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FM WASHINGTON (AMENDED DISTRIBUTION 16/3)  
TO IMMEDIATE FCO  
TELNO 672  
OF 150100Z MARCH 88  
INFO PRIORITY ISLAMABAD, KABUL, MOSCOW, UKMIS NEW YORK,  
INFO PRIORITY NEW DELHI, UKMIS GENEVA

FCO TELNO 493 (NOT TO ALL): AFGHANISTAN  
SUMMARY

1. THE ADMINISTRATION ARE STANDING FIRM ON THE NEED FOR SYMMETRICAL US AND SOVIET OBLIGATIONS AS GUARANTORS. PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND PRIVATE ASSURANCES TO THIS EFFECT HAVE ESTABLISHED A COMFORTABLE TACTICAL POSITION VIS-A-VIS MAINSTREAM CONGRESSIONAL AND PUBLIC OPINION. THE ADMINISTRATION IS NEITHER AT ODDS WITH ITSELF NOR BEING STAMPEDED BY THE HARD RIGHT.

DETAIL

2. AS REPORTED IN OUR TELNO 526, 15 MARCH HAS LONG BEEN SEEN HERE, AS ELSEWHERE, AS AN ARTIFICIAL DEADLINE WHICH WILL INEVITABLY SLIP AS THE SOVIET UNION, PAKISTAN AND, TO A LESSER EXTENT, THE US THEMSELVES ALL INDULGE IN EXTENDED BRINKMANSHIP. NERVOUS US RIGHT-WING AGITATION OF THE TYPE REFLECTED IN TUR WILL CONTINUE TO THE END BUT IS NOT NOW TO BE TAKEN TOO SERIOUSLY. PARTLY IN DEFERENCE TO CONGRESSIONAL VIEWS BUT MORE AS A REFLECTION OF THE ADMINISTRATION AND THE PRESIDENT'S OWN POSITION, US POLICY HAS SETTLED FIRMLY ON THE NEED FOR SYMMETRICAL OBLIGATIONS ON NON-INTERFERENCE AS THE CLINCHING ELEMENT REQUIRED FOR THE US TO GUARANTEE A GENEVA AGREEMENT. THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL CALCULATIONS HAVE LARGELY BEEN MADE ALREADY (SEE OUR TUR), THE ADMINISTRATION ARE COMFORTABLE THAT THEIR TACTICAL POSITION COMMANDS THE SUPPORT OF THE CONGRESSIONAL MAINSTREAM, AND THERE ARE NO SIGNS THAT THEY ARE IN THE TYPE OF INTERNAL DISARRAY SUGGESTED BY VISCOUNT CRANBORNE'S SOURCES.

3. ON ONE DETAIL, THOSE SOURCES WERE CORRECT. THERE WAS AN NSC INTER-AGENCY SENIOR OFFICIAL MEETING ON 14 MARCH ABOUT AFGHANISTAN. BUT THE ACCOUNTS WE HAVE HAD OF THE AGENDA (BOTH LAST WEEK AND THIS AFTERNOON) SUGGEST THAT IT WAS A RELATIVELY ROUTINE MEETING TO EXAMINE THE STATE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS IN GENEVA (ON THE EVE OF 15 MARCH), TO CONSIDER THE TACTICAL OPTIONS FOR ACHIEVING SOVIET COOPERATION ON SYMMETRY WITHOUT WEAKENING US DOMESTIC SUPPORT AND TO REVIEW PROGRESS ON ALL THE QUOTE MULTILATERAL UNQUOTE ASPECTS OF A SETTLEMENT (IE. ACTION WITH UN AGENCIES AND GOVERNMENTS ABOUT AID, RESETTLEMENT AND

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RECONSTRUCTION).

4. THE ACCOUNTS WE HAVE HAD HERE OF DEVELOPMENTS IN GENEVA MATCH THE FULL REPORTING FROM UKMIS GENEVA AND ISLAMABAD. THE PAKISTANIS HAVE TOLD THE US THAT THEY WOULD BE WILLING TO SIGN AT GENEVA, IF OFFERED A SATISFACTORY PROPOSAL ON THE PROCESS TOWARDS AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT (RATHER THAN ANY COMMITMENT ON THE SHAPE OF THE GOVERNMENT ITSELF). THE SOVIET UNION ARE STILL PLAYING A HARD, TACTICAL GAME BOTH ON SYMMETRY AND ON INTERIM GOVERNMENT (DESPITE SOME EARLIER HINTS OF FLEXIBILITY ABOUT A ROLE FOR CORDOVEZ IN BRINGING THE AFGHAN PARTIES TOGETHER). AS EXPECTED, THE SOVIET BOTTOM LINE IS UNLIKELY TO EMERGE BEFORE SHEVARDNADZE'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON.

5. MEANWHILE, THE ADMINISTRATION HAVE PUBLICLY RE-AFFIRMED THEIR POSITION ON SYMMETRY (EG. COLIN POWELL IN AN INTERVIEW ON WORLD NET: AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN ON 11 MARCH). AND THE PRESIDENT HAS SENT SENATOR BYRD A PRIVATE, WRITTEN ASSURANCE THAT THE ADMINISTRATION'S OBJECTIVE IS COMPLETE, IRREVERSIBLE AND VERIFIABLE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL AND THAT US INSISTENCE ON SYMMETRY WILL NOT BE RELAXED.

6. BUT IT IS CLEAR AT THE SAME TIME THAT THE ADMINISTRATION SEE VARIOUS WAYS THIS CONDITION COULD BE SATISFIED SHORT OF A SPECIFIC SIGNED SOVIET COMMITMENT ON MILITARY AID TO THE KABUL REGIME. ONE WOULD BE FOR THE RUSSIANS TO ACCEPT PUBLICLY THE GENERAL PROPOSITION THAT THE GUARANTEE INSTRUMENTS PROVIDE FOR NON-INTERFERENCE TO BE SYMMETRICAL. ALTERNATIVELY, THE RUSSIANS MIGHT AGREE NOT TO CONTRADICT US STATEMENTS TO THAT EFFECT. IF THERE IS NO GIVE FROM THE RUSSIANS, THE ADMINISTRATION ARE PREPARED TO CONTINUE THEIR CURRENT POLICY OF SUPPORT FOR THE RESISTANCE AND MILITARY PRESSURE ON THE SOVIET UNION. BUT THEY BELIEVE ON BALANCE THAT THE RUSSIANS HAVE DECIDED TO WITHDRAW AND WILL SEE IT AS IN THEIR INTEREST TO AGREE CONDITIONS WHICH GET BOTH GREAT POWERS OUT OF AFGHANISTAN SYMMETRICALLY.

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