March 9, 1972

State Department cable 40378 to US Embassy Ottawa, 'Indian Nuclear Intentions'

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Summary:

During a discussion with the Canadian embassy counselor, U.S. country desk director David Schneider opined that Indian was unlikely to test a device in the “near future” but he wanted Ottawa’s prognosis. Schneider was also interested in whether the Soviets, with their close relationship with India, might be able to use their influence to “deter” a test. If India tested, the U.S. could respond with a “strong statement,” but whether “punitive” measures would be taken would depend on whether the test “violated existing agreements.” In October 1970, the State Department had cautioned the Indians that a “peaceful nuclear explosion” was indistinguishable from a weapons test and that the test of a nuclear device would be incompatible with U.S.-Indian nuclear assistance agreements.

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SUBJ: Indian Nuclear Intentions on South Asia situation

1. In course of routine conversation with Canadian Counselor Seymour, India Country Director Schneider said he wished to compare notes informally on subject Indian nuclear intentions. Schneider began by noting that in December 1970 US and Canada had exchanged assessments of Indian nuclear program and had concluded that while India could construct a primitive device, we had no evidence it had taken decision to do so. Earlier this year USG had received indications that issue of nuclear weapons program was again a live one within GOI and that it might be giving serious consideration to nuclear detonation for peaceful purposes. Consequently we had reviewed information available to us and had taken note of categoric public

DRAFTED BY:	DRAFTING DATE	TEL. EXT.	APPROVED BY:
NEA/INC:ACEOuainton/emg	3/7/72	21289	NEA/INC - Mr. Schneider

CLEARANCES:
NEA - Mr. Van Hollen
PM/AE - Mr. XXXXXXXXXX Hanydside
S/S - Mr. Miller
EUR/RPM - Mr. Humphreys
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statements by PM Gandhi in Bombay and DefMin Ram in Calcutta ~~XXXXXXX~~ denying Indian intention to develop nuclear weapons. Schneider said that from our review we had concluded that an Indian nuclear test in near future was unlikely, although GOI may have taken preliminary steps to develop nuclear weapons. In our view Indians have capability to assemble one or more nuclear devices using plutonium from ~~XXX~~ CIRUS reactor at Trombay, but we have no evidence they have elected to do so.

2. Schneider said USG would be interested in having current GOC assessment of Indian intentions and thoughts about steps which might be taken to deter Indian decision and about actions we might take in event India went nuclear. In particular, we wondered whether in light of strong Soviet commitment to non-proliferation there might be some way to get USSR to use its influence. Schneider noted that we had heard that ~~XXXXX~~ Lauren Grey, head of Canadian Atomic Energy program, had recently

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visited India. He understood Embassy Ottawa would be getting in touch with GOC for briefing on his visit and we would appreciate anything which Canadian Embassy in Washington could pass on as well.

3. Schneider said that in event India went nuclear we would anticipate making strong statement of our concern. We would also look carefully at source of fissionable material used for nuclear explosion to determine whether existing agreements had been violated before deciding on any punitive steps. We intend to continue to make clear to Indians political and economic effects of nuclear weapons program and our view that "peaceful uses of nuclear energy" does not extend to peaceful nuclear explosion. Schneider noted we had made clear to Indians in past that nuclear explosions were indistinguishable from weapons tests. He cited November 16, 1970 aide memoire in which USG had stated to GOI it would consider it incompatible with

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existing US-Indian agreements for American nuclear assistance to be employed in development of peaceful nuclear explosion devices. Schneider noted that since public justification for Indian test would probably be in terms of peaceful uses, it was important that we and other countries committed to non-proliferation maintain a consistent position on indistinguishability of PNEs and nuclear weapons tests.

4. Seymour expressed appreciation for this review of US position and said he would seek answer to our questions from Ottawa. He said he understood that there was possibility of JIC study on Indian nuclear intentions. He noted that in past GOC had expressed strongly to Indians GOC hope that they would take no steps in violation of agreements with Canada.

5. Conversation with Seymour held prior ~~XXX~~ to receipt Ottawa's 0391 (NOTAL). Department continues to be interested in GOC thoughts on steps which might be taken re Indian nuclear ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ decision. END

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