



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

9 December 1983

Dear John,

MS

Lebanon: Multi-National Force

In preparation for the meeting which the Prime Minister is holding on the afternoon of 12 December, you may find useful a note on some of the factors which are of particular concern and some suggestions on the questions which the meeting might address. This letter reflects a general discussion with Sir Geoffrey Howe following his return from Brussels today, but he has not yet seen the text of it.

FLAG A | You will have seen the reports of Sir Geoffrey's meetings with the US Special Envoy to the Middle East, Mr Rumsfeld, on 7 December and with the other three MNF Foreign Ministers in Brussels on 8 December. He also spoke separately to Shultz and Cheysson on this subject.

Three points seem to us to emerge clearly from these meetings:

- (i) the gap between the US posture in Lebanon and that of the three European MNF contributors has widened. The US have shown that they are prepared to interpret their right to self-defence more widely and more vigorously than we believe to be justified. They consider that a hardline approach to the Syrians will pay dividends, and claim to be unconcerned about the evident damage to their relations with the Arab world which will result from what is widely perceived to be a shift towards closer US/Israel relations following Shamir's visit to Washington. For example, Mr Rumsfeld told us on 7 December that although the Egyptians had initially been upset by the outcome of Shamir's visit, they had now calmed down; reports from our Embassy in Cairo indicate that the opposite is true. Our view would be that, in pursuing their policy of closer cooperation with Israel and direct pressure on the Syrians, the Americans are in practice making President Gemayel's task of achieving national reconciliation in Lebanon more difficult.
- (ii) The Italians, and particularly the French, are now looking actively at ways of reducing their MNF contingent in the near future. Cheysson has told us that he intends to start discussions immediately with the Lebanese on reducing the French MNF contingent, partly by recalling troops to France, or at least accommodating them afloat, and

/partly



partly by transferring some units to the French UNIFIL contingent. The French may well present the Americans with a fait accompli. This could leave us with the worst of all worlds: the French would then have effectively decoupled their contingent from the Americans leaving us with an awkward choice; at the same time Cheysson may well claim to the Americans that they had done so with our acquiescence.

(iii) There is a real risk that in the short term there will be no progress towards reconciliation in Lebanon.

Against this background, there are a number of specific issues which might be addressed at the meeting on 12 December:

(i) should we reconsider the present size and functions of our contingent? Could we, for example, consider dropping the patrolling function but continue with the guarding of the ceasefire talks? This might allow us to abandon the base at Hadath, leaving a residual presence at the Embassy with the remainder spending each night on board HMS Fearless. Is their scope to involve UNIFIL in taking up some MNF tasks?

(ii) What should our tactics be during President Gemayel's visit on 14 December? We must clearly press him hard on the need to make progress in the reconciliation talks. Cheysson clearly hopes that we will put additional pressure on him by discussing the French ideas on thinning out MNF contingents. Sir Geoffrey has been careful to avoid commitment.

(iii) There is also the question of consultation among MNF contributors. Such political consultation as there has been to date is largely the result of our prompting, but it remains inadequate in the light of the task we are engaged on. At the meeting in Brussels, Shultz showed himself reluctant to be drawn into consultations in which US policies would, inevitably, be under close scrutiny. The French have their own reasons for wishing to avoid political consultations of a kind which would tie them in more closely to the Americans. Better coordination at the political level remains, however, a priority; and we shall continue to do what we can to bring it about.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Richard Mottram (MOD).

Yours ever,

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Private Secretary

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