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Looking Back at the Events That Created DS and the Diplomatic Security Service

DIPNOTE: MILITARY AND SECURITY

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On September 19, 1986, President Reagan hosts a ceremony in the White House Oval Office to commemorate his signing of the Omnibus Diplomatic Security and Antiterrorism Act on August 27, 1986. (White House photo)

On August 27, 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed the Omnibus Diplomatic Security and Antiterrorism Act, creating the **Bureau of Diplomatic Security** and formalizing the structure of today's Diplomatic Security Service (DSS).

On the anniversary of this landmark presidential action, we remember the tragic events that led to the passage of the Act. In the years leading up to its signing, terrorist attacks on U.S. embassies in Tehran, Islamabad, Beirut, and Kuwait City dramatically altered how U.S. officials perceived and responded to the terrorist threat, and redefined diplomatic security.

Following the December 1983 bombing of the U.S. embassy in Kuwait City, the U.S. Department of State convened a diplomatic security review panel, led by retired U.S. Navy Admiral Bobby Inman. Known as the Inman Panel, the panel recommended the creation of mandatory minimum physical security standards for diplomatic facilities, budgeting

for new construction and supplemental funding to upgrade existing office buildings, and elevating the State Department's Office of Security to a bureau, now known as the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, thus creating today's Diplomatic Security Service.

The following is a brief timeline of key terrorist events that led to the formal creation of the Bureau and DSS:

Iranian Guerrillas Attack the U.S. Embassy in Tehran – February 14, 1979

Khomeini rebels carry the U.S. flag outside the U.S. Embassy compound in Tehran, February 14, 1

The U.S. embassy in Tehran was the scene of frequent demonstrations by Iranians who opposed the American presence in the country, and on February 14, 1979, the embassy was attacked and briefly occupied. The embassy weathered the assault, but nine months later anti-American demonstrations again threatened embassy staff.

Iranian Students Protest Outside U.S. Embassy Tehran – November 1979

Left: Iranian students hold their fists in the air as others display anti-American banners, November 1979, near the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, where staffers were still being held hostage. Right: Shouting student demonstrators reach out to grab the last shreds of the U.S. flag outside the American Embassy in Tehran, Iran on November 5, 1979.

Iranian ruler Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's close ties to the U.S. created suspicion and hostility among Iran's revolutionary leaders. After President Jimmy Carter allowed the Shah to enter the United States for medical treatment, Iranian students stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979, and took 63 Americans as hostages who were held for more than one year.

U.S. Embassy Attacked, Islamabad, Pakistan, November 20, 1979

A Pakistan Army helicopter flies over the burning American Embassy building after it was attacked by anti-American demonstrators in Islamabad, Nov. 20, 1979.

Thousands of Pakistanis, enraged by rumors that the U.S. had invaded Mecca, burned the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad. **One Marine Security Guard was shot and killed** during the attack, and 100 Americans and embassy employees were trapped for five hours.

U.S. Embassy Bombing, Beirut, Lebanon – April 18, 1983

U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon after a suicide bomb explosion on April 18, 1983.

On April 18, 1983, a suicide bomber detonated a one-half-ton pickup

truck laden with 2,000 pounds of TNT near the front of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, killing 63 people, including 17 Americans. It was the deadliest attack on a U.S. diplomatic mission to date.

U.S. Marine Barracks Bombing, Beirut, Lebanon – October 23, 1983

Aftermath of the bombing of the U.S. Marines barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, October 23, 1983.

Tragedy struck again in Beirut on October 23, 1983, when a suicide bomber drove a truck underneath the four-story building housing the U.S. Marine barracks and detonated 12,000 pounds of TNT. The explosion reduced the building to rubble and killed 220 Marines, 18 sailors, and three soldiers.

U.S. Embassy Bombing, Kuwait City, Kuwait – December 12, 1983

Smoke hangs over the compound of the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait, December 12, 1983 after a car bomb exploded. The attack was one of six in Kuwait, in which at least two people died, and another fifteen were injured.

In December 1983, terrorists drove a dump truck filled with explosives through the gate of the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait City and set off an explosion that destroyed the consular annex. No Americans were injured, but four embassy-employed local staff died in the attack.

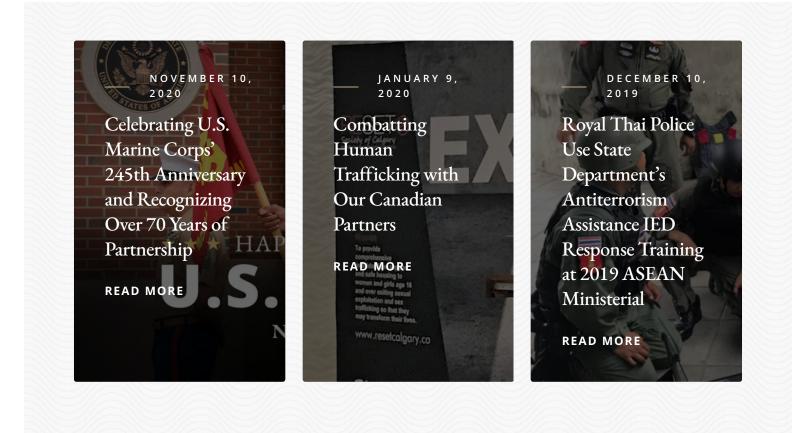*About the Author: Eric Weiner serves in the U.S. Department of State's **Diplomatic Security Service**.*

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