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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

4 June 1984

Dear John,

Type letter pl
AS 4/6

Afghanistan: Soviet Prisoners

Thank you for your letter of 29 May, enclosing one from Lord Bethell in which he asked whether there would be any objection to his making public the fact that the two Soviet soldiers had appealed to the Prime Minister and the content of their letters. I enclose copies of the latter.

We do not suggest that Lord Bethell's request be turned down although we are not particularly attracted by it because of the implications for our relations with the Soviet Union at an unfortunate moment (as discussed below). However once the two Russians have been admitted to the United Kingdom, there will of course be a great deal of publicity (given the involvement of the 'Mail on Sunday', which will pay the fares of the two men) and the fact that the two men appealed directly to the Prime Minister will no doubt emerge at some point, even if Lord Bethell does not himself make use of their petitions.

The content of the letters, supported no doubt by fact which will emerge from subsequent press interviews with the men themselves, will usefully serve our wider aim of maintaining critical public awareness of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. But the whole incident is bound to affect the Russians' perception of the Government's publicly stated wish to improve UK/Soviet relations and expand contacts. We have never pretended that we want to sweep contentious issues like Afghanistan under the carpet, but the fact that the arrival of the soldiers will follow - quite coincidentally - hard on the Bettaney and Skinner cases may risk provoking not only a counter propaganda campaign but a restriction of opportunities which would be of interest to us.

However since the Prime Minister's role in the Government's decision to admit the two soldiers is likely to be

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revealed (eg by the soldiers themselves) and there is no plausible reason we could give Lord Bethell for asking him to suppress it, the Foreign Secretary accepts that he should be told we have no objection to his using the soldiers' petitions. But we shall need to be very careful generally in answering questions about the extent of the Government's involvement and the political implications. We are considering this aspect with the Home Office and will be writing to you on this point shortly.

I enclose a draft reply to Lord Bethell, which has been cleared with the Home Office.

I am copying this letter to Hugh Taylor (Home Office).

Yours ever,

Peter Ricketts

(P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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DSR 11 (Revised)

IN CONFIDENCE

DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despatch/note

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM

A J Coles Esq

Reference

DEPARTMENT:

TEL NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO:

Your Reference

Top Secret

Secret

Confidential

Restricted

Unclassified

Lord Bethell MEP
73 Sussex Square
LONDON W2 2SS

Copies to:

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT:

.....In Confidence

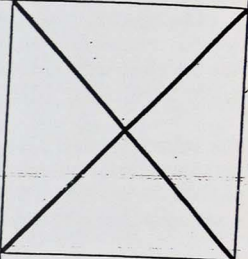
CAVEAT.....

Thank you for your letter of 25 May. We have noted your assurance that you will not make public correspondence with the Prime Minister and Government Departments. We have no objection to your making public the existence and contents of the letters to the Prime Minister from Igor Rykov and Oleg Khlan, forwarded under cover of your letter of 15 February. This should not, of course, ^{be} before the two men arrive in this country. It is ~~of course~~ important, as you recognise, to avoid publicising the arrangements to bring the two men to the United Kingdom, and in particular the role of the Pakistan Government.

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Enclosures—flag(s).....

A The National Archives

DEPARTMENT/SERIES <i>PREM 19</i>	Date and sign
PIECE/ITEM <i>1672</i> (one piece/item number)	
Extract details: <i>Enclosures to letter from Ricketts to Coles dated 4 June 1984</i>	
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FILE SH

cc: FCO



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

4 June, 1984

IN CONFIDENCE

Thank you for your letter of 25 May. We have noted your assurance that you will not make public correspondence with the Prime Minister and Government Departments. We have no objection to your making public the existence and contents of the letters to the Prime Minister from Igor Rykov and Oleg Khlan, forwarded under cover of your letter of 15 February. This should not, of course, happen before the two men arrive in this country. It is important, as you recognise, to avoid publicising the arrangements to bring the two men to the United Kingdom, and in particular the rôle of the Pakistan Government.

A. J. COLES

The Lord Bethell, M.E.P.

NIR



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epc

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

29 May 1984

Afghanistan: Soviet Prisoners

BT

I enclose a copy of a letter which I have received from Lord Bethell. You will see that when the two Soviet prisoners whose case has been under discussion have left Pakistan, he proposes to generate publicity on the need to "save other Soviet prisoners in the hands of the Afghan resistance". He asks whether he may make public the fact that the two men appealed to the Prime Minister for permission to come to this country. I see no objection to this myself, but should be grateful for your views - by the end of this week.

I am copying this letter to Hugh Taylor (Home Office).

A. J. COLES

Peter Ricketts, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Bo



FROM
NICHOLAS
BETHELL

TELEPHONE
01-402-6877

73 SUSSEX SQUARE
LONDON W2 2SS

2/2

John Coles Esq.,
10 Downing Street,
London S.W.1.

25th May 1984

Dear John,

I went yesterday to see Michael Burton, head of the Foreign Office's South Asia Department, to talk about the transfer of the two former Soviet soldiers to the United Kingdom.

It seems as if the arrangements for bringing the two young men to England are going quite well. Our best guess now is that they will come here in about three weeks time.

I am of course saying nothing publicly about this business and I will say nothing until the two men have left Pakistan. However, when they arrive here I propose to generate some publicity on the need to save other Soviet prisoners in the hands of the Afghan resistance.

I do not propose to make public any of the correspondence that I received from the Prime Minister or from other Government departments. I would however like to make public the fact that the two men appealed to the Prime Minister for permission to come to this country. I would like to make known the contents of the two letters addressed to her.

I would not have thought that the Prime Minister would have any objection to this, but I thought that I ought to let you know that this is my intention. Please do not hesitate to tell me if there is any problem.

I would like once again to thank you very much for all the work you did to help this enterprise along to what promises to be a successful conclusion.

Yours ever

Nicholas

Lord Bethell