

# PASTOR GENERAL'S REPORT



TO THE MINISTRY OF THE  
WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

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## FROM MINISTERIAL SERVICES

### Passover and Holy Day Supplies

Every year we receive requests for reimbursement of expenses for Passover supplies such as basins for footwashing, towel rental, etc. Because of a very limited budget, we will not be able to reimburse these expenses this year. With the increased number of members attending, we will be using all of our budget and then some just to cover the cost of the wine glass and bread trays that have been requested. Anything other than some minor expenses, such as wine and bread, that cannot be covered by your current expense allotment, will need to be paid for out of the local activity accounts.

In case there should be some misunderstanding, there has never been a policy decision that the Church should rent towels for the footwashing ceremony. In Pasadena we have everyone bring a towel from home for his or her own use.

With regard to holy day offering baskets, we do not have any in stock here that we can provide. The expense for additional baskets will also have to be covered locally. Hopefully this type of expense is infrequent enough to not be a burden to the local activity accounts.

If any of these expenditures does create a financial burden for your church(es), please contact Mr. Glenn Nice at Ministerial Services.

### International News

From Bonn, West Germany January was another month of KLAR & WAHR subscription list growth. A total of 32,363 new subscribers were added to receive various language editions of The PLAIN TRUTH, 25,950 of which were for the German magazine. The successful back-page ad which appeared at the end of December in the ADAC MOTORWELT magazine has so far brought in 39,254 responses. The KLAR & WAHR list now stands at 183,000.

Something else which kept us very busy here in the Bonn office this past month was the 73,139 KLAR & WAHR renewals which were sent out at the beginning of January. 36,000 renewals were sent to "primes" (readers who have renewed once before) and 37,000 to new subscribers who were scheduled to receive their first renewal notice. At the end of the month, 29,038 (or 39%) of the renewals were returned. Approximately 48% of the primes renewed and about 28% of the new subscribers renewed.

The high renewal rate seems to be the result of our new renewal method, which we began using in January. The prelabeled renewal card is placed on top of the KLAR & WAHR magazine and then both are plastic wrapped. (We had previously been placing the renewal card inside of the magazine.) Using our present method guarantees that each reader will immediately be aware of the renewal card before the plastic wrap is taken off. This is also a

breakthrough pricewise, since the renewals have now qualified for the less expensive internal mailing rates in Germany. Besides saving money, processing time is saved by having the subscriber's label glued onto the card.

The renewal card is also designed for ordering booklets. As a result of all the renewal responses, we sent out a record-breaking total of 41,000 booklets and Bible correspondence course lessons in January! Church members and office staff volunteered for two Sunday "work parties," which helped us keep up with the flood of requests.

Mail income for January was up 8.4% over January of last year.

Also this last month, preparations began for this year's Feast of Tabernacles in Bonndorf. Festival Coordinator for Bonndorf, Mr. Tom Lapacka (also pastor of the Zurich, Basel and Stuttgart Churches) met with the mayor of Bonndorf at the Lapacka home in Zurich to discuss the Bonndorf festival program. As with 1983, approval has been given for another concert by the Bodensee Symphony Orchestra, again featuring pianist Mrs. Ruth Walter of Big Sandy, Texas. Anyone interested in attending the Bonndorf Feast site may now write to the Bonn office (or to Mr. Rod Matthews at Ministerial Services) to request an application. Applications will be sent out shortly before this year's Spring festival season begins.

--Joe Tkach, Ministerial Services

#### AMBASSADOR COLLEGE UPDATE

(Pasadena Campus)

It is certainly both enjoyable and exciting to have a number of God's ministers and their wives back in Pasadena attending the first session of the third Ministerial Refreshing Program. All of the ones I have talked with are very happy to be at Headquarters once again for the program.

On Sunday evening, February 12th, the College held its annual Sophomore Ball and Speech Banquet at which we feature four top speakers from the men's and women's clubs. It was a very inspiring and enjoyable evening, and was attended by most of the members of the Council of Elders, faculty, students and a few of the Regional Directors who are attending the Ministerial Refreshing Program. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong, whom we were again privileged to have at the banquet, enjoyed the banquet and speeches very much. All of the visiting ministers and their wives were invited to the dance which followed the banquet.

But even more enjoyable and inspiring was the 50th Anniversary Celebration of God's Work held in the Ambassador Auditorium on the following Tuesday morning, February 14th. The celebration was, I think, the most inspiring assembly I have ever witnessed. This special 50th Anniversary Celebration assembly was attended by employees, students, faculty, and the ministers and wives in on the Ministerial Refreshing Program. A film chronicling the development of the Work was shown, narrated by Art Gilmore. Mr. Gilmore then made a personal appearance and spoke for a few minutes. To conclude this special meeting, Mr. Armstrong gave an inspiring personal account of events in his life which led up to his calling and the major developments in the history of the Philadelphia era of God's Church, from its beginning in Eugene to the present. He again stressed that it is God who has really done the great things accomplished by this Church. He finished by saying that the greatest accomplishments are yet ahead.

Following this inspiring assembly, those who attended in the Auditorium gathered outside on the mall under a warm, sunny sky and sat down at long lines of beautifully decorated tables to partake of a fine catered meal and fellowship together.

Mr. Rod Meredith recently returned from spending a profitable and inspiring week at our sister campus at Big Sandy--teaching classes, speaking at the Forum, and giving a couple of sermons. I know that the faculty, students and brethren there all enjoyed having Mr. Meredith with them once again.

We hope all of you are well and happy, and pray that God will inspire each and every one of you to serve Him to the very utmost of your ability.

--Raymond F. McNair, Deputy Chancellor

#### PUBLISHING SERVICES UPDATE

##### Sunday Supplement Ad Draws Large Response

Some time ago, Mr. Armstrong approved our running a small ad in PARADE and FAMILY WEEKLY supplements in over 34 million Sunday newspapers in the United States. Occasionally these supplements run a full page of free ads for various products and services. Other religious groups, including the Catholic church, regularly use this service. The current charge for the exposure is 50¢ per inquiry for FAMILY WEEKLY, and 40¢ for PARADE. The names and addresses of those who request a subscription are sent to us on computer-generated labels. This makes it very easy for us to add them to the files.

In 1981, we received 7,964 responses at 35¢ each for an ad run in the September 13 issue of PARADE. We ran the ad again the following year (1982) in FAMILY WEEKLY and received 3,500 responses. The renewal conversion rate for these responses is surprisingly high, considering the amount of information contained in the ad. It would appear that the people responding to the Sunday supplements form the same socioeconomic group that responds most to The PLAIN TRUTH. The total number of subscribers added for 1983 using Sunday supplement ads was over 38,000.

We recently ran the ad in the February 5 issue of PARADE. The response thus far has been overwhelmingly successful, even more so than in the past.

--Ray Wright, Publishing Services

#### UPDATE FROM MAIL PROCESSING

##### WATS Operators Kept Busy Between Phone Calls

On Sundays, when "The WORLD TOMORROW" telecast is airing, most of the calls to request literature come in the first few minutes after the 800 number is announced. This cycle repeats itself every half-hour throughout much of the day. As a result, many operators are free to perform other duties for up to forty minutes each hour.

This extra time is efficiently used by assigning work from other sections of Mail Processing to the available operators. The types of jobs done include:

- Sorting and bundling of mail returned from the post office with address corrections, so that it can be speedily processed.

- Compiling lists of cities and towns in various countries from detailed maps. This data is used by our International Mail Center to ensure correct address and postal code information.
- Packaging of "Young Ambassador" tapes for mailing.
- Placing copies of our letters and publications in special racks used by employees who answer mail.

This cooperative effort greatly aids MPC and other departments in making maximum use of available manpower. Last year WATS personnel handled more than 700,000 items in their "off-phone" work. This year, with record amounts of mail expected, we hope that even more will be accomplished.

#### Postal Center Uses Mail Bags by the Truckload

Here's a bit of incidental news we thought you would find interesting. About every two months, our Postal Center receives a thirty-foot trailer load of mail sacks for use in sending out church literature. Each trailer holds about 17,000 bags. Since the Church is Pasadena's second-largest mailer (the Bankamerocard Center is the biggest), in the past we would often totally deplete the local supply of sacks. To alleviate this problem, the U.S. Postal Service now delivers them directly to us from their supply center in Phoenix, Arizona.

#### Readers Prove Mr. Armstrong Right

A number who contact God's Church are at first skeptical, even antagonistic toward our teachings and doctrines. Some start out determined to prove Mr. Armstrong wrong. But after thorough study, they are forced to admit that he is right after all and that it was their former beliefs which are in error. Following are some interesting comments from such people:

I felt I had to tell you that I will not swallow your teachings hook, line and sinker! I will continue to read your literature if only to try to prove you wrong (which I am beginning to think I cannot do). If, in the course of my study, I come to the conclusion that you are indeed right, I will let you know. I must thank you for opening the Bible as a book of study for today, and not just some great dark unfathomable mystery.

A.T. (Muskegon, MI)

I'm a firm believer in God's advice "to prove all things." Yes, I diligently sift through Mr. Armstrong's booklets too. God does work in mysterious ways--all my "buts," "maybes," and excuses are being stripped from me. I'd like very much for you to relay the following to Mr. Armstrong: in trying to prove him wrong, I've ended up proving him right and me wrong!

E.S. (Ironwood, MI)

I must write to tell you how much I appreciate all the publications I have received from you so far--The PLAIN TRUTH, GOOD NEWS and Bible correspondence course plus many of your booklets. There have been a number of times while reading your articles when I said to myself, "I got 'em on this one," only to find you are right again.

G.H. (National City, MI)

My husband and I have been married a little over six years. I've grown up listening to you and believing the Gospel but my husband hadn't. So he finally decided to prove you wrong. He started this on his own. I had nothing to do with it. All I've ever said to him in all these years is prove it wrong and I'd believe anything he wanted me to believe.

So all of a sudden he did try and then said, "One of the hardest things I've ever had to do is to say I was wrong and that hurts." I said "Mr. Armstrong has always said that." Now he hungers for the truth and wishes to pay his tithe, which he's never done before.

S.G. (Moscow, TN)

I don't swallow things whole--I'm a digger and I see that I've been wrong! That's refreshing to me. I'm 61 years old and have been in and out of 13 "Christian" churches. This is the only [real] one. He [Mr. Armstrong] calls himself an apostle and wow, I believe it!

V.H. (Boulder, CO)

Please allow me first to say thank you for all the booklets and Bible correspondence course lessons you have sent me. Over the past year and a half or so, I've been having my eyes and ears opened by Mr. Armstrong's broadcasts and all the printed material from the Worldwide Church of God. I took the challenge and started to check into and prove (or disprove) the beliefs which I had blindly accepted for so long. I proved to my satisfaction that the Worldwide Church of God is God's true Church.

With that proof, I started to change my life and the course it was on. I started keeping the Sabbath and I got in contact with the Church's local minister. For the last two months I've been attending Sabbath services, and most recently my wife has come along also. I will be speaking to the minister soon about baptism.

R.R. (Somersworth, NH)

After reading your magazine and literature I always check my Bible. I have never caught you wrong in any of your statements pertaining to Bible scripture. Sometimes it's a little hard to grasp, but it always stands up.

W.W. (Alexander, NC)

I have been receiving The PLAIN TRUTH magazine for almost one year now, along with countless booklets all free of charge. I am amazed at the accuracy of your interpretations and translations of the subjects in your writings. You and your staff are to be commended. I check out each and every translation with YOUNG'S ANALYTICAL EXHAUSTIVE CONCORDANCE and find that you are right on the money each and every time. You are batting 1000. Keep plugging away and telling it like it is, The PLAIN TRUTH.

J.B. (North Bergen, NJ)

I have increased my knowledge tremendously by reading and studying your literature. At first I was apprehensive, but

through prayer I've found your works are scriptural. There have been many unanswered questions in my mind that you shed light upon.

H.B. (Farmington, MI)

--Richard Rice, Mail Processing Center

### ON THE WORLD SCENE

#### CHERNENKO TAKES OVER; LEBANON DEBACLE SHOWS UP AMERICA--AGAIN--AS A "PAPER TIGER"

It didn't take long for the changeover at the top of the Soviet Union to take place following the long-expected death of Yuri Andropov. The new leader is 72-year-old Konstantin Chernenko, the oldest of the Soviet Union's chain of rulers (Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev and Andropov before him). Of all the published profiles of Mr. Chernenko and the role he is expected to play, the following article from the February 14 WALL STREET JOURNAL appeared to be the best.

Konstantin Chernenko,...72 years old, isn't seen as an innovator. Indeed, he is viewed by some U.S. analysts as a plodding leader of the Soviet old guard, a drab bureaucrat who rose to prominence as an assistant to former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. His selection as Soviet Communist Party leader represents a holding action by the Soviet leadership against serious problems at home and abroad....

The Soviets could have introduced new uncertainty for the U.S. by picking a younger leader with a mandate for change. Instead they settled on a man who helped run the Soviet collective leadership in recent years and whose main attribute is that he isn't likely to rock the boat.

Mr. Chernenko may prove to be only a transitional leader. He is old, even by the standards of the Soviet leadership, and he reportedly suffered at least a mild health problem last year. Moreover, many analysts expect that Mr. Chernenko won't win the other two top posts held by Yuri Andropov--chairman of the Supreme Soviet and chairman of the Defense Council--so that leadership will be shared. For all these reasons, the Chernenko era is likely to be a time in which the next generation of Soviet leaders prepares to run the country....

The elevation of Mr. Chernenko is a victory for the bureaucratic apparatus created by Mr. Brezhnev and a testimony to its recuperative strengths after the reform efforts of the Andropov period. Mr. Chernenko will be welcomed by party elite that prospered under Mr. Brezhnev, but many U.S. analysts believe it's only a temporary victory for a dying elite. Mr. Chernenko inherits leadership of a regime that many U.S. officials believe is in serious trouble. Despite Mr. Andropov's efforts to make workers more productive, the Soviet economy remains burdened by severe structural problems. Abroad, Mr. Andropov's major foreign-policy initiative--his attempt to stop deployment of U.S. cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe--was a failure....

There's little to distinguish Mr. Chernenko's career, other than his close relationship with Mr. Brezhnev. He was born in Siberia, into what he has described as "a large and poor peasant family."... His career seemed to be going nowhere, in a series of dead-end party jobs, until he met Mr. Brezhnev in 1950 in Moldavia.... The two became friends, and in 1960, when Mr. Brezhnev became chairman of the Supreme Soviet, he asked Mr. Chernenko to direct his personal staff. As Mr. Brezhnev's power increased, so did that of his protege. But U.S. officials who met Mr. Chernenko at summit conferences during the 1970s weren't impressed. Officials describe him, variously, as a "flunky," "coat-carrier" and "gofer" for Mr. Brezhnev....

To improve Soviet economic performance, Mr. Chernenko faces the same basic choice Mr. Andropov did: discipline or reform. Both carry political dangers; but U.S. analysts believe that without some strong economic medicine, Mr. Chernenko won't be able to reverse the steady slide in the growth of Soviet output that has taken place since the mid 1960s. "The Soviet economy will stay in a slow-growth plateau," predicts Jan Vanous, a Soviet specialist at Wharton Econometric Forecasting Associates. He argues that because of Mr. Chernenko's close ties to the party apparatus, he isn't likely to undertake any major reforms that would give Soviet managers more freedom.

In his first public appearance before foreign leaders, at the Andropov funeral, Mr. Chernenko did not make too imposing an impression. He appeared, in fact, to be in rather poor health. And in the background, Western experts detected the "number two" man in the Kremlin, 52-year old Mikhail Gorbachev. Here is a February 15 Reuters dispatch:

New Soviet leader Konstantin Chernenko appeared in frail health when he met foreign leaders in Moscow yesterday, and some gained the impression he would be only an interim leader, diplomatic sources said today. Soviet officials also told some visitors that Politburo member Mikhail Gorbachov [spelled usually with an "ev" at the end] would be No. 2 in the Kremlin, indicating that the leadership may have already mapped out a future succession.

Chernenko, 72, gave an impression of frailty when he led the funeral of his predecessor, Yuri Andropov, on Moscow's Red Square yesterday. He was short of breath and appeared unable to hold his arm up in a salute for more than brief periods. In the most knowledgeable assessment of his condition, British politician David Owen, a physician, said today that Chernenko was suffering from emphysema. This involves fibrosis of the lungs, which leads to shortage of breath and often serious heart strain. Medical dictionaries say it also causes a "barrel chest" in older people, a condition Chernenko appears to have....

However, Vice President George Bush took the opposite view, saying the new Soviet leader "appeared very vital.... He gave me the impression of a man...who has a potential to be a strong leader."

Diplomats said the impression that Chernenko might be only a short-term leader was reinforced by comments from Soviet

officials about the new power structure in the Politburo. Senior Kremlin aides told some visitors that Gorbachov, 52, was now the effective No. 2 in the Kremlin, making him Chernenko's deputy and heir-apparent. "It looks as if Gorbachov has been guaranteed second place as part of the deal which put Chernenko into power. That would mean the leadership has already pre-programmed the next succession," one Western analyst said. Signs that Gorbachov, the youngest member of the Politburo, was now second to Chernenko emerged shortly after the new Communist Party chief was elected Monday. When the Politburo twice lined up to pay respects at Andropov's coffin, Gorbachov was placed on Chernenko's right, the position traditionally taken by the Kremlin No. 2. Gorbachov, in charge of overall economic strategy under Andropov, was clearly the former leader's own choice as successor....

Thus the overall impression then is that the Chernenko era is likely to be relatively short and uneventful. The members of the 12-man Politburo were simply not willing to reach down at this time to someone in the next half-generation below them. In the February 20, 1984 U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT, Adam Ulam, an authority on Soviet politics, asked the following--before it was known that Konstantin Chernenko had been selected as General Secretary:

Will it happen under this leader? If the new man has a very strong personality, manages to get tremendous leverage within the Politburo and the Secretariat, then he may risk some very basic reform--such as changing the agricultural system, reorienting the economy, trying new initiatives in world politics. Failing that, however, he will follow the same beaten path as his predecessors.

It is obvious that Chernenko is not this type of innovative leader. Perhaps Mr. Gorbachev, if and when he takes control, might be more amenable to "trying new initiatives in world politics," such as a "new deal" regarding Eastern Europe. Gorbachev was only age 13 when World War II ended. He is of the generation that did not have any leadership role in the trying days of the "Great Patriotic War."

#### Lebanese Debacle: Another U.S. Foreign Policy Blunder

With the Lebanese army forces of President Amin Gemayel collapsing all about them, the U.S. Marines, in their base south of Beirut, are all but surrounded by hostile forces, their backs against the Mediterranean Sea. President Reagan has already announced a staged removal of the marines to warships offshore, although no firm evacuation timetable has been set.

American credibility has been dealt a very sizeable blow, far worse than the U.S. public seems to realize. As recently as February 3, the President said in an interview that for the United States to get out of Lebanon "means a pretty disastrous result for us worldwide." Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Dam added, "America's credibility is at stake in Lebanon. Every regional state--friend and foe alike--is watching our actions for proof of America's strength and its ability to promote peace."

But after all this rhetoric, reality has set in on an ill-conceived policy and "the boys" are coming out. The February 8 WALL STREET JOURNAL noted the

disturbing parallel to past U.S. crises, especially in Iran. Syria has shown America up for what it is in the Middle East--a paper tiger!

President Reagan's decision to move U.S. Marines from Beirut to ships off the Lebanese coast is a stunning defeat for his Lebanon policy and a haunting reminder of the Carter administration's failure in Iran.... At stake is far more than Lebanon. President Reagan, who boasts that he hasn't "lost" a single country during his presidency, has made Lebanon the major test of his administration's ability to contain Soviet-backed forces. He raised the stakes just last week, when he said in an interview with The Wall Street Journal that an American retreat in Lebanon would have "a pretty disastrous result" for U.S. foreign policy around the world.

Mr. Reagan, in the face of growing election-year criticism of his Lebanon policy, apparently decided to cut his losses now. He said the U.S. will continue its training of the Lebanese army and will step up that assistance "when the government of Lebanon is able to reconstitute itself into a broadly based representative government."

The American withdrawal from the Beirut airport area will have enormous consequences--in the Mideast, in other foreign countries, and in domestic U.S. politics. In the Mideast, Syria is already a big winner. By waging a ruthless campaign against the Gemayel government and the U.S., Syria has reassured its traditional power in Lebanon....

Syria's gains in Lebanon complicate U.S. policy elsewhere in the Middle East. Moderate Arab regimes, such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia, will be more likely to knuckle under to the radical demands of a victorious Syria rather than seek accommodation with Israel.... The broader diplomatic consequences are harder to gauge. Some European allies, convinced that the U.S. has been making a mistake in Lebanon, might be relieved that the Marines will be moved out of Beirut. Nevertheless, there could be a lasting perception of U.S. weakness and a judgment that the Reagan administration, for all its tough talk, was unable to succeed in its most visible foreign-policy venture....

The trauma in Lebanon, like the Carter administration's failure in Iran, raises questions about the ability of the U.S. to carry out a coherent policy in the Middle East. Though the two cases obviously have many differences, foreign-policy experts in and out of government note some common problems:

-- The U.S. in both instances found itself with a weak and vacillating client who was a prisoner of his own indecision. Like the shah in Iran, President Gemayel could never decide whether to open his government to the opposition or to subdue foes with military force....

-- The U.S. compounded the leadership problem in both countries by sending confusing signals. Just as in Iran, American

officials in Lebanon alternately counseled moderation and toughness....

-- The U.S. misjudged political forces in the region. In Iran, it failed to appreciate the appeal of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's Islamic fundamentalism; in Lebanon, it consistently has misread Syria's intentions--assuming, for instance, that Damascus wouldn't block the May 17 agreement for Israel to leave Lebanon. Later, Washington waffled on its policy toward Syria, talking of conciliation one day and threatening military action the next. The Syrians, like Ayatollah Khomeini, eventually concluded the U.S. was a paper tiger....

The Iran parallel isn't lost on some Lebanese politicians. "Lebanon's little shah is on the verge of collapse," proclaimed Lebanon's Shiite Moslem leader Nabih Berri on Monday, as his militia swept through Beirut, capturing most of the western half of the city. Even pro-American Lebanese Christians criticize the Reagan administration's mistakes in Lebanon. "U.S. policy in Lebanon was never on time or at the level the situation required," said Fadi Hayek, the spokesman of the Phalangist militia, in a telephone interview from Beirut yesterday. He stressed: "The Marine deployment came without a clear U.S. policy, and that has continued until now."

The administration's blunders with Syria will probably have the most lasting consequences, partly because of Syria's alliance with the Soviet Union. Political officials at the White House and State Department made a series of overly optimistic assessments about the Syrians, often against the advice of professional intelligence officers within the U.S. government.

The U.S. lost its best chance to get Syrian troops out of Lebanon in the fall of 1982, when Syria was still reeling from the Israeli invasion. By letting Israel drag its feet in troop-withdrawal negotiations, the U.S. gave Syria time to restock its arsenal with Soviet weapons. By the spring of 1983, when the U.S. turned to Syria to negotiate a similar troop withdrawal, the Syrians were strong and intransigent. Administration officials admit they erred by allowing the Syrians to block execution of the May 17 agreement with Israel by refusing to withdraw their own troops....

The administration, for all its bluster toward Syria, also failed to make a convincing demonstration that it would use military force to punish Damascus. A Lebanese official notes that despite administration statements blaming Syria for allowing the bomb attacks last year against the U.S. Embassy and the Marine headquarters in Beirut, the U.S. never retaliated. Says this official: "If you don't have the will to use a gun, don't carry one. It's dangerous."

The lesson for the U.S. is that it is awkward for a superpower to confront a regional power like Syria. Alfred Mady, a leader of

the Christian Phalange Party, argues that the Gemayel government should have recognized this reality and depended less on the U.S. and more on Israel: "We were asking a strategic power to play the role of a tactical power. That was our first mistake, and it was fatal. It's like an elephant looking for an ant."...

One Lebanese official, reviewing the confused and sometimes contradictory course of U.S. policy in Lebanon during the last two years, comments: "They were just ad-libbing. To this moment, they are just ad-libbing."

Columnist George F. Will, in his February 9 syndicated column, also dealt at length with the full importance of the retreat.

This is "standing tall"? Even with a formidable fleet within sight offshore, the United States has proved itself unable to defend a coastal city.... The United States has been driven from Lebanon, and perhaps effectively from the Middle East, by the Shias and Druze. Considered in conjunction with the Grenada operation, the signal to the world is that the United States is (at the most) a regional power.

The Administration may think that the retreat off the beaches can be conducted with studied slowness--"retreating tall," for whatever that might be worth. But nothing now can disguise the fact that this military and political defeat in Lebanon is the result of a use of military assets as incompetent as the Iranian rescue mission or the Bay of Pigs. As former Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger has said, the wisdom of a deployment depends on the clarity of mission and sufficiency of force. This deployment flunked both tests. Begun partly as a humanitarian reflex and partly as a gesture of political support, the mission became, in Schlesinger's word, more "enigmatic." But one thing was ruinously clear from the start. The United States was unwilling to inflict serious casualties on the forces that were determined to do what they can now do: conquer Lebanon....

A moment for serious action came and quickly went in October, when Syria inflicted a military defeat on the marines. Americans have insistently referred to that as a "terrorist attack." That phrase disguises the fact that it was a military defeat--the most costly in Marine lives since the first day of fighting on Iwo Jima. The day of the attack was the day on which to have said that our mission is to destroy forces shelling Beirut. The Syrians and others have 48 hours to move back out of range. After that, the buffer zone around the capital will be a free-fire zone....

A fascinating aspect of this episode is that the State Department has been more hardheaded than has the Pentagon about the need to back diplomacy with force. A myth about contemporary America is that the military is itching to use force. But in the councils of government a large peacetime military bureaucracy is usually a voice against activism.... Regarding Lebanon, the Pentagon's strategy--moving offshore--has prevailed.

Given the public and congressional mood, and the Reagan Administration's inability or disinclination to alter that mood, the strategy may be necessary. But it should be interesting to hear the Administration defend its defense budget, which seems somewhat large for a regional power, and disproportionate to the nation's political will and strategy.

Now, consider: If you are an enemy of the United States in, say, the Persian Gulf or (for that matter) Central America, are you not exhilarated by developments in Lebanon? Are they not fresh evidence of a familiar axiom--that it is more dangerous to be America's friend than its enemy? If you are a Saudi leader, you are going to be especially generous with this year's subsidy to Syria. If you are King Hussein of Jordan, there is now one controlling fact: Your hostile neighbor to the north has shoved the United States west.

In the end Syria's President Assad, the shrewdest political leader in the Middle East, won out. As reported in the "Washington Whispers" column of the February 20 U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT:

Syria's President Assad gambled and won in Lebanon, White House advisers privately admit. Assad bet that American resolve to defend the besieged Lebanese government would crumble under constant criticism at home--precisely what happened.

One can almost discount now America's victory in Grenada. The blow to U.S. prestige in the crucially important Middle East more than offsets the former action. Where it really counts, U.S. policy is afflicted with flawed conception and faulty execution. Despite Grenada, America is still a "paper tiger."

--Gene H. Hogberg, News Bureau