Annexe 86

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

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DEF 12-1 INDIA
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FILE DESIGNATION

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A-256. SECRET

NO. HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Amembassy, NEW DELHI

FROM : DEPARTMENT OF STATE DATE: MAR 29 4 42 PM '66

SUBJECT : Possible Indian Nuclear Weapons Development

REF :

1966 MAR 29 PM 5 51

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The information in this airgram is controlled NO FOREIGN DISSEM.

Although there is no evidence that India has decided to develop nuclear weapons, a nuclear device could probably be ready for testing within a year following such a decision. India possesses all the basic facilities necessary to produce plutonium; its research and nuclear power programs are small-scale but well advanced; it has uranium metal, fuel element fabrication facilities, and a heavy water plant; and the capacity of the recently completed plutonium separation plant (30 tons of fuel annually) apparently exceeds present requirements.

In the event of a decision to develop nuclear weapons, construction of a test site would probably be started well ahead of the anticipated date of the initial test. As a signatory of the Limited Test Ban Treaty, India would presumably test underground. If so, construction of the test site would require tunneling or extensive drilling operations. Nuclear scientists and engineers and possibly some military personnel would be involved.

The Canada-India reactor is capable of producing enough plutonium for one or two nominal-yield weapons annually, although India has agreements with both Canada and the United States to employ the reactor for peaceful purposes only. The fuel has reportedly been removed from the reactor after an average burnup of only 450-600 MWD/t, which is significantly lower than the 900 MWD/t burnup for which the reactor was designed. While this circumstance alone does not necessarily indicate that a decision

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has been made to develop nuclear weapons, it hints strongly that suitable material is being produced to permit the rapid implementation of such a decision.

Electronic neutron generators and high-quality detonators--components likely to be used in the first Indian nuclear device--are readily available on the open market in Western Europe. The testing of high-explosive shapes, a necessary step toward the development of a nuclear weapon, would probably be carried out over a period of several months.

The Embassy is requested to report any of the following information on this subject which may become available:

1. Signs of activity in remote areas which might portend the construction of a nuclear test site.

2. Indications that nuclear-associated research facilities are being established surreptitiously or that security is being tightened at existing facilities.

3. Evidence of continued operation of the Canada-India reactor at Trombay to produce relatively "clean" plutonium.

4. Procurement or development by India of small electronic neutron generators and high-quality, electrically-initiated, high-explosive detonators.

5. Testing of highly instrumented high-explosive shapes or sections. Any reporting which may prove feasible in response to this requirement should cite SICR No. D-ST2-13788. Because of the high collection priority accorded this subject, even tenuous indications of nuclear weapons activity should be reported.

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