

September 5, 1972

Telegram from S.K. Arora, Deputy Secretary, on India and the OSA

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Summary:

Considering proposal that India become a Permanent Observer of the Organization of American States.

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FROM: S.K. Arora, Deputy Secretary (AMS)

TO: JS (AMS)

DATE: September 5, 1972

Our Charge d' Affaires in Caracas suggested a few months ago that we should think in terms of applying for admission to the Organization of American States as a Permanent Observer, and pending our obtaining that status "seek to attend as Observer on an ad hoc basis every Inter-American conference, whether under the OAS or under specialized agencies of the UN dealing with a technical or economic or cultural matter."

2. Commenting on this proposal, JS (UN) has remarked:

"It occurs to me that instead of seeking the status of Permanent Observer straightaway, it would be preferable for us to attend as Observer on an ad hoc basis, the meetings held under the aegis of OAS in the economic and technical fields. The experience gained through such participation will enable us to take a decision later on about seeking permanent observership..."

3. Shri Eric Gonsalves, Minister (Pol) in our Embassy in Washington, is not in favour of our seeking a Permanent Observer's status with the OAS. While he agrees that there is a tremendous scope for economic and cultural co-operation in Latin America, he feels that we should concentrate on bilateral efforts before we move on to the multilateral regional fields. Besides, there is no difficulty in our taking part in the economic and cultural meetings of the OAS, whenever we are interested, without formally becoming observers. Permanent Observer's status is not recommended for the following two reasons:

The OAS is fundamentally an organization for ensuring American hegemony in the western hemisphere. It would be unwise for us to be tarnished with this image;

In order to have a meaningful technical co-operation with Latin America as a whole, we have to be prepared to provide resources in terms of expertise, investment, technical assistance etc. at a cost running into tens of millions of dollars. This would be impossible for us to do at the present juncture and, therefore, it would be preferable to confine ourselves to the bilateral level.

□□

4. Reacting to the above-mentioned views of Shri Eric Gonsalves, Shri Shahabuddin, our Charge d'Affaires in Caracas, has pointed out that there is a feeling of resentment among the OAS countries against U.S. domination in the area. In course of time OAS may be transformed into an organization of Latin American states from which the United States itself may be excluded. The Latin American countries are seeking to diversify their external relations and would not be adverse to our presence in the region. He feels that the object of presence through Observership and otherwise would, in the first stage, be really to make ourselves known in Latin America and make the countries of our region familiar with our progress in science and technology, our industrial development and our capacity to aid less-developed countries. He also feels that the paucity of resources should not be a limiting factor in extending our contacts in Latin America, within or without the OAS. Even those countries which have become Permanent Observers, like Spain, Israel, Italy and Netherlands, do not have very monumental programmes of technical or economic cooperation with Latin America.

5. Shri Shahabuddin has mentioned the following steps which should be taken for building better relations with Latin America:

We should encourage and subsidize contacts at every level and in every field through assuring unofficial Indian presence at all possible non-governmental meetings of a regional character dealing with political, scientific, cultural or economic

matters. These would include regional conferences of professional bodies like doctors, engineers, architects, lawyers, legislators, planners, economists, scientists, geographers, historians etc

. The Government of India should participate as Observer in every regional inter-governmental meeting organized by specialized agencies of the UN. Such meetings are in any case open to us as a member of the UN system. We should take advantage of these meetings and publicize our progress in the particular field, and to emphasize the relevance of our experience in resolving similar problems in Latin America;

. We should establish the long-proposed Centre for Latin American Studies in order to develop meaningful academic exchanges with Latin America and create over a period of time a body of first-hand knowledge about this part of the world. You would recall that the UK undertook a similar course after the war which has begun paying dividends now when it appears intent on capturing a sizeable share of Latin American market of higher technology and sophisticated goods. We should also offer a sizable number of scholarships, at least 20 or 25, every year for post-graduate studies in India.

□□

6. Finally, Shri Shahabuddin has commented:

□"I would like to emphasize once again that we cannot afford to wait till we have the resources. The think is to look ahead, to plan and to develop the will and the muscles. Latin America is an area we have never really tried to know or cultivate. It is emerging from its cocoon into daylight. There is an opportunity but there are no shortcuts. We have to build brick by brick. But if we do not start building now, we should have missed our chance."

7. I think Shri Shahabuddin's enthusiasm for developing our relations with Latin American countries is somewhat unrelated to our needs and capacity. It cannot be denied that our contacts with Latin America have been of a very limited nature and there is need to foster stronger links, especially in the sphere of trade. Programmes of technical assistance have necessarily to be of a limited nature considering the present state of our own economy. I am inclined to support Shri Gonsalves' views that, for the present, we should confine ourselves to bilateral relationship and, at the same time, participate in regional conferences wherever our interests require us to do so. Again, Shri Gonsalves has very rightly pointed out that the OAS is very much dominated by the United States and our seeking Permanent Observership at the OAS will have political overtones which could damage not only our image but may have repercussions on our relations with several other countries. Shri Shahabuddin's view that the OAS may be transformed in the course of time into a purely Latin American organization without the inclusion of United States does not appear to be very logical in the context of the near future. It will take quite some time before the Latin American countries can achieve their objective, if indeed they have such an objective.

8. In my view, we should not, at present, seek Permanent Observer status with the OAS.