



10 DOWNING STREET

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THE PRIME MINISTER

3 November 1983

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No: T 1748/83

Dear Mr. President,

I am grateful to you for letting me have your thoughts about the way forward in Lebanon and the Middle East following the criminal outrage against the United States and French members of the Multinational Peace Keeping Force in Lebanon on 24 October. I entirely share your view that we must spare no effort to generate a new momentum for peace in the Middle East. It is vital that the international community makes clear to the cowardly perpetrators of this bombing that we shall not be terrorised into giving up our responsibility to help bring stability to Lebanon and a just and lasting peace to the Middle East.

Geoffrey Howe and his colleagues from the United States, France and Italy met in Paris last week to discuss the way forward. You will have seen that we reaffirmed the commitment of the contributors to the Multinational Force to help the Lebanese Government restore stability and bring about national reconciliation. We shall be urging all the parties and their supporters outside Lebanon to adopt a constructive attitude at the talks in Geneva this week. In this connection I share your view that the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon is especially important. I also agree on the importance of not allowing events in Lebanon to distract attention from the urgent need to make progress on the wider Middle East peace process. I have put this point strongly to President Reagan; there was also agreement on it among the four Foreign Ministers in Paris.

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At this difficult time we should keep in touch and exchange ideas as the situation develops. I am glad that we are thinking on similar lines. Richard Luce is visiting Israel, Jordan and Egypt this week and will be glad to discuss how we can help the process forward. I hope therefore that it will be possible for you and him to talk over your ideas while he is in Cairo. I look forward to having a report about his talk with Your Excellency on his return.

Yours sincerely
Raymond Thatcher

His Excellency President Mohamed Hosni Said Mubarak.



File

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

3 November 1983

The Middle East: letter from President
Mubarak

Thank you for your letter of 1 November.

I enclose a reply, signed by the Prime
Minister, to President Mubarak's letter of
27 October. I should be grateful if you would
arrange for its delivery.

BF
H
President

ASC

Peter Ricketts, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

SP

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

Type letter pl.

1 November 1983

A. J. C. $\frac{1}{u}$

Dear John,

In your letter of 28 ^{attached} October you said that the Prime Minister wished to reply quickly to President Mubarak's letter of 27 October about Lebanon and the Middle East. I enclose a draft reply.

President Mubarak's letter contains no specific suggestions as to how the Egyptians think the Reagan plan can be revived or progress made in securing the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon. HM Ambassador at Cairo thinks that the main Egyptian motive in taking this initiative may be fear that the Americans will be tempted to join forces with the Israelis in some form of retaliation in Lebanon. A secondary motive is undoubtedly to use the initiative to draw Egypt closer to the other moderate Arabs.

Sir Geoffrey Howe thinks that it would be right to use the reply to make clear that Egyptian thinking is on similar lines to our own. Mr Luce has started a visit to Israel, Jordan and Egypt. He will be in Cairo from 6 - 8 November. Sir Michael Weir is trying to arrange a call on President Mubarak and thinks that it would be helpful in this context to refer to Mr Luce's visit in the reply to the President.

Yours ever,

Peter Ricketts

(P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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DSF (Revised)

DRAFT: ~~minute/letter/teletype/dispatch/xxx~~

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM:
Prime Minister

Reference

DEPARTMENT: TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO: *HE Mohamed Hosni Said*
President Mubarak

Your Reference

- Top Secret
- Secret
- Confidential
- Restricted
- Unclassified

R T Egypt

Copies to:

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT:

.....In Confidence

CAVEAT.....

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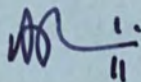
/Lebanon

Enclosures—flag(s).....

Lebanon : Internal Situation A+4

Lebanon to adopt a constructive attitude at the talks in Geneva this week. In this connection I share your view that the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon is especially important. I also agree on the importance of not allowing events in Lebanon to distract attention from the urgent need to make progress on the wider Middle East peace process. I have put this point strongly to President Reagan; there was also agreement on it among the four Foreign Ministers in Paris.

At this difficult time we should keep in touch and exchange ideas as the situation develops. I am glad that we are thinking on similar lines. Richard Luce is visiting Israel, Jordan and Egypt this week and will be glad to discuss how we can help the process forward. I hope therefore that it will be possible for you and him to talk over your ideas while he is in Cairo. I look forward to having a report about his talk with Your Excellency on his return.



Lebanon

10.26 pm

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Mr. Garel Jones.]

Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd (Morecambe and Lunesdale): When I looked at my notes earlier today I saw that I had drafted four speeches on the middle east and endorsed them all "Never made". I am therefore particularly grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for having selected my subject for debate tonight, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister of State is grateful for the fact that we can debate it at such a comparatively convenient hour.

The two subjects of the Lebanon and the West Bank are related, because, of course, the Palestinian question exists in each. The bloody tragedy of the Lebanon overshadows an equally ugly situation on the West Bank. The failure to secure a political solution on the West Bank precipitated—at the very least—the Israeli invasion of the Lebanon. The situation in Lebanon is a matter for our Parliament. We have a major interest because of the British troops who are serving in the multinational force.

We were reluctant participants in the MNF, for we came in later than the other parties. However, I am glad to say that our political reluctance to be involved in the initial stages has in no way undermined the great skill, forbearance, tolerance and courage of our troops who are serving there. I know that all hon. Members would like to extend their admiration to them and pay tribute to them for what they are doing.

We must analyse why they are there. I believe that the Government sent our troops to serve with the MNF for two important reasons. The primary reason was to assist a frail but friendly Government whom we thought at the time might have the support of the people of the Lebanon after a period of stability. We also thought at the time that stability was possible, because we felt that the revulsion of the people in the Lebanon after so many years of bloodshed and horror would make people feel that stability was a better way of life for them. The people were war weary.

However, there was a subsidiary reason for the MNF—not so much supported by the British Government, but certainly supported by the United States—and it was to get the Israelis off the hook. They wanted to withdraw their troops—if not completely, certainly from a large part of the Lebanon—but they were frightened of the vacuum that would be left by their departure.

From the Israeli point of view, the MNF was in some respects a buffer. It has long been Israeli policy to create buffers in southern Lebanon, but this time it was not to be Christian Arab militias, but soldiers of the West. This subsidiary reason had no merit for British interests, or indeed for United States interests. Israel is still deeply committed in the Lebanon. The Israelis occupy one third of the country, and the buffer provided by the MNF, such as it is, operates only in Beirut.

Whatever merits there were at the time for our being there, the situation in that unhappy country has so disintegrated that our present reason for being there is not as we first thought, because we believe that the Government may have the support of the people after a period of stability—which clearly does not exist at present—but because we believe that the Government may be persuaded to enlarge their constituent parts, to

widen their representation of interests in the Lebanon, so that they acquire the support of the people, and hence stability emerges. I believe that that position is fraught with danger and uncertainty, involving as it does complex political judgments into which we might most reluctantly be drawn.

Our troops should not be in the Lebanon, although I recognise that it would be most unwise to withdraw them precipitately. However, all parties have reiterated that their troops are temporarily there. I earnestly ask my hon. Friend the Minister of State, when considering these difficult matters, to face our United States allies, and other allies who are similarly exposed, with this question: in what positive circumstances do they envisage that it would be appropriate for their troops in the MNF to be withdrawn?

It is so easy to see the negative circumstances. Indeed, we have seen two examples of the negative circumstances in which public opinion in America and France might call for the withdrawal of troops. It is so much harder, even with a giant leap of optimism, to envisage the type of political stability in which the Americans could say, in a positive frame of mind, that the job is now done and our men can come home. This question must be faced if we are not prepared—and I am sure that we are not—for an MNF presence to be continued for a long time. There is a grave risk that our troops will end up like the UNIFIL troops and the other United Nations forces in Sinai, while being exposed to far greater danger.

I should like to dwell for a few moments on the position on the West Bank and how it affects the Lebanon. The terrible tragedy of the Lebanon has, since the Israeli invasion in 1982, completely overshadowed an equally grave political tragedy on the West Bank of the Jordan. The savage irony is that had Mr. Begin's Government been prepared to make practical political progress on the position on the West Bank—they had more than enough chances—they might not have found it necessary to invade the Lebanon in the first place. A further dreadful irony is being enacted before our eyes. The powerful forces of immoderation in the PLO have recently been attempting to destroy Mr. Yasser Arafat and his supporters and finish the job for their implacable enemies, the Israelis.

Those of us who know some of the sensible people from the West Bank, who supported the moderate wing of the PLO, warned that if the Israelis could not be persuaded to work on the Reagan peace initiative when it was launched in September 1982 the moderates in the PLO, who did not want to work on that plan, would be savagely exposed to the extremists in their own movement. That is precisely what we are seeing today.

It is easy, and indeed right, to condemn the Syrian involvement in this dreadful affair, but that condemnation must not divert attention from the fact that the Israeli response to the Reagan peace initiative was to tear it up, and for good measure to establish yet another handful of settlements on the West Bank of the Jordan. We all know that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has recently been in Jerusalem. I hope that when he replies to the debate he will say something about his recent visit.

I shall illustrate as graphically as I can, with a simple story, the nature of occupation. I was there just over a year ago. It is easy for the casual observer from the West to imagine that all is not too bad in the occupied territories. There is not a great deal of bloodshed. In the main, people

[Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd]

are at work. One sees smiles — one often does in Palestine. One is also surrounded by the long tired faces of people who wish that circumstances were otherwise. However, it is not all negative, which it appears to be on the surface.

A casual observer could easily be misled, because occupation leads to duplicity. I had this little experience when I was there. I stayed in a hotel in east Jerusalem. The doorman was always polite and friendly. He opened the door of my car and fetched taxis, always smiling and helpful. He had no knowledge of my political views or allegiances, why I was in Jerusalem, or who I supported. I realised that he had to live, eat and do his job, and no doubt, as would any sensible person in his position, he was looking forward to a little present at the end of my stay.

One day the doorman turned to me and said, "Are you one of us?" With that remark, I realised something that had not struck me forcibly before. He realised that I was a friend and identified me as one of them. The duplicity that he would have maintained with most people was no longer appropriate. Those words demonstrated to me what it is like to be made to feel inferior in one's own country.

The occupation of the West Bank is not just unjust, but, much more important, these people are the living evidence, the flesh and blood testimony, of a great political opportunity that is being missed. An ancient Hebrew saying goes:

"Wanting too much leaves you with nothing."

The opportunities that have been missed in the West Bank are lost to us as well and we have every right, indeed an obligation, to condemn those who are responsible.

10.37 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Richard Luce): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Mr. Lennox-Boyd) on initiating this Adjournment debate on what is undoubtedly a singularly important subject. My hon. Friend knows the middle east well. He has considerable experience of that area. That makes the debate all the more valuable.

I am glad that my hon. Friend opened his remarks by drawing a direct connection between the Lebanon and the Arab-Israeli problem. He is absolutely right to do so. I believe that the Lebanon would not be in the condition that it is in today had a proper solution been found years ago to the Arab-Israeli problem. I am glad that he brought that wider problem to the House's attention. I shall make a few remarks about it before I refer to my hon. Friend's points about the Lebanon.

I have started a series of visits, to which my hon. Friend referred. I have been to the Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Egypt. Shortly I shall go to Syria, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries. My first impression, following my last visit, is that there is no movement at all in the Arab-Israeli problem—that there is stagnation and a great deal of despair; that the Israelis are deeply anxious about their security, and that includes their northern borders and their relationship with Lebanon; that the Arab Governments are deeply concerned that extremism will increase in the Arab world if no progress is made on the problem; and—I must say this in response to my hon. Friend, having made a visit to the West Bank—that the Palestinians are close to despair about their future.

We see a lack of any progress towards a peaceful settlement in the Arab-Israel problem; we see continuing internal struggles within the PLO; and we see the persistent pursuit of the construction of Israeli settlements in the West Bank area and in Gaza, which we regard as being both illegal and wrong in itself. Indeed, for any party to this problem to think that to continue along these lines is to their advantage must be totally and utterly wrong because this stagnation in the longer term can only lead to more violence, more terrorism, more extremism and to the danger of more of the wars that we have already seen in the middle east. In short, there will, if the present policy is pursued, be no winners. All—literally all—will be losers.

It is against that background that Her Majesty's Government believe that there is an urgent need for renewed vigour in the peace process. The parties themselves must take the lead, but the British Government stand ready, and are anxious, to help, in conjunction, of course, with the European Community and our allies and with other parties.

There are already a wide range of concepts and plans on the table from which enough common themes exist to enable the parties to move forward and for progress to be made. I mention, for example, the Venice declaration of the European Community in 1980, which contains the cardinal principles that we believe are essential to any solution: the right of Israel to exist within secure boundaries and the right of the Palestinians to self-determination.

We have resolution 242 which, to summarise, exchanges territory for peace. We have the Fez declaration, where the Arab countries moved forward in expressing their desire for all parties—and, by implication, we must assume Israel—to have the right to live in peace. We have the Camp David treaty between Egypt and Israel in which, I remind the House, the British are playing a modest role, with 35 soldiers, in helping to maintain the implementation of that treaty. We also have the Reagan plan, which we continue to believe is a basis on which the parties should be able to move forward.

Before coming to the question of the Lebanon, I have a point to make concerning the West Bank and Gaza, the occupied territories. The limited, but constructive, objectives of the British Government is to give some assistance to the Palestinian inhabitants in the Lebanon. Within the scope of limited resources, the Government are considering how best to direct any further bilateral and multilateral aid so as to benefit the Palestinian inhabitants in the occupied territory. I hope that that will be seen as an intimation of our desire to do something constructive, and I hope that other countries, including those in the Community, will be able to give further assistance.

I wish to respond to what my hon. Friend said about the Lebanon. He is right to put forward the anxieties of the House and many people in this country, about the situation in the Lebanon and our responsibility to our 100 soldiers who are carrying out a very remarkable task.

The debate gives me an opportunity to state what the Government are trying to achieve. First, we must go back to the beginning and ask ourselves what is the British interest and objective in the Lebanon? Surely, it is to help provide conditions whereby peace, reconciliation, territorial integrity and the full authority of a Lebanese Government throughout the whole of the Lebanon can be

created. In short, we wish to see a stable and independent Lebanon—the type of Lebanon that we saw in the 1950s and 1960s.

If that is not the objective, I suggest that the running sore of total instability in the Lebanon would pose and continue to pose a general threat to the stability of the entire middle east. The stability of the entire middle east is of grave concern to Britain and the western world, let alone to the parties to the dispute in the middle east.

Against that background, I ask the House to consider the main ingredients that we believe to be essential to achieving our objective. There must be a successful implementation of the ceasefire, a successful reconciliation between the Lebanese parties, the withdrawal of all foreign forces, the re-establishment of Lebanese authority throughout that country, and thereafter—I wish to stress this point—international support for reconstruction of that country. Britain has already announced that it stands ready to make such a contribution.

I wish to deal with the question posed by my hon. Friend about the multinational force and the British role. We must ask ourselves, why are we there at all? When we made our initial contribution in February, we thought that it was important to respond positively to a request from the Lebanese Government, which was encouraged by many of our friends in the middle east, including Arab Governments, and those in Europe. The request was one which would, in the opinion of the Lebanese Government, fulfil the principles that I have outlined to the House.

Could the House imagine what might have been the position in the Lebanon today—very serious though it is—had no multinational force from the United States, France, Italy or Britain, been in existence?

What are we doing there? The mandate for our presence in that country is confined to assisting the Lebanese Government and armed forces in the Beirut area only for the restoration of Lebanese Government Sovereignty and authority in the greater Beirut area. We are fulfilling two specific tasks. First, we are patrolling the main streets of Beirut with the use of Scout cars, and secondly, we are guarding the ceasefire commission, which I regard as of great importance. That commission continues to operate. We guard it at the request of all the parties, which is a sign of the trust that they all have in the contribution that our soldiers can make.

I was lucky enough to see our soldiers in the Lebanon for myself, and I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the magnificent job that they do in Beirut. They are respected by all the parties, and I have noticed in the past few months that their contribution has been warmly welcomed by many moderate Arab Governments and by Israel. Their presence enables us to play a constructive role out of all proportion to the number of our troops there.

I turn to the safety of those troops. Of course we all understand the difficulties and dangers that face them, and the Lebanon as a whole. Such matters remain uppermost in our minds, and we are always looking for ways of securing and strengthening their safety. That remains one of our priorities. The House will be aware of further measures that we have taken very recently to protect our soldiers, including additional logistic support.

However, I should like to commend the remarkable work of the British Embassy, which now has a new ambassador, Mr. David Myers. My hon. Friend asked whether we should consider leaving the Lebanon and pulling out our troops, and if so, in what circumstances. Against the background of the objectives that I have just described, we keep our presence in Beirut under constant review. We believe that there is no point in staying if we reach a point at which we are no longer carrying out a useful role. We have no intention of staying there indefinitely, but equally we have no intention of carrying out—as my hon. Friend suggested—a precipitate withdrawal. That would not be sensible. On the contrary, our desire is to do our best to help to create the conditions as rapidly as possible that will enable us to withdraw.

Therefore, all the Government's efforts must be, and are being, concentrated on working with other parties, including principally the other contributors to the multinational force, members of the EC as well as other parties to the problem, with a view to promoting the achievement of the overall objective that I have mentioned as quickly as possible. Despite all the tragic events in the Lebanon and the surrounding area, there are some signs that progress is being made. A ceasefire came into existence after my visit—although not as a result of it—and there is progress towards some reconciliation between the parties. We very much hope that President Gemayel, who is undertaking several tours, will come to Britain shortly to discuss these issues, and we can then express our views again to him.

I thank my hon. Friend for initiating this Adjournment debate. I hope that he feels reassured that the Government sense all the difficulties and dangers, but that we are at the same time continuing to fulfil a constructive role.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes to Eleven o'clock.

DIVISION LIST ERRATA

Official Report, 23 November 1983, Division No. 77, c. 416;

After "Ross, Ernest (Dundee W)" insert: "Ross, Stephen (Isle of Wight)".

Line 15, delete "Rost, Peter".