

January 14, 1972

**State Department Bureau of Intelligence and
Research Intelligence Note, 'India to Go Nuclear?'**

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Summary:

The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) evaluates the available intelligence on India's nuclear intentions. There were varying reports that India would test a device that month, sometime in 1972, or that the government was undertaking a program to test a "peaceful nuclear explosive." According to INR, India had the capability to produce some 20-30 weapons, and it could easily test a device in an underground site, such as an abandoned mine, that would be hard to discover. Because the U.S. government had given a "relatively modest priority to... relevant intelligence collection activities" a "concerted effort by India to conceal such preparations... may well succeed." What would motivate India to test, the analysts opined, were domestic political pressures and concerns about China and Pakistan.

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INTELLIGENCE NOTE

BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

January 14, 1972

INDIA TO GO NUCLEAR?

There are continuing reports that the Indians are preparing to detonate a nuclear device during the next several weeks. While the exact timing described in these reports varies, the date chosen may prove to be January 26, the day on which India celebrates the promulgation of its post-colonial constitution and the end of dominion status.

The purpose of the planned detonation is unclear in the reports. Some have indicated that the GOI is leaning in the direction of nuclear weapons development. Others suggest that a peaceful nuclear explosives (PNE) program--a rather thin disguise for nuclear weapons development--would be undertaken. Still other reports, including one from the Indian air attaché in Moscow, flatly state that India plans to test a nuclear weapon in 1972, possibly during the next few weeks.

None of these reports has been confirmed. As late as December 31, 1971, Mrs. Gandhi indicated in a press conference that there will be "no change" in India's nuclear policy.

Capability. So far as capabilities are concerned, there is no question that India could proceed rapidly and with little difficulty to establish a modest nuclear weapons program. It has in operation all

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of the facilities needed to produce plutonium suitable for use as the fissionable material--the critical element of nuclear weapons--although India will have no plutonium available for the next few years which is not subject to restrictions under international or bilateral agreements. Plutonium on hand in India at present is believed to be sufficient for producing some 20 or 30 weapons. In addition, India is capable of providing other essential nuclear weapons components--such as the high explosives and electronic elements. Finally, India's civil nuclear energy program is a relatively advanced one and could provide adequate scientific and technical support to a nuclear weapons effort.

If India should decide to proceed to a nuclear explosion, whether labeled as a nuclear weapon test or as a PNE experiment, it presumably would be conducted in accordance with the terms of the Limited Test Ban Treaty. This would require preparation of an underground site for the test, which increases the cost and the time required to prepare for testing. While there is no information indicating that such preparations have been undertaken, it is possible that they would not come to our attention. A relatively modest priority has been attached to relevant intelligence collection activities, and a concerted effort by India to conceal such test preparations--by using existing or abandoned mining operations for example--might well succeed.

Motivation. India has long wrestled with the issue of proceeding toward the detonation of a nuclear device. The moral content of the

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debate, once prominent, disappeared several years ago, but discussion of the political, economic, and strategic issues has continued. Over the years Mrs. Gandhi's government has been faced with steady pressure from the nationalist right urging development of a nuclear capability. The government, however, sought to retain enough flexibility in its nuclear policy so as to preserve the option whether or not to produce a nuclear device. Should a device be detonated now, it will no doubt be described as intended for peaceful purposes. However, in practice no distinction can be made between a device earmarked for peaceful uses and one produced for military purposes.

As of early 1971, all evidence indicated that the Government of India had decided to defer indefinitely the development and explosion of a test device. In early August, however, the cabinet undertook a review of Indian nuclear policy in the wake of President Nixon's July 16 announcement of his proposed trip to China. There can be little doubt that the July 16 announcement has had major implications for India's security calculations and its nuclear policy. In New Delhi's view, the announcement appeared to rule out all hope that India (not a signatory to the NPT) could anticipate a joint US-Soviet umbrella against the threat of Chinese nuclear attack.

The decision to detonate a nuclear device may have been triggered by the deepening crisis in Indo-Pakistani relations. India may have concluded that an early test would demonstrate its increasing military strength to Pakistan and remind the latter's Chinese and American

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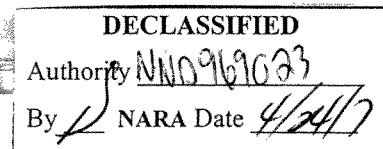
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friends of its potential power. Although the immediate issue with Pakistan has been settled, a test still would probably be regarded as very useful by the Indians. It would constitute dramatic support for India's contention that it is the only important power on the subcontinent. India also may hope that a demonstrated nuclear capability would quash any thoughts of revenge the Pakistanis might still entertain.

Reactions. The Soviets would regard an Indian test as a major setback to their nonproliferation policy generally. They would see it as complicating German ratification of the nonproliferation treaty, as providing some sanction for Israeli efforts to develop advanced weapons in the military-nuclear field, and as encouraging other Nth countries, such as Japan. Much as they might regret an Indian test, the Soviets would not, however, be likely to want to spoil their relations with India over it. Confronted with a fait accompli, the Soviets might even see some compensating advantages in India's assuming this symbol of great-power status and thus increasing its claim to participation in security and disarmament discussions in which the Chinese promise to be increasingly active.

China will vigorously denounce an Indian test as further evidence of Delhi's aggressive "sub-superpower" aspirations; and it may seek to implicate the Soviets as well. In the long run, a successful test by India would presumably raise China's stake in normalizing relations.

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Pakistan will view an Indian nuclear test with deep misgivings and will condemn India's continued "aggressive attitude."

Public reaction in Japan will initially condemn India's action as adding to the proliferation of nuclear weapons and contributing to a further intensification of tension in Asia. On further reflection, however, some Japanese will view the Indian program, which poses no threat to Japan, as a risky counterweight to China; others will see it as useful. While the Japanese will not reverse their own nonproliferation stand just because India has joined the "nuclear club," this development could, over the long run, add to sentiment for Japan's own steps in the same direction. Nevertheless, other factors arising from Japan's relationship with China, the USSR, and the US will continue to be much more important in determining Tokyo's ultimate decision about "going nuclear."

The Arab countries will share Moscow's concern that an Indian test will encourage Israel to unveil the nuclear capabilities which the Arabs believe it already possesses. Relations between the Arab states and India, already somewhat strained by the recent Indo-Pakistani war, may cool further.

Immediate Strategic Significance: Negligible. By entering the nuclear club, India would gain the satisfaction of demonstrating its scientific and technical progress. However, India is years away

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from developing a credible nuclear deterrent against the only prospective enemy with a nuclear capability--China. India has no delivery system capable of posing a threat to targets in northern and eastern China. Its present bomber inventory is not up to the task, and a strategic missile system would take 5-8 years to develop. Soviet assistance in this program would be foreclosed by the NPT.

INR/Near East and South Asia
Director : Curtis F. Jones
Analysts : INR/RNA:DCochran/WDHowells
 INR/RSG:LEFinch/GDMonk
 INR/REA:PSmith/PRuenitz
 INR/RSE:RBaraz
Extension : 22051
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