



SECRET Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

From The Minister of State

6 January 1989

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*If other embassy staff
have armed protection -
I think we should have
Gen. Archie, we have
no*

*Prime Minister
You asked to
see this.
COP 1/1*

I am writing, following a meeting I held here yesterday which was attended by MOD officials, to ask for your help in a matter that has arisen in our contingency planning for improving the security of our Embassy in Kabul during the difficult period which may follow Soviet withdrawal.

It might be helpful if I were to set out the current position. Barring a dramatic deterioration in the outlook, we envisage keeping our Embassy open after completion of Soviet withdrawal (due under the Geneva Agreements by 15 February). There is a strong political case for doing this. From the outset we have played a prominent role in orchestrating the western response to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. We are one of the main opinion-formers on the issue among the Twelve. We have exercised considerable influence over policy-making on Afghanistan by the Pakistanis, who have regularly sought our advice - and we seem to have won grudging respect from the Russians. We have links with certain key elements in the resistance and may be able to put these to effective use if a resistance-dominated government comes to power. But we shall only be able to do this if we retain our Embassy. The Americans, French, Turks and Pakistanis plan to keep their missions open. The Germans and Italians are wavering, but may yet decide to stay. It would not go well with the stance the British Government has taken on the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan over the past 9 years for the British Embassy to join the exodus of fleeing Communist officials at the moment of resistance victory.

The Hon A Hamilton MP
Minister for the Armed Forces
Ministry of Defence
Main Building
Whitehall
LONDON SW1

/A major consideration

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A major consideration, of course, has been the physical risks our people may have to run during the confused period which will follow Soviet withdrawal, when Kabul airport might well close for a time, effectively cutting off our mission. The security outlook has been well covered in a JIC Immediate Assessment - JIC(88)(IA)103 - of 30 December, to which the DIS made a major contribution. We judge that, while the threat will increase once the Russian garrison leaves Kabul, it will remain within acceptable limits. Our Chargé in Kabul (who is currently in London) subscribes strongly to this view. We therefore see no case for a decision to withdraw as things now stand.

But we do owe it to our Embassy staff to do whatever we can to enhance their security during the uncertain days ahead. They have a right to expect this, and I believe that Parliament and public opinion will also need to be convinced that we have taken all reasonable steps to protect our people.

Clearly we cannot provide defences against the full range of threats outlined in the JIC paper. Such steps as can be taken to reduce the risks from cross fire and stray rockets have been taken. It would clearly be foolish to offer armed resistance to an assault by a large body of armed men. But neither risk seems particularly great. The Embassy's location on the edge of the city well away from major regime installations means that it stands a good chance of avoiding being caught up in fighting; there is no intelligence to suggest that any group in Afghanistan is planning to seize our mission.

We share our Charge's view that the main threat would probably result from a breakdown of law and order during the regime's final days and for a time afterwards. The Embassy could then become a target for armed marauders (eg seeking loot, hostages or revenge), probably operating singly or in small bands and armed with the ubiquitous AK-47 rather than heavier weapons.

The Embassy compound already has some defences, including a 12 foot high perimeter wall and a guard force of 12 unarmed ex-Gurkhas. The mission holds a stockpile of food and essential commodities, so that members of staff need not venture outside the compound in times of danger. But we believe that a modest increment to the guard forces in the shape of a small armed team of British military personnel, would significantly increase our chances of deterring and, at worst, countering the sort of attack by casual marauders which we see as a major element in the overall threat.

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/The Americans,



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The Americans, French and German missions already have armed protection teams. If we were to fail to provide our own people with a comparable level of protection and if, as a result, a relatively small scale incident were to lead to casualties amongst our staff, we would be criticised, in my view justly.

I am not asking that the Ministry of Defence should take a final decision to deploy soldiers for this purpose now - our Charge d'Affaires' view is that the moment for this will probably come several weeks from now, unless political developments (such as the negotiated establishment of a mujahideen-led government) make this unnecessary. But if we do not prepare ourselves immediately for such a deployment, the option will simply disappear - flying into Kabul could become highly problematic after 15 February (or even before) and it takes anything up to six weeks to secure visas. I imagine you too would need a little time to prepare and train for such an operation. We shall also need to agree on rules of engagement. The decision whether actually to proceed to deployment will therefore be quite distinct from this initial contingency step, which I hope you will agree needs to be taken urgently.

I should be grateful for your advice on how our requirement might best be met. I understand that some thought is being given to the use of Special Forces soldiers. Their military skills and qualities of resourcefulness, flexibility and self-reliance would presumably well fit them for the unique task we have in mind. In addition to providing armed protection they would also be able to give the Charge expert advice on security matters and supervise the general security measures taken by the Embassy. Their communications and medical skills could be useful bonuses - although we are not specifically asking you to provide either. A possible alternative might be a team of serving Gurkhas who should be able to work well with our existing ex-Gurkha guard force, although, unlike SAS personnel, they would not be able to provide expert advice. (We do not, however, see arming the ex-Gurkhas as a viable option as their military skills are no longer current).

The size of the team will be dictated not simply by the task but also by practical considerations. The Afghan authorities will probably be guided, when it comes to issuing visas, by the size of the protection elements in the American, French and German missions (2-4 men). We would be prepared to consider taking the exceptional step of sending out the team's weapons and ammunition by diplomatic bag (no other method seems possible). There would of course be size and weight constraints. But it seems probable that sidearms, machine pistols and/or rifles (possibly dismantled) could be despatched to Kabul in this way.

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/The deployment of



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The deployment of a team would involve significant costs which we anticipate considerable difficulty in funding. If you can see any way in which these might be mitigated, this would be enormously helpful. Could account be taken, for example, of the training value of a unique deployment like this?

I am well aware that I am bowling you something of a fast ball by asking MOD to provide a service which lies outside its normal commitments and which may involve some risks to those involved (though if we believed them to be very substantial, we should not be putting this request to you). But this is very much a one-off situation, and I am sure you will recognise the need for us to respond to it with imagination and flexibility.

The Prime Minister has expressed a close interest in the welfare and safety of our staff in Kabul. We shall wish to inform her by the middle of January of the steps we are taking to protect them. It would, therefore, be very helpful if you would let me have at least an initial response by early next week.

Yammar
Lima

THE LORD GLENARTHUR

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cc MOD
bc PC

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

12 January 1989

See letter.

The Prime Minister has followed the exchange of correspondence between Lord Glenarthur and Mr Hamilton about the question of security for our Embassy in Kabul. She tends to the view that, if the staff of other major embassies in Kabul have armed protection, then our staff should have it too. The precise form which it should take is very much a matter for professional advice. But she would not want our people to feel let down by comparison with the protection given to other embassies.

I am copying this letter to Brian Hawtin (Ministry of Defence).

*Yours sincerely,
Charles Powell*

C. D. POWELL

Stephen Wall, Esq.
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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MRM

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MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE ARMED FORCES

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 01-218 2216 (Direct Dialling)

01-218 9000 (Switchboard)

Prime Minister
COB copy

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D/MIN(AF)/5/3/73

10th January 1989

attached

Dear Simon

will request if required

- Yes please do not

Thank you for your letter of 6 January concerning possible military assistance as part of your contingency planning in relation to the security of our Embassy in Kabul.

I note that you do not at present believe that the level of threat after the Soviet withdrawal is likely to require armed military assistance but, given the likely delays involved in a deployment (particularly in obtaining visas), you have suggested that we should take preparatory action to allow us to send a small armed team relatively quickly if the situation were to deteriorate. While we are, of course, very willing to consider how we might help, I have to say that we are doubtful as to whether this would be the most appropriate response to such a development.

Before we could send servicemen to Kabul we would need to be very clear about the nature of the threat, the task they were expected to undertake and our ability to equip and, if necessary, resupply or withdraw them. The worst thing we could do is send in a team which was inadequate or ill-prepared and equipped. The crux of the problem is that while there is no need at present for military assistance, it is very difficult indeed to predict the range of threats which may arise if the PDPA regime were to collapse. This makes it very difficult to judge in advance what sort of response would be appropriate but, because of the problems of access to and from Kabul, we cannot afford to wait on events. Nevertheless, I must make it clear that we believe that the constraints on the size and equipment of any armed team we might be able to get into Kabul are such

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that it would be adequate only against the lowest level of threat envisaged by the recent JIC paper.

I think we are both agreed that this is not a classic close-protection (ie "bodyguard") task, as there is no specific threat to the Charge or individual staff. A small armed presence might offer protection against a single opportunist gunman trying to force his way in and this, as I understand it, is the level of protection provided, for example, by the Marine guards who are part of the normal staff at the US embassy. But this is a very limited threat indeed and one to which your existing physical security precautions and your Gurkha guard force should act as a considerable deterrent. Your letter accepts that we could not resist an attack by a large body of armed men but, in fact, it would be impossible to provide a realistic defence of the Embassy compound - with a perimeter of nearly a mile and containing some 19 buildings - against armed attack without a sizeable and well equipped military force. Your letter envisages the possibility of bands of armed marauders perhaps seeking loot, hostages or revenge and the intelligence assessments have also drawn attention to the possible dangers in these circumstances from disorganised groups of regime soldiers or even, though more remotely, from an organised threat from PDPA hardliners with nothing to lose. We do not know whether any of these possibilities will arise but a small armed team could do little against them and there is no doubt that if law and order breaks down Kabul is likely to be full of armed men with a wide range of weapons, including relatively heavy support weapons.

I think I should also draw attention to the practical difficulties which we would face in deploying any armed force. We do not know whether the Afghans would grant the necessary visas and, with an anticipated delay of at least three weeks and probably more like six weeks, it would in any case be questionable whether they could reach Kabul before the Soviet withdrawal puts the continued operation of the airport in doubt. Moreover, the only way in which we could send people to Kabul even at present is by Aeroflot or Ariana (Afghan Airlines) which have one flight a week each. Although I understand that in these circumstances you are, exceptionally, prepared to consider the use of the diplomatic bag to carry weapons and equipment but, especially given the airlines involved, this would be bound seriously to constrain what we might send. We are also concerned that if the security situation deteriorated it is probable that we would be unable to resupply or withdraw the force if required.

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It is, of course, for you to judge the diplomatic advantages of staying as opposed to a temporary withdrawal during an uncertain and dangerous transition period but you should not be under any illusions that we could provide any assistance which would materially alter the risks to the embassy staff if order were to break down. If you do decide that the risks are outweighed by the advantages, I believe that the most practical help that we could offer would be a military security adviser and a communications expert. The former would be capable of advising the Charge on the developing threat to the compound and of training and organising the Gurkha guard force to best effect. He and the communicator (although bringing in the necessary satellite communication equipment on the airlines concerned could be very difficult) would also be very useful if it became necessary to contemplate an evacuation.

This would I believe improve your security against what might be called the 'casual' threat, which is I believe the only threat which we could consider resisting. But even against this threat, our best defence is deterrence - although the Gurkhas are unarmed this is not likely to be apparent to a would be intruder (indeed it was news to us). It would certainly have been possible for us to provide training which would allow you to arm the Gurkhas as an additional precaution but I doubt whether there is now sufficient time to do so. It would also be possible to envisage providing a military protection team to provide an overt armed presence as an additional deterrent but the real increase in security would be very marginal indeed and, as I said at the outset, I am very reluctant to send in a military team without a properly defined military task and which would be inadequate against any serious threat to the Embassy - or to themselves.

Despite the very serious reservations I have expressed, I would not want to foreclose any options at present. For that reason, I agree that it would be sensible to approach the Afghans now about visas. My clear preference, if we do provide assistance, would be for a two man team of the sort I have described and I would regard five men as the absolute maximum we might wish to send. Nevertheless, because of the lead times and because the circumstances under which any military assistance might be required and the nature of the task involved are so unclear, it will be necessary to seek visas for about ten people in order to have a sufficient range of military skills on which to draw. I have asked my officials to be in touch with your department on the necessary details. They will have very much to depend on your officials' information about the practicalities - eg equipment - of any possible deployment.

Finally, you referred to costs. The well established precedent for assistance of this sort is that your department would meet the costs involved.

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In view of her close interest in the threat to the British Embassy in Kabul, I am sending a copy of this letter to the Prime Minister and also to Sir Robin Butler.

Yours ever
Archie

ARCHIE HAMILTON

The Lord Glenarthur
Minister of State
Foreign and Commonwealth Office