN WHICH THE U.S. HAD DECIDED TO REACH OUT TO THE INDIAN

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PRESS AND PUBLIC TO BETTER EXPLAIN OUR INTENTIONS IN THE DIALOGUE. TALBOTT EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR THE EFFORTS THE VAJPAYEE GOVERNMENT HAD MADE TO BUILD A NATIONAL CONSENSUS AROUND THE PRIME MINISTER'S SEPTEMBER UNGA COMMITMENT, AND THE HOPE THAT THIS EFFORT WOULD LEND SUPPORT TO THE GOVERNMENT'S CONSENSUS-BUILDING EFFORT.

SUPPORT FOR INDIA'S SECULAR, DEMOCRATIC TRADITION

8. ~~(c)~~ THE DEPUTY SECRETARY REFERRED TO INDIA'S TRADITION AS A SECULAR DEMOCRACY AND SAID THAT THE U.S. HAD BEEN IMPRESSED BY THE WAY IN WHICH THE PRIME MINISTER HAS TRIED TO MAINTAIN THAT TRADITION. INDIA'S FRIENDS, THE U.S. INCLUDED, WERE UNITED IN THE HOPE THAT THE PRIME MINISTER'S EFFORTS WOULD SUCCEED.

FUTURE OF THE DIALOGUE: MAJOR AND MINOR CHORDS

9. ~~(c)~~ LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OF OUR DIALOGUE WITH INDIA, DEPUTY SECRETARY TALBOTT SAID HE WANTED TO MAKE TWO POINTS:

FIRST, HE AND JASWANT SINGH HAD AGREED ON A CONCEPT FOR MOVING THE RELATIONSHIP FORWARD IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. THE U.S. WOULD TAKE STEPS TO ELIMINATE SOME POST-MAY SANCTIONS IN A WAY SUPPORTIVE OF GOI CONSENSUS-BUILDING EFFORTS IN PARLIAMENT. THE DEPUTY SECRETARY NOTED THAT HE WOULD PROPOSE TO G-8 PARTNERS A PLAN FOR ELIMINATING MULTILATERAL DEVELOPMENT BANK LENDING RESTRICTIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIA'S SIGNATURE OF THE CTBT.

10. ~~(c)~~ THE DEPUTY SECRETARY NOTED THAT THE PART OF THE DIALOGUE HAVING TO DO WITH INDIA'S DEFENSE POSTURE REMAINS IN "A MINOR KEY." THIS IS THE ONE AREA OF THE DIALOGUE IN WHICH WE HAD NOT YET CROSSED ANY THRESHOLDS. IN THE WEEKS AHEAD, INDIA WOULD MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THE NATURE OF ITS MINIMUM CREDIBLE DETERRENT, ON THE KINDS OF WEAPONS IT WILL NEED, THEIR NUMBERS AND POSITIONING, AND OTHER ISSUES. AS INDIA DOES SO -- ON THE BASIS OF ITS SOVEREIGN DETERMINATION OF ITS SECURITY NEEDS -- IT WOULD BE USEFUL FOR INDIA'S EXPERTS TO ENGAGE WITH THE U.S.

11. ~~(c)~~ THE U.S. WANTED TO INAUGURATE A NEW AND MORE POSITIVE ERA IN INDO-U.S. RELATIONS WITH PRESIDENT CLINTON'S VISIT TO INDIA, TALBOTT SAID. BUT FOR THIS TO OCCUR, IT WOULD BE IMPORTANT THAT THE DECISIONS INDIA REACHED ABOUT THE MINIMUM DETERRENT IT REQUIRED BE SEEN TO MEET THE STANDARDS THAT INDIA ITSELF HAD SET (I.E., NOT ENTERING INTO A SOUTH ASIAN ARMS RACE.) IF THEY DO NOT, THE DEPUTY

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SECRETARY SAID, "INSTEAD OF BREAKTHROUGH, THERE MIGHT BE A BREAKDOWN."

THE CHINA FACTOR

12. (C) VAJPAYEE RESPONDED BRIEFLY BY AFFIRMING THAT INDIA'S SECURITY CONCERNS "GO BEYOND SOUTH ASIA. WE MUST TAKE THAT INTO ACCOUNT" IN MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT THE DETERRENT CAPABILITY INDIA NEEDS, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID. TALBOTT REPLIED THAT, TO FURTHER MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF OUR PERSPECTIVES ON CHINA, HE HAD PROPOSED TO JASWANT SINGH THAT DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SUSAN SHIRK, AN AUTHORITY ON CHINA, COME TO INDIA FOR BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS ON CHINA. ADDITIONALLY, THE U.S. WOULD URGE IN OUR OWN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE CHINESE MORE AWARENESS INDIA'S PERCEIVED SECURITY CONCERNS.

BUS RIDE TO BETTER INDO-PAK RELATIONS

13. (C) THE DEPUTY SECRETARY TOLD VAJPAYEE THAT HE AND HIS TEAM WOULD BE FLYING THAT AFTERNOON TO ISLAMABAD AND ASKED WHETHER THE PRIME MINISTER HAD ANY INSIGHTS ON INDIA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH PAKISTAN HE THOUGHT WOULD BE USEFUL FOR THE DEPUTY SECRETARY TO CARRY WITH HIM.

14. (C) VAJPAYEE NOTED THAT OFFICIAL TALKS BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN HAD RESUMED AFTER A LONG HIATUS AND THAT THE TWO SIDES HAD BEEN DISCUSSING IMPORTANT ISSUES. "BUT SO FAR, NO CONCRETE RESULTS HAVE FOLLOWED." DESPITE THAT, THE TALKS WILL CONTINUE AND PAKISTAN'S NEW WILLINGNESS TO TALK ABOUT ISSUES OTHER THAN KASHMIR HAS BEEN POSITIVE, VAJPAYEE WENT ON. IMPROVING TRADE, EXPANDING CULTURAL CONTACTS AND ENHANCING PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONTACT CAN HELP REDUCE MISUNDERSTANDING. RECENTLY, PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN NEGOTIATING INDIAN PURCHASE OF ELECTRICAL POWER FROM PAKISTAN.⁹ CONTACT AT THE LEVEL OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT ALSO OCCURS. "I TALK WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OF PAKISTAN AND WE USE THE HOTLINE WHEN NECESSARY," VAJPAYEE SAID.

15. (C) A "SMALL MINORITY" OF INDIANS ARE SO CONFIRMED IN THEIR DISLIKE OF PAKISTAN THAT "THEY DID NOT WANT TO LOSE TO PAKISTAN EVEN IN CRICKET," VAJPAYEE SAID, RECALLING THE INDIAN TEAM'S DEFEAT BY PAKISTAN OF THE PREVIOUS DAY. MOST INDIANS, HOWEVER, REACT AS THE FANS AT CHENNAI CRICKET GROUNDS DID -- "IN A SPIRIT OF GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP." IN THIS VEIN, VAJPAYEE REVEALED THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A GESTURE OF FRIENDSHIP TOWARDS PAKISTAN IN THE COMING WEEKS. ON

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FEBRUARY 13, VAJPAYEE SAID HE HOPES TO TAKE THE BUS ALONG THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED ROUTE BETWEEN DELHI AND LAHORE AS FAR AS THE BORDER IN PUNJAB, WHERE HE WOULD BE MET BY PAKISTANI PRIME MINISTER NAWAZ SHARIF, WHO WOULD HAVE DONE THE SAME FROM LAHORE. VAJPAYEE'S AIDES STRESSED THAT THIS REMAINED A PROPOSAL WHICH INDIA HAD NOT YET COMMUNICATED TO PAKISTAN. THE DEPUTY SECRETARY AGREED THAT HE WOULD MAKE NO MENTION OF THE PROPOSAL IN ISLAMABAD.

16. ~~(c)~~ THE DEPUTY SECRETARY THANKED THE PRIME MINISTER FOR HIS THOUGHTS ON PAKISTAN, SAYING HE CONCLUDED FROM THEM THAT HE COULD CONVEY TO THE PAKISTANIS THAT INDIA WAS POSITIVELY COMMITTED TO THE DIALOGUE WITH ISLAMABAD.

MIL-MIL COOPERATION, AND A MESSAGE TO PAKISTAN ON TERROR

17. ~~(c)~~ VICE CHIEF JCS GEN. JOSEPH RALSTON NOTED HIS MEETINGS EARLIER IN THE DAY WITH THE CHIEFS OF STAFF OF THE INDIAN ARMY, NAVY AND AIR FORCE. GEN. RALSTON SAID HE HAD TOLD HIS COUNTERPARTS THAT THE U.S. WANTS TO MOVE FORWARD WITH MILITARY-TO-MILITARY RELATIONS -- PARTICULARLY TRAINING EXCHANGES. ONE IMPEDIMENT, SAID RALSTON, IS THAT THE INDIAN MILITARY MISTAKENLY BELIEVES THAT THERE CAN BE NO RESUMPTION OR EXPANSION OF IMET PROGRAMS UNTIL ALL ISSUES UNDER DISCUSSION IN THE INDO-U.S. DIALOGUE ARE RESOLVED. FOREIGN MINISTER JASWANT SINGH UNDERTOOK TO DISCUSS THIS ISSUE WITH THE SERVICE CHIEFS.

18. ~~(c)~~ MOST IMPORTANTLY, SAID RALSTON, IN HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PAKISTANI MILITARY, THE U.S. WOULD RAISE THE ISSUE OF TERRORISM. VAJPAYEE SAID THAT PAKISTAN'S "PROXY WAR" IN KASHMIR "HAS TO BE STOPPED." SIMILARLY, ISI-INSPIRED ATTACKS IN OTHER PARTS OF INDIA MUST CEASE. THE PEOPLE OF KASHMIR, VAJPAYEE ASSERTED, "HAVE REALIZED THAT THEY HAVE TO REMAIN A PART OF INDIA. EVEN NOW, TERRORISTS ARE COMING FROM ACROSS THE BORDER -- NOT JUST FROM THE OTHER PART OF KASHMIR, BUT FOREIGN MERCENARIES, TOO. THIS WON'T HELP, IT HAS NOT HELPED. IT HAS ONLY VITIATED THE ATMOSPHERE" FOR CONSTRUCTIVE INDO-PAKISTANI TALKS.

HOPES FOR A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT

19. ~~(c)~~ CONCLUDING, THE DEPUTY SECRETARY AGAIN RECALLED PRESIDENT CLINTON'S DESIRE TO VISIT INDIA THIS YEAR AND HIS PHONE CALL TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE PREVIOUS DAY, SAYING HE HOPED IT HAD SERVED TO ESTABLISH A CLOSER LINK. HE EXPRESSED THE U.S. HOPE THAT VAJPAYEE WOULD CONSIDER A DIRECT TELEPHONE LINK ESTABLISHED WITH THE PRESIDENT AND, IF

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HE FELT ANYTHING WAS AMISS OR THAT AN OPPORTUNITY WAS BEING MISSED, THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD CALL THE PRESIDENT.

PARTICIPANTS

20. (U) ASSISTING VAJPAYEE IN THE MEETING WERE FOREIGN MINISTER JASWANT SINGH, MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS VASUNDHRA RAJE SCINDIA, FOREIGN SECRETARY K. RAGHUNATH, AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S. NARESH CHANDRA, NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR BRAJESH MISHRA, MEA JOINT SECRETARY (DISARMAMENT) RAKESH SOOD, MEA JOINT SECRETARY (AMERICAS) ALOK PRASAD, AND JOINT SECRETARY, OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER, PRABAT SHUKLA. THE U.S. PARTICIPANTS WERE DEPUTY SECRETARY TALBOTT, VICE CHAIRMAN JCS GENERAL JOSEPH W. RALSTON, AMBASSADOR RICHARD CELESTE, ASSISTANT SECRETARY KARL INDERFURTH, NSC DIRECTOR GARY SAMORE, AND ACTING-POLITICAL COUNSELOR PAUL MAILHOT (NOTETAKER).

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