

PRIME MINISTER'S

PERSONAL MESSAGE

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THE PRIME MINISTER

20 December 1983

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Dear Mr. President,

I am grateful for your message of 5 December in which you set out your view of recent developments in the Middle East.

I think it important that we should explain our thinking to each other in order to increase mutual understanding. Richard Luce has given me an account of the interesting talks which he had in Damascus on 4 December. Only through constructive dialogue can we hope to make progress towards solving the acute problems of the region. I am encouraged that despite your disagreements with the United States, President Reagan's special representative in the Middle East, Mr. Donald Rumsfeld, was in Damascus on 14 and 15 December for talks, and I hope that these talks too were fruitful.

The role of the Multinational Force in Lebanon, and the British contribution to it, is clear. It is a peacekeeping force. We agreed to contribute to it on the basis that its purpose was to assist the Lebanese Government and the Lebanese armed forces in the Beirut area to facilitate the restoration of Lebanese Government authority over that area. Our aim is to help restore conditions in which the people of Lebanon themselves can settle their internal differences. I believe that this objective is shared by all the contributors to the MNF. Above all our presence is intended to help end the cycle of violence which has caused so much suffering in Lebanon and to promote reconciliation among the people of Lebanon.

We also support President Gemayel's efforts to reach agreement on the early withdrawal of outside forces. I am conscious

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of Your Excellency's view that Syrian forces are in Lebanon on a different basis from those of Israel, whose invasion of Lebanon last year the United Nations Security Council unanimously condemned. I hope nevertheless that it will be possible to reach an agreement which will allow the withdrawal of both Israeli and Syrian forces, while meeting the essential and different security requirements of both countries.

It is not our intention to become involved in internal Lebanese quarrels, and we do not intend that our forces should do anything which might have the effect of exacerbating tensions within Lebanon. Naturally our troops must have the right to defend themselves if attacked, but they will exercise this right with deliberation and responsibility. We shall continue to play our part in Lebanon so long as we think we have a useful contribution to make. Both President Gemayel and Mr. Walid Jumblatt have assured us during recent visits to London that all communities welcome the presence of the British contingent, and value the role it is playing, notably in providing a neutral guard for the vitally important ceasefire commission.

If the suffering in Lebanon is to be brought to an end, all of us who have the interests of the Lebanese people at heart must work together constructively for peace and reconciliation. I am sure that we share the same objective. I hope, therefore, that we can continue to keep in touch.

With my personal good wishes for a speedy recovery from your recent illness,

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

President Hafez el Asad