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OUTGOING TELEGRAM

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 SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN

REFS: A. STATE 364282, B. NEW DELHI 28503

1. C - ENTIRE TEXT.
2. ON TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, FOREIGN SECRETARY VENKATESWARAN CALLED ME IN TO BRIEF ME ON THE GANDHI/GORBACHEV DISCUSSIONS ON AFGHANISTAN. VENKATESWARAN POINTED OUT THAT THIS SUBJECT HAD BEEN DISCUSSED BY THE TWO LEADERS ALONE WITH ONLY INTERPRETERS PRESENT AND THAT HE WAS NOT PERSONALLY IN ATTENDANCE. NONETHELESS, HE HAD BEEN BRIEFED ON WHAT TRANSPIRED. VENKATESWARAN SAID THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD NOT ASKED HIM TO BRIEF ME AND HE WAS DOING IT ON HIS OWN INITIATIVE SINCE I HAD PASSED A COPY OF PRESIDENT REAGAN'S LETTER TO HIM ON NOVEMBER 23 (REF B).
3. VENKATESWARAN MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS:
 - A. IN THE COURSE OF THE DISCUSSION, PRIME MINISTER GANDHI CONVEYED THE GIST OF PRESIDENT REAGAN'S LETTER TO GORBACHEV.

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-- B. THE INDIANS GAINED THE IMPRESSION THAT GORBACHEV "WANTS TO GET OUT OF THE AFGHANISTAN IMBROGLIO BUT PERCEIVED THE U.S. POSITION AS NOT BEING CONDUCTIVE TO SOVIET WITHDRAWAL." GORBACHEV APPARENTLY INDICATED THAT THE SOVIET UNION WOULD BE SATISFIED WITH A "NEUTRAL AND NON-ALIGNED AFGHANISTAN WHICH WOULD NOT BE UNFRIENDLY TO THE SOVIET UNION." THE SOVIET LEADER ALLEGEDLY SAID THAT "SOVIET SECURITY DICTATES THAT "ITS SOFT UNDERBELLY NOT BE EXPOSED TO AN UNFRIENDLY GOVERNMENT." SHORT OF THESE CRITERIA, THE SOVIET UNION IS PREPARED TO MOVE "WITHIN AN ACCEPTABLE TIMEFRAME WHICH ALSO ASSUMES THE EXISTENCE OF MUTUAL GUARANTEES." WHEN I ASKED WHAT PRECISELY WAS MEANT BY THE WORD "MUTUAL", VENKATESWARAN SAID THAT THE SOVIETS APPARENTLY WERE THINKING OF U.S. AND RUSSIAN GUARANTEES.

-- C. IN ANSWER TO MY QUESTION OF WHAT TIMEFRAME THE SOVIETS HAD IN MIND FOR THE REMOVAL OF THEIR TROOPS, VENKATESWARAN INDICATED THAT THE SOVIETS FELT THAT THE SUGGESTION BY OUR SIDE OF THREE MONTHS WAS UNREALISTIC, BUT THAT THE SOVIETS ARE PREPARED TO DISCUSS A MORE REALISTIC TIMEFRAME. WHEN I CONTINUED TO PRESS HIM ON SPECIFICS, VENKATESWARAN SAID THAT HE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER SUCH DETAILS WERE DISCUSSED BY GORBACHEV AND GANDHI BUT ON THE BASIS OF HIS TALKS IN MOSCOW AND DELHI WITH SENIOR SOVIET OFFICIALS, HE THOUGHT TWO YEARS OR EVEN ONE AND A HALF YEARS MIGHT BE AN ACCEPTABLE TIMEFRAME. VENKATESWARAN THOUGHT THAT COMING DOWN FROM FOUR YEARS TO THREE AND A HALF YEARS WAS REALLY NOT A MEANINGFUL CONCESSION BY THE SOVIETS. HE POINTED OUT, HOWEVER, THAT THIS WAS MORE HIS OWN IMPRESSION RATHER THAN ANYTHING HE HAD BEEN BRIEFED AS COMING OUT OF THE GORBACHEV/GANDHI MEETING.

-- D. GORBACHEV IS A PRACTICAL MAN AND GANDHI WAS IMPRESSED BY GORBACHEV'S WILLINGNESS TO EXPLORE NEW APPROACHES TO OLD PROBLEMS.

-- E. THERE REMAINS A LINGERING INDIAN SUSPICION THAT CERTAIN ELEMENTS IN PAKISTAN DON'T REALLY WISH TO SEE AN EARLY POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THE AFGHAN PROBLEM BECAUSE IT IS THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THAT PROBLEM WHICH EXPLAINS THE SIZEABLE U.S. ASSISTANCE TO PAKISTAN. I DISABUSED HIM OF THIS FALLACY.

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4. I ALSO AVAILED MYSELF OF THIS MEETING TO RAISE OUR CONCERN THAT A PORTION OF THE INDO-SOVIET JOINT STATEMENT OF NOVEMBER 28 APPARENTLY REFERRING TO AFGHANISTAN SEEMS TO IMPLY AN IDENTITY OF INDIAN AND SOVIET VIEWS ON AFGHANISTAN AND TO ABSOLVE THE USSR FROM RESPONSIBILITY FOR ENDING THE WAR AND MAKING PEACE (STATE 374407). I THEN MADE SOME OF THE POINTS SET FORTH IN REFTEL. VENKATESWARAN ASSURED ME THAT THE GOI POSITION ON AFGHANISTAN HAD NOT CHANGED AND REMAINS "IDENTICAL TO WHAT IT WAS." NOTE: THE CONSISTENT INDIAN POSITION HAS BEEN TO OPPOSE BOTH FOREIGN INTERVENTION (SOVIET TROOPS) AND FOREIGN INTERFERENCE (U.S. ARMS AID TO THE FREEDOM FIGHTERS) IN AFGHANISTAN.

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5. COMMENT: IF WE ARE INTERESTED IN ENGAGING THE INDIANS IN THE PROCESS OF FINDING A POLITICAL SOLUTION TO THE AFGHAN PROBLEM, I SUGGEST THAT THIS BE DISCUSSED WITH VENKATESWARAN WHEN HE VISITS UNDER SECRETARY ARMACOST IN WASHINGTON JANUARY 9. AS FAR AS I CAN SEE, THE INDIANS AT THIS POINT WILL NOT DO ANY MORE THAN WHAT THEY HAVE ALREADY DONE WITH THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER, I.E., CONVEYING THE GIST TO GORBACHEV. ANY ADDITIONAL INDIAN INVOLVEMENT WOULD REQUIRE THAT WE FIRST CONVINCED THEM THAT THE U.S. INTENDS SERIOUSLY TO ENLIST INDIA'S GOOD OFFICES IN A BONA FIDE EFFORT TO OVERCOME REMAINING DIFFERENCES WITH THE SOVIETS AND ACHIEVE A SETTLEMENT WHICH THE GOI WOULD PERCEIVE AS LIKELY TO BE ACCEPTABLE TO MOSCOW AS WELL AS WASHINGTON. DEAN##

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