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Extract from the meeting record of visit from Herr Joseph Strauss
on 25 April 1980

IRAN

The Prime Minister said that all the British Government's efforts over recent weeks had been devoted to the twin objectives of showing solidarity with the United States, who were the ultimate guarantors of European security, and of securing the release of the hostages unharmed. Throughout this period we had been urging the United States Government to continue to show patience and restraint, but they had repeatedly pointed out that this approach was not bringing about the release of the hostages. When they had asked us what we would do to get the hostages out, we really had no answer to give them other than to continue to suggest that the best course was to sit tight. We had thought that we still had some time available for concerted diplomatic activity aimed at securing the release of the hostages, and the Ambassadors of the Nine, who had been recalled for consultation, had been going to see President Bani-Sadr next week. But everything was now in the melting pot following the unsuccessful American attempt to get the hostages out. The failure of the American action had now put the United States in an exceptionally difficult position both internationally and domestically. There was very little which the British Government was able to say publicly at present, but there would be an opportunity to discuss Iran at the meeting of the European Council on Sunday and Monday.

Herr Strauss said that during his recent visit to Washington Mr. Brzezinski had told him that the Americans envisaged three consecutive steps against Iran - first, economic sanctions, then a blockade and finally military action. In his view President Carter should now give a solemn warning to Iran that if any of the hostages were injured or killed, a part of Iran would be smashed to pieces.

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But there was no denying the immense risks involved. Any action against, for example, South Iran, would be a signal to the Soviet Union and to Iraq to move into Iran themselves. There was, however, no point, following the rescue attempt, in thinking any more about economic sanctions. Khomeini's position would now be strengthened immensely inside Iran. He would say that he had appealed to Allah and Allah had defeated President Carter. Khomeini's magical reputation with his primitive people would be enhanced still further. As for the position of the European allies, it would be suicidal if we allowed ourselves to be separated from the United States. He was absolutely against President Giscard's anti-American policies.

The Prime Minister said that she agreed that it was unlikely that economic sanctions would work in the aftermath of the American rescue attempt. The British Government were very worried about the possibility of the Americans taking military action, which in her view included a blockade. Even limited action was fraught with danger. For example, what would the United States do if Iranian ships tried to run a blockade? She was also very worried about the possible use of mines. There were the obvious immediate risks to shipping, but even when the crisis was over, not all of the mines that had been laid might be swept and there might well be a catastrophe involving an oil tanker. She was also concerned that if American aircraft were used to attack Iran, the Iranians might ask the Russians to send fighters to defend them.

Herr Strauss said that he believed the Soviet Union would keep out of any fighting in Iran. They did not want to be directly involved in any conflict with the United States. Rather, their objective was to seize part of Iran. The events of the previous night had humiliated the United States to a point where that country was a ridiculous cartoon figure. If this development was not stopped and reversed, the world would be a permanently different place. There would be only one super power - the Soviet Union -, and the repercussions for European security would be vast.