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Authority NND 969023

By Wm NARA Date 9/2/11

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TELEGRAM

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9120

S E C R E T NEW DELHI 9293

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SUBJ: INDIAN NUCLEAR INTENTIONS

REF: (A) STATE 129158; (B) NEW DELHI A-20; (C) NEW DELHI 8133

1. SUMMARY. APPROPRIATE ELEMENTS OF COUNTRY TEAM CONCLUDE THAT WHILE INDIA ALREADY HAS ADVANCED NUCLEAR INFRASTRUCTURE, AND WILL CONTINUE TO REFINE ITS NUCLEAR EXPERTISE, GOI CURRENTLY HAS NO PLANS TO DEVELOP NUCLEAR WEAPONS. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE GOI HAS DECIDED TO STAGE "PEACEFUL" TEST BLAST. WEAPONS DELIVERY CAPABILITY IS CURRENTLY LIMITED TO CAPACITY OF INDIAN AIR FORCE. INDIAN EXPERT HAS NOTED INDIA HAS NO PRESENT OR FORESEEABLE CAPACITY TO DEVELOP MISSILE LAUNCH SYSTEM. END SUMMARY.

2. SINCE TRANSMITTING REF B IN JANUARY, EMBASSY HAS SEEN NO EVIDENCE OF CHANGE IN GOI POLICY NOT TO MANUFACTURE NUCLEAR WEAPONS; INDEED, PRIMIN AND DEFMIN HAVE PUBLICLY REITERATED POLICY (NEW DELHI 2288 AND 5491). NOR DO WE HAVE REASON TO AMEND ANY OTHER ASPECT OF ASSESSMENT CONTAINED REF B.

3. THERE CONTINUES TO BE SIGNIFICANT POPULAR AND ELITE INDIAN SENTIMENT IN FAVOR OF A NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM. HOWEVER, AS BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER NOTED TO POL COUNSELOR JULY 18, THERE SEEMS TO BE AWARENESS OF TOP GOI POLICY LEVELS OF MAJOR DIVERSION OF ECONOMIC RESOURCES TAILED IN NUCLEAR WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT. MOREOVER, POPULAR PRO-BOMB SENTIMENT TENDS TO DISSIPATE WHEN THE ISSUE IS RECOGNIZED AS A CHOICE BETWEEN BUTTER AND BLAST. BRITISH WICOMMER, LIKE US, BELIEVES INDIA IS "MILES FROM CROSSROADS" WHERE HARD CHOICE WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE TO PURSUE COSTLY MILITARY DETOUR FROM CURRENT OPEN OPTIONS APPROACH.

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4. IN ADDITION TO RESERVATIONS ABOUT PROHIBITIVE ECONOMIC COSTS, PRIMIN GANDHI MAY DOUBT MILITARY UTILITY OF NUCLEAR WEAPONRY (NEW DELHI 2288). MOREOVER, SHE SEEMS EMOTIONALLY SET AGAINST ANY SUCH DEVELOPMENT, AND, WE THINK, FINDS PRESENT OPEN OPTIONS POSTURE TACTICALLY USEFUL, BUT HAS NO INTENTION, AS MATTER OF PRINCIPLE AS WELL AS ECONOMICS, TO PURSUE NUCLEAR WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT AS SUCH AT THIS TIME.

5. CONDITIONS MOST LIKELY TO CHANGE MRS. GANDHI'S PUBLIC, AND PRESUMABLY PRIVATE, OPPOSITION TO NUCLEAR WEAPONRY FOR INDIA INCLUDE: (A) ASIAN PROLIFERATION, PARTICULARLY PAKISTAN; (B) CHINESE BOMB WAVING, INCLUDING PERHAPS MISSILE LAUNCHES IN INDIAN OCEAN AREA; AND (C) ECONOMIC/SOCIAL/POLITICAL DETERIORATION IN INDIA SUFFICIENTLY GREAT TO TEMPT LEADERSHIP TOWARDS PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST OF NUCLEAR EXPLOSION. HOWEVER, NONE OF THESE CONDITIONS CURRENTLY OBTAIN OR APPEARS LIKELY TO EMERGE IN NEAR TIMEFRAME.

6. COUNTRY TEAM SEES NO EVIDENCE THAT AS PART OF OPEN OPTIONS APPROACH, GOI IS CURRENTLY PREPARING "PEACEFUL" TEST TO EXPAND ITS MASTERY OF NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY. WE UNDERSTAND IT IS GENERALLY CONCEDED IN INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CIRCLES, AND CERTAINLY ON DIPLOMATIC CIRCUIT HERE, THAT INDIA HAS TECHNICAL KNOW-HOW, AND POSSIBLY MATERIALS, TO DEVELOP SIMPLE NUCLEAR DEVICE WITHIN PERIOD OF MONTHS AFTER GOI DECISION TO DO SO. (PRODUCTIVE CAPACITIES OF INDIA'S PRESENT AND PROSPECTIVE NUCLEAR STATIONS, GRADES OF PLUTONIUM BEING PRODUCED, AND EXTENT TO WHICH FACILITIES ARE COVERED BY INTERNATIONAL OR BILATERAL SAFEGUARDS, ARE WELL-KNOWN TO WASHINGTON). WE ARE AWARE FROM OVERT AND COVERT SOURCES THAT WITHIN INDIAN NUCLEAR COMMUNITY, AS ELSEWHERE IN GOI AND AMONG POLITICAL AND POPULAR ELITES, THERE IS BODY OF OPINION ARGUING THAT REGARDLESS OF ULTIMATE GOI DECISION ON WEAPONS MANUFACTURE, OPEN OPTIONS POLICY, TO BE PURPOSEFUL AND CREDIBLE, REQUIRES EARLY TEST TO EXTEND INDIA'S RANGE OF NUCLEAR KNOWLEDGE. THIS OPINION ALSO ADDUCES BENEFICIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SIDE-EFFECTS IN INDIA, AND PERHAPS ON POTENTIAL AGGRESSORS ABROAD. OTHERS IN NUCLEAR ESTABLISHMENT CONSIDER TEST BLAST AT BEST DIVERSIONARY, AND AT WORST LIKELY TO TEMPT GOI TO COMMIT SCARCE RESOURCES IN UNHEALTHY DIRECTION OF WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT. WHILE WE THINK IT POSSIBLE INDIAN SCIENTISTS MAY HAVE WORKED ON THEORETICAL PREPARATIONS FOR ASSEMBLING NUCLEAR DEVICE, WE ARE UNABLE TO DETERMINE WHETHER THEY HAVE ASSEMBLED DEVICE. WE RECALL THAT

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IN JULY 12 PRESS CONFERENCE MRS. GANDHI SAID "THERE IS NO TRUTH WHATEVER" TO CURRENT JAPANESE REPORTS INDIA WILL SOON STAGE TEST BLAST (NEW DELHI 8688).

7. FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE INDIA'S DELIVERY CAPABILITY LIES WHOLLY IN LIMITED-RANGE AIRCRAFT IN INDIAN AIR FORCE INVENTORY--CURRENTLY 4 SQUADRONS OF CANBERRAS (B-58), 8 SQUADRONS OF MIG-21 AND 6 SQUADRONS OF SU-7. DESPITE LIVELY GOI INTEREST IN GENERAL FIELD OF ROCKETRY AND SPACE, AS EVIDENCED, E.G., BY EXTENSIVE SOUNDING ROCKET PROGRAM UNDERTAKEN WITH FOREIGN COLLABORATION, INFORMED INDIANS SEEM TO RECOGNIZE THEY ARE STILL BEGINNERS. SCIATT NOTES THAT IN RECENT CALL ON NEW SPACE CHIEF DHAWAN, LATTER DESCRIBED HIS FIRST PRIORITIES AS COMMUNICATIONS AND EDUCATION, AND IN DISCUSSING REPORTS OF AN INDIAN NATIONAL SATELLITE, HINTED THAT LAUNCHING WILL BE DELAYED BEYOND RUMORED 1974, BECAUSE OF FUNDING AND SOFTWARE COMPLICATIONS, AND DIFFICULTIES IN IMPORTING REQUISITE TECHNOLOGY. ALSO, PROFESSOR M.G.K. MENON, DIRECTOR TATA INSTITUTE FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH, AND HEAD OF INDIAN SPACE PROGRAM FOR INTERIM PERIOD OF ABOUT SIX MONTHS FOLLOWING VIKRAM SARABHAL'S DEATH, TOLD BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER THREE MONTHS AGO INDIA HAS NO PRESENT OR FORESEEABLE CAPACITY TO DEVELOP MISSILE LAUNCH SYSTEM, AND COULD NOT, FOR EXAMPLE, EVEN THEORETICALLY EXPECT TO HAVE INDEPENDENT SATELLITE LAUNCH CAPABILITY FOR 8 TO 10 YEARS. COUNTRY TEAM SEES NO EVIDENCE GOI AND SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY ARE WORKING ENERGETICALLY ON PROBLEM.

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