



MO 3/7/4

PRIME MINISTERPrime Minister

The UK contingent for the MNF have Cyprus to Beirut on Sunday. Their base camp is not ideal but there seems to be no alternative. They would be in some danger wherever they were in Beirut.
(see Mr. Tadhing's minute attached).
A-S.C. 4/2.

LEBANON - DEPLOYMENT OF MNF

You will wish to be aware of recent developments in the deployment of the UK contingent joining the Multinational Force (MNF) in the Lebanon.

2. The 22 man advance party of the UK contingent was flown from Cyprus to Beirut on 1st February. They are engaged in preparations for the arrival of the main force, which will follow on 7th February by chartered Ro-Ro ferry, arriving in Beirut on 8th February. To provide the force with secure communications and a security section, we have had to increase the strength of the armoured reconnaissance unit from 80 to 97 men.
3. A base camp for the UK contingent has been selected at Hadath in the southeast suburbs of Beirut. This is an area disputed by Christian and Druze militias and the camp could be subject to accidental shelling during their occasional skirmishes. It is also very close to Israeli positions and a major Israeli supply route. The Israelis have already accused the US MNF contingent, which is deployed in and around Beirut airport, and between the airport and Hadath, of abetting Palestinian guerillas, and in a series of increasingly provocative incidents have probed US positions, sometimes using tanks. They may attempt to provoke incidents around the UK base in an attempt to force us to move to a less sensitive area, and thereby undermine both the MNF's authority and UK prestige.
4. Nevertheless both the Force Commander and our Ambassador in Beirut are satisfied that the Hadath site is the only satisfactory



base that we and the Lebanese have been able to identify. It provides hard standing and cover for the unit's vehicles and a degree of protection for the personnel. A substantial amount of work has already been carried out on the site by the Lebanese Army and our advance party to prepare it for the arrival of the main force. The only alternative to Hadath would be permanently to base our force with another MNF contingent, almost certainly with the Americans. There is no guarantee that this would be safer than Hadath, and it would be seen as a British climbdown. It would also risk our being regarded simply as agents of the Americans.

5. I am therefore satisfied that the Hadath site is the most suitable base available to us, and I therefore propose to authorize the deployment of the UK contingent from Cyprus as planned on 7th February.

6. I will keep you and OD colleagues, to whom I am copying this note, informed of further developments as they occur.

Ministry of Defence
4th February 1983

J. Ridley
(Private Secretary. Draft approved by the Secretary of State and signed in his absence.)

Middle East DG

File



*cc: Sir A. Parsons
Mr. Jackling*

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

7 February 1983

Dear Sir,

LEBANON - DEPLOYMENT OF MNF

Your Secretary of State minuted to the Prime Minister on 4 February about the deployment of the UK contingent which is to join the Multinational Force in the Lebanon.

As I told Jane Ridley on Friday evening, I have discussed this matter with the Prime Minister who is concerned about the possibility of the UK contingent becoming involved in incidents provoked by others around the UK base but, in the light of your Secretary of State's advice, will not raise objection to the deployment taking place on 7 February.

The Prime Minister has, however, asked me to emphasise that the information in Mr. Heseltine's minute makes it all the more necessary to ensure that the UK contingent leaves the Lebanon at the end of the three month period previously agreed.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the members of OD.

*from ever
for Col.*

Richard Mottram, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence.

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cc Sir Anthony Parsons

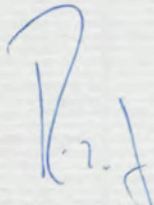
MR. COLES

THE LEBANON

I gather that the Defence Secretary will today seek the Prime Minister's concurrence to the deployment and disposition of the British element of the Multinational Force (MNF). Decisions are needed in time for a move to be made on Monday of next week. A ferry has been chartered for that day to carry the Armoured Recce Squadron and its vehicles from Cyprus to the Lebanon. The British element is due to deploy near the village of Hadath in the South East sector of Beirut. It will be adjacent to an area occupied by the US element of the MNF, and near to one of the main supply routes for Israeli forces.

The Prime Minister will obviously be concerned about the safety of our soldiers. Recent newspaper reports have highlighted the potential risk to all members of the MNF. I have spoken to the Officer who led the reconnaissance party to the Lebanon recently. He tells me that the area around Hedath is relatively open, and therefore more suitable than other areas for operations by an Armoured Recce Squadron equipped with "Ferret Scout Cars". \$75,000 has been spent to provide secure and comfortable accommodation for the British element, which will be sited away from local housing, and should not, therefore, be at risk from ill-directed bombardment.

There is obviously a risk that British soldiers will come under fire either while on patrol or in their base. Ministers have recognised this risk all along. That said, both the reconnaissance party, and the Commander of the British element believe that the area around Hedath is the most appropriate for us, and considerably safer than any other area in which the British element might be deployed.


R.T. JACKLING
4 February 1983

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