

Please release  
attached papers

SIR ANTHONY PARSONS

Soviet Prisoners in Afghanistan

Please see the attached papers.

As you will see, the Prime Minister finds the draft reply too negative. My impression is that the Prime Minister is not questioning the policy but the way it is presented in this letter. I think I could redraft in a way which would obtain her approval but I shall not have time to do so before going to CHOGM. If you yourself wish to try your hand at this, do let me have a revised draft on return. Otherwise I shall deal with it then.

Would you be good enough to tell the FCO that we are holding this up?

A.P.C.

21 November 1983

DS: (Revised)

DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despatch/note

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM: PS/Prime Minister

Reference

DEPARTMENT:

TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO: Count Nikolai Tolstoy  
Count Close  
Southmoor  
Nr Abingdon  
Berks  
OX13 5HS

Your Reference

Top Secret  
Secret  
Confidential  
Restricted  
Unclassified

*is* *1. Under this letter*  
*is made to register*  
Copies to:

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT:

.....In Confidence

The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you for your letter of 23 October about Soviet prisoners captured by the Afghan resistance.

CAVEAT.....

*feel*  
We understand your concern at the possible fate of these soldiers and have carefully considered the arguments you advanced for taking the initiative to bring them to the West. I should make clear that we have not received any application directly from individual Soviet soldiers.

We are of course equally concerned for the fate of those Afghan resistance fighters who have been captured by the Babrak Karmal regime or the Russians. Although some Soviet soldiers have been transferred to internment in Switzerland, the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to arrange the release of resistance prisoners have so far been blocked by the Karmal regime.

Enclosures—flag(s).....

We welcome these efforts to secure the safety of prisoners on both sides. The terms of the agreement /negotiated



negotiated by the ICRC are confidential, and, in our view, this discretion has been essential to even its partial success. The ICRC have not asked for our assistance in any way. We would not want to take any action which could jeopardise the ICRC's efforts to achieve the humanitarian objective of saving the lives of the prisoners on both sides. To encourage the escalation of desertion from the Soviet Army, as you suggest, would risk cutting across the ICRC's efforts.

*Belkin not mentioned*

Incidentally we have no reason to think that there is any question of returning Soviet prisoners to the Soviet Union against their will. We do not therefore accept believe that there is any parallel ~~whatsoever~~ with the events of 1945 to which you refer.

As you appreciate, the question you raised must be approached with a good deal of caution. Applications for asylum require careful consideration, and there are well-established procedures for dealing with each case on its merits. Although we have not received any application directly from individual Soviet soldiers, we would, of course, look at any which were received to see whether re-settlement here was appropriate. ~~But~~ we could clearly not commit HMG in advance to the granting of asylum to one group of people, however unfortunate, without injustice to deserving cases in other countries.



Prime Minister.

There is also a minute by  
Tony Parsons (attached).

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

2. The proposed reply to Count Tolstoy London SW1A 2AH

could lead to criticism of HMG.  
but the Foreign Secretary has considered  
it carefully.

18 November 1983

3. Agree the proposed reply?

Dear John,

A.J.C. 18/11

Soviet Prisoners in Afghanistan Rescue Committee

Your letter of 11 November to Roger Bone asked for advice on the letter of 23 October to the Prime Minister from Count Nikolai Tolstoy, President of the Soviet Prisoners in Afghanistan Rescue Committee (SPARC), a Russian emigre organisation established earlier this year. Count Tolstoy has written in similar terms to the Foreign Secretary.

The fate of Soviet prisoners held by the Afghan resistance has aroused interest in Britain over the past two years, although there is no specific British responsibility or obligation towards them. The arguments advanced by Count Tolstoy and others for HMG to do something on behalf of the prisoners fall into four categories. They argue on humanitarian grounds that we should do what we can to help the prisoners. They claim that an active British role in bringing Soviet defectors out could have both intelligence and propaganda value. Finally, they consider that it should be possible to encourage mass desertions from the Soviet Army in Afghanistan which would have a damaging effect on the capabilities of the Soviet forces there. Both Count Tolstoy and Mr Amery (in Part IV of the report enclosed with his letter of 7 November to the Prime Minister) have also drawn an analogy with the treatment of Soviet prisoners in 1945.

Let me take these arguments in turn. The humanitarian case is undeniable. However, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is best placed to deal with the problem at its present level. We believe that between 30 and 70 soldiers are held by the resistance in camps along the Afghan/Pakistan border. So far eight have been transferred under ICRC auspices to Switzerland where they are held in detention on the understanding that they will return in due course to the Soviet Union. The ICRC are apparently meeting increasing difficulty in persuading the resistance to release Soviet captives, particularly as plans for the parallel release of resistance prisoners have (not surprisingly) been blocked by the Karmal regime. The ICRC are most anxious to avoid any publicity which could jeopardise their efforts on behalf of both the Soviet and resistance prisoners. We have not been asked for any assistance, but we keep in touch with the ICRC and the Swiss Government, who have indicated that no Soviet soldier will be returned to the Soviet Union from





Switzerland against his will. There is therefore no question of any analogy with Yalta.

Turning to the intelligence argument, it is unlikely that any of the Soviet soldiers currently held by the resistance would have significant intelligence value. They are mostly young conscripts with little education. The propaganda value of any Soviet defectors brought to this country would probably be limited and short-lived. Exposure of prisoners to the media could help maintain awareness of Soviet actions in Afghanistan but could equally backfire if the soldiers were inarticulate or failed to settle down here and wanted to return to the Soviet Union.

A policy of encouraging widespread defections would conflict with humanitarian efforts such as those of the ICRC which require quiet negotiation out of the limelight; and, if successful, it would involve us in a potentially costly commitment to permanent resettlement in the United Kingdom. On the other hand, a successful effort in this field would be a serious blow to the Soviet Union and would therefore be very much worth considering if there were a reasonable prospect of success. The key point here is the position of Pakistan, without whose overt co-operation such a policy could not be conducted on any scale. The Russians would be very conscious of the dangers to them of sharply increased desertion and we would expect them to apply maximum pressure on Pakistan - including the threat and use of force, eg through retaliatory raids across the border - if they were to participate in such a Western campaign.

Although the Pakistani authorities have acquiesced in ICRC operations we believe that President Zia is very conscious of the risks described above and would not favour a Western campaign of the kind proposed. There would of course be no question of acting without the full agreement of the Pakistani Government.

Our present policy in these matters is in line with that of other Western Governments. We know that the Americans have recently exfiltrated two Soviet prisoners (without publicity) for debriefing purposes, but we have heard nothing to suggest that they are at present thinking of anything more ambitious.

The Foreign Secretary considers that the balance of advantage is against an initiative to encourage desertions by a general offer of resettlement to Soviet soldiers. He sees no case for the UK to take the lead, but believes that we should maintain our existing policy of leaving open the possibility of accepting individual soldiers who satisfy our normal criteria or who have intelligence and/or exceptional publicity value (a summary of the standard procedures covering defectors and the grant of asylum are at Annex).

/I enclose



/ I enclose a draft reply to Count Tolstoy which draws  
/ on the Prime Minister's letter of 17 November 1981 to  
Mr Bukovsky (copy enclosed), and the line we have been  
following in reply to MPs and others since then, and which  
has been agreed at official level with the Home Office.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Hugh Taylor  
(Home Office).

*Yours ever,*

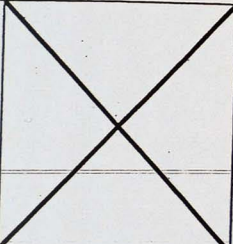
*P F Ricketts*

(P F Ricketts)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
10 Downing Street



# A The National Archives

DEPARTMENT/SERIES ..... <i>PREM</i> .....	Date and sign
PIECE/ITEM ..... <i>1672</i> ..... (one piece/item number)	
Extract details: <i>Annex to Letter from Ricketts to Coles dated 18 November 1983</i>	
CLOSED UNDER FOI EXEMPTION .....	
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3(4) OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT 1958	<i>28/11/17</i> <i>Ni Niws</i>
TEMPORARILY RETAINED	
MISSING AT TRANSFER	
NUMBER NOT USED	
MISSING (TNA USE ONLY)	
DOCUMENT PUT IN PLACE (TNA USE ONLY)	

Instructions for completion of Dummy Card

Use black or blue pen to complete form.

Use the card for one piece or for each extract removed from a different place within a piece.

Enter the department and series,  
eg. HO 405, J 82.

Enter the piece and item references, .  
eg. 28, 1079, 84/1, 107/3

Enter extract details if it is an extract rather than a whole piece.

This should be an indication of what the extract is,

eg. Folio 28, Indictment 840079, E107, Letter dated 22/11/1995.

Do not enter details of why the extract is sensitive.

If closed under the FOI Act, enter the FOI exemption numbers applying to the closure, eg. 27(1), 40(2).

Sign and date next to the reason why the record is not available to the public ie. Closed under FOI exemption; Retained under section 3(4) of the Public Records Act 1958; Temporarily retained; Missing at transfer or Number not used.





Nikolai Tolstoy

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

11 November 1983

SOVIET PRISONERS IN AFGHANISTAN  
RESCUE COMMITTEE

A copy of Count Nikolai Tolstoy's letter of 23 October to the Prime Minister was sent to you earlier, though there appears to have been some delay in transmission. I enclose a further copy for ease of reference.

I think it desirable that the writer should receive a reply from me, on the Prime Minister's behalf, before we leave for India on 21 November. I should accordingly be grateful for advice and a draft reply by the close of play on Wednesday, 16 November, at the latest.

BFI

A. J. COLES

R.B. Bone, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

NK

We spoke  
A.D.C. 17  
"



10 DOWNING STREET

~~Sir A. Parsons.~~

J.C.  
→

This has got into a muddle  
through a mishandling here of  
Cout Trolley's letter.

We need Sir G. Howe's  
advice before we can do anything.  
I have asked to it by Wednesday  
at latest (so that we can refer  
to Trolley before CHOGON).

Perhaps we could discuss  
it.

A.D.C. 17



# SPARC

## КОМИТЕТ СПАСЕНИЯ СОВЕТСКИХ ПЛЕННЫХ В АФГАНИСТАНЕ SOVIET PRISONERS IN AFGHANISTAN RESCUE COMMITTEE

Address: SPARC, 78 Beckenham road, Beckenham/Kent BR34RH, United Kingdom, Bank Account: Account No 91115758, Midland Bank Plc. 184, High Street, Bromley/Kent, BR1 1HL, United Kingdom

23rd October 1983

Court Close,  
Southmoor,  
nr. Abingdon,  
Berks. OX13 5HS.

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing on behalf of this Committee, of which I am the Chairman, to place an urgent plea before the Government on behalf of Russian prisoners captured by Afghan liberation forces, who are now or are likely to request asylum in Great Britain.

I will not attempt to set out the factual background, which is no doubt well known to H.M. Government, but simply stress that while the numbers are small, the principle is great. These unfortunate men are in serious danger of being executed or otherwise maltreated by their sorely tried Afghan captors, and in view of Pakistan's understandably apprehensive attitude towards the whole question the only real chance of their survival appears to lie in their finding a refuge in the West.

There is also a considerable measure of political advantage in adopting a humane attitude. The one sure way - probably the only way - to ensure a Soviet withdrawal is to encourage in every way the escalation of desertion from the Red Army. I argue this point in an article to be published shortly in the WALL STREET JOURNAL. There would also be great gains in the field of intelligence, particularly if officers are encouraged to desert. There is at present scant incentive for them to do so.

We fully appreciate that it is a matter to be approached with the utmost tact and discretion, but cannot see any obstacle so serious as to be insuperable, especially when weighed against the enormous advantages. Unfortunately, the Foreign Office appears to be as little humane or robust in its attitude as it was when deciding the fate of Russians in the West in 1945. I have reason to understand that they have resolutely set their faces against any consideration of the policy we are advocating. We hope therefore that a Government which has proved itself to be so admirably forthright in its conduct of foreign affairs, particularly with regard to the Soviet threat, will not allow this matter to pass by default.

Yours faithfully,

Nikolai Tolstoy

Председатель — граф Николай Толстой-Милославский; Почетные члены: Пр. Антоний, Архиепископ Женевский и Западно-Европейский, Пр. Константин, Епископ Ричмондский и Британский, Пр. Марк, Епископ Берлинский и Германский, А.А. Авторханов, В.П. Аксенов, А.И. Гинзбург, П.Г. Григоренко, И.А. Иловайская-Альберти, О.А. Керенский, Л.З. Колпелев, Назум Коржавин, В.Е. Максимов, Э.О. Неизвестный, В.П. Некрасов, Э.В. Оганянин, С.М. Поликанов, Андрей Седых, А.П. Столыпин, Я.А. Трушнович, Е.А. Якобсон.