



Prime Minister.

I asked for this to be done on a contingency basis.

A.S.C. 14/11.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

14 November 1983

Dear John,

Lebanon: US Retaliation

With my letter of 11 November I enclosed some suggestions on how we might react publicly to news of US retaliation for the bomb attack of 23 October. Since then events have moved on, but if the President decides to go ahead, despite the Prime Minister's latest message, an attack could take place at any time, and could be a principal focus during questions in the House tomorrow. We suggest that, in deciding how to react, the Prime Minister may like to draw on the considerations set out below.

When we first hear that a retaliatory operation has been carried out we are unlikely to know clearly whether it has succeeded in eliminating a clearly identifiable target. First reports will not be a reliable guide to the extent of casualties. This points to the need for caution in commenting on the operation. There is the further consideration that although the Americans have sought our views about retaliation in principle, they have not so far discussed with us the type of operation they have in mind. We therefore suggest that in any public comment the Prime Minister might take the line that the Americans have kept us informed about their broad intention to act and asked for our views, which we gave; we fully understand President Reagan's desire to punish the perpetrators of the bomb attack on 23 October and to deter such attacks in the future; although we were informed in advance that the United States would take action, we were not given details of the specific course of action that was to be taken, nor asked to approve it. It was a decision for the US Government alone. She could add that the Government's first priorities in this situation are the safety of our men, and the urgent need to see reconciliation talks in the Lebanon succeed.

What further can or should be said will depend on the nature of the attack and the amount of information available about it at the time. Three possible scenarios are:

- (a) If we know that an attack has been made but do not have details, we propose that the Prime Minister should avoid being pressed into making substantive comment at this stage. She could take the line that we were seeking urgently to establish exactly what happened but that, in the meantime, people not in possession of the full facts would do well to avoid jumping to conclusions and leaping

/to attack



to attack the Americans as an automatic reflex.

- (b) If we can establish that the Americans have succeeded in a 'surgical' operation without civilian casualties, the Prime Minister could speak in more positive terms. She could give a warning to other outside parties not to exploit the action of the United States as a pretext for a further escalation of violence and the wrecking of the fragile reconciliation process.
- (c) If it is confirmed that the operation has not succeeded or has caused high civilian casualties, the Prime Minister is likely to be pressed on the extent of consultation which has taken place, and will be expected to say whether or not we approve the action. We recommend that if possible she should stick firmly to the line in paragraph 2 above, adding that the important point now must be to concentrate on the future: the cycle of violence must be ended if the effort to bring peace to Lebanon and make reconciliation possible is to succeed.

I enclose some notes on a line to take together with additional notes for supplementaries.

Sir Geoffrey Howe has not yet seen this letter; I am showing him a copy in parallel.

Your ever,

(P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

Peter Ricketts

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street



LEBANON/MNF: US RETALIATION

Line to Take

1. Much sympathy with US for enormous loss of life suffered by their barbarous attack on 23 October.
2. Each MNF contingent has right to self-defence. Fully understand US wish to deter perpetrators of 23 October attack from striking again. Their decision on how to do this. We were not asked to approve the operation.
3. Hope no-one will seek to exploit the situation. Priority for all those involved must be to help restore conditions in which reconciliation can be pursued and peace restored in Lebanon. The cycle of violence must be ended.
4. [If reports that US action has caused casualties, complications with other parties]
 - wish to have confirmation of reports before commenting.
[If confirmed]
 - Greatly regret bloodshed caused. Call on all parties to show restraint. Cycle of violence must be broken.



WERE HMG CONSULTED?

Have been in close touch with US, particularly since 23 October attack. We were consulted in general terms about US intention to retaliate. Not [told about or] asked to approve details of this operation - nor would we expect this. US decision alone.

DETAILS OF CONSULTATIONS?

Not appropriate for me to reveal details.

FUTURE OF BRITFORLEB/MNF

Consulting urgently with MNF partners. No hasty action. BRITFORLEB has been doing a valuable job. But we shall ensure that British servicemen are not exposed to unjustifiable risks. Full precautions already in force.

CONDEMN US ACTION?

No. Those who carried out terrorist attacks on 23 October and who have subjected US contingent to constant harrassment are those who should be condemned.



RE-ASSESS US/UK RELATIONS?

No. As I said in my speech last night (14 November) any differences between us are infinitely less important than the purposes and loyalties which bind us together.