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SNIE 31-1-65
21 October 1965

SPECIAL
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

NUMBER 31-1-65

Supersedes Memorandum to Holders of

NIE 4-2-64 and NIE 31-64

India's Nuclear Weapons Policy

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf
21 OCTOBER 1965

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: MAY 2001

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Nº 423

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The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, AEC, and NSA.

Concurring:

Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State
Director, Defense Intelligence Agency
The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB
Director of the National Security Agency

Abstaining:

The Assistant to the Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, the subject being outside of his jurisdiction.

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India's Nuclear Weapons Policy

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INDIA'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS POLICY

THE PROBLEM

To estimate India's nuclear weapons policy over the next few years.

CONCLUSIONS

- A. India has the capability to develop nuclear weapons. It probably already has sufficient plutonium for a first device, and could explode it about a year after a decision to develop one. (*Paras. 1-3*)
- B. The proponents of a nuclear weapons program have been strengthened by the Indo-Pakistani war, but the main political result has been a strengthening of Prime Minister Shastri's position. We believe that he does not now wish to start a program and that he is capable of making this decision stick for the time being. (*Paras. 4-14*)
- C. However, we do not believe that India will hold to this policy indefinitely. All things considered, we believe that within the next few years India probably will detonate a nuclear device and proceed to develop nuclear weapons. (*Paras. 15-20*)

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DISCUSSION

Technical Capabilities

1. India has everything necessary to produce the plutonium for a modest weapons program, from extensive uranium ore reserves through a plutonium separation plant. It is expanding some of its facilities and striving to build up its domestic capabilities to reduce and eventually eliminate its dependence on foreign suppliers. The country plans to complete three sizable nuclear power stations in the next several years; two are already under construction with Canadian and US assistance. However, the reactors for the currently planned power program are to be under safeguards designed to ensure peaceful uses. The Canada-India Reactor (CIR)—one of India's three research reactors—is capable of producing annually enough plutonium for one or two weapons in the 20 KT range. There are no safeguards on either the uranium or heavy water now used in this reactor, although when Canada furnished the reactor India agreed to use it only for peaceful purposes.

2. India probably already has on hand enough plutonium for a nuclear device. The CIR has been operated, at least through mid-1965, in a manner which favors the output of plutonium suitable for weapons, though this plutonium is also useful for other purposes. The plutonium separation plant has processed the fuel irradiated in the CIR. A plant for the production of plutonium metal from the output of the separation plant is scheduled for completion in 1966; in the meantime, this task probably has been performed by a pilot facility which has enough capacity to process the plutonium the CIR can produce. The Indians maintain that their entire nuclear program is directed to peaceful uses; they say they want plutonium for research on fast breeder reactors which they hope to develop to exploit their extensive thorium reserves. Nevertheless, it is clear that the facilities and the manner of operating them make it possible for New Delhi to move promptly into a weapons program.

3. If Indian leaders decided in late 1964 or early 1965 to develop nuclear weapons, we believe that India could conduct its first test within a few months. To do so, however, work on weapons design and technology would have to be well advanced, and a testing site would have to be established soon. We have no evidence that such activities are well advanced. However, early work applicable to weapons technology and design has probably started. Such work is easy to conceal and difficult to identify. India has expanded the electronic facilities at its nuclear establishment considerably and may have begun to set up a high explosives test facility, though both developments could be intended for other purposes than production of nuclear weapons. If work applicable to weapons design and technology is in its early stages, as we believe probable, India would be able to test its first device in the second half of 1966. India signed the 1963 partial test ban treaty, but has areas where it could test underground. A weapon deliverable by the Indian Air Force's Canberra light bombers

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could probably be produced about two years after the first test; India could produce about a dozen weapons in the 20 KT range by 1970. Production could then increase rapidly if India used the plutonium produced in the power reactors now scheduled.

Pressures for a Weapons Program

4. Pressures for a nuclear weapons program began to build up in India after the first Chinese test late in 1964. Elements of the press and the scientific community, as well as some politicians, called for India to make the bomb. Shastri and other top leaders opposed these pressures and reaffirmed India's intention not to develop nuclear weapons. The leaders had considerable difficulty, however, in gaining formal Congress Party support for this position, and the Indian Government has acknowledged that this policy is subject to change.

5. The war with Pakistan, and particularly Communist China's threatened intervention in the fighting, have given considerable impetus to those Indians who favor developing nuclear weapons. Several opposition parties have called for the government to reverse its position; 85 members of Parliament—including some members of the Congress Party—have done the same; and various influential people throughout India have begun to put pressure on the government on the issue. Public sentiment is now such that the proponents of nuclear weapons may even outnumber opponents, and senior Congress Party leadership constitutes the main obstacle to a policy reversal. To some extent this sentiment reflects an emotional surge, generated by the war, which will probably decline in time. But we think that the war has permanently strengthened the voices of those who argue that India's security will be better protected by greater reliance on its own military strength than upon other powers and world opinion.

6. Those who favor nuclear weapons argue that Indian prestige will suffer unless India has the bomb, and that, without nuclear weapons, India will not be regarded as a great power. Equally appealing is the simple claim that an India without nuclear weapons will be unable to stand up to a nuclear-armed China, particularly a decade or so hence when Peking will probably have a considerable nuclear arsenal. This argument is likely to have growing appeal as further Chinese tests occur. Finally, proponents of the bomb note that Communist China has suffered no setbacks as a result of developing a nuclear capability, and indeed its status as a world power has been enhanced.

7. At the same time, the Indian Government has had little success in finding non-nuclear ways to deal with the threat which Chinese nuclear developments pose to its prestige and security. It has been unable to find any scientific spectacular that would match the Chinese explosions. Nor have guarantees satisfactory to India been forthcoming from the nuclear powers that they would come to India's assistance in the event of a nuclear attack by Communist China. Indian interest was centered on the possibility of a joint US-USSR guarantee, because it would be consistent with the country's nonalignment policy. However, Moscow's response has not been encouraging. Its passivity following Peking's ulti-

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matum during the recent conflict with Pakistan, the suspension of US military aid to India and US failure to prevent Pakistan's use of US weapons against India, are all cited as proof that India cannot depend upon outside powers for protection in the great variety of contingencies it will face. India probably believes that the difficulties of securing a joint guarantee now are even more formidable than they were a year ago, and the confidence it is willing to place in formal assurances has also deteriorated. For these reasons, New Delhi recently has shown little interest in security guarantees. On the subject of non-proliferation, India has taken a rather stiff stand, insisting that before non-nuclear powers agree not to proliferate, the present nuclear powers must undertake some nuclear disarmament measures. Finally, India is probably discouraged about the possibility of insuring its security through a comprehensive test ban treaty.

Opposition to a Weapons Program

8. On the other hand, opponents of a nuclear weapons program argue that, during the recent crisis, India was able to deal with both Pakistan and Communist China simultaneously with conventional arms, and that what is needed is added strength of this sort. They believe that a reversal of Nehru's traditional position after all India has said about the evils of nuclear weapons would damage its international prestige. Moreover, they apparently feel that if India develops nuclear weapons, other countries (including Pakistan) will be more inclined to seek such weapons, either through their own efforts or from other countries. Indian leaders also are likely to continue to stress the evil nature of atomic weapons and the threat they pose for the world. Such considerations still are important in India, though they are declining as the legacy of Gandhi and Nehru fades. Some opponents of the bomb are convinced that the cost of a meaningful weapons system will be prohibitive; some believe that, should China attack India with nuclear weapons, the US and perhaps even the USSR would inevitably become involved.

9. India's policy probably is influenced to some extent by the views of the country's military leaders. While our information on their attitudes is limited, they apparently are not now pressing for nuclear weapons. They seem to favor the use of available funds to build up India's conventional military strength. Indian military thought, long dominated by the army, concentrates heavily on defending the country's borders rather than on strategic capabilities. Indian military leaders probably do not yet see a pressing need for nuclear weapons for border defense. As China's nuclear arsenal grows and its delivery capability improves, the attitudes of the military leaders seem likely to change. However, their arguments provide Shastri with powerful support for his present policy, though he has not yet made public use of them.

Economic Considerations

10. The economic burden involved in developing a few simple fission weapons would not be great. The cost of a modest weapons program (up to the testing

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of a first device) would be \$30-40 million; indeed, if some work has already been done on weapons technology it could be considerably less.* Thereafter, the additional costs would be only \$20-30 million a year for 1-2 weapons annually. A considerably larger program—some 10-15 weapons a year—in the early 1970s would require an investment of \$50-60 million; thereafter the annual cost would be about \$60 million a year. Only a small part of these costs would be in foreign exchange.

11. The costs of a delivery system would be in addition to the above nuclear expenses; they would be mainly in foreign exchange. To develop a meaningful nuclear deterrent to Communist China, given the distance of major Chinese targets, India would at least have to procure longer range bombers than the Canberras now in its inventory. The Soviet Badger has been sold to non-Communist countries for approximately \$1.5 million per unit; it has a combat radius sufficient to reach many important areas in China. India probably believes it could acquire medium jet bombers from the USSR—or from the West—despite the political problems this could pose for the suppliers. A fleet of 20 medium jet bombers would cost about \$30 million; if costs could be spread over several years, the expense of acquiring and operating these planes would be about \$20 million a year. A similar number of heavy jet bombers, if obtainable, would probably cost three or four times as much.

12. India has so far done only limited work in missile technology. However, if New Delhi came to feel a need for missiles, it might, during the next ten years, be able to produce or purchase a missile delivery system suitable to deliver against Chinese targets the warheads it could manufacture.

13. Thus India would have to spend about \$80-120 million a year to produce 10-15 bombs annually and to acquire and operate a small jet bomber force. The costs of producing or purchasing a missile delivery system would probably be greater, though we cannot say by how much. Given the country's present and prospective economic difficulties, these expenditures—particularly the sizable foreign exchange costs of a delivery system—will be an important inhibition. However, India has increased its defense budget fourfold—to nearly \$2 billion annually—in the last eight years rather than seek accommodation with Pakistan and Communist China, and we doubt that concern over costs will be the overriding factor in the Indian decision.

The Indian Decision

14. The case for nuclear weapons has been strengthened by the war with Pakistan. However, the main political result of the conflict has been a strengthening of Shastri's position. We believe that he does not at present wish to develop

* Indian expenditures on its nuclear energy program from 1954 through 1965 will total about \$300 million. 1965 expenditures will be about \$85 million. Expenditures are expected to average about \$100 million a year for the next five years, largely in connection with the construction of power stations. Expenditures of this magnitude would represent approximately 0.2 percent of estimated gross national product.

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nuclear weapons, and that he is capable of making such a decision stick for the time being—at least so long as he continues to have the support of the key leaders of the Congress Party in this stand. His immediate course of action will probably be to keep India's diplomatic and technical options open. During this period, he will weigh the assurances, inducements, and pressures that are forthcoming from the great powers. He will almost certainly avoid commitments to international agreements which might curtail India's options, and he will support technical efforts to shorten the time between an affirmative decision and the detonation of a first device.

15. The major influence on Indian opinion will be the pace and scope of the Chinese nuclear program. As Chinese testing proceeds, we expect growing pressure in India for a weapons program. A renewal of the war—with China again supporting Pakistan—might cause New Delhi to opt for the bomb. In any event, the attractions of becoming a nuclear power in order to increase India's prestige and bargaining position in international affairs will also grow.

16. In considering the advantages of developing nuclear weapons against continued postponement of a decision, New Delhi will be concerned about the prospects for international support—especially foreign aid. The Indians probably would calculate that, despite the USSR's opposition to nuclear proliferation, Moscow would be unlikely to cut off aid to influence India's nuclear weapons policy. While New Delhi must allow for curtailment or the possible termination of US aid under certain circumstances, it probably considers that in the face of continuing Soviet aid, the West would feel obliged sooner or later to follow suit. If the US were already withholding aid in an effort to force concessions on Kashmir, threats of further penalties designed to deter India from making the bomb might not be very persuasive. Indeed, such threatened penalties might strengthen nationalist elements in the country who favor a "go-it-alone" policy on defense, and thus increase the chances of an early affirmative decision.

17. New Delhi is unlikely to accede to any non-proliferation treaty which fails to restrict Communist China's further development of nuclear weapons, and we see no chance that Peking will accept such restrictions. Indeed, if the US and the USSR sponsored a non-proliferation treaty that did not include China, the issue of whether or not India should sign might bring to a head the national debate on nuclear weapons and lead to a reversal of India's present policy. A comprehensive test ban agreement—even without China—would be more difficult for India to reject, particularly one endorsed by the US, the USSR, and the majority of the non-nuclear nations. However, India would count on an escape clause to preserve its options.

18. If India decided to proceed to construct a device and test it underground, it might claim that it was merely exploring the potentialities of nuclear explosions for peaceful purposes—an Indian Plowshare program. By this means it could obtain the prestige of having produced a nuclear device while maintaining it had neither proliferated nuclear weapons nor violated its agreement with Canada to use the CIR only for peaceful purposes. New Delhi would not expect

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this claim to be fully credited, but might believe that it would give Canada, the US and other countries an opportunity to continue assistance, even in the nuclear field.

19. The Shastri government is probably predisposed to postpone a decision. India might continue to postpone a decision for a time in return for a continued high level of US economic aid, a renewal of military assistance, and a foregoing of pressure on the Kashmir issue. Other factors that might influence India to hold to its present policy include a combination of severe domestic economic difficulties, meaningful international progress in the field of disarmament, and some Indian progress in securing outside guarantees.

20. However, we do not believe that such factors would result in India holding to its present policy indefinitely. All things considered, we believe that within the next few years New Delhi probably will detonate a nuclear device and proceed to produce nuclear weapons. It is unlikely that we would immediately learn of an Indian decision to proceed with a weapons program, but we probably would have advance indications of the first detonation.

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