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Prime Minister.  
30.8.83



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

30 August 1983

Dear Tim

Recent Developments in Lebanon

You will have seen a number of telegrams and other reports about the fighting in Beirut over the weekend. The Prime Minister may like to have a short summary of recent events and an assessment of the implications for the Multinational Force.

The fighting in the Shouf mountains south east of Beirut has been going on intermittently for some weeks. But developments in Beirut itself over the weekend have given a more serious twist to the deteriorating security situation. A minor clash on Sunday evening (28 August) between the Lebanese Army (LAF) and the Shia (Muslim) militia escalated yesterday into fierce fighting between the army and a variety of armed militias. This in turn drew renewed shelling of the city and the airport from Druze controlled areas in the mountains. The airport is again closed and two US marines were killed. For the first time in its deployment the US contingent returned fire.

Meanwhile heavily armed militias took over for a time some areas of west Beirut which they controlled before the Israeli invasion last year. Lebanese army positions were overrun and some army vehicles destroyed. One militia briefly occupied the Government TV station in west Beirut. The army managed to regain control of some parts in west Beirut. A ceasefire was agreed late yesterday, with the army returning to barracks and armed militias to their homes. Casualties are reported to have been between 30 and 40 dead, including 15 LAF.

Beirut today has been fairly quiet, with some minor clashes continuing in the southern suburbs between the army and the militias. We have not so far heard any reports of damage to British lives or property. A patrol from the British contingent in the MNF came under fire earlier today but suffered no casualties (it is not clear whether this was deliberate or accidental).

/Beirut telno

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/ Beirut telno 450 (copy enclosed) sums up the implications of the fighting. The Lebanese Government's credibility has been further eroded. Its lack of control of the city has been demonstrated. The Muslim sections of the population, whose support the Government badly needs in its attempts to rebuild a national consensus, has been further alienated. The Lebanese army, now preoccupied with events in Beirut, is even less likely to be able to take control outside Beirut following an Israeli withdrawal.

Mr McFarlane, who was in Jerusalem earlier today, has apparently succeeded in securing postponment of the partial withdrawal of Israeli forces by 3 - 4 days. The Lebanese Government will then face a crucial test. Unless an agreement can be reached with the Druze, which seems unlikely, further fighting in the Shouf seems inevitable either between the Druze and Christian militias or, if the LAF attempts to deploy, between the Druze and the LAF.

Mr McFarlane was in London briefly on 28 August. As far as the Multinational Force is concerned, the Americans consider that the situation in the Shouf is at present too confused to allow a considered discussion on whether MNF should deploy patrols there in support of the Lebanese army. They would only consider agreeing to an extension of the MNF's deployment if there was first a political agreement and assurances from the parties concerned that they wanted an MNF presence. These are clearly sensible conditions. We have ourselves not received any formal request from the Lebanese Government. We have made clear to the Americans that we have very strong reservations about deployment of our contingent into the Shouf.

/ You may have seen reports that Mr Denzil Davies MP called yesterday for a statement by the Government on the position of our MNF contingent. I enclose a copy of the statement made by the FCO spokesman made at 1230 today.

*Yours ever*  
*J E Holmes*  
 (J E Holmes)  
 Private Secretary

Tim Flesher Esq  
 10 Downing Street

FCO SPOKESMAN, 30 AUGUST  
LEBANON: MULTINATIONAL FORCE

Legal Basis of Deployment

British contingent of Multinational Force is in Beirut at request of and by agreement with Lebanese Government. Agreement contained in exchange of letters published as a Command Paper in the Treaty series. Further exchanges of letters covering extended deployment took place on 8 May and 7 August 1983. Parliament informed of Government's decision on each occasion - most recently on 20 July 1983.

Deployment Outside Beirut

No formal request from Lebanese Government. Any such change in MNF's mandate would need to be considered with other contributors. Small size of our contingent does not allow deployment far from its present base. Internal Lebanese disputes are for Lebanese Government to settle, not for foreign forces.

Rules of Engagement?

We do not comment on ROEs. But Exchange of Letters specifies that British contingent may exercise the right of self-defence.

How Long Will MNF Stay?

Deployment of British contingent will be kept under review. No intention of being drawn into a lengthy commitment.

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FM BEIRUT 300740Z AUG 83

TO IMMEDIATE F.C.O.

TELEGRAM NUMBER 450 OF 30 AUGUST 1983

INFO IMMEDIATE DAMASCUS, TEL AVIV, WASHINGTON, MODUK

PRIORITY AMMAN, CAIRO, JEDDA, PARIS, ROME, UKMIS NEW YORK.

MY TELNO 448: LEBANON

1. BEIRUT HAD A RELATIVELY QUIET NIGHT AFTER A FULL DAY OF FIERCE FIGHTING BETWEEN THE LEBANESE ARMY AND MUSLIM, MOSTLY SHI'A, MILITIAS. ALTHOUGH BBC REPORTS YESTERDAY (29 AUGUST) OF THE INTENSITY OF THE FIGHTING MAY HAVE BEEN EXAGGERATED, NONETHELESS THE CLASHES, ACCORDING TO THE LOCAL PRESS, HAVE LEFT BETWEEN 30 AND 40 DEAD, INCLUDING 15 LEBANESE ARMY.
2. I HAVE SO FAR HEARD NO REPORTS OF DAMAGE TO BRITISH LIVES OR PROPERTY. THE STAFF OF THIS EMBASSY ARE SAFE, AS ARE BRITFORLEB.
3. WE SHALL NOT BE ABLE TO SEND YOU A FULL ASSESSMENT UNTIL THE DUST HAS SETTLED. ADA IS REPORTING THE MAIN EVENTS ON HIS CHANNELS. MY PRELIMINARY REACTION IS TO AGREE WITH JIM MUIR OF THE BBC THAT THIS REPRESENTS A SEVERE BLOW TO THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT'S CREDIBILITY - MORE SEVERE THAN THEIR CLASH WITH THE PSP EARLIER THIS MONTH BECAUSE THESE EVENTS TOOK PLACE IN BEIRUT, WHERE THE GOVERNMENT'S WRIT IS SUPPOSED TO RUN.
4. THE IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FIGHTING ARE:
  - (A) THE WEST BEIRUT MILITIAS HAVE SHOWN THAT WHEN UNITED THEY CAN STILL CHALLENGE SUCCESSFULLY THE LEBANESE ARMY IN AN AREA WHERE IT IS SUPPOSED TO BE ESTABLISHED. SOME AREAS OF BEIRUT - E.G. THE STRONGLY NATIONALIST AREAS OF THE BASTA AND MAZRAA - ARE CURRENTLY UNDER MILITIA CONTROL.
  - (B) WITH WEST BEIRUT MILITIAS ACTIVE ON THEIR SIDE OF THE FORMER GREEN LINE AND THE PHALANGE REPORTED TO BE ACTIVE ON THEIRS, THERE IS A RISK OF BEIRUT BECOMING DIVIDED ONCE AGAIN.
  - (C) WITH THE ATTACK ON THE US MARINES AND THEIR RETALIATION, THE MNF HAS BEEN DRAWN FOR THE FIRST TIME INTO COMMUNAL CONFLICT.
  - (D) THE GOVERNMENT HAVE ALIENATED ANOTHER LEBANESE COMMUNITY - THE SHI'A. ALTHOUGH THE ARMY APPEAR TO HAVE THE UPPER HAND IN THE SOUTHERN SUBURBS, THE RESENTMENT THERE SMOULDERS AND CAN EXPLODE AT ANY TIME.

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/5. I BELIEVE

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5. I BELIEVE THAT THESE EVENTS HAVE SHOWN THAT THE GOVERNMENT CANNOT IMPOSE ITS AUTHORITY BY FORCE. IF IT DOES SO, IT WILL EXPOSE THE ARMY TO FURTHER CONFRONTATION, WHICH IT MAY NOT WIN. THE ARMY CANNOT TAKE MUCH MORE OF THIS WITHOUT A DISASTROUS EFFECT ON ITS INTERNAL COHESION. PUTTING THE ARMY INTO THE HEART OF THE SHOUF AGAINST THE WILL OF THE DRUZE IS NO LONGER FEASIBLE (IF IT EVER WAS). THE GOVERNMENT NOW HAS FEW OPTIONS OTHER THAN NEGOTIATION. MOREOVER IT WILL BE NEGOTIATING FROM WEAKNESS.

PALMER

### MIDDLE EAST

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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

5 September 1983

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON

The Prime Minister has noted  
the contents of your letter of  
30 August.

A JC

John Holmes, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.