

PRIME MINISTER

MULTINATIONAL FORCE IN THE LEBANON

We can't do either and we must be very firm + frank about it. mb

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I apologise for a minute of some length but the object is to make it unnecessary for you to read all the attached papers.

On 2 June Sir Robert Armstrong received a telegram from Mr. McFarlane in the White House. It was a somewhat curious approach, saying that the Americans were carrying out a comprehensive review of their planning to facilitate the total withdrawal of foreign troops from the Lebanon and asking whether:-

*No
No*

- (a) it might be feasible to expand the British unit; or
- (b) put together a Commonwealth contingent.

No we are already over funded

McFarlane said that these thoughts had no standing within the US Government.

No - a limit, even been able to do this ourselves for Beirut.

Sir Robert Armstrong sought instructions on the reply which he should send. He proposed to make three points:-

- (a) "My impression is that Ministers ~~would see serious difficulty about a proposal to~~ ^{cannot} increase the existing contingent". Later in the draft, he would state "In my judgement, therefore, Ministers would find it very difficult to contemplate that the British contingent could be increased".
- (b) "I am afraid that I also have to be discouraging about the prospects for assembling a Commonwealth Force".
- (c) "Of course, it would be a great prize to reach agreement for the withdrawal of all Israeli, Syrian and PLO Forces from the Lebanon; and Ministers might feel that, if a temporary increase in the British contingent was an essential element in an agreed plan that was going to have that result, they should consider it very seriously".

No

/On (a) above

On (a) above, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary has said that we should make the reply slightly more negative. Rather than stating "Ministers would not find it easy to contemplate that the British contingent could be increased" we should say that they "would find it very difficult" I agree with this.

On (b) above, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary thought we could be a little more positive and say "I am rather doubtful whether Commonwealth countries would be willing to contribute to the Force, but I see no harm in your putting the question to, say, the Governments of Australia, Canada and New Zealand and should you do so we would be glad to give you support".

On (c) there is a disagreement. The Defence Secretary believes that we should confirm to the Americans that if it would help to bring about total withdrawal we should be willing to contemplate an enhanced British contribution. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary takes the opposite view. He believes that any hint we give on these lines runs the risk of being taken by the Americans as a commitment. Sir Anthony Parsons agrees with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary. So do I. I think we should delete this thought from Sir Robert Armstrong's reply. Agree?

Finally, the Defence Secretary said that he would favour a discussion before we reached a view on the reply to be sent to the White House. I really doubt whether it is worthwhile getting Ministers together to discuss the drafting of a reply to a rather curious White House document. I suggest that I say to the Defence Secretary that you doubt whether a discussion is necessary now but that you hope that the Chequers discussion of the Middle East in September will enable us to reach a clear view on what may and may not be possible in the Lebanon. Agree?

20 July 1983

*We cannot overstretch
on either any
more. No
need for a discussion.
A.J.C.
not*



MO 3/7/4

Copy to:

Foreign & Commonwealth
Secretary
Secretary of the Cabinet

PRIME MINISTERMULTINATIONAL FORCE IN THE LEBANON

with ASE?
I read with interest Robert Armstrong's minute to Mr Coles of 14th July enclosing a possible draft reply to the message received from the White House about the use of the Multinational Force (MNF) in the Lebanon.

2. I do not myself see much evidence that there is a realistic prospect that Israeli, Syrian and PLO forces might be removed from the Lebanon. We must also do nothing which might suck us into an open-ended commitment on a large scale whose contribution was in reality not much greater than that provided by our present highly effective but limited force. This said, I believe that, were a great prize in prospect, we should be willing to contemplate an enhanced British contribution and that the Americans would not understand a reply to the contrary. We should also not discard the possibility of involving our Commonwealth partners in such an enterprise without satisfying ourselves that it really would not be feasible.

3. I would therefore favour a discussion of what may and may not be possible in the Lebanon before you reach a view on the reply to be sent to the White House. At the very least, I am sure that we should couch the message in less negative terms generally and leave in Paragraph 3.

with ASE
Ministry of Defence
15th July 1983



PM/83/53

PRIME MINISTER

Multinational Force in the Lebanon

1. On my return from Washington I have seen Robert Armstrong's minute of 14 July to Mr Coles and Michael Heseltine's minute of 15 July on the same subject.

2. I agree with Michael Heseltine that in the circumstances described in paragraph 2 of his minute we might feel it necessary to contemplate an enhanced British contribution for a very short period. However, I think it would be better not to hold out this possibility to the Americans at this stage, when the prospects of achieving an agreed withdrawal of all foreign forces from the Lebanon in the near future are so uncertain, to say the least. Anything that we said about this now would inevitably be taken by those concerned in Washington as a commitment more or less. It would, therefore, be better in my view if paragraph 3 of Robert Armstrong's proposed reply were omitted. On the other hand the last sentence of the previous paragraph might, perhaps, be toned down by saying that 'Ministers would not find it easy to contemplate that the British contingent could be increased' rather than 'would find it very difficult ...'

3. I agree with Michael Heseltine that the passage on the Commonwealth in paragraph 4 of the draft reply could be made rather more positive. I suggest something along the following lines:

/ 'I am



'I am rather doubtful too whether Commonwealth countries would be willing to contribute to the Force, but I see no harm in your putting the question to, say, the governments of Australia, Canada and New Zealand and should you do so we would be glad to give you support.'

4. I should be happy to have a discussion, as Michael Heseltine suggests, if you think it necessary.
5. I am sending copies of this minute to the Secretary of State for Defence and the Secretary of the Cabinet.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'J.M.' or similar, located below the numbered list.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

19.7.83

Ref. A083/2064

MR COLES

With my minute of 4th July (A083/1946) I sent you a copy of a signal which I had received from the White House about the use of the multinational force (MNF) in Lebanon.

2. It was a curious document: sent as a personal 'feeler', but the author can hardly have expected me to reply without consultation and would hardly attach much value to the reply unless he thought that I had at least some reason to write as I did.
- 3. I now attach a possible draft reply. It is in general negative, and designed to crush any expectation that we might agree to increase the size of the British contingent in the MNF. The question is whether I should offer any chink in the door, to suggest that Ministers might be prepared to think again if an increase in the British contingent was an essential element in an agreed plan that was going to result in the intolerance of Israeli, Syrian and PLO forces from the Lebanon. That would be a great prize: do we want the Americans to think that there are no circumstances in which we would help them to achieve it? If we do, paragraph 3 of the draft must come out. If we want to leave a little chink, paragraph 3 offers that.
4. I should be grateful for instructions.
5. I am sending copies of this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

14 July 1983



DRAFT LETTER FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG TO
MR ROBERT C MCFARLANE, THE WHITE HOUSE

Thank you for your personal message of 2 July about the withdrawal of foreign forces from the Lebanon. I appreciate your consulting me on a personal basis while your thinking is still at a formative stage, and I am replying in the same spirit.

Without wider consultation than I have thought it right to undertake on the basis of your message, I cannot say with certainty how British Ministers would react to a considered American request that the British contingent to the multinational force (MNF) should be expanded for the purposes you have in mind. The British Government, as you know, warmly supports the efforts your Government is making to find a peaceful and lasting solution in the Lebanon. That was why we agreed to provide the existing British contingent to the MNF. But my impression is that Ministers would see serious difficulty about a proposal to increase the existing contingent to enable it to take on additional responsibilities. You yourself refer to the strains imposed on Britain by the many overseas commitments which we are carrying. Our armed forces are already overstretched to meet these commitments while at the same time discharging their primary NATO roles on the European mainland and in the Eastern Atlantic; and we have been able to find

the men for the existing British contingent to the MNF only by some diversion of resources from inescapable commitments elsewhere. In my judgment, therefore, Ministers would find it very difficult to contemplate that the British contingent could be increased.

Of course it would be a great prize to reach agreement for the withdrawal of all Israeli, Syrian and PLO forces from Lebanon; and Ministers might feel that, if a temporary increase in the British contingent was an essential element in an agreed plan that was going to have that result, they should consider it very seriously. But I think that they would need to feel sure that the prize was firmly within your grasp; and, if they were prepared to contemplate any increase in the British contingent, they would certainly want to set a strict and short time limit to the period.

I am afraid that I also have to be discouraging about the prospects for assembling a Commonwealth force. There is no Commonwealth country with as strong an interest in the Middle East as the countries which are at present contributing to the MNF, and I just do not think that Britain would be able to persuade the Commonwealth as such to become directly involved. It is conceivable that one or two of them - Australia or Canada for example - might respond to a direct approach from the Government of the United States: but I would not rate the prospects very high.



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MOD

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10 DOWNING STREET

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From the Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG
CABINET OFFICE

Multinational Force in the Lebanon

The Prime Minister has seen your minute of 14 July, Mr. Heseltine's minute of 15 July and Sir Geoffrey Howe's undated minute on the above subject.

In Mrs. Thatcher's view, we cannot respond positively to the suggestions by Mr. McFarlane that we should consider expanding the British contingent in the MNF or consider putting together a Commonwealth contingent. She believes that we must be frank in our reply on both these points so that there can be no misunderstanding.

As regards the wording of your proposed reply, the Prime Minister would like the fourth sentence of your second paragraph to read:

"My impression is that Ministers could not contemplate an increase in the existing contingent to enable it to take on additional responsibilities".

This would probably make the last sentence of that paragraph unnecessary.

The Prime Minister agrees with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary that it would be better to delete the third paragraph of your draft.

Finally, she would prefer the fourth paragraph to be retained in its present form.

The Prime Minister has considered whether it would be desirable to hold a Ministerial discussion on this matter but would prefer not to have one at this very busy time. There will of course be an opportunity for discussion of the issues involved at the session on the Middle East which will be included in the series of meetings at Chequers in September on our strategy in international affairs.

I am copying this minute to Mr. Fall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Mr. Mottram (Ministry of Defence).

A. J. COLES

21 July 1983

B10

RF

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Ref. A083/1946

MR COLES

*Amid better advice.
A.I.C. 4/12 p.a.*

I attach a copy of a signal which I have received from the White House about the use of the multinational force in the Lebanon.

2. It is a curious document. In effect it invites my personal comments on a proposition which, if the message is to be believed, has no greater authority within the United States Government than the standing of its sender, Mr Robert C McFarlane; and I am told that he does not wish to get my colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office stirred up.

3. You will see that the request is for my comment whether it might be feasible to expand the British force in Lebanon - or to supplement it with a Commonwealth contingent - so that it can not only maintain a reassuring presence in the city of Beirut but can also keep a watch on the port and the airhead.

4. I am meeting Sir Antony Acland and Sir Clive Whitmore tomorrow afternoon on other business, and propose to take the opportunity of discussing this message with them. In the light of that, I will submit further advice about how to deal with this curious approach.

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

4 July 1983

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S E C R E T VIA CABINET OFFICE CHANNELS PERSONAL WHO4605

PERSONAL FOR SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG FROM ROBERT C. MCFARLANE

SUBJ: LEBANON--WITHDRAWAL OF FOREIGN FORCES

SIR ROBERT,

1. FOR REASONS YOU WILL APPRECIATE, WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF OUR PLANNING TO FACILITATE THE TOTAL CONCURRENT AND PROMPT WITHDRAWAL OF ISRAELI, SYRIAN AND PLO FORCES FROM LEBANON. THAT REVIEW MIGHT INCLUDE SOME CONSIDERATION OF HOW WE CAN USE OUR MULTINATIONAL FORCES IN THE FIRST INSTANCE TO FACILITATE THE WITHDRAWAL OF ALL THE OCCUPATION FORCES. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WE MAY ALSO WANT TO CONSIDER HOW WE COULD USE THE MNF TO ACTIVELY TRAIN THE LEBANESE ARMED FORCES (LAF) IN THE MISSION OF PROVIDING FOR THE LONG-TERM SECURITY OF THE COUNTRY WITHIN RESTORED FRONTIERS. THAT SAID, THE FOREGOING SHOULD NOT IMPLY THAT WE ARE THINKING OF VOLUNTEERING THE MNF TO UNDERTAKE EITHER AN INTERNAL SECURITY ROLE OR AN ACTIVE COMBAT MISSION.

2. MY OWN THINKING IS THAT ONE POSSIBLE WAY TO RECONCILE ISRAELI AND SYRIAN CONCERNS FOR THE SECURITY OF THEIR BORDERS WITH THE SOVEREIGNTY OF LEBANON WOULD BE TO DEPLOY THE LAF WITH CORRESPONDING MNF CONTINGENTS INTO THE AREAS GRADUALLY VACATED BY ISRAELI, SYRIAN, AND PALESTINIAN FORCES. THE CORRESPONDING MNF CONTINGENTS (HIGHLY MOBILE UNITS SPECIALIZED FOR SURVEILLANCE AND PATROL) MIGHT BE CHOSEN IN A WAY WHICH TAKES CAREFUL ACCOUNT OF THE PECULIAR SENSITIVITIES OF THE WITHDRAWING PARTIES. FOR THAT REASON THE USMNF WOULD PROBABLY BE MOST HELPFUL IN THE SOUTHERN ZONE, CONTIGUOUS TO ISRAEL, AND THE EUROPEAN CONTINGENTS IN THE NORTH AND EAST.

3. RECOGNIZING THE STRAIN IMPOSED BY THE MANY OVERSEAS COMMITMENTS YOUR COUNTRY HAS ALREADY UNDERTAKEN, I AM INCLINED TO THINK THAT WHILE THE FRENCH AND ITALIAN CONTINGENTS MIGHT HELP IN THE EASTERN AND NORTHERN SECTORS, THERE WOULD BE A CRUCIAL ROLE FOR BRITISH FORCES IN BEIRUT. DO YOU THINK IT MIGHT BE FEASIBLE TO EXPAND THE BRITISH UNIT--OR POSSIBLY UNDERTAKE TO PUT TOGETHER A COMMONWEALTH CONTINGENT--TO KEEP A WATCH ON THE PORT AND THE AIRHEAD AS WELL AS TO MAINTAIN A REASSURING PRESENCE IN THE CITY.

4. SIR ROBERT PLEASE BEAR IN MIND THAT THE FOREGOING REPRESENTS VERY

END OF PAGE 01

TENTATIVE AND PRELIMINARY THINKING OF MY OWN. THESE THOUGHTS HAVE NO STANDING WITHIN THE US GOVERNMENT AND THUS, I DO NOT WISH TO GET YOUR COLLEAGUES IN THE FCO STIRRED UP. BUT... BEFORE THE DISCUSSION HERE IN WASHINGTON GETS TOO FAR ALONG, I WOULD GREATLY PROFIT FROM YOUR SAGE ADVICE ON WHAT, IF ANYTHING, IN YOUR JUDGMENT CAN BE DONE ALONG THE LINES DISCUSSED ABOVE.

WARMEST REGARDS,
BUD.

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