



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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2nd September 1983

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Dear John

BRITFORLEB - OPTIONS FOR EMERGENCY WITHDRAWAL

Although morale amongst our forces in Beirut is high, and we continue to assume they will remain in place, in view of the current situation in the Lebanon we have reviewed our contingency plans for their emergency withdrawal should this prove necessary. The Prime Minister may wish to be aware of the options available to us: they have yet to be considered by the Defence Secretary who will be reviewing the state of our planning on his return from Greece. These options depend to some extent on whether our action is part of a general pull out of the Multi-National Force (MNF) or is on a purely national basis. In either case our forces could withdraw initially to the US base at Beirut airport as a temporary measure if our presence at our Hadath base becomes untenable.

Our preferred option would be to withdraw to Cyprus with the assistance of the US Marine Corps and the US 6th Fleet. Informal arrangements for this already exist, and the Commander of our force in the Lebanon is currently discussing more formal plans with the American forces in Beirut. However, we cannot be sure that this assistance would be available if we wished to withdraw while the Americans remained. In this event we would need to evacuate our force by sea or air using national resources. The use of RN warships would depend on their availability in the Mediterranean at the right time, but we have 3 small craft based in Cyprus. These have sufficient capacity to evacuate all our men and some equipment but they may be restricted to fair weather operations. It might be possible to charter a civil vessel, but this could not be guaranteed and would take at least 3 days to arrange.

A J Coles Esq



If Beirut airport is open we could evacuate all our personnel in about 14 hours using Hercules aircraft. It would take a further 30 hours to remove our equipment. However, in the more likely event of the airport being closed, withdrawal by air would depend on helicopters. We have 5 Wessex based at Cyprus, but with a limited payload they are not ideal for the task, and would each have to make several trips. A Chinook (which could carry up to 80 men in an emergency) could be provided from the UK in 60 hours, but we are examining pre-positioning one in Cyprus in case the situation deteriorates. A combination of Wessex and Chinook helicopters might well represent the best chance, in an emergency, of getting our men out quickly and safely. We might have to leave some equipment behind (either stored in the US area or destroyed) and the operations could subject the helicopters to some risk.

We believe that the range of options described above is sufficiently flexible to enable us to select the best combination in the light of circumstances at the time, and we are of course keeping a very close watch on developments in Beirut.

I am copying this letter to John Holmes (FCO) and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever,

R. C. Mottram

(R C MOTTRAM)
Private Secretary