

Fr A. Paran.

Prime Directive

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For information.

APR 6/7.

MR. COLES ✓

MNF LEBANON - THE BRITISH CONTINGENT

On the assumption that it is decided to extend our contingent for a further three months from 7 August, the next problem which the Prime Minister will have to face is the question of redeployment following a partial Israeli withdrawal. This problem could easily come up during the recess. The Prime Minister may therefore like to be briefed on the background as it is at present.

There is a coordinating committee in Beirut under Lebanese Army chairmanship, comprising the Ambassadors and military commanders of the various contingents in the MNF. Fortunately, the British Commander, Colonel Cochrane, is obviously a man of outstanding ability and political sense. He is more than holding his own in the Committee.

The situation as of last weekend is as follows. The Committee is considering contingency plans for redeployment of the MNF in the event of partial or total Israeli withdrawal. The current idea is that the MNF should not be deployed in the hinterland if the Israelis withdraw. The Lebanese Army would deploy in the inland areas evacuated by the Israelis and the MNF would be used to patrol the main roads. The latest suggestion is that the French would be responsible for the main road between Beirut and the Syrian frontier: the Italians would look after the road running north from Beirut to Tripoli: and the British and Americans would be responsible for the road running south along the coast from Beirut to the Awali River. In order to avoid our being too identified with and integrated with the American contingent, Colonel Cochrane has suggested that the best redeployment for the British contingent would be to look after the short stretch of road running south from Beirut for about 25 miles to the Damour River. This seems to me a very sensible suggestion.

It is, of course, likely that the various Lebanese factions will not consent to the Lebanese Army on its own being responsible for internal security in their areas and that they may insist on the MNF being deployed in the hinterland. If so, I believe that we should strongly resist such a deployment for the British contingent and should insist on our force being used to patrol a stretch of main road such as the one suggested above. It would be both wrong and dangerous for a small reconnaissance unit to become embroiled in the civil war situation which is likely to continue in the mountains south of Beirut.

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I will continue to keep an eye on these developments.

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A.D. PARSONS  
6 July 1983