

STATEMENT ON AFGHANISTAN TO BE MADE BY THE MINISTER OF STATE
FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS, MR DOUGLAS HURD IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS ON MONDAY 14 JANUARY

I will, with permission, Mr Speaker, make a statement on Afghanistan.

In the view of Her Majesty's Government, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on 27th of December was an unprovoked act of aggression against an independent country. It represents a serious threat to world peace and an unprecedented development in the history of post-war Russian expansion. The Soviet Union acted, to establish a military hold on a sovereign country, in violation of the international principles which the Soviet Union constantly calls on others to observe. The Soviet Union justified its act by alleging prior foreign intervention. Yet the intervention has been the Soviet invasion.

In our view it is essential that we and our allies should draw the right conclusion. The Russians have shown, more vividly than ever before, that, when they have the chance of gaining positions of power in developing countries, they are willing to put at risk their relations with the West. Non-alignment is no protection against their appetites. We can expect further Soviet interventions elsewhere unless the international community shows clearly that acts of this kind cannot be undertaken with impunity.

/With

● With these considerations in mind we are developing our own response.

First, we fully supported the action taken in the United Nations Security Council. The letter to the President of the Council was signed by fifty-two States. Now a number of Third World countries are pressing their arguments in the General Assembly using the Uniting for Peace procedure. This rallying of opinion in the Third World is a new and important factor.

Second, in Afghanistan itself, we have recalled our Ambassador in Kabul for consultations. We have ended our aid programme in Afghanistan, though Afghan students now in the United Kingdom may complete their courses. We have closed the British Council office in Kabul. We have provided relief aid - tents, blankets and medical supplies - to help the Afghan refugees in Pakistan, who now total about four hundred thousand.

Thirdly, we are considering the necessary firm and calculated response to the Soviet Union. The Government welcome the measures announced by the President of the United States. The United States must not be alone in its firmness. Her Majesty's Government have been reconsidering all aspects of British-Soviet relations. On the 31st of December the United States presided at a meeting in London attended also by the United Kingdom, Canada, France, the Federal Republic of Germany and Italy to discuss what steps might be taken. Discussion has since continued in Brussels among the members of the North Atlantic

/Alliance.

alliance. The measures which might be undertaken by individual Western countries include curtailment of high-level and Ministerial meetings and other important contacts with the Soviet Union. Suitable measures in the economic field are also being considered. It is highly desirable that measures by Western countries should be concerted, especially in the economic field, where solidarity with our Community partners will be particularly important.

These matters will be discussed tomorrow at a meeting of Ministers of the European Community in Brussels at which my right honourable Friend the Lord Privy Seal will attend and also at a meeting of the North Atlantic Council, which I and Ministers from some other member countries will attend. We will of course keep the House informed.

We saw an urgent need to consult and express support for our friends in the area. My right honourable Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary is at present visiting Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Pakistan and India. He is discussing the current situation with their leaders, seeing the problems of the region at first hand, and reassuring our friends and consulting them about the right response. He is due in Islamabad this evening and will be going on to Delhi before returning to London later this week.

/In

In our judgement this is not a time for either panic or weakness. The Soviet Union has launched into an unprecedented foreign adventure. The chances of such an adventure being repeated will be reduced if it is met with a firm and concerted response. The Soviet Union cannot expect relations with Western Europe to continue unaffected while it invades and subjugates independent countries of other continents.