

S E C R E T

Tehran, Iran

May 16, 1979

Excellency:

During our recent meeting, the Prime Minister indicated interest in receiving information which might not otherwise be available to you. I have attached a separate paper on Afghanistan, the first part of which in effect is status report from the time of the April 1978 coup. The second section draws upon our recent information.

Please let me know whether information of this nature is of interest to you and/or advise me of what specific areas are of special concern to you and your colleagues.

I look forward to further exchanges with you.

Sincerely,

Charles W. Naas
Charge d'Affaires, a.i.

His Excellency,
Mr. Amir Entezam,
Deputy Prime Minister,
The Prime Minister's Office,
Tehran.

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SECTION ONE - SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN AFGHANISTAN

(A) WHILE THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE SOVIETS WERE BEHIND THE COUP THAT BROUGHT THE TARAKI REGIME TO POWER LAST APRIL 27, THEY WELCOMED THE CHANGE AND MOVED QUICKLY TO TURN IT TO THEIR ADVANTAGE. BY EARLY JUNE 1978, THE USSR HAD:

--INCREASED THE NUMBER OF ITS MILITARY ADVISORS FROM 350 TO 650;

--PLACED SOVIET PERSONNEL IN VIRTUALLY EVERY AFGHAN MINISTRY;

--TAKEN OVER KEY POSITIONS IN THE AFGHAN DEFENSE AND SECURITY APPARATUS; AND

--SIGNED OVER 30 ECONOMIC DEALS NEGOTIATED UNDER THE DAUD REGIME.

(B) SINCE THEN, THE SOVIET PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN HAS CONTINUED TO GROW:

--A NEW ARMS AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED;

--ADDITIONAL ECONOMIC AGREEMENTS WERE CONCLUDED, INCLUDING A MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR ACCORD, DURING TARAKI'S VISIT TO MOSCOW LAST DECEMBER;

--THE NUMBER OF SOVIET MILITARY ADVISORS HAS INCREASED TO AT LEAST 1,000;

--THE NUMBER OF SOVIET ECONOMIC ADVISORS HAS GROWN TO OVER 2,000;

--SOVIET MILITARY ADVISORS HAVE OPERATED WITH AFGHAN MILITARY UNITS FIGHTING THE REBEL TRIBESMEN AND PROBABLY HAVE SUFFERED CASUALTIES.

(C) PERHAPS THE MOST DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF 1978, HOWEVER, WAS THE SIGNING IN DECEMBER OF THE AFGHAN-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION TREATY WHICH:

--UNDERScoreD WHAT BREZHNEV HAS CALLED THE "QUALITATIVELY NEW CHARACTER" OF AFGHAN-SOVIET RELATIONS;

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--LEGITIMATIZED THE SOVIET ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN AND PROVIDED LEGAL BASIS FOR HELPING THE DRA SURVIVE;

--GAVE KABUL A MEANS OF BOLSTERING ITS OWN POSITION AND DISCOURAGING OPPOSITION AT HOME AND ABROAD -- ALBEIT UNSUCCESSFULLY SO FAR.

(D) UNLIKE THE OTHER FRIENDSHIP TREATIES THE USSR HAS SIGNED WITH THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES, THE DEFENSE CONSULTATION CLAUSE IN THE AFGHAN ACCORD IS OPEN-ENDED WHICH:

--ALLOWS THE SOVIETS TO JUSTIFY THEIR PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN; BUT

--DOES NOT NECESSARILY TIE THEM TO KABUL'S DEFENSE.

(E) THE SOVIETS WERE RATHER SILENT ABOUT THE TRIBAL UNREST IN AFGHANISTAN UNTIL PRAVDA CARRIED AN AUTHORITATIVE PIECE BY I. ALEXANDROV ON MARCH 19. ALEXANDROV:

--ACCUSED PAKISTAN, EGMPT, AND CHINA OF SUPPORT FOR THE REBELS;

--IDENTIFIED THE REBELS AS "REACTIONARY AND CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS."

(F) SINCE THEN, THE SOVIETS HAVE FURTHER BLAMED THE PAKISTANIS, IRANIANS, THE US AND UK, AND SUGGESTED THAT THE SAUDIS MIGHT BE INVOLVED. THEY HAVE ALSO:

--PRAISED THE REVOLUTIONARY ASPECTS OF TARAKI REGIME;

--CLAIMED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS PUT DOWN THE UPRISING;

--EMPHASIZED THAT THE REBELS WERE MAINLY DISCONTENTED RICH LANDLORDS OPPOSING THE TARAKI LAND REFORM;

--STATED THAT THE RELIGIOUS-MOTIVATED INSURGENCY IS LED BY "FALSE MUSLIMS."

(G) MORE SUBSTANTIVELY, THE SOVIETS HAVE:

--INCREASED THEIR MILITARY AID TO AFGHANISTAN AND MAY HAVE SUPPLIED MORE ARMOR AND AIRCRAFT;

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--PROBABLY HELPED DIRECT MILITARY OPERATIONS AND PROVIDED LOGISTICAL IF NOT COMBAT SUPPORT TO AFGHAN MILITARY UNITS; AND

--WARNED OFF OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE BOTH PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY.

(H) MOST RECENTLY, THE SOVIETS HAVE:

--SHIFTED THE EMPHASIS OF THEIR PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN AWAY FROM PAKISTAN AND IRAN;

--PLACED GREAT EMPHASIS ON AN ALLEGED U.S. ROLE AND CIA MACHINATIONS;

--NONETHELESS MADE QUITE CLEAR THAT THEY WANT NO PAKISTANIS OR IRANIANS MEDDLING IN AFGHAN AFFAIRS.

(I) IN GENERAL, THIS IS PROBABLY INTENDED TO DIVERT ATTENTION FROM EVENTS IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE SOVIET ROLE THERE, AND POSSIBLY BUILD A CASE TO JUSTIFY A LARGER SOVIET INVOLVEMENT.

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SECTION TWO - THE CURRENT SOVIET ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN

QUANTITATIVELY, THE SOVIET PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN HAS NOT INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY DURING RECENT MONTHS, IN SPITE OF THE DETERIORATING SECURITY SITUATION THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. THE NUMBER OF SOVIET MILITARY ADVISORS REMAINS SLIGHTLY OVER 1,000 -- AND THERE ARE PROBABLY STILL ABOUT 2,500 CIVILIAN ADVISORS FROM THE USSR IN THE COUNTRY. ALTHOUGH THE SOVIET EMBASSY DENIES IT, WE BELIEVE THAT LARGE NUMBERS OF THEIR DEPENDENTS HAVE BEEN EVACUATED TO THE USSR.

QUALITATIVELY, THE INFLUENCE OF SOVIET ADVISORS APPEARS TO HAVE BECOME MORE PRONOUNCED IN RECENT WEEKS, PARTICULARLY SINCE THE VISIT OF THE USSR'S GENERAL A.A. YEPISHEV, CHIEF OF THE MAIN POLITICAL DIRECTORATE OF THE SOVIET ARMED FORCES, EARLY IN APRIL. ALTHOUGH THE ANNOUNCED REASON FOR YEPISHEV'S VISIT WAS TO UPGRADE THE "POLITICAL EDUCATION" OF THE AFGHAN FORCES, HE CAME WITH A LARGE STAFF OF SOVIET OFFICIALS WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LOOKED INTO SEVERAL ASPECTS OF MILITARY SUPPORT FOR THE AFGHAN ARMY AND AIR FORCE. WE ARE ALSO AWARE OF INCREASED SOVIET GUIDANCE IN VARIOUS CIVILIAN MINISTRIES.

THE BEST QUALITY EQUIPMENT WHICH THE USSR HAS PROVIDED TO AFGHANISTAN THUS FAR HAS BEEN MIG-21 AND SU-7 FIGHTER AIRCRAFT, MI-24 HIND-TYPE HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS AND T-62 TANKS. IN SPITE OF FREQUENT RUMORS TO THE CONTRARY, THE AFGHANS HAVE NOT BEEN SUPPLIED WITH MIG-23 AIRCRAFT.

WE ARE AWARE OF THE WIDESPREAD RUMORS THAT SOVIET PILOTS FLY SOME OF THE OPERATIONAL MISSIONS OF AFGHAN AIRCRAFT AGAINST GUERRILLA TARGETS. WE HAVE NO SOLID EVIDENCE RULING OUT THIS POSSIBILITY. BECAUSE SOME OF THE NEW EQUIPMENT, SUCH AS THE MI-24 GUNSHIP, IS MORE SOPHISTICATED THAN THE OLDER AFGHAN ARMAMENT, SOVIET PERSONNEL ARE BELIEVED TO BE ENGAGED IN INTENSIVE TRAINING ACTIVITY. THERE ARE SEVERAL REPORTS THAT THE MI-24'S HAVE BEEN USED OPERATIONALLY AGAINST THE INSURGENTS. BECAUSE THIS IS A SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS SYSTEM, WE DOUBT THERE HAS BEEN SUFFICIENT TIME TO TRAIN AFGHANS TO FLY THESE ALONE. THEREFORE, IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT SOVIETS COULD BE HELPING TO FLY THOSE MI-24'S BEING USED OPERATIONALLY, AS WELL AS PROVIDING TRAINING TO AFGHAN PILOTS.

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BECAUSE THERE ARE SOVIET MILITARY ADVISORS ASSIGNED THROUGHOUT THE AFGHAN GROUND FORCES -- IN ALL CASES DOWN TO THE BATTALION LEVEL, AND ALSO WITH SEVERAL SMALL SPECIALIZED UNITS, IT WOULD BE UNUSUAL IF SOVIET MILITARY PERSONNEL WERE NOT CAUGHT UP IN MILITARY OPERATIONS FROM TIME TO TIME.

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION IS: CAN WE EXPECT TO SEE SOVIET COMBAT TROOPS ENTER AFGHAN CONFLICT? CAN ONLY OBSERVE THAT THAT POSSIBILITY CANNOT BE EXCLUDED. ARTICLE 4 OF THE NEW AFGHAN-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP TREATY OF DECEMBER 5, 1978, PROVIDES THAT THE TWO PARTIES "...SHALL CONSULT EACH OTHER, AND TAKE, BY AGREEMENT, APPROPRIATE MEASURES TO ENSURE THE SECURITY, INDEPENDENCE, AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF THE TWO COUNTRIES." THE ARTICLE CONCLUDES: "IN THE INTERESTS OF STRENGTHENING THE DEFENSE CAPACITY OF THE HIGH CONTRACTING PARTIES, THEY SHOULD CONTINUE TO DEVELOP COOPERATION IN THE MILITARY FIELD ON THE BASIS OF APPROPRIATE AGREEMENTS CONCLUDED BETWEEN THEM."

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