



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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MO 3/7/4

8th July 1983

Dear John

LEBANON: UK CONTRIBUTION TO THE MNF

Thank you for your letter of 30th June which has been seen by the Defence Secretary. This raises three main issues.

First, I can confirm that Mr Heseltine accepts that there is a strong political case, for the reasons set out in your letter, for a continuing British contribution to the MNF. If we do remain, however, it would be preferable from a military planning point of view for this to be for a period of six months rather than three (subject of course to the possibility that our contribution might no longer be needed from some earlier date).

Secondly there is the question of whether the force should continue to be drawn from Cyprus or from the UK. The Defence Secretary's view on this remains as expressed in his minute of 3rd May to the then Foreign Secretary. Our strong preference would be to draw on UK based forces for any future deployment in the Lebanon. As Mr Heseltine's minute pointed out, the absence of two thirds of the UNFICYP squadron is placing unreasonable demands on the remaining two troops, and as you will be aware, the UN have made strong representations to have the force restored to full strength. The Defence Secretary has noted the view expressed in John Gieve's letter of 1st July to John Coles that the current review of UNFICYP should have a bearing on this question. However, it is our understanding that the scope of this review, agreed between Treasury, FCO and MOD officials, is that it should be a primarily "housekeeping" exercise designed to see if we can carry out effectively the functions entrusted to UNFICYP more economically by reduction, for example, in logistic support. It is thus most unlikely that the review will suggest any significant changes in the armoured reconnaissance capability which is the most valuable operational contribution we make to the force. Moreover we face the problem of replacing the BRITFORLEB contribution now, whereas the review of UNFICYP is scheduled to allow decisions to be taken in time for the next renewal of the mandate at the end of this year. The review should therefore not stand in the way of the early restoration of the UNFICYP squadron to full strength.

J E Holmes Esq





This raises the third issue, that of finance. We appreciate that to cease to fund BRITFORLEB from resources originally intended for UNFICYP will place an additional burden on the FCO budget. But MISC 42 was quite clear that peacekeeping operations, which are carried out for essentially political rather than defence policy reasons, should be paid for by the FCO, and Mr Heseltine sees no reason for re-opening this issue. He would, however, be willing to support the Foreign Secretary in an approach to the Chancellor for an additional allocation to FCO votes to meet the cost of BRITFORLEB. Although the original decision was that the contribution should be met from existing programmes, this was on the understanding that the commitment would be for three months only. Now that we are considering a second extension of the force there is clearly a case for reconsidering this point.

Finally I should also mention the question of the possible deployment of BRITFORLEB outside the Beirut area. While we remain opposed to the original Lebanese proposal for an extension into the Chouf, another proposal has now been put forward for a more limited extension involving patrolling the coast road from Beirut to Damour. This is something which we would not rule out, provided there were corresponding reductions in our present patrol programme and that there was no requirement for additional UK forces. The details of this proposal are being studied further at present.

Yours ever,

(J E RIDLEY) (MISS)



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*See later correspondence.*

*MR 2/7*

12 July 1983

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LEBANON: UK CONTRIBUTION TO THE MULTINATIONAL FORCE (MNF)

*with J.C.?*

The Chief Secretary has seen copies of your letter of 5 July to John Coles and of Jane Ridley's letter of 8 July. In his view it would be quite wrong to agree to the extension of the deployment of the UK contingent in the Lebanon MNF until the financing question has been settled; nor can he accept any claim on the Contingency Reserve for this purpose. The importance of keeping down public expenditure this year does not need any further underlining. In the Chief Secretary's view the proper course is for FCO and MOD together to work out the cost of the proposed extension and how it can be accommodated within their existing expenditure provisions. The FCO's unallocated provision was of course designed to accommodate foreign policy initiatives of this sort. If neither Department is prepared to accept the cost (which I understand is in the order of £700,000 - £1 million for a three months' extension), the conclusion should be that the policy is not of sufficient priority to be worth pursuing.

On the question of whether the UK contingent should continue to be drawn from Cyprus or from the UK the Chief Secretary notes Mr Heseltine's preference for drawing on UK based forces and for returning the present contingent to Cyprus. Both the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary however are convinced that it would not be appropriate to restore the strength of the UK contingent in UNFICYP until Ministers have seen the findings of the current review of the level of our commitment to this force which should be available in early October. As you may know, that review, is not simply a "housekeeping" exercise. Its objective is to assess the maximum possible scope for economies. If in advance of the review Mr Heseltine wishes to replace our contingent in the Lebanon with UK based troops, the Chief Secretary considers that MOD should be prepared to bear the additional cost.

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As regards the time limit for any extension, the Chief Secretary is content with Sir Geoffrey Howe's proposal that if Ministers agree to an extension this decision should be considered again in three months time. He notes Mr Heseltine's view that from a military planning point of view a six months extension would be preferable but considers that the decision on this matter should rest with the Department which is responsible for paying for the contribution.

I am copying this letter to John Coles and Richard Mottram.

Yours sincerely

J. Gieve

JOHN GIEVE

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