

Intelligence Failure and Terrorism: the Attack on the Marines in Beirut

by
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INTRODUCTION

With uncomfortable regularity presidents, be they Republican or Democrat and regardless of their foreign policy agenda, have expressed dissatisfaction with the intelligence they have received. Of late, Congress and the media have added their voices to those criticizing the performance of the intelligence community. So commonplace have these criticisms become that charges of an intelligence failure now accompany almost every failed foreign policy initiative. Not unexpectedly, this dissatisfaction has also brought forward demands for reform that would provide policy-makers with greater control over intelligence. From the policy-maker's point of view, the control problem in this case is not one of curbing illegalities or excessive behavior as has often been the case with covert action. Rather, it is one of making institutional processes and individual behavior more responsive to the policy-maker's values and concerns. The hoped-for result is intelligence analysis and estimates that will prevent policy-makers from being surprised again. This paper examines the legitimacy of these expectations by reviewing the relationship between intelligence and policy, the concept of an intelligence failure, and the attack on the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut.

Reform efforts designed to produce greater control of intelligence analysis and estimates have followed a regular pattern in which an emphasis on greater centralization is gradually diluted by bureaucratic competition and the desire to insure that all competing points of view can be aired. President Nixon reorganized the intelligence bureaucracy in 1971, Ford reorganized it in 1976, Carter did so in 1978, and Reagan also made changes upon becoming president. Considerable attention has focused on the process by which national intelligence estimates are produced. In 1971, Nixon replaced the Office of National Estimates (ONE) with the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) system. The ONE was created in 1950 to draft national estimates. It operated in a collegial fashion with the professional analysts who served on it taking collective responsibility for the estimates they produced and approved. The NIO system replaced collegiality with individual responsibility for an estimate. Critics argued that the ONE system had become too inbred and insulated in its outlook and as a consequence was producing intelligence that was not responsive to policy-maker needs. Defenders of the ONE argued that the NIO system left the individual analyst too exposed to pressures from policy-makers and would result in "intelligence to please" rather than quality analysis. Under Carter, the NIOs became part of the National Foreign Assessment Center (NFAC) which was under the control of the CIA's Deputy Director for National Foreign Assessment. A national intelligence council was also created to give the NIOs a collective support

system similar to that which analysts enjoyed in the framework of the ONE. The Reagan administration returned the NFAC to its previous status as the Directorate of Intelligence and once again placed the NIOs under the control of the Director of Central Intelligence.¹

INTELLIGENCE POLICY

The continuing dissatisfaction with intelligence and the persistent allegations of intelligence failures suggests that organizational solutions, at least as they have been carried out to date, have not provided policy-makers with the control necessary to lessen the frequency of surprise. It also suggests that arriving at greater control may require re-examining the fundamental premises from which policy-makers proceed in phrasing the problem and searching for an answer. First, policy-makers tend to assume that a correct method exists for linking intelligence and policy. Under the best of conditions, the line joining intelligence and policy is a tenuous one, and as the brief review of organizational changes made in the production of national intelligence estimates revealed, no agreed upon formula exists for bringing the two together. One position holds that intelligence and policy must be kept separate.² Excessive contact is seen as corrupting intelligence, robbing it of its ability to inform and warn policy-makers. Others maintain that the greater danger is irrelevance brought on by the production of intelligence in a vacuum. Unsure of the policy-makers' concerns and priorities, analysts are forced to rely upon organizational routine or personal intuition in producing intelligence.³

In large part, no answer to the problem exists due to the conflicting dynamics of intelligence and policy-making. Unsure of what policy will work or unable to get a consensus on how to proceed, policy-makers try to keep as many options as possible open for as long as possible. However, having decided upon a course of action and finding themselves publicly (and politically) identified with it, they are reluctant to change direction and admit to a failure. From a policy-maker's perspective, all too often intelligence contributes little to either of these pursuits. In the course of presenting them with basic background information, analysis of current events, estimates of future developments, and warning intelligence closes more doors for policy-makers than it opens and holds the potential for undercutting policy initiatives.

Second, policy-makers tend to treat intelligence as a free good. It is something "on tap" which can be accessed at any time. The costs associated with the collection, analysis, production, and dissemination of intelligence go unrecognized. Far more is involved than the monetary costs associated with each of these activities, considerable though they may be. The cost of collective intelligence for the U.S. exceeds \$10 billion per year and encompasses such activities as reconnaissance satellites, aircraft, ships, signals, intelligence stations, radar, underseas surveillance, and human sources.⁴ Significant decision costs also exist.⁵ These costs emerge in the process of coalition-building around an intelligence

estimate or the accuracy of a piece of information. They include information costs, responsibility costs, intergame costs, division-of-payoffs costs, dissonance costs, inertia costs, persuasion costs, and pressures-of-time costs.

Third, policy-makers tend to equate surprise with an intelligence failure. The presumption exists that all events are knowable, and therefore when one is caught off guard, it is due to incompetent organizations or individuals who should have known to act differently.⁶ Not only does this assumption fail to take into account the inherent limitations of individuals and organizations in processing data, it misunderstands the problems inherent in the process of intelligence estimating. Estimating the future involves artificially creating it through the construction of scenarios. Numerous problems confront the analyst who seeks to do so. First, there is the inherent ambiguity of evidence. Working with twenty-twenty hindsight, it is easy to pick out the important pieces of information and identify unfolding trends. At the time events are taking place, this is not the case. Discriminating between important signals and noise, the natural clutter of useless information, is not easy. At Pearl Harbor, for example, the problem was not one of too few signals but too many irrelevant ones. On the eve of the attack, a great deal of evidence existed to support all the wrong interpretations of the last-minute signals being picked up.⁷ Complicating matters further is the fact that unfolding events do not automatically become more understandable as signals accumulate; major events do not come in nice, neat packages. The more closely the details of the terrorist attack are examined, the more loose ends one is likely to encounter.

Starting assumptions also complicate the task of estimating the future.⁸ Events are not self-interpreting but gain meaning only when placed in a theoretical or policy-oriented context. If these assumptions are incorrect, incoming data are unlikely to be interpreted properly. In 1973, Israel incorrectly assumed that Egypt would not attack until it could control the air space over the battlefield. Stalin incorrectly assumed that Hitler would attack only after issuing an ultimatum. Because of these faulty assumptions, policy-makers and analysts failed to interpret properly the troop movements and military build-ups underway. The actions of the adversary form a third factor which complicates the task of estimating the future. The adversary always has the option of changing its plans. Warnings of attack may thus be correct even if no attack is forthcoming. Indecision on the part of the adversary similarly complicates the task of estimating the future. Contradictory signals are received because the adversary is unsure of what it wants to do. By the time a consensus is reached, insufficient time may exist for policy-makers to be warned of an impending action.

The fourth presumption made by policy-makers in expressing their criticism of intelligence and charge of intelligence failures is that had the intelligence failure not occurred, the policy would have succeeded. Such criticism understates the role that chance and accident play in world politics. It also tends to overestimate one's own importance in the play of

events. Robert Jervis found both of these tendencies to be prevalent in his study of how policy-makers learn from the past.⁹ In the American case the tendency to define foreign policy problems as engineering ones for which permanent, technical, and nonpolitical solutions exist reinforces these mistakes. This orientation to foreign policy-making also brings with it both a sense of optimism that all problems can be solved and impatience when obstacles are encountered.

THE CONCEPT OF AN INTELLIGENCE FAILURE

Solutions to the problem of controlling intelligence based on these assumptions about the nature of the link between intelligence and policy are unlikely to yield significant or enduring improvements in the performance of the intelligence function. More likely to take place are additional cycles in the pattern of reform efforts noted above. Corrective measures are possible if these assumptions are replaced by their opposite number: no single correct method exists for linking intelligence and policy, intelligence is costly to acquire, not all events and developments can be foreseen, and policies will fail even if intelligence is provided. Because it recognizes the many potential roots of intelligence failures and makes a distinction between being surprised and having an intelligence failure, this alternate set of assumptions serves as a more secure starting point for raising the question of controlling intelligence.

Surprise is seldom absolute. Bolts out of the blue rarely happen. As Richard Betts noted, there is almost always some warning and usually some response.¹⁰ Assessing instances of surprise thus requires making judgments about what type of surprise took place. Two dimensions can be used to capture the relativity of surprise.¹¹ First, at what level of activity did the surprise occur. Distinctions can be made between technical surprise (whether or not a piece of equipment can perform in a certain manner) and doctrinal surprise (the concepts and ideas that combine men and equipment into a plan of action). The second dimension of surprise involves the nature of the surprised state's unreadiness: was the surprise one of whether the opponent would act, when it would act, or where it would act. Pearl Harbor, for example, involved both technical surprise—the capabilities of Japanese torpedoes—and doctrinal surprise—the nature of the Japanese attack with many at Pearl Harbor focused on sabotage as the primary danger. Yet, the U.S. was not so much surprised by the fact of the Japanese attack or its timing as by the location. The U.S. naval presence at Pearl Harbor was seen as a deterrent and not as a target.

Michael Handel makes use of similar distinctions in the study of diplomatic surprise.¹² Minor surprise involves an unexpected move which is limited in its impact on the nature of world politics and may be reversible. A *fait accompli* may have a major impact on the balance of power in the international system but is a surprise only in its timing. A major surprise is unexpected in both its timing and object and has a major impact on the division of power in the international system. The point recognized by Handel and echoed by students of military surprise is that not all

cases of surprise are equally significant. Surprise becomes important the more thoroughly it negates the premises on which a state's planning has proceeded and prevents the effective application of that state's power.

If surprise is able to take different forms, so too can intelligence failures. The inability to recognize this point has made the concept of an intelligence failure more of a hinderance than a help in diagnosing cases of surprise. Mark Lowenthal argues that the term should be restricted to those cases where the intelligence process fails to collect, evaluate, produce, or disseminate intelligence in a timely and accurate fashion.¹³ Separated out of the concept of an intelligence failure by this definition are those cases where surprise occurred in spite of warning. That is, where policy-makers did not react to warning either out of disbelief, political paralysis, or a desire not to aggravate a dangerous situation. Of the ten cases he examined, Lowenthal judges only Pearl Harbor and the 1973 Mid-East War to be intelligence failures. Gerald Hopple agrees that the concept of an intelligence failure has become over used and suggests a three-part typology for analyzing cases of surprise:¹⁴ (1) policy failures are a direct outgrowth of a state's defense or policy position; (2) analysis failures are due to the misinterpretation of data; and (3) technical warning failures are due to the failure to collect, process, or distribute the relevant data to policy-makers.

THE TERRORIST ATTACK ON THE U.S. MARINES IN BEIRUT

The problem of international terrorism has always been very near to the center stage of the Reagan administration's conduct of foreign policy. Directly or indirectly, it has played a major role in a wide range of controversial foreign policy initiatives. Intelligence estimates on terrorism were an early source of controversy within the CIA as DCI William Casey established his control over the agency, and the Reagan administration set its foreign policy agenda. Terrorism was also cited as a major reason for an increased emphasis on counter-intelligence. Retaliation against Libya for its support of terrorism was used to convey the desired image of toughness and renewed vigor in U.S. foreign policy. An act of terrorism was also at the heart of one of the greatest foreign policy mishaps of the Reagan administration: the October 23, 1983, bombing of the Marine compound at Beirut which left 241 dead. The attack brought forward charges of an intelligence failure, charges which congressional, Defense Department, and newspaper investigations concluded were justified. But what type of intelligence failure was involved, and what type of improved control measures could prevent it from happening again?

The U.S. Marine presence in Beirut had its roots in the June 6, 1982, Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The military objective was to secure Southern Lebanon and destroy the PLO. The political objective was to alter the political climate within Lebanon in order to give Israel a free hand in dealing with the West Bank and Gaza, and to lead to the establishment of a Christian-dominated Lebanon.¹⁵ Within three days, Israeli forces reached the outskirts of Beirut, and by June 14 they had

linked up with the Christian Lebanese forces militia in East Beirut. On July 2, Israeli forces instituted a military blockade of Beirut, and in August PLO forces and Syrian combatants had become isolated in the city. In order to arrange for the safe evacuation of these forces, the Lebanese government called for an international presence. A U.N. force was not acceptable to Israel, and in its place a Multilateral Force consisting of French, Italian and U.S. troops was dispatched to Lebanon. The Marine unit involved in the Multilateral Force had already conducted the successful evacuation of U.S. citizens from the port city of Juniyah. The withdrawal of the 15,000 PLO and Syrian forces was successfully carried out between August 25 and September 9. On September 10, the Multilateral Force was withdrawn from Beirut.

The situation in Lebanon took a decisive turn for the worse in mid-September. On September 14, President-elect Bashir Gamayel was assassinated. From September 16-18, Phalangist forces massacred Palestinian and Lebanese civilians in the Sabra and Shatila camps (camps nominally under the control of Israeli forces). In the wake of these events, the Lebanese government requested the return of the Multilateral Force. On September 26, the French and Italian units returned to Beirut. On September 29, the U.S. Marine contingent began landing at the port of Beirut. The 1,200-person contingent took up positions near the Beirut International Airport separating the Israeli forces from the populated areas of Beirut. U.S. Ambassador Philip Habib stated that the basic objectives of the Marines were: (1) to bring about the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon; (2) following that, to restore the full sovereignty of the Lebanese government over its territory; and (3) to see to it that Lebanon would not be used as a source of hostile actions against Israel.¹⁶

While the stated objectives of the U.S. presence in Beirut would remain unchanged, the conditions under which the Marines operated changed markedly. Initially, Beirut was a relatively benign environment. The Marines encountered a generally "passive attitude" according to General James Mead.¹⁷ He characterized Beirut as being a "minimally threatening situation" and attributed this to the perception held by many that the Marines were impartial peacekeepers. Gradually, this changed as consensus emerged that the U.S. forces were really biased in favor of the Christians.¹⁸ Support for this view came from the U.S. training of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the continuing failure to redress the political imbalance in the Lebanese government by increasing the number of Moslem officeholders. Viewed in a larger context, the presence of the U.S. Marines in Lebanon had little potential for being viewed as neutral for any long period of time. Not only did the Marines impact on the local balance of power, but the force affected the stakes that other states in the region had in the outcome of the struggle in Lebanon. Most deeply involved was Syria which in turn had Soviet support.

As views of the Marine presence changed, the level of violence in Beirut increased. Beginning in January 1983, Israeli Defense Forces came into repeated contact and conflict with Marine positions. In March, five Marines were slightly wounded by a terrorist's hand grenade in a

southern Beirut suburb. On April 18, a pick-up truck loaded with explosives destroyed the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, killing over 57 people including 17 U.S. citizens.

As fighting between Christian and Druze forces escalated in early May, the Lebanese government and Israel signed an agreement providing for the withdrawal of Israeli troops and the establishment of special security measures in southern Lebanon. No withdrawal of Israeli troops took place, however, because Israel predicated its exit on the simultaneous withdrawal of Syrian and PLO forces from Lebanon. These forces had not been a party to the agreement and refused to leave. The collapse of the agreement further angered the Moslem sectors of the population and produced an angry backlash against the government for having entered into it.

Fighting continued to escalate in July and August. In the course of this fighting, mortar and rocket fire landed on U.S. Marine positions. The situation became more complex when on September 4 Israeli forces withdrew from the Alayh and Shaf districts of Beirut. This action produced another round of massacres and the further shelling of the U.S. position. On September 19, U.S. Navy destroyers provided gunfire support for Lebanese armed forces in their efforts to defend Suq-al-Gharb, the high ground overlooking the U.S. Marine position. While successfully accomplishing its military objective, the shelling reinforced the Moslem community's belief that the U.S. supported the Christians and was not a neutral peacekeeper. On October 14, leaders representing Lebanon's major warring factions agreed to reconciliation talks in Geneva. Nevertheless, factional clashes and sniper fire continued.

At 6:22 a.m., on October 23, a single terrorist driving a yellow Mercedes Benz truck drove through the public parking lot south of the Battalion Landing Team headquarters building in the Marine compound at Beirut International Airport and crashed into the lobby of the building. In doing so, it went through a barbed wire and concertina fence, passed between two Marine guard posts without drawing fire, entered an open gate, passed around one sewer pipe barrier and between two others, and flattened a guard's sandbag booth. The explosion produced by the over 12,000 pounds of TNT that it was carrying occurred while most in the building were asleep. It had sufficient force to rip the building from its foundation and cause it to implode on itself. Two hundred forty-one Marines died and over 100 were injured. Not quite four months later, on February 7, 1984, President Reagan announced the withdrawal of the remaining 1,600 Marines from Lebanon.

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTS

Three notable investigations were conducted to determine what went wrong in Beirut. The Committee on Armed Forces of the House of Representatives held eight days of hearings and produced a 69-page report.¹⁹ The Defense Department put together a five-person committee chaired by retired Admiral Robert L.J. Long to study the incident.²⁰ It produced a nine-part, 141-page report. The *New York Times* carried out

a four-week investigation into the bombing.²¹ All three reports were issued in December, 1983.

The House Committee's Report made eleven points in its summary statement of findings and conclusion. The following observations are particularly relevant to assessing the nature of the intelligence failure.

1. There were inadequate security measures taken to protect the Marine unit from the full spectrum of threats.
2. The commander of the Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU) made serious mistakes in judgment in failing to provide better protection for his troops.
3. While the higher elements of the chain of command did not deny any requests for support from the MAU, they failed to exercise sufficient oversight.
4. Higher policy-making authorities adopted and continued a policy that placed military units in a deployment where protection was inevitably inadequate.
5. Marine leaders interpreted the political/diplomatic nature of the mission as requiring a high priority on visibility and emphasized that to the extent of allowing greater than necessary security risks.
6. The MAU did not receive adequate intelligence support dealing with terrorism. Serious intelligence inadequacies had a direct affect on the capability of the unit to defend itself. The Marines did not possess the capability to analyze the massive amounts of data at their disposal.
7. Notwithstanding the above, the Marine command erred in not considering the possibility of a large bomb-laden truck as a threat. The failure is significant given the numerous other threats considered, the numerous car bomb threats, and an intelligence survey that recommended that trucks be usually inspected for explosives.

The Defense Department Report made the following relevant points in its executive summary statement.

1. The Marine "presence" mission was not interpreted in the same way by all levels of the chain of command. Decisions may have been taken without the clear recognition that the initial conditions had changed dramatically.
2. The chain of command did not take action to ensure the security of the MAU in light of the deteriorating political/military situation.
3. Although the Marine commander was provided with a large volume of intelligence warnings concerning potential terrorist threats, he was not provided with timely intelligence tailored to his specific operational needs. HUMINT support (human intelligence) was ineffective, being neither precise nor tailored to his needs.

The *New York Times* made the following points in concluding its inquiry.

1. Marine officers in Beirut and those above them in the chain of command did not consider terrorism to be the primary threat.
2. The Marine commander in Beirut objected to the Reagan administration's decision to bomb in support of the Lebanese forces for fear of the consequences it would have for the safety of his troops.
3. Marine intelligence officers were deluged with raw intelligence reports about terrorism but were never provided with the expertise required to evaluate them.

Specific recommendations were also made to prevent a repeat of this type of intelligence failure. The Defense Department report recommended the establishment of an all-source fusion center which would tailor and focus all-source intelligence support to U.S. military commanders involved in military operations in areas of high threat, conflict, or crisis. It also called for steps to increase HUMINT support to U.S. forces in Lebanon and other areas of potential conflict. The House Committee cited the need for a special intelligence officer with expertise in terrorism to be assigned to such conflict areas.

WHAT TYPE OF INTELLIGENCE FAILURE

Building upon the earlier discussion of surprise and intelligence failures, a five-fold typology will be used to assess the preceding analyses of the Beirut bombing as an intelligence failure. A tasking failure is an intelligence failure due to the failure to identify relevant information as important for collection. According to the *New York Times*, the Marines did not consider terrorism to be the primary threat to their security in spite of being warned to the contrary. The liaison between the Marines and the Lebanese armed forces observed that when they arrived they "ran from tree to tree with their rifles pointed. They must have thought they were in Vietnam." He told them right away not to expect any classic offensives. The only threat was terrorism.²²

Yet, by training and doctrines, neither the Marines in Beirut nor their superiors in the chain of command were prepared for such a primary threat. The predisposition to downplay terrorism was reinforced by the nature of the expanding threat in Beirut. As identified by the House Committee, the problem of terrorism was masked by a growing series of concrete challenges. On landing, the first threat was from the large quantity of unexploded ordnance at the airport. This was followed by a series of political-military clashes with Israeli forces. Then came artillery fire from the mountains and still later sniper fire and convoy attacks.

Was this depreciation of the terrorist threat avoidable? To a large extent, the answer appears to be yes. Guidance in selecting and ordering collection targets comes from two possible sources. It can be determined by individuals outside the intelligence system (outer guidance) or by individuals and organizations within it (inner guidance).²³ From a policy-

maker's control perspective, outer guidance is important for it best establishes links between the remaining steps in the intelligence cycle with the policy concerns and priorities of the intelligence consumer. All three investigative reports found outer guidance to be conspicuously absent. Singled out for criticism were the upper levels of the chain of command for their failure to exercise sufficient oversight of the operation, to recognize the magnitude of the terrorist threat, or to appreciate the extent to which the situation in Lebanon was different from when the Marines first arrived. The mission statement the Marines received was brief, more political than military in nature, and worded somewhat differently depending on its source. The result was confusion over just what was expected of the Marines and the relative emphasis to be given the competing objectives of visibility and security. The variously worded mission statements were as follows:²⁴

President Reagan in his notification to the Speaker of the House, under the War Powers Act, described the marine mission as follows:

To provide an interposition force at agreed locations and, thereby, provide multinational force presence requested by the Lebanese government to assist it and the Lebanese Armed Forces.

The mandate agreed upon by the nations making up the Multinational Force states:

The Multinational Forces are to assure the safety of persons in the area and to bring to an end the violence that has tragically recurred.

The mission statement issued by the military chain of command at the time set out the mission thusly:

To establish environment which will permit Lebanese Armed Forces to carry out their responsibility in Beirut area.

This failure to provide guidance was compounded by the tendency of higher authorities to avoid "second guessing" local commanders on their defensive measures. Only after the bombing did higher authorities conduct independent evaluations of these security measures. Having identified a tasking failure, it would also appear that the failure was not a significant one. As will be seen below, inner guidance did produce a vast amount of information regarding terrorism in Beirut. What gaps existed can be explained by other factors.

A collection failure is an intelligence failure due to the failure to collect relevant information. Both the House Committee Report and the Defense Department (DOD) Report were highly critical on this point. This was especially true of the DOD Report which stated that one of the intelligence reports specified the time or date of a predicted attack and most could not be independently verified. The DOD Report also criticized the lack of HUMINT (human intelligence) available to the Marines.

The collection of intelligence was carried out by a variety of means and numerous intelligence agencies. DIA, CIA, NSA, and the individual military intelligence units all collected information. Tactical intelligence was available to the Marines from daily airborne and seaborne collection platforms. Supplementing these sources were frequent information exchanges between the intelligence units of the French, Italian, and British components to the Multinational Force and contacts with the Lebanese army. Included here were weekly meetings between intelligence officers from the intelligence services and the Lebanese army at which the lists of suspected car bombs, descriptions, license plates were given.²⁵

All reports agreed that this system provided a virtual flood of information on terrorism. If anything, too much information was gathered. General Paul Kelley states that he was given the descriptions of at least 100 potential car bombs between June 1 and October 23. Between September 15 and October 23, one small section of an intelligence organization provided the Marines with over 170 pieces of information. General Mead recalls that he received so many warnings about a white Mercedes that he would tell his driver to count the number of white Mercedes they passed. In addition to intelligence on terrorism, information was also gathered on conventional threats. The intelligence system's ability to locate artillery positions, tanks, and militia strongholds was considered to be excellent.

To the extent that a collection failure occurred, it was one endemic to the collection process as it operates today. Virtually all accounts of the intelligence cycle stress the extent to which modern technology and the tendency to approach intelligence as a jigsaw puzzle (in which the key to success lies with finding a missing piece) have combined to overload the system with raw data. Calls for creating an all-source intelligence center or improving the amount of HUMINT available are unlikely to provide better control in collecting intelligence. More helpful would be greater clarity in tasking collection objectives and priorities. As noted above, the failure here was more external to the intelligence system than it was internal.

The DOD Report called for greater HUMINT and greater specificity in the nature of the intelligence provided. In doing so, it voiced two of the fundamental misperceptions of intelligence that hinder the introduction of meaningful control measures. First is the notion that intelligence is a free good. HUMINT is not something which can be turned on and off. To be effective, calls for greater amounts of HUMINT to be available to military commanders in conflict or crisis situations require that these assets be in place well before the conflict begins. It also requires a measure of good fortune, something which was absent in Beirut. While the U.S. officially had no contacts with the PLO, the CIA had developed a highly effective intelligence network in the Lebanese Palestinian community. The disintegration of the PLO and its August 1982 evacuation seriously damaged the U.S. HUMINT collection capability. Also, the April 1983 bombing of the U.S. Embassy killed the entire CIA staff in Beirut and though a new staff was quickly assembled and the

network of informants was unhurt, the changeover period was disruptive from an intelligence collection standpoint.²⁶

Second, the expectation that the specifics of a terrorist attack (its time, date, location, and means) can be foreknown reflects a failure to distinguish between what is realistically knowable from what is unknowable. Gathering intelligence on terrorism is a particularly difficult task given the secrecy, paranoia, and fanaticism that surrounds such activities and the small numbers of people involved. The same standards and expectations cannot be applied to it that are applied to gathering intelligence on tank locations. An additional problem is that even if the desired specificity were obtained, the prediction might prove to be false. The terrorist always has the option of not striking if the defender looks to be prepared. This ability negates the specificity of an intelligence warning and leaves commanders with the same dilemma they faced having less specific warnings. As General Mead noted:

Initially after the American Embassy went, we went into a condition one-type situation. But then I began thinking . . . I'm wearing my men down, without more specificity of a threat.²⁷

This review suggests that the failures at the collection phase were of two types. First, and of less significance, was the common tendency of the system to collect too much information. Second, the more significant, was the attitude of consumers to the intelligence they were reading. Greater control here needs to take the form of educating consumers to what they can expect from intelligence and how to respond to it. The intelligence failure was not the absence of warning but the inability to translate warnings into action. These are failures of process and policy more than collection.

A processing failure is an intelligence failure to analyze information properly and make it available to the appropriate consumers. All three reports stress the existence of a processing failure. While abundant information was available, there was no parallel capacity to analyze it. One specific failing cited was a thirty- to forty-hour backlog on processing information between the task force in Beirut and the one off-shore. The DOD Report commented critically on the failure of the FBI to place its report on the embassy bombing into CIA, DIA, and State Department communication channels. The report noted that had this been done perhaps the Marine commander would have had a greater appreciation of the magnitude of the terrorist threat. All three reports criticized the absence of analysts who specialized in terrorism.

The Marine intelligence unit in Beirut was directed by a chief intelligence officer and a staff of five, two of whom were in counter-intelligence. Marine officers stated that given the situation in Beirut additional counter-intelligence staff were assigned to the Marine unit. The battalion intelligence staff was under the direction of a captain or lieutenant and included a chief intelligence officer and two assistants. Information collected by the CIA and NSA went to the Marines through the

European chain of command and arrived within hours of its dissemination in Washington.

The picture, however, is not totally negative. The DOD Report acknowledges that intelligence provided a good overview of the broad threat facing the Marines. Representative Bob Stump (R-Arizona) stated that he was satisfied that intelligence did move through the system. Intelligence officials also pointed out that:

Along with the normal flow of information to the Marines, the National Intelligence Digest, a daily summary of significant intelligence information, contained several reports on threats in Beirut during the summer and fall, including one published on October 20 that specified that American forces in Beirut might soon be the target of a major terrorist attack.²⁸

The absence of analysts specifically trained in terrorism clearly stands out as a major processing failure. It is a situation individuals inside and outside of the intelligence system should not have allowed to happen. It is less clear how significant a failure it was. As the above quote confirms, competent analysis was carried out. Proposals for creating an all-source center plus the presence of analysts expert in terrorism certainly hold the potential for improving the quality of the analysis. The greatest benefit of such measures, however, may not lie in improving analysis as much as in educating the consumer. Not themselves expert in terrorism and lacking analysts who were, the Marines did not heed the warnings. Analysts expert in terrorism might have been able to educate Marine commanders about what they could expect and make them more receptive to the analysis. This educatory role is not an easy one. Policy-makers cannot be forced to listen or to act on the intelligence they receive. An additional problem is created by the turnover in personnel and the continuous insertion of new officers into the chain of command producing a rapid loss of institutional memory. A terrorist attack ten months ago means far less to the person on the job two months than it does to the person in command at the time.

A policy failure is not an intelligence failure *per se*, but a failure due to the pursuit of a policy which available intelligence suggests is flawed. Two different policy failures took place in connection with the Marine presence in Lebanon. One was the failure to act on the warnings received. At first glance, this failure is surprising given the April bombing of the U.S. Embassy. Other factors make it more understandable: the continuing expectation of greater specificity in threats, the numbing effect of constant warnings, and the Marines' interpretation of their mission as requiring greater visibility. As General Mead observed, you cannot assume the worst and accomplish your mission.

The second policy failure was the failure to re-evaluate the Marines' mission as circumstances in Lebanon began to change. The Marines were given an essentially political mission which they interpreted as requiring a

visible yet non-combat presence. The nature of this mission was in part responsible for placing the Marines at the airport (along with the location of the Israeli forces). The Beirut airport is run by the Lebanese as a symbol of the authority of the central government. General Mead stated, "We did not want to accept the position but because of the low order of threat and the diplomatic requirements, it was acceptable."²⁹

The operational centerpiece of the Marines' mission was political neutrality. The DOD study cited the requirements for the success of the mission. The experience of earlier U.N. forces pointed to the need to keep extra-legal militias away from the Marines. Other assumptions included a benign environment, the ability of the Lebanese forces to provide security for the Marines, a presence of limited duration, and their evacuation if attacked. The DOD Report goes on to note that developments in Lebanon had a negative impact on these assumptions. This point was recognized by the participants. The commander of the off-shore forces regarded his authority to bomb in support of the Lebanese army as a change in mission. Officers in Beirut objected to it because they saw it as compromising their neutrality and exposing them to greater danger.

Corrective action in each case lies outside the realm of controlling intelligence. Once again, it lies with educating policy-makers. Betts argues that one key lies in not trying to prevent surprise but to minimize its consequences.³⁰ For Marine commanders, this would have meant not concentrating so many troops in one building where a single terrorist act could have such tragic consequences. Problems are greater with regard to encouraging a constant reassessment of the Marines' mission. We return here to the inherent tension between policy and intelligence. Committed to opposing terrorism and having a highly visible diplomatic presence in Beirut, the Reagan administration was unlikely to see the need to pull the Marines out or change their position.

A final type of intelligence failure is a no-fault failure. Here, surprise occurs even though no failures occurred in the tasking, collection, or processing of information, or in the policy line pursued. Just as "good" policy-making procedures cannot guarantee the success of a policy, so too chance, accident, and coincidence have their place in world politics and can affect the outcome of events. Given the above account of events in Beirut, this type of intelligence failure did not occur. It is a type of intelligence failure which one can expect to encounter in dealing with terrorism.

CONCLUSION

James MacGregor Burns writes that "leadership is the reciprocal process of mobilizing . . . in the context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals . . ."³¹ The problem of controlling intelligence can be viewed in the same light. Control is achieved when policy-makers mobilize the resources of the intelligence community in a timely fashion for clearly articulated and communicated goals, and when the intelligence community collects, analyzes, and transmits to policy-makers the intelligence needed to formulate and implement policy.

It is clear that intelligence failures occurred prior to the Beirut bombing. By disaggregating the concept of an intelligence failure, failures were found in the tasking, collection, and processing of information. Yet, a review of the intelligence system also reveals that these failures were not major contributing factors to the surprise that accompanied the bombing. Far more significant were the attitudes and actions (or lack of action) of the consumers of intelligence. Improved control over intelligence estimates in order to prevent future "Beirut" must focus not only on the intelligence system but also on the controllers. Intelligence consumers must be educated on what they can expect from intelligence and on the relationship between intelligence and policy.

This task is especially urgent given the renewed willingness of the United States to inject military force into Third World trouble spots. Recent U.S. actions suggest that these operations hold two problems for controlling intelligence. First, as the placement of Marines in Lebanon, the placement of naval forces in the Persian Gulf, and the invasion of Grenada illustrate, the decision to send U.S. forces has been made on a short deadline. In each case, the perceived need to act appears to have outpaced the ability of intelligence to inform the decision-making process or consumer interest in intelligence. While the invasion of Grenada was a "success," it was not without serious lapses in the quality of the intelligence on hand: accurate maps were not available, there was a lack of information on the quality and number of enemy forces, and the location of all of the U.S. medical students was not known.

Second, the political dimension to these operations holds the potential for greatly complicating the consumer-producer relationship. The mission of both the Marines in Lebanon and the naval task force in the Persian Gulf was as much political as military. This created a tension between the military/security needs of the forces present and the political requirement that they have a visible and calming presence. The existence of such competing objectives makes it difficult for intelligence to influence policy deliberations in a constructive fashion. Intelligence relevant to one mission may be irrelevant to or produce a negative effect on another. Neither policy-makers nor intelligence professionals may be sure about the desired mix between objectives, and officials on the scene and those in Washington may see the situation differently. The result, as the bombing of the Marine barracks and the attack on the USS Stark demonstrated, can be tragic.

Endnotes

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