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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

25 June, 1982

Prime Minister

Delivered to European Council.

AS 25/6

Dear John,

Israeli Invasion of Lebanon: Arms Sales

I wrote to you on 16 June about a possible suspension of arms sales to Israel. In your reply of 17 June, you said that the Prime Minister thought that we should not act alone. We agreed to be in touch about what action our European partners were proposing to take (we are providing briefing for the European Council separately).

Preliminary soundings among our partners in the Ten have revealed that it may be possible to reach a consensus on the suspension of delivery of defence equipment to Israel. We are pursuing this further. Belgium has already suspended arms sales since the fighting began. France and West Germany have not supplied arms to Israel for many years. Dutch policy is not to export arms to areas of tension. The Italians are uncertain about what policy to adopt. The remainder are not arms manufacturers, although the Danes and Irish have told us that they will be acting to stop sales by companies based in their countries to those engaged in the fighting.

There is now a serious danger that the Israelis will invade Beirut over the weekend. We note that Haig told the Prime Minister on 23 June that he thought Sharon would not refrain from entering Beirut unless the PLO made further commitments to disarm, leave Beirut and shed some of their leaders. At present there is little sign that the PLO will make such commitments, and we are inclined to agree with Haig's assessment, the more so as there is no sign that the Americans have done anything to make the decision really difficult for the Israelis.

An attack on Beirut would be an important step in escalating the war. There would be more heavy bloodshed. There would be renewed pressure on Arab leaders to take some action, and to a lesser extent Beirut would also make a deep impression on European opinion, perhaps especially French opinion.

It is therefore possible that Ministers will meet in Brussels on Monday in an atmosphere of sharply increased tension. This would be likely to affect the attitude of our partners both to an arms embargo and to other possible measures against Israel.

Yours ever

John Holmes

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