



FROM
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The Rt. Hon. Sir Geoffrey Howe, QC, MP,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office,
London S.W.1.

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Dear Geoffrey,

I was sorry to see in The Times today that there is a short article about Mr Rykov and Mr Khlan, the two former Soviet soldiers who hope to come to the United Kingdom soon.

I telephoned Mr Burton of your South Asia department yesterday as soon as The Times telephoned me. I explained to him my view that Nikolai Tolstoy was acting on the advice of George Miller, who is a member of the anti-Soviet organisation NTS and who recently returned from Peshawar.

I was in no way involved with Mr Miller's visit to Pakistan. Obviously the NTS is trying to involve itself in the issue of Soviet prisoners. I wish that they would keep out of it. It only complicates the issue. And I think it irresponsible of Count Tolstoy to have revealed the two men's names in public print at this stage.

The problem is that it is nearly two months since the Prime Minister wrote to me agreeing to give sympathetic consideration to the two men's request to be allowed to enter this country. In order to obtain sponsorship for them, I had to talk to members of the European Liaison Group, who represent east European communities here and who have found a family who will look after them. And so the basic facts about what we are trying to do have been known to a number of people in London for many weeks. And some of them are not as discreet as they ought to be.

I did not realise when I received the Prime Minister's encouraging letter that it would take so long to go through the bureaucratic formalities of getting the two men out of Pakistan. And it seems that we are still quite a long way from getting a final green light, since the men have still not been interviewed by our consular representative in Islamabad and his report still has to be approved by the Home Office.

This is a little worrying. Not only does it prolong the two men's incarceration in very difficult circumstances, but it also makes it

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more likely as time passes that the detail of what is happening may become public.

I myself have scrupulously observed the Prime Minister's request to say nothing. But I cannot prevent other people from speaking to the press. And in the meantime of course other organisations and journalists can go to Pakistan and talk to the two men, thus creating further confusion.

I would be very grateful for anything that you can do to speed up the process. It would be a great shame if we were to fall at the last fence of such a long and complicated course.

Yours ever

Nicholas

Lord Bethell