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YOUR TELNO 375: AFGHANISTAN: POLICY OPTIONS

SUMMARY

1. THE RUSSIANS ARE FIRMLY BENT ON WITHDRAWAL, AND WILL HAVE DECIDED TO LIVE WITH AN AFGHAN FUNDAMENTALIST-DOMINATED GOVERNMENT IF THEY MUST. HOWEVER, SHORT OF MILITARY RE-INTERVENTION THEY WILL TRY TO PROP UP THEIR EXISTING CLIENTS FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. THE EC'S POLICY SHOULD BE DESIGNED TO COUNTER THIS.

DETAIL

2. PARAGRAPH 8(E) OF TUR, IN PARTICULAR, RAISES THE QUESTION OF FUTURE SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS AFGHANISTAN.

3. ALL RECENT EVIDENCE AVAILABLE HERE SUGGESTS THAT THE POLITBURO HAVE TAKEN A DECISION TO WITHDRAW WHICH THEY WOULD LIKE TO REGARD AS "IRREVERSIBLE". ARTICLES HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO APPEAR TO THE EFFECT THAT THE DECISION TO INVADGE WAS A MISTAKE MADE BY A VERY NARROW GROUP OF LEADERS. THE RUSSIANS HAVE ACCEPTED FRONT-LOADING AND SEEM KEEN NOT ONLY TO REMOVE HALF THEIR TROOPS BY MID-AUGUST, BUT TO WITHDRAW THE ENTIRE FORCE BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR IF POSSIBLE. AT THE CRUNCH POINT, SHEVARDNADZE AND GORBACHEV APPLIED PRESSURE TO NAJIB TO FALL IN WITH THE GENEVA PACKAGE. DESPITE DELAY AT GENEVA, THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT RETAINED 15 MAY FOR THE START OF TROOP WITHDRAWAL. I STILL KNOW OF NO EVIDENCE THAT THE DECISION TO CUT THE AFGHAN KNOT, IN GORBACHEV'S WORDS, HAS PROVOKED SERIOUS INTERNAL DIVISIONS.

4. IN TAKING THIS DECISION, THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP WERE FULLY AWARE THAT THE FUTURE NATURE OF AFGHANISTAN WAS UNPREDICTABLE AND POTENTIALLY HOSTILE. THEY WERE ALSO FULLY AWARE OF THE ISLAMIC FACTOR. THEY HAVE ACCEPTED THEIR FAILURE TO IMPOSE COMMUNISM ON AFGHANISTAN. THEY NO LONGER TALK OF BUILDING SOCIALISM THERE, AND

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OPENLY POINT TO THE RELIGIOUS STRAND IN NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AS A REALISTIC AND CREDIBLE PLANK. THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT KNOWS THAT IT CANNOT CONTROL THE NATURE OF AFGHANISTAN'S GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY WITHOUT BEING PREPARED TO SUSTAIN OR REVIVE THE MILITARY INTERVENTION. BUT ONCE WITHDRAWAL IS UNDER WAY, THE LAST THING THEY WILL WISH TO DO IS TO GO BACK AGAIN.

5. I WOULD NOT ATTACH TOO MUCH SIGNIFICANCE TO A SINGLE REMARK BY THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR IN KABUL. THE SOVIET UNION HAS REASONABLE RELATIONS WITH MANY ISLAMIC STATES, AND WITH ISLAM WITHIN THE SOVIET CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS. THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT IS INDEED NERVOUS ABOUT ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM AND ITS POSSIBLE DISSEMINATION HERE. BUT IT KNOWS THAT AFGHAN FUNDAMENTALISM IS NOT THE SAME AS IRANIAN FUNDAMENTALISM (I UNDERSTAND THAT THE MAJORITY OF AFGHAN MUSLIMS ARE SUNNI RATHER THAN SHIA) AND THAT AFGHANISTAN DOES NOT HAVE THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE, HOMOGENEITY OR POTENTIAL STRENGTH OF IRAN. THERE IS AT PRESENT NO AFGHAN KHOMEINI: AND THE RUSSIANS WILL HAVE CALCULATED THAT A FUNDAMENTALIST LEADER IN AFGHANISTAN WOULD FIND IT DIFFICULT TO MOBILISE HIS NATION AS KHOMEINI HAS MOBILISED IRAN. IF THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT WERE GENUINELY NOT PREPARED TO TOLERATE ANOTHER ISLAMIC STATE ON ITS BORDER, IT WOULD NOT HAVE DECIDED TO WITHDRAW.

6. I THEREFORE JUDGE THE SOVIET CALCULATION TO BE ROUGHLY AS FOLLOWS:

- (A) ISLAM (INCLUDING SOME FUNDAMENTALIST ELEMENTS) WILL CONTINUE TO BE AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN AFGHAN LIFE.
- (B) FUTURE AFGHAN REGIMES ARE UNLIKELY TO SEE IT IN THEIR INTERESTS TO BE ACTIVELY HOSTILE TO THE USSR, AND MAY BE ATTRACTED BY ECONOMIC COOPERATION.
- (C) THROUGH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT BACKED UP WITH MILITARY SUPPLIES AND ADVISERS AND WITH SUBVERSION OF THE OPPOSITION, THE RUSSIANS MAY BE ABLE AT LEAST TO DELAY NAJIB'S FALL, AND PERHAPS TO SUSTAIN HIS CLIENT REGIME'S CONTROL OF THE CAPITAL AND OF CERTAIN OTHER AREAS, ESPECIALLY IN THE NORTH, FOR SOME TIME TO COME.
- (D) IF THEY CANNOT ACHIEVE (C), THEY WILL HOPE THERE IS ENOUGH STRENGTH IN THE PRESENT PDPA TO MAKE IT A FACTOR IN A FUTURE AFGHAN REGIME AND A COUNTER-BALANCE TO ELEMENTS HOSTILE TO THE SOVIET UNION.

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(E) IF CIVIL WAR AND INTERNAL INSTABILITY PREDOMINATE IN AFGHANISTAN OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS, THE RUSSIANS NEED FEEL NO PARTICULAR THREAT. AFGHANISTAN WILL BE TURNED INWARDS RATHER THAN OUTWARDS. THE INSTABILITY WILL HAVE A WORSE EFFECT ON PAKISTAN AND PERHAPS IRAN THAN ON THE SOVIET UNION, AND MAY BE EXPLOITABLE BY THE LATTER.

(F) IF, ON A WORST CASE ANALYSIS, THE FUNDAMENTALIST ELEMENTS COME OUT ON TOP, THEY WILL NOT BE STRONG ENOUGH TO BECOME A SERIOUS EMBARRASSMENT. THE SOVIET UNION HAS ALWAYS BEEN SURROUNDED BY AWKWARD NEIGHBOURS. IT COULD LIVE WITH A FUNDAMENTALIST-LED AFGHANISTAN.

EC POLICY

7. AS I HAVE SAID BEFORE, WE SHOULD DO ALL WE CAN TO PREVENT THE RUSSIANS MAKING A VIRTUE OF THEIR DEFEAT. ONE OF OUR OBJECTIVES (PARAGRAPH 2 OF YOUR TUR) SHOULD SURELY BE TO WORK FOR PEACE AND THE WELFARE OF THE AFGHAN PEOPLE. AN IMPORTANT INDICATOR OF SUCCESS WILL PRESUMABLY BE THE RETURN AND RESETTLEMENT OF THE REFUGEES.

8. I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE EC'S INFLUENCE SHOULD NOT BE OVER-RATED. BUT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FORM OF GOVERNMENT GENUINELY REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BROAD INTERESTS OF THE AFGHAN PEOPLE SHOULD SURELY CONTINUE TO BE AN IMPORTANT PLANK IN THE EC PLATFORM. THIS WOULD BE A POLITICAL COUNTER TO SOVIET EFFORTS TO SUSTAIN THEIR CLIENTS. TO THIS END, WE SHOULD TAKE A HARD LINE ON RECOGNITION OF THE PDPA: AND SHOULD PRESS THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL AND CORDOVEZ TO MAKE GENUINE EFFORTS TO NEGOTIATE A NEW GOVERNMENT.

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