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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELNO 4420 OF 31 DECEMBER 1979

INFO IMMEDIATE UKDEL NATO MODUK PRIORITY KABUL ISLAMABAD NEW
DELHI MOSCOW ROUTINE JEDDA PEKING DACCA TOKYO UKMIS NEW YORK ROME
PARIS BONN.

AFGHANISTAN

1. LORTON (STATE DEPARTMENT) BRIEFED THIS EVENING THE SAME GROUP OF REPRESENTATIVES AS LAST WEEK (MY TELNO 4395) ON THE CURRENT SITUATION. A SIMILAR BRIEFING WOULD BE GIVEN BY U S EMBASSIES IN CAPITALS LATER THIS WEEK.
2. THE RUSSIANS HAD QUICKLY FOLLOWED UP THE COUP BY OCCUPYING KABUL AND WERE NOW SECURING THEIR GRIP OVER THE OTHER CITIES, IMPORTANT ROADS AND MILITARY INSTALLATIONS. THERE WERE SOME REPORTS THAT THEY HAD ENCOUNTERED RESISTANCE FROM THE AFGHAN ARMY, E.G. AROUND HERAT AND HAD ENGAGED THE INSURGENTS DIRECTLY. ESTIMATES OF SOVIET CASUALTIES BY 30 DECEMBER WERE SOME 250 KILLED AND WOUNDED. THESE WERE NO DOUBT GREATER BY NOW. OF THE 30 - 40,000 SOVIET TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN, MOST HAD CROSSED THE BORDER BY LAND (THE REST BEING AIRLIFTED). AT LEAST AN EQUAL NUMBER WERE AVAILABLE ON SOVIET TERRITORY FOR RAPID DEPLOYMENT INTO AFGHANISTAN. SOVIET AIRCRAFT INCLUDING MIG 23'S (NOT IN THE AFGHAN INVENTORY) HAD BEEN SEEN OVER KABUL (MY TEL UNDER REF PARA 6). THERE WERE NO REPORTS OF CASUALTIES AMONG OTHER FOREIGN NATIONALS APART FROM RUSSIANS. KABUL AIRPORT WAS NOW CLOSED BECAUSE OF SNOW.
3. ALTHOUGH BABRAK KARMAL HAD STILL NOT BEEN SEEN IN PUBLIC IN KABUL, NOR HAD HE BEEN HEARD ON RADIO OR TELEVISION, THE U S PLACED CONFIDENCE IN REPORTS (SOME FROM PEOPLE WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE SEEN HIM) THAT HE WAS NOW THERE. IT WAS NOT CLEAR WHERE HE HAD BEEN AT THE TIME OF THE COUP, AND THERE WAS EVIDENCE THAT HE HAD BEEN IN MOSCOW AT THAT POINT. WHILE SOME POLITICAL FIGURES (JALALAR AND FAIZ MOHAMMED) WITH LINKS TO FORMER REGIMES HAD JOINED BABRAK'S GOVERNMENT, THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF PROMINENT FORMER POLITICIANS, LET ALONE LEADERS OF THE INSURGENTS, ACCEPTING A ROLE. THE REBELS HAD ALREADY DECLARED THEIR OPPOSITION TO BABRAK. SOME WESTERN JOURNALISTS HAD BEEN PREVENTED FROM ENTERING AFGHANISTAN AND THE REST WERE CONFINED TO THE INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL (WHERE THEY APPARENTLY HAD NO COMMUNICATION WITH THE OUTSIDE). THERE WAS EVIDENCE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS, PROBABLY MAINLY PARCHMISTS, BEING RELEASED, AND THE NEW REGIME WAS BEGINNING TO REPORT CONGRATULATORY MESSAGES (EG FROM BULGARIA, THE GDR AND VIETNAM).

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4. THE INDIAN PRIME MINISTER, ACCORDING TO NEWS AGENCY REPORTS, HAD CALLED IN THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR THIS EVENING IN DELHI AND ASKED FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF SOVIET TROOPS FROM AFGHANISTAN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE STATEMENT FROM MOSCOW. HE HAD SAID THAT THE PRESENCE OF THESE TROOPS WOULD HAVE FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES FOR THE SUB-CONTINENT, AND RECALLED THE SOVIET-INDIAN JOINT STATEMENT IN JUNE WHICH TOOK A STAND AGAINST FOREIGN INTERVENTION IN AFGHANISTAN. THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR HAD UNDERTAKEN TO CONVEY THE INDIAN CONCERN TO MOSCOW. LORTON NOTED THAT, APART FROM THE REACTIONS FROM WESTERN COUNTRIES, THERE HAD BEEN GOOD STATEMENTS BY IRAN, YUGOSLAVIA, ROMANIA AND A NUMBER OF OTHER NON-ALIGNED NATIONS.

5. IN ANSWER TO QUESTIONS LORTON MADE THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS ON CURRENT U S THINKING:

(A) STATEMENTS ABOUT THE COUP FROM OTHER COUNTRIES WERE ENCOURAGING FOR THE U S, ALTHOUGH IT REMAINED TO BE SEEN WHAT FURTHER RESPONSE (EG AT THE UN) WOULD EMERGE. THE LATEST INDIAN REACTION, WHICH WENT MUCH FURTHER THAN THEIR EARLIER STATEMENT, WAS PARTICULARLY HELPFUL.

(B) FUTURE U S STRATEGY TOWARDS PAKISTAN WAS STILL BEING CONSIDERED. THERE HAD BEEN DETAILED EXCHANGES WITH THE PAKISTANIS IN ISLAMABAD ON THE PRESENT SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN, BUT SO FAR NO POLICY REVIEW HAD BEEN INITIATED. THIS WOULD NOT HAPPEN UNTIL A PACKAGE HAD BEEN ASSEMBLED OF OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE, WHICH COULD OBVIOUSLY INCLUDE US MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. LORTON NOTED THAT THE ADMINISTRATION HAD TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF LEGISLATIVE CONSTRAINTS (THOUGH LEGISLATION COULD ALWAYS BE CHANGED). THERE HAD BEEN NO PARTICULAR REACTION YET FROM CONGRESS. THIS COULD BE EXPECTED TO EMERGE WHEN CONGRESS RETURNED FROM THE CURRENT RECESS. THE U S HAD TAKEN NOTE OF THE INDIAN STATEMENT ABOUT THE DANGERS OF A U S -INDUCED BUILD-UP OF WEAPONS IN PAKISTAN.

(C) LORTON COULD ADD NOTHING TO WHAT HAD ALREADY BECOME PUBLIC ABOUT HOT-LINE ACTIVITY BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND MOSCOW. THE STATE DEPART-

MENT SPOKESMAN HAD REFUSED TO SPECULATE TODAY ON WHAT THE QUOTE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES UNQUOTE MIGHT BE TO WHICH THE PRESIDENT HAD REPORTEDLY REFERRED OVER THE WEEKEND IN DISCUSSIONS WITH JOURNALISTS (MY TELNO 4406 PARA 2).

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(D) THE U S ACCEPTED THAT THE FIRST STATEMENT BY BABRAK HAD BEEN DESIGNED TO BE CONCILIATORY, AND TO PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK FOR POLITICAL SOLUTIONS TO THE INSURGENCY. HOWEVER THE RUSSIANS SEEMED DETERMINED FIRST TO OCCUPY THE COUNTRY, AND THIS WOULD INEVITABLY INVOLVE THEM IN SOME SORT OF MILITARY STRUGGLE. THE INITIAL RESULT MIGHT BE A GREATER FLOW OF REFUGEES TO PAKISTAN (BRING THE TOTAL TO PERHAPS AS MANY AS HALF A MILLION), AND THE INSURGENCY SEEMED UNLIKELY TO END UNLESS THE RUSSIANS TOTALLY SEALED THE BORDER, WHICH WAS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE.

(E) THE RUSSIANS PROBABLY DID NOT WANT TO STAY IN AFGHANISTAN IN THEIR PRESENT NUMBERS BUT WOULD WISH TO REALISE THE AIMS OF THEIR INTERVENTION: TO END THE INSURGENCY AND REBUILD THE AFGHAN MILITARY FORCES, IN ORDER TO PROVIDE PROTECTION FOR THE REGIME AND PREVENT A NEW OUTBREAK OF REBELLION. THIS WOULD BE A TIME-CONSUMING PROCESS EVEN IF THEY WERE SUCCESSFUL.

5. ON RECOGNITION (YOUR TELNO 221 TO KABUL), LORTON SAID THAT THERE WERE TWO QUESTIONS UPPERMOST IN THE ADMINISTRATION'S MIND: DID THE ISSUE ARISE AND IF SO, WHAT RESPONSE SHOULD BE GIVEN. NO U S POSITION HAD YET BEEN DECIDED AND HE EXPECTED THE SUBJECT TO HAVE BEEN DISCUSSED TODAY IN LONDON AND TO BE CONSIDERED FURTHER AT TOMORROW'S MEETING OF THE NAC IN BRUSSELS. THE U S WERE AWARE OF THE CAMBODIAN PRECEDENT.

6. LORTON CONCLUDED THAT THE ADMINISTRATION FELT THE SOVIET ACTION IN AFGHANISTAN WAS SUFFICIENTLY SERIOUS TO REQUIRE THEM TO PAY AN APPROPRIATE PRICE. THE EXACT SUM WOULD BE DETERMINED AS A RESULT OF THE PRESENT CONSULTATIONS WITH THE ALLIES. THE INTERNATIONAL IMPACT OF THE SOVIET INTERVENTION COULD BE EXPECTED TO BE GREATER THAN IN THE CASE OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA, GIVEN AFGHANISTAN'S STATUS AS A MOSLEM AND NON-ALIGNED COUNTRY. LORTON ADDED (AND ASKED FOR SPECIAL PROTECTION TO BE GIVEN TO THIS) THAT THE U S HAD REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE DECISION TO INTERVENE IN AFGHANISTAN HAD BEEN TAKEN AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL IN THE SOVIET UNION.

HENDERSON

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