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SUBJECT

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IMMEDIATE

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FEBRUARY 84

FROM CABINET OFFICE

TO WHITEHOUSE

BT

TOP SECRET

MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT REAGAN

DEAR RON,

THANK YOU FOR YOUR MESSAGE ABOUT THE LEBANON RECEIVED EARLY THIS MORNING.

IT WAS IN AN EFFORT TO MEET YOUR CONCERNS THAT WE MADE CLEAR IN PUBLIC THAT WE WERE REDEPLOYING OUR CONTINGENT TO RFA RELIANT UNTIL THE SITUATION BECAME CLEARER. BUT THE LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS OF KEEPING OUR TROOPS THERE FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME ARE SEVERE, NOT LEAST BECAUSE WE MAY NEED SPACE ON BOARD THIS SHIP FOR BRITISH CITIZENS WHO ARE EVACUATED FROM BEIRUT. IT IS THEREFORE POSSIBLE THAT WE SHALL HAVE TO REDEPLOY THE BULK OF OUR MNF CONTINGENT FURTHER AFIELD TO CYPRUS. BUT IF WE DO THIS WE EXPECT TO LEAVE SOME OF THE CONTINGENT ON BOARD. WE WILL MAKE NO ANNOUNCEMENT OF PERMANENT WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT FURTHER CONSULTATIONS WITH YOU.

WE UNDERSTAND THE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT SITUATION WITH WHICH YOU ARE NOW FACED. IN PARTICULAR, I CAN SEE WHY YOU HAVE HAD TO GIVE YOUR MILITARY COMMANDERS DISCRETION TO RETURN FIRE AGAINST SYRIAN CONTROLLED AREAS. BUT I BELIEVE THAT ANY FORCE USED BY OUR COUNTRIES IN THE LEBANON SHOULD BE CLEARLY LIMITED TO THE NEEDS OF SELF-DEFENCE. ANY REPETITION OF THE PATTERN AND SCALE OF SHELLING BY THE NEW JERSEY THAT OCCURRED YESTERDAY COULD INCREASE THE VIOLENCE WHICH GRIPS BEIRUT. IT WOULD PUT AT RISK CURRENT PLANS TO EVACUATE WESTERN NATIONALS AND INCREASE THE THREAT TO THE REMAINING MNF CONTINGENTS AND TO BRITISH AND AMERICAN STAFF WORKING IN THE BRITISH EMBASSY. DRUZE LEADERS HAVE ALREADY APPROACHED US TO POINT OUT THE CONSEQUENCES WHICH MIGHT FOLLOW IF CASUALTIES CONTINUE TO BE INFLICTED ON THEIR PEOPLE. THEY WOULD FIND IT MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO RESTRAIN THEIR FOLLOWERS FROM ATTACKING WESTERN TARGETS IN BEIRUT WHICH HAVE SO FAR BEEN LEFT RELATIVELY UNSCATHED IN THE RECENT FIGHTING. THE POLITICAL EFFECTS ON GAMAYEL'S ALREADY WEAKENED POSITION AND HENCE ON THE PROSPECTS FOR AVOIDING THE PARTITION OF LEBANON COULD ALSO BE SERIOUS. I HOPE, THEREFORE, THAT YOU WILL URGENTLY CONSIDER ORDERING YOUR COMMANDERS TO USE THEIR DISCRETION WITH THE UTMOST RESTRAINT.

WITH BEST WISHES
YOURS EVER
MARGARET

BT

NNNN

subject
Lebanon

INT Sit A6

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T29184

Handwritten initials



dec ^{NC} 23

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Copy no ... of 3 copies

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

9 February 1984

Thank you for your letter of 9 February enclosing a draft message from the Prime Minister to President Reagan following this morning's discussion in Cabinet.

I discussed the draft with Richard Mottram who conveyed to me orally the comments of the Defence Secretary. You also conveyed to me certain comments made by the Foreign Secretary.

I now enclose the message which was approved by the Prime Minister and despatched to President Reagan this afternoon.

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

A. J. COLES

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

TOP SECRET

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MB

MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT REAGAN

Dear Son,

Thank you for your message about the Lebanon received early this morning.

It was in an effort to meet your concerns that we made clear in public that we were redeploying our contingent to RFA Reliant until the situation became clearer. But the logistical problems of keeping our troops there for any length of time are severe, not least because we may need space on board this ship for British citizens who are evacuated from Beirut. It is therefore possible that we shall have to redeploy the bulk of our MNF contingent further afield to Cyprus. But if we ~~have to~~ do this we expect to leave some of the contingent on board. We will make no announcement of permanent withdrawal without further consultation with you.

We understand the extremely difficult situation with which you are now faced. In particular, I can see why you have had to give your military commanders discretion to return fire against Syrian controlled areas. But I ~~have~~ ^{believe} ~~always thought~~ that any force used by our countries in the Lebanon should be clearly limited to the needs of self-defence. ~~I am bound to say that~~ ^P any repetition of the pattern and scale of shelling by the New Jersey that occurred yesterday ^{could I fear} ~~can~~ ^{increase} ~~only give a further twist to the spiral of violence~~ ^{be} which grips Beirut. It would put at risk current plans to

/evacuate

evacuate western nationals and increase the threat to the remaining MNF contingents and to British and American staff working in the British Embassy. Druze leaders have already approached us to point out the consequences which might follow if casualties continue to be inflicted on their people. They would find it much more difficult to restrain their followers from attacking western targets in Beirut which have so far been left relatively unscathed in the recent fighting. The political effects on Gamayel's already weakened position and hence on the prospects for avoiding the partition of Lebanon could also be serious. I hope, therefore, that you will urgently consider ordering your commanders to use their discretion with the utmost restraint.

With best wishes

Yours ever

Raymond Hill



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

9 February, 1984

Dear John,

Now see amended version
which has been approved by the
Prime Minister and despatched.

Lebanon: Message to President Reagan

A.S.C. 9/2.

As agreed when we spoke on the telephone this morning,
I enclose a draft message for the Prime Minister to send
to President Reagan registering our views about the shelling
by US naval vessels yesterday. The message also contains a
response to the President's message received this morning
(your letter of today's date to me).

I discussed an earlier version of this draft with
Sir Geoffrey Howe and the enclosed draft reflects the
general lines of his comments. He has not however seen
this text: I shall be showing him a copy in parallel over
lunchtime. I am also sending a copy to Richard Mottram (MOD).

Yours ever,
P F Ricketts

(P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despach/note

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM: Prime Minister

Reference

DEPARTMENT:

TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO: President Reagan

Your Reference

Top Secret

Secret

Confidential

Restricted

Unclassified

Copies to:

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT: Lebanon

.....In Confidence

Thank you for your message received early this morning.

CAVEAT.....

Our MNF contingent ^{will probably} cannot remain at sea off the coast of Lebanon for very long. Sooner rather than later they will have to move to Cyprus. They will remain where ^{at least} they are for a day or two longer, ^{partly} not least because some of them ~~at least~~ may be needed to help with the evacuation of British citizens. I will let you know before they go. In any case we shall defer making a formal announcement of their permanent withdrawal from the MNF.

Recall we shall consider their situation further and will be in touch with you

I understand the reasons which led you to give your military commanders discretion to return fire against Syrian-controlled areas. But I have always believed it important that any force used by our countries in the Lebanon should be clearly limited to the needs of self-defence. I am bound to say that any repetition of the pattern and scale of shelling by the New Jersey that occurred yesterday can only give a further twist to the spiral of violence which grips Beirut. Specifically, it would put at risk current plans to evacuate Western /nationals

Enclosures—flag(s).....

nationals, as well as increasing the threat to the remaining MNF contingents and to British and American staff working in the British Embassy. The Druze ^{leaders} have already approached us to point out the implications of inflicting casualties on their people, ~~and their~~ ~~determination to retaliate against East Beirut, if~~ necessary. The political effects on Gemayel's already weakened position of ~~appearing to need such action to~~ ^{and hence on the prospects of avoiding the} ~~sustain him~~ ^{parties of Lebanon} could also be serious. I hope, therefore, that you will urgently consider ordering your Commanders to use their discretion with the utmost restraint.

I am looking forward to discussing this and other matters with George Bush on Sunday.

It would make it much more difficult for them to restrain their followers from attacking West Beirut in Beirut which have so far been left relatively unscathed in the recent fighting