



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Prime Minister

London SW1A 2AH

A. J. C. $\frac{12}{9}$

12 September 1983

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Dear John,

Lebanon

As the Prime Minister will be aware, Mr McFarlane reported on 11 September in alarming terms on the military situation around the village of Suq al-Gharb, which is a Druze village on the western edge of the Druze stronghold in the Shouf mountains East and South of Beirut. He recommended that immediate US military action was needed if the village was not to fall to a combination of Palestinian, Iranian and Libyan forces backed by Syria; in that case there was a possibility that these forces would stream down into Beirut and overrun the Lebanese President's Palace and the US Embassy.

We obtained assessments urgently from our Embassy and the British contingent in the MNF. These were less alarming. It is clear that there was a fierce battle on Saturday night, but the Lebanese 8th brigade fought back and recovered positions they had lost, then and during a further round of fighting on Sunday night. The Lebanese brigade might of course still be overrun but this is not imminent; nor would it in our view have the military and political consequences originally suggested by Mr McFarlane. (Mr McFarlane himself has now passed on to us the Lebanese Chief of Staff's view that the Lebanese Army can hold the position at least for another round or two of fighting.) Beirut telno 505 enclosed.

On receipt of Mr McFarlane's report, the Americans again asked us to delay the naval task force with HMS Invincible in the Eastern Mediterranean for a while. They also proposed that we should alter the rules of engagement of the MNF to permit supporting action around Suq al-Gharb. They told us that the President had decided that in certain circumstances (set out in Washington telno 2553 enclosed) US forces would act to support the Lebanese. In reply Washington have been instructed to say that we are not prepared to detain the Invincible.

We have not been pressed further today on the question of rules of engagement, but if necessary the Embassy will draw on Athens telno 428, also enclosed, which makes clear that neither Sir G Howe nor his Italian and French colleagues see grounds to broaden the mandate in present circumstances. We have been in close touch with the Ministry of Defence today. We are agreed

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that there is at present no requirement to amend BRITFORLEB's orders or rules of engagement. We shall be considering tomorrow the terms of the formal reply we need to give to the Americans.

Mr Luce leaves on 13 September for Cyprus and will be in Beirut on 14 September. This will give him an opportunity to see the situation on the ground and to discuss it with the Lebanese authorities. He will be urging them to make every effort to clinch a political deal which could lead to a ceasefire. On this the latest situation as reported to us by Mr McFarlane is that negotiations between the Arab and Lebanese parties continue, though the chances of success are obscure. Mr McFarlane himself was due to make another visit to Jedda and Damascus this afternoon.

There have been informal consultations today in the Security Council, where the Lebanese mission are working for a resolution calling for a ceasefire, humanitarian action with the ICRC to deal with some of the urgent problems of civilian populations caught up in the fighting, the introduction of UN observers into the Shouf, and the extension to the Shouf of the activities of a UN force. We regard the last point as unrealistic, at least in present circumstances, but should be able to support a resolution containing the other points, if one emerges.

I am copying this letter to Nick Evans (MOD) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

John Holmes

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