

SECRET



free DS315E //
bc = PC

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

27 January 1989

KABUL EMBASSY

Thank you for your letter of 27 January about the position of our Mission in Kabul, in the light of the American decision to withdraw their Embassy.

I have discussed this with the Prime Minister. She is naturally reluctant to see us go after we have stayed right throughout the Civil War. But with the departure of other Western missions, she thinks that our people would be exposed, not least because it is widely known that we have given substantial material support to the Resistance. That could make them the target for revenge by supporters of the régime. Moreover, her understanding is that we have formally advised British citizens to leave and that there is no significant British community left in Afghanistan to protect, other than journalists. In these circumstances, the remaining role of our mission would only be to report developments and this does not justify putting their safety at risk. She agrees, therefore, that we should now take the decision to withdraw, preferably in concert with the French and Italians (you told me that they have now agreed to this).

The Prime Minister has also commented that she hopes that we will make arrangements to look after the Afghan staff of our mission, for instance, by giving them access to emergency food supplies if necessary.

I am copying this letter to Brian Hawtin (Ministry of Defence) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

C. D. POWELL

Stephen Wall, Esq.
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

SECRET



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

SECRET

London SW1A 2AH

27 January 1989

Dear Charles,

The Kabul Embassy

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary discussed the position of our mission in Kabul on 19 January.

At that time, they agreed that we should not pull out our mission for the time being, but that we should stay in close touch with the Americans and take into account the conclusions they reached. That same afternoon, Mr Shultz took a decision that the US Embassy should remain in Kabul. However, the new Secretary of State, James Baker, has now reviewed that decision and (without the prior consultation we had been expecting) has sent instructions to the US mission in Kabul to withdraw on 3 February, if not earlier. The State Department have confirmed to us through the US Embassy that no new factors influenced Mr Baker's decision; in particular, there has been no change in their assessment of the threat to the staff of their mission. As for the others, the Germans have already left Kabul. The Italians have sent out a mission to decide what to do, and the French are reducing their mission to a Chargé d'Affaires and one other. These two countries are likely to review their position in the light of the American decision. The French have indicated that they want to keep in close touch with us and that they would be unlikely to stay on if we now left.

There is no reason why we should automatically follow the American lead. The Foreign Secretary believes that the US decision has, however, changed the situation in three significant respects. First, the need to stay close to the Americans in order to be well placed to exert influence on their policy on Afghanistan at a particularly critical moment was an important part of the case for remaining in Kabul. Second, if we stay in Kabul alone among the major Western countries we shall give a misleading signal of the part we intend to play in shaping the future of Afghanistan, thus increasing the vulnerability of our staff, particularly from fundamentalists like Hekmatyar who are hostile to us. Third, the risks to our staff would increase because, in the absence of the Americans, our mission would become the prime target for Communist revenge, for asylum-seekers and for hostage-takers in any breakdown of law and order.

SECRET

B.



SECRET

When the Foreign Secretary discussed this issue with the Defence Secretary yesterday, they agreed that the advantages of staying in Kabul could not justify putting the safety of our own people at risk. The Foreign Secretary has now concluded that the risks of staying do outweigh the advantages, and that we should bring our people home.

Withdrawal is unlikely to be feasible before the middle of next week, and we propose to tell our people to go on 3 February or as soon as possible thereafter. The Foreign Secretary would, however, prefer to delay any announcement until we have informed the French and Italians of our decision, and given them an opportunity to coordinate their departure with our own.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Brian Hawtin in the Ministry of Defence and to Trevor Woolley.

Jaws,
Stephen Wall
(J S Wall)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

SECRET



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

SECRET London SW1A 2AH

From The Minister of State

25 January 1989

*9:10-d
cele*

Dear Archie,

*mt
—
In please.
Agg this. 000 257i*

Richard

*You will want to
be kept abreast*

Thank you for your letter of 10 January about contingency planning in Kabul, in which you agreed that we should apply for visas for MOD personnel who could, if necessary, provide additional security for our Embassy. Since then my officials have had some very useful discussions with yours, for which I am most grateful.

Temporarily retained

THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

Last week we reviewed once again our decision to keep open our Embassy. Since I wrote to you on 6 January the Germans (as expected) have gone, and the French and Italians are likely to follow them. The Americans however, have decided to stay for the time being. The Turks, Pakistanis, Austrians, Japanese and Chinese show no signs of leaving.

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

SECRET

/The Prime Minister



b

SECRET

The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary had a full discussion of the pros and cons of staying in Kabul on 19 January. They agreed that it would be a pity to pull out our mission now after it had stayed right through the war (Mr Powell's letter of 19 January). The Prime Minister had earlier made it clear (Mr Powell's letter of 12 January) that she tended to the view that, if the staff of other major embassies in Kabul had armed protection, our people should have it too.

We shall obviously keep the decision under continuous review as the situation develops. Meanwhile, we must work on the assumption that we shall stay. I therefore believe that the time has now come to seek your agreement in principle to the deployment of an MOD armed protection team, when preparations are ready and visas can be secured. Once the preparations are complete, we shall need to take a very quick decision, in the light of any developments in the security outlook, on whether to proceed to actual deployment of men (and weapons).

Timing is important. Soviet withdrawal is due to be complete by 15 February. The situation in Kabul could deteriorate quickly during the final stages of withdrawal; the airport might cease to operate normally. I believe that the team should complete its preparation and be ready to leave by 29 January. The logistics of getting their arms and equipment out to Kabul are being worked out now by officials. We should obviously not despatch anything until the final decision I have referred to has been taken.

Clearly it will be for the MOD to decide on the size and composition of the team, bearing visa availability in mind. We can be reasonably confident of securing the three visas already applied for (we have just granted one visa, and are in the process of granting two more, to Afghans paying official visits to London - so we shall be looking for reciprocity). It may conceivably be possible to obtain a further two visas, though given the time constraints we should not bank on these. We doubt that the Afghans would give us more. The size of the protection team would then be out of all proportion to the number of other staff in the mission.

SECRET

/I gave details



SECRET

I gave details of the perceived threat in my letter of 6 January. The most likely problem will be a general breakdown of law and order during, and after, the final days of the regime. We are specifically concerned that our mission might be threatened by marauders operating singly or in small bands and armed with light weapons. We believe that this could be effectively deterred, or defeated, by the sort of deployment we have been discussing with your officials. We accept that such a team could not deal with a threat from a sizeable organised military unit, especially one equipped with medium or heavy weapons, and should not offer any resistance to such an attack. But we have no reason to anticipate any threat of this kind.

We would see an armed protection team having two major and three subsidiary tasks:

Main tasks:

- To protect our compound (an area of diplomatic inviolability) against the limited threat described above through its own direct efforts and by training, arming and organising our existing ex-Gurkha guards.
- More generally, the team leader should act as military adviser to the Chargé d'Affaires, for example with regard to the planning and execution of an evacuation.

Subsidiary tasks:

- To provide occasional close protection for members of the Embassy travelling outside the compound during a general breakdown of law and order. In such circumstances, Embassy personnel would try to remain in the compound. But they might have to venture outside (eg to move to the airport for evacuation, to obtain medical treatment, to seek assistance from, or go to the help of, another diplomatic mission). If so, they would probably require armed protection.
- If possible, to provide portable satellite emergency communications capable of communicating with the UK, and with Royal Air Force aircraft in the event of a Services Assisted Evacuation. This, too, is a bonus rather than an essential requirement. The Embassy already has effective main line and emergency communications.
- To provide medical support. We do not need a doctor or full-time medical orderly, as medical assistance is available from other sources, chiefly the surgical hospital belonging to the International Committee of the Red Cross. But it would be useful if one of the soldiers had sufficient medical skills to deal with minor problems and to stabilize more serious cases pending a move to hospital.

SECRET

/The situation

