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MDHIAN 1721

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FM UKMIS GENEVA

TO DESKBY 111800Z FCO

TELNO 170

OF 111630Z MARCH 88

INFO IMMEDIATE KABUL, ISLAMABAD, MOSCOW

INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK, NEW DELHI

PL:4

MY TELNO 149: AFGHANISTAN: PROXIMITY TALKS

SUMMARY

1. PAKISTAN ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER CLARIFIES OUTSTANDING POINTS INCLUDING PROGRESS TOWARDS INTERIM GOVERNMENT AND SYMMETRY. HE BELIEVES THAT SOVIET UNION WILL WITHDRAW FORCES, EVEN WITHOUT AGREEMENT.

DETAIL

2. ON 11 MARCH I HANDED OVER TO NOORANI A SPEAKING NOTE BASED ON FCO TEL 76 AND KABUL TELNO 02. NOORANI READ IT CAREFULLY, AND COMMENTED THAT IT WAS A VERY USEFUL ASSESSMENT. HE ASKED WHETHER A SUDDEN COLLAPSE OF THE PDPA GOVERNMENT ON SOVIET WITHDRAWAL COULD THEREFORE BE RULED OUT. I SAID THAT WE HAD REACHED NO FINAL CONCLUSIONS, AND THEREFORE NOTHING COULD BE RULED OUT. BUT OUR BEST GUESS AT PRESENT WAS THAT A SUDDEN COLLAPSE WAS UNLIKELY.

3. NOORANI SAID THAT THE PROXIMITY TALKS HAD MADE NO PROGRESS THIS WEEK. HE HAD CAREFULLY RESTATED THE POINTS WHICH REQUIRED CLARIFICATION BEFORE A COMMITMENT TO SIGN COULD BE GIVEN, BUT THE AFGHANS HAD BEEN UNWILLING TO DISCUSS THEM. SUBJECT TO RECEIVING SATISFACTORY ASSURANCES ON THESE POINTS, AND AFTER TIDYING UP THE TEXTS (SEE PARA 6 BELOW) PAKISTAN WOULD BE READY TO SIGN CORDOVEZ WAS URGING PAKISTAN TO TAKE SOVIET AND AFGHAN GOODWILL ON TRUST: BUT IF PAKISTAN GAVE A COMMITMENT TO SIGN ON A GIVEN DATE ON THE BASIS OF A VAGUE PROMISE BY KABUL TO DISCUSS A BROADBASED GOVERNMENT, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO STEP BACK IF IT LATER TURNED OUT THAT KABUL WERE NOT SERIOUS. SIGNATURE BY 15 MARCH WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION, BUT IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO SIGN BY 31 MARCH. PAKISTAN WOULD REQUIRE CONFIRMATION THAT THE US AND SOVIET UNION WERE ALSO PREPARED TO SIGN ON THE SAME DATE.

4. NOORANI SAID THE FOLLOWING POINTS WERE OUTSTANDING:

- (I) INTERIM GOVERNMENT. PAKISTAN REQUIRED "VISIBLE MOVEMENT" ON EFFORTS TO SORT OUT THE PRINCIPLES AND THE FRAMEWORK NEEDED TO PRODUCE A BROAD-BASED TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT, TOGETHER WITH A SOVIET COMMITMENT TO BRING THAT PROCESS TO A SUCCESSFUL END.
- (II) SYMMETRY. THE SOVIET UNION MUST GIVE A COMMITMENT, IRRESPECTIVE OF THE TERMS OF THE 1921 TREATY, TO STOP MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO THE PDPA.
- (III) MINE CLEARANCE. PAKISTAN REQUIRED A SOVIET COMMITMENT TO CLEAR LANDMINES AS WITHDRAWAL PROGRESSED, OTHERWISE THE PHYSICAL RETURN OF REFUGEES WOULD BE IMPEDED (I ASKED NOORANI IF THIS WAS A NEW ITEM, BUT HE ASSURED ME HE HAD INFORMED CORDOVEZ OF THIS REQUIREMENT AT AN EARLY STAGE OF THE TALKS).
- (IV) PHASING. PAKISTAN WAS CONCERNED THAT SOVIET WITHDRAWAL SHOULD BE EVENLY SPREAD IN TIME AND BY AREA THROUGHOUT THE NINE MONTHS AHEAD, AND SHOULD NOT BE CONCENTRATED ON A FEW SECTORS.
- (V) REFUGEES. THE CLAUSE RELATING TO THE RETURN OF THE REFUGEES SHOULD BE AMENDED AS CORDOVEZ HAD PROMISED TO KHALIS. THE SOVIET UNION HAD AGREED TO THIS, BUT KABUL WAS RAISING OBJECTIONS.
- (VI) DISENGAGEMENT. PAKISTAN WOULD REQUIRE PARA 5 OF THE DRAFT INSTRUMENT ON INTER-RELATIONSHIPS TO CONTAIN A SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO "DISENGAGEMENT" DURING WITHDRAWAL.
- (VII) BOUNDARIES. AFGHANISTAN WAS STILL MAINTAINING ITS RESERVATION ON THE INCLUSION OF "INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED BOUNDARIES" IN INSTRUMENT I, AND WANTED THIS MOVED TO THE PREAMBLE. PAKISTAN ATTACHED IMPORTANCE TO COMPLETE SOVIET EVACUATION OF ALL AREAS WITHIN AFGHAN BORDERS AS AT DECEMBER 1979.
- (VIII) IF NO INTERIM GOVERNMENT WAS IN PLACE BY 15 MAY, IT MUST BE CLEARLY STATED THAT THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING LAW AND ORDER IN AFGHANISTAN WOULD REST WITH THE PDPA. WHEN I ASKED WHETHER THIS MEANT THAT PAKISTAN WOULD NOT INSIST ON THE TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT BEING IN PLACE BY 15 MAY, NOORANI REPLIED, ALBEIT UNEASILY, THAT PAKISTAN COULD INDEED CONTEMPLATE SUCH A SITUATION: ALTHOUGH HE WOULD NATURALLY PREFER THE TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT TO BE IN PLACE BY 15 MAY.
5. COMMENTING ON EVENTS IN THE PAST WEEK, NOORANI CHARACTERISED

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THE POSITION AS A TEST OF PATIENCE AND WILLPOWER. HE INTERPRETED THE HARD LINE PRESS CONFERENCES BY WAKIL AND THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR (MY TELNOS 156 AND 168) AS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS, NOT STRENGTH. PAKISTAN'S ASSUMPTION WAS THAT SOVIET MILITARY FORCES WOULD BE WITHDRAWN, EVEN IF THE ACCORDS WERE NOT AGREED. SIGNATURE OF THE AGREEMENTS WOULD GIVE THE SOVIET UNION A DEGREE OF RESPECTABILITY, IN THAT THEY WOULD BE SEEN TO BE RESPONDING TO AN APPEAL FROM THE UN AND WOULD HAVE AN INTERNATIONAL GUARANTEE OF AN ORDERLY DISENGAGEMENT PROCESS. HOWEVER, PAKISTAN TOO WOULD BENEFIT FROM AN AGREEMENT WHICH ASSURED COMPLETE, RATHER THAN PARTIAL, SOVIET WITHDRAWAL, BUT PAKISTAN COULD NOT SACRIFICE 'AN ENTIRE NATION'. THE REFUGEES MUST BE ENABLED TO RETURN.

COMMENT

6. NOORANI WAS IN A RELAXED MOOD AND WAS CLEARLY GRATEFUL TO RECEIVE OUR PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE SURVIVABILITY OF THE PDPA REGIME. IT WAS INTERESTING THAT HE WAS WILLING TO CONCEDE THAT THE TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT MIGHT NOT BE IN PLACE BY 15 MAY. ALTHOUGH THE LIST OF OUTSTANDING POINTS LOOKS FORMIDABLE, THE MAIN PAKISTAN EMPHASIS REMAINS ON INTERIM GOVERNMENT AND SYMMETRY.

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