

CONFIDENTIAL



②
Ernie Painter.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

The line proposed seems
right.

London SW1A 2AH

28 January 1981

Dear Michael,

Amk
- 28/1

ms

President Giscard's Proposal for an International Conference
on Afghanistan

On French television last night, President Giscard announced a French initiative on Afghanistan.

He said he had proposed to the Soviet Union and the other nations concerned a conference on ending foreign intervention in Afghanistan. He had sent a message to Brezhnev (on 26 January according to Reuter's report of the interview) and had been in touch with other potential participants. His plan was to bring together all nations which were either accused or suspected, rightly or wrongly, of interfering in Afghan affairs as well as other countries who clearly had a role to play in the search for a solution. He said he had in mind the Soviet Union, about whose intervention there could be no doubt, and also the other Permanent Members of the Security Council, Iran, Pakistan and India. The Islamic community should participate in a manner yet to be determined. In answer to a question, he said that the Afghan government itself would not need to participate since the conference would not discuss the status of Afghanistan. It would rather deal exclusively with the question of ending external intervention in Afghanistan. This could be achieved by a simultaneous and verifiable undertaking by all participants. Afghanistan would thus be permitted to return to its status of a non-aligned country.

The Secretary-General of the Elysee gave the Ambassador advance warning of this announcement early on the afternoon of 27 January, the day of the speech. Wahl made the following points in addition to those which were made in Giscard's speech. The Soviet Union had never provided details of the foreign interference which it alleged was taking place in Afghanistan. Nevertheless they had expressed interest in a political settlement e.g. at the Giscard/Brezhnev meeting in Warsaw. Pakistan's attitude had also evolved and it was interested in the initiation of talks. Wahl said the conference would be under UN auspices but the Elysee's verbatim transcript does not record Giscard as having made this point.

The idea of a conference on Afghanistan was mentioned by the French during consultations in a very restricted group in May 1980, but it has not to our knowledge been heard of subsequently until Giscard made his remarks on the television yesterday.

/There

CONFIDENTIAL



There is doubtless a strong element of electioneering in this move. Giscard is anxious to demonstrate to domestic opinion, particularly after events in Chad, that he remains capable of pursuing an independent foreign policy and taking the diplomatic initiative. This doubtless explains at least in part his failure to consult the 10, the United States or Pakistan in advance. This omission is not unprecedented but is a particularly blatant example of inadequate consultation; Giscard himself, in the same interview, called for greater consultation between the United States and her main allies. The French made no mention of the initiative last week when the European political co-operation machinery spent a good deal of time discussing and agreeing to a French proposal for a demarche by the Presidency to the UN Secretary-General and the Secretary-General of the Islamic Conference emphasising that the position of the 10 on Afghanistan had not changed.

We do not know for certain when Giscard informed Brezhnev of his proposal but it looks as though the Russians were told before anyone else. The US Embassy here tell us that their people in Paris were notified at noon on 27 January. The US Embassy in Paris are seeking clarification of certain points in Giscard's statement and are under instructions to say that they would have appreciated fuller advance consultation, but not to make an issue of this. In public the State Department are taking the line that they were notified in advance, look forward to further consultations, and will give serious study to the proposal. They will say nothing about the substance for the time being but apparently see some positive elements in the proposal.

We plan to say nothing in public which would inflate its importance. In evidence to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee this morning the Minister of State (Mr Hurd) took the line after consulting Lord Carrington that the proposal seemed to be essentially procedural. The Committee did not press him on whether we had been adequately consulted but the point came up in passing. If the press take up the point we propose to say that we were informed in advance but were not given time for detailed consultations.

We shall now be studying urgently the substance of the French proposal. While it has a certain logic, it raises many questions. It is not clear how it can be linked to Pakistan's proposal for tripartite talks under the aegis of a UN representative. Because it excludes both the Kamale regime and the resistance, it is unlikely to appeal to either of them. The Soviet attitude will be crucial, but our initial reaction is to doubt whether they will agree to participate in such a conference. If this is right, they will have to incur the embarrassment of rejecting a possible opening for negotiations. When we have done further work on the substance we propose to seek clarification of certain

CONFIDENTIAL



points from the French and to take the opportunity to express regret at the lack of advance consultation.

*Yours ever,
Francis Richards*

(F Richards)
Private Secretary)

M O'D B Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
LONDON

CONFIDENTIAL