

CONFIDENTIAL

RECORD OF CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE PRESIDENT  
OF LEBANON AT 1215 HOURS ON WEDNESDAY 14 DECEMBER 1983, AT  
No. 10 DOWNING STREET

---

Present

Prime Minister  
Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary  
Defence Secretary  
Mr. Coles

President Gemayel  
Lebanese Ambassador  
Mr. Farouk Jabre  
Col. Muhammad Al-Khalil

\* \* \* \* \*

The Prime Minister said that it would be useful first to establish the latest military situation. The Secretary of State for Defence said that shells had fallen this morning near the headquarters of the British contingent of the MNF. They had apparently been fired from Druze positions. President Gemayel said that he had just taken a telephone call from Beirut where the situation was calm. The various factions in the Lebanon wished to reach an agreement but there was a fifth column which always prevented this. That was the main problem.

The Prime Minister said that we had naturally been worried about the position of the British contingent. It was isolated and near a no-go area, but we believed that our troops were very highly regarded and that they had won respect from all quarters. In an incident two days ago, three British soldiers had been surrounded in the no-go area, but then were released when it was realised that they were British. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that the President had already emphasised to him that this was in a sense encouraging.

The Prime Minister said that our contingent had two main roles. It guarded the bank where the cease-fire committee met, though there had been no meetings for 11 days. It also carried out patrols. We would naturally continue to keep under review the safety of our contingent, following the terrible attacks on the American and French contingents. If anything happened to the British contingent, there would be strong Parliamentary criticism.

CONFIDENTIAL

/And if

And if the cease-fire talks did not start again, questions would be asked as to whether the role of the British contingent was useful.

The Secretary of State for Defence asked whether the President believed that the shells which landed near the British contingent were <sup>fired by</sup> Druze forces. President Gemayel said he was not sure whether this was the case. The Druze had nothing against the British contingent. Perhaps the fifth column of which he had talked was the source of the firing. Colonel Al-Khalil said that there were two possible explanations. The shells might have been fired in Bhamdoun. Or it was possible that the Amal had asked for artillery support and the initial shots had landed near the British contingent. He doubted whether the shells had been deliberately aimed at our troops. It was not true to say that the British contingent was isolated. It was in contact with the Lebanese army lines at Hadath. The Secretary of State for Defence asked whether the Lebanese armed forces were able to enter the no-go area. Colonel Al-Khalil said that they could not do so. The area was controlled by Amal.

President Gemayel said that Lebanon would always be grateful to the United Kingdom for its participation in the MNF. The British contingent was small in size but, because of its efficiency and conduct, big in impact. Its role was accepted by all Lebanese, irrespective of their differing positions. That was why the British contingent was chosen to protect the cease-fire talks. This role signified that our contingent really was a peace-keeping force. Its efficiency in carrying out its duties reflected the quality of the British armed forces. Lebanon felt very comfortable with the British contingent which was the guarantee that the cease-fire talks could continue. He would like the cease-fire committee to work for 24 hours a day, but the British contingent was too small to manage to guard the venue for that length of time and the parties to the cease-fire talks did not wish any other contingent to protect them. So effectively the committee could not operate after 5 p.m.

/The

The Prime Minister commented that at present the cease-fire committee was not meeting at all. President Gemayel replied that on 15 December certain Lebanese officers would visit Damascus to try to reconstitute the cease-fire committee. They would see Mr. Khaddam with whom the Lebanese Government was in permanent contact. The purpose of the visit was to restore a permanent cease-fire and establish the best way of maintaining it. He would be able to solve the various problems with Walid Jumblatt and the Shi'a quickly. But the fifth column - whether Syrian or Iranian - was an obstacle. Colonel Al-Khalil said that the fifth column was composed of many groups, controlled variously by the Syrians, the Iranians and the Palestinians. President Gemayel said that in the suburbs of Beirut near the British contingent, there were Palestinian troops who were manipulated by Syria. The various clashes which occurred resulted from conflicting interests of foreign parties.

Syria wished to reach an agreement with the Lebanese Government but only under certain circumstances and provided that the Lebanese Government were ready to give Syria certain concessions and advantages. The Prime Minister asked what kind of concessions were involved. President Gemayel replied that it had not yet been possible to start a real negotiation. But in September Syria had been determined to destroy the Lebanese Government and had carried out a war by proxy. In November the Syrian attitude had changed and become more positive. He had telephoned President Asad before the latter had become ill and had had a quiet and friendly conversation. He had received the Foreign Minister and his own Foreign Minister had visited Damascus. Then President Asad had succumbed to his illness. There had not therefore been time to determine the Syrian attitude and the concessions which would be necessary.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary emphasised that we attached great importance to success in the reconciliation talks. When could we expect a resumption? President Gemayel said that the situation was very complex. Lebanon's problems had begun in 1975 - or even in 1969 when the Lebanese Government, by signing the Cairo agreement which gave the PLO the right to establish a military infrastructure in the Lebanon, had taken the first

step towards abdicating Lebanese sovereignty. In 1973, the first serious clash between the PLO and the Lebanese army had occurred. The Prime Minister asked how one could envisage progress now and the re-establishment of Lebanese sovereignty and integrity. President Gemayel said that there were two kinds of problems - the domestic and the foreign - and they were connected. The Lebanese Government had to seek to rebuild a national consensus through the Geneva Conference, to maintain security through the cease-fire committee and to handle the problem of foreign intervention.

As regards the national consensus, Lebanese leaders had been united in voting for him in September 1982 when he was elected. On 17 May, 1983 two-thirds of the Lebanese Parliament had approved the agreement with Israel. There had been a new feeling of unity. Unfortunately, after 17 May the Syrians had begun to put strong pressure on Walid Jumblatt, the former President Franjieh and Rashid Karamé. Before 17 May he himself had had good relations with Jumblatt and Franjieh but after that date, owing to Syrian pressure, deterioration had set in. Syria had wanted the Lebanese agreement abrogated and had decided to destroy Lebanese integrity. He was working hard to handle the Syrians and re-build relations with Asad. If the Syrian problem could be handled, the Lebanon would be easier. The Prime Minister said that she believed the President to be saying that in order to achieve reconciliation he needed Syrian co-operation.

/President Gemayel

CONFIDENTIAL

- 5 -

President Gemayel said that this was correct. The Geneva Conference had been very fruitful. All Lebanese leaders except Eddé, who was no longer seriously involved in Lebanese politics, and Hussein Mussawi, who had not been invited, had taken part. The Prime Minister asked whether it would be possible to resume the talks. President Gemayel replied that he had spoken to Beirut this morning with the aim of trying to resume the reconciliation talks in Geneva next week. His adviser, Dr. Haddad, would visit Franjieh on 15 December to discuss this possibility. But a failure could not be afforded. It was therefore necessary to reach agreement on the outcome of the conversations before it started. The Lebanese Foreign Minister had had positive talks with Walid Jumblatt two days ago. It was to be hoped that something could be accomplished before Christmas. A committee was working on preparations for Geneva, in particular, the resolution of internal Lebanese differences. There was already a "specific file" on the domestic problems. But that left the Syrian problem and the question of how Syrian pressure on Lebanese leaders could be minimised. He would now be visiting certain Arab countries. He would see King Hassan of Morocco on 15 December and would also visit Saudi Arabia. He had close personal contact with the Syrian Foreign Minister and believed an understanding could be reached with him. Khaddam had become more pragmatic. The Syrian attitude was now much more positive. They had decided to have new contacts with the Lebanon. Khaddam had told him that the Syrian Government had taken a new decision to help his administration. He did not know whether this was genuine or simply a tactic but he would in any case make the best possible use of it. He had told the Syrians that he was ready to discuss with them how to secure Syrian borders and prevent the Lebanon being used as a base against Syria. The presence of the Multinational Force in Lebanon was a determining factor in helping to change the attitude of the Syrian Government. Damascus had realised that the Lebanon was backed by important western countries. The Prime Minister said that this would suggest that it was important to continue to show firmness

/towards

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 6 -

towards Syria. It was important to put this point positively in public by talking of western support for the integrity of the Lebanon and for a Government of reconciliation.

At this point Mr. Luce (the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary having left earlier), Sir Anthony Parsons and Mr. Miers joined the conversation which continued over a working lunch. The following were the main points made.

Mr. Gemayel said that he had no precise information on the health of President Asad but Asad was a diabetic and had had a heart attack. He was not expected to be well for several more weeks yet.

Sir Anthony Parsons asked whether it would be possible to put to one side the Lebanese/Israeli agreement. President Gemayel said that when outsiders looked at the problem of the Lebanon, everything seemed black. But from the inside there were a number of positive signs. He knew the real feelings of Jumblatt, Franjeh and Karamé. Their public pronouncements, often unhelpful, were due to Syrian pressure. But their private views had enabled him to make useful public statements at the Geneva Conference. And it had been Franjeh who had suggested at Geneva that he (Gemayel) should be given carte blanche to represent the Conference in further negotiations. These Lebanese leaders were ready to deliver when the Syrian pressures upon them were removed. And, as he had already said, the Syrian attitude had changed. Last September Syria had talked about cancellation of the 17 May agreement. But Khaddam had visited him without any decision on the part of the Lebanese to cancel the agreement. This was a positive development.

He was now trying to put aside the 17 May agreement. The Israelis were ready to withdraw from some positions, e.g. in Sidon and some parts of the south, without reference to the 17 May agreement. This would encourage Syria to withdraw

/because

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 7 -

because it would be the first sign of withdrawal outside the terms of the 17 May agreement. People were beginning to talk about withdrawal by stages, a concept which Syria was willing to envisage. Then it would be necessary to see how one could manage those provisions of the agreement which the Syrians saw as a threat.

Sir Anthony Parsons asked whether, if the Israelis withdrew from some positions, the Syrians would too. President Gemayel said that the position in Syria was very different. The pressures from the West were worrying for the Syrians. Much of the Arab world was against them. They were isolated. Mr. Luce said that when he had seen the Syrian Foreign Minister last week he had said that he would not wish to link any Syrian withdrawal with Israeli withdrawal, because the basis for their intervention in the Lebanon had been quite different. But if the two withdrawals were distinct and the Israelis moved first, Syrian withdrawal would be possible.

The Secretary of State for Defence asked when the President expected to announce the reconvening of the Geneva Conference. President Gemayel said that it would be necessary to prepare heads of agreement first. An announcement might depend on the answer from Franjeh to the approach which would be made tomorrow.

The Prime Minister asked how the President's talks with President Reagan had gone. President Gemayel said that they had been very successful. The establishment of the new Lebanese/United States Committee would be very helpful. Co-ordination between Israel and the United States was now much better. The two sides had discussed the mechanism to promote the implementation of the 17 May agreement and the Americans had begun to discuss specific points with the Israelis. He now felt he had real American backing.

/The Secretary

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 8 -

The Secretary of State for Defence stated that he had just spoken to Mr. Walid Jumblatt and had received an assurance that he would do what he could to ensure that the shelling of the British contingent's headquarters would stop. Mr. Luce, who had also spoken to Jumblatt, said that he had been asked to pass a message to President Gemayel that the sooner the head of Lebanese intelligence went to Damascus in order to get the ceasefire talks started, the better.

There was then a brief discussion of the line to be taken with the press. President Gemayel said that if we wished to designate someone to be in touch with the Lebanese Ambassador before his own press conference on 15 December he would be glad to make any points which we would find helpful.

The working lunch ended at 1435.

A.J.C.

14 December, 1983

CONFIDENTIAL



CONFIDENTIAL



*file TWP*

*cc MASTER  
for*

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

14 December 1983

*Dear Peter,*

VISIT OF THE PRESIDENT OF LEBANON

I enclose a record of the conversation between the Prime Minister and President Gemayel which took place here this morning and a note of the main points made at the working lunch which followed.

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

*Yours ever*

*for Colas.*

P.F. Ricketts, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

A handwritten signature, possibly 'PFR', written in dark ink.

CONFIDENTIAL

VISIT OF PRESIDENT GEMAYEL

Press Line

Plenary session with the Prime Minister (attended by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and Defence Secretary), followed by working lunch.

The discussion focussed on the present situation in the Lebanon. President Gemayel described his efforts to achieve the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the Lebanon except those there at the invitation of the Lebanese Government. He also described the efforts to carry forward the reconciliation process begun at Geneva and to restore the Government's authority throughout the country. The President made clear the importance he attached to HMG's support for the Lebanese Government and to the key peace-keeping role of the British contingent with the Multinational Force. He expressed his great appreciation for the conduct and professionalism of the British contingent.

The Prime Minister told President Gemayel that HMG would continue to support the Government of Lebanon in the essential task of reconciliation and in its efforts to restore Lebanese Sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.