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From the Private Secretary

2 January 1989

CSCE MEETING IN VIENNA: MOSCOW HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE

I have already informed Stephen Wall of my two conversations yesterday with General Powell. You may none the less like a brief record.

General Powell first telephoned me early yesterday from California. He said that the President, George Shultz and he had discussed the prospects for ending the Vienna CSCE meeting and reaching agreement on a human rights conference in Moscow in 1991. Quite considerable progress had in fact been made with the Russians, including over the past few days, on human rights issues. The President's inclination was to try to reach a conclusion in Vienna before his term of office ended. There would be an opportunity for a final round of discussion at Foreign Minister level in the margins of the meeting on Chemical Weapons in Paris later this week. George Shultz would speak to the Foreign Secretary later in the day to explain the position in more detail. The main outstanding question was the degree of conditionality which should be attached to Western participation in a Moscow conference. On this, the State Department were not as robust as the White House would like. It would be helpful if the United Kingdom could continue to argue strongly for conditionality.

I said this was very much our intention. The proposed Moscow meeting was controversial in this country. A large number of MPs had put down a Motion urging the Government not to agree to such a conference and there was considerable pressure from human rights and Jewish organisations. We had to consider how those who had fought for human rights in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe would feel if we agreed to a conference. We must not put ourselves in a position where we were committed to attending a Moscow meeting whatever happened. For instance, Mr. Gorbachev might be removed: or there might be some new bout of repression within the Soviet Union. I did not think the Prime Minister would be prepared to agree in principle to a Moscow conference unless it was quite clear that a final decision whether to attend would be taken only in the light of actual Soviet performance in the intervening two years. General Powell did not dissent from this. He said that the President would be replying to the

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Prime Minister's message, probably on 2 January. It would be helpful to have a further reaction from her as soon as possible.

I subsequently spoke again to General Powell in the evening to say that I thought it very important that the President did reply to your message (George Shultz had seemed to imply that he might not do so). General Powell said that he had the draft of a reply in front of him and had every intention of sending it. It would not go into great detail. I said it seemed to me there were two crucial points on the way ahead:

- first, we should try to agree between us the language for the conclusion of the Vienna meeting which we would both support, making clear that participation in a Moscow conference would depend upon Soviet implementation of their undertakings;

and

- second, that we should both agree the language we would use publicly in describing exactly what our position was, i.e. how we would interpret the conclusions at Vienna.

General Powell said that he agreed with this although it would be difficult to agree language in Vienna with the Russians, the neutrals and even the other Europeans. It would be very useful if we could propose some language since the State Department were being resistant on this point. It was still not absolutely clear that the Americans would agree to a Moscow conference: there had been a scorching editorial in the Washington Post that day opposing it and there would be difficulties with Congress. The Administration would be beginning consultations with Congress early this week. But the President had pretty well made up his mind that he wanted to conclude the Vienna meeting before he left office. General Powell's view was that he would do so.

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