

310

CONFIDENTIAL



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

7 February, 1984

Dear John,

MZ

Lebanon/MNF

I enclose a draft statement prepared by officials here for the Foreign Secretary to make in the House on the redeployment of BRITFORLEB tomorrow 8 February. This has been drafted in the light of the news received late this evening that President Reagan is after all to make an announcement of a partial redeployment of US marines. Ministers may wish to discuss this draft at their meeting at 0900 tomorrow morning. I enclose a further six copies in case we are unable to get copies in advance to all participants.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Resident Clerk in MOD. The Foreign Secretary has not seen this draft: I shall be showing him a copy overnight.

Yours ever,

Peter Ricketts

(P F Ricketts)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
10 Downing Street

CONFIDENTIAL



There has been widespread anxiety about the situation in Lebanon for some time and the conditions have deteriorated sharply in the past few days. The Lebanese government has resigned and factional fighting has broken out again on a large scale. The prospects of achieving reconciliation appear as elusive as ever. It has become increasingly difficult for BRITFORLEB to carry out its role, and its situation has become ever more exposed. In these circumstances we have been in urgent consultations with our MNF partners. In the light of these consultations and of the announcement made by President Reagan yesterday evening the Government have decided that our troops should be moved to RFA Reliant off the Lebanon coast and stationed there until the situation becomes clearer. [The House will be relieved to know that this redeployment has already been successfully completed].

For the time being British residents in the Beirut area are being advised to stay indoors for their own safety. Our Ambassador in Beirut is keeping the situation under close review but has not at this stage advised immediate evacuation. British Embassy staff are safe and well.



TO BE CHECKED  
AGAINST DELIVERY

STATEMENT BY THE FOREIGN SECRETARY IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS:

8 FEBRUARY 1984: LEBANON

As my Rt Hon Friend the Prime Minister told the House yesterday, we have been considering closely and urgently the situation in Lebanon where conditions and the prospects for achieving reconciliation have deteriorated sharply in the past few days. The Lebanese Government has resigned and factional fighting has broken out again on a large scale.

The British contingent to the multinational force has been performing two important tasks: carrying out street patrols in Beirut and, at the request of all the parties, providing an impartial guard for the ceasefire talks. With the recent deterioration in the situation, it has become impossible for it to fulfil this role, and the danger to the contingent has been greatly heightened.

In these difficult circumstances, we have been in close touch with our MNF partners. And the Government have decided that our troops should be moved to the Royal Fleet Auxilliary Reliant which is stationed off the Lebanese coast and remain there until the situation becomes clearer. The House will be glad to know that the major part of this redeployment has already been successfully completed.

/The British



The British contingent have earned a high reputation among all Lebanese as an impartial force. I am sure I speak for the whole House when I say that they have carried out their tasks in Beirut with exemplary courage and efficiency. They have played an important part in contributing to stability in the Beirut area and in providing an opportunity for political reconciliation. It is a tragedy that this opportunity has not been seized.

We continue to have very prominently in our minds the safety of British residents in the Beirut area. I am glad to be able to report that I have received no reports of any casualties. For those British residents who wish to leave appropriate arrangements are being put in hand. British Embassy staff are safe and well and their position is being kept under close review. I would like to pay tribute to the British Ambassador in Beirut, Mr David Miers and his staff who have been performing their duties under very difficult circumstances.

The need for the restoration of stability, sovereignty and independence to Lebanon remains of the highest importance. We shall stay in close touch with our MNF partners, with the Lebanese Government and with all those who can help in this process. If needless bloodshed is to be avoided, a supreme effort must now be made by all the parties to settle their differences by compromise.



# LOBBY BRIEFING

time: 4pm

date: 8.2.84

We repeated the morning's Lobby.

*AS 8/2*

## LEBANON

We said that we had been vague in giving information yesterday for obvious safety reasons. We said we thought that there had been a general disposition to withdraw our contingent at the first meeting of Ministers yesterday and had been firmed up by the time of the second meeting.

On timing we thought that a certain amount of leeway had been left with the Commander on the spot and he had clearly chosen the right moment to go. We understood that the bulk of the redeployment operation had been completed despite bad weather. Equipment had also been taken offshore in Chinook helicopters. (Footnote: according to MOD redeployment had been concluded by 5.30pm our time).

We indicated that there appeared to be three options: i) to move to Cyprus, ii) to return home, iii) to go back into Beirut. Nothing had yet been decided and the men would remain deployed offshore until a policy decision had been taken. We pointed out that with 115 men there could not be phased withdrawal, they all went or they all stayed.

Asked about the position of civilians we referred to the statement from the Foreign Secretary:

"We continue to have very prominently in our minds the safety of British Residents in the Beirut area. I am glad to be able to report that I have received no reports of any casualties. For those British residents who may wish to leave appropriate arrangements are being put in hand." During questions the Foreign Secretary said that as long ago as last September British citizens with no urgent reason to stay were advised to leave, but we did not know how many people had done so.

Asked about predictions that a war in the Gulf (Iran/Iraq) would be the next problem we said that there was nothing new in the sort of implications that could hold and a close eye was always kept on the situation.

Asked about the prospect of a new initiative we said the time had come to stand back and think. The least that could be said was that for 12 months the MNF had kept alive hopes of a reconciliation but there was only so much that could be done if people were determined to resist.



# LOBBY BRIEFING

2.

time: 4pm

date: 8.2.84

Asked about our Ambassador to the UN and his talks with the UN we said our position was well known - we thought that the UN could have a role but guided against too high an expectation of a UN force. Other countries would have to be convinced, including Russia. We said that claims that our force was there on the coat-tails of the Americans merely proved that people don't get thanked for trying to help in difficult circumstances.

We restated that we had been in close contact with our allies. We understood that the Italians were likely to say something today but did not know where the French were on their discussions. We were not prepared to get into suggestions of a quarrel between the allies - there had been consultation, and we had known of President Reagan's intentions.

## GCHQ CHELTENHAM

We said that the Government had not moved at all on its position. The number of staff who had signed up were in their thousands plus.

AM

Robin



10 DOWNING STREET

The wording for the  
press release has been  
rearranged slightly  
+ takes into account  
discussions throughout  
the day.

Brainfall has said  
that if any thought  
needs to be given to  
supplementary questions  
it is important that  
PTO

we take the line

'we have been in  
very close contact  
with the Americans'

rather than:

'we will consider  
their proposals'

which would suggest  
that we are not  
fully aware of what  
is going on.

Peter



BRIAN FALL 'PHONED.

"THE PRIME MINISTER MENTIONED IN HER ANSWER TO  
QUESTIONS THIS AFTERNOON/YESTERDAY THAT WE HAVE  
BEEN HAVING URGENT CONSULTATIONS WITH OUR MNF  
PARTNERS, THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES, THE BRITISH  
AMBASSADOR IN BEIRUT AND THE COMMANDER OF THE  
BRITISH CONTINGENT. THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION  
IN THE LIGHT OF THESE CONTINUING CONSULTATIONS  
AND EVENTS ON THE GROUND WILL BE MADE CLEAR IN  
PARLIAMENT TOMORROW/THIS AFTERNOON."