

MEMORANDUM

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
November 2, 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR Robert C. McFarlane

RCM HAS SEEN

FROM: Richard S. Beal *RSB*

SUBJECT: Potential for Violence in the Middle East

1. Key Judgment: The potential for an escalation of violence in the Middle East is great, including a possible confrontation between Israel and Syria. In the immediate term, and affecting other security issues, the threat to the MNF in Lebanon appears likely to increase.

2. Supporting Information: Information to support the above judgments comes from a number of sources. Reporting from [redacted] indicates the Syrian military was placed on full alert on 27 October. This alert simply restricts all personnel to their bases and was evidently in response to expected reprisals by France and the US for suspected Syrian complicity in the 23 October attacks on MNF facilities in Beirut. Additionally, for the past several days, Lebanese and Syrian media have reported heightened tension in Syria over Israeli maneuvers in the Bekaa valley. [redacted]

[redacted] The intended target of these weapons is reportedly the Marines. Our knowledge of this information has been passed to the Syrians.

3. The Syrians also seem to be playing the spoiler in Geneva. Their insistence on an abrogation of the 17 May Israeli-Lebanese withdrawal accord will probably lead to an impasse. In addition, Israel has publically threatened to effectively partition Lebanon, by closing two bridges over the Awali river, if the treaty is abrogated.

4. While we have not noted any unusual Israeli troop movements, there has been some movement by the Syrians. DIA cannot yet assess if this is simply a troop rotation or a more ominous deployment.

5. Complicating the regional security problem and having the potential to heighten Israeli-Syrian tensions are terrorist threats in Lebanon. [redacted]

E. O. 12958  
As Amended  
Sec. 3.3(b)(1)

[REDACTED] According to several sources, the Hizballah was behind the 23 October incident in Beirut. [REDACTED] also reports that a [REDACTED] has arrived in Beirut and is planning a "significant event" around 15 November which would be directed at "foreign schools." While some of these reports are more believable than others, each adds to the heightened tension in the region.

6. Outlook: In our judgment, the trend in the region, driven by the Syrian diplomatic and military activities, is toward the concerned parties (especially the Syrians and Israelis) positioning themselves for a collapse of the Geneva talks and a breakdown in the ceasefire. This would lead to a renewal of factional violence within Lebanon and an increased potential for external involvement. Obviously, the danger to the MNF increases if these events occur.

7. ~~Jeff~~ Kemp has seen and concurs in this assessment.

Geoff

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