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Mandatory Review

Case # NL: 90-211

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The Indian Nuclear Problem

I. The Present Situation Within India

India may be near the point of deciding on starting a nuclear weapons program. The pressures for a weapon are likely to be irresistible after the Chinese test their next device in the absence of some better alternative. China's attack on India two years ago greatly increased the Indian feeling of vulnerability and changed some of its views on the virtues of non-alignment (although US and USSR willingness to give military aid has enabled it to preserve a substantial measure of non-alignment as between these two powers). Now the Chinese bomb is rapidly modifying its anti-nuclear attitudes. Whether or not the decision to make the bomb will be taken, and when,



II. Possible Indian Nuclear Programs and Their Costs

A. Alternative programs

The Indians have a range of possible nuclear programs they might attempt to carry out: 1) developing and testing one or a few single fission devices, solely to get a political effect, but then stopping; 2) going on to develop a crude, but droppable, weapon that could be delivered by existing aircraft (e.g., by Canberras--- against Tibet and Pakistan); 3) developing more efficient fission

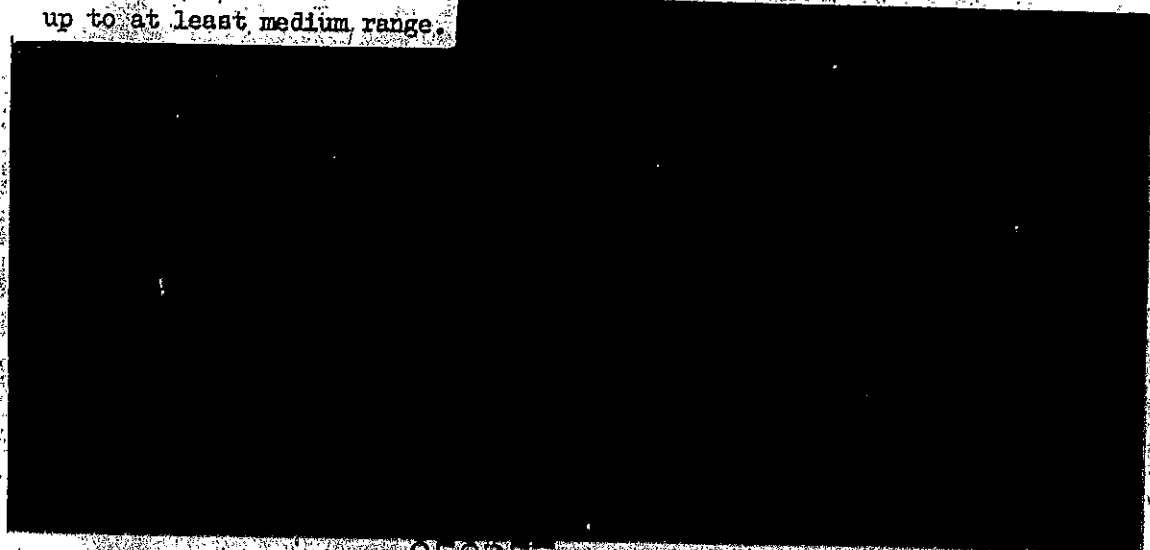
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weapons; 4) getting aircraft or missiles with a long enough range to reach Chinese cities; 5) developing a thermo-nuclear weapon; 6) getting a secure, second strike force able to survive a Chinese nuclear attack and retaliate against a small number of Chinese cities; 7) getting a protected force designed to hit Chinese nuclear forces; 8) building a significant tactical nuclear capability; 9) building a system for acquiring, transmitting and evaluating information needed for decision and a protected capability to make and send responsible orders.

B. Pressure toward a big program

An Indian decision to proceed might be based on the belief that they could buy a nuclear program fairly cheaply. But there can be little doubt that if India decides to compete with China, it will be pushed toward a sophisticated and expensive program--depending in part on what the Chinese do. Although there is much uncertainty on the Chinese program, it seems clear that it will include fairly sophisticated nuclear weapons, plus a variety of missiles and aircraft up to at least medium range.



There are no effective controls over this reactor.



C. The Costs

The essential point is that the cost of getting one or a few nuclear devices is small; the cost of a serious delivery capability is very great. For example, the cumulative total expenditures on India's nuclear programs to date from 1954 has been \$220 million of which \$63 million was allocated in the current fiscal year. Additional expenditures up to the testing of a first nuclear device might total only about \$40 million over the next three years.

A more ambitious program which included testing and production of about 100 fission weapons by 1975 and the obtaining of 50 longer-range aircraft than their Canberras which have a 900-mile radius (either by procurement abroad or through conversion of jet transports) would cost perhaps \$200 to \$400 million a year. This modest force would be vulnerable both on the ground and in the air--and this fact would become widely understood over time.

A more ambitious program that would attempt to meet the Chinese on their own terms would be much more costly and would have serious resource implications for India. This is particularly true since India (unlike France and Britain) is not only directly exposed to Chinese non-nuclear attack, it has recently been attacked. Therefore, a

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responsible Indian defense program should be accompanied with strong non-nuclear defenses.



This inadequate program promises to cost France an average of about \$2 billion a year--a sum greater than the entire \$1.8 billion Indian defense budget.

On balance, an Indian national nuclear program would probably take up a large part of India's defense and national budget. If such a program were to be carried out, there would either have to be large and risky--reductions in Indian non-nuclear forces or a large increase in its defense budgets at the expense of its economic development. And given the level of our economic aid to India, an Indian nuclear program would indirectly be at the expense of the US aid effort.

C. Reported Indian military views



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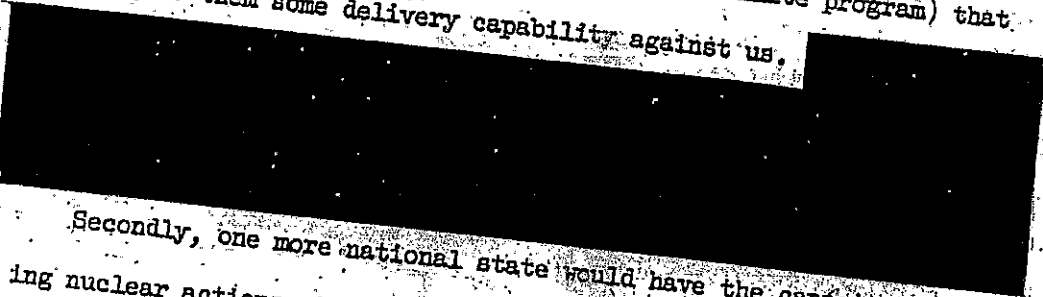




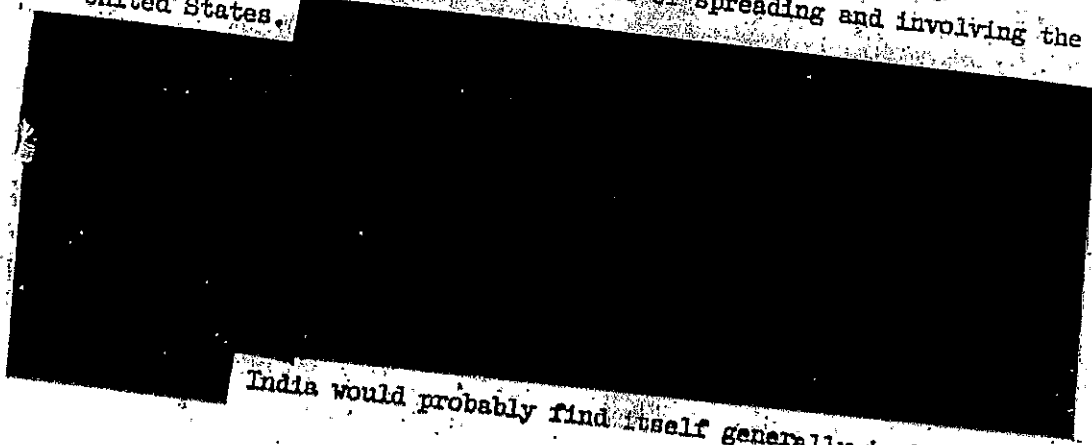
It does suggest, however, that some Indians are conscious that they face severe resource problems in adopting the nuclear course.

III. Consequences of an Indian Program

One consequence of an Indian program is that one more national state, India, could some day be able to attack the United States with nuclear weapons. In time, the Indians will gain access to rocket technology (perhaps through an earth satellite program) that would give them some delivery capability against us.



Secondly, one more national state would have the capacity for starting nuclear actions with a fair chance of spreading and involving the United States.



India would probably find itself generally isolated.


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Thirdly, it follows from the above that there would be a reduction in our power to influence events in South Asia and to some extent throughout the world.

Fourthly, India's economic development would suffer--and possibly at serious costs to the Indian social structure.

Fifthly, pressures for further proliferation in Asia would grow. Most notably in Pakistan.

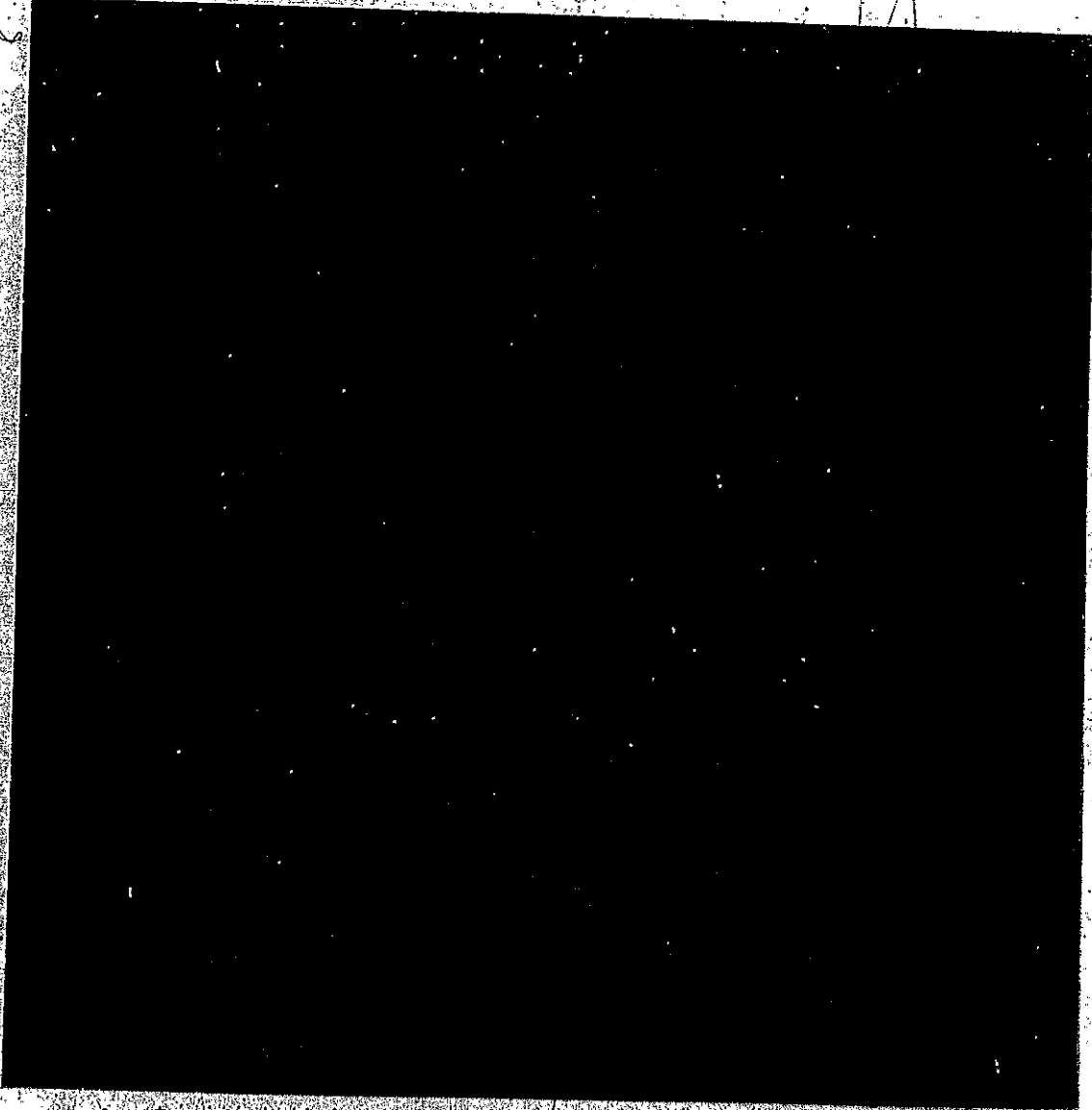
 They certainly would also emphasize nuclear programs that would bring them closer to having their own nuclear weapons. Japan, less exposed to conventional attack than India, directly protected by the US, and still strongly anti-nuclear in outlook (although less so over time) is under less immediate pressure. But a succession of Chinese tests followed by an Indian decision to "go nuclear" may rapidly change Japanese attitudes. Indonesia, despite its low level of technical competency, has ambitions and would be spurred on by the Chinese and Indian examples. And evidence of serious Indonesian intent would undoubtedly lead the Australians to try to get nuclear help in some form from the UK and the US.

Sixthly, the effects would be felt more widely. Israel, Sweden, Germany, and other potential nuclear countries far from China and India would be affected by proliferation in Asia. A nuclear decision by India, following soon after China, would undoubtedly help to remove inhibitions to the development of these weapons--especially if it

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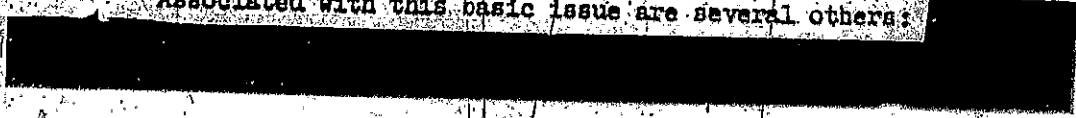
appeared that the United States and the Soviet Union were unwilling or unable to prevent the spread.

IV. The Main Issues



A. Related Issues

Associated with this basic issue are several others:



B. Would the Effects of a National Indian Nuclear Program be Isolated?

There are three reasons why this is not so. First, an Indian nuclear decision would not only affect nearby countries such as Pakistan and Japan but also more distant ones, such as Israel or Sweden or Germany. One reason is that the factions in these countries opposed to nuclear weapons could, until recently, point to the fact that only great

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powers or those with a great power heritage (UK) had weapons. But within a few years, France and China and now India will have joined the club. And this despite US opposition, the risks, and the costs. In short, the world may be near a basic change in attitudes on the inevitability of the spread of nuclear weapons. And the fact that yellow and brown men are making these most modern of weapons is not likely to lead white men to decide to abstain from making them.

Second, although the US cannot be said to have a major stake in India today in the sense that we do in Europe, we are continuing to make our greatest aid effort there and we could, in any event, hardly be indifferent to what happens in the world's second most populous country.

Third, we have now and presumably will want to continue to have a major stake in Japan and Australia. These two countries will be affected by what happens in India and between India and China.

V. Further Analysis

A. How the situation probably looks to the Indians




Some Indians seem to have an awareness of at least some of the unhappy consequences if India goes nuclear. And others undoubtedly underestimate these costs and overestimate the security benefits to be gained from going this route. However, if the Indian Government comes to feel that it has no alternative open to it to counter China's nuclear

capability there can be no doubt that the Government will choose the nuclear route. What external alternatives might be available?

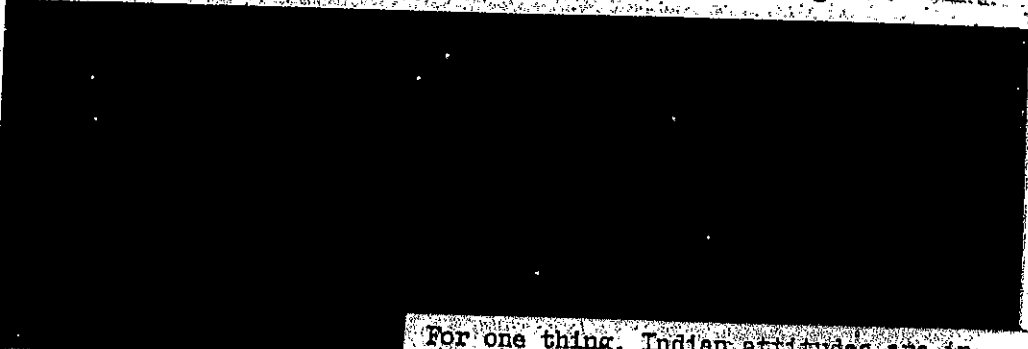
B. The UK

The V bombers give the UK the option of offering India nuclear support. But it is unlikely to do so unless the US is also prepared to make a suitable offer. (Denis Healey's recent gambit called for all of the nuclear powers--including China--to offer a guarantee. This proposal can be expected to fall well short of India's needs.)



C. The Soviet Union

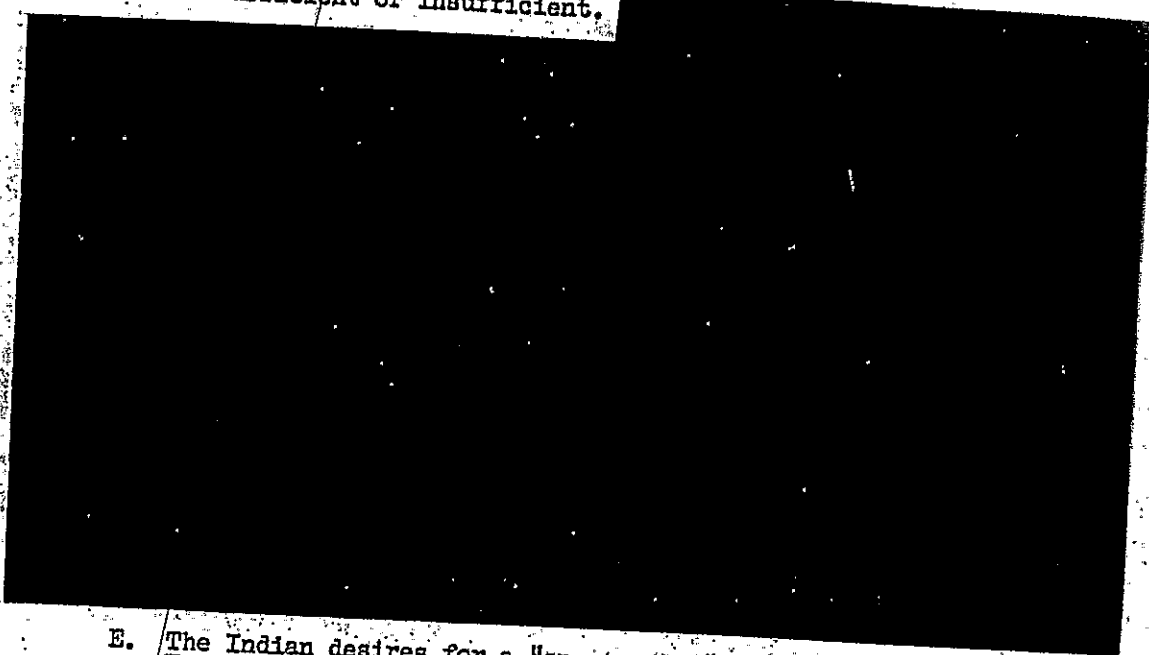
A Soviet offer of retaliation against China if India is attacked would very probably not be made at this time. Although the basic hostility between Russia and China and the harm done to Russian long-term interests from nuclear spread would seem to support such a guarantee being given to India, the Russians will probably judge the costs among the Communist parties to be too great. We



For one thing, Indian attitudes are in flux. This means that it is most important that we stay close to the Indians and follow the trend of their thinking. It also means that

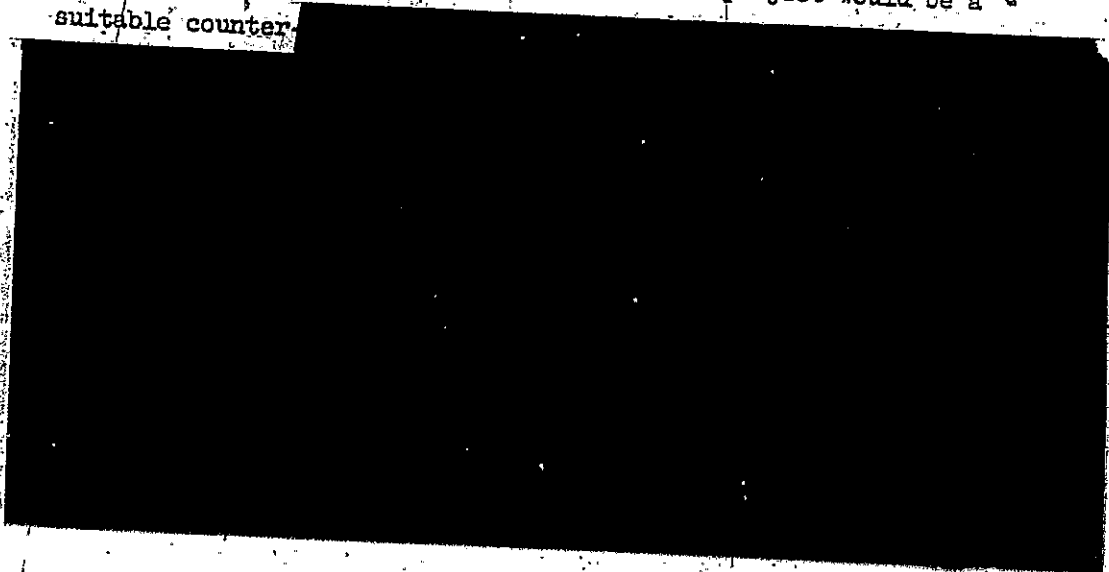
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it would be a mistake for us to decide--in ignorance--what US action might be sufficient or insufficient.



E. The Indian desires for a "spectacular"

The Chinese test has led to a desire both in Japan and India for a comparable technical event on their part. One suggestion has been that participation in an earth satellite project would be a suitable counter-



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F. U. S. Aid Leverage

It would be quite plausible for the US to object to an Indian nuclear program on the grounds (a) that it would greatly damage the Indian economy, (b) the US was underwriting the growth of this economy with its aid effort and we were not prepared to see these aid funds wasted on an India needlessly devoting its scarce resources on nuclear systems,



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