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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

7 February, 1984

Lebanon

The Prime Minister held a third meeting today at 1700 to discuss the situation in the Lebanon. It was attended by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Defence Secretary, Mr. Luce, the Chief of the Defence Staff and Sir John Leahy.

It was noted that Mr. Eagleburger of the US State Department would be talking to Ambassadors of the MFA contributing countries in Washington at 1730.

The Defence Secretary stated that orders had been sent to OC BRITFORLEB in accordance with the conclusions of the previous meeting. Namely, the force was to make preparations to move in such a way as not to endanger the contingent and that they should be ready to move, by preference, at about 0300 London time on 8 February. A meeting would be held in the Ministry of Defence at 2300 hours at which final instructions to move would be issued. The force would take with them the US observers who were present at its headquarters. Two buccaneers would be just off the Lebanese coast in case of need. Only the Lebanese armed forces would be told of our departure plans. The roll-on-roll-off ferry had been hired but not yet told to sail.

Contingency plans had been prepared for the evacuation of British civilians and British Embassy staff.

When the media became aware of the departure of the British contingent, No. 10 would take the line that we were re-deploying our forces and that a full statement would be made in the House of Commons on 8 February.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary observed that there would also be a need for a press line when the details of President Reagan's speech later this evening become clear. It was agreed that No. 10 would speak as follows:

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"The Prime Minister mentioned in her answer to Questions this afternoon that there have been urgent consultations with the MNF partners, the Lebanese authorities, the British Embassy in Beirut and the Commander of the British contingent. In the light of these continuing consultations and events on the ground, the Government will be making its position clear in Parliament tomorrow."

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that he also proposed to instruct HM Ambassador, Beirut (on receipt of a further telegram when President Reagan had spoken) to inform the Lebanese authorities that we had decided that BRITFORLEB should be re-deployed. We would make it plain that any further decision on the role of the British contingent could not be taken until we saw how the situation developed.

In further discussion, it was pointed out that we would need to bear in mind the possible role of British troops in assisting with civilian evacuation. For the time being the plan was to take all the troops to RFA Reliant. Any question of moving the troops to Cyprus would be the subject of a further decision.

The question was raised of whether a further message should be sent to President Reagan expressing reservations about the extension of the rules of engagement for American forces in the Lebanon. It was decided, since we had already taken steps to warn the Americans of the danger of putting the MNF at risk by a more aggressive policy, no further message should be sent to the President at this stage. The line to be taken in the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's statement to Parliament on 8 February would be discussed further at a meeting at 0900 hours on 8 February. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office would provide a draft statement for discussion then.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence).

A. J. COLES

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

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