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AFGHANISTAN : MEETING WITH RABBANI

SUMMARY

1. RABBANI DESCRIBES MUJAHIDEEN SUCCESSES AND THE DISARRAY OF THE NAJIB REGIME. IT IS TIME FOR A NEW INITIATIVE FOR BROAD-BASED GOVERNMENT THOUGH NOT INCLUDING THE PDPA, AND NOT ALL THE SEVEN ALLIANCE PARTIES MIGHT AGREE. DISCUSSION OF VORONTSOV'S OBJECTIVES. RABBANI ASKS FOR REASSURANCE ON CERTAIN POINTS, BUT APPEARS GENERALLY CONFIDENT AND POSITIVE.

DETAIL

2. DURING THE ONE AND A HALF DAYS I SPENT WITH DAVID GILLMORE IN PESHAWAR LAST WEEK WE CALLED ON RABBANI, THE JAMIAT LEADER AND NEW ALLIANCE CHAIRMAN. ALTHOUGH HE CAME STRAIGHT TO THE MEETING AFTER RETURNING BY CAR FROM ISLAMABAD, RABBANI WAS ON GOOD FORM: FRIENDLY, OPEN AND CHEERFUL AND MORE ROBUST AND POSITIVE THAN I HAD SEEN HIM IN THE PAST.

3. I REMINDED HIM THAT WE HAD NOT MET SINCE BEFORE THE GENEVA AGREEMENTS AND CONGRATULATED HIM ON THE ALLIANCE CHAIRMANSHIP. WE THEN ASKED ABOUT THE SITUATION INSIDE AFGHANISTAN IN THE LIGHT OF HIS RECENT VISIT TO THE INTERIOR. HE SAID HE HAD FOUND HIS VISIT VERY REWARDING. THE MORALE OF THE MUJAHIDEEN WAS HIGH AND THAT OF THE REGIME FORCES WAS CORRESPONDINGLY LOW. MILITARY SUCCESS WAS INCREASINGLY COMING WITHOUT THERE BEING A NEED TO FIGHT. OFTEN REGIME FORCES JUST RAN AWAY. THE MUJAHIDEEN WERE CAPTURING SIGNIFICANT QUANTITIES OF EQUIPMENT, INCLUDING TANKS AND GUNS.

4. RABBANI SAID THAT MUJAHIDEEN AUTHORITY WAS WIDESPREAD AND APPARENT. IT WAS INTERESTING TO SEE THE SELF CONFIDENCE WITH WHICH THEY WERE ENGAGING IN RECONSTRUCTION, PARTICULARLY OF SCHOOLS, HOSPITALS AND ROADS. (HE ADMITTED THAT THIS WAS PROBABLY MORE TRUE

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OF CERTAIN JAMIAT CONTROLLED AREAS IN THE NORTH THAN OTHER PLACES).

5. THE NAJIBULLAH REGIME WAS IN DISARRAY. THERE WERE AN INCREASING NUMBER OF CONTACTS BETWEEN THE MUJAHIDEEN AND REGIME OFFICIALS AND ARMY OFFICERS, EVEN AT THE MOST SENIOR LEVELS, WHO WERE SEEKING AMNESTY IN RETURN FOR DEFECTIONS. PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE REGIME WAS DIMINISHING FAST. IN TAKHAR, FOR EXAMPLE, WHERE THERE HAD ONCE BEEN 5,000 PARTY MEMBERS ONLY 70 PEOPLE HAD RENEWED THEIR PARTY DOCUMENTS WHEN RECENTLY CALLED UPON TO DO SO.

6. RABBANI SAID THAT IT SEEMED THAT THE USSR WAS NOW UNCERTAIN WHAT POLICY TO PURSUE TOWARDS THE KABUL REGIME. SOVIET TROOPS NO LONGER PARTICIPATED IN COMBINED OPERATIONS WITH REGIME FORCES. IN MANY CASES THE RUSSIANS HAD DIRECT CONTACTS WITH THE MUJAHIDEEN ON LOCAL MILITARY AND LOGISTICAL MATTERS. THE LEVEL VARIED FROM AREA TO AREA, IN SOME CASES THE RUSSIANS MAKING A PLEA THAT THEY SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO WITHDRAW WITHOUT INTERFERENCE SINCE THEY WERE LEAVING AFGHANISTAN ANYWAY. HE CONFIRMED THAT CONTACTS WITH THE RUSSIANS WERE TACTICAL AND NOT POLITICAL. THERE WAS NO QUESTION OF THE MUJAHIDEEN RESPONDING TO ANY OVERTURES ABOUT JOINING THE GOVERNMENT.

7. GILLMORE AND I THEN ASKED WHAT PROGRESS THE MUJAHIDEEN WERE MAKING IN ESTABLISHING A POLITICAL STRUCTURE TO REPLACE THE NAJIB REGIME, IF IT FELL SWIFTLY AFTER SOVIET WITHDRAWAL. WE HAD RECENTLY HEARD RUMOURS IN ISLAMABAD OF PLANS FOR A MORE BROADLY BASED GOVERNMENT EMERGING FROM AN ELECTED SHOURA. RABBANI REPLIED THAT THERE WAS NO DIFFERENCE OF OPINION BETWEEN THE ALLIANCE LEADERS ON THE PRINCIPLE OF A SHOURA BUT TIME WAS SHORT AND THE ALLIANCE WOULD NEED TO FIND WAYS OF GETTING A SHOURA IN PLACE QUICKLY. NO DECISIONS HAD BEEN TAKEN, ALTHOUGH THE MATTER WAS NOW UNDER URGENT DISCUSSION IN THE ALLIANCE. HE GAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT HIS PARTY FAVOURED MAKING PROGRESS WITHOUT WAITING FOR A SHOURA.

8. HE THEN SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO ASK US A QUESTION. SINCE IT MIGHT BE DIFFICULT TO FORM A NEW ADMINISTRATION OR GOVERNMENT COMPRISING ALL MEMBERS OF THE ALLIANCE WHAT WOULD BE THE POSITION OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT IF THE MUJAHIDEEN, INCLUDING JAMIAT, FORMED A GOVERNMENT WHICH COMPRISED SOME BUT NOT ALL OF THE SEVEN PARTIES. (WHEN I ASKED IF HE WAS THINKING IN TERMS OF SIX RATHER THAN SEVEN HE DECLINED TO BE SPECIFIC. BUT OUR IMPRESSION WAS THAT THIS WAS WHAT HE HAD HAD IN MIND IE. EXCLUDING HEKMATYAR.

9. GILLMORE AND I BOTH MADE THE POINT THAT BRITISH POLICY WAS TO RECOGNISE STATES NOT GOVERNMENTS. WE WOULD NORMALLY DEAL WITH ANY

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ADMINISTRATION OR GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO THE AUTHORITY IT EXERCISED AND THE DEGREE OF PUBLIC SUPPORT IT ENJOYED. GILLMORE SAID THAT ANY GOVERNMENT WHICH EMERGED AS A RESULT OF DELIBERATIONS OF A SHOURA WOULD TEND TO HAVE BETTER CREDENTIALS WITH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ABROAD. AS FAR AS DEALING WITH ANY GOVERNMENT WAS CONCERNED WE SAID THAT IT WOULD OF COURSE DEPEND ON CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT AN EXAMPLE WAS THE ADMINISTRATION OF RESETTLEMENT AID. THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAD SAID PUBLICLY THAT BRITISH AID WOULD NOT BE DISPENSED THROUGH THE KABUL REGIME BUT WE COULD NOT IMAGINE THERE BEING ANY INHIBITIONS IN DISPENSING AID THROUGH AN ADMINISTRATION CONSISTING OF MUJAHIDEEN GROUPS, WHETHER OR NOT IT REPRESENTED ALL OF THE SEVEN PARTIES.

10. RABBANI THEN ASKED ANOTHER QUESTION: PAKISTAN WAS A FRIEND OF THE MUJAHIDEEN BUT DID THE AGREEMENT WITH THE RUSSIANS ON A CONSENSUS RESOLUTION AT THE UN WITH REFERENCES TO A BROAD BASED GOVERNMENT MEAN THAT THE PAKISTANIS HAD AGREED THAT THERE SHOULD BE PDPA PARTICIPATION IN SUCH GOVERNMENT? WE SAID WE THOUGHT NOT. WE WORKED CLOSELY WITH THE PAKISTANIS AT THE UN AND AGREED WITH THEIR TACTICS ABOUT A CONSENSUS RESOLUTION THIS YEAR. BUT WHILE BRITAIN AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY HAD SUPPORTED THE IDEA OF A 'BROAD BASED GOVERNMENT' THE PHRASE HAD BEEN DELIBERATELY LEFT VAGUE. IT WAS UP TO THE AFGHANS THEMSELVES TO DETERMINE THE TYPE OF GOVERNMENT THEY WANTED. ONE MIGHT IMAGINE, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT A BROAD BASED GOVERNMENT SHOULD ENJOY SUPPORT FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE COUNTRY FROM SHIAS AS WELL AS SUNNIS ETC BUT NOT THAT IT SHOULD COMPRISE ANY SPECIFIC POLITICAL GROUPS, SUCH AS THE COMMUNISTS. THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAD EXPRESSED THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE CONCEPT OF A BROAD BASED GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD ENJOY SUPPORT AMONG THE PEOPLE OF AFGHANISTAN AND WHERE THE ROLE OF THE MUJAHIDEEN WOULD BE RECOGNISED.

11. RABBANI THEN SAID THAT HE HAD HEARD THAT GILLMORE HAD RECENTLY SEEN VORONTSOV. WHAT DID HE THINK OF THE LATTER'S ROLE IN KABUL? GILLMORE REPLIED THAT HE BELIEVED VORONTSOV HAD BEEN SENT TO AFGHANISTAN WITH CONSIDERABLE AUTHORITY. HIS AIM WAS PROBABLY TO EXTRACT SOVIET MILITARY FORCES FROM AFGHANISTAN BY 15 FEBRUARY WITH MINIMUM DAMAGE, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME LEAVING BEHIND IF POSSIBLE A REGIME WITH WHICH THE RUSSIANS COULD HAVE GOOD RELATIONS. IN MOSCOW VORONTSOV HAD DISMISSED NAJIB AND EXTROLLED SHARQ. HE HAD BEEN TOLD, HOWEVER, THAT WE BELIEVED SHAQ WOULD BE JUST AS UNACCEPTABLE TO THE MUJAHIDEEN AS NAJIB (RABBANI CONCURRED). IT LOOKED AS THOUGH THE RECENT PDPA PLENUM IN KABUL HAD NOT PRODUCED THE AGREEMENT ON A MORE MODERATE GOVERNMENT THAT VORONTSOV HAD HOPED FOR. THE LATTER WAS NO

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DOUBT CONCERNED ABOUT THE PROPECTS OF MAJOR DISSENSION INSIDE THE REGIME.

12. WE SURMISED THAT VORONTSOV'S AIM MIGHT FIRST HAVE BEEN TO ORCHESTRATE A COALITION BETWEEN PDPA AND MUJAHIDEEN, AND WHEN THIS PROVED IMPOSSIBLE, AT LEAST TO SEE THAT THE PDPA COULD REMAIN IN EXISTENCE AS A POLITICAL FORCE. IF BOTH THESE OPTIONS WERE UNOBTAINABLE, AS SEEMED LIKELY TO BE THE CASE (RABBANI AGAIN CONCERRED), THE QUESTION WAS WHETHER VORONTSOV WOULD PURSUE A FALLBACK POSITION OF DEALING WITH AN AFGHAN GOVERNMENT WHICH WAS FREE OF ANY CONNECTIONS WITH THE PDPA, SO LONG AS IT WAS NOT OVERTLY HOSTILE TO THE USSR. WHEN ASKED FOR HIS OWN VIEWS, RABBANI SAID THAT VORONTSOV HAD NO DOUBT GONE TO KABUL TO TRY AND BOOST THE MORALE OF THE REGIME. HE WAS PERHAPS AIMING TO SPLIT THE MUJAHIDEEN BY ATTEMPTING TO BUY OR OTHERWISE WIN THE SUPPORT OF SOME MILITARY COMMANDERS. THIS POLICY WOULD FAIL.

13. I SAID THAT I HAD HEARD THAT THE SOVIETS HAD IN THE RECENT PAST BEEN PREPARED TO TALK DIRECTLY TO THE MUJAHIDEEN ABOUT PRISONERS OF WAR, WHICH MIGHT HAVE LED TO THE DISCUSSION OF MORE SUBSTANTIVE MATTERS: BUT THAT RECENTLY THEY HAD PULLED BACK. RABBANI WAS NOT SPECIFIC ON THIS POINT BUT INDICATED THAT THE RUSSIANS HAD INDEED NOT FOLLOWED UP THE IDEA OF PRISONER OF WAR TALKS.

14. AS A LAST QUESTION, RABBANI ASKED WHETHER IT WAS TRUE THAT CERTAIN COUNTRIES SUPPORTED PLANS TO DIVIDE AFGHANISTAN INTO NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN SECTORS. GILLMORE SAID THAT HE DOUBTED WHETHER SUCH PLANS WOULD BE CAPABLE OF REALISATION SINCE THEY WOULD NECESSITATE A MAJOR INFLUX OF SOVIET TROOPS NOW SOLELY CONCENTRATED IN TWO RIBBANDS STRETCHING NORTHWARDS FROM KABUL AND SHINDAND. THE IMPACT ON WORLD OPINION WOULD BE VERY NEGATIVE. THERE WAS NO QUESTION OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, OR LIKE MINDED GOVERNMENTS, SUPPORTING A POLICY OF DIVIDING AFGHANISTAN INTO TWO.

15. AT THE END OF THE CONVERSATION GILLMORE RETURNED TO THE QUESTION OF NEW DEVELOPMENTS AMONG THE MUJAHIDEEN. IT WAS IMPORTANT NOT TO LEAVE THE INITIATIVE TO THE RUSSIANS AND THERE WOULD SEEM TO BE ADVANTAGES IN HAVING NEW PROPOSALS IN PLAY BEFORE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL. RABBANI AGREED VERY MUCH THAT NOW WAS THE TIME TO MAKE SOME NEW MOVES.

16. FINALLY, RABBANI ASKED FOR HELP OVER SCHOLARSHIPS FOR ONE OR TWO YOUNG JAMIAT ADMINISTRATORS. I EXPLAINED THAT THERE HAD BEEN PROBLEMS IN THE PAST OVER AWARDS FOR AFGHANS WHEN THERE WAS NO

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GUARANTEE THAT THEY WOULD GO BACK TO WORK FOR THEIR COUNTRY. THE SITUATION WAS NOW CHANGING AND THOUGH I COULD GIVE NO COMMITMENT WE WOULD CERTAINLY LOOK SYMPATHETICALLY IF WE RECEIVED A FIRM REQUEST.

17. WHEN I ASKED WHETHER RABBANI HAD ANY PLANS TO TRAVEL ABROAD IN THE NEAR FUTURE HE SAID HE MIGHT DO THIS BUT HAD AS YET NO PLANS.

18. SEE MIFT

FCO PLEASE PASS SAVING ADDRESSEES.

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