

PNQ on Iran

The Lord Privy Seal, in answer to Mr. Shore's PNQ, simply reported the facts as you know them. He added that President Carter is making a further statement at 1300 BST, and that we were not involved.

Mr. Shore said that the world was holding its breath following these events. We should impress on the US Government the need for the utmost restraint in dealing with the unpredictable consequences of what had happened. He said that the Labour Party could not support, and would oppose, military action against Iran. There needed to be full, frank, and if necessary confidential exchanges between the United States and her allies. He suggested two immediate actions: calling on the Russians to apply pressure on the Iranian Government to release the hostages, and inviting President Carter to the Luxembourg Meeting this weekend. In reply, Ian Gilmour said that everyone would agree that the US should show the utmost restraint, as they had done over the last few months. He said that there was a clear distinction between a rescue attempt and military action. He entirely agreed that consultation was desirable. He would be delighted, if it was appropriate, to invite President Carter to Luxembourg, but thought it likely that he would want to stay in Washington. He said that a Summit Meeting in the near future could not be ruled out.

Peter Temple-Morris said that there was very real concern about the quality of the United States leadership at the present time. They had vacillated on food sanctions, military action, and now there was last night's very sad venture. He suggested a

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meeting of the West at the highest level. Ian Gilmour said that this was not a suitable moment to criticise the Americans. It was a time for the Allies to stick together.

Tony Benn asked whether the Government knew about the operation, whether the SAS were involved in advising about it, and whether we supported the idea of military action given its possible consequences. He said that in any circumstances, we should not allow American bases here to be used. Ian Gilmour said that the SAS were not involved, and that we were not consulted, but had been informed of the possibility of a rescue operation.

Norman Atkinson said that world powers should now be discussing the extradition of the Shah to Iran. Ian Gilmour said he could not accept that for a moment. The Shah was not relevant, and extradition had nothing to do with us or the United States, since the Shah was in Egypt. He thought that extradition would now be incredible. In answer to further questions, Ian Gilmour said he could not confirm reports (from Israeli sources) that the American planes had flown from Egypt, since he simply did not know. Donald Stewart said that "my country right or wrong" was a dubious slogan. The UK should be a rational and candid ally and not a mindless satellite. Ian Gilmour said that that language was unfortunate. Our role was that of a valuable ally, giving advice when asked.

David Mellor said that while everyone sympathised with the American dilemma, he was concerned that this action had come so soon after agreement on economic sanctions. Ian Gilmour said that we had been working throughout for a peaceful and speedy solution. The Foreign Secretary was going to Washington in 8 days, and that did not preclude earlier consultations.

/ Joan Lestor

Joan Lestor said that there was a thin line between a rescue operation and military intervention. There was no way in which she and her friends could support military action. Ian Gilmour repeated that the Government had known of the possibility of such an action, but had not had consultation about it. He said that we had throughout been seeking to solve the crisis by political and diplomatic means, not military action.

Andrew Faulds, in a highly inappropriate supplementary, said that we should condemn the American action, not commiserate with them. He thought that "this fiasco" had sealed the fate of the hostages, and that it was contrary to international law. Ian Gilmour said that his remarks were highly unfortunate in this delicate situation. It was very easy to take a holier-than-thou attitude, but it was not shared by the majority of the House.

Finally, Peter Shore made a formal request for a further statement on Monday. The Lord Privy Seal undertook to consider it.

25 April, 1980.