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Comparison between Italian and American mission during  
Multinational Force II, Beirut 1982-84.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Title:** Comparison between Italian and American mission during Multinational Force II, Beirut 1982-84.

**Author:** Lcdr Leonardo MARTELLA, ITN.

**Thesis:** There were several differences in the conduct of the mission between the Italians and Americans. The Americans focused on the strategic and political level providing security and training to the Lebanese Armed Forces and with diplomatic efforts. The Italians focused mainly on the tactical and humanitarian aspects, providing support to civilians. This resulted in fewer casualties for the Italians.

**Background:** The mission in Lebanon from 1982-84. In this mission the Lebanese government requested military intervention in order to re-establish lost peace. This request was done through bilateral exchange of diplomatic letters with The United States, France, Italy and Great Britain.

**Discussion:** The location of the contingents influenced the conduct of the mission. The Italian contingent was located in a highly populated area. The American contingent was located at the international airport, which had a low population density. Consequently, they focused more on the support of the Lebanese government rather than of the population.

The reaction to attack was different. The Italians tried to hold the conflict to a low intensity level by responding to attacks promptly

and proportionately. The US MNF responded with a heavier use of weapons.

How the forces were deployed influenced the mission. The Italian contingent had a turnover established in order to allow continuity of the mission with a core constituted by 60-80 key personnel. The USMNF, constituted by a Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU), changed each 4 months, losing continuity in the field.

The unity of command was relevant. The Italian contingent had clear unity of command. In contrast US MNF did not have unity of command.

**Conclusion(s) or Recommendation(s):** The Lebanese crisis was a difficult testing in peacekeeping for the Multinational forces. All the forces deployed in Lebanon suffered not only for the casualties incurred but also for the result gained. It was not a military failure because it was a diplomatic mission. Political factors are responsible for the unfortunate outcome. The lack of coordination among different contingents through the national authorities was perhaps the main reasons for the failure of the MNF as a whole. So, if a multinational force is to be successful, then the initiative must be truly multinational from the political top to the military bottom.

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## PREFACE

It is not easy to analyse a tragic event with lives lost and the mission not achieved. The research is complicated by the short time passed and the unavailability of classified documents. For that reason my research was focused mainly on books, newspapers, periodicals, and general documents available on the Internet and at the Marine Corps Research Center.

I would like to thank my Mentors, whose many suggestions have greatly improved my paper: Dr John B. MATTHEWS and Dr Craig A. SWANSON.

Special thanks are due to "Policlinico Militare di Roma - Celio", to its Commandant Brig. General doctor Vito Contreas and Lt. Colonel doctor Vincenzo Barretta, Chief of Department of Pharmacy.

## Introduction

"They came in peace".<sup>1</sup> These words do not come from a priest but from a wreath that was placed in front of a destroyed building located in Beirut, Lebanon. In that building several Marines and sailors were killed while they attempted to restore peace in Beirut. They operated as a peacekeeping force.

It is hard to establish when this kind of military deployment to maintain peace started in human history. But it is correct to say that in the last century they are used more often with different names: Peacekeeper, Peacemaker, Peace Enforcer. In any case, they are soldiers for peace.

It is possible to recognize these soldiers by different uniforms but with the same hat and the same command, the blue hat of the United Nations. Not all military missions for peace are characterized by United Nations dependence. Sometimes, it is not possible or suitable to act under the auspices of the United Nations. In these circumstances the Peacekeepers usually wear their own national colors and act in accordance with their national military command.

It sounds strange that soldiers operate, sometimes fight, to for peace in another country. An example of this is the mission in

Lebanon from 1982-84. In this mission the Lebanese government requested, through an exchange of bilateral diplomatic letters with different countries, military intervention in order to re-establish peace. The United States, France, Italy and Great Britain responded to this request. This Multinational Force deployed forces to Beirut with the clear intent to re-establish peace. These troops constituted the Multinational Force.

Initially the Multinational Force operated to withdraw Syrian and Palestinian fighters from Beirut (MNF I). This operation lasted less than a month and was considered a full success.<sup>2</sup> The second time, the Multinational Force helped the Lebanese government to re-establish authority in Beirut (MNF II). This mission lasted 18 months and was considered a failure.<sup>3</sup>

The Multinational Force II is considered a bloody episode in peacekeeping history. Hundreds of soldiers were killed trying to accomplish the mission, especially Americans and French. The Italian contingent, however, suffered only minor incidents, with one dead.

There were several differences in the conduct of the mission between the Italians and Americans. The Americans focused on the strategic and political level providing training to the Lebanese

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<sup>1</sup> The same words are used for the Memorial at the entrance of Camp Johnson (Jacksonville, North Carolina) and a brochure created to remember the casualties suffered during this peaceful mission in Beirut.

Armed Forces and with diplomatic efforts. The Italians focused mainly on the tactical and humanitarian aspects, providing support to civilians. This resulted in fewer casualties for the Italians.

This paper examines the Multinational Force II. In particular, it examines the Italian and American missions. After that, the paper compares both missions marking the most significant differences. Finally, the work concludes with some personal considerations.

### **Lebanon, a soil for the confrontation**

Lebanon is geographically located in the eastern Mediterranean area. In the ancient era it was the natural gate between Europe and Asia. It prospered, economically and culturally, by taking advantage of this position. In this country several communities found refuge from oppression. It was easy to see different cultures, some times opposed, living side by side peacefully. Still today, it is possible to see evidence of this style of living in the architecture (Figure 1).

Lebanon, despite its glorious origin, has become a country where numerous forces confront each other over fundamental religious and

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<sup>2</sup> From 25 August until 10 September 1982

political issues. It is not a wealthy and peaceful state any longer. Today, this small state, with 3.6 millions of people, is sadly known for the recent 16-year civil war, for continued internal destruction, and its religious intolerance.<sup>4</sup> It is trying to reach stability by dividing the executive power of the government among the main factions.<sup>5</sup> Even so, Lebanon remains a colorful state, divided by internal and external forces (figure 2).



Figure 1. Reproduction of a street in Beirut where a mosque and a church are side by side.

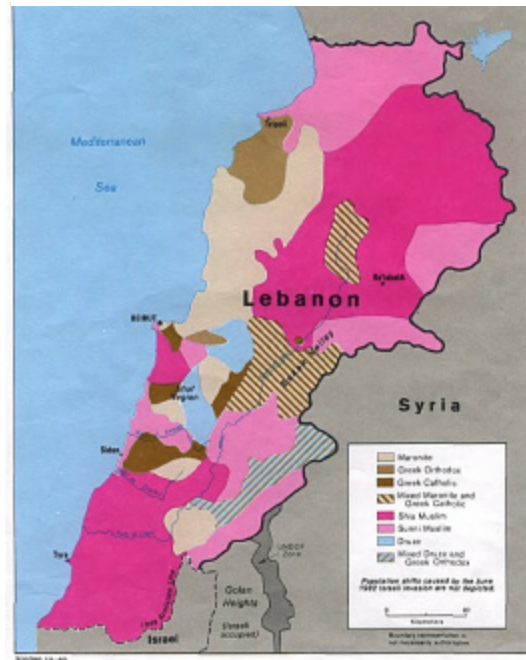


Figure 2. Distribution of religious groups.

These forces were more evident in the 1980s. The Soviet Union and United States conducted one of their last battles of the Cold War

<sup>3</sup> From September 1982 until March 1984

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/lebanon> accessed on 15 November 2001

<sup>5</sup> National Pact of 1981 specifically states that the president is a Maronite Christian, the prime minister is a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the legislature is a Shi'a Muslim

on this soil.<sup>6</sup> Syria and Israel fought there to gain control over Lebanon.<sup>7</sup> Religious and social tensions provided fertile ground for international games dividing the population.<sup>8</sup> The Israeli invasion in 1982 further complicated matters.

### **Chronology of a disaster**

On 6 June 1982 the Israeli Army invaded southern Lebanon as a response to continued terrorist actions conducted by members of the Palestinian militia located in the area.<sup>9</sup> Although the Palestinians were supported by Syria not only politically but also militarily, Israeli action was so effective that they quickly encircled the headquarter of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Beirut. The international community's response was a unanimous condemnation of Israel's aggressive action.

On 15 June 1982 France proposed a resolution to the United Nations Security Council calling for a ceasefire, a mutual withdrawal

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<sup>6</sup> At the end of the mission the U.S. "loses" Lebanon to the Muslims, and indirectly to the Syrians, and even more indirectly to the Soviets. James Kelly, "All hell breaking loose", *Time*, 20 February 1984, 33

<sup>7</sup> Israel wanted to eliminate PLO located in Lebanon and to create a government favourable. Syria desired to constitute the "greater Syria" where Lebanon was part of it. Dawisha Adeed, "The motives of Syria's involvement in Lebanon", *The Middle East Journal*, 229. Ze'ev Schiff, "Lebanon: motivations and interests in Israel's policy", *The Middle East Journal*, 225.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony McDermott and Skjelsbaek Kjell, *The Multinational Force in Beirut 1982-1984* (Miami, FL: Florida International University Press, 1991), 248

in Beirut and a more active role for United Nations Forces. Israel opposed United Nations intervention because several times their actions were in conflict with United Nations authorities over key Middle East issues.<sup>10</sup> Yasser Arafat, Palestine Liberation Organization leader, opted for a Multinational force because it could be formed more quickly than a United Nations peacekeeping force.<sup>11</sup> The United States tried to convince the Israelis to use United Nations forces but this initiative failed.<sup>12</sup> The situation could be potentially very dangerous for eventual deployment of forces in Lebanon. For these reasons the United States vetoed the United Nations resolution.<sup>13</sup>

Other Arabic countries complicated the diplomatic efforts because they saw United States diplomacy as an attempt to impose Israeli/Western culture in the area. But when they were challenged to take a more active role to solve the crisis, the Arab states declined. Apparently no Arab country wanted to accept the Palestine Liberation Organization within their borders.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The real aims of Israel's Peace for Galilee campaign: to destroy the P.L.O., eject the Syrians from Lebanon, and reinforce Lebanon's Christian-dominated government. Kelley, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Transcript, Ambassador Dillon Robert. Participating the seminar "Marines in Lebanon. A ten year retrospective: Lessons Learned" in the Marine Corps University, 03 May 1993.

<sup>11</sup> George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: my years as secretary of state*, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1993), 46.

<sup>12</sup> Dillon

<sup>13</sup> Jim Muir, "Lebanon: arena of conflict, crucible of peace", *The Middle East Journal*, 212.

<sup>14</sup> Shultz, 47.

In order to avoid economical and political pressure, Israeli leaders agreed with the Lebanese government and United States to allow the evacuation of all Syrian and Palestine Liberation Organization armed forces from besieged Beirut. The final diplomatic solution was the constitution of a Multinational Force of Peace (MNF I). The Multinational Force had the limited mission of evacuating the combatants from Beirut to a safe haven. Israel accepted this solution because a pro-Israeli government had come to power in Lebanon in the meantime.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, it was known that this government was not representative of all Lebanese factions. In fact, the Sunni Muslim community was forced to accept this government.<sup>16</sup>

A different understanding about the Multinational Force role created another tension. For Multinational Force participants and the Lebanese government the goal consisted only of the safe departure of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Arafat, the Palestinian leader, understood the mission to be protection of all Palestinians, civilian and combatants. Arafat agreed to the Palestine Liberation Organization militias departure under the condition that all Palestinians, even those left behind in the Lebanese refugee camps, would be protected against retaliation. Ambassador Philip Habib,

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<sup>15</sup> Bashir Gemayel, from Christian enclave, was lifted to the presidency by Israel's intervention. Schiff, 221.

<sup>16</sup> In August 1982, Summi Muslim proposed a prolonged mandate of the former president Sarkis. Bashir Gemayel, leader of Christian community and father of the proposed president, threaten the use of Christian militia backed by Israeli forces. Shultz, 75.

United States special presidential envoy, who obtained assurances from the Lebanese and Israelis, agreed to this condition.<sup>17</sup>

With Palestine Liberation Organization forces evacuated, the mission was accomplished, and the Multinational Force departed from Lebanon. It is important to remark that the Multinational Force leaders were unaware of Habib assurance.<sup>18</sup> Anyway, the situation quickly returned to normal, but it was a short peace. On 14 September a terrorist killed the newly elected president Bashir Gemayel. Israel interpreted the assassination as a direct threat and responded by occupying Beirut on 15 September in order to prevent chaos.<sup>19</sup> On 16 September, under the cover of Israel's military presence, members of the Phalange militia entered the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila and systematically massacred hundreds of men, women and children.<sup>20</sup>

The media reported images of this massacre worldwide. The Lebanese government, which was re-established with the election of Amin Gemayel as president, requested a new Multinational Force (MNF II) to intervene in order to restore peace in Beirut. This request came in the shape of a diplomatic letter sent to the United States, France, Italy and Great Britain. The new Lebanese president turned to the West when it was clear that the United Nations Security Council

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<sup>17</sup> Shultz, 103-105.

<sup>18</sup> Dr John B. Matthews

<sup>19</sup> McDermott and Skjelsbaek, 131

would not support a peacekeeping force in Beirut and that the United Nations could not move fast enough.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately the absence of United Nations' forces jeopardized the mission from the beginning. In fact the second Multinational Force was seen as a:

Peace and containment force: its function was both to preserve the peace in Beirut and contain Soviet communist expansion in a strategic region.<sup>22</sup>

This time the international forces had the following mandate, as required by Lebanese government:

To provide an interposition force at agreed locations and thereby provide the multinational presence requested by the Lebanese Government to assist it and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in Beirut area. This presence will facilitate the restoration of Lebanese Government sovereignty and authority over the Beirut area, and thereby further efforts of my Government to assure the safety of persons in the area and bring to an end the violence which has tragically recurred. The MNF may undertake other functions only by mutual agreement.<sup>23</sup>

In the same document, the Lebanese government asked for a larger military force than the first Multinational Force. The nations consulted agreed to send a force of about 1,000 troops.<sup>24</sup> These forces had to be coordinated at diplomatic and military levels. The

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> McDermott and Skjelsbaek, 58.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>23</sup> This is part of a diplomatic letter sent by Lebanese Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Foreign affairs Fouad BOUTROS on September 25, 1983 (Department of State Bulletin November 1982, pg 50). Same Diplomatic letter, with identical mandate, was sent on September 29, 1983 to the Italian Ambassador in Lebanon Franco Lucio OTTIERI.

diplomatic committee, consisting of Ambassadors and commanding officers, had to ensure general coordination. The military committee had to ensure liaison and coordination at the military and tactical level.<sup>25</sup> The Military Committee worked properly for the flow of information but never moved forward to coordinate the military actions.<sup>26</sup> No combined headquarter was established, therefore each contingent executed a "stovepipe chain of command."

The nature of the mission caused the lack of coordination. The mission was the result of bilateral agreements between the Lebanese government and each individual nation. Consequently, each contingent referred to and was coordinated by their nations. If coordination had to be provided, it would have been through diplomatic channels. Commanders provided limited direct coordination; for example, when the Italian commander requested the United States to secure the northern border of the airport.

Initially the Multinational Force enjoyed a relatively peaceful period. All Multinational Force personnel felt they were doing a really helpful job to re-establish peace in that tormented area. The situation worsened in March 1983 when the second Multinational Force

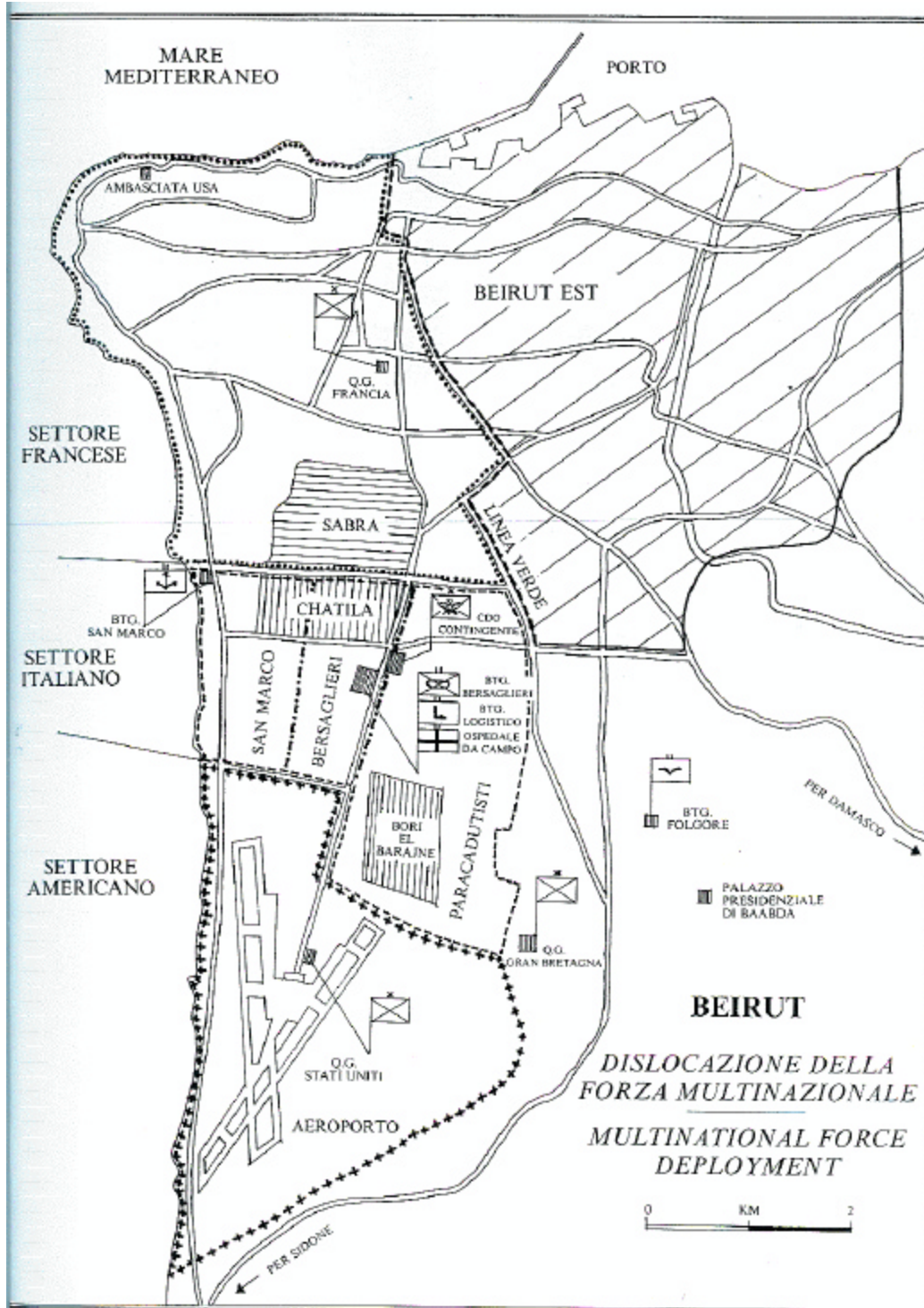
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<sup>24</sup> The Lebanese government required the intervention of USA, France and Italy. Later Great Britain intervened with a smaller group.

<sup>25</sup> Fabio Tana, *La lezione del Libano*, (Milano: Franco Angeli Libri, 1985), 85

<sup>26</sup> Benis M. Frank, *U.S. Marines in Lebanon 1982-1984*, (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1987), 31

experienced its first premeditated incident. Italian and United States units were attacked but with no fatalities.<sup>27</sup>



<sup>27</sup> McDermott and Skjelsbaek, 14.

### Figure 3. Multinational Force Deployment in Beirut

On 17 May 1983 a diplomatic agreement was reached between Lebanon and Israel, brokered by the United States. This agreement brought cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon, but it gave Israel certain authority in southern Lebanon. Because this document failed to involve the Lebanese factions sponsored by Syria,<sup>28</sup> it deepened the internal conflict. As a consequence, all of the Multinational Force started to be more heavily targeted.<sup>29</sup> A United States diplomatic effort attempted to involve Syria in the solution of the Lebanese crisis in September 1983. The Syrians refused it.<sup>30</sup>

On 3-4 September Israeli forces withdrew from Shouf Mountains. This action created a void that the Lebanese Armed Force was unprepared to fill. The Muslim Druze militia occupied the area, threatening the United States' area of operations. Additionally, Israel dramatically changed from an aggressive military posture to an inexplicable "all-too-passive" one, thus creating instability in the area.<sup>31</sup>

Training the Lebanese Armed Forces was part of the mission. United States forces conducted it appropriately as an initial step to

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<sup>28</sup> In May 1983 was established an internal party, the 'National Salvation Front'. Druze, Sunni Muslim, Maronite were element constituting the Front. The Shi'I militia, AMAL, was closely but not included. Adeed, 213

<sup>29</sup> McDermott and Skjelsbaek, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Frank, 83

<sup>31</sup> Shultz, 224

reconstitute the legitimate authority in Beirut, and later on the entire Lebanese territory. It was agreed that with the United States training and equipment, the Lebanese Army could be made ready to assume responsibility for the security of Beirut within 18 months, and for the security of all of the Lebanon within 38 months. The training began during November 1982.<sup>32</sup>

In September 1983 three possibilities became apparent: A Lebanese Armed Force victory, but it is hard to win a battle in a town and the result is temporary; a long guerrilla war, but the result could be an increasing involvement of the four international contingents, with the high probability of a withdrawal; or a national unity agreement among the different factions.<sup>33</sup>

On 19 September, the *USS Virginia* provided naval gunfire provided support to the Lebanese Armed Force against the advice of an officer on-the-ground.<sup>34</sup> Colonel Tim Geraghty, Commander of United States Forces Ashore in Beirut, had understood the risk of such an action, and tried to gain time. Unfortunately the diplomatic pressure on him was irresistible.<sup>35</sup> The result was a retaliatory attack against a few militias and the end of any residual Moslem sympathy for the United States.<sup>36</sup> For the first time the United States

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<sup>32</sup> Matthews

<sup>33</sup> Bruno Vespa, *Italia/Libano per la pace*, (Cermenate,Co: Arti Grafiche Maspero Fontana & C., 1984), 98

<sup>34</sup> McDermott and Skjelsbaek, 92

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 99

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 181

contingent helped the Lebanese army by providing indirect fire support. This action not only transformed the United States contingent into a partisan, but also jeopardized the Multinational Force as a whole.<sup>37</sup> In particular, certain Lebanese factions and the Syrians saw this action as an unacceptable attempt to establish a Western-oriented Lebanon<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, the Reagan administration described the offshore United States Naval presence as a "marker for Syria".<sup>39</sup>

The Multinational Force mission was beset by retaliatory actions. Different militias tried to provoke a reaction by harassing the Multinational Force elements<sup>40</sup>. On 23 October two terrorist attacks occurred against the French and American positions causing hundreds of casualties.<sup>41</sup>

On 2 March 1984 the Soviet Union vetoed a United Nations resolution that called for a replacement of Multinational Force with a United Nations force. The veto stemmed from the fact that the Soviets did not want to legitimate a pro-western government in Lebanon.<sup>42</sup> This action caused the Multinational Force to withdraw.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 93

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 41

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 47

<sup>40</sup> In particular a Christian Falange opened fire against Marine position in order to provoke a retaliatory action against Moslem forces. Ibid, 179

<sup>41</sup> McDermott and Skjelsbaek, 16

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 67

### **The Italian experience in Lebanon**

Maybe because of its geographical location, its vocation for peace, or for undisclosed interests, Italy has had a continuing orientation on hot spots, not only throughout Europe, but the Mediterranean region as well. The area was and still is perceived as an important region where instability has potentially adverse effects on Italy.<sup>43</sup>

Italy perceived the crisis in the Middle East, and particularly in Lebanon, as an exacerbation of tensions and instability that was the result of local contradictions exploited by the Palestinians, who were seeking self-determination. The Soviet Union was seen by Italy as a superpower that used its advantage in the crisis. Consequently, Italy thought that the solution to the central problem was correcting the underlying Palestinian problem. This problem had to be solved economically and diplomatically rather than militarily.<sup>44</sup>

After the Second World War, Italy started to have a more active role in the United Nations. Since the 1980s, Italy was prepared to quickly deploy different military forces all around the world in respond to requests for peacekeeping forces. When the Lebanese political leader called for a humanitarian help, Italy responded rapidly.

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<sup>43</sup> Fabio Tana, *La lezione del Libano*, (Milano: Franco Angeli Libri, 1985), 29

<sup>44</sup> Tana, 26

The first mission in Beirut was to evacuate combatants from the area. The Governolo Battalion, numbering 519 men, carried out two different assignments. First, they garrisoned high-risk areas by means of mobile and fixed posting in order to enforce the cease-fire, and second, they formed a protective convoy for the fighters to be evacuated.<sup>45</sup>

When the Italian contingent arrived in Beirut, they were derided for their strange helmets with a feather and their white vehicles (figure 4). But later this judgement changed favourably:<sup>46</sup>

They were supposed to land at nine o'clock. Eleven o'clock in the morning they show up with an old LST, they go out with this big ball peen hammer, clack, clack, clack, the bow plank opens, out comes the Italians in their white cars. And the ABC guy says to him, "What the hell they got white cars for?" he says, "Well, you got white cars, you don't need white flags... Most everything they did in there, they did extremely well. They seemed to have great sensitivity to the peacekeeping mission."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Giuseppe Lundari, *Gli Italiani in Libano*, (Milano: Editrice Militare Italiana, 1986), 75

<sup>46</sup> Fabio Isman, *Angioni. Noi a Beirut*, (Roma: Societa' Editrice And Kronos Libri, 1984), 122

<sup>47</sup> Transcript Brigadier General Mead M. James, USMC ret. Participating the seminar "Marines in Lebanon. A ten year retrospective: Lessons Learned" in the Marine Corps University, 03 May 1993.



Figure 4. Italian white vehicle used in Beirut

This particular color was displayed because initially the Italian government believed that the mission had to be conducted under United Nations direction.<sup>48</sup> On 12 September 1982 the mission was accomplished successfully and the Italians withdrew.

The terrible massacres that occurred at Sabra and Shatila shocked all Italians. The brutal act was hastily debated at length in the Italian parliament. When the Lebanese officially requested intervention, supported by the international community, Italy responded positively.

The Italian contingent had basically three tasks:

- to assist the Lebanese armed forces;
- to restore Lebanese Government sovereignty and authority over the Beirut area;

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<sup>48</sup> Lundari, 21

- to assure the safety of the populace in the area.

The Lebanese Armed Force had withdrawn from the area where Italian contingent was located. Consequently, it was impossible for the Italian contingent to assist them. The anti-government forces ruled the area, and it was impossible to change, so restoring Lebanese government authority was unfeasible. The only task remaining was to protect the population.<sup>49</sup> This last task influenced the composition of Italian contingent, which combined a strong element of front line troops with a field hospital for Beirut's civilians.<sup>50</sup>

Three distinct battalions carried out the mission: the Governolo Bersaglieri battalion (the same battalion that carried out the previous mission in Lebanon), the Folgore Brigade paratroopers (selected for their high level of training and readiness) and the San Marco Battalion of marines (same high training and readiness as the Folgore but Navy force).<sup>51</sup> About 1,200 men, 800 of who were combatants, composed the force. Command of the Italian contingent in the field was assigned to Colonel Franco Angioni.<sup>52</sup>

The central-west part of Beirut was assigned to the Italians, including two refugee camps, Shatila and Borj el Barajne, totalling

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<sup>49</sup> Isman, 117

<sup>50</sup> McDermott and Skjelsbaek, 252

<sup>51</sup> San Marco was chosen also to give a Joint connotation to the Italian contingent

<sup>52</sup> During the mission he was promoted brigade general as result of a previous examination.

30 square, highly populated, kilometres<sup>53</sup>. This particular location later influenced the Italian mission.

The Italian sector was divided among the three different battalions. Folgore was responsible for Borj el Barajne, Governolo for Shatila, and San Marco for the western sector near the coastline. San Marco was also assigned to patrol the coast, keeping it clear in the event of a hasty evacuation.

The operative organization on the field was the following (figure 4):

- Command Group
- Military police Carabinieri platoon
- Mechanized Infantry Battalion composed of one Command and Service Company, three mechanized companies with "Veicolo Corazzato da Combattimento" (VCC) 2, one company with anti-tank weapons.
- Parachute Battalion composed of one Command and Service Company, three parachute companies with VCC1 and VCC2, one platoon with anti-tank weapons.
- Marine Battalion (San Marco) composed of one command and service platoon, two assault companies with LVTP7 and M113-A1 (later

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<sup>53</sup> The French contingent took the north sector including the refugee camp of Sabra. The American contingent took the International Airport sector. And the British contingent, the smallest, was located in east Beirut. Lundari, 75

replaced by VCC1), one platoon with anti-tank weapons. This Battalion was reinforced with Underwater Commando elements

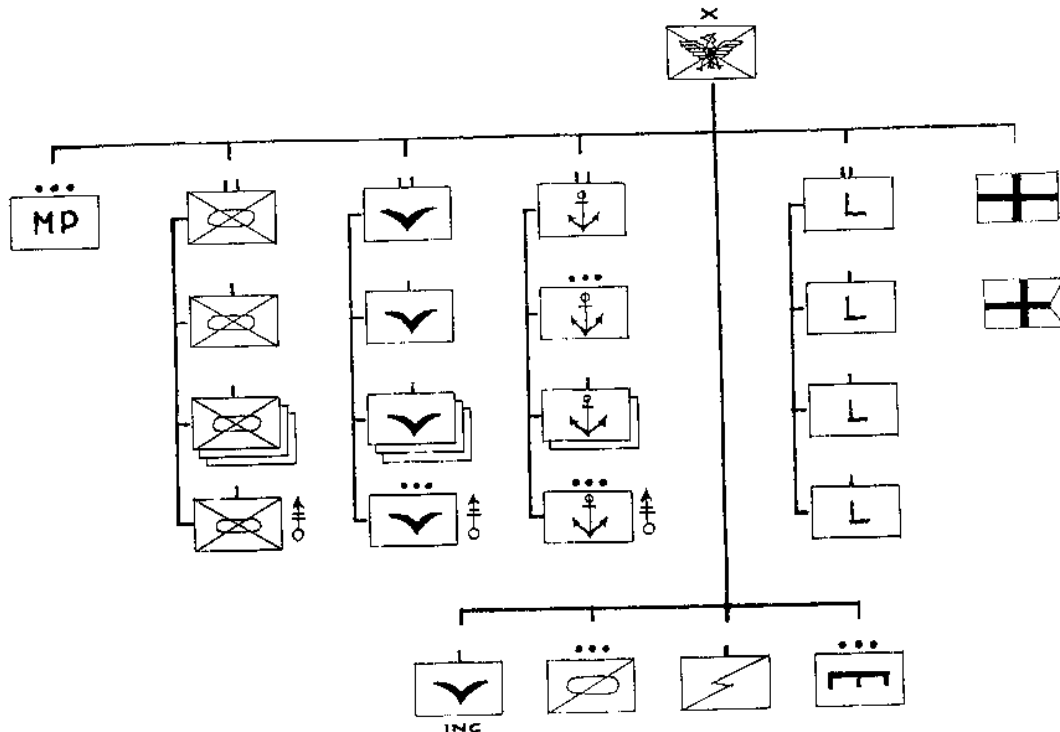
- Commando Company, in charge of special operations.<sup>54</sup>
- Scout platoon, constituted after 16 March 1983, was a quick response force for critical situations inside the Italian sector.
- Command and Signals Company.
- Engineer Platoon and security measures.
- Support battalion and the personnel's well being.
- Field Hospital.

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<sup>54</sup> Some elements were used to clear the area from unexploded ordinance and mines, dangerous not only for the patrolling forces but also for the local population. It was considered another way to protect the civilians.

# ORGANIGRAMMA DI ITALCON

## ITALCON ORGANIZATION



### LEGENDA

COMANDO RAGGR. HEAD QUARTER	FANTERIA DI MARINA MARINES	CAVALLERIA ESPLOR. CAVALRY SCOUTS	BATTAGLIONE BATTALION
POLIZIA MILITARE MILITARY POLICE	LOGISTICO SUPPORT	TRASMISSIONI SIGNALS	COMPAGNIA COMPANY
FANTERIA MECC. MECH. INFANTRY	OSPEDALE MILITARE MILITARY HOSPITAL	GENIO ENGINEERS	PLOTONE PLATOON
PARACADUTISTI PARACHUTISTS	SEZIONE DISINFEZIONE DISINFECTATION PLATOON		ARMI ANTI CARRO ANTI TANK WEAP.

Figure 5. Italian organization

On station off the coast a small naval formation stood ready to support the contingent on the ground with naval gunfire or logistics.

The Mechanized Infantry Battalion had a turnover every 4 months. San Marco and Folgore had a turnover based on the elements rather

than the Battalion as a whole. All the forces deployed in Beirut during Multinational Force II were rotated with the exception of 60-70 personnel that constituted the core and adequate continuity for the mission.<sup>55</sup>

The entire contingent averaged 1,400 men, with a peak of 2,000 men in August 1983. Sixty per cent of the personnel deployed were conscripts.<sup>56</sup> Many Italians considered these elements unprepared for such risky duty. Time demonstrated the faults of this consideration. In fact, they were both prepared and extremely motivated.

A year after the deployment *Time* reported:

Heavily armed men still prowl fringes of Beirut. But instead of the feared fatigue uniforms of Phalangist militiamen, they wear spiffy red-and-gold scarves emblazoned with the Venetian lion of St. Mark, and their presence inspires comfort rather than terror. They are Italian Marines who keep strict watch from a ring of sentry posts and constantly patrol streets that are now as safe as any in Lebanon.<sup>57</sup>

In the same magazine is reported a sympathetic consideration about the Italian mission:

2,100 strong and posted in Beirut's southern suburbs protect the scenes of last year's massacre and also the Burj-el-Baraineh refugee camp. Highly motorized, like the French, they maintain regular patrols, and also provide more assistance to civilians in their area than do the other contingents. Two Italian mobile

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<sup>55</sup> Basically the headquarter, the Commando elements, and intelligence/liaison officers constituted the core.

<sup>56</sup> In general, Italian society is reluctant to accept casualties. Casualties in conscript forces are particularly unacceptable.

<sup>57</sup> George J. Church, "Peace Keepers with a Difference", *Time*, 03 October 1983, 30

clinics make daily tours of the refugee camps, ministering to the health needs of the Palestinians.<sup>58</sup>

During the 18 months, the Italian contingent carried out the mission of garrisoning and patrolling the area. Initially, the only threats were mines and unexploded ordnance. Later the situation became more confusing and the Italian contingent started to be targeted. Still today, the reasons why this happened are puzzling.

At the end of August 1983, for the first time, the Italian contingent was under heavy fire. The Italians were under fire of Syrian guns, Druse and Phalange howitzers, Shiite bullets and Lebanese army artillery. Under these difficult circumstances, with everybody shooting at each other, the Italian government did not provide any direction to Angioni. His mission remained unchanged.<sup>59</sup>

On 20 February 1984 the Italian government withdrew its forces. The Italian president, Sandro Pertini (figure 5), reported that there was no reason to risk the life of Italian soldiers in Lebanon because the situation had drastically changed. No suitable results could be gained for Lebanese population with Multinational Force on station in Beirut<sup>60</sup>.

The mission was concluded with a total of 1 dead and 74 wounded<sup>61</sup>. The Italian soldiers returned in Italy with the knowledge

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 31

<sup>59</sup> Vespa, 96

<sup>60</sup> Isman, 8

<sup>61</sup> Antonio Ferrari, *I giorni di Beirut*, \_\_\_\_\_, 15

that they had helped return the population to normal for a short time. Expressing appreciation, Lebanese civilians sadly saluted the Italian contingent that had tenaciously protected them for 18 months.



Figure 6. Italian president Sandro Pertini with General Angioni during a visit in Beirut

### **Characterization of the Italian mission**

The Italian mission was conducted in the most difficult area in Beirut where the population constituted the main problem and in the same time the main reason to carry on the mission. Colonel Angioni, later promoted to General, understood this key factor and conducted the mission accordingly. It helped that Angioni was in charge during

the entire mission. And for that reason he had a "tremendous feel for the situation, especially in his own area".<sup>62</sup>

He was the only one in command in Lebanon for Italy. No one could interfere with his decision except political and military leaders in Italy. During the 18 months of mission, the Italian government never changed the dual-purpose mission that was seen as protection of the population first, then support to the Lebanese government.

Angioni maintained the conflict in a low intensity level. He avoided eventual spiralling in the conflict through an immediate reaction directed at the offender, avoiding an overreaction.<sup>63</sup> In that way the action was always self-defense rather than retaliation. Additionally, throughout their mission they protected the population, remaining neutral<sup>64</sup> and established regular contacts with all different factions.<sup>65</sup>

The Italian contingent avoided the unnecessary violence against civilian, sometimes perpetrated by regular Lebanese police. In key areas, the Italian contingent prohibited movement of armed persons, keeping the violence to a minimum.<sup>66</sup> An example of this was when a civilian was beaten by Lebanese Armed Force only because he had

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<sup>62</sup> Transcript Captain Morgan M. France US Navy ret. Participating the seminar "Marines in Lebanon. A ten year retrospective: Lessons Learned" in the Marine Corps University, 03 May 1993

<sup>63</sup> McDermott and Skjelsbaek, 153

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 175

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 257

reacted verbally. In this case an Italian corporal threatened the use of force, and calmed the situation. Lebanese commanding general Ibrahim Tannous officially apologized for the incident, thus concluding the episode<sup>67</sup>.

The contingent established a link with civilian institutions in order to receive early warning of threats and also to reinforce the feeling of security among the populace. An example was the telephonic hotline establish between the Italian headquarter in Beirut and a school located in the area of responsibility of the Italian contingent.<sup>68</sup>

Even though some saw the Italian presence as a problem because with its continuous checks they did not allow criminal movements. These illegitimate forces wanted to destabilize the government in order to establish chaos.<sup>69</sup>

The contingent reinforced this feeling among the civilians by allowing them access to the military medical structure. The field hospital activities earned the Italian contingent international admiration and especially the gratitude of the refugee camp inhabitants who enjoyed continuous assistance, free of charge by efficient medical personnel. The hospital was originally created for military purposes. It was set up by Friuli Motorized brigade and had

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 152

<sup>67</sup> Isman, 91

<sup>68</sup> Ferrari, 31

the following personnel: 93 medical officers, 6 pharmacists, 41 health NCOs and 147 volunteer nurses from the Italian Red Cross. 614 military personnel were admitted to the hospital, while about 65,000 civilians were examined and treated. There were also two ambulances, which brought medical services to the refugee camps every day<sup>70</sup>. When the Italians departed from Beirut, they donated the field hospital to the local community. The community promptly organized a medical team consisting of 74 doctors.<sup>71</sup> This helped to break the religious barrier, reinforcing the concept that safety of a Christian has the same value as that of a Muslim.<sup>72</sup>

### **The American experience in Lebanon**

During the Reagan administration, the crisis in Lebanon was perceived at the strategic and political level as a Soviet expansion attempt. The Palestinian problem was considered a secondary issue.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, the crisis was managed as a Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union<sup>74</sup>. The solution of the

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<sup>69</sup> Vespa, 91

<sup>70</sup> Lundari, 52-53

<sup>71</sup> Vittorio Ferri, "Qui Beirut grazie Italia", *Doctor*, 5 Maggio 1984, 70

<sup>72</sup> Shiite spiritual leader, Ibrahim Chamseddine, to his men, addressed this consideration. Ferri, 71

<sup>73</sup> Transcript Ambassador Morris Draper. Participating the seminar " Marines in Lebanon. A ten year retrospective: Lessons Learned" in the Marine Corps University, 03 May 1993.

<sup>74</sup> In particular, this thesis was arranged by Arms Control And Disarmament Agency Director Eugene ROSTOW. Tana, 25

crisis was seen as a military intervention and/or a supply of military equipment and training.

Economic and military assistance to friendly nations of the region to enable them to defend themselves and deter threats from the Soviet Union and its proxies, as well as arrangements for strategic cooperation for access in times of threat.<sup>75</sup>

The American government perceived the Middle East as a key area to the economic and political life of the West. Its strategic importance was linked to its energy resources, the Suez Canal, and the well being of the populations living in that area. President Reagan seemed up the strategic importance of Beirut:

If that key should fall into the hands of a power or powers hostile to the free world, there would be a direct threat to the free world, there would be a direct threat to the United States and to our allies.<sup>76</sup>

There were other reasons for American intervention in the area. The United States government believed it had a moral obligation to assure the continued existence of Israel as a nation.<sup>77</sup> There was also an understandable sense of guilt because of the massacre in Sabra and Shatila.

The American contingent mission, as decided, was more diplomatic than military.<sup>78</sup> It was stated as "presence", to "show the flag", but

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<sup>75</sup> Nicholas A. Veliotes, "Middle East Policy update", *Department of State Bulletin*, July 1983, 87

<sup>76</sup> Ronald Reagan, "America's Commitment to peace", *Department of State Bulletin*, December 1983, 2

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> In particular the mission was 20 percent military and 80 percent diplomatic, as saw by Major Farmer during his deployment with 22<sup>nd</sup> MAU.

without a clear military objective. A fleet offshore, or something else seemed safer for the forces could have carried out the presence mission. It could have been accomplished also through a more massive military intervention, but this solution was discarded because of fear for a potential "Vietnam" experience. The option chosen was the deployment of a small number of Marines just to buy time to solve the crisis diplomatically.<sup>79</sup>

All these elements determined the military mission that was:

To provide a supporting presence requested by the Lebanese Government. Their job has been to help the government and the Lebanese Armed Forces to restore Lebanese authority and sovereignty over the Beirut area and to end the violence there.<sup>80</sup>

The decision to deploy Marines was a "hasty decision" due to the embarrassment for the massacres that had occurred at Sabra and Shatila.<sup>81</sup> The force deployed on the ground was a Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU) consisting of a MAU headquarters, a Battalion landing team (BLT), a Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron (HMM) and a Marine Amphibious Unit Service Support Group (MAU SSG). The Phibron and elements of the sixth fleet elements were near Beirut ready to support the ground force.

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<sup>79</sup> Transcript, The Honorable Robert F. McFarlane. Participating the seminar "Marines in Lebanon. A ten year retrospective: Lessons Learned" in the Marine Corps University, 03 May 1993.

<sup>80</sup> Robert H. Pelletreau "Major U.S. interests in the Middle East", *Department of State Bulletin*, November 1983, 53

<sup>81</sup> Dillon

The Marine Amphibious Unit was tasked to assist the Lebanese Armed Force in the Beirut International Airport (BIA). The BIA was chosen for its importance. It was considered critical for Lebanese commerce and also was a symbol of the return to normality.<sup>82</sup> The airport was not an easy area to defend because it had an average of 35 flights, 2,400 passengers, 1,000 civilian employees and 3,000 vehicles daily. The Lebanese Army Headquarter was located in the same area.<sup>83</sup> Initially this choice seemed irrelevant, but later it served to identify the American contingent as a pro Lebanese Armed Force.

It was also important that the Lebanese Armed Force became an effective organization. Initially, the Lebanese Armed Force was composed of Christian elements and all other Lebanese factions. Ideally, the Lebanese Armed Force should have been the seed of integration among Druses, Shiite, Christian and Sunni forces.<sup>84</sup>

An additional threat to the American contingent came from the terrain. The Shouf Mountains were near the airport. The first American commander asked permission to occupy the Shouf because he estimated that they could jeopardize his position if hostile forces occupied the mountains. American diplomats rejected the request because it could be considered a kind of United States protection of

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<sup>82</sup> Draper

<sup>83</sup> McDermott and Skjelsbaek, 51

<sup>84</sup> McFarlane

the Israeli forces. In fact, the main supply lines for Israeli forces ran along the Sidon Road, which was between the Beirut International Airport and the Shouf Mountains. Later, this decision jeopardized the American contingent.<sup>85</sup>

The Marines perceived from the beginning the importance of a neutral posture. This action could be the best defence.<sup>86</sup> Also they perceived the importance of avoiding escalation in the conflict. In fact during the bitterness of the Lebanese crisis, under 122mm rocket fire, they responded with 81mm illumination fire upon the suspected hostile sites. When this proven ineffective, they reacted with equal fire in self-defence.<sup>87</sup>

United States diplomacy failed to maintain its neutrality when a special envoy appeared to have no regular contact with the antigovernment militias.<sup>88</sup> On 19 September 1983, during an LAF action against Palestinian Units, naval gunfire support was requested by Lebanese Ministry of Defence through Ambassador McFarlane's JCS liaison officer in Beirut. Four American ships opened fire with 360 5-inch rounds. The American contingent commander reported that due to

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<sup>85</sup> Colonel Mead, 32 MAU Commander, submitted a first request after a reconnaissance of the airport area to US Ambassador in Lebanon Draper. A second request was reiterated to Ambassador Habib, special envoy in Middle East, and his diplomatic assistants by Col. Smith, 32 MAU Executive Officer. In both cases the diplomats rejected the request. Frank, 24-25

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 55

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 75

<sup>88</sup> McDermott and Skjelsbaek, 257

this fire the Marines were seen as legitimate target by anti-government forces.<sup>89</sup>



Picture 7. USS New Jersey during a naval gunfire in Lebanon



In October 1983 a suicide bomber destroyed a building where hundreds United States Marines and sailors were located.

A year after the deployment *Time* reported:

1,200 Marines, took up positions around Beirut Airport, originally facing Israeli occupation lines. Now the Israelis have withdrawn to positions farther south, and the Marines' encampment is highly exposed to shelling from the Shouf; they cannot prevent frequent closings of the airport. Primarily a fight-on-foot force, they have hunkered down behind sandbags and no longer patrol beyond the airport. The Americans lead a more Spartan and lonely existence than their European counterparts: only one hot meal a day, a lot of field rations, and a restrictive policy on recreation in and around Beirut.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Frank, 88-89

<sup>90</sup> Church, 31

## Characterization of the American mission

During the entire mission three individuals were in charge: the Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU) commander that acted as classical commander of the landing force (CLF), the Phibron commander that acted as commander of the amphibious task force (CATF), and the diplomatic authority that transited in the area.<sup>91</sup> Militarily, the command never was transferred ashore and the MAU commander had limited authority.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, on the political side, the mission was compromised due to a series of different ambassadors and special presidential envoys that were assigned in the area.<sup>93</sup> The result was messy.

The MAU had a turnover based on a cycle of 4 months. 32<sup>nd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> were the MAUs that rotated during the mission<sup>94</sup>. An additional MAU, the 31<sup>st</sup>, was moved into the area ready to support the American contingent in case of complications. This rotation shows an apparent continuity in the mission. Basically two MAU were alternated during the mission, but its elements were different with the few exceptions.<sup>95</sup> In reality, there was no continuity.

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<sup>91</sup> In the Amphibious theory CLF is the commander of the landing force, CATF is the commander of the amphibious task force.

<sup>92</sup> Transcript Vice Admiral H. William H. Rowden US Navy ret. Participating the seminar "Marines in Lebanon. A ten year retrospective: Lessons Learned" in the Marine Corps University, 03 May 1993.

<sup>93</sup> Transcript Colonel Thomas A. Fintel US Army ret. Participating the seminar "Marines in Lebanon. A ten year retrospective: Lessons Learned" in the Marine Corps University, 03 May 1993

<sup>94</sup> On 1 December 1982 32<sup>nd</sup> MAU was redesigned as 22<sup>nd</sup> MAU. Frank, 49

<sup>95</sup> Only 45 percent of the 22<sup>nd</sup> MAU had previous experience in the mission. Frank, 49

The American contingent was considered a covert supporter of Israel by all Middle East forces. Initial reality showed the opposite. The deployment in Beirut was delayed because Israeli forces did not abandon the harbour area. Particularly critical was the situation when Captain Charles Johnson, a young marine officer, stopped several Israeli tanks preparing to attack civilians. The Arabic community acknowledged this action positively.<sup>96</sup>

Even if the Marine Amphibious Unit could rely upon their own intelligence, they were mostly dependent on Lebanese intelligence, which was controlled by the Phalange<sup>97</sup>. Additional strategic intelligence assets were lost on 18 April 1983 during a terrorist attack against the United States Embassy in Beirut where the majority of Central Intelligence Agency elements in the Middle East perished.

An attempt was made to relieve the civilian sufferance. The MAU's medical platoon, three days a week, diagnosed and treated the local population for free. This service began with the 24<sup>th</sup> MAU and it was known as Medical Community Aid Program (MEDCAP). Before the 24<sup>th</sup> MAU left the area, it treated 2,000 Lebanese<sup>98</sup>. Additionally Marines successfully rescued a group of civilians who were trapped at Dahr al Baydar by a heavy snowstorm on 24 February 1983.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 46

<sup>97</sup> McDermott and Skjelsbaek, 172

### **A comparison between Italian and American mission**

Even if originated by the same Lebanese request, the two different contingents had different outcomes. The result was influenced by factors like the location, the mission carried out, and their relation with the Lebanese Armed Force.

The location of the contingents influenced the conduct of the mission. The Italian contingent was located in a highly populated area. They focused mostly on confidence and safety of people. They established close contact with the local communities, helping them not only in sweeping the area of unexploded ordnance but also by providing medical care. The American contingent was located at the international airport, which had a low population density. Consequently, they focused more on the support of the Lebanese government rather than of the population.<sup>99</sup>

The connection with the Lebanese Armed Force was a critical factor. The Italians supported the Lebanese Armed Force but prevented LAF abuse of authority. For that reason, occasional critical situations occurred between the Italian contingent and the Lebanese Armed Force. Otherwise, the American contingent not only fully cooperated with the Lebanese Armed Force but also provided training

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<sup>98</sup> 24<sup>th</sup> MAU, deployed in the period 1<sup>st</sup> November 1982-15<sup>th</sup> February 1983, initiated this program directed to the civilians. This action helped the contingent to be more accepted and appreciated by the population. Frank, 41

<sup>99</sup> The Americans helped the local population evacuate people isolated during the exceptional snowy cold winter in 1983.

and protection for their forces <sup>100</sup>. When the Lebanese Armed Force proved representative of only one faction, its trainer and protector, the American contingent, became partisan and consequently a legitimate target.

The reaction to attack was different. The Italians tried to hold the conflict to a low intensity level by responding to attacks promptly and proportionately.<sup>101</sup> Conversely, the American contingent responded heavier weapons.<sup>102</sup> These actions not only jeopardized the American contingent, but all Multinational Force.

How the forces were deployed influenced the mission. The Italian contingent had a turnover established in order to allow continuity of the mission. A core, constituted by 60-80 key personnel never changed during the mission. Folgore and San Marco changed personnel by small groups. Only the Mechanized Battalion was changed each 4 Months. The American contingent, constituted by a Marine Amphibious Unit, changed on average every 4 months, thus losing continuity in the field.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> In the Lebanese diplomatic note addressed to the American Ambassador, differently from the Italian one, it was reported that the American contingent had to provide secure to the Lebanese Armed Force. More over the Lebanese and American Governments had agreed to provide training to Lebanese Armed Force as measure to re establish authority in the country.

<sup>101</sup> It means that they reacted with the same intensity, and never threatening a bitter and heavier reaction.

<sup>102</sup> This action, under some aspects, result to be apolitical decision taken in Washington rather than a military decision taken in Beirut. In Fact the Commanding officer of the USMNF informed Washington that such action could determine an embitter in the conflict.

<sup>103</sup> This sort of turnover without continuity, probably, could be the result of what was the mission. In fact the mission was just "presence". Any group without particular training could carry out this mission as it was stated.

Intelligence on the ground was different. The Italian contingent had consistent intelligence personnel during the entire mission giving the force reliable information. The American forces received their intelligence information from the Lebanese Armed Force. The American contingent had its own intelligence, but it was negatively impacted by the way the forces changed every four months. The Central Intelligence Agency provided additional intelligence. But, the terrorist attack on the American Embassy in April 1983 killed most of the personnel compromising this intelligence capability.

The unity of command was relevant. The Italian contingent had clear unity of command. Colonel Angioni was clearly identified as the commander of the Italian contingent and could decide about the utilization of naval gunfire. In contrast American contingent did not have unity of command. Within the doctrinal concept of amphibious operations, the command was divided between CATF and CLF, with the intrusion of ambassadors into military affairs.

All these factors influenced the outcome of each contingent's mission. The casualties suffered during this mission can be related to these factors. Particularly interesting is the fact that a single action conducted by a contingent jeopardized all contingents deployed in Beirut. But, it is still difficult to say that it was a military

failure. It is especially true if we consider the forces that acted in this little space.<sup>104</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Lebanese crisis was a difficult test in peacekeeping for the Multinational forces. This crisis began as a declared war, but it evolved into a civil war where hidden external forces acted. The Multinational Force II's mission was one of deadliest experiences in the history of peacekeeping operations. Not for the number of casualties suffered, but because the outcome was a withdrawal without accomplishing the mission.

All the forces deployed in Lebanon suffered not only for the casualties incurred but also for the result gained. They were motivated, they tried to relieve the local population from the pain of a long war, but they failed. This failure resulted neither from poor training nor from lack of will. Politics contributed to the mission failure.

It was not a military failure because it was a diplomatic mission. Political factors were responsible for the unfortunate outcome. Political leaders failed to state a clear military mission.

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<sup>104</sup> As we have said above in this region operated Syria, supported by Soviet Union, and Israel, considered supported by United States. Moreover each internal faction

They failed to listen to their field commanders who were aware of the changing situation and the increasing risks. They decided upon military issues without consulting the commanders. They conducted a weak diplomatic campaign without involving all parties. Politicians called the shots, but soldiers bled for the decisions.

The lack of coordination among different contingents through the national authorities was perhaps the main reasons for the failure of the MNF as a whole.<sup>105</sup> So, if a multinational force is to be successful, then the initiative must be truly multinational from the political top to the military bottom.

For 15 months the Multinational Force was able to establish peace and security among the population. Their constant patrols and presence helped to restore the normal routine among the population. The Marines, as well as the Italians, courageously conducted their mission. They recognized the importance of their role and the changes that occurred in the area during the mission. But their wisdom did not touch the diplomats who jeopardized the mission.

It does not make any sense to assert that Italians were more successful than American just by counting the number of casualty suffered. The Italians could have suffered heavy casualties if they had been targeted by a massive terrorist attack. The civilians

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operated to gain power with the sponsor of Soviet Union, United States, Syria or Israel.

<sup>105</sup> Tana, 86

trusted the Italian contingent, lead by General Angioni. The Americans missed the neutrality because of the diplomatic decisions made by others.

This mission wasn't conducted only on Lebanese soil but also in other locations like the United Nations headquarters. It was clearer that different forces were gambling upon a country through vetoes. It is a clear example of how often the life of a state is decided by other countries in the modern era. There is no possible solution when different countries that are playing key roles refuse to take an active role to solve the problem. It is a dangerous world where only an active, peace oriented, position can help us to live better and safe.



Picture 7 "The Beirut Memorial on Line" front page.

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