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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

23 January 1984

Dear Peter,

LEBANON

We spoke on the telephone on Friday night about Beirut telegram number 38 and in particular the statement, reported in paragraph 2, by the Security Adviser to the President of the Lebanon that the Lebanese Government was determined to close the Shuweifat Gap. As you know, this question arose in Rumsfeld's conversation with the Prime Minister on Friday.

You told me that you would be arranging for instructions to be sent to HM Ambassador in Beirut over the weekend to the effect that, since action in relation to the Shuweifat Gap could have repercussions for the British contingent in the MNF, he should make it plain to the Lebanese authorities that we would expect to be fully consulted in good time if there was any prospect of such action.

The Prime Minister has since commented that should any further information of Lebanese intentions to act come to the attention of HM Ambassador or the Commander of BRITFORLEB, they should inform London immediately so that we can, if necessary, take steps to dissuade the Lebanese from going ahead. Subject to any views which the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary may have, I should be grateful if you could ensure that this point is clear to all concerned.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence).

*you see
for Cole.*

P.F. Ricketts, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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DESKBY 201230Z FCO
FM BEIRUT 201150Z JAN 84
TO IMMEDIATE F.C. O.
TELEGRAM NUMBER 38 OF 20 JANUARY 1984
INFO IMMEDIATE MODUK

PRIORITY WASHINGTON, PARIS, ROME, DAMASCUS, TEL AVIV,
UKMIS NEW YORK, AMMAN, JEDDA, CAIRO, MOSCOW, CBFC
SAVING BRITFORLEB

Prime Minister

On X, the Lebanese Foreign Minister told the Foreign Secretary today that action to close the gap was a distant possibility and he recognized that the UNF 4 would have to be consulted.

I have asked the F/C.O. to telephone the Ambassador in Beirut this weekend and instruct him to tell the Lebanese that in view of our exposed position we expect to be fully consulted in good time if there is any prospect of such action.

1. I CALLED ON KASSIS (MILITARY INTELLIGENCE), AND WADIH HADDAD (SECURITY ADVISER TO THE PRESIDENT) THIS MORNING, TO PROBE THE GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY. THEY MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY INTENDED TO CONTINUE TO TRY TO GET THE SECURITY PLAN BROUGHT INTO EFFECT.

KASSIS WOULD PROBABLY GO TO DAMASCUS FOLLOWING KHADDAM'S RETURN FROM CASABLANCA. SYRIAN OBJECTIONS WERE NOT FUNDAMENTAL. THEY WANTED TO GET WHAT THEY COULD FROM AGREEING TO THE PLAN, BUT THE REAL OBSTACLE WAS JUMBLATT, WHO WAS CONFUSED AND IRRESOLUTE AND AFRAID OF BEING CRITICISED FOR NOT CONVERTING THE DRUZE VICTORY OF SEPTEMBER INTO REAL GAINS FOR HIS PEOPLE. HADDAD SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD OFFERED JUMBLATT A LOT POLITICALLY, BUT THEY COULD NOT MAKE PROMISES THAT MIGHT NOT BE ACCEPTABLE TO OTHER GROUPS COMPARABLE TO THE DRUZE, EG THE GREEK ORTHODOX. HE THOUGHT THAT THE PROBLEM OF DRUZE PROMOTIONS COULD BE SOLVED ROUND A TABLE WITH JUMBLATT AND BERRI. KASSIS SUGGESTED THAT THE LAF HAD ADAMANTLY OPPOSED THE PROMOTION OF DESERTERS: BUT HE SAID THAT A COMPROMISE WAS ON OFFER UNDER WHICH THE DESERTERS WOULD BE GIVEN RETRO-ACTIVE PROMOTION WHEN THEY RETURNED.

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2. HADDAD MADE IT QUITE CLEAR THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS DETERMINED TO CLOSE THE SHUWEIFAT GAP. THIS WOULD BE DONE BY THE ISF IN TWO KEY POSITIONS. THE ARMY WOULD BACK THEM UP AS NECESSARY. SUCH ARMY ACTION WOULD NOT CONSTITUTE A BREACH OF THE SECURITY PLAN OR CEASEFIRE, SINCE THEY WOULD ONLY BE INTERVENING TO HELP THE ISF, WHOSE ACTIVITIES WERE PART OF THE PLAN. HE ASSURED ME THAT BERRI AND JUMBLATT UNDERSTOOD THAT THE GOVERNMENT INTENDED TO CLOSE THE GAP IN THIS WAY. AT ONE STAGE HE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD TO RELY ON THE GOODWILL OF THE OTHER PARTIES TO THE AGREEMENT: AT ANOTHER HE SAID THAT THE NEED TO IMPOSE THE LAW (IT WAS ILLEGAL TO MOVE ARMS WITHOUT PERMISSION) MUST IF NECESSARY TAKE PREFERENCE OVER WHAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD NEGOTIATE WITH THE OPPOSITION. HE ALSO SAID THE ARMY WAS MUCH STRONGER NOW THAN IT HAD BEEN IN AUGUST.

(A.S.C. 20)
We must ask for guidance from our Commander-in-Chief so that we can, if necessary, prevent it happening
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3. I ASKED HOW THE GOVERNMENT THOUGHT NABIH BERRI COULD ACCEPT GOVERNMENTAL CLOSURE OF THE SUPPLY LINE INTO THE SOUTHERN SUBURBS WHEN THIS WOULD PRESUMABLY BE UNACCEPTABLE TO MANY OF THE AMAL MILITIAMEN AND OTHERS WHOSE SUPPORT HE CLAIMED. KASSIS SAID THAT BERRI EXERCISED REALLY VERY LITTLE CONTROL ON THE SOUTHERN SUBURBS NOW. SOONER OR LATER HE WOULD HAVE TO DECIDE WHETHER HE WAS WITH OR AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. HADDAD ALSO SAID THAT ONCE THE SECURITY PLAN WAS IN FORCE THE ARMY WOULD UNDERTAKE A BIG OPERATION TO "CLEAN UP" WEST BEIRUT. IF THEY TRIED THIS NOW, THEY WOULD RUN INTO A LOT OF POLITICAL OPPOSITION FROM PEOPLE LIKE SAEB SALAM. BUT SUCH OPPOSITION WOULD BE DEFUSED ONCE THE SECURITY PLAN WAS IN FORCE, SINCE IT PROVIDED FOR THE ARMY TO TAKE OVER FROM THE LEBANESE FORCES IN MANY PLACES: THE LEBANESE FORCES WERE "THE BIG LOSERS" UNDER THE PLAN.

4. I THANKED HIM FOR THIS INFORMATION. I SAID THAT THE SECURITY SITUATION WAS ONE WHICH HMG WANTED TO FOLLOW VERY CLOSELY. IT WAS NATURALLY OF CONCERN TO THEM IF CLASHES WERE TO OCCUR AS A RESULT OF THE SECURITY PLAN GOING INTO EFFECT. WE NEEDED THE FULLEST POSSIBLE CONSULTATION IF FIGHTING WAS FORESEEN WHICH MIGHT INVOLVE THE MNF.

MIERS
BT

[COPIES SENT TO NO 10 DOWNING ST]

MULTINATIONAL FORCE IN LEBANON (MNF)

LIMITED
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DEFENCE DEPT
PUSD
NEWS DEPT
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NAD
WED
SED
ECD(E)
FINANCE DEPT
PROTOCOL DEPT
PS

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PS/MR LUCE
PS/PUS
SIR J BULLARD
SIR J LEAHY
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MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1
Telephone 01-930 7022 218 2111/3

MO 3/7/4

26th January 1984

Prime Minister⁽²⁾

Dear JShu,

MS
DMS
26/1
A.S.C. 27/1
f.a. MOD

The Defence Secretary has seen your letter of 23rd January about possible Lebanese action to close the Shuweifat Gap.

Mr Heseltine agrees that any such deployment of the Lebanese Government forces in the absence of political agreement would be a matter of very considerable concern. Such an action could precipitate the final collapse of the ceasefire and might well spark off an upsurge of violence in Beirut. This could have the most serious consequences for the whole MNF. He was therefore pleased to note that HMA, Beirut has been instructed to represent our concern to the Lebanese authorities and that Mr Miers and COMBRITFORLEB have been told to keep a close eye on Lebanese intentions.

Yours ever

N H R Evans

(N H R EVANS)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq