

## Smiling Buddha led to US shock & awe Pokhran-I Plan Caught American Spooks Unawares: Declassified Papers

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**Mumbai:** The American intelligence community in the Nixon era missed India's preparations for a nuclear weapons test and was caught unawares when "Smiling Buddha" was successfully conducted at Pokhran on May 18, 1974.

US tilt towards Pakistan and its overtures to China in the early 70s apparently led India to go ahead with the decision to conduct its first nuclear test in Pokhran in 1974. A secret State Department intelligence note, dated January 14, 1972, acknowledged that US policy had an impact on India's decision making on nuclear weapons, saying there was "little doubt" that the then president Richard Nixon's



**Nixon's tilt towards Pakistan and his overtures to China in the early 70s led India to go ahead with the decision to conduct its first N-test, a secret state department intelligence note recently revealed**

announcement of his trip to China changed New Delhi's calculations. The revelation means India managed to keep the US in the dark over Smiling Buddha as well as the Pokhran-II tests in 1998, some 25 years later.

A declassified intelligence community staff post-mortem made public on Monday by the US National Security Archive and the American

Nuclear Proliferation International History Project shows US had taken its eye off India caught up with its initiatives with China and the Vietnam war.

The record says, "India's peaceful nuclear explosion on 18 May 1974 caught the US by surprise in part because the intelligence community had not been looking for signs that a test was in the works."

"relatively modest priority" to relevant intelligence collection activities. The White House was more focused on the Vietnam war and "a grand strategy" towards Beijing and Moscow.

However, the small spate of reports about a test had such "apparent reliability and seeming credibility", that they prompted a review of India's nuclear intentions by INR and other government establishments. "In the end government officials (US) could not decide whether India had made a decision to test although a subsequent lead suggested otherwise," it said. While the US State Department had cautioned India against nuclear tests in late 1970, the concern was never quite overwhelming.