



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

7 February 1984

LEBANON: MNF

The Prime Minister held a meeting at 0830 this morning to consider the position of the British contingent in the MNF in the light of the deteriorating situation in the Lebanon. The meeting was attended by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Mr. Luce, The Defence Secretary, the Chief of the Defence Staff and Sir Antony Acland. A message from President Reagan, dated 6 February, but received early this morning, was before the meeting. Copies have been distributed separately.

It was noted that in his message, President Reagan was not seeking consultation with us but rather informing us of his decision that the United States will begin a phased re-deployment of the US marines on the shore at Beirut Airport back to their ships off shore. It was agreed that the position of the British contingent which, though it had not yet sustained serious casualties, was now in the heart of an area where serious fighting was taking place was no longer tenable, either politically or militarily. The Defence Secretary reported that for the first time OC BRITFORLEB had reported that, while the British contingent was in good spirits and could do its job as long as necessary, there was a significant increase in the risk of the contingent's Headquarters being hit.

It was decided that the British contingent should in principle re-deploy to ships off shore as quickly as possible. A precise plan would be worked out by the Ministry of Defence, in consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, after further advice had been received from OC BRITFORLEB. It was noted that a roll-on roll-off ferry now in Cyprus could be immediately chartered and that this would enable the equipment of the British contingent to be removed. If possible, it was desirable to arrange an orderly departure of the contingent complete with its equipment but priority should be given to the safety of the British troops. The Chief of the Defence Staff believed, subject to further examination, that the minimum time necessary for re-deploying the British contingent off shore, together with all its kit, was 48 hours.

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It was further agreed that urgent consideration should be given to the safety of the staff of HM Embassy. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office would seek immediate advice from HM Ambassador. It was noted that President Reagan, in his message, had stated that a contingent of US marines would maintain defensive positions near the British Chancery. The question arose of whether a small party of British infantry should also be deployed to help in the task of protecting the Embassy. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that HM Ambassador had reported at 0630 this morning that there was fighting close to the Embassy but that all the staff were safe and well. Mr. Miers appeared to be unable to leave the Embassy.

Careful consideration should be given to the timing of any announcement. This would be affected by the state of British public opinion, US intentions as to the timing of the announcement of their own decision and the possible effect of an announcement on the safety of the operation of re-deploying the British contingent. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office should immediately instruct HM Embassy, Washington, to establish when the US re-deployment would begin and when the US Administration proposed to make a public announcement. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in conjunction with the Ministry of Defence, would prepare two lines to take for use in Parliament today, the first on the assumption that we wished to announce re-deployment, the second on the assumption that, in order not to prejudice the safety of British personnel, an announcement of our decision should not be made immediately.

It was agreed that it was essential to consult the French and Italians immediately, since they would presumably have received similar messages from President Reagan, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was asked to arrange this.

Finally, it was decided that an immediate reply should be sent to President Reagan's message indicating that, in the light of his own decision, we intended to re-deploy our own contingent. We should attempt to present our decision in such a way as to avoid the attempts which would undoubtedly be made to portray the proposed moves as another example of disagreement between the United States and its allies. I have sent you separately a draft of a possible reply.

A further meeting will be held by the Prime Minister at 1230 this morning.

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

Peter Ricketts, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

File No.

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[TEXT]

LEBANON

The situation in Beirut is serious and had deteriorated further overnight.

The Government have been following the situation closely and will continue to do so. I have held two meetings with ministerial colleagues today.

We are in urgent and constant touch with our MNF partners and with the Lebanese authorities. We have also communicated today with the British Ambassador in Beirut and the Commander of the British contingent.

/The safety

Copies to:-

The safety of our men is a major factor in
our thinking.

We are also watching closely the situation
of the remaining British Community in the
Lebanon and our Ambassador has their
well-being constantly in mind.

A statement will be made to the House when
there is anything further to report.

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN

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A.S.C. 7/2.LEBANON: STATEMENT A [HOLDING LINE]

1. As the House will know, the situation in Beirut has deteriorated further. As my Hon Friend the Minister of State in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office told the House yesterday (6 February), we are in close touch with our MNF partners and with the Lebanese authorities. These exchanges have continued in the last 24 hours. All MNF contributors are reviewing the role and deployment of their contingents in the light of the latest developments in Beirut. The safety of our men is a major factor in our thinking. The Government will keep the House closely informed.

2. The Government hope that the parties in Lebanon will agree to an early ceasefire and that it will still be possible to organise the early resumption of negotiations to settle differences by peaceful means. We shall continue to weigh carefully how we can best contribute to this process.



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A.F.C. 7/2.

p.a -

LEBANON: STATEMENT B [US decision already known]

1. The Government have carefully reviewed the position of our contingent with the Multinational Force in Beirut, in the light of the recent deterioration in the security situation there. In this process we have been in the closest contact with our MNF partners as well as with the Lebanese authorities.

2. I can now confirm to the House that the US Government have decided to begin a phased redeployment of their contingent to US ships off the Lebanese coast [add news of French and Italian decisions if known].

3. For our part, Her Majesty's Government have decided that we should also redeploy the British contingent of the MNF in a similar manner. Arrangements for this redeployment are already in hand. [If confirmed: part of Britforleb will be detached to assist in the defence of the British Embassy].

4. In taking these decisions we have had very much in mind the safety of our men and their ability to contribute both now and in the future to the restoration of stability in Lebanon.

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I would stress that the decision we have taken is for the redeployment, not the withdrawal, of our contingent. We shall continue to follow developments in Beirut closely and consider carefully what contribution we can make to restoring stability there.

5. British residents in the Beirut area are being advised to stay indoors. An evacuation is not planned at present, but we are keeping the situation under careful review. British Embassy staff are safe and well: some non-essential staff and dependents are being evacuated to Cyprus.

6. Our objectives in the Lebanon remain the same: we wish to see a resumption of the reconciliation process and the withdrawal of foreign forces, which are both essential for a long-term solution and the restoration of Lebanon's independence and sovereignty.



27 FEB 1984



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TO BE CHECKED
AGAINST DELIVERY

BY PRIVATE NOTICE

Mr Tony Marlow (Northampton N): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will consider the immediate withdrawal of UK forces from Lebanon.

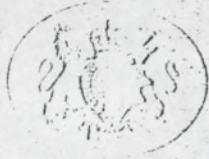
Fighting broke out on 2 February in Beirut between the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Shia Militia Amal. The fighting escalated on 3 and 4 February and continues today. Heavy Lebanese casualties have been reported.

The Lebanese Government resigned on 5 February but continues as a caretaker administration. President Gemayel has begun consultations on the formation of a new government and has issued an appeal to all parties in Lebanon to resume reconciliation talks.

The British contingent of the Multinational Force has not been the target of any deliberate attacks. Stray rounds have landed in or near the contingent's base. The contingent has suffered one minor casualty.

We are today consulting our partners in the Multinational Force and will keep the situation under close review. We wish to see an early end to the violence and bloodshed, an effective ceasefire, and more vigorous efforts by the Government of Lebanon and all

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the parties to settle their differences by negotiation. We do not intend to withdraw our contingent precipitately. But against the background I have described we have to judge with other partners whether the MNF can still help in this process.