

MARINE BARRACKS BOMBING

Situation: A large concentration of American troops was a lucrative target for terrorists in Beirut.

On 23 October 1983, a large truck crashed the barricade of the US Marine compound at the Beirut International Airport and penetrated the entrance to the Marine Battalion Landing Team Headquarters (HQBLT) building. It exploded with the force of 12,000 pounds of TNT and destroyed the building, killing 244.



US forces were welcomed into Lebanon in September 1982 in a multinational force to establish conditions for withdrawal of foreign military forces and to assist the Lebanese government gain control of Beirut. As fighting among Lebanese factions intensified, US forces provided support to the Lebanese Armed Forces. The Islamic Jihad Organization made the attack with Iranian and Syrian sponsorship.

Iran, Syria, and Lebanese dissident factions wanted to force the US Marines from Lebanon and this concentration of troops was a lucrative target. Although the security environment was permissive at the outset, it deteriorated over time.

The Long Commission concluded the US chain of command did not adequately adapt to new threats and provided confusing guidance on rules of engagement for use of deadly force.

Extended deployments require a sustained and adaptable defense posture. Individual service members can play a key role by staying personally alert and bringing security concerns to their chain of command.

Following this attack, DoD placed greater emphasis on the use of vehicle barriers and reexamined the rules of engagement for use of deadly force.



Initially the local populace welcomed US Marines and the environment remained benign into early 1983. The operation was expected to be short and the Marines set up headquarters at the Beirut International Airport.

The situation worsened, and in April terrorists bombed the US Embassy. By August US forces were receiving hostile fire and car bomb and sniper attacks were increasing. As the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) fought

to control the highlands near the airport, the National Security Council decided control of the highlands was essential for security of US forces, and in September US Naval guns fired in support of the LAF against dissident militias. US forces received over 100 intelligence warnings of terrorist car bomb attacks, however, the reports were not specific.

[A changing threat situation requires units and individuals to continually question their assumptions. This is a responsibility of the chain of command, but you can help by being a good team player.](#)

[Do you fully understand your role in your unit security plan?](#)

[Are your instructions clear or do you need to ask for further explanation?](#)

[Have you observed suspicious activities you can report to your chain of command?](#)

On 23 October, a large yellow Mercedes Benz truck penetrated the perimeter barbed wire and concertina obstacle at 35 miles per hour. It passed two guard posts without being fired upon, then entered an open gate, circled past one sewer pipe obstacle and between two others, flattened the Sergeant-of-the-Guard booth, entered the building, and exploded.

A guard heard the truck as it ran over the wire and inserted a magazine into his M16, chambered a round, and took aim. He did not fire since it was by then in the building. The Sergeant of the Guard was alone at his post at the main building entrance when he heard an engine revving. He turned to see the truck and ran, repeatedly yelling to hit the deck. The truck ran over his post, stopped in the lobby, and detonated after a second or two.



It was the largest conventional blast ever seen by FBI explosives experts. Even if it had detonated on the roadway, some 330 feet away, it would have produced major damage to the headquarters and significant casualties.

You should question your assumptions about the type and size weapon a terrorist might use against you. Sufficient stand-off and tight vehicle access control measures are important.



The Islamic Jihad Organization acted under Iranian direction with Syrian support. Conspirators included a Lebanese financial emissary, the Iranian ambassador to Syria, a Syrian intelligence colonel, a former PLO security officer, members of the Syrian-controlled Sai-qua terrorist group, a relative of the Shiite Muslim leader in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon, and an Islamic clergyman.

Syria sought removal of the multinational force, especially the US element. Iran was motivated by French arms support to Iraq in its war with Iran. After the attack, the Islamic Jihad announced their aims and willingness to die for their goals. This catapulted the Islamic Jihad to world attention.

President Reagan expressed the sympathy and appreciation of the nation to wounded survivors of the Beirut bombing and the Grenada invasion. This tragic incident began an extended effort to enhance the defense capabilities of US forces against terrorist attack that continues this day.

Many of the factors in this incident were beyond the control of individual Marines at Beirut Airport. However, consider what could have been done differently. You can contribute to a better defensive posture for your organization by recognizing problems, raising questions, and being a strong team player.