

PRIME MINISTERAFGHANISTAN

The attached letter says:

- The Resistance are not going to win.
- We shall have to be prepared to accept whatever successor regime emerges, provided it is chosen by a vaguely democratic process endorsed by UN observers.
- The Americans likewise accept this.

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- The French and Italians are returning staff to their Embassies in Kabul. We should make contingency plans to do the same within the next few months. Our return to Kabul in present circumstances would of course be seen as writing off the Resistance.

The key judgement is whether we are giving up too soon. The Americans are clearly losing confidence in the Resistance, but are continuing their military help and are not yet re-opening their Embassy (although they might not consult us in advance). It would be a pity to break ranks now, after the stalwart support we have given to the Resistance and with the current uncertainty in the Soviet Union. The Foreign Secretary's recommendations postpone final decisions. I think you can accept them, making clear that you regard them as keeping options open and not pre-judging the actual decisions.

Agree?

C.D.P.

CHARLES POWELL

14 May 1990

This will give the Russians their victory - the only one they have had. It is very difficult to withdraw all help from guerrillas who have fought bravely for several years.

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10 DOWNING STREET
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From the Private Secretary

15 May 1990

AFGHANISTAN

Thank you for your letter of 14 May with the Foreign Secretary's thoughts on the way ahead over Afghanistan. The Prime Minister is distinctly uneasy about what is proposed, seeing it as conceding a victory to the Russians. She thinks that a decision to return our Embassy staff would be seen as writing off the prospects for the Resistance and equally would not wish us to take any decision at this stage against further supply of military equipment to the Resistance. She would like to discuss this at her next bilateral with the Foreign Secretary.

CHARLES POWELL

Stephen Wall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

SECRET AND PERSONAL London SW1A 2AH

Dear Charles,

14 May 1990
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Afghanistan

The Foreign Secretary has been reviewing within the Office [redacted] and the next steps which we should be considering. The following sets out his general thinking, and deals with two particular points of which he considers the Prime Minister should be aware.

It is now 14 months since the Russians withdrew. Contrary to the general expectation, Najibullah and his regime have not yet fallen, and still give no sign of doing so. They retain control of most of the towns, at least by day. They continue to receive massive Soviet aid, both military equipment and other supplies.

The Mujahideen groups are even more disunited, now that the Russians have left, than they were while the Russian forces formed a common target. The recent coup attempt, which saw Hekmatyar, an Islamic fundamentalist Mujahideen leader, making common cause with Tanai, a hardline Communist ex-colleague of Najibullah, illustrates the degree of cynical opportunism now being practised. It has also made mutual trust between the various Mujahideen leaders even more problematic. The Americans and Pakistanis have made determined efforts to get them to cooperate more effectively, but even the progressive decline in international sympathy and material support has not brought about a greater coherence.

With the withdrawal of Soviet forces, we have few direct interests in Afghanistan. Our general objectives must be to bring about the emergence of a stable, non-extremist regime which would not have a destabilising effect on Pakistan or on contiguous areas of the Soviet Union; to see a government installed in Kabul which will take effective action against the production of and traffic in illicit drugs; and to enable the Afghan refugees now in Pakistan and Iran to return to Afghanistan and resume a normal life there. The realisation of these objectives would require the replacement of the present Najibullah regime by a government acceptable to Afghans of all persuasions and prepared to live in peace with its neighbours.

The Americans and Russians have made some progress in their negotiations about the steps by which a new regime might be installed, although the Americans do not expect an early

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solution. We are not directly involved in these talks, but are following them closely. The main differences remain:

- at what point would Najibullah step down;
- when to terminate the supply of weapons both to the regime and to the Mujahideen, and what to do about the regime's stocks of weapons, which give it a decided advantage;
- how to obtain an agreed representative voice from the multifarious Mujahideen and refugee groups.

Najibullah himself has recently proposed various liberalisation measures designed to woo the resistance and help to bring about a settlement. Although most of these have been rejected by the main Mujahideen groups, his efforts appear to be having some effect, at least with purely local commanders.

The disarray amongst the Mujahideen means that they have little hope of toppling Najibullah militarily and are unable to articulate a coherent political programme. For these reasons, they have been told by the Americans that they risk forfeiting US Congressional support. This prospect might induce them to improve their coordination, but it is unlikely that they will ever be able to organise themselves into a credible political force. In the last resort, we should be prepared to do business with any successor regime - provided it emerges as a result of some kind of democratic process (involving Afghans both inside the country and those in refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran); and that the process itself is endorsed by observers from the United Nations and the organisation of Islamic countries, a principle which both the Americans and Russians have accepted.

Aid to the Resistance

In the meantime, the Americans are continuing, with the Saudis, to meet the bulk of the Resistance requirements for military supplies. Our own assistance to the Mujahideen within Afghanistan has been directed to Massoud, who controls a substantial area of territory to the north-east of Kabul. He would have a role to play in a settlement. Nevertheless, as a Tadjik, one of the minority tribes in Afghanistan, he is not a plausible candidate to head a national administration.

The Foreign Secretary doubts whether, if we were starting afresh with the situation as it is now, we would wish to become so involved in a country where few direct

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British interests are at stake.

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British Embassy, Kabul

France has decided to return staff to its mission in Kabul, probably in May. Italy plans to follow suit. German intentions are not yet clear, but they seem unlikely to favour an early return.

Although the Americans are unlikely to follow the European lead, at least initially, the Foreign Secretary takes the view that it is not too soon to be thinking of re-establishing our mission. It will be of value to be represented on the spot. Without a presence there, it would be more difficult for us to play a role in bringing about a settlement as one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

You will recall that the original decision to withdraw was precipitated by the Americans. Once the Americans do decide to return, we cannot rely on them to consult us in advance; they would be more likely simply to go ahead, leaving us to follow in their wake. Against this background, the Foreign Secretary believes we should now start contingency planning for a possible reopening within a matter of months. We would, of course, need to give careful thought to the presentation of an eventual decision to return, to avoid giving Najibullah a propaganda victory. We should also need to consider what dealings we wanted to have with the regime once our mission was in place. The Foreign Secretary will be reflecting on these points and will consult the Prime Minister in due course.

Stephen Wall

(J S Wall)
Private Secretary

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