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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON  
November 8, 1983

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OFFICE OF THE  
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

MEMORANDUM FOR THE HONORABLE CASPAR W. WEINBERGER  
The Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT: Expanding the Rules of Engagement (ROE) for the  
U.S. MNF Contingent in Beirut (U)

As a follow-up to our discussion at breakfast yesterday morning, I would like to clarify for you the President's intention in directing a modification to the ROEs for the U.S. MNF. The Beirut tragedy has underscored the need for us to take every conceivable measure to improve the safety and security of the MNF units. It is intended that the language in NSDD-111, which mandates a modification in our current ROEs, be consistent with the concept of aggressive self-defense developed during the intensive fighting last September.

The premise on which the decision was based is that Suk al-Gharb, while a key strategic point, is not the only position which, if overrun by hostile forces, would seriously endanger the security of our Marines, our diplomatic mission, and the other MNF units. Were the LAF to lose control of the ground which controls key arteries into Beirut (such as Baabda, Quabrshumun, Khalde, Al Shauayfat, Arraya), the uncontrolled access to Beirut by armed units hostile to the presence of the MNF could quickly render the MNF positions in West and South Beirut untenable. While the bulk of the LAF's strength is deployed along the ridgeline east of the city, a breakthrough by elements such as those which repeatedly attacked Suk al-Gharb would put the MNF in a direct confrontation with mobile and potentially superior forces. Moreover, their seizure of positions on the high ground just east of the city would greatly compound the risk of artillery, mortar, and rocket attacks on our units.

It is for the above reasons, that the President has directed a modification to the ROEs. He intends it as a precautionary measure should heavy fighting resume. Let me reassure you that his intention is not to modify the governing mission of the MNF--deterrence by active presence in Greater Beirut. It is rather an extension of the concept of aggressive self-defense to include support for the LAF, if positions comparable to Suk al-Gharb are in danger of being overrun. As in the case of Suk al-Gharb, the President intends that the decisions to employ fire power organic to the Marine contingent, and to call in naval gunfire or tactical air support remain with the ground commander, who is in the best position to determine if the criteria in the modified ROE apply.

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Robert C. McFarlane

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