

CONFIDENTIAL
FM UKMIS GENEVA
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELNO 174

ADVANCE COPY

OF 141116Z MARCH 88
INFO PRIORITY ISLAMABAD, KABUL, MOSCOW, WASHINGTON
INFO ROUTINE UKMIS NEW YORK, NEW DELHI

AFGHANISTAN: PROXIMITY TALKS

SUMMARY

1. THREE MAIN ISSUES REMAIN. SYMMETRY WILL NEED TO BE SOLVED AT THE SHULTZ/SHEVARDNADZE LEVEL, BUT PROBLEMS OF A BROADBASED GOVERNMENT AND PHASING OF WITHDRAWAL SHOULD BE SOLUBLE IN GENEVA. SIGNATURE OF THE ACCORDS BY 31 MARCH REMAINS A POSSIBILITY, BUT ARRIVAL OF RESISTANCE DELEGATION COULD INTRODUCE A COMPLICATING FACTOR.

DETAIL

2. AFTER TWO WEEKS OF TALKS, AND ON THE EVE OF THE ORIGINAL DEADLINE FOR SIGNATURE OF 15 MARCH, THIS MAY BE A SUITABLE OPPORTUNITY TO ASSESS THE PRESENT STATE OF PLAY AS SEEN FROM GENEVA.

3. THE FACT THAT ALL PARTIES ANNOUNCED AGREEMENT TO THE NINE MONTHS TIMEFRAME AND THE THREE MONTHS/FIFTY PERCENT FRONTLOADING SO SWIFTLY TENDED TO OBSCURE THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS DEVELOPMENT, AND ALSO TO PUT PRESSURE ON PAKISTAN. THE PRESS CONFERENCES BY AFGHAN FOREIGN MINISTER WAKIL AND THE SOVIET OBSERVER KOZYREV HAVE ADDED TO THIS PRESSURE. HOWEVER, PAKISTAN ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER NOORANI HAS STOOD FIRM, AND THE PRESS ARE BEGINNING TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE IS SUBSTANCE IN PAKISTAN'S DEMAND FOR (I) PROGRESS ON SYMMETRY (OF AMERICAN AND SOVIET CESSATION OF MILITARY SUPPLIES), (II) FORMATION OF A BROADBASED GOVERNMENT IN KABUL AND (III) PHASING OF THE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL (BY MONTH AND PROVINCE, WITHIN THE NINE MONTHS TIMEFRAME).

4. THE AMERICAN OBSERVER PECK IS CONVINCED (MY TELNOS 142 AND 171) THAT THE SYMMETRY QUESTION CAN ONLY BE SOLVED BY DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE SUPERPOWERS, AND NOT AT THE PECK/KOSYREV LEVEL. IT THEREFORE SEEMS LIKELY THAT THIS WILL BE ON THE AGENDA OF THE SHULTZ/SHEVARDNADZE TALKS IN WASHINGTON NEXT WEEK. IF THEY REACH AGREEMENT, SIGNATURE OF THE GENEVA ACCORDS BY 31 MARCH REMAINS A

POSSIBILITY. IF NOT, THE CHANCES OF EARLY SIGNATURE DIMINISH, BECAUSE THE SUPERPOWERS MUST SIGN THEIR GUARANTEE AT THE SAME TIME AS THE PAKISTANIS AND AFGHANS SIGN THEIR AGREEMENTS: AND PECK IS ADAMANT THAT THE AMERICANS WILL NOT SIGN WITHOUT AN UNDERSTANDING ON SYMMETRY (THE EMPHASIS IS ON 'UNDERSTANDING' - THE AMERICANS ARE NOT INSISTING ON AN AMENDMENT TO THE GUARANTEE ITSELF).

5. WHILE THE SYMMETRY QUESTION AWAITS EVENTS IN WASHINGTON, PROSPECTS FOR PROGRESS ON FORMATION OF A BROADBASED GOVERNMENT AND ON PHASING LOOK REASONABLY GOOD. NOORANI'S INDICATION TO ME (MY TEL 170) THAT PAKISTAN IS NOT INSISTING THAT A BROADBASED GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE IN POWER IN KABUL BEFORE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL BEGINS ON 15 MAY, AND THE DECISION OF THE RESISTANCE LEADERS TO SEND A DELEGATION TO GENEVA (ISLAMABAD TEL 386) SHOULD GIVE CORDOVEZ THE OPENING HE NEEDS TO RE-LAUNCH HIS IDEA OF TRIPARTITE (KABUL/RESISTANCE/EMIGRES) TALKS AMONG THE AFGHANS THEMSELVES. FINDING A SOLUTION WILL NOT BE EASY OR QUICK: BUT NEITHER THE RUSSIANS NOR THE PAKISTANIS SHOW ANY SIGN AT PRESENT OF WANTING TO BRING THE GENEVA TALKS TO A PREMATURE CLOSE.

6. THE QUESTION OF PHASING APPEARS AT PRESENT TO BE THE LEAST TROUBLESOOME OF THE THREE MAIN ISSUES. PAKISTAN'S WISH TO BE ASSURED THAT THE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL IS EVENLY SPACED BY NUMBERS AND GEOGRAPHICAL AREA SHOULD NOT BE TOO DIFFICULT TO SATISFY BY A COMBINATION OF REPORTS FROM THE UN OBSERVER TEAM, INFORMATION FROM AMERICAN SATELLITE AND OTHER SOURCES. THIS WILL LARGELY BE A MATTER FOR AMERICAN/SOVIET DISCUSSION AND AGREEMENT AND A MINIMUM OF CO-OPERATION FROM THE RUSSIANS THEMSELVES.

7. THE OTHER OUTSTANDING ISSUES MENTIONED BY NOORANI (MY TEL 170) WOULD NOT SEEM INSUPERABLE. WE BELIEVE THAT CORDOVEZ HAS DEVICES OR FORMULAE TO SETTLE THESE POINTS FAIRLY QUICKLY ONCE THE MAIN QUESTIONS (SYMMETRY ETC.) ARE DEALT WITH. THE DILEMMA FOR NOORANI IS THAT HE DOES NOT WANT TO SIGN UNLESS HE HAS SOME ASSURANCE THAT THE REFUGEES WILL REALLY RETURN TO AFGHANISTAN. ON THE OTHER HAND IF HE DOES NOT SIGN, THE SOVIETS MAY BEGIN WITHDRAWING IN ANY CASE, BUT NOT LEAVING COMPLETELY - THEY MIGHT RETAIN GARRISONS IN KABUL AND/OR SOME OF THE NORTHERN PROVINCES.

8. MY PROVISIONAL ASSESSMENT THEREFORE IS THAT SIGNATURE OF THE GENEVA ACCORDS BY ALL FOUR PARTIES BY 31 MARCH REMAINS A POSSIBILITY, BUT MANY UNCERTAINTIES REMAIN - NOT LEAST WHETHER OR NOT THE RESISTANCE DELEGATION WILL PLAY A CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE.