ABSTRACT

REAGAN’S ANTITERRORISM: THE ROLE OF LEBANON

by Laura Jarboe

In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan was faced with an increase in terrorism directed specifically at the United States. He feared that terrorism compromised America’s reputation, especially in the midst of the Cold War. An examination of terrorism which specifically targeted the military reveals that Reagan’s language and proposed policies emulated his Cold War fight. By 1985, the Reagan administration developed a Task Force for combating terrorism. Close investigation of the Task Force’s publication reveals that although Reagan talked a hard-line against terrorists, he partook in little action against them.
REAGAN’S ANTITERRORISM: THE ROLE OF LEBANON

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of History
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2012

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Preface

On the morning of October 23, 1983, a truck bomb ripped through the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, killing hundreds of American servicemen. This tragedy heightened President Ronald Reagan’s concern for America’s military and America’s reputation. Reagan’s antiterrorism developed from his perception that terrorist acts victimized the U.S. Because terrorism threatened America’s Cold War reputation, Reagan fought it like he fought the Cold War.

Introduction

In 1981, Reagan assumed leadership of a United States wearied of American decline and even the government itself. Reagan was determined to reverse these attitudes and decided to do it by reinvigorating the Cold War. His end goal, he admitted, “is simple, and some would say simplistic. It is this: We win and they lose.” The president was unrelenting in his determination to take down the U.S.S.R. through a variety of methods. Most importantly, Reagan initiated a massive military buildup, insisting that success in the Cold War hinged on military superiority. The success of his leadership seemed to hinge on it as well, for Reagan was firmly convinced that appearing to seize the upper hand in the Cold War would allow him to seize the upper hand at home. He promised to restore the confidence of Americans by making them believe in their government, their military, and their president. And, in part, he was successful. Historian Michael Schaller wrote that Reagan’s “rhetoric stirred and lifted the spirits of Americans – and many foreigners – who had considered themselves victims in an unfriendly world of hostage taking, nuclear threats, rising oil prices, and third world insurgencies.”


2 Quoted in Wilentz, The Age of Reagan, 151.


Americans did not want to feel like “victims” anymore, and he advocated building a stronger military with an expanded agenda so they would not have to, but everything did not work out the way he planned.

While Reagan’s policies toward the Soviet Union ended up seeming successful—largely because domestic changes in the U.S.S.R. that had little to do with him⁵—he pursued a stronger American presence in the Third World often backfired. Reagan sent troops to Central America to “undermine the appeal of communism and unravel Soviet self-confidence,”⁶ but escalating violence soon invited criticism that the administration was betraying the democratic values it had promised to support.⁷ While events in Central America threatened the Reagan administration’s image, however, they did not seem to threaten the security of the United States. Many Americans felt the same could not be said for concurrent events in the Middle East. There, the Reagan anti-Soviet agenda became mixed up with its pro-Israeli and pro-oil agendas, which complicated the pursuit of “freedom.”⁸

This thesis looks at one of those complications: terrorist attacks on U.S. troops in Lebanon. While terrorism was not a new issue for the Reagan administration,⁹ terrorism in

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⁶ Schaller, “Reagan and the Cold War,” in Deconstructing Reagan, 7. See Scott, Deciding to Intervene, 1. Scott discusses how the Reagan Doctrine was a direct response to Cold War policies in the 1970s and that the administration hoped to “reassert U.S. power and purpose in the post-Vietnam world by providing aid to anticommmunist insurgencies intent on overthrowing Marxist regimes.”
⁷ See Wilentz, The Age of Reagan, 156-157. Wilentz writes that the application of the Reagan Doctrine in Central America signaled the administration’s attempt to curb Soviet expansion in the region; Cannon, President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime, 297-299. Cannon discusses the administration’s interests in Central America as an opportunity to challenge the Soviet Union.
⁹ Reagan’s first encounters with terrorism in his administration were with Qaddafi in Libya. Qaddafi openly supported the PLO, which engaged in terrorism against Israel. When Qaddafi claimed the Gulf of Sidra as Libyan territory, he insisted that the U.S. no longer perform ordinary operations there. The Sixth fleet moved into the Gulf and Qaddafi’s forces fired on the fleet. Ultimately, Libyan forces were destroyed by American forces. See Wilentz, The Age of Reagan, 158; Matthew Carr, The Infernal Machine: A History of Terrorism (New York: The New Press, 2006), 224-225. Carr writes that Reagan’s initiation into terrorism via Qaddafi inspired an inflammatory antiterrorist response on the part of Reagan; Coral Bell, The Reagan Paradox: U.S. Foreign Policy in the 1980s (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 81. Bell discusses the paradoxical nature of Reagan’s antiterrorist policies. While he advanced a hard line against terrorists, he in turn gave them publicity which was a central aim of terrorists.
Lebanon prompted a different response from the White House. The Reagan administration came to define terrorism as violence aimed at government to achieve policy changes better suited to terrorists own objectives.\(^{10}\) Lebanese terrorists sought to change Reagan’s policy in Lebanon, and eventually, his foreign policy in general. American soldiers rather than civilians were targeted, which dramatized vulnerability in the seemingly invincible American military machine. Terrorism specifically in Lebanon persisted throughout 1984-85, frustrating the Reagan administration and the American public. As indicated by a Roper poll in 1985, Americans perceived that terrorist attacks compromised American power, making the U.S. appear “powerless, easily manipulated and at the mercy of attackers.”\(^{11}\) Neither the White House nor the public relished the role of “victim.” Reagan immediately responded to the attacks with air strikes that reinforced American power (and his own), but he also called for a reconsideration of the government’s approach to fighting terrorism. This reconsideration led to the 1986 “Task Force on Combatting Terrorism,” which sits at the heart of this paper.

The Task Force has never become a popular topic in Reagan historiography, primarily because it did not drastically alter policy. Marc A. Celmer argued in *Terrorism, U.S. Strategy, and Reagan Policies* that the Task Force reflected the government’s opinion that it was doing all it could to combat terrorism.\(^{12}\) David C. Wills wrote in *The First War on Terrorism* that the Task Force mainly reiterated Reagan’s policy of no concessions to terrorists, but also offered a structural adjustment in antiterrorism staff and proposed tougher legislation against terrorists who murdered Americans. Wills argued that the main contribution of the Task Force was its emphasis on considering when the U.S. should use force against terrorists.\(^{13}\) Although the Task Force did not radically alter antiterrorism policies, it deserves more consideration from contemporary academics.

The history of the Task Force sheds new light on the ways in which the Cold War informed Reagan’s tactics against terrorism. Reagan identified terrorists as an enemy in complete

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\(^{11}\) Also see Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 218. McAlister describes that at the Second International Conference on Terrorism, held in Washington D.C. in 1984, participants came to describe terrorism as cancerous, spreading quickly, especially in the Middle East. The conference understood terrorism to be targeted at the West.

\(^{12}\) “Public Report of the Vice President’s Task Force on Combatting Terrorism,” 17.


ideological opposition to the United States, co-opting the vocabulary he was using against the Soviet Union. Once again, the White House adopted an “us-versus-them” attitude in an effort to seem strong and proactive. Reagan wanted allies to fight this scourge and called for multilateral action against terrorists. Although it was largely confined to incidents that happened far from American soil, terrorist attacks on U.S. military targets during the Reagan administration were seen by that administration as attacks on America’s global reputation, which, in turn, threatened the core of Reagan’s Cold War strategy. By examining specific instances of terrorism in Lebanon and Reagan’s responses to them, this thesis will show how Reagan’s antiterrorism evolved according to his administration’s perception that terrorists victimized the United States.
A New Terrorism is Born

Ronald Reagan’s Middle East policy differed from that of his predecessors. Ayatollah Khomeini’s 1979 ascension to power in Iran altered the political makeup of the region because he “offered the most profound critique of the secular state in the Middle East.”14 A previously friendly nation turned away from what Khomeini proclaimed the Great Satan, encouraging other nations to follow suit. According to historian Augustus Norton, the United States was preoccupied with the spread of the Iranian Revolution and “After the shah’s fall, concerned US officials would unfold maps showing swaths of green ink marking the countries threatened by Iran. Special note was taken of places where local Shiite communities – presumed allies of Iran – were located.”15 The United States government hoped to contain the Iranian Revolution and attempted to pinpoint populations most susceptible to Khomeini’s message. The Iranian Revolution (which inspired radical Islamist movements), when coupled with a decade of weakness for the U.S., challenged American interests and security in the greater Middle East as they were conceived of by the Reagan administration. Some Muslim countries were seduced by Khomeini’s outspokenness against the U.S., compromising access to oil and military bases, and straining old friendships and alliances. The Iranian hostage crisis forced urgent reconsideration of American policies toward the region and of the limits of American power around the globe.

The threat of the radicalism of the Iranian Revolution seemed particularly noticeable in Lebanon. Decades of struggle between the Christian and Muslim populations came to a head as Khomeini’s revolution radicalized an already agitated Muslim population. The Iranian Revolution offered a promising alternative to Lebanese Shi’ites and some Sunnis16 who were frustrated with the Christian leadership, and in response, terrorist groups began to spring up in Lebanon. Because Muslims, especially Shi’ites, felt underrepresented in Lebanese government, groups such as Amal worked to advocate their interests.17 Khomeini, however, found Amal too

15 Ibid., 434.
16 See Norton, “The Shiite ‘Threat’ Revisited,” 436. Norton writes that “the most enthusiastic Sunni embrace of the ‘Islamic Revolution’ came in Lebanon, where Iran founded Hezbollah in the early 1980s, taking advantage of the opportunity created by Israel’s 1982 invasion and the long Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon.” Norton traces the distinctions between Sunni and Shi’ite in the Arab world, arguing that religious identity alone did not ensure whether or not a nation would accept the Iranian Revolution.
secular and invited its members to establish a new group in Lebanon which would disseminate his vision of an Islamic state. Lebanese Shi’ites took to the Baalbek region to receive religious and political education as well as military training from Iranian operatives. This new organization, Hizballah, adopted Iran’s message and shared its enemies – the United States and Israel. Hizballah explicitly stated its intimacy with Iran when it proclaimed in its 1985 Open Letter that it was “carrying the banner of action under the patronage of Abdallah Khomeyni.”

The presence of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, who were expelled from Jordan in 1971, further exacerbated tensions. By 1975, conflict between Palestinians and Lebanon’s Maronite Christians plunged the country into civil war. In April, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) attacked a Maronite church and the following January massacred 10,000 Christians. In the fall 1976, the Christians retaliated by murdering Palestinians at a refugee camp. The bloodshed prompted the PLO and Christians to seek allies: the PLO looked to Lebanon’s Muslim and Druze populations while the Christians turned to Israel. Syria also entrenched its forces in the civil war, initially aiding the PLO and later the Christians, depending on which group most closely cooperated with its designs for Lebanon. And as the civil war drew to a close, the Syrians refused to withdraw.

The election of Menachem Begin to Israeli Prime Minister in 1977, resulted in increased aid to Lebanese Christians in hopes of establishing a more Israel-friendly neighbor. Israeli forces launched airstrikes against the PLO and eventually Syrian forces in Lebanon because they would not leave. A ceasefire, however, was reached in 1981. But hostilities quickly resumed after an assassination attempt was made against Israel’s ambassador to Great Britain in 1982. Israel retaliated with an airstrike in southern Lebanon, which was met with rocket fire from the PLO. By June 6, Israel precipitated a full scale invasion of Lebanon in “Operation Peace for Galilee.” Because Lebanon was an historic ally of the United States (and the Western world), the U.S. became increasingly alarmed by the violence in Lebanon and Ambassador Habib

Lebanon’s confessional system – that political representation was based on population. A census had not been conducted, however, since 1932, and by the 1980s, it was believed that the Shi’ites had become the largest group in Lebanon. Amal’s leaders worked to rid Lebanon of the confessional system and achieve greater participation for Shi’ites. Shi’ite frustration was also a product of Israeli military operations in Lebanon. Shi’ites lived in the South, exposing them more to Israel’s military activity.


proceeded to negotiate the evacuation of PLO forces from Beirut which was overseen by a multinational force composed of the U.S., France, and Italy in August 1982.

After the completion of the evacuation, U.S. forces left. But by September 14, it was evident that the fighting was not finished, President Bashir Gemayel had been assassinated. Gemayel’s death prompted Israeli occupation of Beirut as well as retaliation. According to journalist Robert Fisk, “Gemayel’s death destroyed any immediate Israeli hope of an Israeli-Lebanese peace treaty.”20 Israeli forces wanted to avenge Gemayel and the seemingly lost chance of securing its northern borders against Palestinian “terrorists.”21 The occupation of Beirut represented an opportunity to eliminate terrorists because “the Israelis controlled the camps.”22 Israeli soldiers, with the help of Lebanese Christians (Phalangists), committed severe atrocities against Palestinian refugees. Thousands of Palestinians perished at the Sabra and Shatila camps when Israeli soldiers blocked the exits while Phalangists gunned down refugees. Fisk, an eyewitness to the aftermath of the massacres, recalled that “down every alleyway, there were corpses – women, young men, babies and grandparents – lying together in lazy and terrible profusion where they had been knifed or machine-gunned to death.”23 These massacres demanded international attention and intervention, leading Israel to agree to the withdrawal of its forces from Beirut. The MNF returned and the U.S. contingent was stationed at the Beirut International Airport “to separate Israeli forces from the city of Beirut.”

The MNF aimed to establish a presence in Lebanon which would oversee the removal of all occupying forces (Syria, Israel, and the PLO) and return stability and legitimacy to the Lebanese government. The administration defined its presence mission as to “be visible - - - provide a backdrop of U.S. presence which would be conducive to the stability of Lebanon – a sovereign Nation with a duly constituted government…we are a visible manifestation of U.S. strength and resolve to Lebanon and to the free world.”25 The Reagan White House hoped that

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21 See Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, 388. Fisk writes that “by labeling Palestinians as terrorists, the Israelis were describing their enemies as evil rather than hostile. If the Palestinians could be portrayed as mindless barbarians, surely no individual would dare regard their political claims as serious.”
22 Ibid., 379.
23 Ibid., 360.
the visibility of U.S. Marines in Lebanon would push out Lebanon’s occupiers.26 The United States contributed a force of about 1,200 Marines to the MNF. This force was not military in nature; rather, its objective was to establish a peaceful presence in Lebanon. President Amine Gemayal desired the presence of U.S. Marines to deter violence and pressure occupying forces to leave. Gemayal appealed to the power and reputation of the United States when he invited American forces into his country. He intended for nations, such as those with forces in Lebanon, to be intimidated by the presence of the Marines. Through U.S. power, Gemayal hoped to restore peace and stability to Lebanon.

In a report to the Senate Armed Services Committee on October 31, 1983, General P.X. Kelley discussed the USMNF’s presence mission. Marines stationed in Beirut were intended to be seen, not heard, which constituted an untraditional military mission. Rather than engaging in actual fighting, U.S. forces completed projects such as cleaning up ordnance and conducting civic activities. The rules of engagement for the Marines were strict: the only situations in which troops were allowed to fire weapons were those that required self defense. Even at their headquarters at the Beirut International Airport, the Marines did not conduct security, which was carried out by the Lebanese army. The mission for the Marines was visibility, which would hopefully accomplish the goals of both the United States and Lebanon: to remove occupation forces and restore stability to Lebanon. General Kelley stated that the presence mission planned to serve as a “visible manifestation of U.S. strength and resolve to Lebanon and to the free world.”27 Reagan hoped to convey the U.S.’ commitment to allies in addition to military strength and influence.

To conduct this mission, the main tactic required that “the Marines had to be seen by the Lebanese people.”28 The success of the mission hinged on the perception of the civilian population. If the population acted in concert with the Marines, Lebanon stood a better chance of ending the civil war and removing Syria, Israel, and PLO forces. According to General Kelley, the Marines initially enjoyed the support of the Lebanese population. Throughout the end of 1982 and the start of 1983, opposition to the American military presence grew, especially

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26 See Little, *American Orientalism*, 246. Little writes that the MNF acted as a peacekeeping mission in response to the Israeli invasion; Wawro, *Quicksand*, 390. Wawro also writes that the MNF was in the role of peacekeeper, especially after the U.S. encouraged the Israeli invasion of Lebanon; Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 331. Makdisi argues that the MNF came to Lebanon in order to uphold the Gemayel government amid the chaos of the civil war.
27 Kelley to SASC, October 31, 1983, 2.
28 Ibid., 4.
among Shi’ites because it seemed as if U.S. forces were in Lebanon to maintain the status quo by assisting Lebanese Christians. Incidents such as car bombings, grenade attacks, verbal harassment, and shootings targeted the Marines. Increased violence forced the Marines to develop a more defensive strategy, which included training the Lebanese army, initiating patrols, securing the ambassador’s residence, and reinforcing the headquarters at the airport with sandbags and barbed wire. The Marines’ reaction indicated that the mission was no longer just “a presence.” Historians such as Geoffrey Wawro and Ussama Makdisi argue that these attacks on Americans were consequences of Reagan’s policy blunder which sent American troops to Lebanon in the first place.29

On April 18, 1983, the U.S. Embassy in Beirut crumbled in the explosion of a car bomb which killed 63 people, including 17 Americans. The American media seized upon the suddenness of the attack, which shocked and terrified the American people. Time magazine described the episode: “Seconds before the explosion, the eight story building was alive with the everyday activity common to any foreign mission… At 1:05 pm it happened. ‘There was a great flash of light and then the blast,’ recalled (Public Affairs Officer) Reid, who was thrown to the floor. ‘Suddenly it looked like the whole room was coming apart in tiny pieces.’”30 Americans were stunned that such a small group could exercise such lethal force against the United States. Throughout the summer and fall of 1983, snipers and car bombs increasingly targeted the stationed Marines but the worst was yet to come.

On the morning of October 23, 1983, a yellow Mercedes Benz truck arrived unannounced at the American Marine barracks at the Beirut International Airport. The driver crashed through fences, guard posts, and gates. Once inside the lobby of the building, the truck bomb detonated. Moments later, another truck bomb destroyed the French barracks in the Drakkar building. 241 American servicemen lost their lives, as well as 58 members of French forces. While the Islamic Jihad Organization, a Lebanese Shi’ite organization with connections to Iran, claimed responsibility, Hizballah praised the attack as a victory for the Islamist cause.31 Hizballah

29 See Wawro, Quicksand, 390. Wawro writes that Reagan’s peacekeeping force in Lebanon resulted in the death of 241 Marines; Makdisi, Faith Misplaced, 331. Makdisi argues that Reagan’s eagerness to aid Israel in Lebanon put the Marines at risk.
31 Rogan, The Arabs, 411. Rogan discusses this organization’s responsibility for both the Embassy and barracks bombings. (421) Rogan also considers connections between Islamic Jihad and Hizballah, but notes that Hizballah characteristically denied linkages to the bombings.
justified the bombings by saying that “Khomeyni…has repeatedly stressed that America is the reason for all our catastrophes and the source of all malice. By fighting it, we are only exercising our legitimate right to defend our Islam and the dignity of our nation.”\textsuperscript{32} While Hizballah denied its involvement in the bombings, it enthusiastically supported other groups who took orders from Iran.

Descriptions of the bombing instantly filled the media. The November 7 issue of \textit{Time} captured the somberness – and the gruesomeness - of the event by describing how pieces of the soldiers were being pulled from the rubble. It personalized the attack by providing individual accounts of both the deceased and the survivors. The most poignant was that of an entry gate sentry’s memory of the attack. Lance Corporal Robert Calhoun recalled that as the truck advanced “he’ll always remember, the guy was smiling.”\textsuperscript{33} Americans could not shake the chilling image of the heartless terrorist who happily slaughtered sleeping Marines.

The murder of so many American soldiers prompted the American public to demand information regarding their security. Queries about the safety of the Marines brought into question the purpose of the U.S. mission in Lebanon. The Reagan administration was forced to respond quickly. \textit{Time} reported that “the Administration mulled over a tactical redeployment to make its forces in Lebanon less vulnerable.”\textsuperscript{34} The dangerous situation in Lebanon also raised the issue of American power. According to \textit{Time}, the bombing “demonstrated that not even a superpower is safe from violence in Lebanon.”\textsuperscript{35}

Likewise, in a mission conducted by the Department of Defense almost immediately following the attack, much concern was given to the vulnerability of U.S. forces in Lebanon. Tremendous numbers were lost; at the site of the attack “almost all the occupants were crushed or trapped inside the wreckage.”\textsuperscript{36} Hundreds of Marines were left vulnerable to a single man with a truck. The report emphasized the ease with which the terrorist accomplished his mission, citing the vulnerability of U.S. security measures. The report carefully delineated the obstacles the driver faced, which did not really act as a deterrent. While the Reagan administration ordered the Marines to Lebanon as a peaceful presence, measures were not taken to keep their

\textsuperscript{32} Quoted in Ra’an, et. al, \textit{Hydra of Carnage}, 490.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid..
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid..
situation peaceful. Instead, they were received by angry groups who violently tried to remove
them. The American public questioned a military intervention in Lebanon which repeatedly put
Americans at risk.
Reagan Reacts to Terrorism

The barracks bombing stunned the Reagan White House. Racing to the Situation Room, officials gathered details of the truck bombing from a cable sent by Ambassador Bartholomew, who was stationed in Beirut, at 8:30 am local time. Bartholomew referred to the grisly details of the bombing, and, as in the Department of Defense report, Bartholomew described the ease with which the truck driver overcame barriers around the American headquarters at the Beirut airport, citing the vulnerability of American forces.37

A DIA spot report swiftly followed Bartholomew’s cable. The report reiterated the nature of the attack on both the U.S. and French forces. It also began assigning blame, citing that “these attacks are probably the work of the pro-Iranian Lebanese Shia Hizb Allah (Party of God), led by Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah.”38 The report drew connections between the car bombing at the embassy in April, sniper fire directed at the Marines throughout the summer and fall, and the current situation. It seemed as if the fears of radical Islam associated with the Iranian Revolution came to fruition. Seemingly small, weak combatants responded to Khomeini’s call and began to damage the United States.

Reagan’s response to the bombing took a fierce edge. He struggled to reaffirm American power in the aftermath of the vicious blow. In his October 24 address at the Regional Broadcasters Luncheon, Reagan insisted that America’s terrorist enemies in the Middle East were “vicious, cowardly and ruthless.”39 He labeled them “criminals and thugs,”40 who tried to upset world peace and destroy the struggle for rights and freedom in the region. But as he pinpointed terrorists as a new kind of enemy that the United States faced, he also discussed the Soviet Union. This address signaled Reagan’s belief that terrorists in the Middle East were tied to the Soviets, even hinting at terrorists as Soviet “surrogates.”41 And like communism, Reagan feared that the phenomenon of terrorism was spreading. He stated that “if the Soviets and their surrogates can feel confident that they can intimidate us and our allies in Lebanon, they will

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
become more bold elsewhere.” To Reagan, the barracks bombing represented the culmination of fear associated with terrorism; if the entire Middle East region succumbed to the dangers of the Iranian Revolution and began practicing terrorism, U.S. interests would be severely compromised. A good deal was at stake and the possibility of Lebanon succumbing to “the tyranny of forces hostile to the West” troubled Reagan. After all, the Reagan administration perceived Lebanon as “central to our credibility on a global scale.” Lebanon was important to the United States in terms of Cold War alliances, but the U.S. response to terrorism in Lebanon also resonated on the world stage. The aftermath of the barracks bombing prompted Reagan to treat terrorism and the Cold War similarly, evident in the contrast he drew between the West and “tyranny.” In response to the attack, Reagan took a hard line, proclaiming that “the United States will not be intimidated by terrorists…We intend to find the criminals who harbor and direct them. We will not allow this behavior to go unpunished.” Reagan was concerned about his considerations of America’s superpower reputation which he felt could be tarnished by an uncertain enemy who was encouraged by rival nations. His chief worry centered on intimidation – he did not want the United States to appear bullied or victimized.

The question of retaliation quickly entered the administration’s discussions about the bombing. In mid-November, Reagan launched an airstrike against the alleged perpetrators. The National Security Council pinpointed the “Husayni Suicide Commandos” as responsible for the terrorism in Beirut. The airstrike successfully targeted the group’s headquarters and training grounds in the Bekaa Valley. After the completion of the airstrike, Reagan issued a statement to the American public. He emphasized the success of the retaliatory measures as well as their necessity: “this action was in response to the outrage that was committed against our people who came to Beirut in peace, to help advance the cause of peace in that troubled land.” The president attempted to restore the public’s faith in the government’s measures as well as stress that the United States would not shrink in the face of terrorists. Reagan also issued a warning to terrorists and state-sponsors: “I caution those responsible for supporting this form of terrorism.

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
that we will continue to respond decisively to similar acts in the future.”

Reagan wanted to take a strong stance against terrorism so the U.S. would not appear intimidated or weakened under his leadership.

The barracks bombing forced the Reagan administration to reconsider its role in Lebanon, but the attack served to solidify the American commitment, as the White House was loath to be seen as giving in to terrorist pressure. But it was clear that American forces in Lebanon had to alter their strategy to decrease their vulnerability. In the December 1 meeting of the National Security Planning Group, Robert McFarlane presented three options for the USMNF. McFarlane first suggested the withdrawal of American forces from Lebanon with complete reliance on diplomacy for increasing the authority of the Lebanese government and military as well as removing occupation forces. The second option entailed more aggressive use of the U.S. military to convince Syria to leave Lebanon. McFarlane’s final option was forcibly removing Syria from Lebanon. Reagan and his advisers chose the second option, which offered a middle ground between retreat and dramatically expanded aggression.

The Marines would stay, but it was clear to everyone involved that they needed greater flexibility and enhanced protection. In a meeting regarding National Security Decision Directive 117 on December 5, the administration intensified the rules of engagement for the Marines so they could more effectively deal with threats to their self-defense. The barracks bombing demonstrated that the previous rules of engagement were inadequate in protecting American lives and accomplishing goals of peace and stability in Lebanon. NSDD 117 allowed American forces to retaliate in the event of further attacks: “responsive attacks will be used to destroy targets originating fire if this can be done with minimum collateral damage.”

The administration also insisted Gemayal’s government play a larger and more aggressive role in securing Beirut. Reagan’s initial response to the barracks bombing was reminiscent of the airstrikes he launched against Libyan terrorism in 1981. But his decision to continue the Marines’ mission in Lebanon represented a break with tradition. Reagan wanted to show that the U.S.’ goals would be accomplished and the White House believed that it was doing enough. The American public disagreed.

47 Ibid.
48 Talking points, Robert McFarlane to NSPG, December 1, 1983, folder “Lebanon Chronology (2),” box 41, Executive Secretariat, Ronald Reagan Library.
Calming the Public

Despite administration promises that the situation in Lebanon was improving, the American public remained concerned about its soldiers. Hundreds of Americans sent letters to the president expressing concern for the safety of the Marines, while Congress raised questions about the military mission in Lebanon. Congress was unsure about the constitutionality of Reagan’s commitment of troops to Lebanon. According to the War Powers Resolution, the president was required to seek congressional approval before sending American forces into warfare. But in instances such as Lebanon, the risk for troops seemed low and Reagan could choose to send troops on his own. Congress questioned Reagan’s authority only after Marines died in the barracks bombing. The bombing had fundamentally altered the public’s perception of the situation in Lebanon and the Reagan administration faced significant challenges to its decision to maintain a military presence there. This was a worrisome change. Reagan’s response to the barracks bombing and his decision to maintain U.S. forces in Lebanon demonstrated his concern for America’s reputation. Although the American military had been attacked, Reagan did not want the U.S. to seem like a victim. But Reagan also needed public confidence in his policies. His administration undertook a public diplomacy campaign to signal to the American public that it was developing a coherent antiterrorism policy.

Robert McFarlane’s October 26, 1983 memorandum, which circulated among the National Security Council, expressed White House unease about the proliferation of concerns emanating from the American public as well as Congress. “Serious questions about why we are in Lebanon and whether the price is too high are being asked in normally supportive regions of the country,” it reported, “and members of Congress are suggesting forcefully that we have not made a case for our Lebanon policy.” Criticism was even evident amongst normally supportive portions of the population. The State Department and the White House decided to attack the problem via public diplomacy, which would supplement Reagan’s approach defined in his speech the following day. This public diplomacy sought to transform the American paradigm regarding U.S. interests and security. U.S. involvement in Lebanon, as well as the larger picture

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50 See Hall, *The Reagan Wars*, 148-154. Hall argues that the American mission to Lebanon was in line with the constitution, however, the casualties at the embassy and barracks made the commitment of troops questionable as the situation became more hostile. According to the War Powers Resolution, the president has to consult with Congress before sending troops to a hostile environment, which was not the case in the initial arrival of U.S. forces.

into which Lebanon fit, needed clarification. The American people, media, and Congress, McFarlane argued, should be informed about why U.S. troops were in Lebanon in the first place. They needed to be convinced, he continued, that Lebanon was strategic, both in terms of the Cold War and the greater Middle East.

The administration’s outreach took many forms. American policies were communicated through speeches, briefs, press coverage, question and answer sessions, and charts. Specific targets of these efforts included Congress, the public, the media, and foreign governments. McFarlane recommended senior officials make television appearances, grant interviews, and give talks to communicate the administration’s message. The administration undertook a bipartisan effort to garner public support for Reagan’s policies in Lebanon, which were a growing political issue at home.

As evidenced by McFarlane’s memorandum, Reagan’s speech regarding the Beirut attacks would be critical for justifying the American presence in Lebanon and clenching public support for this policy. On October 26, the White House received a paper entitled Explaining a Violent World to the American People, drafted by Republican Congressman, Newt Gingrich, which offered ideas to be included in the president’s address which hoped to solidify public support for Reagan’s policies. The Congressman from Georgia realized that the American public and media would have a difficult time comprehending why American men were dying in Beirut because they did not understand why Marines were even on the ground in Lebanon. Gingrich claimed that it was necessary to develop “a contextual framework within which they [the American public and media] can make sense of the events of the last few days.”

Gingrich appealed to familiar tropes to help the American public “make sense” of the barracks bombing – he was eager to connect terrorism and the Cold War because he wanted to convey that terrorism threatened America’s Cold War reputation. His solution was for the U.S. “to firmly and consistently maintain our position of moral and military strength throughout the world.” Despite the aggravation terrorism caused for the Reagan administration, it was necessary to maintain the appearance of strength. Gingrich postulated that “the Soviets will keep the peace as long as they are convinced we are both strong and have the will to use that

52 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
According to Gingrich, it was necessary only for the Soviets to be convinced of American strength, which reinforced Reagan’s tough talk against terrorists. If rhetoric alone could convince the Soviets, and terrorists, of American superiority, that would demonstrate success. His paper emphasized that terrorists were a new enemy in the Cold War and that the Reagan administration had to continue to fight against them to uphold what it expounded as its values of freedom and democracy.

Additionally, the prevailing American conception of the world and foreign policy was still reeling from experiences in Vietnam and Watergate. Gingrich argued that these memories fomented public distrust in government policy. But Gingrich was quick in his attempts to separate Reagan from the past. Gingrich claimed that the American people could not understand Reagan’s foreign policy because they did not understand Reagan or the precarious situation of the world. Gingrich sought to distinguish Reagan from his predecessors with motives more suited to general support. Gingrich also made tantamount the state of danger which comprised the world order. He explained “that if people understood Ronald Reagan’s view of the world, they would feel more secure in explaining to themselves why a particular action is taking place.”

Terrorism represented part of this danger, and, according to Gingrich, Reagan’s policies were most apt to protect the United States.

Gingrich cast Reagan’s mindset of American intervention (including in Lebanon) in terms very familiar to the American public. Most importantly, Gingrich placed recent events such as terrorism in Beirut in context of the Cold War. Gingrich hinted at Soviet involvement in Lebanon when he claimed that “we are engaged in a long, low-intensity war with the Soviets in which terrorists, spies and surrogates play active roles.” Gingrich indicated his feeling that terrorists were part of the Cold War in Lebanon. The presence mission in Lebanon worked as a part of the Cold War because it attempted to illustrate U.S. influence, but terrorists endeavored to upset this mission, therefore becoming a Cold War enemy. Gingrich identified a “constant terrorist effort around the planet,” which reasserted Reagan’s feeling that the motives behind terrorism were spreading and becoming a force to be reckoned with around the globe.

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55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
In these connections between terrorism and the Cold War, Gingrich justified American intervention. He emphasized Reagan’s consideration of the perilous position of freedom and peace amid the throes of war with the Soviets. Because American values were susceptible to being undermined by the Soviet Union, it was necessary to uphold alliances. The Cold War necessitated alliances which prompted the Reagan administration to intervene in Lebanon on behalf of its ally. The world stood polarized, watching the United States’ response to measures taken by the Soviets. Gingrich contended that only by standing strong and expressing willingness to exert force would the United States hold onto its power because “allies and neutrals watch the American nation to see if we have the will to survive as a leader.” Even after instances of terrorism like the barracks bombing, Gingrich asserted that the continued assertion of American dominance and strength was imperative for maintaining allies, continued access to resources, and winning the Cold War.

In measures of conveying American strength, Gingrich also emphasized the importance of relating Lebanon to U.S. interests in the greater Middle East. Gingrich stated that “the first sign of collapse on our part could lead to a disintegration of our alliances. And that might lead to a drastic change in our oil supply lines from the Middle East and the weakening of Israel.” Because oil and Israel were hot button issues, connecting Lebanon to them could bolster opinions regarding the U.S. presence there as well as justify American global intervention.

Gingrich proposed reshaping the American paradigm of the United States’ role in the world to match that of Reagan’s worldview, which Gingrich claimed was more in line with reality. He cited the fragility of the public and media by reminding White House staff “that neither the American people nor the American news media are intellectually prepared to deal with the world as it is.” In an atmosphere of public distrust of leadership, it was necessary for Americans to feel they could relate to Reagan and his reasons for advocating particular policies.

It is clear from reading Reagan’s speech that the framework provided in Gingrich’s paper became the foundation for Reagan’s October 27 address to the nation. Reagan closely linked Lebanon to U.S. interests in the Middle East region as well as contention with the Soviet Union. Reagan forcefully advocated peace as a necessity in the Middle East, and that by aiding Lebanon in its civil war, strides toward this goal would be accomplished. Lebanon represented a small

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59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
piece of larger strategies in the Arab world. The president pointed to the vital interests of the United States and its allies in the region; he cited that “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 nearly 200 million people living there - - all are vital to us and to world peace.” Reagan conveyed that he thought these interests could only be secured through peace which his administration helped negotiate. Reagan also expressed interest in upholding American ideals by assisting Lebanon in removing its occupiers, Syria and the PLO. Before Lebanon could attain stability and self-governance, foreign designs on its governmental functioning had to be removed. Also, because of its close connection to Israel, it was critical for the U.S. to advocate Arab-Israeli peace. A peaceful solution in Lebanon would represent a step closer to this aim.

U.S. interests in the Middle East were also compromised by the Cold War. Reagan intricately tied conflict in Lebanon to the United States’ own confrontation with the Soviet Union. A central reason for MNF intervention in Lebanon was to remove Syrian occupiers. Reagan expressed concern for the intimacy between Syria and the Soviet Union and the ramifications this relationship would hold for the future of Lebanon. He cited that “Syria has become a home for 7,000 Soviet advisors and technicians who man a massive amount of Soviet weaponry.” This threat of Soviet infiltration into Lebanon was perceived as a threat to the United States and the “free world.” As hinted in Gingrich’s paper, the Reagan administration felt that terrorism in Lebanon was associated with the Soviet Union. Reagan quickly cast the situation in Lebanon in terms of a Cold War battleground. It was imperative for U.S. Marines to work toward stability in Lebanon in order to protect it from succumbing to Communism, which might threaten the region in its entirety. Reagan posed the question: “Can the United States, or the free world, for that matter, stand by and see the Middle East incorporated into the Soviet bloc? What of Western Europe and Japan’s dependence on Middle East oil…?” Reagan’s speech elevated hostilities in Lebanon to potential threats to the entire Middle East in order to garner support from the American people about the Marines’ continued presence in that nation. Reagan wanted to clearly illustrate that terrorism emerging in the Middle East threatened the United States: “if that key should fall into the hands of a power or powers hostile to the free

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63 Ibid., 2.
64 Ibid., 2.
65 Ibid., 4.
world, there would be a direct threat to the United States and to our Allies.”\textsuperscript{66} Like the Soviet Union, terrorists and their state-sponsors were hostile to Reagan’s notions of the “free world” of democratic values.

By coating the conflict in terms of U.S. interests and the Cold War, Reagan justified the American presence in Beirut as well as other global interventions. In times of ideological confrontation which threatened vital interests, the U.S. had to be proactive in protecting itself and its position of power. Reagan sold intervention to the American people by proclaiming that “the world has changed. Today, our national security can be threatened in far away places. It is up to all of us to be aware of the strategic importance of such places and to be able to identify them.”\textsuperscript{67} American men were dying in truck bombings across distant oceans to protect American citizens from Communism, threatened interests, and compromised ideals.

While the media portrayed the American presence in Lebanon as a failure, Reagan argued that the mission was actually successful so that he could uphold the soundness of his policies. In this speech, Reagan claimed that the barracks bombing had occurred because of American success in restoring stability to Lebanon. Terrorists had attacked because they resented this accomplishment. Reagan asked, “would the terrorists have launched their suicide attacks against the multinational force if it were not doing its job?”\textsuperscript{68} He also insisted that Lebanese guerrillas backed down in the face of the U.S. The mere presence of the United States military caused the opposition to cower. Reagan used examples for actions the USMNF took to explain the effect of the Marines in Lebanon. He said that on one occasion, “we ordered the battleship New Jersey to join our naval forces offshore. Without even firing them, the threat of its 16-inch guns silence those who once fired own on our Marines from the hills.”\textsuperscript{69} The success of the American mission was also tangible in the outcomes it had with the Lebanese people. A woman claimed that her daughter was able to receive an education and live normally simply because the Marines were in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{70} Reagan wanted to justify intervention in Lebanon by emphasizing the strides American forces made in securing freedom and democracy, which in turn attracted the animosity of those who bought into Khomeini’s anti-Americanism.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 2.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 7.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 3.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 3.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 5.
\end{itemize}
The barracks bombing, however, was unacceptable, and Reagan insisted that the terrorists would not go unpunished. The individuals responsible for the attack must and would suffer. Reagan warned, “Those who directed this atrocity must be dealt justice. And they will be.”

The address to the nation signaled the administration’s determination to formulate an official policy on terrorism. In the address, Reagan pointed to three terrorist attacks: the Korean airliner being shot down, the Embassy bombings in Lebanon earlier in 1983, and the barracks bombing. This stress on moments of the American experience of terrorism reflected increased frustration with the loss of life despite supposed superpower status. And to take a stand against terrorists, Reagan vowed that the United States would not turn away from Lebanon. Reagan assured the American people that this fight was worth the cost because it represented the American spirit of freedom. Reagan weaved an intricate narrative of interests, Cold War, terrorism, and ideals to justify his policies in the region – and to garner public support for them.

The White House’s public diplomacy continued after Reagan’s speech. On October 29, Democratic Congressman Lee Hamilton of Indiana addressed the nation on NBC radio about U.S. forces in Lebanon. His radio speech expressed solidarity with Reagan’s conception of affairs in Lebanon as propounded in his address two days prior. The framework Reagan delineated for considering the importance of Lebanon was reasserted by Hamilton.

Hamilton immediately confronted the public’s anxieties about the American presence in Lebanon. He established the purpose behind the Multinational Force and also explained that the duration of the Marines stay in Lebanon could not be determined because of the delicacy of their mission. The Marines were acting with “a Multinational Force requested by the Lebanese Government. The Marines are not in Lebanon to tip the balance of power. They are there as one element among several to help achieve stability. Their mission remains one of keeping the peace…” Hamilton reminded Americans that the Lebanese government invited the Marines to help stabilize the country. The American presence in Lebanon was justified by an emphasis on American power and the responsibilities associated with it: “as a great power, the United States must shoulder the responsibility that accompanies power. We cannot walk away from Lebanon.

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71 Ibid., 3.
72 See Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 161. Wilentz writes that “the Soviet Union mistook a Korean Air Lines passenger jet that had strayed into Soviet airspace for an American reconnaissance plane.”
and expect the world to be the same again.” Like Reagan did a few days earlier, Hamilton wished to convey the global ramifications of bending to terrorists by abandoning the mission in Lebanon. The U.S. needed to finish its job in Lebanon in order to maintain an ally and succeed in the Cold War. Hamilton’s address signaled American awareness that the world was changing and that the U.S. had to adapt.

Hamilton’s address hinged on the importance of Lebanese stability amidst Cold War dynamics and fluctuations of Middle Eastern attitudes toward the United States:

They [the Marines] are symbols of our commitment to the Lebanese people and to a sovereign, independent Lebanon. Withdrawing them immediately would make hollow our insistence that diplomacy be given a chance. What we have worked for, and what those men have died for, would be jeopardized, if not lost. The Soviet Union would be given more leeway as it tries to dominate Lebanon, and the entire Middle East would become a more inviting target of Soviet opportunity…Moderate Arab states would be alienated from us, and our general influence in the Middle East would sink while the influence of radicals rose.\(^75\)

Hamilton feared that if the U.S. abandoned its ally, it stood the chance of losing the Middle East as a whole to the Soviet Union. Just as Reagan did in his address to at the Broadcaster’s Luncheon, Hamilton expressed that the United States would not be intimidated by terrorists, because, in the case of Lebanon, bending to terrorists would open the door to Soviet infiltration. Hamilton stressed that the Marines’ mission was valuable because of what it had thus far prevented – Soviet domination of the Middle East. Hamilton also expressed consternation regarding the impending spread of the Iranian revolution. He cited the threat of radical Islam, with the potential to compromise American allies and interests because Hamilton felt “our general influence in the Middle East would sink while the influence of radicals rose.”\(^76\) To the Reagan White House, Khomeini’s vision of Islamic states represented a fundamentally different ideology from that of the U.S., which smacked of potentially overturning America’s global dominance, much like Soviet communism.

Hamilton focused on Lebanese stability as the continued purpose of the mission. Following the barracks attack, he set forth six goals to maintain the mission’s purpose: withdraw foreign troops, renew the Middle East peace process, achieve national reconciliation among

\(^{74}\) Ibid.
\(^{75}\) Ibid.
\(^{76}\) Ibid.
Lebanese factions, reassert the power of the Lebanese army, secure the Marines, and investigate the attack.\textsuperscript{77} Hamilton emphasized that it was critical for the United States to inquire into the source of terrorism and protect Lebanon from further infiltration. Hamilton’s address reflected the administration’s attempt to convey that its antiterrorism policy was consistent, even across party lines.

In the case of Lebanon, successful domestic public diplomacy was critical to foreign policy. The memory of Vietnam, Watergate, and the Iranian hostage crisis caused anxiety among Americans about the viability of the U.S. mission in Lebanon, especially after 241 Marines were lost as a result. In Reagan’s address to the nation as well as in efforts such as Hamilton’s radio address, the American people needed to be assured of the power of the United States. These efforts reflected the administration’s perception that success in Lebanon was crucial to success in the Cold War – the U.S. needed to demonstrate its power in Lebanon.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
The White House Investigates

In fulfillment of the goals asserted via public diplomacy, the Department of Defense embarked on an investigative mission to Beirut. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger convened the “Department of Defense Commission on Beirut International Airport” on November 7: the Commission included five prominent military men, led by Admiral Robert L.J. Long. The Commission traveled to Lebanon, Israel, Spain, Germany, Italy, and the UK to investigate the barracks bombing. They pulled from interviews with eyewitnesses and key officials as well as documentation from Washington agencies to draw conclusions about the attack and the American response to it. The Commission wanted to pinpoint the conditions that led to a successful terrorist act. The report served as an effort to draw lessons from the attack in order to implement greater security for American forces in Beirut as well as establish preventive measures against terrorism in Lebanon and beyond. The investigation indicated that the United States was not prepared for terrorist attacks because the U.S. did not adequately understand how to prevent them. The report emphasized that the bombing at the barracks was an act of terrorism that the United States was not prepared for: “the USMNF was not trained, organized, staffed or supported to deal effectively with the terrorist threat in Lebanon.”

The entire mission in Lebanon presented complications for the U.S. which had not been adequately considered. The hostile situation in addition to the proliferation of threats in Lebanon made them nearly impossible to address despite faulty precautions taken by military commanders. While the Reagan administration upheld through public diplomacy that it knew how to fight terrorism, the Commission suggested otherwise.

The Commission established a context for the Marines’ presence in Lebanon. The Commission emphasized that the U.S. agreed to work with the MNF under the conditions “that the Government of Lebanon and the LAF would ensure the protection of the MNF, including the securing of assurances from armed factions to refrain from hostilities and not to interfere with MNF activities.” Despite the severe factionalism apparent in Lebanon, the U.S. expected that its presence be respected, a demand which was expected to be enforced by the Lebanese government. Its image quickly deteriorated, however, among large segments of the Lebanese

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79Ibid., 39.
population: “the USMNF, in the eyes of the factional militias, had become pro-Israel, pro-
Phalange, and anti-Muslim.”\textsuperscript{80} Lebanese Muslims felt like U.S. forces were taking sides, they perceived the American presence as an attempt to uphold Christian leadership in Lebanon. This perception inspired the attack on the barracks. Significant portions of the Lebanese population deemed the U.S. “anti-Muslim” and called for the removal of its troops from their territory. Iranian anti-Americanism had inspired their confidence, but it was the chaos at home that had turned anger into violence – and threatened to do so again.

The Commission set out to investigate the conditions leading up to the attack and American preparedness for such an occurrence. The mission following the attack hinged on understanding the security of the Marines: “the Commission focused on the security of the U.S. contingent of the Multinational Force through 30 November 1983.”\textsuperscript{81} The Department of Defense collected information regarding pre-attack security, immediate responses to the attack, and post-attack security. To delve into these concerns, the Commission centered its inquiry around several facets of the forces stationed at the Beirut International Airport: the Marines understanding of their mission, the rules of engagement, the chain of command, intelligence support, security measures, the attack itself, and casualty handling.

A key component of the investigation was gleaning how U.S. forces received and responded to intelligence. In the duration of their presence in Lebanon, Marines frequently obtained information which pointed to terrorist threats. The Commission claimed that “between May and November 1983, over 100 intelligence reports warning of terrorist car bomb attacks were received by the USMNF.”\textsuperscript{82} Despite numerous threats, many were not serious ones. Intelligence, however, was not strong enough to demarcate which were dangerous. The Commission recommended that sources of intelligence be consolidated and centralized so U.S. forces could better discern actual security threats.

The Commission asserted that the USMNF’s mission in Lebanon was supposed to represent a presence to oversee “the withdrawal of foreign military forces from Lebanon and to assist the Lebanese Government and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in establishing sovereignty and authority over the Beirut area.”\textsuperscript{83} American forces were not intended to fight;

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 2-3.
rather, the USMNF sought a peaceful restoration of stability. The U.S. presence in Lebanon aimed for a short duration, in hopes of quickly restoring order to that country. As 1983 progressed, American forces suffered increased hostility as evident in the number of threats from terrorists. The Commission underscored that “the USMNF was assigned the unique and difficult task of maintaining a peaceful presence in an increasingly hostile environment.”\(^8^4\) The Embassy bombing in May, sniper fire and car bombs throughout the summer and early fall, and finally the barracks bombing in October illustrated the ineffectiveness of a peaceful American presence. Part of the responsibility for the attacks, according to the Department of Defense report, resided with varying interpretations of the U.S.’ mission. Not all the ranks of the Marines understood the mission in the same way, which led to confusion and vulnerability. The Commission encouraged the White House to reconsider the aims of U.S. forces in Lebanon in order to best secure the Marines there. Despite the White House’s public diplomacy campaign which insisted on the coherence of U.S. antiterrorism, the Commission reported otherwise.

Because the mission was intended to be peaceful, the rules of engagement were murky; the Commission cited “that a single set of ROE providing specific guidance for countering the type of vehicular terrorist attacks…had not been provided to, nor implemented…”\(^8^5\) Like the mission, however, the rules of engagement were not clear and not all Marines understood them in the same way. The Commission expounded that the “action taken by U.S. forces ashore in Lebanon would be for self-defense only.”\(^8^6\) The Marines represented authority and power, with the hope that just their presence would bring an end to the infighting in Lebanon. Force was acceptable only as a measure of self-defense. Despite frequent sniper fire and car bombings, Marines were not allowed to carry loaded weapons when on patrol. Self-defense was nearly impossible amid hostilities because the mission was proclaimed a peaceful one. As the attack on the barracks signaled, this inability to defend themselves kept the Marines from stopping the truck driver who detonated the bomb inside the airport. The rules of engagement, like the USMNF mission and Reagan’s Lebanon policies, begged greater coherence.

After establishing the purpose of the Marines’ presence in Lebanon, the Department of Defense report considered the actual experience of American forces immediately prior to and during the attack. The report emphasized that the USMNF was vulnerable prior to the barracks

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\(^{8^4}\) Ibid., 4.  
\(^{8^5}\) Ibid., 8.  
\(^{8^6}\) Ibid., 48.
attack because of inadequate security – resulting from lack of clarity in the mission, rules of engagement, and intelligence support. Special attention was given to the construction of the building where the Marines were stationed at the Beirut International Airport. While the building was ideal logistically, as an observation post and communications center, human error increased the location’s susceptibility to attack because of the large volume of traffic entering and exiting the airport each day.\(^87\)

In depicting the attack itself, the Commission compared the Embassy and barracks attacks. The barracks bombing reflected increased severity both in terms of terrorism and the bombs. The report underscored the more potent bomb used at the airport through forensic evidence provided by the FBI which indicated that the “the Commission believes that the explosive equivalent of the latter device 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.”\(^88\) Even if patrol forces had prevented the truck driver from entering the compound, the report asserted that the bombing would have been deadly because of the sheer strength of the bomb, an assertion which tried to refract blame from faulty foreign policy. A central concern, however, was the enhanced ability of terrorists to access powerful measures of destruction and what this capability meant for the U.S.

U.S. forces in general were not blamed for the attacks. However, the report assigned responsibility to U.S. leadership in Beirut. According to the Commission, the security of the headquarters at the airport did not correspond to the threat level. Despite the multiplicity of threats emanating from intelligence sources, military commanders chose to quarter large amounts of troops in the same barracks. The report cited that “the decision to billet approximately one-quarter of the BLT [Battalion Landing Team] in a single structure contributed to the catastrophic loss of life”\(^89\) making the airport headquarters a “lucrative target for attack”\(^90\) indicating that American troops themselves were targets. This decision was made by the commanders of the

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\(^87\) Ibid., 79-80.  
\(^88\) Ibid., 3-4.  
\(^89\) Ibid., 6.  
\(^90\) Ibid., 7.
Battalion Landing Team who “are responsible for the performance of their subordinates.”\textsuperscript{91} Also, sentries at the airport were not allowed to carry loaded weapons, a precaution that could have prevented the truck from entering the compound and allowed U.S. forces to exercise self-defense. The attack on the barracks ultimately represented “failure of the operational chain of command.”\textsuperscript{92} Greater caution should have been taken in securing American forces and their safety. This fluke in the chain of command represented the culmination of failure to uniformly understand the mission and rules of engagement of the USMNF. While the Commission did not directly cite Reagan’s Lebanon policy as problematic, it noted several flaws in the U.S. mission.

The Beirut attacks were indicative of a larger phenomenon, one that signified the changing order in the Middle East. Iran was exporting its radicalism throughout the Middle East, which compromised America’s power in the region and affected its reputation on the world stage. The authors of the Department of Defense report considered terrorism a Middle Eastern trend: “international terrorist acts endemic to the Middle East are indicative of an alarming world-wide phenomenon that poses an increasing threat to U.S. personnel and facilities.”\textsuperscript{93} The report’s authors were certain that American vulnerability to terrorists in the Middle East had ramifications outside of the region, but they were not yet certain what those ramifications would be, and that worried them.

Hostility towards the United States was clearly spreading throughout the Middle East. Lebanon, in particular, had already become breeding grounds for terrorists and the situation seemed unlikely to change anytime soon. Its unsatisfied Muslim population soundly rejected the possibility of friendly relations with the United States, which led the Commission to identify Lebanon “as an ideal environment for the planning and execution of terrorist operations.”\textsuperscript{94} Its connections to Iran were considered particularly dangerous, because “Iranian operatives in Lebanon are in the business of killing Americans.”\textsuperscript{95} It seemed that the United States was now fighting Iran in Lebanon. Clearly, something had to be done. The Department of Defense Commission argued that the first step was the development of a coherent and consistent policy on terrorism. The government, the military, and the public needed to be on the same page in understanding terrorism and responding to it. The report used familiar tropes to do it, claiming

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid, 9.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 66.
that the “attack on the Marine Battalion Landing Team Headquarters in Beirut was tantamount to an act of war using the medium of terrorism. Terrorist warfare, sponsored by sovereign states or organized political entities to achieve political objectives, is a threat to the United States that is increasing at an alarming rate.” 96 The Commission sought to reconfigure the definition of war and terrorism and how each fit into the formulation of policy. If the government considered terrorism an act of war, it needed to reflect on how this would alter antiterrorism. The Commission hoped to bring the Reagan administration to the realization that it had to adjust its approach to terrorism.

96 Ibid., 4.
Changing Tactics

In response to the Commission’s findings, Reagan issued a statement specifically concerning the phenomenon of state-supported terrorism. The Commission reported that the USMNF was not adequately prepared to meet such an attack as the one at the Beirut Airport. Reagan asserted that American forces could not anticipate the attack in Lebanon because of “the fundamentally new phenomenon of state-supported terrorism.” Rather than admitting that there were problems within his policies or that the U.S. was unprepared, Reagan pointed to a new enemy with which the U.S. had to contend. Because of the newness of this form of attack, it was impossible for the Marines to make necessary security arrangements to prevent it. Reagan commented on the widespread nature of this form of terrorism in recent years and vowed that the United States would take great strides to directly deal with state-sponsored terror. Reagan correlated the spread of radicalism from the Iranian Revolution with increased terrorism. He used the Commission’s findings, which treated Lebanon as a breeding ground for terrorists because of Iranian infiltration, to link terrorism in Lebanon to Iran. The president argued that if states such as Iran supported terrorists, the U.S. needed to form alliances against state-sponsors.

Increased international cooperation served as Reagan’s solution to combat terrorism. While some states chose to support ruthless cowards, Reagan advocated that other states align against them. He proposed that

For terrorism to be curbed, civilized countries must begin a new effort to work together, to share intelligence, to improve our training of security forces, to deny havens or legal protection to terrorist groups, and, most important of all, to hold increasingly accountable those countries that sponsor terrorist activity around the world. The United States intends to be in the forefront of this effort.

Reagan formulated a new approach to fighting terrorism. He presented a tremendous policy shift to deal with the shift in terrorist operations. The president advocated more coordinated efforts against state-sponsors which included defense spending increases and more vigorous intelligence to root out terrorism. Reagan brought a Cold War understanding to terrorism; once again, two

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98 See Bell, The Reagan Paradox, 81. Bell states that Reagan had a “preoccupation with the notion of state terrorism as a new and sinister technique by which ‘rogue governments’…could pursue diplomatic or political ends through the instrumentality of individual fanatics willing to die.” State-sponsored terrorism was a new phenomenon which especially concerned Reagan because it seemingly embodied the radicalness of the Iranian Revolution which prompted individuals to die (while killing others) in the name of their religion.
99 Reagan, Presidential Statement, Ibid.
fundamentally different ideologies engaged in a clash which polarized the world when Reagan made a clear distinction between the “civilized world” and the world of state-sponsored terrorism.

The attack on the Marine barracks illustrated that it was necessary for the Reagan administration to develop a coherent policy for dealing with terrorist threats. After October 23, 1983, dealing with terrorists was a key concern of the administration - as illustrated by its efforts to secure public opinion as well as the Marines in Beirut. Reagan, his administration, and the Department of Defense recognized the emerging danger of terrorists. Meanwhile, the attack perpetuated the seeming decline of American power. While the 1970s marked a very visible downturn for the U.S. after events such as Vietnam and the energy crisis, the 1980s presented a curious case. All signs pointed to American strength because of a military buildup, an economic recovery, and increasing discussions with the Soviet Union regarding arms control. Beneath the surface, however, new problems simmered. Reagan felt that terrorism threatened American power because it was able to conduct successful attacks on U.S. personnel and policies. Terrorism represented a threat to the U.S. because it compromised America’s reputation, making it appear like a victim and forcing the government to reconsider and alter its policies. The barracks bombing succeeded in not only killing American soldiers, but also in derailing the administration’s initial plans for the mission.

Despite the obstacles posed by terrorism in Lebanon, the Reagan administration decided to maintain the presence mission of the USMNF. In his January 25, 1984 State of the Union address, Reagan insisted, “There is hope for a free, independent, and sovereign Lebanon.”100 He would not allow the fear of another attack prevent the United States from maintaining a troop presence. Terrorism would not shake Reagan’s will and he was determined to fight, but so too were Lebanon’s terrorists, which eventually prompted American forces to withdraw.

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The Hostages

William Buckley, CIA station chief at the American embassy in Beirut, was taken hostage March 16, 1984. His kidnapping was just one of many in Lebanon throughout 1984 and 1985. Also taken were Jeremy Levin, Benjamin Weir, Peter Kilburn, Lawrence Jenco, Terry Anderson, David Jacobsen, and Thomas Sutherland. Some literally disappeared off the battle torn streets of Beirut. Weir was abducted while walking next to his wife (who was unharmed). The hostages came from a variety of fields: some were diplomats, religious figures, journalists, or professors at the American University.¹⁰¹

Eleven months after his abduction, a video of Buckley surfaced on British television, which quickly infiltrated American press networks. Buckley held a Beirut newspaper and said, “Today, the 22nd of January 1985, I am well, and my friends Benjamin Weir and Jeremy Levin are also well. We ask that our Government take action for our release quickly.”¹⁰² But in order to retrieve the hostages, the U.S. government had to negotiate with terrorists because the kidnappers demanded the removal of all Americans from Lebanon in return for the release of the hostages.¹⁰³ Negotiation, however, was a measure Reagan repeatedly stated he would not take.

Shortly after Buckley’s appearance in the media, Jeremy Levin escaped from his captors. He described armed guards who monitored his every movement, but despite their heavy oversight, Levin discovered laxity in the chains that bound him and seized his opportunity. After scaling an apartment wall and hiking for hours to a highway, Syrian soldiers found Levin and later delivered him to the U.S. ambassador in Damascus.¹⁰⁴ One hostage had been safely recovered.

By the summer of 1985, hostage-taking began occurring on a much larger scale. Lebanese Shi’ite terrorists hijacked Trans World Airlines’ Flight 847 from Athens on June 14, 1985, and flew between Beirut and Algiers three times. The terrorists demanded the release of Lebanese prisoners in Israel, Cyprus, and Kuwait as well as the removal of Israeli forces from Lebanon.¹⁰⁵ Of the 153 passengers, 100 were Americans, which seized the attention of the

¹⁰¹ A series of *Time* articles reported on the hostages throughout 1984 and 1985.
¹⁰³ Ibid.
¹⁰⁵ See Carr, *The Infernal Machine*, 227. Carr writes that “the hijackers’ main demand was the release of Shia prisoners rounded up by the Israeli army in south Lebanon and taken to an Israeli prison, but they also called on the
American media and government. Reagan publicly responded, “we’re going to continue doing the things we’re doing and just hope that they themselves (the hijackers) will see that, for their own safety, they’d better turn those people loose.” The president firmly reminded the hijackers that they would not receive concessions from the United States in return for the hostages. The administration considered retaliation and put American forces in motion.

When refueling the plane (with fuel, food, and terrorists), the hijackers released handfuls of hostages, except 32 American men who were transported to an unknown location. After the flight’s second landing in Beirut, the hijackers insisted on speaking to leaders of the Lebanese Shi’ite organization, Amal. The request was denied. After 16 grueling days, the terror ended and the remaining hostages were released – except for Robert Stethem, an American Navy diver, who had been shot in the neck and tossed onto the tarmac. The hijackers justified the action by claiming he “was a U.S. Marine who had taken part in ‘security blowups in Lebanon...” They had specifically sought out a military target for their vengeance, aiming at the heart of U.S. military power.

Amidst the panic surrounding the Flight 847 hijacking, the location of the seven American hostages in Lebanon remained unknown – to the great frustration of their families. The Reagan administration assured them that the U.S. government was working for their release, but it knew little about what was happening with them. In the end, most of the hostages were eventually freed. Buckley and Kilburn, however, endured extensive torture from their Hizballah captors, who later killed them. Buckley’s remains were not found until 1991, when a sack of his bones were discovered on a roadway.

A pattern that had begun with the Marine barracks bombing was continuing: terrorism was changing. Indiscriminate terrorism for publicity was being replaced with terrorism directed at the U.S. military. The new focus mattered, because it threatened the image Reagan tried to build of the United States as the world’s leading military power – something that mattered a

US government to take responsibility for the car bomb in Beirut. One of the hijackers had come from a village destroyed in the New Jersey bombardment, in which his wife and child had been killed...”


107 Ibid.


109 Fisk, Pity the Nation, 656.
great deal in the Cold War. The United States was spending billions on ensuring military superiority to the USSR, yet was vulnerable to attacks by small, sometimes unidentifiable terrorist groups. Terrorism not only threatened American lives, but also American prestige. And the problem was spreading.

A few days after the Flight 847 hijacking on June 19, a radical group, Mardoqueo Cruz (part of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front), in El Salvador opened fire in a bustling restaurant district of San Salvador. This group sought to terrorize the U.S. military in order to remove its presence from El Salvador. The shooters murdered thirteen people, including four U.S. Marines. The Marines worked as guards at the U.S. embassy and were off duty at the time of the shooting. The day before the Marines were gunned down, FMLN’s radio station broadcasted “that U.S. military involvement in El Salvador had caused the killings. ‘The first Marines are starting to fall.’”110 The group focused on military targets in the ambush, further indicating a new tendency in terrorist acts.

Other episodes targeted locations frequented by American military personnel. On February 2, 1985, terrorists bombed a Greek nightclub which was often visited by U.S. military. The bombing resulted in the injury of 69 Americans. On August 8, a U.S. airbase in West Germany was bombed, killing one American serviceman. Before the attack, another American soldier was murdered so that terrorists could use his ID to access the base. Later in the year, a military shopping mall in West Germany was also bombed, injuring 23 Americans.111 Military personnel and their haunts emerged as prime targets of terrorism.

111 “Public Report of the Vice President’s Task Force on Combatting Terrorism,” i-ii.
Appearance v. Reality

While the government set out to prevent terrorism targeted at the military, the American public latched onto fears of terrorists lashing out against innocents. Historian Melani McAlister argues that, culturally, “terrorism, hostage taking, and captivity worked to construct the United States as a nation of innocents, a family under siege by outside threats and in need of a militarized rescue.” The film *The Delta Force* was released in February 1986 and captured the utter horror which terrorism invoked in the American public. Even though Reagan worked to pull Americans away from feeling like victims after the 1970s, it seemed that some Americans felt victimized by terrorism.

In the film, an array of American passengers awaits ATW Flight 242 in Athens en route to Rome then New York. Characters such as a cowboy, a Jewish couple celebrating their silver anniversary, and a family with a six year old daughter engage in small talk which reveals their innocence as they discuss activities such as vacation and business trips. Meanwhile, three Arab terrorists anxiously prepare to board the plane and one is detained when he finds out the plane is full and becomes angry. Soon after takeoff, the two terrorists, Abdul and Mustafa, loudly announce that “This is a hijacking!” As they order the passengers to separate according to gender, they beat anyone who resists. The hijackers maliciously attack innocent passengers who fail to follow instructions; one of the terrorists seems sympathetic of the innocent passengers when he tries to calm a young girl who reminds him of his daughter and then offers a pregnant woman a more comfortable place to sit. Three Navy divers aboard the flight endure especially harsh treatment because the terrorists perceive them as minions of American imperialism. Strikingly reminiscent of the TWA Flight 847 hijacking, one of these young men is shot and thrown from the plane. Eventually, the women and children are released in a publicity grab to garner sympathy from Americans, but the men are held hostage.

The terrorists express that their focus on innocents is part of a larger scheme which seeks to attack innocent Americans to attract attention from the White House. Abdul and Mustafa are part of the organization New World Revolution which is directed by Ayatollah Khomeini. This terrorist organization is ostensibly outraged by acts of American imperialism and demands change. The film reveals interesting interpretations of how the American public came to

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112 McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 201.
understand the Iranian revolution and terrorism as intricately bound – the fear of terrorism also reflected a fear of the spread of Islamic radicalism.\footnote{See McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 219. McAlister asserts that this relationship between Islam and terrorism was developed at the First International Conference on Terrorism in July 1979.} When the U.S. military learns of the hijacking, one soldier reads a book entitled *Fighting Mad*, illustrated with a man prepared to die in the name of Islam, indicating that the anger aroused in the Iranian Revolution was channeled into an eagerness to fight. In the film, terrorism is intrinsically linked to the Middle East and Arab perpetrators, a trend to which the Defense Department’s Commission following the barracks bombing contributed. American military forces quickly identify the terrorists as Arabs based on a “calculated guess” from analyzing a list of the passengers.\footnote{Golan, *The Delta Force*.}

While the Reagan administration responded to the Flight 847 hijacking through diplomatic means, the film depicts an aggressive military response when the president sends in the Delta Force. A heavy handed reaction was necessary to stop the hijacking and rescue the hostages. After a series of shoot-outs and strategic bombing campaigns, all the hostages return safely to their families, signaling a triumph for American military forces.\footnote{See McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 228. McAlister discusses the militaristic nature of the film when it departs from the reality of TWA Flight 847 and depicts troops eager to take action against the terrorists.} In reality, terrorism was not so easy to stop. When the military attempted to intervene, the military itself became a target. While the film portrays an incredibly strong American military that can accomplish any goal, the reality of the situation was that American forces had limited success in curbing terrorism. Even as the Reagan administration fought a war against terrorism with a military designed to win the Cold War, it could not prevent terrorist acts aimed at American troops. Reagan feared that terrorism chipped away at the superpower reputation of the United States, which as evidenced by *The Delta Force*, held the potential to compromise the American public’s faith in its government; even after a huge military buildup, the Reagan White House continued to be aggravated by what it perceived as small, weak enemies. And if terrorism continued, despite Reagan’s hard line against it, the president may lose support for his foreign policy.
Preparing to Fight

Reagan realized the Cold War implications terrorism held and he quickly placed it within the context of the Cold War. He associated the perpetrators of terrorist acts with the Soviet Union, linking terrorism to his anti-communist crusade. The administration argued that the Soviets were utilizing terrorism as a tool to further their cause. According to David Wills, Reagan viewed “terrorist attacks as illegitimate acts by the Soviet Union’s proxies who were intent on undermining the West.” Terrorism fit well into the polarized worldview that dominated Cold War thinking—just as there were communists and freedom fighters, there were terrorists and their targets. Reagan vowed to wage war against terrorism, which resembled his struggle against the Soviet Union. In a contemporary analysis of the administration’s antiterrorism, Marc Celmer pinpointed Reagan’s adoption of terrorism in his Cold War struggle. From the outset, Reagan incorporated terrorism into “the administration’s East-West perception of world affairs.” The struggle against terrorism required allies as well as a cohesive ideology, which first had to be achieved within Reagan’s own administration.

The Reagan White House was riddled with infighting, which posed difficulties in formulating the administration’s response to terrorism. Friction between Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of State Caspar Weinberger was a hallmark of the Reagan administration. Historian George Herring described this infighting as “acrimonious a power struggle as ever seen in Washington over such issues as arms reduction, the proper response to terrorism, and the employment of U.S. military forces abroad.” Central to this tension was

117 See Carr, The Infernal Machine, 235-236. Carr argues that Reagan viewed terrorism as evil and barbaric, which necessitated that he fight it. Carr asserts that Reagan began replacing Soviet enemies with terrorists as the Cold War drew to a close.
118 Wills, The First War on Terrorism, 24.
119 Celmer, Terrorism, U.S. Strategy, and Reagan Policies, 113. Also see page 114. Celmer wrote that “the Reagan administration’s use of terrorism as a public relations tool and foreign policy lever against the Soviet Union is an improper use of the issue. There is evidence of Soviet Union support of some terrorist organizations. However, support should not be equated with command.” Celmer argued that Reagan’s connections between the Soviet Union and terrorism were not fruitful in actually developing policy and served mainly to exacerbate tensions with the Soviets.
120 George C. Herring, From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 865. See Cannon, The Role of a Lifetime, 264. Cannon explains that the divisions in the administration can be characterized as between conservatives (Weinberger) and pragmatists (Shultz). In terms of the Cold War, “The conservatives believed that the Soviets responded only to military power. The pragmatists distinguished between ‘strength’ and ‘peace through strength’;” Bell, The Reagan Paradox, 86. Bell asserts that fighting between Shultz and Weinberger was especially apparent in antiterrorism. Shultz advocated action, while Weinberger was critical of military responses.
disagreements over when and how to use force. Fundamental differences regarding terrorism and how to deal with it created a great deal of the tension between Weinberger and Shultz. These debates over defining terrorism and responding to it played out very publicly. The administration’s infighting already caught the attention of the American public, as did antiterrorism policy. The debate between Weinberger and Shultz brought together many of the public’s concerns about the government.

In *The First War on Terrorism*, David Wills delineated Reagan’s “system” for managing his administration. The president approached his cabinet in a hands-off manner and placed a tremendous amount of trust in his advisors, allowing them significant leeway in developing policy. Reagan felt that because he took great care in appointing his staff, they were worthy of doing their own work. Reagan’s aloofness reflected his desire to avoid management and conflict. He “was not particularly interested in the minutiae of policy, and consequently did not like to receive a lot of detailed paperwork;” he preferred overall policy decisions rather than their details. The president wanted to avoid conflicts with this system, but he ended up creating them instead, often at great cost to his policies. Reagan’s personality and interaction among his staff influenced how his policies evolved.

From the beginning, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger clashed with Secretary of State Alexander Haig, and later, George Shultz. CIA director, William Casey, intentionally left cabinet members uninformed of operations while Haig kept the National Security Council in the dark. This infighting was so severe that it resulted in frequent staff turnover. Two years into his presidency, Reagan accepted the resignation of Haig, replacing him with Shultz. During his two terms, Reagan went through six national security advisers. These administrative conflicts often drew public doubt: according to *Time* in early 1982, Reagan “once again…was under pressure to convince skeptics that his Administration has only one, consistent foreign policy” after secretaries Haig and Weinberger issued discrepant statements. The embattled

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121 Wills, *The First War on Terrorism*, 44.
122 See Cannon, *The Role of a Lifetime*, 324. Cannon writes “Reagan’s distaste for disharmony made it difficult for his administration to reach a coherent decision on any issue where profound disagreements existed.”
123 See Wawro, *Quicksand*, 390. Wawro describes divisions which existed in the Reagan administration from the beginning, especially regarding Israel. Weinberger advocated “bringing the Israelis to heel,” while Haig encouraged “giving them free rein.”
124 Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 865.
administration evoked public concern regarding government initiatives; the public wished for its government to proceed cohesively.

Reagan appointed Weinberger to the Department of Defense from the start of his first term. While Weinberger was an amateur in terms of defense, he proved himself capable of slashing and balancing budgets during the Nixon administration. The December 22, 1980 issue of *Time* emphasized that his “first-hand knowledge of weapons and military strategy apparently is confined to whatever he picked up poring over Defense Department budgets eight to ten years ago.”

Weinberger had also worked for a large defense contracting company prior to his appointment to Reagan’s cabinet. Reagan hoped that Weinberger would carefully maintain the Defense budget as the administration planned a tremendous military buildup. *Time* reported “most old hands think Weinberger will make sure that the extra dollars Reagan intends to lavish on the military are spent on muscle rather than frills and fat.”

Rather than being able to utilize an intimate knowledge of military strategy, Reagan hoped that Weinberger would enable the administration to pursue its aggressive goals around the globe to ensure American interests.

Weinberger enjoyed a close relationship with the president, having known Reagan since his time as governor of California. He earned Reagan’s trust, which gained him greater autonomy and influence in the administration. *Time* reported by the end of 1982 that “By dint of their position, he and Secretary of State George Shultz are the most powerful men in the Administration, but Weinberger enjoys a longstanding relationship with the President that Shultz can never match.”

It seemed clear that Weinberger’s voice would resonate loudest in matters of policy. Reagan and Weinberger also shared worldviews. Reagan advocated a massive military buildup, and with Weinberger presiding over the Defense budget, this could be accomplished. *Time* conveyed that both men believed that “the Soviet Union can only be prevented from dominating the West by a rapid buildup in the military might of the U.S.”

Reagan and Weinberger prepared to take on the Soviet Union anywhere its influence was made manifest.

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130 Ibid.
Reagan appointed George Shultz head of the State Department after Haig’s resignation in the summer of 1982. Prior to Shultz’s appointment as secretary of treasury in the Nixon administration, he worked as an academic economist. After serving in Nixon’s cabinet, Shultz acted as president and director of an engineering company, the Bechtel Group. The president hoped that Shultz would garner greater cooperation after Haig’s tendency to create tension among White House staff. *Time* hoped that Shultz “might be able to avoid the bureaucratic battles that gave Haig so much trouble in bringing ‘consistency, clarity and steadiness of purpose’ to American foreign policy.” These hopes swiftly proved unattainable. The relationship between Shultz and Weinberger quickly devolved into jockeying for Reagan’s ear, competing to dominate policy.

The conflict between Weinberger and Shultz climaxed in their disagreement over withdrawing the Marines from Lebanon in 1984. From the outset in 1982, Shultz advocated sending a U.S. contingent to Lebanon to remove occupation forces and to stabilize the government there. Weinberger and the military, however, did not support the decision to utilize American forces in the Lebanese civil war because the goals and mission of the Marines remained unclear, a result of hasty and inexperienced policy decisions.

Avenging the bombing of the Marine barracks became a personal vendetta for Shultz. He himself served as a Marine, so this act of terror hit close to home. Afterwards, “Shultz became the administration’s most ardent and outspoken proponent of using military force to combat terrorism.” Shultz felt that the United States should stop at nothing, including the commitment of American forces, to punish terrorists. The bombing also influenced Weinberger by solidifying his opposition to the American presence in Lebanon. According to historian Douglas Little, Weinberger felt like American intervention in Lebanon was potentially turning into another Vietnam. Weinberger, with the support of the military and Bush, rushed to remove the U.S. contingent of the Multinational Force, which met fierce resistance from Shultz who was adamant.

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133 Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, 873.

See Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*, 160. Wilentz writes that “By bowing before political and military realities, which had been apparent for months to experts at the Pentagon, the administration had made a mockery of its tough talk about terrorism.”
“that an abrupt pullout would undermine U.S. credibility in the Middle East.” Ultimately, the Marines withdrew from Lebanon, because Reagan agreed with Weinberger’s assessment. Historian Michael Oren argues that “by February 1984, Reagan realized that Lebanon was becoming a Vietnam-like quagmire and recalled all American troops.” Warfare and terrorism, however, continued unabashed in Lebanon.

Shultz claimed that the withdrawal of American forces from Lebanon contributed to ongoing terrorism. He insisted that “The hurried withdrawal of the marines from Beirut in February 1984 left a clear message: terrorism works. And when terrorism works, one consequence is assured: far more lies ahead.” The withdrawal placed the United States in a position of weakness; terrorists effectively pushed American forces to succumb to their tactics, demonstrating that their methods were successful. It also signaled a defeat in the Cold War. Historian Eugene Rogan contends that “the Lebanon conflict had proved a major defeat for the United States in its rivalry with the Soviet Union.” Terrorists were affecting the United States’ reputation in the Cold War.

Shultz considered acts of terrorism as acts of war. He agreed with the Department of Defense commission following the barracks bombing which identified terrorism as “a form of warfare for which we were ill prepared.” Many in the Reagan administration disagreed with this assessment and attempted to identify the root causes of terrorism instead, a policy Shultz rejected. By associating terrorism with poverty and injustice, Shultz felt that their methods were being legitimized.

Shultz argued that “terrorists fear negotiations and seem spurred to terror in an effort to derail progress. They reject the fundamental character of democracy and negotiated peace or social progress.” Shultz was especially opposed to emerging state-sponsored terror. Some states provided resources to terrorists who accomplished state interests without the states themselves receiving blame. He asserted that “State-sponsored terrorism had by 1980 become a weapon of unconventional war against the democracies of the West, taking advantage of their

135 Little, American Orientalism, 247.
137 George P. Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), 644.
138 Rogan, The Arabs, 422.
139 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph, 645.
140 Ibid., 645-646.
openness and building on political hostility toward them.”141 Shultz reaffirmed that terrorism resided outside the realm of democracy. In the administration’s bipolar worldview, state sponsors were enemies just like the Soviets.

He felt that current U.S. antiterrorism policies were lacking: “the U.S. government had policies for dealing with terrorists, but I did not think they were sufficient or effective.”142 So far, the U.S. had not proven itself able to meet the challenge of terrorism. Shultz himself pointed to administrative infighting as a cause of inadequate measures against terrorists. He claimed that “The executive branch was itself so fragmented that it was impossible to orchestrate all counterterrorist efforts effectively or even to get agreement that there should be a specific counterterrorist effort.”143 He blamed ineffective policy on the inability to develop a coherent and consistent antiterrorism program.

Shultz felt the most effective way to exercise diplomacy was from a position capable of intimidation: he said, “I regarded strength and the credible possibility of its use as an essential element of policy.”144 As such, he argued for preemptive measures against terrorism to prevent future American vulnerability and weakness. A more proactive antiterrorist policy was introduced in National Security Decision Directive 138, which stirred debate about the hardening of foreign policy.145

In his October 25, 1984, speech at the Park Avenue Synagogue in New York, Shultz posited his ideas for a policy of preemption. Because terrorism occurred momentarily, Shultz purported that the U.S. military should have “the capability to act on a moment’s notice.”146 He also developed a strategy against terrorism which renewed emphasis on intelligence, improved security of embassies and airplanes, and, most importantly, public support. An antiterrorist policy rooted in preemption required public support beforehand and “that there is potential for loss of life of some of our fighting men and the loss of life of some innocent people…”147 Shultz

141 Ibid., 643.
142 Ibid., 644.
143 Ibid., 647.
144 Ibid., 649.
147 Ibid.
seemed to endorse the possibility of casualties, just to convey the harsh ramifications for terrorists. Shultz’s preemptive antiterrorist policy allotted the government and military tremendous decision-making ability. Additionally, it encouraged more U.S. global interventions with less explanation. Members of the administration, particularly Bush, as well as the American public received Shultz’s speech with concern and scorn. Time reported that Bush stated “I don’t agree with Shultz. We’re not going to kill 100 innocent civilians just to kill one terrorist.” It was evident that such a heavy handed policy would not triumph in the Reagan administration.

Weinberger’s antiterrorist policy marked the antithesis of Shultz’s; while Shultz considered terror as warfare, Weinberger regarded it as criminal. In order for Weinberger to agree to using force, “there had to be a causal chain of events from attack to suspect to proposed retaliation target before he would endorse military action.” Weinberger needed evidence and deliberation, much like in criminal proceedings, before condoning military responses. While Weinberger did not always oppose military action, he felt that certain conditions had to be met before committing American forces.

A month after Shultz’s Park Avenue Synagogue speech, Weinberger delivered a speech at the National Press Club which encapsulated what was to become the “Weinberger Doctrine.” Time magazine indicated that Weinberger directly engaged Shultz’s preemptive antiterrorist policy in his speech, which contributed “palpable” tension between the men. Weinberger delineated six “tests” which should be tried before committing forces abroad: he stated “these tests I have just mentioned have been phrased negatively for a purpose – they are intended to sound a note of caution. When we ask our military forces to risk their very lives in such situations, a note of caution is not only prudent, it is morally required.” This doctrine reflected a more measured and reserved use of force as well as greater concern for public

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148 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph, 652-653.
See Wills, The First War on Terrorism, 190. Wills writes that Bush acted as a middle ground between Shultz and Weinberger.
150 Wills, The First War on Terrorism, 30.
151 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph, 649.
opinion. The doctrine mandated that force be used only in situations imperative to national interest; instances in which force was necessary required that U.S. forces were intent to win and followed clear objectives which would be reconsidered regularly. Furthermore, the use of force required public and Congressional support.  

Weinberger was unwilling to sacrifice American lives to prevent terrorism. 

The Weinberger doctrine initiated an administrative feud, particularly between Weinberger and Shultz. Shultz vehemently responded to Weinberger’s policy of limited action, calling it the “Vietnam Syndrome in spades.” If the United States proved unwilling to vigorously respond to terrorism, it not only succumbed to terrorists, but also demonstrated frailty. Shultz felt that “in the face of terrorism…his [Weinberger’s] was a counsel of inaction bordering on paralysis.” The nature of terrorism, whether as an act of war or criminality, divided the administration: Reagan, Shultz, and Casey viewed it as warfare, while Weinberger and National Security Adviser McFarlane considered it a crime. The administration remained uncertain of how to meet terrorism, specifically regarding the use of force. Whether the White House chose to consider terrorism as criminal or as warfare dictated the government’s response to terrorist acts. But these internal debates did not soothe the American public which wanted the government to issue a unified policy about terrorism.

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154 Ibid. 
155 Herring, From Colony to Superpower, 875. See Schaller, “Reagan and the Cold War,” 6. Schaller considers the role notions of the Vietnam Syndrome played in the Reagan administration in. He argues that leadership in the 1970s invoked the memory of Vietnam in its “unwillingness to use force to resist Soviet pressure or to defend foreign friends and interests.” Reagan scorned the lack of force, believing it resulted in the hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; Bell, The Reagan Paradox, 86. Bell describes the Weinberger-Shultz debate regarding force in antiterrorism; Wilentz, The Age of Reagan, 153. Wilentz writes that neoconservatives in the Reagan administration “pushed for a reversal of what they called the ‘Vietnam Syndrome,’ which they believed had crippled America’s will to use military force against the Soviet Union’s proxies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.” 
156 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph, 650. 
157 See Wawro, Quicksand, 388. Wawro cites Reagan and Casey’s move toward developing an offensive antiterrorism program.
Addressing the Public

Government in-fighting on the issue did not go unnoticed and the White House needed to do something. The American people increasingly demanded more information about what the government was doing to keep them safe. Americans were frustrated with ongoing terrorist activity and they “believe the government is virtually helpless when it comes to catching terrorists, they feel something should be done.” Americans were aware “that there was no cohesive policy” and thought that the public should “be made aware and reassured that U.S. counterterrorist forces are highly trained and capable.” The public desired the best use of intelligence and the military to protect the United States and its people. Cold War dynamics insisted that the U.S. military be the best, but as military personnel became targets, Americans began doubting the nation’s ability to win.

In late July, 1985, Reagan charged Vice President Bush with leading a new Antiterrorism Task Force to examine the United States’ counterterrorism program. After five months, the Task Force presented Reagan a classified report of its findings on December 20. By January 20, 1986, Reagan approved the recommendations and encouraged their implementation. In order to fulfill Reagan’s wishes to make the Task Force findings public, Bush introduced the report on March 6, 1986. This public statement sought to inform the American public of current policies dealing with terrorism as well as reassure Americans that the U.S. government had a sound and effective antiterrorism program. While some Americans asked the government for a coherent policy, the White House felt that in this public report, it successfully established this policy. Bush confidently underscored that “Our policy is clear.”

The Task Force, therefore, served a twofold purpose: to evaluate U.S. antiterrorism policies and to reassure Americans of government policies. It was apparent that the Task Force would mainly act as an answer to public criticism about whether the Reagan administration had a coherent and cohesive antiterrorism program. Despite its attempts to assert the power of the United States, terrorism presented a challenge to Americans. While the government poured billions into national security and intelligence, American citizens continued to die at the hands of terrorists. Because terrorists were difficult to pinpoint and confront, the challenge for the Reagan

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159. Ibid., 17.
160. Ibid., 18.
administration appeared insurmountable. And terrorism weighed on an American public that refused to idly stand by.

In order to improve communication between the government and the American public, the Task Force recommended a public education effort which would inform the public about antiterrorism policy in the form of publications, seminars, and speakers. Central to enhancing domestic policy was developing a communications campaign to disseminate information about Reagan’s antiterrorism policies to the American public. The task force recommended “a broad education effort should be undertaken to inform the American public about our policy and proposals as well as the many ramifications of the use of force against terrorism including death of innocent people, destruction of property, alienation of allies and possible terrorist reprisals.”

Reminiscent of the public diplomacy campaign following the barracks’ bombing, the administration was concerned with informing Americans about the many measures it undertook to protect American citizens. Additionally, the report maintained that closer cooperation between the government and media would convey a better sense of how the government responded to terrorism. For better media coverage of terrorist incidents, the Task Force encouraged the appointment of spokespersons to provide a consistent message to the public from the government.

In Bush’s public statement regarding the report, he sketched the methodology the Task Force utilized. Bush honed in on the policy of no concessions to terrorists, which directly engaged Shultz’s fears after the barracks’ bombing. Meeting terrorists’ needs, such as removing American forces from Lebanon, demonstrated the success of their actions and fostered more terrorist acts. The report also illustrated that the White House felt better prepared to deal with terrorist threats after implementing the Task Force’s recommendations. According to Bush, the current policy underwent significant improvement to protect the American people, which was what the people asked of the government.

Bush emphasized that the Task Force “looked at all aspects of our policies, resources, organization, diplomatic initiatives, and legal procedures” in order to grasp a full understanding of the government’s antiterrorism network. An endeavor of this magnitude required a great deal of cooperation between all government agencies involved. The White House wished to

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162 Ibid., 27.
163 “Public Report of the Vice President’s Task Force on Combatting Terrorism,” 22-23.
164 Ibid., 1.
convey internal cooperation in this effort to ensure that the antiterrorism program functioned smoothly: “we [Reagan and Bush] were very impressed with the dedication and abilities of all parts of the government dealing with terrorism on a daily basis.” Bush complimented Executive Director James L. Holloway for his success in establishing “the cooperative atmosphere that lead [sic] the various working groups to formulate the specific recommendations.” The Task Force wished to quell public concerns regarding administrative infighting in order to gain their confidence in Reagan’s antiterrorism.

As stated in the introduction of the report, Bush emphasized that the Task Force sought “to reassess U.S. priorities and policies, to ensure that current programs make the best use of available assets, and to determine if our national program is properly coordinated to achieve the most effective results.” Members of the Task Force met with many involved in antiterrorism such as government agencies, operations centers, statesmen, military officers, law enforcement, and airline CEOs to get a sense of how various agencies worked together for the overall functioning of the program. The Task Force evaluated this network and offered recommendations for improving and strengthening it.

The report emphasized that the U.S. antiterrorism program drew from a large pool of resources. Since the Nixon administration, it involved a vast network of government agencies, in addition to a large budget. The National Security Council played a central role in spearheading antiterrorism programs. In terms of managing incidents of terrorism, the State Department dealt with those outside the U.S., the Department of Justice handled those within the U.S., and the Federal Aviation Administration managed hijacked flights. These departments also oversaw more than 150 projects which encompassed other federal agencies. These activities focused on developing and enhancing intelligence and security. The Task Force reported that in 1985 alone, approximately $2 billion was allocated to combat terrorism. Because the volume of threats kept increasing, the report predicted that these expenditures would also rise. The Task Force wished to convey that the U.S. allocated vast resources for antiterrorism, indicating that the government was stringently fighting terrorists.

165 Ibid., 2.
166 Ibid., 1.
167 Ibid., introduction.
168 Ibid., 10-11.
The conclusions the Task Force reached, however, propped up the antiterrorism policies already in place. Bush’s Task Force reached the conclusion that current antiterrorism policies were sound, just in need of enhancement. The Task Force could maintain that antiterrorism was effective because terrorism was not occurring on American soil. According to the Task Force’s definition of terrorism, incidents occurred to effect change. Admitting that significant change in antiterrorism policy was needed would signal a victory for terrorists: their methods worked because American policy was changing. Despite the challenges presented by terrorism, the government did not want to admit that its policies needed revision because doing so would require acknowledgment that American power was threatened.

The chief contribution of the Task Force resided in its alignment of antiterrorism policy with Cold War policy. The identification of terrorists and how to fight them closely mirrored Reagan’s methods for challenging the Soviet Union. The Task Force defined terrorism as “the unlawful use or threat of violence against persons or property to further political or social objectives. It is generally intended to intimidate or coerce a government, individuals or groups to modify their behavior or policies.”

Terrorists acted to achieve change in order to improve their own situation. In terms of the United States, military targets were extremely effective to engineer change. The U.S. government reconsidered its policies to protect its military strength and Cold War reputation in addition to answering public questions of America’s vulnerability. The Task Force’s conclusions, therefore, were at odds with its own definition of terrorism. While American policies did change as a result of terrorism, as evidenced by the Marines withdrawal from Lebanon, the Task Force insisted that American anti-terrorism was resolute and unchanging.

To effect change, terrorists utilized several tactics, which the Task Force delineated. It provided a list of activities considered terroristic to assert acts unacceptable to the U.S., such as “hostage-taking, aircraft piracy or sabotage, assassination, threats, hoaxes, indiscriminate bombings or shootings.”

The report also identified individuals likely to serve as agents of terrorism. It drew correlations between significantly youthful populations and economic and political hardship, wherein terrorism offered an alternative for overturning inequities, which fit the administration’s considerations of the conditions that enabled the Iranian Revolution to occur.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 1.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.}\]
and prompted other countries, such as Lebanon, to follow suit. The report identified that terrorism was a product of economic and political grievances and that the United States would continue to promote democracy and freedom in its foreign policy to alleviate these grievances.\textsuperscript{171} This commitment seemed easier than meeting terrorism head on and it allowed Reagan to portray his policies as noble, and, if the U.S. could eliminate the causes of terrorism, it would have demonstrated a Cold War success. The Reagan administration wished to spread democratic ideals to win over terrorists for a twofold gain: removing a Cold War enemy and halting the threat to the U.S. military.

The report, like the film \textit{The Delta Force}, closely associated terrorism with the Middle East, citing that “the most deadly terrorists continue to operate in and from the Middle East.”\textsuperscript{172} The propagation of terrorism concerned the Task Force because it was becoming increasingly more violent as well as more directed at Americans, with a growing trend of targeting the U.S. military. The report claimed that one of the key aims of Middle Eastern terrorism was in fact destroying Western governments and citizens.\textsuperscript{173} Americans outside the United States represented easier targets because of highly effective domestic antiterrorism measures conducted by the FBI and the Department of Justice. But the report cited the openness of American society, along with its highly developed infrastructure, as its greatest vulnerabilities. Because of the interrelated nature of American governmental and societal functioning, a single terrorist act could damage a great deal within the U.S. This assertion represented the Reagan administration’s considerations of terrorism as a Cold War Fight because it signaled the clash of two very different ideologies, which privileged the American system.

In the 1980s, state sponsored terrorism was on the rise and presented a problematic case; because it involved elements bigger than the terrorist cell, it became murky to pinpoint culpability.\textsuperscript{174} The report explained that some states used terrorism as a form of diplomacy because it seemed a cheaper and potentially more effective route to obtain concessions: “this trend toward the alignment of interests between certain states and terrorist groups has markedly elevated threat levels worldwide, as state and financial resources have expanded terrorists’

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{174} See Bell, \textit{The Reagan Paradox}, 81. Bell writes about Reagan’s “preoccupation with the notion of state terrorism as a new and sinister technique by which ‘rogue governments’ …could pursue diplomatic or political ends through the instrumentality of individual fanatics willing to die.”
As the power of terrorists increased, they posed a greater threat in the Cold War. Current policy also contained a warning to those states sponsoring terrorists:

States that practice terrorism or actively support it will not do so without consequence. If there is evidence that a state is mounting or intends to conduct an act of terrorism against this country, the United States will take measures to protect its citizens, property, and interests.\(^{176}\)

With the Task Force report, the U.S. began to divide the world according to terrorism and its state sponsors. These states became enemies, which the Reagan administration tended to align with Cold War enemies. The government sought to reach the root of terrorist activity and considered all who were involved in carrying out terrorism guilty. The Reagan administration held anyone who “planned, organized and financed”\(^{177}\) terrorist acts responsible. The U.S. treated perpetrators of terrorism as fundamentally different in terms of their ideology. Similar to how the United States treated the Soviet Union as other because of communism, radical Islam stood in opposition to Western notions of democracy. It was clear that Cold War dynamics shaped this fight. And the Reagan administration was not willing to compromise with terrorists and their state sponsors. The antiterrorism program, in 1985, rested upon a no-concessions policy. The United States government refused to succumb to terrorists’ objectives. The government would not compromise with terrorists for fear of exacerbating their activity; the report argued that engaging terrorists in forms such as paying ransom or releasing prisoners would only serve to encourage terrorism.\(^{178}\) Shultz even considered the removal of the Marines from a Lebanon a concession to terrorists – the perpetrators achieved their ends.

The Task Force identified the U.S.’ enemies along Cold War lines: terrorist and their state-sponsors adhered to an ideology in complete opposition to that of the United States. Terrorists, like the Soviets, formulated America’s opponent in a bipolar world. And the report recommended fighting terrorists with Cold War resources – military and intelligence. The report offered the alternatives considered by the United States in response to terrorist incidents: political, economic, or military retaliation. In terms of terrorists, the Task Force upheld the effectiveness of military responses, but hinted that they may be too controversial. While Reagan elevated terrorism to a Cold War fight in his speeches, he was unwilling to put into practice the

\(^{175}\) “Public Report of the Vice President’s Task Force on Combatting Terrorism,” 3.

\(^{176}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{177}\) Bell, The Reagan Paradox, 86.

\(^{178}\) “Public Report of the Vice President’s Task Force on Combatting Terrorism,” 7.
hard line that he preached. Force would demonstrate to terrorists the resolve of the U.S. to fight them; however, retaliatory measures had to succeed in order to be effective. Also, a military reaction might be ill-received by other nations. In terms of international support, political and economic sanctions would garner the most favor, but could be less effective in reaching the terrorists themselves.\textsuperscript{179} While Shultz’s understanding of force made a decisive imprint on the report, this measure was not upheld as the most desirable. The Weinberger Doctrine’s careful calculation of when to use force established the U.S. military response to terrorism. While Reagan’s ideological consideration of terrorism tended to align with Shultz’s, Weinberger’s advocacy of limited force triumphed in the Task Force document. The Reagan administration wanted the strongest military in the world to solidify the U.S.’ reputation of military superiority, but was reluctant to use American forces. Because the military was targeted, increasing its exposure would possibly undermine Reagan’s objectives by turning the military into a victim.

Besides the military, intelligence played an integral role in the long-term struggle against terrorism, just as it did in the Cold War. The antiterrorism program relied on human and technical intelligence as well as police investigation to “penetrate terrorist groups and their support systems, including a sponsoring state’s activities.”\textsuperscript{180} In order to circumvent the causes of terrorism, the Task Force considered long-term intelligence critical to better understand the “regional history, culture, religion, politics, psychology, security conditions, law enforcement and diplomatic relations.”\textsuperscript{181}

Along with military and intelligence, American antiterrorism adopted another Cold War strategy to fend off state-sponsored terrorism – by accumulating allies. The Task Force advocated that the best means for long term success against terrorism was increased international cooperation. The U.S. sought a global network of allies to defeat this enemy. An orchestrated force hedged against terrorist organizations and states which sponsor them would most effectively thwart their activities; a cooperative force would “complicate the terrorists’ tasks, deter their efforts and save lives.”\textsuperscript{182} International cooperation required developing a coherent policy about common concerns as well as strengthening aviation and maritime security. The report cited the Summit Seven as the most promising forum for discussing international

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 13-14.  
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 14.  
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 14.  
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 12.
antiterrorism. Additionally, greater strides were made in the UN to condemn terrorism when hostage-taking was identified as a terrorist act in December 1985.  

Cooperation with other countries also focused on individual Americans. A key concern of the report was the protection of Americans abroad; the Task Force identified issues surrounding jurisdiction and how to ensure the safety of Americans in foreign nations. Because most terrorism occurred beyond the borders of the United States, the resources of these countries required enhancement because it was their responsibility to protect Americans within their borders. The report identified the State Department’s Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program as a successful venture in reinforcing the security of other nations.

Other international efforts beyond an alliance system were considered by the Task Force. The report argued that more international agreements concerning aviation, shipping, and tourism should be pursued as well as strengthening security at airports and ports. The international community also needed to enforce existing agreements, establish conventions for dealing with the methods of terrorism, impose sanctions against state supporters of terrorism, and establish firm guidelines for extradition. Because intelligence played a pivotal role in combating terrorism, the Task Force recommended the creation of an intelligence center on terrorism. It also encouraged an increased in human intelligence efforts to infiltrate terrorist groups and those who support them.

The Task Force, however, recognized that the government needed to adapt to challenges presented by terrorism, so offered several recommendations to improve the functioning of the antiterrorism program domestically and internationally. While some historians contend that the Task Force only slightly changed America’s policies, Reagan did take strides to implement its recommendation to increase international cooperation against terrorism. At the Tokyo Economic Summit Conference, also called the Summit Seven, in May 1986, Reagan rallied the participants to take a united stand against terrorism. In the conference’s Statement on International Terrorism, the “democracies” present called for “all like-minded nations to collaborate with

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183 Ibid., 12-13.
184 Ibid., 9-10.
185 Ibid., 13.
186 Ibid., 23-25.
187 Ibid., 25.
us.” The statement identified terrorism as an attack on the participating countries’ “values of human life, freedom and dignity.” The summit pinpointed state-sponsored terrorism as the threat and vowed to work together to thwart these states. The statement proposed measures to hold state-sponsors accountable by limiting missions and travel to these countries as well as bringing individuals connected to terrorism to trial. Also, these “like-minded nations” created an alliance against state-sponsored terrorism and agreed on “bilateral and multilateral cooperation.” Reagan demonstrated that this change, however, was limited. At a press conference following the summit, Reagan declared “that the United States still retains the right to take unilateral action,” because, he said, “There was nothing in the joint statement that would ‘preclude some nation from acting’ on its own if there were an attack on its citizens.” While Reagan’s involvement in the Tokyo Economic Summit represented an effort to implement Task Force recommendations for an international alliance against state-sponsors of terrorism, the president was not willing to relinquish the U.S.’ right to take unilateral action. Although Reagan tried to implement one of the Task Force’s recommendations, he maintained that the United States could fight terrorism without its allies. This, coupled with the limited changes proposed by the Task Force, edged the administration toward the conclusion that its policies were effective. This conclusion was confirmed both in the Task Force’s findings and the 1987 review of the Task Force. In a letter from Bush to Reagan on May 7, the vice president noted considerable progress in combating terrorism. Bush stated that “overall we have found progress has been excellent and the improvement in our counterterrorism capability has been evident in the results.” He cited that while terrorism continued to take place, adherence to the antiterrorism program would help diminish it. The 1987 review observed substantial strides in fighting state sponsors of terrorism. Bush claimed that while fostering international cooperation posed difficulties, the United States found allies to fight terroristic states. He emphasized that “these successes have been the direct result of a step-by-step application of our policy.” It appeared that the Reagan administration fruitfully dispelled terrorism by fighting it like the Cold

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190 Ibid.

191 Ibid.


194 Ibid., 5.
War – with military might, intelligence, and allies. While the Task Force endorsed existing policies, Reagan’s decision to conduct an evaluation of antiterrorism policies indicated that he seriously considered the threat of terrorism to the United States and its impact on the American public.

According to its recommendations, the Task Force believed that increased cooperation between the U.S. government and other entities such as the international community, the media, the American public, and government agencies was tantamount in a soundly functioning antiterrorism program. Combating terrorism required a united front, which concretely defined terrorism, its methods, and its supporters. The Reagan administration defined a new enemy, fighting it with old tactics. Reagan’s antiterrorism was another hallmark of his Cold War foreign policy: he aligned antiterrorist states against states that supported terrorism, creating more polarities in an already bipolar world.

But the Task Force represented another hallmark of Reagan’s policies: while he posited harsh rhetoric against terrorists, he did little to actually thwart their efforts. He permitted occasional airstrikes as retaliatory measures, but his actions did not match the language he espoused. The hostages in Lebanon illustrated this best. Reagan demanded they be returned, but the hostages were released on their captors’ terms (those who were not murdered).

Contemporary critic, Marc Celmer, captured the essence of Reagan’s antiterrorism: “Despite all of its harsh rhetoric, the Reagan administration’s approach has had no positive impact on the deterrence, prevention and suppression of international terrorism, nor has it created a greater degree of safety for Americans traveling and living abroad.”195 Like in his Cold War fight, Reagan invigorated tension with terrorists through words alone.

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Terrorism Persists

On September 11, 2001, two hijacked planes crashed into the World Trade Center, killing thousands and turning the towers into a smoldering pile of ash. Another plane slammed into the Pentagon, while passengers on a fourth plane forced it down in a Pennsylvania field. President George W. Bush faced a shocked and anguished public. These acts of terrorism on American soil damaged the public psyche and left people both angry and afraid. That very evening, Bush said “We’re at war.”

Like Reagan before him, Bush wished to subdue public anxiety about the security of the U.S. Bush dramatically increased defense spending and launched a massive military buildup, but he also pursued administrative options. In the National Security Strategy of 2002, Bush announced the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, a government agency dedicated to fighting the “invisible enemies” of terrorism. This new department altered government structure by combining tasks of more than 100 agencies with a sole focus on protecting U.S. soil and making “Americans safer.” The department pledged to defend the United States by securing the borders and infrastructure, improving intelligence, enhancing communication, and better training emergency personnel.

Bush’s responses to 9/11 were reminiscent of Reagan’s responses to terrorism. Bush inherited a rightist American foreign policy. From the start of the Cold War, American policy focused on security and supremacy. But Reagan’s seemingly singlehanded victory over the Soviet Union solidified some opinions, especially on the right, that the U.S. should maintain this strategy. Charles Krauthammer, a political commentator, wrote in Foreign Affairs that the end of the Cold War left one option: a unipolar world with the U.S. as the “unchallenged superpower.” Krauthammer condemned the United Nations as incapable of managing a

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199 Ibid.
200 Ibid.
unipolar world because it did not have military power. The post-Cold War world order privileged unilateral action, of which, Krauthammer argued, the U.S. would act as a trailblazer “because where the United States does not tread, the alliance does not follow.”\(^{203}\) His justification for unilateral action was that “our best hope for safety…is in American strength and will – the strength and will to lead a unipolar world, unashamedly laying down the rules of world order and being prepared to enforce them.”\(^{204}\) Despite the fact that the Cold War was over, Krauthammer argued that American policy should continue to focus on security. These concerns for American strength and security spilled over into the Bush administration. The National Security Strategy of 2002, in particular, illustrated these anxieties. The strategy underscored that the war on terror was effort to protect “our democratic values and way of life.”\(^{205}\) And to this end, Bush called for allies against terrorism; however, the strategy said that “while the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone.”\(^{206}\) These rightist policies, developed since the Reagan era, informed the actions Bush took.\(^{207}\) In both the Reagan and Bush administrations, Americans demanded action against terrorists because they did not want to be victims and they wished for the United States to be strong and both Reagan and Bush worked to restore confidence in government policy. While Reagan and Bush both preached a hard line against terrorists, Bush went further to put these policies in motion. Even though Reagan’s fight against terrorism emerged in his reinvigoration of the Cold War, he hesitated to mobilize American forces. President Reagan fought terrorism like he fought the Cold War – he talked tough and sought allies, but that was the extent of it. He relied on upholding America’s superpower reputation on words alone, reluctant to plunge American forces and lives into combat, especially after the disaster at the Marine barracks in 1983.

\(^{203}\) Ibid., 24.
\(^{204}\) Ibid., 33.
\(^{206}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{207}\) See Daniel Pipes, “Reagan’s Early Victory in the War on Terror,” New York Sun, June 15, 2004. In 2004, Pipes argued that “the first American victory in the war on terror was won by Ronald Reagan.” He claimed that this victory was possible because of Reagan’s personality, which also ended the Cold War.
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