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### US Marines in Lebanon

On August 25, 1982, US Marines were sent into Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, to oversee the evacuation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The evacuation was complete in September of 1982, so the Marines were withdrawn. However, they were redeployed to Beirut after the assassination of the Lebanese president, Bashir Gemayel. While in Lebanon, the Marines trained the Lebanese troops in basic skills. The Lebanese soldiers began working with the US troops in 1983. During the fighting between the Israeli-US forces and the PLO and other Islamic radical groups, many Marines were wounded or killed. The largest attack on US troops came on October 23, 1983, when a suicide bomber truck carrying 2,000 pounds of explosives crashed into Marine barracks located in the Beirut airport. 241 US troops were killed and 70 were injured. In early February of 1984, militiamen took over Beirut and demanded that the Lebanese president and his cabinet members resign. After their resignation, the militiamen took control of southern and western Beirut. On February 7, 1984, President Reagan ordered the withdrawal of US Marines in Beirut. The Marines left Beirut only to board US battleships that were located offshore. Reagan then ordered naval and air attacks on the militiamen and their supporters (Syrians) in Lebanon. The naval attacks were the largest since the Vietnam War.

So, why evacuate Lebanon? With the fall of the Lebanese government, Reagan had no one to support in Lebanon. Reagan may have withdrawn the troops in Lebanon in order

to mount a more effective attack in the form of air strikes and naval bombings of Syrian militia positions. The Marines are known for being an offensive war machine. They are not meant to be peacekeeping forces. If the Marines were only allowed to fire when fired upon, they would not be able to do their jobs well. The Marines were, in a sense, “sitting ducks.” Reagan may have evacuated the Marines because he saw that they were in danger and were not able to effectively fight back. According to George Schultz, “Beginning with the first deployment of the MNF--the Pentagon restricted our Marines to a passive, tentative, and dangerously inward-looking role in Beirut...”<sup>1</sup> Another problem with the situation in Lebanon was that the Lebanese and Syrians had been fighting for a long time and neither side showed any signs that they wanted to stop fighting. This was a battle that the US could not control. With both sides determined to beat the other into submission, the US had no hope of instituting peaceful negotiations. There was no point in losing more and more men in a battle that we could not stop. Reagan himself said that he pulled the troops out to “enhance the safety of American and other MNF personnel in Lebanon.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>“Lebanon: 1982-1984”

[http://www.rand.org/pubs/conf\\_proceedings/CF129/CF-129.chapter6.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF129/CF-129.chapter6.html)

<sup>2</sup> “Statement on the Situation in Lebanon. February 7, 1984”

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/20784d.htm>