



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

2 July 1980

Dear Michael,

Afghanistan

/ As you know, our News Department have come under persistent pressure recently on the question of the supply of arms to the resistance movement in Afghanistan. After considerable discussion in the Department, Lord Carrington accepted the attached line for use with the press. In his appearance before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons this morning, he himself used points (i) to (iv). Our News Department will be using the remaining points unattributably as from today.

*For ever*  
*GGH*

(G G H Walden)  
Private Secretary

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Q: In the BBC Panorama programme of 23 June 1980, Lord Carrington said that the West might have to consider whether or not to supply arms to "the freedom fighters in Afghanistan". :

- (a) How far was this possibility explored at the Venice Summit?
- (b) What is the British attitude to such a possibility?
- (c) What is his assessment of the strength, cohesion and durability of the rebels' challenge?

A. As the Prime Minister said in the House of Commons on 24 June, the question was discussed at Venice "only very much in the margins". It was not raised at the conference.

B. The British attitude is as follows:

- (i) The thrust of the government's policy remains to promote a political settlement, the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops and a neutral, non-aligned and independent Afghanistan.
- (ii) It is also important that the Resistance should have the arms it needs to operate against the Soviet invaders. And arms do seem to be getting through.
- (iii) The question where the arms come from - for instance from the complex networks of the international arms trade - is not the central question.
- (iv) I doubt whether it would be helpful to the Afghans themselves to be more specific about

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their sources.

- (v) I am not saying that we are, or are not, supplying arms to the freedom fighters, though it is not necessary for every possible supplier country to become involved. Still less am I excluding the possibility of supplying arms in the future. But the objective remains a political settlement.

C. The will to continue the fight against the Russians continues. They can win daylight encounters with the freedom fighters but have at present insufficient forces deployed in Afghanistan to control the whole countryside. They are vulnerable to attack by the resistance at night. One of the problems has been the disunity of the resistance.