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Prime Minister.

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MR. COLES

If you agree I shall ask the F.I.C.O. to consider this idea.

LEBANON

A.J.C. 4/12.

The Syrian/Soviet attitude towards the deployment of UN observers in the Chouf has discouraged us from serious consideration of the possibility of replacing the MNF and the Israeli presence in South Lebanon, as well as the Syrian presence in the Bekaa, by UN forces. Something of the kind has been touched on lightly in recent discussions, eg by the French, but it has not been explored. Perhaps we should do so, although I would not rate the chances of success above .1% and it would take a long time to negotiate, if at all. But what is the alternative?

A major UN presence in Lebanon is not as inconceivable as it was a year ago. The Americans would not be so hostile since they want to withdraw their troops. The Israelis are uncomfortable in South Lebanon, suffering casualties and unable to control the local Shi'ite population. There is strong pressure in Israel for withdrawal. The Israelis would no longer have the excuse used for hostility to UNIFIL, namely that UNIFIL did not prevent the PLO from infiltrating South Lebanon and firing on Israeli settlements. The PLO is no longer there. Equally, the Israelis now know that Major Haddad's militia is incapable of controlling the local indigenous populace. Hence, the Israelis might be a fraction less implacably opposed to a UN presence than they have been in the past.

So far, the Syrians and Russians have effectively blocked any UN deployment in and around Beirut. The Syrians would not, of course, block a move to deploy UNIFIL in the area of South Lebanon running up to the Israeli border. If the Israelis withdrew the Syrians would probably be less reluctant to see UN forces deployed in the Bekaa and around Beirut. I do not believe that it would be possible to extend the operation to the whole country ie to replace the Syrians in North Lebanon by UN forces.

The objections to this scheme are obvious. The Americans are deeply suspicious of the UN, particularly since any action in the Security Council would involve a measure of cooperation with the Soviet Union. Israeli hackles would rise high and Shamir would be likely to stand pat on the 17 May agreement, although he knows perfectly well that it will never be implemented. The Syrians would react badly at the outset since any UN presence would inhibit their freedom of action in Lebanon.

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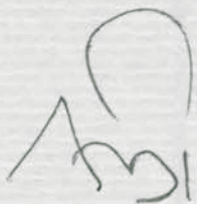
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The Moslem factions might feel the same. In Third World terms, ever since Nasser's fiasco in 1967, it has been considered off-side to make life difficult for UN troops. The Third World regard this kind of behaviour as the prerogative of eg Israelis and South Africans. Hence, the Syrians and the Moslem factions would feel more inhibited than they do vis a vis the MNF.

The real point is that all of us have run out of ideas and the situation continues to deteriorate. American policy has failed. I find it impossible to believe that the Americans could bring about the total withdrawal of both Syrian and Israeli forces. Failing this, we shall continue to hang about until something happens which precipitates the withdrawal of the MNF. There will then be a vacuum which will be filled by the Syrians. A war between Syria and Israel will become a virtual certainty.

I suggest therefore that, with all scepticism, the FCO should consider discussing the UN card with the MNF partners. The very fact of such a negotiation being in train might help to defuse some of the tensions. Even if it only partially succeeded, we might get far enough to enable the MNF to withdraw.



A.D. PARSONS  
14 December 1983

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