



PM/83/32

PRIME MINISTER

Agreed MB

Prime Minister

Mr Pym proposes that we should keep the UK contingent at its existing strength for a further 3 months from now (or until there is a substantial Israeli withdrawal). The FCO would find the cost of some £790,000.

Lebanon: UK Contribution to the Multinational Force

1. You will know that during Douglas Hurd's visit to Beirut last week the Lebanese President formally requested that the UK contingent with the Multinational Force should stay on in Lebanon until an agreement for the withdrawal of foreign forces had been signed. I have discussed with the Secretary of State for Defence both this request and earlier Lebanese suggestions that we should increase the size of our contingent with the Multinational Force and agree in principle to its deployment outside the Beirut area. This minute represents our joint recommendations.
2. First, we see no merit in agreeing to any increase in the size of the UK contingent. Even if the extra men and money involved were available we would expose ourselves needlessly to the risk of being dragged into a wider and more indispensable role in Lebanon, with the corresponding difficulty of extracting ourselves later. The Lebanese have made contingency plans for extending their control outside Beirut. These envisage BRITFORLEB operating in an area south-east of the capital. There are considerable military objections to this. Our contingent is not equipped to operate either in the rough terrain outside Beirut or in the face of the possible threats it could meet there. Operations outside the Beirut area would place our forces at increased risk and would inevitably lead to requests for reinforcements and additional equipment. The Chiefs of Staff have therefore recommended that BRITFORLEB should not be deployed outside Beirut. This will disappoint the Lebanese government, who always envisaged calling on the MNF to help restore its authority outside Beirut, and other MNF contributors who are prepared to put their forces at risk outside the city. But we shall have a perfectly defensible case, and our contingent will still have an important role in the Beirut area, which is the

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government's power base and totals some sixty-four square miles.

3. There are clear attractions to extending the period of BRITFORLEB's deployment in Lebanon. As Douglas Hurd was able to see for himself, our contingent is doing a valuable job, out of all proportion to its size. The Lebanese President and Foreign Minister told him that they were delighted with our contingent's performance. Our involvement with the MNF also gives us a political position in Lebanon close to the President which is valuable in itself, and may have commercial benefits in due course. Our presence in Lebanon is also welcome to other MNF contributors, particularly the Americans. George Shultz recently sent me a message (text enclosed) in which he expressed the hope that our contingent would stay on. We share with the Americans an interest in restoring a measure of stability in Lebanon and ensuring that it does not again become a battle ground for inter-Arab and Arab/Israeli conflict. By the beginning of May the negotiations for the withdrawal of Israeli and other forces are likely to have reached a crucial stage. I believe it is important that we should show that we are willing to continue to take an active part in helping the US pursue their objectives in the Middle East, where success in securing the withdrawal of forces from Lebanon has become a prerequisite for progress on the wider Arab/Israel issues. We shall be in a much weaker position to push the Americans and moderate Arabs in the right direction if we are at the same time withdrawing even our limited help in Lebanon. While other contributors remain committed to the MNF (indeed the French have recently increased their contribution), it would be hard to defend a decision to withdraw as early as May.

4. I am of course concerned about the risk of being drawn into an indefinite and expensive commitment in Lebanon. I therefore propose that we tell the Lebanese Government that we can agree to keep the UK contingent at its existing strength in Lebanon for a further 3 months from May, or until there is a substantial Israeli withdrawal, whichever is the earlier.



5. As you know, our contingent with the MNF is drawn from our troops serving with UN forces in Cyprus (UNFICYP). The Commander of UNFICYP has indicated his opposition to the continued absence of our squadron in Beirut. If a further extension is agreed, we shall consider separately with the MOD whether we should meet this commitment by keeping the present unit in Lebanon, or by drawing on other forces in Cyprus or in the UK. This will mean consultations with the UN and others, which we cannot begin until we have made a decision in principle to extend the stay of our contingent.

6. As for the present deployment the FCO will be responsible for finding funds for the second 3-months deployment. The MOD estimate that this will cost about £0.79 million.

7. I am sending copies of this minute to the Secretary of State for Defence, the Chief Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

(FRANCIS PYM)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
8 April, 1983



De VC  
Lebanon

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

11 April 1983

Lebanon: UK Contribution to the Multi-National Force

The Prime Minister has seen the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute of 8 April. She agrees with Mr. Pym's recommendation, supported by the Secretary of State for Defence, that we should tell the Lebanese Government that we can agree to keep the UK contingent at its existing strength in Lebanon for a further three months from May, or until there is a substantial Israeli withdrawal, whichever is the earlier.

BK

For the future, it would be useful to know what the precise new terminal date for the UK contingent's presence will be.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence), John Gieve (Chief Secretary's Office, HM Treasury) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

A. J. COLES

SG

J.E. Holmes, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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*Lebanon*



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

14 April, 1983

*N. B. P. R.*

*A. J. C. f/f.*

*Dear Idm.*

Lebanon: UK Contribution to the Multinational Force

In your letter of 11 April you asked for the precise new terminal date for the UK contingent. The main body of our force arrived in Lebanon on 8 February. If they stay for the maximum period now agreed, their departure date will be 7 August 1983.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence), John Gieve (Chief Secretary's Office, HM Treasury) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever*  
*John Holmes*

(J E Holmes)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
Private Secretary  
10 Downing Street

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LEBANON : INT. SIT. : PL3

ADRESSE: (Faint, illegible text)

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4 APR 1983

