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ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301



INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

4 FEB 1972

Refer to: I-20931/72

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Strategic Weapons in Near East, South Asia Area

Several recent intelligence reports from sources in India and elsewhere indicate that the Indians may plan to explode a nuclear device in the near future. Whether the test is of a weapon or, as has been suggested, under the guise of "peaceful application," it would set off a chain reaction that would be felt throughout West Asia.

India for some time has possessed the capability to produce nuclear weapons within a short period after any decision to move forward on a weapons program. Although we estimate the Indians would not be able to develop sophisticated delivery systems (missiles/high performance aircraft) for some 6-10 years, the military implication of such a program could not be missed by India's neighbors. The Indian leadership doubtless recognizes that any test would tarnish the country's image abroad, but it may believe that the advantages of "going nuclear" before the President's trip to Peking and in conjunction with peace negotiations with Pakistan merit the risk.

Implications for the Near East and South Asia would be far reaching. Pakistan might opt to compete, with disastrous consequences for its already strained economy; more important, China might exploit the situation to secure a firm position on the subcontinent and to dabble in the Persian Gulf. The Shah of Iran already has indicated that an Indian decision to develop nuclear weapons would leave him no alternative but to follow suit despite his already massive military program. Such a move could cripple Iran's economic development and further threaten the country's internal stability. The reaction of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the Arab States of the Gulf is predictable. Finally, Israel could regard the Indian test a sufficient justification to surface its own nuclear program, adding a new dimension to the Arab-Israeli question, and opening new avenues for Soviet and Chinese penetration of the Arab world. The consequences of such a move for US interests -- economic, military, and political -- in the area and globally are incalculable.

I see little that we can do at this time to affect this situation. Nevertheless, we are continuing to study the problem and plan to forward to you, if and when India does go nuclear, various proposals for ways to minimize the impact of an Indian weapons program both on the states of the area and on US relations with those states.

G. Warren

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son - We might pressure USSR to control Indian nuclear activities.

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