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MODUK FOR DI ROW 3(C)

YOURTELNO 583 TO ISLAMABAD

AFGHANISTAN: SOVIET PRISONERS OF WAR

1. I WAS ABLE TO DISCUSS THIS WITH THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR AT A FAREWELL RECEPTION FOR THE CUBAN LAST NIGHT. I ASKED YEGORYCHEV WHETHER THERE REALLY WERE 300 OR SO SOVIET PRISONERS OF WAR, OR WHETHER THAT WAS THE TALLY OF TROOPS MISSING. HE AGREED THAT "MISSING" WAS PERHAPS A BETTER WORD THAN "PRISONERS", AND ADDED THAT HE BELIEVED 10 OR 11 WERE IN "OTHER COUNTRIES" AND THAT AT LEAST 62 HAD BEEN KILLED OR DIED AFTER CAPTURE. HE DID NOT KNOW WHERE THE BALANCE MIGHT BE, BUT DID NOT QUARREL WITH MY SPECULATION THAT IF JAN GOODWIN IS RIGHT AND ZIA HAD OBLIGED THE RESISTANCE TO BRING SOVIET PRISONERS BACK INTO AFGHANISTAN, AT LEAST SOME COULD HAVE BEEN KILLED IN BOMBING RAIDS ON THEIR CAPTORS. WHEN I ADDED THAT YET OTHERS MIGHT HAVE TAKEN UP ARMS WITH THE MUJAHEDDIN, HE MERELY SHRUGGED.

2. I TOLD YEGORYCHEV THAT I WAS NOT SURE WHAT THE RUSSIANS EXPECT OF US IN KABUL, AND THIS HAD NOT BEEN EXPLAINED TO THE PRIME MINISTER, BUT WONDERED IF HE THOUGHT WE OUGHT TO SPEAK TO THE ICRC. HE SAID THAT MIGHT HELP. I THEN POINTED OUT THAT THERE WERE MANY MORE THAN 300 MUJAHEDDIN PRISONERS OF THE REGIME. WAS AN EXCHANGE POSSIBLE? YEGORYCHEV SAID IT WAS, AND ADDED THAT THE RESISTANCE HAD RECENTLY AGAIN DEMANDED DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE USSR. IN REPLY TO MY QUESTION, HE SAID THE DEMAND HAD ONLY BEEN MADE TWO DAYS AGO, AND MOSCOW HAD YET TO FORMULATE A REACTION. I THEN ASKED WHETHER THE RUSSIANS WOULD BE PREPARED TO FOLLOW THE ISRAELI EXAMPLE AND COUNT ONE

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OF THEIR MEN AS WORTH A HUNDRED OR EVEN A THOUSAND AFGHANS. HE SAID HE WAS SURE SOMETHING ALONG THESE LINES COULD BE WORKED OUT AND, IN REPLY TO A FURTHER QUESTION, SAID HE SAW 'NO PROBLEM' IN THE FACT THAT THE REGIME NOT THE RUSSIANS HELD THE MUJAHEDDIN PRISONERS.

COMMENT

3. ALTHOUGH THIS WAS A USEFUL EXCHANGE, I DO NOT THINK IT ALTERS MY FIRST REACTION ON RECEIPT OF TUR, WHICH IS THAT THERE IS VERY LITTLE WE CAN DO IN KABUL. I COULD OF COURSE SPEAK TO THE ICRC REPRESENTATIVE, BUT SINCE TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE THERE ARE NO SOVIET PRISONERS IN THE KABUL AREA, AND LAVOYER'S MOVEMENTS ARE AS CONSTRAINED AS OURS, HIS REACTION IS LIKELY TO BE THAT THERE IS LITTLE HE CAN DO THAT COULD NOT BE BETTER DONE EITHER BY ICRC HEADQUARTERS IN GENEVA OR HIS COUNTERPARTS IN PAKISTAN. HE IS AN INNATELY CAUTIOUS MAN, AND IS LIKELY TO ADD THAT ICRC HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN THE DELICATE BUSINESS FOR SOME YEARS, IS STILL WORKING HARD AT IT, AND THEREFORE DOES NOT NEED TO UNDERTAKE NEW INITIATIVES, AT LEAST IN KABUL. THE ONE POSSIBLE LINE I COULD TAKE MIGHT BE TO URGE HIM TO USE THE OPPORTUNITY TO STEP UP HIS EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF PRISONERS OF THE REGIME, AS ONE ELEMENT IN A THREE OR FOUR CORNERED NEGOTIATION. BUT I SUSPECT HE WOULD BE MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO PRESSURE IN THAT DIRECTION FROM GENEVA THAN FROM ME.

4. WHILE IT IS CLEARLY RIGHT, IN BOTH HUMANITARIAN TERMS AND IN TERMS OF OUR RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION, THAT WE SHOULD SHOW WILLING ON THIS ISSUE, I ALSO BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT NOT TO OVERLOOK THE FACT THAT FOR MANY YEARS THE SOVIET UNION WAS AS INDIFFERENT TO THE FATE OF ITS SOLDIERS CAPTURED BY THE MUJAHEDDIN AS TO THOSE WHO WERE KILLED AND AND BURIED AT HOME WITHOUT CEREMONY, REFUSING TO NEGOTIATE FOR THEIR RELEASE AND METING OUT PRETTY SHABBY TREATMENT TO ANY WHO MANAGED TO MAKE THEIR WAY BACK TO THE USSR. WHILE THE RECENT OFFICIAL CONCERN FOR PRISONERS IS DOUBTLESS PARTLY A REACTION TO GENUINE DOMESTIC PRESSURE, I ALSO DETECT A CYNICAL USE OF AN EMOTIVE ISSUE TO FURTHER THE OBJECTIVE OF CREATING THE IMPRESSION THAT THE WAR ENDED AT GENEVA IN APRIL, THAT CONTINUED FIGHTING IS A BREACH OF A CEASEFIRE, AND THAT THE MUJAHEDDIN AND THEIR SPONSORS ARE HEARTLESS TERRORISTS. THIS WILL ALL HELP IN THE GARNERING OF SUPPORT FOR AN ANTI-PAKISTAN RESOLUTION AT UNGA.

5. AS BECAME CLEAR IN MY CONVERSATION WITH YEGORYCHEV, THE STATISTIC OF 300 PRISONERS OF WAR IS MISLEADING. IN REALITY, APPROXIMATELY THAT NUMBER HAVE GONE MISSING. MANY WERE DOUBTLESS KILLED IN ACTION BUT THEIR BODIES NEVER RECOVERED. MANY MORE THAN YEGORYCHEV'S 62 WERE PROBABLY KILLED AFTER CAPTURE BY THE MUJAHEDDIN. THIS IS NOT A WAR IN WHICH MANY PRISONERS ARE TAKEN. THE SOVIET AND REGIME HAVE OFTEN SHOT CAPTURED MUJAHEDDIN OUTRIGHT, AND WE SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF THE MUJAHEDDIN BEHAVED SIMILARLY, AND CLAIMED GREATER JUSTIFICATION: SOVIET PRISONERS ARE A LOGISTICAL LIABILITY: NEW FOUND SOVIET CONCERN FOR THEIR PRISONERS IS IN STARK CONTRAST TO THE MASS EXECUTIONS OF HUNDREDS OF MUJAHEDDIN PRISONERS IN PUL-I-CHARKHI GAOL EARLIER THIS YEAR.

6. GIVEN THE ABOVE, I WOULD BE SURPRISED IF THERE WERE AS MANY AS 100 SOVIET PRISONERS STILL ALIVE IN MUJAHEDDIN HANDS. SOME MAY BE HELD IN THE TRIBAL AREAS OF PAKISTAN AND OTHERS IN LIBERATED ZONES OF AFGHANISTAN NEAR THE BORDER. WE KNOW THAT YET OTHERS ARE ACTIVELY CO-OPERATING WITH THE RESISTANCE. DESPITE SOVIET ASSURANCES TO THE CONTRARY, I SUSPECT THE LATTER WOULD NOT GET A WARM RECEPTION IF RETURNED HOME. I ACCEPT THAT WE MAY NOT WISH TO OFFER TO RESETTLE SUCH MEN, BUT THEY SHOULD CERTAINLY NOT BE FORCIBLY RETURNED TO THE SOVIET UNION IN A REPEAT OF THE MASS REPATRIATIONS AFTER WORLD WAR II.

UM ICRC REPRESENTATIVES HAVE VISITED MOST PRISONERS IN KABUL. ONE OF THEIR CONCERNS IS THAT IF THE REGIME CRUMBLES, COMMUNIST HARDLINERS MAY BE TEMPTED TO MASSACRE REMAINING MUJAHEDDIN PRISONERS - THERE ARE AT LEAST 8,000 IN PUL-I-CHARKHI ALONE. TO PREVENT SUCH A TRAGEDY, THE RESISTANCE MAY WELL WISH TO HANG ON TO ANY BARGAINING CHIPS THEY MAY HAVE FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE, AND I DOUBT IF IT WOULD BE POLITIC FOR HMG TO COUNSEL THEM OTHERWISE. INDEED, I BELIEVE OUR AIM SHOULD BE TO CONCENTRATE ON PREVENTING THE RUSSIANS FROM MAKING POLITICAL CAPITAL OUT OF THEIR SUDDENLY-DISCOVERED COMPASSION FOR THEIR MISSING SOLDIERS, AND TO STRESS THE POOR TREATMENT CAPTURED MUJAHEDDIN RECEIVE. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND THE UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS HAVE DOCUMENTED SOME HORRENDOUS EXAMPLES.

MACKLEY

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ADDITIONAL 3

NO 10 DOWNING STREET

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