

STATE 46565

The President has asked me to pass on his thanks for your letter of February 8 and the subsequent information provided about Mr. Vorontsov's visit:

AFGHANISTAN

- The President very much appreciated your advance notice of the Gorbachev announcement conveyed in your letter.
- He particularly appreciated your emphasis to the Soviets on acceptable modalities of withdrawal, including frontloading.
- Since the Summit last December, there has been a significant evolution in the Soviet position on withdrawal.
- Gorbachev's February 8 statement is a clear step forward and addresses more authoritatively than heretofore many areas of concern, such as frontloading, a shortened timetable, a date certain for withdrawal to commence, phasing, and monitoring.
- More than ever before the Soviets seem serious about withdrawing. Important questions regarding the foregoing still must be resolved, however.
- Vorontsov's trip to Islamabad focused on other issues, particularly the issue of interim arrangements, leaving to Geneva the resolution of a number of other questions relating to the details of withdrawal.
- The ministerial talks in Moscow February 21-23 can also contribute to a fuller U.S.-Soviet understanding and then to a productive and successful session in Geneva beginning March 2.
- Our bottom line, of course, remains the same--to effect the complete and irreversible withdrawal of Soviet troops in the shortest time possible, and to ensure self-determination for the Afghan people and return of the refugees.
- The next Geneva round will be the real test of Soviet intentions. At a minimum we would expect that the details of all four instruments could be completed.
- We are hopeful that successful parallel efforts to reach agreement on interim arrangements could facilitate withdrawal, the orderly return of the refugees, and the subsequent exercise of Afghan self-determination. Some progress has been made in this direction as a result of Cordovez' recent consultations between the U.S., the USSR and Pakistan. More progress is obviously needed given the need to ensure the attainment of these objectives which are shared by all those who have voted for the UNGA resolution.

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- There is general agreement between the U.S., the USSR, and Pakistan that whatever emerges as an interim or eventual successor government in Afghanistan, the process must be the product of the Afghans themselves.

- For our part, we have no plan of our own nor are we able to predict what shape that government may take. We are convinced, as you apparently are, that the Najibullah regime cannot hold power without the Soviet Army. We share the Soviet interest that post-settlement Afghanistan be independent, neutral and non-aligned. We also understand and accept the USSR's perceived need for a neighbor to the south which is not unfriendly. We have been urging the Soviets to join us in some sort of an agreement which would help guarantee this outcome.

- We understand your concern that no Khomeini-like fundamentalist regime takes over in Kabul. Afghan historical and cultural experience, along with the fact of a small Shi'a minority, argue strongly against such a development. The moderate political orientation of the Afghan resistance, as well as its strong ties to conservative Islamic governments and movements should be reassuring. The sooner the Soviets withdraw and a new regime with genuine popular support (including that of the resistance) assumes power in Kabul, the less will be the influence of extremist elements.

- In sum, we are encouraged by recent developments and value our bilateral dialogue with you on this as well as other issues. Events may move rapidly in coming weeks, and we should all remain in the closest touch. In this regard, India's recent efforts to keep Pakistan informed of its activities are most helpful.

#### SRI LANKA

- The President appreciates being kept informed on Sri Lanka. We have already begun appropriating money for reconstruction work and hope you and the Government of Sri Lanka can restore peace in Sri Lanka as quickly as possible so the aid group's efforts can proceed.



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