

President Reagan's Commitment of Peacekeepers in Lebanon, 1983

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

President Reagan's Commitment of Peacekeepers in Lebanon, 1983, by COL Paul G. Schlimm, United States Army, 55 pages.

The attacks of September 11, 2001 stand as a stark waypoint in the United States' involvement in the Middle East. For a generation of Americans, these attacks, unanticipated by the general population, mark a beginning point in US efforts to combat Islamic extremism. For an earlier generation, however, the 23 October 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, resulting in the death of 241 Americans, served as a similar waypoint. While these perceptions of the general public are understandable, they are incorrect. America has been involved in the Arab world since just after the American revolution, when its merchant vessels and their crews, newly bereft via national independence of the protection of the British Navy, became prey for the pirates of the Barbary Coast. Interestingly, Americans at that time were asking the same questions, as were their countrymen after Beirut and the September 11 attacks: how could this have happened?

In response to Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, President Reagan committed peacekeeping forces to Lebanon in 1982. He did so with little understanding of the operational environment, failing to account for the influence exerted by external agents such as Iran and Syria, and Reagan's policy was ultimately unsuccessful in facilitating a lasting peace in Lebanon. To say the long-term regional instability that followed the Israeli invasion was the result of the failed US-led peacekeeping mission is unjustified. However, poorly formulated policy by the Reagan administration resulted in unnecessary US casualties in Lebanon. The Reagan administration also missed an opportunity to develop a more stable Lebanon by disengaging almost completely with the country after withdrawing the Marines in 1984.

Lacking a clear visualization of the operational environment, the administration sent US forces into Lebanon with no clear mission. US military advisors, also lacking an understanding of the situation in Lebanon, failed to develop a coherent operational approach for the committed forces. Unaware of local "politics" and the expectations competing factions had for the peacekeepers, the administration was therefore unable to consider the potential negative effects of subsequent decisions about how to enforce peace, and specifically which of the factions to support and how. When the Marines, against the advice of Colonel Timothy J. Geraghty, the commander on the ground, were told by Washington to support the Lebanese Army in Suq-al-Garb with naval gunfire on 19 September, 1983, their role, in the eyes of the competing Lebanese factions, changed. As Colonel Geraghty stated, "American support removed any lingering doubts of our neutrality, and I stated to my staff at the time that we were going to pay in blood for this decision." They did "pay in blood," losing 241 Marines, Soldiers and Sailors in the truck bombing of the Marine Barracks on October 23, 1983.

Understanding Reagan's decision making with respect to Lebanon, and understanding the outcomes of the US involvement in 1982-1984 are important because the US is faced with similar challenges today. The Middle East and Arab North Africa remain in a state of "persistent conflict," and the US remains involved. Examining the complex problems presented by Lebanon in 1982 can provide relevant lessons today for policy makers.

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Acronyms

BIA	Beirut International Airport
BLT	Battalion Landing Team
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
CMC	Commandant of the Marine Corps
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Force
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
LNM	Lebanese National Movement
MAU	marine Amphibious Unit
MNF	Multi-National Peacekeeping Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSA	National Security Advisor
NSC	National Security Council
NSDD	National Security Directive
PD	Presidential Directive
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
ROE	Rules of Engagement
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
SECSTATE	Secretary of State
UAR	United Arab Republic
UN	United Nations
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

UNSCOP	United Nations Special Committee on Palestine
USMC	United States Marine Corps

Introduction

Beware of small states.

—Mikhail Bakunin

The attacks of September 11, 2001 stand as a stark waypoint in the United States' involvement in the Middle East. For a generation of Americans, these attacks, unanticipated by the general population, mark a beginning point in US efforts to combat Islamic extremism. For an earlier generation, however, the 23 October 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, resulting in the death of 241 Americans, served as a similar waypoint. While these perceptions of the general public are understandable, they are incorrect. America has been involved in the Arab world since just after the American revolution, when its merchant vessels and their crews, newly bereft via national independence of the protection of the British Navy, became prey for the pirates of the Barbary Coast. Interestingly, Americans at that time were asking the same questions, as were their countrymen after Beirut and the September 11 attacks: how could this have happened?

America's involvement in the Middle East spans centuries, and this involvement has shaped how Arabs and Muslims perceive and react to America. While often negative, these perceptions have gone mostly unnoticed by Americans until recently. The Middle East is not all Muslim, however, and in Lebanon, the Christian Maronites have been central to much of the unrest that has consumed that country over the past century and a half. Lebanon represents a small part of the Middle East, but its affect outside its borders greatly exceeds its physical size. Future policy makers should strive to understand why America became involved in Lebanon, and understand the results of that involvement. In 1958, in response to unrest between the pro-Western, Christian government of Camille Chamoun, and Muslim leaders, who sympathized

with Pan-Arabism, President Eisenhower deployed 14,000 US personnel to Lebanon. This deployment saw the restoration of peace, resulting the election of moderate Maronite President, Fuad Chehab. By 1982, Lebanon was drastically different, affected by more regional actors, operating both in the open and clandestinely. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), ejected from Jordan in 1970, had moved into Southern Lebanon. Allowed to attack Israel without Lebanese interference via the 1969 Cairo Accord¹, the PLO had, by 1982, provided Israel with that country's excuse to invade Lebanon. While Israel partially justified its invasion as a means to protect its people from PLO attacks, the invasion's scope far exceeded what was required to secure that end. ² Iran and Syria were also directly involved in Lebanon in 1982. Syrian forces entered Lebanon in 1976 during the Lebanese Civil war, and Iran had actively been working with Shi'a groups in Lebanon following the Iranian Revolution in 1979. These factors presented a much different Lebanon to US policy makers than existed in 1958.

President Reagan committed US forces to Lebanon twice following the Israeli invasion. The first instance was to secure the August 1982 evacuation of Arafat's PLO out of Beirut following the Israeli invasion on June 6, 1982. The second instance followed the massacres in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps from 16-18 September 1982. Telling his National Security Council to "go for broke" and the American people that the US was "in at the request of the Lebanese,"³ Reagan committed just 1200 military personnel on the ground, mostly US Marines,

¹ Trevor N. Dupuy and Paul Martell, *Flawed Victory: The Arab-Israeli Conflict and the 1982 War in Lebanon* (Fairfax: Hero Books, 1986), 29.

² Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 154.

³ Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*, ed. Douglas Brinkley (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 101.

in Lebanon as part of a multinational force comprising US, Italian and French troops, and later British troops as well. Reagan ultimately ordered the Marines out of Lebanon in February 1984, following the deaths of 241 Marines, Soldiers and Sailors killed in the suicide bombing attack of the Marine Barracks at Beirut International Airport (BIA) in October 1983. The Marines withdrew without facilitating a lasting peace, and a result, beyond continued unrest, was the ascension of Hezbollah as a regional actor.

The thesis of this monograph is centered on America's involvement in Lebanon from 1982 to 1984. President Reagan committed forces to Lebanon in 1982 with little understanding of the operational environment, failing to account for the influence exerted by external agents such as Iran and Syria, and Reagan's policy was ultimately unsuccessful in facilitating a lasting peace in Lebanon. To say the long-term regional instability that followed the Israeli invasion was the result of the failed US-led peacekeeping mission is unjustified. However, poorly formulated policy by the Reagan administration resulted in unnecessary US casualties in Lebanon. The Reagan administration also missed an opportunity to develop a more stable Lebanon by disengaging almost completely with the country after withdrawing the Marines in 1984.

Lacking a clear visualization of the operational environment, the administration sent US forces into Lebanon with no clear mission. US military advisors, also lacking an understanding of the situation in Lebanon, failed to develop a coherent operational approach for the committed forces. Unaware of local "politics" and the expectations competing factions had for the peacekeepers, the administration was therefore unable to consider the potential negative effects of subsequent decisions about how to enforce peace, and specifically which of the factions to support and how. When the Marines, against the advice of Colonel Timothy J. Geraghty, the commander on the ground, were told by Washington to support the Lebanese

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Understanding Reagan’s decision making with respect to Lebanon, and understanding the outcomes of the US involvement in 1982-1984 are important because the US is faced with similar challenges today. The Middle East and Arab North Africa remain in a state of “persistent conflict,” and the US remains involved. Examining the complex problems presented by Lebanon in 1982 can provide relevant lessons today for policy makers. Military leaders will continue to be asked to provide “best military advice” to the President, and can use US involvement in Lebanon as an example of a failure to leverage what today is referred to as operational design to formulate that advice. As Ambassador Douglas Lute, the current US Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) argues, policy makers, “get into trouble when they take shortcuts.”⁵ U.S. policy makers shortcut the decision to send Marines into Lebanon, and provided the Marines with little guidance or clarity of mission.

Methodology

Section 1 of the monograph provides an overview of the general history of Lebanon. The section will discuss the Ottoman Empire’s policies toward the Levant, and how external actors

⁴ Timothy J. Geraghty, “25 Years Later: We Came In Peace,” *Proceedings Magazine* 134/10/1,268, (October, 2008), accessed November 5, 2014, <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2008-10/25-years-later-we-came-peace>.

⁵ Douglas Lute, Briefing to the Author, Brussels, September 2014.

such as Egypt, France and the United Kingdom shaped the internal politics of Lebanon prior to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. The section will then discuss the years under the French Mandate through Lebanese independence in 1943, and how the political boundaries of modern Lebanon came to be. Finally, this section will examine the period between 1943 and 1975, where external actors either directly or indirectly exerted an increasing influence on Lebanon. That influence drew neighboring states into direct conflict in Lebanon. This historical discussion takes the reader to the eve of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975.

Section 2 provides a detailed discussion of the major groups in Lebanon, and their positioning between 1975 and 1982 relative to each other. The author will include the Maronite Christians, the Druze, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Shi'a in Lebanon, and the remaining Sunni in this study. The discussion will include how each group's interactions with each other and with external actors, most notably Israel, Iran, Syria and the Arab League, exacerbated the internal divisions in Lebanon.

Section 3 will examine in detail President Reagan's commitment of US forces to Lebanon in 1983. The discussion will examine the differences in circumstances between 1958, or prior to the presence of the PLO in Lebanon, and 1983, and why that is significant. The discussion will also examine how US policy toward Israel shaped strategic decision-making in the Reagan Administration.

Section 4 will discuss the relevancy of Lebanon in 1983 to today's policy makers. The current situation in Lebanon is rooted in the events leading up to 1983. The rise of Hezbollah, and the current Palestinian conflict in Gaza and the West Bank have roots in Lebanon. Hybrid warfare, a phrase that has gained traction during the current crisis in the Ukraine, is not new,

and external actors using local proxies will continue, and often to the detriment of those local proxies. The section will conclude with some lessons military advisors involved in the security policy process can consider during future crises.

Scholarship

The scholarship on Lebanon, particularly concerning the US intervention of 1982, is prolific. There are several general histories of Lebanon that provide context for the events of latter half of the twentieth century. Fawwaz Traboulsi published *A History of Modern Lebanon* in 2007, providing a detailed examination of Lebanon's sectarian conflict. He notes the twin characteristics of Lebanon's sizeable Christian population and its long exposure to the West and explains the significance of each.⁶ Philip S. Khoury's *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945*, published in 1987, focuses on the rise of Arab nationalism and its effects on Lebanon after World War I.

For information on the Reagan administration's policy toward Lebanon, the author examined sources such as John Boykin's *Cursed is the Peacemaker: The American Diplomat Versus the Israeli General, Beirut 1982*, and Lou Cannon's *President Reagan, The Role of a Lifetime* in 1991, which portrays how the Reagan Administration developed and implemented foreign policy. Raymond Tanter, a staff member on President Reagan's National Security Council, provides an inside view of how the administration dealt with Lebanon in his book, *Who's At the Helm: Lessons of Lebanon*, published in 1990.

⁶ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Books, 2007), vii.

Many authors have examined the effects of US policy in Lebanon and the Middle East. Lawrence Pintak, a journalism professor and former Middle East correspondent for CBS, published *Seeds of Hate: How America's Flawed Middle East Policy Ignited the Jihad* in 2003, examining how the US intervention in Lebanon served as the catalyst for Arab and Muslim enmity towards the US. Matthew Levitt's book, *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God*, published in 2013, examines how conflict in Lebanon allowed Iran to "aggregate under one roof a variety of militant Shi'a groups in Lebanon."⁷.

Lastly, there are many primary sources available for research. Prominent are the US Department of State and the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives that are available publicly. The Israeli source material covers the period of their involvement in Lebanon, Operation Peace for Galilee and beyond, in the 1980s. The US Department of State's archives are available through end of the Carter Administration in 1980.

A History of Lebanon

Lebanon is a small country at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. Just smaller than Connecticut, it is bounded by Syria to the north and east, Israel to the south, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. In 2014, the population of Lebanon was approximately 5.88 million people, of which 59% were Muslim and 40% were Christians. Of the Christians, about half were Maronites, and most of the remainder a mix of Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic.

⁷ Matthew Levitt, *Hezbollah, The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 11.

Among the Muslims, 27% were Sunni, 27% were Shi'a, and 5.6% were Druze, which is a branch of Shi'ism.⁸

The history of Lebanon has been characterized by conflict for centuries. The modern state of Lebanon came into existence as a result of the Lebanese crisis in late 1943, which ended of the French Mandate.⁹ Lebanon itself had been under French mandate since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire following World War I. The crisis was precipitated by a disagreement between the French and the Lebanese Government concerning the ability to amend Lebanese law. Prior to this crisis, Free French Forces and British Forces had occupied Syria and Lebanon in 1941 in response to an increased German presence in Vichy controlled Lebanon and Syria. Concerned about having a strong Axis presence in the eastern Mediterranean, the British Government forced an armistice onto Vichy authorities in the Levant.¹⁰

Free French Forces, under General Georges Catroux, and with the support of Charles de Gaulle, announced they had come to end the mandate and declared Lebanon and Syria free and independent.¹¹ Winston Churchill, appearing before the House of Commons in September 1941,

⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, "CIA World Factbook," accessed September 23, 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>.

⁹ Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism 1920-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 615.

¹⁰ Majid Khadduri, "The Franco-Lebanese Dispute and the Crisis of November, 1943", *The American Journal of International Law* 38, no. 4 (October, 1944): 603, accessed November 5, 2014, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2192794?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

¹¹ Khoury, 593.

stated that Britain did not seek to, “replace or supplant France,” supporting independence for Syria and Lebanon.¹²

For their part, the Lebanese were pleased with the arrival of Allied Forces. The end of the French Mandate also meant a lifting of Allied blockades, and commerce with neighboring states began again. Rare in Lebanon’s history, this change in masters was not accompanied by the use of force. However, the path to final independence was not without issue. Having formed a government by late 1943, the Lebanese found the French less than supportive of full independence than hoped, regardless of earlier proclamations. When French authorities jailed the President and Prime Minister of Lebanon following a dispute over Lebanon’s desire to amend their Organic Law without French approval, the Lebanese almost revolted.¹³ Under Arab pressure from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, Churchill intervened and General Catroux, on 22 November 1943, released the jailed leadership and declared an end to the French Mandate.¹⁴

While independence in 1943 came with relatively little blood shed, conflict preceded the Mandate period, and conflict has been almost constant since independence. Prior to the 1830s, conflict in area of today’s Lebanon was predominantly along family or tribal lines, as individuals and families sought primacy within their particular communities. There were also opportunistic revolts by one or several factions against the rule of the Ottoman Empire, usually following some Ottoman setback, providing an accompanying perception of Ottoman weakness, in

¹² Khadduri, 606.

¹³ Ibid., 613.

¹⁴ Traboulsi, 108.

another part of the Empire.¹⁵ In 1838 the 1838 Druze revolt against the rule of the Egyptian Ibrahim Pasha, sparked by Pasha's repression of the Druze who he saw as infidels. During this revolt, factions in Lebanon began increasingly to fight each other along sectarian lines.¹⁶

This split between Maronites and Druze during the Ottoman and Egyptian conflict, along with other disagreements concerning land ownership and taxation rights, lead to increased armed clashes between Maronite and Druze communities over the next 30 years.¹⁷ In 1843, as part of the resolution of Ibrahim Pasha's expulsion from Lebanon, the Ottomans, in consultation with the European powers, agreed to partition the area around Mount Lebanon into two districts. The northern district was predominantly Christian, and was supported by the French. The district in the south was given to the Druze to rule, although the population was about 60 percent Christian.¹⁸ That the Austrian Chancellor Metternich suggested this compromise illustrates the extent of foreign involvement in Lebanon prior to the twentieth century.¹⁹

The partitioning did not, however, lead to stability. Almost immediately, the Maronites appealed to the French consul to have the southern district placed back under Maronite control. The Druze, who had ruled Mount Lebanon prior to the Egyptian occupation, wanted control

¹⁵ Traboulsi, 5.

¹⁶ Ibid., 12.

¹⁷ Kamal S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 107.

¹⁸ Traboulsi, 24.

¹⁹ Ibid., 24.

over the whole.²⁰ This tension resulted in a series of clashes between Maronite and Druze forces between 1843 and 1860. This period also witnessed increased influence on Mount Lebanon by the French and Ottomans. It also saw the rise of Beirut as the administrative center of power in the region, as Druze and Maronite leaders on Mount Lebanon increasingly sought assistance from the French and Ottomans, and business concerns on the mountain increasingly became beholden to lenders and merchants in Beirut.²¹

The Maronite and Druze conflict in the nineteenth century culminated with the Maronite revolts in 1860. What began as a Maronite peasant revolt against Druze landowners in the Druze districts expanded into recurring violence between Druze and Maronite throughout Mount Lebanon. The Druze, “felt it to be a struggle for successful and lasting ascendancy, or irremediable ruin and humiliation.”²² The ensuing conflict saw thousands of Maronites massacred, but also lead to French intervention, which turned the Maronite military defeat into a, “qualified political victory.”²³

²⁰ Carol Hakim, *Origins of the Lebanese National Idea: 1840-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 67.

²¹ Leila Fawwaz, “The City and the Mountain: Beirut’s Political Radius in the Nineteenth Century as Revealed in the Crisis of 1860,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 16, no. 4 (November 1984): 491.

²² Charles Churchill, *The Druzes and the Maronites under Turkish Rule from 1840 to 1860* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1862), 159.

²³ Carol Hakim, *Origins of the Lebanese National Idea: 1840-1920* (Berkeley: University of California, 2013), 69.

France's influence in Lebanon, following the dispatch of 6000 soldiers to defend the Maronites, increased with the approval of the Ottoman Empire.²⁴ France and the Ottomans agreed to the establishment of the Mutasarrifiyate of Mount Lebanon, which saw Mount Lebanon reorganized into one semi-autonomous region, and administered by a Christian Ottoman. Significantly, France, along with several other European powers, had to agree to the Ottoman's choice.²⁵ Thus, by 1861 Mount Lebanon had witnessed the supplanting of Druze rule by Maronite, the process that began with the Druze decision to back 'Ali Pasha in the 1830s, and Lebanon entered its period of much greater interaction with European powers. Lebanon also entered into a period of relative peace, lasting for the most part until independence, and the departure of French forces, in 1943.

Independent Lebanon

After independence, Lebanon enjoyed a period of relative calm. Developing itself as a center for regional trade and finance, what conflicts there were in Lebanon were generally, "personal feuds between rival political factions seeking to extend their clientage support, or bickering over the spoils of office."²⁶ Lebanon also enjoyed a peaceful transitions of power and civic empowerment as shown when President Bishara Khoury was compelled to leave office by a coalition of secular leaders following questions about nepotism and corruption.²⁷

²⁴ Salibi, 110.

²⁵ Traboulsi, 43.

²⁶ Samir Khalaf, *Civil and Uncivil Violence in Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 104.

²⁷ Ibid., 104.

The demographic landscape of Lebanon was significantly altered, however, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. With the advent of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent war between Israel and the Arab states came expulsion of Palestinians from the area. Upwards of 700,000 Palestinians fled the conflict area, according to a 1951 report by the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine.²⁸ Approximately 100,000 settled into refugee camps in Lebanon. The presence of these refugees, along with the emergence of the PLO in the 1960s, would unfavorably alter the prospects for long-term peace in Lebanon, and would directly lead to conflict between Israel and Lebanon in the 1970s and 1980s.

For Lebanon, the period of relative calm ended in 1958. The crisis was both political versus religious in nature, and was exacerbated once again by factions outside of Lebanon. As in previous conflicts, larger foreign powers, such as Syria and the PLO, fomented unrest in Lebanon to further regional agendas. President Camille Chamoun was a Maronite Christian and was pro-Western. The 1950s saw a rise in pan-Arab nationalism, championed by Egyptian President Gamal Nasser. Chamoun feared that Lebanon would get swept up in this movement and turn into an Islamic Arab state.²⁹ Nasser was also displeased with Chamoun for not severing diplomatic relations with Britain and France during the Suez crisis. For its part, the portions of the Muslim population of Lebanon were attracted to the idea of a pan-Arab state, and the Shi'a

²⁸ United Nations General Assembly, *General Progress Report and Supplementary Report of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, Covering the period from 11 December 1949 to 23 October 1950*. Official Records, 5th sess., accessed November 6, 2014, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/93037E3B939746DE8525610200567883>.

²⁹ Julian Becker, *The PLO* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1984), 90.

were particularly dissatisfied with the uneven distribution of the economic prosperity enjoyed by independent Lebanon.³⁰

These complementary internal and external pressures lead to a short-lived civil war in 1958. The Chamoun government, feeling increasingly vulnerable, enacted a series of laws to curb dissent. Opposition leaders encouraged by Syria and Egypt protested these measures, leading to increased repressive measures by the government. When Egypt and Syria created the United Arab Republic (UAR) with their union in February 1958, Nasser supporters in Lebanon demonstrated. In May 1958, an assailant killed the journalist Nassib-al-Matni. He was a critic of the regime, and anti-regime factions blamed President Chamoun. Finally, Lebanese security forces clashed with pro-Nasser demonstrators in Tripoli in May 1958, killing ten and wounding sixty, inciting violence across Lebanon.³¹

Following the July 14 overthrow of the pro-western Iraqi government, and fearing he would face the same, President Chamoun asked for military assistance from the Eisenhower administration. The U.S. Congress had passed a joint resolution the year before to “promote peace and stability in the Middle East,” which gave the President authority to commit military forces to, “assist any such nation or group of such nations requesting assistance against armed aggression from any country controlled by international communism.”³² On the strength of that, and advised by General Twining, the CJCS, that the Soviets would, “do no more than wring their

³⁰ Khalaf, 107.

³¹ Ibid., 115.

³² Joint Resolution To Promote Peace and Stability in the Middle East, Public Law 85-7, 85th Cong., 1st sess. (March 9, 1957)

hands and deliver verbal protests,” President Eisenhower approved the deployment of over 10,000 Soldiers and Marines into Lebanon to secure the Chamoun administration and restore peace.³³

Called Operation Blue Bat, the deployment was successful in restoring peace in Lebanon. From July until October 1958, US naval and ground forces partnered with Lebanese security forces to maintain peace, while President Eisenhower’s envoy, Robert Murphy, negotiated with Maronite and Druze leaders on a lasting settlement. Murphy was successful in getting the opposing factions to agree to an election in July 1958, which saw the moderate Christian Feud Chehab elected.

Following President Chehab’s election, Lebanon passed back into a protracted period of peace. President Chehab’s term ended in 1964, and he refused to allow a constitutional amendment that would permit him to remain in power. The Presidency passed peacefully to Charles Helou in 1964, and to Suleiman Frangieh in 1970. It was in 1970, however, that the Palestinian presence in Lebanon increasingly destabilized security in the country.

Civil Wars and the Coming of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)

1970 was indeed a watershed year for the Lebanese, as internal security continued to decline. In September 1970, Jordan succeeded in ejecting the PLO under Arafat. Arafat moved his forces to Lebanon, and between 1970 and 1975 increasingly clashed with Lebanese factions. Lebanese demographic and political tensions continued to cause unrest between the ruling Maronites and other Lebanese factions, exacerbated by the presence of the PLO. All of these

³³ John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys: A History of the National Security Council from Truman to Bush* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 83.

tensions combined to serve as a catalyst the Lebanese Civil War that erupted in 1975. The precipitating event, oddly enough, was a fisherman's strike in Sidon in response to former President Chamoun's efforts to monopolize coastal fishing.³⁴ During that strike, a sniper killed the former Mayor of Sidon, Marouf Saad. Protestors blamed the government, and the Lebanese Army's attempt to regain control of the deteriorating situation provided an opening for the PLO to join with and encourage the disaffected Muslim populations to greater violence against the government. The PLO desired a free hand in attacking Israel without Lebanese interference.

The war that followed was brutal and destructive, and was part of the *casus belli* Israel used for invasions into Lebanon in 1978 and 1982. The violence also drew the attention of the United States to Lebanon for the first time since the late 1950s. The continued violence and subsequent Israeli invasion prompted the Reagan Administration to send a peacekeeping force to Lebanon twice in 1983. The first instance was to secure the departure of the PLO from Beirut, and the second to keep peace in an increasingly volatile country. The thesis of this paper remains that the Reagan Administration had little understanding of the geopolitical dynamics in Lebanon, and were thus unsighted on the risks involved in committing military forces. Prior to discussion Reagan's policy decisions, the paper will examine the myriad factions that precipitated the civil war, or who joined in later. Developing an understanding of the interplay among the Maronites, Druze, and Shi'a factions in Lebanon, and the influence of the PLO, Iran and Syria had between 1975 and 1982 will highlight the complexity of an environment Reagan's policy makers never understood.

The Stakeholders in Lebanon, 1982

³⁴ Khalaf, 227.

The previous sections already examined the historical conflict between the Maronite and Druze communities. The confessional model of representative government apportioned among the different Lebanese religious communities had worked for a time, but had fallen apart under the pressure of these external influences.³⁵ The situation in Lebanon in 1982 was far more complex than a simple clash between super powers. As the paper will show, it is a complexity that eluded both the Reagan administration policy makers, as well as some of the local actors as well.

The Shi'a in Lebanon

Scholars have paid much attention to the conflict between the Druze and the Maronites, and to the presence of Syrian forces and the PLO in Lebanon prior to the Israeli invasion. They have conducted less research on the status of the Shi'a minority in southern Lebanon. The bomber that attacked the Marine Barracks was a Lebanese Shi'a, and the operation was most likely organized and supported by either Iran or Syria, and possibly both.³⁶ Iran's ties to the Shi'a in Lebanon go as far back at the 16th century, when the Safavids who ruled Persia sent for clerics from southern Lebanon to help spread Shi'ism, the new state religion.

To present the Shi'a as a unified block in Lebanon is inaccurate, and their history contains examples of the same factionalism present among the Maronites and Druze. In the early years of the French Mandate, support for a Lebanon independent of Syria was generally

³⁵ Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon* (New York: Macmillan International, 1990), 118.

³⁶ Geraghty, 181.

stronger in the Jabal 'Amil region of southern Lebanon. The French were viewed as a means for the Shi'a in the region to regain some of the status they lost during the rule of the Ottoman Ahmad Al Jazzer in the early nineteenth century.³⁷ The Shi'a of the Bekaa Valley, with that region's historic ties to Damascus, were more aligned with Sunni thoughts regarding a pan-Syrian regime comprising both countries.³⁸ In the confusing politics of Lebanon, that meant the southern Shi'a were in agreement with the Maronites, who also supported an independent Lebanon, and the Shi'a in the Bekaa were in agreement with the Sunni.

Agreement did not, however, mean alignment or cohesion, and the Shi'a in both the Jabal 'Amil and Bekaa had little political or social power. The roots of this are ancient, as the Shi'a had never enjoyed political advantage outside of Safavid Persia. Often forced to practice taqiyyah, or the concealment of one's faith, due to Ottoman persecution, the Shi'a were on the margins of power in Lebanon.³⁹ This changed somewhat in 1926, when the French recognized the Shi'a as a separate religious sect, and allowed the Shi'a to open their own courts free of Sunni Hanafi law. Among other actions, this move generally solidified Shi'a support for a separate Lebanon, and guaranteed support for a Lebanese constitution.⁴⁰

The Shi'a population in Lebanon did not, however, enjoy a level of support from the Lebanese government commensurate with Shi'a support for Lebanon. However, neither the

³⁷ Fouad Ajami, *Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shi'a of Lebanon* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 52.

³⁸ Yitzhak Nakash, *Reaching for Power: The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 102.

³⁹ Ajami, 58.

⁴⁰ Nakash, 103.

Shi'a in the Bekaa or in the Jabal 'Amil received the same financing for schools, utilities and hospitals than other parts of Lebanon did. The Shi'a in Jabal 'Amil were further disadvantaged by the lines drawn between the French mandate in Lebanon and the British Mandate in Palestine, which effectively split the Jabal 'Amil between the two. The result was a weakening of social and economic power for both. These factors caused a lasting resentment among the Shi'a beyond independence in 1943, but not enough for the Shi'a to actively protest against. As described by Ali al Zayn, a Shi'a author from Jabil 'Amil, the Shi'a remained, "pessimists and sectarians – a tendency which made them stay away from political movement or rebellion."⁴¹

Into this situation arrived Musa Al-Sadr from Iran in 1959. Al Sadr was from a distinguished line of Shi'a scholars from Qom. The Shi'a revere Qom, and has several significant religious structures associated with the original twelve Imams of Shiite Islam. Al Sadr traveled to Tyre with the intent of working with the Lebanese government to improve social and economic conditions for the Shi'a in Lebanon.⁴² He arrived just after the 1958 Civil War, invited by the Shi'a uluma Abd Sharaf al-Din, who was concerned about the trend toward secularism within the community. The 1958 civil war resulted in both a US military intervention, and the election of Maronite General Fuad Chehab as President. That ushered in a brief hopeful time for the Shi'a, as Chehab sought to advance the concept of a Lebanese state at the expense of "the old politics of warlords and nepotism."⁴³

⁴¹ Ajami, 59.

⁴² Ibid., 87.

⁴³ Ibid., 88.

Chehab's agenda matched that of al Sadr, who also sought to unify the Lebanese Shi'a and promote social and economic programs for the Shi'a community. By strengthening the community, he reasoned the Shi'a would be better able to extract benefits from the state. He founded the Higher Islamic Shi'a Council in 1969 as another means of focusing the efforts of Lebanese Shi'a. During the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, he used the council to lobby the government for larger Shi'a roles in the government administration, foreign service, and military.⁴⁴

Conditions deteriorated for the Shi'a in the early 1970s. First, as already discussed, the emergence of the PLO in southern Lebanon brought friction between the two groups, and between the PLO and the Lebanese Army. PLO fighters built resentment within the Shi'a community by using tactics such as establishing checkpoints in Shi'a areas to extract tolls to fund PLO activities. While these tactics were not confined to the Shi'a areas of Lebanon, they worsened relations between the two groups. All of this worsened security in the south, causing many Shi'a to move north into Beirut.

In the mid-1970s, al Sadr started the "movement of the oppressed" and formed the Amal militia to provide protection and military support for the Shi'a. When civil war in Lebanon began in 1975, al Sadr aligned himself with Kamal Jumblatt's Lebanese National Movement (LNM) against the Maronite government. The LNM were supported by Syria, and when Syrian troops occupied the Bekaa in 1976, al Sadr and many other Shi'a turned against Syria. Israeli military operations in southern Lebanon caused an increase in Shi'a radicalism in the late 1970s

⁴⁴ Nakash, 117.

and early 1980s as well. Some Shi'a did not think Amal was militant enough, and other Shi'a leaders, such as Hussein al Masawi and Hasan Nasrallah formed groups that would coalesce into Hezbollah in the early 1980s.⁴⁵

Al Sadr's influence in Lebanon ended abruptly in 1978. He disappeared while traveling to Libya. With his disappearance, Amal's influence faded while the factions that would become Hezbollah ascended. Many Shi'a rejected Al Sadr's replacement, Nabih Berri, because Berri was seen as cooperating with the Maronite government, and by extension the Israelis.⁴⁶ Unlike Amal, who did not have a foreign patron, Hezbollah received direct support from the new Shi'a power in the region, Iran.⁴⁷ As Shi'a disaffection in Lebanon grew, Iran was well positioned in the late 1970s to leverage this.

Iran

Iran's influence in Lebanon during the 1980s and beyond would have been significantly different without the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Islamic revolutionaries overthrew the Pahlavi government in Iran in February 1979, following years of unrest. The U.S. lost an important regional ally, and the subsequent embassy hostage crisis was instrumental in Jimmy Carter's loss to Ronald Reagan in the 1980 election. Ruhollah Khomeini became Iran's supreme leader, and Iran became the only Shi'a-dominated theocratic state in the Middle East.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁶ Daniel Byman, *Understanding Proto-Insurgencies* (RAND Corporation Counterinsurgency Study, Paper 3, 2007), accessed January 20, 2015, <http://site.ebrary.com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/lib/carl/reader.action?docID=10225479>

⁴⁷ Levitt, 12.

As stated previously, the link between Iran and Lebanon dated back to the Safavid period when Iran brought Shi'a scholars over from southern Lebanon to teach Shi'ism as the state religion in the empire. After the revolution in 1979, the Iranian government was no longer restricted in its efforts to support the Lebanese Shi'a. Iran also sought to export its Islamic revolution and Lebanon was a logical start point. Shortly after Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, Iran sent approximately 1,500 members of its new Islamic Revolutionary Guards Force (IRCG) into the Syrian controlled Bekaa Valley in order to organize and train Lebanese Shi'a.

As the militant Shi'a broke away from Amal and began to form Hezbollah, they operated in the Bekaa Valley, which was controlled by the Syrian. While Iran organized internally after its revolution and began to exert renewed influence on the Lebanese Shi'a, it is important to note the acquiescence of the Syrians. Without Syrian support, Iran would likely not have been as successful in organizing Hezbollah.⁴⁸

Syria

By 1975, Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad had secured his position as Syria's ruler. He became the Syrian Prime Minister in 1970, after overthrowing Salah Jadid. The catalysts of Assad's rise was Syria's defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and Syria's failed military intervention in the Jordanian-PLO conflict of September 1970. During that conflict, the Syrians sent armored forces into Jordan, ostensibly to prevent a Jordanian massacre of the PLO. When Jordan's air force attacked the Syrian columns, it was Assad who ordered the Syrian air force to

⁴⁸ Levitt, 13.

not provide assistance. That caused the Syrian forces to retreat, and also precipitated Jadid's downfall.

Part of the rationale Assad used for not supporting the PLO was an Israeli threat to intervene in support of Jordan. Having lost the Golan Heights to Israel in 1967, Syria remained cautious of fomenting trouble with Israel. When the Lebanese civil war started in 1975, exacerbated by the PLO presence in Lebanon, Syria again used a fear of Israeli intervention as a reason to send troops into the Bekaa Valley in 1976.⁴⁹ Assad thought that continued unrest in Lebanon would provide Israel with a pretext for invasion. The Bekaa Valley provides relatively easy avenues of approach into Syria and Assad sent Syrian forces into the Bekaa to stabilize Lebanon while also protecting his own strategic interests.

Assad was also concerned about domestic politics when he intervened in Lebanon. Assad is of the Shi'a Alawite sect, which ruled Syria over the majority Sunni population. While not a theocracy like Iran, Syria did not look favorably on a Lebanese Sunni lead government displacing the ruling Christian Maronites in Beirut. Assad used the Army and a divide and rule approach internally to maintain order in Syria. He also cultivated ties with the Soviet Union for military support to his Army.⁵⁰ It is that last fact, arguably, that to globalists in the Reagan administration looked at while mentally conflating the Lebanese anti-aircraft missile crisis in 1981 with the larger U.S. – Soviet conflict.

⁴⁹ Taku Osoegawa, *Syria and Lebanon: International Relations and Diplomacy in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 5.

⁵⁰ Osoegawa, 26.

Assad also allied with Iran after the Iranian Revolution and allowed Iran to support the emergent Hezbollah in the Bekaa Valley. Without Syria's occupation of the Bekaa, Iran would not have been able to exert as great an influence. Syria also supported the diminished Amal, and that support would have negative repercussions for Lebanon itself, and for Syrian-Iranian relations in the latter half of the 1980s, as Assad became uncomfortable with the terrorist tactics of Hezbollah, which were at odds with his more cautious approach.⁵¹

In the 1970s and early 1980s, however, the Syrians failed to control the PLO, who moved into Lebanon from Jordan in 1970 as detailed below. The PLO's presence in Lebanon did much to destabilize the country, and exacerbated the civil war that began in 1975. Ultimately, the PLO provided Israel with their rationale to invade Lebanon in 1982, which was the very thing Assad sought to avoid.

The Palestine Liberation Organization

The PLO's origins lie in the founding of Israel after World War II. The desire of the Jewish Diaspora to return to the Holy Land was a centuries-old theme, but gained momentum beginning in the late 1800s. By the middle of the nineteenth century, some 10,000 Jews lived in Palestine, and most of those in Jerusalem.⁵² Following an increase in attacks against Jews in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, known as the pogroms, Jewish immigration to Palestine increased in the late 1800s. Another effect of these attacks was the development of the Zionist movement by Theodore Herzl, who founded the World Zionist Organization in 1896. Over the

⁵¹ Ibid., 34.

⁵² Martin Gilbert, *Israel: A History* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 3.

next half century, the movement gained adherents within the Jewish populations of Europe and the United States, as well as the government of the United Kingdom.

In 1917, the British Government issued the Balfour Declaration, which stated that the United Kingdom favored establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and the British would use "their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of the object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious' rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country." ⁵³ However, in 1915, in order to secure Arab support against the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the British had also promised the Sharif of Mecca support for an independent Arab-ruled state, presumably to include Palestine. The British claim they did not include Palestine in these promissory correspondences, but to subsequent Arab nationalists the promise was a valid one, and was used as evidence of later Western perfidy. ⁵⁴ This would be a theme that arose in Lebanon again during the Reagan administration.

The persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany, culminating in the Holocaust, lead to several hundred thousand Jews emigrating to Palestine during and after World War II. There is great disagreement concerning the fate of the Arabs living in Palestine during this period, depending through which lens one looks. The Palestinians claim to have been thrown off of their ancestral lands wholesale by the Jews, often under threat of violence. The Israelis claim that the

⁵³ Balfour Declaration, The United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), accessed January 20, 2015, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/E210CA73E38D9E1D052565FA00705C61>.

⁵⁴ Becker, 9.

Palestinians willingly left their homes to join the fight against Israel, and thus have no valid claims to Palestinian land any longer.⁵⁵ The Palestinians have maintained their claim of their right to return is still valid today.

The reality was somewhat more complex. The Jewish settlers in Palestine were better organized socially and politically than the Arabs. Under the British Mandate following World War I, the Arabs did develop some administrative and commercial capacity, but not nearly to the extent the Jews had. The Arabs were also divided internally between those who supported the Hussein clan and those of the Opposition. The agrarian majority of Arabs seldom participated in any political processes, and what Arab resistance that did occur against Jewish settlement was lead by the minority urban elites.⁵⁶ For most of the Arabs in Palestine, “the struggle to establish a state was a remote affair.”⁵⁷ Because of these factors, when war eventually came to Palestine, the Arabs were much less well placed to organize a coherent resistance, limiting the options they had in response.

When the United Nations (UN) created the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) in May 1947, that body proposed to end the British Mandate, and partition Palestine between the Arab and Jews. The Jewish Agency, which was the recognized representative of the Jewish population, accepted the plan, while the Arabs, both local Palestinians and the Arab League, rejected it. When the British left, and Israel declared it’s statehood in May 1948, the

⁵⁵ Le Monde Diplomatique, “The Expulsion of the Palestinians Re-examined” <http://mondediplo.com/1997/12/Palestine> (accessed January 20, 2015).

⁵⁶ Benny Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 2nd ed. (West Nyack, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 22.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 27.

long-brewing civil war in Palestine expanded into an interstate war, with Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Egypt invading Israel.

Over the next eighteen months, some 700,000 Arabs left Palestine, most with the expectation of returning once the conflict ended. How many were forced to leave and how many left simply to escape the war is still open to debate. What is clear is that some 400 villages were depopulated, and many of these rendered uninhabitable by mid-1949. In the cities, many Arab houses were simply occupied by Israelis. The Israelis used these circumstances as a justification to disallow the return of refugees.⁵⁸ In short, there were no longer homes for the Palestinians to return to. The displaced Palestinians were forced to settle in neighboring countries, which was ideal for neither the refugees nor those countries. The 150,000 Arabs who remained now constituted a marked minority.⁵⁹ As stated, the rest have maintained that the “right to return” to their former homes and lands remains.

This is the context in which the PLO developed in the 1950s and 1960s. Yasser Arafat emerged in the late 1960s and the leader of Fatah, which was the largest of several groups comprising the PLO. Following the Six Day War in 1967, Arafat began to consolidate his leadership of the PLO from its bases in Jordan. Though defeated by the Israelis at Karamah, the PLO realized a strategic victory, and attracted upwards of 5,000 new fighters from the Middle East and Europe.⁶⁰ In 1969, at the Palestinian National Council meeting in Cairo, Arafat was

⁵⁸ Morris, 552.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 552.

⁶⁰ Becker, 65.

elected chairman of the PLO, and within a year most of the armed Palestinian groups came under Arafat's control.⁶¹

The PLO grew confident enough of their position in Jordan to attempt to establish an autonomous area in the country free from Jordanian governance. Angered by several aircraft hijackings by a sub-group of the PLO in 1970, and concerned about the waning legitimacy of his government in the face PLO defiance, King Hussein attacked the PLO in their bases around Irbid on 15 September 1970.⁶² After two weeks of fighting cost the PLO several thousand casualties, other Arab states brokered a cease-fire between Jordan and the PLO. King Hussein promptly broke this, and the PLO was ultimately ejected from Jordan. Arafat established a new base in southern Lebanon.

Arafat and his PLO were not content to sit idle in Lebanon. Prior to Arafat's ejection from Jordan, those PLO elements already in Lebanon had been fighting the Lebanese Army, and had been attacking Israel from Lebanese territory. The 1969 Cairo Accord between the Lebanese Army and PLO temporarily ended the fighting, and allowed the PLO to continue attacks into northern Israel free from Lebanese interference. The agreement also allowed the PLO to govern its own refugee camps.

By the mid 1970s, the situation in southern Lebanon had become much worse. The PLO continued to attack Israel, and most were directed against civilian targets. The Israelis sent forces into Lebanon in both 1970 and 1972, and responded in kind with indirect fire that killed

⁶¹ Ibid., 69.

⁶² Joseph Nevo, "September 1970 in Jordan: A Civil War?," *Civil Wars* 10, no 3 (July 2, 2008), 217, accessed December 22, 2014, <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/fciv20/current#.VJht1AHk4>.

PLO, Lebanese military and civilians. By this time, Syria under Hafiz Assad was actively arming the PLO, and courting anti-government factions in Lebanon in order to advance its own aim of destabilizing Lebanon. Presumably, Syria still harbored a desire to assimilate Lebanon into a greater-Syria.

Chief among these anti-government factions was the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), which was the armed faction of the Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), led by Kamal Jumblatt. Jumblatt's aim was to change the sectarian quota system in the Lebanese government and gain greater Muslim representation.⁶³ While not dissimilar to Muslim aspirations and subsequent conflict that lead to the 1958 crisis, the presence of the PLO, and the willingness of the Assad regime to participate in the crisis marked a decidedly dangerous shift in the fortunes of Lebanon. The PLO supported Jumblatt as a means of leveraging more autonomy away from the government, and Assad desired to lessen Maronite power.

Meanwhile, PLO attacks into Israel continued. In March of 1978, PLO gunmen used rubber boats to land in Israel, and in the ensuing fighting killed over thirty Israelis. Fatah and Arafat claimed responsibility for the attack, and stated that it was in response to the on-going peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt. Arafat claimed there could be no peace without Palestinian involvement.⁶⁴

⁶³ Nasser Yassin, "Violent Urbanization and Homogenization of Space and Place: Reconstructing the Story of Sectarian Violence in Beirut." New York: United Nations University, accessed December 23, 2014, <http://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/53994/1/636486265.pdf>.

⁶⁴ Dupuy and Martell, 48.

The Israeli response was immediate, and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) launched the Litani River Operation on 14 March 1981 with the purpose of clearing out PLO bases from southern Lebanon. In this, they were successful, and by 21 March imposed a unilateral cease-fire that left them in control of southern Lebanon up to the Litani River. The Carter administration's response was limited to mild protests over Israel using US supplied equipment for "offensive operations," which was against existing agreements.

The cease-fire did not last long, partly because the PLO did not view terrorist attacks conducted outside Lebanon as part of the agreement. Over the next several years, the PLO continued attacks into Israel as well. The Lebanese government remained unable to curb the PLO. During this time, resentment among the Shi'a towards the PLO continued to grow, aiding in the growth of influence of militants among the Shi'a community.

The act that Israel claims as *causus belli* for its 1982 invasion illustrates that even Arafat had to suffer the consequences of factionalism amongst Palestinian organizations. In June of 1982, three members of Abu Nidal's organization shot Israel's Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Shlomo Argov. Abu Nidal was head of the Iraqi-supported Fatah. Iraq allegedly ordered the assassination attempt as a means of provoking Israel. An Israeli invasion, the Iraqis reasoned, would be detrimental to their Syrian rivals. This was indeed one of the many outcomes of the Israeli operation.⁶⁵

The Reagan Administration and Lebanon

⁶⁵ David Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), 134.

It was into this very complex environment that the Reagan administration was drawn in the first two years of the administration. As will be discussed, the policy to deploy forces into Lebanon was based on a poor understanding of this environment. The Marines sent to Lebanon were sent to keep the peace. In that, they failed, paying the price of 241 dead in the truck bombing in October 1983. The DoD's Long Commission, formed in the wake of the bombings, stated that decisions regarding Lebanon were, "characterized by an emphasis on military operations, notwithstanding the fact that conditions upon which the security of the USMNF were based continued to deteriorate as progress toward a diplomatic solution slowed."⁶⁶ In other words, policy and diplomacy were not sufficient to account for the changing operational environment. Arguably, then, the Marines should either not have been deployed, or should have been deployed in much greater numbers, and perhaps in the magnitude of Eisenhower's deployment of 14,000 personnel in 1958.

Before examining President Reagan's decision to deploy forces into Lebanon in 1982, there is utility in considering how the administration configured its national security apparatus, and how effective that apparatus was in making policy. The National Security Act of 1947 created the National Security Council (NSC), charged with advising the President, "with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to national security."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *Report of the DOD Commission on Beirut International Airport Terrorist Act, October 23, 1983* (Washington, DC: Federation of American Scientists, 1983) accessed January 20, 2015, <https://www.fas.org/irp/threat/beirut-1983.pdf>.

⁶⁷ National Security Act of 1947, Title I, sec. 101, Public Law 80-253, 80th Cong., 1st sess. (July 26, 1947).

Every President since has organized his NSC differently, and Reagan put a much different structure in place than his predecessor, Jimmy Carter.

Reagan signed his National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) Number 2 on January 12, 1982. NSDD 2 specified the national security structure for his administration, and it directed a structure larger than Carter used. The directive discussed the individual roles of the National Security Advisor (NSA), as well as the Secretaries of State and Defense, and the director of the CIA. NSDD 2 also directed the establishment of three senior interagency groups (SIG) to, “assist the NSC at large and its individual members in fulfilling their responsibilities.”⁶⁸ The three SIGs addressed foreign policy (SIG-FP), defense policy (SIG-DP), and intelligence (SIG-I), and were to, “establish policy objectives, develop policy options, and make appropriate recommendations” concerning foreign and national security policy.⁶⁹

Each SIG had a specified chair: the Deputy Secretary of State for SIG-FP, the Deputy Secretary of Defense for SIG-DP, and the Director for Central Intelligence for SIG-I. Reagan saw this as addressing the weaknesses in the Carter national security structure, a point on which he campaigned during the 1980 presidential election.⁷⁰

Upon examination, however, Reagan did not emplace a stronger national security system. One need only look at the number of National Security Advisors (NSA) Reagan had during his administration. Over two terms, Reagan had six NSAs, and the longest serving advisor,

⁶⁸ Ronald Reagan, National Security Decision Directive 2, “National Security Council Structure,” January 12, 1982.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ M. Kent Bolton, *U.S. National Security and Foreign Policy Making After 9/11: Present at the Re-creation* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 97.

Robert McFarland, came into office barely a week before the Marine Barracks at Beirut Airport was destroyed by the truck bomb. The previous two advisors, Richard Allen and William Clark, had been marginally effective, given Reagan's propensity to both rely on an inner circle of White House advisors, and his desire to strengthen the hand of the Secretary of State (SECSTATE) in foreign policy formation. An indication of the lessened influence the NSA was Allen's relegation from the West Wing to the basement of the White House. Instead of reporting directly to the President, the NSA now reported to Edwin Meese, who Reagan appointed his Counselor to the President for Policy.⁷¹

Meese was a long-time Reagan insider, and had been chief of staff for Reagan when he was the governor of California. There were two others in the White House who were also long time Reagan associates from his time as governor, James Baker and Michael Deaver, who were Reagan's Chief of Staff and Deputy Chief of Staff. Together, they wielded significant influence on Reagan, and Allen had to clear national security matters through them before the President saw anything. Allen seemed outwardly comfortable with this diminished role, telling a reporter that policy formulation "should be offloaded to the secretary of state."⁷²

Reagan's first SECSTATE was Alexander Haig, the retired NATO Supreme Commander and former White House chief of staff for both Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. Reagan brought Haig on as his chief foreign policy. Reagan wanted to avoid the conflicts between SECSTATE and NSA that had caused friction in the Nixon and Carter administrations. Haig assumed the role

⁷¹ Prados, 449.

⁷² Ibid., 449.

enthusiastically, even bringing a draft National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) that specified the role of the State Department in national security matters to the White House for Reagan to sign on inauguration day. The triumvirate of Meese, Baker and Deaver headed off this effort.⁷³ Haig and the new Secretary of Defense (SECDEF), Caspar Weinberger, drafted a second version for Meese to review that never made into Reagan either. While that effectively forestalled Haig's primacy in formulating national security policy, it also forestalled anyone assuming that role. As stated, Reagan did not sign NSDD-2 until almost a year into his administration, and these unclear lines of authority would not facilitate effective security policy formulation.

Missiles in the Bekaa Valley, 1981

By the time Reagan did sign NSDD-2, the administration had already dealt with a crisis in Lebanon in 1981 that foreshadowed how it would handle subsequent crises there. In response to an attack by Israeli aircraft on Syrian forces in the Bekaa Valley in April 1981, Syria deployed surface to air missiles into Lebanon. Syrian forces had entered Lebanon as nominal peacekeepers in 1976 during the Lebanese Civil War, and Israel considered their presence a threat. Syria's deployment of anti-aircraft missiles violated a tacit agreement between Israel and Syria not to do so, and Israel threatened to destroy the missile batteries with air strikes.

The crisis highlighted the difference in priorities among Reagan's collection of policy advisors. Haig's view, like Reagan's was framed in the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. U.S. Middle East policy at the beginning of the Reagan administration was also

⁷³ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 185.

seeking to build a, “firm, if informal alignment against external threat” from the Soviet Union among Arab states.⁷⁴ This globalist view tended to reduce any conflict in the world as a potential conflict between the two superpowers, regardless of the motivations of the local actors involved. The missile crisis is illustrative of this. The thinking at DOS was that the Syrian missiles were supplied by the Soviets, so clearly the Soviets had an ulterior motive there.⁷⁵

The reality was more complex. As previously stated, Syria had long-standing designs on destabilizing the Maronite government in Lebanon, and minimizing its influence in the Bekaa Valley. Syria also considered the Bekaa key to its defense of the homeland in the event of an Israeli ground attack. When the Syrians entered Lebanon in 1976, ostensibly as peacekeepers, they settled into the Bekaa after withdrawing from positions closer to Beirut. In yet another tacit agreement with the Lebanese, the Syrians agreed not to occupy the Sannine Heights, which lie to the west of the Bekaa Valley and overlook Christian East Beirut.

The Lebanese government, on the other hand, sought to lessen Syria’s influence within its borders. In early 1981, Lebanese forces, lead by Bashir Gemayel, a Maronite, violated the agreement not to occupy the Sannine, and began to encourage the Christian Phalangists in the Bekaa to actively resist the Syrians. Gemayel also directed the improvement of a road to Zahle at the base of the Sannine Heights. In 1981, there was a sizeable Christian population in Zahle, who Gemayel announced he was supporting against Syrian aggression. The Syrians viewed as an

⁷⁴ Laurence I. Barrett, *Gambling with History* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc, 1983), 269.

⁷⁵ Raymond Tanter, *Who’s at the Helm: Lessons of Lebanon* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 21.

overt threat to their forces and their influence in the Bekaa. Gemayel conveniently overlooked the fact that most of the Christians in Zahle were Greek Orthodox and not Maronites like him during this conflict with the Syrians.⁷⁶

The Syrian response was to engage Lebanese positions on the Sannine with artillery and tank fire, and attempt to quell resistance in Zahle by force. In this, they were unsuccessful, and Western governments and Israel condemned their use of artillery into Zahle, and occasionally into Christian East Beirut. It was during these operations that the Israeli air force shot down two Syrian helicopters in April 1981, and Syria responded to that attack by placing the anti-aircraft missiles into the Bekaa as previously stated. Israel viewed these missiles as limiting their ability to conduct reconnaissance flights over PLO dominated southern Lebanon.

In Washington, Reagan's policy team scrambled to respond. Portions of the State Department, to include SECSTATE Haig, and NSC staff tended to take the globalist view that, because the Syrians received arms from the Soviets, placing missiles into the Bekaa represented a Soviet challenge to the pro-Western government of President Elias Sarkis. This perception was bolstered by the Christian orientation of President Sarkis' government, and the Israelis and others spoke of the threat to Christians imposed by a Muslim Syrian force.⁷⁷ Other members of the State Department, such as Middle East special envoy Philip Habib, and the Director for Near East and South Asian affairs Geoffrey Kemp, took a regionalist view, and argued that diplomatic pressure placed on Lebanon, Israel and Syria, could prevent the conflict from expanding into a

⁷⁶ Fisk, 188.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 189.

war between Syria and Israel. The regionalists were supported by members of the Defense Department, who worried that Israeli attacks against the Syrians could jeopardize ongoing talks with other Arab states about access and basing rights for US forces in the event of a Soviet attack into the region.⁷⁸

Ultimately, the missile crisis in early 1981 did not result in a war between Israel and Syria, but the missiles remained in the Bekaa. The policy process the US used to determine a strategy for handling the crisis presaged several trends that would have negative consequences the following year when Israel invaded Lebanon in response to PLO attacks. First, Reagan himself did not exercise leadership over the policy process. Reagan had not signed NSDD-2 yet, which would specify the structure and roles of the NSC, so arguably there was no formal NSC apparatus for developing policy. Reagan was also more concerned at this point in his administration with his domestic agenda and with the larger US-Soviet conflict, and that distracted him from the missile crisis in the Bekaa.⁷⁹

Reagan has been described by Raymond Tanter, an NSC staff member from 1981 to 1982, as unwilling to assert direct leadership, and willing to assume, “that logically coherent priorities would flow from bargaining among the principals” involved in policy formulation among the DoS, NSC, White House staff, and DoD. In the absence of a strong Presidential influence, some other person within the policy apparatus has to exert this influence and guide the process. Since Reagan had reduced NSA Allen’s role in favor of SECSTATE Haig, control was not going to come from the NSA, Allen played a minimal role in this first Lebanon crisis.

⁷⁸ Tanter, 209.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 210.

Haig's position within the administration was also diminished markedly after the assassination attempt against Reagan on 30 March 1981. With the President in the hospital, and Vice President Bush in Texas, Haig stated at a press conference that he was "in control" pending the return of the Vice President. While his motive was the reassure the country that the government was functioning and the crisis was managed, his detractors and the public seized upon that statement as an example of Haig's desire for position and influence. The previous week, Haig had publicly expressed concern to the House Foreign Affairs committee over Bush being selected to lead a Crisis Management Team, which also caused consternation within the administration.⁸⁰ Richard Allen stated in 2011, "Within every Situation Room of every White House, there are struggles for power, control and territory, and clashes of personality and decision-making style. When crisis erupts, as it inevitably does for each president, and as it did on March 30, 1981, those conditions can affect how smoothly the top tier of the executive branch functions."⁸¹ The assassination attempt and aftermath foreshadowed the disjointedness of the Reagan security apparatus during the looming Lebanon Crisis.

Haig's dissatisfaction with the administration was not limited to the Vice President. The former Army general was also increasingly frustrated with the lack of discipline among the

⁸⁰ Bernard Gwertzman, "Haig Says Furor Over Bush's Role Should Now End," *New York Times*, March 27, 1981, accessed January 8, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/03/27/us/haig-says-furor-over-bush-s-role-should-now-end.html>.

⁸¹ Richard V. Allen, "When Reagan Was Shot, Who Was 'In Control' at the White House?," *Washington Post*, March 25, 2011, accessed January 8, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/when-reagan-was-shot-who-was-in-control-at-the-white-house/2011/03/23/AFJlrfYB_story.html.

administration and the President himself. In September 1981, he told journalist Philip Geyelin that the President needed to “tighten up” the security apparatus and acknowledged that NSA Allen, while “doing exactly what the President wanted,” was not an NSA that would bring cohesion to the system.⁸² That Haig would make such an overt statement to a reporter, assuming incorrectly that the remarks were off the record, speaks to the dysfunction within the White House.

Allen would not last much longer as NSA, as Baker and Deaver came to realize that a weak NSA, paired with a SECSTATE increasingly alienated from the President and his inner circle, was detrimental to security policy formulation. By January 1982, Allen had been forced out, and replaced by William Clark. Clark was another California insider with long ties to Reagan, and was made NSA after serving as Deputy Secretary of State under Haig. Haig was content with the move, because Clark was to be given direct access to Reagan without having to go through the triad of Meese, Baker and Deaver. Those three were content with the choice as they saw Clark as a moderating influence on Haig.⁸³

Casper Weinberger, the SECDEF under Reagan, was also content with the selection, as his relationship with Haig was not good either. Their conflict had its origins in the first days of the administration, when Weinberger tried to limit the scope of SECSTATE’s authority. With NSA Allen lacking the power to moderate, this arrangement “lead to a cacophony of voices” speaking

⁸² Barrett, 223.

⁸³ Cannon, 190.

to security policy.⁸⁴ This was the policy apparatus in place in that had to manage diplomacy in the Middle East as war finally did break out in Lebanon the following summer.

Over the winter of 1981 and into 1982, PLO attacks against Israel continued. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, and his Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, felt increasing domestic pressure to reduce the threat to Israel posed by the PLO in Lebanon. Israel had sent ground forces into Lebanon in 1978, advancing as far as the Litani River before withdrawing back into Israel in accordance with UN Resolution 425. That resolution also established the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which proved ineffective in stopping PLO attacks over the next four years. A Lebanese force, called the Southern Lebanon Army commanded by Saad Haddad, was Israel's ally below the Litani, and also proved ineffective in establish control or preventing PLO attacks.⁸⁵

Operation Peace for Galilee

By late 1981, a fragile cease-fire between the PLO and Israel broke down over the issues of Israeli reconnaissance flights and whether PLO terrorist attacks were covered under the cease-fire terms. These ongoing terrorist attacks, culminating with the assassination of Israel's Ambassador to London on June 3, 1982, that gave Israel its *casus belli* for another ground invasion of Lebanon. Called Operation Peace for Galilee, Israel began its ground operations on the morning of June 6.

⁸⁴ Tanter, 136.

⁸⁵ Dupuy and Martell, 61.

Begin informed Reagan that the operation had the dual objectives of destroying the PLO's ability to launch rockets attacks into Northern Israel, and to destroy PLO terrorist bases in Lebanon. While Begin did not mention any intention of reducing the PLO in Beirut itself, there is little doubt now that Sharon never intended to stop his forces at the Litani line, and arguably wanted to force Syria to react to Israeli maneuvers and fight.⁸⁶ This would provide Sharon with the opportunity to force the Syrians out of Lebanon as well. Israel also began its operation with the understanding that Bashir Gemayel's Phalangists would attack the PLO based in West Beirut in conjunction with the Israeli attack. This did not happen, and while this paper focuses on US policy and decision-making, it is instructive to note that Israel, who had decades of experience dealing with Maronite rulers, was no better at divining Lebanese intentions than the US.

The Israeli invasion was nonetheless militarily successful. Israeli forces crossed the Lebanese border on 6 June, and by 8 June, had maneuvered well beyond the Litani River, closing in on the outskirts of Beirut itself in the west. In the east, Israeli forces had entered the southern end of the Bekaa Valley. On 8 and 9 June, the IDF were fighting Syrian forces directly. By 11 June, the Syrians in the Bekaa were defeated, and the IDF had surrounded Beirut with the intent of driving remaining PLO and Syrian forces out of the city.⁸⁷

Reagan's policy team debated how to formulate a response to the Israeli invasion. William Clark had replaced Richard Allen as NSA in January 1982, and unlike Allen had a more direct line into Reagan. Clark sent Reagan a concise memorandum on June 14, 1982 that

⁸⁶ Hirst, 126.

⁸⁷ Dupuy and Martell, 128.

encapsulated his view of the Lebanese situation. He rightly began by stating that, “the war in Lebanon represents a major setback for U.S. diplomacy which requires a fundamental and immediate review of our Middle East Policy.”⁸⁸ Clark stated that the Israeli invasion also provided an opportunity to advance the overall peace process in the Middle East, but that doing so would require Reagan to put extensive pressure on Israel.⁸⁹

U.S. Middle East policy at the beginning of the Reagan administration sought to build a, “firm, if informal alignment against external threat” from the Soviet Union.⁹⁰ Clark listed the three main U.S. objectives as deterring Soviet military aggression, pursuing a comprehensive Middle East Peace, and securing access to oil.⁹¹ The war in Lebanon could potentially derail those objectives, depending upon how the Soviets and other Arab nations responded to both Israel’s invasion and the armed conflict between Israel and Syria in the Bekaa Valley.

Clark also saw opportunity. He correctly stated that Israel’s invasion had significantly weakened the PLO, and had undermined Syria’s position in Lebanon. Clark also said that failing to prevent the Israeli invasion had damaged the U.S. position in the region as well. In Clark’s opinion, Reagan had an opportunity to leverage U.S. support to Israel and offers of assistance to secure and stabilize Lebanon against Israel’s occupation policies in the West Bank and Gaza to bring resolution to those issues. Clark summed up the opportunity by stating the Lebanese crisis

⁸⁸ William P. Clark to Ronald Reagan, June 14, 1982, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Barrett, 269.

⁹¹ Clark to Reagan.

and the Middle East peace process were linked, and “success in both will dramatically enhance our position,” while accomplishing strategic objectives.⁹²

Not everyone agreed with Clark. While Reagan acknowledged the damage done to U.S. relations in the region, he did not publicly criticize Begin. SECDEF Weinberger was in favor of demanding an immediate cessation to fighting, curtailing military aid to Israel, and to renewed discussion on Palestinian autonomy.⁹³ SECSTATE Haig did not support linking the Lebanese crisis to the broader U.S. Middle East strategic objectives, and proposed a six-point local solution. Haig also did not support sanctions against Israel or cutting military aid.⁹⁴

Initial Commitment of Forces: Extracting the PLO

The administration began discussing the possibility of sending forces to Lebanon as part of a multi-national peacekeeping force (MNF) as early as June 14. General John W. Vessey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), initially urged Casper Weinberger to dissuade President Reagan from committing forces, writing on June 19, 1982 that, it would “be very unwise for the U.S. to find itself in a position where it had to put its forces between the Israelis and the Arabs.”⁹⁵ Haig, in his waning days as SECSTATE, supported the idea of peacekeeping forces, but only after the PLO had withdrawn and the Lebanese government in charge again. The problem with Haig’s desire was that no country was willing to take the PLO. Haig did begin

⁹² Clark to Reagan.

⁹³ Cannon, 396.

⁹⁴ Clark to Reagan.

⁹⁵ Cannon, 398.

discussions with several nations to determine support for a peacekeeping force “in principle” but specified no mission parameters at that point.⁹⁶ Philip Habib, Reagan’s special envoy to the Middle East, countered that other countries would not provide forces if the United States did not, and that the PLO would not be willing to “walk out under Israeli guns.” He shared that concern not with Haig, but with NSA Clark, George Shultz, who would replace Haig within a month as SECSTATE, and Reagan, all of who were in California at the time.⁹⁷

Reagan approved the plan on July 2, but did not release the news. As often happens, somebody leaked the decision to the press, this time the Israeli press, who published news of Reagan’s approval on July 6. In a press conference in California later that day, Reagan confirmed his decision to send in forces. The peacekeepers were to separate Israeli and Palestinian forces, assist in evacuating the PLO from Beirut, and facilitate the Lebanese Army in establishing control of the city.⁹⁸ While the above does not represent the totality of discussions pertaining to committing forces, it does illustrate how Reagan was more comfortable discussing issues with trusted advisors than in formal policy meetings, where participants often disagreed and argued.

In the mean time, the IDF continued its attacks into Beirut. They did so knowing the U.S. peacekeepers were on the way, and did so in defiance of a UN Security Council resolution calling for yet another cease fire.⁹⁹ By August 12, with the PLO surrounded in Beirut and civilian casualties mounting, Reagan personally called Begin to demand a cease-fire. Begin assented,

⁹⁶ Cannon, 398.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 399.

⁹⁸ Tanter, 150.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 152.

causing Reagan to tell Michael Deaver, “I didn’t know I had that kind of power.”¹⁰⁰ There remained considerable pressure to get peacekeepers into Beirut. Arafat, knowing a full scale assault by the IDF into West Beirut would devastate the PLO, agree to evacuation to Tunis, but asked for assurances that the IDF guarantee the security of Palestinian refugees staying behind.¹⁰¹ Habib offered assurances that U.S. forces would remain in Beirut for up to 30 days to ensure security.¹⁰²

The force chosen to represent the United States in the MNF was a battalion landing team (BLT) from the 32nd Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU). Marine General Robert H. Barrow expressed his misgivings about the mission in a memorandum to CJCS Vessey on August 9, 1982. Among his concerns were the “vague and ill-defined mission” that did not specify the extent of the MNF’s mission. Barrow also expressed concern over the lack of unity of command among political and military decision makers. He also rightly expressed that there were many other factions besides the PLO that could “disrupt the operation,” and the MNF had no specific withdrawal guidance for that eventuality.¹⁰³ The author found no sources indicating the MNF received any further clarity in task and purpose before deploying to Beirut.

French forces arrived to establish the MNF on 21 August 1982, followed by the Maries and an Italian contingent four days later. Fortunately, the evacuation of the PLO proceeded

¹⁰⁰ Prados, 470.

¹⁰¹ Prados, 470.

¹⁰² Timothy J. Geraghty, *Peacekeepers at War: Beirut 1983- The Marine Commander Tells His Story* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, Inc, 2009), 5.

¹⁰³ Robert H. Barrow to John W. Vessey, August 9, 1982, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.

without major incident and was complete by September 1. Instead of leaving the MNF in Beirut for a full thirty days as promised by Habib, SECDEF Weinberger ordered the Marines to withdraw on September 10. This caused considerable alarm among Lebanese Arabs and the Palestinians.¹⁰⁴ The Marine's commander, Colonel Jim Mead, expressed to a visiting SECDEF Weinberger in Beirut that redeploying too soon could jeopardize security. Weinberger did not change his decision.¹⁰⁵ As it turns out, they had reason to be concerned.

The Second Commitment: UN Peacekeeping Force

On September 14, 1982, the former Christian Phalangist commander and Lebanese President-elect, Bashir Gemayel was assassinated by a fellow Maronite named Habir Shartouni. Bashir Gemayel's brother, Amin, soon replaced him. On 15 September, the IDF entered West Beirut, ostensibly to protect Palestinian refugees. However, under the eyes of watching Israelis, Phalangist militia entered the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila on September 18 and massacred several hundred Palestinians. The IDF did nothing to stop the killing. Some reports indicated the IDF fired illumination rounds over the camps.¹⁰⁶ On 19 September, Reagan decided to send the MNF back into Lebanon over the objections of Weinberger and CJSC Vessey. Those objections were either not voiced in front of the President or were muted, because Reagan states in his diary for September 19 that "apparently there was no disagreement."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Geraghty, 5.

¹⁰⁵ John Boykin, *Cursed is the Peacemaker: The American Diplomat Versus the Israeli General, Beirut 1982* (Belmont: Applegate Press, 2002), 266.

¹⁰⁶ Geraghty, 7.

¹⁰⁷ Reagan, 101.

The assumptions military planners used were that the MNF would be on the ground for sixty days, and that the population would be friendly. The NSC also discussed the scope of the mission and how to approach the removal of Israeli and Syrian forces from Lebanon. NSC Advisor Clark and others suggested sending a force equal or larger than the 14,000 personnel Eisenhower had deployed in 1958. This echoes the thoughts he provided to Reagan in June, that the U.S. could leverage the situation in Lebanon for larger strategic goals if planned and resourced properly.¹⁰⁸ Dissent came from SECDEF and CJCS Vessey. Both objected to the number of troops in the proposal. Vessey continued to oppose deploying forces, but international and domestic pressure convinced Reagan to approve the deployment.

The Marines returned to Lebanon on 29 September 1982 and established their operations around BIA. Instead of 14,000 personnel, the Marines numbered just 1,200. France, Italy and Britain also provided forces to the MNF. The mission for the MNF was now to, “establish an environment which will permit the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to carry out their responsibilities in the Beirut area.” The MNF also had rules of engagement (ROE) limiting it to defensive measures and self-protection. Most importantly, the MNF was to be neutral towards the myriad factions in Lebanon.¹⁰⁹

With the MNF back in Lebanon, diplomats still had issues to solve. Chief among these was how to get Israeli and Syrian forces out of Lebanon. Again, the Reagan policy team disagreed over whether to facilitate a separate peace between the Government of Lebanon (GOL) and Israel as a precursor to unilateral Israeli withdrawal, or to seek withdrawal of all

¹⁰⁸ Cannon, 410.

¹⁰⁹ Geraghty, 8.

foreign forces. In the discussions at the time, “all foreign forces” generally meant Israel and Syria. The PLO ostensibly had already left, and planners made no mention of the 1,500 IRGC forces operating in the Bekaa Valley alongside the Syrians. The IRGC continued to train Shi’a militants in the recently formed Hezbollah.

While Israel was open to a separate peace with GOL, the Syrians were not. Syrian policy in 1983 remained to consolidate its political and military position in Lebanon by securing submissiveness and cooperation of GOL, removing American and Israeli influence, and continuing to support its local proxies, Hezbollah and the Druze LNM. Syria also continued to allow the IRGC to operate in the Bekaa valley, and on April 18, 1983 Hezbollah, with assistance from their Iranian patrons, destroyed the American Embassy in Beirut with a large truck bomb.

This attack was significant for several reasons. First, Robert Ames and seven other CIA officials died. Ames was the primary U.S. source for intelligence in Lebanon, and the MNF’s intelligence capability would not recover. Second, Hezbollah could not operate without Syrian and Iranian support, and the attack signaled both Syrian intransigence and a willingness of Hezbollah to attack Americans. While time has provided a clearer picture of who was involved, U.S. signal intercepts at the time implicated Hezbollah and the Iranians. However, most viewed the attack as just another in a series of unfortunate attacks in Beirut, and the MNF did not change its operational and security posture in response.¹¹⁰

On 17 May 1983, Israel and GOL signed an agreement ending the war between the countries, and stipulating the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. Syria and Lebanese

¹¹⁰ Cannon, 411.

Muslims reacted negatively to the agreement, seen as maintaining the Maronite status quo in GOL. In July, the Druze leader Walid Jumblatt formed the “National Salvation Front” in opposition to the agreement, and he received Syrian support. Fighting increased in the Shouf Mountains overlooking Beirut between the Druze one side, and the Christian Phalangists and Lebanese Army on the other. The Muslim population in Lebanon increasingly lost faith in the neutrality of the MNF because of their role supporting the training the LAF. When Israeli forces did withdraw from the Shouf in on September 4, 1982, fighting among the factions markedly increased. With just 1,200 personnel in Lebanon, and with Syria actively supporting the Druze, the U.S. MNF had few options.¹¹¹

One of these was to fire artillery in support of the LAF. The current MNF commander, Colonel Timothy Geraghty, was opposed to this. He knew it would permanently compromise and remaining neutrality the MNF possessed. Robert McFarlane, who replaced Habib as Reagan’s special envoy to the Middle East, pressed the Pentagon to order Geraghty to request artillery support, arguing that the LAF would be defeated in the Shouf without it. Geraghty had better situational awareness, and knew the LAF commander in contact was prone to panic. He rightly argues that supporting the LAF with artillery fire would alienate the Muslims and increase attacks against the MNF. McFarlane prevailed, and Geraghty requested the support.¹¹² While the immediate result was the LAF prevailing in the Shouf, the outcomes for the MNF were disastrous.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 421.

¹¹² Geraghty, 68.

The attacks against the MNF did increase, and on September 26, 1983, the National Security Agency intercepted an Iranian signal directing the Iranian Ambassador in Damascus, “to take spectacular action against the American Marines.” Geraghty’s chain of command received that intelligence on 26 October 1983. Unfortunately, on 23 October 1983, Hezbollah drove a truck bomb larger than the one employed against the American Embassy in April into the Marine Barracks in BIA, killing 241 U.S. personnel. Hezbollah also attacked the French MNF that day, killing 58 personnel. Reagan’s immediate reaction was to reinforce the vital nature of the MNF mission. However, domestic pressure ultimately forced him to withdraw the MNF in February 1984. For many reasons, the mission was a failure, but paramount was committing to few forces into a poorly understood environment.

The Consequences of US Policy in Lebanon

“Beware of small states,” wrote Mikhail Bakunin in 1871.¹¹³ While Bakunin was writing about the presence of ethnic Germans in small European states, the sentiment is appropriate to Lebanon. The lasting effects of the Lebanese crisis in the 1980s are larger than the country’s physical size would indicate.

Syrian forces would remain in Lebanon until April 2005. The Syrians continued to work against stability in Lebanon, and along with Iran continued to provide support and training to Hezbollah. Hezbollah began a campaign of kidnappings and killings of Westerners. Hezbollah also replaced the PLO as Israel’s chief antagonist in Lebanon. There was hope that after Israel withdrew completely from Lebanon in 2000 that Hezbollah would transition entirely from a

¹¹³ Mikhail Bakunin, *Les Empires Knuoto-Germaniques et la Revolution Sociale* (Geneva: Imprimerie cooperative, 1871), 50.

militia to a political party. That did not happen. While Hezbollah did secure seats in the Lebanese Parliament and engage in national politics formally, they never disbanded their militant arm. In 2006, in response to continued attacks from Hezbollah, Israel invaded Lebanon once again with negative consequences for both countries. The group has also shown little willingness to become accountable to the non-Shiite communities in Lebanon.¹¹⁴

In 2008, Hezbollah staged what amounted to a coup in Lebanon, as the GOL was unable to develop an inclusive government. While Syria's influence in Lebanon fell markedly with the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Iran retains influence over Hezbollah and continues to threaten regional security. As of January 2015, Iran and Hezbollah continue to collude against Israel.¹¹⁵ As long as Iran and Hezbollah continue along these lines, there remains little hope for increased security for either Israel or Lebanon.

The withdrawal of the MNF also signaled to other terrorist organizations that U.S. policy could be changed through terrorism. Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden claimed to be inspired to attack the United States in 2011, "because of injustices against the Lebanese and Palestinians by Israel and the United States."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Mohamad Bazzi, "Hezbollah & Iran: Lebanon's Power Couple," Council on Foreign Relations, October 14, 2010, accessed January 20, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/iran/hezbollah-iran-lebanons-power-couple/p23163>.

¹¹⁵ Chris Pleasance, "Iran and Hezbollah are planning 'imminent' joint invasion of Israel's northern Galilee region according to 'high level intelligence'," *Daily Mail Online*, January 20, 2015, accessed January 21, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2918478/Iran-Hezbollah-planning-imminent-joint-invasion-Israel-s-northern-Galilee-region-according-high-level-intelligence.html>.

¹¹⁶ Joel Arak, "Osama Bin Laden Warns America," *CBS News*, October 30, 2004, accessed January 21, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/osama-bin-laden-warns-america/>.

Lastly, the United States missed an opportunity to broker a regional peace solution that encompassed Israeli, Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese concerns. In retrospect, taking the short view of a limited presence designed to separate the warring parties to allow GOL to reestablish control instead of taking a more comprehensive approach as put forth by NSA Clark failed to address the root causes of the conflict. As Clark correctly stated, the U.S. had an opportunity to “dramatically strengthen our position throughout Southwest Asia.” That would have required a reevaluation of our approach to Israel by linking U.S. support to Israel to Palestinian autonomy talks. Clark again correctly indicated that would have, “would be costly in political, military and economic terms” depending upon the reactions of OPEC and other Arab states.¹¹⁷ Reagan chose the short view, and never seriously considered Clark’s approach.

Conclusion: Lesson for Military Planners

There are many lessons military planners can glean from the U.S. involvement in Lebanon. The lessons are instructive for personnel directly involved in the policy process, as well as instructive in developing a useful understanding of the operational environment. This section will also comment on the findings of the retired Admiral Long Commission, which Reagan appointed to investigate the Marine Barracks bombing.

For military planners involved in the policy process, the U.S. involvement in Lebanon clearly illustrates that security policy formulation at the national level is not simply a matter of NSC procedures and structures detailed in Presidential directives. Policy formulation is also largely a matter of the personalities and relationships of those involved with the process. In the Reagan administration internal conflicts among SECSTATE, SECDEF and Reagan’s personal

¹¹⁷ Clark to Reagan.

advisors impeded effective policy formulation. Changes in key personnel also effected policy formulation, and the Reagan administration changed the NSA and SECSTATE, as well as the special envoy dealing with Lebanon at the height of the crisis. While military planners have little control over these disputes, they surely need to be aware of and account for them while determining what military course of action to recommend.

The second lesson concerns developing an understanding of the operational environment. From the start, most involved in the policy process viewed the Lebanese crisis through the lens of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. Lebanon was a regional conflict fought by regional actors, of which the policy makers developed little understanding. Such reductionist thinking is counterproductive. Misunderstanding Syrian intentions, not heeding signs of Iranian involvement, and underestimating the volatility of the Maronite-Druze relationship at the center of the crisis caused U.S. planners to make poor assumptions that no one challenged. Concerning the deployment of the MNF for the second time after the Sabra and Shatila massacres, CJSC Vessey said about the mission, “once we got over our feeling of guilt (about the massacres) and a little bit of law and order was established, the Marines would be withdrawn.” He went on to say that the assumption that “things were going to get better” was wrong.¹¹⁸

A more thorough understanding of the local dynamics would have shown that assumption wrong and suggested a different policy. Lebanon in 1982 was vastly different than in 1958. The primary difference was the disruptive influence of external actors such as the PLO,

¹¹⁸ Cannon, 409.

Israel, Syria, and Iran. In light of those, one struggles to understand how Reagan thought 1,200 Marines could accomplish what it took Eisenhower's 14,000 personnel to accomplish.

After the Marine Barracks bombing, Reagan appointed retired Admiral Robert L. Long to investigate the incident. Long's conclusions are instructive for future planners as well, with the first one concerning the mission being perhaps the most important. He states that the mission was, "not interpreted the same by all levels of the chain of command" which caused confusion. He concludes that, "U.S. decision as regards Lebanon taken over the past fifteen months have been, to a large degree, characterized by an emphasis on military options," and that, "there is an urgent need for reassessment of alternative means to achieve U.S. objectives in Lebanon."¹¹⁹ That the military is not the sole solution to developing comprehensive security in Iraq and Afghanistan is a recurrent theme. The U.S. continues to lack the capacity for holistic "nation building" and it is clear we have not heeded Long's recommendation.

¹¹⁹ Robert L. J. Long, *Report of the DoD Commission on Beirut International Airport Terrorist Act, October 23, 1983 (Long Commission)*, Department of Defense, December 20, 1983, accessed January 21, 2015, <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/AMH/XX/MidEast/Lebanon-1982-1984/DOD-Report/>.

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