



Prime Minister.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

To be aware.

London SW1A 2AH

A.S.C. - 1/11

1 November 1983

Dear Richard,

[Handwritten initials]

Lebanon: UK Contribution to the Multinational Force (MNF)

On 20 July Mr Luce announced, in reply to a written question, that we were telling the Lebanese Government of our willingness to extend the deployment of the British contingent in the Multinational Force for a limited period beyond 7 August. At no time have we given any indication in public of a specific time limit for our participation in the MNF. In reply to questions following his statement to the House on 24 October, Sir Geoffrey Howe said that the British force cannot be expected to remain in Lebanon indefinitely but "it will stay for so long as it plays a useful part in promoting the peace process". He also said that at a time when the forces of other countries had suffered such a severe blow (in the attacks on 23 October) it would be quite the wrong moment for us to consider unilateral withdrawal.

When Ministers considered the extension of our contingent's deployment after 7 August they agreed nevertheless that we would for our own purposes reconsider the position after 3 months (John Holmes's letter of 5 July to John Coles). Sir Geoffrey Howe does not consider that this is an appropriate moment for us to take any long-term decision about future British participation in the MNF. He therefore proposes that we should continue to participate in the MNF after 7 November until the end of the financial year 1983/84 subject to reconsideration at any time in the light of the situation in Lebanon. We would not of course reveal the new time limit if challenged, eg in Parliament, but continue to use the 24 October line set out above.

I understand that following the discussions of senior officials chaired by Sir Robert Armstrong on 13 October it was agreed that in future the Ministry of Defence would charge the FCO marginal costs for our contribution to the MNF. Your officials estimate that for the period from 7 November until the end of the 1983/84 financial year these will amount to £461,000. We estimate that it will be possible for the FCO to meet costs of this size without recourse to the Central Contingency Reserve. But we could not find a larger sum.

/I am

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I am coping this letter to John Coles (No 10).

Yours sincerely,

Peter Ricketts

(P F Ricketts)
Private Secretary

R C Mottram Esq
Private Secretary
Ministry of Defence

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MO 3/7/4

4th November 1983

Dear Peter,

LEBANON: UK CONTRIBUTION TO THE MULTINATIONAL FORCE (MNF)

Thank you for your letter of 1st November to Richard Mottram, concerning extended deployment of our contribution to the MNF beyond 7th November.

My Secretary of State agrees that under present circumstances it would not be appropriate to withdraw the British contingent, and that British participation should therefore continue for the time being, subject to review at the end of the financial year (or in response to earlier developments). He agrees also that we should continue to avoid any suggestion of a particular time limit in public.

I understand that the financing question has now been resolved as a result of the discussion between senior officials, and can confirm that future charges for our MNF contribution will be raised on the basis of short run marginal costs (provided, of course, that the commitment does not endure for so long as to necessitate investment of additional resources). I am also pleased to be able to inform you that our cost estimate to the end of 1983/84 has now been reduced to £425,000, including the estimated cost of implementing General Kitson's recommendations arising from his visit last week. A major element of the reduction stems from the resumption on an opportunity basis of resupply by Hercules aircraft in place of helicopters, depending on the security situation at Beirut airport at the time of each flight. The Chinooks must, therefore, remain in Cyprus for the time being in case Beirut airport is closed again (in which case resupply costs would go up), or for emergency withdrawal. Finally you will wish to note that we intend to rotate our personnel on a four rather than six-monthly basis in future, starting next month, in view of the very difficult circumstances under which they are now operating. This will not affect our cost estimate in 1983/84.

I am copying this letter to John Coles.

A H Lowe

(S H LOWE)

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