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cc John Coles

8

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

7 February 1984

Dear Peter,

The Lebanon

I sent you earlier today an account of the Ministerial meeting held at 0830 at 10 Downing Street.

The Prime Minister held a further meeting at 1245 today which was attended by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Defence Secretary, Mr. Luce, the Chief of the Defence Staff and Sir John Leahy.

It was confirmed that the Prime Minister's reply to President Reagan's overnight message had been despatched (a copy of the reply is enclosed with this letter). The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary confirmed that messages had been sent to the French and Italian Governments. Mr. Luce said that we had learned from the Americans that President Reagan would make a public statement about US policy at 8.55 p.m. British time today. It was not yet known precisely what he proposed to say. Sir John Leahy added that information from the Americans indicated that the first phase of US re-deployment would begin within the next two days and would involve 500 out of the 1,800 US soldiers currently in the Lebanon. The Americans had added that the first phase could take up to a month to implement (some surprise was expressed at this statement). The rest of the offshore re-deployment was to be completed by the early Spring. President Reagan was determined to avoid accusations of precipitate action. There had so far been no leak of American intentions but as soon as arrangements were made to book TV time for the President's announcement, the danger of a leak would be greatly increased.

The Defence Secretary said that the roll-on/roll-off ferry referred to at the earlier meeting was available. It could not reach Beirut for 48 hours. It had not yet been ordered because news of this would leak in Cyprus. OC BRITFORLEB would need six hours notice for the departure of the British contingent. But there was a danger of leakage when he was ordered to move because of the presence of the media in Beirut. The plan was to evacuate the British contingent by helicopters to RFA Reliant. Their equipment would be taken to Jounieh, which was thought to be secure, until the ferry could pick it up. It was necessary to decide when the ferry should be commissioned and when the British

/ contingent

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contingent should be given orders to move.

After further discussion it was decided that BRITFORLEB should be ordered to prepare to move as from first light on 8 February and to await further instructions. The Commanding Officer should further be told to inform London immediately if there were a further deterioration in the situation and he considered it desirable to move his troops earlier. Subject to further confirmation, it would probably be right for definitive orders to be issued at the time of President Reagan's broadcast to the effect that BRITFORLEB should move as soon as they judged it practicable.

The meeting was informed, on the basis of Beirut telegram no. 70 of 7 February, that H.M. Ambassador did not think it necessary for a party from the British contingent to assist in guarding his Embassy. British subjects in the Lebanon had been advised to stay indoors.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that he thought it would be desirable to reinforce the message which had already been sent to the US Government to the effect that they should take no military action which might prejudice the safety of the MNF.

Note was taken of Damascus telegram no. 71 reporting a message from Mr. Walid Jumblatt expressing the concern of the PSP not to become engaged with the MNF.

The remainder of the meeting was spent in discussion of the line which the Prime Minister might take in answer to Questions in the House this afternoon.

Finally, it was agreed to meet again if necessary at 5.00 p.m. Meanwhile efforts should be made to establish precisely what President Reagan intended to say in his announcement later in the day.

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

*John*

*John Cole.*

Peter Ricketts, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.