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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

Prime Minister
For your information
Paul
DJG

16 September 1983

MS

Dear John,

Lebanon

As you know, Mr Luce visited Beirut on 14 September. He had meetings with President Gemayel, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, and visited our MNF contingent and the Embassy. The Prime Minister may like to have a summary of his main impressions, contained in the attached note.

As you know, the Foreign Secretary discussed today with the Italian Foreign Minister what the European MNF contributors might do in support of US and Saudi efforts. The enclosed telegrams to Rome set out our ideas. The Foreign Secretary subsequently spoke to M. Cheysson by telephone. He had not yet seen our paper, but had a paper of his own which he was sending us in return. He said that it was similarly aimed at creating a joint position of the three European contributors. We will be comparing notes with the French over the weekend.

Yours ever

John Holmes

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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Lebanon Today

The Lebanese are remarkably resilient after 8 years of strife, but are now more tired and despondent than ever. The government is sincere in its efforts to establish a ceasefire and start a dialogue with Syria's Lebanese allies, but is relying heavily on US and Saudi assistance and is not yet ready to make the concessions that will be necessary for a negotiated settlement of the present crisis. The army is holding together well and is making a determined stand at Suq-al-Gharb and in three main sectors. But they are opposed by considerable forces (6,000 including 3,000 Palestinians according to the Lebanese) and are unlikely to be able to hold the line for more than a short time.

Our MNF contingent is greatly valued by the Lebanese Government. BRITFORLEB provides tactical support to the Lebanese Army and considerable psychological support to the Government and people. Their praises were sung by everyone Mr Luce met from President Gemayel down. Participation in the MNF has brought us some influence and goodwill, principally inside the Lebanon but also in the Middle East and among our traditional friends.

The Prospects

It is difficult to be optimistic. Syria is the key. There appears to be little to stop Syria getting what she wants: a Lebanese government under her tutelage. The only question is how far she will pursue her bargaining by military means (i.e. by providing all the necessary support to her allies in Lebanon) in order to achieve her political objectives.

The worst case military scenario Mr Luce heard described in Beirut would have the Druze and their allies over-running Suq-al-Gharb and moving to cut the coast road south of Beirut. They might thereafter be tempted to push into the suburbs of

southern Beirut



southern Beirut, though the need for them to do so in order to bring about a collapse of confidence in Beirut itself would be doubtful. The LAF and Lebanese forces (Phalange) are likely to continue to resist even then. But Syria would be in a commanding position to impose her will.

A political solution forged in any 'national reconciliation' dialogue would presumably produce a new Lebanese 'government of national unity' more openly attuned to Syrian interests. Whether Gemayel and the Phalangists could stomach that is an open question. Gemayel spoke openly of fear for his life if he was to concede too much to the Syrians.

The other possibility is that the position will hold roughly as it is now, with or without a ceasefire. In any event, most of Lebanon will probably remain partitioned. The choice will lie between a two-way split, with the north under Syria's thumb and the south under Israeli control; and a three-way divide in which the above would be supplemented by an embryo Lebanese government in the Beirut area.

Consequences for the MNF and British/Western Interests

The consequences of the worst case scenario outlined above would clearly be very difficult for the MNF. The fall of Suq-al-Gharb would make life more uncomfortable but not necessarily untenable for BRITFORLEB. We do not share the US view of the town's significance and Mr Luce has stressed to the Minister at the US Embassy today the dangers of escalation. US intervention in support of the LAF would increase the prospects of the West being drawn into an apparent conflict with the Arab world and would certainly make military retaliation on the MNF collectively more likely. If the Lebanese government and LAF crumbled, the MNF would have little choice but to withdraw

/in dangerous

in dangerous and probably humiliating circumstances. The evacuation of civilians would probably also be necessary.

A new Lebanese government under Syrian tutelage would no doubt ask the MNF to leave: we would not in any case want to stay in those circumstances.

We clearly need to keep the presence of our MNF contingent under constant review. A decision to withdraw would need to be carefully presented, but the consequences for our wider interests in the Arab world need not be very serious. We could point out that we have done more than any single Arab State by way of providing practical support for the Lebanese Government, and that our presence gave Lebanon a breathing space in which to find a political solution. We are hardly to blame if the opportunity turns out to have been squandered.

Overall, the prospects are for the continued partition of Lebanon in one form or another. This carries with it the high risk of future Israeli/Syrian clashes in Lebanon with unpredictable consequences for the rest of the Middle East and for our interests there.

OUT TELEGRAM

Classification and Control

Precedence/Priority

CONFIDENTIAL

IMMEDIATE

ZCZC 1 ZCZC
 GRS 2 GRS
 CLASS 3 CONFIDENTIAL
 CAVEATS 4
 DESKBY 5
 FM FCO 6 FM FCO 161650Z SEP
 PRE/ADD 7 TO IMMEDIATE ROME
 TEL NO 8 TELEGRAM NUMBER
 9 INFO IMMEDIATE PARIS
 10 PRIORITY EC POSTS, PRIORITY BEIRUT, TEL AVIV, JEDDA, DAMASCUS,
 11 TUNIS, WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK, MOSCOW
 12 LEBANON
 13 1. I told the Italian Foreign Minister today 16 September that,
 14 following our useful meeting with Cheysson in Athens, at which it
 15 was clear that the three of us were very much in agreement about
 16 Lebanon and the MNF, and following also Mr Luce's visit to Beirut
 17 which had confirmed our own assessments, I wanted to propose a
 18 coordinated programme of diplomatic approaches aimed at helping
 19 a peace settlement to evolve. Andreotti welcomed the idea, and
 20 I gave him a piece of paper in the form of a a draft COREU with
 21 detailed proposals. An amended version of the paper, worked out
 /// 22 jointly with the Italian Political Director, is in MIFT.
 // 23 2. Andreotti argued that the French would have nothing to do
 / 24 with this idea if it was put out by COREU on the political
 25 cooperation net, and I subsequently agreed with him that it might

NNNN ends telegram	BLANK	Catchword be
File number	Dept NENAD	Distribution <i>ME Standard</i>
Drafted by (Block capitals) R O Miles		
Telephone number 233 6048		
Authorised for despatch <i>Oliver Miles</i>		
Comcen reference	Time of despatch	

OUT TELEGRAM (CONT)

Classification and Caveats
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1 <<<<
 2 be better to go for action by the three European MNF contributors,
 3 and not to try to carry the others with us.
 4 3. Bullard subsequently gave the text in MIFT to the French
 5 Ambassador. He explained that I was inclined to accept
 6 Andreotti's proposal of limiting action to the three, and
 7 therefore asked de Margerie to ignore the first paragraph.
 8 de Margerie asked one or two questions of detail, but said that
 9 in general the proposal seemed to be compatible with what he
 10 knew of his Government's position. He would let us have French
 11 comments as soon as possible: Bullard has since spoken by
 12 telephone to Andreani to alert him: [I was not able to reach
 13 Cheysson as I should have liked to do.]
 14 4. Copy addressees should treat this telegram as being for
 15 their own information only at this stage.

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 17 HOWE
 18 NNNN

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ZCZC 1 ZCZC
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 TEL NO 8 TELEGRAM NUMBER

9 REPEATED FOR INFORMATION IMMEDIATE PARIS
 10 PRIORITY EC POSTS, BEIRUT, TEL AVIV, JEDDA, DAMASCUS, TUNIS,
 11 WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK, MOSCOW

12 MIPT : **LEBANON : DRAFT COREU**

13 1. Following their talks in London today, and ~~following~~ *after*
 14 consultation with France, the Foreign Ministers of Italy and
 15 the United Kingdom, recalling their conversations with
 16 M Cheysson in Athens on 12 September, are instructing their
 17 Ambassadors in the capitals concerned:

18 a) to make approaches in the terms of paragraph 2 below;
 19 b) to ^{delay} ~~day~~ doing so until tomorrow, 17 September, so as to
 20 permit partners to associate themselves with these approaches
 21 if they so wish.

/// 22 2. The following are the lines on which the two/three
 // 23 Ambassadors will speak to the various parties, taking as a
 / 24 basis the seven points adopted by Foreign Ministers of the
 25 Ten in Athens on 12 September:

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File number	Dept NENAD	Distribution <i>M.E. Standard</i>
Drafted by (Block capitals) RO Miles		
Telephone number		
Authorised for despatch <i>JM 16/9</i>		
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2 To the Americans:

3 a) Syria's objectives are not necessarily incompatible
4 in all respects with the interests of the West.

5 b) The presence of the MNF is based on the assumption that
6 the Lebanese Government enjoys the support of the great
7 majority of the people. President Gemayel must have the
8 confidence to negotiate, but not the over-confidence to refuse
9 concessions.

10 c) Italy the UK and France intend to maintain their military
11 commitment at their respective present levels. They are concerned
12 that deeper involvement of any part of the MNF, for example
13 at Suq el-Gharb, could lead to escalation.

14 To the Lebanese:

15 a) We will continue our support within present limits.

16 b) We believe there must be internal reconciliation, even if
17 some legitimate objectives (eg full deployment of the Lebanese
18 Army) have to be renounced for the time being. Progress may be
19 gradual, but efforts should be sustained.

20 To Israel:

21 a) Israel should withdraw fully, to create the conditions
22 for Syrian withdrawal and Lebanese internal reconciliation.

23 b) Israel should press her friends in the Phalange and the
24 Lebanese Druze to accept a political compromise, and should cut
25 off military assistance and supplies to them.

26 To the Saudis:

27 a) Appreciation and backing for Saudi mediation efforts, with
28 the offer of practical help in these.

29 b) Explore the idea of an Arab contribution to a peace
30 force for Lebanon in due course.

/// 31 To Syria:

// 32 a) Syrian interests would be best served by a political
/ 33 settlement, providing a basis for the withdrawal of all foreign
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2 forces (not however excluding the possibility of UN observers).

3 b) Syria should moderate the political demands of her Lebanese
4 clients, and cut off military assistance and supplies to them.

5 c) Syrian forces should draw back, especially from confron-
6 tation with Israeli forces.

7 To the Arab League (Klibi):

8 What are the prospects for an Arab peace force?

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