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LONDON SW1A 2AA

18 February 1988

From the Private Secretary

Dear Robert,

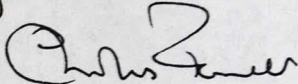
AFGHANISTAN

BF11 The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary had a talk this evening about Afghanistan. It was not conclusive and the Foreign Secretary promised to let the Prime Minister have a letter setting out the position more fully. But you may nonetheless like a brief account of the Prime Minister's views.

The Prime Minister said that she had reached the conclusion that we could not continue to support the Pakistanis in their insistence on agreement on an interim government in Kabul before they signed a withdrawal agreement. She had reached this view on various grounds, of which the most important was that we must not admit that the Russians had any role to play in determining the nature of the regime which should follow their withdrawal. All we wanted them to do was get out. She had made this point to Mr. Gorbachev when they met at Brize Norton in December. Now that Gorbachev had himself simplified the terms for Soviet withdrawal, we should take him at his word. The alternative course of insisting on negotiations for the formation of an interim government would, as well as suggesting that the Soviets had a legitimate role, only delay Soviet withdrawal. Given the divisions among the Resistance, it could well be a long delay. In practice, if the Russians were to withdraw promptly leaving Najibullah in control, the PDPA regime would be unlikely to last very long before the Resistance took over. The really important point to guard against was a situation in which the West cut off supplies to the Resistance while the Soviet Union continued to supply the regime. This was a point which belonged to the modalities of withdrawal and should be cleared up before signature of an agreement. We should be ready to participate in an international effort to resettle the refugees. We should also encourage the Resistance to settle their differences. But her main point was that negotiations on an interim government were not a matter for outsiders and to suggest otherwise greatly over-estimated our capacity to influence events in Afghanistan.

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The Foreign Secretary said that he fully shared the Prime Minister's objective of seeing the Russians leave Afghanistan as rapidly as possible. In practice events would probably follow the course which the Prime Minister had suggested: no agreement on an interim government, with Soviet withdrawal followed by a period of fighting, with the Resistance gradually gaining control. The problem was that the Pakistan government were still wedded to the idea of reaching agreement on an interim government before signing an agreement on Soviet withdrawal. They were very reluctant to sign an agreement with Najibullah which would seem to legitimise him and weaken the Resistance. Pakistan would probably find in practice that their aim of agreement on an interim government was in practice unrealisable. But we should not undermine them at a delicate moment. He would let the Prime Minister have a note setting out the arguments more fully.

Yours sincerely,


CHARLES POWELL

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