



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

6 December 1983

Dear Brian,

LEBANON

During the Prime Minister's working breakfast with President Mitterrand, the Prime Minister said that she would like to discuss with the President the situation in Lebanon. I am recording this part of the discussion separately in this letter. The Prime Minister has asked that the passage about the events leading up to the French retaliatory action in Lebanon in particular should be made available only to the most limited number of people who need access to it.

The Prime Minister opened the discussion by saying that she would particularly value President Mitterrand's views on Lebanon, in view of France's historical connections both with Syria and Lebanon. She was the first to stand up for the right of self defence, but she felt that the present situation was giving President Gemayel no hope of achieving a successful outcome to the reconciliation talks. A successful outcome could only be achieved with the co-operation of Syria, and this was impossible when President Gemayel was being made to look like a puppet of the United States. So the reason for sending the Multi-National Force into Lebanon - to assist the reconciliation process - was looking incapable of fulfilment, and the general situation became more menacing as it looked more and more like a battle between the United States and Israel on the one hand and Syria on the other. The British had begun to receive demarches from the Arabs about the situation.

President Mitterrand said that he shared the Prime Minister's analysis. He recalled that the original purpose of sending in the Multi-National Force had been partly to assist the reconciliation process and partly humanitarian, to save lives when the PLO were being bombarded by the Israelis in West Beirut. What had started as a friendly gesture to the Arabs was now being seen as hostile to them, and the Multi-National Force was seen more and more to support the Christians. It had now become a question of how the Multi-National Force could leave Lebanon with dignity. This had to be a matter of consultation between the four contributor countries, and the difficulty was that people would say that the Multi-National Force had been there in vain and that lives had been lost for nothing.

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One possibility would be to leave the French ships off the coast, perhaps with a few forces dispersed among the diplomatic Residences, and to try to instal a UN force. But the latter course would be obstructed by the Russians.

The Prime Minister commented that the Multi-National Force had been a failure, although it was difficult to say this: but following the events of the last few days the Multi-National Force were in danger of becoming prime targets.

She was sympathetic towards the suggestion that a UN force might be substituted: UNIFIL were already there and might be converted into a UNTSO force. But the United States' attitude towards Syria remained critical, since the Syrians could overturn any settlement. It was ironic that, when the Syrians were engaged in a battle, they were invariably defeated; but they nevertheless remained central to efforts to achieve peace.

President Mitterrand asked the Prime Minister whether this meant that she accepted that Syria should stay in Lebanon: they would not withdraw without a war. The Prime Minister replied that she did not accept the Syrian presence, but the present United States' attitude was not bringing the prospect of Syrian withdrawal nearer. Even with a continuing Syrian and Israeli presence in Lebanon, a UN force would be preferable to the present Multi-National Force. The present situation was seriously damaging the relations of the contributor countries with the Arabs. President Mitterrand commented that the Arab world was divided. The Prime Minister said that they were uniting on this issue. She had always regretted that the Saudi Arabian Government were not prepared to be more active, for example in putting pressure on the Iraqi Government to open the Iraqi pipeline. The immediate question was whether a war was to be fought against Syria: this would have the effect of making the US and the French prime targets for retaliation, and history showed that guerillas won such actions. Members of the Multi-National Force had reason to ask what their political leaders were doing. She did not regard Syria as a puppet of Russia but thought that Syria would not hesitate to seek support from the Russians and it would probably suit the Russians to foster a situation in Lebanon which would be a gaping wound to the United States.

President Mitterrand gave the Prime Minister an account of events leading up to the retaliatory action taken by the French following the bombing of the military garrison, saying that he had not previously revealed these facts to anybody outside France. He had received a letter from President Reagan saying that the President wanted to retaliate and proposed to attack between 16 and 19 November. There had been contacts between the United States and French military headquarters which had resulted in a decision on joint military action on 17 November between 0400 and 0900. At 0400 he had

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been invited by his military commanders to authorise action and, believing that this corresponded with the wishes of the Americans, he had given his authority. By 0900 nothing had happened and he had therefore tried to telephone President Reagan in Washington: he had been told that the President was sleeping but that the orders for action would be given at noon. At noon M. Attali had telephoned Mr. MacFarlane and had been told that the US were not ready: on the President's instructions, M. Attali had said that there must be agreement by 1430, since the President could not give orders and then countermand them three times. At 1400 the Americans had sent a message saying that they did not want the French to act but would understand if they did so. Yet this action had been initiated at the behest of the Americans and he had a letter from President Reagan urging that military action in retaliation should not involve the Syrians: this had prompted the French to choose as a target a training camp belonging to those who had taken part in organising the bomb attack, which contained some Iranians but no Syrians.

The Prime Minister commented that she understood why President Mitterrand should think it difficult to rely on the United States in these circumstances: part of the problem was that the allies did not have enough direct contact with President Reagan. President Mitterrand said that his impression was that there were many factions in the US Administration, and the President could not choose between them. In order to obliterate the impression of uncertainty, he was prone to take sudden and brutal decisions, and he regarded the decisions to invade Grenada and to authorise the latest bombing raids on Syrian posts as falling into this category. The Prime Minister commented that she shared President Mitterrand's concern, but thought that Mr. Shultz was disposed to take measured decisions. She commented that the meeting in Brussels on Thursday between the Foreign Secretaries of the contributor nations to the Multi-National Force would be very important; and President Mitterrand assented.

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

Yours ever,

Robin Butler

Brian Fall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

1. John Galt - to see ^{A.S.C.7/a.}

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TO IMMEDIATE FCO.,

TELNO 735 OF 6 DECEMBER 1983.,

REPEATED AS IMMEDIATE INFO TO WASHINGTON, PARIS, ROME
(PERSONAL FOR AMBASSADORS/MINISTERS).

FROM PRIVATE SECRETARY

LEBANON

1. THE PRIME MINISTER RAISED THIS TODAY WITH MITTERRAND. SHE SAID THAT SHE WAS THE FIRST TO STAND UP FOR THE RIGHT OF SELF DEFENCE, BUT THE SITUATION IN LEBANON WAS INCREASINGLY STARTING TO LOOK LIKE THE UNITED STATES PLUS ISRAEL VERSUS SYRIA, WITH GEMAYEL AS AN AMERICAN PUPPET. THERE COULD BE NO NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IN LEBANON WITHOUT SYRIAN CONSENT, AND SO LONG AS SYRIA WAS SEEN BY THE UNITED STATES IN ITS PRESENT COLOURS, RECONCILIATION WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE. THE US VIEW OF SYRIA WAS THEREFORE CRRITICAL. SHE FORESAW A RISK OF A SITUATION IN WHICH THE US AND FRENCH CONTINGENTS IN THE MNF WOULD BE THE MAIN TARGETS. WHAT DID MITTERRAND THINK?

Friend)

2. MITTERRAND SAID HIS ANALYSIS WAS THE SAME. THE ORIGINAL AIMS OF THE MNF CONTRIBUTORS WERE NO LONGER VALID: INSTEAD OF APPEARING AS A FRIEND OF THE ARABS WE WERE STARTING TO LOOK LIKE THE OPPOSITE. THE ONLY QUESTION WAS HOW WE COULD LEAVE WITH DIGNITY. HAVING LOST 77 DEAD, FRANCE COULD NOT HAVE IT SAID THAT THE INTERVENTION HAD BEEN IN VAIN. MITTERRAND SPECULATED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF REPLACING THE MNF BY A UN FORCE (BUT HE FEARED THAT THE RUSSIANS WOULD VETO THIS) OR REDUCING ITS NUMBERS AND DISPERSING IT IN DIPLOMATIC RESIDENCES IN BEIRUT. THE PRIME MINISTER ADDED THE THOUGHT THAT UNIFIL MIGHT BE CONVERTED FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

3. LATER THE SECRETARY OF STATE SAW ANDREOTTI, WHO EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE ANXIETY ABOUT THE WAY THINGS WERE GOING AND REPEATED THAT ITALY INTENDED TO WITHDRAW HER CONTINGENT AT THE END OF THE GENEVA TALKS. HE ALSO SPOKE TO CHEYSSON, WHO SAID THAT THE FRENCH WISH WAS TO REDUCE THE SIZE OF A FRENCH CONTINGENT BY THE END OF THE YEAR. HE HAD PLANS WHICH WENT INTO CONSIDERABLE DETAIL, INVOLVING DISPERSAL OF SMALL NUMBERS OF TROOPS IN DIFFERENT LOCATIONS, MOVING THE BULK OF THEM TO THE CARRIER, AND LEAVING ONLY A TOKEN FORCE AND THE FLAG AT THE EMBASSY. CHEYSSON HOPED THAT THE 4 FOREIGN MINISTERS WOULD AGREE AT THEIR MEETING IN BRUSSELS ON 8 DECEMBER TO SEND A MESSAGE TO GEMAYEL REMINDING HIM THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE MNF WAS TO ASSIST THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS AND THAT THE LATTER COULD NOT CONTINUE INDEFINITELY.

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