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JP

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

21 February 1984

Dear Nicholas,

Thank you for your letter of 15 February enclosing letters from two Soviet soldiers whom you met in Pakistan. As you say, this is a complicated matter. We are looking into it urgently and I will let you have a substantive reply as soon as possible.

Laura

Raymond

The Lord Bethell, MEP.

JP

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

20 February 1984

The letter pl.

20/2

Dear John,

Soviet Prisoners held by Afghan Resistance

Your letter of 15 February asked for a draft reply to Lord Bethell's letter of 15 February to the Prime Minister.

The application from the two Soviet soldiers for political asylum in the UK raises difficult questions. Although decisions on asylum rest with the Home Office, we have a strong interest in the particular problem of Soviet soldiers. We are pursuing Lord Bethell's points urgently with them. I enclose a copy of a letter which we have sent to the Home Office setting out Sir Geoffrey Howe's views on how we should approach the problem.

In the meantime, we recommend that the Prime Minister should send Lord Bethell an interim reply. He acknowledges that his request is a complicated matter, and does not seem to expect an instant decision. I enclose a draft accordingly.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Hugh Taylor at the Home Office.

Yours ever,

(P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

Peter Ricketts

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despatch/note

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM:
PRIME MINISTER

Reference

DEPARTMENT:

TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO: Lord Bethell
73 Sussex Square
LONDON W 2

Your Reference

- Top Secret
- Secret
- Confidential
- Restricted
- Unclassified

Copies to:

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT:

.....In Confidence

Thank you for your letter of 15 February enclosing letters from two Soviet soldiers whom you met in Pakistan. As you say, this is a complicated matter. We are looking into it urgently and I will let you have a substantive reply as soon as possible.

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Enclosures—flag(s).....

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

20 February 1984


Dear Hugh,Afghanistan: Resettlement of Soviet Prisoners

As you will have seen from John Coles' letter of 15 February, Lord Bethell has written to the Prime Minister forwarding applications for asylum in this country from two of the Soviet prisoners he met in Pakistan.

In addition, the US Embassy here have recently approached us to seek our agreement in principle to resettling some Soviet soldiers in the UK. As you will remember, two Soviet soldiers were granted refugee status in the USA last November, and the Embassy's approach indicates that the Americans may have further soldiers in the pipeline and are likely to seek our help in resettling at least some of them in order to spread the burden. It is also possible that the Swiss Government may approach us with a request to take in Soviet soldiers who are at present interned in Switzerland under ICRC auspices and who are due to be released shortly.

As you know, we have so far taken a cautious line about possible requests for resettlement in the UK from Soviet soldiers. We have maintained that any individual application for resettlement would be considered on its merits. The Prime Minister made clear in her letter of 6 December to Count Tolstoy that HMG could not give any blanket assurances in advance, but added that it would be wrong to assume that individual applications would be treated unsympathetically.

Sir Geoffrey Howe realises that decisions on resettlement in the UK are the responsibility of the Home Secretary. However, now that we are faced with actual applications from Soviet soldiers, he thinks that it would be useful to have his views on the problem.

The humanitarian case for accepting soldiers for resettlement here may be no stronger than for other deserving groups. Nonetheless, if it became clear that a number of Soviet soldiers do wish to come to the West, we can expect some domestic pressure for HMG to do something for them. This

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suggests that a sympathetic approach will be right. Furthermore, a major part of our policy on Afghanistan is to maintain public awareness, both here and overseas, of the Soviet occupation and to bring effective pressure to bear on the Soviet leadership to withdraw their troops. Lord Bethell's articles are helping to keep Afghanistan in the public mind. The initial propaganda impact of bringing soldiers to the UK could be considerable. However, there would be drawbacks as well, particularly if we act in isolation from other European countries, or are seen to be taking the lead in encouraging defections. The Soviet Union might then be tempted to take steps against us, at the expense possibly of our policy of developing a broader dialogue with the Soviet Union. If, on the other hand, there were a general effort on the part of Western countries, we would on balance see political advantage in the UK being seen to play its part.

Nevertheless, we recognise that HMG cannot take an open-ended commitment. We have no reliable estimate on the number of Soviet prisoners in the hands of Afghan resistance, but the Americans believe there are between 50 and 200, (not all of whom would of course wish to come to the West). In practice, we would expect few, if any, to qualify for formal defector status. This would mean that any soldier would have to qualify for resettlement on normal Home Office criteria. It would also obviously be desirable to limit any burden on the State. The best approach might therefore be to put the onus on to private organisations and individuals, who have an interest in the Soviet soldiers, to demonstrate that they are prepared to make the necessary arrangements and to meet the costs. We believe this, if it is possible, would effectively limit the numbers of soldiers which we would be asked to accept.

In short, Sir Geoffrey considers that we should be prepared in principle to play our part, together with some of our allies, in accepting the small number of Soviet prisoners which private organisations are themselves prepared to sponsor financially. But we should not reveal our willingness to do so in public until we know that some at least of our European partners will take a similar line: Sir Julian Bullard plans to discuss the subject at a meeting of the Political Committee of the Ten in Paris on 21/22 February. We would hope that there can be close consultation on what is sure to remain a highly sensitive subject.

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I am sending a copy of this letter to John Coles (No 10)

Yours ever,
Peter Ricketts

(P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

Hugh Taylor Esq
PS/Home Secretary
HOME OFFICE

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LORD BETHELL 21/2

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

15 February 1984

Soviet Prisoners held by Afghan Resistance Groups

I enclose a copy of a letter which the Prime Minister has received from Lord Bethell.

He asks whether the Government will consider granting political asylum to two Soviet prisoners held by an Afghan resistance group in Peshawar.

Lord Bethell told me on the telephone that he does not propose to publicise, for the time being, the fact that he has written to the Prime Minister about these cases. But it is of course likely that he will do so at a later stage.

I should be grateful for a draft reply by 21 February for signature by the Prime Minister.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to Hugh Taylor (Home Office) (Lord Bethell says that he has already copied this correspondence to both the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Home Secretary).

A J COLES

Roger Bone, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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FROM
**NICHOLAS
BETHELL**

TELEPHONE
01-402-6877

**73 SUSSEX SQUARE
LONDON W2 2SS**

The Rt. Hon. Mrs Margaret Thatcher, MP,
10 Downing Street,
LONDON S.W.1.

15th February 1984

Dear Margaret,

Last week, following a European Parliament visit to Pakistan to investigate the problem of Afghan refugees, I went independently into the Afghanistan border region and then across to a resistance base inside Afghanistan. My main aim was to interview former members of the Soviet army presently being held by Afghan resistance groups and I wrote about this in the Mail on Sunday on February 12th.

I went to see Janet Young before I left and, since she knew of my interest in the plight of these Soviet prisoners, she indicated to me that the Government might be ready to consider admitting some of them to the United Kingdom. She emphasized though that each case would have to be examined separately.

I am now writing to bring two such cases to your attention and to ask whether the Government will consider granting political asylum to Igor Fyodorovich Rykov and Oleg Grigoryevich Khlan. I met them both on February 3rd in Peshawar, where they are held by Dr Sibghatullah Mojaddidi's group, known as the National Liberation Front.

Mr Rykov is 21 years old. He was trained for six months after being conscripted into the Soviet army and he served as a sergeant in a tank unit. He describes some aspects of his military service in Afghanistan in the enclosed letter addressed to you, which I have translated into English. I also enclose a letter that Mr Rykov wrote on behalf of his friend Mr Khlan.

I spoke to Mr Rykov for about an hour in Peshawar and I have the conversation on tape. He struck me as an intelligent young man, bright and with a sense of humour. He is a trained mechanic and I feel that there is little doubt of his ability, after a period of rehabilitation, to earn his own living.

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Dr Mojadidi and his group are well known to the British Embassy in Islamabad, especially to Mr Peter Preece, First Secretary, who travels frequently to Peshawar. It would be possible for Mr Preece or another Embassy official to contact these two young men and interview them, if you were minded to consider their application favourably.

Dr Mojadidi's son, who presented the two prisoners to me in his father's absence abroad, told me that his group would be only too pleased to get the prisoners off their hands. These prisoners are now an embarrassment to the groups. The Red Cross is doing very little to help and, as I wrote in the Mail, it is distrusted for having failed to deliver an agreed deal.

The prisoners have to be guarded and fed. They are an embarrassment to the Pakistani authorities and cause much friction between these authorities and the resistance groups. The Pakistan government is worried by the idea of keeping Soviet prisoners for long periods on their territory. They are of course in Pakistan quite illegally.

Nevertheless we think it quite an achievement that the Afghan resistance fighters are now taking prisoners at all. Until recently they just killed the Soviet soldiers that fell into their hands. Vladimir Bukovsky has put a lot of work into this, sending emissaries to talk to the resistance groups, to persuade them of the propaganda value of keeping Soviet prisoners alive. I have been doing all I can to help Mr Bukovsky in this enterprise.

We achieved a certain success, I think, in arranging for two young Soviet prisoners, Nikolai Ryzkhov and Alexander Voronov, to get from Pakistan to the United States at the end of November 1983. This was widely reported in the press and the two young men broadcast about it in Russian to the

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Soviet Union on BBC and Voice of America. I believe that this increases the pressure on the Soviet government to seek a negotiated solution, a way out of their Afghan adventure.

Therefore, while appreciating that this is a complicated matter, I very much hope that you will conclude that there are strong political as well as humanitarian grounds for considering favourably Mr Rykov's and Mr Khlan's applications to come to this country. I would be glad to give any further information about their cases, if this would help, and to make my tape available. I have sent copies of this letter and Mr Rykov's letter to Geoffrey Howe and Leon Brittan, since this is obviously something that will be of interest to their two departments.

Yours ever

Richard

Lord Bethell

