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Pakistan: Jan 80: Military Aid

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## 10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

17 June 1980

CALL BY THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF PAKISTAN

The Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Agha Shahi, called on the Prime Minister this afternoon. He was accompanied by the Pakistan Ambassador and by Mr. Riaz Pivacha. Mr. Blaker was also present.

After an exchange of courtesies, Mr. Agha Shahi described to the Prime Minister the background to the establishment of the Committee of Three by the Islamic Conference. He did so in terms very similar to those which he had used with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary earlier in the day. The Prime Minister said that the establishment of the Committee of Three had been an admirable initiative. The Soviet Government was sensitive to the pressure of world opinion. The Islamic Conference had done well to sustain this pressure, especially in the non-aligned movement. The conditions being laid down by the Soviet Government for a withdrawal from Afghanistan seemed impossible to meet. The position of a number of tribes across the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan meant that the Soviet requirement for an end to "interference" was unrealistic. In the circumstances it was not easy to envisage a formula which would lead to a Soviet withdrawal.

The Prime Minister asked Mr. Agha Shahi for his views on what sort of government the Afghans would choose if free to do so; whether they would ever learn to cooperate; and whether they would continue to resist the Russians. Mr. Agha Shahi said that there were some distinguished emigres, e.g. Dr. Yussuf, who might have a role to play. However, it was important not to focus too much attention on them for the moment. As regards the leaders of the Resistance, the Committee of Three were conferring political status on them by agreeing to meet them in Geneva. The Babrak Kamal regime would collapse as soon as the Soviet troops departed. Mr. Agha Shahi had made it plain to the Russians that he and his colleagues had no interest in promoting a government hostile to the Soviet Union. At the same time, it was clear that no purpose would be served by installing another puppet regime. If there was to be peace in Afghanistan, the

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new Prime Minister would have to be a man respected by the Afghans. Unfortunately, it looked as though the Soviet Government wished to prevent the Standing Committee from making progress. It seemed that they would prefer the Cubans or the Indians to be making the running.

As regards the ability of the Afghans to continue to fight against the Soviet troops, Mr. Agha Shahi said that they had kept the insurgency going for six months against all expectations. They had the will to go on doing so. However, they were suffering great hardship. The Soviet troops dominated the roads and were trying to starve the Afghan forces out of the hills. Moreover, the Afghans found it difficult to cope with the M24 helicopter. They needed anti-helicopter missiles. The Pakistan Government was being pressed to supply the Afghans with arms. However, Mr. Agha Shahi feared that if and when the insurgents succeeded in bringing down helicopters in large numbers, the Russians were likely to react against Pakistan. The position of the Pakistan Government would be impossible if the Russians, or a section of the Afghan army, were to seize a slice of Pakistan territory. Pakistan had no adequate defensive infrastructure in the west of the country.

Reverting to the general political situation, Mr. Agha Shahi said that Chancellor Kreisky, President Ceausescu and Chancellor Schmidt all backed the Islamic Conference initiative. If the Soviet Government were interested in withdrawal, there were real prospects that the Committee of Three would make progress. If, however, their objective was to seek a strategic advantage, then they would no doubt remain in Afghanistan, bringing in more troops if necessary. They would be well placed to act against Western interests in future. Pakistan's own position had been weakened, not only by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan but also by the change of government in India. When Mr. Desai visited the Soviet Union in 1979 he had been asked to exert pressure against Pakistan in order to divert Pakistan attention from Afghanistan. Mr. Desai had refused, but Mrs. Gandhi was, of course, altogether more unpredictable. If the West were to try to match in Pakistan the massive arms deal which Mrs. Gandhi had just signed with the Soviet Union, they would have to supply equipment to the value of \$6 to 8 billion. Mrs. Gandhi was undermining her country's status as a member of the non-aligned movement.

Mr. Agha Shahi said that it was against this background that he wished to convey to the Prime Minister his Government's modest requests for assistance from HMG. They hoped that they might be supplied with:- a few Sea King helicopters armed with Exocet missiles; night vision devices; laser range finders; mortar locating equipment; surface to surface missiles (equivalent to the American Harpoon missile); and a fleet oiler or destroyer tender. He hoped that the equipment could be provided on easy terms and with the

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earliest possible delivery date. Mr. Agha Shahi also said that his Government were worried about the Indian Jaguars. The Mirages which the Pakistan Air Force were at present operating were not good enough. But it might be that they would have to continue to make do with them. The Prime Minister said that she would ensure that the Pakistan Government's requests were looked into.

In the non-military field, Mr. Agha Shahi said that his Government would welcome help with building up the infrastructure in the west of the country, particularly the roads and other forms of communication. Finally, he hoped it might be possible for a British team of experts in local government to be sent to Pakistan. President Zia was anxious to devolve powers to the country's regions and districts. Before embarking on a programme, he wished to have the benefit of British advice and expertise. The Prime Minister said that we would do everything we could to help.

At the end of the discussion, the Prime Minister asked Mr. Agha Shahi about the present situation inside Pakistan. Mr. Agha Shahi said that there was a strong feeling that Pakistan was standing alone. If it was possible for the Pakistani Army to be reasonably well equipped, there would be a regrowth of confidence. If, however, the equipment was not forthcoming - and the armed forces had had no new equipment for many, many years - pessimism would take over and the national will to resist external pressure would weaken.

I am sending copies of this letter to Brian Norbury (Ministry of Defence) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

R.M.J. Lyne, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.