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TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELNO 845

OF 302315Z MARCH 88
INFO PRIORITY ISLAMABAD, KABUL, MOSCOW, UKMIS NEW YORK
INFO PRIORITY UKMIS GENEVA, PARIS, BONN, RIYADH, NEW DELHI

YOUR TELNO 258: AFGHANISTAN

SUMMARY

1. US CONFIDENT THAT THEIR POSITION ON SYMMETRY HAS FULL PAKISTANI SUPPORT, MEETS RESISTANCE CONCERNS AND KEEPS THE SOVIET UNION UNDER PRESSURE.

DETAIL

2. THE US WOULD PREFER SOVIET WITHDRAWAL THROUGH AN AGREEMENT AT GENEVA, BOTH FOR AFGHAN-RELATED REASONS AND FOR THE SAKE OF BROADER US-SOVIET RELATIONS. BUT THEY SEE LITTLE TO CONCERN THEM IN UNILATERAL SOVIET WITHDRAWAL. THEY CONTINUE TO BELIEVE STRONGLY THAT WITHDRAWAL WILL HAPPEN. THEY DOUBT THE RUSSIANS CAN AFFORD TO DISAPPOINT THE DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL EXPECTATIONS THEY HAVE BUILT UP.

3. THE AMERICAN (AND THE AMERICANS BELIEVE ALSO THE PAKISTANI) MINIMUM REQUIREMENT AT GENEVA IS AN AGREEMENT WHICH THE RESISTANCE WILL NOT REJECT. FORMER PAKISTANI CONDITIONS ON AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT WERE INSURANCE AGAINST SUCH A REJECTION. THESE HAVE NOW FALLEN AWAY AND, IN THE US VIEW, HAVE BEEN REPLACED IN PAKISTANI, AS WELL AS US, EYES BY THE QUESTION OF SYMMETRY. ON THIS, AFTER SOME WOBBLER, THE US HAVE REACHED A POSITION WITH WHICH THEY REMAIN COMFORTABLE. THEY CLAIM THAT THE PROPOSAL WHICH SHULTZ ANNOUNCED AFTER THE SHEVARDNADZE VISIT:

- (I) MEETS CONGRESSIONAL CONCERNS (WHICH ARE PROTECTIVE OF RESISTANCE AND PAKISTANI INTERESTS):
- (II) HONOURS US MORAL OBLIGATIONS TO THE RESISTANCE AND WOULD ATTRACT THEIR SUPPORT, IF AGREEMENT WERE REACHED WITH THE RUSSIANS:
- (III) HAS FULL PAKISTANI SUPPORT: AND
- (IV) OFFERS AN EQUITABLE AND UN-HUMILIATING WAY FOR THE RUSSIANS TO ACHIEVE A DIGNIFIED, NEGOTIATED WITHDRAWAL. (STATE HAVE TOLD US THAT US EMBASSIES IN LONDON AND OTHER FRIENDLY CAPITALS WILL SHORTLY BE LOBBYING FOR SUPPORT FOR THE US POSITION ON SYMMETRY.)

4. AS SOVIET WITHDRAWAL WITH OR WITHOUT AN AGREEMENT APPEARS INCREASINGLY PROBABLE, STATE BELIEVE THAT DOMESTIC PRESSURE ON

JUNEJO FOR EARLY SIGNATURE IS EASING. OUR CONTACTS ARE NO LONGER CONCERNED, AS THEY WERE TWO WEEKS AGO, THAT HE AND ZIA MIGHT FALL OUT OR THAT JUNEJO MIGHT PREMATURELY SIGN AN AGREEMENT WHICH THE US COULD NOT GUARANTEE. ACCORDING TO STATE, THE SOVIETS HAVE ATTEMPTED AT GENEVA SINCE SHEVARDNADZE'S VISIT TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN THE US AND PAKISTAN BUT HAVE BEEN SENT PACKING BY NOURANI.

5. IN THE US VIEW, THE BALL IS FIRMLY AND PROPERLY IN THE SOVIET COURT. IT IS FOR THEM NOW TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT THEY WANT A NEGOTIATED WITHDRAWAL. THE BROAD LINES OF AN EQUITABLE AGREEMENT ARE AVAILABLE AND PUBLIC. THE DETAILS OF THE US VOLUNTARY MORATORIUM PROPOSAL ON SYMMETRY ARE STILL NEGOTIABLE. IF THE SOVIETS DECLINE TO ENGAGE ON THAT BASIS, THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CONSEQUENCES WILL BE THEIRS. STATE EXPECT THE GENEVA PROCESS TO LIMP ALONG WHILE THE RUSSIANS CONSIDER THIS FINAL DECISION. THEY SAY THEY WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF THE ISSUE HARDLY ADVANCES BEFORE SHULTZ AND SHEVARDNADZE NEXT MEET IN MOSCOW ON 21-25 APRIL.

6. SEVERAL ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLINE THIS US POSITION:

(A) THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE DECIDED TO WITHDRAW.

(B) THAT AFTER AND, PROBABLY DURING, WITHDRAWAL A FIGHT FOR POWER IN KABUL IS INEVITABLE: BUT THAT THE FIGHTING WILL BE CONCENTRATED AROUND THE CAPITAL AND OTHER CITIES WHICH THE PDPA WILL TRY TO HOLD.

(C) THAT, DESPITE THE FIGHTING, SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS OF REFUGEES WILL BEGIN TO RETURN ONCE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL IS CERTAIN.

(D) THAT THE RESISTANCE WILL NOT REJECT A GENEVA AGREEMENT, PROVIDED THE US ACHIEVE SOME AGREEMENT ON SYMMETRY ON THE LINES THEY ARE PURSUING.

(E) THAT A CREDIBLE RESISTANCE POSITION ON AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT IS A CHIMERA.

7. AS SEEN FROM HERE, THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN KABUL TELNO 143 WOULD MAKE US APPEAR MORE DEMANDING ABOUT THE TERMS OF A SETTLEMENT THAN THE US ADMINISTRATION, WHOSE DIFFICULTIES WITH THE FAR RIGHT IN CONGRESS MIGHT BE INCREASED AS A RESULT WITHOUT PRODUCING ANY MORE EFFECTIVE PRESSURE ON THE RUSSIANS. THE IDEA THAT A CONTINUING IMPASSE ON SYMMETRY MIGHT BE FINESSED BY REFOCUSING ON THE SEARCH FOR AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT (ISLAMABAD TELNO 448) WOULD BE LOOKED ON WITH A SIMILAR CONCERN ABOUT CONGRESSIONAL REACTIONS: ANYTHING THAT LOOKED LIKE A REDUCTION IN THE IMPORTANCE ATTACHED TO SYMMETRY WOULD PLAY VERY BADLY ON THE HILL. IN ADDITION, THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD BE CHARY OF ANYTHING THAT MIGHT SERVE TO GET THE PAKISTANIS BACK INTO THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT MAZE

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WITHOUT ANY CLEARER IDEA THAN LAST TIME AROUND OF THE WAY THROUGH.

8. IF WE HAVE GOOD REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE US ARE BEING SERIOUSLY OVER-OPTIMISTIC IN THEIR ASSESSMENT EITHER OF US-PAKISTANI COHESION OR OF SOVIET DETERMINATION TO WITHDRAW WITH OR WITHOUT AN AGREEMENT (AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PUBLIC WESTERN POSITION) WE SHOULD MOVE QUICKLY TO DISCUSS OUR CONCERNS WITH THE ADMINISTRATION. IF NOT, IT WOULD SEEM IN OUR INTEREST TO ALLOW THE US MORE TIME IN THEIR ATTEMPT TO REACH AN UNDERSTANDING WITH THE SOVIET UNION ON SYMMETRY: THE TIME MAY BE MORE ONE FOR PATIENCE THAN NEW THINKING.

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