



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

3 November 1983

Prime Minister.

Dear John,

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Security at the British Embassy, Beirut

As the question of our Embassy in Beirut came up in Cabinet last week, you may like to know the outcome of an urgent review that we have been carrying out of security arrangements there.

We are concerned, of course, to do everything possible to prevent a suicidal attack by a lorry heavily laden with high explosives on the lines of the attacks on the American and French bases on 23 October. Defences against an attack of this kind have to go far beyond the measures that are customary at our Missions abroad: in Beirut we are fortunate in being able to get assistance from the Americans, who have been in part of our building since the destruction of their Embassy last April, as well as from the British MNF contingent and their advisers. The presence of the Americans may increase the threat to our Embassy, but we believe the guard they provide more than compensates for this.

The present position is that the Embassy is already heavily defended. It is guarded round the clock by a substantial contingent of armed US Marines in sandbagged positions around the building. We also have a team of eight NCOs from the Royal Military Police for the protection of the Head of Mission and his staff from close-range terrorist attack. The west-bound carriageway of the boulevard which the Embassy faces has been closed to ordinary traffic, as have other roads adjacent to the building.

A specialist member of our Security Department was in Beirut from 27 to 29 October to advise on further measures. Following his visit authority has been given for a number of defences designed to prevent a vehicle charging through the existing perimeter fences. These are to be installed at once by local contractors and include 'anti-tank' obstacles inside the existing fence, two chicanes at points where traffic is allowed through (concrete blocks to prevent an approach at high speed), and three strengthened tilting-arm barriers.

/Advice

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Advice on the second phase of external works is to be given by the Royal Engineers, who are today considering the technical aspects of possible options. Measures could include the erection of an anti-blast wall to protect the building from a vehicle bomb detonated on the highway, and provision of a screen as protection against rocket-propelled grenades.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Richard Mottram at the Ministry of Defence.

Yours ever,

Peter Ricketts

(P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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4 November 1983

Security at the British Embassy, Beirut

Thank you for your letter of 3 November, the contents of which the Prime Minister has noted.

A J COLES

Peter Ricketts, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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