



MO 3/7/4

PRIME MINISTER

LEBANON

1. We discussed at Cabinet yesterday two issues arising from our participation in the Multi-National Force (MNF) in the Lebanon - the French request to make use of RAF Akrotiri, and the request from the Lebanese to purchase RAF Hawker Hunter aircraft. We need to reach a view on these soon. They are, of course, separate issues.

The French Request

2. When I was in Paris on Wednesday for the trilateral meeting, M. Hernu raised with me in general terms the use of facilities at Akrotiri to change over members of the French MNF contingent. We asked for further details. I understand from the French Embassy this morning that the request is for 25 sorties of Transall aircraft in 5 trips on 25th September to carry material - mainly ordnance we assume - for the French MNF contingent. Permission is only sought for the aircraft to land at Akrotiri. The material would be transported by French helicopters to a French amphibious landing ship - the Ouragan. They have asked for our agreement today.

3. In view of our earlier willingness to permit the Americans to undertake a similar operation albeit on a smaller scale at RAF Akrotiri and given our agreement to permit the Italians to deploy combat aircraft there, I do not believe that the French would understand it if we were to refuse this



comparatively modest request. In reaching this judgement I do not make light of the possible adverse reaction of the Cyprus Government. This clearly is a problem with which we will have to contend. Nevertheless, I believe it important, at this critical stage in developments in Lebanon, to help a fellow MNF contributor. Moreover President Mitterand's Government have taken a very positive line on Western defence and I have established - in my two meetings with him - a good relationship with M. Hernu. If we turn down a request made personally by him, there will inevitably be adverse consequences.

4. I therefore believe we should accede to the French request. I have already explained to M. Hernu our difficulties with the Cyprus Government and the need to proceed cautiously with limited assistance. We should not offer a blank cheque for future help nor will they expect one. To have the maximum impact on the French, I would hope we can agree this request quickly today and I would then propose to speak personally to M. Hernu.

Sale of Hunter Aircraft to Lebanon

5. The question of the possible sale to Lebanon of Hunter aircraft is, in my view, much more finely balanced. The Lebanese Government are already aware from negotiations earlier this year that there were no Hunter aircraft available of the Mark 9 type they are now requesting. However, they probably know that Mark 6A aircraft are available, which would do the job as well. It is of interest that since making their request about a week ago, they have not pressed us for an answer. We have, of course, already provided them with a good deal of the ordnance for their existing Hunters which formed part of the same request.



6. Willingness to meet the request would be consistent with our policy of support for the Lebanese Government and would enable us to continue in our longstanding role as supplier to the small Lebanese Air Force. Conversely, refusal to supply would no doubt be seen both by the Lebanese and the Americans as a weakening of our commitment. A further argument in favour of supply would be that it would help assuage Lebanese disappointment at our decision to refuse them use of RAF Akrotiri except in emergencies. Perhaps the strongest argument is that if the Lebanese have inadequate air capability of their own it will lead to increased pressure on the Americans to use their own air or sea support openly on behalf of the Lebanese. This would be a much greater escalation by the MNF than supplying the Lebanese with their own capability.

7. Against this, we need to weigh the argument that we should be involved in a quantitative escalation on the side of the Lebanese Government which might not help the cause of establishing a cease-fire, and the particular - and most important - issue of whether we should be adding to the risks to our own contingent and their supporting aircraft. We have considered up until now that the supply of the aircraft would not significantly increase these risks. The position on air defences in the area is, however, confused and we cannot rule out the possibility that stepping up the air war in Lebanon could lead to enhanced air defences being brought in by the Syrians, thereby posing a greater threat to our aircraft should they be required to act in support of BRITFORLEB. More immediately the Druze might shell our ground contingent in protest against the enhanced air power of the LAF.

8. My own view is that the balance of argument at present is against meeting the Lebanese request. I propose, however, to proceed with checking of the aircraft by the RAF so that we could respond quickly to the Lebanese request, should circumstances change and we conclude that it would be in our interests to help. There is little likelihood of this preparatory work becoming known. We would not respond to the Lebanese unless they raise the matter again, in which case we would prevaricate pending a Ministerial discussion.

SECRET



9. I am copying this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

MJA

Ministry of Defence
23rd September 1983

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

23 September, 1983

The Lebanon

I have brought to the Prime Minister's attention the matters raised in your Secretary of State's minute of 23 September.

I explained to the Prime Minister that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary agreed with Mr. Heseltine that we should inform the French Government that our facilities at Akrotiri may be used for the purpose described in paragraph 2 of the minute. Mrs. Thatcher is content with this.

As regards the sale of Hunter aircraft to the Lebanon, the Prime Minister has noted that the Secretary of State for Defence believes that the balance of argument at present is against meeting the Lebanese request.

I am copying this letter to John Holmes (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

J. DOLES

Richard Mottram, Esq.,
Ministry of Defence

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

23 September 1983

NRPM

WR
26/9

Dear John,

Sale of Hunters to Lebanon

The Foreign Secretary has seen Mr Heseltine's minute of 23 September to the Prime Minister about the Lebanese request for the supply of five Hunter aircraft.

Sir Geoffrey agrees with Mr Heseltine that the arguments are finely balanced and shares his assessment of the arguments in favour of supply. As to the argument against meeting the Lebanese request, our latest information is that President Gemayel and his adversaries, as well as the Syrian Government, are very close to agreeing the terms of a ceasefire. At this critical time Sir Geoffrey thinks that we should take care that our overall posture in Lebanon does not give the wrong signal either to President Gemayel or his adversaries. We are already pursuing a high profile policy through the involvement of our MNF contingent and the RAF Buccaneer support based in Cyprus. We have also supplied the Lebanese airforce with ammunition for their remaining stock of Hunters, so far without attracting publicity. At the same time we have formulated with our French and Italian partners a programme of diplomatic action intended among other things to bring about a visible de-escalation following a ceasefire. Agreement now to supply replacement Hunters might serve to diminish the impact of the message which we wish to convey to President Gemayel that he must negotiate seriously with his opponents.

Sir Geoffrey is very conscious of the risk of increasing the threat to our own forces. He therefore agrees that the balance of argument is at present against meeting the Lebanese request, at least for the time being, particularly given that the Lebanese have not returned to the charge. He therefore sees merit in Mr Heseltine's proposal that we should not respond to the Lebanese unless they raise the matter again and that we should then prevaricate pending a ministerial discussion.

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I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

J E Holmes

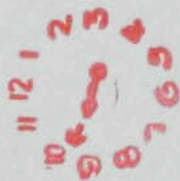
(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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Lebanon: Int. Ex.
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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

23 September 1983

Dear John,

Lebanon

A-J.C. 23/9

p.a.

The Secretary of State for Defence minuted to the Prime Minister today about the Lebanon. This is to confirm what I told you on the telephone, that the Foreign Secretary agrees that we should approve this French request as a one-off operation, and that Mr Heseltine should telephone his French opposite number today. Clearly there is some cumulative risk in terms of our relations with the Cypriots if we agree to a series of similar requests from either the French or other MNF contributors. We must consider each case on its merits and in the light of all the political circumstances at the time. Meanwhile, we agree with the Defence Secretary's view in his minute of 16 September that we should discourage the Americans from putting in requests to use Akrotiri unless absolutely essential. While doing all that we can to help our Allies, we must also keep a careful watch on our own longer term interests in the Cyprus Bases and therefore the Cypriot reaction to what happens there.

We will be writing separately on the question of selling Hunter aircraft to the Lebanon.

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

Yours ever

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

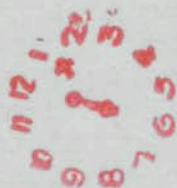
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23 SEP 1983



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TO IMMEDIATE BRUSSELS

TELEGRAM NUMBER 119 OF 19 SEPTEMBER

INFO IMMEDIATE THE HAGUE (FOR MR COLES PRIME MINISTERS PARTY)

FOLLOWING FOR PRIVATE SECRETARY

LEBANON: SUPPLY OF HUNTER AIRCRAFT

1. THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT HAVE MADE AN URGENT REQUEST FOR THE SUPPLY OF FIVE MARK 9 HUNTER AIRCRAFT. THE ONLY MARK 9 HUNTERS READY TO FLY ARE THOSE USED AND REQUIRED BY THE RAF. FIVE OTHER MARK 9 HUNTERS ARE EAR-MARKED FOR ZIMBABWE WHICH HAS NOT YET TAKEN A DECISION ON WHETHER TO BUY THEM. IN ADDITION THERE ARE FIVE OLDER MARK 6A HUNTERS WHICH COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE FROM THE RAF. THESE COULD BE READY FOR SHIPMENT WITHIN 2-3 WEEKS AT A COST OF ABOUT POUNDS 200,000 EACH.
 2. LEBANON'S SMALL AIR FORCE WAS EQUIPPED MANY YEARS AGO WITH HUNTERS. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE DISCUSSED AND INDICATED WILLINGNESS TO SUPPLY A WIDE RANGE OF EQUIPMENT RECENTLY, THE LEBANESE HAVE MADE ONLY FEW PURCHASES, RELYING INSTEAD ON THE FRENCH AND THE AMERICANS. OVER THE WEEKEND FCO AND MOD MINISTERS AGREED TO THE URGENT SUPPLY OF AMMUNITION FOR THE EXISTING HUNTER FORCE.
 3. AT AN OFFICE MEETING TODAY MR LUCE CONCLUDED THAT WE SHOULD OFFER FIVE MARK 6A AIRCRAFT TO THE LEBANESE ON NORMAL COMMERCIAL TERMS. IF THE LEBANESE WERE ONLY INTERESTED IN MARK 9 AIRCRAFT WE SHOULD EXPLAIN THAT NONE ARE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE AND CONSEQUENTLY CONSIDERATION OF A REQUEST FOR THEM WOULD TAKE SOME TIME. IN ANY CASE MR LUCE DID NOT FAVOUR DIVERTING AIRCRAFT EAR-MARKED FOR ZIMBABWE. HE TOOK THE VIEW THAT WILLINGNESS TO SUPPLY MARK 6A AIRCRAFT WAS CONSISTENT WITH OUR POLICY OF SUPPORTING THE AUTHORITY OF PRESIDENT GEMAYEL'S GOVERNMENT THROUGH OUR MNF CONTRIBUTION AND OUR WILLINGNESS TO SUPPLY EQUIPMENT TO THE LEBANESE ARMED FORCES.
- IT WOULD ALSO HELP ASSUAGE LEBANESE DISAPPOINTMENT

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AT OUR NEGATIVE ATTITUDE OVER THE LEBANESE REQUEST TO USE AKROTIRI FOR THEIR HUNTERS. REFUSAL WOULD BE CORRESPONDINGLY DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN TO THE LEBANESE.

4. GRATEFUL FOR CONFIRMATION THAT SECRETARY OF STATE AGREES WITH THE PROPOSED COURSE OF ACTION.

HOWE

MULTINATIONAL FORCE IN LEBANON (MNF)

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DESK BY 201530Z UKREP BRUSSELS
 TO IMMEDIATE UKREP BRUSSELS (FOR PRIVATE SECRETARY)
 TELEGRAM NUMBER 503 OF 20 SEPTEMBER
 INFO IMMEDIATE (DESKBY 201530Z) CICC GERMANY (FOR COLES IN PRIME
 MINISTER'S PARTY FROM PS/FOREIGN SECRETARY)
 SUPPLY OF HUNTERS TO LEBANON

1. THERE HAVE BEEN FEW RECENT SUPPLIES TO LEBANESE AIRFORCE WHICH HAS BEEN LARGELY DEFUNCT SINCE 1975/76 CIVIL WAR. FRANCE HAVE SUPPLIED SOME HELICOPTERS. US ARE ABOUT TO SUPPLY 500LB BOMBS.
2. ALL MNF CONTRIBUTORS HAVE BEEN KEEN TO RESUPPLY LEBANESE ARMY. ALMOST ALL EQUIPMENT RECENTLY PROVIDED HAS COME FROM AMERICANS WHO HAVE IN EFFECT MET ALL ARMY'S LAND-BASED REQUIREMENTS. SUPPLIES HAVE INCLUDED TANKS 155MM HOWITZERS AND SHELLS, ARMoured PERSONNEL

PAGE 2 RBDWCR 5073 C O N F I D E N T I A L UK COMMS ONLY
 CARRIERS AND LARGE QUANTITIES OF AMMUNITION. FRENCH HAVE SUPPLIED ANTI-TANK MISSILES AND SMALL ARMS. JORDANIANS HAVE SUPPLIED TANKS AND ARMoured CARS.
 3. LEBANESE AIRFORCE HAS HAD LITTLE EFFECT ON THE FIGHTING SO FAR, AND THEIR ACTIVITY HAS TO DATE BROUGHT NO SYRIAN RESPONSE. MAIN IMPORTANCE FROM LEBANESE POINT OF VIEW HAS BEEN TO BOOST ARMY'S MORALE. AS FAR AS SYRIAN/DRUZE ARE CONCERNED, HUNTERS POSE LESSER THREAT THAN RAF BUCCANEERS. ASSUMING THAT SUPPLY OF FIVE HUNTERS WOULD BECOME KNOWN OUR VIEW, SHARED BY MOD IS THAT THIS WOULD NOT REPEAT NOT SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASE THE RISK TO OUR CONTINGENT (THE HAGUE TELNO 260) ON THE OTHER HAND, A DECISION NOT TO SUPPLY THE AIRCRAFT WOULD BE HARD TO JUSTIFY TO LEBANESE GOVERNMENT.
 4. MR LUCE, WHEN CONSULTED BY EGSTON ON 19 SEPTEMBER IN A PRELIMINARY WAY, AGREED WITH THE FOREGOING (HE HAS NOW LEFT FOR THE FAR EAST).

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FM THE HAGUE 200030Z SEP 83
TO IMMEDIATE DESKBY 200830Z FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 260 OF 20 SEPTEMBER
INFO IMMEDIATE DESKBY 200830Z BRUSSELS

FOLLOWING FOR PS TO THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY FROM
COLES.

LEBANON: SUPPLY OF HUNTER AIRCRAFT

THE PRIME MINISTER HAS SEEN FCO TELEGRAM NO. 119 OF 19 SEPTEMBER.
SHE WOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR THE VIEWS OF THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH
SECRETARY. IN PARTICULAR, SHE WOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR HIS ASSESSMENT
OF WHETHER OUR SUPPLY OF FIVE MARK 6A AIRCRAFT TO THE LEBANESE
WOULD BE LIKELY TO LEAD THOSE OPPOSING THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT TO
TAKE RETALIATORY STEPS AGAINST THE BRITISH CONTINGENT IN THE MULTI-
NATIONAL FORCE.

MANSFIELD

(REPEATED AS REQUESTED)

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PS/LADY YOUNG
PS/MR LUCE
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MR CARTLEDGE

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PS/MR HESELTINE, MOD
SIR R ARMSTRONG, CAB OFFICE.
DS 11, MOD.

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pm

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FM BEIRUT 200950Z SEP 83

TO PRIORITY F C O

TELEGRAM NUMBER 525 OF 20 SEPTEMBER 1983

INFO PRIORITY PARIS, MODUK DS13, D14 AND DEFENCE SALES

YOUR TELNO 375: HUNTERS FOR LEBANON

1. WE RECEIVED AN OFFICIAL REQUEST FROM THE LEBANESE MOD TO PROVIDE THEM WITH TWO HUNTER AIRCRAFT EARLY IN 1983. THE PROVISION OF THE AIRCRAFT WAS INVESTIGATED BY DEFENCE SALES. THE RAF DOES NOT ACCORDING TO OUR INFORMATION WISH TO PART WITH ANY OF ITS HUNTERS. OTHER SOURCES EG SINGAPORE HAVE ALSO DRAWN A BLANK. WE HAVE SO INFORMED THE LEBANESE.

2. ON 15 SEPTEMBER THE LEBANESE REPEATED TO ADA THEIR URGENT NEED OF HUNTER MARK 9 OR TRAINER T66 DUAL SEAT. (MARK 6 IS UN-ACCEPTABLE AS IT HAS TOO LONG A TAKE OFF FOR THE SHORT EMERGENCY STRIP CURRENTLY BEING USED AND HAS, THEY SAY, AN UNDERPOWERED ENGINE.)

3. WE HAVE PASSED THE LATEST REQUEST TO DEFENCE SALES BUT WITHOUT HOPE OF SUCCESS.

4. DANNY CHAMOUN TELEPHONED ME LAST WEEK ASKING WHETHER WE COULD SUPPLY. I TOLD HIM THAT WE WERE PASSING SUCH REQUESTS TO MOD DEFENCE SALES. CHAMOUN IS TRYING TO IMPROVE HIS POSITION IN THE CHRISTIAN POLITICAL HIERARCHY, HAVING DOUBTLESS ASSESSED THAT THAT OF THE PHALANGISTS WILL SUFFER FOLLOWING DEFEATS OF THE LEBANESE FORCES IN THE SHOUF. CHAMOUN ALSO, I UNDERSTAND, DABBLES IN THE ARMS TRADE AND WOULD EXPECT TO BENEFIT FINANCIALLY AS WELL FROM ANY SALE OF HUNTERS TO LEBANON.

PALMER

MULTINATIONAL FORCE IN LEBANON (MNF) LIMITED

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TELEGRAM NUMBER 3222 OF 20 SEPTEMBER
INFO IMMEDIATE CICC GERMANY (FOR COLES PRIME MINISTERS' PARTY).
FOLLOWING FROM PRIVATE SECRETARY/FOREIGN SECRETARY.

SUPPLY OF HUNTERS TO LEBANON.
YOUR TEL NO. 503.

1. IN THE LIGHT OF THE POINTS IN YOUR TEL. UNDER REFERENCE, THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S VIEW IS THAT WE SHOULD GO AHEAD WITH THE OFFER OF 5 MARK 6A AIRCRAFT TO THE LEBANESE.

BUTLER
BT

*I told Mr. Holmes on 21
Sept that the S. R. wished
no action to be taken until
she had had a word with
the FCS on Thursday.*

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