



Prime Minister

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Lord Carrington sees great Foreign and Commonwealth Office
 difficulties in the kind of quadripartite
 meeting on the eve of Venice which

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you & Chancellor Schmidt envisaged. It
 may be the idea would be pursued a little

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Dear *Vance*

AFGHANISTAN: FUTURE ACTION *out of what you & the Chancellor agreed.*

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has now been able to consider the suggested plan of action which completed the record of the Prime Minister's discussion with Chancellor Schmidt enclosed with your letter of 25 February.

Taking the points in order, the first ((a) of your record) was trilateral discussion. Lord Carrington is in favour of our pursuing this and we shall be doing so at various levels as appropriate. Trilateral discussions have in fact already begun, with a meeting in London on 27 February of French, German and British "Asian experts" to try to agree a common position on handling the "neutrality proposals" in advance of the meeting of the Asian Working Group of the Nine in Rome on Thursday and Friday, 28 and 29 February.

That meeting did not specifically "prepare comments on the American paper recently circulated by Mr Vance". This was the Speaking Note used by Mr Vance on his recent tour and we are doubtful whether it calls for further comment than was made by the four Ministers on this side of the Atlantic who met him. Nevertheless the FCO is preparing a comparative study of the Vance "paper" and the papers which we and the Germans have also produced and propose, if this study throws up any need for further comments, to pursue matters bilaterally with the French, Germans and Americans. (The Americans have circulated a separate paper covering much the same ground as Mr Vance's note. This is under study in NATO.)

Coordination of the European viewpoint ((b) of your record). The Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 17/18 March (not 10/11 March). We shall certainly ask the Presidency to leave time for discussion on Afghanistan and other related subjects then. The Political Directors of the Nine will meet in Rome on 13/14 March and will prepare for that Council discussion. They will meet again on 22/23 April in advance of the next likely ministerial discussion, the timing of which has not yet been settled.

As for Quadripartite consultation ((c) and (d) of your record) Lord Carrington sees some familiar difficulties. The proposals for preliminary meetings of the four Foreign Ministers (UK, US, FRG and France) and later the four Heads of Government would leak and provoke, as did the "Guadaloupe" meeting, protests from many of our partners, not least from the Italians who clearly envisage the European Council (12/13 June) and the Economic Summit (22/23 June), both in Venice, as major political events from which they

/will

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We must not lose

will derive prestige at the culminating point of their Presidency. In any case Lord Carrington doubts whether the German ideas will get off the ground, not least because President Carter will be paying a State Visit to Italy before the Economic Summit and would not therefore be available for a Quadripartite Summit. Lord Carrington sees more attraction in the idea which Chancellor Schmidt put forward (page 4 of your record) that Mr Vance should have regular consultations with the British, German and French Ambassadors in Washington, even as frequently as once a fortnight or every three weeks. Such meetings would be an effective way of associating the Americans with the Nine's thinking (your paragraph (b)). Since the three European participants ought if possible to have a common line it would be desirable for senior officials (Political Directors) to agree their joint instructions in advance; this in turn would further improve trilateral coordination. Should such meetings in Washington leak, there could be difficulties with our other partners; but Lord Carrington thinks that it is the public demonstration of quadripartite activity, represented by meetings at Foreign Minister and Prime Minister level, which they object to rather than carefully handled meetings at official level to which they can - however reluctantly - turn a blind eye. Indeed there was at one time just such a "Washington Ambassadorial Group" for Berlin questions. Of course at Venice itself it may be possible for the four Heads of Government to meet unobtrusively as they have done before at Tokyo and earlier summit meetings of the Seven. It might be possible in the same way for the Prime Minister to talk privately to President Giscard and Chancellor Schmidt during the Venice European Council.

Political discussion at the Venice Summit ((e) of your record). At some point, when the Three/Four have sorted out their ideas for topics to be discussed, it will be necessary to ask the Italians, who will be in the chair at Venice, to arrange the agenda to permit this. But there should be no difficulty about this and we can decide nearer the time how and by whom this should be put to the Italians.

If the Prime Minister agrees with these ideas for carrying forward our coordination, Lord Carrington would propose to instruct Sir Oliver Wright to put our views to the Federal Chancellery. In the light of the German reactions, we and the Germans can then get in touch with the Americans and the French with the aim of obtaining rapid agreement to setting up the framework for consultations in Washington.

*Y. av
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(G G H Walden)