

PRIME MINISTER

## AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Gorbachev has said that the Russians are now ready to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan rapidly. But they are not prepared to take any active part in putting together an interim Government which, they say, is none of their business. The Americans are prepared to go along with this course since they do not want to delay Soviet withdrawal. The Pakistanis, on the other hand, continue to insist that there should be agreement on an interim Government in Kabul before they sign a withdrawal agreement. So far we are supporting them.

The attached minute by Percy Cradock sets out the arguments for and against breaking the link between Soviet withdrawal and agreement on an interim Government. I also attach a letter from Robert Cranborne arguing passionately that we must continue to maintain the link.

You will want to reflect on the arguments. Like Percy, I think that, while we want to see the Afghan resistance agree among themselves about the sort of Government which would follow Soviet withdrawal, we cannot make agreement on an interim Government a pre-condition for withdrawal. That spells delay, suggests that the Russians have a right to remain until some satisfactory Government is in place, and gives us little leverage over the Resistance to come to agreement among themselves. Breaking of the link seems to me more likely to make the Resistance face up to the need to cooperate amongst themselves and get themselves ready to return to Afghanistan in good order. I also agree with Percy that by far the most important point is to deal with the question of aid, to try to avoid a situation where the West suspends its aid to the Resistance while the Russians continue to pour aid into the Kabul regime.

It is a difficult balance, and one that you will want to discuss with the Foreign Secretary. I don't think we actually have much influence ~~either~~ way, but if we are to say anything, it needs to be before George Shultz visits Moscow next Monday.

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16 February, 1988.