

Prime Minister

This seems on the right line. But just as you were right to reject an interim government before, so you Foreign and Commonwealth Office



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would be now. There is no point in our supporting an "intra-Afghan dialogue" or

16 June 1988

Dear Charles,

"an interim government". It won't work - as you told Perez de Cuellar. We want the resistance Afghanistan to win. Agree? CGP

In your letter of 23 February, you outlined the Prime Minister's views on how we should play our hand during the final round of Geneva negotiations. She felt that, if Pakistani efforts to put together an interim government in Kabul were to fail, we should advise the Pakistanis to sign a Geneva Agreement with the Najib regime anyway in order to ensure that there was no delay in getting the Russians out. This is what happened. The agreement was signed on 14 April; Soviet withdrawal began on 15 May; the Soviet Union is committed to pulling out half its forces by 15 August and the rest by 15 February 1989.

The Foreign Secretary has reached the following conclusions on the way ahead:

- (a) The Russians are going, and will not be stopped. It would make military sense for them to get all their troops out before the onset of winter makes movement difficult. But their withdrawal may be slowed down for genuine logistical reasons (there is some evidence) or in retaliation for the continuation of aid to the resistance (the Russians have threatened this). Soviet allegations about the latter could be used to justify any delays resulting from the former. Nevertheless, when Secretary Shultz was here on 3 June, he told the Foreign Secretary that the US were confident that the Russians would withdraw as planned; it was the reality of the situation not their Geneva obligation which was compelling them to leave.
- (b) The Najib regime will fall; nobody knows when. The key imponderables are the cohesion of the faction-ridden regime and the solidarity of the resistance. But Soviet withdrawal will probably lead to a siege of Kabul. Then it should only be a matter of time.
- (c) However, the end game will be messy; there is no easy route to the replacement of the regime by a truly representative government. There is no formal intra-Afghan dialogue yet in progress although all those party to the UN agreement agreed to encourage Cordovez to make the effort. As the Prime Minister pointed out to Perez de Cuellar in May, such UN efforts are unlikely to succeed. The resistance factions cannot agree on the composition of an alternative government. President Zia,

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seems to be backing the ambitions of the arch-fundamentalist resistance leader, Gulbaddin Hekmatyar; this is disturbing the other resistance leaders and military commanders. There is scope for increased Iranian meddling. The best guess is that, if the fundamentalists do come to power, we shall be faced with a radical Sunni government dominated by military (resistance) commanders. There is no real precedent for this (the Iranian government is, of course, Shia and dominated by the mullahs). It is not easy to predict how such a government would interact with the USSR, Pakistan, Iran - or the West. A resistance victory would not automatically produce a government in Kabul with which we could easily do business, although there is a pragmatic streak in Afghan fundamentalism from which we can derive some comfort.

- (d) These uncertainties, coupled with the devastation of the Afghan infrastructure, the continued fighting and the presence of large numbers of uncleared mines, are delaying the mass return of refugees. Mr Shultz thought however that this hiatus might not last as long as we feared, and suggested that a return movement of some sort was already underway.

The Foreign Secretary believes that we must keep in mind the limits to our real ability to influence the course of events. Nevertheless, we are regarded as well informed observers and our advice is frequently sought by Pakistan; we have played an influential role in the evolution of EC thinking on Afghanistan; we shall be significant aid donors; we shall need to influence Western tactics at the UN General Assembly in November. The Foreign Secretary would welcome therefore the Prime Minister's general endorsement of our objectives, summarised in the attached note.

Our primary aim has been to get the Russians out. We must keep up the political pressure until the last Soviet soldier has crossed the Oxus. Beyond that, our objective is that Afghanistan should no longer be a source of regional instability, but an independent, non-aligned country living at peace with its neighbours.

National self-determination is central. But we should not be afraid to give history a helping hand; the regime installed by the Russians enjoys the unfair advantage of a "sitting tenant". We need to keep up the pressure on it to step down.

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We should support the UN effort to promote an intra-Afghan dialogue. We cannot expect much to come of it, but the lack of a UN strategy could lead to creeping international acquiescence in Najib and leave the Russians room for propaganda manoeuvring.

We should continue to limit the level of our dealings with any Afghan "authorities", Najib or an alternative or successor regime, unless it has passed a genuine test of public opinion. But we should of course stay in touch with a broad spectrum of Afghan opinion apart from the PDPA.

The main leverage we (and our EC partners) have is our aid. We must be careful that it does not help prop up Najib, or any equally unrepresentative alternative regime. But there is a strong moral imperative to base our emergency aid programmes on humanitarian, not political, considerations. If this means helping the needy in some areas controlled by the regime, we shall have to insist that the aid is provided direct, not via the regime. The Russians aim to retain influence through a network of bilateral economic agreements; we should press them to contribute instead to international aid programmes.

There was some discussion along these lines among EC Foreign Ministers in Luxembourg on 13 July. The Japanese are stimulating a similar process within the Group of Seven. All this should help the maintenance of a Western consensus, which will be strained by Soviet accusations of continuing Pakistani and US cross-border military support for the resistance and by internal developments in Pakistan.

It is bound to be a long haul in Afghanistan. Soviet withdrawal will be a triumph for Western firmness and Afghan grit. But things could still go wrong for us, if for example an unrepresentative fundamentalist government were installed, if the Russians were able to extricate themselves with more kudos than they deserve, or if they were able to deflect the blame for post-withdrawal problems on to Pakistani or US cheating.

Yours ever
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Private Secretary

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Afghanistan - Policy

1. Our aim should be the removal of Afghanistan as a source of regional instability.
2. Our objectives should be:
 - (i) complete Soviet withdrawal in 1988;
 - (ii) the installation of a truly representative government, replacing the existing PDPA regime;
 - (iii) the voluntary return of refugees in safety and honour;
 - (iv) the failure of Soviet attempts to convert a military defeat into a propaganda victory.
3. The policies/areas of action through which we seek to achieve the above objectives should be to:
 - (i) maintain pressure on the Soviet Union and PDPA regime by:
 - (a) identifying the continued presence of Soviet troops and survival of the PDPA regime as the obstacles to Afghan independence and self-determination, and as the main threats to regional stability;
 - (b) advocating an interim government as the best means of facilitating a peaceful transfer of power from the regime to a truly representative government;
 - (c) calling for the full involvement of the resistance in any comprehensive internal political settlement;
 - (d) underlining the Soviet responsibility for the devastation of Afghanistan;
 - (e) refusing to channel aid through the regime (unless there are overwhelming humanitarian reasons for providing essential emergency relief to those in regime controlled areas).
 - (ii) work (eg with the French) for an effective EC position on Afghanistan which reflects our thinking and which would form the basis for effective public diplomacy at the UN later this year;

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- (iii) sustain Western solidarity, particularly in the fact of Soviet claims that Pakistan and the US are in breach of the Geneva agreement, and against the background of a possible hiatus in Pakistan's progress back to democracy;
- (iv) support Pakistan in the fact of Afghan-related threats to its stability;
- (v) encourage a UN sponsored intra-Afghan dialogue;
- (vi) exploit fully the opportunities open to our Mission in Kabul, while maintaining the restrictions on UK relations with the present regime;
- (vii) develop links with key resistance figures including selected internal commanders;
- (viii) contribute financially and with ideas to an international aid programme for Afghanistan, whilst continuing support for the refugees in Pakistan;
- (ix) put pressure on the Soviet Union to contribute to the multi-lateral programme of aid for Afghanistan;
- (x) highlight the vulnerable parts of the Soviet and Kabul regime's position over Afghanistan through a vigorous information policy and at the United Nations.

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From the Private Secretary

17 June 1988

AFGHANISTAN

Thank you for your letter of 16 June about our future policy on Afghanistan. The Prime Minister agrees with most of the conclusions which the Foreign Secretary draws for the way ahead with the exception of the proposal that we should support the United Nations effort to promote an intra-Afghan dialogue and advocate an interim government. Having supported the Resistance through the long and difficult years of the conflict, our aim now should be to see them achieve the victory they deserve, even recognising that a fundamentalist government would not be at all easy to deal with. We should not dilute our support by recommending half measures, particularly since, as your letter recognises, our ability to influence the course of events is very limited anyway. The Prime Minister would therefore like to see paragraphs 3(i)(b) and 3(v) dropped from the list of policies/areas of action in the enclosure to your letter.

(CHARLES POWELL)

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