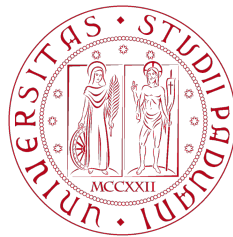


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RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE IN LEBANON:  
THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION AND THE ROLE OF  
COMMUNICATION IN COUNTERTERRORISM  
STRATEGY

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## ABSTRACT

Hezbollah is a Lebanese Shia political and military organization that formed largely in response to the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Beginning in the 1980s, Hezbollah's military factions targeted the citizens and peacekeeping operations of several Western countries, including the United States. Ronald Reagan assumed his role as president on the tail-end of the Iranian hostage crisis. While he vowed to avoid such an entanglement during his presidency, his administration was quickly swept up in a new and ongoing hostage situation, multiple deadly suicide bombings, and several commercial airplane hijackings – all allegedly committed by Hezbollah. The violence against Americans and the subsequent media response made foreign policy and counterterrorism strategy a time-sensitive issue. External pressure, in conjunction with a lack of adequate intercultural communication, contributed to numerous errors being made by the Reagan administration in handling the crises. This historical analysis examines communications from President Reagan and his administration on an *intercultural* and *intracultural* level regarding attacks by Hezbollah on American citizens through an exploration of primary sources. On an intercultural basis, this research scrutinizes the tonal differences of communications between Reagan and the heads of state of Lebanon, Syria, Israel, France, and the United Kingdom. At the intracultural level, relevant speeches given by Reagan and official government documents are examined, which demonstrate the internal conflict within the administration and their dishonest communication with the American public. This culminates in an analysis of the role of communication during a time of ongoing crisis and highlights the need for widespread improvement within the West of understanding non-Western cultures and contexts to inform foreign policy and counterterrorism strategy.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

*CFR* - Committee on Foreign Relations

*HAWK* - “Homing All the Way Killer” surface-to-air missiles

*IDF* - Israel Defense Forces

*MNF* - Multinational Forces

*NSC* - National Security Council

*PLO* - Palestine Liberation Organization

*TOW* - “Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wireless-guided” anti-tank missiles

*TWA 847* - Trans World Airlines Flight 847

## **ARABIC AND PERSIAN TERMS\***

*Ayatollah* - A high-ranking leader within the Shia clergy

*Hezbollah* - Party of God

*Imam* - Islamic religious leader

*Jihad* - Resistance, self-defense

*Shari'a* - Islamic law

*Ulama* - A body of Islamic religious leaders or scholars

*Umma* - Community; used in reference to the Muslim community

*Wilayat-al faqih* - Governance of the jurisconsult

*\*A note on spelling: the transliteration of Arabic and Persian words to the Latin alphabet is an imperfect practice. Much of the literature that discusses Hezbollah, Lebanon, and the Middle East as a whole have varying and disagreeing spellings of many of the words listed above. There are even multiple alternate spellings of Hezbollah, including Hizballah, Hizbullah, and Hizb'allah. For the sake of consistency, the spelling will remain as “Hezbollah” throughout this work, unless a direct quotation from a source includes a different spelling. The same issue arises with the spelling of Shia, which is also often spelled as Shi'a. Unless used in a quotation, the spelling used will be Shia.*

## INTRODUCTION

Hezbollah is an active Shia organization in Lebanon that operates as both a political party and a militia. The group emerged in 1982 in response to numerous factors, though its formation was primarily influenced by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, long-term oppression of the Lebanese Shia community, and assistance from the government of post-revolution Iran. Hezbollah is currently designated by the United States government as a foreign terrorist organization (Central Intelligence Agency 2023c). The relationship between the US government and Hezbollah, or, rather, the lack thereof, is central to this research. The primary focus will be President Ronald Reagan and how his administration handled counterterrorism strategy and foreign policy pertaining to the threats that Hezbollah posed to American citizens in Lebanon between the years of 1982 and 1989. Hezbollah was responsible for numerous kidnappings and attacks that targeted or involved US citizens during the Reagan administration, which include the hijackings of three flights, as well as multiple suicide bombings that killed hundreds of Marines and embassy workers. While their attacks have also targeted many Israeli operations and citizens, that discussion is outside the scope of this research. It is, nevertheless, important to acknowledge.

In response to Hezbollah's acts of violence against American citizens in Lebanon, the US government led by President Reagan did not respond militarily, nor did they attempt to communicate directly in any way with the attackers. Instead, they chose to focus on defining and redefining terrorism for the purpose of suiting American interests abroad. The Reagan administration repeatedly condemned, in a public manner, the state-sponsors of terrorism while privately discussing regional issues with actors from these states. A significant part of the counterterrorism strategy revolved around attempting to secure the release of American hostages, which ended in deceptive arms dealing and caused the credibility of US foreign policy choices in the Middle East to come into question. What happened in the Middle East when the US attempted to bring peace to Lebanon is slowly being lost to history, but the lessons to be learned from it are still very relevant today.

This research takes a qualitative approach to examining the issues with the Reagan administration's communication choices. An analysis of this case study will be done through the examination of relevant primary sources that detail Reagan's communication style with various heads of state and the American public, as well as the communication within the federal

government during his presidency, all in relation to Hezbollah and counterterrorism strategy in Lebanon. There are two questions that this research aims to answer, which are as follows:

**Primary question:** How does the Reagan administration's response to terrorism committed by Hezbollah and its associated groups serve as an example of the need for better cross-cultural communication in counterterrorism strategy?

**Follow-up question:** How can past examples of poor cross-cultural understanding by the US government demonstrate how counterterrorism strategy can be improved moving forward?

Much of the literature that has been written discussing Reagan's approach to foreign policy and counterterrorism strategy is dated, and a significant portion was written while Reagan was still in office. Hindsight allows for better analysis of the errors made, and this research intends to provide a post-9/11 reexamination of the legacy of Reagan's decisions and cultural biases in this regard. There are two main purposes of displaying and scrutinizing primary sources as a methodology. The first is that, as of the time of conducting the research, this specific methodology is uncommon and provides a new perspective in discussing the issue. The second reason for the reliance on firsthand accounts is to allow the words of the subjects to stand alone and be interpreted by the reader before continuing into a subjective analysis by the researcher. While this is a case study of actions carried out by the United States government thirty to forty years ago, they still hold weight today.

The United States government continues to be at odds with Hezbollah, which has only gained political power and legitimacy since the Reagan era. Besides its status as a prominent political party, offshoots of Lebanese Hezbollah have emerged and inserted themselves in conflicts around the Middle East, including the civil war in Syria (Itzhakov 2018). Additionally, Lebanon remains a proxy for the ideological conflict between the US and Iran, who have not restored diplomatic relations since they were broken in 1979. Both countries seek influence in Lebanon as a means for protecting their interests in the country—the US aims to safeguard Israeli national security and Iran seeks to protect Shia interests in the region (Nerguizian 2014). Hezbollah, as it was in the 1980s, continues to be a surrogate of Iran, and similar Iranian-backed groups also seek to impose their shared ideology on the Middle East (Heras 2018). Additionally, the US continues to approach their response to Hezbollah in a self-serving and Western-centric

way. For example, the US government does not consider Hezbollah to be a legitimate political actor, while the Lebanese Armed Forces—an American ally—do recognize the legitimacy of Hezbollah (Nerguizian 2014). A state actor cannot negotiate with those that they perceive as irrational or illegitimate actors, meaning that a lack of direct communication with and acknowledgement of Hezbollah by the US government has the potential to lead to significant issues if any tangible conflict were to arise between the two once again. As such, there is a pressing need for the US government to reconsider their approach in Lebanon. This can be done by learning from the mistakes made by past administrations, particularly that of Reagan, and by putting policies in place to improve future dialogue.

While this case study focuses on a historical example, the consequences of the errors made can still be felt today and lessons learned from this could be used to formulate solutions. Framing the actions of Hezbollah within a contemporaneous, Reagan-era perspective as well as with the hindsight of a post-9/11 frame of reference allows for a fuller examination of what went wrong with the Reagan administration's foreign policy in Lebanon. While it is not necessarily impartial to judge historical actions by the standards of today, it is still important to understand how and why missteps were made so as to learn from them. The Reagan administration failed the victims of Hezbollah's terrorism as well as the American public during the early years of Hezbollah attacks and kidnappings by not properly communicating with Lebanese and Iranian actors, and also by outright misleading the American people about what was happening. With such a blatant example of poor intercultural communication having consequences, there should be no excuse for the US government to repeat any of these mistakes. This research, in the following four chapters, seeks to go beyond answering the research questions by providing recommendations for how to avoid repeating the actions of the Reagan administration in Lebanon.

The first chapter of this research contains a literature review and defines the theoretical framework with which the primary sources will later be analyzed. It is organized into three main sections. The first of these is a thorough explanation of the origins of Hezbollah and the role that Iranian sponsorship played in its development and expansion. The three areas of focus within this section are the influence of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the ensuing civil war, the means with which Iran exported revolutionary ideology, and the religious leadership and



historical oppression of the Lebanese Shia, all of which contributed to the emergence of Hezbollah. The second section shifts to a discussion of the framework that will be used to analyze the documents by exploring literature on intercultural communication, Orientalism, and the theoretical debate around the clash between Western and non-Western civilizations. This section delves into how to discuss Islam from a Western perspective, the identity politics that contribute to the perception of an East-West divide, and the importance of intercultural communication. The final section in this chapter outlines the foreign policy and counterterrorism strategy of the Reagan administration in Lebanon. This is broken down into an examination of the responses to Hezbollah's violence against American citizens, the role that mass media played in creating and implementing policy, and how the Iran-Contra scandal impacted public perception of American intervention in Lebanon. This chapter aims to provide an appropriate background to the issues that will be discussed in subsequent chapters, as well as to scrutinize the existing literature on the subject.

The second chapter provides an explanation of the research design and methodology of this dissertation. It elaborates upon where and how the qualitative research for this case study was carried out and details how the subsequent two chapters on the findings and discussion will be laid out. In addition, the chapter discusses relevant ethical considerations and limitations of the study, primarily focusing on the role of bias in both the existing literature and the present research. It also restates the arguments of this dissertation and elaborates on why a qualitative case study was the necessary structure within which to carry out and present the research most effectively. Finally, this chapter justifies why the specific primary sources were chosen and placed in a specific order within the following chapter and explains the framework with which they will be analyzed in Chapter 4.

The third chapter of this dissertation contains the findings of the research, which consist of quotations pulled from the numerous primary sources outlined in Chapter 2, in addition to providing a general summary of the documents. The data is separated into two distinct sections, and the most important quotes and concepts pertaining to Hezbollah and American intervention in Lebanon are sorted chronologically into a narrative format. The first of the two sections contains the correspondences between President Reagan and the heads of state of Lebanon, Syria, Israel, France, and the United Kingdom. These communications are separated by country

within this section, and those which had multiple heads of state during Reagan's presidency are contained within the same subsections. The second main section of this chapter displays the relevant correspondences and communiques that took place within the United States. These are broken down further into two subsections, the first of which is comprised of internal federal government communications regarding Lebanon, Hezbollah, and applicable foreign policy and counterterrorism strategy. The second of these contains the speeches and press conferences of Reagan during his time as president that discussed pertinent information. Chapter 3 sets up the foundation for synthesis in the subsequent chapter.

All of the prior chapters culminate in Chapter 4, which contains an analysis of the findings. Like Chapter 1, it is divided into three main sections. The first considers the consequences of the Reagan administration's lack of appropriate intercultural communication when discussing with the heads of state and while formulating policies. This focuses on the echo chamber of ideas from people of the same background within the Reagan administration presenting solutions involving a culture that they were not a part of and did not completely understand. The second section is an overview of the lessons learned from the dishonesty of Reagan and his administration, with emphasis on the Iran-Contra scandal, and will also explore the legacy of his foreign policy in Lebanon. Finally, the third section in this chapter is a discussion about the controversial nature of defining terrorism and how this was a significant part of the faulty counterterrorism strategy of the Reagan administration, but also how this has led to contemporary issues for the US government when dealing with Islamic extremism.

This dissertation will conclude with recommendations for how the US government can learn from this case study and find ways to improve foreign policy and counterterrorism strategy, particularly in the Middle East. While intercultural communication is a more understood field today than it was in the 1980s, there is always room for improvement. Those who do not learn from history are doomed to one day repeat it. The foreign policy of the current presidential administration is by no means perfect, and the hope is that by taking into account lessons from the past, the US government will be more cautious and mindful when formulating policies and strategies moving forward.

## CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Introduction

The formation of Hezbollah cannot be attributed to a single event or the ideology of an individual person. There were numerous factors that led to the advent of the group, and the absence of any of the actors or events may have made the difference between whether or not Hezbollah was created. Of the more significant catalysts were the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, which is most often cited as the *raison d'être* of the organization, as well as the political and religious sectarianism exacerbated by the Lebanese Civil War. Support from Iran, combined with a history of oppression and the fallout of war and invasion, created the opportunity for the creation of Hezbollah and expansion of their military power. The first section of this chapter is dedicated to a thorough elaboration upon the roles of violence, state-sponsorship, and internal religious and political sectarianism in the emergence of Hezbollah and its growth as an organization. This is a crucial first step in understanding the less-discussed perspectives of non-Westerners, which is relevant to the analysis of the importance of intercultural communication and understanding within this research.

When discussing Hezbollah—and other violent groups with ties to Islam—there is often clear bias in the statements made. This tends to be a product of the environment that the speaker comes from. A conservative Western government official and a Muslim academic writer will evidently not hold the same values about what constitutes a terrorist versus a freedom fighter; this does not mean that one opinion is more correct, but it instead reflects a perspective. Where this comes into question is when the Western perspective is heralded as fact and exists more prominently throughout in political and academic circles. In an increasingly globalized world, it is important to be critical of biases and work to be better informed on cultures different from one's own. As such, the second section of this chapter explains how to appropriately approach discussions of Islam from a Western perspective in tandem with the growing role of identity politics that has emerged and been shaped by controversial works such as Samuel Huntington's thesis regarding a theoretical clash of Western and non-Western civilizations. Additionally, an introduction to the field of intercultural communication will serve as a background to demonstrate its importance and limitations. This section aims to define the framework that will be used to analyze the data within this research, particularly with regards to how the Reagan

administration's attitudes towards and understandings of Islam and the Middle East and how those attitudes influenced both policy and the perceptions of the American public.

The Reagan administration took a fundamentally flawed approach when responding to attacks by Hezbollah. Beyond poor understanding of dynamics in the Middle East, there was such an emphasis on American hegemony in Lebanon that Hezbollah's violent responses should hardly come as a surprise given their religious and political stances. The United States' counterterrorism strategy and foreign policy in Lebanon was often a series of rushed and poorly informed decisions that led to one of the most well-known American presidential scandals, known as Iran-Contra or the arms-for-hostages deal. The final section of this chapter delves into how the combination of factors discussed in the previous sections culminated in the poor response of the Reagan administration to terrorism in Lebanon. This section acts as a review of the relevant literature regarding the central topic of this research: the words and actions of the Reagan administration in response to Hezbollah's violence against Americans.

## **The Origins of Hezbollah and Iranian Sponsorship**

### *Civil War and the Israeli Invasion*

The Lebanese Civil War was the culmination of many internal and external issues within Lebanon and the Middle East as a whole, though it was arguably also a long-term consequence of French colonialism in the country. The partitioning of the Ottoman Empire after World War I led to new borders being drawn throughout the Middle East, dividing a once-united Syria and Lebanon (Traboulsi 2007). Under the League of Nations, European powers established mandatory territories throughout the Middle East, with France controlling the mandates in Lebanon and Syria (Traboulsi 2007). Despite the apparent "decolonialism" by the West, the mandates in the Middle East were ultimately colonies under a different title. Prior to Lebanese independence in 1943, the French established a parliamentary government structure that heavily favored the Maronite Christians (Traboulsi 2007). A non-codified deal called the National Pact was agreed upon by the Maronite Christian president and the Sunni Muslim prime minister that established Lebanese independence and laid the groundwork for the political elites to represent and respect both Christians and Muslims (Jabbara & Jabbara 1983). This agreement marked the

beginning of the many compromises between the religious groups in Lebanon and gave rise to a political system that existed until the beginning of the war in 1975.

Between the years of independence and civil war, a consociational democratic Lebanese political structure existed within the government and was based on excessive compromises between the Christian, Muslim, and Druze populations to avoid hostility and the sectarianism of the past (Jabbara & Jabbara 1983). The 1948 establishment of the state of Israel, however, disrupted the possibility of the newly independent Middle East being free from conflict. Amal Saad-Ghorayeb (2003) explains that the “loss of Palestine” was the event largely responsible for “the inception of a Shī‘ī political consciousness” (p. 294). There was an influx of nearly half a million Palestinian refugees in Lebanon by 1975, leading an already divided country to take on the polarizing crisis and consequences of the foundation of Israel (Jabbara & Jabbara 1983). Many of the Palestinians within Lebanon began forming resistance movements such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which fought back against Israeli forces. During this period, sectarianism began to run rampant once more in Lebanon, and several prominent nationalist movements emerged, each of them taking sides in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. A Muslim and Druze leftist organization known as the Lebanese National Movement supported the PLO in its resistance against Israel, while Christian groups such as the Troops of Free Lebanon allied with Israel (Jabbara & Jabbara 1983). This was an early demonstration of the Lebanese Muslim organizations, particularly the Shiites, showing solidarity with the Palestinian resistance.

Besides bearing the weight of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, other internal and external issues plagued Lebanon during this time that contributed to widespread instability and, ultimately, the emergence of Hezbollah. The commitment to the National Pact weakened, especially as the Muslim population began to replace the Maronite Christians as the majority, stoking fears among the latter about losing their political and social power (Jabbara & Jabbara 1983). Shia Muslims in particular became frustrated with their position in society. The Shiites of Lebanon largely resided in the southern towns that were impacted the most by the violent clashes between Israeli and Palestinian fighters (Saad-Ghorayeb 2003). The polarization between the religious groups and their associated nationalist movements was worsened by the political elites failing to seek solutions to their concerns, which contributed to a widespread mistrust of the

central government (Jabbara & Jabbara 1983). The beginning of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 culminated in the collapse of the central political system, with the primary aggressors in the conflict being the Israeli-backed Christian Phalangists and the pro-PLO Lebanese National Movement (Jabbara & Jabbara 1983). The fighting prompted responses from neighboring states with their own interests, though foreign intervention seemingly contributed to further sectarian divides.

Israeli intervention and violence in Lebanon were the key factors in the radicalization of many Lebanese Shia fighters. In 1976 and 1978 Israel led attacks on towns and smaller-scale invasions in the South of Lebanon, which has a majority Shia population, which contributed to the destabilization of the local economies and triggered a mass exodus towards the North (Saad-Ghorayeb 2003). The sectarian nature of the social and political order suited the displaced and angry Shia and allowed many to find a sense of community and have their needs met. In 1982, however, Israel invaded Lebanon. The pretext came in the form of an assassination attempt on the Israeli ambassador to the UK by a Palestinian organization in 1982, which culminated in the IDF taking over southern Lebanon (Jabbara & Jabbara 1983). The invasion was a demonstration of the military power of Israel that had devastating consequences for the primarily Shia population of the south, as well as for the Palestinian refugees and fighters that lived there. Damage was caused to eighty percent of villages in southern Lebanon, leading to nineteen thousand deaths and thirty-two thousand wounded by the Israelis, in addition to an economic blockade, destruction of Lebanese crops, and the mass introduction of Israeli goods into the market (Saad-Ghorayeb 2003). The Israeli troops oversaw the Phalangist murders of Palestinian refugees and Shia Muslims in the Sabra and Shatila massacres, and between 1982 and 1985, “the Ansār prison camp alone is reported to have detained half the South’s male population at one time or another” (Saad-Ghorayeb 2003, p. 301). The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon is overwhelmingly cited as the primary catalyst for the formation of Hezbollah—the violence experienced by the Lebanese Shia at the hands of the IDF and their internal allies seemed, to them, to justify retaliation.

International intervention by the United States and the Soviet Union attempted to broker deals to solve the conflict in the Middle East. All of the proposals that were offered, however, called for the recognition of Israel by the Arabs; the solution from the US—the Reagan plan—opposed the establishment of an independent Palestinian state while ignoring the question of the

PLO (Jabbara & Jabbara 1983). The solutions offered seem to fundamentally miss the point of why there was fighting in the first place, which was rooted in the very recognition of Israel. Two scholars at the time, Joseph and Nancy Jabbara (1983) elaborate, saying:

The only way the Israeli invasion could be considered a turning point in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict is if the United States, Israel, and the whole world realize that to find a solution to the Middle East problem, the root of the problem will have to be addressed squarely. In other words, it is time for everyone to realize that the only way to find a solution...is to face the Palestinian problem and to find a just and equitable solution to it. (p. 612)

Contemporaneous perspectives from leaders of the Lebanese Shia community (who would be influential in shaping the ideology of Hezbollah) further demonstrate the antipathy towards Israel and their allies. Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah criticized the United States for not helping Lebanon after the invasion and trying to impose hegemony on the Islamic people and Third World countries, believing the US is trying to disrespect and humiliate the Arabs (el Husseini 2008). Similarly, Ayatollah Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din advocates for the Lebanese to create an “international shock” to generate foreign assistance in rejecting the presence of the Israelis (el Husseini 2008). The Shia community clearly felt that the West was concerned with the Israelis that were being killed, but not those who were being killed by the Israelis. While the situation within the borders of Lebanon was partially the cause for the formation of Hezbollah, the external push from the Iranian government following their 1979 Islamic Revolution was also largely influential.

#### *Revolutionary Tools and State Sponsorship*

When the Shah Reza Pahlavi was deposed and replaced by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as the leader of Iran during the revolution in 1979, Khomeini’s interpretation of Shia Islam gained a wider audience and increasing legitimacy. Khomeini was a follower of “Twelver” Islam, which is the most widely practiced branch of Shiism that holds the belief that the Twelfth Imam in the line of successors of the Prophet, Muhammad al-Mahdi, has been in occultation—hidden from the world—though he continues to hold authority and will reemerge in the end times (Mavani 2013). The rightful Imams, who in Shia Islam are the descendants of the Prophet, are spiritual leaders

who hold the power to interpret the Qur'an and *shari'a*, in addition to guiding and ruling over the *umma*—the Muslim community. The absence of the Twelfth Imam leaves a gap in Islamic authority, which is where Ayatollah Khomeini's interpretation of Islam makes a drastic departure. Khomeini developed the idea of *wilayat al-faqih*, which translates to “guardianship of the jurisconsult,” and claims that certain Islamic scholars have the power and consent to implement Islamic rulings in political, social, and personal affairs in the absence of the Twelfth Imam (Mavani 2013). This was a controversial interpretation that essentially operated as justification for establishing an Islamic state and carrying out ultimate religious and political authority.

Iran exported *wilayat al-faqih* and revolutionary ideology to the Shia rebels in Lebanon in the late 1970s and early 1980s for a number of reasons, most of which had to do with Iranian goals in the country. The three main motivators for Iranian support of non-state fighters were desired involvement in regional issues (especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), having a means to strengthen its weak military operations through proxies, and the Iranian government viewing itself as the voice of the oppressed Shia Muslims (DeVore 2012). A key aspect of revolution that was impressed upon the Shia rebels by the Iranians was martyrdom. This took the form of suicide missions carried out by Iranians and was expanded upon by the Lebanese fighters, including Hezbollah, who later committed a number of suicide bombings (el Husseini 2008). This was a deeply effective tool that led to significant loss of life when later carried out by Hezbollah. Another of the revolutionary methods was hostage-taking, which had its roots in the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979-81, and manifested as the Lebanon hostage crisis that involved a number of radical Shia groups such as Hezbollah and its associated organizations (Jahanpour 1992). There is not necessarily a professional consensus on the effectiveness of hostage-taking, although the hostage crisis in Lebanon objectively had a significant impact on US counterterrorism strategy, which will be discussed in further detail later in this research.

Hezbollah as an organization emerged in 1982 with considerable assistance from Iran. Without the state-sponsorship it received, it is considerably less likely that Hezbollah would have emerged or gained the strength that it did. In fact, it was Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, the Iranian ambassador to Syria and a vocal proponent of exporting Iranian revolutionary tactics, who was one of the founders of Hezbollah (Jahanpour 1992). Because of the aid from the State, the group



quickly became well-organized on both a local and national scale, with its 12-member council being composed primarily of clergymen and military officers (Deeb 1988). Many Lebanese Shiites already had considerable military experience from joining Palestinian groups and fighting in the militia in the Lebanon Civil War under Amal, another Lebanese Shia militia, prior to the formation of Hezbollah (DeVore 2012). The ideology of Khomeini was vital to the organization as it was finding its footing. If the council had a disagreement, they would directly appeal to Khomeini for an answer. *Wilayat al-faqih* allowed the Iranian government to indirectly influence the actions and beliefs of Hezbollah. Deeb (1988) elaborates on the importance of the Iranian influence, explaining that “the first ideological tenet of Hizbullah, following ‘the Imam [Khomeini] line (*Khat al-Imam*)’ is the imperative struggling against ‘imperialism in all forms’, followed by the stand of ‘no-East and no-West, only Islam’” (p. 694). Not only did Iran export the methods for carrying out revolution, but also the principles.

As previously mentioned, state-sponsorship was vital to the growth of Hezbollah. The shared ideologies of *wilayat al-faqih* and anti-imperialism contributed to a strong bond between the organization and Iran. The primary means of aid Hezbollah received from Iran were financial support that allowed for long-range planning and the development of social services, sanctuary within Iran and Lebanon’s Beka’a valley to develop infrastructure, and political backing allowing for freedom to operate within Lebanon (DeVore 2012). Where the Lebanese state was failing its citizens, Hezbollah was there to fill the gaps. They were able to do this because of the massive financial support that they received. In the 1980s, Hezbollah was receiving an annual subsidy of around \$140 million from Iran (DeVore 2012). While this was funneled into military operations, the money also went back to the communities. Throughout the 1980s, agricultural co-ops were organized, thousands of scholarships were given out, garbage collection services were launched, clean water initiatives began, a healthcare system was implemented, and low-cost housing was built (DeVore 2012). The Shia community in Lebanon had experienced violence and economic hardship for many years and the services offered by Hezbollah were transformative. Poor socioeconomic standing was a major factor in the formation of Hezbollah to begin with because of the desperation it caused, and radicalizing a downtrodden demographic proved easy under these circumstances (Saad-Ghorayeb 2003). The political mobilization of the Shia in Lebanon by foreign and domestic sectarian forces was the final key step in the formation and development of Hezbollah.

### *Leadership and Community of the Lebanese Shia*

There is a legacy of persecution and deprivation within the Twelver Shia community in Lebanon. This can be traced back to Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, who was a companion of the Prophet Muhammad that was exiled from Syria and got a Yemeni Christian tribe, the ‘Amilī tribe of the Jabal-‘Āmil region in Lebanon, to revert to his version of Islam (Saad-Ghorayeb 2003). Throughout the years, the Shia were treated as lesser than the Sunnis. Discrimination by those that ruled over them led to a widespread understanding of their status as a minority and a persecuted group. Under the Ottoman Empire, their autonomy as a separate sect from the Sunnis was not respected, while under the French they had very little influence politically (Saad-Ghorayeb 2003; Traboulsi 2007). The combination of historical discrimination by the Ottomans and French, Israeli destruction, bad state policy, low education, poor socioeconomic standing, mass migrations, and high birth rates led to the Shia becoming a kind of proletariat, primed for revolution (Saad-Ghorayeb 2003). Hezbollah, and by extension Iran, gave a voice to the persecuted Shia in Lebanon, as well as access to services that provided them with a better quality of life. Unfortunately, Hezbollah’s adherence to Iranian political and religious leadership contributed to anti-Shia sentiment, as the media often equated the entire Lebanese Shia community with the organization (Kawtharani 2016). As a result, some of the Shia leadership began to distance themselves from *wilayat al-faqih* and other ideas that had spread from Iran to Lebanon.

The existing Shia leadership in Lebanon had a complicated relationship with the influx of Iranian ideology. Initially, Lebanese Ayatollahs Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din and Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah believed that Khomeini’s evidence was enough to demonstrate that a jurisconsult that is qualified enough may hold the same authority and power as the Prophet and infallible Imams, which, as mentioned, was an extreme departure from traditional Shia thought (Mavani 2013). Later, however, Shams al-Din distanced himself from *wilayat al-faqih* as he assumed the role of the head of the Islamic Shi’i Supreme Council (ISSC) of Lebanon, which was instituted to represent all Lebanese Shia interests (Kawtharani 2016). Despite his change of stance, the words of Shams al-Din still inspired Hezbollah action. As mentioned previously, he was the one who called for the Lebanese Shia to create an “international shock,” which manifested shortly thereafter as a suicide bombing by a Hezbollah military faction that killed

hundreds of American and French peacekeepers in Beirut (el Hussein 2008). Another important figure, Ayatollah Fadlallah, was a member of the *ulama* whose writings served alongside Khomeini's doctrine as a basis for Hezbollah (Deeb 1988). Fadlallah, fearing the worsening of sectarian divisions, opposed the institution of the ISSC (Kawtharani 2016). Even within the highest level of Shia leadership, there was internal conflict. Shams al-Din and Fadlallah, along with other Shia leaders, did reach somewhat of an agreement on certain elements of interpreting Islam, namely in defining *jihad* and the role of martyrdom, two elements relevant to Hezbollah's operations.

*Jihad* is a controversial concept to define, even within Islam. In Twelver Shiism, the authority to wage *jihad* comes from the leadership of the Twelfth Imam and is both religious and political in nature and no rightful *jihad* can be waged during his occultation (el Hussein 2008). Even within *wilayat al-faqih*, leaders such as Khomeini struggle to justify waging *jihad*, often resorting to euphemisms. Shams al-Din and Fadlallah wrote extensively about the concept, which gives insight into prominent Shia thoughts on the matter in the wake of the Israeli invasion. Muhammad Shams al-Din argues that violence against foreign invaders and occupiers is a legitimate form of defensive *jihad*, arguing, "resistance, then, is a form of *jihad*. It is a defensive *jihad* against an occupying force, in this case Israel," and is permitted by Islamic law (el Hussein 2008, p. 402). There are religious and secular elements within resistance, the latter pertaining to nationalism, which was rampant within many political movements in Lebanon. Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah echoes this sentiment, giving multiple justifications for waging *jihad*, such as to grant "victory to the persecuted and downtrodden in their fight against colonialist and exploitative tyrannies," as well as to protect "oneself by fighting invaders and halting their aggression against believers, their homeland, and sacred places" (el Hussein 2008, p. 401). Based on the views of the Shia leadership, fighting back against the Israeli invasion and, later, the US and French citizens and government operations seemed justified to Hezbollah. Israel and their Western allies were foreign invaders and occupiers, which gave Shia militia groups the religious backing to act against them.

The notion of martyrdom in Shiism has roots in the battle of Karbala, the paradigm of which is a central narrative in the religion. In this battle, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Husayn, was martyred when fighting against the Umayyad Caliphate, and his

story is used as an example of a model for rebellion against foreign imperialism, especially in Iran and Lebanon (el Hussein 2008). In Lebanon, this foreign imperialism was manifested as Israel and its allies. Given that one of the core values in Shiism is that of resisting oppression, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon was a clear catalyst for the formation of violent resistance movements such as Hezbollah. While suicide is forbidden in Islamic law, exceptions are made for fighters to carry out such missions, and Hezbollah views their suicide bombings as parallels to the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (el Hussein 2008). The Karbala paradigm can also be used as justification for seeking revenge against oppressors, although this interpretation is contested (Deeb 1988). Rola el Hussein (2008) best summarizes the Islamic perspective of Hezbollah's actions:

However, what the West and Israel saw as 'terrorism' was seen by Hizbullah and by the Lebanese at large as legitimate resistance: Israel had invaded Lebanon and occupied it, and it was the inalienable right of the Lebanese to defend themselves against this aggression. From all of the above, I conclude that the Shi'a 'terrorism' of the 1980s and 1990s was mainly nationalistic, albeit couched in religious language to make it more acceptable to the Shi'a masses. Religion in this instance was used as a rallying and unifying tool against the enemy. (p. 413)

This points to the discrepancies in Westerners and non-Westerners covering radical Islamic groups. The inherent biases that exist on both sides points to the larger concern over who the dominant voices are that discuss the myriad facets of Islam.

### **Intercultural Communication, Orientalism, and a "Clash of Civilizations"**

#### *How to Discuss Islam from a Western Perspective*

Historically, discussion of global events and peoples in many academic fields have had a tendency to separate the world into two separate geographical entities. The first is the "Occident," more recently referred to as the "West," and generally is used in reference to the United States, Canada, Europe, and the Anglophone countries of Oceania. The second, originally referred to as the "Orient" (a now-outdated term), is the "non-West" or the "East." Defining this geographical entity is more precarious, as the "Orient" has been used more as a point of comparison against the cultures and values of the West than to describe a particular location

(Said 1978). The Middle East is one such region that has been subjected to what has become known as “Orientalist” theory, which has led to Islam being a focal point of research and literature through this lens.

Orientalism is a difficult concept to define, as it has multiple overlapping explanations, though a key element of the framework is the binary language that it produces in defining a West in opposition to an East (Schmidt 2014). Academia offers Oriental Studies as a means to teach, study, and write about the seemingly mysterious “East” and its many facets. An early criticism of the field comes from Palestinian-American professor Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* (1978), where he explains that “the very presence of a ‘field’ such as Orientalism, with no corresponding equivalent in the Orient itself, suggests the relative strength of Orient and Occident” (p. 204). Teaching about the East within the West from Western perspectives is often more an act of power and a means of promoting Western hegemony than an appropriate means of framing discourse. This is not to say, however, that any Western writer or researcher discussing events or cultures of non-Western countries is perpetuating Orientalist thought. Rather, Orientalism in practice effectively creates an “us” in opposition to a “them.” Schmidt (2014) describes that the “two sets of vocabulary and their respective connotations” are what frame Orientalism, as they insinuate “inferiority/superiority connected to the binary” of East versus West (p. 145). Associating the East and the cultures within it with violence, backwardness, and barbarism, for example, portray the people in these countries as in-need of Western intervention, either passive or active, so they may modernize and “catch up” with the rest of the world.

Following the September 11th attacks on the United States, the discussions of the “East” shifted. Neo-Orientalism, which refers to the “American neo-colonial and neo-liberal agenda in the Middle East and the superiority of the American values,” became the dominant framing device (Altwaiji 2014). Exhaustive and often under-informed discussions of “Islam” as a concept filled the press and academic literature, and the “us” versus “them” binary was exacerbated. A vision of a tyrannical and barbaric Middle East filled with inherently aggressive Muslims was propagated by many Americans at the time, all while denying the relevance of American hegemony to discussions (Altwaiji 2014). Where the roots of Orientalism lie in the values of European colonialism in the Middle East, neo-Orientalism centers American imperialism,

particularly with reference to the War on Terror (Said 1978; Schmidt 2014) Orientalism and neo-Orientalism are crucial concepts when discussing groups such as Hezbollah, because the language used by scholars and government officials alike often echoed these frameworks. Additionally, Orientalism, whether intentionally or not, was the lens with which the Reagan administration viewed the Middle East and carried out policy and counterterrorism strategy in Lebanon.

Many Western depictions of the non-West—particularly concerning the Middle East—are rooted in mythos and misinformation. This misinformation, rooted in Orientalism, often ends up as the basis for teaching and learning about the Middle East in the United States. Opinions and facts are often conflated to the detriment of the groups being studied. Said (1978) succinctly explains this:

Three things have contributed to making even the simplest perception of the Arabs and Islam into a highly politicized, almost raucous matter: one, the history of popular anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the West, which is immediately reflected in the history of Orientalism; two, the struggle between the Arabs and Israeli Zionism, and its effects upon American Jews as well as upon both the liberal culture and the population at large; three, the almost total absence of any cultural position making it possible to either identify with or dispassionately to discuss the Arabs or Islam. (pp. 26–27)

If inaccurate or heavily biased information is given to an audience, for example the American public, by a reliable source, such as a professional researcher, it will be easier to accept it as fact. *Foreign Affairs*, the quarterly journal of the Council on Foreign Relations, and other scholarly journals often publish polarizing material relating to Islam and terrorism (Said 1997). A student researching religious terrorism may stumble upon one of many articles making the commonly heard argument that the culture of the Middle East threatens Western values and safety, and they may uncritically accept this as fact (Altwaiji 2014). The Western narrative and its positioning of Muslims and Middle Easterners as the “other” or even the “enemy” is pervasive in both literature and policy. Islam often becomes a scapegoat for what “we” in the West do not like about social, political, and economic patterns in the world (Said 1997). Historical context is also critical when discussing violence perpetrated in the Middle East. Among scholars, terrorism is often attributed to a hatred of the West that exists within Islam (Altwaiji 2014). Much of the discourse negates an

explanation of whether or not the violence was offensive or defensive. In the example of Hezbollah, without any explanation of the extensive physical and economic harm done to the Lebanese Shia community by colonial and imperial forces, they appear as an angry and hateful organization as if these feelings are ingrained in their very being.

Bias is very difficult to avoid in academic writing, especially when covering polarizing and controversial issues like the statehood of Israel and Palestinian resistance. The biases of the author often manifest in the use of words with strong positive or negative connotations, and these often have a basis in Orientalist framing. For example, the concept of “the West” needs no further adjectives to clarify the meaning of the term, but discussion of the “non-West” is often accompanied by negatively charged words such as “autocratic” and “barbaric” (Schmidt 2014). There is typically an inherent and overlooked positive bias in speaking about the country or region that one belongs to, their “in-group,” and a negative bias about the unknown, the “out-group.” Reducing Islam and the Middle East to words such as “evil” and “violent” not only dehumanizes the individuals being spoken about, but it may also generate strong feelings among Western readers or listeners that negatively shape their opinions of these groups. The biases against Muslims and Arab governments and the view of them as backwards societies allows for easier justification and legitimization of imperialism and intervention.

Religion, namely the treatment of Islam, is a salient issue in discussions of the politics and conflicts in the Middle East. In the media, Christianity and Judaism are rarely treated with the malice that Islam is (Said 1997). This is an element of Orientalism and a way that the Muslim world is treated as the “other” that is in need of fixing. Focus is often directed towards violence as an action, rather than a reaction. In addition, many of the Western experts of Islam and the Middle East have at some point been consultants or employees of the government, media, and various corporations (Said 1997). Each of these institutions have their own agenda, which may involve a desired dominance or hegemony over the Middle East. The 1976 Arab-Israeli war was the catalyst for high media coverage of the Arab world, which shaped an image of the “Arab” as the oppressor (Schmidt 2014). This image of a bid for power by Muslim leaders and revolutionaries in the Middle East threatened Western hegemony and interests in the region. In the case of Hezbollah, a group that would normally be considered guerillas fighting a military occupation in their country, their religious ties and violent opposition to Israel (a US ally) were

emphasized by the American media; there appears to be an overemphasis on Hezbollah's violence and an underemphasis of Israel's violence (Said 1997). Defining an organization as freedom fighters versus defining them as terrorists is relative, but the tendency of the United States is to label most resistance to Israel as terrorism.

Islam is often framed in opposition to the existence of Israel, and such a nuanced topic often lacks sufficient depth when it is discussed. The argument at hand is not that Muslims have never attacked Westerners and Israelis in the name of Islam, but that these cases are overrepresented, misinterpreted, and are used to represent Islam as an inherently violent religion (Said 1997). In the words of Hezbollah in their 1985 manifesto, they are "fighting a ferocious battle against America and Israel and their plans for the region [Middle East]" (Alagha 2011 p. 52). The Shia community in the South of Lebanon saw their men tortured and imprisoned in the Ansār camp and their friends, relatives, and Palestinian refugees massacred in Sabra and Shatila by the Phalangists and Israeli forces (Saad-Ghorayeb 2003). The violence and deprivation they experienced at the hands of the IDF and their Lebanese allies was, to them, cause enough to fight back. This is highlighted not to justify violence in retaliation, but to demonstrate what led Hezbollah to take their stance against the very foundation of the state of Israel. Reducing Hezbollah to a "militant" Islamic party associates the organization with fundamentalism and violence (Said 1997). This implies a need for intervention, which the US government under the Reagan administration felt justified in carrying out in Lebanon.

### *Civilizations and Identity Politics*

One of the most influential and controversial works discussing the global roles of the East and West is Samuel Huntington's 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article, *A Clash of Civilizations?*, which was later expanded into a book. The thesis of his work revolves around hypothesizing that the great conflicts in the age of globalization will be between opposing civilizations in the West and the non-West (Huntington 1993). Much like in Orientalist thought, Huntington pits a "Western civilization" against an "Islamic civilization." The work suggests that non-Western civilizations are progressing from objects to actors in the political sphere, but as this happens there is more room for conflict (Huntington 1993). This is the oft-used justification from the American perspective to defend US hegemony in the Middle East. Linguist and political activist Noam Chomsky (1987) argues that the West is orchestrating a panic about violence and international



terrorism as a means of propaganda to overshadow its own violence in the rest of the world. This is a contentious viewpoint that raises the controversial question of how to define terrorism, which is something that will be discussed in more detail later in this work.

This “clash” between East and West ingrained itself in Western public consciousness, but also had an impact on the identities of people from the “Islamic civilization” in particular, which caused somewhat of an identity crisis. Returning to discussion of Orientalism, Said (1978) suggests that negative generalizations about Arabs are far more abundant than listing their positive attributes. One such example of this is referenced by Chomsky (1987), as he explains that the media is complicit in a selective denouncement of violence that plays into the idea that terrorism is an Arab phenomenon. At the same time, Huntington argues that modernization and social change are weakening historical (political) identities and sometimes warping them, which has led to a call for the revival of religions (1993). A question arises of how this can be true if, in Islam for example, religion and culture are inherently intertwined to political identities.

Huntington expresses the opinion that defining one’s identity in ethnic and religious terms contributes to the “us” versus “them” phenomenon, seemingly implying that the Muslims and Arabs are largely the ones responsible for the clash between the East and West. Schmidt (2014) suggests that the causes of the “clash” may be more related to economic factors, rather than cultural ones. Said (1978) mediates between these two perspectives, pointing out that US dominance of the market in the Islamic world has led to, among other things, the “standardization of taste in the region” and the rise of an intelligentsia legitimizing modernization, which culminates in the suggestion that “the modern Orient, in short, participates in its own Orientalizing” (pp. 324–325) There is little consensus among scholars about who is responsible for creating the East-West divide, leaving no clear path forward to gain deeper insight, nor an way to frame this situation more accurately. This is an important issue, but it is worth discussing further on its own.

Several key events and conflicts externally shaped the identities of the Arab and the Muslim within the US government and the wider American consciousness. As previously stated, the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict was a starting point for introducing the US public to the Arab world. Of note is the role that the Cold War played as well. The American concern of dealing with Soviet threats manifested in regional conflicts—such as the Palestinian question—coming

second while creating a network of relations between the United States, Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia (Quandt 1984). While some, such as Huntington (1993) claim that the Cold War was a conflict confined within the West, this argument overlooks the numerous proxy conflicts that occurred during this period. The “cold” aspect was between the West, but there were “hot” violent conflicts between the West and the rest of the world during this period of time; the US was especially responsible for stoking tensions in the Middle East in the name of preventing the spread of communism. Rubin (2002) claims that “Washington maintained its pro-Arab policy throughout the Cold War, worried that if it antagonized Arab regimes they would side with the Soviet Union” (p. 75). The issue with this perspective, however, is that the nature of these policies was more so anti-Soviet than pro-Arab.

The other important framing device to use in discussion of the Arab and Muslim identities within the United States is the post-9/11 attitude towards a perceived Muslim anti-Americanism. In the year following the attacks, Israeli American scholar Barry Rubin (2002) wrote a think piece regarding the relationship between the Arab world and the US, saying:

Although anti-Americanism is genuinely widespread among Arab governments and peoples, however, there is something seriously misleading in this account. Arab and Muslim hatred of the United States is not just, or mainly a response to actual U.S. policies—policies that, if anything, have been remarkably pro-Arab and pro-Muslim over the years. Rather, such animus is largely the product of self-interested manipulation by various groups within Arab society, groups that use anti-Americanism as a foil to distract public attention from other, far more serious problems within those societies. (p. 73)

In response to the September 11th attacks, there was incentive among scholars and experts to reexamine the relationship between the East and West, which was largely motivated by anger and resentment. This was a moment that solidified negative attitudes towards Muslims from within the US for years to come. In 2011, ten years after the attacks, a Pew Research study found that 70 percent of Americans responding to a poll believed Islam to be the most violent religion, and 41 percent viewed them as fanatical (Schmidt 2014). Even years after the poll was conducted, Donald Trump enacted a series of executive orders that were dubbed the “Muslim ban” during his presidency, which blocked entry to the US from nationals of several Muslim-majority countries in an effort to prevent terrorism (Panduranga et al. 2017). The “us” versus

“them” narrative pitting America against a concept of Islam has become woven into the very systems that govern the United States. This is why it is important to critically examine historical mistakes—it may help prevent future mistakes of this kind from being made again.

### *The Importance of Intercultural Communication*

Intercultural communication programs in the US were born out of diplomatic and military necessity in order to advance the role and ultimately American influence abroad. The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the US State Department, which trains American diplomats for missions abroad, is the origin of intercultural communication studies (Piller 2017). Edward Hall, one of the anthropologists hired by the FSI, wrote one of the most influential early pieces of literature on intercultural communication. Hall’s 1959 book *The Silent Language* discussed non-verbal aspects of communication that vary from culture to culture. He touched upon an issue existing within the FSI at the time, stating that “it is time that Americans learned how to communicate effectively with foreign nationals. It is time that we stop alienating people with whom we are trying to work” (Hall 1959, p. 14). This was an early optimistic view of intercultural communication. Piller (2017), however, asserted that his methodology of pinpointing hyper-specific examples instead of making generalizations was ineffective. Additionally, as a consequence of its military origins, intercultural communication as a field often conflates culture, nation, and language (Piller 2017). Given that intercultural communication is a relatively new academic discipline that is constantly impacted by changes that globalization and major events bring, criticism and reflection on the nature of the field is certainly warranted. This is especially the case considering that “culture” itself does not even have an agreed-upon definition.

Many of the concepts discussed have been ideologies originating in and perpetuated by the West. Orientalism, a byproduct of European colonialism, and the “clash of civilizations,” the thesis of an American political scientist, are Western ideas to explain the non-West. The value of Western concepts and institutions within the Middle East of course vary on an individual basis, but structurally hold little merit outside of the Western hegemony that has been imposed in the region. Huntington (1993) acknowledges that many Western values and notions have little merit elsewhere and when they are implemented it is usually a result of colonialism and imperialism. This is concerningly reflected in a passage from Hall’s 1959 work, where he claims that much of

the difficulty in aiding foreign countries is derived from Americans being unable to understand the culture, leading to the “good will and great effort of the nation” in the form of overseas programs being wasted (p. 14). The point that Hall misses, which is understandable for the time that he lived in, is that perhaps the people of the Middle East and other regions of the world did not want Western systems implemented. Huntington (1993) claims that it would be very difficult for a Muslim country to join the ranks of the West, but perhaps that was not a consideration until the West began exerting its power in the Middle East.

Hezbollah is one such example of a non-Western entity rejecting Western institutions. In their 1985 manifesto, they argue that the UN, Security Council, and additional international organizations “do not constitute a podium for the oppressed nations, and in general, they remain ineffective and inefficient due to the procedural hegemony and domination of the world oppressors on its decisions” and the veto right afforded to certain countries is one of the primary issues (p. 55). As Hall (1959) explains, people living in the West do not understand the pervasive nature of religion in the Arab world—it infiltrates all facets of life. In a short period of time, Lebanon was plagued by outsiders trying to implement change within the country while ignoring its complex nature. A combination of uninformed American politicians, Israeli strategists, and Christian Lebanese actors have all attempted and failed to “fix” the problems of Lebanon that were often caused by colonialism in the first place (Quandt 1984). Intercultural communication can only go so far when some ultimately reject it. Rubin (2002) argues that the failure of Americans to understand the complexities of the Middle East is only part of the problem, and that Middle Easterners not understanding the United States is the larger issue at hand. In the end, however, it is the US that holds a more dominant position globally, and the West will have to accommodate and coexist with those “civilizations” that it dragged into its global political system.

Muhammad Fnaysh, an official that formerly represented the political faction of Hezbollah in the 1990s and early 2000s, attributes the initial rise of the organization to a number of factors. These include modernization, a sense of political alienation, past European colonialism, and present neo-colonial policies being carried out by the United States, specifying its continued support for Israel (Saad-Ghorayeb 2003). This is where arguments, such as those made by Rubin (2002) decrying the Arab propensity to not understand America, fall apart. Why

would an organization or a government that has been so deeply hurt by the West want to collaborate with it and learn all about its nuances? Huntington (1993) believes that to best accommodate the non-Western civilizations that have emerged as actors in the global political sphere, the West must protect its interests by maintaining economic and military power in these regions. To a community such as the Lebanese Shia who have been repeatedly victimized by the hegemony of the West and the military force of Israel, this could easily be perceived as a threat. While many in the West have been spoon-fed the message that the Arabs want to forcefully impose Islam on a global scale—not unlike how the West has thrust its ideology on the East—Hezbollah directly states that this is the opposite of their intention. Hezbollah, at least in its early years, was more of a nationalist movement than a religious one (el Husseini 2008). The nationalist sentiment of the group arose as a frustrated response to the circumstances of the Lebanese Shia, rather than to advocate religious domination. With better intercultural communication from all actors involved in the events in 1980s Lebanon, perhaps there would have been less bloodshed, and the legacies of both sides could have avoided tarnishing.

### **The Foreign Policy and Counterterrorism Strategy of President Reagan**

#### *Responses to Violence*

The beginning of Ronald Reagan's presidency coincided with the release of the remaining American hostages from Iran, which seemingly shaped his concern with foreign policy in the Middle East. Hemmer (1999) argues that policymakers may develop political areas of interest that influence policy as a direct result of lessons that they learn from specific historical events. The outcome and controversy about President Carter's handling of the Iranian hostage crisis may have influenced the foreign policy of the Reagan administration in a more significant way than has been let on. At the beginning of his first term, Reagan openly considered combating terrorism to be his top national security priority (Shank 1987). By the end of his first term as president in 1984, which saw the bombing of American embassies in two countries and the deaths of hundreds of US Marines by Hezbollah, Reagan found that he had three main areas of focus pertaining to terrorism. These were broad policies to strengthen long-term counterterrorist action, an escalation of combatting Libyan- and Syrian-sponsored terrorism, and, crucially, there was an effort to obtain the release of American hostages in Lebanon as part of a larger process of moderating Iranian policies (Oakley 1986). This suggests that Reagan was cautious about

directly attributing the title of ‘state sponsor of terrorism’ to Iran in an effort to not exacerbate the situation, but also hints at the secret negotiations to supply arms with Iran in exchange for them to coerce Hezbollah into releasing hostages.

Much of the literature pertaining to the source of the Reagan administration’s fixation on the Middle East also point to the role of Israel in the events of the region as a whole. In an interview with PBS shortly following the September 11th attacks, Vincent Cannistraro, a director of the NSC Intelligence under President Reagan, argues that the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 caused an issue for the US because it forced the government to find a balance between its relationship with Israel and the good will it had among moderate Arab governments (Kirk et al. 2001). Rubin (1985) echoes this sentiment, explaining that the US is both an ally of Israel and of several Arab states, and played a key role as a mediator of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The victimization of Israel and the West was a central theme in the narrative of the Reagan administration. Robert B. Oakley, a member of the administration who served on the NSC, explains that the targets of violence in the Middle East at the time were Israel, Western governments and their citizens (particularly of the US and France), and moderate Arab governments and their actors (1985). By the beginning of Reagan’s second term, the cooperation between the United States and Israel was very strong (Rubin 1985). The allyship between the US government and Israel, though, was a significant contributing factor to the growth of Hezbollah. The organization even explains in their 1985 manifesto that they repudiate the goals of the US and Israel in the Middle East, and points to the relationship between the countries as a reason for rejecting their presence (Alagha 2011). It appears, then, that this is where Hezbollah and the Reagan administration reached an impasse—the American government was unwilling to break its ties with Israel, but these ties were significant to Hezbollah’s overwhelmingly negative feelings towards the US.

A counterargument to the dominant American narrative of the 1980s was that the War on Terror was a means for the US government to victimize itself while racializing terrorism and criminal activities. Writer Gregory Shank (1987) explains:

As in the assumptions of the War on ‘Street’ Crime, where the perpetrators were people of color – or the dangerous or criminal classes – the targets of the War on Terrorism emerge overridingly as nations of color, the criminal nations. (p. 44)

This was not a common sentiment at the time. Of the relevant literature that was written during and immediately following the presidency of Reagan, Shank is the only one to directly link race to the issue, which was an argument ahead of its time. Noam Chomsky, an outspoken critic of American foreign policy, echoed the critical sentiments of Shank. He argued that the very concept of terrorism has evolved to suit the needs of the hegemon (Chomsky 1987). The emergence of such critical discourse demonstrates the deep, polarizing divide between the perceptions of those within the Reagan administration, such as Cannistraro and Oakley, versus those of other Western scholars. This will become important in the later discussion of the data collected for this research.

A majority of the violence that was carried out by Hezbollah against Americans culminated in a general reform of counterterrorism policy, although one event during the first term of President Reagan led to specific actions being taken. On the 23rd of October 1983, Hezbollah carried out a twin suicide bombing against the barracks housing American and French members of the Multi-National Forces (MNF) in Beirut, killing over three hundred people—a majority of whom were Americans (Helmer 2006). While not the first suicide bombing carried out by Hezbollah, it was the most deadly and sent a clear message to the American and French governments that if they did not leave Lebanon, Western citizens would die. The MNF had been stationed in Lebanon as a symbolic peacekeeping force, rather than as a combative entity, but following the bombing, their role changed to demonstrate a show of American force (Oakley 1985). Fighting terrorism became the line used to sell Reagan's vision of global interventionism to the American public (Shank 1987). Suicide bombings were almost unheard of among the West during this time, which made the events of the 23rd of October so paralyzing for both the US government and its citizens. The US government had difficulty taking action against those responsible for the bombings for numerous reasons, chiefly among them being that the actual perpetrators of the bombing died in the attack (Oakley 1986; Helmer 2006). This event captured the attention of the West. Oakley (1985) claimed in the aftermath that Iranian-backed Shiite zealots from Lebanon constituted one of the two biggest threats in the Middle East.

A second operation carried out by Hezbollah that had a direct impact on foreign policy and American attitudes towards the Middle East and terrorism took place during Reagan's second term as president. Beginning on the 14th of June 1985, two men hijacked Trans World

Airlines Flight 847 (TWA 847) en route from Athens to Rome, flying between Lebanon and Algeria repeatedly and holding the occupants of the plane hostage for two weeks, as well as killing one American on board (Brown 1990). This event received some of the most extensive media coverage of 1985, prompting the Reagan administration to feel pressured to respond quickly. Rubin (1985) explains that the TWA 847 hostage affair exposed uncertainty within the US government on how to deal with terrorism. Much like the MNF bombing two years prior, the TWA hostage crisis demonstrated the ability of Hezbollah to directly confront the American government. These two attacks became the primary justification for pushing sweeping anti-crime reforms both domestically and abroad. The Reagan administration introduced an “antiterrorist package” of legislation following the attacks, which included HR6311, which intended to increase security abroad, but also created a very broad scope for what constituted terrorism. (Shank 1987). This is an issue that will be further discussed later in this work.

The second term of Reagan’s presidency was spent carrying out plans for foreign policy, contrasting with the first term being spent coming to conclusions about how to handle events in the Middle East (Rubin 1985). By 1985, the Reagan administration reasoned that an international effort would be necessary to end the terrorist threat, calling for effective coordinated action with the US government, integration of passive and defensive security measures to protect citizens abroad, and international cooperation (Oakley 1985). Notably, US counterterrorism legislation was often inspired by Israeli retaliatory anti-terrorist tactics, and even expanded upon them by introducing preemptive self-defensive strikes against potential terrorist training areas (Shank 1987). The US was using Hezbollah’s violence in Lebanon as a primary reason for modeling their counterterrorism strategy after that of Israel, but that exact Israeli strategy was a significant part of the reason why Hezbollah formed in the first place. The fact that the US pushed for what was essentially an international expansion of the Israeli counterterrorism strategy demonstrates a lack of understanding for why groups such as Hezbollah formed in the first place. Reagan began launching initiatives such as emergency action planning, crisis training, and antiterrorist assistance to contend with the violence, though these efforts did not appear to involve discussions with the heads of state of the Middle East (Oakley 1985). Additionally, even within the Reagan administration there was discordance about the proper use of military force in handling terrorism. Secretary of State George Shultz saw force necessary in order to reach a point of negotiation with the opposing side, while Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger worried



about the political and financial consequences of engaging US troops in long-term conflict relating to terrorism (Shank 1987). The lack of a consensus internally and failure to adequately consult with non-Western governments are arguably significant to the lackluster foreign policy of the time.

Returning to the discussion about the narrative that the US government told to the American people about what was taking place in Lebanon, it is crucial to expand upon the variety of attitudes held by scholars and government officials at the time. An overwhelming majority of works by these demographics took a condescending attitude towards both the region of the Middle East and the people residing there. Shank (1987) explains that Secretary Shultz describes the role of American foreign policy concerning the Middle East should aid in stabilizing the “developing world” that struggles to balance democracy and extremism. Gary Sick, a member of the NSC under President Carter, takes a firm stance regarding the nature of terrorists, claiming that they may initially commit violent acts “for reasons associated with politics,” though they “may continue to be terrorists for no reason except that they are terrorists” (Sick 1987, p.11). This is a concerning statement to hear coming from a member of the NSC that specialized in Iranian affairs, though it seems to be reflective of the general attitude of the US government at the time. NSC member Robert B. Oakley (1985), goes farther, explaining that political intimidation and the threat or use of violence—key elements of terrorism—have no place in democratic society, and that institutions such as the United Nations have been established to demonstrate this. There is an irony that, in defining these elements of terrorism as coming from the non-“civilized world,” he has, in effect, also described actions that the US has taken to exert influence over these countries.

What Shultz and many other Western politicians and scholars seem to neglect is the fact that much of the instability in that region of the world was caused by the West and their acts of colonialism and imperialism. Particularly of note is the Middle East, where countries such as France and the United Kingdom drew arbitrary state borders which contributed to future authoritarian rule and violence by creating a breeding ground for extremism (Traboulsi 2007). Where there is chaos and uncertainty, there is room for a charismatic leader or a radical organization to offer solutions and bridge gaps in areas of need, such as social services. The Iranian government, and Hezbollah by extension, was one such example of this. As mentioned,

Hezbollah was able to bring significant beneficial changes to Lebanese Shia communities through the development of infrastructure and implementation of social services (DeVore 2012). Shultz's logic was that the West would clean up its own messes in the Middle East without acknowledging that they were a significant contributor to the issues in the first place. Rubin (1985) declares American hegemony in the Middle East to be necessary, claiming that the region has a lack of consistent leadership and many sectarian identities in conflict with each other that prevents stability without intervention. With regards to this, it seems that many in the West take a dismissive and often condescending stance towards Middle East regional politics. This is a pervasive theme in academic literature, and it continues to be an issue. These writings from the 1980s reflect attitudes of the time and demonstrate the stance that the West takes as being more responsible than the Arab world. The pro-American, pro-West attitude that was amplified by Cold War tensions is on full display.

With the benefit of hindsight and the increased accessibility to global perspectives and information, newer perspectives are given the opportunity to be heard and eventually change the narrative. During a 2001 interview with Lebanese American journalist Hisham Melhem, a question was posed regarding the mistakes learned from the Reagan administration. Melhem responds:

Don't act as an empire that thinks that it can impose its own will any time it wants, anywhere it wants. Avoid acting as an arrogant power. Consult. Talk to the people who are involved. Act not in a unilateral fashion ... And again, understand the environment that you're stepping into. (Kirk et al. 2001, para. 86).

His perspective as someone connected intimately with both the United States and Lebanon is crucial and reflects that, when one is able to humanize the "other" or the "opposition," they are less likely to take an aggressive stand against them. Sick (1987), contradicting himself, explains that the US constantly changes the definition of terrorism to fit each of its iterations, but this can lead it to lose track of the lessons taught by past terrorist acts. Shifting briefly to an Iranian perspective, Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, prior to his presidency of Iran, argued that the Americans commit acts of terrorism in the Middle East and are complicit in protecting terrorists from countries that they are allied with (Sick 1987). This demonstrates both a parallel and a very complex issue—each side, East and West, sees the other as the perpetrators of terrorism but feels

that its own violence is justified. This is a complicated dilemma unlikely to be solved soon but is nonetheless important to acknowledge here.

### *The Role of the Media*

Mass media played a crucial role in shaping opinions and getting out the messages of both the US government and Hezbollah during the 1980s, and it has been used as a force for good and for evil. The relationship between the media, the Reagan administration, and the American public was complex, with each of these influencing the other in some way. Americans often follow political leadership when they lack sufficient knowledge about foreign policy, though this does not prevent them from forming their own opinions in the wake of additional knowledge, usually presented to them by the media (Gilboa 1990). Reagan was a very popular president who effectively utilized mass media, specifically by giving speeches on television and radio, to gain public favor (Gilboa 1990). Televised and broadcasted speeches meant that Reagan's words reached a large audience very quickly, which meant that the opinions of the American public could be influenced and changed frequently. Public opinion also had the power to shape policy and action—if a policy was seen as unsuccessful, Americans and the media would ask questions or demand answers from the government (Gilboa 1990). One risk of the intertwined relationship between the government, media, and public is that policy actions, especially regarding counterterrorism strategy, were often too concerned with appeasing domestic opinions and constituents (Sick 1987). The Reagan administration's approaches to counterterrorism strategy were initially very popular and viewed as one of the successful areas of policy prior to the uncovering of the arms-for-hostages deal (Oakley 1986). The available literature does not dispute that Reagan's presentation of his foreign policy as successful to the American public was initially effective, but this does not necessarily make that policy good.

Publicity can be weaponized by governments and insurgents alike. Both the Reagan administration and Hezbollah utilized mass media for their benefit. In the US, public opinion was especially crucial in shaping counterterrorism strategy, and finding a way to frame objectionable regimes and political movements as terrorism was a primary method that the Reagan administration used to shift public opinion in his favor (Shank 1987). Mass media was utilized by the US to shift the narrative about Lebanon. Following his release as a hostage held by Hezbollah, American journalist Terry Anderson (1993) explains that, from an outsider

perspective, Lebanon was an exciting country, despite its political issues. Following Hezbollah's first few attacks and hostage-takings, the journalistic perspective shifted, and the media stoked a widespread fear amongst the American public that risked being victims of terror attacks if they traveled abroad (Oakley 1986). The Reagan administration leaned into this perspective, reducing the definition of terrorism to that of criminalizing political dissent and liberation movements, and "terrorism" became a word used to describe any conflict in the Middle East (Shank 1987). While the media fixated on victimizing Americans in the Middle East, the real threat existed within Latin America. US citizens were actually the demographic which constituted the highest number of victims of international terrorism, but seeing as the most highly publicized attacks in the region rarely involved them, the issue was not sensationalized the way that Middle Eastern terrorism was (Oakley 1986). Sick (1987) explains that Americans will generally pay the most attention to issues that seem to threaten them, and the widely covered attacks by Hezbollah certainly captured their attention.

The Reagan administration was not the only side that weaponized the media; Hezbollah was very strategic in their utilization of publicity. The most notable example of Hezbollah taking advantage of media coverage was during the TWA 847 hijacking and hostage situation. As the hijacked aircraft sat in the Beirut airport, the press swarmed the plane and was able to interview the terrorists, hostages, and their families (Gilboa 1990). In a sense, the US government had to rely on the media during this event, as the press had more access to the situation than any government agency did (Sick 1987). Anderson (1993) explains that the media essentially became the main conduit between the terrorists and the governments. The hijackers demanded the release of over seven hundred Shia Muslims who were imprisoned in Israel, leading to the mediator of the situation, Lebanese Shiite politician and spokesperson for the hijackers Nabih Berri, crafting a parallel in the media between those imprisoned by the Israelis and those being held captive on the airplane (Brown 1990). The widely publicized nature of the event made it an urgent issue in the eyes of the American public (Oakley 1986). Abrahms (2006) argues that the very act of terrorism is a communication strategy to demonstrate the consequences and noncompliance with demands. This made Hezbollah somewhat effective in communicating its message to the American public. While some stories reported that the goals of Hezbollah were to purge the Islamic world of Western influence, many others reported the parallel goals of releasing the Shia prisoners and the American hostages on the hijacked plane (Brown 1990). Regardless of whether

the US public understood the demands of the hostages, they were outraged over the lack of safety for Americans overseas, which pressured the Reagan administration to find better ways to stop terrorism (Oakley 1986). The vivid coverage of this event ultimately brought Hezbollah to the forefront of American consciousness and influenced the actions of the Reagan administration, arguably making it successful.

The absence of media coverage also was an effective strategy used by Hezbollah. While some will argue that terrorists only act because the media gives them an audience, this is not necessarily the case. Sick (1987) explains that many of the hostages taken by Hezbollah “virtually disappeared from public consciousness,” and their captors had very little interest in publicity (p. 24). Anderson (1993), one of the hostages, corroborates this, saying that the hostages were often forgotten about because the captors utilized the media so sparingly. The families of the hostages ultimately led the public outrage about the situation, frustrated that the Reagan administration was seemingly ignoring the issue (Oakley 1986). The administration, on the other hand, was actually making a concerted effort to cut out the press and engage in secret negotiations to secure the release of the hostages, though this was ultimately a failure (Anderson 1993). The media, public, and government all fixated on the repeated insistence of Reagan that the administration would not make concessions to Hezbollah in order to obtain the release of the hostages, but this was widely criticized as an indication of indifference and poor communication strategy (Oakley 1986). Behind the scenes, of course, the administration was brokering deals with Iran, via Israel, in an effort to have the state sponsor of Hezbollah coerce them into releasing hostages in exchange for weapons. This deal, after it became public, was known as the Iran-Contra scandal because the excess money made by the US from the deals went to funding the Contras, a counterrevolutionary group in Nicaragua.

### *Arms-for-Hostages*

No discussion of Reagan era foreign policy and counterterrorism strategy is complete without discussing the Iran-Contra scandal, and it is especially relevant in this case because of the involvement of Hezbollah. The Reagan administration’s attempt to secure the release of American hostages in Lebanon has gone down in history as an example of poor foreign policy, and it left a stain on the legacy of Ronald Reagan’s presidency. The main precursor to the arms-for-hostages deal was the hostage crisis in Lebanon brought on by the actions of a newly formed

Hezbollah and was exacerbated by the little influence that the US had in Iran, as well as poor intelligence about the situations of the hostages (Douville 2012). Oakley (1986) blames the pressure from the media and the American public for why counterterrorism strategies and foreign policy were contradictory, arguing that their “schizophrenic” opinions, “one day calling for toughness and no concessions to terrorists, but the next day moved by the plight of the hostages and the appeals of their families,” were to blame (p. 627) It makes sense, though, that a member of the Reagan administration such as Oakley would try to place blame on an external force, as this seemed to be a widespread issue. Douville (2012) explains that a lack of accountability was a contributing factor to the poor policy making, as well as a mismanagement of resources, individual judgment errors, internal conflicts within the administration, ambiguous authority, and existing personal biases. The pressure that the administration felt arguably contributed to the perceived need to quickly find a solution without considering the long-term consequences.

The other crucial issue that led to the outcome of the Iran-Contra scandal was the fear that the president felt about repeating the mistakes of President Carter during the Iranian hostage crisis, which led Reagan to develop a private obsession with freeing the hostages. Hemmer (1999) explains further:

In this case, a historical analogy determined what the president saw as his interests: Reagan defined his administration in opposition to what he saw as Jimmy Carter’s failure to quickly secure the release of the American captives during the Iranian hostage crisis of 1970–1981. This led Reagan to define his interests in such a way that getting the hostages in Lebanon freed was more important to him than advancing what could be seen as his structurally deducible interests, such as protecting the international standing of the United States or the domestic standing of the president. (p. 268)

Reagan’s concern that he would be perceived in the same vein as Carter regarding the mishandling of a hostage crisis seemingly was such a looming thought that it led to less rational policy decisions. In response to the hostages being taken in Lebanon, the Reagan administration transferred policy control from the NSC as a whole to a few members of the staff to avoid the need for congressional oversight, which led to a small number of civilian officials being tasked with carrying out the arms-for-hostages deal (Douville 2012). Only after nearly everything that could have gone wrong did go wrong—news of the arms sales being leaked, the resignation and

firing of staff, multiple investigations, public outrage, and a series of speeches and press conferences that seemingly made things worse—did Reagan concede that the arms-for-hostages deal was not worth continuing (Hemmer 1999). Reagan and his administration had repeatedly insisted that the US government would not negotiate with Hezbollah, and, in the wake of the scandal, an even more hard line was drawn on not negotiating with terrorists (Anderson 1998). The Iran-Contra affair demonstrated that the Reagan administration clearly had not learned enough of a lesson from the Iranian hostage crisis.

The fallout of the arms-for-hostages deal had a global effect. It undermined the credibility of the United States as a competent actor, as well as the hostage-freeing efforts (Ranstorp 1996). In fact, Terry Anderson was set to be released as a hostage around the time that the deal was leaked to the press, which aggravated the situation and led to him being imprisoned for a further five years (Anderson 1993). He was the last of the hostages to be released. Reagan would not admit that he made a mistake, claiming that the only issue was that he cared too much about the return of the hostages (Hemmer 1999). Douville (2012) claims that the scandal was the “perfect example of how a well-intentioned President and his White House bypassed traditional oversight avenues to conduct foreign policy, with a bad outcome,” making it a crucial example to use in modern discussions of security policy reform (p. 137). The arms-for-hostages deal was also a demonstration of the inability of the Reagan administration to communicate with governments in the Middle East. The US government tried to avoid the involvement of Iran and completely excluded Hezbollah from negotiations, despite the organization being the key actor in the hostage crisis, in addition to demonstrating a disregard for the importance of the dynamics between Iran, Hezbollah, and Syria and a general lack of understanding of the political environment that led to the formation of Hezbollah in the first place (Ranstorp 1996). The international nature of the Iran-Contra affair made it atypical of modern presidential scandals and led to the American public wondering if there is any room for ethics in politics (Rottinghaus 2012). The foreign policy choices of the Reagan administration generally came from an echo-chamber of Western biases and opinions, which ultimately culminated in the Iran-Contra scandal negatively impacting the reputation and credibility of the United States in the global political arena.

## **Conclusion**

The formation, growth, and actions of Hezbollah were shaped by the political landscape of Lebanon. The Lebanese Shia community in particular has historically faced oppression, and they hold resistance against colonial and imperial forces as a core value of their religious identity. It is no surprise, then, that with state support from Iran, a group such as Hezbollah emerged in the wake of invasion and civil war. The actions of group—kidnapping, suicide bombing, hijacking—reflect an anger towards the United States for their support of Israel as well as their own attempt at establishing hegemony in the Middle East. The way that the Reagan administration framed the issues in Lebanon to the American public is reflective of a wider condescending attitude that Western scholars and government officials tend to hold towards the Middle East. These feelings and the lack of attempts to confront bias led the US government to make many missteps in Lebanon and the Middle East as a whole. The decision-making of the Reagan administration regarding the situation in Lebanon has a complicated legacy. While the arms-for-hostages deal was certainly controversial, the president also had considerable support from the American public regarding the military presence in Lebanon.

The available literature discussing Reagan’s foreign policy actions in Lebanon most often comes from the 1980s and 1990s, which is part of the issue that the research at hand aims to address. There is also often a one-sided narrative, with few writers willing to be too critical of Reagan’s policies and strategies in Lebanon. With a lack of accessibility to Arabic-language perspectives as well comes the challenge of balancing all perspectives within the literature. The lessons learned from history are important, no matter how long ago they took place. It is crucial to reevaluate policy decisions with the benefit of hindsight, as even more can be learned when scrutinizing past choices through a different lens. In this case, the framework of analysis largely derives from a post-9/11 stance, which provides for a fuller examination of American attitudes and policies regarding the Middle East to conclude what must be avoided moving forward.



## **CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

This chapter aims to define the framework in which the data is analyzed, as well as elaborate upon the research design and how the data will answer the questions this work poses. The first section of this chapter will discuss the purpose, approach, and justification for the research design. The second half of the chapter will be a further discussion of the methodology, explaining the processes of collecting and analyzing the data. Additionally, this chapter will explain any relevant ethical considerations and the limitations found within the process of research. To conclude, there will be a brief outline of what the results say about the research as a whole.

### **Research Approach**

The purpose of carrying out this research is to better understand mistakes of the past so as to avoid making them again in the future. Both the primary research question and the follow-up question address the issue of poor cross-cultural understanding on the part of the US government, and how this reflected their communication to the American people, thus shaping widespread and often ignorant attitudes towards the Middle East and Muslims. The Reagan administration did a poor job of communicating with non-Western governments and organizations, which became increasingly problematic as American citizens in Lebanon and elsewhere were victimized by violent groups such as Hezbollah. One of the more significant issues that was addressed by Hezbollah in their rationale for committing acts of violence was the collaboration and good-will between the United States and the newly formed state of Israel, to the detriment of Lebanon (Alagha 2011). As explored in the previous chapter, the Israeli invasion and US attempt at a power-grab were significant contributing factors to the growth and spread of Hezbollah and their ideology, as was state sponsorship by Iran. All of the significant actors—Hezbollah, the United States, Israel, and Iran—still exist today, albeit with different leadership, but their relationships with each other have hardly changed since the Reagan administration.

Before discussing the research design further, it is necessary to elaborate on the current relationships between the US government and Hezbollah, Iran, and Israel, as this is central to the

framing of the research. The government of the United States has designated Hezbollah as a Foreign Terrorist Organization that is backed by Iran, meaning that the organization is still perceived as a threat to American citizens (Humud 2023). As has been the case since 1980, the United States and Iran have no diplomatic relations (Central Intelligence Agency 2023a). The US government policy preventing negotiation with terrorists in conjunction with nonexistent relations with Iran means that, if Hezbollah were to hypothetically attack or abduct American citizens again, there is the potential for another series of events similar to the Iran-Contra scandal to transpire, or possibly a worse outcome. Additionally, Israel holds Major Non-NATO Ally status with the US, meaning that it receives American defense and security support (Central Intelligence Agency 2023b). Given these relationships, and that Israel and its citizens are still considered to be under the threat of Hezbollah violence, it is clear that little has changed in the overall diplomatic nature of these four actors. In order to not make similar mistakes, it is important to reflect on how so much went wrong under these conditions before.

A qualitative approach to the research felt like the most appropriate design, as it allows for a more thorough explanation of the relevant concepts. Within the words of President Reagan and his administration, there are lessons to be learned. The information being presented about counterterrorism strategy and the responses to Hezbollah's attacks could not be properly conveyed through quantitative means. Reducing the hostages and the death toll of American citizens to numbers would do them a disservice; the aim is to utilize this case study to let the actions of the Reagan administration serve as an example of what not to do in the event that something similar transpires in the future. The research taking the format of a case study aids the crafting of a cohesive message—that governments must learn from their ways and not be doomed to repeat the past.

## **Methodology**

This case study utilized the archives of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library to source original documents for discussion. The archival material was accessed through a combination of the digitized collections of the library, as well as in collaboration with the archivists on site in Simi Valley, California. Two distinct sets of communication from the US regarding Hezbollah have been chosen for analysis: external communications between President Reagan and the heads of state of Lebanon, Syria, Israel, France, and the United Kingdom; and the internal

communications between members of the Reagan administration along with President Reagan's communiques. These serve as points of comparison about how the Reagan administration chose to discuss Hezbollah on an intercultural and intracultural basis. The findings will be ordered and presented in their appropriate sections using a linear narrative style. This allows for the information to be organized as it happened and show a progression of events and attitudes.

The five countries that were chosen for the head of state communication analysis were selected because of their proximity to the events taking place in Lebanon, and they are utilized to demonstrate differences between how Reagan spoke to Western versus non-Western leaders. The severed diplomatic relations between the US and Iran meant that, though Iran's inclusion on this list would have been useful, there was no head of state communication between the two countries. The order in which these exchanges are evaluated is also significant, as it demonstrates a gradual shift in tone and familiarity. To start, the correspondence between Reagan and Lebanese President Amine Gemayel are evaluated. The inclusion of Lebanon on this list is obvious, as Hezbollah, a Lebanese organization, tended to attack and abduct Americans within its own borders. Next, messages between Reagan and Syrian President Hafez al-Assad are discussed. The Syrian government was heavily invested in the conflict in Lebanon and involved itself in diplomatic efforts with the US. Israel is another clear choice for inclusion because of its proximity to the violence in Lebanon. As such, the communications between Israeli Prime Ministers Yitzhak Shamir and Shimon Peres are analyzed. Moving now to Europe, citizens of France and the United Kingdom were also victims of Hezbollah abductions and violence, meaning the inclusion of President Reagan's talks with French President François Mitterrand and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. As mentioned, the ordering of these discussions is deliberate, which will be illuminated in the following chapters.

The second focus of analysis is how the Reagan administration spoke within its own (Western) culture about Hezbollah, comparing what was said within the administration to what was communicated to the American public. These are meant to demonstrate that, even within a single culture, there are distinct differences in communication. As evidenced by the arms-for-hostages scandal, there were many discrepancies between what the public was told about foreign policy and what was actually transpiring behind the scenes. While President Reagan mentioned the hostages in a number of speeches and press conferences, those that were selected had the

hostages as either a primary or otherwise large focal point. The internal communications selected were based on their relevance to Hezbollah violence and as a demonstration of attitudes towards the crises in Lebanon. Reagan's communiques were a large part of how the American public stayed informed about foreign policy, so the attitudes of the administration were crucial to their feelings towards Hezbollah, the Muslim community as a whole, and the region of the Middle East. Many of these feelings are echoed in the US today, especially having been exacerbated by the governmental response to the September 11th attacks and the fallout of the War on Terror.

This research will use two lenses with which to examine the content of the sources. The first of these is Orientalism. This was an existing framework during the 1980s for discussing Islam and the Middle East, meaning that it is a time-appropriate lens through which this research may view how the often Orientalist attitudes of the Reagan administration impacted their communications and policy choices. The second framing device is post-9/11 anti-Muslim sentiment. Although this is a study of events taking place in the 1980s, the September 11th attacks are used as a means to analyze the existing literature and the primary sources that comprise the data. With the benefit of hindsight, it is not only interesting to find parallels between Orientalist thought and post-9/11 attitudes towards the Middle East, but it is also necessary. In the same vein, the relationships between the US, Hezbollah, Iran, and Israel today are parallels of how they were during the Reagan administration. In learning lessons from the mistakes of the past, it is important to move forward with the knowledge that has been acquired over time.

Given that the research is based within the analysis of a number of publicly available primary documents, any ethical concerns lie in the issues touched upon throughout this research—namely, religion. Special care has to be taken when speaking about a religion and culture that any researcher is not a part of, which in this case is Islam. Even with good intentions there is a potential to say something harmful. Islam, and by extension the global Muslim community, is often stigmatized, which is something addressed within this research. To convey this, a section of Chapter 1 was dedicated to a discussion and critique of how Islam and Muslims are framed in the West, with relevant literature. There was also a concerted effort to include literature in the previous chapter that has been written by sources of varying backgrounds, beliefs, and opinions. The goal was to reflect a range of perspectives while being careful to not let harmful and heavily

biased views dominate the discussion. Bias, as will be discussed shortly, is a significant factor in topics such as those that this research covers.

There were a few limitations that impacted both the data and the overall analysis. The first and most significant of these was that many of the documents housed in the Reagan Archives were either heavily redacted or withdrawn entirely due to exceptions in the Freedom of Information Act that generally pertained to the protection of national security interests. Many of these primary sources would have illuminated how the Reagan administration internally spoke about or acted upon threats posed and attacks carried out by Hezbollah. Folders with content labels such as *US Assistance for Shia in Lebanon*, for example, had the entirety of their content withdrawn and/or redacted. Documents such as these may have provided a better and broader idea of how the US was responding to specific concerns in Lebanon.

With respect to the documents, another limitation was the quantity available. While this seemingly contradicts the first limitation, the issue was that there were so many possible documents to sort through in a relatively short timeframe that it is in all likelihood that something relevant or important was missed. While digitized documents of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library archives are accessible at anytime from anywhere, those that are only available in a physical copy had to be accessed in-person. Given that the primary location for conducting this research was Padova, that meant that a very short amount of time was able to be spent in California viewing these documents. Having previously researched many of the necessary archival materials to be viewed on-site, three days were spent in the archives evaluating which records would be most useful for the purposes of this research. Had considerably more time been available, perhaps it would have been less of a delimitation.

The final of the significant limitations faced is researcher bias. While this played a considerably less significant role than the unavailability of key documents, it is nevertheless important to address. Issues such as Israeli statehood, Palestinian self-determination, and even defining what constitutes terrorism are highly controversial. No matter how objective any researcher tries to be when explaining these issues, a bias will emerge. This does not need to significantly affect the quality of the work for it to still have a potentially harmful impact. To strive for as much objectivity as possible, there was care placed into the choice of relevant literature in this work to avoid a dominant narrative, but that does not mean that the tone is

impartial in its entirety. The hope is that any overt or distracting bias does not diminish the points being made and the message being conveyed.

## **Conclusion**

The questions posed in this research pertain to how a lack of appropriate cross-cultural understanding on the part of the Reagan administration was detrimental to shaping foreign policy and counterterrorism strategy in Lebanon, and what effects this continues to have. A quantitative analysis of primary sources within the framework of a case study allows for a thorough scrutiny of the biases of the Reagan administration and how they shaped policy. The aim is to learn lessons from past mistakes to avoid repeating them in the future; the complex web of relationships between the US, Hezbollah, Iran, and Israel has remained largely intact and preserved since the Reagan administration. The following chapters will present and discuss the data with the goal of learning from the communications that make up the data in order to create a better path forward.

## **CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

The content of this chapter is a presentation of the selected primary sources that will serve as the base for an inductive analysis of the communication choices and their implications in the subsequent chapter. Within the following sections of this chapter, the chosen documents are woven together in a narrative format to display the flow of information. There is one note to be made on spelling – the texts of the documents will remain unchanged in this chapter, which may include spelling errors made by the authors. These will not be altered in any way so as to let the original text be self-explanatory in its presentation. The subsequent chapter may elaborate upon these errors if they are deemed relevant.

The first section of this chapter contains the correspondences between President Reagan and the heads of state of Lebanon, Syria, Israel, France, and the United Kingdom regarding Hezbollah and relevant diplomatic matters. They are separated by country in order to allow the content to speak for itself, free from any potential researcher bias. For the same purpose, the second section, which contains the correspondences within the United States, will separate the messages sent within the Reagan administration from the speeches that Reagan gave. Much of the content will be formatted in a block quotation style to allow for an uninterrupted view of the communications that is as free from researcher bias as possible. A detailed synthesis of the findings will then be carried out in Chapter 4 and will elaborate on any comparisons to be made in order to answer the research questions.

### **Head of State Correspondences**

#### *Presidents Elias Sarkis and Amine Gemayel of Lebanon*

There are two sets of correspondences between Ronald Reagan and Elias Sarkis that are relevant to this research, taking place in 1981 and 1982. While this timeframe is prior to the establishment of Hezbollah, these messages demonstrate the existing relations between the US and Lebanon immediately prior to the formation of the group. Elias Sarkis was the president of Lebanon from 1976 until 1982, which was a time of great conflict in the country. While Reagan and Sarkis do

not correspond about Hezbollah, they do discuss diplomatic matters pertaining to the ongoing violence in Lebanon. Reagan sends a message to the Lebanese president in May of 1981 stating:

You have my pledge, Mr. President, that my administration will do everything within our ability to support the efforts of your government to achieve Lebanon's national goals and to preserve your country's unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and pluralistic democracy. I have asked Ambassador Habib to work as my personal emissary in an attempt to prevent further escalation of a dangerous crisis. Escalation of the fighting between Israel and Syria would benefit no one, would carry the danger of wider hostilities, and would further endanger the people of Lebanon. (Reagan & Sarkis 1981–1982, Reagan to Sarkis, May 25, 1981)

The letter in its entirety thanks Sarkis for accepting Ambassador Philip Habib, while also expressing sorrow and concern for the violence in Lebanon. Sarkis responded the following month, expressing his interest in a “just and lasting peace in the Middle East,” though the peace cannot be just unless they “take into consideration the legitimate rights of all the peoples in the area, including those of the Palestinian people” (Reagan & Sarkis 1981–1982, Sarkis to Reagan June 8, 1981). His message also expressed gratitude towards Reagan for his support of his goals of the independence and territorial integrity of Lebanon, and it mentioned that he will work to further friendly relations between the United States and Lebanon.

One year later, another set of correspondences between Reagan and Sarkis discussed the situation in Lebanon. In his message Reagan assured Sarkis that the US will support him “at every step and will help in this difficult, but essential endeavor in any way possible,” referring to the restoration of democratic principles to the country (Reagan & Sarkis 1982, Reagan to Sarkis June 29, 1982). Sarkis responded quickly, appealing to Reagan for support in the wake of the Israeli invasion of the country. He says:

You all know what the city of Beirut represents, to the Lebanese as well as to the Middle East and to the world, in terms of democracy, freedom, openness [*sic*] and tolerance which are rooted in its history. Those are specific characteristics of the message that Lebanon conveys in its environment and they are its contributions to the evolution of human civilization. (Reagan & Sarkis 1981–1982, Sarkis to Reagan, qtd. in June 29, 1982)



Sarkis likened the fall of Beirut to other disasters which led to the extinction of important civilizations throughout history. This would be the last relevant communication between Reagan and Sarkis before the end of the latter's term. The newly elected Bashir Gemayel would be assassinated prior to assuming the presidency, so Sarkis would be succeeded by Bashir's brother, Amine Gemayel.

The correspondences found between Reagan and Gemayel that are included in this research are set between the years of 1983 to 1985, though Gemayel was the president of Lebanon until 1988. Of note as well is the fact that a majority of these communications are set in 1983, the year after the Israeli invasion. The reason for the lack of inclusion of any letters between the two presidents in 1986 to 1988 is inaccessibility of these documents in the archives from which the data of this research is sourced. Nevertheless, the available correspondences will be included and later analyzed. Amine Gemayel led Lebanon through one of its most tumultuous periods, especially considering he became president shortly following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. In an early 1983 letter from Gemayel to Reagan, the Lebanese president sought American intervention in his country "in order to avoid a crisis that will impair the U.S. investment in peace, imperil the further implementation of present agreements, and constitute a challenge to a historic peace initiative" (Gemayel & Reagan 1983–1984, Gemayel to Reagan, ca. 1983). He ended the message thanking Reagan for continued support and notes their personal friendship.

In early April of 1983, the US embassy in Beirut was rocked by a suicide bombing, which was later learned to have been perpetrated by Hezbollah. President Gemayel quickly wrote to Reagan to offer condolences and said:

For eight years outsiders have made our peaceful country the battleground of all the conflicting forces in the Middle East, bringing with it death and destruction. Your efforts to disentangle Lebanon from these forces and restore peace and stability to our people, must displease those who thrive on conflict and anarchy. (Gemayel & Reagan 1983–1984, Gemayel to Reagan, April 18, 1983)

Gemayel uses this as an opportunity to declare that the violence will only strengthen US-Lebanon relations. Early the following month, Gemayel sent a more detailed letter, calling the

bombing “an outrage to the conscience of all civilized people and to those who are working to promote the cause of peace and security” (Gemayel & Reagan 1983–1984, Gemayel to Reagan, May 3, 1983). Gemayel went on to discuss issues in Lebanon and their relevance to the Israeli occupation, warning that foreign intervention—especially from Syrian and Palestinian forces—are going to worsen sectarianism and reduce the authority of the Lebanese leadership. He acknowledges the “lowered morale” of the Lebanese people “who for too many years have suffered” violence (Gemayel & Reagan 1983–1984, Gemayel to Reagan, May 3, 1983). A month later, Reagan wrote to the Lebanese president to congratulate him and the people of Lebanon for ratifying an agreement with Israel, saying that he will continue the “efforts to achieve the withdrawal of all external forces” from the country (Gemayel & Reagan 1983–1984, Reagan to Gemayel, June 24, 1983). He concluded the letter lauding Lebanon’s move towards freedom and independence. Shortly thereafter, Gemayel visited the president in Washington DC.

In August of 1983, following Gemayel’s visit to the United States, Reagan sent another correspondence. He outlined the initiatives to supply the Lebanese Army with weapons, which will “extend the sovereign authority of [Gemayel’s] government to areas which have been occupied by external forces” and unite the Lebanese community (Gemayel & Reagan 1983–1984, Reagan to Gemayel, August 1983). While several correspondences between the two leaders took place in the weeks following this message from Gemayel, the next communication that is significant to this research was sent by Reagan following the October 23rd suicide bombing that targeted the MNF in Beirut. Reagan was prompted immediately to send a message to the Lebanese president following the attack that killed hundreds of American citizens. The letter was brief, and Reagan urged Gemayel to find solutions and work with factional leaders to prevent another terrorist attack. He says that “Lebanon’s enemies have again struck at Lebanon’s friends,” but that the US “will not be intimidated” with violence into weakening its efforts to achieve peace (Gemayel & Reagan 1983–1984, Reagan to Gemayel, October 23, 1983). A reply from Gemayel, if in existence, was not able to be located in the archives for the purpose of this research. Reagan and Gemayel would correspond further about Hezbollah’s violence in December of 1983, following an attack on the US embassy in Kuwait. Gemayel wrote to Reagan condemning the violence that was committed by “extreme and radical elements in the region who are trying to undermine the foundations of moderate and peace-loving countries in the Middle East” (Gemayel & Reagan 1983–1984, Gemayel to Reagan, ca. December, 1983).

Reagan thanked Gemayel for this message, stating his determination to “ensure that the forces of evil and darkness are finally overpowered by the efforts of all peace-loving people to end these acts of violence and anarchy” (Gemayel & Reagan 1983–1984, Reagan to Gemayel, December 21, 1983). This would be the final set of relevant correspondences for the year.

In March of 1984, Gemayel would write once more to Reagan to express gratitude for the relations between the two countries in the wake of the US withdrawing their forces from Lebanon. He makes reference to the tragedy of the MNF bombings of the year before, saying, “the blood of your heroes, now united forever with the blood of ours, strengthens the bonds of friendship which our two peoples have been developing since the last decades of the past century” (Gemayel & Reagan 1984). In September, Gemayel wrote to Reagan to discuss the importance of outlining the plan for peace in Lebanon and the Middle East to the American people during Reagan’s reelection campaign. Gemayel outlined that:

...Religious fundamentalism and dogmatic socialism, two currents that seem to be flourishing in Lebanon under foreign occupation, now threaten the most central human values as well as some of the most important tangible interests both our countries consider vital. (Gemayel & Reagan 1983–1984, Gemayel to Reagan, September 12, 1984)

He also emphasized the rapport that had been built between the US and Lebanon, but he also recognizes that it is ultimately the responsibility of his own government to free and reunite Lebanon. This was the final relevant set of correspondences that was available. There was one set of messages that was listed between the two leaders in the aftermath of the TWA 847 hijacking, though it was withdrawn from the archives due to certain restrictions of the Presidential Records Act and the Freedom of Information Act. The absence of these, as well as the inaccessibility of any further correspondences during Reagan’s second presidential term, are unfortunate, though the existing and noted communications between 1981 and 1984 are beneficial on their own.

#### *President Hafez al-Assad of Syria*

The communications between Reagan and President Hafez al-Assad of Syria are well-preserved and numerous, which is beneficial for the sake of this research considering Syria’s crucial role in

Lebanese politics in the 1980s. President Assad ruled Syria from 1971 until his death in 2000. The available correspondences begin in 1982, with an exchange between the two leaders regarding American Independence Day that establishes the tone and attitudes for the rest of the messages. The Syrian leader sent a message of congratulations for the holiday and a message about the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, saying:

I also express the hope that your administration will adopt towards this invasion a stand consistent with the commitments of the United States of America as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, with special responsibility towards world peace and security, and also consistent with the real interests of the American people. I wish your excellency and your people happiness and prosperity. (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988, Assad to Reagan, July 4, 1982)

This interaction is significant because there was an available drafted reply with significant revisions from members of Reagan’s administration. Reagan initially drafted a curt response, with the entirety of the message reading, “Dear Mr. President, On behalf of the American people, I thank you for your message of good wishes on the anniversary of our independence. Sincerely, Ronald-Reagan” (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988, Reagan to Assad, July 8, 1982). He did not acknowledge the rest of the content of Assad’s letter. A note was attached to this with a suggestion that Reagan’s message “would have been seen by Assad as insensitive or even insulting,” with a new response written that calls for a peaceful solution in Lebanon (Paganelli 1982). This version was approved and sent.

President Assad would respond shortly thereafter to further discuss the security concerns with moving the PLO from Lebanon to Syria. He concluded this correspondence thanking Reagan for deciding to meet with representatives of the Arab League, with the hope that this meeting “will lead to a better American understanding of the Arab viewpoint regarding the situation in Lebanon and the region in general” (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988, Assad to Reagan, July 14, 1982). This would be the final relevant correspondence of 1982. One year later, in July of 1983, Reagan would write to Assad to thank the Syrian government for securing the release of David Dodge, an American hostage being held by Hezbollah. Reagan added that he hopes that the collaboration would set the tone for future cooperation between the two countries, saying, “despite our disagreements, I hope that we can find a way, through our high-level discussions, to

come to mutual understandings on the promotion of peace, stability and security in the area” (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988, Reagan to Assad, July 22, 1983). Reagan would again write to President Assad in September to discuss efforts to seek peace in the Middle East and acknowledged that “Syria has a special role to play in Lebanon” due to its security interests, and he called for a cease-fire in Lebanon (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988, Reagan to Assad, September 1983). President Assad would reply and expressed frustration with the Lebanese president for not cooperating with the dialogue to end bloodshed in Lebanon, “a brotherly Arab country” to Syria (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988, Assad to Reagan, September 24, 1983). This would be the final relevant correspondence of 1983.

A brief message from the Syrian president was sent in January 1984, which thanked Reagan for his well-wishes during recovery following an illness, and he took the opportunity to mention his “desire of continued dialogue” between the two countries, which would involve receiving Reagan’s personal envoy Donald Rumsfeld (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988, Assad to Reagan, January 1984). Reagan would send a letter to Assad in May to ask for Syrian assistance in securing the release of three American hostages being held by Hezbollah, given that Assad has “taken a public stand against the practice of international terrorism” (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988, Reagan to Assad, May 31, 1984). Reagan would follow up in November, thanking the Syrian president for his “personal interest and concern regarding the location and rescue of the three American citizens” being held in Lebanon (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988, November 12, 1984). He urged Assad to continue with his efforts to secure the release of the hostages and stressed his stance against state-sponsored terrorism. This letter was the final communication from 1984 that is relevant for this research.

The available correspondences between Reagan and Assad regarding Lebanon were sparse in 1985 and 1986. The only available material from this time period was a draft of a letter to the Syrian president that discussed the return of American hostages and the release of prisoners being illegally detained by Israel in the Atlit prison. Of note is the change made at the end of the letter. Reagan originally wrote, “...I recall with satisfaction and appreciation your successful efforts to win the release of the TWA hostages this past summer” (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988, Reagan to Assad ca. 1985–1986). This sentence is crossed out, and the replacement reads, “...I look forward to continuing and enriching the US-Syrian dialogue on broader issues,

including the peace process” (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988, Reagan to Assad, ca. 1985–1986). This eliminates all mention of Syria’s crucial role in freeing the TWA 847 hostages. Reagan did, however, thank Assad for this in both a letter and a phone call, as mentioned in a 1987 correspondence from Reagan. This message in 1987 also discussed Reagan’s opinion that “Syria is in a position to limit Hizballah influence and freedom of action in Lebanon” (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988, Reagan to Assad, June 19, 1987). The US president also lamented the poor relations with Syria, blaming terrorism in-part as an obstacle to normalcy, and called for the improvement of their relations by offering to send a representative to discuss the issues in person.

In 1988, Reagan’s final year in office, he sent another letter to Assad, which would be the final correspondence between the two leaders that is relevant to this research. He discussed the Palestinian question, once again lamented the abysmal state of US-Syrian relations, and he mentioned that the US government “clearly understand[s] the inter-relationship of conflicts” in the Middle East (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988, Reagan to Assad, February 4, 1988). Reagan hoped that by sending another representative to speak with Assad, that there could be dialogue that demonstrates the shared goals of the US and Syria—primarily, peace in the Middle East. The numerous correspondences between the leaders of the US and Syria during both of Reagan’s presidential terms offers much to be analyzed in the following chapter, especially given Syria’s role in influencing US foreign policy in Lebanon.

#### *Prime Ministers Yitzhak Shamir and Shimon Peres of Israel*

Similar to the correspondences between Reagan and the Lebanese presidents, the available communications between the US president and the Israeli prime ministers are limited to the first term of Reagan. The messages sent between President Reagan and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir were written in 1983 and 1984, and the single message between Reagan and Peres is from 1984. Shamir served as the Israeli head of state from 1983 to 1984, and then again from 1986 until 1992, and Peres was the prime minister in the years between Shamir’s terms. The first correspondence between Reagan and Shamir was sent after the 1983 MNF bombing, expressing shock and sorrow. Shamir wrote:

The terrible loss of life and the large numbers of additional casualties caused by the enemies of civilization, humanity and peace, must arouse the anger and condemnation of

the whole enlightened world. The unique role of the United States as leader of the free world and the steadfastness of its forces in defence of freedom and liberty and of our commonly held objectives is once again being tested by those who are determined to undermine stability and peace. (Reagan & Shamir 1983–1984, Shamir to Reagan, October 23, 1983)

He then explained to Reagan that he had instructed the Israeli forces to provide medical assistance to the Marines in the MNF. Reagan responded, thanking Prime Minister Shamir for the condolences. He referenced the close American-Israeli relationship, saying that both countries’ “firm opposition to terrorism” is where their “interests converge” and how their “relationship is drawn closer” (Reagan & Shamir 1983–1984, Reagan to Shamir, November 4, 1983). He ends the letter thanking Shamir for the offer of medical assistance.

The same day that Reagan sent the last letter, he had to send another one following a Hezbollah attack on the IDF headquarters in Tyre, Lebanon. He sent condolences to the Israelis killed in this attack and told Shamir that “these attacks only harden our resolve to not abandon our mission and to rededicate ourselves to the achievement of peace and stability in Lebanon and the region as a whole” (Reagan & Shamir 1983–1984, Reagan to Shamir, November 4, 1983). In February of the following year, Reagan sent another message to Prime Minister Shamir regarding the worsening situation in Lebanon. Reagan discussed directing US military efforts towards the improvement of the security of Beirut and combating terrorism. He also mentioned the threat of Syrian violence and opposition and outlined a plan to discuss “how the U.S. Lebanon and Israel can work together to achieve” unity, sovereignty, and freedom in Lebanon (Reagan & Shamir 1983–1984, February 4, 1984). Prime Minister Shamir’s response came one week later, but it was unavailable within the archives. Reagan would reply to this on the 17th of February following visits from President Mubarak of Egypt and King Hussein of Jordan to Washington DC to discuss Middle Eastern affairs. Reagan began by mentioning the value of the personal friendship with Shamir which allows them to speak to each other with “such candor and honesty,” before sending a lengthy message outlining the need to remove Israeli occupation from Lebanon and the administration’s stance against Israel annexing the West Bank and Gaza (Reagan & Shamir 1983–1984, February 17, 1984). He ends the letter reaffirming the

commitment to peace in the Middle East and the security of Israel. This would be the final message to Shamir before Peres would become the new prime minister.

There was only one correspondence between President Reagan and Prime Minister Shimon Peres that was available within the archives, but it was nonetheless worth including. The letter was a congratulatory message to Peres for taking on the role of the head of state. Reagan said early in the message that:

...Close and cooperative relations between the United States and Israel are a basic element of American foreign policy. The ties of culture, history, and values that bind our two nations are a source of strength to us both, and I am pleased that our relationship has grown even stronger in recent years. (Peres & Reagan 1984, Reagan to Peres, September 11, 1984)

Reagan ended the message with reassurance that the US is committed to the security of Israel and achieving the goal of Arab-Israeli peace. While not numerous in nature, the correspondences between the Israeli heads of state and President Reagan illuminate the US-Israeli relationship in contrast to that of the relationships that Reagan had with President Gemayel and President Assad.

#### *President François Mitterrand of France*

The communications between Reagan and President Mitterrand suffer the same fate as those from President Gemayel and Prime Ministers Shamir and Peres—the only available material was written between 1982 and 1984. Nevertheless, the content of the existing correspondences is more important than the quantity. François Mitterrand was the president of France from 1981 until 1995, meaning that he was the only French head of state that Reagan encountered during his presidency. One of the first relevant communications between the two was a letter sent by Reagan to President Mitterrand discussing the establishment of the MNF in Beirut and the cooperation of Italy in this endeavor. The goal stated within the document was to “restore full control of the Lebanese government over all of its territories” (Mitterrand & Reagan 1982–1983, Reagan to Mitterrand, ca. 1982). Another message was sent from Reagan to Mitterrand following the MNF barracks bombing in October 1983. Reagan expresses his sorrow for the French and American losses, saying that Americans “deplore this cowardly and brutal attack which is aimed



all too clearly at undermining our commitment to work for peace, stability and reconciliation in Lebanon” (Mitterrand & Reagan 1982–1983, Reagan to Mitterrand, October 23, 1983). He reassured the French president that the US will not be deterred from pursuing their goals in Lebanon, and outlines steps moving forward, signing the letter with “Ron,” rather than the standard “Ronald Reagan.”

The only other significant communication is a letter that Reagan sent to the heads of state of France, the United Kingdom, and Italy in February of 1984, as these were the countries participating in the MNF in Lebanon. In this letter, he laments that:

...There are many who neither understand nor appreciate the importance of our joint commitment to Lebanon, nor the real cause of the continuing Lebanese tragedy. Syria remains the primary obstacle, not only to the security plan, but also to the wider goals of a broadened Lebanese government and national reconciliation. Syria harbors the terrorists who infiltrate into Beirut to attack our troops and now even our civilians. (Mitterrand & Reagan 1984)

He continues, referring to Syria as a Soviet proxy in the Middle East that is allied with the state sponsors of terror, Iran and Libya. He goes as far as to say that “Syria and her friends stand in the way of progress toward peace, the Western role in Lebanon and the role of our multinational force” (Mitterrand & Reagan 1984). Reagan then outlines the plans to support the Lebanese army and push for reconciliation and peace in Lebanon and the Middle East. He once again signs the letter with “Ron.” While the quantity of content is low, there is much to be analyzed within these communications in the following chapter.

#### *Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom*

Much like a majority of the other head of state correspondences, the messages sent from 1982 through 1984 between Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher are all that was available. With that said, they were the most numerous head of state communications in the archives, even though not all of their letters were about Lebanon or Hezbollah, which demonstrates the friendliness and close relationship between the two leaders. Margaret Thatcher was the prime minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 until 1990, meaning that her position of head of state largely overlapped with Reagan’s. The letter that Reagan wrote to Thatcher in mid-1982 addressed her

by her first name, whereas letters to other heads of state often began by addressing the leader with their title. This letter outlined the concern with the deteriorating situation in Lebanon following the recent Israeli invasion. Reagan concluded with the statement that the US and UK “should consult closely in the near future about how we can cooperate in achieving a solution to the Lebanon crisis and to the broader issues, including the Palestinian question” (Reagan & Thatcher 1982–1984, Reagan to Thatcher, June 16, 1982). He closes this message, and many more to come, with “Ron.”

In March of the following year, Reagan responded to a message sent by Thatcher regarding separate talks that the two had with President Mubarak about his “forceful” concern with the situation in Lebanon (Reagan & Thatcher 1982–1984, Reagan to Thatcher, March 7, 1983). Reagan then described the US’ plan to coerce further the Israeli-Lebanese negotiations and acknowledged the close cooperation between the US and the UK in the Middle East. Thatcher would write back to Reagan in late August and mention in her correspondence that she was grateful for the US government consulting her in Middle Eastern affairs. She shared the results of a discussion with an Arab League delegation, in which the representatives of the Arab countries expressed that the US must pressure Israel to engage in the peace process, saying that “the Arab world is waiting for a clear signal of American determination and even-handedness” (Reagan and Thatcher 1983b, Thatcher to Reagan, August 22, 1983). The next message would follow the MNF bombings, with Reagan writing to Thatcher that “the perpetrators of the latest bombings in Beirut have attempted once more to undermine our collective will and sense of purpose” in trying to support the Lebanese government, but that the US would not be dissuaded by the attacks (Reagan & Thatcher 1982–1984, Reagan to Thatcher, October 23, 1983). In November, Reagan sent another letter explaining that dealing justice to those responsible for the MNF bombings is “not a matter of revenge, but of self-defense” and reaffirming that Western military presence is necessary to restore peace to Lebanon (Reagan & Thatcher 1983a, Reagan to Thatcher, November 1983). In a later message, Reagan reassures Thatcher that he has “decided not to take any military actions at this time” against those that targeted the MNF (Reagan & Thatcher 1983a, Reagan to Thatcher, November 19, 1983). These are the last important correspondences of 1983.

In February of 1984, as mentioned in the previous section on the French-US communications, Reagan sent letters to Thatcher, Mitterrand, and Prime Minister Craxi of Italy regarding the state of the MNF in Beirut. The letters were identical, but an edit to the original text was made by Reagan to have the letters addressed to the leaders of the UK and France using their first names and the one sent to Italy addressing Craxi by his title. Thatcher would respond to this message, outlining that her plan is similar to Reagan's in the redeployment of forces to Lebanon, which will assist the US. She also mentioned that public opinion in the UK would influence the announcement of this move, and she will "resist the attempts of those who will try to drive wedges between [them]" (Reagan & Thatcher 1982–1984, Thatcher to Reagan, February 1984). Reagan responded to this message thanking Prime Minister Thatcher for her decision but expressing concern for an increase in Syrian violence in the region. He stated, "these have not been easy decisions for me to make since I have a deep distrust of the Syrians in all this business" (Reagan & Thatcher 1982–1984, Reagan to Thatcher, February 8, 1984). This would be the final available correspondence between President Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher. The next set of communications that will be later analyzed are those from within the US and are composed of internal messages in the Reagan administration and the communiques of Reagan, which include a number of speeches and press conferences.

## **Correspondences Within the United States**

### *Internal Messages in the Reagan Administration*

The assorted communications in this section come from primarily memoranda and letters sent between members of the federal government during the Reagan administration and span from 1981 until 1987. The selected content has been narrowed down from the many archival documents available, and the chosen messages best reflect the sentiments of the US government on Lebanon, Hezbollah, and the Middle East. They cover a variety of issues, including policy strategy, concerns about public image, and terrorist psychology. Little attention is paid in this section to the Iran-Contra scandal, as it is not intended to be the primary focus of this research and the following section contains multiple references to it within Reagan's communiques.

The first documents come from early April of 1981, prior to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and formation of Hezbollah, and these messages discuss strategy and concerns over the

violence in Lebanon. A memorandum sent by Richard V. Allen to Vice President George H. W. Bush outlined the current status, key players, and initiatives in the country. Allen expressed concern with potential Shiite involvement in the violence at the behest of Syria and claimed that “Hafiz [*sic*] al-Assad is also a bloodied and determined adversary,” while “President Sarkis has been struggling for the bulk of his six-year term...to reestablish central government credibility and some form of control” (Department of State 1981). The memorandum established the Syrian government as a domineering force and the Lebanese leader as a weak force who will likely be overpowered by both internal sectarian forces and external actors.

Only a couple of days after this memorandum was sent, two letters were addressed to the president regarding the situation in Lebanon. The first was penned by Congresswoman Mary Rose Oakar and Congressman Nick Rahall, two Lebanese American Democrats. It expressed their concern for the effects of violence on the Lebanese population “as people who share common ancestry” with them, and they argued that “rather than being viewed as a sideshow to the problems of the Middle East, Lebanon’s problems must be settled with immediacy” (House of Representatives 1981). The second of the two letters was co-signed by the Senators in the US Committee on Foreign Relations, whose members included future president, Joe Biden. This letter highlights the indefensible nature of Syria’s attacks on the Christian city of Zahlah and expressed “strong Congressional backing for efforts by the Administration to end the bloodshed” with “an immediate and effective ceasefire” and encouragement of the Syrian forces to “end their siege” and withdraw from Lebanon (Committee on Foreign Relations 1981). While both letters were addressed to President Reagan, a brief response was sent on his behalf by his assistant, thanking the politicians for their concern.

The next communication is from July 1983, and is a brief letter typed from one NSC staff member to Geoffrey Kemp concerning the spelling of Syrian President Assad’s first name. The letter reads, “Mr. Kemp, please note the spelling of ‘Hafez’ on the draft ltr [*sic*]. The CIA head of State directory has it spelled ‘Hafiz.’ Is a change needed?” (National Security Council 1983). While the transliteration of Arabic names and words to the Latin alphabet was and still is an imprecise practice, the lack of consistency in spelling such an important figure’s name is notable and will be discussed further in the subsequent chapter. The next document is part of a State

Department report on international terrorism from 1982, and it outlined the definitions of terrorism and international terrorism as follows:

**Terrorism:** The threat or use of violence for political purposes by individuals or groups, whether acting for, or in opposition to, established government authority, when such actions are intended to influence a target group wider than the immediate victim or victims.

**International Terrorism:** Terrorism conducted with the support of a foreign government or organization and/or directed against foreign nationals, institutions, or governments. International terrorism has involved groups seeking to overthrow specific regimes, to rectify national or group grievances, or to undermine international order as an end in itself. (Department of State 1983)

The definition of terrorism will later come under scrutiny in other documents that will be assessed in this research. The rest of the report outlined global terrorism from 1982, focusing extensively on the Middle East.

Two months after the report on international terrorism was written and one month after the MNF bombings, the CIA published a report about terrorist threats to the West in Lebanon. This document highlighted the looming threat of “radical” Shia organizations that “seek to retaliate for the French and Israeli airstrikes against Shia camps in the Bekaa Valley,” who also “see the United States as an accomplice,” and pointed out Syria as a state willing to support terrorism against these targets (Central Intelligence Agency 1983). This document also mentioned that the Americans and French forces were targeted rather than the British and Italian forces because the latter were viewed as more impartial in the Arab-Israeli dispute. In January of 1984, the CIA would publish another document of a similar nature, which discussed the terrorist threats specifically to US personnel in Beirut. This document, while heavily redacted, still provides insight into the perception of the conflict in Lebanon by the CIA. They point out Iranian and Syrian sponsorship of groups such as Hezbollah that are “confident that they are serving the will of Allah” by sacrificing their lives in suicide attacks and other terrorist violence (Central Intelligence Agency 1984). The CIA also pointed out in this report that there was a specific goal of “replacing the Christian-dominated Lebanese Government with an Iran-style Islamic republic”

(Central Intelligence Agency 1984). The next month, Executive Secretary Charles Hill would send a memorandum to Robert C. McFarlane regarding the need to “update and restate Administration policy on terrorism,” and a message to Congress was subsequently drafted (National Security Council 1984b).

Later that month, the NSC would discuss a paper written by Constantine C. Menges on concerns regarding state-sponsored terrorism. This paper had been written as a follow-up to one that Menges wrote in 1980, and it was a reflection on elements of foreign policy during Reagan’s first term. In 1980, and again outlined in 1984, Menges identified the elements of effective counterterrorism strategy as:

(1) better political intelligence and timely political/institutional support for pro-western forces; (2) far more energetic international communications activities to affirm democratic/western values and accomplishments-and tell the truth about communist international subversion and domestic failures; and (3) offensive action against terrorist groups, their transnational support networks and sustained efforts to help moderates replace newly established communist or pro-Soviet regimes (e.g., Nicaragua, Grenada, Ethiopia, Syria). (National Security Council 1984a)

While the content of the discussions of this document is not available, it is worth mentioning that the NSC members felt it important enough to discuss. This is relevant to the next memorandum, which is a public statement that was crafted to answer what the difference is between terrorism and US support for the contras in Nicaragua, to which the answer was an attempt to differentiate “terrorism’s rampant indiscriminate brutality against innocent third parties” from the “organized armed opposition to communist tyranny” in Nicaragua (White House 1984). This answer seemingly leads to the Reagan administration reevaluating the definitions of terrorism and insurgency.

The new guidelines for the differentiation between terrorism and insurgency are defined in the talking points for a meeting with the House Foreign Affairs Committee. They are explained as such:

Terrorism is the use or threatened use of violence for a political purpose to create a state of fear which will aid in extorting, coercing, intimidating or causing individuals and

groups to alter their behavior. A terrorist group does not need a defined territorial base or specific organizational structure ... Its targets are civilians, non-combatants, bystanders or symbolic persons and places. Its victims generally have no role in either causing or correcting the grievance of the terrorists. Its methods are hostage-taking, aircraft piracy or sabotage, assassination, threats, hoaxes, and indiscriminate bombings or shootings. Terrorism is international when the victims, the actors or the location of a terrorist incident involve more than one country.

Insurgency is a state of revolt against an established government. An insurgent group has a defined organization, leadership and location. Its members wear a uniform. Its objectives are acquisition of political power, achievement of participation in economic or political opportunity and national leadership or, ultimately, taking power from existing leadership. Its primary interests relate to one country. Its methods are military and paramilitary. Its targets are military, both tactical and strategic, and its legitimate operations are governed by the international rules of armed conflict. It operates in the open, and it actively seeks a basis of popular support. (White House Situation Room 1984)

This demonstrates the seemingly fluid nature of definitions of terrorism. The definition of terrorism was once again called into question only a few days after this note was written. In a State Department memorandum, which discussed recent proposed legislation to combat terrorism, it was mentioned that the language of one of the bills had drawn criticism from both sides of the political spectrum. Multiple news outlets and organizations focused on the issue of “the authority to designate terrorist states and groups,” as well as “how terrorist groups would be distinguished from insurgent groups” (Department of State 1984).

In October of 1984, a memorandum was prepared for the Directorate of Intelligence based on a New York Times article by Thomas Freidman about the psychology of terrorism. Memorandum author Jerrold M. Post explains that terrorists with nationalist motives “are extremely hostile and share many features of the paranoid personality,” and terrorism “justifies and provides sanction for projecting the person’s own hostility upon society” (Directorate of Intelligence 1984). The following year, the Reagan administration would begin to discuss

Hezbollah in more detail. In May of 1985, a message was sent to the US embassy in Paris discussing the organization and the hostage crisis in Lebanon. This document discussed the goal of utilizing key governments in the Middle East to send messages to Iran and Hezbollah to free the hostages, and highlighted the role of Ayatollah Fadlallah, who “stated that he has spiritual influence with Hizballah” and had recently publicly opposed the practice of hostage-taking (National Security Council Secretariat 1985). The message also lamented the publicity of the hostage taking, especially because it took pressure off of Iran and Syria to aid in the release of the hostages.

Notably, however, a month later Syria would play a significant role in freeing the hostages of the TWA 847 hijacking. This became a point of contention within the administration. A memorandum was sent following Reagan drafting a letter which thanked President Assad for his role. There was a discussion among NSC staff members suggesting that Reagan should avoid expressing gratitude because, while the Syrian government was helpful, they “did so only in their own interests” (National Security Council 1985). The change was made at the risk of offending President Assad, and the letter was sent. The definition of terrorism would be revisited once more in November of 1985 in a discussion of a draft of counterterrorism legislation. The draft would offer up the definition of terrorism to be “the unlawful use or threatened use of force of violence against individuals or property to coerce or intimidate governments or societies, often to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives” (Office of the Vice President 1985). There were dissenting views from all of the government bodies evaluating the legislation, but the most critical point of view came from the State Department, who wrote that “a ‘universal definition’ would create problems without any corresponding benefit. The US could be accused of conducting terrorism, according to the long definition proposed” (Office of the Vice President 1985). This, again, demonstrates the fluidity of the definition of terrorism.

In January 1986, only a few months before news of the arms-for-hostages deal was leaked to the public, the stance on negotiation with terrorists was reaffirmed despite the reality of trading weapons to secure the release of hostages. A draft of the National Program for Combatting [*sic*] Terrorism stated the “firm opposition to terrorism in all its forms” and “states that practice terrorism or actively support it, will not be allowed to do so without consequence” (White House 1986b). The document goes on to explain that the US government “will make no



changes in its policy because of terrorist threats or acts,” and will not agree to any conditions that may encourage additional terrorism (White House 1986b). The following month, to better understand possible responses to the conflict in Lebanon, members of the Reagan administration participated in a game theory simulation to find solutions. While the results of this simulation were redacted, of note is that both simulations were carried out under the assumption that President Assad would be dead by 1987, as his health was failing at the time (National Security Council 1986).

In 1987, the year after the news of the Iran-Contra scandal broke, the discussions still had to continue regarding Hezbollah and the hostages that they held. In a draft of a letter to President Reagan, Vice President Bush praised the effectiveness of the US counterterrorism strategy, but that the policy “needs re-emphasis and its provisions and purposes need careful explanation to the American people” (Office of the Vice President 1987). Bush stressed that the public must understand that the policies were intentional and effective, and that the mistakes were made by disregarding the policy. His proposition for consistency in implementing policy was to “emphasize good intelligence, careful police work, international cooperation, and a controlled approach to public handling of terrorist incidents” (Office of the Vice President 1987). That same year, research by the Defense Intelligence Agency outlined the increasing frequency of Hezbollah violence, and once again stressed the role of Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Fadlallah in guiding the views of the organization. The document claimed that the growth of Hezbollah can be “attributed more to its financial resources and less to its ideological appeal among the poor Shi’a community,” and that its weakness is emphasis on religion (Defense Intelligence Agency 1987). Throughout Reagan’s presidency, the position on the violence in Lebanon from members of the administration, and the federal government as a whole, remained relatively unchanged and unchallenged, though the same cannot be said for their definition of terrorism.

### *Communiqués of President Reagan*

As previously mentioned, Reagan made great use of the media during his presidency. He often spoke to the American people through live broadcasts on television and radio to keep them informed of his policies and important events, and he communicated primarily through speeches and question-and-answer sessions. While the hostages and the wider situation in Lebanon were

often addressed, they tended not to dominate the content of Reagan's communiques. The following selected texts are comprised of the communiques that dedicated significant attention to foreign policy and counterterrorism strategy in Lebanon, including the hostage crisis, the Iran-Contra scandal, and Hezbollah's attacks.

The first important speech was televised on the 1st of September 1982—prior to any Hezbollah attacks—and concerned Reagan's plan for peace in the Middle East. He primarily discussed the success of Ambassador Philip Habib in brokering a deal to evacuate the PLO from Lebanon, and he stated that solving the deteriorating situation in Lebanon was a crucial part of finding peace in the Middle East. He called upon the Middle Eastern countries to “accept the reality” of the existence of Israel, and follows up saying:

In making these calls upon others, I recognize that the United States has a special responsibility. No other nation is in a position to deal with the key parties to the conflict on the basis of trust and reliability. The time has come for a new realism on the part of all the peoples of the Middle East. The State of Israel is an accomplished fact; it deserves unchallenged legitimacy within the community of nations. But Israel's legitimacy has thus far been recognized by too few countries and has been denied by every Arab State except Egypt. Israel exists; it has a right to exist in peace behind secure and defensible borders; and it has a right to demand of its neighbors that they recognize those facts.  
(Reagan 1982b)

Later in his speech, Reagan reiterates that the United States has a commitment to Israel's security. The primary message of this address to the nation is that peace in Lebanon can be achieved through the evacuation of the PLO and an overall acceptance of the existence of Israel, and that Reagan feels a personal and moral commitment to achieving this peace. Nearly three weeks later, on the 20th of September, Reagan addressed the US once again on a live television and radio broadcast to announce the formation of the MNF in Lebanon, in which he restates the importance of stability in Lebanon as a means to attain peace in the region. Reagan also expresses the need to “pave the way for withdrawal of foreign forces” from Lebanon by sending a multinational force “not to act as a police force, but to make it possible for the lawful authorities of Lebanon to discharge those duties for themselves” (Reagan 1982a). This action

was proposed as part of a collaboration with the Lebanese government to serve American national interests and to seek Arab-Israeli peace.

Just over one year after Reagan announced the formation of the MNF, they were devastated by a twin suicide bombing that killed hundreds of the Marines stationed in Beirut. On the 27th of October 1983, four days following the suicide attacks by a violent faction of a newly formed Hezbollah, Reagan once again addressed the nation in a live television and radio broadcast. He discusses the strategic importance of Lebanon and the Middle East to the West as a producer of oil, a key location for international trade, and a barrier against Soviet expansion, and also restates the aims of the MNF. He links the attack in Beirut to recent insurgent violence in Grenada, claiming, “not only has Moscow assisted and encouraged the violence in both countries, but it provides direct support through a network of surrogates and terrorists” (Reagan 1983b). He claims that the attackers’ goal was to “weaken American will and force the withdrawal of U.S. and French forces from Lebanon,” and claims that “the multinational force was attacked precisely because it is doing the job it was sent to do in Beirut” (Reagan 1983b). One week after this speech, Reagan spoke at a Marine Corps air station on American casualties in Lebanon and Grenada. In this address, Reagan says:

America seeks no new territory, nor do we wish to dominate others. We commit our resources and risk the lives of those in our Armed Forces to rescue others from bloodshed and turmoil and to prevent humankind from drowning in a sea of tyranny. In Lebanon, along with our allies, we're working hard to help bring peace to that war-torn country and stability to the vital Middle East. In seeking to stabilize the situation in Lebanon, you marines and sailors --and our French, Italian, and English companions --are peacekeepers in the truest sense of the word. The world looks to America for leadership. And America looks to the men in its Armed Forces --to the Corps of Marines, to the Navy, the Army. (Reagan 1983a)

This address was shorter than the address to the entire nation and acted more as a eulogy. While speaking to the Marines, he spent less time justifying military action in Lebanon and Grenada and more time paying homage to the armed forces and emphasizing the American value of

freedom. Following the MNF bombings, Reagan would not speak at length about acts of violence and terrorism committed by Hezbollah again until the 1985 TWA 847 hijacking.

On the 30th of June 1985, Reagan addressed the nation from the White House in a live broadcast to announce the release of the hostages from the aircraft but denied that it was a time for celebration due to the murder of a naval officer during the ordeal and because other hostages were still being held by Hezbollah throughout Lebanon. The president passionately decries the terrorism in Lebanon and the rest of the world:

...Those responsible for terrorist acts throughout the world must be taken on by civilized nations; that the international community must ensure that all our airports are safe and that civil air travel is safeguarded; and that the world must unite in taking decisive action against terrorists, against nations that sponsor terrorists, and against nations that give terrorists safe haven. This drama has reminded us how precious and fragile are the freedoms and standards of decency of civilized societies; how greatly civilized life depends on trust in other human beings; but how those values we hold most dear must also be defended with bravery --a bravery that may lie quiet and deep, but that will rise to answer our call in every time of peril. Freedom, democracy, and peace have enemies; they must also have steadfast friends. (Reagan 1985)

In addition to this, Reagan declared that the United States would make no concessions or deals with terrorists, and denounced nations that harbor them. He thanked the governments of Syria, Algeria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Israel for their roles in condemning the hijacking and securing the release of the hostages. He concludes on a personal note, explaining that he and his wife had been praying for those being held in Lebanon. This speech would mark the last time that Reagan addressed the US on specific Hezbollah attacks, and there would be a distinct shift in the following year to a focus on answering questions about the Iran-Contra scandal.

In June of 1986, five months prior to the nature of the arms-for-hostages deal being leaked to the public, an interview with a French journalist was sent out as a press release in which Reagan answered questions on numerous foreign policy issues, including arms control, trade, and American values. One question that was posed holds particular interest to this research. The interviewer states that the US supports so-called freedom fighters in countries such

as Nicaragua and Afghanistan and asks if peace can only be achieved through armed conflict versus negotiations with the Soviet Union. Reagan's answer is as follows:

We seek to give effective support to those who have taken the initiative to resist Marxist-Leninist dictatorships so they can struggle for freedom. Also, it is justified because of the threat that these regimes pose to their neighbors, our allies and friends, and our own national security. Support to resistance forces does not undermine our commitment to negotiated settlements. On the contrary, strong resistance movements can only increase the likelihood of bringing Communist rulers to the bargaining table. (White House 1986a)

Among the other topics discussed were French-US relations, where Reagan stated that the two countries are historically bonded by the values of freedom, democracy, and liberty, and that the right of the governments of these countries to disagree with the decisions of the other and overcome differences without conflict is crucial to their strong relationship. While not directly related to Hezbollah and Lebanon, this interview demonstrates an important stance that Reagan takes on "freedom fighters," which will be analyzed in the following chapter.

Shortly after the news of the arms-for-hostages deal reached the American public in November of 1986, Reagan addressed the nation live to discuss the controversy. He began with an explanation that the US has had a "secret diplomatic initiative" underway for eighteen months with goals "to renew a relationship with the nation of Iran, to bring an honorable end to the bloody 6-year war between Iran and Iraq, to eliminate state-sponsored terrorism and subversion, and to effect the safe return of all hostages" (Reagan 1986b). He justifies this with the analogy of Nixon's secret diplomatic missions to open China to the West in 1971. He made a stipulation in the deal very clear: that Iran had to denounce international terrorism in order to progress the relationship, and their sponsorship of international terrorism was the central conflict between the two nations. The requests of the US seemed to entail Iran using their "influence in Lebanon to secure the release of all hostages held there" (Reagan 1986b). Reagan summarizes his message by reiterating once more that the US government will not make concessions to terrorists, "in spite of the wildly speculative and false stories about arms for hostages and alleged ransom payments" (Reagan 1986b).

On the 19th of November, six days after this broadcast, Reagan held a live news conference, where he answered the questions of reporters regarding the Iran arms controversy. He began by restating the four goals of undertaking the secret initiative and took sole responsibility for the operation after calculating the risks. A reporter points out that every time a hostage was released from Lebanon, there was a major shipment of arms to Iran, and asks if that was coincidental. Reagan responded that the US hardly shipped arms to Iran, and that Iran was not holding Americans hostage, so there was not an arms-for-hostages trade. He reiterated that the goal was for Iran to use their influence to persuade the terrorists to release the hostages, which so far has led to three being released. The following exchange then took place between the same reporter and Reagan:

*[The reporter:]* But if I may follow up, sir: On that first point, your own Chief of Staff, Mr. Regan, has said that the U.S. condoned Israeli shipments of arms to Iran. And aren't you, in effect, sending the very message you always said you didn't want to send? Aren't you saying to terrorists either you or your state sponsor --which in this case was Iran -- can gain from the holding of hostages?

*[The President:]* No, because I don't see where the kidnapers or the hostage-holders gained anything. They didn't get anything. They let the hostages go. Now, whatever is the pressure that brought that about, I'm just grateful to it for the fact that we got them. As a matter of fact, if there had not been so much publicity, we would have had two more that we were expecting. (Reagan 1986c)

After further questioning, Reagan then claimed that “Iran does not own or have any authority over the Hizballah,” but they can “persuade or pressure” the organization to release hostages (Reagan 1986c). A few more exchanges between reporters and Reagan stressed the same sentiment that the timing of the hostages being released after arms were shipped to Iran was suspicious, but the president continued to deny that they were connected. Two weeks after this news conference, Reagan again addressed the nation in a live broadcast to discuss the arms-for-hostages controversy. This followed a meeting with the Special Review Board, which was investigating the situation, and the president informed the nation that those in charge of reviewing everything will be thorough and justice will be served. He concluded by stating again

that his policy is to “oppose terrorism throughout the world, to punish those who support it, and to make common cause with those who seek to suppress it” (Reagan 1986a). This marked the end of Reagan’s 1986 statements on Iran-Contra.

In late January of 1987, Reagan released a brief statement discussing the kidnappings of US citizens in Lebanon. He called for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and claimed that the hostage takers’ “acts of terror constitute a declaration of war on civilized society” (Reagan 1987e). The next live broadcast of an address to the nation took place on the 4th of March of the same year, where he once again discussed the Iran-Contra scandal. He reneged his promise to the country that the arms-for-hostages deal was nothing more than a rumor explaining that “what began as a strategic opening to Iran deteriorated, in its implementation, into trading arms for hostages” (Reagan 1987a). Reagan's problem, he claimed, was that he let his “personal concern for the hostages spill over into the geopolitical strategy of reaching out to Iran” (Reagan 1987a). In addition to this claim, he also addressed the families of the hostages directly with a promise to free their loved ones, as well as affirming the credibility of the NSC staff, who were under investigation as well. Two weeks later, in yet another live broadcast, Reagan spoke and took questions from reporters on a number of issues, but they kept circling back to Iran-Contra. Among his answers, Reagan discussed that he did not believe that Iran could give orders to Hezbollah, but “they might be able to be persuasive,” that his judgment about foreign policy decisions was hampered by the fact that he cared too much about freeing the hostages, and he reaffirmed the necessity of secret diplomatic relations (Reagan 1987f). Two months would pass before another question-and-answer session with the media that devolved into a discussion of some element of the Iran-Contra scandal.

In May of 1987, Reagan held his next question-and-answer session with editors and broadcasters. He stood firm in his resolve that the covert operations were necessary, and that he believed Iranian actors could pressure Hezbollah into releasing hostages. Where this differed from other speeches and press conferences was in his discussion of what constitutes a freedom fighter. He mentions first the “contras” of Nicaragua, but opts to refer to them as freedom fighters, as “contra” was a derogatory term imposed on them by the ruling party of the government; Reagan states that they “are people who are fighting for democracy and freedom in their country” (Reagan 1987d). In a later discussion about the contras and the political situation

in Nicaragua, Reagan claims that the Soviet Union, and “other communist countries, Libya, the PLO” have been providing support to the ruling government, so the US has every right to fund the opposition—the contras (Reagan 1987d). Reagan justifies the idea of state-backed freedom fighters that share his vision of democracy. A couple of weeks later, Reagan participated in another press briefing where the Iran-Contra situation became a central focus. He defends his credibility and once again establishes that the US would “not do business with a country that supports terrorism,” but “there is a group of terrorists called the Hizballah that at least has some kind of a philosophical arrangement with Iran,” and the link between the two was important for securing the release of the hostages in exchange for the weapons (Reagan 1987c). Another topic relevant to this research that was discussed was Reagan’s positive relationship with Prime Minister Thatcher and the strong ties between the United States and the United Kingdom. It would be three months before another address to the nation about Iran-Contra was held.

The August 1987 address was the final of the year to focus explicitly on the scandal. He once again places the blame upon himself and his preoccupation with freeing the hostages. Reagan makes an emotional appeal, saying “the image—the reality—of Americans in chains, deprived of their freedom and families so far from home, burdened my thoughts. And this was a mistake” (Reagan 1987b). He denies, however, knowledge of the excess funds (from selling arms to Iran) that were diverted to aiding the contras in Nicaragua. In 1988, his final year in office, Reagan made three final significant attempts within press releases and conferences to speak at-length about Hezbollah and the hostage situation in Lebanon. The first was in February, where he took questions during a live broadcast. Reagan first discussed the need for an effective peace process in the Middle East, to which a reporter posited whether Israel should stop occupying Palestinian land. The president then said, “Well, I don't think it's up to us to dictate the settlement in the Middle East” (Reagan 1988b). Later in this press conference, a reporter asked Reagan about hostage removal efforts, to which he diverted his answer to speak at length defending the arms-for-hostages deal and reiterated the “philosophical” relationship between Hezbollah and Iran that led to the trading of arms for hostages.

In the second of the 1988 conferences that discussed the Iran-Contra scandal, Reagan once again spoke about the philosophical relationship between Hezbollah and Iran that guided the deal. While this conference spent less time on the scandal, President Reagan still dedicated a



considerable amount of time affirming the credibility of his administration and the legitimacy of their actions. Another repeated argument was that the US did not “do business with countries that practice terrorism, and Iran practices terrorism,” but when the Iranian connections said “that they wouldn't and they didn't, and they gave some individual incidents to show their opposition to terrorism,” the deal proceeded (Reagan 1988a). The final of the three 1988 conferences relevant to this research was actually held in Canada but was reported to the American public. When asked by a reporter to reflect on the Iran-Contra scandal as his presidential term comes to an end, Reagan spoke once again about the Iranian contacts and Hezbollah:

...And now back came this request from them that what it would do for them in the event of forming new government and so forth—more or less—token shipment of a type of weapon. I sent word back that we didn't do business with countries that supported terrorism. Well, they sent back reminding us that they weren't representing the country; they weren't that government. And they wouldn't, if they were—be a government—they wouldn't do these things. And so, then was when I sent word back and said, well, all right, but I know that there are connections in Iran with the Hizballah who are holding American hostages. We'll do this if you will use your influence, if you have any, to see if you can get our hostages back. And they said yes. (Reagan 1988c)

Reagan held firm to his assertion that his care for the hostages influenced his decisions and that he had no ill intent in his actions. Despite the stain that the Iran-Contra scandal left on his legacy, the president was at least consistent when speaking to the American people about the issue of not making concessions to terrorists throughout his presidency, even if his actions suggested otherwise. He was an effective speaker who committed to his beliefs when publicly questioned, even if he was ultimately being dishonest or acting covertly.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this case study have been presented separately to create a foundation for the analysis in the following chapter. The communications between President Reagan and the heads of state of Lebanon, Syria, Israel, France, and the United Kingdom are deliberately presented in this order to display a gradual change in the tone of the communication, which will be elaborated upon in the following chapter. The internal messages, documents, and memoranda from

members of the federal government and its agencies during the Reagan administration reflect generally unchanging opinions about Lebanon and Hezbollah. With that said, the definition of terrorism was flexible during this administration and seemingly changed to justify involvement in Nicaraguan politics while condemning similar actions being taken by “enemies” in the Middle East. The communiques of Reagan, while consistent in their messages, demonstrate a willingness to mislead the public in order to gain approval for foreign policy and to preserve his reputation in the face of scandal. The subsequent chapter will examine these texts within a critical Orientalist framework as well as through a post-9/11 lens to understand the legacy and continued implications of Reagan’s foreign policy decisions in Lebanon.

## **CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION**

### **Introduction**

This chapter delves into an analysis of the content of Chapter 3 and will be separated into three sections. These sections will combine the material from each section of the previous chapter, and they will not necessarily be presented in a linear and narrative format. While some outside literature is referenced to contribute to making the arguments, the aim is to focus on the primary sources and analyze them in a way that reflects the arguments of the researcher, rather than the opinions of other scholars. The material is divided by theme in this chapter, rather than by country. The first section discusses the consequences of the poor intercultural communication and understanding by Reagan and the members of his administration. This focuses on the differences in how Reagan communicated with the various heads of state, as well as how he portrayed the issues in Lebanon to the American public in a way that reflects a heavy anti-Arab and anti-Muslim bias. The second section contains an analysis of the lessons learned from the dishonesty of the US government during the Reagan era regarding foreign policy and counterterrorism in Lebanon and the wider Middle East. The final section discusses the ways that the Reagan administration defined (and redefined) terrorism and the implications of this. Heavy emphasis is placed on the deliberate changes made to the US definition of terrorism in the wake of external criticism and how it was spoken about in various contexts. This allows for a segue into the conclusion of this dissertation which provides recommendations for the current US government based on the events detailed in this research.

### **The Consequences of Poor Intercultural Communication**

#### *Centering Christianity and the Echo Chamber of Orientalism*

The communications of the previous chapter will be subjected to comparisons in order to demonstrate that the Reagan administration did a poor job in terms of intercultural communication, and this had many consequences. The understanding of the necessity of intercultural communication was relatively novel in academic and political settings when Reagan was president, so an argument can be made that he did the best that he could for the time in which he lived. The issue with this, however, is that Western portrayals and understandings of non-Western countries had already begun to receive criticism before Reagan became president.

*Orientalism*, the seminal book by Palestinian American professor Edward Said which critiqued Western Orientalist thought, had been published in 1978 and ignited a discussion on Western perceptions and depictions of the “non-West” that continues to this day. The very field of intercultural communication was detailed in the 1959 writings of Edward Hall, over 20 years before Reagan took office, and originated due to the need for the US government to be more effective in overseas missions (Piller 2017). Additionally, the foundations of American policy in the Middle East evolved from explicit Orientalism to concerns about totalitarian Islam and secular nationalism threatening US interests in natural resources—namely, oil—in the region to justify policy decisions (Jacobs 2011). Reagan’s presidency, and Carter’s before him, saw a Shia threat to Americans and US interests, and the legacy of Orientalism and anti-Islamic sentiment ultimately informed policy decisions and communications.

The first significant issue at hand is the echo chamber of ideas in the Reagan administration, meaning that it was generally American politicians with secondhand understanding, at best, of the Middle East and Islam. A pseudo-exception to this was Lebanese American Ambassador Philip Habib. In both his 1981 letter to President Sarkis of Lebanon and his televised 1982 speech, Reagan discussed the successful role of Habib in brokering peace deals in Lebanon and evacuating the PLO from the country (Reagan & Sarkis 1981–1982; Reagan 1982b). Of note is that, while Habib was of Lebanese descent, he came from a Maronite Christian family, meaning that he was able to connect with Presidents Sarkis and Gemayel, also Maronites (Manegold 1992; Traboulsi 2007). The implication here is that, although Reagan was able to engage in some intercultural communication, his conduit for doing so was a person more affiliated with the leadership that was exacerbating the issues in Lebanon. The Maronite Christians historically held more power than the Muslims, especially the Shias, in Lebanon (Traboulsi 2007). The alienation of the Shia community was a major contributing factor to the formation of Hezbollah, and, although the organization had not fully formed during Habib’s first few trips to Lebanon, this is still relevant. It demonstrates that the Reagan administration was not in touch with the needs and problems of the non-Christian Lebanese population.

This is also evidenced in the 1981 letter sent to Reagan by the US Committee on Foreign Relations. The letter, while calling for the US to intervene in Lebanon, focused primarily on the shelling of the Christian town of Zahlah and blamed Syria for the violence (Committee on

Foreign Relations 1981). The letter sent at the same time by two Lebanese American Democrats, Congresswoman Mary Rose Oaker and Congressman Nick Rahall, calling for intervention in Lebanon focused less on the religious identity politics and served more as an appeal to the president by people who had shared ancestry with those being harmed (House of Representatives 1981). This demonstrates a clear divide in how the violence in Lebanon was presented and perceived by American politicians with ties to Lebanon versus those without. The members of the CFR, and seemingly also the Reagan administration, were more concerned with those who are most similar to them—Christians. Oaker and Rahall, as people of Lebanese descent, were concerned with the plight of the Lebanese as a whole, not just a subsection of the population. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the president did not directly respond to either of these letters, and in general seemed reluctant to consider opinions from outside of his administration.

Additionally, the discrepancies between the views of the Lebanese Maronite Christian leaders and, for example, the members of Hezbollah demonstrate that the Christians are not representative of the entire Lebanese population. By collaborating with and utilizing Lebanese Christians for negotiations, Reagan and his administration were leaving out a considerable portion of the population of Lebanon from the very start when considering solutions to the issues that ultimately led to the formation of Hezbollah. Additionally, the clear favoring of the Maronite Christians by the US government made the American forces targets for violence from any opposition, which came in the form of Hezbollah (Central Intelligence Agency 1983). Jacobs (2011) explains that the US government tended to point out certain Middle Eastern leaders as the embodiment of the worries about the region while uplifting others as models of good behavior. President Gemayel was one of these positive models during Reagan's presidency. In his April 1983 letter to Reagan, Gemayel claimed that outside forces, implicitly referring to Palestinians and Syrians, brought sectarianism to Lebanon which encouraged violence, while also calling on the US to intervene (Gemayel & Reagan 1983–1984). This viewpoint oversimplifies internal Lebanese conflicts, which were arguably a long-term consequence of the colonial rule of the country that led to the Maronite Christians holding more power than the Muslims and Druze—an issue that persisted even after the country gained independence (Traboulsi 2007). Moreover, it is hypocritical of Gemayel to blame outsiders for causing problems while simultaneously asking for outside help from the US. Not only was the role of the West over-inflated in Lebanon, but this directly exacerbated tensions following the emergence of Hezbollah.

Despite Western hegemony being a root cause of many of the issues in Lebanon in the 1980s, it was seemingly also the sole proposed solution. This is despite the fact that a lack of impartiality in regional conflicts and high-profile in Lebanon made the US an easy target for violence (Central Intelligence Agency 1983). Reagan complained in a letter to the leaders of countries that were involved in establishing the MNF in Lebanon that too many people misunderstood and did not appreciate the role of the Western forces (Mitterand & Reagan 1984). Who exactly Reagan was referring to is unclear, but there are two possible interpretations of this. The first is that he was referring in general to the Western public, or, more specifically, the citizens of the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Italy. In this case, Reagan lamenting that their military actions were misunderstood by the general public means that he (and possibly the other leaders) did not do an adequate job of explaining what exactly their intentions were in Lebanon. In Reagan's case, this was relatively true. When speaking to the public, he was vague about the role of the MNF other than claiming that it was there to bring peace. Polls conducted during Reagan's presidency demonstrated that Americans were very divided in whether or not they agreed with military involvement in Lebanon, and the opinion that the US should withdraw forces swayed both ways numerous times throughout the years (Gilboa 1990). These were generally not in response to any specific event, so it seems that a lack of adequate information led the American public to have mixed, though usually more negative, feelings towards military presence in Lebanon. On the other hand, another interpretation of Reagan's statement could be that Middle Eastern state actors may be the ones misunderstanding the role of the MNF. Given that Reagan often communicated indirectly with the heads of state and made little attempt to understand their side of the conflict, this would not be surprising either.

#### *Implications of the Differences in the Communications*

The tonal differences in the messages that Reagan sent to the various heads of state is also worth noting. Reagan was much less formal with the French and British leaders, likely due to their countries having close relations in recent history. Reagan would also speak positively about both US-France relations and US-UK relations in interviews and press conferences (White House 1986a; Reagan 1987c). With President Mitterrand and Prime Minister Thatcher, the correspondences were typically addressed to and signed off with the first names of the leaders, demonstrating a rapport between the Western heads of state. The correspondences between

Reagan and Mitterrand were far less frequent and slightly more formal than those between Reagan and Thatcher likely due to their vastly different political ideologies. Mitterrand represented the socialist party and had, early in his term, invited the Communist party to participate in mainstream politics (Muratore 2022). Reagan was a staunchly anti-communist conservative whose politics aligned much more with those of Thatcher. The correspondences with the Western leaders, however, differed considerably from those between President Reagan and the Middle Eastern leaders.

Reagan's communications with the two Maronite Christian Lebanese presidents demonstrated an almost stoic attitude from the American president. He frequently mentioned in the correspondences that the US would do everything that they could to aid the Lebanese government in achieving sovereignty, and in the face of violence Reagan would reiterate that he would not back down from his goals. The messages from the Lebanese presidents also tended to involve them pleading with Reagan to preserve their country. Reagan and Gemayel would also correspond frequently in 1983 because of the fallout of the Israeli invasion of the year prior. Reagan would continue to push the need for cooperation in brokering peace between Lebanon and Israel. With the Israeli prime ministers, Reagan would consistently reaffirm that the goal of the US is to ensure the security of Israel, again, taking on a particularly protective role. This is especially clear in Reagan's September 1984 message to Prime Minister Peres, in which he states that good US-Israeli relations are a fundamental element of American foreign policy (Peres & Reagan 1984). Arguably, Reagan's letters to the Israeli prime ministers seemed somewhat less condescending in tone than those sent to the Lebanese presidents, arguably because Israel was more established as a strong political and military force in the region. All of these correspondences, however, differ significantly to how Reagan and President Assad addressed each other.

Assad was a clear example of a leader in the Middle East that the Reagan administration used as a scapegoat for many of the issues of the region. Where the communications with the Lebanese presidents and Israeli prime ministers were infrequent, formal, but still amicable, the way that Reagan corresponded with President Assad was often full of disdain. Reagan even, on one noted occasion, had to significantly alter a letter that was to be sent to the Syrian president because the original text was so blunt and impolite that it risked seriously offending Assad unless

changed (Paganelli 1982). Reagan would also often speak poorly of Assad and the Syrian government in messages to the other heads of state. One notable example was Reagan's message to the French, British, and Italian leaders regarding the MNF in Lebanon, which referred to Syria as a Soviet proxy that stands in the way of peace in the Middle East (Mitterrand & Reagan 1984). Another instance of this came in a 1984 letter that Reagan sent to Prime Minister Thatcher, in which he expressed his "deep distrust of the Syrians" (Reagan & Thatcher 1982–1984). In addition, Reagan's administration also clearly held some animosity towards the Syrian government. In a 1981 memorandum, Assad was referred to as an adversary of the United States (Department of State 1981). Of note as well is the lack of care initially placed onto elements such as the spelling of Assad's first name. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there was some discrepancy between how two departments, the NSC and the CIA, spelled Hafez, with the CIA spelling it 'Hafiz' (National Security Council 1983). While Arabic to English transliterations are, as stated, not always perfect, something as important as the first name of a world leader should hold significance. It is evident that Reagan and his administration disliked and did not trust the Syrian government, which exacerbated existing tensions between the countries.

It was likely not important to the Reagan administration how Assad came to power. Like Lebanon, Syria had been under French colonial rule, and was essentially left to fend for itself when the French retreated from the country (Sluglett 2014). Much of the Middle East, including Lebanon and Syria, had to deal with newfound independence within the fallout of European colonialism, which included violent conflicts with the Israeli state that was established by the Europeans on Palestinian land. Syria and Lebanon in particular were two countries with a shared history, torn apart by the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire after World War I (Anderson 1987). Some nationalist movements within Lebanon favored a pan-Arab approach and even advocated for the country to reunite with Syria (Jabbra & Jabbra 1983). Syria was heavily involved in Lebanese politics and conflicts, which clearly bothered Reagan, especially considering Hezbollah emerged in the part of Lebanon controlled by Syria. From a Western perspective, Syrian foreign intervention was depicted as harmful, while American intervention was seen as beneficial for Lebanon. Both, however, were acting in accordance with their national interests. Are the motives of one of these countries truly more justifiable than the other? Is it a matter of perspective? These hypothetical questions are not intended as a defense of Assad, nor



his politics. Rather, they seek to challenge the Western notion that the US intervened in Lebanon for purely moral and humanitarian reasons.

Reagan clearly treated the heads of state very differently from each other based on how much he was allied with their country and whether or not he agreed with their politics. He was able to relate to the Lebanese presidents on a religious basis—keeping Christians in power was a significant part of where their interests overlapped. At the same time, Reagan clearly looked down upon the Lebanese leadership for multiple reasons. The first reason is that he viewed the government as weak. This was the case, but it seemed as though the US government did not consider entirely why this was and instead blamed the Palestinians and the Syrian government for creating sectarianism and condemned Syria and Iran for sponsoring Islamic terrorism. This was done instead of factoring in the history of Lebanon and the long-term impacts of colonialism. This was similar to how Reagan approached discussions with President Assad of Syria, except here Reagan was colder in his correspondences and was willing to outright mention that the two leaders did not get along. Reagan's interpretation of the actors in Lebanon and Syria was based on his Orientalist point of view that the Middle East was a backwards and barbaric region that would only benefit from American intervention.

In speaking to the Israeli prime ministers, Reagan took a softer approach because of the strong relationship between the US and Israel. There were elements of condescension in how Reagan viewed the Israeli leadership, again due to the overinflated sense of importance of the role of the US in establishing Arab-Israeli peace. This was less the case with the Israeli leadership than the Syrian and Lebanese leadership likely because Israel had made their military power very clear by the time Reagan was in office. As previously discussed, Reagan viewed the other Western leaders as equals to himself, especially Prime Minister Thatcher. The United States, France, and the United Kingdom were all willing and able to assert military dominance in Lebanon. These Western countries had a kind of savior complex that, again, was rooted deeply in Orientalism. The counterterrorism strategy and foreign policy of the United States in Lebanon that emerged was built on the idea that the US had a crucial role to play in the Middle East, and yet American presence ultimately caused issues where it tried to solve them.

### **Lessons Learned from Dishonesty?**

### *Intention Versus Impact*

The Iran-Contra scandal dealt a devastating blow to the reputation of Reagan and the global credibility of the United States, yet it has been so quickly forgotten. Depending on who is asked, the legacy of Ronald Reagan's presidency usually garners discussion about his economic policies or draws criticism of his mishandling of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. While this scandal may not shock the American public of today that has widely become desensitized to government misconduct and deceit, the immediate reaction of many Americans in 1986 was one of shock and disappointment. Reagan experienced the single largest one-month drop in the presidential approval rating in the history of the poll and, in the year following the reveal of the arms-for-hostages deal, half of all surveyed Americans believed that the president was lying about his lack of knowledge regarding the deal (Hemmer 1999; Shank 1987). Additionally, despite Reagan's obsession with not repeating the mistakes that Carter made during the Iranian hostage crisis, a December 1986 poll showed that Americans believed that Carter handled Iranian relations considerably better than Reagan did (Oakley 1986). Reagan's speeches and press conferences likely did not help his case either. He went from insisting that his administration did not trade arms for hostages to reluctantly admitting that such a deal is exactly what took place. While his credibility was undermined, the very fact that his vice president was elected president two years later demonstrates that the outrage with the Reagan administration, though intense, was short-lived.

The administration essentially investigated itself in the aftermath and found that there was no misconduct on the part of the president. Only a small handful of staff were charged for wrongdoing, though most of them were later pardoned by the subsequent president, George H. W. Bush, who had been Reagan's vice president for both of his terms. Bush remained an optimist about American foreign policy in the Middle East, even following the outing of the arms-for-hostages deal, praising US counterterrorism strategy as effective overall (Office of the Vice President 1987). The transition of power from Reagan to Bush doomed any chance of the US government learning from its mistakes. Considering Bush's proposal for increased policing of terrorism prior to him taking office, it is clear that no lessons were learned by the US government in handling conflict and violence in the Middle East—besides perhaps to be more careful when conducting covert operations. Given that Bush's son would later become president

and would have to contend with the September 11th attacks and their fallout, it is unsurprising that anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment was allowed to run rampant. Had the attacks happened during the presidencies of Reagan or George H. W. Bush, it is likely that there would have been a US response similar to what actually happened. This assumption is made considering Reagan's willingness to use military violence in Libya as foreign policy strategy in the wake of a smaller scale, though still devastating, attack.

Another important area, besides the arms-for-hostages deal, that demonstrates Reagan's dishonesty, was surrounding his intentions in Lebanon. In Reagan's discussion of the American presence in Lebanon that followed the MNF bombings, he claimed that America did not wish to dominate any territories in the Middle East and that the US was solely there as a peacekeeping force (Reagan 1983a). Perhaps he believed in his words when he spoke to them, but that does not make them true. Ultimately, the US government and other Western states had a presence in the Middle East because they believed that peace could not be achieved without them. The United States sought dominance in the Middle East for numerous reasons. These included the prevention of expanding Soviet influence, dependence on oil found in the region, providing security for Israel, and a lack of faith that the countries could solve any issues on their own. The Orientalist perception that the US held remained even after Reagan's second term as president ended, which is an issue that will be further discussed in the following section.

### *The Influences on Decision-Making and Their Aftermath*

A significant element at play that influenced Reagan's decision making was the Cold War and the fear of Soviet influence in the Middle East. The Reagan administration took a staunch anti-Communist stance, and much of the "pro-Arab" foreign policy choices that the US promoted at the time were instead merely anti-Soviet. The US was worried that if they angered Arab regimes, the Soviet Union would be able to gain favor in the countries (Rubin 2002). Reagan explained in his 1983 broadcast following the MNF bombings that the Middle East is a critical region that can act as a barrier against the expansion of the Soviet Union (Reagan 1983b). Counterterrorism strategy at the time also had a goal of taking action against pro-Soviet regimes by supporting "moderates" that could replace them (National Security Council 1984a). This manifested as Reagan fighting Communism by backing the right-wing Nicaraguan Contras with money left over from arms sales to Iran. Essentially, state-backed violence was viewed as

acceptable if it was targeting Communism. If a group such as Hezbollah was targeting a government that shared values with the US, the Maronite Christian leadership of Lebanon, for example, then violence was problematic. Additionally, a large part of Reagan's animosity towards the Syrian government likely came from the fact that he viewed Syria as a proxy of the Soviet Union (Mitterrand & Reagan 1984). The Cold War and anti-Communist sentiment by the US played a surprisingly important role in how the US approached counterterrorism strategy in the Middle East. The Reagan administration was seemingly so preoccupied with preventing the spread of Soviet influence that they were willing to make highly questionable policy decisions, such as those that led to the Iran-Contra affair.

The groupthink of Reagan and his administration regarding the hostage crisis resulted, at least in part, from not taking lessons from the mistakes that the Carter administration made during the Iranian hostage crisis. Carter and his administration took many approaches to freeing the hostages. These included consulting Muslim scholars, attempting to appeal to Ayatollah Khomeini on religious grounds, and contacting Shia clergy in the Middle East to find a solution (Jones 2015). Although these efforts were unsuccessful, they should have still been able to serve as learning experiences for President Reagan during the Lebanese hostage crisis. It seems as though Reagan and his administration did not make a concerted effort to understand the perspectives of those with differing viewpoints. This is something that Assad actually brought up in a 1982 letter to Reagan, when he said that he hoped that the US president's meeting with representatives of the Arab League would lead to Reagan and his administration gathering a better understanding of the "Arab viewpoint" about what was happening in Lebanon and the Middle East in general (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988). Six years later, Reagan would write to Assad that the US government clearly understands the relationships and dynamics of the conflict in Lebanon (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988). This is doubtful; Reagan maintained a very consistent perception of Lebanon and the Middle East throughout both of his terms as president. He also took a very biased stance towards the Syrian government in particular, which, as mentioned, played a crucial role in freeing hostages. Reagan would switch between sharp criticism of Syrian leadership to repeatedly asking Assad for his help because of his "special role to play in Lebanon" (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988). The US wanted to have it both ways with Syria—to condemn the government while asking it for help—but this was not possible and only served to

increase tensions between the two countries. Repeatedly calling out a state for sponsoring terrorism is not an effective way to garner good will or favors.

Following Reagan's departure from the presidency, and in the many years since, Hezbollah has gained significant legitimacy in Lebanon. In some small way, this can be credited to Reagan's ineffective counterterrorism strategy. Had the Reagan administration made stronger attempts to reach Hezbollah directly and properly use intelligence channels to fully understand the demands of the organization, perhaps something akin to a compromise could have been reached. Surely, that is wishful thinking, but the possibilities are unknown because the Reagan administration did not adequately understand the dynamics between Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran, and was biased against attempting to form working relationships with them in any capacity. Additionally, this hypothetical goes against Reagan's frequent insistence in speeches and press conferences that the US does not negotiate with terrorists. That being said, the US negotiated with Iranians and Syrians, both of whom Reagan accused of sponsoring terrorism; the hypocrisy was present regardless. Even the American public was generally in favor of the US negotiating with Hezbollah at the height of the hostage crisis and during the TWA 847 hijacking (Rubin 1985). The combination of public support for yielding to terrorist demands and the very fact that the Reagan administration negotiated with the state-sponsor of Hezbollah to release the hostages demonstrates that there was space for discussion with Hezbollah. It likely would have also been more effective to try that in some capacity rather than sending a large capacity of HAWK and TOW missiles to Iran via Israel with the hope that a few Iranians would pressure Hezbollah to release American hostages, ultimately betraying the trust of the American public.

## **Defining Terrorism**

### *Who Defines Terrorism?*

Throughout his time as president, Reagan was very vocal about his staunch opposition to terrorism. He and his cabinet were arguably quite hypocritical in the repeated insistence of opposition to state sponsored terrorism, though, considering the financial and military support given to the contras in Nicaragua by the United States with the aim of overthrowing the Communist government (Douville 2012). In a 1986 press conference, Reagan voiced his support for freedom fighters and resistance movements in countries such as Nicaragua and Afghanistan

specifically because they were fighting back against Communist rule (White House 1986a). The following year, he would defend the contras yet again, arguing that they were fighting for freedom in their country. According to the US government, violent insurgency is only terrorism if the values of the insurgents oppose the values of the US. Hezbollah chose violence because they felt as if they had no other way to exorcize the “colonialists and the invaders” (Alagha 2011). Were they not also fighting for freedom? The contras also used violence to achieve their goals—what makes them more righteous than Hezbollah? This dissertation does not seek to justify the violence committed by any of these groups, nor necessarily condemn it. What constitutes a freedom fighter versus a terrorist is clearly subjective, but when one side holds a dominant position over the other, their perspective is given more credibility, for better or for worse.

Because the United States holds significant political and military power globally, the values it holds are assumed to be “correct.” Little credence is given to the perspectives of groups such as Hezbollah in the West because not enough meaningful attempts have been made to understand their position. Assuming them to be irrational or illegitimate actors, or simply writing them off as fanatics, was not and is not beneficial to ending their violence or countering their extremist beliefs. The reasons that Hezbollah formed to begin with are clear and have been laid out repeatedly in this research. The Shia community in Lebanon had long been oppressed and subjected to colonialism and violence by outside forces, so some members of this community responded violently. While the kidnappings and murders of innocent civilians by Hezbollah is indefensible, this dissertation hesitates in referring to the organization as a “terrorist” one, primarily because the way that the US historically and presently defines terrorism is based on upholding their values and actions, not necessarily on what is morally right.

The definition of terrorism by the US government during the Reagan administration was very clearly altered to best serve its interests. When publicly questioned about the difference between US support for Nicaragua and state-sponsored terrorism in 1984, the administration explained that by supporting the contras, they were aiding an “organized armed opposition” to tyranny (White House 1984). The issue with this, however, is that the previous year, the US government had defined state-sponsored terrorism as “the threat or use of violence for political purposes by...groups, whether acting for, or in opposition to, established government authority,

when such actions are intended to influence a target group wider than the immediate victim...conducted with the support of a foreign government..." and "has involved groups seeking to overthrow specific regimes, to rectify national or group grievances, or to undermine international order as an end in itself" (Department of State 1983). Realizing that this is exactly what they were doing in Nicaragua, the administration updated the definition of terrorism and made a point to distinguish it from insurgency, which referred to a well-organized revolt by a group seeking a basis of popular support against a government, with a goal of assuming political and economic power and a basis of popular support (White House Situation Room 1984). While Reagan was referring to Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, they seemed to better fit the definition of an insurgent group—they offered systemic and financial support to the Lebanese Shia community and were fighting back against what they saw as unjust rule of their country. To that end, they were successful as well, becoming a legitimate political party that continues to hold power to this day.

The following year, the Reagan administration would once again redefine terrorism to suit their needs. This time, it referred to the use of violence against individuals or property to intimidate the government or society as a whole and achieve political, religious, or ideological goals—the State Department explicitly protested this because a universal definition of terrorism could lead to the US being accused of conducting terrorism (Office of the Vice President 1985). This is a blatant admission by the federal government that the definition of terrorism is arbitrary. In addition to this, there was a concerning, incessant view held by the Reagan administration and the other Western heads of state that the violence perpetrated by Hezbollah and other "disagreeable" organizations was a significant threat to the "civilized" West. Even President Gemayel lambasted Hezbollah's actions and framed them as being against civilized people, peace, and security in a 1983 letter to Reagan (Gemayel & Reagan 1983–1984). Reagan, in a 1985 live broadcast, mentions three times in one statement that "civilized" nations must push back against Hezbollah's violence, as it threatens "standards of decency" (Reagan 1985). This is evidence of the notion discussed in Said's (1978; 1997) works, in which he explains that Western politicians and academics frame Islam and Muslims as uncivilized and backwards to justify condescension at best and harmful, violent policies against Arab and Muslim-majority countries at worst.

## *Double Standards*

Reagan often used the idea of opposition to terrorism as a means to connect with other heads of state. Surprisingly, this somewhat included president Assad. Reagan used Assad's public stance against international terrorism to coerce the Syrian president into further assisting with the release of American hostages being held by Lebanon (Assad & Reagan 1982–1988). Despite this, Reagan would communicate privately to President Mitterrand and Prime Minister Thatcher that Syria is allied with state sponsors of terrorism, referring to Iran and Libya (Mitterrand & Reagan 1984). In addition, a 1983 CIA report would outline Syria as a state that is willing to support Shia terrorism in Lebanon, and a further report in 1984 would reaffirm this (Central Intelligence Agency 1983; Central Intelligence Agency 1984). It appears that Reagan's words to Assad were entirely self-serving. When the Syrian government was successful in freeing any hostages, Reagan and his administration would, amongst themselves, accuse Assad of being disingenuous and aiding the US to further his own interests, leading them to seemingly abandon their prior concern with possibly offending Assad in correspondences sent by Reagan (National Security Council 1985). The accusation from the US government that Assad was acting according to his own interests may be true, but is a ridiculous notion to take issue with, considering the US frequently intervened in the Middle East to promote American hegemony by protecting interests (particularly natural resources) and pushing back against possible Soviet and, in general, Communist influence. This was typically done in the name of anti-terrorism.

Reagan and his administration would give Iran similar treatment to Syria, in that Reagan would publicly condemn Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism while simultaneously selling them weapons and relying on Iranian contacts to pressure Hezbollah into releasing hostages. On at least three occasions, Reagan mentioned that Hezbollah and Iran had a sort of "philosophical relationship" which led the US to work with Iranian actors to carry out the arms-for-hostages deal (Reagan 1987c; Reagan 1988a; Reagan 1988b). If Reagan was as vehemently opposed to terrorism as he continuously claimed he was, these deals would not have taken place. Taking such a publicly and vocally firm stance against terrorism throughout his administration was a mistake made to not look "soft" on crime in any sense, especially following the criticism that the previous administration had received. This is likely part of the reason why Reagan refused to even attempt to directly contact Hezbollah, even through intermediaries. The other reason being



that Reagan did not at any point recognize the legitimacy of Hezbollah as an actor and looked down on the political elements of Islam. The counterterrorism strategy for freeing the hostages was essentially to talk to a few Iranians and hope that they would do their job and pressure Hezbollah to release the hostages. It was indirect, carried out poorly with deceit on all sides, and considerably less successful than it was meant to be. Reagan clearly did not oppose terrorism as much as he claimed to considering that he was still willing to sell weapons to and collaborate with Iranian actors.

Opposing terrorism—a word that’s meaning apparently changes at the whim of the US government—was also a value that brought together the US and Israel. Reagan would write to Prime Minister Shamir in 1983 that the relationship between the two countries was brought closer and strengthened by their mutual firm opposition to terrorism (Reagan & Shamir 1983—1984). This is rather ironic, given the violence that both nations would participate in and support. In 1982, Israel would oversee the massacre of Lebanese Shiites and Palestinian refugees, and beginning that same year Israel would detain, hold hostage, and torture a significant portion of the South Lebanese population in prisons such as the Ansar camp (Saad-Ghorayeb 2003). In 1983, the US would define terrorism as “violence for political purposes” that may be in accordance with or in opposition to a government which is “intended to influence a target group wider than the immediate victim or victims” (Department of State 1983). To be clear, Israel targeted Lebanese Shia and Palestinians to *serve their political interests*, in accordance with a Lebanese Maronite Christian group, the demographic that *held the most political power in Lebanon* (who were avenging the murder of President-elect Bashir Gemayel), and the intent was to assert dominance over Palestinians and Lebanese Shia *as a whole*. By the contemporaneous US definition of terrorism, Israel was both sponsoring and participating in terrorism, yet the Reagan administration continued to support and advocate for Israeli security and power. The US was clearly selective in its outrage against terrorism. When its ally, Israel, perpetrates violence, it is done in the name of safety and peace. When Hezbollah, a group that opposes the US, commits violence in the name of self-defense, it is considered terrorism. There is a double standard that is critical to acknowledge. The American definitions of terrorism were rendered meaningless as soon as the US overlooked Israeli and Lebanese Maronite Christian violence.

*The Consequences of Hypocrisy*

The definitions of terrorism used by the US government essentially equated to any political violence that the US does not agree with, and this is arguably still the case. Gary Sick (1987), a former member of the NSC, argues that perhaps a proper definition of terrorism should avoid value judgments and fixations on political affiliations and identity politics, and it should instead focus on objectives and methodology. To the credit of the Reagan administration, their 1984 definition of terrorism did outline methodology, but the only reason for doing so was to distinguish terrorism from insurgency specifically to justify their sponsorship of the Contras (White House Situation Room 1984). By the logic of the Reagan administration, terrorism cannot be perpetrated by the West unless violence is carried out in the name of Communism or some other disagreeable ideology. It seems to be largely implied that the general consensus was that terrorism had evolved into Islamic zealots blowing themselves up to please their God and oppose the West, which is a gross and ignorant misunderstanding. The lack of care placed into truly understanding why Hezbollah was using violence as a communication strategy meant that no attempt at policy or counterterrorism could be truly effective.

Another area in which the US government demonstrated considerable hypocrisy was in discussing the role of religion in both terrorism and politics. Knowingly or unknowingly using an Orientalist structure, the Reagan administration—and the Carter administration before them—took a condescending approach to “understanding” the role of Islam in Middle Eastern politics and societies. In dealing with the Iranian hostage crisis, Carter and his administration let biases cloud their judgment—the idea that Islamic leadership of a country could be successful in any capacity was incomprehensible to many American officials (Jones 2015). Reagan and his administration seemingly did not learn from this. Hezbollah was written off as a group of fanatics trying to install an “Iran-style Islamic republic” in Lebanon to replace the Christian government (Central Intelligence Agency 1984). While Hezbollah would ultimately gain political and military legitimacy in Lebanon, they seem to have somewhat moved away from their religious roots, and the Lebanon of today is not comparable to Iran under Khomeini (Azzam 2015). Fear mongering about Islamic leadership by Reagan was rather unreasonable, considering Reagan’s own religion shaped his politics. In 1984, Reagan claimed that politics and religion were inseparable, and that religion plays ““a critical role in the political life”” of the US (Gailey 1984). The Reagan era is when Evangelical Christianity began to take hold of the Republican Party and its voting base (Jacobs 2011). Today, this has progressed into Christian values being intertwined with policy

decisions, despite the fact that Church and State are meant to be separate in the US. The implication here is that it is okay for Christianity to have a place in government and politics, but when Islam does, it is viewed as a threat to peace and freedom.

Today, there exists no universal definition of terrorism in the US. This is especially concerning in a post-9/11 world in which the US launched a war on terrorism that directly led to nearly one million deaths, over one third of which were civilians, and indirectly led to up to 3.7 million deaths (Brown University, 2023). In addition, the US government opened and continues to operate Guantanamo Bay, a military prison that has overseen the torture of suspected terrorists, who have, in many cases, knowingly been innocent (Shamsi 2022). The United States has waged war, tortured, and killed so many in the name of something which is not clearly defined. In the years following the Reagan administration and the events of 9/11, Orientalist thought and practices among the US government have been distorted and reshaped into what is now known as Islamophobia. The belief so widely held by Reagan and other US presidents that the West is civilized and violence originating from the non-West is caused by “backwards” and “irrational” Islamic culture and society has had long-term consequences. Stereotyping, disinformation, and prejudice about Islam and Muslims grew in post-9/11 America, and this culminated in Donald Trump winning the 2016 presidential election on a blatantly Islamophobic campaign, which allowed his rhetoric to morph into policy (Sunar 2017). Islamophobia did not suddenly go away after Trump left office. The US continues to uplift the role of Israel in the Middle East and enforce sanctions on Iran under the Biden administration. Preaching tolerance means little if policy does not reflect it.

## **Conclusion**

What exactly constitutes an act of terror is subjective, and yet it is a concept that holds so much weight. Thousands have died over the years from terrorism and millions more have been killed in the name of fighting it. The Reagan administration made many missteps in attempting to combat a concept that they could not even cohesively define. The very fact that there is still no global nor even American consensus on what constitutes terrorism demonstrates the arbitrary nature of the word. The failures of Reagan’s strategies and policies in Lebanon stems from the fight for Western hegemony in the Middle East, despite that being the root cause of so much of the region’s ongoing conflicts. Reagan and his administration also held strong biases against

political Islam and the ability of the region to function on its own, which informed communications with the heads of state of Lebanon, Syria, and Israel. The US government viewed the issues plaguing Lebanon through an Orientalist lens that made intervention the only viable solution. They were willing to deceive the American public and the rest of the world in order to achieve their goals, and it seems that no lessons were learned from their mistakes and the legacy of Reagan's counterterrorism strategy failures is slowly being forgotten by the American public consciousness.

## CONCLUSION

Ronald Reagan left a complicated legacy following his two terms as president. Time allows for the benefit of hindsight when scrutinizing the policy choices of past presidents. As more time passes, new popular ideologies and attitudes develop and influence how historical figures are viewed. There is considerable literature in existence about Reagan's policies and strategies for Lebanon that were written during and in the years immediately following his presidency that reflect the sentiments of the time. There is less that has been written in recent years discussing such issues as the Iran-Contra scandal. As has been mentioned earlier in this work, it is not necessarily fair to critique past political decisions by the standards of today, but that is not the purpose here. There is so much to be learned from the past, and Reagan's words and actions in this case deserve scrutiny in order to provide an understanding of what went wrong, why it went wrong, and how the US government can avoid making such mistakes again.

While Orientalism was a common framework used by the US government for approaching issues in the Middle East at the time of Reagan's presidency, it was also a school of thought that had been receiving public and widespread reevaluation and disapproval for several years before he took office. Reagan was a man who was very firm and unwavering in his beliefs, even in the face of criticism. It is unsurprising that he would not alter his stance on how to approach peace in the Middle East. Members of his administration echoed Reagan's sentiments, several of whom would hold higher governmental positions in later years and would have considerable influence over military action in the Middle East. This is a consequence of years of unchallenged solutions for how to handle issues in that region of the world.

The substantial use of primary sources in this research was deliberate. Any researcher can give their opinion on the intentions or actions of a president and their administration, but letting the actual words of these subjects speak for themselves allows for a fuller understanding and more thorough explanation of the thought process. Displaying and scrutinizing the primary sources directly has the benefit of eliminating the biases and interpretations made by others. Providing the evidence separately from the analysis, as was done in this dissertation, allows any reader to first form their own opinions on the firsthand account before relying on the researcher to synthesize the materials. This can also aid in facilitating discussion and the fostering of potential dissenting or concordant opinions with the original material being more readily

available to use as evidence. Too often, discussions about political matters rest on second or third hand information and data, which has the potential to transform into misinformation. Analyzing primary sources are the key to preventing this, especially when discussing such controversial issues as terrorism or Israeli statehood.

There are lessons to be learned from both the successes and the mistakes of every presidency. These lessons can serve many functions for various audiences, from simply educating a curious student to even guiding future political decision making. The goals of evaluating case studies, such as what this research has done, should aim to go beyond just providing an understanding of what went right or wrong by explaining why the choices were made and what to do with this information. This research does not claim to be more than what it is, rather, the findings are meant to serve as a starting point for a revival of the discussion of the legacy of President Reagan's policies in the Middle East. In addition, it provides an updated take on how the attitudes and actions of the Reagan administration had effects on US policy in the Middle East that are still felt today. The remnants of the Orientalist sentiments and policy choices of the mid-20th Century have become further powerful when entangled with post-9/11 Islamophobia. This is not criticism for the sake of criticism. If the consequences of this divisive mindset are not understood and fought against, they will be allowed to grow and spread to future generations.

Often, when Westerners have written about Islam and the Middle East, they do so from a heavily biased and generally Orientalist perspective, which continues to depict Muslims and Islam as the "other," which alienates these groups of people and their beliefs. This rhetoric allows for polarization, prejudice, and condescension, which can and has contributed to hatred and violence. The September 11th attacks on the United States fed into this sentiment and triggered reactionary violent conflicts. This is not to say that the Reagan administration's actions in Lebanon directly contributed to the wars waged by the US government following 9/11, but it did provide a basis for interventionism in the Middle East. As soon as the Iran-Contra investigations concluded that Reagan did not commit any crimes during the arms-for-hostages deal, it set a precedent that a US president could get away with deceitful foreign policy and counterterrorism strategy in the name of promoting peace. The Global War on Terror that began during the presidency of George W. Bush, the Obama administration's hundreds of drone strikes,

and the Muslim bans under Trump demonstrated a willingness to wield power over the Middle East by any means necessary.

As mentioned, several of the politicians who were around during the Reagan administration would go on to serve in the federal government, some of whom would be known for their role in starting and promoting the Global War on Terror during the Bush administration. Two notable figures whose names came up in the primary sources utilized for this research were the future Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Colin Powell. These men, who were part of the US government during the Reagan administration, would go on to make decisions that would lead to the deaths of millions in the subsequent twenty years following the beginning of the Global War on Terror. This, if anything, is a clear demonstration that what was learned from their time under Reagan was that unilateral military action in the Middle East was a legitimate and fair policy strategy. Another of the names found within the primary sources was Joe Biden, who was a senator during the Reagan administration. Obviously, political careers in the US have the potential to be lengthy, but it draws some concern when politicians who come from a time when overt Orientalism was the dominant force behind foreign policy are still in positions of power forty years later.

There are two main recommendations to be made based on the findings of this research. First, the US federal government agencies that deal with security and counterterrorism should employ more people who come from the national and cultural backgrounds of the regions of concern/interest. In addition to this, the US needs to make a more concerted effort to establish connections and build trust with both state and non-state actors in the Middle East. To best deal with threats from countries with heavy Islamic influence, for example, it is important to have a baseline understanding of why extremist groups do what they do instead of dismissing them as irrational or fanatical actors. This is also something that needs to be better communicated to the American public. There is still a considerable divide between “the West” and “the Islamic/Arab world” in the collective consciousness of the American people, especially in a post-9/11 society. Better education from those with an intimate knowledge and understanding of the overlap of religion and politics is an important first step.

Intercultural communication goes both ways, and it is the responsibility of both the members of the West and the members of the non-West to make better efforts to understand each

other. That being said, the West—and especially the United States—holds more global power. The West bears much of the responsibility for finding ways to combat the consequences of its colonialism and imperialism, especially in the Middle East, and this can be done by putting more care into understanding *why* people hold certain feelings or act in certain ways. Because the United States holds such a dominant position globally, countries around the world have more exposure to American culture than the average American does to, for example, Lebanese culture. It is on those living in the US, then, to learn more about cultures that they have less exposure to but may still hold prejudices against. This includes more than just regular citizens. Members of the US government are clearly not immune to bias and ignorance either, and that must be addressed to begin any proper diplomatic reconciliation processes in the Middle East.

The second recommendation to be made is that, in addition to promoting better intercultural communication and understanding within the US government, there should also be a focus on spreading these values throughout America, especially within the education system. The United States is a diverse country, which is one of its greatest strengths. It is so critical, then, for the many perspectives of its inhabitants to be voiced and heard, as well as those from around the world. With the effects of globalization being increasingly prevalent and the world being brought closer together by media and available technology, there is becoming less and less of an excuse for ignorance and bigotry. Education on cultures other than one's own is a fundamental part of tolerance. Islamophobia in the United States is both an interpersonal and systemic issue that cannot be solved in a short period of time, but sharing cultures among the younger generations primes them to be more considerate and tolerant for when they finally hold political power.

To find faults in one's own government and seek solutions or ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated is a healthy form of patriotism. To blindly accept history and leave questionable political choices unchallenged while praising the values of one's country is unhealthy nationalism. No president, no politician, and no person is perfect. Even the leaders of countries who are popular and widely admired make poor and harmful choices. Reagan was not the only president to let his beliefs and biases cloud his judgment when creating and implementing policies. This is just one example, a case study, of how a set of people in power used their political dominance over others in a way that backfired. The damage of the past has been done. It cannot be undone, but there is room to slowly rectify it. With regards to this case,



the US government can start by engaging in meaningful discussions with those who it may disagree with to fix the relations with state actors and communities throughout the Middle East. This is a big step, but it can be undertaken in increments. The key takeaway that must be utilized on all levels is that communication and education are the best first steps to healing the deep divide between the countries and peoples of the West and the non-West.

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