

Prime Minister.

To be aware.

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A.S.C. 4/12.

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FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY

You will wish to be aware of recent developments concerning Lebanese Government attempts to procure additional Hunter aircraft for their small Air Force. I understand that Richard Luce has already been consulted about them.

2. For some time now the Lebanese have been trying to obtain Hunters from any available source. They initially approached us about the possibility of purchasing Hunters direct from the RAF. We have so far stalled on this request because of the possibility that the risk to our MNF contingent might be increased if we were seen to be augmenting the strength of the Lebanese Air Force. We have however been reluctant to give them an outright refusal since the purpose of the deployment of the MNF is to support the Lebanese Government. The Lebanese have not dropped the idea: they are now well aware of the availability for sale of RAF Hunters of the type they require, including two which they know to be earmarked for the Chileans plus four others. They are already commenting on our reluctance to sell them aircraft known to be available, and may find our attitude particularly inconsistent with our willingness to supply them with ammunition and rockets. Nevertheless despite the presentational difficulties, I believe that we must remain firm in declining to sell them RAF Hunters.
3. More recently, having failed to obtain two Hunters from Qatar, the Lebanese have turned to the Chileans, who are prepared to consider selling them twelve of their Hunters. The Chilean authorities approached us last month to seek our reactions to such a sale. Even



though they are not necessarily bound to consult HMG before resale (because only eleven of their fleet of thirty-two Hunters were supplied sufficiently recently to require our approval for their resale), the Chileans made it clear that they would not sell the aircraft to the Lebanese if to do so would be contrary to British interests. We still owe them a response, which has assumed some urgency now because the Commander of the Lebanese Air Force has gone to Chile to pursue negotiations. He might also discuss with the Chileans the possibility of Chilean release of their option to buy the two RAF Hunters in favour of the Lebanese, which would of course place us in an even more difficult position with the Lebanese Government.

4. There would be some advantage in permitting the Chilean sale to proceed in that it would ease the continued Lebanese pressure on us to supply RAF Hunters whilst also allowing greater scope for us to distance ourselves from the sale. With the latest deterioration of the situation in the Lebanon, however, I am of the view that this advantage is now outweighed by the possible risk to our MNF contingent ensuing from Lebanese Air Force acquisition of a large number of aircraft of identifiably British origin. I therefore believe that we should discourage the Chileans from allowing the sale to proceed at this time.

5. If you agree, I suggest that we might convey this message to the Chileans by thanking them for consulting us, and explaining in confidence that the present deeply unstable situation in the Lebanon gives us cause for concern at the prospect of a number of aircraft of British origin being added to the military resources in the country. We might add that this could also heighten the risk to the British element of the MNF. I think we shall have to give the Chileans some explanation of the nature for our unwillingness to sanction the sale, even though there must be some risk that they may convey the reasons to the Lebanese.

6. I am copying this minute to the Prime Minister and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

WRA
Ministry of Defence

9th December 1983

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