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Reagan's World War 4:

A case study about Lebanon and Libya

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Table of Contents

The US and the Middle East.....	4
The Middle East and the Cold War	
Israel and a Very Special Relationship	
The Strategic Shift: The Beginning of World War 4	
The Early Reagan: Strategic Consensus and Beyond	
 Qadhafi, The Easiest Enemy.....	 58
Fighting Back International Terrorism	
The Case Against Qadhafi	
Sanctions Instead of War	
 Prelude to the Intervention in Lebanon.....	 83
The National Pact and the 1958 Crisis	
The Civil War	
The Building of an Alliance	
 Lebanon: The Israeli Invasion and the US Intervention.....	 100
The Missile Crisis and the Beginning of US Involvement	
The Missing Red Light	
The Invasion	
Sanctions?	
Begin's Visit	
Haig's Resignation	
Towards MNF 1	
The First Multinational Force	
The Rise and the (Sudden) Fall of the Reagan Plan	
The (Missed) Golden Opportunity	

The Fading Opportunity

The Saudi Card

Getting Involved in the Civil War

Before the Attack Against the Marines

1984: Attack, Withdrawal and Debate189

October 23

One Cloud in the Sky

The Christmas Debate

The Withdrawal from Lebanon

Starting the fight against terrorism

The Weinberger Doctrine

Bibliography.....245

Chapter One

The US and the Middle East

The Middle East and the Cold War

In the introduction to their “The Cold War and the Middle East”, Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim drew the distinction between two competing approaches to the study of the Middle East: the “systemic” which assigns a decisive role to external powers and especially to superpowers; the “regionalist” which points out how “local states have much more leverage in dealing with outside powers than is generally recognized”¹.

This division actually resembles one of the main cleavages inside the part of the US foreign policy elite that deals with the Middle East. As Steven Spiegel explained, throughout the Cold War two conflicting views have clashed: on one side those more concerned with regional issues (such as the pro-Israelis or the pro-Arabs), on the other side those “who see the Middle East as part of a larger, more global conflict”². Former member of the Political Affairs Directorate at the NSC Raymond Tanter has defined the former as regionalists and the latter as globalists³.

This distinction is a key factor in understanding US Middle East policy in the cases which are the subject of the present study. In the gradual shift from the Cold War framework to the World War 4 framework, American policy-makers substituted a globalist view with another and mixed it, to different extents during the late 1970s and the early 1980s, with regionalist approaches to the issues that emerged in the Middle East. The creation of a new global view and its ever changing mix with regionalist approaches is the key interpretative tool adopted in this work.

It is therefore crucial to assess the relevance of the Cold War framework in the politics of the Middle East in the part of this work that deals with the historical background to our case studies. This relevance should not be given for granted: while it is definitively true that the Cold War shaped the analysis as well as the policies of the United States

¹ Sayigh, Yezid and Avi Shlaim (ed), *The Cold War and the Middle East*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997

² Spiegel, Steven, 2

³ Tanter, Raymond, *Who's At the Helm? Lessons of Lebanon*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1990

government in the region, the relevance of the east-west struggle to the events that occurred in the Middle East in the second half of the 1900s is more subject to discussion between the followers of the systemic approach and the followers of the regionalist approach.

Before discussing the literature about the superpowers and the Middle East, two things must be kept in mind: first, the members of the US foreign policy elite had both a globalist and a regionalist approach, the different mix is what has to be detected; second, the president which is the subject of the present study, Ronald Reagan saw the events that unfolded in the Middle East in the late 1970s and early 1980s (the hostage crisis and the Islamic revolution in Iran, the invasion of Afghanistan, the Iran-Iraq war) mainly “through the lens of the Cold War” as Peter Hahn wrote⁴ and was therefore a “super-globalist”. The US Middle East policy in the Reagan years is of course the result of the connection between Reagan's ideas and perception of reality and the debate that took place in the foreign policy elite.

Having said that, it is important to stress the evolution of the literature about the role of the superpowers in the Middle East in the recent years. Still in 1991, former British diplomat Peter Mansfield⁵, complained about the lack of literature on the Cold War in the Middle East: there were mainly books about specific countries and their relationship with one of the two superpowers such as Efraim Karsh's “The Soviet Union and Syria, the Asad Years”⁶ or old books like “The Sphinx and the Commissar” by the Egyptian journalist Muhammad Haykal⁷ or like William Polk's “The United States and the Arab World” which was published in 1963⁸. Mansfield noted that a comprehensive and updated chronicle of the role of the superpowers in the Middle East was still missing. He was partially right since back then there few accounts that concerned the *whole* region for the *whole* time span

⁴ Hahn, Peter, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945*, Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005, 69; See more on the importance of this distinction both in the introduction and in the conclusions of this study

⁵ Mandelson, Peter, *Storia del Medio Oriente*, Torino: SEI, 1993, Italian translation by Valentina Colombo

⁶ Karsh, Efraim, *The Soviet Union and Syria: the Asad Years*, New York: Brookings Institution Publisher, 1988; other examples are Dawisha, K, *Soviet Foreign Policy towards Egypt*, London: McMillan, 1979; Bill, J., *The Eagle and the Lion. The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations*, London: Yale University Press, 1988

⁷ Haykal, Muhammad, *The Sphinx and the Commissar*, London: Random House, 1968

⁸ Polk, William, *The United States and the Arab World*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963

of the Cold War⁹.

In more recent years, some very valuable books have been written by outstanding scholars regarding especially the US role in the Middle East while less famous researchers have dealt with Soviet policy in the region, writing often detailed and useful volumes and essays.

Usually, however, these books are either a collection of essays on case studies lacking a comprehensive narrative¹⁰, studies of single events or limited time spans¹¹, or they deal with one of the two sub-issues in the Middle East: the Arab-Israeli conflict¹² and the Persian Gulf. There are only a few authors who have managed to provide an original and comprehensive narrative of the Cold War in the Middle East. To understand the politics of the superpowers in the "greater Middle East", however, one has to look at American and Soviet "hierarchy of priorities"¹³ between the two parts of the region. Also, comprehensive accounts which range from the start to the end of the Cold War in the Middle East are needed to assess factors of continuity and rupture in American and Soviet policies.

Nonetheless, comprehensive and updated accounts are still scarce because on one hand archival resources on the late 1970s and the 1980s have been opened only recently and on the other hand it requires an impressive amount of work and creativity to construct a narrative which can encompass such a wide area for a such a long time span.

Among the accounts of United States' policy in the Middle East during the Cold War two

⁹ A good example of a book about the Cold War in the Middle East in the years 1955-1967 is Gerges, Fawaz, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955-1967*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1994. The problem for that book was that it stopped in 1967, leaving out almost half of the Cold War; For bibliographical essays about the Cold War in the Middle East see Silverburg, Sanford R., and Reich, Bernard, *US Foreign Relations with the Middle East and North Africa: A Bibliography*, Metuchen, 1994; Little, Douglas, "Gideon's Band: America and the Middle East since 1945" in Hogan, Michael (ed), *America in the World: the Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995

¹⁰ See for example, Lesch, David, *The Middle East and the United States: a Historical and Political Reassessment*, Boulder, 1996

¹¹ See for example the excellent volume on the 1967-1973 period Ashton, Nigel J. (ed), *The Cold War in the Middle East. Regional Conflict and the Superpowers 1967-1973*, London: Routledge, 2007; the account on the period in which the region passed from British domination to superpower confrontation, Gerges, Fawaz, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955-1967*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1994,

¹² See for example, Quandt, William B., *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001 and also Quandt, William B., *Decade of Decisions: American Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967-1976*, University of California Press, 1978

¹³ For this concept, see Gaddis, John Lewis, *Strategies of Containment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982

must be singled out: Douglas Little's "American Orientalism"¹⁴ outlines the major themes of US policy along with the ideology that was behind them, while Steven Spiegel's "The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict"¹⁵ is structured around the policies of the single US presidents and focuses more on the conflict between Israel and its neighbours. Another excellent work on the evolution of US Middle Eastern policy from Truman to Reagan is Avi Shlaim's essay on "The Impact of Us Policy in the Middle East"¹⁶ along with his later book on "War and Peace in the Middle East" which analysed the changing relationship between the region and its dominant powers in the Twentieth Century: first the Ottomans, then the British (with a minor French role) and finally the USA and the USSR¹⁷. Avi Shlaim, along with current King's College professor Yezid Sayigh, edited also an outstanding collection of essays on "The Cold War and the Middle East"¹⁸ probably one of the few books which proposed a comprehensive narrative on this issue while providing country-by-country analysis.

On Soviet policy in the Middle East, the most complete work has been done in 1990 by the Israeli professor Galia Golan. In her "Soviet Policies in the Middle East from World War II to Gorbachev" she analysed Soviet main interests in the region and also conducted case studies on the relationship between Moscow and the major countries along with the USSR-PLO relation¹⁹. Other valuable contributions came from essays published on broader issues. Neil Malcolm, in his essay on "Soviet Decision-Making and the Middle East"²⁰ focused on the evolution of Soviet policy in the region from the 1970s on, while in the same volume on "The Superpowers, Central America and the Middle East" edited by Peter Shearman and Phil Williams, Fred Halliday discussed the quality of the relationships

¹⁴ Little, Douglas, *American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945*, University of North Carolina Press, 2002

¹⁵ Spiegel, Steven, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy From Truman to Reagan*, Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1985

¹⁶ Shlaim, Avi, "The Impact of Us Policy in the Middle East", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, University of California Press, vo. 17 n. 2 Winter 1988, pp. 15-28

¹⁷ Shlaim, Avi, *War and Peace in the Middle East*, London: Penguin Books, 1995

¹⁸ Sayigh, Yezid and Avi Shlaim (ed), *The Cold War and the Middle East*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997

¹⁹ Golan, Galia, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East from World War II to Gorbachev*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990

²⁰ Malcolm, Neil, "Soviet Decision-Making and the Middle East" in Shearman, Peter and Phil Williams (ed), *The Superpowers, Central America and the Middle East*, Brassey's Defence Publishers, London, 1988

between the Soviet Union and its regional allies²¹. Giorgiy Mirski, with his essay on “The Soviet Perception of the US Threat” actually gave a brief and interesting account of the evolution of Soviet strategic thinking in the Middle East from Krushchev to Gorbachev²².

The most convincing narrative on the relationship between the superpowers, the Cold War framework and the Middle East actors is given by Avi Shlaim in his “War and Peace in the Middle East”. Shlaim argues that even though the involvement of great powers is not a unique feature of this region, the “pervasiveness and profound impact of this involvement” are specific of the Middle East. In support of his view he cites Carl Brown's “International Politics and the Middle East”²³. However, even though he assigns a big role to the superpowers, he does not see it as decisive and supports rather the opinion of Malcom Yapp of London's SOAS²⁴ that “the dominant feature was the manipulation of the international powers by regional powers”. Shlaim's own view is that “regional powers have enjoyed more leverage in dealing with outside powers than is generally recognized”²⁵.

In the period that goes from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, *manipulation* was two-ways: Fawaz Gerges in his comprehensive account of the events of the Cold War in the Middle East in the years between 1955 and 1967 says that “the intrusion of the Cold War into regional politics *exacerbated* regional conflicts and made their resolution more difficult.”²⁶ As Nigel J. Ashton writes in the introduction to the proceedings of a conference held in England in 2006, the years between 1967 and 1973 can be considered as the “crisis years” of the Cold War in the Middle East²⁷. The case of the “false intelligence report” passed by

²¹ Halliday, Fred, “The Impact of Soviet Policy in the Middle East” in Shearman, Peter and Phil Williams(ed), *The Superpowers, Central America and the Middle East*, Brassey's Defence Publishers, London, 1988

²² Mirsky, Georgiy, “The Soviet Perception of the US Threat” in Lesch, David (ed), *The Middle East and the United States*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1996

²³ Brown, Carl, *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Game*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 1984

²⁴ Yapp, Malcom E., *The Near East Since the First World War: A History to 1995*, Longman, 1996

²⁵ Shlaim, Avi, *War and Peace in the Middle East*, London: Penguin Books, 1995

²⁶ Gerges, Fawaz, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955-1967*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, 246

²⁷ Ashton, Nigel J. (ed), *The Cold War in the Middle East. Regional Conflict and the Superpowers 1967-1973*, London: Routledge, 2007. The book publishes the proceedings of a conference held at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor (UK) between 10 and 12 May 2006. The term “crisis years” was used by Michael Beschloss in his *Kennedy vs. Khrushchev: The Crisis Years, 1960-1963*, New York: Faber and Faber, 1991

the Soviets to the Egyptians in May 1967 provides a good example of “exacerbation” by the superpowers: the news it contained of a supposed Israeli military build-up on the Syrian front provoked the Egyptian mobilisation which in turn was one of the causes of the Israeli pre-emptive strike. According to Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez this was part of a pattern of behaviour by Moscow aimed at provoking an Arab-Israeli war²⁸.

The role of the east-west struggle, however, is more blurred for the years that follow the Iranian revolution in 1979. In the introduction to “The Cold War and the Middle East”, Shlaim and Sayigh go as far as saying that the difference between the systemic and the regionalist approaches might be outdated for the period which forms the subject of this dissertation. The two editors conclude their introduction saying that in this part of the world “the Cold War had already lost some of its significance in the preceding decade [the decade before the fall of the Berlin Wall] as a primary context for the formulation of policies in both foreign and domestic spheres”²⁹.

In his chapter on “The Middle East, the Great Powers, and the Cold War”, Fred Halliday goes even further saying that

It could be argued that if the Cold War is defined as the dominance of international politics by the Soviet-US competition, then it ended not in the late 1980s but a decade earlier, with the Iranian revolution in 1979 (...) The main line of division and conflict was not that of the Cold War, but that between the Islamic revolutionary movement in Iran and the states opposed to it³⁰.

This statement may work well as far as Iran is concerned but is highly exaggerated if we look at whole region. As Halliday himself points out later in his essay, events such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, “could have taken place without the Cold War (...) Yet the Cold War provided an international context that affected these processes in a variety of ways”³¹. But there is more than that as far as the post-1979 scenario is concerned: as Andrew Bacevich

²⁸ Ginor, Isabella and Gideon Remez, “The Origins of a Misnomer: The Expulsion of Soviet Advisers from Egypt in 1972” in Ashton, Nigel J. (ed), *The Cold War in the Middle East. Regional Conflict and the Superpowers 1967-1973*, London: Routledge, 2007

²⁹ Sayigh, Yezid and Avi Shlaim (ed), *The Cold War and the Middle East*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, 5

³⁰ Halliday, Fred, “The Middle East, the Great Powers, and the Cold War” in Sayigh, Yezid and Avi Shlaim (ed), *The Cold War and the Middle East*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, 20

³¹ Halliday, Fred, “The Middle East, the Great Powers, and the Cold War” in Sayigh, Yezid and Avi Shlaim (ed), *The Cold War and the Middle East*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, 26

pointed out, the Cold War and the post-Cold War (which can be labelled also as World War 4) overlapped in the decade that preceded the fall of the Berlin Wall³².

The consequence is that the winding down of the Cold War did not mean the triumph of regionalism over globalism. Rather, both the US and the USSR would initially see the events unfolding in Iran and Afghanistan through the zero-sum game of the Cold War. Later in that decade, some elements of the US foreign policy elite, with the cooperation of some Israeli politicians, started to build a new globalist approach that could encompass all the regional realities of the Middle East: that of the war against terrorism. It is therefore fair to say, in light of the present work, that the systemic approach still has its relevance in understanding US policy in this region during the 1980s because a new globalist view emerged while the old one was disappearing.

Given this focus, it would be unnecessary here – and probably impossible – to give a comprehensive account of the events in the Middle East during the Cold War. It is, however, important to assess the main interests and the main elements of the policy of both superpowers in the greater Middle East in order to understand what the globalist view was about and if it was grounded or not.

According to Steven Spiegel, several “factors of continuity” could be spotted when analysing US policy in this region since they reflected “American style in foreign affairs” and a “consensus on US interests”: “American leaders have consistently sought to prevent Soviet expansion, limit Arab radicalism, promote Arab-moderates and pro-American governments throughout the area, and preserve oil supplies”. Also, “no administration – Spiegel observed – since 1948 has wavered from a fundamental commitment to the security and survival of the State of Israel”. Finally, unilateralism was a fundamental part of US policy in the region, based on the belief that “America's allies had made errors that the United States would not repeat”³³. In his 1988 essay on the “Impact of US Policy in the Middle East” Avi Shlaim outlined the same main areas of interests: containment of the Soviet Union; control over the oil sources of the Persian gulf; limiting Arab radicalism;

³² Bacevich, Andrew J., *The New American Militarism. How Americans Are Seduced by War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 179. Bacevich's point of view is a crucial one in the present study and therefore is discussed in the introduction

³³ Spiegel, Steven, 381-382

safeguarding Israel³⁴.

As for the containment of the Soviet Union in the Middle East, the high concern by US policy-makers was not matched by a coherent strategy: globalist views were not matched by a globalist policy. According to William Quandt the US had tried to replicate in the Middle East the regional security system that it had created in Europe. The failure was due in part to the Arab-Israeli conflict and had left the US without a coherent strategy for the region. The peculiarity of the competition with the USSR in this region was, according to Quandt, that here unlike in Asia "American intervention, it was felt, might face a comparable move by the Soviets". This statement should not be misinterpreted: Quandt refers to "direct military confrontation" between US and Soviet troops which never took place in Asia. He concludes: "the Soviet angle was never far from the minds of policy-makers, but it did little to help clarify choices"³⁵.

The strategic importance for the Middle East in the fight against the USSR was once more stressed by Peter Hahn: military bases in Arab states would enable the Western allies to conduct aerial offensives in the Russian heartland, concentrate troops for ground intervention and position intelligence forces close to the enemy's frontier.

If a hostile power secured control of this area – US and British officials agreed in 1947 – not only would we lose very important resources and facilities but it would acquire a position of such dominating strategic and economic power that it would be fatal to our security³⁶.

According to Seyom Brown, the doctrine by American geopolitical thinkers taught at West Point (where Reagan's first Secretary of State Alexander Haig studied) had warned

Against allowing a would-be Eurasian 'heartland' hegemon to establish a position of dominance on the Near Eastern "rimland" for this would allow the Eurasian imperialist to interdict the oceanic powers' lines of global navigation for essential commerce and military operations. A heartland power that also controlled the

³⁴ Shlaim, Avi, "The Impact of US Policy in the Middle East", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 17, no.2, Winter 1988, pp. 15-28

³⁵ Quandt, William B., *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001, 12

³⁶ US-UK Agreed Minute, October 17, 1947, FO 800/476, Records of the Foreign Secretary's Office, Public Record Office (PRO), London in Hahn, Peter, 7

rimland could rule the world³⁷.

The study of the Soviet policy in the Middle East helps us to assess how much the US perception of this threat was justified. No doubts, several major events of the Cold War took place or originated from this region: the dispute over Iran and Azerbaijan in 1946 was one of the first clashes in the 50 year-long competition between the two superpowers; the Suez crisis in 1956 was one of the events that expanded this competition from Europe to the third world; 4 US presidential doctrines (Truman's, Eisenhower's, Nixon's and Carter's) originated from problems coming from this area; for 7 times the American nuclear alert was declared in order to face problems in the Middle East (Suez 1956, Lebanon 1958, Jordan the same year, Turkey 1963, Jordan 1970, Yom Kippur war 1973).

However, the Middle East was one of the few regions of the world in which there was no serious internal communist threat. Throughout the Cold War, the Soviets failed to stir up a single communist revolution in any of the Arab countries. As Fred Halliday pointed out, in the Arab countries of the Middle East the USSR could not count on strong and influential Communist parties and had to rely on the radical nationalist regimes such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya and Algeria. "They may, on occasion, proclaim 'socialist' goals and aspirations but, apart from with the PDRY [People Democratic Republic of Yemen], Soviet influence has been superficial, and has been easily controlled and repudiated when the states wished". Often, these regimes took initiatives which, against Soviet will, stirred up a major American involvement. Their reliability was, according to Halliday, poor: "The PDRY has been too marginal, and factionally divided, to count. The others - Syria, Egypt and Libya - have been difficult clients at best, prone to adventurist initiatives on the one hand and fickle rapprochements with the West on the other³⁸. Moreover, whereas in Syria or Iraq tiny Communist Parties existed, the Soviets sacrificed them in order to have good relationships with the radical nationalist regimes.

Soviet policy in the Middle East was therefore based on this fundamental weakness and centred on two main interests: first, having a more or less stable partnership with some

³⁷ Brown, Seyom, *The Faces of Power: Constancy and Change in United States Foreign Policy From Truman to Clinton*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, 424

³⁸ Halliday, Fred, *The Impact of Soviet Policy in the Middle East* in Shearman, Peter and Phil Williams(ed), *The Superpowers, Central America and the Middle East*, Brassey's Defence Publishers, London, 1988

Arab radical government in order to build up Soviet reputation as promoter and supporter of “wars of national liberation”; second, obtaining from strategically important countries in the region the possibility to use their ports and airports for the Soviet Navy and Air Force. To achieve this second goal the Soviets nurtured good ties first with Egypt then with Syria and Yemen, while their relationship with Qadhafi's Libya was more based on mutual exchange of weapons-for-dollars than on any common long-term political goal³⁹.

According to Georgiy Mirsky, the alliance between the USSR and the “left-wing Arab regimes” was born under Nikita Khrushchev who in 1955 struck the famous arms deal with Nasser. The alliance gained momentum and came to include Syria, Iraq, Algeria and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) while Libya was always “an embarrassing partner”. The concept that was elaborated to justify this policy was that of “Revolutionary Democracy”: a non-Marxist, non-proletarian set of ideas and politics based on anti-colonialism. The idea was that anti-colonial, anti-imperialist revolutions might eventually grow into a social one. Brezhnev, on his part, saw the Middle East as part of that “soft underbelly” of the capitalist system that had to be included in the Soviet bloc in order to provoke a loss for the United States⁴⁰.

Despite all the ideological justifications, by the early 1980s the picture, according to Neil Malcolm, was becoming bleak:

Third world clients had in any case turned out to be unpredictable and unreliable collaborators. The socialist countries (...) in a number of cases were no doubt seen as liabilities rather than as assets to be further accumulated (...) The Middle East now represented more a problem to be solved than an opportunity to be exploited.⁴¹

At the same time, some of the events that unfolded in the late 1970s (in Angola, Ethiopia, Nicaragua and moreover in Iran and Afghanistan) convinced more than one member of

³⁹ For this general outlook on Soviet policy in the region see Sayigh, Yezid (ed), *The Cold War and the Middle East*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997 and Golan, Galia, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East from World War II to Gorbachev*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990

⁴⁰ Mirsky, Georgiy, “The Soviet Perception of the US Threat” in Lesch, David (ed), *The Middle East and the United States*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1996, 406-408

⁴¹ Malcolm, Neil, “Soviet Decision-Making and the Middle East” in Shearman, Peter and Phil Williams (ed), *The Superpowers, Central America and the Middle East*, Brassey's Defence Publishers, London, 1988

the US foreign policy elite that a Soviet offensive was on the way. This belief led the Reagan administration to eventually launch the Reagan doctrine and a counter-offensive in the Third World⁴².

The Soviets were not the United States' only concern in the Middle East: the defense of the oil fields of the Persian gulf ranged second in the list⁴³. The importance of these resources had its roots in the 1920s but had been greatly increased by the outbreak of the Cold War: as Peter Hahn noted, the region contained the largest proven oil reserves of the world which had to be denied to the Soviets and used for the economic reconstruction of Western Europe and Japan. In 1947, oil coming from this area was about half of the total amount needed for the US Armed Forces and the vast majority (about 90%) of that fueling the Marshall Plan. The CIA deemed Middle Eastern oil "essential to the security of the US" while the State Department added that tax revenues from American oil companies that had invested in the region were "substantial". "The uninterrupted supply of oil from the Middle East is so vital – the Pentagon observed in 1956 – that nothing should be allowed to threaten its continuance"⁴⁴.

The relationship between oil and the Middle East, Douglas Little wrote, was so strong that "the most recognizable symbol of the Middle East for most Americans has probably been the oil well". In the first 25 years of the Cold War, Little argues, there was a "symbiotic" relationship between the policy-makers and the oil industry that "allowed the United States to provide aid and exert influence in the Arab world while keeping shareholders and friends of Israel relatively happy"⁴⁵. With the creation of OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) after 1970, defending oil fields became an alternative goal, for many in the US business elite, to the safeguard of Israel. Those that were friends of the conservative monarchies of the oil-rich countries (and of American oil companies..)

⁴² See above the paragraph on the "Global Cold War" and further the paragraph on "The Strategic Shift"

⁴³ On the roots of American policy on Middle Eastern oil see Anderson, Irvine, ARAMCO, the United States and Saudi Arabia: A study of the Dynamics of Foreign Oil Policy 1933-1950, Princeton, 1981; Engler, Robert, *The Brotherhood of Oil: Energy Policy and the Public Interest*, Chicago, 1977; Painter, David, *Oil and the American Century: The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Oil Policy, 1941-1954*, Baltimore: John Hopkin's University Press, 1986; Stoff, Michael, *Oil, War and American Security: The Search for a National Policy on Foreign Oil*, New Haven, 1980; Yergin, Daniel, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power*, New York, 1991

⁴⁴ Hahn, Peter, 7;

⁴⁵ Little, Douglas, 4

were opposed to stronger relations with Israel and vice versa. An example of this cleavage could be found in the Reagan administration where Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger often clashed with Secretary of State Alexander Haig on the relationship with Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The third main US interest in the region was the fight against Arab radical nationalism. The rationale behind this strategy can be found in a book published in the spring of 1968 by the former American emissary in Cairo John Badeau on the “political and ideological Cold War that is now raging the Middle East”: according to him the radical nationalists such as Nasser were fighting against the conservatives such as Saudi Arabia and Morocco⁴⁶. This classification (which was part of US policy already since the Eisenhower administration as we will see for the Lebanon 1958 intervention) soon became one between the *pro-Soviet* radicals and the *pro-Western* conservatives. This was not out of place since, from a certain point on, some of the Arab radical regimes were actually chosen by the Soviet leadership as their proxies in the region: after 1956, confusing Nasser for a Soviet ally was not too difficult. According to William Stivers, however, the United States had a long story of confrontation with Middle Eastern nationalists: “when confronted with a vital choice between accommodating nationalist forces in the Middle East or seeking to repress them, Washington officials constantly chose a policy of repression”. Stivers dates back the beginning of this confrontation to the 1920s when American policy-makers acquiesced in the partition of the former Ottoman empire between European powers. During the Cold War, according to Stivers, “in the eyes of American officials the Soviets were not likely to gain influence in the Middle East by crude military action or other forms of direct intrusion. Rather, they would take advantage of the anti-Western orientation of ultra-nationalist elements”⁴⁷. Stivers therefore draws a connection between American opposition to Arab radicalism and the defense of the “established order of things”. This explanation has some elements of truth as we will see in the case of Lebanon. However, it is not that the United States was opposed at all to change: rather, it opposed “revolutionary change” and favoured political modernization.

⁴⁶ Badeau, John, *The American Approach to the Arab World*, New York: Harper and Row, 1968

⁴⁷ Stivers, William, *America's Confrontation with Revolutionary Change in the Middle East, 1948-1983*, London: MacMillan Press, 1986, vii and 4

The fear for the “perils of revolution” was indicated among the main features of US foreign policy by Michael Hunt in his 1987 book on “Ideology and US Foreign Policy”. In depicting the influence of John Adams on US thought about revolutions, Hunt wrote:

So many and so serious were the risks that attended a revolution, Adams soberly concluded, that resistance to despotism was justified only where “the fair order of liberty and a free constitution” could be rapidly realized and prolonged anarchy avoided⁴⁸.

One year and a half before John Badeau's book was published, the Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee William Fulbright came out with his “The Arrogance of Power”⁴⁹ in which he argued that, for a variety of reasons, Americans were “handicapped” when dealing with third world revolutionaries: they were frightened by the prospect of radical change and, as Little summed up, “unwilling to admit that the people of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East were likely to pursue a path to the future very different from the one travelled by the United States. The concept of peaceful revolution was an oxymoron”⁵⁰.

This antipathy toward revolutionary change led American policy-makers to think more deeply about modernization theories as the answer to the unrest in the third world. The most remarkable accounts of the influence of modernization theories in US policy in the Middle East come from Douglas Little's “American Orientalism” and Mario Del Pero's history of American foreign policy⁵¹. As Del Pero argues, the “ideology of modernization” was a liberal response to Eisenhower's policy toward the third world which centred on military assistance to the ruling classes and imposition of free market. This ideology was

⁴⁸ Hunt, Michael, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy*, Yale University Press, 1988, 94

⁴⁹ Fulbright, J. William, *The Arrogance of Power*, New York: Vintage, 1966

⁵⁰ Little, Douglas, 190

⁵¹ Del Pero, Mario, *Libertà e impero: gli Stati Uniti e il mondo 1776-2006*, Bari: Laterza, 2008, 313-332; Little, Douglas, *American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945*, University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 193-227; On this issue see also Latham, Michael, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and <<Nation Building>> in the Kennedy Era*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000; Engerman, David and others (ed), *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003; Gilman, Nils, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2003; For a full bibliographical essay on modernization and US foreign policy see Cullather, Nick, “Modernization Theory” in Hogan, Michael (ed), *America in the World: the Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995

the result of the great investments that had been made on social sciences and would be the hegemonic theory during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. The basic idea was that there was only one path to modernity and the final goal was an industrial economy and a consumer goods society with high living standards and low unemployment. The intellectual supporters of this ideology thought that “pre-modern” societies could be shaped by enlightened policies and become modern⁵². As for the policy-makers, according to Douglas Little

Always skeptical of any Third World radical who deviated from a Jeffersonian trajectory, America's national security managers believed that by combining Yankee ingenuity with Middle East petrodollars, the United States could nudge traditional societies such as Iraq, Libya and Iran down the road toward evolutionary change, thereby making revolutionary change impossible⁵³.

In early 1956, then New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller asked Harvard political scientist Henry Kissinger to head a series of wide-ranging panels on the issues most likely to confront the US at home and abroad. In the late 1950s, the members of what came to be called the “Rockefeller panel” published a series of reports highlighting “the revolution of rising expectations” sweeping the third world. Kissinger argued that America could not stand by and look the old social orders be overthrown together with the old colonial rule and wrote that whoever won the White House in 1961 should either “assist these states in becoming economically and socially viable or watch them drift into Kremlin's orbit”⁵⁴.

Two authors were very important in the translation of modernization theories into concrete US foreign policy. First, Walt Rostow who in his “anti-communist manifesto”⁵⁵ warned that communism was the danger facing all the societies that failed to modernize effectively. Rostow, along with Max Millikan, had written in 1957 the book “A Proposal: Key to an Effective Foreign Policy” in which he argued that the Cold War was moving to the third world and that the only way to win it for the US was through modernization⁵⁶.

⁵² Del Pero, Mario, 315-316

⁵³ Little, Douglas, 193

⁵⁴ Rockefeller Brothers Fund, *Prospect for America: the Rockefeller Panel Reports*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1961, 54-56, 165-171 in Little, Douglas, 195

⁵⁵ Rostow, Walt, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960

⁵⁶ Rostow, Walt and Max Millikan, *A Proposal: Key to an Effective Foreign Policy*, New York: Harper and Bros,

One of Rostow's former colleagues, Daniel Lerner, in his "The Passing of Traditional Society. Modernizing the Middle East" argued for implementation of modernization theories in this region: "What America is – he wrote – the modernizing Middle East seeks to become".⁵⁷

Things did not work exactly as these social scientists had predicted, at least in the Middle East. The three countries that were picked to test the effects of modernization were Iran, Iraq and Libya because their oil sources allowed for the development of better life standards⁵⁸.

In Iran a US covert action had helped to overthrow the nationalist democratic government headed by Mossadeq in 1953⁵⁹. After that, US policy makers and diplomats had tried to convince the Shah that, unless he modernized the country and helped to build a new middle class, he would be overthrown by a communist revolution. The implementation of what was called the "white revolution" would create initial opposition in the clergy and then general disappointment in the 1970s that would lay the ground for the Islamic revolution that will be discussed further on in the paragraph about "the strategic shift"⁶⁰.

Another modernization program was devised for Iraq under the regime of Nuri Said which was overthrown by Colonel Qassim in 1958. To counter the Nasserist influence Qassim would eventually ask for the cooperation of the local communists. Eisenhower's advisers would then rely on the tiny Ba'ath party that was going to seize power in 1963 with a coup d'etat⁶¹.

Finally, in Libya the oil boom of the late 1950s had stirred up an unrest in the new middle class caused by "rising expectations". In the early 1960s, as Little writes, the American officials in the country feared that unless modernization was carried out King Idris, a conservative Islamic ruler, would be overthrown by pro-Nasser Libyans. The ruling Senussi dynasty, however, never accepted to implement the whole modernization package and instead focused on US military aid to quell the rising unrest. On September 1, 1969 a

1957

⁵⁷ Lerner, Daniel, *The Passing of Traditional Society. Modernizing the Middle East*, London: Macmillan, 1958

⁵⁸ Little, Douglas, 197-198

⁵⁹ On the 1953 coup, see Kinzer, Stephen, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2008

⁶⁰ Little, Douglas, 219

⁶¹ Little, Douglas, 202

small band of officers from the Libyan army overthrew the Senussi dynasty⁶² and established a pattern that would be followed then years later in Iran by a more massive, civilian revolution: a violent revolt was needed to overthrow pro-Western regimes and produce a regeneration of the country through return to the fundamentals of Islam and rejection of Western allegiances. Despite the initial American hopes that this Islamic fundamentalism would keep the new Libyan dictator Qadhafi away from the Soviets, a few months later an arms deal was brokered between the new regime and the USSR.

Qadhafi's brand of fundamentalism was still a mix of religious extremism and Nasserite pan-Arabism as it emerged from his 1973 "Green Book" which outlined his plan for a "Muslim Cultural Revolution". Qadhafi's "Third Universal Theory" claimed that by returning to the fundamentals of Islam, Libyans could build a "Third Way" toward development that rejected both Western capitalism and communism.

Libya is the most striking example of one of the causes of the collapse of US-led modernization efforts in the Middle East: these programs came together with military assistance to the ruling elites which then used their renewed military prowess to quell social unrest. Also, the economic development caused by the oil revenues created a middle class which, in the case of Iran and Libya, was not granted political freedom and turned to authoritarian and extremist leaders to overthrow its pro-Western oppressors. In the long run, modernization ideology proved thus unable to thwart both Soviet inroads and Arab radicalism while jeopardising often the second main US interest in the region: oil.

Finally, the fourth major US interest in the Middle East, namely the safeguard of Israel, needs to be discussed in a separate paragraph because of the relevance of the issue in this dissertation and also because of the recent debate among historians.

Israel and a Very Special Relationship

In a press conference held on May 22, 1977, US president Jimmy Carter said: "We have a special relationship with Israel. It's absolutely crucial that no one in our country or around the world ever doubt that our number-one commitment in the Middle East is to protect

⁶² Little, Douglas, 212

the right of Israel to exist⁶³.”

The relationship between the state of Israel and the United States is one of the main themes of the history of the Cold War in the Middle East and also of current international politics. Several books and essays have dealt with this issue in the past⁶⁴ but the debate has been particularly active and popular after the article on the “Israel Lobby” by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt appeared in the “London Review of Books” in March 2006 arguing that US policy in the Middle East is a prisoner of the hegemony of the Lobby⁶⁵. The issue of the existence – and relevance – of a pro-Israeli Lobby in the US⁶⁶, however, is only one aspect of the general theme of the US-Israeli special relationship.

According to Douglas Little, “critics of the special relationship have attributed its persistence to election-year arithmetic and domestic politics”⁶⁷. Walt and Mearsheimer's article must be included in this category along with Janice J. Terry's exhaustive analysis of the role of lobbies in the making of US Middle Eastern policy⁶⁸ or Edward Tivnan's study of the excessive influence of the “Lobby” on US policy⁶⁹. Also a whole wealth of studies tried to demonstrate the influence of domestic politics on Truman's decision to support the creation of the state of Israel in 1947 along with the pro-Israeli tilt of all American

⁶³ Reich, Bernard, “The United States and Israel: The Nature of a Special Relationship” in Lesch, David, *The Middle East and the United States: a Historical and Political Reassessment*, Boulder, 1996

⁶⁴ A general overview of the alliance can be found in Schoenbaum, David, *The United States and the State of Israel*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993; Reich, Bernard, “The United States and Israel: The Nature of a Special Relationship” in Lesch, David, *The Middle East and the United States: a Historical and Political Reassessment*, Boulder, 1996; Mansour, Camille, *Beyond Alliance. Israel in US Foreign Policy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994; Sheffer, Gabriel, *Dynamics of Dependence: US-Israeli Relations*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1987; Green, Stephen, *Living by the Sword: America and Israel in the Middle East, 1968-1987*, Brattleboro, 1988;

⁶⁵ Mearsheimer, John and Stephen Walt, “The Israel Lobby”, *London Review of Books*, March 10 2006 . On September 28 of the same year the LRB organized a debate in New York City under the heading “The Israel lobby: does it have too much influence on American foreign policy?” which can be downloaded at <http://www.scribemedi.org/2006/10/11/israel-lobby/>

⁶⁶ On the separate issue of the Pro-Israel Lobby: Terry, Janice J., *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East. The Role of Lobbies and Special Interest Groups*, London: Pluto Press, 2005; Kenen, I. L., *Israel's Defense Line: Her Friends and Foes in Washington*, Buffalo, 1981; Tivnan, Edward, *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy*, New York: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, 1987; Ben-Zvi, Abraham, *The United States and Israel*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994; Melman, Yossi and Dan Raviv, *Inside the US-Israeli Alliance*, New York: Hyperion, 1994;

⁶⁷ Little, Douglas, *American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945*, University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 78

⁶⁸ Terry, Janice J., *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East. The Role of Lobbies and Special Interest Groups*, London: Pluto Press, 2005

⁶⁹ Tivnan, Edward, *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy*, New York: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, 1987

presidents except for Eisenhower⁷⁰. Finally, some authors have started to investigate the relationship between the rise of the religious right in the US and the growing alliance with Israel⁷¹.

On the other hand, authors less critical of the special relationship have argued that Cold War and strategic considerations have fueled the alliance: Israel was a strategic asset in the fight against the Soviets and was the only reliable and truly western-oriented democracy of the Middle East⁷².

The difference between these two historical interpretations resembled the discussion among policy-makers between those who considered Israel as a strategic asset and those who saw it as a liability⁷³. However, an historical synthesis is badly needed because, as Douglas Little again remarks, a close examination of this relationship in the last 50 years reveals that, more often than not, "both simple [electoral] arithmetic and [geopolitical] differential calculus were at work"⁷⁴.

Before analysing the US-Israeli special relationship, a short premise needs to be made because, as in other aspects of the history of the Middle East, the words have to be picked wisely. In this dissertation the expression "*Jewish Lobby*" will never appear. It is the opinion of the author that this expression is both ambiguous and inaccurate: *ambiguous* because it is often used to hide antisemite feelings and justify creative plot theories; *inaccurate* because, as we will see, any identification between the US Jewish community and the Pro-Israeli organizations such as the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee

⁷⁰ Manuel, Frank, *The Realities of American-Palestine Relations*, Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1949; Snetsinger, John, *Truman, the Jewish Vote, and the Creation of Israel*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974; Bain, Kenneth Ray, *The March to Zion: United States Policy and the Founding of Israel*, College Station: A&M University Press, 1979; Wilson, Evan, *Decision on Palestine: How the US Came to Recognize Israel*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1979; Green, Stephen, *Living by the Sword: America and Israel in the Middle East, 1968-1987*, Brattleboro: Amana Books, 1988

⁷¹ Bacevich, Andrew J., *The New American Militarism. How Americans Are Seduced by War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005; Wagner, D., "Reagan and Begin, Bibi and Jerry, the Theopolitical Alliance of the Likud Party with American Christian Right", *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 20, n.4, Fall 1998; Di Motoli, Paolo, "La destra israeliana e gli Stati Uniti", *Il Ponte*, n.2-3, febbraio-marzo 2005

⁷² Ben-Zvi, Abraham, *The United States and Israel*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994; Melman, Yossi and Dan Raviv, *Inside the US-Israeli Alliance*, New York: Hyperion, 1994; Spiegel, Steven, "Israel as a Strategic Asset", *Commentary* 75, no. 6, 1983; Rosen, Steven, "The Strategic Value of Israel", Washington: AIPAC papers on US-Israeli Relations, 1982

⁷³ See further on and also Mansour, Camille, *Beyond Alliance. Israel in US Foreign Policy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994

⁷⁴ Little, Douglas, *American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945*, University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 78

(AIPAC) is perfunctory.

The US-Israeli special relationship has historical, strategic, domestic and international causes which must be analysed separately and then confronted with the subject of the present study.

First of all, historically speaking, the relationship was not always that special. In his comprehensive history of the US-Israeli relationship, David Schoenbaum argues that it is not older than “network television”. If money is a good indicator of a special relationship, Schoenbaum notes that from 1948 to the Jordanian civil war in 1970 “official US aid barely peeped above the baseline of a graph”. Since then, Israel has turned into the world's absolute and per capita recipient of US aid⁷⁵. As Odd Arne Westad has pointed out, over the years Israel has received 81 billion dollars worth of economic and military aid. To draw a comparison, Westad cites the figure about all of Sub-Saharan Africa from 1945 to date: \$ 32 billion⁷⁶.

In the first years of the existence of the Jewish state both the USSR and the USA competed to back Israel. Back then, the Israeli population was overwhelmingly of European descent (Ashkenazis while the Middle Eastern Sephardis Jews and the Russian ones came in significant numbers only later) and the links with Western Europe were still strong. Not by chance, the know-how to acquire nuclear weapons was provided by France and the same country, along with Great Britain, was part of the alliance that was to preserve European control over the Suez Canal and ensure Israeli sovereignty over the Sinai peninsula in 1956. In that occasion, President Eisenhower ruined the Anglo-French-Israeli plans by supporting a UN resolution that called for their withdrawal. UN sanctions, with US support, were avoided only through last-minute negotiations in which the Israelis finally agreed to withdraw and the UN decided to deploy a peacekeeping force in the Sinai and Gaza. During the discussion in the US Congress over sanctions the Secretary of State Dulles stated something which would later become the leitmotiv of the opponents of the view of Israel as a strategic asset: “Much of the world, including the Israeli government, believed Israel could in crucial moments control US policy. Should the Arab

⁷⁵ Schoenbaum, David, *The United States and the State of Israel*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 4

⁷⁶ Westad, Odd Arne, *The Global Cold War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 156

nations see any confirmation of this belief they would turn to Russia.⁷⁷

The turning point came with the Six Days War in which the Johnson administration provided an unwavering support to Israel. Johnson was a friend of Israel since the late 1950s, not by chance the time in which AIPAC was founded. Nixon, who had masterminded the 1956 show-down, was convinced that America's relationship with the Jewish state had to reflect the US national interest, not merely interest group politics. Only after Israel helped to support the Jordanian conservative regime in the 1970 crisis, did Nixon start to consider it as a strategic asset. In the 1973 Yom Kippur War the President instructed the Pentagon to "send [to Israel] anything that will fly"⁷⁸.

Carter's tenure in the White House could also be considered far from a honey-moon with Israel. Only with Reagan did the alliance take a different content: no more only a strategic asset, Israel was starting to be viewed also as an ideological ally. As AIPAC leader Thomas Dine stated in 1986: "We are no longer talking about a transformation in the relationship. We are talking about a revolution"⁷⁹.

Overall, the special relationship with Israel is a recent feature of US foreign policy and is not always as tight as it looks. As Bernard Reich concluded, there existed "broad patterns of concord on the more strategic and existential issues, accompanied by disagreement on the specifics of many of the elements of the Arab-Israeli conflict and on the means to achieve congruent objectives"⁸⁰.

The special relationship is not only recent and unstable: it lacks also a widespread consensus in the foreign policy elite. Policy-makers and intellectuals are divided between those that see Israel as a strategic asset and those who consider it a liability. The golden moment of the the formers were the early 1980s: the fall of the Shah in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the statement of the Carter doctrine and the Reagan victory in the 1980 elections all conjured to put forward the idea that Israel had a certain number of

⁷⁷ Little, Douglas, *American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945*, University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 78

⁷⁸ Little, Douglas, *American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945*, University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 105-107; On the period between 1967 and 1973 see also Quandt, William B., *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001

⁷⁹ Schoenbaum, David, 4

⁸⁰ Reich, Bernard, "The United States and Israel: The Nature of a Special Relationship" in Lesch, David, *The Middle East and the United States: a Historical and Political Reassessment*, Boulder, 1996

“services” which could be useful in fighting the Cold War. They were outlined in a paper by Steven Rosen issued by AIPAC in 1982 on the “Strategic value of Israel”: the Jewish state could serve as a base for a swing force between Europe and the Persian Gulf⁸¹. The later director of the Washington Institute for the Middle East Martin Indyk and Reagan's special advisor for National Security Issues Geoffrey Kemp were listed by Camille Mansour among the supporters of this idea. Israel was valued also for its defense capabilities, for the cooperation in Research and Development and in the intelligence field. In a 1983 article on “Commentary”, Steven Spiegel argued that “if Israeli experiences were worth only 2% of the [US] annual defense budget, that would amount to over \$ 4 billion”⁸². To be able to use Israeli services, according to Mansour, supporters of the strategic asset position thought that ties had to be exclusive: “Indeed, if Israel is to play a role in the Middle East, the other countries must not enjoy ties of the same nature”⁸³.

On the other hand, those that perceived Israel as a burden had a mainly negative position in that they simply opposed stronger ties without being “an advocacy for any precise policy” as Mansour wrote. Their main point was that strong ties with Israel harmed those with Arab states: “The US – wrote former Under-secretary of State George Ball in 1984 – cannot cooperate militarily with Israel without irreparably damaging its relations with the Arab states”⁸⁴.

The importance of Israel in the fight against the Soviet Union was only one of the three premises that, according to David Schoenbaum, defined and drove the special relationship. The moral and psychic legacy of the Holocaust⁸⁵ mattered as much as the “presumed affinities of that were now universally referred to as “Judaean-Christian” values”⁸⁶.

Lobbying for Israel has been easy and effective first of all because Americans have perceived Israel as a sister nation. In a 1975 survey, half of the respondents said the Israelis were “like Americans” while the same quality was attributed to Arabs only by 5% of those

⁸¹ Rosen, Steven, “The Strategic Value of Israel”, Washington: AIPAC papers on US-Israeli Relations, 1982

⁸² Spiegel, Steven, “Israel as a Strategic Asset”, *Commentary* 75, no. 6, 1983

⁸³ Mansour, Camille, *Beyond Alliance. Israel in US Foreign Policy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994

⁸⁴ Ball, George, *Error and Betrayal in Lebanon*, Washington, DC: Foundation for Middle East Peace, 1984, 128

⁸⁵ On the sense of guilt for the Holocaust see Wyman, David S., *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945*, New York, 1984

⁸⁶ Schoenbaum, David, 320

surveyed. In fact, Schoenbaum notes, “what could be more American than the taste for biblical symbolism, entrepreneurial zip, pioneer settlement, national independence, democratic republics that Israelis have shared and exploited since the beginnings of Jewish settlement in Palestine?”. If the frontier is the defining moment of American exceptionalism, as Turner argued⁸⁷, then Israel provided, in the mind of many Americans, a new “West” to be conquered. The Israeli survivors of the Holocaust were also compared to the Puritans running away from religious persecutions in Europe to settle in the new world. As Francis Chase wrote in the National Geographic in 1946, “on a miniature – almost on a laboratory scale – a visit to Palestine today is much like a visit to America of yesterday”⁸⁸. Arabs, on the other hand, were depicted as backward and semi-feudal in a replication of that “hierarchy of race” that Michael Hunt has included among the main features of the ideology of US foreign policy⁸⁹.

Douglas Little cited dozens of examples of this approach in his “American Orientalism”. One of John F. Kennedy's military advisers, Robert Komer, once explained to the president that it was always important to “take adequate account of the inferiority of the Arab soldier compared to the Israeli”. Harold Gliden, then serving as a US diplomat in Baghdad once predicted: “if Arabs ever took over the world, they would start instantly to tear it down”. After the bloody military coup that occurred in Baghdad in 1963 he told a reporter: “Arab values of vengeance, prestige and obsession with feuding are not acclimated to urban society”⁹⁰.

It is on this background of sympathy for Israel that the Lobby has managed to successfully champion the cause of the special relationship. As Janice Terry has skilfully explained, the role of political lobbies is a consequence of the low level of popular participation in US politics. Voters concerned for the fate of Israel – not only US Jews but also a growing percentage of evangelicals - are those most likely to go the polls. By mobilizing them and by exerting constant pressure on policy-makers, the Pro-Israeli lobby has raised its

⁸⁷ Turner, Frederick Jackson, *The Frontier in American History*, New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1920

⁸⁸ Chase, Francis, “Palestine Today”, *National Geographic Magazine*, October 1946

⁸⁹ Hunt, Michael, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy*, Yale University Press, 1988

⁹⁰ Little, Douglas, *American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945*, University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 30-31

leverage on US foreign policy⁹¹.

AIPAC, the main organization of the Lobby, was born in 1954 as an offspring of the American Zionist Council of Public Affairs which had already effectively fought a presumed anti-Israeli bias in the White House during the Eisenhower administration. The founder I.L. Kenen operated on the belief that what was good for Israel was also good for America⁹². Nonetheless, the Pro-Israeli front in US politics is not just made up of AIPAC and similar organizations and is not an exclusive of US Jews. The best definition of the term “pro-Israeli Lobby” can be found in Mearsheimer and Walt's article:

We use ‘the Lobby’ as shorthand for the loose coalition of individuals and organisations who actively work to steer US foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction. This is not meant to suggest that ‘the Lobby’ is a unified movement with a central leadership, or that individuals within it do not disagree on certain issues. Not all Jewish Americans are part of the Lobby, because Israel is not a salient issue for many of them. In a 2004 survey, for example, roughly 36 per cent of American Jews said they were either ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ emotionally attached to Israel⁹³.

As they point out later in the article, the Lobby is made up also of Christian evangelicals who think that the rebirth of Israel is the fulfilment of a biblical prophecy⁹⁴, “neoconservative *gentiles*”, government officials and US representatives which have no personal affiliation with neither Israel nor the US Jewish community.

To this coalition, Walt and Mearsheimer give a prominent role in the making of US Middle East policy:

For the past several decades, and especially since the Six-Day War in 1967, the centrepiece of US Middle Eastern policy has been its relationship with Israel. The combination of unwavering support for Israel and the related effort to spread ‘democracy’ throughout the region has inflamed Arab and Islamic opinion and jeopardised not only US security but that of much of the rest of the world. This situation has no equal in

⁹¹ Terry, Janice J., *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East. The Role of Lobbies and Special Interest Groups*, London: Pluto Press, 2005, 4-13 and 68-81

⁹² This definition of Kenen's thought can be found in Little, Douglas, "Gideon's Band: America and the Middle East since 1945" in Hogan, Michael (ed), *America in the World: the Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Kenen's manifesto is *Israel's Defense Line: Her Friends and Foes in Washington*, Buffalo, 1981

⁹³ Mearsheimer, John and Stephen Walt, "The Israel Lobby", *London Review of Books*, March 10 2006

⁹⁴ On the link between Christian fundamentalists and the Pro-Israeli lobby see further

American political history. Why has the US been willing to set aside its own security and that of many of its allies in order to advance the interests of another state? One might assume that the bond between the two countries was based on shared strategic interests or compelling moral imperatives, but neither explanation can account for the remarkable level of material and diplomatic support that the US provides. Instead, the thrust of US policy in the region derives almost entirely from domestic politics, and especially the activities of the 'Israel Lobby'⁹⁵.

Many parts of this statement contain exaggerations: even though many US presidents like Carter paid lip service to this principle, the US-Israeli relationship *was not* the "centrepiece" of US Middle Eastern policy after 1967 because other very important concerns, as we have seen above, determined American course in the region; strategic considerations played a role in foreign policy-making at least during the Nixon years if not also in other administrations; the US-Israeli relationship did not (and could not) *alone* jeopardise the security of the US and its allies. Moreover, trying to explain the whole rationale behind US policy in the Middle East through the role of the Pro-Israeli Lobby is, at least, parochial as if the interaction between the US domestic scenario and the forces in the Middle East did not matter.

Having said that, the essay contained also some fundamental truths which have already been discussed like the unparalleled economic and military aid for Israel. Above all, the *extent* of the special relationship outlined in the article is further confirmed by the events that are the subject of the present study, especially the US intervention in Lebanon.

First of all, the US accepted to run risks in the name of Israel which it did not take for any other country in the region: it is hard to argue that there would have been any US intervention in Lebanon if the IDF had not invaded that country. Also, when on the ground, the Marines took many risks (and some casualties) because the Israeli army decided to withdraw from the strategic Shuf plateau that overlooked Beirut and its airport, where the US soldiers were stationed. This happened despite requests by US diplomats to delay the withdrawal until a security agreement could be arranged.

Furthermore, in the events in Lebanon the normal system of sanctions and incentives

⁹⁵ Mearsheimer, John and Stephen Walt, "The Israel Lobby", London Review of Books, March 10 2006

applied by foreign policy-makers of any major power to its allies has not functioned. Israel never paid the price of its actions when it played its own game in Lebanon and created problems for US policy in the region. As we will see, despite the promises of a limited operation in Lebanon were not fulfilled, no military sanctions were approved by the US government. Overall, the Israeli government in Lebanon managed to delay and limit the IDF withdrawal requested by the Reagan administration and at the same time gained a new strategic cooperation during Prime Minister Shamir's visit in the US in late November 1983.

However, even though the *extent* of the special relationship envisioned in Walt and Mearsheimer's article is confirmed by this case-study, the *cause* cannot be found only in the overwhelming influence of AIPAC and the Lobby. Support for Israel was one of the main points of Reagan's agenda and one of the few issues (along with anti-communism and taxation) that kept together the Neoconservative intellectual elite and the social conservatives that were both part of the Reagan coalition⁹⁶. Several leading Neocons such as Norman Podhoretz, Irving Kristol, Richard Perle, and Paul Wolfowitz were Jews. According to Michael Schaller, a determination to assist Israel – which many liberals and leftists had come to criticize – partially shaped their political agenda. This agenda dovetailed especially well with many evangelical Christians and with the followers of the Moral Majority. Cooperation with these Jewish intellectuals also provided a strong base of ideas to the conservative movement⁹⁷.

The birth of the Moral Majority was a crucial factor in Reagan's victory in the 1980 elections. This alliance of conservative Christians brought forward the idea that the creation of a powerful Israel represented a critical precondition for Christ's eventual return⁹⁸. According to the leader of the Moral Majority Jerry Falwell, in 1980 about 20% of

⁹⁶ see above the paragraph on “The president and his coalition” in the Chapter about “The Reagan Revolution

⁹⁷ For a good analysis of the relationship between Reagan's coalition and the defense of Israel, see Schaller, Michael, *Right Turn. American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era 1980-1992*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007 pp. 38 and ss.

⁹⁸ On the relationship between the US Christian right and the Israeli right see Wagner, D., “Reagan and Begin, Bibi and Jerry, the Theopolitical Alliance of the Likud Party with American Christian Right”, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 20, n.4, Fall 1998 and also Di Motoli, Paolo, “La destra israeliana e gli Stati Uniti”, *Il Ponte*, n.2-3, febbraio-marzo 2005

the voters agreed with the organization's platform and the security of Israel was one of its pillars:

Moral Majority had four tenets: pro-family, pro-life, pro-strong national defense, and pro-Israel. It didn't matter who you were, or where you went to church, or if you went to church or not. If you could say yes to the four tenets, you could be part of it.⁹⁹

The roots of the relationship between conservative Christians and the Zionist cause could be traced back to the thinking of 1800s' Louis Way, an Anglican clergyman who was fascinated with the ancient Apocalyptic theories. Way emphasized three themes, all of which anticipated the contemporary movement called Christian Zionism: first, Jewish "restoration" was a necessary historical and political phenomenon; second, careful charting and interpretation of present day events would become a primary task of informed Christians, who with sufficient study and inspiration, could decode the signs of the times pointing to the "end"; third, the restored Jewish nation in Palestine would be a sign of the end of history and prelude to Jesus' return to earth¹⁰⁰.

This beliefs were boosted when Israel captured Jerusalem in the June 1967 war. Nelson Bell, editor of the influential evangelical magazine Christianity Today wrote in his editorial of July 1967: "That for the first time in more than 2000 years Jerusalem is now completely in the hands of the Jews gives the student of the Bible a thrill and a renewed faith in the accuracy and validity of the Bible¹⁰¹."

With the election of Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist Sunday school teacher, to the White House in 1976 the once marginalized evangelicals were given increased visibility and legitimacy. However, he was soon to disappoint Israel's friends declaring in March 1977 that the Palestinians deserved their homeland. The new right-wing Israeli Likud (Hebrew for "consolidation") government elected two months later did not like at all this idea. According to Donald Wagner, the Likud strategy was to split fundamentalist Christians

⁹⁹ Interview with Jerry Falwell in Strober, Deborah and Gerald Strober, *The Reagan Presidency. An Oral History of the Era*, Brassey's, Washington DC, 2003; on the birth of Moral Majority, see Martin, William, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, New York: Broadway Books, 1996

¹⁰⁰ Sandeen, Ernest, *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, 19

¹⁰¹ Bell, L. Nelson, Editorial, *Christianity Today Magazine*, July 1967

from Carter's political base and simultaneously to rally support among conservative Christian Americans for Israel's new positions. Political ads were bought on major US newspapers reading: "We affirm as Evangelicals our belief in the promised land to the Jewish people (..) We would view with grave concern any effort to carve out of the Jewish homeland another nation or political entity". A former employee of the American Jewish Committee who coordinated the campaign, Jerry Strober, told Newsweek magazine: "[The Evangelicals] are Carter's constituency and he [had] better listen to them (..) The real source of strength the Jews have in this country is from the Evangelicals"¹⁰².

As both Wagner and Di Motoli¹⁰³ argue, during the late 1970s and the early 1980s the US-Israeli special relationship evolved into an ideological alliance between the American religious right and the hard-line nationalism of the Israeli Likud. Di Motoli argues that, along with the fulfilment of the agenda for a "Greater Israel", the two political rights shared their support for a revival of traditional values and for the abandonment of a presumed "Socialist" or "New Left" hegemony in their societies.

The other crucial factor in the change of the special relationship during the Reagan years is Ronald Reagan himself. On August 15, 1979 the then candidate Reagan wrote on the "Washington Post" that

The fall of Iran has increased Israel's value as perhaps the only remaining strategic asset in the region on which the United States can truly rely (...) Only by full appreciation of the critical role the State of Israel plays in our strategic calculus can we build the foundation for thwarting Moscow's designs on territories and resources vital to our security and our national well-being¹⁰⁴

According to former CIA analyst Cathleen Christison, support for Israel was part of the counter-offensive he wanted to launch against the USSR: "Israel's greatest enemies – Syria and the Palestinians and, more distantly, Libya – are Soviet puppets; Israel is a democracy

¹⁰² Wagner, D., "Reagan and Begin, Bibi and Jerry, the Theopolitical Alliance of the Likud Party with American Christian Right", *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 20, n.4, Fall 1998

¹⁰³ Di Motoli, Paolo, "La destra israeliana e gli Stati Uniti", *Il Ponte*, n.2-3, febbraio-marzo 2005

¹⁰⁴ Reagan, Ronald, "Recognizing the Israeli Asset", *Washington Post*, August 15, 1979 in Spiegel, Steven, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy From Truman to Reagan*, Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1985,

fighting the forces of totalitarianism; Israel and America are together victims of worldwide Soviet-inspired terrorism; support for Israel is therefore an ideological imperative"¹⁰⁵.

Not only he shared the view of Israel as a strategic asset, he thought that Armageddon (the final battle between good and evil) could come during his time in office¹⁰⁶: in that case, Israel would have been crucial. During the 1980 campaign he had told to a Jewish fundraiser that "Israel is the only stable democracy we can rely on in a spot where Armageddon could come". In this fight the Arab "moderates" could just be junior partners of a basically US-Israeli alliance. A book by intelligence analyst Joseph Churba stated that "the Arab states can be auxiliaries to Israeli-American might – they can never be a substitute for it"¹⁰⁷. Not by chance, Reagan's first National Security Advisor endorsed this idea in his introduction to the book¹⁰⁸.

The special relationship actually suffered from several ups and downs during the Reagan administration: downs such as the annexation of the Golan Heights and the strike against the Iraqi nuclear reactor in Osirak or the severe bombings of Beirut in August 1982; ups such as the 1981 Memorandum of Understanding and the Shamir Visit in late November 1983.

The Israeli leadership under Menachem Begin successfully inserted its foreign policy into that Cold War framework that was so important for Reagan. First the Memorandum of Understanding (a result of Strategic Consensus¹⁰⁹) and then the invasion of Lebanon were justified by the common Soviet threat. A masterpiece in this regard was Begin's argument during his June 1982 meeting with Reagan that the invasion of Israel's northern neighbour had helped to unveil the biggest "Soviet base" in the Middle East.

Later, the Israeli leaders were even more intelligent to point to the new threat of terrorism which had started to hit hard the US on October 23, 1983 when more than 240 Marines

¹⁰⁵ Christison, Kathleen, "Blind Spots: Official U.S. Myths about the Middle East," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2. (Winter, 1988),

¹⁰⁶ Further evidence is given by Reagan's diaries: Brinkley, Douglas (ed), *The Reagan Diaries*, New York: Harper Collins, 2007

¹⁰⁷ Churba, Joseph, *Retreat from Freedom*, Washington, DC: Center for International Security, 1980

¹⁰⁸ Christison, Kathleen, "Blind Spots: Official U.S. Myths about the Middle East," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2. (Winter, 1988), pp. 46-61.

¹⁰⁹ See further "The Early Reagan"

were killed. While American threat perceptions were starting to be decisively different with Western Europeans (see their reaction to the 1981 US campaign against Libya¹¹⁰), they were strikingly similar to the Israeli's. Mearsheimer and Walt wrongly date back the birth of the common threat about terrorism to the 1990s:

Beginning in the 1990s, and even more after 9/11, US support [to Israel] has been justified by the claim that both states are threatened by terrorist groups originating in the Arab and Muslim world, and by 'rogue states' that back these groups and seek weapons of mass destruction. (...) Israel is thus seen as a crucial ally in the war on terror, because its enemies are America's enemies¹¹¹.

The converging analysis on terrorism dates back to the 1980s, to the years that are the subject of this study. It was elaborated, as we will see in the chapter about "1984: Attack, Withdrawal and Debate", in Israeli military and intellectual circles such as Benjamin Netanyahu's "Jonathan Institute" but it interacted also with US post-Vietnam debate over the use of military force. Also, the influence of those authors like Claire Sterling who read the problem of terrorism through the Cold War pattern had a great influence on US foreign policy at least in the first half of the 1980s¹¹². The common analysis on terrorism defined it as a form of warfare which threatened the whole West. This threat perception, which is not just a justification for Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories, is one of the things that have made the special relationship so special since the 1980s.

The special relationship between the USA and Israel is recent, it is not the object of a widespread consensus in the foreign policy elite and is not just the result of the influence of the pro-Israeli Lobby. It is the result of the convergence of strategies between the US administrations since Johnson and of the Israeli governments after 1967 and also it reflects the common ideological background of the American conservative coalition and of the Israeli Likud. Even though at times the relationship seemed to be strained by contingencies, the convergence on both domestic and international strategies was what

¹¹⁰ Further in "Qadhafi: the easiest enemy"

¹¹¹ Mearsheimer, John and Stephen Walt, "The Israel Lobby", London Review of Books, March 10 2006

¹¹² On the early debate inside the Reagan administration about terrorism see further the chapter about "Qadhafi: the Easiest Enemy"

has made it so special.

The growing strategic alliance of the US with Israel was, as we have seen from Reagan's article, also a result of what had happened in the Middle East in 1979 and in 1980. The invasion of Afghanistan and the fall of the Shah had led the US government to conceive a strategic shift which became public with the statement of the Carter doctrine.

The Strategic Shift: The Beginning of World War 4

In 1979 a strategic shift occurred in US foreign policy from Europe to the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. Also, regional politics changed dramatically as a consequence of the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran. Authors usually focus either on the change in US foreign policy¹¹³ or on the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the changing scenario in the Middle East¹¹⁴. Only a couple of books, not by chance also the best on the whole history of the relationship between the superpowers and the Middle East¹¹⁵, manage to keep together the narrative about the changing nature of the Cold War (or the beginning of World War 4) and the profound movements in Middle Eastern politics that took place between 1977 and 1980.

The traditional US policy in the Middle East from the 1940s through the late 1970s adhered to the principle that Andrew Bacevich defined as the “economy of force”: rather than establishing a large presence in the region, Roosevelt's successors sought to achieve their

¹¹³ See for example Arquilla, John, *The Reagan Imprint. Ideas in American Foreign Policy from the collapse of communism to the war on terror*, Chicago: Ivan Dee, 2006; Bacevich, Andrew J., *The New American Militarism. How Americans Are Seduced by War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005; Gaddis, John Lewis, *Strategies of Containment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982; Garthoff, Raymond L., *Détente and confrontation : American-Soviet relations from Nixon to Reagan*, Washington : Brookings Institution, 1985; Leffler, Melvyn P., *For the Soul of Mankind. The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2007; Martin, David C. and Walcott, John, *Best Laid Plans: The Inside Story of America's War Against Terrorism*, New York: Harper & Row, 1988; Quandt, William B., *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001; Westad, Odd Arne, *The Global Cold War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005

¹¹⁴ See for example, Halliday, Fred, *The Middle East in the International Relations. Power, Politics and Ideology*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, Italian translation by Alessandro Quarenghi; Kepel, Gilles, *Jihad: Expansion et déclin de l'islamisme*, Paris: Gallimard, 2003; Schulze, Reinhard, *Il Mondo Islamico nel XX secolo*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2004 trad. it. Di Andrea Michler

¹¹⁵ Little, Douglas, *American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945*, University of North Carolina Press, 2002; Sayigh, Yezid and Avi Shlaim (ed), *The Cold War and the Middle East*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997

goals spending a minimal amount of “American resources and especially of US military power”. Interventions such as the 1946 deployment of the USS Missouri to the eastern Mediterranean to warn the Soviets that they should not meddle in Turkey or the Marines' mission in Lebanon in 1958 proved to be the exception, not the rule: covert action and proxies could be a good substitute for direct use of force¹¹⁶. By the end of the 1970s, however, several events changed radically the mind of US policy-makers: the oil shock, the creation of Soviet-backed regimes in Ethiopia and Yemen, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Islamic revolution in Iran were just the major ones.

1979 marked the beginning of the 15th century in the Islamic calendar and indeed it was a new era that was taking shape in the Moslem world. In this year, General Zia started what he called the “Islamization” of Pakistan substituting the British common law with the Islamic law. On November 20, the new-year day in the Islamic calendar, a crowd of religious hard-liners opposed to the Saud family took control of the Great Mosque in Mecca. They surrendered only after a siege that lasted for two weeks.

1979 would mark the beginning of Islamic fundamentalism as one of the major political movements in the Middle East, moreover for the first time this movement would control one of the most important states in the region. As French historian Gilles Kepel wrote in his remarkable “Jihad”, “after 1979 no one, in the Moslem world and beyond, ignored the expansion of the Islamic phenomenon”¹¹⁷.

As often happens, 1979 was the result of a process that had started some years before. Reinhard Schulze convincingly argues that the events of 1973, with the final defeat of Arab nationalist regimes and the oil shock, laid the ground for a major shift in the balance of power in the Middle East from (relatively) secular Egypt to the more fundamentalist regimes of Libya and Saudi Arabia. In 1972 Qadhafi had introduced the use of Islamic Law (šaria) in Libya, putting it into the forefront of Islamization¹¹⁸. The rise of oil prices gave an enormous amount of money to these regimes and directed Arab emigration toward the Gulf and Libya. These immigrants helped to spread a more conservative vision of Islam

¹¹⁶ Bacevich, Andrew, 180

¹¹⁷ Kepel, Gilles, *Jihad: Expansion et déclin de l'islamisme*, Paris: Gallimard, 2003, 193, my own translation

¹¹⁸ Schulze, Reinhard, *Il Mondo Islamico nel XX secolo*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2004 Italian translation by Andrea Michler, 225-270

back home. Finally, in the years between 1973 and 1978, the Organization for the Islamic Conference, backed by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, helped to transform the Islamic discourse into the main ideology of previously leftist-dominated resistance movements in the Moslem world¹¹⁹.

A power shift was occurring in the Middle East, and behind it laid a struggle for the hegemony over the Islamic discourse. Peter Mansfield outlined the shift from the early Saudi hegemony over radical Islam to the Iranian revolutionary wave. Even though Saudi Arabia had been the first nation in the 1900s to establish a state on the foundations of Islamic law interpreted in the strictest way (the Wahabite vision of Islam), it had to rely on the alliance with the United States to survive. This alliance with the West created opposition and disenchantment among Islamic fundamentalists. On the other hand the Iranian revolution from the start sought to distance itself from western patronage and therefore seemed, in 1979, to have a different momentum in the Moslem world¹²⁰.

The Islamic reaction in Iran had started with the modernization attempts carried out by the Shah in the 1960s, the so-called White Revolution. Since then, Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the opposition to the Shah from within the Shiite clergy, had been exiled first to the southern Iraqi city of Najaf and then to Paris. In his home country, the rise of oil prices and the industrial modernization carried out by the Shah had effectively created a middle-class which, however, did not have any political power. By the mid-1970s it was clear to these people that most of the money coming from the oil market was being squandered in weapons and in unrealistic public works. When oil prices started to decrease, the middle class which had grown out of the modernization process started to feel the weight of the economic crisis. As Melvyn Leffler noted, the more the Shah repressed the opposition, the more it grew.

Leftists, moderates, and Islamic reformers focused their wrath on the Shah while competing for support in urban streets and rural towns. From exile in Iraq and then in Paris, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini spat forth his hatred of the Shah, of America and of modernity. Like the communists, he called for justice and blamed

¹¹⁹ The most important example of this kind of transformation is the highly symbolical Palestinian movement, see Kepel, Gilles, 221-253

¹²⁰ Mansfield, Peter, 350

the woes of humankind on capitalist greed; unlike the communists, whom he detested, he called for the restoration of God's law, the Sharia. Political Islam had found a voice¹²¹.

At the same time, the Carter administration, coherently with its policy of promotion of human rights, had pressured the Shah to ease off the repression. At the midst of the decade, Iran lived a dangerous situation: an entire social class was becoming poorer but was also granted more freedom of speech and action to cry out his disappointment.

Also, the limited political liberalization, according to Kepel, gave Iranians the impression that US support for the Shah was waning away, thus emboldening the opposition. During the so-called "Tehran Spring" in 1977 some forms of freedom of speech, freedom of press and freedom of assembly were guaranteed. The secular middle-class was the first to come out from silence but also the least organized. In a matter of months, the leading role in the opposition to the Shah went to Khomeini and his followers who could rely on an efficient network of mosques and buildings to hold their meetings.

Mass demonstrations took place on December 10 and 11, 1978 and led to the strike of the workers of the oil sector which seriously curtailed the Shah's revenues. On January 16 the Shah left Iran to go into exile. On February 1 Ayatollah Khomeini was back in Tehran, greeted by an immense crowd¹²².

To understand how this could have happened - and happened so quickly - in one of the main bastions for US policy in the entire Greater Middle East, one has to look also at the debate that took place inside the Carter administration and between the administration in Washington and the US embassy in Tehran.

The regional experts, such as member of the NSC staff Gary Sick, had tried to warn National Security Advisor Brzezinski that the narrative of the unrest created by the ruling Pahlavi family was unreliable:

¹²¹ Leffler, Melvyn P., *For the Soul of Mankind. The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2007, 300

¹²² Kepel, Gilles, 173-183

Although the government is making reference to Communist support and outside involvement, what may be the true threat to the Shah's regime [is] the reactionary Muslim right wing which finds his modernization program too liberal and moving too fast away from the traditional values of Iranian society¹²³.

The inability to distinguish among the different parts of the opposition was going to be one of the weaknesses of the US administration in this crisis. In late 1978, president Carter had been thorn by conflicting advices: on one side National Security Advisor Brzezinski was more concerned with the global balance of power; on the other side, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was more sensible to the analysis of regional experts like Gary Sick¹²⁴. Therefore, Brzezinski advised Carter to side with the Shah: a military repression was needed to crush the rebellion. Vance, instead, thought that the president had to convince the Shah to strike an agreement with the moderate elements of the rebellion.

The US embassy was a supporter of this latter thinking. In November 1978 US Ambassador in Tehran Robert Sullivan had proposed in a memo to “think the unthinkable”: “patch together a reformist coalition – as Douglas Little described Sullivan's plan – of pro-Western military officers, middle-class professionals, and religious moderates capable of reining in the Islamic extremists”. Little, however, notes that “few inside the Carter administration found Sullivan's thoughts thinkable” mainly because they did not believe that the Shah was going to be overthrown¹²⁵.

Also, there was an ideological reason behind the inability to come to terms with the real nature of the Iranian revolutionaries: this was probably another case of that fear of revolutionary change that Michael Hunt has described as one of the main features of the ideology of US foreign policy¹²⁶. As NSC staff member Gary Sick later commented, the fear of revolution blocked US policy-makers and did not help them to understand the differences between the various elements of the opposition to the Shah which, according

¹²³ Sick, Gary, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter With Iran*, Backinprint.com, 2001, 34-35

¹²⁴ In a sense, in this situation Brzezinski can be considered as a globalist while Vance played the regionalist. On this definition of their positions, see Stivers, William, *America's Confrontation with Revolutionary Change in the Middle East, 1948-1983*, London: MacMillan Press, 1986, 77

¹²⁵ Little, Douglas, *American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945*, University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 224-225

¹²⁶ Hunt, Michael, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy*, Yale University Press, 1988

to him, provided them with some opportunities:

The emergence in Iran of a coalition of non-Communist, non-fanatic Islamic and pro-Western moderates operating within a responsible constitutional framework was profoundly to be preferred to the virulently anti-Western theocracy that ultimately assumed power¹²⁷.

Brzezinski, however, seemed to be more concerned about the potential global risks coming from Iran than with political analysis of the opposition to the Shah. In early December, he had asked the Defense Department to make contingency plans for deploying US forces to guard the oil fields. On December 2 he wrote to Carter what later came to be known as the “Arc of Crisis” memorandum:

If you draw an arc on the globe stretching from Chittagong (Bangladesh) through Islamabad to Aden, you will be pointing to the area of currently our greatest vulnerability (...) There is no question that we are confronting the beginning of a major crisis, in some ways similar to the one in Europe in the late 40's. Fragile social and political structures in a region of vital importance to us are threatened with fragmentation.

The resulting political vacuum might well be filled by elements more sympathetic to the Soviet Union (..) A shift in Iranian/Saudi orientation would have a direct impact on trilateral cohesion [meaning the US, Western Europe and Japan] and (...) in a sentence it would mean a fundamental shift in the global structure of power¹²⁸.

This memorandum can be considered the start of a globalist interpretation to the events in the Greater Middle East which then took hold in the occasion of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan: the power struggle that was taking place in the Middle East became, in Brzezinski's analysis, part of the global struggle with the Soviet Union. Not by chance, on December 28 he wrote to the president that “the disintegration of Iran would be the most massive American defeat since the beginning of the Cold War, overshadowing in its real

¹²⁷ Sick, Gary, 83

¹²⁸ Brzezinski to Carter, 2 December 1978, box 42, BC, Carter Library in Leffler, Melvyn P., *For the Soul of Mankind. The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2007, 301

consequences the setback in Vietnam”¹²⁹.

In January 1979 Brzezinski insisted with Carter that the US should organize a military takeover that could produce a caretaker government made up of pro-Western military officers. Carter, however, according to Douglas Little, wanted to avoid civil war in Iran and encouraged the Shah to flee the country, which he did on January 16¹³⁰. Leffler argues that another, more profound, motive was behind Carter's reluctance to intervene militarily:

All through the Iranian crisis – Leffler wrote – Vietnam was much on his mind. American embroilments in foreign civil wars were bound to fail and were incompatible with US beliefs. Détente required self-discipline in the face of strategic setbacks. (...) Patience was therefore imperative¹³¹.

The Kremlin, indeed, had feared a US intervention in Iran in the last months of 1978. On November 17, Brezhnev informed Carter that he had received informations about a possible American military move in Iran and warned that such a move would “endanger Soviet security”. The Soviet leader proposed that he and Carter issue a joint declaration renouncing publicly to intervene. Carter replied that there was no plan to intervene in Tehran but that the US support for the Shah was not going to be withdrawn. Also, he warned Brezhnev with touch against spreading rumours of a US intervention in order to justify its own military moves: “I am sure that you appreciate that any such interference would be a matter of the utmost gravity to us”¹³².

The irony of the events of those months was well described by Raymond Garthoff: “The American reaction to events such as the Iranian revolution has been to fear Soviet intervention, while the Soviet reaction has been to fear American intervention in this area

¹²⁹ Brzezinski to Carter, 28 December 1978, box 42, BC, Carter Library in Leffler, Melvyn P., *For the Soul of Mankind. The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2007, 301

¹³⁰ Little, Douglas, *American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945*, University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 224

¹³¹ Leffler, Melvyn P., *For the Soul of Mankind. The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2007, 302-303

¹³² Carter to Brezhnev, 21 November 1978, Box 17, Plains file, Carter Library in Leffler, Melvyn P., *For the Soul of Mankind. The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2007, 302

adjoining the Soviet Union”¹³³. The same kind of paradox took place over a neighbouring country: Afghanistan. Here, however, the Soviet Union did in the end decide to intervene, unlike what had happened to the Americans for Iran.

Afghanistan had entered the Soviet reach on April 27, 1978 when the local communists had staged a coup d'etat with the help of several members in the army¹³⁴. As Melvyn Leffler found out through his archival research, the Soviets initially did not favour the “revolution” since they already had good relations with the Daoud government¹³⁵. The Afghan communists had soon divided between the extremist *Khalq* faction led by Taraki and Amin and the pro-Soviet *Parcham* faction whose head was Babrak Karmal. The Khalq faction had actually prevailed purging the members of the Parcham faction and pushing them into exile to Moscow. When Soviet leader Ponomarev arrived in Kabul in September, Taraki told him of tempting promises he had received from the US. Ponomarev backed saying that the Kgb had reports of his links with the US intelligence.

To tighten their grip on the ambiguous and unreliable Afghani leaders, the Soviets decided to sign a treaty of friendship with their regime in December 1978 while asking to both Amin and Taraki to show restraint and avoid persecuting their opponents or stirring up an Islamic reaction in the countryside. Unfortunately for the Soviets, the two radical leaders did not comply and on March 15 the Islamic fundamentalist guerilla dealt a severe blow to their army in Herat. Taraki's and Amin's soldiers deserted or dwindled, giving the impression that the communist regime was really in danger. Taraki and Amin started to ask for direct Soviet intervention to shore up their position. This started a discussion inside the Soviet politburo which, in some aspects, echoed that which took place inside the US administration over Iran.

Gromyko, for example, wrote that “if we lose Afghanistan now and it turns against the Soviet Union this will result in a sharp setback to our foreign policy”. Soviet leaders, however, seemed to have a better understanding of the threat of Islamic fundamentalism than their American colleagues. “What is the problem? - Ustinov rhetorically asked – The

¹³³ Garthoff, Raymond, 672

¹³⁴ For a comprehensive history of the events in Afghanistan, see Akram, Assem, *Histoire de la guerre d'Afghanistan*, Paris: Balland, 1996

¹³⁵ Leffler, Melvyn, 303

problem is that the leadership of Afghanistan did not sufficiently appreciate the role of Islamic fundamentalists". Andropov, on its part, added that Afghanistan was far from being a situation favourable for the outbreak of a socialist revolution. Gromyko agreed with both of them and outlined the risks for détente coming from a Soviet intervention in Afghanistan¹³⁶.

Requests of intervention, however, did not stop with the spring of 1979. Soviet distrust of Amin was growing both because of his alleged links with US intelligence and because of his ruthlessness in repressing the opposition. In August 1979 a plot was organized with the help of Taraki to overthrow Amin. Unfortunately for the Soviets, the undesired outcome brought Taraki to jail where he was later killed, leaving Amin as the only man in charge in Kabul. Even though Soviet support officially did not wane during the following weeks, suspicions continued. On December 2, Andropov sent an handwritten note to Brezhnev: "we have been receiving informations – he wrote – about Amin behind-the-scenes activities which might mean his political reorientation to the West". Soviets, according to Leffler's research, feared that Afghanistan could be turned into a new US base following the fall of the Iranian bastion. Pershing II missiles along with intelligence centres to eavesdrop the Soviets could be implanted in the central Asian country.

To avoid this, a "regime change" was needed: the unreliable Amin was to be replaced by the pro-Soviet Karmal, with the use of Soviet troops if it was needed. According to Leffler, at this point the Soviets did not fear any longer to disrupt détente: "after the decision to station medium-range missiles in Europe – Soviet leaders concluded – there was nothing to lose"¹³⁷. Also, Soviet leaders were convinced that the war would not last long, "3 or 4 weeks" as Brezhnev had told ambassador to the US Dobrynin. On December 12 the final decision to intervene in Afghanistan was taken¹³⁸. Amin was ousted and Babrak Karmal, coming to Kabul on Soviet trucks, was brought to power. The Soviets, according to Odd Arne Westad, were subject to the same illusion that would hit the Americans in Lebanon some years later: the idea that their intervention could save a regime that was not able to

¹³⁶ Leffler, Melvyn, 306-310

¹³⁷ For quotation, see Lyakhovskii, "New Russian Evidence", 27-28 in Leffler, Melvyn, 333

¹³⁸ Leffler, Melvyn, 330-332

stand by itself¹³⁹.

Further confirmation to Leffler's research has still to come but his basic conclusion is shared also by Gilles Kepel: the invasion was the result of a fundamental weakness of Soviet positions in Afghanistan, not the first act of a march toward the Persian gulf¹⁴⁰. It was, however, perceived rather differently in the West:

The Soviet arrival in Kabul was perceived as a continuation of the 1800s Anglo-Russian "great game" in which the Tsar had tried to have access to "warm waters". That became, in the context of post-1945 relations, an open violation of the international balance of power that had come out of Yalta and also a threat for western security made even worse by the proximity of the oil fields in the Persian gulf and the ongoing unrest in Iran¹⁴¹.

The invasion of Afghanistan, coupled with the start of the hostage crisis and the demise of any credible secular alternative inside Iran, changed the American perception of regional events which came to be seen, even more than in the past, through the lens of the zero-sum game with the USSR. As Kepel notes, bluntly speaking in those months the US had lost one of its main allies (the Shah) while the Soviets seemed to have gained a new stronghold in Afghanistan, gaining a vantage point to the strategic Persian gulf. Later, however, events would prove to have a different meaning: the US-backed Afghani *mujahedin* would constitute, as Kepel argues, a "Sunni alternative" to the Iranian extremists helping to turn Afghanistan in one of the main causes of the collapse of the USSR¹⁴².

The perception of a Soviet offensive in this part of the world was strengthened by the treaty of friendship between the Marxist South Yemen and the USSR in October 1979 which seemed to threaten the American policy aimed at obtaining military facilities in the horn of Africa¹⁴³. The scenario in the Greater Middle East looked bleak to American

¹³⁹ Westad, Odd Arne, *The Global Cold War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 322

¹⁴⁰ On this same wavelength is Odd Arne Westad in his *The Global Cold War*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005, 322

¹⁴¹ Kepel, Gilles, 225, Author's translation. A similar view is expressed in Garthoff, Raymond, 972

¹⁴² Kepel, Gilles, 221-224

¹⁴³ Garthoff, Raymond, 661

policy-makers:

The invasion [of Afghanistan] – summed up Fritz Ermath, the Soviet expert on Brzezinski's staff – sharply increases the prospect of eventual Soviet military domination of the greater Middle East and US exclusion from the region, except perhaps from Israel. Next we shall very probably see civil strife in Iran with direct Soviet involvement, a PDRY [Popular Democratic Republic of Yemen, communist] take-over of North Yemen, increased Soviet efforts to destabilize Turkey and Pakistan, and intense Soviet pressure on other states in the region to line up with Soviet interests¹⁴⁴.

As Bacevich points out, these events led president Carter to conclude that “treating the Middle East as a secondary theatre, ancillary to the Cold War, no longer made sense”¹⁴⁵. The statement of the Carter Doctrine came with the State of the Union address on January 23:

Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.¹⁴⁶

According to Bacevich, with the statement of the doctrine that was to bear his name, Carter decided to throw “the weight of American military power into the balance” to protect the Persian gulf¹⁴⁷. Other authors, such as Melvyn Leffler, point out the return to a more traditional pattern of US foreign policy entailed in the doctrine which “revived” containment and “resurrected” the Cold War¹⁴⁸.

Behind this statement laid a whole new strategic thinking by the US government developed as a consequence of the events which had occurred during the late 1970s. The interest for the Persian gulf dated back to Carter's first year in office when Presidential

¹⁴⁴ Leffler, Melvyn, 336

¹⁴⁵ Bacevich, Andrew, 181

¹⁴⁶ Carter, Jimmy, “State of the Union Address”, January 23 1980, downloaded from <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml> accessed on January 7, 2007

¹⁴⁷ Bacevich, Andrew, 181

¹⁴⁸ Leffler, Melvyn, 336

Directive 18. This document stressed the “essential equivalence” in the strategic sphere between the two superpowers and requested that the US enhance its conventional forces also through the creation of the Rapid Deployment Force which was described as follows:

The United States will maintain a deployment force of light divisions with strategic mobility independent of overseas bases and logistical support, which includes moderate naval and tactical air forces, and limited land combat forces. These forces will be designed for use against both local forces and forces projected by the USSR based on analyses of requirements in the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, or Korea¹⁴⁹

The Rapid Deployment Force was not implemented before 1979, according to Stivers, because the “liberals” inside the Carter administration were pushing for a US-Soviet naval arms free in the Indian Ocean. Neither the Marine Corps nor any other corps in the US military pressed hard for its implementation¹⁵⁰.

Raymond Garthoff observes that this project was perceived from the beginning by the Soviets as just another move to exclude them from the Middle East. Attempts in this direction, according to Garthoff, were dated back by them to the very outset of Détente in 1972. “In the arc of crisis – he writes – Moscow saw the United States or its allies and associates as having almost invariably taken the first step in external intervention or involvement”¹⁵¹. This mutual fear regarding the arc of crisis would lead eventually, as we have seen, to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the US sanctions.

Njolstad is one of the authors that stress the continuity between Carter's last years in office and the early policy of the Reagan administration. He, too, like Bacevich underlines that, following the fall of the Shah “the Carter administration implemented a shift in strategic priority away from Europe and in favour of the Persian gulf/Middle East region”. He points out, however, that the shift had began some years before the fall of the Shah and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan even though this latter event “gave the effort a new urgency as well as improved prospects for success”. Signs of this acceleration were

¹⁴⁹ PD/NSC-18 “US National Strategy”. August 26, 1977. Unclassified. Downloaded from <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/pddirectives/pd18.pdf> on January 4, 2007

¹⁵⁰ Stivers, William, 84

¹⁵¹ Garthoff, Raymond, 667

evident throughout 1979: in March an updated version of 1978 Comprehensive Net Assessment was approved. It called for an increased military presence in the Gulf. The urgent task was to transform the Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) which had been called for in PD-18 from a “paper tiger” into a “real military factor”. The first RDF units started to exercise in the region in the second half of 1980. In tandem with this force, a “regional security framework” was devised to assure a long-term US military presence in the Persian gulf¹⁵². This would be an informal alliance including Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Persian gulf monarchies. It was based on two assumptions: that Saudi Arabia and Jordan would acquiesce in the Egyptian-Israeli peace; that the common threat represented by the USSR and Arab radical states would help to pack the alliance together. Even though the first assumption would prove to be wrong before the end of the Carter administration, the second was assumed by the Reagan administration and used to repackage the “regional security framework” into its policy of “Strategic Consensus”¹⁵³.

The attention for the Persian gulf had been conceptualized some months before the statement of the Carter doctrine in a document which was drafted at the Defense Department under the direction of then Deputy Assistant Secretary for regional programs Paul Wolfowitz. The “Limited Contingency Study”¹⁵⁴ has been disclosed only recently thanks to the request of James Mann, the author of “The Rise of the Volcans”, a remarkable work on the life and thought of those members of the US foreign policy elite that ended up devising the George W. Bush strategy for the Middle East in the early 2000s.

Before writing the Study, Wolfowitz had been struck by a seminar held by a young professor who would later become a top National Security official in the Reagan administration: Geoffrey Kemp. In his lectures at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, according to Mann's recollection, Kemp argued that the American military was overly obsessed with defending Europe while the real danger facing the US was the possibility that Soviet forces would have moved southward, into the Persian Gulf. This

¹⁵² Njolstad, Olav, “The Carter Legacy: Entering the Second Era of the Cold War” in Njolstad, Olav (ed), *The Last Decade of the Cold War*, London: Frank Cass, 2004, 204

¹⁵³ See further

¹⁵⁴ Pentagon Study, “Capabilities for Limited Contingencies in the Persian Gulf”, June 15 1979, Declassified on April 23 2003 in Mann, James, *The Rise of the Vulcans. The History of Bush's War Cabinet*, New York: Viking, 2004

vision fitted well with the Team B's idea that the administration was underestimating the Soviet threat. Wolfowitz hired both Kemp and Dennis Ross (another quite successful figure in the following years and to date) to write the Limited Contingency Study. It began with a very assertive statement: "We and our major industrialized allies have a vital and growing stake in the Persian Gulf region because of our need for Persian Gulf oil and because events in the Persian Gulf affect the Arab-Israeli conflict". Therefore, "the importance of Persian Gulf oil cannot easily be exaggerated" because if the Soviet Union were to control Persian Gulf oil, the impact would "probably destroy NATO and the US-Japanese alliance without recourse to war by the Soviets".

This idea was a complete breakthrough from the traditional Cold War strategies of the US military. The previous focus of Pentagon's planning had always been the invasion through the Fulda Gap in Germany, along NATO's northern flank in Norway or across its southern flank in Greece and Turkey. Wolfowitz combined the globalist and the regionalist approaches and asked: what if another country, directly from the Gulf, decided to threaten the viability of oil fields? What if Iraq did so? The description of Iraq was very similar to the one later given of Libya: "a worrisome element because of [its] radical-Arab stance, its anti-Western attitudes, its dependence on Soviet arm sales, and its willingness to foment trouble in other local nations"¹⁵⁵.

The Persian Gulf oil was the big strategic prize for the superpower that controlled the area. The US could not afford to leave it to the Soviets. Carter did not hide this to the American public when he delivered his State of the Union Address on January 23, 1980:

The region which is now threatened by Soviet troops in Afghanistan – Carter said on January 23 - is of great strategic importance: It contains more than two-thirds of the world's exportable oil. The Soviet effort to dominate Afghanistan has brought Soviet military forces to within 300 miles of the Indian Ocean and close to the Straits of Hormuz, a waterway through which most of the world's oil must flow. The Soviet Union is now attempting to consolidate a strategic position, therefore, that poses a grave threat to the free movement of Middle East oil¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵⁵ Mann, James, *The Rise of the Vulcans. The History of Bush's War Cabinet*, New York: Viking, 2004, 78-80

¹⁵⁶ Carter, Jimmy, "State of the Union Address", January 23 1980, downloaded from <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.org/documents/speeches/su80jec.phtml> accessed on January 7, 2007

Working on this part of Carter's speech, Bacevich goes as far as saying that "the overarching motive for action was the preservation of the American way of life". While it is probably an exaggeration to say that this was the main cause, it is fair to say, as Bacevich himself points out further in his book, that one of the aims of the Carter doctrine was to "guarantee the ever-increasing affluence that underwrites the modern American conception of Liberty"¹⁵⁷.

The statement of the Carter doctrine had one long-term effect: to start to shift US policy focus toward the Middle East and the Persian gulf, exactly what had been predicted in Wolfowitz' Limited Contingency Study. Other developments further confirmed this shift, as Mann noted: US officials started to encourage friendly states in the Middle East to build larger airfields and storage facilities that American forces could use; in 1980 the exercise Bright Star was carried out jointly by US and Egyptian troops; the year after Carter left office, the Reagan administration created CENTCOM, the new military command for the Middle East¹⁵⁸.

In the short-term, the invasion of Afghanistan, as Leffler argues, ended Détente and started a second phase of the Cold War. Carter imposed the grain embargo, curtailed technological cooperation with the USSR and boycotted the Moscow 1980 Olympic games. On January 2, 1980 the National Security Council approved, along with these sanctions, also a plan for covert support of the mujahedin¹⁵⁹. As Gates recorded, before this NSC meeting Carter had already given the green light to the CIA to proceed with the plan¹⁶⁰. Actually, the support for the Afghani opposition dated even further back to the previous spring when, on April 6, a Special Coordination Committee had approved a plan for economic and military aid to the mujahedin.

¹⁵⁷ Bacevich, Andrew, 183; On the importance of this conception of liberty on Reagan's Middle East policy see the chapter on "The Reagan Revolution"

¹⁵⁸ Mann, James, 88-89

¹⁵⁹ Njolstad, Olav 206

¹⁶⁰ Gates, Robert, *From the Shadows : the Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*, New York, Touchstone, 1996, 131-149. Also, Odd Arne Westad dates back US support for the Afghani opposition to July 1979, almost 6 months before the Soviet invasion. See Westad, Odd Arne, *The Global Cold War*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 328

Also, the relationship with many regional allies such as Pakistan which had been chastised for their violations of human rights and their nuclear proliferation was resumed. As Garthoff recorded, a “massive build-up of the American naval presence in the Indian Ocean-Persian gulf region” was carried out along with an increase in the weapons supply to Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Garthoff, however, warns that this support was changing nature with respect to what it had been in the early 1970s:

The new containment approach marked a very fundamental revision of policy. The Carter Doctrine was not only a reaffirmation and extension of the Truman and Carter doctrines of an earlier political and geopolitical era; it was also in part a repudiation of the post-Vietnam Nixon doctrine. No longer would the United States expect other countries in the first instance to defend their own security¹⁶¹.

Having moved away from Détente did not make Carter the champion of American militarism. Instead, he was to link his name to what was perceived as one of the major American military failures in recent times.

In October 1979 the Democratic president had let the exiled Iranian Shah enter the US for medical treatment for his cancer. Iranian radicals, however, suspected that this was part of an American plot to return the Shah to the throne as it had been the case in 1953. But there was more than that. The first months of 1979 had seen the victory of Islamic fundamentalists against the secular nationalists to gain the soul and the body of the revolution. Initially, after Khomeini's arrival in Tehran, the provisional government had been ran by Mehdi Bazargan and members of Mossadeq's National Front. These people played a decisive role in assuring the continuity of state functions during the revolutionary period. In March a referendum had approved the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and in the following months the “experts' assembly” drafted the new theocratic constitution.

The assault to the US embassy which took place on November 4, 1979 must be seen through these events: as Kepel argues, not only the emerging Islamic radicals wanted to

¹⁶¹ Garthoff, Raymond, 974

protest against Carter's help for the Shah , they also saw the attack against the embassy as a tool to oust the secular nationalist and crush the liberal and leftist opposition to the Islamic republic. As a consequence of the assault, 66 Americans were taken hostage, the Bazargan cabinet resigned and the head of the moderate clergy, Ayatollah Shariat-Madari, was arrested¹⁶².

The stand-off between the Carter administration and the Islamic Republic riveted the world attention and led to the suspension by the US of Iranian oil imports and the imposition of economic sanctions which succeeded in the release of only 14 hostages.

As he had done before the outbreak of the revolution, Carter showed to be reluctant to use military force. On December 13, five weeks after the start of the kidnapping, he said that Americans had learned from Vietnam that “to become unnecessarily involved in the internal affairs of another country when our own security is not directly threatened is a serious mistake”. His National Security Adviser Brzezinski, on the other hand, recommended greater pressure including, as Leffler wrote, “the possibility of assisting efforts to unseat Khomeini”. This, however, was still not a good moment in the US for “Regime Change” theories¹⁶³ and Brzezinski's suggestions were over-ruled by Carter's willingness to save Détente under some form. In a few weeks, however, as we have seen the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan would radically change Carter's mind on the relationship with the Soviets.

As months passed with the hostages still under captivity, Carter faced the prospect of an electoral campaign with this issue as its focus. The idea of a rescue operation gained strength. Operation “Eagle Claw” was launched in great secrecy on April 24, 1980 but, to Carter's chagrin, it collapsed before it even took place. Equipment failures led the commanders to abort the mission before it even met any opposition from the Iranians. 8 Americans died as a result of the collision of two aircraft while they were refueling at a remote staging area (“Desert One”) in the Iranian desert. The failure had several causes, as David Martin and John Walcott pointed out: first the lack of good maintenance for the

¹⁶² Kepel, Gilles, 185

¹⁶³ They would have greater success during the late Reagan years as far as Libya was concerned. See further the Chapter “1985: Annus Horribilis”.

helicopters and the aircraft involved; second, the men involved in Eagle Claw came from different branches of the armed forces and had never worked together before; third, there had not been any specific drill on this kind of operations in the past; finally, good intelligence was lacking¹⁶⁴. “The disastrous failure at Desert One – NSC staff member Gary Sick later commented – was a terrible blow to the United States at a moment when it badly needed a victory”¹⁶⁵.

As Andrew Bacevich noted, not only Eagle Claw was Carter's low point, it also demonstrated that the US armed forces had “hit the bottom”. This event “persuaded Americans that the enfeebled state of the armed services had become intolerable. This least militaristic of recent presidents inadvertently created the conditions for the militarization of US policy”¹⁶⁶.

Also, the victory of anti-Western radicals in Iran was just another defeat of those modernization theories that the US government and intellectual elite had started to translate into policies in the late 1950s. As Douglas Little concluded,

Wedded to the belief that economic development and westernization would bring political stability to pro-American regimes from Tehran to Tripoli, every administration from Eisenhower's to Carter's embraced a reformist agenda that had unintended revolutionary consequences. More often than not, US backed programs such as the Shah's White Revolution (...) inadvertently raised popular expectations to unrealistic levels and triggered a violent backlash¹⁶⁷.

The last year in office of the Carter administration was therefore, both on the practical and on the theoretical levels, an anticipation of the Reagan administration as Raymond Garthoff argues:

¹⁶⁴ Martin, David C. and Walcott, John, *Best Laid Plans: The Inside Story of America's War Against Terrorism*, New York: Harper & Row, 1988

¹⁶⁵ Sick, Gary, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter With Iran*, Backinprint.com, 2001, 299

¹⁶⁶ Bacevich, Andrew J., *The New American Militarism. How Americans Are Seduced by War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 104-105

¹⁶⁷ Little, Douglas, *American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945*, University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 226-227

In retrospect, while the first three years of the Carter administration represented basically a continuation of the Nixon-Ford policy of détente, the fourth and last year was a precursor to the Reagan turn toward confrontation (...) After January 1980 [the structure of negotiations with the USSR] was largely dismantled and the aim subject to such a major condition – Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan – that détente became inoperative. In many ways January 1980 was a sharper turning point than January 1981, when Ronald Reagan was inaugurated and repudiated détente¹⁶⁸.

Nevertheless, in the Middle East Carter's United States had for the first time clashed with Islamic fundamentalism, had experienced the limits both of the Nixon doctrine and of the modernization theories and had, albeit probably unconsciously, declared an all-out fight against the radical elements of the Islamic world. In other words, Carter had, as Bacevich argued, started World War 4.

The Early Reagan: Strategic Consensus and Beyond

Looking at Reagan's campaign in 1980 it was hard to understand if he had a comprehensive policy for the Middle East. His only detailed article on the issue was published on the "Washington Post" and has been discussed above for its statement of Israel's importance in the face of the collapse of the Shah¹⁶⁹. According to historian William Quandt, two main themes emerged: along with Reagan's commitment to the safety of Israel, the "contest in the Middle East was described almost exclusively in Cold War terms"¹⁷⁰. These themes emerged again in his address to the B'Nai B'rith¹⁷¹ Forum where he started by saying that "in defending Israel's right to exist, we defend the very values upon which our nation is built" and also stressed the growing Soviet threat in the region:

Because of the weak and confused leadership of Jimmy Carter, we are approaching a flashpoint in this tragic process, with Soviet power now deployed in a manner which directly threatens Iran, the Persian Gulf and the Arab sea; with Soviet forces and proxy forces building up again in the region; with Soviet fleets and air

¹⁶⁸ Garthoff, Raymond, 967

¹⁶⁹ Reagan, Ronald, "Recognizing the Israeli Asset", Washington Post, August 15, 1979

¹⁷⁰ Quandt, William, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001, 246

¹⁷¹ B'Nai B'rith ("The Sons of Covenant" in Hebrew) is one of the main Jewish organizations in the United States, see <http://bnaibrith.org/>

bases emplaced along the sea lanes on which we and our Allies and the entire free world depend¹⁷².

And indeed, Reagan's main speeches as a president and his diary are witness to his use of the Cold War framework to look at the entire region. With him in the White House, the US policy in the Middle East had initially an impressive "globalist" tilt¹⁷³.

Reagan's basic idea, especially that of his neoconservative advisers, was that the fate of the United States was at stake in the coming years. In this he shared Brzezinski's concerns expressed in the "arc of crisis" memorandum and beyond. This sense of ultimate threat had been stressed by the Reagan administration and preserved throughout the years. The National Security Strategy (NSDD-32, Reagan's equivalent of Carter's PD-18) issued on May 20, 1982 read: "the decade of the eighties will likely pose the greatest challenge to our survival and well-being since World War II"¹⁷⁴.

As Ronald Bruce St. John points out, however, while at least for its first years in office Carter stressed regional causes to local conflicts, Reagan tried from the beginning to put everything into the Global Cold War paradigm¹⁷⁵. Carter's regionalist approach, however, did change a lot in the course of 1979 as Brzezinski's conception of the "arc of crisis" took hold and with it the idea that events in the Greater Middle East were part of a zero-sum game with the Soviet Union. Also, according to Quandt, the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980 led many in Washington to fear that the Soviets might exploit the turmoil in the Gulf to advance even further toward "warm waters"¹⁷⁶.

The globalist approach, in other words, was not just Reagan's fixation: he was just elaborating on the globalist interpretation given by the Carter administration (and specifically by Brzezinski) to the events in Iran and Afghanistan. The immediate consequence of this approach was to establish a new hierarchy of priorities in the US policy in the Middle East: as St. John points out, under Reagan the overriding concern was

¹⁷² "Address by the Honorable Ronald Reagan B'Nai B'Rith Forum", Washington DC, September 3, 1980. Fred Ikle papers, box 10. Hoover Institution

¹⁷³ On this point see above the paragraph about "The Cold War and the Middle East"

¹⁷⁴ Leffler, Melvyn,

¹⁷⁵ On Reagan's understanding of the Global Cold War, see above the chapter "The Reagan Revolution"; For this distinction between Carter and Reagan see St. John, Ronald Bruce, *Libya and the United States. Two centuries of Strife*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002, 121-123

¹⁷⁶ Quandt, William, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001, 246

the danger of Soviet inroads while other problems were mostly neglected “until they forced themselves to center stage as full-blown international crises”¹⁷⁷.

If the globalist approach implied an hierarchy of priorities, this in turn was based on some basic ideas which defined the early policy of the Reagan administration in the Middle East. The new republican administration worked, according to Avi Shlaim, on 4 main assumptions: the first was that the threat to the security of the oil-producing Gulf states was the major problem facing the United States in the region; second, the Arab-Israeli conflict had become somewhat less significant and it could be left on the back burner; third, the Gulf and the Arab-Israeli conflict were two distinct issues that could be treated separately by the US; the last assumption was that, above all, what the states of this part of the world needed most was protection against the Soviet threat¹⁷⁸.

The first assumption was very much coherent with the Carter doctrine and so was the general policy framework that was elaborated in the first months of 1981: strategic consensus was an evolution of that “regional security framework” which had been envisioned already by the Carter administration. William Quandt, with a sharply critical view of this project, wrote that it was hard to understand the significance of this formula but “it presumably meant trying to focus the attention of “our friends” in the region on the Soviet threat while simultaneously attempting to push parochial local conflicts to the back burner”¹⁷⁹.

Alexander Haig tried to refute allegations that strategic consensus was a geostrategic abstraction with no real background in regional politics. In his memoirs, he argued that

Three great fears ran through the region: fear of terrorism, which was endemic; fear of Islamic fundamentalism, which had broken out in Iran in fanatical form; and fear of the Soviet Union (..) In reality this was one consolidated fear: that terrorism and fundamentalism so destabilize the region that the Soviets would either subvert the Islamic movement for their own purposes or seize control of Iran and possibly the whole gulf in a second revolution after the Iranian revolution collapsed under the political and economic

¹⁷⁷ St. John, Ronald Bruce, *Libya and the United States. Two centuries of Strife*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002, 121-123

¹⁷⁸ On the hierarchy of Middle Eastern threats in the Reagan administration see Shlaim, Avi, “The Impact of US Policy in the Middle East”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 17, no.2, Winter 1988, pp. 15-28

¹⁷⁹ Quandt, William, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001, 248

weight of its own excesses¹⁸⁰.

In his history of America's relations with revolutionary change in the Middle East, William Stivers argued that, with this formulation of the threat,

The Reagan policy makers eliminated the old problem of the elusive enemy. The Soviet Union, Soviet proxies, independent actors whose aims happened to coincide with Soviet aims, revolutionary elements opposed to conservative friends of the US – each was a threat to the United States. The enemy was no longer elusive because the image of it had expanded so as to be almost all-encompassing¹⁸¹.

The concept started to emerge during the visit of Alexander Haig, Reagan's first Secretary of State, in the Middle East in April 1981. The goal was to form a solid anti-Soviet alignment that would include both the so-called Arab moderates and Israel to thwart possible Soviet inroads in the region. The three pillars of this “Consensus” were Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Israel. According to William Stivers, the informal alliance would include also Turkey, Pakistan, Jordan and the Gulf Emirates. Where this Arab-Israeli alliance could not work, the US was going to use directly its military forces¹⁸².

Strategic Consensus reflected a purely military approach to the Middle East issues and, at least during 1981, this meant an enormous increase in arm supplies to US allies in the region: by the end of that year, arm sales to these countries had skyrocketed by an amazing 325%¹⁸³; Awacs had been sold, not by chance, to Egypt and Saudi Arabia; a Memorandum of Understanding on military cooperation had been signed with Israel.

Strategic Consensus, at least in the early years of the Reagan administration, combined with the actual implementation of the Carter doctrine especially with regards to the

¹⁸⁰ Haig, Alexander, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy*, New York, MacMillan Publishing Company, 1984, 169-170

¹⁸¹ Stivers, William, *America's Confrontation with Revolutionary Change in the Middle East, 1948-1983*, London: MacMillan Press, 1986, 96

¹⁸² On Strategic Consensus and Reagan's initial priorities for the Middle East see Lawson, Fred, “The Reagan Administration in the Middle East”, *Merip Reports*, no. 128, Nov.-Dec. 1984, pp. 27-34 ; Quandt, William B., “Reagan's Lebanon Policy: Trial and Error”, *Middle East Journal*, Volume 38, no. 2, Spring 1984; Brown, Seyom, *The Faces of Power: Constancy and Change in United States Foreign Policy From Truman to Clinton*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, 423-425; Stivers, William, *America's Confrontation with Revolutionary Change in the Middle East, 1948-1983*, London: MacMillan Press, 1986, 98

¹⁸³ Lawson, Fred, “The Reagan Administration in the Middle East”, *Merip Reports*, no. 128, Nov.-Dec. 1984, pp. 27-34

building of the Rapid Deployment Force envisioned in PD-18. The massive military build-up carried out by the Reagan administration since its first weeks in office included the RDF: funds were increased by 85% for Fiscal Year 1982; moreover, the RDF would not just be Joint Combined Force, as Carter had conceived it, but it would be assigned its own units. In 1983 the RDF became the US Central Command, in charge of the Middle East and South-West Asia¹⁸⁴.

According to Fred Lawson, Strategic Consensus defined only the first phase of Reagan's policy in the Middle East which lasted until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982. In this phase the globalist approach was visible not only through the policy of Strategic Consensus but also through the confrontation with Libya which will be discussed later¹⁸⁵. The result of these two converging policies was to increase the relevance of superpower confrontation in the region. The Soviet Union, however, was hardly relevant, as we will, see in the regional dynamics during that year.

Regional allies of the United States accepted the globalist approach in words and practised their regional goals in deeds. As Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East Nicholas Veliotis told Senator Orrin Hatch:

Every Arab leader who met with Secretary Haig had something else on his mind besides the Soviet threat. In fact the strategic consensus expressed by Arab leaders seems to have been about the need of the US to pressure Israel into establishing a Palestinian state¹⁸⁶

According to Sheila Ryan, the Israelis feared that the willingness of the US to develop links with the Arab moderates would create conditions for further pressure on Israel to make concessions in the autonomy negotiations that were envisaged by the Camp David Agreement of 1978¹⁸⁷. Lawson, on its part, argues that Strategic Consensus, in the long run, could diminish Israel's role as the only strategic asset in the region and therefore the goal of the Israeli leadership was to create opportunities for divisions between the US and its

¹⁸⁴ Stivers, William, *America's Confrontation with Revolutionary Change in the Middle East, 1948-1983*, London: MacMillan Press, 1986, 96

¹⁸⁵ See the chapter "Qadhafi: the easiest enemy"

¹⁸⁶ Korbani, Agnes G. , *US Intervention in Lebanon 1958 and 1982*, Praeger, New York, 1991 p.57

¹⁸⁷ Ryan, Sheila, "Israel's Invasion of Lebanon: Background to the Crisis", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: The War in Lebanon (Summer - Autumn, 1982)

Arab allies: for example with the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak in June 1981 and the bombing of Beirut the following month. Lawson goes as far as saying that the rearmament of US Arab allies had provoked further Israeli unilateral actions such as the annexation of the Golan heights and the invasion of Lebanon¹⁸⁸.

This interpretation is exaggerated: Israeli unilateral actions were caused by its concern for security which also in the past had led its leaders to overrule any Cold War commitment to the US¹⁸⁹. While Strategic Consensus and growing US-Arab relations might have worried the Israeli leadership, a short reference to the preparation of the invasion of Lebanon proves also the opposite: Secretary Haig's strategy was seen as an opportunity by those members of the Israeli cabinet who were advocating a major land operation in Lebanon¹⁹⁰.

On April 10, 1981 the expert of military affairs Ze'ev Schiff wrote on the Israeli newspaper "Ha 'aretz" that Sharon could be identified as the head of this group favouring the invasion of Lebanon inside the Israeli government.

It is very possible that Israel would meet with understanding in the Reagan administration in this matter. Washington is seeking to check any Soviet clients, and why should it be against harming Moscow's more important clients – Syria and the PLO?¹⁹¹

However, Schiff added that the Reagan administration was not eager to favour a major Israeli-Syrian war at that moment because it would have harmed its efforts to build a Strategic Consensus against the Soviet Union. He concluded that "it would be a mistake to think that the Reagan administration would back such an Israeli move *right now*".

During his visit to Jerusalem, Haig had called the PLO "Soviet proxy" along with Libya.

¹⁸⁸ Lawson, Fred, "The Reagan Administration in the Middle East", Merip Reports, no. 128, Nov.-Dec. 1984, pp. 27-34

¹⁸⁹ See for example the origins of the Six Days War in Quandt, William, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001

¹⁹⁰ The events that led to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon will be discussed at length in the chapter "Lebanon: The Israeli invasion and the US intervention". On the relationship between Haig's Strategic Consensus and the preparation of the war in Lebanon, see Ryan, Sheila, "Israel's Invasion of Lebanon: Background to the Crisis", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: The War in Lebanon (Summer - Autumn, 1982)

¹⁹¹ Ryan, Sheila, "Israel's Invasion of Lebanon: Background to the Crisis", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: The War in Lebanon (Summer - Autumn, 1982)

Haig, as reported by the April 7 issue of the Jerusalem Post, had told to the press that his two meetings with Begin had produced

A convergence of outlook in the area of broad, strategic threat to the Middle East region, to include traditional military threats from unfriendly superpowers, to include assessments of proxy activity, and to include some very important discussions on the overall issue of international terrorism¹⁹².

Three days later Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir exulted that Haig was putting together a “revolutionary” new approach to the Middle East asking the states in the region to put aside their differences (ie. The Arab-Israeli dispute) to fend off the Soviet threat. The Reagan administration, he emphasized, was “more friendly than previous” administrations¹⁹³.

Strategic Consensus would not outlast the first half of 1982. Its globalist background would be tested initially in the struggle against Libya¹⁹⁴ and would then finally be ruined by Israel's invasion of Lebanon¹⁹⁵. Time would show that the Soviet threat could not unite what was divided by the Arab-Israeli conflict.

¹⁹² Ryan, Sheila, "Israel's Invasion of Lebanon: Background to the Crisis", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: The War in Lebanon (Summer - Autumn, 1982)

¹⁹³ Ryan, Sheila, "Israel's Invasion of Lebanon: Background to the Crisis", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: The War in Lebanon (Summer - Autumn, 1982)

¹⁹⁴ See the chapter “Qadhafi: the Easiest enemy”

¹⁹⁵ See the chapter “Lebanon: the Israeli invasion and the US intervention”

Chapter Two

Qadhafi, the Easiest Enemy

Fighting Back International Terrorism

International Terrorism and relations with Qadhafi's Libya were high on the agenda since the first days of the Reagan administration. As former Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East Nicholas Veliotis says, "Reagan thought that the hostage crisis [in Teheran] had condemned the Carter administration" so when he "came into office Libya, hostages and terrorism were on everyone's mind"¹⁹⁶.

Early in the Reagan administration, and actually during transition time, some of the main themes of its policy in the Middle East started to come out: the idea of "international terrorism" as the new threat facing not only US interests but also American credibility in this area of the world; the vision of terrorism not as a criminal act but as a form of warfare waged against "the West"; the idea of a military response to the terrorist threat also as a way to overcome the "lack of will" that had followed US defeat in Vietnam; the concept of state-sponsorship for terrorist organizations that were all bound in an international network (which would become, in the years, the "League of Terror" and eventually the "axis of evil"); the inclusion of the issue of international terrorism into the broader paradigm of the Global Cold War, thus setting the goal of striking at terrorism as a way to strike at the USSR. The campaign against Libya that took place throughout 1981 and early 1982 cannot be understood without looking at the debate that occurred inside the administration and at the public policy that was carried out in that year.

The debate had started during the transition between Reagan and Carter, as recollected by Elaine Morton who at that time worked at the Policy Planning Staff in the State Department.

Libya was taken as a symbol of international terrorism – says Morton - this approach began before the inauguration of the Reagan Administration in January 1981. During the pre-inagural "transition", papers were requested to the CIA on it. (...)The issue of international terrorism was used to demonstrate that the US could be forceful again. In a sense, terrorism was the weapon of the weak. Weak countries were starting to

¹⁹⁶ Author's interview with Nicholas Veliotis, Washington DC, April 2007

use it successfully against us, the big country and since we were a status quo power we had to fight against the instability brought by international terrorism in order to maintain our hegemony.¹⁹⁷”

The attention for international terrorism was one of the early topics of discussion in the administration. On January 26, 1981 the president gathered with the top national security officials of the administration: vicepresident George Bush, Secretary of State Alexander Haig Jr., Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, National Security Advisor Richard V. Allen, FBI director William H. Webster and CIA director William Casey¹⁹⁸. They listened to Anthony Quainton, head of the Office for Combatting Terrorism at the State Department. According to David Martin and John Walcott, Quainton said that terrorism was “a manageable threat”: in 1980 10 US citizens had been killed, fewer than those killed by lightning in the same year. However, State-sponsored terrorism was on the rise and attacks against Americans had hit the highest figure since 1968, when the CIA had started compiling these statistics. According to a later recollection by the “New York Times”, nothing conclusive had been decided during the meeting apart from stating that a more decisive policy had to be adopted along with a revision of intelligence on the matter and a review of resources available¹⁹⁹.

The following day, Reagan spoke at the the welcoming ceremony for the freed hostages of the US embassy in Teheran. His speech sounded like a declaration of war:

Let terrorists be aware that when the rules of international behavior are violated, our policy will be one of swift and effective retribution. We hear it said that we live in an era of limit to our powers. Well, let it also be understood, there are limits to our patience²⁰⁰.

The tough line was not just a coup de theatre designed for that particular speech. It was confirmed as official administration policy by Undersecretary of State Walter J. Stoessel speaking on February 25 at the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee:

¹⁹⁷ Author's interview with Elaine Morton, Washington DC March 22 2007

¹⁹⁸ Stanik, Joseph, 32

¹⁹⁹ Taubman, Philip, “U.S. Tries to Back Up Haig on Terrorism”, New York Times, May 3 1981

²⁰⁰ “Remarks at the Welcoming Ceremony for the Freed American Hostages January 27, 1981”. The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.
<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1981/12581a.htm> (Accessed on July 7 2006)

The U.S. Government will make no concessions to the terrorists. We will not negotiate the payment of ransom nor the release of prisoners. We will work to insure that the perpetrators of terrorist acts are brought to justice²⁰¹.

According to David Martin and John Walcott, Reagan's speech came as a surprise both to Quainton and to his deputy Frank Perez who later commented: "My own personal feeling was that swift and effective retribution against an enemy that you can't really identify is a very iffy proposition". Ronald Spiers, head of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research stressed the lack of information on the new enemy hidden behind international terrorism²⁰².

Indeed, identifying the enemy was the biggest problem. In the early months of the Reagan administration, terrorism was equaled to subversion and therefore included in the Global Cold War paradigm. Not by chance on January 28, Secretary of State Alexander Haig (not exactly an ideological extremist) had declared during his first press conference that "terrorism will take the place of human rights in our concern, because it is the ultimate abuse of human rights"²⁰³. And since human rights had been one of the focuses of Carter's policy toward the Soviet Union, it is fair to consider Haig's view of terrorism as yet another tool in the ideological and political confrontation with Moscow. The new Secretary of State put forward a new charge against the Soviets: "They today are involved in conscious policy, in programs, if you will, which foster, support and expand this activity [terrorism] which is hemorrhaging in many respects throughout the world."²⁰⁴

The link between the Soviets and the rising threat of terrorism was not just propaganda. Many people inside the administration and in the intelligence believed this was true. To understand why it was so, we must keep in mind two things: first, terrorism in 1981 was still something different than what it was going to become just two years later because leftist terrorist groups were still much more powerful and effective than Islamic organizations; second, a confusion existed, and continued to exist throughout the Reagan

²⁰¹ Taubman, Philip, "U.S. Tries to Back Up Haig on Terrorism", New York Times, May 3 1981

²⁰² Martin, David and John Walcott, 45

²⁰³ Stanik, Joseph, 34

²⁰⁴ "Excerpts From Haig's Remarks at First News Conference as Secretary of State", New York Times, January 29, 1981 e Gwertzman, Bernard, "Haig Says Teheran Will Not Get Arms; Asks Trade Caution", New York Times, January 29, 1981

administration, between subversion and guerrilla on one hand and terrorism on the other. According to Graham Fuller, National Intelligence Officer for the Middle East in those years, the issue of Soviet support to terrorism was debated in the intelligence community:

The question was: how much control did the Soviets have on these groups? The “liberals” in the CIA thought there were contacts but not full control, no direct involvement by the Soviets. Casey, on the other hand, was an hawk. He asked the agency to pay attention to this issue. He thought that the USSR orchestrated groups that were behind international terrorism as well as guerrilla movements²⁰⁵.

Henry Rowen, Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, had a more nuanced position than Casey:

Yes, we thought there were states which sponsored terrorism, and among them were also Romania, Bulgaria and the GDR [but] the issue of Soviet support was different. We had suspicion about that, there wasn't evidence yet (not that I remember) but later this evidence was found in Soviet and Eastern European archives²⁰⁶.

The idea of a global network of states sponsoring terrorist organizations and heavily supported by the Soviet Union was not new. It reflected a widespread feeling that the Soviets were supporting subversion and terrorism around the world in order to continue the Cold War even under Detente, only in a different way. Events in 1979 in Iran, Afghanistan and Nicaragua had only reenforced this idea.

Constatine Menges during the Reagan administration served first as National Intelligence Officer for Latin American affairs at the CIA and then as Special Assistant to the president for Latin America. During the campaign in 1980 he wrote a very interesting article on the “New York Times” that read:

History will mark the events in Iran, Afghanistan and Nicaragua in 1979 as a turning point in the invisible war between radical and moderate forces for control of the oil and destiny of the Middle East and control of Central America and Mexico.

²⁰⁵ Author's phone interview with Graham Fuller, March 23 2007

²⁰⁶ Author's phone interview with Henry Rowen, March 19, 2007

Menges thought that the Middle East could be the issue on which the Soviet Union could finally achieve the “decoupling” of Europe and Japan (heavily dependent from Middle Eastern oil) from the US. In this region, Menges wrote, Western *military* power was needed against “converging radical forces” coming from the region but also supported by the USSR. Menges made “a private proposal” to be discussed with the Soviet Union: “Stop your indirect war” in the Middle East or “we will stop economic transactions”²⁰⁷.

During transition Menges proposed the creation of special groups that for each area of the world could “integrate the public and covert aspects of United States resources” working on this assumption:

During the last 35 years, The Soviet Union and those it controls have achieved a number of major gains through political warfare which uses a blend of propaganda, deception, competent organization, terrorism and para/military methods. Our government has had great difficulty in taking prudent and timely preventive action because those techniques – often applied through proxies – intentionally keep the threat ambiguous while evading the responsibility of any single executive agency.

In the same document Menges identified a “destabilization coalition” composed by the USSR, Libya, Cuba, Yemen and Syria. Against this coalition, Menges proposed three elements: support for “reformist, moderate, pro-western forces”; “international communication”; “offensive action against terrorist, radical groups and their transnational supporting network”²⁰⁸.

The idea of a global terrorist network was the basis of a book by journalist Claire Sterling titled “the Terrorist Network” and which served as a source of inspiration on the issue of international terrorism for many members of the administration. According to member of Political Affairs Directorate at the NSC Raymond Tanter, many people in the administration had read this book when it first came out: among them National Security Advisor Richard Allen, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Fred Iklè, Chairman of the National Intelligence Committee Henry Rowen²⁰⁹.

²⁰⁷ Menges, Constantine C., “*Radicalism Abroad*”, The New York Times, June 11 1980

²⁰⁸ Paper by Constantine C. Menges. “Proposal for the establishment of a small group to plan and coordinate United States international political action”. December 23, 1980. Unclassified. Subject files, Ronald Reagan Library

²⁰⁹ Author's interview with Raymond Tanter, Washington DC, March 15 2007

Moreover, Director of CIA William Casey fell in love with the main thesis of the book: that there was an international network of terrorist organizations that was supported by the Soviet Union.

Casey – says Graham Fuller, then National Intelligence Officer for the Middle East - had read Claire Sterling's book on the terrorist networks. This was the first book that put forward the idea of some form of orchestration. Casey wanted us to pay attention to this issue but the Soviet experts inside the agency dismissed the book as inaccurate²¹⁰.

Actually, Claire Sterling's book was not inaccurate, it was simply outdated for the 1980's. Sterling wrote on "left-wing, or Red, terrorists who dominate world scene". They would be out of fashion in the Middle East in a couple of years from 1981: as soon as the hardcover edition of the book came out in late 1980, the major terrorist threat to the US had come from Iranian "students" who had stormed the embassy in Teheran and had held hostage 52 Americans throughout 1980 and early 1981. They had little or nothing to do with the Italian Red Brigades or the Irish IRA, their "patron" was not Giangiacomo Feltrinelli as Sterling wrote, rather Ayatollah Khomeini. The kidnapping, according to the US journalist, was the work of people "who might have been Black or Red or both" and was the first event of what she called "Fright Decade II" (1970's being the first Fright Decade). The main feature of this new era was terrorism used as "continuation of war by other means" to destabilize the West. The facts in Teheran were put in the same box as the kidnapping of Italian statesman Aldo Moro or the actions of the German Baader-Meinhof Gang²¹¹.

In an interview to the ABC news program 20/20 on April 2 1981, then National Security Advisor Richard Allen supported Haig's view that the Soviets were behind the phenomenon. He said that he based his views on Claire Sterling's book which he said was "a significant landmark work on the subject of terrorism, and something about which we have to be better informed". Asked for evidence of this involvement, Allen said he could not disclose it but was ready to defend the idea that "Soviet involvement is organic"²¹².

²¹⁰ Author's interview with Graham Fuller, March 23, 2007

²¹¹ Sterling, Claire, *The Terror Network*, New York: Berkely Books, 1981, 3

²¹² "Transcript of complete interview given by NS advisor Richard Allen on March 20 1981 to ABC news

Sterling's ideas influenced for some time the administration's policies which in turn tried to influence intelligence. According to then Director of Casey's Executive staff Robert Gates, following his press conference Secretary of State Alexander Haig had requested a national intelligence estimate on Soviet support for terrorism. The first draft by the Office of Soviet Analysis in the CIA "proved beyond a shadow of doubt that Haig had exaggerated the Soviet role". Casey did not like it and directed the Defense Intelligence Agency to write a new one which he liked more. This started a bureaucratic infighting that ended in late May when a "an old hand in the estimates business" crafted the final version of what became SNIE 11/2-81 on "Soviet Support for International Terrorism and Revolutionary Violence"²¹³. Two of its key-judgements were: first, that Soviets were highly involved in the support of revolutionary violence around the world and they did not care whether it took the form of terrorism; second, the Soviets supported states like Libya which in turn supported terrorists. The report admitted that "the demarcation between terrorism and guerrilla and paramilitary activities is sometimes murky". The conclusions actually denied the relevance of Soviet support in the fight against terrorism:

Even a complete withdrawal of Soviet support would not put an end to international terrorism. Libya and the extreme Palestinian groups have ample independent resources. The weapons needed for terrorist activities are relatively cheap and readily available in the world²¹⁴.

Vincent Cannistraro, then at the CIA and later Director for Intelligence Programs at the NSC, confirmed that Claire Sterling's book was part of the cultural background that led to this narrative of terrorism. The problem was that the intelligence analysts "looked at the whole phenomenon together, they didn't make many distinctions on the different groups"²¹⁵.

Cannistraro highlighted a problem that we will see even further: creating the comprehensive concept of terrorism led policy-makers and the intelligence to concentrate

program". Kemp files. Ronald Reagan Library.

²¹³ Gates, Robert Michael, *From the Shadows : the Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*, New York, Touchstone, 1996, 202-206

²¹⁴ SNIE 11/2-81, "Soviet Support for International Terrorism and Revolutionary Violence", May 27 1981, declassified on April 4 1994, downloaded from www.foia.cia.gov (accessed on October 11,2005)

²¹⁵ Author's interview with Vincent Cannistraro, Arlington VA, March 20 2007

on the phenomenon (ie. on the way it manifested itself, on the technique) rather than on the organizations that carried it out and on their motivations. Putting together the IRA, the Red Brigades, the Palestinians and the Latin-American guerrillas as was made in the SNIE 11/2-81 did not help to understand them and devise specific, effective policies. Context was sacrificed in order to have a global framework that could justify a certain kind of foreign policy.

Looking for Soviet support for terrorism was not very useful for US policy in the Middle East because the scenario was changing.

In those days - explains Graham Fuller, then National Intelligence Officer for the Middle East - movements of national liberation were seeking ideological vehicles for their aspirations. Marxism-Leninism and Arab nationalism served well this purpose up to the 1970s.

After the Iranian revolution the paradigm was no longer Marxism-Leninism but Islam. The irony is that the movements were still the same. The Palestinians went through 3 different phases: the Arab nationalist, the Marxist-Leninist and the Islamic. But throughout all of these phases they were aiming at the same thing: Palestinian independence.²¹⁶

Having included the fight against terrorism inside the Global Cold War framework, some officials in the administration like Paul Wolfowitz and Robert McFarlane went over to spot Libya and its dictator Muammar Qadhafi as the litmus test of the renewed US resolve against this threat. The goal was to “teach Qadhafi a lesson”, in order to send a message to Teheran and Damascus.

The Case Against Qadhafi

In the brainstorming that took place during the transition between Carter and Reagan, Paul Wolfowitz and his Policy Planning Staff listed the three states that were considered the most dangerous sponsors of terrorist organizations: Syria, Iran and Libya. Syria was not considered for American action because, as Elaine Morton puts it, “it would have inflamed the Arab-Israeli conflict”. Iran instead was “a big country, one difficult to attack”. Libya was instead the easiest enemy to fight.

²¹⁶ Author's phone interview with Graham Fuller, March 23, 2007

Libya – says Morton - was therefore used to signal to Iran and Syria that we were willing to use force against international terrorism, to put them “on notice” in the hope that they would curtail their support for terrorism in fear of a potential U.S. military reprisal. Libya was a much weaker power and had a less problematic geographic location [than Iran and Syria]. Qadhafi looked to many people in the administration as a perfect character, as though coming out of some movie to play the symbolic role of “the odd-man-out,” that is, someone who was not following the “norms of international behavior(..) In addition, Libya was picked because in case of provocation requiring a military response we could play it out without many risks, without body bags.²¹⁷

Also former member of the NSC staff Raymond Tanter confirms that Libya was taken into consideration because of its feasibility:

Libya was more doable: it had fewer friends than Syria because it wasn't really in the Soviet orbit, in other words it was less risky. On the other hand, the resupply of our troops would have been easier in the case of Libya because we could go there from Great Britain through Spain²¹⁸.

Libya and terrorism came on the agenda very soon, actually on the first meeting of the NSC on January 21, 1981²¹⁹. All materials from this meeting are currently classified so we do not know what exactly was discussed there. However, we know that several issues related to Libya concerned the incoming Reagan administration.

First, Libya was probably acquiring weapons of mass destruction. In 1975 the Soviet Union had announced that it was going to provide Qadhafi its first nuclear reactor and in 1978 a formal agreement to build a nuclear power plant had been reached²²⁰. According to Bob Woodward, in December 1980, the Soviets had delivered 11 kilograms of Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) to a research center located in Tajura, outside the Libyan capital. The CIA estimated that this was not enough to build a bomb, but that keeping that pace Qadhafi would be able to build it in 1990. Other reports showed that yellowcake was coming from Niger through United African Airlines (a ghost Libyan company used by Qadhafi) flights.

²¹⁷ Author's interview with Elaine Morton, Washington DC, March 22, 2007

²¹⁸ Author's interview with Raymond Tanter, Washington DC, March 15, 2007

²¹⁹ Haig, Alexander, 77 and Stanik, Joseph, 32

²²⁰ St. John, Ronald Bruce, *Libya and the United States. Two centuries of Strife*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002, 124

A secret report by the CIA issued on July 5, 1981 was titled not by chance "Niger: Libya's Next Target"²²¹. The hawks in the administration called for a tough stance on Libya's nuclear program. On March 9, then Deputy Director of the Policy Planning Staff Donald Fortier wrote that "Libya is the place to begin - if Iraq wasn't already - to demonstrate to our allies that we are still deadly serious about at least one facet of non-proliferation policy: the need to curb the spread of weapons to radical states in the NE/SWA[Near East/South West Asia]". When facing the Western Europeans, Fortier suggested, it had to be made clear that the US was prepared "to contemplate fairly extreme actions to stop the Libyan [nuclear] program". A failure to deal effectively with Libya would make it "harder domestically to move away from the global approach favored by the Carter administration"²²².

Second, diplomatic relations were strained since the late Carter administration. On December 2, 1979 an angry crowd had assaulted the US embassy in Tripoli and the Libyan government had done little to prevent that. As Ronald Bruce St. John wrote, "the two governments tried to coexist with a mutually unsatisfactory diplomatic relationship which neither seemed willing either to improve or to terminate"²²³. Following this outrage, the US curtailed its diplomatic presence in Libya and moved its remaining personnel in the Belgian embassy. Finally, after attacks against French and Tunisian embassies all American diplomats had been withdrawn from Libya²²⁴.

Third, Qadhafi was a regional problem for the US in terms of credibility. He was harassing US' friends and, after the fall of the Shah, the American government needed badly to convince pro-western governments in the region that it was capable to stand by its allies. As Dennis Ross, then at the Net Assessment at the Pentagon, remembers "it was very important for us to demonstrate that those that were friends of the United States were better off and those that were foes of the United States were going to loose."²²⁵

²²¹ Woodward, Bob, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987*, New York: Pocket Books, 1987, 189

²²² Memorandum from Donald Fortier to Mr. Roche. "Proposed Points on Libyan Nuclear Draft". March 9, 1981. Unclassified. Fortier files, folder:Libya 1981-1984. Ronald Reagan Library

²²³ St. John, Ronald Bruce, *Libya and the United States. Two centuries of Strife*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002, 121

²²⁴ For a brief history of diplomatic relations before the Reagan administration, see Schumacher, Edward, "The United States and Libya", *Foreign Affairs*, volume 65, number 2 (winter 1986/1987)

²²⁵ Author's interview with Dennis Ross, Washington DC, March 30 2007

Last but not least, Libya was considered to be one of the main supporters of international terrorism: from the Palestinians to the Latin-American guerrillas many of the “subversive” organizations were funded with Qadhafi's money. This charge was going to become the most important against Qadhafi.

The public campaign stressed four main themes which could be found in a paper drafted by Elaine Morton for a Senior Interagency Group held on November 25: first, Qadhafi was ideologically antithetical to the US; second, he had training camps for terrorists; third, the danger posed by the “Islamic nuclear bomb” was reaffirmed; fourth, the Soviets might be hiding advanced weaponry in Libya²²⁶.

Many in the early months of the administration, saw Libya just as a Soviet puppet to be defeated in order to win the Global Cold War. As Howard Teicher wrote in his memoirs, “a perception of Qadhafi as a leading agent of Soviet subversion took hold in Washington²²⁷” as soon as Reagan established himself in the White House. When asked whether Libya was acting as a Soviet surrogate in Chad, Chester Crocker, then Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, answered:

It would seem to me that there is some – how should we put it - “overlap” in the interests and motivations of the Soviets and the Libyans. I do not believe the Soviets would claim to have control over Colonel Qaddhafi, and I am certain the Libyans would not accept that formulation. But their purposes may well be compatible in a number of situations and they wind up achieving results which are not helpful to our interests or to those of many African countries²²⁸.

There was a difference between being part of the Soviet camp or of the camp of those hostile to the US and being a Soviet ally taking orders from Moscow. As Graham Fuller puts it,

Libya was part of the Soviet camp, it was on their part of the red line. One had to be cautious about striking at them because of their link with the Soviets, even though they were a minor risk as compared to other

²²⁶ Paper. “A public affairs strategy for actions against Libya”. Declassified on August 6, 2002. Near East and South Asia Bureau Files, folder: IG on Libya Nov 17 1981. Ronald Reagan Library

²²⁷ Teicher, Howard and Gayle Radley, *Twin Pillars to Desert Storm. America's Flawed Vision in the Middle East from Nixon to Bush*, William Morrow and company, New York, 1993, 134

²²⁸ St. John, Ronald Bruce, *Libya and the United States. Two centuries of Strife*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002, 123

Soviet clients. Qadhafi was a “bad guy” but not one that took instructions from the USSR, they wouldn't have encouraged him to use terrorism against us.²²⁹

Only late in 1981 did the Reagan administration write down its definite understanding of the relationship between the USSR and Libya. On December 18, Robert McFarlane sent to several officials in the JCS and to the Defense Department a memo he had written almost two months earlier on the “Soviet response to US pressures on Libya”. He defined the relationship as “complementary”: they shared some short-term common goals (such as undermining Western influence in the region) and exchanged Libyan hard currency for Soviet modern weaponry.

However, according to McFarlane, long-term goals differed. Libya wanted to create an “Arab or Islamic bloc of nations” that could challenge the superpowers while Moscow wanted to increase its own influence in the region. The Soviets did not trust Qadhafi while he wanted to avoid too strong a dependance from a superpower²³⁰.

We will see further McFarlane's assessment of the influence of American tough stance against Qadhafi on the relationship between Libya and the Soviet Union. The policy change from the Carter administration would end up to be dramatic even though concrete actions against Qadhafi had actually built up slowly during the year. The first meetings about Libya of which we have some form of record were held in March. In a Senior Interagency Group held on the 18th a paper was presented by the Department of State which the other attendees considered “mild”. It contained a series of options which could not be “disseminated in writing”²³¹.

We might infer some of the contents of the Department of State's paper from what Richard Clarke (in the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs at the State Department back then) said to David Wills. According to Clarke's account, in the first weeks of the administration Secretary of State Alexander Haig had asked Robert McFarlane what could be done “to

²²⁹ Author's phone interview with Graham Fuller, March 23, 2007

²³⁰ Memorandum by Robert McFarlane. “Study of Soviet Responses to US Military Actions Against Libya”. December 18, 1981. Declassified on February 23, 2001. Reproduced in Declassified Documents Reference System

²³¹ “Update on Pakistan, Sinai and Libya SIGs”. Memo for Richard Allen from Geoffrey Kemp. Near East and South Asia Bureau Files, box 91144, SIG on Libya March 18 81. Issued: March 24, 1981 Declassified: August 6, 2002. Reagan Library

put Qaddafi back in the box". McFarlane, at that time working as a counselor for the State Department, had met Egyptian president Anwar Sadat to discuss military options against the Libyan dictator. One of these options included the annexation of Libya by Egypt. A comprehensive plan, calling both for open and for covert US support to Egyptian actions, was drafted by Clarke's office. However, the plan was aborted when it went to the White House and the Pentagon because of fierce opposition by the military²³².

In May the situation began to become serious. On Monday May 4 Reagan had approved the closing of the Libyan embassy (official name: People's Bureau) in Washington. In his diary he wrote down:

Heard from Haig & Dick Allen – approved closing the Libyan embassy here. One of their officials linked to a terrorist killing in [Chicago]. Our embassy there was burned down & there has never been compensation or rebuilding²³³.

Publicly, the Department of State's spokesman listed all the attempts by the Libyans to kill members of the opposition exiled to the US and all the Libyan "subversive" activities in Chad, Sudan and Egypt. And then added: "The United States (..) has been worried that the Libyans were serving as an indirect Soviet "proxy" in Africa by interfering militarily and politically in various countries."²³⁴

Among the countries subject to Libyan interference there was Chad. A few days after the closing of the embassy, Reagan approved a "plan for a diplomatic strategy to remove Libyans from Chad" as a May 15 memo from Richard Allen recalled²³⁵. According to that same memo, the stakes and the goals of US policy were very clear:

Libya has now become a strategic threat to US interests both in the Middle East and Africa. A policy is needed which will bring about a basic reorientation of those Libyan policies and attitudes which are harmful to our interests. Our initial policy recommendations – though not meant to be deliberately provocative – are

²³² Wills, David, 164-165

²³³ Brinkley, Douglas (ed.), 17

²³⁴ Gwertzman, Bernard, "U.S. Expels Libyans and Closes Mission, Charging Terrorism", New York Times, May 7, 1981

²³⁵ Memorandum by Richard Allen. "Nsc meeting May 15". May 15, 1981 Declassified on August 6, 2002. Near East and South Asia Bureau Files, folder: Nsc meeting on Libya/Caribbean May 15 1981. Ronald Reagan Library

meant to put Colonel Qadhafi on notice that the US Government is now taking a new and more forceful approach in our dealings with Tripoli.

Moreover, Qadhafi threatened to be the major problem for the US in fighting World War 4²³⁶.

Libya poses a threat to the long Mediterranean lifeline of our capability to project power into the Persian Gulf area as well as directly threatening the survival of friendly regimes in the area. This could endanger our entire strategy in that region²³⁷.

With these assumptions, it is fair to think that closing the Libyan embassy in Washington and annoying him in Chad was not enough. On June 1 Reagan wrote on his diary about the NSC that was held that day:

I approved naval maneuvers in Mediterranean waters that Khadafi of Libya has declared are his territorial waters. I'm not being foolhardy but he's a madman. He has been harassing our planes out over international waters & it's time to show the other nations there Egypt, Morocco, et al that there is different management here²³⁸.

Actually the NSC had approved also other measures against Qadhafi: a media campaign to put forward the case against him; an approach to the Europeans to get their cooperation in cutting back arm sales; training and joint maneuvers with Tunisia and Sudan; an "action plan against the Islamic Nuclear bomb"; contingency studies against possible Soviet interventions to support Libya²³⁹. In other words, the campaign against Qadhafi was actually starting now.

On August 1 Reagan formally authorized the naval exercises in the gulf of Sidra²⁴⁰. Four days later, he met with Egyptian president Sadat in Washington. When the US president

²³⁶ For the discussion of the concept of World War 4, see above the chapter on "The US and the Middle East"

²³⁷ Paper. "US policy towards Libya". Declassified on August 6, 2002. Near East and South Asia Bureau Files, folder: Nsc meeting on Libya/Caribbean May 15 1981. Ronald Reagan Library

²³⁸ Brinkley, Douglas (Ed.), 22

²³⁹ Memo for the Vicepresident by Richard Allen. "US policy toward Libya". Declassified on August 6, 2002. Near East and South Asia Bureau Files, box 91144, folder: Nsc meeting on Libya June 4 81. Ronald Reagan Library

²⁴⁰ Stanik, Joseph, 47

informed Sadat of the Freedom of Navigation exercises beyond the “line of death” “he [Sadat] almost shouted: magnificent!”²⁴¹. The Freedom of Navigation exercise actually took place between August 18 and 20. A Libyan aircraft fired against two American F-14 and was eventually shot-down²⁴².

This was not the first confrontantion in the gulf of Sidra between the US and Libya. In March 1973 Libyan Mirage fighters attacked but did not damage a US Air Force RC-130 reconnaissance plane operating off the Libyan coast. In October 1973, while the Yom Kippur War was on, the Libyan government had declared its sovereignty over the part of the Mediterranean south of 32 degrees, 30 minutes north latitude. This area was in effect the whole gulf of Sidra which Tripoli identified as a bay despite the fact that it exceeded the parameters set by the 1958 Geneva Convention on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone. The US governement did not accept this claim and thus conducted several “Freedom of Navigation” (FON) exercises in the area in the following years²⁴³.

Three days after the clash in the air space over the gulf of Sidra, Qadhafi was in Ethiopia speaking to the dictator Menghistu. As Woodward wrote:

In the room at the time was a senior Ethiopian official, a secret CIA source of such sensitivity that his reports went only to the BIGOT list (..) At that meeting, Qadhafi declared he was going to have president Reagan killed. When the report reached Washington, it carried this evaluation: “Mengistu was convinced Qadhafi is very serious in his intention and that the threat should be taken seriously”. Shortly afterward, the NSA intercepted one of Qadhafi's conversations in which he said essentially the same thing: Reagan was the target. Both reports received prominent mention in the President's daily brief²⁴⁴.

This information started the “assassination paranoia” that hunted Reagan and many other US officials well into 1982. A constant flow of intelligence kept the threat alive. Again in August, a European CIA source reported that a key Palestinian had conferred with a member of the Libyan General Staff and had agreed to a joint action against Reagan. Another report said that the Black September group had been re-activated to hit the US

²⁴¹ Brinkley, Douglas (ed), 35

²⁴² Stanik, Joseph, 42-43

²⁴³ St.John, Roland Bruce, 125

²⁴⁴ Woodward, Bob, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987*, New York: Pocket Books, 1987, 190

president. September was a continuous build-up of news pointing to a rising Libyan threat. On the 9th the Italian intelligence and police had arrested and expelled a number of Libyans believed to be involved in a plot to kill US ambassador in Rome Max Rabb. On the 19th a report stated that a Libyan-supported suicide attack against the air carrier USS Nimitz was under preparation. On October 9th European intelligence services had reported a trip by Qadhafi to Syria where he had enlisted the support of four terrorists groups in attacking US targets in Europe. On October 21st Rabb was called back to the US for his own safety²⁴⁵.

Meanwhile events both in the Middle East and in Washington were unfolding toward confrontation. In October, the Libyan opposition merged into one single movement under the direction of Dr. Muhammad al-Muqaryaf a former senior bureaucrat. The name of the new opposition organization was the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NSFL). It established a radio station that broadcasted anti-Qadhafi propaganda from Sudan and recruited exiles to abolish the Qadhafi regime through violence, if it was needed. According to Joseph Stanik, the CIA was allowed to support it by an intelligence finding signed by Reagan which called for the provision of “non-lethal aid”²⁴⁶.

In a memo to Richard Allen, member of the Political Affairs Directorate at the NSC Raymond Tanter summed up the results of the interagency meetings on Libya that were held in those weeks in Washington. Department of State, Tanter explained, had “called an IG to prepare a number of diplomatic, economic and military responses” in case Libya attacked under any form the US. Economic options included an oil embargo, the prohibition on US companies to operate in Libya and a mandatory withdrawal of Americans. Tanter concluded:

If US citizens have been ordered out or have left Libya on their own, direct military action may be considered in response to a Qadhafi move. Military options include open assistance to anti-Libyan elements in Chad and elsewhere; urging of Egyptian military action against Libya; and blockade of Libyan ports²⁴⁷.

²⁴⁵ Woodward, Bob, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987*, New York: Pocket Books, 1987, 207-208

²⁴⁶ Stanik, Joseph, 41 also in Martin, David and John Walcott, 73

²⁴⁷ 49 (295).Memorandum from Raymond Tanter to Richard Allen. “IG on Libya, 1 october 81”. September 29, 1981. Declassified on August 6, 2002. Folder: “IF on Libya Oct 1, 1981”. Near East and South Asia files, Ronald Reagan Library

The debate both at the agency level and in the White House continued for some weeks, centering on the alternative between sanctions and military intervention. In the end the former would be picked but this debate laid the foundations for what became US policy on Libya in the following years.

Sanctions Instead of War

As a result of the growing tension with Libya, several options were under consideration by the policy-makers in Washington. Secretary of State Alexander Haig, in a memo to the president issued in November, noted that Libya had stepped up its terrorist activities and that there was a prospect of increased cooperation among Soviet clients in the area. Interagency groups were reviewing the following options: "Withdraw US Business Personnel from Libya; Unilateral US oil Embargo of Libya; Complete US Economic Boycott of Libya; Enhanced US Security Assistance to Friendly Regional States; Increased US military presence in the Region; Increased Military Cooperation with Regional Forces; Further Contingency Planning Concerning US Military Response to Libyan Aggression"²⁴⁸. In November, NSDD 16 started the process towards the oil embargo by creating an interagency task force on it. The announcement of this measure was delayed until the evacuation of American workers in Libya was completed for fear of a new hostage crisis. Also, the delay was meant to give time to the Europeans to join the anti-Qadhafi efforts²⁴⁹. On November 4, McFarlane wrote a memo on a "comprehensive strategy on Libya" which actually took into consideration only the economic or oil sanctions, not the military response. The document highlighted the difficulties behind these options: the lack of support from the European allies that would make the American ban useless; the damage for the American companies involved along with the legal problems for joint ventures; the risk that American activities in the country might be replaced by others²⁵⁰.

Also, in the above-mentioned memorandum on Soviet-Libyan relations, McFarlane had

²⁴⁸ Memorandum to the President from Alexander M. Haig, Jr., "Status of Review of Libya Policy". November 17, 1981. Declassified on July 30, 2002. Reproduced in Declassified Documents Reference System

²⁴⁹ Stanik, Joseph, 68

²⁵⁰ Secret Paper by Robert McFarlane. "Comprehensive Libya Strategy". November 4, 1981. Declassified on July 30, 2002. Reproduced in Declassified Documents Reference System

assessed the negative effects on Libyan dependence from Moscow due to the possible embargo and to increased US pressure during the past year.

Qadhafi's increased economic vulnerability as a result of such an embargo would make him even more dependent on Moscow and bolster Soviet leverage over him. If Qadhafi perceives a threat to his hold on power in these US actions, Moscow may be able to extract military concessions it has long sought – such as naval and communications facilities – without having to commit itself to Libya's defense (...) [During 1981] Moscow has come out clearly in support of Libya's occupation of Chad and has hosted visits from Qadhafi in April and his second in command, Major Jallud, and the Libyan high command in June. Tripoli has permitted Soviet naval ships to visit Libyan ports for the first time in a decade (July and October), and allowed the first ever deployment to Libya of Soviet operational aircraft and IL-38 antisubmarine warfare and reconnaissance planes (July and October).

However, after the incident in the gulf of Sidra in August, the Soviets had denounced the American shootdown of the Libyan SU-22 but had not supported Libyan territorial claims. A demonstration, according to McFarlane, of how little the Soviets shared Qadhafi's long-term goals²⁵¹.

The embargo was not favoured also by the two interagency groups (SIG) on Libya that had been set up at the State Department to devise a political as well as a military strategy for Libya: one dealt with economic sanctions, the other with the retaliation to a possible Libyan terrorist attack²⁵². The paper prepared by the first group was titled “Libyan Contingencies and US Options” and read:

In light of low prospect of Libyan escalation and the increasing likelihood of French or African diplomacy forcing him to withdraw from Chad, economic sanctions seem to be premature at best and counterproductive at worst.

To understand the rationale behind the oil ban which would eventually be adopted by the administration, one has to read the background paper for the Senior Interagency Group

²⁵¹ Memorandum by Robert McFarlane. “Study of Soviet Responses to US Military Actions Against Libya”. December 18, 1981. Declassified on February 23, 2001. Reproduced in Declassified Documents Reference System

²⁵² Memorandum by Raymond Tanter for Richard V. Allen. “Interagency Meetings on Libya and the NSC Staff Paper – Libyan Contingency and US Options”. November 13, 1981. Declassified on August 6, 2002. Near East and South Asia files, folder: SIG Meeting on Libya 25 Nov 1981. Ronald Reagan Library

held on November 25 which recognized that “since economic measures relative to military actions minimize the risk of escalation and reprisal and have positive mid-term effects, economic sanctions probably are worth the risk”. Also, the ban would have an effect on the Europeans because it would show the “seriousness with which the US views the Libya threat” therefore creating the opportunity for decreased western European military supplies to Qadhafi. While this document provided a rational background for sanctions, advocates of a tougher stance did not stop their planning.

In those same weeks, a detailed chart of 16 possible targets in Libya was prepared for a US retaliation in case of a new attack²⁵³. In a paper prepared by the Department of State in October, “political objectives” were pointed out at the request of the Joint Chief of Staff which was planning a military response to a Libyan act of terrorism against US diplomats or military installations. The overall goal, the paper said, was “to carry out the President's policy of swift and effective retribution” against the terrorists and those who supported them. A military response would have to target Libyan military capabilities, economic interests and “Qadhafi's personal prestige” not only in Libya but in the whole Third World. However, the paper pointed out some constraints: the possibility of hurting American and Western citizens in the country and the possible escalation that would occur after such an attack.²⁵⁴

Nicholas Veliotis, then Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East, confirms that extensive planning for military action in Libya was under way already in 1981:

We tried to get the Americans out of Libya, we didn't want new hostages. We also worked with the Pentagon on contingency planning in case the Libyans committed some acts of terrorism against the Americans. [The Pentagon] had worked on a contingency plan for an American retaliation. Their [Pentagon's] plans included different waves of air strikes in which not only the terrorist training camps would have been wiped out but also most of the military facilities. I would dare to say that we would have wiped out half of Libya²⁵⁵.

Another document prepared by Elaine Morton for the Senior Interagency Group held on

²⁵³ Woodward, Bob, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987*, New York: Pocket Books, 1987, 211

²⁵⁴ Memorandum by Robert Blackwill. “Objectives for consideration in Drafting a Military Response”. Undated. Declassified on July 30, 2002. Kemp files, folder: Libya 1981. Ronald Reagan Library

²⁵⁵ Author's interview with Nicholas Veliotis, Washington DC, April 2007

November 25 drafted a chronology of US actions leading to the oil embargo. The danger, the paper said, was to appear as “overreacting”, so the timing of US actions had to be carefully chosen. Some events could help: “A particularly heinous crime, like the assassination of a US ambassador, would help dramatize the need for US actions against Libya and the fulfillment of our promise of swift and effective retribution against terrorism.” There were two major reasons for concern: the 1500 Americans in Libya seen as an element of vulnerability; the danger that the message for the US domestic audience could build up Qadhafi's prestige in the arab world. The paper proposed therefore a 3-phase policy: first, consultations with key members of Congress, Saudia Arabia and the European allies should start immediately; second, the evacuation of Americans could take place; finally, the oil embargo could go into effect. According to the paper the time needed to carry out phase two was 45-60 days so the embargo should start from February 15 with the whole process starting on December 4.

A few days after the SIG meeting, the Cia received a report on serious Libyan threats to the lives of president Reagan, vicepresident Bush, Secretary of State Haig and Secretary of Defense Weinberger. Libyan hit squads had infiltrated into the US and were ready to hit²⁵⁶.

According to an article published on December 3 in the “New York Times”, the report prompted a nationwide search for the potential assassins and an upgrade in security measures surrounding top US government officials. The plans appeared to be quite creative:

These plans, intelligence and law-enforcement officials said today, include a plot to kill Mr. Reagan by shooting down Air Force One, the presidential jet, with surface-to-air missile, blowing up the President's limousine at close range with small arms²⁵⁷.

If this report proved to be grounded, the major provocation invoked by Elaine Morton's paper (see above) was not far away. Advocates of a military retaliation against Qadhafi

²⁵⁶ Gates, 253

²⁵⁷ Taubman, Philip, “U.S. Officials Say F.B.I. Is Hunting Terrorists Seeking to Kill President”, The New York Times, December 4, 1981

must have been disappointed when, on December 6, the Libyan dictator appeared on American TV to deny any assassination attempt against US officials: "We refuse to assassinate any person (..)This is silly, this administration and this president". A subsequent report by the CIA traced all the misinformation about hit-squads to one source: Manucher Ghorbanifar, on CIA's pay roll and later very much involved in the unfolding of the Iran-Contra scandal²⁵⁸. In a report issued by the CIA on December 18 the validity of the original source of the assassination plot was confirmed: the intelligence about the Qadhafi-Menghistu meeting was reliable. Follow-on reports, however, were not as credible: "it is possible that some of the reports may have been generated because informants are aware we are seeking this information"²⁵⁹.

Meetings continued to take place on Libya and Reagan complained about the stalemate. On Decembder 7 he wrote on his diary: "An NSC meeting re Quadaffi [sic]. No conclusion reached except that we can't do anything until we find an answer to the 1700 Americans still working in Libya²⁶⁰". The following day he also wrote something very important:

We are sending a secret or private warning from me to him that harm to any of our people by his terrorist goons will be considered an act of war. We're looking at other actions that must however come only after we've tried to get our people out of Libya²⁶¹.

The "hit squads" paranoia hunted Reagan for the whole month. On December 11 his helicopter had to take a different route from usual because "our Libyan friends are thought to possess heat seeking missiles that can be hand launched"²⁶².

Since no major provocation by Qadhafi came, the process envisioned in Elaine Morton's "Chronology" for the oil ban was set in motion. William Clark, then Deputy Secretary of State, wrote a memo to sum up the consultations with Congress and with allies. According to Clark, Congress strongly supported the president's policy against Qadhafi although Senator Pell said that covert actions would have been the best means against the dictator

²⁵⁸ Woodward, Bob, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987*, New York: Pocket Books, 1987, 211

²⁵⁹ Woodward, Bob, 186

²⁶⁰ Brinkley, Douglas (ed.), 53. The actual figure of Americans living and working in Libya thus ranged from 1500 in some documents to 1700 in others

²⁶¹ Brinkley, Douglas (ed.), 54

²⁶² Brinkley, Douglas (ed.), 54

because they avoided the possible escalation of the conflict.

Few foreign governments believed to the death threats Qadhafi had made to Reagan and other officials in the administration, even though, given the dictator's personality, this threats were deemed in some ways credible: he might have said that, but he was not going to carry it out. The French and the Italians seemed to have some doubts on the decision to withdraw American citizens from the country: the former thought that it wasn't the right moment, since the Libyans were withdrawing from Chad; the latter feared that it could cut off any communication line with the regime. Soviets and Arab countries feared that it could start a military confrontation²⁶³.

By Christmas 1981 it was clear that events worked in favour of the oil ban, not the military showdown envisioned during transition early that year. Qadhafi had not carried out any major terrorist attack, diplomacy and French intervention were driving him out of Chad, American workers in Libya and fear of possible escalation (another legacy of Vietnam) made a military attack very difficult.

On December 10, American citizens living in Libya were encouraged by their government to leave the country. When William Clark announced the recall of US citizens, Alexander Haig was in Brussels attending a meeting of NATO foreign ministers. He was to present the evidence against Qadhafi to the European allies to convince them to join the sanctions. However, in the same days the situation in Poland had worsened, dominating the attention of the European foreign affairs' ministers. Generally speaking, the western Europeans were interested in the evidence but, as Clark had pointed out in his memo, not eager to confront Qadhafi. During the news conference that followed the meeting Haig accused them of "double standards" while the Europeans pointed at the hypocrisy of US comments: US exports to Libya had nearly doubled during the previous year²⁶⁴.

It would take almost 5 years to get European and American governments to agree again on the policy on Libya. Meanwhile, the US decided to proceed unilaterally not trusting the western Europeans on their relationship with Qadhafi which was considered to be too much influenced by business. Ambassador Robert Oakley, State Department Coordinator

²⁶³ Memorandum to the President from William P. Clark. "Libya Status Report". Declassified on July 30, 2002. Reproduced in Declassified Documents Reference System.

²⁶⁴ Stanik, Joseph 70

for Counterterrorism, traveled a lot to Europe in those weeks and in the following months and, in his account, was always denied cooperation by western European governments. "I worked with the Europeans – he explains - to try to make them join our sanctions but they didn't want to. They were doing business with the Libyans and they didn't understand the threat."²⁶⁵

On March 9, 1982 Reagan signed National Security Decision Directive 27 on "Economic Decisions for Libya" which explicitly called for the prohibition of import of Libyan crude oil into the United States²⁶⁶. The following day the General Accounting Office released a study on the effects of the oil ban on Libya: in the short-term there might have been a revenue loss but in the long-term the effect either on Libyan or US economy would be small²⁶⁷.

It's hard to say if the sanctions actually worked in curtailing Qadhafi's oil revenues and making it harder for him to finance "subversion" around the world. As Ronald Bruce St.John has noted, the economic decline for Libya had already started in 1981 due to the combination of worldwide recession and oil glut. Also, once the US oil embargo went into effect, Libya pursued a "maximalist pricing policy" which produced the obvious result of reducing sharply the oil production: 70% less from the last quarter of 1981 to the first quarter of 1982, while actual revenues dropped "only" by 50%. To make things even worse, the purchase of sophisticated weapons did not stop while the costs of the military adventure in Chad rose thanks also to the joint French and US commitment²⁶⁸.

Actually, by early 1982 the attention for Qadhafi and Libya had dropped in the top echelons of the administration. As we will see, the issue of Lebanon was to be the focus of Reagan's, Haig's and Weinberger's concerns on the Middle East since January. However, Casey's CIA was to keep the threat alive in the following years.

According to then Deputy Director of Intelligence Robert Gates, in April 1982 the Director of CIA had visited several countries in the Greater Middle East: Tunisia, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan and Oman. When he got back he wrote to Reagan that he was very much

²⁶⁵ Author's interview with Robert Oakley, Washington DC, March 28 2007

²⁶⁶ NSDD 27. "Economic Decisions for Libya". March 9, 1982. Declassified on June 11, 1991. Presidential Directives collection, National Security Archive.

²⁶⁷ Stanik, Joseph, 72

²⁶⁸ St.John, Roland Bruce, 128

concerned about the progress that “the Soviets and their proxies” were making in the Third World. According to him, in each country he visited dissidents were being brought out and trained usually in Libya and South Yemen, equipped and sent back into the country “to organize, propagandize, or practice terrorism against the government”. Libya, Ethiopia, South Yemen, Afghanistan and Syria were “all working together or under Soviet influence” and surrounded “our friends Egypt and Israel and the oil fields of the Middle East”. The conclusions of his memo to the President outlined a worldwide strategy while providing a policy recommendation for the administration:

Through Libya, South Yemen and Ethiopia, the Soviets have mounted subversion and insurgency threats to countries which control the most strategic choke-points in the world: Oman and the Strait of Hormuz; North Yemen and Somalia at the mouth of the Red Sea, the pathway to Suez; and Morocco at the Straits of Gibraltar. In the past eight years, the Soviets and their proxies have promoted insurgencies in over a dozen countries, five of them successful and seven now under way (..) Most of these states cannot effectively use and do not need sophisticated high-priced weapons. What they need is light arms, transport, and communications to deal with multiple, widely scattered hit and run forces. This security and counter-subversion assistance [by the US] should be low-profile²⁶⁹.

In other words, Libya as part of the Global Cold War and as one of the proving grounds for what came to be called the “Reagan doctrine” of support for anti-communist insurgencies and governments around the world, a statement which came, probably not by chance, a few weeks later in a speech at the Eureka College²⁷⁰.

Still in 1983, according to Woodward, the amount of intelligence resources devoted to Libya was impressive. “The number of meetings at the CIA and the amount of attention to Qadhafi – wrote Woodward - exceeded Libya's importance. At times, Libya got more attention than the Soviet Union.²⁷¹”

Even though no serious confrontation with Libya had occurred during 1981 and early 1982, the ground had been laid for the events of 1985 and 1986: the threat posed by

²⁶⁹ Gates, Robert, 250-251

²⁷⁰ The speech that became known as the statement of the Reagan doctrine took place on May 9, 1982. Reagan had been a student of the same college. See more on this speech above in the chapter on the Reagan Revolution

²⁷¹ Woodward, Bob, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987*, New York: Pocket Books, 1987, 366

Qadhafi had been analyzed and dramatized with US public opinion; a policy had been set in motion and all the economic as well as military tools to confront him had been devised. For some years the attention of the administration in the Middle East would shift to Lebanon²⁷² only to refocus on Libya once a new terrorist wave would emerge in 1985, the *annus horribilis* of terrorism. Even though major US military action had been avoided in 1981, it would surface again among the policy options once “terrorism as a form of warfare” would hit seriously the US in Beirut on October 23, 1983. But before that, several crucial events took place in Lebanon which must be analyzed.

²⁷² And of course to the Iran-Iraq war which is not the subject of the present study

Chapter Three

Prelude to the Intervention in Lebanon

The National Pact and the 1958 Crisis

The US intervention in Lebanon in 1982 was not the first one, and the civil war that had raged in the country since 1975 was not the first of the 1900s. In this Mediterranean country several communities had coexisted since the Middle Ages: the Maronites (a Lebanese version of the Roman Catholics), the Greek-Orthodoxes, the Sunni and the Shiite Muslims, the Druzes and also a tiny Jewish community. The peculiarity of Lebanon is not the existence of this communities but the political and institutional role they have received over time.

According to Lebanese historian Georges Corm, the role of the communities was not an “historical constant” but a result of modernity and interaction with western powers. The first step in this sense was taken by the Ottoman rulers after the Maronite-Druze clashes in 1840 and 1860. In 1861 the system of *Mutassarifiya* was established: political representation was granted to each community proportionally to its population and had to coexist with the power of the Ottoman *wali*. With the disintegration of the Ottoman empire, the French were given a mandate over Lebanon. French domination, according to Corm, would even increase the role of the communities: a decree issued by the mandate authority in 1936 recognized the existence of 17 “historical” communities. From that moment on, no Lebanese could exist from the legal point of view, unless he proved to be part of one of these communities²⁷³.

Independence was finally achieved in 1943 thanks to a National Pact between the notables of the major communities. The agreement divided power in the central government between a Maronite president and a Sunni Prime Minister. Based on the 1932 census (which is still today the last census of the Lebanese population) the Pact established a ratio of 6 Christian members of parliament for each 5 Moslem MPs. The electoral system based on the local community notables (in Arabic *zu'ama*) hindered the birth of real political parties. Lebanon was not a real nation but a “confederation of protonational communities”

²⁷³ Corm, Georges, *Il Libano Contemporaneo*, Milano:Jaca Book, 2006, 79-97

vested with political power as Israeli historian Itamar Rabinovich argued²⁷⁴. As far as foreign policy was concerned, the Pact included one more provision, according to Corm: the Maronites would not seek foreign protection while the Sunnis would not try to include Lebanon into Syria²⁷⁵.

This system actually worked well for the first fifteen years and made the country the closest thing to a parliamentary democracy in the Arab world. Personal ambitions were of course part of the game, too: in 1949 the Maronite president Bechara El-Khoury won an unconstitutional second mandate thanks to a parliament whose election he had tightly controlled. In 1952 a coalition of community notables forced him to step down but this did not create any major crisis: power was granted in the interim to Army general Fouad Chehab, appointed Prime Minister, who would then turn it back to Camille Chamoun once he would be elected President of the Republic by the Parliament.

Despite its stated neutrality, Lebanon would be regarded as a potential ally by the West. This idea had been reinforced by the “moderate” attitude of the government in Beirut toward the first Arab-Israeli war. On June 8, 1948 a document by the US State-War-Navy Coordination Committee (SWNCC, the precursor of the current NSC) stated the ideological motives of this alliance: Lebanon was “the sole country in the Near East having a Christian majority, a feature which has characterized Lebanon as a sort of occidental bridgehead in the Moslem world”²⁷⁶.

The 1952 crisis did not evolve into a major crisis, according to Corm, because the neutrality of the country was not questioned and none of the major actors had been backed by any foreign power. The new president Camille Chamoun, however, was a supporter of the British and US rule in the Middle East and tried to move the country decisively towards the Baghdad Pact thus starting to break the fundamental provision of the National Pact on foreign policy²⁷⁷. He soon impressed US diplomats in 1953 for his staunch anti-communism and his promises of aid to the West: “If it ever came to war with the Soviets –

²⁷⁴ Rabinovich, Itamar, *The War for Lebanon 1970-1985*, Cornell University Press, 1985, 24

²⁷⁵ Corm, Georges, 105

²⁷⁶ SWNCC, “Long-range Assistance to Lebanon”, 8 June 1948, RG 59, 890E.00/6-848 in Little Douglas, “His Finest Hour? Eisenhower, Lebanon, and the 1958 Middle East Crisis”, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Winter 1996

²⁷⁷ Corm, Georges, 108

he had told to US diplomats – Lebanon would be 100 percent on the side of the West, our harbours would be open to your ships, our airfields to your planes²⁷⁸.”

The problems would come with the combination of the approaching end of Chamoun's term and the growing American Cold War concerns in the Middle East following the Suez Crisis and the statement of the Eisenhower doctrine. On January 5, 1957 the president had addressed the Congress proposing a legislation that would promote economic and military aid for the countries of the Middle East threatened by communism and went as far as to say that this support would include

The employment of the armed forces of the United States to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid, against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by International Communism²⁷⁹.

In this occasion the president had won Congressional approval for his plan that included \$ 200 million worth of economic aids and military support for pro-Western regimes in the region.

President Chamoun had told the US ambassador in Beirut in January that he “supported the Eisenhower plan one hundred percent”²⁸⁰. Chamoun's words, however, did not reflect a wide consensus in Lebanese politics: both the Sunnis and the Druzes warned that the neutrality implied in the 1943 National Pact could not be changed by the president alone²⁸¹.

According to Erika Alin, this differences on foreign policy had transformed into a domestic cleavage: “The Lebanese government increasingly pro-Western orientation found support primarily among Christians whereas pro-Arab allegiances were to be found primarily, but by no means exclusively, among the country's Muslim population”.

²⁷⁸ Department of State Briefing Paper, “Lebanon”, 5 May 1953, FRUS

²⁷⁹ On the Eisenhower Doctrine see Yaqub, Salim, *Containing Arab nationalism : the Eisenhower doctrine and the Middle East*, Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 2004; The text of his “Special Message to the Congress on the Situation in the Middle East” can be downloaded from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=11007&st=&st1=>

²⁸⁰ On the origins of the Eisenhower doctrine see Paterson, Thomas G., *Meeting the Communist Threat: Truman to Reagan*, New York, 1988, 177-183; Brands, *Specter of Neutralism*, 282-289

²⁸¹ Little Douglas, “His Finest Hour? Eisenhower, Lebanon, and the 1958 Middle East Crisis”, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Winter 1996

The unrest was evident after the murder on May 8, 1958 of the pro-Nasser journalist Nassib Metni. Also, the possibility that Chamoun could seek a second term in office had provoked, according to Erika Alin, the insurrection of the opposition which was led by the Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt. The Maronite president was indeed pursuing a domestic, personal goal (his re-election) while depicting his actions as the defense of his pro-Western policy against the communist and nasserite threats²⁸². On this background, he started asking with some insistence for US intervention to quell the rebellion.

It was not an easy choice for the US administration because the policy of the Eisenhower administration was, according to Erika Alin, fundamentally ambiguous: on one hand “the administration regarded the 1958 civil crisis in Lebanon as a microcosm of the threat to western influence emanating from the spread of Soviet communism and Arab nationalism” and attributed the clashes to the communists who had “fanned the flames” while on the other hand it acknowledged privately the purely domestic factors behind the unrest and “that communists were not directly involved in Lebanon's civil disturbances”²⁸³.

In other words, while publicly following a globalist path, the Eisenhower administration privately acknowledged the existence of domestic causes to the unrest in Lebanon. Also, the globalist framework used – the east-west struggle – could be out of place since the Lebanese opposition could be traced back mainly to the Nasserite pan-Arab ideal rather than to Soviet communism. Alin notes that, with this respect, the problem was the ambiguity of the Eisenhower doctrine itself: it did not clearly distinguish between communist and nationalist threats. Nonetheless, military action was seen as “an important means of sending a deterrent signal to anti-western forces in the Middle East and elsewhere”²⁸⁴. In other words, what would in the 1980s be called “a show of American resolve”, regardless of the nature of the threat that had to be faced.

²⁸² Alin, Erika, “US Policy and Military Intervention in the 1958 Lebanon Crisis” in Lesch, David (ed), *The Middle East and the United States: a Historical and Political Reassessment*, Boulder, 1996; Chamoun saw the two threats as being the major problem of the Middle East, see Chamoun, Camille, *Crise au Moyen-Orient*, Paris: Gallimard, 1963

²⁸³ Alin, Erika, “US Policy and Military Intervention in the 1958 Lebanon Crisis” in Lesch, David (ed), *The Middle East and the United States: a Historical and Political Reassessment*, Boulder, 1996

²⁸⁴ Alin, Erika, “US Policy and Military Intervention in the 1958 Lebanon Crisis” in Lesch, David (ed), *The Middle East and the United States: a Historical and Political Reassessment*, Boulder, 1996

This combination of global and domestic factors could be seen in the parliamentary elections that had been held in June 1957: Chamoun won 53 out of 66 seats thanks both to help from the CIA, as Douglas Little argued²⁸⁵, and to smart gerrymandering in favour of his supporters, as Corm wrote²⁸⁶. The result was that Camille Chamoun used the global US approach of the east-west struggle to strengthen his purely domestic rule over Lebanon. The more he tilted toward the West, the more unrest he produced, the more he needed a foreign intervention on his behalf. As the summer of 1958 was about to start, the low-intensity civil war did not seem to stop. The US government started to discuss seriously the opportunity of intervening in the country. The Eisenhower administration decided to pose three conditions for US involvement: first, that Chamoun accept UN help in resolving the crisis; second, that he obtain support from at least another Arab state; third, that he renounce his own candidacy for a second term. American diplomats pressed him to support his main Christian rival General Chehab whereas the understanding with Nasser was that he was going to use all his influence to “try to end dissidence within Lebanon”²⁸⁷. On July 14 a coup d'etat overthrew the pro-western regime in Baghdad. Chamoun summoned the US and British ambassadors and asked explicitly for help pointing at the “communist and nasserite” danger coming from Iraq. Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia as well were pressing hard for US military intervention to contain the radical tide sweeping throughout the region. While these countries saw a regional threat, namely Arab radicalism, the US inserted this threat into the global east-west struggle and exploited it to show a measure of “resolve” against the Soviets. In the NSC held the day of the coup in Baghdad, it emerged clearly that US credibility was at stake, not just the fate of Lebanon. Eisenhower, according to his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Robert Cutler, made clear that “to lose this area by inaction would be far worse than the loss of China, because of the strategic position and resources of the Middle East”²⁸⁸. The globalist view in Washington overruled any regional consideration in Beirut. As Erika Alin wrote “while

²⁸⁵ Little Douglas, “His Finest Hour? Eisenhower, Lebanon, and the 1958 Middle East Crisis”, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Winter 1996

²⁸⁶ Corm, Georges, *Il Libano Contemporaneo*, Milano:Jaca Book, 2006, 109

²⁸⁷ Little Douglas, “His Finest Hour? Eisenhower, Lebanon, and the 1958 Middle East Crisis”, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Winter 1996

²⁸⁸ Cutler, Robert, *No Time for Rest*, Boston, 1966, 362-363 in Little Douglas, “His Finest Hour? Eisenhower, Lebanon, and the 1958 Middle East Crisis”, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Winter 1996

trying to address Lebanon's internal problems [the Eisenhower administration] subordinated this to the primary objective of ensuring that the crisis did not diminish western influence in Lebanon and in the Arab world"²⁸⁹.

The globalist approach helped also to get operation Blue Bat through Congress. A few hours after the NSC, the president consulted key members of the Congress. William Fulbright, the Arkansas democrat who would later chair the Foreign Relations Committee wondered if the crisis was really "Soviet-inspired" or if Nasser was playing "his own game". Eisenhower's response was quite instructing: "the crucial question is what the victims believe" and Chamoun believed that "it is Soviet Communism that is causing him his trouble". Fullbright actually voiced the concern of two other congressmen who would later have an important role in US politics: then Massachusetts Democrat John F. Kennedy and Minnesota's Hubert Humphrey who termed the intervention in Lebanon as a "sad mistake"²⁹⁰.

The confusion between Arab nationalists and Communists could be avoided by reading CIA's National Intelligence Estimate issued in those days: pro-Nasser, pan-Arab radicals, not pro-Soviet subversives were behind US problems in the region²⁹¹.

Despite this confusion, the coup d'etat in Baghdad finally broke US hesitations about intervention in Lebanon: on 15 July 1958, 1700 Marines waded ashore in Beirut, under Operation Blue Bat. In a week, the number of US troops in Beirut would rise to 14,000. British troops, with US resupply, were meanwhile carrying out a similar job in Amman while the US 7th fleet was checking the security of the straits of Hormuz with orders to defend the oil fields in the Persian Gulf.

For many historians²⁹² Eisenhower's handling of the 1958 crisis constituted his "finest

²⁸⁹ Alin, Erika, "US Policy and Military Intervention in the 1958 Lebanon Crisis" in Lesch, David (ed), *The Middle East and the United States: a Historical and Political Reassessment*, Boulder, 1996

²⁹⁰ Little Douglas, "His Finest Hour? Eisenhower, Lebanon, and the 1958 Middle East Crisis", *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Winter 1996

²⁹¹ SNIE 30-2-58, "The Middle East Crisis", 22 July 1958, FRUS, 1958-1960 in Little, Douglas, "His Finest Hour? Eisenhower, Lebanon, and the 1958 Middle East Crisis", *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Winter 1996

²⁹² See for example, Stookey, Robert, *America and the Arab States: An Uneasy Encounter*, New York, 1975, 156-157; Brands, H.W., *Cold Warriors: Eisenhower's Generation and American Foreign Policy*, New York, 1988, 100-113; Quandt, William, "Lebanon 1958, Jordan 1970" in Barry Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force Without War: US Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*, Washington, 1978, 225-257

hour” as historian Douglas Little wrote in his 1996 article on the review “Diplomatic History”: pro-western regimes had been shored up, the special relationship with Great Britain was strengthened and the oil fields were safe from Arab radicals. Last but not least, no Americans were killed in the operation that ended by Christmas the same year. Eisenhower himself, in his memoirs, presented Operation Blue Bat as a successful example of how Marines were fit to fight “small wars”: “the operation in Lebanon demonstrated the ability of the United States to react swiftly with conventional armed forces to meet small-scale, or “brush fire” situations” in the third world²⁹³.

Other historians, however, are more critical of the results of Blue Bat²⁹⁴: America was drawn into the Lebanese labyrinth and assumed obligations toward the Lebanese leaders that the following US presidents would not be able to repudiate. Also, according to Little, “US officials tried to mislead both Congress and the US people by publicly attributing Lebanon's political instability to Communist subversion while privately acknowledging that the real cause was Arab nationalism”. Little goes even further when he says that Eisenhower set a precedent which would be used with little success by his successors by misrepresenting third world nationalism as Soviet inspired and the US has a guarantor of friendly governments against this threat²⁹⁵.

Moreover, with Operation Blue Bat the US had definitively sided with the conservative front of Lebanese politics composed mainly of those Christians that did not want to change the terms of the 1943 National Pact and considered their country as part of the Western bloc.

The Civil War

The consensus on the National Pact was actually shattered by the 1958 crisis: the main cleavage was now between what we could call the Revisionist front and its opponents.

²⁹³ Eisenhower, Dwight D., *Waging Peace, 1956-1961*, Garden City, 1965, 290

²⁹⁴ See for example, Barnett, Richard J., *Intervention and Revolution: The United States in the Third World*, New York, 1968, 140-151; Watt, Cameron, *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place, 1900-1975*, New York, 1984, 134-135; Piers, Brendon, *Ike: His Life and Times*, New York, 1986, 356-360; Gendzier, Irene, “The Declassified Lebanon, 1948-1958, Elements of Continuity and Contrast in US Policy toward Lebanon” in Simon, Reeva S. (ed), *The Middle East and North Africa: Essays in honor of J.C. Hurewitz*, New York, 1990

²⁹⁵ Little, Douglas, “His Finest Hour? Eisenhower, Lebanon, and the 1958 Middle East Crisis”, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Winter 1996

Revisionists wanted to change the 1943 agreement to allow a bigger share of power for Muslims and a more pan-Arab foreign policy. Most of the Revisionists were Muslims but among them there were also Christians. The anti-revisionists (mainly Christian Maronites) saw Lebanon as a “Christian haven and fortress in the midst of a hostile Muslim environment”²⁹⁶. For this reason, they thought that conceding a little bit of more power to the Muslims was tantamount to surrender.

To make things even worse, since 1948 there were over 200,000 Palestinians living in the refugee camps, almost completely segregated from the rest of the country because their full participation to the political life would have definitively altered the ethnic balance in favour of the Muslims. With the gradual disintegration of the national consensus created with the 1943 National Pact, the Palestinians grouped in the PLO would acquire more power and influence in the Revisionist front.

On November 3, 1969 the Cairo Agreements, reached under Nasser's patronage, granted to the Palestinians the permission to carry weapons and organize military activity inside the refugee camps in Lebanon. Gradually, this transformed them in the military umbrella organization for the Revisionist front²⁹⁷. The following year, the PLO members that had been expelled from Jordan established their headquarters in southern Lebanon and in Beirut. In a short time this became a state-within-a-state and the Israelis became more and more concerned about their northern border.

Such was the situation when the civil war broke out in 1975. On April 13, in Beirut, a bus loaded with Palestinians was attacked by the Maronite militia: 27 passengers were killed. Fighters from the Sunni Nasserist “*Al-Murabitun*” (The sentinels) movement and from the Palestinian PFLP-General Command responded by killing 4 Christians. The fighting escalated in December during “black Saturday” when checkpoints were established both in East and West Beirut. Drivers who were found to be on the wrong side of the city were taken out of their cars and killed on the spot²⁹⁸.

Soon, the Phalangists would control eastern Beirut while the Palestinians and their Sunni allies would settle in the western part of the city. The civil war, however, was not just the

²⁹⁶ Rabinovich, Itamar, 29

²⁹⁷ Korbani, Agnes G. , US Intervention in Lebanon 1958 and 1982, , New York: Praeger, 1991, 14-15

²⁹⁸ Fisk, Robert, Pity the Nation. Lebanon at War, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001 p. 78 and ss.

result of an incident. It came at the end of a process that had evolved in the past years when, along with the Palestinians, almost every faction in the Lebanese melting-pot had built its own militia. The Christians had the Maronite Phalange, based mainly on the Gemayel family and inspired by the 1930s' European fascist regimes. Other families, such as the Faranjiya and the Eddè, initially had their own parties and militias but were gradually eliminated and were no more crucial players when the events that are the subject of this case study took place.

The Sunnis did not have a very strong militia. The Nasserist "*Murabitun*" numbered just 3,000 but the moderate leadership did not have its own armed force. The real forces behind the Revisionist front were the Palestinians and the Druzes. This latter group was a tiny Moslem minority which had gathered around the old feudal Jumblatt family and its Progressive Socialist Party (PSP). Druzes lived mainly in the Shuf plateau overlooking Beirut.

The Shiites were the poorest and fastest-growing community of the country, living mainly in the south of the country and in Beirut's slums. They were the slowest to build their own party, *Amal* (Arabic for hope), a moderate Islamist movement. Later on, after the Israeli invasion, a splinter group from Amal would form *Hizbullah* (Arabic for Party of God), a radical Iranian-backed fundamentalist organization.

Unfortunately for the Lebanese, these militias interacted with outside powers which had their own interests in the morass. First of all, Syria. To many policy-makers in Damascus Lebanon was just a little part of greater Syria. And indeed it had been so: it was first the Ottomans and then the French who had actually separated Lebanon from Syria to build a Christian-dominated *enclave*²⁹⁹.

Using the Cold War paradigm one could infer that Syrian president Hafez al-Asad would have sided with the leftist Revisionist front. Too simple to be the truth in Lebanon. Early in 1976, the helpless Lebanese president Elias Sarkis asked Syria's intervention on the behalf of the Christians. The rationale behind the Syrian intervention was explained by the British journalist and long-time Beirut correspondent Robert Fisk: Asad feared that the

²⁹⁹ On Lebanon's pre-independence history, see Corm, Georges, *Il Libano Contemporaneo*, Milano, Jaca Book, 2006

outcome of the civil war could be the birth of a revolutionary Palestinian state on its borders trying to start a war with Israel that would eventually involve Syria too. Also he was afraid that if the civil war lasted longer, it could poison his country and destabilize his regime³⁰⁰.

Other considerations moved Asad, according to the Israeli historian Itamar Rabinovic: if the Revisionist front succeeded, Syria would have ended as a buffer between a radical Lebanon and an hostile Iraq. Israel would have intervened to defend the Christians, forcing Syria to choose between fighting and being humiliated. The goal was also to build better relations with the US by acting as a regional power³⁰¹.

As a matter of fact, Syrian intervention in Lebanon could not take place without some form of consent from the United States which had become more powerful in the region since the USSR had “lost” Egypt. Henry Kissinger brokered an informal understanding whereby Israel assented to Syrian intervention in Lebanon as long as the Syrians did not come closer to Israel than a certain, fixed “red line”. The American-Syrian agreement seemed to work well and some form of order was finally established in the country.

For the Soviet Union this agreement was a major problem: it fostered better Syrian-US relations and it posed two Soviet allies (Damascus and the PLO) one against the other. Kosygin went to Damascus on June 1, 1976 in order to avoid the Syrian intervention, which actually took place on May 31 putting him in front of a *fait accompli*. The ultimate proof that for Asad Syrian national interest was more important than the relationship with the USSR³⁰².

The Israelis were also part of the game in Lebanon and had their own interests to pursue. First of all, they wanted to avoid the shelling of their northern cities and villages from PLO positions in southern Lebanon. Second, both Ben Gurion and later Begin harboured dreams of an “alliance of the minorities” in the Middle East which would include, among others, the Israelis and the Lebanese Maronites. Ben Gurion's biographer Michael Bar Zohar, wrote that Israel's founding father wanted to conquer Lebanon up to the Litani river, create a Christian state north of that river allied with Israel and leave to the Syrians

³⁰⁰ Fisk, Robert, 81 and ss.

³⁰¹ Rabinovich, Itamar, 48

³⁰² Rabinovich, Itamar, p. 54

the Muslim-dominated area³⁰³.

According to Israeli journalists and historians Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, the first meetings between Maronite and Israeli officials took place in 1976. In August, Ytzahak Rabin had met with members of the Chamoun family and reached an agreement: Israeli weapons would flow to the Maronites. Overall, in years of military support Israel gave \$ 150 millions to the Lebanese rightists³⁰⁴.

This first phase of the civil war ended with the Riyadh Agreement on October 18, 1976 which delimited the Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon. The Syrians remained in the country under the cover of the Arab Deterrent Force. The stabilizing effect of this intervention did not last long since the Lebanese rightists continued to aspire to dominate the country and the Palestinians continued to use it as a launching pad against Israel.

On March 11, 1978 armed Palestinians coming from their strongholds in Southern Lebanon attacked civilians in the coastal road between Haifa and Tel Aviv. In response to this, Israel launched operation Litani, occupying a six-mile deep security zone on Lebanese territory. Israel withdrew on June 13 but left behind the Haddad militia composed mainly of Christians and Shiites which in effect created a buffer zone in southern Lebanon. In that same area a UNIFIL peacekeeping force was also deployed. In Beirut, the Maronite Phalange drew the Syrians out of the eastern part of the city. The alliance between the Christian rightists and Israel was a matter of fact but Ariel Sharon and his Grand Design were still missing from this scenario to turn it into a major battlefield.

The Building of an Alliance

In Lebanon, the US had traditionally a good relationship with the Christians. The leading party among them was the Phalange with a militia of around 20,000 men. The Party was defined by the CIA as a "State within a State" since in the area of Mount Lebanon (the Maronite heartland) it collected taxes, enforced the law and dispensed justice. Its main

³⁰³ Korbani, Agnes G., p. 17. Korbani quotes Bar Zohar, Michael, Ben Gurion, Delacorte Press, New York, 1979

³⁰⁴ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, Israel's Lebanon War, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1984 translated by Ina Friedman

goal was preserving “Maronite Christian hegemony in Lebanon”. In December 1980 the Phalange approved a document entitled “The Lebanon We Want to Build Up” which contained a plan for a “swiss-style canton system” dividing the country along ethnic lines and leaving only a weak central authority in place.

Bashir Gemayel, the young promise of the family, was described as the man in control of the militias and as “the leading advocate of an aggressive anti-Syrian, pro-Israeli policy” while his elder brother Amin now represented a minority, more conciliatory position in the Phalange. The relationship with Israel was of “occasional discreet ties” since the 1940s which were strengthened in the aftermath of the outbreak of the civil war in 1975. Since early 1976 Israel had become the “key outside military ally” providing arms and ammunitions³⁰⁵.

Some historians like Douglas Little went so far to say that there was some funding from the CIA to the Maronite militias³⁰⁶. It was probably more complicated than that. First of all, money did not flow directly from the CIA to the Phalange party, as Vincent Cannistraro - Director for Intelligence Programs at the National Security Council from 1984 to 1987 – explained:

The French opposed giving money to the Phalange so we did too. The CIA had liason with the Lebanese intelligence which was dominated by the Christians. We gave them training and money, but after the failed assassination attempt against Fadlallah [in early 1984]it stopped.³⁰⁷

In any case, it is fair to say that, since the US supported Israel and since Israel supported the Maronites, there was at least some form of American indirect support for them. Apart from money and weapons, the relationship with the right-wing Christians was a political one, as then-Deputy Director of Net Assessment Dennis Ross explained:

[I don't recall any financial support for them] But there was clearly recognition. You have to understand that

³⁰⁵ 309.(1659) Cia Assessment. Lebanon's Phalange Party. May 15 1981. Declassified on May 29,2001. Kemp Files. Folder: Lebanon May 81 (1 of 2). Ronald Reagan Presidential Library

³⁰⁶ Little, Douglas, “Mission Impossible:the Cia and the Cult of Covert Action in the Middle East”, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 28 No. 5, November 2004, pp.663-701

³⁰⁷ Author's interview with Vincent Cannistraro, Arlington, VA March 20 2007

the Christians were talking with us all the time. They were asking us to convince the Israelis to get into Lebanon and take care of the Palestinians. They saw the Israelis as basically being the answer to their problems.³⁰⁸

Second, the Lebanese Christians and moreover their right-wing component grouped around the Phalange Party had been very quick to include their struggle to dominate Lebanon into a Cold War pattern that could be understood by the Reagan administration. As early as May 1981, the Maronite-dominated American-Lebanese League wrote to Vice-president Bush to offer its view of the struggle in Lebanon: the Syrians had to be removed from the country and Asad's regime had to be "weakened" because "Syria is anti-western by nature and inclination and it is the primary extension of Soviet policy in the region". Also, since both the USSR and Damascus were "testing the resolve of the new US Administration", a "strong, pro-western Lebanon" had to be established. Obviously from their point of view, the Christians had to take the lead of such a pro-Western government because "only the Christian resistance has prevented the loss of strategic Lebanon to the anti-US and pro-Soviet Syrian/PLO forces"³⁰⁹.

Because of this supposed convergence of interests, the Phalange's leadership tried to strengthen its ties with the Reagan administration. In a letter written in November 1981, Bashir Gemayel proposed to Reagan to establish an alliance in order to "achieve a free, pluralist Lebanon" and further US interests in the area. In the meantime, his father Pierre denied ties with the Israelis and tried to bridge the gap with the other Lebanese factions³¹⁰. On the other hand, the globalists inside the administration saw the Syrians, the PLO and the whole Revisionist front as Soviet proxies. On the other hand a "regionalist" such as Assistant Secretary for the Middle East Nicholas Veliotis would instead say that:

Syria was using the Soviets and the Soviets were using Syria. Asad was no Soviet puppet doing Moscow's bidding. He was his own man. When Syrian and Soviet policies converged, Assad was happy to go along.

³⁰⁸ Author's interview with Dennis Ross, Washington DC, March 30 2007

³⁰⁹ Letter to Vicepresident Bush from American-Lebanese League, May 12 1981, Donald Gregg Files. Bush Presidential Library

³¹⁰ 315 (1689). Memorandum for Richard Allen. Letter to the President from Bashir Gemayel. November 25, 1981. Unclassified. Kemp Files. Folder: Lebanon August-December 1981 (1 of 3). Ronald Reagan Library.

And, particularly after the Egyptian “defection” to the US [at Camp David], Syria had much leeway in this relationship and was at least an equal.³¹¹

As in the 1958 crisis, intelligence supported a more regionalist view than the one held in Washington. In a CIA report issued in February 1982, the Soviet attitude towards confrontation in Lebanon was analysed. The Soviets, it said, were going to provide to the Syrians only limited support such as weapons resupply if the clash was confined to Lebanon. However, “tensions - or even limited hostilities - in Lebanon enable the USSR to increase Syrian and Palestinian dependence on Soviet support while portraying the US as the sole supporter of Israeli intransigence”. On the other hand, their influence in Lebanon was limited because Asad considered Syrian interests in the country as “vital and separate” from the Soviet-Syrian relationship. Also, the CIA report predicted what actually happened some months later: “An Israeli attack on Syria's SAM sites in Lebanon or a large-scale ground incursion into Lebanon would probably prompt the Soviets to resupply the Syrian military”³¹².

Along with right-wing Christians and the Revisionist Front, a third group was present in Lebanon: the Shiites which constituted a large part of the Lebanese population settled mainly in the south and in some Beirut neighbourhoods. In the first years of the Reagan administration they were not even taken into consideration. As former US ambassador to Lebanon Robert S. Dillon recollected,

At that time, when you spoke of Muslims, it almost always meant to be Sunnis -- the Sunni establishment based in Beirut. The Shiites, although the largest group, were usually ignored. They were the bottom of the pile. People didn't even talk about them very much; when they did, it was usually in scornful terms³¹³.

The Shiites had created in those years a very different leadership from the past. Only some officials in the US embassy insisted on the importance of dialogue with them, as Dillon

³¹¹ Author's written interview with Nicholas Veliotis, March 11 2007

³¹² 311(1664). CIA directorate of Intelligence. The USSR and Lebanon. February 9 1982. Declassified on May 29, 2001. Kemp files. Folder: Lebanon May 81 (1 of 2) Ronald Reagan Library

³¹³ Stuart Kennedy, Charles, Interview with Robert S. Dillon, May 17, 1990, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfdip:6::/temp/~ammem_vFvM:: accessed on March 19, 2007)

recollected:

By the time you got to know Nabih Berri, who was the leader of the Amal, you immediately took them seriously. One would quickly come to understand that in the Lebanese context, these were fairly modern men were moderates. (...) [Washington] was more concerned with the possibility of Russian influence in these groups and the alliances with the Syrians (...) [However] The political officers in the Embassy, led by [chief of the Political Section, Ryan] Crocker, right from the beginning were watching these people (...) They were conscious of the growing power of the Shiites³¹⁴

As with the Revisionist front, the American view of the Shiites differed between those in Washington and those closer to the ground. The latter were more aware of the different nuances of the situation while the former tried to fit everything and everyone into their favourite Cold War paradigm.

Using this paradigm and following their ideological links with the Israelis, it was possible to predict with whom would side those in charge of US foreign policy in the early 1980s: the Christians – in their projects - would have been the pillar of a pro-western Lebanon, free of Syrian (and therefore Soviet) influence and still ruled according to the 1943 National Covenant. The Shiites were not part of this picture.

This does not mean that the US did not talk at all with the factions that were part of the Revisionist front, it happened for example for the PLO despite the official US policy was that no negotiation could take place between American diplomats and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Henry Kissinger had promised it to the Israelis during the talks that led to the signing of the second Sinai Disengagement Agreement: the Memorandum of Understanding included a clause pledging that the US would neither recognize nor negotiate with the PLO unless the PLO recognized the state of Israel and accepted United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338³¹⁵.

Reagan had restated this policy during the 1980 campaign. On September 3 he had said to the B'nai B'rith Forum in Washington that

³¹⁴ Stuart Kennedy, Charles, Interview with Robert S. Dillon, May 17, 1990, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfdip:6:./temp/~ammem_vFvM:: accessed on March 19, 2007)

³¹⁵ Ryan, Sheila, "Israel's Invasion of Lebanon: Background to the Crisis", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: The War in Lebanon (Summer - Autumn, 1982)

President Carter refuses to brand the PLO as a terrorist organization. I have no hesitation in doing so (...) If others wish to deal with them, establish diplomatic relations with them, let it be on their heads. And let them be willing to pay the price of appeasement³¹⁶.

The reality on the ground was quite different. According to a Los Angeles Times article appeared on July 5 1981³¹⁷, under the Reagan administration the US had quietly continued low-level contacts with the PLO through both the CIA and the embassy in Beirut. Anonymous sources said that the liason between the CIA and the PLO had been Arafat's chief of intelligence Ali Hassan Salameh, the man accused of having planned the Munich 1972 kidnapping. He was killed by a remote controlled bomb in Beirut in 1979.

The security of the embassy in Beirut, in the first place, was granted by the Palestinians. But the relationship did not stop there: as both former ambassador Dillon and former Director of Intelligence Programs at the National Security Council Vincent Cannistraro admitted³¹⁸, the CIA and the embassy used to share intelligence with the Palestinians. In the early 1980s the journalist Mahmoud Labadi had become the liason. As Dillon said, Labadi would call Arafat in his presence and they would talk about "political issues". The US ambassador would then refer about these talks to Washington through telephone calls with Nicholas Veliotis.

However, this relationship did not go very far because, as Cannistraro recollected, "The political side of the administration was against a close relationship with them. So It was merely a CIA-PLO relationship not an American-Palestinian one³¹⁹".

The choice of alliances was probably one of the fatal flaws in the US intervention in Lebanon. The Christians would prove to be both unable to rule the country by themselves and unable to change the domestic balance of power by striking a deal with the other factions to strengthen the central government. The "bad guys" would be taken away from the negotiations but their opposition would prove to be quite harmful for US troops. The

³¹⁶ 364 (1868). Memorandum from Douglas Feith to Norman Bailey. US Policy toward PLO. August 28 1981. Declassified on August 10, 1999. Kemp Files. Folder: PLO 1981 (1 of 3) Box 90220. Ronald Reagan Library.

³¹⁷ (1878). McManus, Doyle, "US, PLO:7 years of Secret Contacts", Los Angeles Times, July 5 1981.

³¹⁸ Author's interview with Vincent Cannistraro, Arlington, VA March 20 2007

³¹⁹ Author's interview with Vincent Cannistraro, Arlington, VA March 20 2007

Shiites would form Hizbullah and bring a fatal blow to the US presence in Beirut. Both the “bad guys” and the Shiites would eventually provoke the US withdrawal, with the Christians unable to defend themselves and the Marines.

The alliance between the Israelis and the Phalangists, however, had been created. Reagan's United States would follow suit, convinced by their globalist outlook that Lebanon was “about the Cold War” and that this alliance was the appropriate one to fight Soviet influence and Soviet proxies.

Chapter Four

The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon and the US Intervention

Throughout 1981, many in the Reagan administration had thought of Libya as the testing ground for the US to show resolve against international terrorism and keep stability in the Middle East. The new Lebanese crisis which had started to unfold in mid-1981 would, however, prove to be the first real test for Reagan's Middle East policy.

In the management of this crisis most of the features of US Middle East policy in Reagan years were at work: the Cold War paradigm used to understand each local situation; the strategic alliance with the Israeli right; the inability to keep together Arab allies and Israel to fight against radicalism and the Soviet Union; the inability to use military power to effectively assert US leadership in the region; the lack of political strategy in dealing with nation-building and peace-enforcing.

In Lebanon two strategies were at work: the US “strategic consensus” (see above) between Arab moderates and Israel against Soviet inroads and the Israeli (actually Sharon's) Grand Design to redraw the map of the Middle East. These strategies proved to be complementary in the minds of policy-makers and contradictory on the ground. As we will see, the Israelis would successfully depict the Lebanese situation in terms that could be understood by US cold-warriors but which did not help in devising an effective solution.

The convergence with Israel in Lebanon was the result of the way the Reagan administration (and probably also some members of the foreign policy establishment) conceived the “special relationship” with the Jewish state: not simply safeguarding the existence of Israel as stated, rather supporting (or showing at least a passive indulgence) the policy of the new Likud right which had won the elections in 1977 and again in 1981. Thanks to US help, the Israeli right used the invasion of Lebanon to divert attention from the autonomy negotiations (which were to be held under the provisions of the Camp David agreement and would end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza) to the security of Israel's northern border and the expulsion of the PLO from Beirut.

The US intervention in Lebanon can be considered as on the brink between the global cold

war and the post-cold war world. The Cold War was the initial intellectual framework used by many inside the administration to understand the Lebanese crisis. To begin with, alliances were the result of this mindset: the Syrians were excluded as well as the secular Shiites because they were considered Soviet clients or proxies. Lebanese right-wing Christians, on the other hand, were given credit because of their declared pro-Western stance. Also, the Cold War implied that US credibility vis-a-vis the Soviet Union was at stake in Lebanon, especially during the debate over withdrawal. Finally, the Cold War was used by Reagan to justify the presence of US troops in Beirut with domestic public opinion.

Nonetheless, Lebanon was not just about the Cold War. The Israeli invasion unleashed new forces such as the Iranian-backed Hizbullah which would pose a new threat to US interests in the region. While the US military was building up its capabilities to counter a conventional as well as a nuclear attack by the Soviet Union in Europe, it would be attacked in Lebanon with the same tool adopted by “freedom fighters” supported by the Reagan administration in the third world, from Central America to Afghanistan: asymmetrical warfare.

Also, the civil war was not just about the East-West confrontation: it had its roots in the Ottoman domination and in the French colonization which had exploited the divisions among the different communities to rule the country relying on the Christians. The US tried to work out a diplomatic solution which in fact perpetuated the domination of this community and justified the Israeli invasion.

This chapter ends the day before the attack against the Marines at Beirut airport on October 23. That event came to be considered inside US government as the first event in which terrorism was used as a form of warfare against Americans. The debate that followed, which was about withdrawal from Lebanon and the changing nature of warfare, will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

The Missile Crisis and the Beginning of the US Involvement

The beginning of US involvement in Lebanon was the so-called “missile crisis” that broke out in the late spring of 1981. It is worth paying a little bit of attention to this episode of

the Lebanese civil war because it laid the ground for the deployment of the Multinational Force one year later³²⁰.

At the end of 1980, the Christians rightist leadership decided to take a bold step and extend its military presence to the city of Zahle, the third largest city of Lebanon (with a population of 200,000 mostly Greek Orthodoxes) and the capital of the Bekaa valley, a crucial point for the defense of the Syrian territory. The Maronite extremists decided to build a road from this town to Mount Lebanon, in the Christian hearthland north of Beirut. On April 1 1981, Phalangist units had inflicted heavy casualties to the Syrian army which then decided to shell heavily the militia as well as the civilian population in Zahle.

At this point, the Maronite lobbyists started their campaign in the US to present the situation in their terms. In mid-April, the American Lebanese League which represented Lebanese Christians in the US bought pages in the major newspapers to denounce the “systematic extermination of the Christian community in Lebanon by the Syrian army and the PLO”. The advertisement formally asked Reagan to pressure the Syrians towards pulling out their troops³²¹.

Also at this point the Israelis were officially brought in the Lebanese quagmire for the first time since Operation Litani in 1978. Begin was very responsive to the issue of a “Christian genocide” in Zahle. He, like his political rival Ben Gurion, liked the idea of an alliance of minorities in the Middle East uniting the non-Arab and non-Muslim peoples of the region. The Christians of Lebanon held a special place in this conception because they faced the danger of extermination by their Arab neighbours. The Israeli prime minister was determined not to repeat the mistakes of the 1938 Munich conference in which the French and the British had abandoned the Czechs to themselves in the face of Hitler. He was not going to leave the Maronites to the Syrian will.

The Israeli intervention started by shooting down two Syrian helicopters in Zahle on April 28. The Syrians responded by introducing surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) in the area and by deploying Scud surface-to-surface missiles nearby Damascus. This was perceived as a

³²⁰ For the events that led to the missile crisis and their roots, see Rabinovich, Itamar, *The War for Lebanon 1970-1985*, Cornell University Press, 1985 pp. 118 ss. And Shlaim, Avi, *The Iron Wall*, Norton & Co., New York, 2001 pp. 395 ss.

³²¹ 307(1654). Ad on Washington Post. April 15 1981. Kemp files. Folder: Lebanon January-April 1981 (1 of 2). Ronald Reagan Library.

major threat by Israel since it made impossible reconnaissance flights over Lebanon by its air force. Also, the Scuds threatened Israeli territory. Begin planned an air strike against the SAMs for April 30 but had to cancel it because of the weather conditions.

This provided time for the US to send ambassador Philip Habib to the region to broker a cease-fire. Begin was informed of this trip by ambassador Lewis on the evening of April 30. Leaving on May 5, the US envoy was going to remain in the region until an agreement could be reached³²².

Meanwhile, discussion between regionalists and globalists (for the definition of these two groups, see above) took place in Washington. The latter were more concerned on the Soviet origin of the missiles and saw them as a way to move Syria's first line of defense against Israel further into Lebanon. The consequence of this line of thought was that Israel had to be granted the green light to strike at those missiles. Also, the longer Israel "waited" to destroy those missiles, the higher the possibility of a Soviet involvement on Syria's behalf.

The "globalists" in the State's Politico-Military Affairs and in the Policy Planning Staff thought that Israeli strikes could take away the Syrian SAMs with little or none political damage. And if Israel could not deliver, then the US could carry on the strike by itself. According to a plan which was leaked to the "Miami Herald" in January 1982³²³,

A White House "option paper" last spring [1981] seriously proposed that the United States declare war on Syria during the crisis over its moving of Soviet-made anti-aircraft missiles into Lebanon, State Department sources said.

According to the Miami Herald, "the proposal to use American jets to take out the Syrian missiles did not come from [National Security Advisor] Allen's staff (..) but emanated from the State Department's bureau of politico-military affairs". This is how Assistant Secretary Veliotis recalled the reception that that paper had in the administration:

One Sunday morning I was called by Acting Secretary Stoessel to have a meeting on a memo to the Secretary

³²² Gwertzman, Bernard, "U.S. Expels Libyans and Closes Mission, Charging Terrorism", New York Times, May 7, 1981

³²³ McCartney, James, "Did the US consider War on Syria?", Miami Herald, 28 January 1982

by the Policy Planning Staff. I had not seen the memo before. The subject of the memo was the Syrian missile sites. Acknowledging that our goal was to avoid an Israeli-Syrian confrontation, they recommended that *we* do the air strikes against the Syrian missile sites! That plan went nowhere but to the Secretary of State's office. And to the waste basket.³²⁴

Unfortunately for the globalists, the winds of war were brought down by Philip Habib's mission. His main goal was to restrain Israel in order to buy time to convince the Syrians to withdraw their missiles. According to Raymond Tanter, the President at that time was too much involved in US domestic economic issues to pay attention to the Syrian presence in Lebanon and his non-involvement started a tradition of internal struggles to dominate Middle Eastern policy³²⁵.

The Habib mission proved to be successful in defusing the Israeli-Syrian crisis. He worked out an informal understanding that the Syrians would not fire the missiles and the Israelis would not try to destroy them. Israeli jets could continue their overflight of Lebanon and the SAMs would continue to stand still³²⁶.

The regionalists in Washington had won their first battle. A consensus had formed inside the administration on the possible consequences of an Israeli victory over Syria in the missile crisis. According to this consensus, such an outcome would produce difficulties for Sadat (at peace with a country which had just defeated another Arab country), the autonomy talks would stall and US-Egyptian relations would be harmed.

Also, according to Tanter³²⁷, the Defense Department was concerned about the consequences for the Gulf states. As he recollected,

An Israeli air strike with American-origin weapons would complicate access rights negotiations with Gulf area states for use of their military facilities in Gulf contingencies. Officials in the Department also worried that such air strikes would decrease the likelihood that the Gulf states would take part in joint military planning in preparation for a possible South-west Asian military contingency – a Soviet invasion of Iran

³²⁴ Author's off-the-record interview with Nicholas Veliotis, Washington DC, April 2007

³²⁵ Tanter, Raymond, *Who's At the Helm? Lessons of Lebanon*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1990 p. 20

³²⁶ On Habib's informal agreement with the Israelis and the Syrians, see Boykin, John, *Cursed Is the Peacemaker. The American Diplomat Versus the Israeli General*. Beirut 1982, Applegate Press, Belmont CA, 2002 p. 46

³²⁷ Tanter, Raymond, p. 26

In early May a task force on Lebanon had been formed inside the administration. The discussion that occurred in its May 8 meeting provides a useful viewpoint to understand the US position towards the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. According to then-member of the NSC staff Raymond Tanter, whereas the White House was concerned with preventing hostilities, Foggy Bottom was “thinking strategically of using prospective hostilities to achieve broad American goals in the region”. The main goal for the State Department was to “*neutralize Lebanon*” and, to achieve that, the “neutralization” of the PLO was thought to be crucial. Neutralizing Lebanon, Tanter recognized, meant bringing it away from the Arab world, into the path preferred by the rightist Christians³²⁸. Neutralizing the PLO, on the other hand, meant destroying it. And to destroy it, Israel had to go all the way up to Beirut.

According to Tanter’s recollection, already in May 1981 Alexander Haig’s Department of State shared Sharon’s goal of the elimination of the Palestinian Liberation Organization from Lebanon. Its presence in the country was widely regarded to be Lebanon’s major problem. This analysis of the situation conditioned the whole policy towards the Israeli invasion one year later.

While the debate went on in Washington, events continued to unfold in the Middle East. On May 28 Begin approved the IDF chief of staff’s proposal to launch bombing strikes against PLO concentrations in southern Lebanon³²⁹. From this positions, the Palestinians used to shell the cities and villages of Northern Israel.

The first reaction by the PLO was one of restraint. The bombings went on until June 3 and then started again on June 10. This time, the reaction was different: the Palestinians shelled the Israeli coastal town of Nahariya. The fighting had escalated and now Israeli bombing raids took place also over West Beirut where the headquarters of many Palestinian guerrilla organizations were located.

To make US-Israeli relations even more tense, on June 7 the IAF had bombed the Iraqi

³²⁸ Tanter, Raymond, p. 35

³²⁹ For a full account of the origins and development of the bombings of PLO positions in the spring of 1981, see Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1984 translated by Ina Friedman p. 35 and ss.

nuclear reactor at Osirak³³⁰. Reagan reacted by delaying the delivery of F-16 aircraft to Israel. In a letter to the US president, Begin made ample use of references to the Holocaust saying that as during the Nazi years Jewish children had been killed by Ziklon gas, now they were under the same threat by Iraqi radioactivity. This new extermination of Jews had been prevented by the “heroism” of Israeli pilots. In his diary on June 7 Reagan wrote: “I swear I believe Armageddon is near”³³¹. Two days later, probably moved by Begin’s letter, he sounded more understanding of the Israeli action:

We are not turning on Israel – that would be an invitation for the Arabs to attack. It's time to raise H—I worldwide for a settlement of the “middle-east” [sic] problem³³²

On June 30, Begin won the elections for the Israeli parliament, the *Knesset*. Three months before, Shimon Peres’ Labor Alignment was leading by 25% in the opinion polls. In the elections, the two parties got more or less the same share of votes but the conservative Likud party got one seat more than the Alignment. The new Begin cabinet was the first one in the history of the Jewish state which was formed entirely by right-wing parties. The lack of stable parliamentary majority was compensated by the ideological cohesion³³³.

The war with the PLO continued. The total death toll at the end of the fighting would be 450 dead among Palestinians and Lebanese and 6 among the Israelis. The Israeli bombing that took place on July 17 killed 300 and wounded another 800, most of them Lebanese civilians. According to the New York Times³³⁴, the terrorist infrastructure had not been decisively harmed while Libya, Syria and the Soviet Union had supplied the Palestinians with heavy artillery.

The “War of Katyushas” posed a peculiar threat to Israel: these missiles hit randomly in a general area, thus spreading terror among the population. On the other hand, they don't

³³⁰ On the bombing of the Osirak nuclear plant, see Shlaim, Avi, *The Iron Wall*, Norton & Co., New York, 2001 pp. 387 and ss.

³³¹ Brinkley, Douglas (ed), *The Reagan Diaries*, Harper Collins, New York, 2007 p.24

³³² Brinkley, Douglas (ed), p. 24

³³³ On the 1981 Israeli elections see Shlaim, Avi, p. 389

³³⁴ Shipler, David K., “Cease-fire in Border Fighting Declared By Israel and P.l.o.”, *New York Times*, July 25, 1981 e Kifner, John, “Palestinians Say a U.N. Initiative Brought About the Halt in Clashes”, *New York Time*, July 25, 1981

need a fixed position to be fired: they can be mounted in the back of a truck which can be already far away once the Israeli jets arrive on the scene of the shooting.

When US envoy Philip Habib met with the Israeli prime minister on July 24, Begin was ready for a truce. The American diplomat had worked out another informal agreement: the Israelis and the PLO would both refrain from shooting at each other from across the Lebanon-Israeli border. As with the Syria-Israel deal, the terms of the agreement were written down but there was no piece of paper bearing everyone's signature³³⁵.

Because of the non-recognition of the PLO by Israel and the US, the cease-fire had taken a peculiar form: the US had reached an agreement with the Jewish state and with Lebanon and the Lebanese government had negotiated with the PLO through the UN. According to the Israeli Attorney General Moshe Nissim,

This is an arrangement by which the Government of Lebanon commits itself to stop any act of violence against Israel, and Israel has agreed to this challenge and will cease acts of hostility.³³⁶

However, the role of the Lebanese central government was pure fiction since it had no real control of the Southern part of the country. The reality was that there was a momentary truce which could hold only until the parties agreed to it. As a consequence of the Habib mission, the US had given a double guarantee: On the Syrian-Israeli dispute and on the safety of the Lebanese-Israeli border with regards to the shelling by the Palestinians. American credibility was now at stake in Lebanon, even though Ronald Reagan had hardly realized it.

The Missing Red Light

The Habib agreements had just postponed the war. In the Palestinian camp, Arafat convened the PLO's Supreme Military Council in August and said clearly: "We must prepare for another war". His policy towards confrontation with Israel was two-fold: first,

³³⁵ On the July 24 1981 agreement see Boykin, John, *Cursed Is the Peacemaker. The American Diplomat Versus the Israeli General*. Beirut 1982, Applegate Press, Belmont CA, 2002 p. 47

³³⁶ Shipler, David K., "Cease-fire in Border Fighting Declared By Israel and P.l.o.", *New York Times*, July 25, 1981 e Kifner, John, "Palestinians Say a U.N. Initiative Brought About the Halt in Clashes", *New York Time*, July 25, 1981

he promoted a metamorphosis of the PLO from a guerrilla movement to a semi-regular army with permanent bases; second, Fatah's standing orders since mid-1980 were that, in the event of an assault on PLO's positions, artillery would be activated immediately. The military build-up was attained through deals with East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and North Korea³³⁷.

In the Israeli cabinet, the head of the "pro-war" faction, Ariel Sharon, argued with some success that the underlying problem had not been addressed. The PLO's *raison d'être* was still the harassment, and ultimately, the destruction of Israel.

Sharon had some leverage over the cabinet. As US ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis recollected:

Arik [Ariel Sharon] controlled three Likud votes – his own and two others. He threatened Begin that if he did not become Defense Minister, he and his two friends would 'take a walk' and make the Likud a minority party.³³⁸

In early August, therefore, Ariel Sharon became the Israeli Defense Minister. An academic had commented on the difference between him and Begin: "Begin will do what must be done; Sharon will do ten times what must be done"³³⁹. And Sharon appeared to know very well what had to be done: a massive Israeli military operation to drive the PLO out of Lebanon once and for all. He didn't speak of Beirut yet, but he was clear about the final goal of an invasion: eliminating Palestinian leaders, their advisers and their associates³⁴⁰.

The summer of 1981 was therefore a turning point both because of the PLO's build-up and because of Sharon's accession to the Defense Ministry. Now his plans, combined with Begin's political capabilities, had a fairly good chance to become reality. Actually, they weren't really *his* plans: Sharon claimed to have applied a plan devised by the IDF General Headquarters in 1979 under the guidance of Defense Minister Weizemann. The lesson that the Israeli military had learned from operation Litani in 1978 was that to deal effectively

³³⁷ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, p. 81-83

³³⁸ Jessup, Peter, Interview with Samuel Lewis, August 9, 1998, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³³⁹ On Sharon's position about the ceasefire and his accession to the Defense ministry, see Boykin, John, p. 47

³⁴⁰ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, p. 37

with the PLO it was necessary to target its entire “political and military infrastructure” in Lebanon³⁴¹.

The destruction of the PLO was just the first step of Sharon’s “Grand Design”. The second aim was to establish a friendly government in Beirut with Bashir Gemayel as president. His government would sign a peace treaty with Israel. The third step was expelling the Syrians from the country, which was actually the pre-condition for building a strong Lebanese central government friendly to Israel. The consequences of these military and political moves could affect the whole Middle East: the backbone of Palestinian nationalism would be weakened thus allowing the annexation of the Occupied Territories in the Greater Israel. The Palestinians would flee from Lebanon and the West Bank towards Jordan which would become their new state. The Hashemite monarchy would be sacrificed to the Grand Design³⁴².

In the following months, as we will see, Sharon was going to give several warnings to the United States on what he was going to do. But he received no effective red light. As US ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis commented a few years later:

We knew [the invasion] was coming, we tried to stop it, but our efforts were not sufficiently threatening. They were not halfhearted, but they were inadequate for the challenge--no major and very tough ultimatums.³⁴³

To be an effective “no”, the US response had to contain one word, “sanctions”, which never became the official US policy. If the Israelis did not have to suffer any heavy consequence from their action, they did not have to fear US public condemnation of the invasion. A condemnation without the threat of sanctions was like a red light without the threat of having to pay a fine.

There was a precedent on this issue during the 1978 “operation Litani”. But that time, the US threats worked effectively and the invasion stopped. As US diplomat Nicholas Veliotis recalled,

³⁴¹ Sharon, Ariel, *Warrior*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989 p. 426

³⁴² The best description of Sharon's Grand Design is in Shlaim, Avi, *The Iron Wall*, p. 396

³⁴³ Jessup, Peter, Interview with Samuel Lewis, August 9, 1998, *Frontline Diplomacy*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[The 1978 invasion was] Much smaller and lasted very much shorter. And do you know why? As we were debating with the Israelis the terms and timing of their withdrawal, I was told to draft a telegram, to be sent to our embassy, of a letter from the president to Menachem Begin. And I did. When Jimmy Carter saw that letter, he inserted a phrase: "Unless you withdraw," (...) he said, "I will be forced to invoke the terms of the Arms Export Control Act." Which meant an embargo³⁴⁴

Actually, even though some US officials criticized the invasion on every occasion, parts of the administration (especially the Secretary of State) appeared to appreciate the political and diplomatic windfalls of Sharon's plan and to share his analysis of Lebanon's problems.

Signalling started in September 1981, at the same time when Awacs³⁴⁵ and not Lebanon were high on Washington's agenda. On the 19th, members of the NSC staff Robert McFarlane and Howard Teicher flew to Israel to discuss the sale of Awacs to Saudi Arabia and the situation in Lebanon. On this latter subject, the Israelis thought that the previous summer the IDF had been on the verge of wiping out the PLO but had been stopped for "wider considerations". At this phase of the talks, they were still looking for American cooperation not just for a mere acquiescence to their plans.

As Howard Teicher recollected,

Sensing an opportunity to advance Israel's agenda for Lebanon, the Israelis suggested that the United States and Israel begin to cooperate to prevent a takeover of Lebanon by negative elements. They noted the close relationship between Bashir Gemayel and Israel. Israel wanted to work with him to improve the situation in Lebanon (...) [US ambassador] Lewis interjected that Washington fundamentally disagreed with Israel's view that the Phalangists could become one with the central government³⁴⁶

The Israeli officials warned that if the US did not work effectively on the stability of the country, Israel would act unilaterally to guarantee it. In other words, American

³⁴⁴ Kennedy, Charles Stuart, Interview with Nicholas Veliotis, January 29 1990, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁴⁵ In the fall of 1981, US congress voted with a thin majority to sell AWACS planes to Saudi Arabia

³⁴⁶ Teicher, Howard and Gayle Radley, Twin Pillars to Desert Storm. America's Flawed Vision in the Middle East from Nixon to Bush, William Morrow and company, New York, 1993 pp. 151-2

cooperation was sought but it was not crucial to the implementation of the plan.

On the occasion of Begin's visit to the US in the same month of September, Haig cautioned him about any possible plans to invade Lebanon. As he recalled in his memoirs:

[I told him that] in case Israel was contemplating an invasion of Lebanon, its government should realize that unless there was a clear, internationally recognized provocation – and even then, unless Israeli reaction was proportionate to the provocation – any such course would have very grave effects in the United States³⁴⁷

Haig had spoken (and would speak of in the following months) of two conditions for US approval: the “internationally recognized provocation” and the “proportionate” reaction by Israel. Deliberately, Haig spoke only of “grave effects” but never explicitly mentioned “military sanctions” as a possible consequence of the invasion. For Sharon, as we will see further, the two preconditions could be bent to his will, while the absence of real consequences for Israel made his plans ever more possible.

Meanwhile, the Israelis were not simply “contemplating” plans to invade Lebanon. The head of the IDF's Northern Command Amir Drori ordered his staff to put on hold the plan code-named “Little Pines” which included the conquest of southern Lebanon up to the outskirts of Sidon and simultaneously to review the more ambitious “Big Pines” which covered the occupation of a larger part of the country, up to the Beirut-Damascus Highway³⁴⁸.

The US intelligence community was somewhat aware of the Israeli plans, even though the distinction between Little and Big Pines was not really felt. In his monthly report on the Middle East, the CIA wrote on September 29:

Israel continues to play up the frequency of PLO violations of the ceasefire in Lebanon and has reiterated publicly that it cannot be expected to have unlimited patience. While the ongoing AWACS debate in Congress may inhibit the Israelis from a preemptive strike, several members of the Begin government are pressing for a major ground operation in southern Lebanon. Even a mildly provocative act could spark a serious Israeli response on the ground³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ Haig, Alexander, *Caveat: Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy*, New York, MacMillan Publishing Company, 1984 p. 325

³⁴⁸ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, p. 45

³⁴⁹ Central Intelligence Agency. Summary of the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) monthly meeting.

On October 6, Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat was killed by Islamic fundamentalists of the secessionist province of Asyut where groups of students calling for the Holy War (Jihad) had been challenging “the Pharaon” since the previous year³⁵⁰.

The day after Sadat's funeral in Egypt, Begin met with Haig and informed him that Israel had “begun planning a move into Lebanon that would not draw Syria into the conflict”. Haig replied quite clearly: “If you move, you move alone (..) the US will not support such an action”³⁵¹. Again, Haig had not given him any red light, he had just denied cooperation. As David Martin and John Walcott noted,

To the Israelis what Haig didn't say was more important. He did not threaten to cut off the supply of American military equipment that Israel needed to sustain an operation in Lebanon³⁵²

Also, the plan that Begin explained to Haig resembled “Little Pine”, not Sharon’s plan of invading an Arab capital. One might wonder if the Secretary’s reaction would have been the same if he had heard the “Big Pines” plan at that stage.

The rumours of Israeli plans for Lebanon did not affect the implementation of the Strategic Consensus. After the sale of the Awacs to Saudi Arabia was approved by Congress, the Reagan administration proceeded to sign on November 30 a “Memorandum of Understanding” with Israel (acronym: MOU). The memorandum clearly stated on article 1 that

It is designed against the threat to peace and security of the region caused by the Soviet Union or Soviet-controlled forces from outside the region introduced into the region.

The purpose of this statement was to confine the agreement only to the problems which may arise from a Soviet (or Soviet-proxy) intervention in the region, thus eliminating all

Secret. Issue Date: Sep 29, 1981. Date Declassified: Feb 23, 2001. Complete. 2 page(s). Downloaded from DDERS on May 20, 2006

³⁵⁰ On the background of Sadat's assassination, see Schulze, Reinhard, *Il Mondo Islamico nel XX secolo*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2004 p. 284

³⁵¹ Haig, Alexander, p. 326

³⁵² Martin, David C. and Walcott, John, *Best Laid Plans: The Inside Story of America's War Against Terrorism*, New York, Harper & Row, 1988 p. 87

the “threats to peace and security” which may arise from the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Further it was stated even more clearly that

The strategic cooperation between the parties is not directed at any states within the region. It is intended solely for defensive purposes against the above-mentioned threat.

The cooperation was meant to work mainly through joint military exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean, access to maintenance facilities, cooperation in research and development³⁵³.

This “globalist” outlook of the Memorandum expired a few days later. In early December, the Begin cabinet approved the annexation of the Golan heights which had been conquered during the 1967 war. The US soon suspended the agreement.

The suspension of the Memorandum of Understanding made Begin very nervous. To US ambassador Samuel Lewis he yelled:

What kind of talk is this – ‘penalizing’ Israel? Are we a state or [are we] vassals of yours? Are we a banana republic? You have no right to penalize Israel³⁵⁴

If the suspension of the MOU made Begin so nervous it is legitimate to wonder what his (and Sharon’s) reaction would have been in the face of sanctions on the military supplies from the US to Israel. But, at least for the moment, he did not have to fear anything like that.

On December 5 Sharon met with US diplomats Philip Habib and Morris Draper in Jerusalem³⁵⁵. Habib outlined his plan for a staged withdrawal of the PLO out of range of the border, along with some concessions by Israel. Sharon called his aides to bring in some maps. Pointing to West Beirut and to the Beirut-Damascus highway, Sharon noted that in August presidential elections would take place in Lebanon. The new president could be one that finally signed a peace treaty with Israel and brought definitely Lebanon in the

³⁵³ ---, “Text of American-Israeli Agreement”, The New York Times, December 1, 1981

³⁵⁴ Haig, Alexander, p. 329

³⁵⁵ For accounts of this meeting, see Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, p. 66 and Boykin, John, p.49 and Teicher, Howard, p. 193

Western camp. In Morris Draper's account of the meeting, gesturing over the maps

Sharon made it quite clear that he would be marching up to the outskirts of Beirut (...) He didn't say "go right into Beirut" but he made it very clear that that's where the Palestinians were, that's where the Israelis were going to attack³⁵⁶

Habib responded very harshly:

General Sharon, this is the twentieth century and times have changed. You can't go around invading countries just like that, spreading destruction and killing civilians. In the end, your invasion will grow into a war with Syria, and the entire region will be engulfed with flames³⁵⁷

Again, the US official refused Sharon's plans (and did it in the toughest possible way) but did not threaten any sanctions. To understand why Habib could not do that, one has to rely upon Howard Teicher's account of the discussion that took place inside the administration³⁵⁸.

According to Teicher, Haig insisted that Israel's right to self-defense could not be denied simply out of deference to US interests in the Gulf. He also denied any link between the possible war in Lebanon and the alliance with the "Arab moderates". For example, Haig said, the Saudis would not ask for a refund of their Awacs just because Israel was at war with the PLO in Lebanon. Weinberger, on the other side, said that Israel was exaggerating the PLO threat and was deliberately trying to split the US from its Arab allies.

On December 14 Sharon delivered a speech at the Institute for Strategic Studies at the Tel Aviv university which clearly described the strategic concept of the invasion. A coalition of Arab regimes (Syria, Libya, Iraq and South Yemen) had a strategy to wipe out Israel from the Middle East. With Soviet support and using the oil weapon, they planned to use the PLO as an instrument of violence against Israel and as a means to achieve Soviet influence in the region³⁵⁹. According to Sharon, either Israel removed the PLO from the Middle East or the PLO, with its powerful allies, would remove Israel.

³⁵⁶ Boykin, John, p. 50

³⁵⁷ Boykin, John, p. 51

³⁵⁸ Teicher, Howard, p. 194

³⁵⁹ Tanter, Raymond, p. 57

US policy-makers probably started to sense the danger implied in Sharon's plans. Reagan wrote a letter to Begin in January 1982 to make clear once more the US opposition to the invasion but again threatening no sanctions and instead making plain the US commitment to a diplomatic solution. In other words, accepting that what was good for the *Likudnik* government in Jerusalem could be good also for Lebanon.

That these warnings by the US government were inefficient was proved on the ground. According to Israeli sources quoted by Raymond Tanter, by mid-November two activities had begun: the building of more observation points along the Israeli-Lebanese border and the improvement of roads in the security zone controlled by Major Haddad³⁶⁰. Both were means to improve Israeli capabilities to launch a major invasion.

In the second week of January, Sharon visited Beirut with Bashir Gemayel. To a perplexed IDF General Saguy he said that Beirut had to be conquered in order to accomplish Israel's mission in Lebanon³⁶¹.

In those same days, at the NSC, Howard Teicher, Dennis Ross and Richard Hass were meeting regularly to "assess what would trigger the inevitable Israeli invasion of Lebanon". Robert McFarlane sent Teicher and ambassador Vernon Walters to London to discuss with David Kimche, director-general of the Israeli Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Kimche noted that Israel was trying to find a solution to many problems in Lebanon and "might have to resort to military options to achieve its goals". One or two provocations by the PLO would trigger a "major reaction". Also, Israel had its own agenda, namely helping Bashir Gemayel become president. After the meeting, Vernon Walters commented: "This sounds like war"³⁶².

In the following months, signals of the Israeli intentions kept coming and the US continued to oppose them ineffectively. Lebanon was probably not very high on the administration's agenda in those months. In a March 1982 draft of the National Security Study Decision number 4 concerning US policy in the Middle East and South Asia³⁶³,

³⁶⁰ Tanter, Raymond, p. 54

³⁶¹ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, p. 49

³⁶² Teicher, Howard, pp. 166-168

³⁶³ 444 (2227). Memo for McFarlane from Teicher, Shoemaker, Kemp. Revised NSSD-4 Study Outline Package. March 31, 1982. Declassified on June 5, 2000. Teicher files. Folder: Chron March 23 1982 [1]. Ronald Reagan Library

Lebanon did not even figure in the top 10 “regional conflicts and instabilities”. No political strategy was devised for the country, which was not among the most important ones listed in the document.

In February the US embassy in Beirut sent a very foreshadowing warning: an Israeli invasion could stir up terrorist attacks³⁶⁴. The US Joint Chief of Staff presented a paper to a “Lebanon contingency group” chaired by Deputy Secretary of State Walter Stoessel. The paper denied that Israel had any “legitimate defense concern” extending to Lebanon and predicted that an Israeli military action in that country could stir up a full-scale war between the US, Syria and other Arab states. The plan suggested a joint US-USSR initiative to ease down the tension in Lebanon. According to the March 12 issue of the Middle East Policy Survey, the paper was “dismissed out of hand” by “outraged” US officials.

Meanwhile, the Israelis kept moving. In late February, the new Israeli ambassador to the US Moshe Arens had told to the press that an Israeli invasion of Lebanon was “only a matter of time”. Meanwhile, some people in the US press, seemed to look with favour to the implications of Sharon's Grand Design. As Joseph Kraft wrote on March 16 in the Washington Post, the most likely scenario was for Israel to launch

A deep strike, cutting off PLO units on the border, and including a crack at Syrian forces in central Lebanon. The theory is that the PLO and the Syrians would be forced to quit Lebanon, with Assad toppled from office.

The consequent marginalization of the Alawites and the redrawing of the map of Syria would, in Kraft's words, “foster a general peace”³⁶⁵.

Even the possible casus belli was investigated (with some astonishing accuracy) by the NSC staff. In a March 31st memo³⁶⁶ to Norman Bailey (member of the Planning and Evaluation Directorate of the NSC) Howard Teicher predicted what actually happened some months later:

³⁶⁴ Martin, David and John Walcott, p. 89

³⁶⁵ Ryan, Sheila, "Israel's Invasion of Lebanon: Background to the Crisis", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: The War in Lebanon (Summer - Autumn, 1982)

³⁶⁶ 445 (2233). Memo for Norman Bailey from Howard Teicher. Major National Security Issues. March 31 1982. Declassified on June 5, 2000. Teicher files. Folder: Chron March 23 1982 [1]. Ronald Reagan Library

West Bank/Lebanon. Unrest is likely to continue. Given fractionated state of PLO, radical factions may seek to disrupt Lebanon cease-fire. Would probably provoke an Israeli response.

The Israeli plans were by early April well-known not only to the US foreign policy elite: On April 8 the American TV network ABC talked extensively about them³⁶⁷. Also the Maronite leader Bashir Gemayel felt compelled to tell the US ambassador in Beirut about the Israeli plans to invade the country.

There were just the two of us. We sat down and he looked at me and said, rather formally: "Mr. Ambassador, you know they are really coming". I asked him what he meant. "Look, the Israelis are really coming", he replied.³⁶⁸

As Dillon recollected, however, his report from Beirut conflicted with those coming from Tel Aviv:

Our staffs in Israel were reporting that the invasion, if it took place at all, would be a limited one, focusing only on the southern part of Lebanon³⁶⁹

Meanwhile, signals from the ground kept coming. On April 10, New York Times reported an Israeli military build-up along the northern border. According to experts quoted by the US newspaper, the timing would be perfect: Iraq was busy with its war with Iran, Syria was struggling internally with the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama, Egypt was waiting for the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai³⁷⁰.

In a memo written to McFarlane on April 8³⁷¹, Teicher warned that signals of an imminent

³⁶⁷ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud, Ya'ari p. 69

³⁶⁸Stuart Kennedy, Charles, Interview with Robert S. Dillon, May 17, 1990, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfdip:6:/temp/~ammem_vFvM (accessed on March 19, 2007)

³⁶⁹Stuart Kennedy, Charles, Interview with Robert S. Dillon, May 17, 1990, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfdip:6:/temp/~ammem_vFvM (accessed on March 19, 2007)

³⁷⁰ Smith, Hedrick, "Israeli Units Move To Lebanese Line", New York Times, April 10, 1982

³⁷¹ 446 (2236). Memo from Teicher to McFarlane. Growing Likelihood of Israeli Military Action. April 8, 1982. Declassified on June 5, 2000. Teicher files. Folder: Chron Apr 1982. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library

Israeli action in Lebanon were growing. He suggested that the Israelis might have acted on the Easter weekend and that actions had to be taken in order “to limit their military action and reduce the damage to US-Israel relations”.

He confirmed the ambiguities of US policy:

[Given] our repeated warnings that only a clear provocation would justify an Israeli military move against the PLO in Lebanon, the Israeli Government may have concluded that the US will not react negatively to limited Israeli military operations against high-value, clearly identifiable, terrorist targets.

Actually, the withdrawal from the Sinai (due to end on April 25) was the only thing that kept the Israeli from invading Lebanon as Howard Teicher pointed out³⁷². In an another memo to McFarlane Teicher defined the invasion as “inevitable”. There had been several briefings by Israeli politicians to American officials on this point. Also, Palestinian factions were trying to undermine Arafat. As we know now, the internal Palestinian struggle for leadership would be crucial in providing the *casus belli* for the war. On the other hand, Teicher pointed out how Bashir Gemayel could not possibly win the presidency without a sound Israeli help³⁷³.

On April 28 Arafat summoned the PLO Supreme Military Council and said clearly: “We’re up against America (...) What’s more, we’ll have to go it alone this time; everyone will abandon us”³⁷⁴. The theme of a presumed American green light to the Israeli invasion was going to be one of the main propaganda points of the Arab radicals.

In May 1982 there was still a possibility for the US to stop the invasion, but few people seemed to see it. On May 17, Acting Secretary of State Walter Stoessel met with Israeli diplomats in Washington. The message they brought from Begin was quite clear:

It might well become imperative – even inevitable – that Israel take action to remove the threat because Syrian missiles in Lebanon, along with the PLO armed presence there, comprised a stronger threat to Israel during 1982 than the Soviet missiles in Cuba had presented to the United States two decades earlier.

³⁷² Teicher, Howard, p. 169

³⁷³ Teicher, Howard, p. 171

³⁷⁴ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, p. 93-94

Again, the Israelis drew a comparison between their situation in the Middle East and a frightening Cold War scenario that the Americans could well understand.

A letter was prepared by the Near East Bureau and agreed between Clark and Stoessel. The presidential message would threaten “legal implications” (ie. the use of the Arms Export Control Act) in case of an invasion of Lebanon. Haig killed the letter because he thought that the threat of sanctions had not to be used in this case³⁷⁵.

Actually, the invasion was not really “inevitable” as Begin had described it. At least, not as far as the Israeli cabinet was concerned. During the May 10 meeting, Sharon laid out maps of Lebanon for the ministers’ scrutiny. They were maps of the Big Pines plan with arrows pointing north, well over southern Lebanon and towards the Christian hearthland above Beirut. However, the minister of Defense smartly talked about a “limited operation” and a “police action”. He did not mention Beirut and when asked about the duration of the operation he replied: “24 hours”. He actually did not persuade the cabinet. The initial D-Day was scheduled for May 17. But it had to be postponed because of the opposition to a ground operation of 7 ministers including the two Begin's deputies³⁷⁶.

No further US public and diplomatic pressure was applied in the period before the invasion in early June. Haig tried to ask Reagan to summon a meeting of the NSC to discuss a possible US position on the subject but never got an answer³⁷⁷. The president, however, had a clear picture of the dangers in Lebanon. On his diary on May 15 he wrote:

Held morning meetings with George Shultz and Phil Habib (...) Phil thinks our Lebanon cease fire is on thinner ice than it has been in 9 months. A radical wing of the PLO wanting to take over from Arafat is out to provoke Israel into action. This will rid them of Arafat who is more moderate & will rally Arab & Soviet support to the radicals. We're trying to make Israel see this³⁷⁸

It's worthwhile to point out the strange presence of George Shultz to this meeting, given that he was not yet Secretary of State since Haig's resignation was still far away. The preoccupying situation in Lebanon did not prevent the president from leaving for his

³⁷⁵ Tanter, Raymond, p. 103

³⁷⁶ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, pp. 55-60

³⁷⁷ Haig, Alexander, p. 335

³⁷⁸ Brinkley, Douglas (ed), p. 85

ranch in California on May 24. He would stay there until May 30. A few, crucial days for the start of the invasion of Lebanon.

On May 25 Sharon was in Washington speaking with Secretary Haig and other officials from the State Department³⁷⁹. It was the Secretary's last occasion to stop him. Two meetings actually took place. The first between nine Americans and 12 Israeli officials, the second was a face-to-face meeting between Sharon and Haig.

Sharon started the plenary session by saying that virtually all terrorist operations against Jews in the world (which he considered as violations of the 1981 ceasefire) originated from Beirut. Therefore, he saw no alternative but to enter Lebanon and "clean out" the terrorist headquarters. He also added that "it would be very hard – almost impossible – not to touch the Syrians". The invasion, however, would not only have freed Israel of a major threat to its security but could "turn Lebanon toward the free world and help form a new, friendly government".

Haig's demarche was not very different from the things he had said in the past months about the "clear provocation" and the "proportionate response". He said that he understood Israel's dilemma and that "the US, as an ally, cannot tell Israel not to defend its interests". Habib was much harsher but Sharon had not come to Washington to listen to him.

During their private meeting, Sharon used Haig's words against his warnings: "No one has the right to tell Israel what decision it should take in defense of its people". Having said that by himself a minute before, Haig had to concede this. John Boykin is right to say that these scene alone granted Sharon the green light he needed: "[Haig's] message became, in effect, 'We don't think you should invade Lebanon, but it's really up to you to decide that for yourself'³⁸⁰".

A slightly different account was given to US ambassador in Lebanon Robert S. Dillon by a person who was present at this meeting. Haig had made clear that if the Israeli just drummed up a pretext for an invasion, the United States would be opposed. After a brief discussion between the two, Sharon left the office. One of the officials in the room told

³⁷⁹ For a full account of this meeting, see Boykin, John, pp. 54 and ss. and Teicher, Howard, p. 195

³⁸⁰ Boykin, John, p. 56

Haig that he had actually given to the Israeli Defense Minister a “green light”. Since Haig did not intend to do that, he quickly ordered to write a letter to Sharon to make clear that the US was opposed to an Israeli invasion of Lebanon. But, as ambassador Dillon commented in one of his interviews³⁸¹, Sharon had already had his answer:

Americans sometimes don't understand this. Sharon didn't care whether Americans approved or disapproved of whatever he wanted to do. He just wanted to know whether the US would take any punitive action. He had sat and looked at the Secretary, who was a distinguished military officer himself, and immediately understood that the Americans were not going to take any action if Israel were to invade Lebanon. He saw that there would be no political costs to Israel. And that is the message that Sharon got during his meeting with Haig.

Sharon had also run a very effective public relations campaign in favour of the invasion. The link between the PLO and worldwide Soviet offensive was evident in his words, as he had told the “Wall Street Journal”,

Palestinian terrorism, PLO terrorism, has been one of the main means by which the Soviets are preparing the ground for further extension into the Middle East³⁸².

Not by chance, the op-ed in the Wall Street Journal on June 2 (4 days before the invasion), read:

The Syrian-PLO nexus in Lebanon has a senior partner, the Soviet Union (...) The most immediate issue in the Middle East is how to deal with the entrenched Soviet-Syrian-PLO position in Lebanon and the threat it poses to peace. And in trying to solve that riddle, the US and European policy makers could do worse than to pay more attention to the views of the Israelis, who have had some experience surviving in the Middle East³⁸³.

³⁸¹ Stuart Kennedy, Charles, Interview with Robert S. Dillon, May 17, 1990, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfddip:6:./temp/~ammem_vFvM (accessed on March 19, 2007)

³⁸² Ryan, Sheila, "Israel's Invasion of Lebanon: Background to the Crisis", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: The War in Lebanon (Summer - Autumn, 1982)

³⁸³ Ryan, Sheila, "Israel's Invasion of Lebanon: Background to the Crisis", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: The War in Lebanon (Summer - Autumn, 1982)

Conservative think-tanks also shared this pro-Israeli view. In a memo prepared in early June for Ambassador Habib who was on his way to the Middle East³⁸⁴, the American Enterprise Institute said that “direct linkage” between Israeli actions and US responses had to be avoided. Israel could be convinced through positive incentives such as resuming the cooperation which was included in the then-suspended Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1981. As for the coming presidential elections, they had to become an opportunity for a major US involvement. The goal of the Habib mission was to come back with some ideas on “candidates for president that would increase the chances of progressive isolation of the leftist forces”. Rebuilding the Lebanese Armed Forces had to be also very high on Habib's agenda since it was the “second pillar” (the presidency being the first) on which it was possible to “build success”.

On May 28 Haig actually sent his letter to Begin to reaffirm the US position. The letter did not contain any threat nor ultimatum to Israel³⁸⁵. Begin's reply demonstrated the depth of his feelings:

You advise us to exercise complete restraint and refrain from any action (...) the man has not born who will ever obtain from me consent to let Jews be killed by a bloodthirsty enemy and allow those who are responsible for the shedding of this blood to enjoy immunity³⁸⁶

In the same last days of May 1982 the Lebanese allies of the PLO started to leave Arafat on his own. In Sidon, there had been clashes between the Sunni militias and the PLO. Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Druze PSP, had said that the National Movement (the umbrella organization of the Revisionist Front) would remain neutral in a fight between the Syrians and the Palestinians. He had also added that there was a crisis of confidence with Yasir Arafat³⁸⁷.

And finally, the *casus belli* came on June 3, 1982. Outside the Dorchester Hotel in London a

³⁸⁴ 464 (2281). Memo from Teicher to Habib. AEI-CSIS Materials. June 4, 1982. Unclassified. Teicher files.
Folder: Chron June 1982 [3]. Ronald Reagan Library

³⁸⁵ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, p. 75

³⁸⁶ Shlaim, Avi, *The Iron Wall*, p. 402

³⁸⁷ Cody, Edward, “Palestinian Guerrillas Begin to Alienate Lebanese Moslem Allies”, *The Washington Post*, May 27, 1982

group of Arab terrorists gravely wounded Israeli ambassador Shlomo Argov. For Begin, who had always thought that the 1981 ceasefire applied to attacks against Jews in any part of the world, this was enough.

It didn't matter that the assassins were not obeying Arafat's orders. The group that carried out the assassination attempt was in fact led by Abu Nidal (real name: Sabri al-Banna), Arafat's worst enemy in the Palestinian camp. He was supported by Saddam Hussein and Israeli intelligence agency Mossad indicated that the attack was designed to provoke an Israeli assault on Arafat's headquarters in Beirut.

According to Howard Teicher, Saddam's interests in the operation was that an Israeli invasion of Lebanon would trigger a clash with the Syrians, thus keeping Damascus' troops in a quagmire for a while. Also, killing an Israeli diplomat was Saddam's little revenge for the raid on its nuclear plant one year before. When the killers were finally arrested by Scotland Yard they soon confessed their Iraqi links³⁸⁸.

Menachem Begin didn't really pay attention to these "details". On June 4 he convened a meeting of the cabinet, while Sharon was on a secret trip to Rumania. He interrupted the head of the General Security Services Avraham Shalom who was elaborating on the origin of the attack and stated bluntly: "They're all PLO". Chief of Staff Eitan recommended that the IAF be sent to bomb the headquarters of "terrorist organizations" in Beirut. As soon as the news reached Habib who was in England for a conference, he said: "Oh, Christ, here it goes up again! The Israelis are going to use that to get after something"³⁸⁹.

Eitan proposed the air strike against Beirut being fully aware from an IDF memorandum known as the "Saguy report" (issued in mid-May) that the PLO would automatically respond by shelling northern Galilee. Some in the cabinet observed that such an attack would lead to civilian casualties and probably to an hostile American reaction. However, Eitan, Begin and Sharon knew that American hostility would not go as far as interrupting the flow of military supplies.

The ministers then approved the plan with some concern, knowing that the air strike would quickly escalate into a full-scale war in Lebanon but, as Avi Shlaim wrote, "they felt

³⁸⁸ Teicher, Howard, p. 196

³⁸⁹ On the Argov assassination attempt and the following events, see Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, pp. 98-100, Boykin, John, p. 59 and Shlaim, Avi, *The Iron Wall*, p. 403

unable to stop the snowball from starting to roll³⁹⁰”.

The Invasion

The bombing hit 25 sites in Beirut and elsewhere in the country. Targets included Palestinian refugee camps, a PLO headquarters building and an empty sports stadium which was believed to be an ammunition dump. More than 60 people were killed. The Palestinians, as predicted by the Saguy report, responded with a 24 hours rocket barrage on Galilee, killing one Israeli and wounding 15. Now the ceasefire, even under Habib's interpretation, had been really broken³⁹¹.

At the White House, the Head of the Near East Bureau Geoffrey Kemp, the Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East Nicholas Veliotis and CIA Middle East specialist Robert Ames argued in favour of a rapid US diplomatic initiative. According to them, it could prevent a total breakdown, perhaps Israel could still be restrained. The result of this discussion was a letter from Reagan to Begin which the President finally approved on Saturday night, June 5. The letter called for a ceasefire to take effect the next day at 9 AM. The US ambassador Samuel Lewis managed to deliver the letter a few hours later but the Prime Minister brushed him off and refused to consider a ceasefire³⁹². On that same day, the United States voted a UN resolution (UNSCR 508) calling for Israeli restraint and a cross-border ceasefire³⁹³.

Both efforts proved useless. Begin's cabinet had already decided that day to start the war in Lebanon. The name of the operation was Peace for Galilee and Begin had informed the US that the goal was to drive the PLO back 40 km from the border “so that all our civilians in the region of Galilee will be set free of the permanent threat to their lives”. The operation was due to last no more than 3 or 4 days. Israel also asked the US to tell Syria that its forces were not going to attack Syrian units unless they were attacked³⁹⁴.

In a cable to Washington, US ambassador in Beirut wrote that Begin's claim was “clearly a

³⁹⁰ Shlaim, Avi, *The Iron Wall*, p. 404

³⁹¹ For the death toll, see Boykin, John, p. 59

³⁹² Teicher, Howard, p. 197

³⁹³ Haig, Alexander, p. 337

³⁹⁴ Haig, Alexander, p. 337

lie”³⁹⁵. Begin's message, as a matter of fact, contained several lies. First, the operation that he described to the US officials was “Little Pine” but we know that the real plan, and the one that was actually implemented in the following days, was Big Pine whose political consequences were much more far-reaching. Second, the operation was far from being the *blitzkrieg* he described. Third, he knew from the Saguy report³⁹⁶ that Syrian units were stationed in the 40-km belt. The report had also warned that following the clash with the ground units, the Syrians would have sent their air force into the fray. To be effective in countering this offensive, the Israelis would have had to attack the Syrian missile batteries in the Bekaa valley, escalating the conflict even further.

Americans were not the only ones to whom Begin and Sharon were lying. During the meeting of the Cabinet the Minister of Defense had actually spoken of Little Pine, had ruled out any clash with the Syrians and had said clearly that Beirut was not a target of the operation. The official decision of the Cabinet was a consequence of Sharon's speech as it mentioned generically that the goal of Peace for Galilee was to “place the civilian population of the Galilee beyond the range of the terrorist fire from Lebanon”³⁹⁷. And the range of PLO artillery was 42.8 km³⁹⁸.

The only time that Big Pines had been submitted to the cabinet, on December 20 1981 it had been rejected. Sharon had actually received the approval for Little Pines and then implemented Big Pines. However, as we have seen, he had given the Americans enough signals in the past months of his real plans.

At 11 AM on Sunday June 6 the first units of the IDF started to cross the Lebanese-Israeli border. In the first day of the war, they captured Nabatiyeh, surrounded all Lebanese coastal towns up to Sidon and attacked the PLO wherever they found it. It took Sharon only 24 hours to go beyond the mandate of the cabinet and Begin's promise to Reagan: On the second day of the war, he ordered the IDF to move up to the Beirut-Damascus highway and to be prepared to fight against the Syrians. One wonders whether Begin was at least informed of Sharon's moves. As he declared later, he was always informed about

³⁹⁵ Boykin, John, p. 62

³⁹⁶ For a full account of the Saguy report, see Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, p. 56

³⁹⁷ Shlaim, Avi, The Iron Wall, p. 406

³⁹⁸ Boykin, John, p. 61

the IDF moves – sometimes before the decision was taken, sometimes afterwards³⁹⁹. On the third day of the invasion, Bashir Gemayel was brought by helicopter to meet with Eitan. He was told that he should prepare to conquer Beirut and to form a new government in Lebanon⁴⁰⁰. The Grand Design was at work.

In Washington, the Secretary of State was well aware of the final goal of the invasion and demonstrated years later in his memoirs to appreciate them:

Syria and the PLO, the heart of the Arab opposition to Camp David, had been defeated. With the PLO's "military option" gone, Israel's arguments against granting a wider measure of autonomy to the Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza would be negated. There would be a fresh opportunity to complete the Camp David process⁴⁰¹

From Europe where he was attending the session of the North Atlantic Council with Reagan, he restated in a press conference on June 7 his understanding of Israeli motives behind the invasion:

We want the cease-fire to be reinstituted. (...) We certainly do not misunderstand or misappreciate the vulnerability of the Galilee area to terrorist actions, rockets, artillery shelling of the kind that preceded the Israeli invasion⁴⁰².

That Haig (and also ambassador to the UN, Jeanne Kirkpatrick) were not totally upset by the invasion is confirmed also by Dennis Ross, then Deputy Director of Net Assessment at the Pentagon:

They thought that the PLO had brought that on itself. They had what they expected. They thought that getting rid of the PLO was a good thing for Lebanon. It would have taught them a lesson. They thought that a loss for the PLO was a loss for the Soviet Union.⁴⁰³

Deputy National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane was less enthusiastic about the

³⁹⁹ Shlaim, Avi, *The Iron Wall*, p. 410

⁴⁰⁰ Shlaim, Avi, *The Iron Wall* p. 408

⁴⁰¹ Haig, Alexander, *Caveat*, p. 318

⁴⁰² Goshko, John M., "U.S. Anger in Check", *The Washington Post*, June 8, 1982

⁴⁰³ Author's interview with Dennis Ross, Washington DC, March 30 2007

invasion. In a memo to the President written on the same day of the invasion⁴⁰⁴, McFarlane warned that it could have “severe adverse effects on US interests”. Now, the task for the administration was to show that the US, after Vietnam and the fall of the Shah, could look reliable again in defending its allies and pursuing its policy.

Past US policy, according to McFarlane, did not work because it did not deal with the fundamental issue of Lebanese internal stabilization. McFarlane's proposal to get out of the crisis focused on establishing an international conference to work out a viable settlement among Lebanese factions.

He argued in favour of sanctions against the Jewish state:

Our interests may demand that we condemn Israel and/or use strong sanctions against it (...) Clearly Begin may bargain extremely hard for a replacement force much stronger than UNIFIL if Israel is to withdraw.

McFarlane predicted that the Soviets were going to exploit the situation, complicating the diplomatic solution “at every step” and directing the Arab outrage for the invasion towards the US which could be presented as an accomplice. “The Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon offers important opportunities to the Soviets in this regard”.

As if it had been reading McFarlane's memo, Moscow's Tass News Agency wrote on June 6 that a “genocide against the Arab people of Palestine” was taking place. Egypt talked of a grave violation of International Law⁴⁰⁵.

President Reagan started to realize that the storm over Lebanon had finally begun. In his diary, after writing about his “fairy tale experience” in British castles and German palaces he wrote: “Also learned though that Israel had invaded Lebanon. I'm afraid we are faced with a real crisis⁴⁰⁶”.

Meanwhile, the Israeli campaign went on and part of it was a strategy to undermine further US credibility in the region. The prime target of this strategy was Philip Habib, the presidential envoy. On June 9 he was told by Begin to deliver a message to Asad granting

⁴⁰⁴ 456 (2263). Memo from McFarlane to the President. How to Pursue Our Strategic Goals in Lebanon. June 6, 1982. Declassified on June 5, 2000. Teicher files. Folder: Chron June 1982 box 91667. Ronald Reagan Library

⁴⁰⁵ “Moscow Says Israel Seeks 'Extermination' Of Palestinian People”, The Washington Post, June 7, 1982

⁴⁰⁶ Brinkley, Douglas, p.88

that the Syrians would not be harmed if they withdrew their missiles from Lebanon. The Israeli requests were “unlikely to be acceptable” according to what Haig wrote to Reagan because they asked that both Syrian and PLO units pull out of their position in the south and as Haig recognized “the Syrians are very unlikely to agree if Israel is still moving north on the ground and attacking by sea and air targets well beyond the 50 km zone”⁴⁰⁷.

On that same day, Sharon obtained from the Israeli cabinet the authorization to hit the Syrian missiles. The timing of the action was spectacular: right at the moment when Habib was about to meet Asad to deliver Begin's message of restraint. The Syrians at that point could easily believe that he was sent to give them a sense of security and facilitate the Israeli attack.

The strike was one of the biggest air battles in world history⁴⁰⁸. The SAM-6 sites were all destroyed. 23 Syrian MiGs were shot-down without losing a single Israeli aircraft. American-made Israeli weapons had won against Soviet-made Syrian arms. The Soviets would not let this happen again without at least raising their (usually thick) eye brows.

On June 9 Brezhnev delivered a message to Reagan through the “hot line”. It was the first time the hot line was used since the start of the Reagan administration. Finally, the Soviets were really part of the game. Now reality matched Reagan's understanding of it. The Soviet leader was threatening to intervene if the US could not restrain Israel. However, neither the JCS nor the CIA observed any unusual Soviet activity. Actually, NSC staff member Howard Teicher found out a little bit later that the Soviets had moved to alert status their airborne forces in Odessa, the same ones that had been put on alert during the 1973 war⁴⁰⁹.

Vicepresident Bush drafted Reagan's response which took a firm stance towards the Soviets. The president accused Brezhnev of arming the PLO and undermining the Camp David accords. He asked Moscow to use its “strong influence” on Syria to bring about a ceasefire. On the same day he wrote a new letter to Begin asking Israel to accept a ceasefire for the following day⁴¹⁰.

⁴⁰⁷ Memo to the President from Alexander Haig. Lebanon: Critical Moment at Hand. June 9, 1982. Declassified on 3/5/1996. Downloaded from www.foia.state.gov on July 1, 2007

⁴⁰⁸ Shlaim, Avi, *The Iron Wall*, p. 409

⁴⁰⁹ Teicher, Howard, p. 200

⁴¹⁰ Haig, Alexander, p. 339

Officially, the Department of State expressed simple “concern” over what was going on. The intelligence community, according to the “Washington Post”⁴¹¹ predicted an Israeli advance up to the Beirut-Damascus highway which would separate Syrian troops in Beirut from Syrian territory. The Israeli ambassador in the US Moshe Arens, in a press conference in Washington tried to calm down the American anxieties: “If there are no more complications with the Syrians, I would think we are very close to achievement of the objective”.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee met with CIA officials. Their assessment was that there was a serious possibility of escalation between Syria and Israel and that there could be some Soviet gesture to help Asad. The second prediction was quite disturbing as it would influence the fate of the US intervention in the following months: Iran could send some “volunteers” to help its Lebanese allies. The “Washington Post” concluded

While it is unlikely that such troops would affect the course of the war, such support could have important political impact in the Arab world

As Howard Teicher recalled in his memoirs⁴¹², the Reagan administration officials had learned that Iran had dispatched several thousands *Pasdaran* fighters to fight alongside the Syrians. Asad did not want this help but could not avoid the *Pasdaran's* settlement in the Bekaa valley. From this first settlement the organization now known as Hizbullah was born. However, at that time as Teicher recognized, “the significance [of this event] was not immediately apparent”.

In those two days both the Cold War enemy (the Soviet Union) and the post-Cold War foe (Islamic fundamentalism) had showed up, but this didn't affect for the moment the course of events: Begin's word kept being unmatched by reality and Reagan would continue acting ineffectively⁴¹³.

On June 10 Clark had provided Reagan with the draft of a new letter for Begin calling in tough terms for an unconditional withdrawal from Lebanon. Haig convinced him not to

⁴¹¹ Oberdorfer, Don and John M. Goshko, “Dispersed Reagan Administration Still Quiet on Mideast Conflict”, The Washington Post, June 10, 1982

⁴¹² Teicher, Howard, p. 203

⁴¹³ On the difference between Israeli words and deeds, see the remarkable chart in Boykin, John, 322-323

send it. Earlier in the day Begin had called Haig to promise once more that the IDF would stop at 40 km from the Israeli border⁴¹⁴.

Three days later the IDF troops had closed the ring around Beirut, quite far from the 40 km line. Sharon's goal had by then been achieved: he had trapped the PLO in Beirut, cut off the Syrians troops in the capital and defeated Asad's army both in the air and in the lower Bekaa valley. As Haig recognized in his memoirs, "Operation Peace for Galilee had become an Israeli-Syrian war and, now, the siege of an Arab capital."⁴¹⁵

Sharon had counted on the Phalange to conquer Beirut for him. Gemayel refused to do the dirty job. The IDF couldn't afford an hand-to-hand fight in Beirut: according to two of Habib's military advisers it would "cost" the lives of 2,000 Israeli soldiers and Habib knew that Begin did not want that⁴¹⁶.

Such a fight could have grave consequences. A bloodbath in Beirut, a Syrian-Israeli all-out war that could lead to a superpower confrontation, the outrage of the Arab world seeing that the US was incapable of stopping Israel and had probably cooperated in Sharon's aggression. The US simply could not afford the fulfilment of even one tenth of this scenario.

At this point it is worth stopping to look at what went on in Washington.

Sanctions?

In the week between the beginning of the siege of Beirut and Begin's scheduled visit to the US on June 20, several issues were discussed in the White House. To understand what were the issues at stake we have to read a document written at the end of that week. In a June 17 memo to the top officials in the administration⁴¹⁷, National Security Advisor William Clark listed some of them. First of all, it had to be decided if the US was going to commit its troops to a probable multinational peacekeeping force. Second, the link between this troop commitment and a parallel commitment by the Israeli to the autonomy

⁴¹⁴ Haig, Alexander, p. 340

⁴¹⁵ Haig, Alexander, p. 341

⁴¹⁶ Boykin, John, p. 72

⁴¹⁷ Memo from Geoffrey Kemp and Howard J. Teicher. "Memorandum for the Vicepresident and others". June 17, 1982 Declassified on November 23, 1999. Near East and South Asia files, box 91987, Begin Meeting with President June 21 1982 [3 of 4]. Ronald Reagan Library

talks had to be considered. Third, the continuation of a “business as usual” attitude on the arm sales to Israel in the face of their invasion of Lebanon was at stake. These issues had already been discussed during a crucial NSPG meeting held on June 14, the day after the beginning of the siege of Beirut.

On that day, Clark sent a memorandum to the President providing his own analysis of the situation and giving him a picture of the different positions inside the administration. The Israeli invasion, according to the National Security Advisor, was a setback for American policy in the region but it also provided an opportunity to reshape the Middle East since the position of the PLO and of Syria in Lebanon had been weakened. Clark warned Reagan that the US could not fall in the trap of postponing the peace process while it tried to solve the Lebanese crisis.

Given this nuanced analysis, the positions differed between the Defense, the JCS, the Vice-president and the CIA on one side and the Department of State on the other. The first group wanted to avoid the US military involvement and was more willing to stop the invasion through the imposition of military sanctions. In his memo, Clark said clearly that “Cap [Caspar Weinberger] wants to use US military assistance [to Israel] as a leverage” and that the JCS were opposed to a US military involvement in the country. Also, Vice-president Bush and CIA Director Casey generally wanted to be tough on Israel⁴¹⁸. The then-director of the office for Near East and South Asian Affairs at the State Department Robert Gallucci explained their position in these terms:

They knew that Lebanon was about peacemaking, not about peacekeeping. So, yes, they might have seen in “punitive sanctions” against Israel an alternative to American involvement in the country. The situation had to be solved through the Israeli withdrawal, not through the deployment of US troops.⁴¹⁹

Secretary Haig's plan, on the other hand, focused on the following goals: creating a strong Lebanese central government, reducing the Syrian presence in the country, ending PLO privileges and major Haddad's role in the south, bringing forward the autonomy

⁴¹⁸ 148 (822). Memo from Clark to Reagan. NSPG Meeting on Middle East Policy. June 14, 1982. Declassified on November 4, 2004. NSPG files, NSPG 0039 14 Jun 1982 [Lebanon] Box 91305. Ronald Reagan Library

⁴¹⁹ Author's interview with Robert Gallucci, Washington DC, March 15 2007

negotiations which were part of the Camp David agreements, and building a peacekeeping force for Lebanon.

Haig thought that, in order to reduce the Syrian presence, the Israeli withdrawal had to be linked with Syria's. He also proposed the formation of a "contact group" with France and Saudi Arabia⁴²⁰.

To lay the ground for the proposal on military sanctions against Israel, the CPPG of the NSC had requested an assessment by Bob Lilac (Head of the Political-Military Affairs Directorate of the NSC) on this issue. A cut-off of the spares' pipeline would have effects only after 30 days. He suggested switching from automatic supply to a manual one in order to assess each request on a case-by-case basis adding that something similar had been done during the fall of the Shah and during the 1973 war. NSC staff member Oliver North noted that this switch could impose a "de facto sanction without a presidential decision to do so"⁴²¹.

Avoiding making sanctions a hot political issue was one of the goals of this group. They knew that neither the cabinet nor the Congress could approve sanctions against Israel without incurring into serious political trouble. As Robert Gallucci noted⁴²², from a domestic policy point of view sanctions were simply "implausible". The plan that had been devised, sought to achieve its goal without having to pay a political price for it.

North and McFarlane would, not by chance, be two of the major architects of the Iran-Contra affair, based on the idea that to devise effective solution the ordinary decision-making process had to be overruled.

The alternative approach, which laid the basis for the Haig plan, was well represented in a memo to National Security Advisor Clark by NSC staff members Howard Teicher, Geoffrey Kemp and Oliver North⁴²³. They proposed a "positive approach" to the issue

⁴²⁰ 149.(828) Memorandum from Alexander Haig to the President. A Forward US strategy in the wake of Israel's offensive. June 12, 1982. Declassified on November 4, 2004. NSPG files. Folder: NSPG 0039 14 Jun 1982 [Lebanon] box 91305. Ronald Reagan Library

⁴²¹ 146. (811) Memorandum from Oliver North to Robert McFarlane. Negative Incentives/sanctions to Israeli actions in Lebanon. June 14, 1982. Declassified on April 19, 2001. NSPG files. Folder NSPG 0039 14 Jun 1982 [Lebanon] box 91305. Ronald Reagan Library

⁴²² Author's interview with Robert Gallucci, Washington DC, March 15 2007

⁴²³ 147. (816) Memo for William P. Clark from Teicher, Kemp and North. Talking points for the NSPG meeting. June 14, 1982. Declassified on November 4, 2004. NSPG files. Folder NSPG 0039 14 Jun 1982 [Lebanon] box 91305. Ronald Reagan Library

which involved the Arab-Israeli peace process and the “autonomy talks” included in the Camp David agreements.

Begin, they argued, needed to get out of Lebanon so there was no need of US threats to force an Israeli withdrawal. This was true, as we have seen, because the sudden moves by Sharon had trapped the Israelis in an unpleasant situation where they could not move into Beirut without paying a heavy price and their Christians allies had refused to do the dirty job for them.

According to the “alternative approach” the US government had to: stand firm in the face of European and Arab pressure in order not to force a precipitate Israeli withdrawal; take the lead in a peacekeeping operation to strengthen the government of Lebanon and create a buffer zone in southern Lebanon; engage in a “risky action” with Congress for a direct US involvement.

The price for all of this had to be Israeli responsiveness to achieve a credible autonomy agreement and to implement more “enlightened” occupation policies, freeze settlement activity in the West Bank and give voting rights to the Arabs in Eastern Jerusalem. The issue had to be raised during Begin's visit. However, even though the US did work on this part of the exchange, the issue of a more responsive Israeli position on the autonomy negotiations was not raised significantly, as we will see, during the subsequent Begin visit in Washington.

The idea of an exchange between US help to Israel in the Lebanese quagmire and Israeli help to the US in the autonomy negotiations was first suggested by two very important figures in American foreign policy such as Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. The latter was one of the members of the American foreign policy elite who thought that the Israeli invasion presented some opportunities for US foreign policy.

On July 16, 1982 he wrote on the “Washington Post” that the first victim of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon was the “mirage” that the key to the Middle East peace was to be found in a PLO-Israeli negotiation. Such a negotiation was undesirable, according to the former Secretary of State, because it would give a veto power to “the most intransigent element in the Arab world”. Even though Israel had not consulted “adequately” with the

United States before the invasion,

[The] results were congruent with the interests of the peace process, [of] all the moderate governments in the area and of the United States. It would serve nobody's interest to restore PLO control over Lebanon or Syrian pre-eminence in Beirut. The United States can have no interest in salvaging Arab radicalism or rewarding military reliance on the Soviet Union⁴²⁴.

Not by chance, Haig's strategy had been inspired by Kissinger. Raymond Tanter draws the parallel:

Secretary of State Kissinger had used the 1973 war to launch his step-by-step peace process, and Secretary Haig deserved the opportunity to do the same in 1982.⁴²⁵

In the end, the “alternative approach” won and sanctions were never implemented. As Dennis Ross explained it

Weinberger was against what the Israelis were doing, he wanted to put pressure on them. [But] The State Department didn't favour it, the White House didn't favour it.⁴²⁶

Many members of the administration thought that sanctions weren't necessary, that they could be counterproductive and domestically too “expensive”. Even members of the State Department free of pro-Israeli biases such as Nicholas Veliotis opposed them:

I argued against major military and economic sanctions against Israel because I was convinced that we could achieve our objectives in this case without them. It just required the president's willingness to pressure Israel publicly. And be firm and be seen as being firm. The views of the US president have considerable impact in Israel.

You can do a lot in the Israel-US relationship with “public diplomacy” given the fact that without US support, Israel is an isolated little country despite what macho talk comes out of it⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴Ryan, Sheila, "Israel's Invasion of Lebanon: Background to the Crisis", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: The War in Lebanon (Summer - Autumn, 1982)

⁴²⁵ Tanter, Raymond, p. 128

⁴²⁶ Author's interview with Dennis Ross, Washington DC, March 30 2007

⁴²⁷ Author's interview with Nicholas Veliotis, Washington DC, March 2007

Reagan himself had been positively impressed by Haig's plan, notwithstanding their deteriorating personal relationship. On the morning of June 14 (the day of the NSPG meeting) he had had a horseback ride but in the afternoon he was listening to the Secretary of State with some admiration, as he wrote in his diary:

There is a possibility the separate Lebanese factions can unite – get Syrians and Israelis out of their country and disarm the PLO. Al H. [Alexander Haig] made great good sense on this entire matter. It's amazing how sound he can be on complex international matters but how utterly paranoid with regard to the people he must work with⁴²⁸

In the following days, Reagan convinced himself that the Israeli presence out of Beirut was the only guarantee that the PLO would withdraw from the city. Of course, in his mind and in that of many members of the administration, the “foreign forces” and not the internal division of power were the major problem of Lebanon. On June 16 he wrote again in his diary:

Met with Al H. [Alexander Haig] and Bill Clark on Lebanon. We're walking on a tightrope (...) Pres. Sarkis of Lebanon can't say openly but he apparently wants Israel to stay near until the PLO can be disarmed. Then he wants to restore the Central govt. Of Lebanon – allow Palestinians to become citizens and get all foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon. The world is waiting for us to use our muscle and order Israel out – we can't do this if we want to help Sarkis but we can't explain the situation either. Some days are worse than others.⁴²⁹

Begin's Visit

Some days before Begin's arrival, the Department of State prepared a series of briefing papers on the situation in the Middle East which were sent by Paul Bremer III, then executive secretary at Foggy Bottom, to all members of the NSC. Although one may wonder whether they were ever read by the top echelons of the decision-making process, they are worth analysing as they reflect some of the thinking that was taking place in the

⁴²⁸ Brinkley, Douglas (ed), p.88

⁴²⁹ Brinkley, Douglas (ed), p. 89

Department at the time.

According to the State Department the peace process was in a major stalemate, Israel was already acting independently to defend itself but the US could still have a major leverage over the Jewish state. Also, according to this assessment, Bashir Gemayel was the wrong man to bring peace to Lebanon.

The first briefing paper⁴³⁰ dealt with the status of “autonomy negotiations” between Egypt and Israel on the fate of the West Bank and the Gaza strip. By reading this paper it is possible to understand how difficult could be an exchange a between US commitment in Lebanon and an Israeli softer position in the peace process. First of all, and not by chance, the paper was accusing Sharon of undermining the agreement by promising to build houses for 100,000 Israelis in the West Bank.

Second, the negotiation was in a political stalemate because the Egyptians could not settle for anything less than a Palestinian state while the Israelis were not eager to hand over the land they had conquered and that Begin thought to be fully part of *Eretz Israel* (the biblical Israel stretching from the Jordan to the Mediterranean). The Reagan Plan, issued on September 1 of that same year (see further), seemed not to take into account what was written in this document.

Another briefing paper⁴³¹ said a lot about the level of understanding of the Lebanese situation by the US department of State: The civil war was caused by the rise of a new generation of Lebanese, heavily armed and unwilling to reach compromise. They attempted to

Enhance their power further through alliances with outside powers: the Muslim leftist National Movement with Syria and the Christian Maronite Phalange with Israel. The PLO can be considered as yet another heavily armed group which must now be induced to lay down its arms and subsume military power into a political accommodation with the Lebanese central government.

⁴³⁰ Department of State briefing paper. “Peace Process”. June 18, 1982 Declassified on December 22, 1997. Near East and South Asia files, box 91987, Begin Meeting with President June 21 1982 [4 of 4]. Ronald Reagan Library

⁴³¹ Department of State briefing paper. “The Lebanese Political Environment”. June 18, 1982 Declassified on December 22, 1997. Near East and South Asia files. box 91987. Folder:Begin Meeting with President June 21 1982 [4 of 4] Ronald Reagan Library

The PLO was, in fact, considered to be part of the problem in Lebanon not *the* problem as the Israelis had convinced the Americans.

However, the most important assessment was made about the man who was going to become, in a few weeks, the new president of Lebanon with both US and Israeli support:

Bashir Gemayel: The Christian Phalange militia leader (...) dedicated to the retention of absolute Maronite supremacy in Lebanon with himself at the helm. He has excited the opposition of Muslims and other Christian leaders, who believe the country can be reunited only if the Muslim community is given a fair share of political and economic power.

It's hard to believe that anyone in the White House spent any time reading this description of Gemayel before his election to the presidency of Lebanon, which happened to take place in the same days in which American troops landed in Beirut to pacify the country.

Meglio evidenziare qui il nesso invece che alla fine del paragrafo. The US-Israeli "special relationship" had been further strengthened during the first years of the Reagan administration, nonetheless Israel tended to act more and more independently as another briefing paper by the State Department admitted⁴³².

The figures of US military assistance to Israel⁴³³ were impressive and demonstrated the leverage that the Americans could use to change Begin's policy in Lebanon: 1.4 billion dollars for the 1982 Fiscal Year with a proposed increase to 1.7 billion for 1983. As the Department of State recognized, "United States aid to Israel" was "sufficient to enable Israel to continue to defend itself".

However, the invasion of Lebanon could cause some troubles to the flow of military equipment to the Jewish state both for a possible investigation into the use of cluster bombs and for other "initiatives in the Congress to punish Israel (e.g. reduce or suspend military assistance) for its actions".

As the meeting with Begin was approaching in Washington President Reagan feared that

⁴³² Department of State briefing paper. "US-Israeli strategic relationship". June 18, 1982 Declassified on December 22, 1997. Near East and South Asia files box 91987, Begin Meeting with President June 21 1982 [4 of 4]. Reagan Library

⁴³³ Department of State briefing paper. "US-Israeli security relationship". June 18, 1982 Declassified on December 22, 1997. Near East and South Asia files box 91987, Begin Meeting with President June 21 1982 [4 of 4]. Reagan Library

Alexander Haig could show a divided administration in front of the Israeli delegation. So a few days before the meeting he called Alexander Haig⁴³⁴ to make sure that the “stern” demarche to Begin he was preparing for himself did not surprise the Prime Minister. Haig had to be as tough as Reagan was trying to be.

In a briefing paper drafted in those days⁴³⁵, Geoffrey Kemp outlined the risks for US policy coming from the Israeli invasion: “In essence, we may be confronted with a major erosion of our position in the Arab world, a resurgence of anti-American fundamentalism and radicalism, and damaging strains in US-Israeli relations”. Kemp predicted dire consequences in case of an Israeli invasion of Western Beirut which could “transform the rhetorical outcries in the Arab world into direct actions against the United States interests, including possible threats to our embassies”. In the end, the civil war could break out again, leading to a partition of the country between a “Christian area supported by Israel, and a Muslim area supported by Syria. This would be the worst of all worlds since it would solve neither Israel's problems nor those of Lebanon”. Also, a radicalization of the PLO had to be kept in mind as a possible outcome of its displacement.

Kemp concluded very bluntly:

It would be well to bear in mind this list of horrors when listening to the optimistic tones that Begin will outline to you as he explains the enormous 'benefits' to the West that have come from the Israeli invasion.

On June 20, Begin finally arrived in the US and Reagan had his opportunity to show him his toughness. On the morning of June 21 the Israeli Prime Minister met with the US president⁴³⁶. To be sure “not to leave anything out” Reagan started by reading a note his staff had prepared for him. He recalled that they had communicated personally about “developments in Lebanon for more than a year” and was shocked when he learned of the

⁴³⁴ Talking points. “Talking points for telephone conversation with Al Haig”. box Issued: June 17, 1982 Declassified: November 23, 1999. Near East and South Asia files 91987, Begin Meeting with President June 21 1982 [2 of 4]. Reagan Library

⁴³⁵ 461 (2274). Briefing paper by Kemp. Potential Costs to the United States Interests of the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon. June 18, 1982. Declassified on June 5, 2000. Howard Teicher files. Ronald Reagan Library

⁴³⁶ Memorandum of conversation. “Summary of meeting with Begin. June 21, 1982 11:05-11:50 a.m”.. Issued: June 21, 1982 Declassified: November 23, 1999. Near East and South Asia files box 91987, Begin Meeting with President June 21 1982 [1 of 4]. Reagan Library

“massive” invasion of a country “whose integrity we had pledged to preserve”.

He said that he had repeatedly warned the Israelis against an invasion that was not “clearly justified by the nature of the provocation”. However, he added, “what is done is done” and at that moment it was important to “salvage from this tragedy a new Lebanon which will no longer constitute a threat to Israel”.

The first common goal should have been the establishment of a strong Lebanese central government which, he stressed, could not appear as an Israeli surrogate. He quoted Begin's June 6 letter to say that Israeli forces had to withdraw to the 40 km line. After such pullout, an international force could be deployed. He agreed with a Syrian and Palestinian withdrawal as well. He was in favour of strengthening the Unifil mission, but “understood” the Israeli position in favour of a different, multinational force.

Israeli actions had damaged US relations with Arab moderates such as “Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman” that were so important to “counter forces of Soviet-sponsored radicalism and Islamic fundamentalism now growing within the region”. However he was going to stand firm against “European and Arab pressure” for a quick Israeli withdrawal. But to do so, he needed a strong commitment by Begin for a “breakthrough in the autonomy negotiations”, a deal which resembled very much the one envisaged in the Clark memo inspired by Nixon and Kissinger.

An Israeli withdrawal could “preempt what remains of the PLO, further isolate Syria and leave the Soviets out in the cold”. The United States’ “ultimate purpose” was to “create more Egypts ready to make peace” with Israel.

Begin was not shaken by this demarche and started his reply touching the president's sensible nerve: the Cold War paradigm. According to the Prime Minister, 3 days earlier the Israelis had found and dismantled a huge “Soviet base” near Sidon.

It was a true international terrorist base [and the Israelis] rendered a great service to the United States and to the free world. [We] uprooted a Soviet base and the headquarters of an international terror organization.

He did not reply when Reagan asked to see “the documents” that proved the existence of such an international terrorist base. He stressed the importance of Israeli military moves

(he denied any “invasion” of Lebanon) to secure Israel’s northern border. He changed the subject when Reagan tried to talk of the “perception” by public opinion of atrocities committed by the IDF in Lebanon. He said that the world press was biased and that parts of the American public opinion were in favour of Israel's policy. The two leaders were then joined by the rest of the delegations.

The president began the plenary meeting⁴³⁷ by describing the previous meeting as “cordial”. Then Israeli general Saguy started discussing the IDF moves in Lebanon. He said that, in the first stage, the aim was to take control of Lebanon up to the 40-45 km range, the range of the enemy artillery. To be exact, this first stage lasted 24 hours. Then the Israeli plan had become Big Pines, but the general didn't mention it.

Begin at this point interrupted the general to reiterate that Israel hadn't invaded Lebanon, it was just going out “to fight armed bands”. He also stressed again the PLO-USSR link:

There is no doubt - Begin said - that far more than simply arming the PLO, the Soviets had made Lebanon the center of Soviet activity in the Middle East (...) Based on documents they had captured, it was clear that a terror network sponsored by the Soviets and involving Hungary, Bulgaria, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, Pakistan, India, the People's Republic of China, East Germany and Austria were all involved in assisting the PLO.

According to the memorandum of conversation, no one laughed when he mentioned India and Austria as part of this alliance. Begin, probably, had read Claire Sterling's book on the “Terror Network”⁴³⁸. He then reiterated that Israel was in favour of a Multinational force and would withdraw to the 40 km line after the deployment of such a contingent.

Haig stated the US goals in the crisis: The strengthening of the Lebanese government, the establishment of a buffer zone, the withdrawal of all foreign forces. He also said that a Multinational Force would run into “massive Congressional opposition”. The meeting then adjourned for lunch.

⁴³⁷Memorandum of Conversation. “Summary of the President's Plenary Meeting with Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel. June 21 1982 11:55 a.m-12:30 p.m. Issued: June 21, 1982 Declassified: November 23, 1999. Near East and South Asia files”. box 91987, Begin Meeting with President June 21 1982 [1 of 4]. Reagan Library

⁴³⁸ Sterling, Claire, *The Terror Network*, New York: Berkely Books, 1981

During the “working luncheon” the evacuation of the PLO was discussed⁴³⁹. Begin suggested a self-defeating solution: “Libya is a great friend of the PLO. Why shouldn't the PLO go to Libya or perhaps Iraq. They are both empty countries.” Reagan asked Weinberger to brief the delegations on the US strategy in the region.

The US - according to Weinberger - has been trying to develop the ability to protect Middle East oil fields (...) If the oil fields fall, the West would have a hard time surviving.

The Israelis then strongly criticized the arm sales to the Arabs by the US but Reagan recalled how Nixon's arm sales to Egypt had paved the way for Camp David and concluded: “A new era has now fragmented the region between those who are pro-Soviet and those who fear the Soviets.” Again, the Cold War was the main framework that Reagan used to understand the situation in the Middle East and Begin, as we have already seen, greatly exploited this to justify Israeli actions.

Israelis officials stressed that only Arabs who joined the peace process should receive American weapons. Haig replied that it was “critical” to move to the peace process and to bring into it Saudi Arabia and Jordan but that “Israel cannot be oblivious to their security concerns and still get their cooperation in the peace process”. He then added, receiving Begin's approval:

Nonetheless, the first order of business is to optimize the consequences of Lebanon and we must work together in that regard. The US has paid a price. That's a fact (...) We have more assets today than we had six weeks ago. There is a new set of realities and we must exploit them to our collective advantage.

This was all that was said about the peace process. The “stern” demarche prepared by Reagan had met Begin's stern reaction which exploited Reagan's Cold War fixation. The Prime Minister had been successful in depicting the invasion of Lebanon as an episode in the fight against the Soviets and terrorism, which in his mind (and also in Reagan's) were

⁴³⁹Memorandum of conversation. “Summary of the President's Working Luncheon with Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel. June 21 1982 12:40-1:40 p.m”. box 91987, Begin Meeting with President June 21 1982 [1 of 4]. Issued: June 21, 1982 Declassified: November 23, 1999. Near East and South Asia files. Reagan Library

more or less the same thing. Begin did not have to fear very much what Reagan was saying because at no point the President had threatened to withdraw American political and military support to Israel as a consequence of the invasion or because Israeli was not behaving as agreed. On the contrary, the US accepted the Israeli fear of a UN-sponsored peacekeeping force and decided to favour the implementation of a US-led multinational force, though admitting that that would cause some problems with the Congress.

To show how ineffective this meeting had been in restraining the Israelis and dictating US policy to solve the crisis, one has just to look at what happened in the Summer of 1982 and in the following months.

Nevertheless, the meeting was depicted in quite a different manner to the Congressional leadership. In a telephone call to senator Percy⁴⁴⁰, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, Reagan described the meetings he had with Begin as very tough. Begin, he explained, was “uncompromising” on American policy towards the Arab moderates (especially the arm sales) and did not reply to American criticism. Reagan also said that Weinberger and the JCS were “adamantly opposed” to the MNF and predicted that that sort of thing would run into “pretty formidable” opposition in Congress too.

The Middle East peace process came up as a major subject only during secretary Haig's meeting with Begin in the latter's hotel that afternoon. The Secretary was quite clear with the Prime Minister:

In my last meeting with Begin (..) I told him that the United States expected, after resolution of the Lebanon problem, that Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank would come to an end and rapid progress toward an agreement on autonomy would be realized⁴⁴¹

Since “rapid progress” towards the agreement on the autonomy would have come only *after* the resolution of the “Lebanon problem”, Begin and Sharon could quietly work to buy time in Beirut in order to delay the peace process.

Besides, Haig was down in the power curve in Washington, and in a few days he would

⁴⁴⁰Talking points. “Talking points for the president's telephone conversation with senator Percy”.. Issued: June 24, 1982 Declassified: November 23, 1999 . Near East and South Asia files box 91987, Begin Meeting with President June 21 1982 [2 of 4]. Reagan Library

⁴⁴¹ Haig, Alexander, p. 318

be forced to resign. Probably, Begin did not have to pay much attention to his words.

Haig's resignation

Alexander Haig had been a candidate in the Republican primaries for the 1980 presidential elections. Reagan had decided to enlist him in his team after he won the elections but the Secretary of State never got along well with the other members of the staff. As one top official recollects:

Haig openly expressed disdain for too many people, including the president and this destroyed his relationships with senior colleagues and White House officials. This was very much in evidence during the trip that Reagan made in Europe in June 1982. Haig had had increasingly poisonous relationships with most of the senior staff members

Also, he never actually recognized that he was a subordinate of the president,

An example of this was his decision in early June to cut off from the White House the cables coming from Philip Habib - the President's Special envoy for the Middle East who at the time was trying to negotiate the departure of the PLO from Beirut.⁴⁴²

The Lebanese crisis had precipitated this situation. On June 24, Haig and Reagan met for the last time together in the Oval Office⁴⁴³. The Secretary of State presented to the President a bill of complaints that can now be found, not by chance, in William P. Clark files at the Reagan Library⁴⁴⁴. This document testifies how much the relationship between Haig and Reagan's other aides had become explosive.

Haig was against the UN resolution proposed in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon because it did not mention the shelling of the northern Israeli border from Lebanon and it contained an implied threat of sanctions. . William Clark, however, had obtained Reagan's consent to the resolution without consulting Haig. On Haig's

⁴⁴² Author's interview with anonymous top US official

⁴⁴³ An account of the events leading to Haig's resignation can be found in Cannon, Lou, President Reagan. The Role of a Lifetime, New York:Public Affairs, 2000 pp. 168-171

⁴⁴⁴ 227 (1218). Paper. The mismanagement of a crisis. Undated, Unclassified. William Clark files, Ronald Reagan Library.

recommendation the decision was later overturned. The Secretary of State had managed to avoid being bypassed on such an important decision just at the last minute.

Haig claimed that the “presidential staff” had blocked his trip to Israel on June 10. On June 16, Bush, Weinberger and McFarlane saw king Fahd of Saudi Arabia. In their meeting they stress[ed] in the President's name, that he will be firm and stern with Begin”, and later on Weinberger expressed his opposition to the Israeli action in Lebanon and compared it to the Argentine aggression in the Falklands. He added that many in the US believed that “Israel [had] gone too far”. Subsequently, Habib was informed that the PLO had hardened its position on its withdrawal from Lebanon. Haig concluded: “Conflicting signals damage the Habib mission at critical moments in US efforts to halt the fighting”. After this meeting, Reagan told to William Clark and Michael Deaver that Haig had shown him “in his hands” a letter of resignation. Haig later denied this, but from the above document⁴⁴⁵ it is possible to infer that he had at least requested that Clark's influence in foreign policy-making be reduced or he was going to leave. As Lou Cannon noted, “Haig had resigned, although he did not seem to know it”.

On June 25, Haig wrote to Reagan to resign from his office of Secretary of State.

In recent months it has become clear to me that the foreign policy on which we embarked together was shifting from that careful course which we had laid out. Under these circumstances, I feel it necessary to request that you accept my resignation⁴⁴⁶

On the same day, Reagan told Clark to track down where George Shultz, then president of Bechtel corporation, was. Clark found him in London, holding a business meeting. Shultz was brought to the US embassy to talk on a secure phone with the president who asked him bluntly if he wanted to replace Alexander Haig as Secretary of State. He accepted⁴⁴⁷.

Reagan announced this change in his cabinet during a very short statement to the press in the early afternoon of June 25. He said that he had accepted Haig's resignation with “deep regret” and was replacing him with George Shultz giving no further explanation to the

⁴⁴⁵ 227 (1218). Paper. The mismanagement of a crisis. Undated, Unclassified. William Clark files, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁴⁴⁶ 226(1217). Haig's letter of resignation. June 25, 1982. Clark files, box 3. Ronald Reagan Library

⁴⁴⁷ Cannon, Lou, 170-171

journalists and leaving immediately for Camp David.

The following day the press called for some form of explanation of what had happened but then focused on the new Secretary of State. Shultz received high praise and was held in high esteem. He was seen as having “pontifical calm” and as being “a team player” as well as being well-known and respected in Europe. Some, however, feared that a “Weinberger/Shultz alliance could be tougher on Israel”⁴⁴⁸.

One of the tasks of the Reagan team in the following weeks, therefore, was to present a more balanced view of the new Secretary. In his paper on “Public strategy for Shultz's confirmation” the Deputy Press Secretary Bob Sims wrote that the foremost concern was Shultz's apparent Pro-Arab tilt. To this end “administration spokesmen should knock down the story that the change represents a shift in a pro-Arab direction (...) We are still supportive of the state of Israel”⁴⁴⁹.

Towards MNF 1

Some people in the administration⁴⁵⁰, along with Sharon himself⁴⁵¹, have argued that during Begin's visit to Washington the Israeli prime minister had actually received some encouragement from Alexander Haig to “finish the job” in Lebanon. Haig had welcomed the Israeli delegation saying “we have a problem with president Reagan”. According to what Nicholas Veliotis told John Boykin⁴⁵²:

Haig was fulminating that the president wasn't treating Begin right. He went on and on and said, “By God, I'm going to tell Begin to go into Beirut and finish the job”. And he did. He told Begin privately that once you start an operation like this, you have to finish it as fast as possible. When Begin heard that, he sent Sharon instructions “to prepare to go into Beirut itself”

Probably not by chance, less than a week later Sharon asked the Israeli cabinet the

⁴⁴⁸ 225 (1215). Haig Resignation- press themes. Undated, Unclassified. Clark files, box 3. Ronald Reagan Library

⁴⁴⁹ 224 (1214). Note by Bob Sims. Public strategy for Shultz's confirmation. Undated, Unclassified. Clark files, box 3. Ronald Reagan Library

⁴⁵⁰ Author's interview with Nicholas Veliotis, Washington DC, March 2007

⁴⁵¹ Transcript of Ariel Sharon interview for the BBC documentary “The Fifty Years War”. King's college Archives.

⁴⁵² Boykin, John, p. 87

permission to accelerate military operations before Shultz became Secretary of State. Sharon said that there was an agreement with the Shiites to penetrate the city from the southern neighbourhoods with the goal of occupying West Beirut. The cabinet, however, decided to wait for the result of Habib's negotiation⁴⁵³.

Habib actually feared the Israeli moves on West Beirut. On the same day, June 27, he called the State Department to dictate his recommendations⁴⁵⁴. Since he thought that the US credibility in the region depended on its ability to protect the civilian population, he went as far as saying that if the Israelis invaded the city the US had to threaten that

The president will call a halt, under US law, to all military shipments to Israel; we shall also be prepared to go immediately to the UN security council to seek a binding resolution calling on Israel to stop its military actions and withdraw from Lebanon

When Larry Eagleburger conveyed this message to the lame-duck Secretary, he said:

Tell Habib that I disagree with his analysis and his recommendation. There will be no presidential message to Begin. Israel must keep the pressure on

Haig's instructions to Habib outlined a different policy. As he wrote to the president on June 30⁴⁵⁵, first of all the PLO had to leave Lebanon. After that, a "readjustment" of IDF lines would take place and the LAF would take control of Beirut. The final agreement would include the end of all foreign presences in the country: "PLO, Syrian or Israeli". Haig ruled out any formal agreement since it could lead to serious tensions between the Lebanese factions.

On July 2, Habib met with his Lebanese intermediaries who had just seen Arafat. The PLO had taken a "decision in principle" to accept the US proposal for evacuation. The Lebanese government, on its part, now requested formally a Multinational Force (MNF) and not a UN peacekeeping force. Notwithstanding opposition from Weinberger and the JCS, on

⁴⁵³ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, pp. 205-206

⁴⁵⁴ For Habib's recommendation and Haig's response, see Boykin, John, pp. 99-100

⁴⁵⁵ 460 (2271). Memo from Haig to the President. Lebanon Crisis: Status Report as of Mid-day June 30. June 30, 1982. Declassified on June 5, 2000. Teicher files. Folder: Chron June 1982. Box 91667. Ronald Reagan Library

July 3 the State Department got word from the White House that the president had approved US participation in the MNF⁴⁵⁶.

Everything seemed to be falling into place. It was just an illusion, though, as the siege of Beirut and the frantic Habib negotiations would last almost another two months. One of the main problems was that no Arab country was willing to take the PLO fighters. As ambassador Lewis recollected:

American embassies in the region were making discreet inquiries of their host government whether they would be willing to accept these PLO fighters. There were no takers because these "immigrants" would prove to be nothing but trouble either domestically or internationally (...) Mubarak was crystal clear that although he had great sympathy for Arafat and the PLO, he was not about to get the PLO out of the mess they had made and was not about to jeopardize his peace treaty with Israel.⁴⁵⁷

Sharon made a provocative suggestion: The PLO could go back to Jordan, and Israel would force King Hussein to resign. "One speech by me – Sharon promised – will make King Hussein realize that the time has come to pack his bags"⁴⁵⁸.

Sharon and Director-General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry David Kimche were perplexed about the Multinational force because they thought that the PLO withdrawal had to come before the arrival of the MNF and not as a consequence of it⁴⁵⁹. Arafat on the other hand wrote a letter to Habib saying that the PLO was not going to leave unless it received a guarantee on the safety of the refugee camps⁴⁶⁰.

The first half of August was terrible both for the civilian population in Beirut and for US policy-makers. On the first day of the month, Israeli tanks invaded south Beirut and the international airport. In a press conference, president Reagan stated quite clearly that he was losing his patience⁴⁶¹.

⁴⁵⁶ Shultz, George, *Turmoil and Triumph. My Years As a Secretary of State*, New York, MacMillan, 1993 pp. 45-46

⁴⁵⁷ Jessup, Peter, Interview with Samuel Lewis, August 9, 1998, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁵⁸ Shlaim, Avi, *The Iron Wall*, p. 412

⁴⁵⁹ Letter from George Shultz to Menachem Begin. August 7, 1982. Declassified on March 5 1996. Downloaded from www.foia.state.gov on July 1, 2007

⁴⁶⁰ The full text of this letter can be found in Shultz, George, p. 47

⁴⁶¹ "Exchange With Reporters on the Situation in Lebanon August 1, 1982", The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

On August 2, Reagan and Shamir met. The president for the first time threatened military sanctions against Israel:

If you invade West Beirut (...) it will become increasingly difficult to defend the proposition that Israeli use of US arms is for defensive purposes⁴⁶²

Out of diplomatic language this meant that Reagan might have started considering the use of statutory provisions that could suspend the supply of American military equipment to Israel.

Not even this ultimate threat worked, however. On August 4, the IDF seemed to be invading West Beirut. As Reagan wrote in his diary⁴⁶³:

Awakened about 6:30 AM by Bill Clark. The Israelis had moved to new positions within W.Beirut and were shelling the city (...) [sent] a msg. [message] to Begin from me that a ceasefire was necessary and continued offense could bring a drastic change in our future relationship

Forty-Five minutes after Clark's phone call, an enlarged version of the National Security Council gathered in the White House. This is how ambassador Lewis, who was present, remembers it:

The mood was pretty grim all around. Bush and Weinberger led the charge in favour of cracking down hard on the Israelis; Jeane Kirkpatrick made an eloquent defense of the Israeli rationale for keeping up military pressure to persuade Arafat that he had no option but to abandon Beirut - the objective we all were seeking. Reagan seemed prone to accept Jeane's arguments; she obviously was a favourite of his.

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<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/80182a.htm> (accessed on June 19, 2007)

⁴⁶² Shultz, George, p. 54

⁴⁶³ Brinkley, Douglas (ed), p. 96

Meanwhile, Ariel Sharon was considering new big plans for Lebanon. Some officers in the IDF Northern Command were arguing in favour of a de facto partition of the country. According to them, Bashir Gemayel could never really become the master of a country that was so factionally divided. The creation of a security belt in southern Lebanon had to be the war's new goal, and it had to be implemented through two measures: Shoring up Saad Haddad (the Israeli puppet who already controlled parts of southern Lebanon) and reaching some form of agreement with the Shiite population, which was the overwhelming majority in that area. These officers said quite clearly that the Shiites would never obey Haddad's orders, but Israel could build its policy on the Amal Shiite secular movement. On August 5, two Middle East experts presented a memorandum to Ariel Sharon. They too shared the conclusion that there was no hope of establishing a stable central government in Beirut. The experts also suggested arming the Shiites and reaching a "defensive equilibrium" with Syrian presence in northern Lebanon and in the Bekaa valley⁴⁶⁴.

The Shiites had welcomed the Israeli with flowers. As Senior Director for Near East Affairs in the NSC Geoffrey Kemp recalled, "for a few weeks the Lebanese Shiites felt liberated by the Y'hud [Jews] as they said."⁴⁶⁵ Later in the conflict, one of the members of Amal leadership contacted a top US diplomat and said that if the Israelis had withdrawn they wouldn't have had problems with their northern border. But if Israel did not leave soon, the Shiites were going to fight them⁴⁶⁶.

Sharon, however, didn't seem to take into account these advices. He still counted on Bashir Gemayel and ignored the Shiites. So did the Americans, who still ignored the political importance of this ethnic group. In the meantime Habib completed his evacuation plan on August 10 and submitted it to Arafat who approved it. Tunisia said it was willing to take the PLO fighters if the US wanted so. The last "incident" before the deployment of the MNF 1 was IDF heavy bombing of Beirut on August 12. At least 300 people were killed. Reagan was outraged and called Begin:

⁴⁶⁴ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, pp. 237-239

⁴⁶⁵ Author's interview with Geoffrey Kemp, Washington DC, March 28 2007

⁴⁶⁶ Author's interview with anonymous US diplomat

I told him it had to stop or our entire future relationship was endangered. I used the word holocaust deliberately & said the symbol of this war was becoming a picture of a 7 month old baby with its arms blown off (...) Twenty mins. [minutes] later he called to tell me he'd ordered an end to the barrage and pled for our continued friendship⁴⁶⁷

On August 12 it was enough even for the too-long-silent Israeli cabinet. Sharon was stripped of his right to order the use of IDF's military power⁴⁶⁸.

On August 18 finally Reagan could announce to the press that the US was going to be part of the MNF and that the evacuation of the PLO would start very soon. He also added a very important caveat: If the Marines were hit, they were going to be pulled out⁴⁶⁹.

With the evacuation of the PLO, one of Sharon's goals had been implemented. He thought therefore that he could proceed to the next one: Installing Bashir Gemayel in the presidential palace at Ba'abda, nearby Beirut. On August 23 the young Maronite was elected president by 57 out of the 62 deputies who attended the session of the Lebanese parliament. This, as Israeli historians Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari have documented⁴⁷⁰, would have been practically impossible without the active help of the IDF troops, which controlled a large proportion of the areas from where most of pro-Gemayel deputies came from.

The United States cooperated in this effort, notwithstanding the above-mentioned State Department briefing paper that warned against supporting Bashir Gemayel. In a document prepared by State Department chief of staff Charles Hill in the wake of the US withdrawal in early 1984⁴⁷¹, it was clearly stated that the US had "played a crucial role in ensuring Bashir Gemayel's election in 1982" by, for example, protecting "certain deputies en route to parliament".

Gemayel was not the only possible choice in Lebanon. The United States had had contacts with other Christians (according to the 1943 National Covenant, the president had to be a

⁴⁶⁷ Brinkley, Douglas (ed), p. 98

⁴⁶⁸ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud Ya'ari, 221

⁴⁶⁹ "Remarks to Reporters Announcing the Deployment of United States Forces in Beirut, Lebanon August 20, 1982", The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/82082b.htm> (accessed on June 19, 2007)

⁴⁷⁰ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud, Ya'ari, pp. 230-232

⁴⁷¹ 246. (1299) Memo from Charles Hill to Robert McFarlane. Analysis of US options for Lebanon contingencies. Declassified on 3/27/2002. Donald Fortier Files. Ronald Reagan Library

Christian). On October 21, 1981 NSC official Norman Bailey had had dinner with Roger Eddè, another Christian candidate to the presidency of Lebanon and then reported to Kemp, Tanter and Feith that Mr. Eddè had “made a number of interesting points”⁴⁷².

On July 20 1982, former Lebanese ambassador to the US Edouard Ghorra wrote a letter to vicepresident Bush⁴⁷³ putting forward an alternative candidate for the presidency: George Jabre, a man that according to Ghorra was well-known to William Casey and had the support of the Vatican, France and “European circles”. The former ambassador concluded his letter saying that he hoped that “the United States will assist in the selection of the Candidate [sic] who will make Lebanon secure for Democracy”. Jabre had also written personally to CIA director Will Casey stressing his reliance “on the special and privileged assistance of the US”⁴⁷⁴. Nothing, however, had worked in favour of this candidate. The US and Israel had already picked Gemayel as their man for Lebanon.

The First Multinational Force in Beirut

On August 25, 800 marines arrived in Beirut equipped “with weapons consistent with their non-combat mission, including usual infantry weapons”. They were going to cooperate with 800 French soldiers and 400 Italians. In his letter to the Senate's president pro tempore Strom Thurmond, the president specified that the US personnel was going to be withdrawn within 30 days of its deployment. Finally, he stated clearly that “our agreement with the GOL expressly rules out any combat responsibilities for the US forces”⁴⁷⁵.

The Marines had been chosen because they were already in the Mediterranean and because they were technically the easiest corps to withdraw. The mood in the military was that they had to get out of Lebanon as soon as they could. US Army General Willie Smith said: “We wanted to make sure we got in and we got out as soon as we could”⁴⁷⁶.

⁴⁷² 316 (1690). Memo by Norman Bailey to Kemp, Tanter and Feith. Meeting with Roger Eddè. October 26, 1981. Unclassified. Kemp files. Folder: Lebanon: August-December 1981 (1 of 3). Ronald Reagan Library.

⁴⁷³ 56. (april 3 104). Letter from Eduard Ghorra, July 20 1982. Donald Gregg files, Bush Presidential Library

⁴⁷⁴ 57. (april 3 106) Letter to William Casey from George Jabre, June 7 1982. Donald Gregg files, Bush Presidential Library

⁴⁷⁵ 202 (1091). Letter from Reagan to the Senate president pro-tempore Strom Thurmond on the deployment of Marines to Beirut under MNF 1. August 24, 1982. NSC System files, 90676. Ronald Reagan Library.

⁴⁷⁶ Martin, David and John Walcott, p. 94

Even though the Marines were due to stay only 30 days, Secretary of Defense Weinberger waited only 16 days and then withdrew them unilaterally. A top US official interviewed by David Wills⁴⁷⁷ said: “whether he told [about the withdrawal] to the President or not I don't know, but I don't know of anybody else who knew about it”.

The MNF 1 had one main task: To assist in the evacuation of the PLO from Beirut. It was accomplished by August 30 when Arafat left the city. It had not been an easy job. According to Shultz⁴⁷⁸, the Soviets embassy in Washington had made a strong demarche claiming that Israel intended to massacre the Palestinians as they boarded the boats. As ambassador Lewis recalls,

There was concern that the Israelis might sink some of the transport vessels once the PLO troops were on board and the ships were on their way to Cyprus.⁴⁷⁹

In the end, the car ferry loaded with PLO fighters had to be escorted out of Beirut harbour by the US navy. It was just the first of the absurd events that would take place in those months in Lebanon: The US forces were protecting against one of their allies the fighters of an organization that their government pretended not to recognize.

Tense as they might have been in that summer, US-Israeli relations were still good enough to implement in the course of a week two of Sharon's main goals: Eliminating the PLO infrastructure in Lebanon and installing a pro-western, pro-Israeli man at the presidency.

The Rise and the (Sudden) Fall of the Reagan Plan

The Lebanese crisis had shown how important was the resolution of the Palestinian problem in order to stabilize the region. Now that the PLO had been defeated there was, according to the Reagan administration, a fresh opportunity to bring about an agreement that would solve the problem and marginalize the extremists.

Arafat himself had shown to be more ready to negotiate in the months before the invasion of Lebanon. On March 30, the Republican senator from California, John G. Schmitz, had

⁴⁷⁷ Wills, David C., *The First War on Terrorism*, Lanham (Maryland), Rowman & Littlefield, 2003 p. 52

⁴⁷⁸ Shultz, George, pp. 76-77

⁴⁷⁹ Jessup, Peter, Interview with Samuel Lewis, August 9, 1998, *Frontline Diplomacy*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

met the Palestinian leader in Beirut. The Chairman of the PLO, according to him, was ready to recognize Israel in exchange for a Palestinian homeland and American recognition⁴⁸⁰. The problem was that the US was not ready to recognize an independent Palestine.

In his memoirs, Secretary Shultz wrote that some days after he entered office he had been informed of CIA Robert Ames' contacts with the PLO. The Middle East specialist said that the Palestinians were ready to meet the American conditions for withdrawal from Beirut if the US could make some gesture supporting an independent Palestinian state. Shultz commented that this was not a gesture but a "gigantic step" and he was unwilling to make it⁴⁸¹.

The Secretary had started to convene what he called "Saturday seminars" with Henry Kissinger and other key people from the Department of State, the CIA and the NSC staff. During the first meeting on July 17, there was a consensus that Habib could meet Arafat to discuss the arrangements for the PLO departure from Beirut if that organization publicly accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242. However, Shultz killed the idea because he thought that Lebanon and the peace-process had to be kept separated⁴⁸².

Shultz therefore gathered a small group of people which included Robert McFarlane, Larry Eagleburger, Robert Ames, Paul Wolfowitz, Charles Hill and Nicholas Veliotis. On August 23, Veliotis had met with king Hussein for two and a half hours to discuss the US proposal for the peace process. The plan, according to ambassador Viets⁴⁸³,

Involved the US calling a conference of the confrontation states with Israel based on the famous UN Resolutions 242 and 338 requiring Israel to withdraw from the bulk of the occupied territories. It involved a series of telescoped time steps leading to Israeli withdrawal and to elections, etc. The final status of the territory that the Israelis withdrew from was to be decided in negotiations to be concluded within 5 years. In the interim the Palestinians were to establish and implement a self-governing authority."

⁴⁸⁰ Macdonald, Katharine, "Schmitz, Plagued by Frogs, Recites Arafat Peace Plan", The Washington Post April 9, 1982

⁴⁸¹ Shultz, George, p. 48

⁴⁸² Shultz, George, p. 50

⁴⁸³ Kennedy, Charles Stuart, April 6 1990, Interview with Richard Viets, August 9, 1998, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Hussein had been “very interested” and said that the American diplomats could refer to other Arabs that he thought the initiative was “very serious” and that he had it “under active consideration”. Hussein wanted to keep the Palestinians out front: he was going to work on Arafat to make him accept the conditions. Veliotis, on his part, clarified that the US was going to negotiate with the PLO only as “one important interested party, not repeat not as sole representative of Palestinian People”. Veliotis then answered Hussein's question about Jerusalem, reconfirming that the eastern part of the city was, for the US, “occupied territory”. The Jordanian king also asked for a real settlement freeze.

However, when discussing about the time when the initiative could be disclosed, the American diplomats said that they wanted to do that in a month while Hussein said that he had to have “active cooperation” from PLO, Saudis and Egyptians before that⁴⁸⁴.

According to Howard Teicher⁴⁸⁵, Veliotis and US ambassador to Jordan, Richard Viets, were led to understand that within 48 hours of Reagan's public enunciation of his plan, the King would issue a favourable declaration.

Ambassador Lewis from Israel soon forecast that Israel was going to say a clear “no”. First of all, the Israelis had not been consulted before the public disclosure. There was a reason for this: The administration feared that they would leak the plan to the press and kill it⁴⁸⁶. Second, the Reagan plan was quite the opposite from Begin's dreams: “This would mean – according to Viets - ultimately getting out of most of his beloved Judea and Samaria, and he wanted nothing to do with it.”⁴⁸⁷

On August 31, ambassador Samuel Lewis received a “top secret, eyes only” message from Washington. It contained the Reagan initiative. He had to deliver it to Begin and listen to his reaction. The Israeli Prime Minister listened to Lewis' demarche and then said: “Sam, could you not have let us enjoy our victory just for a day or two?”.⁴⁸⁸ The Reagan plan, in

⁴⁸⁴ (2344). Cable fm Veliotis to Secretary. Meeting with King Hussein August 23. August 27 1982. Declassified in 2002. Teicher files.

⁴⁸⁵ Teicher, Howard, p.212

⁴⁸⁶ Spiegel, Steven, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict. Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1985 p. 419

⁴⁸⁷ Kennedy, Charles Stuart, April 6 1990, Interview with Richard Viets, August 9, 1998, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁸⁸ Jessup, Peter, Interview with Samuel Lewis, August 9, 1998, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Begin's eyes threatened to wipe out all the political benefits of the invasion of Lebanon: Instead of postponing the discussion on the West Bank (and securing in the long term an Israeli annexation) it would have led to the birth of a Palestinian authority in those territories.

After his meeting with the American ambassador, the Israeli Prime Minister met with Lebanese president Bashir Gemayel in Nahariya. According to Samuel Lewis⁴⁸⁹, Begin told the young Maronite leader that "Israel had now won him the Presidency and had ridden his country of the PLO fighters; it was therefore time to sign a peace treaty". But by now Gemayel had understood that he had to reconcile with the Muslims that had assisted him in the expulsion of the PLO and so he needed time before approving such a treaty. Begin felt betrayed: the third objective of the invasion (ie. An Israeli-Lebanese agreement) was farther than he thought.

September 1 marked the end of the evacuation of the PLO from Beirut. On that evening, Reagan interrupted his two weeks of riding at his ranch in Santa Barbara to deliver his speech on the Middle East peace process⁴⁹⁰. He called for a "fresh start" and restated US commitment to Camp David. The most important paragraph of the speech said:

The United States will not support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, and we will not support annexation or permanent control by Israel.

There is, however, another way to peace (...) It is the firm view of the United States that self-government by the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza in association with Jordan offers the best chance for a durable, just, and lasting peace.

The Soviets accused Washington of pursuing a policy of "diktat", trying to enhance their influence in the Middle East through the Reagan plan. A DIA report on the Soviet reaction to Reagan's speech⁴⁹¹ gave some cause of hope to the White House:

⁴⁸⁹ Jessup, Peter, Interview with Samuel Lewis, August 9, 1998, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁹⁰ "Address to the Nation on United States Policy for Peace in the Middle East September 1, 1982" The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. (<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/90182d.htm>) downloaded on July 2, 2007

⁴⁹¹ 358 (1852). Cable from DIA Washington. USSR-Middle East: report from Moscow. September 3 1982. Declassified on November 13, 2000. Kemp files. Folder: Middle East, reactions to the Reagan Plan. Ronald Reagan Library.

While hoping to repair its tarnished image in the aftermath of the invasion, Moscow's credibility in the region would indeed be suspect should it be caught on the sidelines. Especially if the Reagan initiatives served as a catalyst for an eventual settlement.

King Hussein did not come out with his declaration of support within 48 hours. Instead, he decided to wait for the Arab summit that was to be held a few days later in Fez. In Morocco, the Arab leaders disappointed the American policy-makers and presented a plan of their own calling for an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. There was no explicit guarantee on the existence of Israel⁴⁹².

On September 4 the Israeli cabinet "unanimously rejected" the Reagan plan charging that it deviated from the Camp David accords. While Labor leaders signalled their favour for the plan, "government sources" hinted at a collusion between them and the Reagan administration. Labor leaders had told American diplomats that a strong US position on the peace process was needed in order to "save Israel from itself". They saw the US as clearly opposing Begin's and Sharon's "professed goal of annexing the West Bank and Gaza"⁴⁹³.

Meeting with Prime Minister Thatcher on September 8, Weinberger talked about his visit to Israel. Prime Minister Begin had told him that he was staunchly opposed to the Reagan Plan but was not against negotiating with Jordan and also that "he could accept an accompanying Palestinian presence at those negotiations". The pre-condition, however, was that Jerusalem had to remain an undivided city, of course in Israeli hands⁴⁹⁴.

Apparently the pro-Israeli lobby in the US did not share Begin's hard line. Aipac's president Thomas Dine said that he saw "a lot of value" in the Reagan plan⁴⁹⁵. Privately, however, they expressed all their concern. In a memorandum for the White House⁴⁹⁶,

⁴⁹² Spiegel, Steven L., 420

⁴⁹³ 348 (1830). Cable from US embassy in Tel Aviv. The great debate begins. September 4, 1982. Unclassified. Kemp files. Folder: Middle East_Reaction to the President's Peace Initiative. Box 90496. Ronald Reagan Library.

⁴⁹⁴ 478 (2364). Memcon Weinberger and Thatcher. September 8, 1982. Declassified on July 4, 2000. Country files. Folder: UK 8/1/82-10/31/83. Ronald Reagan Library.

⁴⁹⁵ (1860). Gwertzman, Bernard, "Leading Pro-Israeli Lobbyist Sees 'A lot of Value' in Reagan's Plan", New York Times, Sep 6 1982

⁴⁹⁶ 349(1833). Memorandum from Aipac re: The Reagan Speech. September 2, 1982. Unclassified. Kemp files.

AIPAC outlined three issues on which it disagreed with the president. First of all the speech didn't make any reference to the need to have a Lebanese-Israeli peace treaty. Also, if Hussein was not willing to sit down with Israel, the plan would cause only a useless confrontation with the Begin government. Finally, Reagan did not understand Israel's importance in fighting the Soviets in the Middle East.

On September 10, the American contingent started to withdraw from Beirut. Meanwhile, almost nothing was left of the Reagan plan. The Israelis had rejected it and the Arabs had presented an alternative plan in Fez, which was unpalatable both for the US and for Israel.

The Butchery

In the same weeks, another gloomier scenario was unfolding. On July 11, a meeting had been held at the Israeli Defense Ministry in Tel Aviv⁴⁹⁷. Sharon wanted to divide Beirut in two parts: the northern one, which was not going to be touched, and the southern one, which he considered as the seat of "terrorist camps", his definition of refugee camps. He was clear on what the IDF's goals had to be:

The Southern part [of Beirut] must be cleaned out, utterly destroyed (...) These camps must be in our hands so that the terrorists can't build a new infrastructure there (...) It's in our interest to have the Palestinians move on elsewhere. The Lebanese will take care of that, but we have to lay the groundwork

Not everyone in the meeting was convinced of Sharon's plan: "You can destroy – said Brig. Gen. Giora Forman – but the question is whether we have to, and I'm not at all convinced that we do".

In his memoirs, Secretary of State George Shultz wrote that in August the Israelis were bombing the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, defining this operation as a "softening up". But, as Shultz wrote:

We were suspicious that "softening up" shelling was a prelude to an IDF assault into the refugee camps.

Folder: Middle East_Reaction to the President's Peace Initiative. Box 90496. Ronald Reagan Library.

⁴⁹⁷ For the account of this meeting, see Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud, Ya'ari, pp. 211

Sharon had mentioned to Habib on August 8 the “need to clean out” the camps. Habib protested violently and was deeply alarmed

On the night of September 12, Sharon and the new Lebanese president Bashir Gemayel met to discuss the purge of West Beirut⁴⁹⁸. The Israeli Defense minister wanted to make sure that the Phalangists would get into the camps to clean them out. Bashir talked about destroying all trace of the camps and build “an enormous zoo” in their place. “By October 15 – he promised to Sharon – there won’t be a single terrorist in Beirut”.

He did not live enough to see that day. On September 14 a bomb blew up in his headquarters in East Beirut and killed him. A 26-years old Greek-Orthodox Lebanese named Habib Tanious Sartouni was held responsible for the murder, though to this day no one knows for sure on whose behalf he worked⁴⁹⁹.

The following day at 5 AM the IDF entered West Beirut. The Shatila refugee camp located in the Sabra neighbourhood was surrounded and cut off completely from the rest of the city. Searchlights from buildings nearby were mounted to illuminate the area. A group of Maronite fighters were allowed to enter the camp. Their head was Eli Hobeika, Bashir’s personal bodyguard. He was defined by US ambassador Robert Dillon as a “pathological killer”⁵⁰⁰. He had some expertise on massacres in Palestinian refugee camps: In 1976 he had masterminded the killing of 3,000 people at Tel Za’atar. In Shatila, the death toll ranged from 700 to 3,500⁵⁰¹.

The US administration had tried to avoid this massacre. On September 16, when the butchery was still going on, the Department of State had issued a warning to the Israeli government that the IDF move into “strategic positions throughout West Beirut” was “contrary to assurances given to [the US government] by the Israelis both in Washington and in Israel” and therefore asked for its withdrawal⁵⁰².

⁴⁹⁸ On this meeting see Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud, Ya'ari p. 246

⁴⁹⁹ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud, Ya'ari p.247 and Boykin, John p. 267

⁵⁰⁰ Stuart Kennedy, Charles, Interview with Robert S. Dillon, May 17, 1990, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfdip:6::/temp/~ammem_vFvM:: accessed on March 19, 2007)

⁵⁰¹ Boykin, John, p.270

⁵⁰² 301 (1633). Cable from Secretary of state. Spokesman statement on Lebanon. September 16 1982. Declassified on November 21, 2001. Kemp files. Folder: Israel/Lebanon Phase II. Ronald Reagan Library.

The following day the US supported a UN resolution which condemned Israeli actions that had led to the massacre. On September 18, the US administration was acknowledged of the full scale of the massacre by Ryan Crocker, the political officer of the embassy in Beirut. The embassy in Tel Aviv sent a telegram (no. 14040) to Secretary Shultz which deeply shocked him. According to Shultz's memoirs, Sharon had told US envoy Morris Draper that

Israeli forces would remain in the areas where "the terrorists" were located until the Lebanese Armed Forces cleaned them out. "Let the LAF go into the camps"⁵⁰³ – Sharon said – They can kill the terrorists. But if they don't, we will". I was stunned by this cable (...) "The brutal fact is, we are partially responsible" I told Eagleburger (...) The president was deeply shaken and asked whether we had been too cautious with the marines⁵⁰⁴

According to the Secretary of State, the Italian Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo called him on September 19 and proposed to send a new MNF to Beirut. Reagan was "more than ready" to send the marines back but was worried "by what he called the Vietnam problem, the reluctance of the United States to use its troops again in tough spots". The following day, the president announced the deployment of a new multinational force to Lebanon⁵⁰⁵. According to the background for Reagan's speech prepared by the Department of State⁵⁰⁶, the function of the second MNF was going to be somewhat similar to the one of the first MNF: "It's a function to provide a presence – the document read - that will help the armed forces of the government of Lebanon to take charge of their central city". Also, the Department of State suggested Reagan had to emphasize publicly that it was the Italians who had proposed the second MNF several days before.

A few years later, speaking before the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, the NSC Middle East specialist Geoffrey Kemp defined this decision as "an emotional response to a tragic event. A decision influenced by the feeling that the United States had assumed responsibility for the safety of the Palestinians and that our friends, the Israelis,

⁵⁰³ Actually, as Shultz writes further on p. 105, it was not the official Lebanese Army (LAF) who carried out the massacre but the Maronite militia called Lebanese Forces (LF)

⁵⁰⁴ Shultz, George, p. 104-105

⁵⁰⁵ Shultz, George, p. 106

⁵⁰⁶ 302(1635). DOS background briefing on President speech re Lebanon. sep 20, 1982.

had allowed the worst to happen”⁵⁰⁷.

To understand more deeply what he meant we have to take a look at the debate that took place in the White House prior to that decision.

The (missed) Golden Opportunity

The debate around the deployment of a second Multinational Force was well recollected in a paper presented to the Tower Board by Harvard's Robert Murray⁵⁰⁸. There were three different positions inside the administration. The NSC staff proposed a wide deployment of troops. According to an NSC staff member, they proposed a much larger MNF with a greater share for US troops which would be deployed to the south showing to Israelis and Syrians alike “that we meant business”. The Pentagon estimated the number of troops needed for this task at 63,000. Their mission would be to disarm the militias, secure ports and borders and take over the ground held by Syria and Israel⁵⁰⁹.

George Shultz thought that Congress was not going to support this plan. The Department of State proposed its own plan which was composed of three intertwined elements: First of all the insertion of a small contingent of Marines, part of a larger Multinational Force, in order to stabilize the country and prepare the ground for the second element, namely the diplomatic negotiations under US auspices aimed at Israeli and Syrian withdrawals which would enable the Gemayel government (Amin, Bashir's brother, was to be voted as president a few days later) to re-establish its rule over Lebanon. The third element was a program of US military assistance to rebuild the Lebanese Army. This plan, according to Robert Murray, worked on 2 assumptions, the first being Syrian and Israeli desire to quickly withdraw from the country. According to the same NSC staff member, Reagan thought that “if you get the Israeli's out, everything else would follow”. As recollected by Morris Draper, assistant to US envoy Philip Habib, the US thought that the Israeli withdrawal was a matter of days and that it would bring about a Syrian withdrawal too. In his diary, on September 19, Reagan wrote:

⁵⁰⁷ Fisk, Robert, p. 444

⁵⁰⁸ 221 (1164). Paper presented by Robert Murray (Harvard University). Lebanon intervention 1982-1983. Undated, unclassified. Tower Board files. Folder: Case studies summaries wise-men lessons learned Scowcroft. Ronald Reagan Library.

⁵⁰⁹ On the details of this plan, see Wills, David, p. 52

We are asking the Israelis to leave Beirut. We are asking Arabs to intervene and persuade Syrians to leave Lebanon at which time we'll ask Israelis to do likewise. In the meantime, Lebanon will establish a govt. & the capability of defending itself. No more half way gestures, clear the whole situation while the MNF is on hand to assure order. George S. and Jeanne K were enthusiastic about the idea and apparently there was no disagreement. The wheels are now in motion⁵¹⁰

The second assumption, as we could see from this diary entry, was that Gemayel could succeed in working out a national deal to stabilize the country.

However, Murray concluded, both of "these assumptions were proven wrong by June 1983. Nevertheless, we continued to hold in deteriorating circumstances until driven out by the terrorist bombing in October". No consideration was made of possible consequences of this failure, no profound scrutiny took place over the assumed Israeli and Syrian willingness to withdraw, no re-examination of policy was called when diplomacy appeared to be failing. According to Murray the US "stayed in Lebanon well after the prospects for success had vanished".

On September 21, Amin Gemayel was elected president of Lebanon with the support of the Muslim MPs who sensed that behind him were the United States and not Israel⁵¹¹. According to the US ambassador Robert Dillon, Amin reversed his brother's alliances tilting towards the Sunni leadership instead of the Shiites. But, as Dillon pointed out,

[The Sunnis] had not developed their own militia and had in fact relied on the Palestinians. (...) The Shiites, on the other hand had developed their own militia (...) So Amin became chummy with the Sunnis, who couldn't bring much to the table.⁵¹²

Amin decided to ignore not only the Shiites (which at that time were represented also by the secular Amal group) but also the Druzes. In the Sunni camp he dealt with Saab Salam, who had been in Lebanese politics for a long time but, after the departure of the PLO, had

⁵¹⁰ Brinkley (ed), cit. p. 101

⁵¹¹ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud, Ya'ari p. 288

⁵¹² Stuart Kennedy, Charles, Interview with Robert S. Dillon, May 17, 1990, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfdip:6:/temp/~ammem_vFvM:: accessed on March 19, 2007)

no army or militia on the ground.

The lack of agreement between the Lebanese factions was going to become a problem for the 1,800 Marines that were sailing towards Lebanon. The US Secretary of Defense had declared that they were not going to become a police force and that they would be withdrawn if they encountered combat. President Reagan, questioned on the duration of the mission, talked vaguely only about a “limited period” without specifying further⁵¹³.

George Shultz was even more vague when he spoke on the NBC TV network:

It's just that when you sit here right now, and you say that they should be there to help the government of Lebanon create stability, you don't know how long it is going to take. It could come very quickly – it could take a matter of more days⁵¹⁴

Seen from Lebanon, the second Multinational Force was heavily understaffed. Ambassador Dillon later commented:

The prestige of the United States and the prestige of the Marines is such that you can get away with a light presence for a short period of time, but after a while, that fades. The potential enemies are not stupid; they can count. After a while, they notice how few Marines there are and how lightly armed they are. They didn't have artillery which some of the Lebanese militia had⁵¹⁵

On September 24, 400,000 people demonstrated against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in Tel Aviv. The domestic support for “Peace for Galilee” was collapsing. Begin’s cabinet wanted to salvage the mission by signing a peace treaty with Lebanon. According to George Shultz, when Habib went to see Begin on September 30, he was told by Sharon that such an agreement had been already reached with Gemayel’s government. The new Lebanese president confirmed this pact which, according to Shultz, contained “a series of

⁵¹³ Gwertzman, Bernard, “U.S. Irked as Israel Seems to Balk At Pullout of Troops From Beirut”, The New York Times, September 22, 1982

⁵¹⁴ Gwertzman, Bernard, “U.S. Irked as Israel Seems to Balk At Pullout of Troops From Beirut”, New York Times, September 22 1982

⁵¹⁵ Stuart Kennedy, Charles, Interview with Robert S. Dillon, May 17, 1990, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfdip:6:/temp/~ammem_vFvM:: accessed on March 19, 2007)

far-reaching demands that could not possibly stand the light of the day”⁵¹⁶.

On October 11, the Israeli cabinet approved a plan which allowed for 3 Israeli surveillance stations in southern Lebanon and an Israeli staged withdrawal which would in turn allow for a Syrian redeployment⁵¹⁷. According to ambassador Dillon⁵¹⁸, coming back from one of his trips to Damascus, Habib had told him that Asad was willing to withdraw “but that he would not permit the Israelis to gain any political advantage from their Lebanese invasion. Both Phil and I understood that to mean that the Syrians would withdraw only if the Israelis left Lebanon entirely.” But as negotiations went on, it became clearer and clearer that the Israelis wanted to keep a “security belt” inside Lebanon.

Sharon was clearly conscious that Israel could slow down at its like the pace of negotiations. In a meeting with Philip Habib, he had said clearly that Israel was in no hurry to withdraw. In November 1982, the issue that he used to achieve his purpose was the seat of Lebanese-Israeli negotiations: the Defense Minister asked the Lebanese to hold them in Jerusalem which would of course stir up a reaction by the other Arab countries which did not recognize the Holy City as the capital of Israel. In a memorandum for the President, Secretary Shultz commented: “the outlook is for continued stalemate”⁵¹⁹.

In those same weeks, the US government started working on the improvement of the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces, Lebanon's “official” army. The goal was to bring 4 brigades of the LAF to a 70% readiness level by February 1983. This project was worth 85 millions \$ of which 35 millions were American taxpayers' money. On November 2 an American delegation led by Bing West met with president Gemayel. According to a memo by Robert Lilac⁵²⁰, the Lebanese president was happy for the shipment of military materiel but was very much distressed by the Israeli behaviour that made the LAF deployment in the Shuf plateau very difficult. According to Lilac, the “prevailing theme”

⁵¹⁶ Shultz, George, p. 112

⁵¹⁷ Schiff, Ze'ev and Ehud, Ya'ari p. 289

⁵¹⁸ Stuart Kennedy, Charles, Interview with Robert S. Dillon, May 17, 1990, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfdip:6::/temp/~ammem_vFvM:: accessed on March 19, 2007)

⁵¹⁹ Memorandum for the President from George Shultz. Stalemate over Lebanon. November 29, 1982. Declassified on 6/26/1996. Downloaded from www.foia.state.gov on July 1, 2007

⁵²⁰ Memorandum from Robert Lilac to William Clark. “Security assistance for Lebanon”. November 3, 1982. Declassified: April 19, 2001. NSDD files. NSDD 64 (1) [Next Steps for Lebanon] box 91286. Reagan Library

of the meeting was US “political support”. As Gemayel said: “If the US can provide us the political backing then the military equipment issue is easy”.

According to Colonel Lilac's report, the situation in Beirut was “quiet” even though some fighting was taking place in some “mixed villages”. However, the Lebanese president and his staff were very concerned about the “spreading tension” in the Shuf area.

During this same meeting, the LAF commander Victor Khoury said that the formation of a 5th brigade could be expected by June 1983, while the 6th and the 7th were going to be ready by September and December respectively. On the other hand, the French were also providing military aid: According to what president Gemayel told during the November 2 meeting with American officials, the French had offered 150 million \$ that were going to be used to repair the LAF Mirage aircraft in the Bekaa valley or to buy helicopters. Gemayel stressed that the Lebanese were going to have “military relations” only with the US.

At the end of the meeting Gemayel reiterated his favourite topic:

Gemayel said Lebanon's military problems are basically political problems. If the US can help solve those political problems (i.e., secure the withdrawal of all foreign forces), he would not need much military assistance⁵²¹

On December 20 the US public opinion and ruling elites showed infinite patience with the Israeli waiting game. Congress approved an increase by \$ 250 millions in the military aid provided to Israel, notwithstanding the administration's opposition to the measure: on December 9, Shultz had written a formal letter of opposition saying that it “appeared to endorse and reward Israel's policies”⁵²². Now the total amount of military aid was \$ 1,7 billions⁵²³.

The Fading Opportunity

⁵²¹ Memorandum of Conversation at presidential palace, Beirut. November 2, 1982. Declassified on April 19, 2001. NSDD files. Folder: NSDD 64 (1) [Next Steps for Lebanon] box 91286. Ronald Reagan Library

⁵²² Shultz, George, p. 106

⁵²³ Martin, David and John Walcott, p. 102

In early January 1983, the Assistant Secretary for the Middle East Nicholas Veliotis wrote a memorandum to George Shultz on the status of the Lebanon negotiations⁵²⁴. The situation looked very grim as the Lebanese and the Israelis did not even agree on the agenda.

Our primary policy objective of bringing about the prompt withdrawal of all external forces from Lebanon (...) remains far from being reached. We once again are in danger of appearing to be unable to shape the course of events in the Middle East in order to implement our declared policies⁵²⁵

A few days after Veliotis' memorandum, the Soviets completed the deployment of SAM-5 missiles in Syria. Now Asad had less incentives to withdraw and to negotiate. According to then CIA top official Robert Gates, the director of the Agency William Casey wrote to Bush, Weinberger and Shultz to point out that the goal of the Soviets was to get a recognition of their role in the Middle East⁵²⁶.

In the wake of the Shatila massacre, an independent commission had been nominated in Israel to investigate possible responsibilities by the political and military leaders. The Kahan commission (named after its chairman) recommended the removal of top officials in the IDF and of Ariel Sharon. His substitute was going to be Moshe Arens, a name much more palatable for the Americans.

According to NSC Middle East expert Geoffrey Kemp, this move changed George Shultz's attitude towards Israel. Kemp goes as far to say that "he essentially became the champion of Israel by the end of 1983"⁵²⁷.

As always, it was difficult to have at the same time good relations with the Israelis and with the Arab allies. In a meeting with Habib in London on March 19, 1983 King Hussein of Jordan emphasized the importance of solving the Lebanese crisis in order to recover US credibility in the Middle East. Peace was closer than the Americans thought:

⁵²⁴ Memorandum from Nicholas Veliotis to the Secretary. Lebanon: how to force the pace. January 5, 1983. Declassified on 6/26/1996. Downloaded from www.foia.state.gov on July 1, 2007

⁵²⁵ Memorandum from Nicholas Veliotis to the Secretary. Lebanon: how to force the pace. January 5, 1983. Declassified on 6/26/1996. Downloaded from www.foia.state.gov on July 1, 2007

⁵²⁶ Gates, Robert, p. 274

⁵²⁷ Kemp, Geoffrey, Author's On-the-record interview, Washington DC, March 28 2007

Hussein reiterated that it was important for the US to move quickly to resolve the Lebanon issue, because the Arabs viewed it as a test of US commitment. He said this was particularly true of Syria which, he added, accepts the concept of simultaneous Syrian/Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.⁵²⁸

In recent negotiations in Washington, the Israeli had put forward their position involving a “residual” IDF presence in Lebanon and a “major role for Haddad”. Haddad was the Christian ally of the Israelis in the south. Both issues were considered unacceptable for the US and, of course, for the Lebanese government. The US presented its own security package which involved a strengthening of the LAF in which the Israeli could have confidence⁵²⁹.

Meanwhile, the Syrians were sending ambiguous messages. In mid-March, the Lebanese Foreign Minister Salem had met with his Syrian counterpart Khaddam who had been very straightforward in his commitment about withdrawal:

Khaddam was unambiguous and emphatic: Once Lebanon and Israel reach an agreement concerning Israeli withdrawal, Syria will decide 'within one-half hour' to withdraw. Syria will withdraw simultaneously with Israel, and not 'in light of Israeli withdrawal' as contemplated in the Fez communique⁵³⁰.

Later, however, the Syrian position was that any agreement negotiated by the Lebanese under Israeli occupation must have been “imposed” and would just legitimize the war.

The month of April 1983 inflicted two heavy blows to the Americans. The first was a diplomatic one. On April 10 Jordan King Hussein announced that he would not enter negotiations with the Israelis on behalf of the Palestinians because his relations with Arafat had soared. This put a final “the end” sign on the movie of the Reagan plan which had not been really alive in the past months after the Fez summit and Begin’s disapproval. On April 18 a more physical blow was inflicted to the American effort. A pickup truck

⁵²⁸ 471 (2310). Cable from US embassy in London. Habib Mission: Meeting with King Hussein, March 19. March 20 1983. Declassified on June 12, 2002. Country files. Folder: UK 8/1/82-10/31/83 1 of 5 box 20. Ronald Reagan Library

⁵²⁹ 471 (2310). Cable from US embassy in London. Habib Mission: Meeting with King Hussein, March 19. March 20 1983. Declassified on June 12, 2002. Country files. Folder: UK 8/1/82-10/31/83 1 of 5 box 20. Ronald Reagan Library

⁵³⁰ (2316). Cable from US embassy in London. Habib Mission: Meeting with Lebanese Foreign Minister Salem, March 19. March 19, 1983. Declassified on June 12 2002. Country files. Folder: UK 8/1/82-10/31/83 1 of 5 box 20. Ronald Reagan Library

loaded with 2,000 pounds of explosives was driven inside the US embassy in Beirut. The detonation provoked the collapse of the whole central part of the building. 63 people were killed, including 17 Americans. The major CIA expert on the Middle East, Robert Ames, was among them⁵³¹.

According to some authors⁵³², the US National Security Agency had intercepted an authorization for the attack given by the Iranian Foreign Ministry to the Iranian embassy in Damascus. However, no evidence of this interception has been found in the records declassified until now.

In his address to the nation on April 23, president Reagan said that there was no clear information on whose behalf this attack had been carried out. "They [the terrorists] mistakenly believe – he added - that if they're cruel enough and violent enough, they will weaken American resolve and deter us from our effort to help build a lasting and secure peace in the Middle East"⁵³³. A statement which would sound tragic a few months later. Concluding his speech, he announced that the following day Secretary Shultz was going to leave for the Middle East where he would use his personal weight for the success of the negotiations.

Two days later, Shultz met in Cairo with the US ambassadors in the region. According to his account⁵³⁴, the ambassadors talked about the rising Arab hostility towards Israel. The Israelis, on their part, were more and more relying on their Lebanese ally Major Haddad rather than on the Americans. Also, there was the fear of the birth of a "North Bank": a new occupied zone in southern Lebanon much to the like of the West Bank.

US ambassador to Jordan Richard Viets gave a different account of the meeting⁵³⁵. Shultz wanted to know the ambassadors' opinion about the Israeli-Lebanese treaty. The response was not warm:

⁵³¹ Wills, David, p. 55

⁵³² See Martin, David and John Walcott, p. 105 and Woodward, Bob, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987*, New York, Pocket Books, 1987 pp. 271-272

⁵³³ "Radio Address to the Nation on the Death of Federal Diplomatic and Military Personnel in Beirut, Lebanon April 23, 1983", *The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan*. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. (<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/42383a.htm> accessed on September 10, 2007)

⁵³⁴ Shultz, George p. 200

⁵³⁵ Kennedy, Charles Stuart, April 6 1990, Interview with Richard Viets, August 9, 1998, *Frontline Diplomacy*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

With the exception of Sam Lewis, who was still our ambassador in Israel, the rest of us to a greater or lesser extent told the Secretary--either very bluntly or very diplomatically--that he was embarking on a useless and dangerous venture (...)To negotiate treaties piecemeal with Israel would surely guarantee an imbalance in the final result--or so we thought.

The NSC staff was not enthusiastic about the possible agreement either. As the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Geoffrey Kemp recollected⁵³⁶,

Most of us, including myself, all argued that it was utterly foolish to try to get Amin Gemayel and the Israelis together if you hadn't made sure that the Syrians would agree. And of course, they rejected it. And everybody told that they were going to reject it. (...) [Shultz] was encouraged by the Israelis and their supporters because it was seen as a way of soaring up the legitimacy of their military operation.

Shultz was not deterred by these opinions. On April 27, he met with Begin who restated his confidence in the efforts of Major Haddad's militia and said that he wanted the Lebanese to disengage themselves from the other Arabs, to recognize Israel and accept its liaison officers. Shultz wrote⁵³⁷ that he was conscious that these conditions were unacceptable but thought that by focusing more on negotiations these problems could be overcome. Later, Shultz met with Amin Gemayel who said that he was afraid of signing an agreement which was opposed by Syria⁵³⁸.

Syria had actually made it known to the US that it was not going to support the agreement. The problem with Israel was that they wanted to "impose hegemony over Lebanon" as Foreign Minister Khaddam had told the US ambassador early in May. The agreement that was about to be signed was "detrimental to Syrian security and hence was not going to be accepted". he told to Secretary Shultz on May 7 in Damascus. He didn't rule out, however, a Syrian withdrawal: that could take place simultaneously with an Israeli and PLO pull out following a plebiscite on this issue in Lebanon. In June (ie. after the agreement had been signed) he explained again to the ambassador the reasons for the Syrian refusal of the agreement. It was imposed on Lebanon (and therefore legitimized the

⁵³⁶ Kemp, Geoffrey, Author's on-the-record interview, Washington DC, March 28 2007

⁵³⁷ Shultz, George, p. 203

⁵³⁸ Shultz, George, pp. 205-206

Israeli invasion); it altered the power balance in Lebanon giving too much power to their Maronite enemies; it threatened Syrian security. He said that in the letter brought by Habib in June 1982, the US committed itself to secure a ceasefire, push Israel to initiate a withdrawal and undertake security arrangements in the south. Those arrangements, according to Khaddam, were totally different from what was being proposed at that time. According to the agreement, the “security zone (...) put Israelis within 23 km of Damascus”⁵³⁹.

On May 17, the Israel and Lebanon finally signed the “Agreement on Withdrawal of Troops in Lebanon”. The agreement⁵⁴⁰ established a “security zone” in southern Lebanon under the control of the Lebanese Armed Forces. This zone had to be free of any other militia and two “supervision stations” manned by Israeli officials would be located there. In exchange, Israeli forces would withdraw within 8 to 12 weeks. On the eve of that signature, some very interesting events took place which created caveats that conditioned the implementation of the agreement.

According to Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East, Nicholas Veliotis⁵⁴¹, the treaty was bound to fail because it would isolate Lebanon in the Arab world much like what happened with Egypt a few years earlier “but Lebanon was not Egypt and could not take this kind of pressure”. “But what absolutely ensured that it would be killed – he explained - was Israel's incomprehensible insistence on a side letter in which it stated that Israeli withdrawal would take place only after withdrawal of all armed Syrians and Palestinians”. The Lebanese in turn produced their own side letter in which they stated that they were not going to implement the agreement if the Israelis did not withdraw.

A few days before May 17, Veliotis was summoned to the Israeli Foreign Ministry where he learned that

Prime Minister Begin wanted another side letter in which they received *carte blanche* to go to war with Syria with our full support. I demurred, pointing out “we're in the middle of the Cold War” and Israel could not

⁵³⁹ 425. Cable from Secretary of state. Rumsfeld Mission: Sayings of FM Khaddam. January 12 1984.

Declassified on June 5, 2000. Teicher files. Folder: Amb. Rumsfeld Mission. Box 91124. Ronald Reagan Library.

⁵⁴⁰ "Text of the Lebanese-Israeli Troop Withdrawal Agreement", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 12 No.4 (Summer,1983)

⁵⁴¹ Veliotis, Nicholas, Author's off-the-record interview, Washington DC March 2007

have blind US support to do whatever it might wish to do against Syria and thus risk bringing in the Soviets and the US. I noted the US President would never agree to this. I suggested they just drop the subject since the higher it went in the USG, the more painful would be the rejection, with attendant publicity. I never heard about this again⁵⁴²

Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, in his memoirs⁵⁴³, confirmed the existence of the Israeli side letter and stated that it gave Syria a veto power over the agreement. Also, he remembered having met with Shultz in Paris on May 11. In that occasion, he claimed to have warned the Secretary of State that the treaty was going to be killed but Shultz seemed to have no ears for his suggestions.

The Secretary of State had had other warnings about that agreement. Graham Fuller, National Intelligence Officer for the Middle East during the early Reagan years, remembers how Shultz wanted the intelligence officers to keep in mind “the force of America’s will” when writing their estimates. As he recollects,

Shultz asked for an estimate on the May 17 agreement for Lebanon. We said the agreement couldn't work. Shultz didn't like it and he asked us to rewrite it considering the force of America's will. We redid it, but the results were just the same. We only changed some words. [CIA Director] Casey accepted our analysis, by then the agreement had already failed. Shultz was furious, he said he had not received enough support from us.⁵⁴⁴

On May 7, Shultz had met Asad in Damascus. In his memoirs⁵⁴⁵, he wrote that “Asad's manner was pleasant and engaging, even though his message was negative”. According to Shultz, “he did not say no, and he invited me for further discussion. The discussion had gone as well as I could have expected”. Veliotis, however, gives a different account:

When Shultz mentioned the two side letters (the Israeli and the Lebanese), Asad smiled and said “Mr. Secretary, you can be sure that the agreement will never be implemented.” He was right.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴² Veliotis, Nicholas, Author’s off-the-record interview, Washington DC March 2007

⁵⁴³ Weinberger, Caspar, *Fighting for Peace*, Warner Books, New York, 1990

⁵⁴⁴ Fuller, Graham, Author’s Phone interview, March 23 2007

⁵⁴⁵ Shultz, George, pp. 216-217

⁵⁴⁶ Veliotis, Nicholas, Author’s off-the-record interview, Washington DC March 2007

According to ambassador Richard Viets, the Syrians killed the agreement on the behalf of the Lebanese.

Alas, the treaty that [Shultz] ultimately negotiated was an appalling invasion of Lebanese sovereignty. The Lebanese ran for cover--the Syrians provided a good deal of that cover--and the treaty blew up in George Shultz' face.⁵⁴⁷

In Shultz's mind, Israelis would "move first" in the withdrawal but they would do so "only after the Arabs had prevailed upon Syria to agree to pull out as well. It was crucial now that Israeli troops remain in place in Lebanon until agreement for Syrian withdrawal was achieved. Only if the Arabs saw that Israel would not leave unless Syria agreed to go would the plan have a chance of succeeding"⁵⁴⁸. In his plan, Israeli force was complementary to US diplomacy. And since the US could not work out an agreement with Asad, its moderate allies in the region had to do that.

The Arab allies of the US, however, were not eager to do so. In his meeting with Shultz before the signing of the agreement, King Fahd voiced his disapproval for a normalization of Lebanese-Israeli relations fearing the creation of the North Bank⁵⁴⁹. However, the Saudi card was going to come out again in a few weeks.

Meanwhile, Asad's allies in Lebanon (particularly the Druses under Walid Jumblatt's leadership) had stepped up their military pressure on the Gemayel government in the Shuf area, a plateau overlooking Beirut and populated both by Druses and Christians. As ambassador Robert Dillon recollected, "by June, 1983, everything was beginning to come apart"⁵⁵⁰.

Philip Habib had been declared "persona non grata" by Asad and was replaced by Robert McFarlane as US envoy to the region. McFarlane, as others in the Reagan administration, had served in Vietnam as a Marine officer. He, among others, believed that he had the

⁵⁴⁷ Kennedy, Charles Stuart, April 6 1990, Interview with Richard Viets, August 9, 1998 , Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁴⁸ Shultz, George, p. 221

⁵⁴⁹ Shultz, George, p. 218

⁵⁵⁰ Stuart Kennedy, Charles, Interview with Robert S. Dillon, May 17, 1990, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfdip:6:/temp/~ammem_vFvM:: accessed on March 19, 2007)

duty to restore the use of military force as an American policy option. According to ambassador Dillon, “he had decided that his mission was to support Amin Gemayel. The remaining opponents of Gemayel, with the PLO gone, were the Druze.”⁵⁵¹ By siding with the government of Gemayel, however, the US was getting more and more entangled in the civil war. The misunderstanding was based on the wrong assumption that Gemayel represented the non-factional central government opposed to warring factions. On the contrary, Amin was just the head of one of the factions. To negotiate with its opponents, in and outside Lebanon, the US chose to play the Saudi card.

The Saudi Card

The idea behind the “Saudi card” was that a pressure was needed by the most influential Arab regime on Asad to force him to withdraw his troops from Lebanon. Saudi's intervention was also needed to support Amin Gemayel's efforts and to help king Hussein of Jordan to join the peace process. However, these tasks proved to be more difficult than the Reagan administration had predicted.

In February 1983, Saudi prince Bandar (ambassador designate to the US) met with president Reagan to “clarify American position” towards Lebanon and the Middle East⁵⁵². In this phase, the Saudis were more concerned with the future of the peace process. The meeting actually lasted only ten minutes. Reagan handed a letter for king Fahd and talked about the importance of Saudi support both for Gemayel and for the Jordanians. Bandar promised to get in touch with Hussein in a few days while adding that “the Russians were active throughout the region and that we must stop the Russians”.

The US asked for Saudi support of Lebanese-Israeli negotiations. Reagan hoped that “Saudi Arabia [would] be understanding of the situation and give support to president Gemayel”. The Saudis had also opposed any contacts between Amin Gemayel's

⁵⁵¹ Stuart Kennedy, Charles, Interview with Robert S. Dillon, May 17, 1990, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?mfdip:6::/temp/~ammem_vFvM::; accessed on March 19, 2007)

⁵⁵² Memo from William Clark to the president. Meeting with prince Bandar. Near East and South Asia files, box 91993, Bandar Meeting with President Feb 18, 1983. Declassified: June 8, 2000 . Reagan Library and also “Draft”. Note by Richard Fairbanks. Near East and South Asia files, box 91993, Bandar meeting with President Feb 18, 1983. Declassified: June 8, 2000. Reagan Library

government and the Israelis over the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country. According to a memo by George Shultz⁵⁵³,

The Saudis have made clear to Gemayel their expectation that he maintain an unrealistically rigid line against the normalization of relations with Israel. They apparently have gone so far as to impede the export of Lebanese goods to the Kingdom.

Also, the Saudis were asked to give their support to the Jordanian entry into the peace process. Jordan was experiencing “financial hardship” for which Reagan asked Bandar for “immediate assistance”⁵⁵⁴. Saudi's money was badly needed to bring Jordan into the game. According to Shultz, Prince Bandar had also promised to give as much as \$ 1 billion to Jordan in financial support should they join the peace process⁵⁵⁵.

Prince Bandar came back as Fahd's special envoy to the US in late June 1983. The scenario was now somehow different. The peace process had derailed and Saudi assistance was badly needed in Lebanon.

On June 19 Prince Bandar had met with Syrian president Asad. As Bandar referred, the Saudi king was under pressure to distance himself from the US on Lebanon, he was worried with “Soviet maneuvering and an inadequate US response”. According to a William Clark memo⁵⁵⁶, Syria's attitude was ambiguous:

Bandar will probably describe a hardened Syrian position on the Lebanon [May 17] agreement but Assad's insistence that Syria will not start a war with Israel. With regard to withdrawal, Assad may [underlined in the original] be willing to open a dialogue with us that will lead to negotiations with Lebanon.

Bandar's report of the meeting was further analyzed in a Department of State briefing

⁵⁵³ “Your Meeting with Bandar”. Memo from George Shultz to Ronald Reagan. Near East and South Asia files, box 91993, Bandar meeting with President Feb 18, 1983. Declassified: June 8, 2000. Reagan Library

⁵⁵⁴ “Meeting with prince Bandar”. Memo from William Clark to the president. Near East and South Asia files, box 91993, Bandar Meeting with President Feb 18, 1983. Declassified: June 8, 2000 . Reagan Library and also “Draft”. Note by Richard Fairbanks. Near East and South Asia files, box 91993, Bandar meeting with President Feb 18, 1983. Declassified: June 8, 2000. Reagan Library

⁵⁵⁵ “Your Meeting with Bandar”. Memo from George Shultz to Ronald Reagan. Near East and South Asia files, box 91993, Bandar meeting with President Feb 18, 1983. Declassified: June 8, 2000. Reagan Library

⁵⁵⁶ “Meeting with Bandar”. Memo by William Clark. Near East and South Asia files, box 91993, President Meeting with Bandar June 24 1983. Declassified: June 8, 2000. Reagan Library

paper⁵⁵⁷:

[Asad] is confident of complete Soviet support, and believes Syria is stronger militarily than ever before (...) He cannot accept the [May 17] Lebanon agreement, but wants Bandar to assure you that he will not start a war. If attacked, however, he will retaliate with missile attacks against Israeli population centers, in the knowledge he has no second-strike capability. Assad claims he has been ignored and mistreated by the United States. Nevertheless, it is possible he is open to a renewed dialogue and interested in negotiating an agreement on Lebanon and on Israeli-Syrian security interests.

According to the Department of State, in other words, the “window of opportunity” to impose the May 17 agreement to the Syrian president had been closed by the massive Soviet resupply. Now, a direct negotiation with him was needed.

When Bandar returned in Washington in September he was delivering a letter from King Fahd. According to a memo sent by Kenneth Dam to president Reagan⁵⁵⁸, the administration expected this letter to say a few important things. First of all:

The Syrian's basic goal remains Israeli withdrawal. If the Syrians see evidence that this is developing, they will be prepared to allow reconciliation talks to focus on vital intra-Lebanese issues. If not, the Syrians, through their proxies, will force the talks to focus entirely on the Israeli withdrawal issue and renunciation of the May 17 agreement with Israel

The Saudis doubted that they could hold the Syrians to the negotiations unless there was clear evidence of a similar American commitment to ensure an Israeli withdrawal. However, the IDF withdrawal was conditional to security arrangements to protect Israeli northern border. For the Reagan administration, Israeli and Syrian withdrawals had to take place simultaneously. Kenneth Dam, therefore, advised Reagan that

You will want to make it completely clear that the idea of US pressure on Israel to withdraw unilaterally, in the absence of a predictable security situation, is not workable

⁵⁵⁷ “Meeting with Bandar, objectives and setting”. Department of State briefing paper. Near East and South Asia files, box 91993, President Meeting with Bandar June 24 1983. Declassified: June 8, 2000. Reagan Library

⁵⁵⁸ “Meeting with Saudi Ambassador Designate Prince Bandar bin Sultan”. Memo for Reagan from Kenneth W. Dam. Near East and South Asia files, box 91994, President Meeting with Bandar Sep 29 1983. Issued: September 28, 1983 Declassified: June 8, 2000. Reagan Library

Reconciliation talks and Israeli and Syrian commitment to withdraw had to be, according to what Reagan said to Bandar, “separate, but parallel tracks”.

The “Saudi card” had not worked, as we will see further, because no one (not even the Saudis who had some economic leverage over him) could force Asad to accept the May 17 agreement. Quite the contrary he could pressure his Lebanese proxies to subvert it.

Getting Involved in the Civil War

Playing the “Saudi card” did not mean avoiding direct talks with the Syrians. In August 1983 several contacts took place between US and Syrian officials. Positions did not seem too distant.

Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam told US ambassador Paganelli on August 23 1983 that Syria was going to support national reconciliation and that Jumblatt and other confessional leaders were ready to meet Gemayel, but the Lebanese president had to return to the parliament and rescind the agreement. McFarlane could work together with the Lebanese government on security arrangements for southern Lebanon that would allow a complete Israeli withdrawal. Only after that would the Syrian government be prepared to arrange its withdrawal with a “newly formed national unity government of Lebanon”⁵⁵⁹.

In a letter to William Clark, US Senator Hatch summed up his August 27 meeting with Khaddam. According to the senator, the Syrian Foreign Minister “seemed willing to deal”. He had listed four objections to the May 17 agreement: the prohibition of Lebanon from maintaining an effective air defense, the fact it placed Lebanese economy and security at the mercy of Israel, the requirement that Lebanon give up relations with states “in conflict” with Israel, and the Israeli security zone leaving the Israeli army only 23 kilometres from Damascus”. The last point was actually a distortion of the reality of the agreement: no Israeli troops would be present in the security zone which would be controlled by the Lebanese army. As we have seen only two “control stations” would be

⁵⁵⁹ 425. Cable from Secretary of state. Rumsfeld Mission: Sayings of FM Khaddam. January 12 1984. Declassified on June 5, 2000. Teicher files. Folder: Amb. Rumsfeld Mission. Box 91124. Ronald Reagan Library.

present there with some Israeli observers inside. Maybe, this was enough to concern the Syrians.

In his letter, Hatch also added something very important on the Soviet-Syrian nexus: “overall it is hard to recognize the image of an intransigent Soviet puppet in the Syrian representatives with whom we met. Rather, the Syrians went out of their way to indicate their independence from Moscow”. Hatch concluded saying that “our staffs should be in contact about the prospects for a higher level and more flexible dialog with the Syrians than is presently occurring”⁵⁶⁰.

In mid-August, Khaddam had explained to US Ambassador-at-large Richard Fairbanks that the election of Amin Gemayel was a result of “Syrian support, Israeli cooperation and a Sharon/Pierre Gemayel agreement” and the Syrians had decided in this direction after having received a letter from Amin in which he “listed a number of principles” among which there was his guarantee that he was not going to negotiate with Israel⁵⁶¹.

Presumably in the same days of August 1983 McFarlane met with Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Lebanese Druze community. We can infer the date of their meeting from a cable sent between august 27 and august 28 with the talking points for McFarlane. The US envoy argued that, in view of Israeli withdrawal from the Shuf Plateau above Beirut, an agreement had to be reached on its fate. Jumblatt had to sit down with Amin Gemayel and discuss the issue, since the Lebanese president was ready to negotiate⁵⁶².

Jumblatt also met with Lebanese National Security Advisor Haddad in Paris. The two were ready to reach an agreement on the Shuf issue when fighting erupted between the LAF on one side and the Sunni Murabitun, the Shiite Amal and the Druze PSP on the other side. The US backed Gemayel's effort to assert his authority had displayed its naval power in the Mediterranean “a fact which could not go unnoticed to the Syrians and their proxies”⁵⁶³.

⁵⁶⁰ 430 (2176). Letter to W.P.Clark fm Orrin Hatch. Meeting with Khaddam. 28 september 1983. Declassified in 2000. Teicher files.

⁵⁶¹ 425. Cable from Secretary of state. Rumsfeld Mission: Sayings of FM Khaddam. January 12 1984. Declassified on June 5, 2000. Teicher files. Folder: Amb. Rumsfeld Mission. Box 91124. Ronald Reagan Library.

⁵⁶² 181 (907). Talking points for meeting with Jumblatt. Undated, Unclassified. Subject files. Folder: M.E. Trip (McFarlane) – Chron Cables [8/27/83- 8/28/83] box 54. Ronald Reagan Library.

⁵⁶³ 182(912). Press themes to be used with the press on august 31. Undated, Unclassified. Subject files. Folder:

By this time, several officials in the administration started to realize how profound were the problems that the US faced in Lebanon. In a “concept paper” titled “Lebanon:forcing the pace of foreign withdrawal”⁵⁶⁴ Philip Dur and Howard Teicher started by admitting that “we have lately come to realize that factional strife in Lebanon cannot be ended absent better distribution of political and economic power”.

First of all, the Christians had to concede some of their power but so long as the Syrian and Israeli “protectors” continued to meddle in the process, it was hard to think of a compromise between the different political and ethnic factions. Given the low level of commitment by the US, this simply meant the *de facto* partition of the country which deferred prospects for reconciliation.

One way to avoid such partition, according to the two NSC officials, would be to obtain an Israeli withdrawal which would eliminate any justification for a Syrian presence in the country but that would mean throwing the May 17 Accord in the garbage. Also, they thought that a Syrian withdrawal could come only after the US issued an ultimatum and committed a certain amount of troops to enforce it. Therefore, the old idea of a “Turkish cooperation” was resurrected:

We may be able to enlist Turkish cooperation in applying pressure on the disputed border with Syria. This option would also entail readiness to confront the Soviet Union militarily and the recognition that – depending on the amount of force required to dislodge the Syrians and the degree of active Israeli involvement – we may face at least a rhetorical firestorm from the Arab world and certain European allies

In late August, the Israeli Defense Forces withdrew from the crucial Shuf mountains overlooking Beirut, notwithstanding American pleas to delay this move. In Israel, public opinion did not understand why the army should work as a policeman between the warring factions. In a few days, images of a new carnage returned to TV screens, just one year after Sabra and Shatila. Only, this time the victims were Maronites killed by the Druses. One thousand people were killed, sixty villages were lost, 50,000 people were

M.E. Trip (McFarlane) – Chron Cables [8/29/83- 9/1/83] box 54. Ronald Reagan Library.

⁵⁶⁴188 (961). Concept paper. “Lebanon:Forcing the Pace of Foreign Withdrawal”. Subject files, ME Trip (McFarlane) Chron Cables. Box 55. Declassified on April 16, 2001. RRL

homeless⁵⁶⁵.

What was more important for American policy-makers, now the marines at the Beirut International Airport were under Druze fire. On September 1, one year after the statement of the Reagan plan, the drums of war were beating again: the Druses declared that from now on they would regard US troops as “enemy forces”⁵⁶⁶. This statement was issued together with Nabih Berri’s secular Shiite group⁵⁶⁷. The enemies of the US were creating some sort of united front, another cause of concern for the White House.

It took a few days to make the situation much worse. On September 6 the US lost two Marines under enemy fire. Reagan wrote in his diary:

The civil war is running wild & could result in collapse of the Gamayal [sic] govt. & the stuff would hit the fan. I called the parents of the 2 Marines – not easy. One father asked if they were in Lebanon for anything that was worth his son's life⁵⁶⁸

In Reagan's mind, time had come for the US to flex its muscles. The next day he wrote:

I can't get the idea out of my head that some F14s off the Eisenhower coming in at about 200 ft over the Marines & blowing hell out of a couple of artillery emplacements would be a tonic for the Marines & at the same time would deliver a message to those gun happy middle east terrorists⁵⁶⁹

On September 10 the NSC met to discuss the situation in Lebanon. Following that meeting ,NSDD 103 was issued⁵⁷⁰. This directive officially marked a crucial (and sudden) turning point in the official US policy in Lebanon since it marked the direct involvement of the Marines in the Lebanese civil war. The new mission of US troops in the Greater Beirut area was upgraded from simple “presence” to “aggressive self-defense against hostile or provocative acts from any quarter

Material and training assistance to the Lebanese army, the directive dictated, had to be

⁵⁶⁵ Schiff, Ze’ev and Ehud Ya’ari, p. 298

⁵⁶⁶ Shultz, George, p. 225

⁵⁶⁷ Martin, David and John Walcott, p. 115

⁵⁶⁸ Brinkley (ed), cit. p. 177

⁵⁶⁹ Brinkley (ed), cit. p.177

⁵⁷⁰ “NSDD 103: Strategy for Lebanon”. NSDD files, NSDD 103 (1) [Strategy for Lebanon] box 91291. Issued: September 12, 1983 Declassified: August 30, 1999 [129]. Reagan Library

accelerated and “tactical” intelligence as well as “reconnaissance support” had to be granted to the Lebanese central government. In the addendum to the NSDD, the area of Suq-al-Gharb (overlooking Beirut’s airport where marines were located) was declared “vital to the safety of US personnel” and therefore US “assistance” could be provided to the LAF in the operations over there. From this moment on, the US forces abandoned their peacekeeping position towards a direct involvement in the civil war on the side of the Christian-dominated central government. Something the Syrians (and their Lebanese proxies) could not allow to happen.

Following NSDD 103, an interagency group prepared a document which tried to define the possible US actions in case of a collapse of the Lebanese central government under Syrian fire⁵⁷¹. According to this paper, the credibility of the US policy in the region rested on its support to the central government in Lebanon. Four options were therefore considered:

- “staying the course”: not expanding the MNF military role and considering withdrawal if the diplomatic strategy failed
- expanding the defensive role of the MNF in the greater Beirut area in support of the LAF, withdrawal would also be considered as part of this option in case of failure
- direct US military support to the expansion of the area controlled by the Lebanese army
- forcing Syrian and Israeli withdrawal by ultimatum and, upon Syrian refusal, using US troops to extend the area under control of the government of Lebanon

The choice, in other words, seemed to be between withdrawal and escalation. But escalation implied a war with Syria and “by extension” with the USSR. The second option seemed to be the best one, even if it may turn out to be a failure too.

The document took care to restate once more the strategic importance of Lebanon for the US. First of all, this country had a border with Israel. Secondly, it had had in the past a moderate political posture in the Arab world. Third, more recently the US goal was to prevent a “Soviet-backed Syrian victory at US expense”. The military significance of such

⁵⁷¹186. (924) Memo for William Clark from Charles Hill Strategies for Lebanon if current concept proves inadequate. Issued: September 26, 1983 Declassified: 10/28/2004 Subject Files. Folder: M.E. Trip (McFarlane) Chron Cables [9/28/83-9/30/83] box 55. Ronald Reagan Library

a shift would be small. However, the symbolic significance was great: Syria, an “instrument, proxy or ally-of-convenience of the Soviet Union” had engaged the US in a test of will and had won. In other words, the same old problem of credibility: backing US friends and attacking Soviet allies.

Since Amin Gemayel had put his fate publicly in the hands of the US, the direct involvement had raised the stakes for the US in Lebanon. But the “big enemy” was hard to eradicate: “there is no practical possibility of eliminating Syrian influence in Lebanon”. Talking about enemies, the document said something very predicting: radical states such as Iran and Libya as well as independent terrorist groups in Lebanon were going to increasingly target American personnel as the US became more active in support of the Lebanese central government.

The Lebanese army had fought well, but it was already compromised in the eyes of the Druses by fighting together with the Phalange in the Shuf and in the eyes of the Shiites in Beirut by fighting alongside the predominantly Maronite Lebanese Forces. As the “DIA assessment on LAF” (Annex II of the document) stated, the only effective units of the Lebanese army were the Christian-dominated ones.

Therefore, option 2 (ie. “preservation of the government of Lebanon in greater Beirut Area”) was the one actually adopted since it granted to the US the possibility to “limit Syrian ambition without extraordinary cost to ourselves” as the document bluntly recognized. However, this kind of settlement implied “a significant degree of Syrian influence in Lebanon's future”. What that meant was explained further in a footnote:

Recognition of Syria's strong interests in Lebanon; Syrian and Israeli troops in Lebanon indefinitely; the Shuf and the Alayh remaining with the Druze; the continuing de facto partition into Israeli, Syrian, Druze, Phalangist and GOL zones; and scrapping of the Israeli-Lebanese withdrawal agreement”

Partition was therefore an almost inevitable outcome of the current crisis. The country would be divided into areas controlled by the Phalange, the Druses, the Syrians, the Israelis and some part controlled by what remained of the central government. In that scenario one possible solution could be a cooperation between the last two in order to

secure control of some parts of Beirut and the south.

The withdrawal of Marines was still not considered as an option but it could become one if the central government collapsed or if the US decided “that our interests in Lebanon do not warrant the costs and risks” of such a mission.

On the other hand, there were those who thought that Lebanon was a litmus test of the US resolve to stand by its allies in the Middle East.

Supporters of this view believe that our commitment to a sovereign and restored Lebanon provides both an obligation and an opportunity to confront the Soviet-Syrian design to undermine the US position in the Middle East

The idea of Lebanon as a “litmus test for US credibility” was also the subject of another paper prepared in the National Security Council staff⁵⁷². According to this document, there was a group of radical and Rejectionist Arab states that kept together “Islamic fundamentalism with an anti-western phobia” and efforts by the Soviet Union to gain influence in the region. Since the disengagement from Vietnam, US credibility in the region had been eroded. Also the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the hostage crisis had further weakened the image of the US as a credible security partner.

Asad had clearly stated to McFarlane that Lebanon and Syria were “as one” and since Syria was supported and encouraged by the USSR, withdrawing from Lebanon could become a loss to the Soviets. The document tried to give a second chance to the domino theory when it said that the Soviets “have now opted for a more confrontational policy where our interests diverge” so if they were to succeed in Lebanon they would probably challenge the US in the Sea of Japan, the claimed Libyan waters or in Central America.

Therefore “incremental demonstrations of power” against Syria were to be made in order to “signal” US willingness to achieve its goals. However a major US involvement was to be ruled out because of “congressional opposition” and reluctance of the MNF allies.

Meanwhile, the press continued to stress the difficulties of US policy in a country which was plunging again into chaos. On September 12, CBS's Bob Simon reported from Beirut:

⁵⁷² 187. (957) Paper. Lebanon: Litmus test for US credibility. Undated. Declassified on April 16,2001. Subject Files. Folder: M.E. Trip (McFarlane) Chron Cables [9/28/83-9/30/83] Box 55. Ronald Reagan Library. For its contents, the record was produced presumably between August and September 1983.

Ancient Lebanese blood-feuds are developing one more contest between the superpowers. The questions which were asked in Vietnam, which were being asked in Salvador, are coming up again. Can the US train, equip and motivate enough Lebanese soldiers fast enough? And if not, what then? US officers say a pullout could change the map of the Mideast⁵⁷³.

A few days later the US ship New Jersey was ordered to deploy off-shore to the Beirut area⁵⁷⁴. On September 19, it started to shell the frontline near Suq-al-Gharb, north of the capital city⁵⁷⁵.

According to ambassador Robert Dillon,

It fired its 16 inch guns, which was the first time in a long time that the Navy had found a role for these huge ships and guns. Sixteen inch shells are huge and very indiscriminate. We ended up killing Druze villagers; it didn't effect the outcome of the fighting in any way.

Two days later, Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker convinced Reagan to start the War Powers Act procedure to receive formal authorization to use force. When Secretary Shultz met with the president on the same day, Reagan asked him: "Are we going to let the Syrians and the Soviets take over? Are we just going to let this happen?"⁵⁷⁶.

According to David Wills⁵⁷⁷, the administration wanted to extend the mission for at least another 18 months. During a meeting with a large number of members from the House of Representatives, Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East Nicholas Veliotis argued that this time-span was needed to "depoliticize" the deployment – to postpone further decisions until after the 1984 elections. Even though the administration eventually got the approval for its plans, some members of Congress imposed some secret caveats, as

⁵⁷³ 228 (1224). WH News Summary Sep 12, 1983. William Clark Boxes.

⁵⁷⁴ "Deployment of the USS New Jersey". Memorandum from Phil Dur for William Clark. NSDD files, NSDD 103 (1) [Strategy for Lebanon] box 91291. Issued: September 20, 1983 Declassified: August 30, 1999 [126] Reagan Library

"Movement of the USS New Jersey". Memorandum from William Clark for Caspar Weinberger. NSDD files, NSDD 103 (1) [Strategy for Lebanon] box 91291. Issued: September 20, 1983 Declassified: August 30, 1999 [127] Reagan Library

⁵⁷⁵ David Martin and John Walcott, p. 122-123

⁵⁷⁶ Shultz, George, p. 227

⁵⁷⁷ Wills, David, pp. 60-61. His account is based on interviews with Nicholas Veliotis and Robert Gallucci

Veliotis recalled:

Congressman Trent Lott called me over and said, "now you go back (...) we're going to vote, we're going to give you 18 months but you go back and tell the Secretary of State and the President that we really mean 3 or 4 months. We expect this to be wrapped up"⁵⁷⁸.

Tough choices were to be made in Lebanon, as a preliminary draft of paper on "US Policy for Lebanon"⁵⁷⁹ suggested. The paper started with a positive assessment: even though the USSR valued Syria as its main ally in the region, Syria "might even distance itself from the Soviets and strike a deal with the US".

US alliances in the region were questioned. Iran was "implacably opposed to any kind of US presence in the region at all and ideologically committed to a radical visionary struggle against the West" whereas "Syria [was] not ideologically engaged and [could] probably settle for some kind of practical relationship if their interests are served". The document therefore suggested hitting pro-Iranian targets in Lebanon because that will "sober the Syrians and maybe encourage them to believe that the Iranians are risky allies in Lebanon". Therefore, if the MNF wanted to get out of Lebanon it needed to "accept the reality of considerable Syrian influence in - but not of Syrian domination of - Lebanon". The consequence of this policy was a shelving of the May 17 accord, a weak government accepted by everyone and not hostile to Syria but also a diminution of Iranian influence in the country. On the other hand, a major Israeli involvement in Lebanon was deemed to be counter-productive.

Before the Attack Against the Marines

In October 1983, just before the attack against the Marines, the National Security Council staff was working on a new paper on the next steps to be taken in Lebanon. Deputy Director of Net Assessment at the Department of Defense Dennis Ross had prepared a

⁵⁷⁸ Wills, David, p. 61

⁵⁷⁹ 259 (1376). Preliminary draft of paper. A US policy for Lebanon. Undated, declassified in 2004. Lebanon III, Fortier files. Ronald Reagan Library.

It's undated but it refers to the Israeli withdrawal from the Shuf while it makes no reference to the attack against the Marines, so it must have been written sometime between early September and mid-October. From the language used, it sounds like a CIA document.

draft to be discussed by the NSC which was summed up in a memo sent by Phil Dur and Donald Fortier to John Poindexter⁵⁸⁰. Ross' paper stated clearly that one problem had not been addressed in the discussion: Syrian involvement in stirring up Lebanese opposition to the MNF presence. As the two officials wrote,

The one problem which is not addressed [in Ross' paper] is how to remove the figleaf which Syria uses to justify its continued occupation and to increase its leverage on the anti-government factions. That figleaf is, simply put, continued Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. We are working on an addendum or another facet of the strategy which would deal with inducing more Israeli flexibility. In very basic terms, the argument is that Israel might withdraw if the USG [US government] were prepared to undertake a more active (and visible) degree of military cooperation with Israel and to license preventive and punitive actions in Lebanon if Israel's northern settlements are threatened again.

Reading this, one should not be surprised by the rapprochement between Israel and the US which occurred on the occasion of Shamir's visit to the US a few weeks later after this memo was written.

In these weeks the US administration decided to forget that the Israelis had got them into the Lebanese quagmire and restarted cooperation with them as a counterweight to Syria. The issue was raised in a document titled "Our strategy in Lebanon and the Middle East" prepared for the NSPG meeting to be held on October 18⁵⁸¹. One week before the attack against the Marines, the document stated that troops had to be maintained in Beirut but "further decisions are now necessary to protect American forces". Further Israeli withdrawals could strengthen Gemayel and help him bring the Druze and the Shiites in the national government.

Israel was becoming weaker in Lebanon while it did not ease occupation in the West Bank. However, strengthening Israel was seen as a means to thwart any further Syrian inroads in the region. The "US-Israeli dialogue" had to be "energized" because, as NSDD-99 said, it

⁵⁸⁰ "Draft paper on next steps in Lebanon". Memorandum from Phil Dur and Donald Fortier to John Poindexter. NSDD files, NSDD 103 (1) [Strategy for Lebanon] box 91291. Issued: October 6, 1983
Declassified: April 19, 2001 [125]. Reagan Library

⁵⁸¹ 169.(872) Paper. Our strategy in Lebanon and the Middle East: Operational Issues. October 17, 1983. Declassified on July 27, 2004. NSPG files. Folder: NSPG 0073 18 oct 1983 [Middle East] Box 91306. Ronald Reagan Library.

was a means for countering the Soviet-Syrian bid for dominance. The peace process had to pursued and moderate friends (Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia) bolstered as another counterweight to Syria. In the internal setting, MNF presence had to be kept and Gemayel was to be encouraged to give weight to Shiite leaders. Military cooperation with Israel had to be accelerated and on the other hand, Israeli opposition to US cooperation with Jordan had to be overcome.

People around Donald Fortier, a prominent hawk in the NSC, started putting forward “creative solutions”. In an undated paper to the attention of Fortier⁵⁸², NSC official Philip Dur proposed to use Turkey (defined as the “old leader and ruler of Islam and the Arabs”) to destabilize Syria which was considered as “the main obstacle to US policy in Lebanon and the region”. The Syrian Sunnis would welcome the Turkish Sunnis “in saving them from the Alawite regime”. A Turkish invasion from the north would destroy the “Alawite stronghold”, leaving Assad and his followers to fall back “on an ocean of hateful Sunnis”. Dur explained his plan to overthrow Asad using the Turkish “Sunni” influence over the Syrian Sunnis in the army and then promised: “Six months and Mr. Assad will go down to his knees”. Moreover, Turkey “is also Moslem and cheaper than the Israeli option”, Dur concluded.

In view of the same NSPG meeting, Donald Fortier prepared a paper with some “Thoughts from the Middle East and Beyond” for Robert McFarlane⁵⁸³ who by that time had been nominated National Security Advisor⁵⁸⁴. Fortier suggested drawing political red lines in Lebanon to prevent a Syrian dominated outcome. The most important one was preserving the May 17 accord for one very important reason:

Standing firm on this is necessary not only for our credibility but also for inducing the Israelis to work with us in assuming a more aggressive posture in Lebanon. Once the agreement vanishes the Israelis lose an important prop by which to legitimize their past -- and future -- involvement

⁵⁸² 256 (1349). Paper drafted by Phil Dur to the attention of Donald Fortier. Undated, unclassified. Fortier Files. Folder: Lebanon III. Ronald Reagan Library

⁵⁸³ 260 (1384). Memo From Fortier to McFarlane. Thoughts for the ME NSPG and Beyond. Oct 18, 1983 declassified on October 13, 2004. Fortier Files. Folder: Lebanon III. Ronald Reagan Library

⁵⁸⁴ Wills, David, p. 61

An Egyptian involvement in the MNF was also suggested. Though supporting a less exaggerate tilt towards Iraq in the Persian Gulf war, Fortier advocated Saddam's support in splitting the PLO and weakening Syria: "this time we expect (underlined) his support and will not look kindly on excuses". He also supported a major role for the Turks: "I believe, with imagination, we can still build a role for the Turks and that doing this would contribute significantly to building pressure on Syria". Their entry in the MNF, along with the Egyptians, would be intimidating to the Syrians.

After the NSPG meeting on October 18 and just two days before the attack against the marines in Beirut, the Defense Department suggested its own diplomatic strategy⁵⁸⁵. Weinberger's strategy was different in many respects with the one endorsed by the administration. According to Reagan's biographer Lou Cannon⁵⁸⁶, recent intelligence indicated a heightened probability of a terrorist attack against the Marines. This prompted Weinberger to ask for a redeployment offshore. The issue was dropped because of the opposition of the other members of the cabinet.

The US, as Weinberger wrote in his paper⁵⁸⁷, had to draw Druze support away from Syria towards the central government. Israel had to use its influence with the Christians to make them support the central government as well. More important, "[the US] should not assume that Syria will be a long-term adversary of the United States. Rather, our long-term goal should be to wean the Syrians away from Soviet influence". Since the US troops at the airport could be targeted by "factional elements", "additional defensive actions may be required or it might be necessary and desirable to reduce or eliminate US ground presence in Beirut and keep our forces offshore, perhaps bolstered by additional naval gunfire support". Any expansion of the US commitment would, according to Weinberger, "be misinterpreted by Gemayel as a sign that he need not show flexibility in the current national talks". The relationship with Israel, which at that time was generally improving and would lead to the Shamir visit in November, was also questioned since the Jewish State was supporting Major Haddad's militia in Lebanon and had still to prove more

⁵⁸⁵ 257 (1357). Memo From Weinberger to McFarlane. US policy in Lebanon and the Middle East. October 21, 1983. Declassified on October 13, 2004.

⁵⁸⁶ Cannon, Lou, p. 384

⁵⁸⁷ 257 (1357). Memo From Weinberger to McFarlane. US policy in Lebanon and the Middle East. October 21, 1983. Declassified on October 13, 2004.

cooperative on the peace process: “the Shamir government must understand that flexibility on key issues -- such as the West Bank -- will be required if it is to enjoy full US support”. In light of this, the settlement policy had to be “addressed again” because it was “harmful to [US] interests in the region”.

According to the briefing charts that Weinberger attached to this paper, the US had committed “over 550 million \$ in security assistance to LAF [Lebanese Armed Forces]”. The options for the US and the MNF were listed as follows:

- continue the current deployment
- reduce vulnerability by reducing exposure ashore
- withdraw to ships and provide fire support only
- establish interposition force between Syrians, Lebanese and Israelis

In the same charts, the LAF was defined as multi-confessional (“50% shia/sunni Moslem”) and as “stronger than any faction”.

On October 22 1983, the day before the attack against the Marine barracks occurred, US NSC official Howar Teicher and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt had met to discuss the issue of national reconciliation. When Teicher said that the US positions were clear “an independent sovereign Lebanon, not a Maronite fiefdom and not a Syrian puppet”, Jumblatt replied asking if AG (ie. Amin Gemayel) was “ready for constitutional change”. He outlined the need for a new census and general elections in order to foster a process of dialogue. He mentioned the idea of the “Finlandization of Lebanon”.

Teicher restated US support for the May 17 agreement as the “only means of obtaining Israeli withdrawal”. Jumblatt replied that it gave Israel things that Syria was also going to demand. There was the need to have “something new in the way of agreements” that could guarantee Israeli security⁵⁸⁸.

In a few hours, a detonation would accelerate the underlying tendency to withdrawal that had already emerged in the past weeks and that could be read in these documents. The US insistence on the May 17 agreements would eventually have to come to terms with reality. Moreover, once the dust was settled, the US would start to understand that it faced new,

⁵⁸⁸ 428 (2171) Talking points for meeting with Jumblatt. Undated, Unclassified. Teicher files. Folder: Howar Teicher Chron Oct 1983 box 91666. Ronald Reagan Library

unpredictable enemies.

Chapter Five

1984: Attack, Withdrawal and Debate

October 23

At 6:22 AM (Beirut Time) on Sunday October 23 a Mercedes truck full of explosive entered the parking lot in front of the Marine barracks and detonated. In the collapse of the building 241 US soldiers died. Minutes later, another suicide bomber attacked the headquarters of the French contingent, killing 58. First word of the bombing came to Washington when it was midnight, local time⁵⁸⁹.

The “Islamic Jihad” claimed responsibility for both attacks. According to David Martin and John Walcott⁵⁹⁰, the American intelligence had intercepted an order from Teheran to organize large scale attacks against the US and its allies in Beirut. As State Department Coordinator for counterterrorism Robert Oakley recollected⁵⁹¹,

The attack against the barracks was an act of the Iranian government. It had two purposes: to attack those supporting Iraq in the war against Iran and to push out the French and the Americans from Lebanon in order to extend the Islamic influence to that country. (...) At the beginning Hizbullah took different names, for example Islamic Jihad. And then we found out that Iran was supporting it but it took us some months after the attack against the Marines.

While being hit by its post-Cold War enemies, the US was planning to take care of its Cold War foes in the Caribbean. Two days after the bombing of the Marines’ barracks in Beirut, US troops landed in the tiny island of Grenada to free it of its pro-Soviet regime. The operation was a great show of the new American militarism envisaged by Reagan: a quick, easy move that dealt an apparently mortal blow to the Evil Empire. The president looked as the tough leader of proud nation. As Irving Kristol wrote in 1989,

The American people had never heard of Grenada. There was no reason why they should have. The reason we gave for the intervention--the risk to American medical students there--was phony but the reaction of the

⁵⁸⁹ Wills, David p. 63

⁵⁹⁰ Martin, David and John Walcott, 128-137

⁵⁹¹ Oakley, Robert, Author’s off-the-record interview, Washington DC, March 28 2007

American people was absolutely and overwhelmingly favorable. They had no idea what was going on, but they backed the president. They always will.⁵⁹²

Despite his successes in the Caribbean, Reagan could not afford to look as a loser in the Middle East. The US had been challenged in Lebanon, it had to respond in some way. In the immediate aftermath of the bombing, the president said quite bluntly: "This is an obvious attempt to run us out of Lebanon (...) The first thing I want to do is to find who did it and go after them with everything we've got⁵⁹³".

The Vietnam Syndrome was still alive, retaliation in Lebanon was badly needed to kick it away no matter how useful it could prove in the fight against terrorism. As Under Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger said: "It made little difference whom you clobbered, so long as you clobbered somebody who had it coming. They all talk to each other"⁵⁹⁴.

Shultz and McFarlane favored the "Navy only" option which included the bombing of the Sheikh Abdullah barracks in the Bekaa valley, considered a terrorist training facility by US intelligence. Weinberger opposed it:

I'm not an eye-for-an-eye man (...) I have no objection to bombing Baalbek if you're going to stop future terrorism with it (...) But we didn't have the conclusive kind of target information that I think is essential⁵⁹⁵.

As Richard Armitage explained to David Wills⁵⁹⁶, "many of us felt that that kind of retaliation was a sort of "feel good" exercise rather than a sharp, tight, military response". Chief of Staff Vessey opposed the retaliation plan on very practical ground, believing that the US was not in a good position to carry it out since the Marines in Beirut would have been vulnerable to further terrorist attacks⁵⁹⁷. The debate, as we will see, did not stop there.

⁵⁹² Kristol, I., in Crovitz, G. and Rabkin, J., "The Fettered Presidency. Legal Constraints on the Executive Branch", AEI, Washington DC, 1989. Quoted in Lynd, M., A Tragedy of Errors, The Nation, 2/2004

⁵⁹³ McFarlane, Robert, 267

⁵⁹⁴ Martin, David and John Walcott, 137

⁵⁹⁵ Martin, David and John Walcott, 137

⁵⁹⁶ Wills, David, 64

⁵⁹⁷ Perry, Mark, Four Stars: *The Inside Story of the Forty-Year Battle Between the Joint Chief of Staff and America's civilian Leaders*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1989 p. 316

Still on October 23, NSDD 109 was issued⁵⁹⁸. It called for a visit to Beirut by general Kelley to enhance the security of the US troops also by agreements with factional militias to thwart any future terrorist attacks. Also, the American ambassador to Beirut had to “formally request that the Government of Lebanon sever all diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran”.

Talking to both houses of Congress in the wake of the attack against the Marines' barracks in Beirut, Secretary Shultz tried to answer a question about who could be responsible for the carnage saying simply that “Syria, the Soviet Union and Iran have all opposed” the presence of the MNF in Beirut. The link with the East-West struggle appeared crucial to get the support of the Congress: “Most members – Shultz wrote to Reagan - appeared to agree that we cannot walk away and leave Lebanon to Syrian/Soviet domination”. Congressman Lee Hamilton expressed his view that “Syria could not be brought to withdraw pursuant to the Lebanon-Israel Agreement because Syria could not accept the relationship between Israel and Lebanon envisaged by the Agreement”⁵⁹⁹.

On October 27 Reagan addressed the nation on the events in Lebanon and Grenada⁶⁰⁰. He first tried to explain to the American public why Lebanon and the Middle East in general were worth the lives of more than 200 American soldiers:

Well, it's true, Lebanon is a small country (...) on the edge of what we call the Middle East (...) The area is key to the economic and political life of the West. Its strategic importance, its energy resources, the Suez Canal and the well-being of the nearly 200 million people living there – all are vital to us and to world peace. 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 United States and to our allies.

If anyone had any doubts on who this “hostile power” could be, Reagan tried to clear them, proposing once more the Claire Sterling's⁶⁰¹ connection between the Evil empire and

⁵⁹⁸ “NSDD 109: Responding to the Lebanon Crisis”. October 23, 1983 Declassified: March 9, 2001 [130]. NSDD files, NSDD 109 [Responding to the Lebanon Crisis] Box 91291. Ronald Reagan Library

⁵⁹⁹ 429 (2174) . Memorandum for the President from George Shultz. “Sentiment in Congress with respect to Beirut bombing”. November 26, 1983. Declassified on May 6, 2000. Teicher files, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶⁰⁰ Excerpts of this speech can be found in “Foreign Intelligence and National Security Policy Developments, October-December 1983”. Declassified on July 31, 2000. Crisis Management Center, box 91129. Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁰¹ Sterling, Claire, *The Terror Network*, New York: Berkely Books, 1981

the terrorist threat:

The events in Lebanon and Grenada, though oceans apart, are closely related. Not only has Moscow assisted and encouraged the violence in both countries, but it provides direct support through a network of surrogates and terrorists

A month later, Secretary of Defense Weinberger stated clearly who the main suspects were: "We have a pretty good idea of the general group from which they came and, as I said the first day, they are basically Iranians with sponsorship and knowledge and authority of the Syrian Government."⁶⁰²

As the situation in Lebanon worsened and the likelihood of a US pullout increased, the relationship with Israel became more and more important: the Jewish state was seen as the best subject in order to protect American interests in the region.

On November 29, the Israeli prime minister Shamir visited the US. A new commitment to economic and military cooperation was made by the Reagan administration. The declared goal of this strengthened alliance was Soviet containment, as Reagan remarked: "We examined together Soviet activities in the Middle East and found a common concern with the Soviet presence and arms buildup in Syria."⁶⁰³

According to William Quandt⁶⁰⁴, in this occasion the US decided to strengthen its alliance with Israel in order to put pressure on Syria. This, according to the NSC staff member for the Middle East in the Nixon and Carter administrations, meant sacrificing the intra-Lebanese reconciliation in the name of the May 17 agreement.

The Defense Department was not enthusiastic about the rapprochement with Israel. As then Assistant Secretary Richard Armitage recollected:

[A] topic that came up in the meetings at that time was the strategic relationship with Israel. We had strenuous arguments over that. The Defense Department worked with our friends in the Gulf and we

⁶⁰² Weinraub, Bernard, "President Accuses 5 'Outlaw States' of World Terror", The New York Times, July 9, 1985

⁶⁰³ Excerpt of the President's remarks after Shamir visit, see "Foreign Intelligence and National Security Policy Developments, October-December 1983". Declassified on July 31, 2000. Crisis Management Center, box 91129. Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁰⁴ Quandt, William, 248

thought that a strategic relationship with Israel would hurt us in the Gulf area. But we lost that battle⁶⁰⁵.

Meanwhile, an exact assessment of the situation on the ground was proving to be a difficult task. According to some sources, the situation was improving. NSDD 111, issued on October 28⁶⁰⁶, said that the new cease-fire and the beginning of intra-Lebanese talks gave “cause for hope”. This directive contained a realistic assessment of the regional situation: “We must be realistic and accept that Syria and Israel, as major neighbouring powers, have interests in Lebanon's future which cannot be ignored or dismissed.” The problem was that the May 17 agreement had made things worse: if the US dropped it, the Israelis were going to feel betrayed. If the US decided to stick with it, then Syria would have never entered real negotiations and according to this NSDD, a US-Syrian understanding was crucial since only Damascus could put pressure on its Lebanese proxies to reach reconciliation.

Shultz had had some hope in the Syrian role after his meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam on September 30. Syria, Khaddam said, had promised to the Saudis that it was going to “press all parties to move promptly towards [national reconciliation]”. However, as soon as November 5, a significant caveat had been expressed: before pressuring its Lebanese proxies, the Syrians wanted to remove the “problem of the agreement” (ie. the May 17 accord) as Khaddam had told to US ambassador Paganelli. This concept was restated one month later when he told again to Paganelli that Jumblatt, Karami, Franjiya and Barri (ie. the Druze, the dissenting Christians and the Shiites) were not going to bring the dialogue further if Gemayel did not repudiate the May 17 accord⁶⁰⁷. NSDD 111 did not try to solve the stalemate but rather focused on other issues. First of all, the US had to be “bold” again. Therefore, rules of engagement were modified to allow the defense of the high ground that overlooked Beirut by supporting the LAF in a manner similar to that used in the defense of Suq-al-Gharb. The involvement in the Lebanese civil

⁶⁰⁵ Armitage, Richard, Author's interview, Arlington VA, March 28 2007

⁶⁰⁶ “NSDD 111: Next Steps toward progress in Lebanon and the Middle East”. October 28, 1983 Declassified on September 3, 1999 [131]. NSDD files, NSDD 111 (1) [Next Steps toward progress in Lebanon and the Middle East] box 91291. Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁰⁷ 425. Cable from Secretary of State. “Rumsfeld Mission: Sayings of FM Khaddam”. 12 January 1984. Declassified on May 6, 2000. Teicher files, Ronald Reagan Library.

war was thus stepped up after the attacks. Second, the US commitment to the May 17 agreement was reaffirmed even though it had proved unable to improve the situation⁶⁰⁸. NSDD 111, in other words, tried to move around the diplomatic obstacle represented by the Israeli-Lebanese agreement. Diplomacy was substituted by military power.

The problem was that while the NSC staff favoured the use of military force towards diplomatic ends, those in charge of the military argued in favour of deploying Marines offshore. Returning from his visit to Beirut, the commander of the Marine Corps General Kelley wrote a report on the security of US forces there. As McFarlane summed up for the president⁶⁰⁹, Kelley proposed to move logistical and support forces for the Marines Amphibious Unit back to the ships. This, according to McFarlane, could “send the wrong signals” to the French and Italians. Also, he was concerned that

The security improvements proposed will enhance the perception that our MNF unit is a force which is dug in for self-defense and therefore increasingly less visible to the Lebanese people (...) A more mobile and tactically aggressive deployment is regarded by the JCS and the responsible commanders as inconsistent with the mission of our MNF.

Reagan, according to a memo written by Robert McFarlane to Weinberger⁶¹⁰, agreed with Kelley's proposal for a redeployment but thought also that some form of visible US presence had to stay on the ground in Beirut. A draft NSDD on the “Mandate and Mission for the US contingent of the Multinational Force” was prepared.

The draft NSDD recalled that, according to the agreements with the Government of Lebanon, “US forces would not engage in armed combat but would exercise the right of self-defense”. Absurd as it may look, therefore, the mission of the US contingent was from the beginning to deploy in Beirut and protect itself. As Richard Armitage, then at Defense,

⁶⁰⁸ “NSDD 111: Next Steps toward progress in Lebanon and the Middle East”. October 28, 1983. Declassified on September 3, 1999. NSDD files, NSDD 111 (1) [Next Steps toward progress in Lebanon and the Middle East] box 91291. Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁰⁹ Memorandum from Robert McFarlane for Reagan. “General Kelley's Report on Security for the US MNF contingent in Beirut”. Declassified on April 19, 2000. NSDD files, NSDD 111 (3) [Next Steps toward progress in Lebanon and the Middle East] box 91291. Ronald Reagan Library

⁶¹⁰ Memorandum from Robert McFarlane for Caspar Weinberger. “Security in Lebanon”. Declassified on April 4, 2001. NSDD files, NSDD 111 (3) [Next Steps toward progress in Lebanon and the Middle East] box 91291. Ronald Reagan Library

recollected⁶¹¹,

In 1983 we became involved in what was called “presence” which we at the DOD did not understand as a military mission. We were occupying the low ground and our enemies were on the high ground above us. Over time we started to be seen as being on one side of the civil war. And once we were seen as on one side we became a target. Weinberger wanted to get out in the worst way because he didn't understand the mission. Shultz wanted to stay in the worst way. I think this was a time of disastrous calculations, with the May 17 agreement which gave a veto to Syria. I argued strongly about that with Shultz and he didn't buy it.

To the previous definition of the mission, the draft NSDD added only that the USMNF was going to “demonstrate an active and mobile presence” in the area. Which, simply put, didn't mean anything.

Restating the mission of the Marines as simple “presence” at that moment seemed to be useless and dangerous. A paper prepared by the NSC staff on “Improving Security Training Readiness and Visibility of the MNF” concluded that the Marines’ position at the airport was untenable:

The utility of our static presence at the airport is questionable and its impact on the morale and training effectiveness of the MAU is strongly negative. Finally, the political value of the USMNF role is hampered by the restricted visibility of our units⁶¹²

Therefore, the paper suggested moving a big part of the contingent out of the airport to Damur, in the greater Beirut area which seemed to be more secure. Meanwhile, Marines had to be involved both in exercises and “civic action projects” to be more visible by the Lebanese.

On October 31, Kelley appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee to report about the attack against the Marines in Beirut⁶¹³. First of all he discussed once more the

⁶¹¹ Armitage, Richard, Author’s interview, Arlington VA, March 28 2007

⁶¹² “Improving security training readiness and visibility of the MNF”. NSDD files, NSDD 111 (3) [Next Steps toward progress in Lebanon and the Middle East] box 91291. Declassified: April 19, 2001. Reagan Library

⁶¹³ “Remarks by General Kelley at SASC”. NSDD files, NSDD 111 (3) [Next Steps toward progress in Lebanon and the Middle East] box 91291. Issued: October 31, 1983. Declassified: August 31, 2000 [135]. Reagan Library

definition of the US mission in Beirut as one of “presence”: while acknowledging that “presence as a mission is not in any military dictionary”, he said that that meant providing a “backdrop of US presence which would be conducive to the stability of Lebanon”. He concluded that “we are a visible manifestation of US strength and resolve”.

He stated clearly that on October 23 a well-planned and unexpected attack was carried out with the goal of forcing the US out of Lebanon. The French had also reported to him some intelligence on the Iranian-Syrian connection behind the attack:

The French commander reported to me that he now has intelligence which shows that of the twelve persons who departed rapidly from the Iranian embassy within 15 minutes of the attacks (fully clothed and in a hurry), ten have been identified as Syrian military officers.

Attacks would continue in the following months, he predicted, since the “Soviet Union, Syria, Iran and possibly Libya will be focused upon our Marines”. Further he made clear that there was a “new threat of highly professional terrorism, most likely sponsored by the Soviets, Syria and Iran”. Therefore, a full range of options had to be considered:

- 1) moving into the “high ground” was impossible since it was now “disputed” after the Israeli sudden withdrawal in late August
- 2) moving all the forces aboard ships. This would not have resolved the security issue during activities ashore. Besides, it “would cause the MNF to collapse”
- 3) Remain at the Airport but improve security

In the end he remarked that there was “no way” (underlined in the text) to provide absolute guarantees for the safety of the Marines. Also, he admitted his powerlessness towards the terrorist issue:

I do not believe that we can ever create an effective passive capability which can counter all forms of terrorism in Lebanon or anywhere else (...) Under our current disposition, restrictions, and mission, we will always have vulnerabilities, and the other side will make every effort to exploit them.

While discussing on the location of Marines’ deployment, the administration was still considering a retaliation for the attack. A first raid, to be done jointly with the French, was

blocked right before implementation by Weinberger, despite Reagan approval. The Weinberger “defection” was confirmed also by Robert McFarlane during a long interview he gave to PBS tv channel in 2001⁶¹⁴.

According to Reagan’s biographer Lou Cannon, the closest advisers of the president, namely James Baker and Michael Deaver, were “cautious” from the beginning on the possibility of retaliation. Reagan himself was afraid of civilian casualties and wanted a “strictly military target”. The Chief of Staff had set one such target in the Sheik Abdullah Barracks in Baalbek. That was the headquarter of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and its Lebanese allies⁶¹⁵.

However, that location was defended by Syrian antiaircraft power and General Vessey was afraid that some US planes could be lost on that mission. According to David Martin and John Walcott⁶¹⁶, during a meeting of the National Security Council on November 14, the president decided in favour of the strike despite Vessey’s warnings. Robert McFarlane, interviewed by the two journalists, confirmed that the president and his advisers had decided that the strike would take place on November 16 but on that day Weinberger ordered the fleet to stand down, outdoing the president’s will.

The former Secretary of Defense argued strongly against this recollection of the events, saying that it had been circulated by “NSC staff people, always eager for combat at all time”⁶¹⁷. He denied having refused to carry out a presidential order,

This is, of course, absurd; because, on the face of it, if I had been ordered by the president to do anything and refused, I would not have been around for several years.

According to Weinberger, his French counterpart Charles Hernu had called him on the morning of November 16 telling him that French planes were going to attack “Syrian positions in about two or three hours”. Since he had “received no orders” from the president, he thanked him, “wished him and his pilots good luck, and said “unfortunately

⁶¹⁴ www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/target/interviews/mcfarlane.html

⁶¹⁵ Cannon, Lou, 395

⁶¹⁶ Martin, David and John Walcott, 138

⁶¹⁷ For Weinberger’s recollection of these events, see Weinberger, Caspar, *Fighting for Peace*. New York: Warner Books, 1990, 161

it is a bit too late for us to join you in this one”.

Despite Weinberger’s strong rejection of McFarlane’s “chimerical account”⁶¹⁸, it is worthwhile to give some credit at least to the idea that a retaliation had been discussed at the highest levels in those days. First of all, because a speech by the president had been drafted to comment the attack against the Baalbek barracks, a copy of which can be found at the Reagan Library⁶¹⁹. In that speech, Reagan was going to point at the "Husayni Suicide Commandos" as the “culprits” of the attacks against the Marines. They were described as a “fanatical group based in the Bekaa and supported by Syria and Iran”.

Second, Weinberger, as we have seen (See above the chapter on “Lebanon: The Israeli Invasion and the US Intervention”), had already acted on his own by withdrawing the US contingent in the first MNF earlier than it had been decided.

Third, as David Martin and John Walcott have pointed out,

It was not unusual for two of the President’s closest advisers to come out of a meeting with completely different impressions of what Reagan had decided. Although he projected the image of a strong leader, Ronald Reagan frequently relied on ambiguity to resolve – or bury – the conflicts within his administration.⁶²⁰

Some new insights on this episode come from the publication of Reagan’s diary. From there we can infer the confusion and distance with which he looked at the events. On November 16 he wrote on his diary: “NSPG Meeting. We’ve contacted French about a joint operation in Beirut re [regarding] the Beirut Bombing.”⁶²¹

The following day he wrote: “NSC – Surprise call from France – they were going ahead without us & bombing our other target in Lebanon. They took it out completely”⁶²². Two days later, new plans for retaliation were underway:

Bud McFarlane called on secure phone, has checked with all concerned and consensus is that in view of

⁶¹⁸ Weinberger, Caspar, 162

⁶¹⁹ 173. (886) “Statement by the President”. Undated, Unclassified. NSPG files, Ronald Reagan Library

⁶²⁰ Martin, David and John Walcott, 139

⁶²¹ Brinkley, Douglas, 198

⁶²² Brinkley, Douglas, 198

French bombing in Lebanon we carefully catalogue potential targets & be ready for immediate retaliation in event of another attack on our forces. I agreed but asked that we maintain intelligence efforts to see if we can forestall another attempt⁶²³.

From these entries in Reagan's diary, it is possible to infer that he had probably given some form of consent to the strike but then the French had done it on their own, missing their targets. Since the "retaliation by proxy" had not worked, no US retaliation was going to be carried out. Rather, a new strike was planned to retaliate as a response for a possible new attack.

As Reagan had noted in his diary, the French "unilateral strike" did not succeed. They launched their planes against the Sheik Abdullah barracks but reconnaissance photos later revealed that they had hit nothing. "The French – Weinberger later commented – accomplished nothing whatever with that raid. They probably made some people feel good (...) but that's not really a basis for military action"⁶²⁴.

In early December the situation was growing worse and worse. In a memo sent to McFarlane prior to the NSPG to be held on December 1, Geoffrey Kemp expressed his fear that the group would focus on "long-term" issues and delay any response to "increasing attacks". "We need a decision today – he concluded - to agree to do something even though it may be less than what we all would like"⁶²⁵.

Still according to Reagan's diary, the Saudi card was again on the table. But just for one day. In his November 30 entry, the president wrote:

[Prince Bandar] brought a message by King Fahd re [regarding] Lebanon & the chances of wooing Syria away from the Soviets. I'm afraid his plan involves us separating ourselves somewhat from Israel. No can do⁶²⁶.

In Reagan's mind, therefore, Cold War considerations stopped in front of Israel's security:

⁶²³ Brinkley, Douglas, 199

⁶²⁴ Martin, David and John Walcott, 139

⁶²⁵ 174. Memorandum from Geoffrey Kemp to Robert McFarlane. "Nspg Meeting". December 1, 1983. Declassified on April 19, 2001. NSPG files, Ronald Reagan Library

⁶²⁶ Brinkley, Douglas, 201

wooing Syria away from the Soviets was not worth the alliance with the Jewish state. This was probably the whole rationale behind the US attitude on the May 17 agreement even after the attack against the Marines.

The involvement in the civil war was stepped up after the NSPG that was held on December 1. As Reagan noted, “so far we haven’t done anything, we’re a divided group”. He thought that “taking out a few batteries” might have given a pause to US allies in Lebanon to think about what to do. However, the JCS was against this because it would have “altered our mission & lead to major increases of troops in Lebanon”⁶²⁷. The ghost of the escalation in Vietnam was still haunting the US military.

A draft NSDD prepared in those days called for the change of the rules of engagement for the Marines to assure an effective self-defense. This goal could be enacted also by a support from naval surface and tactical air forces with fire directed against “targets originating fire”. Also, the draft NSDD called for a tougher stance by the Government of Lebanon against “radical” Lebanese factions. Among targets, the draft included specifically the Druze PSP and “Syrian military targets”.

The response did not take long to come. On December 3, a US F-14 Tomcat was heading inland over Lebanon to conduct a reconnaissance flight searching for signs of impending attacks against the Marines at the airport when the Syrians launched SA-7 anti-aircraft missiles against it. They missed and the aircraft returned safely to the USS Kennedy⁶²⁸. Ironically, the same administration that had proved unable to strike back when 241 of its soldiers had been killed in Beirut, decided right away to shoot back when one of its planes was targeted without casualties.

The US strike took place on the morning of December 4. Twenty-Three aircrafts from the carriers Independence and Kennedy were supposed to hit the Sheik Abdullah barracks in the Bekaa valley. Eventually, two A-6 bombers were lost to Syrian anti-aircraft fire. One pilot was killed, another one was captured. Robert Goodman, that was his name, was later freed thanks to the intervention of Reverend Jesse Jackson⁶²⁹.

⁶²⁷ Brinkley, Douglas, 201

⁶²⁸ Martin, David and John Walcott, 140

⁶²⁹ Cannon, Lou, 394 and Shultz, George, 228-229

According to Joseph Stanik⁶³⁰, the navy had failed to take advantage of new weapon systems and technologies developed after the Vietnam war. The operation was instead conceived as a typical “Alpha” strike as the ones done in Vietnam, but as he pointed out, “those tactics did not fool Syrian gunners”. The fallout of Vietnam was still hitting the Reagan administration.

At approximately 9:30 local time on December 12, 1983 another truck-bomb exploded against the Americans. This time the target was the US embassy in Kuwait city and the death toll was far less impressive than on October 23: “only” 5 people died, of which none was American. According to the Evening Report⁶³¹ to the president by Acting Secretary of State Kenneth Dam the embassy's administrative annex had been totally destroyed and the “Islamic Jihad” organization had claimed responsibility for the attack.

The driver of the truck was later identified, according to the State INR bureau's report⁶³², as a member of the Iraqi “Hizb al-Dawa”, a fundamentalist party “controlled directly by Iran”. Ironically, this party was going to be one of the two Shiite groups on which the US would rely after the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

On December 19, the same INR bureau wrote:

The bombings in Kuwait for which the “Islamic Jihad” organization has claimed credit, appear designed to demonstrate that Kuwait, and by extension, the other Gulf states are vulnerable to the forces of Islamic Fundamentalism⁶³³.

The Americans had been hit for the second time in less than a month and a half in the Middle East. Moreover, the threat of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism backed by Iran was

⁶³⁰ Stanik, Joseph, *El Dorado Canyon: Reagan's Undeclared War With Qaddafi*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2004, 200

⁶³¹ “Acting Secretary Dam's Evening Report”. Secretary of State Evening Reports. Vol. IX 7/1/1983-12/31/1983. December 12, 1983. Declassified on March, 12, 1999. NSC, Executive Secretariat. Box 6. Reagan Library.

⁶³² State INR Morning Summary. “Morning Summary”. December 15, 1983. Declassified on January 17, 2001. Executive Secretariat. Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Box 8. Ronald Reagan Library. Also the Kuwaiti authorities placed all the blame on the Shi'ite Dawa party, see State INR Morning Summary. “Current Reports”. December 19, 1983. Declassified on January 17, 2001. Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Box 8. Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶³³ “Kuwait: A Message from the Ayatollah”. Bureau of Intelligence and Research Analysis. Box 8. State INR Morning Summary. Issued: December 19, 1983. Declassified: January 17, 2001. Reagan Library

now directly visible in those Gulf states so important to American foreign policy since the statement of the Carter Doctrine.

One Cloud in the Sky

Two months after the Beirut bombing the independent commission created on November 7 by the Department of Defense to investigate on those attacks issued its final report⁶³⁴. The attack, performed with a truck loaded with 12,000 pounds of TNT, was defined as “tantamount to an act of war using the medium of terrorism”.

The report said that the US contingent had to take side in the civil war after the Lebanese Armed Forces was locked fighting against “factional militias” in the high ground overlooking Beirut (i.e. The Shuf plateau). “Factional militias” was just another way to call Druze and leftist troops against which the mainly Christian Lebanese army was fighting. Between May and November of that year, according to the report,

Over 100 intelligence reports warning of terrorist car bomb attacks were received by the USMNF. Those warnings provided little specific information on how and when a threat might be carried out. From August 1983 to the 23 October attack, the USMNF was virtually flooded with terrorist attack warnings.

The FBI forensic laboratory described the terrorist bomb as the largest conventional blast ever seen by its experts. The commission ruled out that the rules of engagement (Roe) might have made the Marines headquarters less safe:

The explosive equivalent (...) was of such magnitude that major damage to the Battalion Landing Team Headquarters building and significant casualties would probably have resulted even if the terrorist truck had not penetrated the USMNF defensive perimeter but had detonated in the roadway some 330 feet from the building.

The lack of good intelligence was another point stressed in this report which came to be known as the Long Commission Report, being retired US Navy Chairman Robert J. L.

⁶³⁴ “Report of the DoD Commission on Beirut International Airport Terrorist Act, October 23, 1983” Issue date: 20 December 1983. Downloaded from: <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/AMH/XX/MidEast/Lebanon-1982-1984/DOD-Report/index.html> on 28 September 2006

Long the head of the commission:

The USMNF commander did not have effective U.S. Human Intelligence (HUMINT) support. The paucity of U.S. Controlled HUMINT is partly due to U.S. Policy decisions to reduce HUMINT collection worldwide. (...) The lesson of Beirut is that we must have better HUMINT to support military planning and operations.

In the conclusions of the report some very important recommendations were made. The first one concerned “the expanding military role” and it was rather ambiguous:

The commission recommends that the Secretary of Defense continue to urge that the National Security Council undertake a re-examination of alternative means of achieving U.S. objectives in Lebanon, to include a comprehensive assessment of the military security options being developed by the chain of command and a more vigorous and demanding approach to pursuing diplomatic alternatives.

What “alternative means” meant was not clear, but it pointed very much to a non-military involvement in Lebanon. Further, the report said that the security measures taken after October 23 “have reduced the vulnerability of the USMNF to catastrophic losses (...) [but they] were not adequate to prevent continuing significant attrition of the force”. In other words, “we can protect our troops but they will never be safe there”.

Among other recommendations were the establishment of “an all-source fusion center” where all the intelligence collected by the different agencies could be gathered together and the development by the Joint Chiefs of Staff of “a broad range of appropriate military responses to terrorism for review, along with political and diplomatic actions, by the National Security Council”.

In a memo for president Reagan in which he commented the report⁶³⁵, Secretary of Defense Weinberger proposed again a redeployment of the Marines at sea as a way to comply with the recommendation on the improvement of the security of the mission and as an alternative way to accomplish its goals.

Weinberger stressed that “the Commission suggested that the responsibility for casualties is to some extent rooted in the policy we have for Lebanon(...) The mission itself

⁶³⁵ 264 (1405). Memorandum from the Secretary of Defense for Reagan. “Long Commission Report On October 23 Bombing”. December 23, 1983. Declassified on October 14, 2004. System II 91530. Fortier files, Ronald Reagan Library

contributed to the loss and will continue to cause losses". But even though Weinberger explicitly used this report to support the withdrawal of the troops, he also mentioned the necessity to adapt military doctrines to a new threat:

In the Commission's view the attack on the Marine Battalion Landing Team Headquarters in Beirut was tantamount to an act of warfare using the medium of terrorism. Terrorist warfare, sponsored by sovereign states to achieve political objectives is a threat to the United States.

In a draft of the statement that Reagan was going to deliver on the Long Commission report⁶³⁶, NSC official Donald Fortier wrote a very interesting remark:

The report draws the conclusion that the US and its military institutions are, by tradition and training, inadequately equipped to deal with the fundamentally new phenomenon of state-supported terrorism. I wholeheartedly agree. Throughout the history of this country, we have recognized a clear distinction between being at peace with other states, and being at war. We have never before faced a situation in which others routinely sponsor and facilitate acts of violence against us, while hiding behind proxies and surrogates which they claim they do not fully control

In the actual speech, Reagan said clearly that the country and its military were unprepared to counter the new state-sponsored terrorism. He took all the responsibility of what had happened for himself: "If there is to be blame, it properly rests here, in this office, with this president. I am prepared to accept responsibility for the bad as well as the good".

Faced with this hard reality, the US could not just cut and run: "The problem of terrorism – he remarked - will not disappear if we run from it". The administration was working on creating conditions on the ground so that Marines could be brought home soon, however, Reagan added that "we must not delude ourselves into believing that terrorism will vanish on the happy day that our forces come home"⁶³⁷.

What lacked in the aftermath of the attacks was not investigation or military analysis. Officially, no one spent his time reconsidering American overall strategy to end the

⁶³⁶ 203 (1094). Statement on Long Commission report prepared by Don Fortier.

⁶³⁷ "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters on the Pentagon Report on the Security of United States Marines in Lebanon". December 27, 1983. The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan. RRL. www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1983/122783a.htm (accessed on June 8 2007)

Lebanese civil war. Not one word was spent to criticize the involvement on the side of the Christians, nor anyone dared to point out the lack of a diplomatic strategy to create a major commitment by the Syrians in the solution of the crisis after they had rejected the May 17 agreement between the Lebanese government and Israel.

Christmas was approaching. Reagan wrote in his diary on December 24:

“One cloud in the sky. I'll keep to myself – the threat world wide by the Iranian fanatics to loose terror on everything American”⁶³⁸

The Christmas Debate

As the end of 1983 was approaching, Congress was getting more and more nervous about Lebanon. In December, Congressmen Thomas J. Downey, Charles E. Bennett and the later Clinton White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta wrote to the House Speaker to ask for a congressional discussion on Lebanon once the House reconvened in January. According to their letter⁶³⁹, the US policy in Lebanon had shifted in the last months from a peace-keeping role to an open involvement in the fighting. They added that that was not “the mission approved by Congress, nor there [was] any indication that the American people have approved such a policy”. In another letter asking to their fellow congressmen to join their plea to the Speaker, they said clearly:

We feel it is essential that the mission of our Marines be spelled out in no uncertain terms, or that they be extracted altogether from what is quickly becoming an ever-expanding military involvement⁶⁴⁰.

On December 14, Representative Dante B. Fascell (D-Fla), Acting Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs issued a statement in which he promised: “Congress will be directly - and properly - involved in deciding whether a continued US peacekeeping role in Lebanon is necessary or justified”⁶⁴¹.

Even though no official reappraisal of US strategy in Lebanon was undertaken, in the

⁶³⁸ Brinkley, Douglas (ed), *The Reagan Diaries*, Harper Collins, New York, 2007 p. 207

⁶³⁹ 270 (1425). Memorandum for Fortier from Everett. “Congressional letters on Lebanon”. December 21, 1983. Unclassified. Fortier files, Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁴⁰ Ibidem

⁶⁴¹ Ibidem

White House the secret brainstorming was well under way, as recently declassified records show. In those weeks, two plans about Lebanon were laid out in Washington. One, by Weinberger, was presented to the president after the report of the Long Commission and called for the redeployment of troops offshore and basically for their withdrawal. The other, by Dennis Ross, was more a thought-provoking plan meant to tie the use of force to a political solution.

In the second half of December 1983, National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane called one of his "Saturday sessions" to "think outside the box" on Lebanon. Participants were encouraged to speak freely and outside of usual bureaucratic thinking. The NSC staff then collated and wrote up the thoughts from that Saturday session in a non-paper that was later circulated among different offices. Probably, Donald Fortier was the action officer on this.

Admiral John Poindexter, McFarlane's Deputy, circulated the first draft of the non-paper to Fred Ikle and Richard Armitage at the Defense Department, Vice Admiral Art Moreau at JCS, Ambassador Richard Murphy and Rear Admiral Jonathan T. Howe at the State Department. These people were probably "attendees" of the Saturday session. In the material that was used as background for these meetings, there were cables coming from US envoy Donald Rumsfeld which are still completely classified.

In a still classified memo to McFarlane on the "Working luncheon on Lebanon" by Donald Fortier, Philip Dur and Geoffrey Kemp the issues of substantial disagreements were mentioned: how to accomplish the MNF mission in the light of the recent developments, what to do about the May 17 agreement and how to deal with the Syrians. On this very last issue, Dennis Ross, back then at the Defense Department, wrote a paper discussing the positive and negative views of the situation and stated that the political solution was a key aspect in getting out of Lebanon⁶⁴².

Ross thought that the US had not applied the right kind of pressure on Asad. As he recollected recently⁶⁴³,

We didn't apply to him a real pressure. That would have meant using a significant amount of force against

⁶⁴² The whole recollection of the bureaucratic setting is based on a confidential interview by the Author

⁶⁴³ Ross, Dennis, Author's interview, Washington DC, March 30 2007

the Syrians. But we didn't do it because there was a fundamental divide in the administration between what Shultz and Rumsfeld wanted and what Weinberger wanted. When Asad saw that there was no willingness to use force he became emboldened. You had to make clear to him that he was going to pay a price but you also had to open the door to him and show that there was something that he could have gained. We had the worst of both: We didn't pressure and we didn't offer anything. The Syrians will never give you something for free, never. For the Syrians there is no such a thing as a goodwill gesture. Everything is part of a price.

In his plan, Ross proposed an increase in the number of US soldiers on the ground. This increase was conditional on the Lebanese factions reaching a deal on a new division of power in the country. As he explained⁶⁴⁴,

I was trying to make a point. You can do something militarily but you can't achieve anything militarily. There has to be a political gain, there has to be a political solution. All the chances that you had to achieve a political solution was to make clear to those Lebanese that the price for our commitment was that they make concessions internally towards each other that they hadn't been prepared to make. So don't pursue a build-up unless you are prepared to go for a political solution, use that as a lever for the Lebanese and as a form of reassurance.

A recently declassified draft⁶⁴⁵ of the non-paper that came out of McFarlane's Saturday session gives a new insight into the brainstorming that was taking place at the White House. According to the draft, domestic support for the MNF was plunging while the situation on the ground could have actually improved thanks to possible Soviet pressure on Syria and because of the power struggle in Damascus: Asad weakened health conditions had indeed opened a temporary clash for power in Syria.

The draft non-paper said that escalating the fight against the Syrians in Lebanon would have caused problems in the relationships with the Arab allies. Also, a stalemate in Lebanon could undercut public support for the "needed military action to protect Saudi oil facilities and keep open the Straits of Hormuz".

From this analysis an original plan was drawn. The first task, according to those who wrote the draft, was to try to strike a diplomatic deal with Syria involving a troop

⁶⁴⁴ Ross, Dennis, Author's interview, Washington DC, March 30 2007

⁶⁴⁵ 262 (1392). Non paper. "Next Steps in Lebanon. Original version". System II 91511. Declassified on December 15, 2005. Fortier files, Ronald Reagan Library

disengagement and a process of intra-Lebanese national reconciliation.

Incentives such as Israeli withdrawals and “a formula to handle May 17” could be given to the Syrians together with possible military pressure from the US or other regional allies. Withdrawals, however, would not be complete: some form of partition of the country was envisaged since the Israelis would have trusted no one but themselves to control southern Lebanon while the Syrians would not retreat from the northern and eastern part of the country. Also, Gemayel had to strike a deal with the Druses and Shiites who were in control of Western Beirut in order to extend his rule over there and be credible as someone who could take charge of the south. Syria’s “red line” was the May 17 agreement: it was not going to withdraw unless it was sure that a new Lebanese government *would not* strike a deal with Israel. Gemayel had to move towards a “de facto (underlined in the text) devolution of political and economic power to the Druses and Shiites. The Maronites could be expected to oppose this, “but their interests – the document pointed out - are not the same as ours”. On the other hand, the MNF would have been deployed offshore “to change perceptions of indefinite, hunkered-down role in Beirut” while UNIFIL could take charge of “all eight Palestinian camps throughout Lebanon”.

However, it was not sure whether the Syrians were going to buy this plan because they might have calculated that US domestic support would dwindle. So the US should have considered “the possibility of coordinated Turkish and Iraqi activity on Syria's northern and eastern flanks”. Again the Turkish card was proposed, but the Iraqi one was new.

This last proposal told a lot about the possible author of the document: Donald Fortier was apparently the only top-level official in the NSC staff who supported the Turkish option. This version of the non-paper stressed the opportunities that could come out of the situation but also the possible problems caused by the unwillingness of the US to use force to promote its diplomatic agenda.

At the Defense Department they had a different view of the possible solution. A little before Christmas Assistant Secretary Richard Armitage wrote to National Security Advisor McFarlane that he had discussed “at length” the non-paper with Weinberger and had written down some annotations⁶⁴⁶. They were quite crucial ones.

⁶⁴⁶ 263 (1399). Non-paper. “Next steps in Lebanon, Original version with DOD annotations”. Declassified on

First of all, the Department of Defense was against any “coincidence” between American pressures on Syria and military actions by the IDF. Defense thought that Israeli air strikes against the Syrians were “questionable” while the original draft of the non-paper defined them as “effective”, though they were not the core of that strategy. Also, a certain date had to be agreed not only for the withdrawal of the MNF but also of the Israeli armed forces. Bringing the MNF offshore was proposed as a way to put pressure on Gemayel so that he committed himself more seriously towards national reconciliation. This was exactly the opposite point of view from Dennis Ross’: according to the Secretary of Defense, withdrawing troops (not increasing their number) was the way to put pressure on the Lebanese president.

The analysis of the Pentagon focused on the growing radicalization of the Shiites: the US – according to the Defense Department - had to try to appeal also to those living in southern Beirut. To them and to the Druze community a devolution of political and economic power was needed while with the Maronites it was necessary to recognize the “diverging interests”.

The presumed Fortier draft of the non-paper called for a redeployment of US troops from Beirut Airport to the south (“to reassure Israel”) while the French would have moved to the Shuf and Metn regions. Only Italian and British units would have remained in Beirut. On this point, the Department of Defense reiterated Weinberger’s position: the troops had to be redeployed offshore, aboard US ships, while the other MNF contingents could stay in Beirut and the UNIFIL could take charge of the refugee camps.

As seen above, some months after the Israeli invasion and the US intervention, top officials in the secular Shiite organization Amal had contacted US officials to propose an informal deal involving the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the Shiites taking charge of the security of the border. This option was rediscovered by the Department of Defense in its annotations on the non-paper:

Interim security arrangements that do not include an overt, residual Israeli military presence could be devised to provide adequate security for Israel's border, assuming that the radicalized Shiites in southern

Lebanon would not take their fight into Israel after the IDF occupation ended.

The strategy, according to the Defense Department, could be the following: put the May 17 accord on hold; get an Israeli “early” (underlined in the text) withdrawal; protect the Lebanese-Israeli border with interim security arrangements. The whole thing had to appear as a sign of US strength and influence and not as another example of Israeli weariness. An arrangement with the Druses recognizing their territorial gains and giving them a fairer share of power had to be struck as well as one with the Shiites with whom “time [could be] running out” since they were becoming more radicalized.

Both the presumed Fortier draft and the annotations by the Defense Department contained what apparently seemed well-thought plans. It is hard to believe that they ever got to the upper echelons since, as we will see, the withdrawal from Lebanon was going to be far from well-planned.

The Withdrawal from Lebanon

Opinion polls conducted early in January 1984 showed that a majority of Americans favoured withdrawing Marines from Lebanon. A poll conducted in November had shown how much Reagan’s Achilles’ heel laid in his policy in Lebanon: when questioned specifically about Lebanon, 52% of those polled disapproved the president's policy while only 34% approved⁶⁴⁷.

Democrats in Congress pressed for disengagement, while Republicans were in deep trouble. When he joined the Super Bowl on January 22, speaker of the house Tip O’Neill declared: “Everybody [in Congress] came up to me and said “Get those Marines out”. Robert McFarlane was asked by James Baker: “What is the light at the end of the tunnel?”. He told to Reagan’s biographer Lou Cannon: “I had to tell him “well, there isn’t any”⁶⁴⁸.

In early January members of the administration and congressmen from the "Ad Hoc Group on Lebanon" headed by speaker O'Neill had met to discuss the situation. Congressmen were concerned over the position of the Marines and didn't see any major diplomatic development that could lead to a solution. The intervention of “Scandinavian

⁶⁴⁷ Fischer, Beth, 64

⁶⁴⁸ Cannon, Lou, 397 and David Martin and John Walcott, 147-148

troops or others without superpower baggage” was suggested to replace the US troops. Kenneth Dam and Assistant Secretary Armitage stressed the improvements in the level of preparation of the Lebanese Army and the very active diplomacy carried out by special envoy Rumsfeld. Dam stressed once more the importance of the May 17 agreement and said that the US had to “avoid flip-flop diplomacy”⁶⁴⁹.

Substituting the MNF with a more “neutral” or UN-led presence had been on the agenda since quite a while. In an interview with British ITN TV anchorman Sir Alastair Burnet held on January 5, Margaret Thatcher confirmed that attempts had been made in the past months to substitute the MNF with a UN presence.

For quite some time we've been trying to get an expanded role for the United Nations forces. When I was in New York in September I spoke to Mr Perez de Cuellar about it and again our Ambassador in New York was active just before Christmas⁶⁵⁰

However, according to a report by the State Department INR bureau issued on December 15,⁶⁵¹ the Soviets and the Syrians opposed a new UN role in defending and protecting the city of Beirut.

Members of the NSC staff tried to provide loyal Congressmen with good arguments against withdrawal. Howard Teicher prepared draft papers which “could be used by supportive Congressmen in answering constituents”⁶⁵².

These papers are interesting to understand the ideological fallout of the Lebanese failure on some members of the administration. His considerations, as we will see further, were going to be shared by those arguing in favour of a tougher stance against the new terrorist enemy.

Faced with unrest in Congress, Teicher started to re-evaluate the balance of power between the legislative and the executive. He supported the role of the executive in

⁶⁴⁹ 437 (2195). Memorandum for President from Shultz. “Deputy Secretary Dam's meeting with O'Neill and his ad hoc group”. January 4 1984. Declassified on May 6, 2000. Teicher files, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶⁵⁰ 481 (2386). Extract from Transcript of Prime Minister's Interview with Sir Alastair Burnet: Lebanon. January 5, 1984. Country files, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶⁵¹ State INR Morning Summary. “Morning Summary”. December 15, 1983. Declassified on January 17, 2001. Executive Secretariat. Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Box 8. Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁵² 271 (1427). Memorandum from Teicher to others in NSC staff. “Lebanon packet for Congress”. January 24, 1984. Fortier files, Ronald Reagan Library

handling military matters and foreign policy because “an effectively coordinated, calibrated and coherent policy can only be carried out by a Presidential decision (...) The Congress must realize that it can thwart a coherent policy but it is incapable of formulating or implementing a coherent policy of its own”. Since the US faced non-democratic regimes which can “conduct aggressive policies without constraints” from public opinion, he argued, a “voluntary self-discipline in the national interest” was required.

In another paper titled “the realities of terrorism in the 1980s”, Teicher wrote that “terrorism is a fact of life (...) Given America's position in the world, Americans are bound to be prime targets”. Terrorist sponsors were “the Soviet Union and East bloc countries, Iran, Libya, Syria and North Korea”. So if the US wanted to keep its international role it had to learn how to cope with the terrorist threat⁶⁵³.

Problems ran deep also inside the cabinet. According to George Shultz’ memoirs⁶⁵⁴, vice-president Bush had started to question the Marine presence in Beirut as early as January 9, during a meeting of the NSPG. Shultz himself was hopeless about defending Reagan’s December 10 pledge that “only when internal stability is established and withdrawal of all forces is assured, the Marines will leave”.

Geoffrey Kemp, then Special Assistant to the president for National Security Affairs, agrees with Shultz’ theory about the importance of vicepresident Bush in the decision to withdraw:

I think Bush and Baker had enormous influence because by February 1984 two things were apparent: One, we no longer had support on the Hill and two it was an election year and James Baker who was chief of staff wanted to get Lebanon out of the agenda as soon as possible. And so to the extent that the vicepresident and James Baker were very close, to the extent that they both had excellent relations with the Congress that makes much sense. Bush was not a weak vicepresident, he made his views very clear.⁶⁵⁵

Not only was domestic support for the mission plunging, the internal situation in Lebanon

⁶⁵³ 271 (1427). Memorandum from Teicher to others in NSC staff. “Lebanon packet for Congress”. January 24, 1984. Fortier files, Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁵⁴ Shultz, George, 230

⁶⁵⁵ Geoffrey Kemp, Author’s interview, Washington DC, March 28 2007

was getting worse and worse. The Army which had been so heavily supported by the US was disintegrating. According to David Martin and John Walcott, the CIA and the DIA had already predicted what was taking place: the army was far from being a unifying force because president Amin Gemayel had used it “as a bulwark against giving the Shiites and the Druses a greater voice in government”.

Druze leader Jumblatt called on all Druze soldiers to quit the army and Shiite leaders were putting pressure on Shiite soldiers to do the same. About 60% of the LAF was made up of Moslems, those who continued to serve in this period, did it at their own peril⁶⁵⁶.

To make things worse, the overall situation in the Middle East at the end of 1983 was not positive for the US, according to the “Foreign Intelligence and National Security Policy Developments” paper prepared by the Department of State⁶⁵⁷.

A “qualitative change” had occurred in the Syrian-Soviet relationship, “thanks largely to Moscow's sending the Syrians the advanced SA-5 anti-aircraft missile system as well as some 2,400 to 3,200 Soviet troops needed to man the sites”.

The only good news on the Middle East was that the relationship between US’ rival superpower and the major sponsor of the attack against the marines in Beirut had worsened:

Soviet-Iranian relations, cool to begin with, worsened when Moscow ended its arms embargo to Iraq and Tehran jailed leaders and members of the pro-Moscow Tudeh (Iranian Communist) party.

On the Iranian and Syrian sponsorship of that terrorist bombing few doubts were expressed in the paper:

The MNF bombings were actually carried out by radical Shiites Moslems of different nationalities, almost certainly instigated and supported by Iran and Syria. (...) While every possible measure has been taken to improve the security of US military and diplomatic personnel, Syria and Iran have concluded that terrorism works.

⁶⁵⁶ Martin, David and John Walcott, 148

⁶⁵⁷ “Foreign Intelligence and National Security Policy Developments, October-December 1983”. Declassified on July 31, 2000. Crisis Management Center, box 91129. Ronald Reagan Library

As for the Lebanese civil war, the paper drafted by the Department of State said that the fighting between the Druze and Shiite militias on one side and the Lebanese Army on the other side continued, often catching in the middle the US troops. Rumsfeld's efforts to broker a deal between the Lebanese factions, Syria and Israel were not successful at all also because of the "wavering of some MNF members" which incited a "dramatic hardening of Damascus' position".

The Syrians have concluded that the West "has short breath" and Syria can get what it wants in Lebanon without giving up anything. Ambassador Rumsfeld is working to change that Syrian perception, but pressures in Europe (classified) for a pullout of the MNF have increased⁶⁵⁸.

On January 23, 1984 the NSC met to hear a briefing on Lebanon "and related Middle East matters from George Shultz and Don Rumsfeld". Shultz had held talks with the other MNF foreign ministers in London and Stockholm, while Rumsfeld had concentrated on his efforts as a special envoy for negotiations in the Middle East⁶⁵⁹. As McFarlane wrote in his talking points to the president, no new "diplomatic initiatives" had to be made, even though Shultz and Rumsfeld might have had some recommendations for the "immediate future"⁶⁶⁰. According to Reagan's diary, the meeting was attended by Rumsfeld, Shultz, McFarlane, Weinberger, Vessey and Casey. Reagan's summary of the meeting was as follows: "We're going to study a possible move of the Marines to the ships offshore but an Army force [will stay] on shore to train the Lebanese Army in anti-terrorist tactics."⁶⁶¹

The effort to substitute the Marines conventional presence with a more covert-action plan to train anti-terrorist units was also confirmed by Reagan's diary January 26 entry:

We took up the business of Beirut again & came up with a plan for redeployment of the Marines but only after sending in Army training units who specialize in antiterrorist measures⁶⁶².

⁶⁵⁸ "Foreign Intelligence and National Security Policy Developments, October-December 1983". Declassified on July 31, 2000. Crisis Management Center, box 91129. Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁵⁹ Memorandum for Robert McFarlane. "Nsc briefing". Declassified on June 8, 2000. Near East and South Asia files, box 91994, NSC briefing with President Jan 23, 1984. Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁶⁰ "Talking points for McFarlane for President's Meeting on Middle East". Declassified on June 8, 2000. Near East and South Asia files, box 91994, NSC briefing with President Jan 23, 1984. Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁶¹ Brinkley, Douglas, 214

⁶⁶² Brinkley, Douglas, 215

This was probably the beginning of the discussion of a strategy that was later disclosed by Bob Woodward and Charles Babcock on the Washington Post⁶⁶³. Reagan, according to the two journalists, had authorized in late 1984 the CIA to train anti-terrorist units to strike terrorists before they could hit US-related targets in the Middle East. One of those units, however, had organized an action without the CIA's consent to detonate a car bomb outside the house of one of the leaders of Hizbullah. Eighty people were killed and 200 were wounded on March 8, 1985. The training program was suspended but the idea of pre-empting terrorists, as we will see, will continue to live in the mind of many US officials. Just a few weeks after the massacre both Robert McFarlane and CIA director William Casey would say, using the same language: "We cannot and we will not abstain from forcible action to prevent, pre-empt or respond to terrorist acts where conditions merit the use of force."⁶⁶⁴

It is quite important to read some of the documents that were prepared for the January 23 meeting since they show us some more "lessons" (along with the ones listed in Teicher's "packet") that the administration thought it could learn from the Lebanese situation. For example:

The US has learned some wise lessons from the Vietnam experience (eg. gradualism is a mistake). This need not mean, however, that limited uses of force for limited political objectives are no longer possible. US needs to rethink this intellectual problem of the use of force in a democracy. In some regions of the world (eg. the Middle East) the most relevant currency supporting diplomacy is military power and the demonstrated willingness to use it in support of limited objectives (...) This does not mean "war" in the traditional sense; rather, it is the use of military power to complement diplomacy (ie. "gunboat diplomacy")⁶⁶⁵

The paper then concluded: "If the Vietnamese example turns out to be a pattern for the future, then Western interests throughout the world will be in danger".

⁶⁶³ Woodward, Bob and Charles Babcock, "CIA Operation Reportedly Ended With Unauthorized Lebanese Blast", *The Washington Post*, May 13 1985

⁶⁶⁴ Woodward, Bob and Charles Babcock, "CIA Operation Reportedly Ended With Unauthorized Lebanese Blast", *The Washington Post*, May 13 1985

⁶⁶⁵ Paper. "Complexity of a political-military challenge". Declassified on June 8, 2000. Near East and South Asia files, box 91994, NSC briefing with President Jan 23, 1984. Ronald Reagan Library

Another document prepared for the meeting restated US goals in Lebanon. The US had realized by then that its goals were not going to be achieved by “military force” and that a “diplomatic solution will require compromise”. The US was therefore “prepared to withdraw”⁶⁶⁶.

Finally, a paper titled “Current Situation in Lebanon”⁶⁶⁷ pointed out both positive and negative trends. The former included the growth of the Lebanese Army to 6 brigades which, according to the paper, were composed by a 50% of Moslems. The ongoing collapse of the unity of such multi-ethnic army was not mentioned.

According to the paper, further Israeli withdrawals were also possible while the IDF would continue to stay in the Bekaa Valley “as a deterrent to Syrian forces”. Also a coalition of “moderate Arabs” was forming in opposition to the “Syrian-Iranian-Libyan axis”. As for the negative trends, they included the weakening of the Lebanese economy, the hardening of Syrian positions as a consequence of the wavering in the MNF countries and the increasing terrorist infiltration in Beirut. This last point was going to be the most troublesome for the US in the following years.

In those same weeks in which the decision to withdraw was taken, 4 interagency papers were handed to Robert McFarlane evaluating the possible consequences of the US pull out⁶⁶⁸. “Sailing away – one of the documents read - would of course be perceived as ‘cutting and running’ but would prevent our being embroiled in a civil war”.

Several different options for US intervention were considered:

- A massive deployment of Marines as in 1958. However, for this solution there was no congressional or domestic support, there was a risk of direct confrontation with the Syrians and the intervention would have been seen as on behalf of the Christians against the Muslims, thus stirring up once more the fundamentalists
- Naval gun fire and air support on the side of the LAF was ruled out since it could provide no more than a stalemate

⁶⁶⁶ Paper. “Us objectives in Lebanon”. Declassified on June 8, 2000. Near East and South Asia files, box 91994, NSC briefing with President Jan 23, 1984. Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁶⁷ Paper. “Current situation in Lebanon”. Declassified on June 8, 2000. Near East and South Asia files, box 91994, NSC briefing with President Jan 23, 1984. Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁶⁸ 246. (1299) Memorandum from Charles Hill to Robert McFarlane. “Analysis of US options for Lebanon contingencies”. Declassified on March 27, 2002. Fortier Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

- A “quiet” presence offshore would work as a deterrent to a “final solution” only if the LAF was effective, which was not the case
- A UN force was ruled out for two reasons: the Soviets were against it and no countries would contribute its men until the war was, in fact, over
- Israel, as well, had shown no interest in further military involvement in Lebanon. The only threat that could move them would be the risk of extinction for the Maronites
- Syrian intervention was the one which was described in the best terms since it would end the fighting, avoid the partition of the country and allow some form of US influence through the Saudis and the Sunni establishment

Very disturbing, according to this same assessment, was also the Lebanese internal balance of power that could come out in the following weeks. Amin Gemayel's government was already collapsing, since its main instrument, the armed forces, could no longer hold the ground. The problem was that this time the US could not pick anyone better to replace Amin. In February 1984, indeed, it was difficult to pick a valid Christian alternative to the weak and ineffective brother of Bashir who was seating in the presidential palace and ruling over nowhere. There was no one strong enough to draw support from all the major factions. A non-divisive candidate was sought and desired by the US officials but none could be indicated in the document⁶⁶⁹.

Another undated document probably written in this period, focused on “Choices in Lebanon”⁶⁷⁰. It started by saying very earnestly that “the situation in Lebanon is desperate”. In a matter of weeks the US had to face an alternative: Either “reverse the situation on the ground” which was considered as practically impossible later in the document or “tell Gemayel he has no alternative but to agree to the final distasteful concessions the Syrians seek”.

Very sadly, this document said explicitly that the US had lost:

No matter how we rationalize defeat to ourselves, no matter how much we dwell on the very real limitations of the Lebanese, the fact remains that those who stood with us will conclude that we pulled the plug on

⁶⁶⁹ 246. (1299) Memorandum from Charles Hill to Robert McFarlane. "Analysis of US options for Lebanon contingencies". Declassified on March 27, 2002. Fortier Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁶⁷⁰ 252 (1328). Secret memo. “Choices in Lebanon”. Declassified on March 27, 2002. Fortier Files, Ronald Reagan Library

them.

Globally speaking, the “ever calculating leaders of the Soviet Union (...) may see the collapse of our posture in Lebanon as evidence that nothing much has really changed since the fall of Iran”.

One alternative, the paper said, would have been to impose an “American mandate” on Lebanon but that would have required sending two or even more divisions. This option would have implied an ultimatum to the Syrians to withdraw their artillery in Lebanon and a negotiation with Israel on the possible re-occupation of the Shuf plateau. “Once the US/Israeli actions were completed, the GOL would be pressed to table an agreed and comprehensive program of reforms”.

The diplomatic solution was seen as alternative to a major US military commitment but it implied some form of agreement with Syria. The goal was to find a “modus-vivendi” which would grant a stabilization of Lebanon and a reduction of risks of a new Syrian-Israeli war. To “give a hard edge” to this option, the US could “stimulate Israel to undertake some more limited military actions while [the US] take more sustained punitive actions against Syrian targets in Lebanon as [the US troops] withdraw”⁶⁷¹.

On January 25, George Shultz appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In his account⁶⁷², he emphasized that “state-sponsored terrorism was a new worldwide phenomenon”. Shultz had already started to conceptualize on the new war against terrorism. His argument in those days ran like this:

American power must have more to it than a massive deterrent against the Soviets or a relatively simple exercise like Grenada (...) The nature of the challenge is different (...) We’re in a low-grade war with Iranian and Syrian terrorists⁶⁷³.

Shultz argued that the country could not escape the “Soviet-Syrian” challenge represented by terrorism. Many Congressmen talked about passing a non-binding resolution in favour

⁶⁷¹ 252 (1328). Secret memo. “Choices in Lebanon”. Declassified on March 27, 2002. Fortier Files, Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁷² Shultz, George, 230

⁶⁷³ Shultz, George, 230

of withdrawal. Later on, however, Reagan restated his commitment in his address on the State of the Union: "We must have the courage to give peace a chance and we must not be driven from our objectives for peace in Lebanon by state-sponsored terrorism"⁶⁷⁴.

Reagan was actually sincere in his defense of the Marines' presence. During the NSC held on January 26 some decisions had been taken and had been later written down in NSDD 123 on "Next Steps in Lebanon"⁶⁷⁵. Despite the LAF desperate situation, it was granted new assistance. The US navy was given authority to shell "any units in Syrian-controlled territory in Lebanon firing into greater Beirut". Shultz's idea about deploying "counterterrorism forces" was translated into counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency training to the LAF by deploying a company-size unit of Special Operation Forces as trainers. While stepping up some elements of military pressure, however, the directive called for a plan to redeploy troops offshore which had to be taken into consideration by the Department of Defense, the Joint Chief of Staff and the State Department. In other words, NSDD 123 could also be read as a way to fire the last big bullets before running away.

But even the decision to redeploy Marines offshore, which was more than implicit in this directive, needed a strong congressional strategy since it implied stepping up military pressure before pulling out. On this issue, Donald Fortier wrote a memo to Robert McFarlane⁶⁷⁶ saying that to convince reluctant congressmen to support the new Rules of Engagement for the MNF, the possibility of a "realistic negotiated solution" had to be stressed. The Soviet Union was distancing itself from Syria and so the conflict could be "bounded". Also, a US failure in Lebanon would increase the danger of a Syrian-Israeli war which could imply superpower confrontation. Besides, terrorism was an important theme "to deploy" in these discussions since "Lebanon has become a proving ground of what terrorism can achieve. Walking away from it will only increase the probability of other flare-ups in other vital locations".

⁶⁷⁴ Clines, Francis X., "Reagan and O'Neill Square Off on Beirut Mission", New York Times, January 26, 1984

⁶⁷⁵ 251 (1325). NSDD 123. "Next Steps in Lebanon". February 1, 1984. Declassified on November 15, 2000. Fortier Files, Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁷⁶ 254 (1343). Memorandum from Donald Fortier to Robert McFarlane. "Overcoming congressional reservations on the new Lebanon NSDD". February 1, 1984. Declassified on October 12, 2004. Fortier files, Ronald Reagan Library

Despite the cold war implications, President Reagan was not sure whether he could get the support of the Congress. In his January 27 entry on the diary he wrote:

I'm sure some [Republican Congressmen] won't [support us] but I gave a little lecture on why we can't bug out. We're trying to get the Israeli lobby which is very effective in the Cong. to go to work on how much Israel has to lose if Congress forces a withdrawal of our troops⁶⁷⁷.

In his radio address on February 4⁶⁷⁸, president Reagan tried to show no concern for the situation on the ground, present it in thoroughly positive terms and restate US commitment to Lebanon.

We're working closely with Lebanon's President Gemayel to find a political solution. Support for his government is broadening among the different groups. And just as important, our efforts to strengthen the Lebanese Army and its ability to keep the peace are making sure and steady progress.

Yes, the situation in Lebanon is difficult, frustrating, and dangerous. But that is no reason to turn our backs on friends and to cut and run. If we do, we'll be sending one signal to terrorists everywhere: They can gain by waging war against innocent people.

Actually, by early February, the US was just preparing to pack up and leave. The whole diplomatic strategy devised during 1983 was abandoned. On February 13, Reagan wrote in his diary:

A hush hush cable from Geo B. [George Bush] re Lebanon. Margaret T. [Thatcher] feels strongly we should tell Gemayel to abrogate the May 17 agreement with Israel. Geo. wanted to know if he could tell her we wouldn't object. That's all we can say – we won't oppose but we won't urge either⁶⁷⁹.

Not very much a superpower position. Holding to the May 17 agreement had been the threshold of American diplomacy in the Middle East for months. Now, a few hours before deciding to withdraw, all that Reagan could say was that the US could neither oppose nor encourage the abrogation of that treaty. A resounding declaration of powerlessness.

⁶⁷⁷ Brinkley, Douglas, 215

⁶⁷⁸ "Radio Address to the Nation on the Budget Deficit, Central America, and Lebanon February 4, 1984" The Public Papers of President Ronald W. Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. (<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/20484a.htm>) accessed on September 26, 2007

⁶⁷⁹ Brinkley, Douglas, 218

On February 17, a memo by McFarlane⁶⁸⁰ officially informed both Shultz and Weinberger that the president had decided for the withdrawal of the Marines to the ships. The pull out had to be completed within March 15.

In a similar memo to Reagan the same day,⁶⁸¹ McFarlane said that both Italy and France wanted to replace the MNF with a UN force while resuming intra-Lebanese talks. While proposing this, the French were going “very much their own way by distancing themselves from [the US and Gemayel]”. In the end, the Italians, though giving serious consideration to staying in Beirut, had informed Vicepresident Bush that they, too, were going to withdraw their men in 15 days.

At noon on February 26 the last Marines left the Beirut International Airport. Their positions were soon taken by the secular Shiite Amal militia. In the following years, Lebanon was going to be still in the headlines as an occasion for further humiliations for the administration. On March 16, William Buckley, the head of CIA station in Beirut was kidnapped by Islamic terrorists. His kidnapping was not the first of this sort and would not be the last. Eventually, the kidnappings of US citizens in Lebanon would lead to the Iran-Contra scandal. But that's a whole different story which is not to be told here⁶⁸².

Also, new terrorist attacks were to be suffered by the US. On September 20, 1984 a new attack was carried out against the new American embassy in Beirut, killing two servicemen⁶⁸³.

Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, as recollected by David Martin and John Walcott⁶⁸⁴, concluded: “The fundamental question – to what degree is Lebanon fundamental to the security interests of the United States – was never asked”.

The two authors added:

The salvation of Lebanon was unquestionably a worthy cause, but that was not enough to justify the

⁶⁸⁰ 249. Memorandum by Robert McFarlane for George Shultz and Caspar Weinberger. “Plan for the redeployment of the USMNF contingent”. February 17, 1984. Declassified on July 18, 2002. Fortier files, Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁸¹ 250. Memorandum by Robert McFarlane to Reagan. “Plan for redeployment of USMNF”. February 17, 1984. Declassified on July 18, 2002. Fortier files, Ronald Reagan Library

⁶⁸² The best source on the Iran-Contra scandal is Kornbluh, Peter and Malcolm Byrne (Ed), *The Iran-Contra Scandal. The Declassified History*, New Press, 1993

⁶⁸³ Shultz, George, 647 and Martin, David and John Walcott, 158

⁶⁸⁴ Martin, David and John Walcott, 153

sacrifices Lebanon demanded. Not even Israel was willing to make the sacrifices Lebanon demanded. "What was our mission?" Asked Lance Corp. Nick Mottola "I'll tell you what our mission was. A lot of people died for nothing and then we left"⁶⁸⁵.

Stressing the missing relationship between the needed US commitments and the national interests at stake was of course a simplistic, though partially true, narrative of the US failure in Lebanon. It could not be anything different since Martin and Walcott wrote in the 1980s when the records about the diplomatic strategy followed by the Reagan administration were not open. However, the idea that the US troops had been committed again after Vietnam in a scenario where no national interest was at stake was one of the crucial points of the Weinberger doctrine which was stated later in 1984 and which will be discussed further on.

The failure in Lebanon was about the relationship between war and diplomacy on one side and the use of a global paradigm in local crisis on the other side.

First of all, in Lebanon the "global cold war" paradigm had not served the purpose of devising an effective strategy. The US was led to read the Lebanese factions according to Cold War standards: it had picked the Maronites and left alone the Shiites. The result was an ineffective Maronite government and Shiite terrorism against the US troops. In the end Lebanon had turned out to be about the Cold War because, as many records have pointed out, the failure in Lebanon had created a momentary credibility problem for the US in the area.

Second, there was an unbalanced relationship between military and diplomatic initiatives. The policy-makers both in Washington and on the ground saw two options: either commit more troops to Lebanon and establish an "American mandate" or work towards a diplomatic solution which would have implied some form of agreement with Syria that would have upset the Israelis. The ultimate analysis which we have seen in several documents was that there was either a military solution or a diplomatic one. Probably, only the documents that came out of McFarlane's "Saturday seminars" along with Dennis Ross' proposal tried to combine a limited use of force with a comprehensive diplomatic strategy.

⁶⁸⁵ ibidem

The military build-up was not feasible because not only the Congress and the public opinion but the military itself were unwilling to commit large amounts of troops abroad after Vietnam. The diplomatic solution was also unfeasible because Reagan, as we have seen in his diary, was not willing to pay the necessary price: having a different policy from Israel and dealing with a real enemy like Syria. But diplomacy very often involves negotiations with enemies like Asad.

New concepts of war would emerge from the Lebanese failure, one championed by the Defense Secretary Weinberger and one by the Secretary of State George Shultz. But first of all, we must understand what kind of war the US had lost in Lebanon.

Starting the Fight Against Terrorism

Between 1982 and 1984, the US in Lebanon was faced with a growing “small war”, or as Shultz defined it in Congress (see above), a “low-grade” confrontation. The best definition of this kind of conflicts can be found in Max Boot's masterpiece on the “Savage Wars of Peace”⁶⁸⁶.

Boot uses the definition of small wars (also called “low intensity conflicts” or “military operations other than war”) given by a British officer in the 19th century:

Campaigns undertaken to suppress rebellions and guerrilla warfare in all parts of the world where organized armies are struggling against opponents who will not meet them in the open field⁶⁸⁷.

After the humiliation of the Syrian army by the Israeli Defense Forces in June 1982, the great part of the struggle in Lebanon was between the militias of the revisionist front and the Hizbullah on one side and the Lebanese Armed Forces and the US on the other side. Few battles were fought on the open field as in Suq-al-Gharb. More frequently, the US had to face sniper fire or occasional rounds of shells coming from the Shouf. And then the terrorist attacks, which are all but conventional warfare as Weinberger had pointed out in his comments on the Long Commission report.

⁶⁸⁶ Boot, Max, *The Savage Wars of Peace. Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*, New York: Basic Books, 2002

⁶⁸⁷ Boot, Max, XV

The Marines in Beirut seemed to be following the disdain for small wars of Antoine-Henri Jomini, a swiss-born military strategist of the nineteenth century, who wrote that wars involving nonprofessional combatants were “dangerous and deplorable”. Professional soldiers should avoid this sort of “organized assassination” in favor of more “chivalresque” violence⁶⁸⁸.

The irony was that it had been the Marines the first to draft a “Small Wars Manual” in the 1930s. The Manual, as quoted by Boot⁶⁸⁹, read:

Small warfare operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable (...) small wars represent the normal and frequent operations of the Marine Corps (...) [Their task is] to establish and maintain law and order by supporting or replacing the civil government in countries or areas in which the interests of the United States have been placed in jeopardy

It sounds like a fairly accurate description of the situation in Lebanon in 1982-1983. As Boot pointed out, in these situations it was the State Department (ie. the department in charge of diplomacy not the department in charge of war) that controlled the operations. American goals, according to the manual, had to be achieved not by overwhelming force but by “nothing more than a demonstration of force”.

As Howard Teicher had pointed out in one of his documents for the January 1984 “package for Congress”, the defeat in Vietnam could not mean that “limited uses of force for limited political objectives” were no more possible⁶⁹⁰.

However, as we have seen, more often than not the use of force was conceived as an alternative, not as a complement to diplomacy. Most of the documents that we have seen listed either military or diplomatic options, seldom a combination of the two.

The lack of coherence between the military commitment and the diplomatic strategy was often depicted by members of the administration as “lack of will”. This was one of the points that George Shultz started to raise very soon after the withdrawal. Speaking during

⁶⁸⁸ Boot, Max, 283

⁶⁸⁹ Boot, Max, 284

⁶⁹⁰ Paper. “Complexity of a political-military challenge”. Declassified: June 8, 2000. Near East and South Asia files, box 91994, NSC briefing with President Jan 23, 1984. Ronald Reagan Library

the TV show “Meet the Press” on April 1, the Secretary of State said that the pull out had been perceived as a lack of will by US partners in the region. His explanation of the US failure was the following:

The existence of U.S staying power and forcefulness was an important ingredient and if we could have maintained it in a strong fashion, perhaps the results would be different than they are today. It was not possible because of all the problems in Beirut and all of this second-guessing and changing of mind on the part of the Congress, no doubt reflecting many people's views. (...) It was perfectly apparent to the Syrians that all they had to do was keep pushing and pretty soon the United States, as they said, would be short of breath and drop out⁶⁹¹.

The idea of the lack of will as the main explanation for military failures was pure Reaganism. As John Arquilla has pointed out, Reagan thought that the real problem facing the military after Vietnam was self-doubt not material insufficiency. In one of his radio commentaries in 1977 he had said: “We stand in greater danger of defeat from lack of will than from any mistakes likely to flow from a show of purpose”. Arquilla so commented: “This is an almost eerie foreshadowing of the Lebanon fiasco in 1983, where our “show of purpose” came at such a high cost”⁶⁹².

However, it is not just that diplomacy was not supported by enough military force. The problem in Lebanon, as it emerged both by recently declassified records and from the recollection of some of the protagonists of those events, was that it was used the *wrong* kind of force for the *wrong* diplomatic strategy: a symmetrical military posture (for example, naval gun fire) was used to defend a flawed diplomatic strategy based on the Israeli-Lebanese agreement and the exclusion of the Syrians. As for this second element, as we will see, there was little debate inside the administration following February 1984. Rather, the debate focused on the military response to the new form of warfare represented by terrorism.

First of all, not everyone was convinced that terrorism was a priority. The army and the Defense Department were focusing on the threat posed by a possible Soviet invasion of

⁶⁹¹ “Shultz Says Pullout Harmed U.S.”, New York Times, April 2, 1984

⁶⁹² Arquilla, John, *The Reagan Imprint. Ideas in American Foreign Policy from the collapse of communism to the war on terror*, Chicago: Ivan Dee, 2006 p. 118

Western Europe through the Fulda Gap. During the Reagan years, according to Arquilla, army leaders identified new technologies and drafted a new military doctrine – AirLand Battle – for the proper use in future wars. They “turned their backs almost completely on the problems posed by irregular and guerrilla warfare, fixing instead on visions of a climatic clash with the Red Army on the plains of central Europe. Thus the least likely conflict scenario was nevertheless the one that got the most attention”⁶⁹³.

The statement of the Weinberger doctrine can be seen as a way to further avoid small wars and prepare for a full-scale confrontation with the Soviet Union. But in the months before the speech of the Secretary of Defense at the National Press Club the floor was all for Shultz and the advocates of what John Arquilla has defined a “de facto war on terror”.⁶⁹⁴ On March 24, 1984, just 8 days after William Buckley had been kidnapped by Muslim terrorists in Beirut, Shultz convened a day-long meeting of terrorism experts in Washington. The Chair was Brian Jenkins, then an expert for Rand. As Jenkins recollected for Arquilla, the experts reached a consensus about how terror had become a new form of warfare for which the US was poorly prepared. The group went beyond simple analysis and articulated on the unconventional response to be given to the terrorist threat. According to Arquilla, Shultz “was fully persuaded by the group's concrete recommendations and was soon arguing the case with President Reagan for waging a war on terror”⁶⁹⁵. This is probably an overstatement: it is very important to keep in mind that we were still in the 1980s, the major issue that defined US foreign policy was the Cold War, not the war on terror. These years can be considered as the ideological and tactical breeding ground of the war on terror launched by President George W. Bush in 2001, not as part of it.

Shultz was not yet arguing in favour of a “Global War On Terror” based on preemptive strikes against “rogue regimes” as the one envisaged by the 2002 National Security Strategy. Rather, he was making a point on two issues: first, terrorism was a form of warfare, not a crime; second, it needed a military response, not just one based on law enforcement. He was going to fight his political battle on these two points throughout 1984

⁶⁹³ Arquilla, John, 121

⁶⁹⁴ Arquilla, John, 183

⁶⁹⁵ Arquilla, John, 179-180

and had his first, partial, victory only in 1986.

Ten days after the Saturday seminar Reagan signed NSDD 138, still highly classified⁶⁹⁶. According to Christopher Simpson's account of the directive, it authorized the creation of

Secret FBI and CIA paramilitary squads and use of existing Pentagon military units – such as the Green Berets and the Navy SEALs – for conducting what amounted to guerrilla warfare against guerrillas (...) a de facto declaration of war. It authorized sabotage, killing (...) preemptive and retaliatory raids, deception and a significantly expanded [intelligence] collection program aimed at suspected radicals and people regarded as their sympathizers⁶⁹⁷.

The CIA, according to Arquilla⁶⁹⁸, was the only agency enthusiastic about such a campaign. On the other hand, the Secretary of Defense was still “focusing on confronting other nations in a more classical form of conflict”.

This is how Weinberger recollected these discussions:

We had had many internal discussions within the NSPG and with the President as to the course we would follow if we could ever identify a terrorist or a group of terrorists who had carried out an attack on us or on some of our allies. A number of people, particularly in the State Department, supported what is called an “unfocused” response; that is, an immediate retaliatory action, such as bombing a Syrian or Iranian city if we believed the terrorist act originated there. I always argued against that simple “revenge” approach, as did the President. He very much opposed anything that could hurt or kill innocent people⁶⁹⁹.

To understand more deeply what the directive entailed, it is useful to read a background paper prepared by McFarlane for Attorney General Edwin Meese in August of that year⁷⁰⁰. First of all he provided some data: in 1983 there had been a 128% increase in terrorist incidents in the Middle East. Since 1969 when the first records were taken, there had been the highest number of murders: 652. Of course, the two most striking incidents were the

⁶⁹⁶ Currently it is available just a one-page “extract” that was released in April 1984 which does not say anything significant

⁶⁹⁷ Simpson, Christopher, *National Security Directives of the Reagan and Bush Administrations: The Declassified History of US Political and Military Policy, 1981-1991*, Oxford: Westview Press, 1995 pp. 365-366

⁶⁹⁸ Arquilla, John, 181

⁶⁹⁹ Weinberger, Caspar, 188

⁷⁰⁰ Memorandum from Edwin Meese III from Robert McFarlane. “Background Material On Terrorism”. August 15, 1984. Declassified on May 19, 2000. Subject files, folder: Terrorism [August 1984], Ronald Reagan Library

Embassy bombing (57 killed, 120 wounded) and the bombing of Marine and French barracks in which 296 were killed and 84 wounded. Globally, 271 americans had lost their life for terrorism in 1983, more than in the preceding 15 years. According to McFarlane, 70 attacks could be attributed to state-sponsored terrorism. Sponsor states included Iran, Cuba, Syria, Libya and South Yemen. Syria and Iran played a significant role in the bombing of the embassy in Beirut. In other words: terrorism was stronger than ever, it was directed against the US and the culprits were now fairly clear.

McFarlane explained that the administration, while drafting the directive, had “sought to minimize the attention placed on pre-emptive covert activities in order to preclude adverse reactions which could constrain our options”.

Basic purpose – McFarlane wrote - in view of increasingly heavy involvement of states in terrorism is to shift policy focus from passive to active defense measures and to require that resources be reprogrammed and/or obtained to support that policy focus (...) Active defense measures by the United States are expected to prompt retaliation and at least in short run to increase level of terrorist activity against us, including within the United States⁷⁰¹.

4 bills were presented as a consequence of NSDD 138, on the following issues: Prevention and punishment of hostage-taking; aircraft sabotage; rewards for information on terrorist acts; prohibition against training and support of terrorists.

The language of NSDD 138 had been in fact carefully chosen not to stir up any reaction in the bureaucracy. According to Bob Woodward⁷⁰²,

The United States had been driven out of Lebanon by terrorism. The problem could not be solved by diplomats. As the discussions went on, Shultz became excitable on the subject of terrorism and pushed for an active response (..)Lieutenant Colonel North drafted a decision document for the president (..) His draft NSDD called for CIA-backed and – trained teams of foreign nationals to “neutralize” terrorists

⁷⁰¹ Memorandum fro Edwin Meese III from Robert McFarlane. “Background Material On Terrorism”. August 15, 1984. Declassified on May 19,2000. Subject files, folder:Terrorism [August 1984], Ronald Reagan Library

⁷⁰² Woodward, Bob, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987*, New York: Pocket Books, 1987 p. 441-444

This idea created anxiety in the CIA because it resembled too much the assassination plots against Castro that had caused so much trouble to the agency when they were revealed in the 1970s. Also, Defense was relieved that “the dirty job would be in CIA hands” but thought also that “paramilitary action was in competition with the Pentagon”.

It was because of this bureaucratic struggle that, according to Woodward, NSDD 138 turned out to be much less effective and decisive than it was presented by the media.

On April 3, when President Reagan signed the secret NSDD 138 on counter-terrorism, it was little more than a planning document that called on twenty-six federal departments and agencies to propose how to stop terrorists. It endorsed in principle the notion of preemptive strikes and retaliatory raids⁷⁰³.

Rather than adopting a new, bold strategic thinking, NSDD 138 just opened the floor for further debate. The message that got to the public opinion, however, was always the same: no more reactions to attacks but “pro-active” measures. As an article in *Time Magazine*⁷⁰⁴ explained: “Rather than react after an attack, the US plans to adopt a much more aggressive policy that would establish in advance the likelihood of reprisals and would even permit pre-emptive strikes against suspected terrorists”. The article then reported that

Shultz is especially incensed at what he calls “state-sponsored terrorism” and has accused four nations of practicing it: Libya, Iran, Syria and North Korea. He thinks the US and its allies should regard such conduct as “a form of warfare” and respond accordingly.

NSDD 138 was signed on April 3 (though it was leaked to the press only some weeks later), on the evening of the same day George Shultz spoke at plenary meeting of the Trilateral Commission in Washington DC. The title of his address was “Power and Diplomacy in the 1980's”⁷⁰⁵.

⁷⁰³ Woodward, Bob, 444

⁷⁰⁴ Derner, William, “Getting Tough on Terrorism”, *Time Magazine*, April 30 1984

⁷⁰⁵ For the full text of this speech see: Secretary Shultz. “Power and Diplomacy in the 1980's”. April 3, 1984. Current Policy no. 561. Subject files: Terrorism, Ronald Reagan Library and Address by the Honorable Secretary of State Before the Washington Plenary Meeting of the Trilateral Commission. “Power and Diplomacy in the 1980's”. Washington DC April 3, 1984. Fortier files, Ronald Reagan Library

In this speech Shultz drew some lessons from Lebanon, proposed his way to overcome the Vietnam Syndrome, made his point about the fight against terrorism and attacked what later came to be known as the Weinberger doctrine and which had not yet been disclosed. This was the first time he elaborated deeply on the defeat in Lebanon.

It was precisely our military role in Lebanon that was problematical, not our diplomatic exertion. Our military role was hamstrung by legislative and other inhibitions: the Syrians were not interested in diplomatic compromise so long as the prospect of hegemony was not foreclosed.

Power and diplomacy, in Shultz's words, "are not alternatives. They must go together or we will accomplish very little in this world". From this point he went on to attack Weinberger's military strategy and point at the new threat posed by terrorism. The US was "relatively well prepared to deter an all-out war or a Soviet attack" and that's why these were the least likely contingencies. On the other hand, "terrorism - particularly state-sponsored terrorism - is already a contemporary weapon directed at America's interests, values and allies". It was true, he said, that the US had not to engage in a military confrontation without a clear and precise mission, solid support from public opinion and the ability to finish the job. But, he asked rethorically, "does it mean there are no situations where a discrete assertion of power is needed or appropriate, for limited purposes? Unlikely". The "gray area" conflicts (another synonym for "small wars") were the most likely to happen in the 1980s and beyond, "few cases will be as clear or as quick as Grenada". State-sponsored terrorism being a form of warfare, the US had to address it boldly. Terrorism was a "weapon of unconventional war against democratic societies". The idea that terrorism was a tool in the hand of totalitarian regimes to fight against democracies was, as we will see, one of the key points made at the Jonathan Institute Conference on International Terrorism some weeks later.

State-sponsorship was another: he named the growing threat coming from Iran, Syria, Libya and North Korea only to stress the need that the "nations of the West face up to the need for active defense against terrorism".

Vietnam had left two important legacies, according to him: the idea that diplomacy is an alternative to the use of force and the idea that the US is the “guilty party”, the use of its power being “a source of evil”. Also, Shultz took some time to criticize the War Powers Resolution because it stopped the President from implementing an effective foreign policy while the 60-days deadline encouraged US enemies to wait them out. The idea that normal democratic procedures were an obstacle in the fight against terror was to be hinted at again by Shultz, but would be preponderant only after 2001.

The Secretary of State made again his point before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on June 13⁷⁰⁶. Shultz stressed the changing nature of terrorism which was no more the act of isolated groups of fanatics but was more and more state-supported:

Terrorism is now a method of warfare, no less because it is undeclared and even (though not always) denied (...) It is a form of low-level warfare directed primarily at Western nations and institutions. (...) within the US government we are continuing to study other ways [other than law enforcement] and means of deterring or preemptively dealing with a range of terrorist threats in conformity with existing law.

These concepts would have been stressed even more seriously during the conference held at the Jonathan Institute in Washington on international terrorism. Head of the institute was Benjamin Netanyahu, at that time just an Israeli diplomat at the UN and a commentator for CNN. He was going to become Prime Minister of Israel in 1996.

This was actually the second international conference organized by the Institute on this issue, the first one was held in Jerusalem in 1979. Representing the US there was the cold warrior democratic Senator Henry Jackson.

In Jerusalem some concepts which later became popular in the 1980s (and beyond) were for the first time discussed. First of all, the issue of state sponsorship. As the background paper for the 1984 meeting recollected,

⁷⁰⁶ For Shultz's speech see: “Terrorism: The Problem and the Challenges”. June 13, 1984. Current Policy no. 586 and also “Statement by the Honorable George P. Shultz Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs US House of Representatives”. June 13, 1984. Fortier files, Ronald Reagan Library

Among the sponsors of terrorism discussed in the Conference were the newly transformed Iran, as well as Libya, Iraq, Syria, South Yemen and other Arab countries (..) The Soviet Union, it was noted, used terrorism as an effective tool with which to destabilize and demoralize the West (...) The Arab PLO, the Soviet-backed Armenian ASALA, the Baader-Meinhof gang and the Red Brigades, were all linked not only to each other, but to the Soviet Union⁷⁰⁷.

The Jonathan Institute's background paper then went on to celebrate how useful the invasion of Lebanon had been in the fight against international terrorism:

Perhaps the most significant blow dealt to international terrorism was that delivered by Israel to the PLO in 1982. The entire infrastructure built up by the PLO over a decade was destroyed (..) The PLO's capacity to act as a linchpin of international terrorism has been decisively diminished.

Under the paragraph "the growing threat" the background paper warned about a new problem:

Few can doubt that other, more lethal weapons would be employed. By far, the most disconcerting prospect would be acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by the radical regimes of the Middle East (..) Not one of these countries possesses a scientific establishment capable of acting as a check on the leader's use of advanced weaponry.

Shultz's speech at the Jonathan Institute in 1984, as other authors have pointed out⁷⁰⁸, was a crucial one. Governments which oppose terrorism, he said, had to penetrate much better than before terrorist groups and be willing, with that intelligence, to take "appropriate preemptive measures". Shultz talked about a "League of Terror" made up of Libya, Syria, Iran, North Korea and the PLO. The Soviet role was stressed once again.

The international links among terrorist groups are now clearly understood, and the Soviet link, direct or indirect, is also clearly understood. The Russians use terrorist groups for their own purposes, and their goal is always the same: to weaken liberal democracy and undermine world stability. (...) When the Soviet Union and its clients provide financial, logistic and training support for terrorists worldwide they hope to shake the

⁷⁰⁷ "Background Paper for the Second Conference On International Terrorism". The Jonathan Institute. Donald Gregg files, George Bush Library

⁷⁰⁸ Stanik, Joseph, 95; Martin, David and John Walcott, 157; See also his memoirs: Shultz, George, 647;

West's self-confidence and sap its will to resist aggression and intimidation⁷⁰⁹

This served as an introduction to the main point of his speech:

It is time to think long, hard and seriously about more active means of defense - about defense through appropriate preventive or preemptive actions against terrorist groups before they strike⁷¹⁰.

He did not go into details as to what "active means of defense" practically meant, he just specified that the role of intelligence was going to be crucial and that preemption had to stay within the limits set by law:

The response will have to fit the precise character and circumstances of the specific threats but must be within the rule of law, lest we become unwitting accomplices in the terrorist's scheme to undermine civilized society⁷¹¹.

The idea of pre-emptive strikes did not come out of nowhere. The Israelis, in the most recent times, had included pre-emption in their military doctrine. In 1979, the then Israeli Minister of Defense Ezer Weizman, announced a new policy of "pre-emptive attack" in Lebanon. No longer would each Israeli attack be justified as revenge for a particular Palestinian action; the Israeli government was asserting the right to strike at will⁷¹².

At the Jonathan Institute Shultz felt also compelled also to state the difference between terrorists and those Freedom Fighters who had become the major recipients of US aid thanks to the Reagan doctrine.

Freedom fighters don't set out to capture and slaughter schoolchildren; terrorist murderers do. The resistance fighters in Afghanistan do not destroy villages or kill the helpless. The contras in Nicaragua do not blow up school buses or hold mass executions of civilians.⁷¹³

Other important people spoke during the conference. Its proceedings were to be published in the summer of 1986 in a book edited by Netanyahu and titled, not by chance,

⁷⁰⁹ "Shultz Urges 'Active' Drive on Terrorism", New York Times, June 25, 1984 e Omang, Joanne, "Soviets Using Terrorism, Shultz Asserts", The Washington Post, June 25, 1984

⁷¹⁰ "Shultz Urges 'Active' Drive on Terrorism", New York Times, June 25, 1984 e Omang, Joanne, "Soviets Using Terrorism, Shultz Asserts", The Washington Post, June 25, 1984

⁷¹¹ "Shultz Urges 'Active' Drive on Terrorism", New York Times, June 25, 1984 e Omang, Joanne, "Soviets Using Terrorism, Shultz Asserts", The Washington Post, June 25, 1984

⁷¹² Ryan, Sheila, "Israel's Invasion of Lebanon: Background to the Crisis", Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 11, No. 4, Special Issue: The War in Lebanon (Summer - Autumn, 1982)

⁷¹³ "Shultz Urges 'Active' Drive on Terrorism", New York Times, June 25, 1984 e Omang, Joanne, "Soviets Using Terrorism, Shultz Asserts", The Washington Post, June 25, 1984

“Terrorism. How the West Can Win”⁷¹⁴. Reagan read the book when it came out and was enthusiastic about it. In a letter to Netanyahu, Shultz recollected that on his long plane ride from Washington to Bali Reagan

Came to my area of the plane several times and commented on various parts of the book, which he read aloud to us (...) The president and Nancy also saw you on TV after our action against Libya and told me you did a terrific job, putting forward your -- and our -- position with clarity and eloquence⁷¹⁵.

As it is possible to see, by May 1986 Netanyahu's and Shultz's position on terrorism were so close that the US Secretary of State could confuse them in a letter. The book, despite being a collection of speeches by different people gave one single message attuned to the one proposed by the then Israeli diplomat.

In his review for the New York Review⁷¹⁶, Shaul Bakbash highlighted the cornerstones of Netanyahu's thought about terrorism: first, the primary target of terrorists are western democracies; second, all the terrorists are linked in an international network; third, the network survives because of support from “terrorist states” such as Syria, Libya, Iran and South Yemen with the looming presence of the Soviet Union; finally, there is no root cause of terrorism apart from terrorists themselves (“the root cause of terrorism is terrorists”). Netanyahu, according to Bakbash, established a link between “Communist totalitarianism and Islamic radicalism”.

To understand how influential that book was inside the administration one has to listen to Elaine Morton, who by the time it was published had become Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council:

That was a really extreme book. When I read the review in the New York Times or the New York Review of Books I thought: “this must be the genesis of the ideas that surround me”. I cannot say that Wolfowitz was influenced by that book, and it is worth pointing out that he had stopped working on issues of international terrorism in March 1982, three years before the book was published. However I think it was consistent with

⁷¹⁴ Netanyahu, Benjamin (ed), *Terrorism: How the West Can Win*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1986

⁷¹⁵ Letter from George Shultz to Benjamin Netanyahu. May 2, 1986. Craig Coy files, Ronald Reagan Library.

⁷¹⁶ Bakbash, Shaul, “The Reign of Terror”, *New York Review*, August 14 1986

his previous ideas. It is also possible that Netanyahu and Wolfowitz influenced each other's ideas about confronting terrorism in an informal way, during an earlier period—when Netanyahu was second in command at the Israeli Embassy in Washington at the same time that Wolfowitz was head of the Policy Planning Staff in the State Department.

The approach taken in Netanyahu's book on terrorism was much more directly linked with the approach that George Shultz was taking at the time. It is impossible to say with certainty who was influencing whom although it was probably Netanyahu who was influencing Shultz⁷¹⁷.

In the introduction⁷¹⁸, Netanyahu explained that the scope of the book was to “present a strategy with which the West can wage successful war against terrorism. Since the Western democracies are societies rooted in law, the first requirement is to establish the legal foundations for waging the war”. The conflict that he proposed was nothing less than a clash of civilizations. As he explained in the preface⁷¹⁹, the Jonathan Institute was named after his brother who had died in the Israeli raid in Entebbe (Uganda) to free Israeli citizens who had been kidnapped by Palestinian terrorists. Jonathan, according to Benjamin, had died in “the war against terror” and he “believed that the battle against terrorism was part of a much larger struggle, one between the forces of civilization and the forces of barbarism”.

The Israeli Foreign Affairs minister Moshe Arens stressed this point and justified the Israeli invasion of Lebanon:

We must recognize that we are in a state of war, an undeclared and broad war, a war against Western society (...) Peace for Galilee by striking a lethal blow to the PLO power base also benefited all who were likely to become the targets of international terrorism (...) Had the nations of the free world, instead of criticizing Israel, fully supported its actions in Lebanon, the PLO would have been eliminated⁷²⁰.

Netanyahu, too, reevaluated the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 but also stressed the similarities between Marxist and Islamic terrorists:

Only after the PLO's expulsion from Beirut did captured PLO documents reveal the pivotal role of its

⁷¹⁷ Author's interview with Elaine Morton, Washington DC, March 22, 2007

⁷¹⁸ Netanyahu, Benjamin, 4

⁷¹⁹ Netanyahu, Benjamin, IX

⁷²⁰ Arens, Moshe, “Terrorist States” in Netanyahu, Benjamin, 94

terrorist mini-state in Lebanon as the training centre and launching ground for what had become a kind of terrorist international. This collaboration between Marxist and Muslim radicals is not accidental (...) Both legitimize unbridled violence in the name of a higher cause, both are profoundly hostile to democracy and both have found in terrorism an ideal weapon for waging war against it⁷²¹.

Jeanne Kirkpatrick also stressed the “affinities between terrorism and totalitarianism”:

Both regard violence as an appropriate means to their political ends. Both use it as the instruments of first resort. Both reject the basic moral principles of Judeo-Christian civilization⁷²².

Netanyahu argued that the Soviet Union had resorted to support for terrorism because

For a superpower like the Soviet Union, a direct confrontation with the West entails the unacceptable risks of atomic war (..) Terrorism is part of the broader trend toward war by proxy. It permits regimes to engage in aggression while evading retaliation⁷²³.

Shultz confirmed this in his article for the book when he wrote that “states that sponsor terrorism are using it as another weapon of warfare, to gain strategic advantage where they cannot use conventional means”⁷²⁴.

In this fight democracies could not count on the UN, according to the US ambassador in that organization. Jeanne Kirkpatrick wrote that the United Nations

Has so consistently condemned countries for attempting to defend themselves against terrorist violence that an operational principle seems to have been established (..) Where recognized states were once seen as having a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, “liberation movements” are now seen as having such a monopoly⁷²⁵.

In his conclusions to the book, Netanyahu championed once more the use of military force against terrorism: “Experience shows that far from engendering a cycle of violence, the application of military force, or the prospect of such application, inhibits terrorist violence”⁷²⁶.

⁷²¹ Netanyahu, Benjamin, 11-12

⁷²² Kirkpatrick, Jeanne, “The Totalitarian Confusion” in Netanyahu, Benjamin, 57

⁷²³ Netanyahu, Benjamin, 13

⁷²⁴ Netanyahu, Benjamin, 20

⁷²⁵ Kirkpatrick, Jeanne

⁷²⁶ Netanyahu, Benjamin, 208

Furthermore, he introduced a concept which would have some form of success especially at the end of the 1990's: national sovereignty cannot become the instrument by which human rights violations are protected.

Countries do not have the right to do *anything* within their borders. They risk the intervention of other states if they fail to live up to their *international* (and sometimes, in the case of intolerable human rights violations or wholesale murder, their *domestic*) obligations⁷²⁷.

In this light, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon was justified because since "Lebanon could not discharge its obligation [to stop the PLO] in 1982, Israel had every right to forcibly intervene"⁷²⁸.

Retaliation, according to him, did not always have to be discriminate: "There is certainly no moral imperative to confine the retaliation to the actual perpetrators". The War on Terror *à la Netanyahu* was a long one: "A successful war on terrorism will involve a succession of blows and counterblows, and some unavoidable casualties along the way. What is required is a commitment to a continuous campaign against its sponsors"⁷²⁹.

Netanyahu's ideas will turn to be successful many years later. In the meantime, terrorism around the world targeted the high echelons of important countries. On October 12, an IRA bomb destroyed the Brighton hotel in which British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was staying. She escaped unwounded. On the 31st of the same month, Sikh terrorists succeeded in killing Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. On September 20 (see above) the new US embassy in East Beirut had been hit again by the terrorists. Again the discussion in the NSC over retaliation started but Reagan had to conclude on September 22 that

It is virtually impossible to retaliate without risking killing many innocent people. I've told George S. [Shultz] to let Syria know that we are convinced this couldn't happen without their tacit approval & we don't well will keep this in mind if it continues to happen⁷³⁰.

⁷²⁷ Netanyahu, Benjamin, 216

⁷²⁸ Netanyahu, Benjamin, 222

⁷²⁹ Netanyahu, Benjamin, 221

⁷³⁰ Brinkley, Douglas, 268

Retaliation, however, was not abandoned. Four days later, Reagan wrote in his diary again:

We have intelligence regarding a barracks [sic] in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon which could be the origin of the terrorists who blew up our embassy. I still was not satisfied that we had enough to go on risk an air strike. We're getting closer to being able to tie these attacks to the govt. of Iran. I'd like (when sure) to tell them any more attacks & and we'll retaliate at the source⁷³¹.

On October 19 the issue came up again and Reagan decided to have an air strike ready in case the terrorists attacked, thus leaving them the first strike. This meant deciding not to retaliate for the embassy bombing. The rationale was written down in his diary: "To strike now & then to have them attack would look like it was a reprisal for our raid"⁷³².

Far than being a decisive turning point toward "proactive measures", NSDD 138 had not solved the basic problem of when and how retaliate or preempt against terrorist attacks. In a briefing paper by the conservative Heritage Foundation issued on the same day of the second attack against the US embassy in Beirut⁷³³, NSDD 138 was described as having "triggered some controversy because of its alleged authorization of "preemptive strikes" against terrorist groups or leaders". Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Noel Koch had described the directive as a "quantum leap in countering terrorism, from the reactive mode to recognition that pro-active steps are needed". The meaning of preemptive strikes was shown in all its ambiguity here since it was taken as a synonym of targeted assassination. On this point, the briefing paper criticized the administration: "The administration to date has not demonstrated that it has designed such measures [preemption and retaliation] carefully, and it certainly has not employed them".

The paper then went on to promote the use of covert actions against terrorism such as

- 1) dissemination of "black" (i.e., falsely attributed) propaganda to create dissension within terrorist groups (..) and perhaps to instigate internal, self-destructive violence among terrorist elements;
- 2) disruption of terrorist infrastructures by such means as neutralizing safehouses and sabotaging logistical

⁷³¹ Brinkley, Douglas, 269

⁷³² Brinkley, Douglas, 273

⁷³³ Heritage Foundation. "Dealing with Terrorists: A Better U.S. Policy Is Needed". The Backgrounder. September 20, 1984. Donald Gregg files, George Bush Library

systems;

3) use of disinformation against terrorists, terrorist supporters and sympathizers

Curiously enough, all of these three tools were used just two years later against Qadhafi's Libya. Either someone in the White House must have read this paper or this paper reflected much-discussed options in the Foreign Policy elite.

On October 26, George Shultz delivered his third important speech of the year on the issue of terrorism. This time it was a public one and its importance was even more stressed by the fact that it took place during the campaign for presidential elections. At the Park Avenue Synagogue in New York, the Secretary of State stated once again his commitment to a military preemptive strike against terrorists:

We must reach a consensus in this country that our responses should go beyond passive defense to consider means of active prevention, pre-emption and retaliation. Our goal must be to prevent and deter future terrorist acts, and experience has taught us over the years that one of the best deterrents to terrorism is the certainty that swift and sure measures will be taken against those who engage in it⁷³⁴.

And then the most controversial part of his speech:

The public must understand before the fact that occasions will come when their government must act before each and every fact is known (...) We will need the flexibility to respond to terrorist attacks in a variety of ways, at times and places of our own choosing. Clearly, we will not respond in the same manner to every terrorist act. Indeed, we will want to avoid engaging in a policy of automatic retaliation, which might create a cycle of escalating violence beyond our control. (...) There will be no time for renewed national debate after every terrorist attack. Fighting terrorism will not be a clean and pleasant contest. (...) There is no room for guilt or self-doubt about our right to defend a way of life that offers all nations hope for peace, progress and human dignity.⁷³⁵

According to the *Washington Post*⁷³⁶, not everyone in the administration appreciated Shultz's speech even though State Department spokesman John Hughes had told reporters

⁷³⁴ All the quotes from Shultz's speech at Park Avenue Synagogue come from "Excerpts From Shultz's Address on International Terrorism", *New York Times*, October 26, 1984

⁷³⁵ "Excerpts From Shultz's Address on International Terrorism", *New York Times*, October 26, 1984

⁷³⁶ Oberdorfer, Don and Juan Williams, "Officials Split on Shultz's Antiterrorism Speech", *Washington Post*, October 27 1984

that it had been cleared at the White House and that Shultz “certainly was voicing an administration position”.

Vicepresident Bush, in an interview on a Cincinnati TV station, said: “I don't agree with that [speech]. I think you've got to pinpoint [the response to terrorism] and we're not going to go out and bomb innocent civilians or something of that nature”. As far as he knew, Bush told reporters, the administration's position was the one stated by Reagan during his last TV debate with Democratic candidate Mondale: “In dealing with terrorists, yes, we want to retaliate, but only if we can put our finger on the people responsible and not endanger the lives of innocent civilians”.

Questioned by journalists while he was campaigning in the north-east of the US, Reagan declined to comment Shultz's speech and said only: “I don't think it was a statement of policy. He was saying all these things must be considered”. White House spokesman Larry Speakes had one more different interpretation: “Shultz's speech was administration policy from top to bottom”.

According to the *New York Times*⁷³⁷, Shultz's speech was approved only by Robert McFarlane and had had the “general approval of Mr. Reagan to open up the issue to further discussion”. Bush, on his part, had spoken also for the military:

An administration official familiar with the Pentagon's views said military officials believed that “one has to proceed with caution and with a lot of thought about unintended consequences from the use of force. Officials said Mr. Bush's wariness about the use of military force against terrorists was closer to the views held by the Pentagon than those of Mr. Shultz and Mr. McFarlane.

Others in the Foreign Policy establishment opposed Shultz's ideas. Former Under Secretary of State in the Kennedy administration George Ball wrote on the *New York Times* against the idea of taking Israel as an example. Shultz, while advocating pre-emptive strikes against terrorists, recommended that the US look at Israel as “a model of how a nation should approach the dilemma of trying to balance law and justice with self-preservation”. Ball contested this vision: the US was not a nation under siege as was Israel

⁷³⁷ Gwertzman, Bernard, “Bush Challenges Shultz's Position On Terror Policy”, *New York Times*, October 27 1984

which could not be seen as a model of balance but rather as an example of excess in the use of force. Britain, on the other hand, had kept “faith with humane principles and practices that are our common heritage”.

Opponents of Shultz's “de facto war on terror” were present also inside the administration. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger had been at odds with the the Secretary of State on the whole Lebanese mission. He did not appreciate Shultz's analysis of that defeat. In the last days of 1984 he would finally speak out.

The Weinberger Doctrine

The speech that can be considered the foundation of the Weinberger doctrine was delivered at the National Press Club on November 28, 1984. The Secretary had been thinking about this speech for a while but had been convinced to postpone it until after the presidential election due for early November in order not to give the impression of a divided administration.

Weinberger thought that “the postwar period” had taught the US some lessons from which he had drawn “six major tests to be applied when we are weighing the use of US combat forces abroad”⁷³⁸.

First of all, the US should not have committed its forces to areas which are not deemed vital to its national interest. Second,

If we decide it is necessary to put combat troops into a given situation, we should do so wholeheartedly and with the clear intention of winning (...) Of course, if the particular situation requires only limited force to win our objectives, then we should not hesitate to commit them at all.

Third, there must be “clearly defined political and military objectives”. Thinking probably about Lebanon, he added:

If we determine that a combat mission has become necessary for our vital national interests, then we must send forces capable to do the job – and not assign a combat mission to a force configured for peacekeeping.

⁷³⁸ For this quotations of the speech see Weinberger, Caspar, 441 and ss.

Fourth, “the relationship between our objectives and the forces we have committed – their size, their composition and disposition – must be continually reassessed and adjusted”. Fifth, before committing troops abroad the administration has to make sure that there is

The support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress (...) We cannot fight a battle with the Congress at home while asking our troops to win a war overseas or, as in the case of Vietnam, in effect asking our troops not to win, but just to be there.

Again, it is impossible not to think at the influence that the Lebanese experience had had on Weinberger: asking US troops “not to win, but just to be there” sounds like a new critique of the “presence” mission of the MNF. Also, the faltering support of the Congress had been one of the key elements in deciding the size and the duration of the mission. The sixth test, on which Weinberger decided not to go into details, said simply that “the commitment of US forces to combat should be a last resort”.

In his memoirs, George Shultz criticized his colleague's approach:

Cap's [Weinberger's] doctrine bore relevance to a major, conventional war between adversarial armed forces. In the face of terrorism, or any other of the wide variety of complex, unclear, gray-area dangers facing us in the contemporary world, however, his was a counsel of inaction bordering on paralysis (...) What was left unstated was the Defense Department's deep philosophical opposition to using our military for counterterrorist operations⁷³⁹.

On a similar wavelength, Max Boot criticized the Weinberger's doctrine for not being realistic: “An all-or-nothing approach to warfare with the ideal war being one in which the US wins with overwhelming force, suffers few casualties and leaves immediately”⁷⁴⁰. Coral Bell went even further saying that the Weinberger doctrine provided for so many limits to the use of force that it became virtually impossible to use it in the operational policy⁷⁴¹.

The divergence between Shultz and Weinberger was well summed up again by John Arquilla: “instead of force being used on a massive scale and as a last resort [as advocated

⁷³⁹ Shultz, George, 650

⁷⁴⁰ Boot, Max, 318

⁷⁴¹ Bell, Coral, *The Reagan Paradox. US Foreign Policy in the 1980s*, New Brunswick (NJ): Rutgers University Press, 1989 p. 38

by Weinberger], [Shultz] intended to employ military and paramilitary capabilities on a small, surgical scale, often as a preemptive “first resort”⁷⁴².

Arquilla writes that Reagan chose a “third way” between Weinberger's “focused response” and Shultz's “de facto war on terror”:

Yes, there would occasionally be forceful responses to terrorist acts and threats; but they would almost never be preemptive and would generally take on the more conventional characteristics – both operational and diplomatic – of traditional conflicts⁷⁴³.

To him this looks like Weinberger's triumph. It is probably an overstatement, if one looks to what happened later. Shultz had been successful in stating the need to counter militarily any terrorist attack against the US. From now on, fighting terrorism was a task for the intelligence as well as for the armed forces. However, since the whole nature of the struggle had not yet been understood (and one could argue that it was not understood even after 9/11...) the force used to attack terrorism was a conventional one, not an asymmetrical one as envisaged by Shultz's experts in that Saturday meeting in March 1984.

By reading Reagan's diary it is possible to understand how he considered terrorism: as an heinous crime which called for an overwhelming reaction by the US in order not to let that happen again. Reagan was far from understanding that Middle Eastern asymmetrical conflicts were the wars of the future. Nevertheless, one of his predecessors had instead grasped the full significance of the struggle.

Probably at the end of 1984, a paper titled “A New Approach for the Second Term” was delivered to Reagan's staff⁷⁴⁴. It was presumably written by former president Nixon: who else would write “as I reflected on this historical pattern after my landslide win in 1972, I decided to develop a new strategy (...) Watergate aborted my plans”?

The goal of this paper was to give some advice to Reagan for his second term in office and to share with him some ideas that Nixon had for his second term and could not put into

⁷⁴² Arquilla, John, 181

⁷⁴³ Arquilla, John, 183

⁷⁴⁴ 219 (1193) “A New Approach for the Second Term”. Unsigned and undated paper. Memorandum File Subseries 1984-January 1985, box 9. James Baker files, Ronald Reagan Library.

practice. Nixon told Reagan that in any case new men and new ideas were needed for his last 4 years in the White House.

Talking about policies, he advocated new negotiations with the Soviet Union on arms control: "The Reagan administration can establish a secure place in history for developing a new, less dangerous relationship with the Soviet Union. Incidentally, I have great confidence in George Shultz's ability to quarterback the Soviet-American dialogue".

Having dismissed the negotiations' issue, Nixon turned to the dangers of war rejecting the idea that the Soviet Union was behind all the troubles in the Middle East and that strategic consensus could solve all of US problems in the region.

The major danger of war in the next ten years is not in Europe but in the Third World. And the most crucial areas is the Mideast and the Persian Gulf (...) We must recognize that the major destabilizing and dangerous factor in the Middle East is not the communist revolution but the Moslem/Fundamentalist revolution (...) Even without Soviet assistance, the Khomeinis and the Qadafis will continue to try to export their revolutions.

The nature of this new struggle was also examined:

Military power will not decide this conflict in the Third World. We could have military superiority across the board and still lose. Nuclear weapons are irrelevant (...) conventional weapons and rapid deployment forces serve a purpose but are not effective when aggression is not over borders, as in Korea, but under borders by Soviet- and radical Moslem-supported revolutionaries.

Reagan, according to Nixon, had to appeal to those who were both "non-communist" and anti-status quo in the Third World with a plan of massive aid to poor countries. He had the opportunity to consolidate a permanent conservative majority in the US and to become one of the most important foreign-policy leaders of the century. Nixon, therefore, invited Reagan to seize this opportunity.

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