

CONFIDENTIAL

FM WASHINGTON

TO DESKBY 040900Z FCO

TELNO 10

OF 040041Z JANUARY 89

INFO PRIORITY KABUL

INFO ROUTINE PARIS, ROME, ANKARA, MOSCOW, ISLAMABAD, NEW DELHI

INFO ROUTINE UKMIS GENEVA, UKMIS NEW YORK, TOKYO

OUR TELNO 3075: AFGHANISTAN: CONTINGENCY PLANNING  
SUMMARY

1. NO CHANGE IN US INTENTION TO MAINTAIN THEIR MISSION IN KABUL AT ITS PRESENT SIZE. THEY SHARE OUR SUSPICION OF SOVIET CEASEFIRE OFFERS AND HAVE STONEWALLED SOVIET EFFORTS TO INVOLVE THEM. IN VORONTSOV'S CURRENT DIPLOMACY. SOME THOUGHTS ON HOW THE SITUATION MIGHT EVOLVE IMMEDIATELY AFTER 15 FEBRUARY.

DETAIL.

2. WE HAVE NOW MADE A FURTHER ROUND OF CONTACTS IN STATE AND THE NSC. FOLLOWING ARE THE MAIN POINTS IN CURRENT US THINKING.

3. US EMBASSY IN KABUL. THERE IS NO CHANGE FROM THE ASSESSMENT IN OUR TUR. THE US KNOW OF NO SPECIFIC THREATS AGAINST THEIR PERSONNEL AND HAVE NOT DETECTED ANY PARTICULAR HOSTILITY TOWARDS THEM FROM MEMBERS OF THE REGIME. THEY THEREFORE HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE US EMBASSY OR ITS PERSONNEL WOULD BE TARGETS. IT WAS NOT OF COURSE TO BE EXCLUDED THAT SOME MAVERICK INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP MIGHT TRY TO ATTACK AMERICANS IN THE CONFUSION FOLLOWING SOVIET WITHDRAWAL. BUT THE JUDGEMENT HERE IS THAT ON BALANCE THAT IS UNLIKELY AND THAT THE US EMBASSY SHOULD REMAIN IN KABUL AT ITS PRESENT LEVEL, PREPARED TO WEATHER STORMS EITHER DURING OR AFTER SOVIET WITHDRAWAL.

4. SOVIET POLICY. US ARE WATCHING VORONTSOV'S ROUND OF VISITS TO ZAHIR SHAH IN ROME, TO TEHRAN AND TO THE ALLIANCE IN PAKISTAN WITH CLOSE ATTENTION. THEY BELIEVE THAT IT MAY INDICATE THAT THE RUSSIANS ARE BEGINNING TO FACE UP TO THE REALITY OF THEIR SITUATION. THEY SEEMED TO BE MAKING AN EFFORT TO KEEP THE ZAHIR SHAH OPTION OPEN. AND VORONTSOV MIGHT TRY TO ENCOURAGE AT LEAST SOME OF THE ALLIANCE LEADERS TO JOIN AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT HEADED BY ZAHIR SHAH. VORONTSOV WOULD ALSO NO DOUBT BE LOOKING FOR POSSIBILITIES TO SOW DISSENSION WITHIN THE ALLIANCE. HOWEVER THE FACT OF CONTINUING SOVIET CONTACTS WITH THE MUJAHADEEN WAS IMPORTANT SYMBOLICALLY. AS ONE STATE CONTACT PUT IT, THE RUSSIANS NOW SEEMED TO BE ENGAGED

IN QUOTE PACKAGING THEIR HUMILIATION UNQUOTE.

5. US POLICY. VORONTSOV HAS ALSO BEEN TRYING TO ARRANGE A MEETING WITH ARMACOST. STATE HAVE SO FAR FENDED HIM OFF. THE US HAD NOTHING TO GIVE THE RUSSIANS AT PRESENT. THEY SHARED OUR VIEW THAT THE OFFER OF A CEASEFIRE WAS A TRAP TO BE AVOIDED. THE REALITY WAS THAT THE MUJAHADEEN WERE NOT WILLING TO MAKE ANY FURTHER CONCESSION, BEYOND THE RESTRAINT THEY WERE AT PRESENT EXERCISING TO ENABLE THE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL TO TAKE PLACE. THE AMERICANS HAD NO INTENTION OF BEING PUT IN THE POSITION OF TRYING TO PERSUADE THE MUJAHADEEN AGAINST THEIR WILL TO MAKE FURTHER MOVES TOWARDS THE RUSSIANS, PARTICULARLY AT A TIME WHEN SOVIET AIR STRIKES AGAINST THE RESISTANCE HAD BEEN STEPPED UP. IN SHORT, THE US SAW THEMSELVES AS ESSENTIALLY ON THE SIDELINES AT PRESENT (THE TRANSITION HERE WAS A FURTHER DISINCENTIVE TO HIGH PROFILE US ACTIVITY). BUT THEY HAD TAKEN OPPORTUNITIES TO ENCOURAGE RABBANI TO DEVELOP HIS IDEAS FOR A SHOURA IN TALKING TO VORONTSOV.

6. IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS. THE US ASSESSMENT REMAINS THAT THE RUSSIANS WILL COMPLETE THEIR WITHDRAWAL ON SCHEDULE. THEIR BEST GUESS AS TO WHAT WILL HAPPEN THEREAFTER IS THAT THE REGIME WILL DISINTEGRATE RAPIDLY WITH OFFICIALS DISAPPEARING OR JOINING THE RESISTANCE, AND INDIVIDUAL PDPA UNITS CUTTING DEALS WITH LOCAL RESISTANCE COMMANDERS. THERE WAS THEN LIKELY TO BE A PERIOD OF CONFUSION AND IN-FIGHTING WITHIN KABUL. IT WAS UNLIKELY THAT THE RESISTANCE ALLIANCE COULD PUT TOGETHER A WORKABLE GOVERNMENT BUT IN DUE COURSE SOME TEMPORARY COALITION LEADER WOULD EMERGE, WHO WOULD THEN BECOME A CHANNEL FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE, AND WOULD THEREBY GAIN A BREATHING SPACE TO PROVE WHETHER HE HAD THE QUALITIES TO SURVIVE AS A MORE PERMANENT LEADER.

7. ONE ADDITIONAL POINT WHICH THE US ARE WATCHING CLOSELY IS WHETHER THE PRESENT RESTRAINT ON THE PART OF THE RESISTANCE MAY BREAK DOWN AS THE END OF THE SOVIET WITHDRAWAL APPROACHES. GIVEN THE LACK OF ANY HATCHING SOVIET RESTRAINT THEY DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THIS WOULD IN ITSELF MUCH INCREASE THE THREAT TO WESTERN MISSIONS, BUT IT MIGHT EXTEND THE PERIOD OF CONFUSION IN AND AROUND KABUL.

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