



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
 MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB  
 Telephone 01-888-7622 218 2111/3

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Prime Minister

12th September 1983

To note.

A.J.C. - <sup>13</sup>/<sub>9</sub>

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Dear John,

The Prime Minister will wish to be aware that the Defence Secretary held a meeting this evening to review the position of BRITFORLEB in the light of developments over the weekend and the current advice of the Chiefs of Staff. I gather that John Holmes is writing to you separately to cover the political side.

It was noted that a message had been received from the Americans seeking British support for direct MNF action to help the Lebanese Army counter a Druze offensive around the village of Suq al-Gharb. This followed a report from Mr McFarlane that the loss of this position would open the way into Beirut for Druze, Palestinian, Iranian and Libyan forces backed by Syria and that everything possible should be done to hold it. In discussion it was noted that our own assessment was that Suq al-Gharb did not have the strategic significance implied by the US request. Lebanese forces in the area had fought well over the weekend and were currently holding their ground. The US request implied a significant extension of the current MNF mandate and agreement to it would carry the risk that we would be sucked into a wider involvement outside Beirut in direct support of the Lebanese Army. The vulnerability of our contingent would be increased and it would be likely that, in these circumstances, it would be necessary to withdraw BRITFORLEB into the US stockade. It was therefore concluded that the military advice would be that we should not agree to extend the MNF area of operations as proposed by the Americans.

Nevertheless it was necessary to continue to review the current deployment and structure of BRITFORLEB and the options for reinforcement. At present the advice of the Chiefs of Staff was that there was no need to alter the structure or deployment of the force or its rules of engagement. As to the reinforcement options, in the event of a significant deterioration in the situation it would still be possible to accelerate the INVINCIBLE group. It was also noted that HMS HERMES, with 40 Commando Group embarked, was due to

A J Coles Esq





sail to the Eastern Mediterranean on 14th September in order to take part in the routine NATO exercise DISPLAY DETERMINATION. She would be available in the area, in the normal course of events, on 26th September and this could be brought forward to 21st if required. In addition, the SPEARHEAD Battalion could be deployed complete to Akrotiri within 4 days, with onward movement to Beirut taking a further 24 hours. A lower key measure would be to send one of the two frigates currently in the Mediterranean to a station off Lebanon. The ship would be able to supply communications and, if necessary, gunfire support to the MNF and such a deployment would be welcome to the Americans. In the light of the discussion, and taking account of the current military situation and the discussions at Chequers, my Secretary of State concluded that no action should be taken at present to accelerate any of these possible deployment options. They should nevertheless continue to remain under review in the light of the situation as it develops.

As to the BUCCANEER deployment it was reported that the sorties over the weekend had been successful in their primary purpose of producing a show of strength over Beirut. However, there had been some problems in establishing satisfactory links between the aircraft and their forward air control. These links would be necessary to direct the aircraft on to targets identified by the MNF in attack operations under the rules of engagement agreed last Friday. As I informed you on the telephone earlier this evening, it was therefore decided to carry out a further sortie by two aircraft over Beirut tomorrow, at a time to be decided by the local Commanders.

I am sending a copy of this letter to John Holmes (FCO) and to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

Mich Evans

(N H R EVANS)  
Private Secretary





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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

15 September 1983

The Prime Minister has noted the contents of your letter of 12 September about the situation in the Lebanon.

A. J. COLES

N.H.R. Evans, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.