



*Assessed by Prime Minister
with Lord Carrington.*

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

16 September 1980

Dear Michael,

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Prime Minister's Overseas Visits

We have had an indication that when the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary visits China in about two weeks time the Chinese will be expecting him to say something about when the Prime Minister might intend to return the visit which Hua Guofeng made to this country in November 1979.

Although Hua has now been replaced as Premier (while retaining the Party chairmanship), his successor, Zhao Ziyang, is likely to renew the invitation.

As we understand it, the Prime Minister is likely to have a heavy programme of overseas visits next year. These may include a possible North-South Summit in February-March; a possible visit to India in April; the Ottawa summit in July; and the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Australia in October.

However, we have a very strong interest in maintaining our relations with China and may have some important special business to pursue, eg the Guangdong nuclear power project. We lag behind our Western European partners in terms of top level visits to China. No British Prime Minister in office has ever visited Peking, while the Heads of Government - and in many cases Heads of State - of most other West European countries have done so. President Giscard is expected in Peking in October this year. Since both the Defence Secretary and Lord Carrington will have been to China this year, next year is likely to be a blank as regards senior Ministerial visits unless the Prime Minister is able to fit a visit in.

I understand that the Prime Minister may have a slot free in January. Although it will be cold in Peking then, this would not be an overriding difficulty. But the Prime Minister may not wish to be abroad at that time.

Although the Chinese might not mind, the Indians would probably look amiss at any attempt to combine a trip to India with a trip to China. If, therefore, the visit to India goes ahead, that will rule out a spring visit to Peking.

The only other possibility would seem to be for the Prime Minister to travel to Australia in the autumn via Peking. Given the distances involved, this would lengthen the journey

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by a period of from 5 days to a week depending on how long she stayed in China. This would make the trip a long one but it is difficult to see what other slot might be found.

Lord Carrington plans to have a word with the Prime Minister before he leaves for New York. The choices seem to be to tell the Chinese that she hopes to make a visit some time during 1981, probably in the autumn; or to tell them that, much as the Prime Minister looks forward to making a visit, given her many commitments in 1981 including the Presidency for the second part of the year, we are not yet in a position to propose a time.

yours ever
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