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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

Telephone conversation between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the French Foreign Minister at midnight on Thursday 27 March 1980

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The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that he had rung Monsieur Francois Poncet to discuss with him the reaction of European Heads of Government to President Carter's message of 25 March about the American hostages in Iran.

The Prime Minister and Chancellor Schmidt had been discussing the matter earlier in the evening. They had agreed that any reply should cover the following points:

- (a) As requested by President Carter, they would be prepared to send a message to President Bani Sadr;
- (b) they were doubtful about the wisdom of the American action in giving what appeared to be an ultimatum to President Bani Sadr. This seemed likely to be counter-productive;
- (c) they hoped that the Americans would therefore be prepared to reconsider the course of action on which they had embarked; and
- (d) in the last resort and because of the possible consequences of American action, their Governments would offer support to the Americans. Such an offer of support would be in general terms but would cover the withdrawal of our representatives from Tehran.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor did not wish to take any action until they had discussed the matter with the French Government. Monsieur Francois Poncet asked whether it was Lord Carrington's intention to seek to agree a position of the Nine. He also asked whether Lord Carrington envisaged a joint answer on behalf of the Nine or a concertation of their positions. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that he knew the Presidency were summoning

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

a meeting in Rome the following morning. Clearly this would be a suitable moment to discuss the next steps. He thought that if France, the Federal Republic and the UK agreed, it should be possible to persuade the others to go along. He envisaged separate answers going from each Head of Government.

Monsieur Francois Poncet said that he had not yet discussed the matter with President Giscard but would be doing so at 10.00 am. In general he agreed with the line Lord Carrington had sketched out although he thought that the Americans had already taken action with the Iranians and that it would therefore be too late to dissuade them. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary agreed that this part of the proposed message would probably have no effect. It was nonetheless important to go on record with our views. Monsieur Francois Poncet said that Lord Carrington's proposal of support seemed to be very specific. Any message would certainly leak to the press sooner rather than later. Words along the lines of "We have the greatest understanding for the United States' difficulties and will do what we can to help" might therefore be more appropriate. Nonetheless, he repeated that he agreed with the general line proposed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary. The action taken by the United States Government might be inappropriate but the Americans could not be left alone in their present predicament.

Herr Genscher then spoke briefly to Monsieur Francois Poncet (in German). He said that the British, French and German Ambassadors in Rome should get together early today and suggest to the Presidency a postponement of the proposed meeting until later in the afternoon. Monsieur Francois Poncet repeated that he thought that any expression of support/would have to be very general. He agreed that the Ambassadors should be briefed to seek a postponement of the coordination meeting. Herr Genscher said that the text of the elements to be incorporated in separate replies to President Carter would be sent to Monsieur Francois Poncet overnight.

The conversation ended at ten minutes past midnight.

28 March 1980

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*Handwritten initials*