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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

20 January 1984

See Peter,

CALL ON THE PRIME MINISTER BY MR. RUMSFELD

I enclose a record of the conversation which took place here today between the Prime Minister and Mr. Donald Rumsfeld.

I am sending a copy of this letter and its enclosure to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence).

for ever

John Colman.

Peter Ricketts, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.



SUBJECT: MASTER

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND  
MR. DONALD RUMSFELD ON FRIDAY 20 JANUARY AT 1730 HOURS AT NO. 10

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Present

Prime Minister	Mr. Rumsfeld
Foreign & Commonwealth Secretary	U.S. Ambassador
Mr. Coles	Mr. Rodman

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Mr. Rumsfeld first referred to the general situation in the Arab world. He was very pleased about the decision of the Islamic Conference to readmit Egypt. He understood that Syria, Libya and Iran had opposed this move, but that Guinea and Pakistan had been particularly helpful. Jordan would be very encouraged by this event. The Prime Minister said that all the non-radical Arab world would welcome it.

Mr. Rumsfeld said that he believed that the effects of King Hussein's decision to recall the Jordanian Parliament had been generally favourable. The reactions in the West Bank and in Jordan itself had been good. Israeli comment, apart from a statement by Mr. Shamir yesterday, had been generally positive. Syrian hostility towards Jordan had of course been increased.

The Prime Minister said that Mr. Shultz had told her that the United States had helpfully put pressure on Israel to facilitate the recall of the Jordanian Parliament. Criticisms of the United States for never putting pressure on Israel were not always fair. Mr. Rumsfeld said that the action which the United States had taken with Israel was not generally known. It was a sensitive matter and he hoped we would not divulge it.

It was clear from the discussions with King Hussein that the latter wanted at root a guarantee of some kind. His circumstances were such that private assurances of support were not enough. A

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behaviour pattern based on private assurances was seen as irrational because his people had no knowledge of the nature of the assurances. The United States, like the United Kingdom, believed that it was very important to strengthen and support King Hussein. He had told Mr. Luce earlier that he hoped we were reviewing ways of achieving this. Perhaps some joint effort would be possible. Syria was increasing its pressure upon the King and using both the threat and example of assassination of prominent Jordanians. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary recalled that one of the main points made by the Prime Minister to President Reagan during her September visit to Washington had been the necessity of supporting Hussein.

The Prime Minister stated that she hoped that the US was using its influence upon Israel to prevent further talk about Jordan being Palestine. This line was not true; nor was it helpful. All our efforts to stop Israeli settlements in the West Bank had failed. Moreover, the conditions of life of Arabs in the West Bank were not good and we ought to give them more aid. If it were the case that Israel was now taking a more helpful line towards Jordan, Hussein's position would be eased. But she was not encouraged by Mr. Shamir's background. Mr. Rumsfeld said that he considered Shamir to be more pragmatic than Begin. The Prime Minister replied that Shamir might not be so fanatical but there was probably little basic difference between the two.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that Arafat appeared to have cut loose from that part of the PLO dominated by Syria. Our impression was that he commanded respect on the West Bank. It would be helpful if Hussein, with the help of President Mubarak, could create a representative movement under Arafat. The Prime Minister said that Israelis were worried by Mubarak's reception of Arafat. They had hoped that he would become the representative of simply the West Bank Palestinians, rather than the PLO. Mr. Rumsfeld said that he believed that King Hussein was focussing on creating a mechanism which could deliver some solution for the Palestinian people. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that the diplomatic skill

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and leadership of Egypt, if it were now to be incorporated in the Arab fold, would be great assets.

Reverting to the position of Mr. Shamir, Mr. Rumsfeld observed that he presided over a very fragile coalition. He was, sensibly, talking to Mr. Peres about adjustments in the Government. Given his fragile political and economic situation, and the pressure upon him of some of the coalition partners, he had not done a bad job. He might turn out to be pragmatic on the Arab-Israel issue. The Prime Minister commented that Shamir's coalition partners would not be helpful over the West Bank. Was Shamir doing anything to stop settlements?

Mr. Rumsfeld said that he would not rule this out if King Hussein joined the negotiating process. But <sup>Shamir</sup> / would not negotiate with Arafat. Israeli memories of PLO terrorism were altogether too fresh. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that the Middle East kaleidoscope was changing. Hussein would clearly be playing a leading role. The opposition in Israel wished to discontinue settlements on the West Bank. So there was a certain amount of fluidity. Mr. Rumsfeld said that he would not rule out a fresh look at the Arab-Israel issue by Shamir. But he wondered whether King Hussein really wanted the West Bank to be re-incorporated in Jordan.

The Prime Minister then turned the conversation to the Lebanon. Mr. Rumsfeld said that there were many negative factors. The economy was getting worse. The currency was weakening. Taxes could not be collected. The infiltration into southern Beirut was continuing and had probably accelerated in the last two months. There was an uninterrupted passage of weapons and men (including Iranians, Syrians and Libyans) through the Shuweifat Gap. This was creating a dangerous situation which could explode at any time. The Lebanese Government was very concerned. The Prime Minister pointed out that the area referred to was very close to the position of the British contingent in the MNF. Was the area in question run by the Amal? Mr. Rumsfeld said that he was not sure. He had talked to Nabi Berri four days ago. Berri's organisation was relatively small and undisciplined. He probably

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could not control the area. Moreover, Berri was constantly worried that the radicals would turn their attention to him. He had hastened to assure the US Ambassador in Beirut that his organisation had not been responsible for the assassination of the President of the American University.

The Prime Minister pointed out that the British contingent was the only contingent engaged in patrolling. We were not hidden behind sandbags. She was concerned that if any action were taken in the area described, the British contingent would become a target. Mr. Rumsfeld said that he believed that terrorism would get worse in the Lebanon this year. The Syrians were stalling and were using the time to infiltrate Beirut with their own protégés. The biggest problem was the clear Syrian impression that the MNF would have to leave within the next two months. The Prime Minister stated that if the present situation continued, the Syrians would be proved wrong. But her fear was that there would be another major incident involving the MNF and that this would lead to irresistible political pressure in the country concerned for its contingent to be withdrawn. She had had to intervene to turn round Parliamentary opinion on the presence of the British contingent. It was steady at the moment and would continue to be so, barring another major incident. She was worried at the implications of the assassination of the President of AUB. The MNF contributors should have a contingency plan for dealing with the situation created by another major terrorist attack on the MNF.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that he had discussed these issues in the last few days with Mr. Shultz, Mr. Andreotti and M. Cheysson. Italy had reduced its MNF contingent. The Italian President had recently repeated his view that the Italian contingent should leave. The French were reducing their troops. We had also noted the upsurge of opinion in the United States a few weeks ago against the continuing presence of American troops. The balance of opinion in any one of the four contributing countries was liable to oscillate and could quickly change in the event of another catastrophe. He had told

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the Syrian Foreign Minister that the West would not leave a vacuum behind; thus the MNF would stay until, for example, a UN force was in being. But for the reasons explained by the Prime Minister, the confidence which we expressed on this matter was in fact fragile. All this underlined the urgency of progress towards a solution. He had just seen the Lebanese Foreign Minister who had confirmed that the Lebanon security agreement was blocked by the difficulty about the promotion of Druze officers. Mr. Salem had said that the Druze position probably ought to be accepted, for the sake of getting an agreement. But the question of national reconciliation was much more difficult. The Syrians said that the Geneva Conference could not resume until the 17 May Agreement had been abrogated. The Prime Minister emphasised the need to produce a forward move in the reconciliation process. Mr. Rumsfeld said that the biggest problem was the weakness in MNF capitals. He had emphasised to the Italian and French Foreign Ministers that if the collapse of the MNF were brought about by terrorist action, that would be deplorable. For this was precisely the purpose of such terrorism. We should make it clear in advance that we recognised the danger of terrorist incidents, but that these would not deflect us from our purpose. It was impossible to negotiate with Syria if the latter believed that the MNF would be leaving in the next few weeks. The Prime Minister repeated that the British contingent was the only one which carried out patrols. A single shell on our Headquarters could lead to the deaths of the whole contingent. We would continue to reiterate our firmness in public, but as a politician she knew that one major incident could produce an unstoppable tide of opinion. Hence the need for a contingency plan. It would probably be necessary for a United Nations force to take over. Mr. Rumsfeld pointed out that a UN force would not enter a situation of chaos.

It was possible that a security plan would be agreed in the next week or so. The Saudis, the Israelis and the US were working in this direction. But Jumblatt had now been allowed by the Syrians to produce his fifth excuse for not endorsing it. It was not really the Druze issue which prevented Gemayel

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settling - it was his fear that if that issue were settled, Jumblatt would produce another objection. But it was possible that in the end Jumblatt would let the plan go ahead without positively agreeing to it.

The Americans were now working very hard with the Israelis and the Lebanese for partial Israeli withdrawal. Shamir had taken no decision, but clearly a partial withdrawal would have many good effects and would be a sign of progress for Gemayel. It was difficult for Shamir to make the running on this because the Israeli opposition were advocating such a move. So the Americans were applying the pressure instead. The difficulty for the Lebanese Government in Israeli withdrawal was that they would then have to move scarce troops south to police a new area. The Israelis might withdraw from west to east rather than from north to south, but they were bound to maintain their positions on the Syrian border until the last phase.

He had spent four hours with President Gemayel two days ago. For six weeks now the Americans had been pressing him to produce a reconciliation plan and political reforms. It was possible that he would do so in the next fourteen days. Gemayel would not be able to produce a broadly-based Government because the Syrians were preventing this. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that it looked as though a unilateral declaration of national unity was envisaged. But the real process of reconciliation was blocked by Syria because of the 17 May Agreement. Mr. Rumsfeld observed that the Syrians could only prevent Jumblatt and Berri from joining the broadly-based Government. But Gemayel could broaden the Government by including the National Salvation Front and perhaps Franjieh.

Syria claimed that the 17 May Agreement was an infringement of Lebanese sovereignty and an obstacle to the reconciliation process. This was not true. The Israeli and Lebanese Governments had agreed to put all these elements on the table in the negotiating process and to seek a compromise. Gemayel felt that if the 17 May Agreement were abrogated the Israelis would not leave

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Lebanon. Assad was playing the West like an accordion. He was accusing Gemayel of presiding over a narrowly-based Government but blocking a broadly-based one. Syrian artillery was deployed in the Lebanon in such a way as to intimidate Gemayel. Assad was behaving like this because he saw a prospect of MNF withdrawal. He perceived that the West could carry out operations in Grenada and the Falklands but had not learned to cope with the terrorist environment. The Prime Minister said that there was no way of dealing with terrorists who could retreat across the border.

Mr. Rumsfeld said that there were a certain number of levers. There was the concern of people around Assad about Syria's isolation in the Arab world. Secondly, Syria wanted a degree of independence from the Soviet Union and contacts with the West to ensure this. Thirdly, Syria and the Soviet Union wanted the MNF to leave - they saw its presence as the only thing preventing them dominating the Lebanese Government. There was much speculation that we should persuade Syria and the Soviet Union that UN troops should replace the MNF. This was getting things the wrong way round. The Syrians and the Russians ought to concede something for the departure of the MNF. For United Nations troops to be deployed in the south or north of the Lebanon, or even in the refugee camps, was one thing. But the MNF should not leave Beirut until we had extracted concessions from the Syrians. The big card was the presence of Israeli forces 23 km from Damascus. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that he was not sure how strong this card was. Assad believed that the Israeli Government was in political trouble because of the Israeli presence in the Lebanon and that Israeli troops might consequently have to leave. The Prime Minister thought that it would be optimistic to think in terms of more than partial Israeli withdrawal and some extension of Gemayel's authority. Mr. Rumsfeld commented that it was possible that Assad did believe that he could wait for Israeli withdrawal. But much of the pressure on the Israeli Government would be relieved if there were a partial withdrawal. The only bright hope was the physical presence of Israel on the Syrian border. This complicated life for the

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Syrians who did not forget that they had been worsted by Israel in four wars. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary observed that in that case Syria would be grateful to avoid war. It would continue to play a waiting game.

Mr. Rumsfeld repeated that President Gemayel felt that he had to close the Shuweifat Gap. The Prime Minister said that in that case he must consult closely with us. Mr. Rumsfeld said that he did not know whether Gemayel would have the nerve to make this move or whether he could get the political agreement which would be necessary to allow him to do it. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that the Lebanese Foreign Minister had recognised in their earlier discussion that if an attempt were made to close the Gap by military force, the ceasefire would be ruined and the position of the MNF altered. He had added that any move to close the Gap was a long way down the road; and following such a move all MNF contributors would want to reconsider their role.

Mr. Rumsfeld suggested that pressure should be put on the Syrians to move their artillery back. There was no reason for it to be in its existing positions. The Lebanese Government was no longer entirely sustained by the presence of the MNF because of the constant stories that it would leave. The risk that the MNF would depart made the Lebanese leadership more desperate. Gemayel felt that he was losing the support of his people. One was beginning to hear suggestions that if there could be no political solution, there would have to be a military solution. The Lebanese Government had 35,000 troops and, in a military solution, would be fighting only the Druze. If the Syrians continued to resist a political solution, this resort to military action could take place.

Mr. Rumsfeld said that he would now be returning to Washington for discussions with Mr. Shultz and Mr. MacFarlane. But there was no way of producing a neatly packaged solution - there were no home-run balls.

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The Prime Minister repeated her concern that another terrorist outrage against the US contingent could, in an election year, lead to irresistible demands for its withdrawal. There should be planning against that contingency.

Mr. Rumsfeld said that the Lebanese Government were now asking questions about the readiness of the US Navy to extend its activity. They felt that if Beirut were covered by an umbrella of US naval guns, and it was clear that the US would respond if the Syrians, the Druze or anyone else shelled Beirut, they would have more scope. He had explained to them that the role of the MNF was to respond only to attacks on the MNF. But this did not stop the suggestion being repeated. The Prime Minister said that to embark on such a course would be a major decision. US troops would be in the Lebanon for years. In conclusion, Mr. Rumsfeld said that the Lebanon had four options: a political solution, military action, perhaps with MNF involvement, to close the Shuweifat Gap; a request to Israel for the protection of Beirut; a request for Syrian protection. Those options apart, the prospect was of continued erosion. The Lebanese Government felt they could not let things deteriorate for another six months. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary repeated that the Syrian attitude towards the 17 May Agreement remained a major obstacle. Mr. Rumsfeld disputed this. The Agreement had already been put on one side. It was an element on the negotiating table. Assad's attitude would not change if the Agreement were abrogated.

The discussion ended at 1900 hours.

A.J.C.

20 January 1984