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RELEASED IN PART 1.4(D)

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To: WULFNO, BURKSU, ROCHLIRO, MAGRAWKA, CORDENPI
Date: 11/1/96 12:05pm
Subject: PRIORITY: INDIA S NUCLEAR DEBATE--COMMENTS FROM RAJA -Forwarded

I think the Embassy underplays the potential significance of Ramanna's statement. I've seen a similar write-up in the Times of India. Supposedly many of the Indian papers picked it up. Ramanna is seen in India as the father of the Indian program. He was directly involved, some say the motivating factor behind, the 1974 test. Previously he has hinted that he thought India should test.

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While his statements don't do much for the CTBT in the short term -- he again states his opposition to it, they do a lot for the keeping India from testing effort. This is the guy that designed India's current capability saying they do not need to test to put nuclear warheads on the prithvi or agni and saying they don't need to do computer simulations or other laboratory testing. In the long term, his statements could also help the CTBT effort in that he is essentially saying that India does not need to test to keep its option -- something that many more people in India need to believe if they are going to sign it (unless of course India signs as a way of indicating its desire to abandon its nuclear option - which is much more of a real long-term possibility).

(on computer simulations, etc. Ramanna says they are only useful if you want to make "smaller nuclear weapons for specific uses with less yields" While technically inaccurate, it bolsters the case of those in India arguing that India's existing capability is deterrent enough)

What is unclear is what Ramanna means when he says India needs to "determine the philosophy of our defense." the implication in the article is that India should review its open option (ie., its ambiguous position), but he seems to answer his own question by arguing that the deterrent is sufficient as is.

I can't add much more light to Ramanna's level of influence with this government. Clearly his ties, as with most in India, are with the Congress Party. In some circles (hawkish ones - and in private) he is described as a "has been." At NGO meetings, however, when he attends, all the other hawks in the room bow to his judgements.

Ramanna is also the one putting on this meeting in India in November - the one with the hard-line group. Tom Graham (Rockefeller) is arguing that this statement is meant to be a bone to the US to indicate India's willingness to bend in some areas. I can't say if that is true or not, but the timing is interesting and at a minimum should provide for some interesting discussion AMONG the Indian participants to his meeting regarding the need for India to test.

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