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Soviet Union

RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE SOVIET  
AMBASSADOR, MR. N.M. LUNKOV AT 10 DOWNING STREET ON THURSDAY,  
3 JANUARY 1980 AT 1500 HOURS

*Original - filed on Internal Situation Afghanistan Dec 79.*

Present:-

Prime Minister	H.E. Mr. N.M. Lunkov
Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary	
Mr. M.O'D.B. Alexander	Mr. N.N. Ouspenski

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After Mr. Lunkov had completed reading the message from President Brezhnev which he was delivering, the Prime Minister asked him about the "acts of external aggression" referred to in the message. She was aware of none. The Soviet Union constantly asserted in recent days that there had been external intervention or aggression but she could find no evidence of this. The only aggression of which the British Government was aware was that carried out by Soviet forces. The Prime Minister also enquired about the request which, according to the message, had been addressed to the Soviet Government by the Government of Afghanistan on 26 December. So far as she was aware President Amin had still been in power then. Had the invitation to the Soviet Government come from President Amin? Mr. Lunkov said that information from the Afghan authorities confirmed that internal counter-revolutionaries in Afghanistan had been receiving unlimited support from external sources. The support included weapons, equipment and money and the sources included the United States, China, Pakistan, Egypt and other countries. Scores of centres for subversives had been set up in Pakistan. They were disguised as refugee camps. Armed formations had been prepared for despatch into Afghanistan in these centres and had returned to them for recuperation. Among the instructors in the camps were members of the CIA, and specialists in subversion from China and Egypt. The United States had sought the agreement of

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the Pakistan Government to an expansion of its activities. A good deal of evidence about these activities had appeared in the British media. There were relevant articles in The Times and Telegraph of the previous day. In an interview with Mr. Peter Sissons on New Year's Eve, the Chinese Ambassador had practically admitted that his Government was interfering in Afghanistan.

The Prime Minister said that even supposing subversive activity was taking place in a country this did not justify others in intervening. After all the Soviet Union itself was responsible for subversive activity in many countries. Such activity should be dealt with by the existing authorities in the countries affected. The Prime Minister noted the sequence of coups in Afghanistan involving Messrs Daud, Tarakki and Amin and repeated her question about the timing of the request from the Afghan Government to the Soviet Government for help. Mr. Lunkov said that the Soviet Government had had nothing to do with the coups in Afghanistan. He could only repeat what was said in President Brezhnev's letter. The Prime Minister said that it was remarkable that the Soviet intervention had begun while President Amin was still in power but that within a few hours of the arrival of the Soviet troops, President Amin had been shot and a man who was not even in the country at the time of the intervention placed in power. She could only assume that the new President was not the choice of the Afghan people but had been placed in power by the Soviet Army and was being kept there by 50,000 troops. Mr. Lunkov replied that following President Tarakki's assumption of power in the spring of 1979, the Afghan authorities had warned the world about external intrusions into the country and asked that assistance should not be given to those responsible.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that as he understood the position, President Amin had outraged the Muslims to the point where they had taken up arms against him. The opposition was internal. As a result President Amin had appealed to the Soviet Government. But no sooner had Soviet forces arrived than they had shot President Amin. Mr. Lunkov disclaimed any knowledge of these events. They were internal Afghan matters with which the Soviet

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Government had nothing to do. The Soviet forces were limited in scale and had been sent purely to repel incursions. They had met ~~no~~ <sup>help</sup> opposition within Afghanistan. On the contrary, some very influential Muslims had welcomed them. Their presence was entirely in accord with the Afghan/Soviet Friendship Treaty. Once a request for / had been made under that Treaty, the Soviet Government could not have rejected it. In any case the Soviet Government had a very long frontier in common with Afghanistan and could not be indifferent to what was happening there. Afghanistan might in some circumstances open a bridgehead for intervention in the Soviet Union. The Prime Minister interjected that this last point was the real reason for the Soviet Government's action.

Mr. Lunkov said that many other Governments had troops from the United States on their soil. When the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary observed that this was condemned by the Soviet Government, Mr. Lunkov replied that this depended on whether or not the forces in question were present by invitation. Soviet troops had been invited to enter Afghanistan. The Prime Minister said that this was not the case. Soviet troops had marched with the intention of annexing Afghanistan and turning it, in due course, into a buffer state. President Karmal was a puppet and a considerable military presence would be required to keep him in power. There would probably be continuing trouble from the Muslim population. If the Soviet Union's own claims were justified, Soviet forces could presumably leave Afghanistan within days. Mr. Lunkov agreed but declined to be drawn further when asked for a precise estimate of the length of time Soviet forces would remain in the country.

The Prime Minister said that this was the first time that the Soviet troops had entered a genuinely independent country. While their intervention in Hungary and Czechoslovakia had been appalling, it had been recognised that those countries were in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. But heretofore Afghanistan had been regarded as a country which was free to choose its own destiny.

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Now it was occupied by 40,000 or 50,000 Soviet soldiers.

Mr. Lunkov said that he was unable to confirm the number of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. This was a matter for the Soviet and Afghan Governments alone. He asked the Prime Minister to look beyond the text of President Brezhnev's message and to recognise that if stability in the region were to be preserved, the Governments concerned would need to display qualities of soberness, equanimity and commonsense.

The Prime Minister said that the British Government had all these qualities but this did not diminish the gravity of the situation that had been created. There were many Governments in the world of which she did not approve but she did not attempt to use armed force to change them. There was only one large imperialist and expansionist power left in the world today. This was the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was engaged in annexing territory and using its undoubted military power to impose a Government of its own choosing. This was the first time since the war that the Soviet Government had taken such action. Although the Soviet Government had used proxies and surrogates elsewhere e.g. the East Germans in South Yemen, and the Cubans in Angola and Ethiopia, their action in Afghanistan was something new. The Soviet Government should not be surprised that Western Governments regarded the situation as grave. Fresh light had been cast on the motives for the Soviet Government's enormous military expenditure. Nonetheless, the Prime Minister said that she was hopeful the Soviet Government would agree to withdraw from Afghanistan.

Mr. Lunkov said that the Soviet Government categorically rejected the Prime Minister's allegations about the situation in Afghanistan. He asked why the British Government pretended it knew better than the Soviet Government about the situation in the country. The Prime Minister said that the presence of massive Soviet forces and of a new Head of Government who required their presence to retain his office was obvious enough. Nonetheless it was of great importance for relations between the Warsaw Pact and the North Atlantic Alliance that the troops should be withdrawn

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soon. Their presence could only cause great alarm. She accepted that the Soviet Government was entitled to take measures to defend itself. So was the West. Both sides should be prepared to negotiate from positions of equal strength and to reduce that strength step by step. On that basis she was anxious to see as many contacts as possible between East and West. But recent events in Afghanistan cast doubts on the Soviet Government's motives and in the whole field of East/West relations.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary asked about the implications of the statement in President Brezhnev's message that Britain "could do something if it so wished" about the ending of armed invasions of the territory of Afghanistan. Did this mean that the British Government were being accused of involvement in these invasions. Mr. Lunkov said that President Brezhnev was seeking stability and peaceful co-operation in the region. The message invited the British Government to appeal to those who were seeking to overthrow the new regime to desist from their efforts. Despite what had been said in the Press, Mr. Lunkov was aware of no Soviet Government statement accusing Britain of involvement. Of course there had been some reports from Afghanistan of such involvement: the British Government would know best what weight to give these. The Prime Minister said that the British Government had not been involved in any way in activities of the kind referred to. Mr. Lunkov said that this was a very important statement. The Prime Minister concluded the conversation by repeating her hope that Soviet troops would leave Afghanistan very soon. The Afghan people must be free to choose their own Government. Mr. Lunkov said that he agreed.

The discussion ended at 1540 hours.

*Phm*