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PRIME MINISTER'S

PERSONAL MESSAGE

SERIAL No. T.23/84

CABWTE 002/07=  
FLASH 072040Z FEB 84  
FROM CABINET OFFICE LONDON  
TO THE WHITE HOUSE  
MISC 048

T O P S E C R E T

THE FOLLOWING IS A MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE PRESIDENT.

BEGINS

DEAR RON.

I HAVE JUST RECEIVED THE NEWS THAT YOU WILL NOW NOT BE MAKING A PUBLIC STATEMENT ABOUT THE LEBANON TONIGHT= THAT YOU WILL BE ADOPTING A MORE NEUTRAL POSITION= THAT YOU HOPE WE WILL DO THE SAME= AND THAT U.S. FORCES IN THE LEBANON WILL FIRE ONLY IF FIRED UPON.

I CAN WELL UNDERSTAND THE DIFFICULTY OF FORMULATING A POLICY TOWARDS THE VERY COMPLEX SITUATION THAT NOW EXISTS IN THE LEBANON. BUT THIS CHANGE OF MIND PUTS ME IN A VERY DIFFICULT POSITION. FOLLOWING MY MESSAGE TO YOU THIS MORNING THAT WE HAD DECIDED TO REDEPLOY OUR OWN SMALL CONTINGENT WE HAVE MADE ALL THE NECESSARY PREPARATIONS AND OUR PLANS ARE NOW IN AN ADVANCED STAGE. I WAS ABLE TO HOLD THE HOUSE OF COMMONS THIS AFTERNOON BUT ONLY BECAUSE IT WAS ACCEPTED IN THIS VERY DELICATE SITUATION THAT NOTHING SHOULD BE SAID WHICH WOULD PREJUDICE THE SAFETY OF OUR TROOPS. OUR PUBLIC OPINION NOW UNDOUBTEDLY EXPECTS THAT THEY SHOULD NOT BE KEPT ANY LONGER IN THEIR PARTICULARLY EXPOSED SITUATION WHEN, TO SAY THE LEAST, THEIR ROLE IS UNCLEAR.

I HAVE THEREFORE DECIDED THAT WE MUST GO AHEAD. OUR TROOPS WILL ACCORDINGLY BE MOVED AT THE MOST SUITABLE MOMENT IN THE NEXT TWENTY-FOUR HOURS TO ONE OF OUR SHIPS WHICH IS OFF THE LEBANESE COAST. IN ORDER TO HELP YOU AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE WE SHALL TAKE THE LINE IN PUBLIC THAT THEY ARE BEING REDEPLOYED FROM THEIR PARTICULARLY EXPOSED AND DANGEROUS POSITION AND STATIONED ON BOARD SHIP UNTIL THE SITUATION BECOMES CLEARER. WE SHALL AVOID COMMITTING OURSELVES IN PUBLIC TO PERMANENT WITH-DRAWAL FOR AS LONG AS WE CAN BUT I MUST LEAVE YOU IN NO DOUBT THAT WE ARE MOST UNLIKELY TO BE ABLE TO CONTEMPLATE A RETURN TO THE SITUATION IN WHICH OUR TROOPS HAVE BEEN IN THE LEBANON.

I AM SORRY THAT WE CANNOT MEET YOUR REQUEST TO "GO INTO NEUTRAL" BUT FRANKLY IT CAME TOO LATE - AND I DO NOT THINK PUBLIC OPINION HERE, MUCH LESS OUR COMMANDER IN THE FIELD, WOULD UNDERSTAND SUCH A POSITION.

WITH BEST WISHES,

YOURS EVER,

MARGARET

ENDS

NNNN

SENT AT 072102Z KJM

RGRG QSL AT 2102Z KKK

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Dear Ron,

I have just received the news that you will now not be making a public statement about the Lebanon tonight; that you will be adopting a more neutral position; that you hope we will do the same; and that US forces in the Lebanon will fire only if fired upon.

I can well understand the difficulty of formulating a policy towards the very complex situation that now exists in the Lebanon. But this change of mind puts me in a very difficult position. Following my message to you this morning that we had decided to redeploy our own small contingent we have made all the necessary preparations and our plans are now in an advanced stage. I was able to hold the House of Commons this afternoon but only because it was accepted in this very delicate situation that nothing should be said which would prejudice the safety of our troops. Our public opinion now undoubtedly expects that they should not be kept any longer in their particularly exposed situation when, to say the least, their role is unclear.

I have therefore decided that we must go ahead. Our troops will accordingly be moved at the most suitable moment in the next twenty-four hours to one of our ships which is off the Lebanese coast. In order to help you as much as possible we shall take the line in public that they are being redeployed from their particularly exposed and dangerous position and stationed on board ship until the situation becomes clearer. We shall avoid committing ourselves in public to permanent withdrawal for as long as we can but I must leave you in no doubt that we are most unlikely to be able to contemplate a return to the situation in which our troops have been in the Lebanon.

I am sorry that we cannot meet your request to "go into neutral" but frankly it came too late - and I do not think public opinion here, still less our commander in the Lebanon, would understand such a position.

With best wishes,

Yours ever,

MARGARET



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

7 February 1984

*Dear Peter,*

LEBANON

My letter of 7 February about the third meeting held by the Prime Minister today to discuss the Lebanon was overtaken by the news you conveyed to me this evening that there had been a change of policy in Washington - namely that the President would now not make a statement tonight, that he would be adopting a more neutral position, that he hoped we would do the same, and that US forces in the Lebanon would fire only if fired upon.

After consultation with you and Richard Mottram I conveyed to the Prime Minister the view of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Defence Secretary that we should proceed as planned with the redeployment of BRITFORLEB to RFA RELIANT.

The Prime Minister has tonight despatched the enclosed message to President Reagan explaining this decision. You will wish to note in particular the public line that our troops "are being redeployed from their particularly exposed and dangerous position and stationed on board ship until the situation becomes clearer".

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

*You are  
for notes.*

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

Dear Ron,

I have just received the news that you will now not be making a public statement about the Lebanon tonight; that you will be adopting a more neutral position; that you hope we will do the same; and that US forces in the Lebanon will fire only if fired upon.

I can well understand the difficulty of formulating a policy towards the very complex situation that now exists in the Lebanon. But this change of mind puts me in a very difficult position. Following my message to you this morning that we had decided to redeploy our own small contingent we have made all the necessary preparations and our plans are now in an advanced stage. I was able to hold the House of Commons this afternoon but only because it was accepted in this very delicate situation that nothing should be said which would prejudice the safety of our troops. Our public opinion now undoubtedly expects that they should not be kept any longer in their particularly exposed situation when, to say the least, their role is unclear.

*at the most suitable moment in the next hours to Ron.*

I have therefore decided that we must go ahead.. Our troops will accordingly be moved <sup>tomorrow</sup> ~~tonight~~ to one of our ships which is off the Lebanese coast. In order to help you as much as possible we shall take the line in public that they are being redeployed from their particularly exposed and dangerous position and stationed on board ship until the situation becomes clearer. We shall avoid committing ourselves in public to permanent withdrawal for as long as we can but I must leave you in no doubt that we are most unlikely to be able to contemplate a return to the situation in which our troops have been in the Lebanon.

I am sorry that we cannot meet your request to "go into neutral" but frankly it came too late - and I do not think public opinion here would understand such a position, *still less*

*our words in the US*

With best wishes,

Yours ever,

MARGARET

Copy of T 23/04

US Declassified

Dear Ron,

I have just received the news that you will now not be making a public statement about the Lebanon tonight; that you will be adopting a more neutral position; that you hope we will do the same; and that US forces in the Lebanon will fire only if fired upon.

I can well understand the difficulty of formulating a policy towards the very complex situation that now exists in the Lebanon. But this change of mind puts me in a very difficult position. Following my message to you this morning that we had decided to redeploy our own small contingent we have made all the necessary preparations and our plans are now in an advanced stage. I was able to hold the House of Commons this afternoon but only because it was accepted in this very delicate situation that nothing should be said which would prejudice the safety of our troops. Our public opinion now undoubtedly expects that they should not be kept any longer in their particularly exposed situation when, to say the least, their role is unclear.

I have therefore decided that we must go ahead.. Our <sup>to</sup>troops will accordingly be moved tonight to one of our ships which is off the Lebanese coast. In order to help you as much as possible we shall take the line in public that they are being redeployed from their particularly exposed and dangerous position and stationed on board ship until the situation becomes clearer. We shall avoid committing ourselves in public to permanent withdrawal for as long as we can but I must leave you in no doubt that we are most unlikely to be able to contemplate a return to the situation in which our troops have been in the Lebanon.

I am sorry that we cannot meet your request to "go into neutral" but frankly it came too late - and I do not think public opinion here would understand such a position.

With best wishes,

Yours ever,

MARGARET