

MR. COLES

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Prime Minister

LEBANON

The Prime Minister may wish to have the following in mind when considering the pressing question whether or not we should withdraw our contingent from the MNF. On the face of it, there is no clear justification for our stay. Both sides of the House of Commons are beginning to argue that the MNF is no longer a peace-keeping force. American and, to a lesser extent, French action has turned it into an intervention force, directed against the Syrians and the Moslem factions in Lebanon. This is a very powerful argument, quite apart from the question of the safety of our troops.

The counter-arguments include the following:-

1. The British and Italian contingents are the only two which are in practice still carrying out a peace-keeping role. The Italians are guarding the Palestinian refugee camps and we are guarding the building in which the cease fire talks are taking place.
2. If we pull out, there will be a major Anglo-American row, particularly if the Americans see us as having led the pack in breaking up the MNF, ie if Italian and French withdrawal follow or coincide with ours.
3. If we withdraw, we will certainly be excluded from any future influence with the Americans over the Lebanon. It is, of course, arguable that our influence has proved negligible.
4. Apart from the reaction of the Americans and the Lebanese Government, we might find that a decision to withdraw would be greeted with dismay from the Moslem factions, the Druzes, Shi'ites and others. They would not fancy being left at the mercy of the Americans with or without the French. They might bring powerful pressure on us to reverse our decision.

With these considerations in mind, we must think very hard before coming to a final conclusion. Whatever decision we make, we must be prepared to stick to it in the light of all the consequences. We cannot for example decide to withdraw and then be blown back on course by outside pressures.

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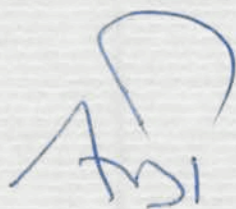
/A major problem

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A major problem is that I cannot see any substitute for the MNF. Unless the Americans are prepared to work with the Russians, which seems inconceivable, the Syrians will block any attempt to transform the MNF into a UN force. This precludes either a change in UNIFIL's mandate and the deployment of UNIFIL around Beirut, or the recruitment of a new force from eg Scandinavian, smaller European and respectable Third World countries, to be deployed in place of the MNF. Equally, I cannot see such countries being prepared to participate in a force unless it was under a UN umbrella.

On balance, I still believe that we should stay, for the reasons given above. Or, if we go, we should go in company with both the other Europeans. The Americans are different. Their Middle East policies are driven by their own private demons. The right thing now would be for the three European governments concerned to form up with the Americans and to tell them that we can only stay if the Americans are prepared to modify their present dangerous, partisan policies, thus enabling the MNF to regain peace-keeping credibility.



A.D. PARSONS
6 December 1983

SECRET

pressure in the build-up to Brussels — ourselves or countries whose Governments oppose significant reforms in the system of financing?

Will the Prime Minister tell the House what response she made in Athens to the positive proposals put to her for joint action by member Governments to raise falling investment and to reduce unemployment across the whole continent of Europe? Will she accept that, especially in the light of our own prolonged slump under her Government — [Interruption.]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinnock: Certain hon. Members could not give any demonstrations of democracy to our partners in Europe.

In the light of the perpetuated slump in this country under her Government, does the Prime Minister not recognise that the continent must invest, trade and produce its way out of depression and thus avoid the waste and horror of 20 million unemployed in Europe by the 1990s? What constructive response has the Prime Minister given to those proposals? Few authorities in this country or among our partners could have thought that she was serious about advancing British interests in Athens, when, in his autumn statement, her own Chancellor budgeted for an increase of £420 million, or 50 per cent., in United Kingdom spending on agricultural intervention next year? Was not that a clear signal to everyone, including those with whom the right hon. Lady was negotiating, that the Government either had no clear intention of securing reform or had given up on it altogether? Was the Chancellor giving a signal? [Interruption.] Apparently the right hon. Gentleman does not understand what I mean. Was it deliberate, or was it just stupid? In either case, does the Prime Minister recognise that the publication of those figures undermined her negotiating posture at the summit? Do not all those considerations—[HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."] Hon. Members are going to get it. Our country has been let down again, and they are going to get more of it.

The fact that the right hon. Lady has fallen into the period of the French presidency, the failure of Athens itself, the rebate problem and the incompetence of her negotiating stature leave us even worse off now than when she went to Athens.

In a spirit of helpfulness and without resorting to any short-term expedients—[Interruption.]

Mr. Speaker: Order. A certain latitude is always allowed to the Leader of the Opposition, but I hope that he will come to his conclusion soon.

Mr. Kinnock: I shall seek earnestly to respond to your request, Mr. Speaker, but we have just heard one of the most superficial and inadequate statements — [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes—yours!"] If the right hon. Lady will not volunteer any matters of substance, we will get the answers out of her, even if it takes longer, by asking questions.

In a spirit of helpfulness and without resorting to any short-term expedients—which I abominate as much as the right hon. Lady does—I suggest that the Prime Minister could gain much greater progress by the time of Brussels, first, by assuring the House that there is no question now of asking us for any increase in our own resources VAT contributions to the EC. [HON.

MEMBERS: "She said that."] Hon. Gentlemen were not listening. The choice of words in the Prime Minister's statement was a great deal more delicate than it had to be.

Secondly, will the Prime Minister insist at the farm price review next year, if no progress has been made, that there will be a reduction in British farm prices in order to reduce the cost to the common agricultural policy?

Finally, will the right hon. Lady now declare her determination to withhold all or part of our contributions until agreement is reached upon fundamental changes in the Common Market which remove the persistent disadvantages of British membership? Will she accept that, unless she is prepared to take such action, none of her tantrums or posturing will impress the British people in the slightest?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman's first point was about Cyprus. I had discussions in the margins with the Greek Prime Minister. There is of course nothing new to report on Cyprus. We fully support the activities of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who is using his good offices to try to bring the two communities together in a unitary Cyprus. We drafted the United Nations Security Council resolution and worked very hard to get it a very good vote. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware of its wording. The matter is in the hands of the Secretary-General and we support his activities.

As a guarantor power, we have twice contacted the other two guarantor powers in an attempt to set up talks. So far we have not succeeded, because the conditions set by the two parties for sitting down together are at present inconsistent. We shall persist in our efforts.

There were talks between the countries represented in the multinational force in the Lebanon. We are in the multinational force together and we believe that we must continue to consult each other and to make decisions together. [Interruption.] There is to be a meeting tomorrow of the Foreign Ministers of the four countries in the multinational force. It is clear that the services of the British contingent are much valued locally by, I believe, all parts of the Lebanon community—

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): The Druze and the Moslems?

The Prime Minister: —and I believe that they would be upset or even dismayed if our small but valuable force pulled out. It is a force of total integrity, in which we can take pride. It has two jobs: guarding the building where the security and truce talks are taking place, and engaging in reconnaissance in Beirut. I believe that there would be considerable repercussions not only among the communities in the Lebanon and the Arab and Jewish communities beyond it, but also within the Alliance, if there were any suggestion that we intended unilaterally to pull out or to lead a retreat. We do not. We are trying to carry out our duties well in the Lebanon.

The particular matter under consideration was the whole Stuttgart agenda. The right hon. Gentleman has no idea how difficult it is to reach agreement among 10 countries when what is under discussion is the whole matter under the purview of the European Community.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): You said you could.

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course, we always try, and many countries agreed. However, when fundamental

I believe that we shall meet in March. Whether we shall concentrate on this or on the normal subjects that we discuss has yet to be seen.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): The stand adopted at Athens by Her Majesty's principal Minister has, I believe, the support of the vast majority of the British people, and, what is more, is in the interests of the European Community. It deserves and will therefore receive our support.

On the Lebanon, the right hon. Lady has rightly rejected the unilateral cutting and running of the peacekeeping force as suggested in the House on Monday. I believe that she is right to do so. Will she assure the House that we shall take a diplomatic initiative with our two European partners to establish the independence of the peacekeeping force in the restoration of peace in the Lebanon, and specifically urge on our United States allies the need to study the Lebanese-Israeli agreement again, and to take account of the feelings of the Moslem population in Lebanon and the Syrian Government's position?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his support on European Community matters. As I said, the four Foreign Secretaries will be meeting on Thursday when there is a NATO meeting. They will also be having separate meetings. I am sure that the points made by the right hon. Gentleman will be pursued vigorously at that meeting. We are very much aware of them.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): With regard to the Lebanon, is not closer consultation between the Governments who contribute to the multinational force the one objective that we should seek to achieve? If we were to withdraw our contribution to that force unilaterally, would it not defeat that objective?

The Prime Minister: Yes. We have no intention of withdrawing unilaterally, for the reasons that I have given. Our force is valued. If we want to exert maximum influence on Lebanese affairs, we must continue to be part of that multinational force. I agree with my right hon. Friend, that we need closer consultations with the United States. We meet frequently with our European partners, but not so frequently with the United States. That will be one of the valuable assets of the NATO meeting and the meeting of Foreign Secretaries, including Mr. Shultz, to which it will give rise.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Prime Minister aware that she deserves the support of both sides of the House for the efforts that she has made to defend British interests in the EC? Our support should be expressed clearly and unambiguously. Having said that, will the Prime Minister consider two matters—first, the withdrawal of British payments to the EC and, secondly, making contingency arrangements for its break-up? That will show that she means business when she fights for British interests in Europe.

The Prime Minister: With regard to the part of the right hon. Gentleman's question about contingency arrangements, it would not be right to prepare for an event that I believe will not occur.

We are at present negotiating for enlargement of the EC to include Spain and Portugal, and those negotiations must

continue. It is in the interests of Europe, and of democracy everywhere, that they succeed and we have an enlarged European Community.

With regard to the right hon. Gentleman's question about withholding, the European Community is not in default with us on its obligations. Were it to default on its obligations, then we would have to take steps to safeguard our position.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): Since the Community's failure at Athens is clearly not the fault of the British Government, would my right hon. Friend make it clear that when the European Parliament votes on the budget next week it would be wrong and mistaken for it to take any action that would discriminate against Britain?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I wholly agree with my hon. Friend. It would be wrong for the European Parliament to discriminate against Britain. It would not be helpful. We are as usual taking a very positive position on the Community and a very positive position on solving our problems, but we do insist on solving the long-term problems. Judging by the position so far taken up by the Parliament, it also desires the solution of that problem on a long-term basis.

Mr. Roy Jenkins (Glasgow, Hillhead): Will the Prime Minister accept that, while I thought she threw away a good solution three years ago in Brussels, there was nothing on which she should have settled at Athens? There was no serious resolve to get hold of agricultural expenditure and she was right in the circumstances to play for time. Will she accept that the stakes are very high for March or June 1984, particularly at a time when there is increasing distrust across the Atlantic? If the Community were to begin to disintegrate, the dangers in terms of money and security in Europe would far exceed even the issues that she was discussing at Athens.

The Prime Minister: I noted the right hon. Gentleman's preliminary statement. He will remember that, when he thought I threw away the chance of a good solution, I actually went on a got a better one. I remember the occasion very well.

With regard to what he said about the stakes being high in March of June, yes, they are high, but that is an extra reason why the Community should be prepared to have strict financial guidelines, to have a fair sharing of the burden and to key that new system into a possible agreement to extend own resources. We cannot have an agreement to increase own resources unless we simultaneously get an agreement on a fairer sharing of the burden. Then we shall get a lasting solution and not otherwise.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): As the common agricultural policy has been a constant source of conflict between the nations of Europe and will continue to be so even if the proposed modifications succeed, would it not be wiser for the Government to try to discuss informally with the other leaders of Europe the possibility of a looser association that would ensure the continuance of the Common Market and of unity without having a policy that surely is contrary to all the excellent economic policies pursued by Her Majesty's Government?

The Prime Minister: Obviously there are some conflicts among the 10 members and many of them were discussed during the past two or three days. I think there

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks. Undoubtedly, some of the decisions that each of us were required to take at Athens would be very difficult politically. We shall not get a change in the practice of the Community in regard to surpluses—not only milk surpluses but, for example, olive oil and wine, and there are great intervention funds for rice and tobacco—without there being considerable difficulty in taking some of the decisions that we must take. Therefore, each country was bound to have to take some penalties and get some gains from the many decisions that we had to take. How far we shall get them in the next six months I do not know—the European elections come up in June—but I believe that it is to our advantage to go ahead and make difficult decisions. I have always taken the view that we must not run away from long-term decisions. However, that view is not at present universally shared. The coalition Governments are often those in most difficulty. It says a lot when one has a good majority from a good two-party system.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): With the European elections coming in June, there may be pressure to delay an agreement. Is the right hon. Lady aware that many commentators fear that a financial crisis could come considerably earlier than the autumn? Will she give an assurance that the Government will bring forward contingency arrangements to ensure that those who are dependent for their cash flow on European funds will have their needs met and that there will not be a loss of confidence in the intervening period?

The Prime Minister: Some Heads of Government and some Heads of State may take the view that it would be more difficult, with the European elections coming up, to take the necessary steps required to carry out the Stuttgart decision. That may be right, in which case it would be delayed even longer.

As for a financial crisis, that will depend, of course, on the amount produced and on world prices. We could come into crisis earlier or later, and if we have any real difficulties on the budget, that would be the strongest factor that one could adduce to get agreement on reducing surplus production.

Mr. Richard Body (Holland with Boston): Is there any hope that my right hon. Friend will come just a little closer to the view that has been expressed on these Benches that there will continue to be friction and discord in the Common Market so long as it remains a customs union instead of a free trade area and so long as it insists on being a supranational authority instead of a partnership of nation states, as some on these Benches wish it to be?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that we could change from the kind of Community that we are now to the kind of Community that my hon. Friend wishes to see. I am the first to admit that there are considerable arguments, conflicts and discords, as there are bound to be in a relationship of that kind. I do not believe that those would be reduced if we went to the other kind of community, and our influence throughout the world would be substantially reduced were we not a full partner in the Community.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): If, as in her answer to the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister attaches so much importance to consultation with the

United States, why does she think that Washington treated us so cavalierly over the Lebanon air strike? Could it possibly have been tit for tat for her disgraceful attitude towards Washington in not consulting them on sending the battle fleet or sinking the *Belgrano*?

The Prime Minister: The United States did not treat us in a cavalier fashion over the air strike. Decisions on self-defence must be taken on the spot, and co-operation between the commanders of the multinational force on the spot is excellent.

Mr. David Crouch (Canterbury): I greatly valued my right hon. Friend's statement this afternoon about maintaining the British presence, our forces, in Lebanon at this critical time. It was not only a careful and considered statement by her but a courageous one, because uppermost in our minds must be the safety of those men in that dangerous situation. May I suggest that so long as their role as an interposition force—a peace-keeping role—is not changed, they should remain? When anarchy and lawlessness break out on the streets, that is not the time to remove the police force.

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for those remarks. We are, of course, daily concerned with the safety of our forces. That is why some weeks ago we sent a force of Buccaneers to Cyprus—to be there should we need them—and a few days ago HMS *Fearless* arrived to help should her services be needed; and sometimes the forces can spend some time on *Fearless*. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for taking the view that he expressed. It is a genuine peacekeeping role. It is highly valued and I believe that if the multinational force were to come out now, the consequences would be severe indeed. So far it has not proved possible to get a United Nations truce supervisory force to take its place. That in theory is technically possible and there is nothing to stop it, except that so far the Soviet Union has not given its agreement.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): As apparently it takes nearly 400 people on the Conservative Benches to effect the ruin of this country, is the right hon. Lady satisfied that less than one quarter of that number of young soldiers can be left in an exposed position to carry out a task which, I think, she described as "extremely valuable"?

As the right hon. Lady mentioned the European elections, is she prepared now wholeheartedly to endorse those Conservative Members of the European Assembly who have not only voted against the national interest in regard to the budgetary contributions but also appear to believe overwhelmingly in the principle of unlimited food surplus?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept the strictures of the hon. Gentleman on our membership of the European Assembly. It is working both for British interests and for the interests of the European Community as a whole.

Frequently, I am afraid, we put our soldiers in an exposed position, nowhere more so than in Northern Ireland, where—whether in the Lebanon or in Northern Ireland—they also carry out their role extremely well. I have given my views on the force in Lebanon; it is doing an excellent job and will continue to do so unless all four members of the multinational force come to some different arrangement, and there is no sign of that yet.

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): While accepting utterly what my right hon. Friend said about the

[Mr. Peter Temple-Morris]

British peacekeeping force in the Lebanon, does she appreciate that there are people both inside and outside the House who have increasing and reluctant reservations about the drift of United States policy in the middle east and who fear that if that drift is allowed to continue unchecked, that fact alone could represent the greatest danger in the future—however much we may dislike that fact—to the British peacekeeping force? Will my right hon. Friend therefore confirm that she is in constant contact with Washington over these important matters?

The Prime Minister: We share my hon. Friend's concern at any increase in violence, first because of the violence itself, which is horrific, and secondly because it is not conducive to the reconciliation talks that the President of Lebanon must soon continue again in Geneva. Thus, I understand my hon. Friend's concern. We should also understand that if, by any terrible mishap, we had lost a large number of soldiers in the Lebanon in the same way as the United States has, we should rightly think that our first duty was reconnaissance—

Mr. J. Enoch Powell (Down, South): When were we told about that?

The Prime Minister:—we should rightly tell the Syrians that we would be undertaking reconnaissance and we would expect our planes not to be shot at; but if they were, we might also rightly think to take certain action in self-defence. I am sure that my hon. Friend, while I understand his concern, would not want us ever to consider even pulling out unilaterally or leading a retreat from the Lebanon.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a very important matter. Therefore, I propose to allow questions to run until half past four, which will mean that the House will have spent about an hour on this important statement.

Mr. Robert Kilroy-Silk (Knowsley, North): Given the threat to British forces in the Lebanon, does the Prime Minister not accept that she has a clear responsibility either to reinforce that garrison or, preferably, to withdraw it?

The Prime Minister: I do not think there is anything I can usefully add to what I have already said. We have a small force there. When we were originally asked to join the force I said that we could put in only a very small force because we are stretched militarily around the world. That small force is valuable.

Mr. Kilroy-Silk: How can it protect itself?

The Prime Minister: If it needed to have more for its own protection, that would be made available. If one turns around the argument and says that they ought not be there—as I gather the hon. Gentleman thinks—then it would be unwise to put more there. I am not sure which case he is arguing.

Mr. Timothy Yeo (Suffolk, South): Bearing in mind that it was the Labour Government which conducted a so-called renegotiation of the terms of British membership of the Common Market, may I ask if my right hon. Friend agrees that it is shameful for the Opposition now to be glorying in the difficulties with which the EC is faced and, indeed, ludicrous for them to direct criticism at those

member states which are trying to resolve the difficulties. By doing those two things, are they not making even harder, the urgent task which we face in the first half of next year?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I think that even the Labour party would not seek to come out of the Common Market.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): The Prime Minister has mentioned the European Community running out of money in certain areas. While it is probably true that the funding of the EC is sufficient to last until August, does she not accept that there will be a considerable temptation for the Community to dip into the regional and social funds to fund the deficit in agriculture and other areas? Would she agree with us—would she agree with me—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]—would she agree with us—[HON. MEMBERS: "Which?"]—that the maintenance of the integrity of those two funds and their enlargement are in large measure essential for the future development of the Community? Will she give an undertaking that she will resist any attempts by the Community to dip into those two funds to fund profligacy in agriculture and other areas?

The Prime Minister: Community funds will have to act in accordance with the rules, but they will be in difficulty if the surpluses go on increasing. While we have tried to get limitations on those surpluses we have not so far been successful. As the hon. Gentleman knows, it takes time to achieve that. A lot depends on prices policy too during the next review. It will be difficult. I hope that the two funds will be kept separate.

I would not necessarily agree with the hon. Gentleman that we must have an enlargement of the funds at any price. I firmly set my face against enlargement except at a price. That price is strict guidelines on financial control, which are embodied in the budgetary procedure. It is no good having political guidelines. They must be in the budgetary procedure so that they are observed. Also, we are not prepared to pay more unless there is a fairer sharing of the burden. It seems intolerable for other countries to say to the two main contributors, Germany and ourselves, "We have not got enough. We know you are the main contributors. Now you have to pay some more." I am saying that, if there is to be more, there must be a fairer sharing and it must be based on ability to pay, not contributions.

Mr. Dennis Walters (Westbury): Did my right hon. Friend have an opportunity to discuss with her colleagues the recent accord between the United States and Israel which has opened a new and dangerous dimension in the situation in the Middle East? Would she exercise her influence on President Reagan to point out that he should be more even-handed and that in committing himself to supporting one of the parties in the dispute, which incidentally is still illegally occupying large tracts of Arab land, he cannot help to bring about a comprehensive peace settlement?

The Prime Minister: We are all naturally anxious, as is my hon. Friend, to bring about a comprehensive peace settlement and to secure conditions under which both Israel and Syria can withdraw from the Lebanon and the President of the Lebanon can go ahead with seeking a reconciliation between the many factions in the Lebanon, which is a difficult enough job on its own. We have to consider how best to go about that very delicate task.

PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT ON EUROPEAN COUNCIL, 7 DECEMBER

LEBANON: SITREP 1700Z 6 DECEMBER

1. Military situation. Beirut quiet with some shelling in Shouf and minor clashes between Lebanese Army and militias. Airport remains closed. Death toll in 5 December car bomb now 16. An anti-Palestinian group has claimed responsibility. Protest strike took place in Muslim West Beirut on 6 December. No independent assessment of effect of 4 December US air raid on Syrian-held territory, although Mr Shultz has called it a 'technical success'. Two Syrians died. The body of the US airman killed is to be returned 6 December. The Syrians have said they will not release the captured US airman until the United States leaves Lebanon; the Americans are making strong diplomatic representations and have asked the UN Secretary-General to use his good offices. Reports that one or two unmanned Israeli drones shot down in the Bekaa 6 December. Israelis have confirmed loss of one. Druze announced intention 4 December to release remaining 20,000 Christians held hostage in Deir al Kamar. South Lebanon remains tense with sporadic attacks on Israeli patrols and restrictions on passage across Awwali Line into Israeli-controlled territory.

2. BRITFORLEB sustained one minor casualty (now back at work) 3 December when HQ deliberately targeted, apparently on local initiative. We have spoken to leaders of Druze and Shia militias involved, who have promised no recurrence. Ceasefire Committee continues to meet with BRITFORLEB guard. BRITFORLEB roulement due for completion 7 December.

3. Diplomatic reactions to US raids. The United States has claimed raids were purely defensive and necessary to protect MNF and said it will continue reconnaissance flights and retaliate again if fired upon. Mr Shultz has said the US will 'see through' its role in Lebanon and has urged Moscow to press the Syrians to withdraw. Israel has affirmed that it was not involved in the raids and Mr Shamir has denied rumours of a secret pact with the US to oust Syria by military means. The Lebanese Prime Minister has implicitly condemned the US air raids: 'we reject

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whatever turns our land into an area of conflict'. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have voiced concern, and Egypt, whilst stopping short of outright condemnation, has asked all parties to exercise self-restraint. The UN Secretary General has also called on all parties to refrain from the use of force. Syria has claimed the incident demonstrates concerted US/Israeli action and in a letter to Arab and other states President Asad has called the US action 'direct military aggression ... that requires serious confrontation'. The USSR has accused the US of violating UN Security Council decisions and has promised material assistance to those opposing the US and Israel. Of the MNF contributors, Italy has evinced the most concern and appears to be reconsidering the position of its contingent: the Italian Cabinet is to meet 7 December. France has avoided direct comment.

4. National reconciliation. President Gemayel has nearly completed his talks aimed at finding a way round the 17 May Israel/Lebanon Agreement, to which the US and Israel remain committed as the only basis for withdrawal of foreign forces, and which the Syrians and most Lebanese parties oppose. Plans are in hand for a visit to the UK on 14 December. But reports from Washington indicate that President Gemayel came away with little from his meeting with President Reagan except promises of increased financial and military aid. Much now depends on his planned visit to Syria next week although President Asad's state of health remains uncertain. The prospects for reconvention of the Geneva talks by the end of December are fading: apart from political constraints, the location used last time, the only one to which all participants could agree, will be unavailable.

5. Mr Rumsfeld's call on the Secretary of State on 7 December will provide an opportunity to stress our concerns at recent US military action and the danger of the Geneva process going off the rails.

REFERENCES

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Columns 19-27

NOTES FOR SUPPLEMENTARIES

LEBANON

INFORMED IN ADVANCE, SUPPORT US ACTION?

Informed shortly beforehand. US have said action taken in self-defence after attacks on their forces. Each MNF contributor has right to self-defence and to decide what measures necessary.

FRENCH, ISRAELI RETALIATION

Not informed in advance.

MEETINGS WITH MNF PARTNERS

Meeting of MNF Foreign Ministers in Brussels on 8 December.

ROLE OF BRITFORLEB

Peacekeeping. Guarding Ceasefire Commission. Help Lebanese Government restore stability and create conditions in which Lebanese sort out differences free from outside interference.

WHY NOT WITHDRAW?

- BRITFORLEB particularly welcomed by all Lebanese communities, moderate Arabs and Israel.
- Withdrawal would undermine Lebanese government, destabilize country, damage reconciliation.

Syrian appreciation of our policies made clear to Mr Luce on 4 December.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO PROMOTE PROGRESS?

Working hard to urge maintenance of ceasefire, end to cycle of violence, pressing for speedy progress in reconciliation talks, promoting conditions in which MNF no longer necessary.

Hope to see President Gemayel here shortly, and reconvening of reconciliation talks as soon as possible.

GOVERNMENT NO LONGER ENJOYS MAJORITY SUPPORT?

Majority of Lebanese share President Gemayel's objectives of restoring Lebanon's independence and securing withdrawal of foreign forces. Where there are differences eg over power sharing, institutional reform, these need to be sorted out by Lebanese themselves, without outside interference. Not for us to get involved. Encouraging progress at Geneva talks. Broadly based Lebanese Government able to exercise authority throughout territory shared objective of all MNF contributors.

WHY IS STABLE/PEACEFUL LEBANON SO IMPORTANT TO US?

Because search for settlement of Arab/Israel dispute (important British/Western interest) is made much more difficult without resolution of Lebanese crisis.

RISKS TOO GREAT?

Won't minimise danger. Safety of our soldiers uppermost in our minds: additional logistic support (HMS Fearless arrived 28 November), Buccaneers on hand if needed for self-defence.

AMERICAN POLICY ON THE WRONG TRACK IN THE LIGHT OF
REAGAN/SHAMIR TALKS IN WASHINGTON LAST WEEK?

Not for me to answer for the US. Our objectives in Lebanon are the same, though idle to pretend that we do not differ from time to time on methods. Constantly in touch (several opportunities this week).



SITUATION REPORT ON THE LEBANON

HMS FEARLESS is off Cyprus moving away from US fleet. Still in a position where it can act as dormitory for British forces in the Lebanon. ACHILES and ANDROMEDA joining FEARLESS at 1730 hours Beirut time. Phantoms on Cyprus on 30 minute readiness to provide CAT(?) for FEARLESS. Commander of British Forces in the Lebanon is seeking further information from ceasefire committee. On basis ~~of~~ currently available information does not think it will be necessary to exercise dormitory option. British forces in the Lebanon currently at full strength - the actual strength of troops is 130 at the moment.

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