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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

12 December 1986

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Prime MinisterCDP
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Dear Charles,

Iran: Detention of Mr Roger Cooper

The Prime Minister may wish to be aware of the background to the latest developments in the case of Mr Roger Cooper, the British citizen detained in Iran without charge or consular access for a year.

The FCO has kept in very close touch with Mr Cooper's relatives in this country. Until recently the family accepted our advice that publicity for Mr Cooper's case might be counterproductive, and that pressure on diplomatic and unofficial channels was more likely to be helpful. However, the family recently said they believed that they had waited long enough, and could not let the anniversary of his detention pass on 7 December without going public. They appreciated the risks involved.

In parallel with the family's publicity, Mr Eggar summoned the newly arrived Iranian Charge d'Affaires on 8 December to protest strongly at Mr Cooper's continued detention without charge, and to demand his release, or, at least, immediate consular access. The Charge d'Affaires was told that this case was bound to cloud the atmosphere of our bilateral relationship.

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The Iranians have now reacted with an announcement from the Ministry of Information (ie Intelligence) that Mr Cooper had been arrested on charges of espionage, and a statement from the Prime Minister alleging that we are putting forward Cooper's case as a condition for any improvement in the level of relations "in order to avoid getting into the same situation as America: nevertheless the Iranian Government's position, both as regards spies and its decision not to improve relations with Britain, is clear".

It is too early to interpret this Iranian reaction. Since we have no evidence that there are substantial charges the Iranians can lay against Mr Cooper, it may be that the Iranian announcement is merely defensive reaction for public consumption, to counter what they doubtless regard as our decision to embark on a propaganda campaign. We will be in a better position to judge how seriously we should take the public statement on bilateral relations once our British Interests Section in Tehran have obtained clarification of it from the MFA.

Yours ever

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Private Secretary

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