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LONDON FOR MOYNIHAN

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MCAP, PARM, TECH, PINT, IN
SUBJECT: INDIA'S NUCLEAR EXPLOSION: WHY NOW?

1. INDIA HAS EXPLODED A NUCLEAR DEVICE AT A TIME WHEN INDIA
IS IN DEEP ECONOMIC DIFFICULTY AND THE GOVERNMENT IS CONTENDING
WITH A RISING TIDE OF DISILLUSIONMENT AND DISCONTENT, CORRUPT-
TION, MISMANAGEMENT, LABOR INDISCIPLINE, RAMPANT INFLATION,
FOOD SHORTAGES, AND THE IMPACT OF THE HIGH COST OF CRUDE HAVE
LED TO DISMAL ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AND SEVERE POLITICAL UNREST.
THE TURMOIL EARLIER THIS YEAR IN GUJARAT AND THEN BIHAR,
SCATTERED SMALL-SCALE VIOLENCE, AND THE CURRENT RAIL STRIKE
HAVE CONFRONTED THE GOVERNMENT WITH A SERIES OF CRISSES IN
MAINTAINING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DISCIPLINE.

2. WE ARE INCLINED TO BELIEVE THAT THIS GENERAL DOMESTIC
GLOOM AND UNCERTAINTY WEIGHED SIGNIFICANTLY IN THE BALANCE OF
INDIA'S NUCLEAR DECISION. THE NEED FOR A PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST;
THE HOPE OF RECREATING THE ATMOSPHERE OF EXHILARATION AND NATION-
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ALISM THAT SWEPT THE COUNTRY AFTER 1971--CONTRARY TO OUR EARLIER
EXPECTATION—MAY HAVE TIPPED THE SCALES.

3. INTERNATIONALLY, INDIA IN RECENT YEAR HAS FELT IT HAD BEEN
RELEGATED TO THE SIDELINES WITH ITS SIGNIFICANCE IGNORED AND
ITS POTENTIAL ROLE DOWNPLAYED. THE FEELING THAT IT NEEDED TO
DEMONSTRATE ITS NUCLEAR CAPABILITY IN ORDER TO BE TAKEN
SERIOUSLY MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN A PSYCHOLOGICAL ELEMENT IN ITS
DECISION.

4. THE SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF INDIA'S TRIPARTITE NEGOTIATIONS
WITH PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH IN EARLY APRIL MAY HAVE INFLUENCED
THE TIMING OF THE EXPLOSION. INDIA PROBABLY WANTED TO WIND UP
THIS PHASE OF CLEARING UP THE PROBLEMS FROM 1971 BEFORE MOVING
AHEAD WITH AN ACTION WHICH WAS CERTAIN TO UPSET ITS RELATIONS
WITH PAKISTAN.

5. WE ARE AWARE OF NO RECENT MILITARY PRESSURE OF THE GOVERN-
MENT TO GO NUCLEAR.

6. THERE HAS BEEN, HOWEVER, NO RECENT DOMESTIC POLITICAL PRESSURE
FOR INDIA TO GO NUCLEAR. IN FACT, THIS ISSUE HAS BEEN RELATIVELY
QUIESCENT DURING THE PAST YEAR. RIGHTWING NATIONALIST JANA SANGH
MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT HAVE Pressed THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT
FROM TIME TO TIME, AS THEY HAVE IN PAST YEARS, ABOUT LAGGING
PROGRESS IN THE NUCLEAR FIELD AND ABOUT WHY THE GOVERNMENT WAS
NOT TAKING STEPS TO ACQUIRE A NUCLEAR CAPABILITY. BUT THESE
OCCASIONAL SALLIES WERE ANSWERED BY STANDARD POLICY STATEMENTS
THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS INVESTIGATING THE POSSIBILITIES OF "PEACE-
FUL" NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS AND THAT INDIA WOULD USE ATOMIC ENERGY
ONLY FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES. WITH A LARGE CONGRESS MAJORITY IN
PARLIAMENT PRESSURE FROM THE FEW VOCAL RIGHT-WINGERS COULD BE
CONTAINED.

7. AT THIS STAGE WE DO NOT KNOW WHEN INDIA'S DECISION TO EXPLODE
A NUCLEAR DEVICE WAS TAKEN. NOR DO WE KNOW EXACTLY HOW THE INTER-
ATIONAL SITUATION, DOMESTIC CONSIDERATIONS, AND TECHNOLOGICAL
PROGRESS INFLUENCED THE TIMING OF EXPLOSION. IT SEEMS CLEAR,
HOWEVER, THAT THE DECISION WAS TAKEN BY MRS. GANDHI, THAT IT
WAS SUPPORTED OR ACCEPTED BY THOSE OF HER ASSOCIATES THAT KNEW
OF THE DECISION, AND THAT THE INDIAN LEADERSHIP BELIEVED THE
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DECISION WOULD REDOUND TO THEIR CREDIT DOMESTICALLY.

8. WE BELIEVE THAT THE DECISION WILL APPEAL TO NATIONALIST
FEELING AND WILL BE WIDELY WELCOMED BY THE INDIAN POPULACE. IT
 REMAINS TO BE SEEN TO WHAT EXTENT THE GOVERNMENT WILL SUCCEED
IN TRANSLATING THIS FEELING INTO TANGIBLE POLITICAL RETURNS.
GOVERNMENT WILL ALSO BE TEMPTED TO SEIZE ON INTERNATIONAL
BACKLASH, CONDEMNATION AND RETRIBUTION TO APPEAL FOR ITS OWN
DOMESTIC PURPOSES TO CHAUVINIST FEELING AT HOME. THE PICTURE
OF A GOVERNMENT EMBATTLED AND STANDING UP TO FOREIGN ABUSE
COULD BE QUITE USEFUL TO THE INDIAN LEADERSHIP TODAY.

9. DEPARTMENT REPEAT AS DESIRED. SCHNEIDER

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