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Authority *MND 969030*
By *ll* NARA Date *10-19-01*

POL AFG

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Department of State

TELEGRAM



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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8337

S E C R E T KABUL 1806

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FROM AMBASSADOR

SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN - POLITICAL UNCERTAINTIES

SUMMARY. VAGUE ATMOSPHERE OF POLITICAL CRISIS HAS BEEN DEVELOPING KABUL IN RECENT DAYS, THOUGH KNOWN FACTORS DO NOT SEEM WARRANT AS MUCH MALAISE AS EXISTS. MINHEALTH RESIGNATION PRIVATELY CONFIRMED AND OTHER NEAR RESIGNATIONS RELIABLE REPORTED. APPROACH TO AMBASSADOR THROUGH INTERMEDIARY FROM FORMER PM PRINCE DAUD QUERYING US ATTITUDE TOWARD POSSIBILITY HIS RETURN TO POWER. ACTION REQUESTED: DEPT COMMENTS ON PROPOSED LINE TO FOLLOW IN RESPONSE DAUD APPROACH. END SUMMARY.

1. THERE IS AN ILL-DEFINED POLITICAL CRISIS IN KABUL WHICH APPEARS DEEPER THAN AVAILABLE FACTS AND KNOWN FACTORS WARRANT. ELEMENTS ARE CONTINUED UNIVERSITY STANDSTILL, SLUGGISH ECONOMY, HIGH FOOD PRICES IN SPOTS AND UNEVEN DISTRIBUTION, SUGAR SHORTAGE, AS WELL AS CONFIRMED (THOUGH POSSIBLY NOT ACCEPTED) RESIGNATION MINISTER OF HEALTH AND REPORTED CONSIDERATION OF RESIGNATION BY MINISTERS OF EDUCATION AND INTERIOR. ADDITIONAL FACTORS ARE GOVERNMENT'S "HOLD-THE-LINE" POLICY ON PUSHTUNISTAN WHICH CRITICS INTERPRET AS FURTHER EVIDENCE OF RGA INDECISIVENESS, STORIES OF HIGH LEVEL CORRUPTION, ADMINISTRATION MALFUNCTION AND CONTINUED ABSENCE PARLIAMENTARY QUORUM.

2. TO THE LONG-TERM RESIDENT, WHICH I HAVE BECOME, NONE OF THESE ITEMS SEEMS UNUSUAL OR EXCEPTIONALLY GRAVE.

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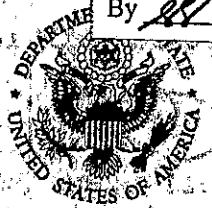
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MOREOVER THE ABOVE LIST DOES A DISTINCT INJUSTICE TO MANY REAL RGA ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF WHICH DEPT IS AWARE. AND YET THERE IS AN ATMOSPHERE HERE OF LASSITUDE, OF RESIGNATION, AS IF THE ELAN VITAL OF THE GOVERNMENT HAS BECOME EXHAUSTED, AND THERE IS GROWING CRITICISM OF THE KING AND HIS ALLEGED INABILITY OR UNWILLINGNESS TO MAKE DECISIONS.

3. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND THE FOLLOWING SHOULD BE EVALUATED:

ITEM - ON MARCH 11, WAHID ABDULLAH, DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION, MFA, CAME TO RESIDENCE AT HIS SUGGESTION. WAHID IS WELL KNOWN TO US AS LONG TIME FERVENT SUPPORTER AND BOOSTER OF FORMER PM PRINCE DAUD. AT THAT TIME HE ASKED ME WHAT WOULD BE USG REACTION TO DAUD'S RE-ASSUMPTION OF POWER. IN RESPONSE I INQUIRED WHETHER HE WAS ASKING UNDER INSTRUCTIONS FROM DAUD. HE STATED CRYPTICALLY "DAUD KNOWS I AM HERE." I THEN STATED THAT INTERNAL AFFAIRS AFGHANISTAN NOT REPEAT NOT PROPER MATTER FOR ME TO COMMENT ON.

ITEM - ON MARCH 27, WAHID SENT ME THROUGH EMBASSY OFFICER FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS COMING DIRECTLY FROM DAUD, AS RESULT CONVERSATION PREVIOUS DAY BETWEEN PRINCE DAUD, PRINCE NAIM AND WAHID.

A. WHAT IS ATTITUDE OF US RE: DAUD'S POSSIBLE RE-ASSUMPTION OF POWER?

B. COULD DAUD/NAIM COUNT UPON SYMPATHY OF USG IF DAUD BECOMES HEAD OF GOVERNMENT?

C. WOULD US THEN CONTINUE TO SUPPORT AFGHANISTAN ECONOMICALLY AND MORALLY?

D. WILL US SAFEGUARD AFGHAN NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE?

ITEM - NHK 3262 OF MARCH 28 CONFIRMING DAUD CRITICISM OF FAILURE GOVERNMENT TO ACT AND NOT REPEAT NOT RULING OUT DAUD RETURN TO POWER.

4. MY EVALUATION IS AS FOLLOWS:

(1) WE HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO REPEAT NO INDICATION OF ANY IMPENDING DRASTIC CHANGE, COUP OR SIMILAR; (2) WE ARE GENERALLY DOUBTFUL OF WAHID'S ACCURACY AND SENSE OF PROPORTION IN REPORTING. CERTAINLY THERE IS A LARGE SELF-SERVING ELEMENT IN ALL WAHID'S ACTIONS, BUT (UNDERSCORE) (A) NEVER BEFORE HAVE SUCH QUESTIONS FROM

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DAUD COME WITH EQUAL PRECISION AND EVERY INDICATION OF AUTHORITY. IN VIEW ALMOST FEUDAL RELATIONSHIP WAHID-DAUD. NAIM IT SEEMS MOST UNLIKELY THAT WAHID COULD HAVE DARED TAKE LIBERTIES WITH ACCURACY OF MESSAGE. (B) NEWLY ARRIVED IRANIAN AMBASSADOR TAFAZOLI ASKED MY OPINION OF DAUD, WHICH QUESTION HAS NOT BEEN ASKED FOR SOME TIME.

5. I CONSIDER LIKELIHOOD OF DAUD RETURN NO MORE THAN OUTSIDE POSSIBILITY. ALSO, DAUD'S KNOWN POLITICS AND FAMILY AND DYNASTIC LOYALTY MAKES COUP SEEM UNLIKELY. MOREOVER VAGUE NATURE OF CRISIS IMPROBABLE BASIS FOR ACT OF DESPAIR. NEVERTHELESS IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE THAT SOMETHING IS STIRRING IN THE DAUD CAMP. LIKELIEST EXPLANATIONS IN MY VIEW ARE (A) THAT DAUD IS CONSIDERING MORE ACTIVE ROLE AFTER LONG PERIOD OF INACTIVITY AND (B) THAT HIS MAIN THREAT, IF ANY, WOULD BE MOST LIKELY TO ACT IN ROYAL FAMILY COUNCIL RATHER THAN BY EXTERNAL FORCE.

6. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES AND WITHOUT OVERRATING CHANCE OF DAUD SUCCESS, IT WOULD, IN MY OPINION, NOT REPEAT NOT BE IN BEST INTEREST USG TO IGNORE DAUD'S INQUIRY. TO DO SO WOULD CONFIRM HIS LONGSTANDING SUSPICION USG HOSTILE TO HIM, AND HE IS CAPABLE OF BEARING LONG GRUDGES.

7. AT SAME TIME WE MUST AVOID GIVING DAUD ANY CARD WHICH HE COULD AND WOULD USE IN STRENGTHENING HIS HAND IN AN INTERNAL POWER STRUGGLE AND WHICH COULD EVEN REMOTELY BE INTERPRETED AS USG SUPPORT.

8. THEREFORE, IF DEPT CONCURS, I PROPOSE ACT AS FOLLOWS:
A. DEAL WITH WAHID ONLY INDIRECTLY THROUGH SAME EMBOFF.
B. RESPOND ALONG FOLLOWING LINES: (1) INTERNAL NATURE OF AFGHAN GOVERNMENT IS MATTER SOLELY WITHIN AFGHAN DOMAIN ON WHICH USG CANNOT REPEAT CANNOT PROPERLY COMMENT. (2) AS A MATTER OF GENERAL, WORLD-WIDE PRINCIPLE, USG ATTITUDE TOWARD ANY GOVERNMENT IS BASED ON THAT GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES AND ACTIONS, IN PARTICULAR TOWARD US INTERESTS AND TOWARDS PEACE AND STABILITY IN REGION. (3) IF WAHID OR DAUD WERE TO ASK WHETHER ANSWERS SUBJECT OF INSTRUCTIONS WASHINGTON, I WOULD INSTRUCT EMBOFF TO

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SAY THAT ABOVE IS ALL HE IS AUTHORIZED TRANSMIT.

9. REQUEST COMMENTS AND GUIDANCE.

10. DEPT. AT ITS DISCRETION, MAY WISH REPEAT TEHRAN,
ISLAMABAD. GP-3.
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