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K.R. Narayanan, 'India and the Chinese Bomb'

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Summary:

K.R. Narayanan, Director of China Division at Ministry of External Affairs, writes that the explosion of the first nuclear bomb by China will alter the political balance of Asia and the world and development of nuclear weapons by India can be justified and beneficial for the country and the international system as well.

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Ministry of External Affairs

(China Division)

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The attached paper on "India and the Chinese Bomb" is based on, or rather inspired by, the discussions which took place in the last two Friday Morning meetings of Directors in the Ministry. I have tried to incorporate and develop in this paper some of my own views on this question. This is circulated for the personal information of Joint Secretaries and Directors.

[signature]

(K.R. Narayanan)

Director (China)

25.11.64

Separate copies to:-

[...]

SECRET

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

(CHINA DIVISION)

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INDIA AND THE CHINESE BOMB

The explosion of the first nuclear bomb by China is an event which will alter the political balance in Asia and disturb profoundly the status-quo in the world.

2. In the hands of a militant Communist power like China the atom bomb has a special revolutionary significance. Its political impact is distinctly different from that of the French or the British bomb. The Chinese have presented their bomb as a direct challenge to American and 'imperialist' power and as a great encouragement to the revolutionary peoples of the world in their struggles. It is a demonstration to the undeveloped nations of the world of the efficacy and superiority of the Chinese social system and of the revolutionary philosophy and methods preached by the Chinese leaders.

3. For India this socio-economic and revolutionary aspect of the Chinese achievement has particular relevance. India's influence and reputation in the Asian-African world was based on her policy of peace and non-alignment and her unique experiment in social and economic development through peaceful and democratic means. The Lop Nor explosion has held up to public gaze the contrast between the two systems in terms of material progress. The contrast is all the more dramatic because China has done this, while, at the same time, making all-round improvement in the economy. It may well be that this contrast will affect the thinking of the people of India even more than those in Asia and Africa. The left-wing of the CPI has already begun to highlight before the people the spectacular progress made by 'socialist China' as compared to 'capitalist India'. Coming after the traumatic experience of the 1962 military defeat and in the context of continuing conflict with China the Lop Nor explosion is likely to exert a demoralising influence on the mass

mind of India unless we can produce some kind of a counterblast to the Chinese bomb.

4. For understanding the significance of the Chinese explosion it is necessary to study the subtleties of Afro-Asian reactions to it. While there has been not much praise for the Chinese bomb, there has been hardly any condemnation either. The majority of nations have remained either silent or equivocal. Even in Asia fear is tinged with admiration for this scientific feat by a non-white country who until 15 years ago was at the very bottom of the scale of nations. One might say that the Chinese nuclear test has produced in Asia and Africa emotions similar to those produced by the historic victory of Japan over Russia in 1905. In the case of China, there is some additional sympathy because of the prevalent feeling that the West has been unjust in keeping China out of the UN and in isolating and surrounding China with nuclear bases. This was what the Algerian Foreign Office meant when it told our Ambassador that while they regretted the Chinese test they cannot condemn it because they appreciated China's reasons in making the bomb. From a strictly moral point of view, these countries do not consider China as an international leper because it has exploded a bomb, when other nations, respectable and peace-loving, hold nuclear weapons of infinite destructive capacity and one of them has, in fact, used these weapons in war.

5. As far as Asia is concerned, the propinquity of China introduces an additional power factor. The smaller countries of Asia are resentful of China's growing might, but they would remain too fearful to express their fear and would rather reckon with and reconcile to the colossus at their doorstep than oppose it or organise world public opinion against it. This is inevitable as there is no other Asian power on which they could lean for protection. And they would not, on account of their nationalism, nonalignment and anti-colonialism, choose to accept the protecting umbrella of the United States, especially when that umbrella may not give them any real protection as is evidenced by the situation in South Vietnam. Tunku Abdul Rahman's statement that he hoped that China would use the nuclear device for promotion of peace only is an indication of the kind of impact the Chinese explosion is having on Asian countries. According to our Embassy in Bangkok even Thailand is not prepared to condemn or express regret at the Chinese bomb, even though it is deeply concerned and feels threatened. The practical possibilities of organizing Asian opinion against China on the question of the nuclear test are very limited. This applies to West Asia and Africa also. Therefore, before plunging ourselves into a campaign to organize world public opinion against China it is necessary to assess the extent to which the world would respond to it so that we are not left out in the cold as a lone crusader. Further, even if we succeed in getting a condemnation of China or a resolution on test ban it would not prevent China going ahead with her nuclear programme as in the case of France. President Liu Shao-chi is reported to have told a Japanese Socialist delegation to Peking that "650 million people of China cannot be deterred from doing what they desired just because 100 million Japanese oppose it".

6. To admit that the impact of the Chinese bomb is political and psychological, and not military, is not to underrate its importance. Nuclear weapons, like conventional arms, are part of the deadly apparatus of power in international politics. They are powerful, even when they are not used, and in the case of nuclear weapons they are politically useful only when they are not used. Therefore, in trying to counter the political and psychological consequences of the Chinese explosion, it is necessary to realize that they are consequences which only an instrument of power like the nuclear bomb can produce.

7. The political-psychological impact of the Lop Nor test is not confined to the Asian-African world. The Chinese achievement has impressed its adversaries as well. Even the USA will now take China more seriously and has already given indications of its preparedness to come to grips with China as a factor in world politics. Normalisation of relations between the two countries is now a realistic possibility. As regards Western Europe, relations with China are likely to become even closer than before. Mr. Gordon Walker, the British Foreign Secretary has, according to our Embassy in Washington, impressed upon the Americans that in view of the Sino-Soviet rift it is necessary for Britain to cultivate China carefully and to develop closer economic relations with it in order to make China more dependent on the West. The Soviet Union and the Communist world have not criticized China, and in any event, they cannot condemn a major scientific achievement

which emphasizes the efficacy of the Socialist system. The sum total of all these reactions and developments would be to speed up the entry of the People's Republic of China into the UN. The majority of nations of the world now feels that if it was illogical and unfair in the past to have kept China out of the international community, it would be positively dangerous to keep her out any longer now that she has a nuclear bomb. However crude the Chinese nuclear device might have been (there is every evidence that it was a somewhat sophisticated device which was exploded at Lop Nor) the world will have to treat China as a member of the so-called nuclear club. U Thant's proposal for a Five-Power meeting is indicative of this. The nuclear powers themselves seem to be agreeable to this notwithstanding American reluctance in this matter. Indeed it is Peking who is spurning the offer of such partial recognition.

8. One important point to remember is that China's prestige is based not merely on the nuclear test but on her revolutionary role, her superiority in conventional arms, and her intrinsic potentialities as a super-power. This is the first time in modern history that one of the historic civilizations of the world with a rich past, with a tremendous geographical extent, and an overwhelming population forming one-fifth of the human race, is being equipped with ultra-modern instruments of power and destruction. Therefore, in considering China's nuclear status, one has to take a long-term view and realize that China is a rising power, and not a declining power like Britain or France for whom nuclear weapons are only a means of retaining their position or retarding their decline. Neither France nor Britain nor Germany could any longer aspire to become first-rate world powers. China's potentialities are greater. So are the potentialities of India. With the atomic explosion China has already attained the break-through to big-power status. What India is facing, in consequence, is a long-term problem. The question is what China and India would be like, in relation to each other, after 25 or 50 years if they follow their different policies in regard to the use of nuclear energy. Would not India be a third-rate power by then and China a dominant power in Asia and the world? This is really the problem facing India; it is a crisis in our national destiny. In 1954 speaking in the Lok Sabha, Jawaharlal Nehru said that the USA and USSR were the big power; he then added "..... if you peep into the future and if nothing goes wrong – wars and the like – the obvious fourth country in the world is India." The fundamental question is whether India is prepared to accept the responsibility of being this "obvious fourth" power and whether it has the vision and the will to take the steps necessary to attain the position enjoyed on her by history, geography, and political destiny. What the Lop Nor explosion has done is to precipitate for the Government and the people of India this problem of our destiny and rightful place in the world.

9. Even if one makes the optimistic assumption that an early settlement of the border dispute and amicable relations with Peking are possible, the fact that China is a nuclear and global power and India is not, will make a crucial difference to our position externally and internally. The internal impact on India of the Chinese achievement was broadly discussed in para 3 of this paper. That China could explode a nuclear bomb and at the same time make progress in her economy is a point which people in India cannot ignore. The economic argument that we are using against the manufacture of an Indian bomb could have a boomerang effect on the very validity of the social and political system in which we believe and which is, at present, experiencing an economic crisis affecting the elementary comforts of life. This is the kind of atmosphere in which fissiparous movements may well become more and more audacious and pitch their demands high as in the case of the Nagas. Externally, our neighbours will be compelled to take into consideration the power-position of India in relation to China. Pakistan will be encouraged to become more intransigent and hostile. Friendly countries like Nepal, Burma and Ceylon will be reluctant to show their friendship and try to wrest from us maximum of concessions in the settlement of bilateral questions. The tendency towards greater independence on the part of Bhutan and Sikkim will be accelerated. Further afield in South East Asia, India's political influence will be increasingly overshadowed by that of China's. This is not an over-drawn picture, if one looks at the facts squarely, because some of these tendencies have been already at play since the Chinese attack of 1962. The question is, can a great, complex and problem-ridden country like India, hold together as a going concern when its power and prestige tend to shrink even in its immediate neighbourhood. Jawaharlal Nehru used to say that India will count for a lot or for nothing in the world.

10. Much has been said about the military insignificance of the Chinese bomb. While it is not yet a military factor, it will be an important military factor after 10 or 20 years when China has developed a stockpile and a delivery system. This providential delay may even be shorter. India can ignore these future possibilities only at her peril. Thus, in any policy-planning, the fact that Chinese nuclear power will be operational in the not too distant future will have to be taken into account. But even in the immediate future India cannot ignore the bomb as a military factor, not so much as a weapon which will be used against us in-warfare but as one of the factors affecting the power-balance between China and India and the rest of Asia. Peking's bomb is not a tactical weapon, but a strategic instrument. It is bound to have an impact on the entire strategy, political and military, surrounding the border question. If the recovery of Aksaichin and the settlement of the border question through resort to arms was inconceivable hitherto it would be more so in the future. In consequence, while we would be in no position to exert military pressure on China, Peking will be able to do so with ease. It could also indulge with impunity in infiltration and subversion, particularly in NEFA and the Himalayan kingdoms. If hitherto we had limited military and diplomatic initiative in regard to the border question, from now on there would be even less initiative in our hands. Further, over any negotiations between India and China the nuclear bomb will brood like an evil presence. In these circumstances the alternatives to developing India's own nuclear strength may well be either a settlement of the border question on Chinese terms followed by a kind of subordinate friendship with China on the Burmese-Cambodian pattern, or open military reliance on the United States.

11. China's nuclear explosion has thus imposed on India an agonising dilemma. The choices open to us are: (1) To agree to co-exist with China on Chinese terms. (2) To seek alliance and nuclear protection from the United States. (3) To organise world public opinion against China and to work for disarmament and (4) To make our own nuclear weapons.

12. Alliance with the United States will be not only contrary to our basic policies, but may well be self-defeating. There is something illogical and derogatory in a great country like India protecting itself under someone else's nuclear umbrella against another country who is more or less in the same stage of economic development as India. Further, alliance with USA will deprive us of the advantage of Soviet neutrality or friendship. It may also throw the world back into a bitter cold war. When China attacked across the border in 1962 it was recognized by all that one of the aims of the Peking leader was to destroy India's policy of non-alignment. Why did they want to destroy India's policy of non-alignment? Firstly, to damage our reputation and influence in the Asian-African world, and secondly, to expedite the process of polarization in the domestic politics of India. The second was, probably the more important objective. Jawaharlal Nehru through his twin policies of non-alignment abroad and socialism at home, had drawn of a kind of magic veil over the inherent disunities and struggles within the body-politics of India. The Chinese leaders wanted to tear asunder this veil of artificial unity so that fissiparous and revolutionary developments may come to the fore. An alliance with the West would profoundly split Indian politics into Right and Left. A polarization of this kind would open the sluice-gates of revolutionary forces in India, and the Communities alone stand to gain from it. The ideological bitterness which the Chinese evinced against Jawaharlal Nehru sprang from a realization that it was his policies of non-alignment and socialism which stood as a broader against the Communist dream of a violent revolution in India.

13. But even if one granted, for the sake of argument, that alliance is the best way out, the recent history of military alliances shows that countries which enjoyed nuclear protection had to, in order to safe-guard their particular national interests, develop nuclear weapons of their own. This is true of Britain, France and China. These countries have manufactured nuclear weapons in order to remain independent within a system of alliance and to be able to safe-guard and press ahead with their own national interests. Therefore, military alliance will not, in the long-run, solve the basic problem which the Chinese explosion has imposed on India. It may not even solve our problem of national security because it is inconceivable that the USA would risk a nuclear war for defending India's Himalayan border.

14. The other choice before India is to continue our present policies including the renunciation of

nuclear weapons and to work for total disarmament, organizing world public opinion against Chinese tests. Such a course would involve no upset in our traditional thinking and methods of diplomacy. From a strictly moral point of view, this is a desirable line to take, though, even in terms of morality, the rest of the world would not concede that we are particularly moral or non-violent, when we are building up a powerful conventional army and receiving considerable military aid from the two power-blocs. Our abstention from making a bomb, therefore, would produce no great impact upon world public opinion, even though the nuclear powers, who jealously guard their monopoly, may express some appreciation of our act of self-abnegation.

15. From a practical point of view, we have to consider whether a world without arms can be brought about and whether we could get the majority of nations to condemn China for the nuclear test and prevent her from building up an atomic arsenal. A world without arms and without nuclear weapons is as yet an adorable dream. Mankind has no choice but to learn to live with nuclear weapons for a long time to come. Therefore, the problems of psychology, politics and military security raised by the Chinese bomb cannot await a solution until general and complete disarmament has been brought about. It is argued that the manufacture by India of nuclear weapons would accelerate proliferation and make nuclear disarmament even more difficult to accomplish. This argument may or may not be correct. One, however, doubts whether countries like West Germany, Japan, UAR, Israel, Indonesia etc. would be swayed in their decision by India's policy in this matter. (Indonesia has already announced the setting up of a high-powered Commission in charge of the production of atomic weapons). Renunciation by India of a non-existent weapon is hardly likely to influence the actions of other countries. Pakistan, especially, may well go in for the bomb, if she can make it, even if India does not make it, in order to nullify the over-all superiority of India in the sub-continent. As regards getting the world to condemn the Chinese test and putting international pressure on China to desist from future tests, even a superficial examination of Afro-Asian and Communist reactions to the Lop Nor explosion would show that the internal and international impact of the brief border war of 1962 is even today a problem of our politics and diplomacy.

16. Can India, without actually making the bomb, claim and achieve nuclear status along with the five nuclear Powers on the basis of its scientific advance and potential nuclear capabilities? Even if we are admitted into the nuclear club, would it make a difference to us in terms of our world position and actual influence? Power and world status cannot be acquired in this manner and all that we could expect from it would be something like what China was when it was one of the Big Five during the Second World War. It is useful to recall in this connection that when China was making the bomb, and all knowledgeable people were aware of it for the last two years, that did not bring about any additional prestige or extra recognition to China, but the moment a bomb was exploded, the situation suddenly changed. This is a fact of human and national psychology to be reckoned with. Diplomacy can only build and embroider upon the fact of power and not act as a substitute for it; diplomacy is almost the non-violent application of power in international politics. Therefore, whatever policy we may choose to follow, it seems that without a nuclear bomb of our own India cannot answer the challenge posed by China.

17. There are, of course, a number of very weighty arguments against India manufacturing her own bomb. These could be enumerated as follows:

1. It goes against India's declared policy.
2. It is repugnant to India's peaceful and non-violent tradition.
3. It would result in India losing her peace image.
4. It would lead to proliferation of nuclear weapons and an arms race.
5. An atom bomb is militarily useless as even the Chinese may not use it against us.
6. It would cripple India economically.

18. Most of these arguments have been dealt with in the preceding part of this paper which may be

summarized here: (1) No declared policies could commit a nation for all time irrespective of changing circumstances. The majority in the world will understand the reasons for India making the bomb as they understand the Chinese reasons. A considerable number of nations, particularly our neighbours, may even welcome such a decision on our part. As long as India does not emerge as a counter-poise to China in Asia our smaller neighbours will have no choice but to depend either on China or on the United States for protection. India's military weakness would deprive our Asian neighbours of one of the major supports to their policy of independence and non-alignment. (2 & 3) As India is not a Gandhian

State, there is really no contradiction between our policy of peace and the making of nuclear weapons for self-defence. In fact, once we possess the bomb it may be possible for us to play an effective role in safe-guarding peace. Even our role in disarmament negotiations would be more effective. We will also have then the power to renounce the bomb dramatically making a profound impact on the world, and perhaps, thus forcing the nuclear powers into renouncing and destroying the entire nuclear arsenal of the world. (4) By abstaining from manufacturing the bomb India would not be able to prevent other countries from making the bomb. As regards arms race India's withdrawal from the nuclear-weapons field will not affect the Chinese policy of building up her military might and acquiring an atomic stockpile and delivery system. China's ultimate aim is to drive the USA out of Asia and to establish herself as a nuclear power equal to the USA and the USSR. (5) The possibility that nuclear weapons may never be used in war does not render it useless as a decisive military factor. In para 6 it was pointed out that nuclear weapons are politically useful only when they are not used. (6) The economic argument against the bomb has some obvious validity. But it deserves closer scrutiny, as it can be exaggerated. The fact that China starting from more or less the same economic base as India has made the bomb is a point to be reckoned with. Countries like UAR, Israel and Indonesia are also finding it within their economic capacity to launch upon atomic bomb programmes. France, once sick to the core politically and economically, went ahead with a nuclear weapons programme and in the process brought about an economic and political recovery comparable to the West German and Japanese miracles. As regards India a considerable part of the overhead expenditure required for a nuclear programme has already been incurred in building reactors and power stations and in training scientific and technical personnel. The development of a delivery system capable of striking at the distant centres of China would, of course, require enormous expenditure. That is a long-term problem, and in the long-term we have to assume that, it would be possible for us to expand on a big and rapid scale.

19. At present the prospects for the Indian economy, even if we do not make the bomb, are neither bright nor exhilarating. The perspective Plan targets set for 1975 would still leave us on a low standard of living with most of the economic problems of today basically unsolved. Even to realize these rather modest targets great efforts by the people as well as considerable aid from outside required. In the planning of our economy the crucial shortcoming has hitherto been our failure to arouse the people and to organize their energies for constructive development. Almost every element of progress except the energizing force of cooperative effort by the people as a whole is present in our economic planning. An Indian atomic explosion accompanied by the socio-economic reform programmes to which the country is committed, may well provide a psychological lift to the people and arouse them from the morass of frustration, enabling the vast unutilised moral and material resources of the country to be harnessed to the needs of development. It has been said recently by one of our leaders that economic progress is not possible when millions of people live in insecurity. It is this sense of security, confidence and pride in oneself and in one's own country that the possession of the nuclear bomb would bring to the millions in un-developed but historically great nations like India and China. Strangely enough, this ultimate weapon of destruction is capable of releasing today new moral forces among the people as thunder; storm and the inclement mysteries of nature produced in the early man the sensation of God and the search for religion. In deciding to make or not to make the bomb we in India must also have some vision of the world of tomorrow. It is going to be, whether we like it or not, a world of nuclear power, electronics, rockets and space-ships. The experience of history is that science and technology has owed much for its advance to the pressure of military necessity. If we withdraw ourselves from a nuclear weapons programme, we may be left behind not so much in the armament race as in the race of science

and technology, and fifty years hence if not earlier, we might be comparatively more undeveloped; than today, even in relation to China.

20. In the international field the manufacture by India of the atom bomb need not necessarily explode India's image of peace. On the other hand, it could give some substance to this image. Far from encouraging an arms race with China, the leaders of China might sit up and consider it necessary to reconcile with India in the same way that USA and other nuclear powers are now thinking of coming to grips with the reality of China. Further, an Indian bomb would enable us to stand up against big-power pressures and to maintain our nonalignment and independence of judgement in foreign affairs. The inevitable alternative is the growth of a psychology of dependence on Outside powers for national security, and a slow unknowing drift towards the nuclear umbrella held forth by the United States. Even a joint US American umbrella, apart from that it is not feasible, would produce a psychology of dependence and uncertainty in India and encroach upon our basic independence and freedom of action. India is too great a nation to dwindle by consent into an international protectorate. An atomic bomb programme of our own does not, however, mean that we should abandon our traditional policy of peace, co-existence and total disarmament. With the atom bomb in our possession we would be able to play an effective part in the field of disarmament and make the nuclear Powers pay heed to our voice. India's peace image can be projected more compellingly in this manner. Once we have the bomb we could announce our readiness to renounce it and conduct a crusade for the complete elimination of conventional and nuclear armaments from the face of the earth. It is only when we have the bomb that we can renounce it convincingly, in the manner of Ashoka, and make a dramatic impact on the world in order to reverse the mad career of mankind to universal destruction.