

April 19, 1979

**Letter from R.J. Alston (Joint Nuclear Unit) to W.K.K. White (South Asia Dept.) and C.L.G. Mallaby (ACDD),
'South Asia - Nuclear Issues'**

Citation:

"Letter from R.J. Alston (Joint Nuclear Unit) to W.K.K. White (South Asia Dept.) and C.L.G. Mallaby (ACDD), 'South Asia - Nuclear Issues'", April 19, 1979, Wilson Center Digital Archive, The National Archive of the UK, FCO 96/952. Contributed by Malcolm Craig.
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/280716>

Summary:

This document, a letter from Robert Alston of the FCO's Joint Nuclear Unit, to a Mr. W. K. K. White and Mr. Christopher Mallaby, discusses Pakistan's burgeoning nuclear program in the context of the broader South Asian political situation.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

(350)

Mr W K K White, South Asian Dept
Mr C L G Mallaby, ACDD

(Separate copies)

men 166/307/7

RECEIVED BY REGISTRY No. 76

20 APR

FROM OFFICER	REGISTRY
INDEX	Action Taken

SOUTH ASIA - NUCLEAR ISSUES

1. There are a number of points which I think need further consideration even in advance of US comments on our proposals.
 2. Recent Pakistani expressions of willingness to sign the NPT and accept full fuel cycle safeguards if India does the same have underlined that India remains the key. The proposals we have put to the Americans have this as their starting point.
 3. Two aspects of this need further thought. We have envisaged an arrangement of limited geographical scope. Sir J Thomson has warned that the Indians, if otherwise attracted by a regional arrangement, might wish to see it extended to all South East Asia and Australasia. Of greater potential significance is the suggestion by Ambassador Smith to Sir A Parsons that the idea might be broadened out to embrace the Middle East. If it emerges that Arab States would have access to any Pakistani nuclear material or weapons this would be of major importance. So would it be if countries such as Libya or Iraq sought access to nuclear weapons by other routes. But it is not at present clear that we are really dealing with an "Arab bomb" situation. There are strong arguments against broadening our proposal in such a way that it gets caught up with the political problems of the Middle East as well as those of South Asia unless there are urgent reasons to do so. We are under no immediate requirement to comment to the Americans on this point, but I believe that we should develop a line on this point for our next bilateral meeting (at present likely to be between Mr Moberly and Mr Pickering on 11 May). I suggest action on this might be taken by ACDD.
 4. A further issue related to our proposals is whether we envisage that regional states would retain the option to have sensitive facilities - reprocessing and enrichment - on a safeguarded basis or whether we should aim to build in, for a period at least, an agreement not to have these in return for guaranteed supplies of material and services from outside. The latter is clearly preferable. In today's climate it is very difficult to envisage it being negotiable, but the hope must be that the detailed arrangement would be put together in a very different climate. Even then, however, major incentives would be needed to make it worthwhile for the Indians to give up facilities which they have already built. I suggest that JNU might consult Delhi on this between now and 11 May.
 5. We would also be prudent to bear in mind the possibility that the Americans may not like our proposals (Mr Robinson's letter to Sir A Parsons suggests that the link with CTB may well be a major problem). Sir J Thomson also reminded us that we should not overlook the two alternative routes to achieving our central aim in India. The first is whether there is any scope for a "universal arrangement, eg based on a declaration covering all
- /or

SECRET

-2-

or nearly all countries" on the basis of which India could accept all safeguards. The only possibility which I can foresee at the moment might lie in the outcome of the proposed UN conference on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy advocated by the Yugoslavs, hitherto opposed by most of the industrialised world, but still a distinct possibility for 1981 or 1982. The thought that it could be used to unlock the Indian situation is in Yugoslav minds. The most obvious snag is that it is undesirably far in the future. I do not think there is any immediate action to be taken on this but it is a factor we should have in the front of our minds in reconsidering the Yugoslav idea, which we shall have to do anyway. In the meantime JNU will mention this possibility to Delhi.

6. Sir J Thomson also pointed out that we should not write the idea of a purely Indian arrangement off as dead. Ambassador Smith told Sir A Parsons that he did not exclude Congressional acceptance of a change in the law to permit greater US flexibility over Tarapur in the context of a settlement. Although it looks improbable at the moment such a deal, coupled with progress on SALT and CTB, could still unlock the situation without the need for a regional treaty. Much will depend on the relative weight which the Indians give to the Pakistani and Chinese problems respectively. We should pursue this with Delhi, and with the Americans, one the latter's reaction to our present proposals is known.

7. A final idea relevant to the overall problem is the approach advocated to the Embassy in Washington by Mr Despres for an approach based on an interlinked series of negotiations to resolve the frontier problems which symbolise the tension between States in the area. This seems an enormously complex objective. It would be helpful to know whether SAD and FED see any possibility that the Americans could get such a process under way.

8. In parallel with this we have the task of refining our earlier work on the specific Pakistan centrifuge problems for incoming Ministers. The background has changed significantly in the past month. Regional political considerations have now clearly emerged as a major factor in American thinking. There is also a suggestion that some Americans may have in mind the aim of getting Pakistani sites to replace those in Iran for SALT verification purposes. The issue has now become public, but international reaction has been muted. The publicity has been on the basis of the existence of an unsafeguarded sensitive facility rather than an actual weapons programme. The Americans have asked the French, Germans, Canadians, Japanese and ourselves to reinforce their general concern with the Pakistanis (the Australians have also done this on their own initiative). Present US tactics are to get the Pakistanis to freeze their programme at its present level; to apply safeguards to their reprocessing activities, and to reiterate their assurances about no weapons development. We are not yet clear on what the Americans are offering in return. The lifting of the Symington amendment is clearly one point. It seems likely that they are also offering to discuss other incentives in the fields of security and nuclear cooperation.

/9.

SECRET

-3-

9. Against this current background I suggest that there are a number of points on which we need to develop our own thinking both within the FCO and interdepartmentally. When you have had a chance to consider this minute perhaps we could meet briefly to run through them, and see if there are others I have overlooked.
- (a) The implication of the present US approach is that the existing facilities, safeguarded in some way, could remain, eg that they will not try to insist on dismantling them. Do we agree?
 - (b) There seems little disposition to deploy pressures at this stage beyond those required by US law. (The Australians have made the point orally and in very general terms that continuation of the centrifuge programme could affect relations.) This attitude to pressures seems realistic in the light of our conclusions. Need we seek to go further in our own next presentation to Ministers?
 - (c) It might on the other hand be worth reviewing our own "incentive" options. We seem agreed that we should not try to buy the Pakistanis off, eg by conditional offers of increased aid. But is there anything we can say about security assurances following Pakistan's withdrawal from Cento, willingness to sell conventional arms or equipment for a safeguarded civil nuclear programme, or our approach to aid, which could reinforce American incentives?
 - (d) The Americans have now taken the initiative over diplomatic action. In addition to the Western Governments mentioned above they are trying to engage both the Chinese and the Saudis. We have suggested that they should speak to the Russians. Further consultation with them will be needed before we can put more specific recommendations on diplomatic action to Ministers. In the meantime we have not hitherto drawn our own posts in Jedda and Peking into discussion on this subject. There could be value in doing so.
 - (e) Do we accept the tactical wisdom of the American decision to present the problem as one of an unsafeguarded facility rather than one of a weapons programme? If so the question of an orchestrated international condemnation of Pakistan does not arise for the moment.
 - (f) We should consider whether to recommend to Ministers any initiative with NSG partners seeking a general embargo on all nuclear supplies to Pakistan whilst she has an unsafeguarded sensitive facility, or a unilateral decision in the same sense. This position will be required of the Americans by law. It is already Canadian policy. On the other hand the French and the Germans in particular will be cautious about any such position because of the parallel

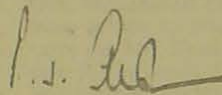
/with

SECRET

-4-

with South Africa. Such a move would be more effective if agreed by all NSG members, but nothing precludes us, as part of our non-proliferation policy, from acting unilaterally.

10. Finally - and this is essentially something for SAD - I feel that we shall need to set out more clearly for incoming Ministers our own assessment of the right balance between non-proliferation factors, and other regional political considerations, in the handling of this issue with the Pakistanis. It may also be useful at the same time to take a view on likely internal political developments in Pakistan and how these might affect receptiveness to the idea of turning away from a weapons programme.



R J Alston
Joint Nuclear Unit

19 April 1979

cc: Mr Moberly o/r
Sir C Rose (Cabinet Office)

SECRET