



THE NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT

THE NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT

WORKING PAPER SERIES

Christian F. Ostermann, Leopoldo Nuti, and Evan Pikulski
Series Editors

1. **The Elephant in the Room**
The Soviet Union and India's Nuclear Program, 1967–89
Balazs Szalontai
2. **Between Aid and Restriction**
Changing Soviet Policies toward China's Nuclear Weapons Program 1954–60
Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia
3. **From the Peaceful to the Nuclear**

11. Waiting for the Bomb
PN Haksar and India's Nuclear Policy in the 1960s
Yogesh Joshi

Waiting for the Bomb:

Waiting for the Bomb:

PN Haksar and India's Nuclear Policy in the 1960s

Yogesh Joshi¹

On December, 9, 2016, *The National Interest (TNI)* published an article by Dr. Vivek Prahladan titled "The Recent Declassification of India's Secret 'Long Telegram' Shows Why It Went

on the complex decision-making within the Indian government related to the nuclear threat from China and the need to have a nuclear weapons program. Until 1970, the Indian government remained undecided and in fact argued against going nuclear. The conclusion summarizes the key findings of this paper, but also looks at the dangers and opportunities for scholarship offered by the continuous declassification of documents in India.

PN Haksar: A Profile

Parmeshwar Narain Haksar was, in the words of J.N. Dixit, India's former Foreign Secretary and National Security Advisor, one of the most important "behind-the-scenes operators" among the makers of modern Indian foreign policy.¹² Born on September 4, 1913 in a Kashmiri pandit family, he was educated both in India and the United Kingdom. The most important intellectual influences in Haksar's life during his student years in the UK were Krishna Menon and Rajni Palme Dutt.¹³ Menon, who later became a close aid of Prime Minister Nehru, actively pursued India's independence through an organization called the India League in 1930s.¹⁴ Dutt, a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, was thoroughly Marxist. In this way, Haksar's student life was shaped both by India's freedom movement and by Marxist thought.¹⁵ These influences, as Subrata Bannerjee argues, had "brought [Haksar] to Marxism and gave him a

¹² JN Dixit, *Makers of India's Foreign Policy: From Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Yashwant Sinha* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2004), p. 167. Also, see, HY Sharada Prasad,

world outlook and a methodology of social analysis that remained a source of inspiration all his life and informed his concept of plural humanism and a humane society.”¹⁶

Haksar joined the Indian Foreign Service as an Officer on Special Duty (OSD) in 1947. From the word “go,” Haksar was in the thick of India’s Cold War diplomacy. His first big assignment came in early 1948 as a member of the Indian delegation to the United Nations Security Council on the Kashmir question. As Nehru wrote Lord Mountbatten on 28 February 1948 that, among stalwarts like Gopalaswami Ayyangar and Girija Shankar Bajpai, “there is another very intelligent and bright young man named PN Haksar whom we sent with the delegation.”¹⁷ Thereafter, he moved to London in May 1948, where he assisted India’s High Commissioner Krishna Menon until 1952. These “four years of apprenticeship,” as Haksar wrote upon Menon’s death in October 1974, taught him that “in diplomacy the most important thing was courage, a non-negotiable sense of dedication to the interests of one’s country and *capacity to see*

1965). In Vienna, Haksar represented India at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In 1965, he was posted to London as India's Deputy High Commissioner.

Haksar's important break came in 1966, when Indira Gandhi appointed him Secretary in the Prime Minister's Secretariat. Haksar's value was recognized by Indira Gandhi at a very critical period in her young Prime Ministership. After the sudden death of Prime Minister Shastri in January 1966, Gandhi had taken over the reins of the Indian National Congress and had become India's Prime Minister. The opposition within Congress was substantial and the domestic situation precarious. As Indira had told veteran journalist Inder Malhotra, food and economic aid from the West had become a necessity.¹⁹ Securing this aid was the principal objective of her April 1966 tour of the United States. Yet Western assistance came with conditions: both the IMF and the World Bank demanded the opening of the Indian economy as a prerequisite for economic aid, including devaluation of the Indian rupee. Her close group of advisors, which included Principal Secretary L.K. Jha (who was also Principal Secretary to Prime Minister Shastri), advised Indira to not only accede to some of these demands, but also suggested adoption of a generally pro-western foreign policy (for example, by cutting down on India's criticisms of the war in Vietnam).²⁰

In June 1966, Prime Minister Gandhi announced a 35-percent devaluation of the rupee. The backlash from left-leaning elements of the Congress was severe. The Congress Party criticized its own government and passed a resolution against devaluation—public opinion became as aroused as it was during the 1962 war with China. As Katherine Frank argues, “within months of becoming the Prime Minister, Indira had managed to make herself far more unpopular

¹⁹ Malhotra, *Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography*, p. 95; Frank,

than Shastri had ever been.”²¹

objected to the timing of the test, not its consequences. As Ramanna explains, “[Haksar] was of the view that we should wait for election time, some six months later, to be able to use it to defeat the opposition parties.”³⁶ For Haksar, Indira’s principal strategist, politics was always in command.

The mid-1970s saw Haksar’s gradual banishment by Prime Minister Gandhi, first because of his criticisms of the Emergency, and even more so because Haksar was fearful of how Sanjay Gandhi, Indira Gandhi’s son, was distorting her political career and legacy.³⁷ Haksar was, in fact, at the “receiving end of much harassment by the emergency regime.”³⁸ He was first shifted to the Planning Commission, where he was Deputy Chairman for two years. He was also a member of the United Nations Civil Service Commission between 1975 and 1980. Later, Haksar took up writing and published and edited a number of books on domestic and foreign policy, including a book edited

daughter Nandita Haksar suggested in 2004, died “a broken man” in 1998 due to two reasons: “one was the collapse of the Soviet Union and secondly [because of] the Kashmir situation.”⁴¹

For many reasons, then, Haksar's contributions to India's foreign and security policies are an important area of study. Because of Haksar's role in Prime Minister Gandhi's foreign and security policy, the provenance of the “long telegram” is critical to understanding India's nuclear history.

Misattribution of the “Long Telegram” to PN Haksar

While *TNI* did not provide a citation for the “long telegram,” the source is referenced in the author's book *The Nation Declassified: India and the Cold War World*, published during 2016.⁴²

In Prahladan's book, the “long telegram” is extensively quoted from and summarized between pages 162–166 under a subtitle, “PN Haksar 1968–69 *Invalid Source Specified [emphasis added]*.” The correct archival source is in fact “Subject File 290, PN Haksar Papers (IIIrd Installment)” at the Nehru Memori

wi0

who served in the Indian government. Officially declassified documents are housed in the National Archives of India. Private papers may therefore contain government documents, but by their very nature they also contain a lot of other items, including personal papers, letters, unpublished writings (including the unpublished work of others shared with Haksar), and sometimes unattributable documents. Therefore, the Haksar Papers at NMML papers contain anything and everything written on paper, by him or others, found at his home in 1998.

All evidence suggests that the “long telegram” was not written by PN Haksar. In fact, the “long telegram” found in File No. 290 echoes conservative foreign policy ideas offered by right-wing domestic parties which were critical of Indira Gandhi’s foreign policy during this period. It appears to be a draft book manuscript on India’s foreign relations which may have been given to Haksar (we do not know by whom). The “long telegram” is just one part of this file, which also has “chapters” on Pakistan, Russia, US, Australia, New Zealand and China. There is no obvious way it can be attributed to Haksar, the Prime Minister's Secretariat, or the Indian Government, as it lacks signatures or other insignia. The papers also lack classification markings (immediate, confidential, secret, or top secret), as is the norm for Indian government documents. It has no imprimatur for a government department, the Prime Minister’s Secretariat or otherwise. The date “1968” given by *TNI* is just the author’s approximation—these papers are undated. Since 2009, eleven scholars (including myself) have looked at this file.⁴³ No one, besides Dr. Prahladan, has used it in any scholarship.⁴⁴ File No. 290 is actually a continuation of four files (289, 290, 291, and 292) in Transcript Number III, PN Haksar papers.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the NMML has not even classified these under ‘Prime Minister’s Secretariat’ in their transcript list.

⁴³ At least 10 other scholars have seen this file since September 2009. See, NMML, “Researcher’s Log Book”, Subject File No. 290, PN Haksar Papers (IIIrd Installment).

⁴⁴ NMML, PN Haksar Transcript List (IIIrd Installment), p. 164.

⁴⁵ NMML, PN Haksar Transcript List (IIIrd Installment), p. 164.

been quoted very selectively. This is how foreign-policy prescriptions, including those on nuclear matters in Haksar's unattributable "long telegram," appear:

- a) "Non-alignment should continue as the initial premise of this Foreign Policy in the sense that military alliance with either Russia or America or both should be avoided as serving, at this stage of India's development, no real national purpose;
- b) To the extent that foreign powers may be interested in maintaining India's integrity as a state and the integrity of her Himalayan frontiers with China, India's own ability to fight in defence of these instruments will more surely influence Moscow or Washington, or both, than any open engagement with either or both of these powers seeking this protection which, as explained in the *chapter on nuclear arms for India* [emphasis added] is wholly unreliable.⁴⁹
- c) It is certain that India must not surrender her nuclear options in her vital national interests;
- d) A primary aim of Indian Foreign Policy should be take steps to keep open and indestructible the avenues which permit this great country, with a great history and vast human and natural resources, to attain progressively a position of real dignity, power and authority in the comity of nations; and this certainly involves the following measures taken in the shortest possible span of time:
 - 1) The development simultaneously of submarine driven by nuclear power fitted out to carry nuclear missiles as this would extend and re-inforce the scope and effect of India's military and, by implication, political authority in South and South East Asia and indeed, *further afield eventually*;
 - 2) This nuclear arms programme should be based on adequate stock-piling of those instruments and machineries which, *as Russia and America advance their common policy towards nuclear non-proliferation*, will be difficult to import from abroad increasingly;

⁴⁹ This "chapter" is available in File No. 292 which the author of the "long telegram" has not seen. Towards the end of this chapter in the conclusion, it is more than evident that these random papers are part of a book: "the areas where advantageous collaboration between China, Japan and India is possible are elaborated in the *final chapter of this book*. See NMML, unattributable and undated, "India and Nuclear Arms," Subject File 292, PN Haksar Papers (IIIrd Installment).

- 3) All Indian metallurgists, physicists and others who could be really useful in developing a nuclear arms programme for India and, attracted by better material and other conditions abroad, are working in foreign countries, should be called back and integrated with the establishments controlled by the Indian atomic energy Commission at high rates of pay and with every incentive available to them;
- 4) Every attempt should be made in *conditions of assured secrecy* to sound the Japanese about collaboration in these fields.”⁵⁰

The note is clearly written by a nuclear hawk. Unlike the claim in *The National Interest* article over how the “long telegram” supports India’s nuclear doctrine of Credible Minimum Deterrence vis-a-vis the revisionist comments recently made by Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar, the “long telegram” is proposing a *touz azimuths* nuclear-force structure, which to date is only prescribed by a handful of Indian strategists and has been completely ignored by successive governments since 1998, irrespective of their political ideology.⁵¹

Second, points three and five indicate that Haksar was inclined toward nuclear proliferation—the implication here is that India’s nuclear-energy program between 1968 and 1974 was therefore just a façade for its weapons program. If extrapolated, it also translates to the fact that all peaceful nuclear programs that India had with US and Canadian cooperation between 1968 and 1974 were geared towards nuclear proliferation. One can only wonder how many Indian nuclear scientists, diplomats, and other decision-makers would agree with this idea. It also belies the most important attribute of India’s nuclear program: Its quest for self-reliance and its unmatched record on nuclear non-proliferation even after the 1974 tests, US’ inability to provide

⁵⁰ NMML, Unattributable and undated, Subject File 290, PN Haksar Papers (IIIrd Installment). Emphasis added.

⁵¹ Prahladan, woTc-.00018

fuel for the Tarapur reactor in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and targeting of the Indian nuclear and space program in the decades following.

Third, if this “long telegram” was sent by PN Haksar to Indira Gandhi, it would also sabotage the foundations of Indian foreign policy in the 1960s and 1970s. There are a total of 15 policy prescriptions (points ‘a’ through ‘o’).⁵² For the want of space, the rest can only be summarized here:

- (e) Indian arms industry should be modernised;
- (f) Cooperation with Japan on heavy-defense industries;
- (g) Development of computers and allied industries;
- (h) Cooperation with Romania and Yugoslavia;
- (i) Cooperation with “no inhibitions whatever about the Hitlerian past of Germany”;
- (j) Provide “free” military training to South, South East Asian, West Asian and African countries;
- (k) Efforts to be made with the United Nations for freeing Africa from the “grip of settlers of foreign origin”;
- (l) Cooperation with Britain for “mutual advantage (even) when that country pursues increasingly a policy of direct and indirect support for the lands of apartheid”;
- (m) Deal with African countries on the “yardstick of

If one instead compares the “long telegram” with arguments from right-wing political parties like the Jan Sangh and the Swatantra between 1967 and 1970, uncanny similarities appear. Broadly, Prahladan argues that the “long telegram” was a response to two major factors: the USSR supplying military equipment to Pakistan in 1968 and the USSR-Soviet detente resulting in the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Between 1967 and 1970, the writings of Jan Sangh and Swatantra ideologues and sympathizers—including HM Patel, Balraj Madhok, Deen Dayal Upadhaya, KR Malkani, Pilo Mody, MR Pai, MR Masani, Subramaniam Swamy, Major Ranjith Singh, ML Sondhi, Prince Dev Prasad Ghosh, and Dr. G.K Mukherjee, among others—continuously attacked Indira Gandhi’s foreign policy on two counts: softening of the Soviet attitude towards Pakistan, and the detente between the two superpowers that resulted in the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).⁵³⁵⁴

⁵³ A good summary of these can be found in Mohammed Ali Kishore, *Jana Sangh and India's Foreign Policy*, (New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1969); For Swatantra Party see, H.L. Erdman, *The Swatantra Party and Indian Conservatism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967). For original writings see, H.M Patel, “India’s Defence Preparedness,” Swatantra Souvenir (Fifth Annual Convention, Bhubaneshwar), 5and 6 October 1968, p. 44–47, p. 38–40; Pilo Mody, “India’s Foreign Policy,” Swatantra Souvenir (Fifth Annual Convention, Bhubaneshwar), 5and 6 October 1968, p. 44–47; M.R. Pai, “India’s Foreign Policy: The Need for Reappraisal,” Swatantra Souvenir (Fifth Annual Convention, Bhubaneshwar), 5and 6 October 1968, p. 168–169; Deen Dayal Upadyaya, “Fundamentals of a War economy,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of Mid-Term elections, 1971), pp. 15–20; K. R. Malkani, “How Jana Sangh looks at Russia and America,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of Mid-Term elections, 1971), pp. 56–59; Ram Singh, “India: a country without friends,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of Mid-Term elections, 1971), pp.139–141; M.L. Sondhi, “Wanted: A National Foreign Policy,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of the 14th Annual Session of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Calicut, December 1967), pp. 47–53; K.R. Malkani, “How we look at the Middle East,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of the 14th Annual Session of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, Calicut, December 1967), pp. 63–65; Balraj Madhok, “India’s Unity,” Jana-Deep Souvenir (A Publication brought out on the occasion of the 15th Anth m02 0 0 10.02[(p)6(Souvenir07(.9(r

issue of NPT, Haksar's advice to Indira Gandhi was radically different from those contained in the long telegram.

On 13 July, 1968, PN Haksar wrote a top-secret memo to Prime Minister Gandhi over the ruckus created by the Jan Sangh and Swatantra Party related to the shipment of Soviet military supplies to Pakistan.⁵⁸ The Soviet decision to provide military assistance to Pakistan, as Haksar argued, raised two important issues for the Gandhi government: "one in the field of our relations with the USSR and the other in the domestic field. It is the later which is of immediate consequence." While accepting that the Soviet decision was "erroneous and misguided," he argued that Indo-Soviet relations are "many-sided and complex." If this bilateral relationship could be seen on a "balance sheet of credits and debits," the Soviet decision on military supplies fell on the "debit side." However, in Haksar's view, the "overall situation remains favourable" to India. Haksar opined that India has been "accustomed all these years to have a sort of favourable exclusiveness in our relations with the USSR which we did not have in our relations with any other country." But there is nothing much India could do about the changing attitude of the

USSR could stand by and watch. The danger to both these powers from a nuclear China which has subjugated India, would be too tremendous for them to face.⁶²

Haksar's own views on detente were remarkably similar. In July 1967, he sent a long note to Prime Minister Gandhi on foreign policy. Argued in a question-and-answer format, Haksar addresses the general question of India's interests head-on. To answer the question of what India's interests are, he explains:

First and foremost, our interest is to safeguard the integrity, sovereignty and independence of our country. Secondly, our interest is to create such conditions which maximise the possibility of the well-being of our people which means social, economic and cultural developments of the country as a whole. We recognise that in the present day world, constituted as it is, the many sided reconstruction of our country is not possible without international peace. That is why we have absolute interest in the maintenance of international peace.⁶³

References to 'international peace' here are not proclamations of a peacenik. In fact, as he explains to Indira Gandhi, central to his arguments on attainment of India's national interests were factors such as "the strength of the economy," "capacity of our armed forces," and "on the balance of power in the world."⁶⁴ But such general support for detente did not translate into surrender of India's national interests, specifically in relation to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). As he pointed out:

We must not beguile ourselves with the thought that the mere signing of the Non-proliferation treaty would produce the permanent basis for international detente. We are, of course, quite clear in our mind and we have stated in numerous occasions that we remain committed to the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes only. Our record is clear and everyo14s.92nsenefor phimelvf-5.91())TJT:0008 Tc[(rn

ourselves that by signing a Non-Proliferation Treaty, we would solve the problem of our security. That problem will remain with us irrespective of the signing of the treaty.⁶⁵

The ‘problem’ was in fact China, which clearly would not have signed the treaty and even if a party to the treaty, would have been a nuclear power. In his instructions to India’s Permanent Representative to the UN on the Non-Proliferation Treaty in April 1968, Haksar explained, “We cannot fail to notice that out of the five nuclear weapons powers, two will not be signatories to it. This might not have mattered but for the fact that one of the non-signatories is our neighbour, namely, China, who is full of hostile intentions towards our country.”⁶⁶ Haksar’s approach to the Non-Proliferation Treaty was to secure India’s national interests by not signing the NPT while ensuring that the spirit of detente symbolized by the treaty continued unabated. His instructions to India’s Permanent Representative at the UN are illustrative of this approach: “avoid polemical tone against the nuclear powers”; mention the Chinese threat but that “we should neither overplay that threat nor underplay it”; “should not mention Pakistan”; “stress the importance of the nuclear energy for economic and social development of the country”; “mention that our policy as hitherto continues to be to refrain from doing anything which would escalate the nuclear arms race”; vote in favour of any proposals “for improving the draft treaty” on disarmament; emphasize “security assurances” for all non-nuclear weapon states and object to any linkage of such assurances with the NPT and finally “on the question of the time table for conclusion of the Non-proliferation treaty, we should not spearhead any move for delay and postponement.”⁶⁷ The Indian approach towards the NPT, as illustrated by the original Haksar papers, is defined by India’s interests but also by the limits of its power. Haksar’s approach to

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶ NMML, “Instructions to India’s Representative to UN on Non-proliferation Treaty,” 20 April 1968 (Top Secret), PN Haksar Papers (I&II Installment), Subject File. No. 35.

⁶⁷Ibid.

the NPT is guided by India's national interests but also by the need to maintain an international political environment where China could be isolated, rather than being courted by the major powers. For these objectives, detente was an essential condition.

India's Nuclear Policy in the 1960s

When the only tool one has is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. In the *TNI* article (and also in the book, *The Nation Declassified*), two other important documents are used to substantiate Haksar's non-existent "long telegram": KR Narayanan's November 1964 memo (repeated in April 1970) and Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) documents from April 1970. Through very selectively quoting these documents, Prahladan tries to create additional legitimacy for Haksar's misattributed "long telegram." Yet closer examination of these documents prove that the "long telegram" was not Haksar's creation. When read with additional documentation from the NMML and the National Archives of India, they reflect the complexity of the Prime Minister's Secretariat and in the Ministry of External Affairs nuclear policy in the 1960s.

Narayanan's November 1964 Note

KR Narayanan's note entitled "India and the Chinese Bomb" of 26 November 1964, can be considered the most intellectually stimulating assessment of the Chinese nuclear threat and its consequences for India.⁶⁸ The note was prepared by KR Narayanan in his capacity as the Director of the China Division in

Foremost in Narayanan's thoughts was the impact of a Chinese nuclear bomb on the Indian body-politic. As he explained, "In the hands of militant communist power like China the atom bomb has a special revolutionary significance." It will demonstrate the "efficacy and superiority of the Chinese social system" and the "revolutionary philosophy and methods preached by the Chinese leaders" to Indian masses. This "material progress" made by China would certainly affect the "thinking of the people of India" and will exert a "demoralising influence on the mass mind of India." For Narayanan, it was a shot in the arm of the "left-wing of the CPI (Communist Party of India)," which had celebrated China's nuclear test as an example of "spectacular progress" made by "socialist China" vis-a-vis what they thought was "capitalist India." Disruptive forces like the Nagas would become "more audacious" and many such "fissiparous and revolutionary developments will come to the fore." For Narayanan, India's internal cohesion was at stake.

If China's atom bomb was a blow to India's internal body-politic, it was also to have a ripple effect on Asia and Africa where India was hitherto seen as an example of a non-aligned power. He compared China's nuclear achievement with the "victory of Japan over Russia" in 1905 and argued that Afro-Asian countries' mute responses to a Chinese nuclear test should be seen as a celebration of China's achievement: "from a strictly moral point of view these countries do not consider China as an international leper because it has exploded a bomb." The fear was that in the shadow of this scientific achievement, Asian countries would start hitching their wagons to the Chinese dragon rather than balancing it.

Beyond Afro-Asia, Narayanan surmised, the effect would be palpable: henceforth, the US would take "China seriously", Western Europe would "move closer to China," and the other communist countries could not "condemn a major scientific achievement which emphasises the

efficacy of the socialist system.” The sum of all fears was the impending accommodation of China by the international community: “the majority of nations now feel that if it was illogical and unfair in the past to have kept China out of the international community, it would be positively dangerous to keep her out any longer now that she has a nuclear bomb.” Irrespective of the sophistication of the Chinese nuclear arsenal, “the world will have to treat China as a member of the so-called nuclear club.”

China's nuclear bomb was not only significant for internal politics in India and its foreign relations—it also had military consequences. Narayanan argued that nuclear weapons, like conventional arms, are part of the deadly apparatus of power in international politics. They are powerful, even when they are not used, and in the case of nuclear weapons they are politically useful only if they are not used.”

Narayanan's writings clearly point to an interpretation that nuclear weapons were essentially “political” in nature and not designed to fight wars. However, Narayanan also calibrates his assessment on the immediate military consequences of the Chinese bomb for India when he argues, “while [the Chinese nuclear bomb] is not a military factor yet, it will be an important factor 10–20 years when China has developed a stockpile and delivery system.” Even then, in Narayanan's assessment, India could not ignore the immediate military consequences as “Peking's bomb is not a tactical weapon, but a strategic instrument.” First, it would have had an impact on the border conflict and its resolution between India and China. Second, it would encourage China to “indulge with impunity in infiltration and subversion” both in NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency, now the state of Arunachal Pradesh) and Himalayan kingdoms (Bhutan and Nepal). Last, given India's “limited military and diplomatic initiative,” one alternative to

India's own bomb would be "subordinate friendship with China on Burmese-Cambodian pattern"; other being "an open military reliance on the United States."

In Narayanan's analysis, therefore, a Chinese nuclear weapon was a "crisis in India's national destiny." He parses a number of strategic choices India could pursue, such as "agree to co-exist with China on Chinese terms"; "seek alliances and nuclear protection from the United States"; "organise world public opinion against China and to work for Disarmament," but comes to the conclusion that the only real alternative India possessed was to make its "own nuclear

“Rejected at the top” is the most important information the US Embassy assessment provides. Evidence from the Indian archives shows that Narayanan knew his memo was rejected. In April 1970, as the Chinese sent their first satellite into orbit, Narayanan submitted his 1964 memo for reconsideration. By now, Narayanan was Director of the Policy Planning Division (PPD) of the MEA. In his cover letter of 28 April 1970, which also contained the 1964 memo, he writes:

importance of indigenous plants cannot be underlined more than now. It is already late but still we can retrieve the lost ground.⁷²

Verma's notes point us to the most important factor in any nuclear weapons program: its capacity to produce fissile material. This is the most understudied dimension of India's nuclear program, and for most obvious reasons—the lack of information. Even with the declassified documents, one can only surmise, but most evidence points in the direction that India's nuclear capabilities were not so robust.

to these considerations because this particular issue had to be viewed not merely in terms of world peace and disarmament but also in terms of our own immediate strategic preoccupation.⁷³

This note again points to a direction that Indian decision-makers were not blinded by idealism; the nuclear question was dealt with strategic consideration it deserved. But one cannot infer from it that the only route available for India was to produce its own nuclear weapons. This was essentially the debate that Perkovich explains in his own work.⁷⁴ The reference to the Department of Atomic energy and “pressures” exerted by them also point to the influence of the strategic enclave (to use Itty Abraham’s terminology⁷⁵) had on India’s nuclear decision-making. But most importantly, in terms of capability, as this note explains, even when India would have taken a decision to go nuclear in 1965, in Bhabha’s own assessment, it would have taken five years to do so, or at least, the earlier estimates of 18 months crash program stand revised.

It was important for India to not only exaggerate the Chinese threat, but also to exaggerate its own nuclear capabilities to both the West and the Soviet Union. An exaggerated version of India’s threat perceptions and its capabilities would have helped India’s cause both in terms of soliciting superpower support vis-a-vis China, but also because it would have provided India more bargaining power in nuclear negotiations. The leaking of Narayanan’s 1964 memo, therefore, must be seen in this light. It obviously created consternations in the US mind. This diplomatic strategy is substantiated by another document written by Foreign Secretary C.S. Jha to the Indian Ambassador in the US, BK Nehru, in 1966.

On 29 May 1966 and 3 June 1966, PK Bannerjee, counsellor at the Indian Embassy in Washington addressed faculty and students at Luther College Decorah, Iowa and Western State

⁷³ National Archives of India, “L.K. Jha to Prime Minister,” 23 March 1965 (Top Secret), *Prime Minister’s Secretariat*, File No. 30(36)/65/ PMS.

⁷⁴ Perkovich, *India’s Nuclear Bomb*, pp. 60–125.

In the year 1970, when then-AEC Chairman Dr. Vikram Sarabhai proposed a 10-year plan for the Development of Atomic Energy,⁸³ “grave doubts” were expressed by none other than PN Haksar, who was also a member of AEC.⁸⁴ In a note to Prime Minister Gandhi, Haksar questioned the AEC’s capability, both in technology and materials, to implement the 10-year plan: “It is essential to have a clear idea of how the concept of initial technology in 1970 and the expected technological state in 1980 would be actually bridged.”⁸⁵ Haksar feared that the “basic relationships in planning for the future” of atomic energy in India—the heavy-water program, uranium and thorium reserves, scale of uranium enrichment, fissile material build-up, development of sophisticated reactor systems, etc—had not been handled adequately by the DAE. These “basic relationships” did suffer tremendously after India’s 1974 Peaceful Nuclear Explosion (PNE). The technology-denial regime after 1974 had done India’s nuclear program immense harm. As foreign firms stopped supplying equipment and material, the nuclear establishment began a period of indigenization; however, this took a considerable period of time.⁸⁶

India’s capacity for a “strategic nuclear program” in 1968, therefore, has always been under doubt. Yet, one must acknowledge that capability was a problem only to an extent that no firm decision was taken to build a nuclear weapons program. Both factors—lack of a firm decision and technical capability to pursue a strategic nuclear program—were applicable to India’s nuclear weapons program in the 1960s. This is most evident in the DAE assessment of April 1970, discussed below.

⁸³ See, Raja Ramanna, “Development of Nuclear Energy in India: 1947–73”, pp. 1–15; Also, Ashok Parthasarathi, *Technology at the Core: Science and Technology with Indira Gandhi*, (New Delhi: Pearson, 2007), p. 99–109.

⁸⁴NMML, “A Note on “Atomic Energy and Space Research- A Profile for the Decade, 1970–1980,” 9 October 1970 (Secret), *PN Haksar Papers*, IIIrd Installment, Subject File No. 160.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ M.R. Srinivasan,

The DAE's Assessment, April 1970

In April 1970, the opposition in India's parliament submitted a series of resolutions on nuclear

This statement corroborates the general emphasis in this working paper, and must be seen in the light of LK Jha's top-secret memos submitted to Prime Minister Gandhi in May 1967.⁹⁰ First, the DAE is certainly not sure whether a nuclear threat existed from the Chinese. Second, the emphasis on an international response to any use of Chinese nuclear weapons against India was also a very important factor in Indian decision-makers' strategic calculus about the need for an indigenous nuclear weapons program. Even when the DAE accepted that one could debate "how

1970s. Contemporary Indian nuclear doctrine also shows remarkable similarity in its aversion to nuclear-war fighting.

The DAE memo did not make these arguments in order to enunciate a nuclear doctrine, but to stress the fact that any effective nuclear deterrence against China could only come from an indigenous nuclear weapons program that was 'strategic' in nature. It never spelt out in exact detail what a "strategic system" looks like: types of warheads, types of missiles and their range and other delivery systems. One wonders why.

For Haksar and others, if the need to deter China necessitated a strategic nuclear deterrent, India was neither prepared nor viewed it in its national in

argued that the “Government of India is opposed to undertake a programme of manufacturing nuclear bombs because this would not be in the interests of national security.”

The DAE memo shows that in April 1970, India was clearly not prepared for such a dedicated and enormously costly affair as a strategic nuclear system. It could have turned India into a national security state, as was the case with all other nuclear powers where every resource was made available for the nuclear program. If this was the thought process of PN Haksar and Vikram Sarabhai in April 1970, it is more than clear that Haksar could not have written the non-existent “long telegram” in 1968.

Conclusion

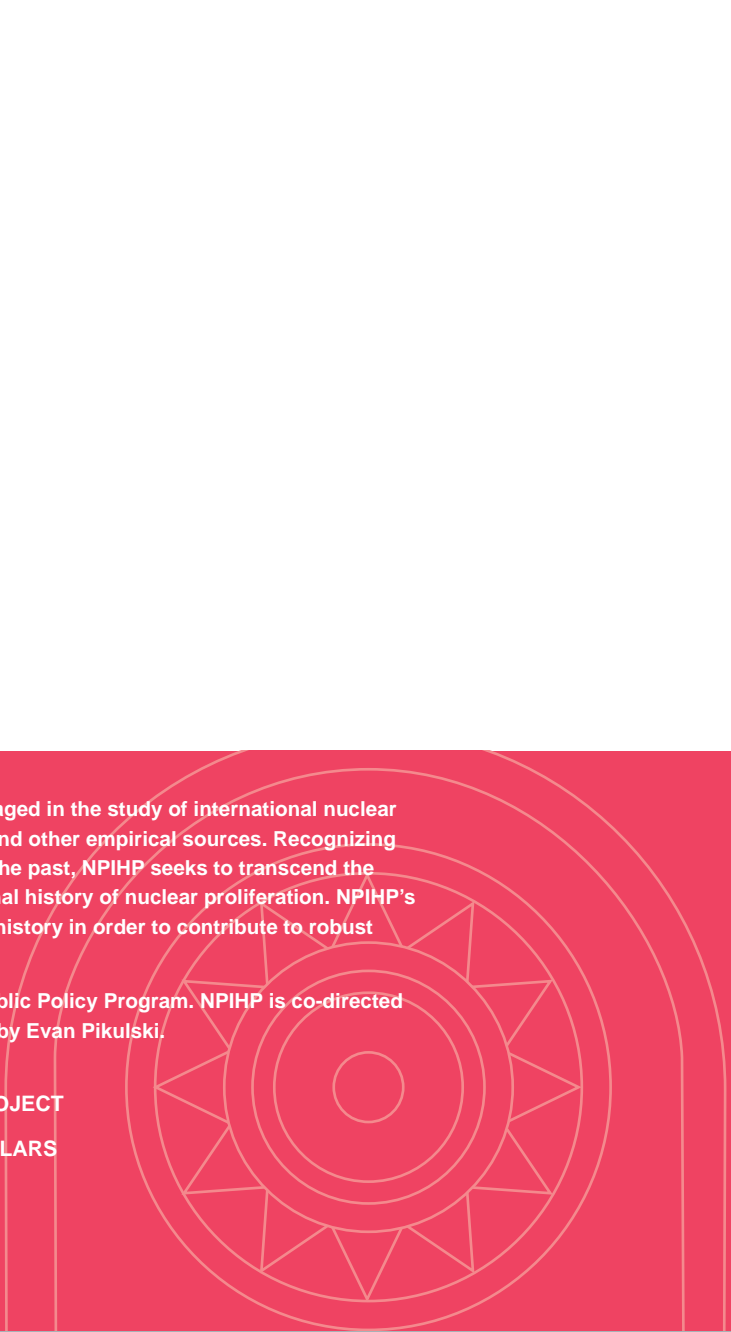

The main objective of this paper was not to offer a documented history of India’s nuclear policy in the 1960s. It was principally to expel doubts and consternation created by the “long telegram” in the minds of scholars, Indian decision-makers and the Indian public. The non-existent “long telegram” distorts the entire research agenda on India’s nuclear history in the 1960s, whether it is the issue of India’s nuclear weapons program, its nuclear diplomacy, its quest for nuclear security guarantees, or its approach to the NPT and the nature and consequences of the Chinese nuclear threat. The “long telegram” also has consequences for research on Indian nuclear policy in subsequent decades. These issues cannot be covered adequately in a single paper; they are all subjects of book-length research.

However, a few arguments can be made on India’s nuclear policy. First, the Indian establishment did not discount the Chinese nuclear threat; it was adequately considered at the highest levels. But the existence of the threat does not translate into a monolithic policy of manufacturing nuclear weapons. In fact, the complexity of India’s approach must be seen in terms of economic pressure, the need to build an adequate conventional defense along the

Waiting for the Bomb: PN Haksar and India's Nuclear Policy in the 1960s

Government of India has allowed a critical, yet credible, scholarship to prosper.⁹⁶ We have seen a number of important scholarly contributions to India's foreign and security policy in recent years. Yet more can be done, and the National Archives and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library deserve greater resources. The "long telegram" issue underlines the necessity of maintaining open access to records and former policymakers in India.

The recent critical mass of scholarship on nuclear history can do much to inform India's foreign and security policy. There is a need for more analytical rigor in scholarship and more careful review of scholarly work. Research on India's security and foreign policy will only prosper through adequate checks and balances. As Haksar, the scholar, told a gathering of journalists in April 1975, "We must bring rationality in our debate, we must subject our debates to the discipline of facts and to scientific methodology of testing hypothesis in the light of facts."



NPIHP is a global network of individuals and institutions engaged in the study of international nuclear history through archival documents, oral history interviews and other empirical sources. Recognizing that today's toughest nuclear challenges have deep roots in the past, NPIHP seeks to transcend the East vs. West paradigm to assemble an integrated international history of nuclear proliferation. NPIHP's research aims to fill in the blank and blurry pages of nuclear history in order to contribute to robust scholarship and effective policy decisions.

Within the Wilson Center, NPIHP is part of the History and Public Policy Program. NPIHP is co-directed by Christian Ostermann and Leopoldo Nuti, and coordinated by Evan Pikulski.

NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT
WOODROW WILSON INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOLARS
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004-3027