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CABINET OFFICE

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From the Secretary of the Cabinet: Sir Robert Armstrong KCB, CVO

Ref. A01166

18th January, 1980

Dear Michael,

As you know, during the course of my meeting in Paris on Tuesday, there was some discussion of support for Afghan resistance to the invading Soviet troops. I reported the conclusion of that discussion in a letter of 16th January. I am now enclosing a fuller record of the discussion. For obvious reasons, I am circulating it separately from the record of the rest of the discussion.

I am sending a copy of this letter to George Walden.

Yours ever  
Robert Armstrong

M. O'D. B. Alexander, Esq.

18 JAN 1980

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ANNEX

Herr von Staden asked whether the Western countries needed to co-ordinate a policy towards the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan. He had been disturbed to hear that there was a possibility of Soviet intrusions into Pakistani territory against the refugee camps, and asked why such intrusions were likely to occur. Dr. Brzezinski said that the camps were liable to be attacked in so far as they were used as bases by guerrillas who were set on continuing resistance to Soviet invasion. The camps were at present within a few miles of the frontier between Pakistan and Afghanistan. If they were moved back and brought under close control, they could not be used as bases for Afghan resistance. That would weaken Afghan resistance and facilitate the pacification of Afghanistan by the Russians. Leaving the camps where they were, and providing adequate support for them, would help to keep Afghan resistance alive. So long as they remained in forward positions, they would need some defensive equipment, possibly including surface to air missiles to defend themselves against air attack.

M. Wahl said that, as he understood the United States position, it would be consistent with that position to take whatever steps were available to nurture Afghan resistance to the Soviet invasion. So far as the French Government were concerned, they had indicated a willingness to help the Iraqis to build their armed forces: if the Iraqis were to use some of that support to help Afghan resistance, the French Government would not object. The decision on supporting Afghan resistance should be taken in the light of a clear view of the final objective for the future status of Afghanistan. If one of the objectives of the West in this crisis was to



keep the Islamic world aroused about the Soviet invasion, that would be served by encouraging a continuing guerrilla resistance.

Herr von Staden suggested that the objectives of the West should be to exploit Russia's political and economic weakness. To encourage guerrilla resistance would be to take the Russians on where they were strongest. It was not at all clear that it could succeed; and it would be a risk that guerrilla resistance could escalate to a border war.

Sir Robert Armstrong said that there would be general agreement on the desirability of avoiding a border war. Nonetheless, so long as Afghans were ready to continue guerrilla resistance, and Pakistan was prepared at least to acquiesce in Pakistani territory being a base for such activity, the West could hardly refuse to provide support, where it could do so with suitable discretion.

Herr von Staden was anxious to make it clear that the German Government was constitutionally debarred from exporting arms, and could not therefore give direct military support to Afghan guerrillas. The German intelligence service was also under charter restraints which were likely to prevent it from taking any part in activities of that kind. He accepted that the German Government would be powerless to prevent aid provided for humanitarian reasons being used in substitution for other funds which might then be in practice diverted to the support of a guerrilla movement.

Mr. Brzezinski said that the consensus of opinion seemed to be that it was politically justifiable to keep some resistance going in Afghanistan, both because it retarded and made more difficult Soviet pacification of Afghanistan and because it would provide a focus for Islamic sentiment. It was agreed that Heads of Government should be invited to endorse this

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conclusion and, if they did so, to authorize discussions at the appropriate level in the agencies involved as to feasibility and methods of providing discreet support for Afghan guerrilla resistance. In view of the special position of the German Government, these discussions should be tripartite, between the United States, the United Kingdom and France, but Germany should be represented by an observer.