

PRIME MINISTER

BILATERAL WITH THE FOREIGN SECRETARY TOMORROW MORNING

You have a bilateral with the Foreign Secretary tomorrow morning before Cabinet. I understand he wants to raise the following subjects:

- Lebanon. You will see in the box the letter justifying the decision to retain our Embassy staff in East Beirut at least for now. His view is supported by the Embassy staff themselves, but contested by the MOD and the intelligence community, both of whom think it would be more prudent to leave. The signs of a Syrian military build up become every day more clear, although it is difficult to predict when they will take action and exactly what form such action will take. There is no doubt that withdrawal is the more prudent course: the only question is whether it is too prudent, in the sense that by being over-cautious we shall dismay those who we have been trying to help in Lebanon and look as though we are cutting and running and leaving our hostages to their fate. The problem is that, once an attack starts, it may be too late to consider any sort of evacuation. The Foreign Secretary is assuming a weighty responsibility by keeping the staff there, and you will want to make sure that he acknowledges that. At the least, we need a much better idea of how our staff would be evacuated if the need arises.

- Vietnamese Boat People. He wants to bring you up to date on preparations for departure of the Vietnamese boat people. I believe the latest dates are 11-13 December. The Vietnamese Government continues to be difficult and to give the impression that it will not accept people who are returned against their will. But I am told this is largely for propaganda

purposes and that in reality they are likely to accept those who are returned.

- NATO Summit. The main purpose is to hear President Bush's account of his meeting with Mr Gorbachev (and Andreotti's account of Gorbachev's visit to Italy). Ideally, the meeting would reaffirm the conclusion of the NATO May Summit: but we don't want to propose that if it will only lead to an argument and give the contrary impression that NATO is no longer united in support of that communiqué. You will want to find out from the Foreign Secretary what response there has been to your idea of a quadripartite meeting either the previous evening or on the day itself. If that is not a runner, you may like to have breakfast with Chancellor Kohl. In either case, it would seem more prudent to travel over the previous evening and stay Sunday night in an hotel, rather than take the risk of being trapped by fog.

yes
not

CHARLES POWELL

29 November 1989

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