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PM/81/28

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister

Yes

Content that Lord Carrington should take the first steps to launch this British initiative (which, as he recognises, is very unlikely to get anywhere)? Or would you prefer to discuss with him

No first?

Afghanistan

mt  
20.v.

1. It remains our aim to bring about a solution to the Afghanistan problem involving Soviet military withdrawal, freedom for the Afghans to have a government of their choosing and satisfactory arrangements for the return of the refugees. To this end we and like-minded countries have been trying to encourage two forms of pressure on the Soviet Union: resistance activity in Afghanistan and international diplomatic pressure. Resistance activity continues at a high level and shows no sign of slackening. But international pressure has been reduced. The US decision to lift the grain embargo and the consequent EC decisions may be interpreted as a weakening of the Western attitude. Pakistan is preoccupied with a new US aid offer and is no longer leading diplomatic activity. Waldheim's current efforts to find a way forward are unlikely to come to anything. No major UN or other discussion of Afghanistan is planned before the UN General Assembly in the autumn. With the change of President in France Giscard's earlier proposal for an international conference is not likely to be pressed.

2. I have therefore concluded that the United Kingdom should take the initiative to stimulate fresh diplomatic activity. My aim is that after careful initial consultations with our principal allies and the Pakistanis, and wider consultations later, the Ten would propose at the end of June that an international conference on Afghanistan be convened, perhaps in Geneva, in October/November. It would be presented as a conference in two stages. Stage One would be very much

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like Giscard's proposal and would involve discussions by the Permanent Members of the Security Council, Pakistan and certain others of external factors such as the cessation of external intervention and the establishment of guarantees for an independent Afghanistan. Stage Two would be attended additionally by representatives of Afghan opinion and would aim to reach agreement on the international arrangements proposed by Stage One and all other matters necessary to promote the return of Afghanistan to independence and non-aligned status. This proposal would avoid some of the difficulties of Giscard's proposal eg by making provision for Afghan opinion to be involved in the second stage. The difficult question of who should represent the Afghans does not have to be settled now. But it is clearly essential for them to participate in any settlement of the problem and any proposal which does not recognise that from the outset is likely to encounter much criticism both from the Afghans and more widely.

3. The likelihood is that the Soviet Union will reject the proposed Conference. It has so far shown no serious disposition to negotiate. The primary purpose of the proposal is therefore to renew diplomatic pressure and rekindle interest. But there is an outside chance that the Russians will be prepared to consider a device which offers them a chance of withdrawal without loss of face. We shall in any case present the proposal as a serious attempt to promote a solution.

4. Much more work will be necessary on the details but my colleagues should be aware of the basic idea before we begin consultations about it with selected countries next week.

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5. I am sending copies of this minute to the members of OD and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized letter 'C' with a horizontal line underneath it.

(CARRINGTON)

20 May 1981

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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