

## Victory in Lebanon: Operation Peace for Galilee

By  
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The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 is often viewed as a mistake and a bloody quagmire. In fact, Operation Peace for Galilee was an Israeli victory which brought peace to northern Israel for a generation. The Israelis triumphed despite having to overcome several unique problems, including rough terrain, fanatical terrorist resistance, and elite Syrian commando teams. By the time the various warring parties adopted the Habib Peace Plan in August of 1982, the Israelis had secured the expulsion of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from Lebanon, engaged and defeated the Syrian army and air force in the Bekaa Valley and the Beirut/Damascus highway, and established a security zone which eliminated the threat to northern Israel.

Since 1975, Lebanon had been in the grip of a civil war between Christian forces (called the Lebanese Forces or Lebanese Front) and a loose alliance of rebel Muslim and Druze militias (called the National Movement). Tensions had been simmering for years between the various Christian and Muslim factions and finally boiled over after the assassination attempt on Maronite leader Pierre Gemayel, who led the most powerful faction within the Lebanese Forces. In retaliation, Gemayel's Maronite militia, called the Phalange, attacked Palestinian neighborhoods in Beirut. After much bloody fighting neither side was able to gain an advantage until Muslim troops in the Lebanese army, which had up until then been neutral, mutinied and joined the Muslim militias. As a result, Muslim forces made significant gains in Beirut.<sup>1</sup>

Surprisingly the Syrian regime of Hafez Assad lent its support to the Christian faction, sending arms and other aid to the Phalangists. By helping the Phalangists, Assad hoped to gain influence in Lebanon and to weaken Yasser Arafat and the PLO with the goal of establishing himself as the Arab world's advocate for the Palestinian cause. He also disliked Arafat because the latter encouraged the Muslim Brotherhood to make trouble in secular, Baathist Syria.<sup>2</sup> Despite Syrian help, the Phalangists lost ground throughout 1976. Assad decided to intervene militarily. On 31 May, 1976 one brigade of the Syrian 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division reinforced with artillery and a pair of commando battalions, crossed into northern Lebanon, with one column driving on Tripoli while the other pushed south through the Bekaa Valley. Once through the valley, the southern column itself split in two, with one force pushing on to Sidon, while another made for Beirut. Here, the Syrians encountered fierce Muslim resistance. Rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) and anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) teams slowed the Syrian advance and inflicted heavy casualties. While Syrian forces did manage to enter Sidon and Beirut, they later had to withdraw due to concerted PLO counterattacks. Under cover of a truce, the Syrians pulled back from the cities and regrouped in the Lebanon Mountains. Assad renewed the offensive in September, this time a Syrian brigade advancing from Zahle to the refugee camp at Ras al-Mataan. The operation was a success with Muslim forces easily cleared out of the area. In October, the Syrians attacked Beirut and Sidon again. Two brigades plus several Phalangist militia units fought a series of bloody battles against Muslim forces east of Sidon. The combined Syrian/Phalangist force got to Sidon's outskirts before Assad ordered them to stop. To the north, the Syrians drove along the Beirut/Damascus highway, encountering stubborn resistance along the way. Assad ordered this column to halt as well, content to occupy the Bekaa and the hills above Beirut.<sup>3</sup>

Syria would not long remain on good terms with the Phalangists, who were themselves divided into a pro- and anti-Syrian camp. Assad had tried to replace Gemayal with the more pro-Syrian Suliman Frangieh, with the ultimate aim of installing him as a puppet ruler in Lebanon. The lingering Syrian presence in the Bekaa, particularly the Maronite city of Zahle, was also a source of tension. Seeking to demonstrate his independence, in 1981 Gemayel attempted to seize control of the city from Syrian forces, opening the battle with an attack on Syrian guard posts over the Bardouni River Bridge. After taking the bridge, the Phalangists swarmed into Zahle. Phalangist forces had effectively seized control of the city, but not for long. Assad sent several battalions of commandoes to seal off Zahle. They laid waste to the countryside, destroying homes and burning crops, and then began a drive for Mount Senin, which overlooks the city. Gemayal asked the Israelis for help, when none was forthcoming, he negotiated a ceasefire and pulled his militia out of Zahle.<sup>4</sup>

Since relations with Maronites had soured, Assad turned his eye toward the PLO. For his part, Arafat was eager to repair relations with Syria, as Egypt's Anwar Sadat had made peace with Israel, depriving him of an important sponsor.<sup>5</sup> With Syrian help by 1980, Arafat and the PLO had built up a state within a state inside Lebanon, including strongholds in Beirut and southern Lebanon, an area often called Fatah Land after Arafat's wing of the PLO. In its enclave, the PLO maintained an army of 15,000 men divided into several brigades. Most ominously for Israel, the PLO possessed 250 Katyusha rocket launchers of various calibers and several batteries of 133 mm guns. There was also a special battalion, the 460<sup>th</sup>, armed with antiquated T-34 tanks, many of which were simply dug into emplacements and used as bunkers. The PLO stored weapons and munitions in countless arms caches in the south and fortified several areas, specifically the castle at Beaufort. Three PLO brigades were deployed in the south: the Kastel Brigade at Nabitiye, the Yarmuk Brigade south of the Litani, and the Karameh Brigade in the Bekaa Valley. The 460<sup>th</sup> Battalion was in West Beirut defending PLO headquarters and several large ammunition caches. Guerilla leaders were stationed in the various Palestinian refugee camps (al-Bas and Rashidye in the north, Ein el-Hilweh in the south, and in Beirut proper), where they raised and armed local militias.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, there were several other Palestinian factions deploying terrorist/guerilla units in Lebanon with a total combined strength of about 5,000 fighters.<sup>7</sup> Despite the impressive assemblage of men and material, the PLO lacked vehicles and communication equipment. Fighters could not be easily moved, and artillery fires could not be coordinated.<sup>8</sup>

The Syrians maintained a considerable military presence in the Bekaa Valley. This was centered on the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, a force of two armored brigades, two mechanized brigades, and ten commando battalions. Supporting the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored was the 85<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Brigade which manned positions along the highway from Beirut east to the Bekaa. The commando battalions were perhaps the best troops in the Syrian army. Armed with RPGs and ATMGs, they had trained to fight Israeli mechanized forces in the rough terrain of southern Lebanon. Such units had taken a heavy toll on Israeli armored forces during the 1973 war and they would do so again during Operation Peace for Galilee. Most troublesome to Israeli planners was the string of surface-to-air missile (SAM) batteries in the valley, 19 in all.<sup>9</sup>

Since the arrival of Arafat and the PLO leadership in the early 1970s, Lebanon had served as a base for countless PLO terrorist attacks against Israel.<sup>10</sup> They also unleashed artillery and rocket barrages on Israeli civilians in Galilee (Israel from the Dan River north to the Lebanese border). The Israel Defense Force (IDF), of course, retaliated in kind. In 1977, the new Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, strengthened ties with the Phalangists, sending them arms and ammunition and establishing training camps. After PLO terrorists landed on the Israeli coast, seized a bus, and killed dozens of Israeli civilians,

on 15 March 1977, the IDF launched Operation Litani. In a 6-day campaign several IDF brigades rolled across the border and advanced to the Litani River. They engaged in dozens of sharp skirmishes with PLO forces, killing more than 300 and destroying several terrorist camps. Most importantly, they linked together a trio of Christian enclaves under the command of Major Saad Haddad, a pro-Israeli Phalangist. Haddad's militia later became known as the South Lebanese Army (SLA), and the area they occupied the Security Zone.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the SLA and the Security Zone, in July of 1981, PLO forces renewed their artillery bombardments against civilians in Galilee. The Israelis responded with air strikes against PLO targets in southern Lebanon and Beirut, which eventually forced a temporary ceasefire. While the ceasefire held in Lebanon, the PLO mounted attacks from Jordan and against Israeli and Jewish targets throughout Europe; in Paris an Israeli diplomat was assassinated. Then on 3 June 1982, terrorists with the Abu Nidal organization shot and critically injured the Israeli ambassador to the Court of St. James. The Israeli cabinet met that same day and in response voted to invade southern Lebanon.

Under Ariel Sharon, defense minister in Menachem Begin's government, the Israelis had developed three plans for invading Lebanon. The first, called "Little Pines," called for an advance to Sidon with the purpose of destroying PLO infrastructure in southern Lebanon. The second called for an advance to Beirut's outskirts but would not see the IDF enter the city. Instead, Phalangist militia would do the job. Both plans left Syrian forces in the Bekaa alone. The third and most controversial plan, called "Big Pines," foresaw a war against the PLO and Syrian forces with goal of destroying both inside Lebanon by taking Beirut, cutting the highway to Damascus, and destroying the Syrian air defense network in the Bekaa. By doing so the Israelis hoped the Maronites could take control of the country and eventually conclude a peace treaty with Israel.<sup>12</sup>

Most of Lebanon's important cities - Beirut, Sidon, Tyre, Tripoli- lie on the coastal plain. The country gradually rises inland until one reaches the Lebanon Mountains. Between this range and the Anti-Lebanon Mountains is the fertile Bekaa Valley which runs northeast to Syria. The Litani River divides south Lebanon from the central and north and runs up the Bekaa Valley. In the south, the land is rough and hilly. A highway links Beirut and Damascus, the only way to cross the Anti-Lebanon Range. There is a road running along the Mediterranean Coast through Tyre, Sidon, Beirut, and Tripoli. Just south of the Beirut Damascus highway is the Shemlan Ridge.

The Israelis had never gathered a mightier army. Division 91 (three mechanized brigades and six infantry brigades) assembled on the coast for the drive up to Sidon and beyond and an eventual link-up with Phalangist militia somewhere east of Beirut. In the center, Division 36 (the Golani Brigade plus two armored brigades and an artillery brigade) stood poised to cross the border, take the castle at Beaufort and drive north to cut the Beirut Damascus highway, while Division 162 (a tank brigade, an infantry brigade and an artillery brigade) would cover their right flank. In the east, Division 90 (three tank brigades and an artillery brigade), Division 252 (two tank brigades, one infantry brigade and an artillery brigade), and an ad-hoc formation of two brigades called Vardi Force would drive north toward the Bekaa Valley. Division 96 (the paratroopers brigade plus a tank brigade and an artillery brigade) would make an amphibious landing somewhere in the vicinity of Sidon.<sup>13</sup>

The Israelis began the war on 4 June 1982 with a series of air and artillery strikes. These hit suspected PLO headquarters (HQ) and weapons dumps, troop concentrations, and fortified positions. The efforts directed against the Kastel brigade on the coast were extremely effective. The initial onslaught panicked the brigade's commander, Col Haj Ismail, who stole the HQ safe and fled the battle area in an ambulance. With their leader AWOL, Kastel subordinate commanders were at a loss as what to do. As a

result, PLO units were scattered throughout the south awaiting orders which never came. Weapons remained in their store houses; in one case, thousands of mines remained in their storage facilities as did stockpiled weapons.<sup>14</sup>

On the extreme eastern flank, Division 252, staged on the Golan Heights, crossed the border and cleared out PLO positions south of the Litani with ease; overall resistance was almost nonexistent. On the left, Division 90 took the town of Marjayoun from PLO guerillas and moved northeast toward the Bekaa Valley and an inevitable confrontation with Syrian forces. Vardi Force came up behind the two lead divisions and, on 8 June, pushed toward the crossroads at Jezzine, which linked the Bekaa with western Lebanon. Here began the first serious fighting between Israeli and Syrian forces as the 460th Brigade (part of Division 162) attacked Syrian forces (one infantry and one armored battalion) holding the town. While Syrian troops fought tenaciously, their officers lacked the training and initiative to maneuver and adapt to Israeli moves. Syrian positions were systematically pinned down and overwhelmed by Israeli fire power. The Syrians pulled out after several hours of fighting, with the bulk of the supporting armored battalion destroyed.<sup>15</sup>

Other elements of Division 252 drove toward Rachaiya, threatening the Syrian 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division's flank and their communications with Syria. Division 880, a reserve force, entered the theatre now, taking up positions north of Marjayoun. At the same time, realizing that the Israelis would probably move into the Bekaa, Assad ordered the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armor Division into the valley, deploying it south of the Beirut/Damascus highway. Unfortunately for the Syrians, the 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade was spotted around Ballbek and pounded by Israeli Air Force (IAF) planes which destroyed hundreds of Syrian vehicles. The 47<sup>th</sup> Brigade ceased to be an effective fighting force.<sup>16</sup>

On 8 June, after Syrian SAM batteries engaged Israeli warplanes, Sharon ordered Israeli forces to attack the Syrians both in and outside of the Bekaa Valley. Division 162 pushed north for the town of Ein Zalta. Taking it would cut the Beirut/ Damascus highway. They were met elements of the Syrian 85<sup>th</sup> Brigade. This was the Israelis first encounter with Syrian commando units and a harbinger of things to come. Syrian rocket and ATMG teams, supported by tanks and artillery, halted the advance at a horseshoe bend just south of town, firing quick volleys before withdrawing. After pushing through and entering the town, the Israelis came under heavy fire from the hills above. Once again though, Syrian commanders were unable to adapt to changing circumstances. In this case, a battalion of Israeli infantry was air lifted behind Syrian positions, enabling the Israelis to pin Syrian troops down in a crossfire and eventually clear out the town. In the meantime, the battle allowed the rest of the Syrian 85<sup>th</sup> and 68<sup>th</sup> Brigades, which were deployed to the west, to reorient themselves to the new threat. From there the Israeli 362<sup>nd</sup> Armored Battalion advanced against Ain Dara, where two Syrian commando units held up the Israeli advance for several hours. After finally breaking through the town, the Israelis took positions atop the hills above, from which they could see the town and the highway.<sup>17</sup>

While Division 162 continued its advance west of the valley, Divisions 90 and 252 advanced into the Bekaa proper. On the east end of Bekaa, Division 252 secured the town of Rachaiya and then Yanta, about 15 miles from the Syrian border. On the west side of the valley, Division 90 advanced north to Lake Quaron and the town of Mashgara. At the same time, elements of Division 252 advanced in the shadow of the Anti-Lebanon Range against the Syrian 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division. Once more, Syrian commando units slowed the Israeli advance. Rocket-armed Gazelle helicopters even joined the fray, doing little real damage but forcing the Israelis to dig in against further strikes. With the main drive stalled, the commander of Division 90 sent an armored battalion around the west bank of Lake Quaron, which gained the Syrian's right flank, pushed them out of their positions, and occupied the east shore.

From there, Israeli troops took Mashgara and continued north to Joub Janninne, taking the town and descending to the floor of the Bekaa Valley. The Syrian 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division fled north, allowed to do so because of extreme caution exercised by the Israelis in the face of Syrian commando units.

Commanders were right to be cautious. On 10 June, disaster struck as the Israeli 362<sup>nd</sup> Battalion advanced to the town of Sultan Yakoub. Occupying the hills above the town was a Syrian commando unit from the 58<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Brigade. With a clear line of sight into the town below, the Syrian commandos exacted a heavy toll from Israeli forces. Trapped in the town, the Israelis hunkered down under heavy fire and were unable to break out until the next morning under cover of a massive artillery box barrage. Division 90 got some measure of revenge that same day, when the Syrian 82<sup>nd</sup> Armored Brigade blundered forward into positions held by 7th Armored Brigade south of Sultan Yakoub. Caught in the open, the Syrian 82<sup>nd</sup> Armored Brigade was annihilated by Israeli armor and artillery.<sup>18</sup>

In the center, Division 36, staged at Metulla, crossed into Lebanon in two places, with one prong advancing south of the PLO stronghold at Beaufort Castle, the other advancing north. Heavy PLO fire from within did nothing to stop the drive. Encountering light resistance, the two pincers met at a junction northwest of the town of Nabitiya, which the Israelis took with little struggle. Back at Beaufort the Sayeret Battalion of the Golani Brigade attacked the castle and took it from the PLO after several hours of close quarters fighting. With the center secured, the Division 36, led by the Golani Brigade, pivoted east and linked up with the coastal thrust at Sidon.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike the battle for the Bekaa valley, the advance up the coast did not see fighting between two conventional forces. Instead, the Israelis battled dozens of small PLO units for control of the road and the various camps lying between Israel and Beirut. The 211 Mechanized Brigade spearheaded Division 91's drive up the coast. Its initial objective was the Kasmiye Bridge across the Litani. An hour after crossing the border, the brigade fought several PLO platoons in prepared positions along the coast road. As 211 Brigade advanced further, it met sporadic, uncoordinated and suicidal PLO resistance. Dozens of fighters were killed in countless futile attacks on the advancing Israeli column. In many cases fighters simply drove up to the head of the Israeli advance in a civilian car and opened fire. When 211 Brigade approached Tyre, the brigade's commander chose to bypass the town and the adjoining camps, turning down a road that led around them. The follow-on battalion missed the turn and blundered into the al-Bas camp crossroads, losing five vehicles in a PLO ambush. The battalion commander was also captured and later murdered. One brigade cordoned off Tyre and the camps while 211 Brigade pushed on, arriving at the village of Sarafend, about ten miles south of Sidon, where they hunkered down for the night. As Division 91 went into laager, the Paratroopers Brigade landed at the Awali River estuary a few miles north of Sidon. The landing went smoothly and was uncontested.

The Israelis gradually reduced the camps outside of Tyre, Rachidiyeh, Burj al-Shamali, and al-Bas. They divided each camp into sections, advanced into each behind tanks or bulldozers, and fought in close quarters until resistance in that quadrant had been stamped out. Though they made use of air and artillery, the Israeli troops were forbidden from using satchel charges and hand grenades for fear of killing civilians. Four days of hard fighting in the narrow streets cost the Israelis 21 dead and 95 wounded.<sup>20</sup>

The resistance in these camps, however, was nothing compared to what awaited the Israelis at the Ein el-Hilweh camp in Sidon. The PLO turned Ein el-Hilweh into the Alamo of Lebanon. Led by a fanatical Sunni cleric named Haj Imrahim, a few hundred PLO fighters held out against the IDF for nearly a week. PLO fighters in the camp used civilians as human shields, armed Palestinian children, and shot civilians trying to surrender to the IDF. The battle for Ein el-Hilweh began on the morning of 8 June with the Golani Brigade's assault on the main entrance. Israeli infantry was met by a barrage of RPG and

machine gun fire as they fought their way inside. After penetrating the PLO defense, the Israelis found that Palestinian fighters had circled behind them and closed the entrance. The advance bogged down, and not wanting to engage in bitter night fighting, the Golani pulled out of the camp. They attacked again the next morning, this time with air support, and managed to push their way into the center of the camp, where they encountered a fortified anti-tank position. PLO fighters there threw up a wall of lead and rockets and refused to be moved. Once again the Israelis pulled out. When the attack resumed on 9 June, the Israelis changed tactics, with infantry leading the way and calling on armor support when they encountered stiff resistance. Using these tactics, two mosques and a hospital used as fighting positions were cleared out, with the hospital evacuated under the guise of negotiations. There were still plenty of prepared positions for the PLO fighters to defend, and not wanting to spill soldier or civilian blood to take them, the Israelis tried to convince the PLO to surrender. In this effort, they sent prisoners of war, doctors, and even psychologists to convince the fighters to lay down their arms. Egged on by Haj Ibrahim, they refused, and the Israelis were forced to clear the camp house by house. Each PLO strong point, a school, a mosque, and a bunker in the center of the camp, were systematically destroyed, with the Israelis firing artillery into them at point-blank range. The Israelis did not secure the camp until 14 June.<sup>21</sup>

In the meantime, 211 Brigade continued up the coast while the Paratroopers Brigade gradually expanded their bridgehead south and occupied the ridge overlooking the town of Damour. The combination of IAF raids and heavy artillery barrages drove PLO fighters out of the town, and the Paratroopers entered unopposed. From there, the Paratroopers Brigade pushed inland in an effort to outflank PLO forces. They advanced northeast toward the town of Kaber Chouman. Along the way, they fought a few skirmishes with PLO fighters and encountered thousands of mines. As night was falling, the Israeli advance stopped. The halt allowed a special battalion of Jordanian volunteers, the Bader Battalion, to occupy the village of Kfir Mata, just ahead of the Israeli advance. When the drive resumed the next day, the battle-hardened paratroopers easily pushed the Bader battalion aside, killing at least 50.

From Kfir Mata, 211 Brigade and Division 91 came into direct contact with elements of the Syrian 85<sup>th</sup> Brigade, deployed around Kaber Chouman and to the north along the Shemlan Ridge. As the lead elements of Division 91 approached the town from the southeast, the Paratroopers Brigade attacked Syrian positions in the town proper, by noon fighting their way into the center and its important crossroads. A ceasefire between Israeli and Syrian forces was supposed to take effect on 12 June but broke down the next day. On the morning of 13 June, Israeli troops advanced against PLO positions at Khalde, just south of the airport. Fierce PLO resistance halted the drive, forcing the Israelis to push inland and outflank the PLO fighters. As the Golani and Paratroopers Brigades moved east, Syrian commando teams took their toll on the Israelis, using hit-and-run raids to inflict casualties, and more importantly, slow the advance and allow Syrian units to pull back.

The Israelis renewed the drive the next day. 211 Brigade advanced toward the airport but was halted by heavy combined PLO/Syrian resistance. The job of punching through to the Phalangists in Baadaba was given to the Paratroopers and Golani the Brigade. To that end, the Golani Brigade struck PLO/Syrian positions at the wealthy suburb of Dhoka; resistance there was overcome only by a combination of massive air and artillery strikes. The Golani Brigade continued north to Kfir Sil, where they collided with a Syrian reinforced armored battalion. Golani armor pushed their way into the center of town, where they were met by a torrent of fire from T-54 tanks, RPGs and ATGMs. Fighting lasted nearly a day and did not end until a battalion of the Paratroopers Brigade joined in, hitting Syrian positions on Radar Hill overlooking the town. To the east of the Golani, the Paratroopers Brigade attacked Syrian positions at the town of Kber Chamoun which overlooked the Beirut/Damascus highway, encountering

heavy fire from a mixed battalion of Syrian commandoes, PLO fighters, and Palestinian T-34 tanks. The Paratroopers Brigade pushed through these positions and on to Kfir Shemlan, which they took against heavy resistance. That night they pivoted east toward Ein Anub, surprising the Syrians there who expected the Israelis to move west instead. The Syrians withdrew without a fight. The next day, 13 June, Israeli troops linked up with Phalangist militia in Baadaba.<sup>22</sup>

For the next week skirmishes and artillery exchanges occurred between Israeli and Syrian forces with no heavy fighting. The Israelis had secured most of their territorial objectives except one: the cutting of the Beirut/Damascus highway. The Syrian 62<sup>nd</sup> and 85<sup>th</sup> Brigades, battered but still combat effective, occupied positions on both the north and south sides of the highway. On 22 June, the Israelis unleashed a five-brigade assault on the highway, composed of Division 162, the Paratroopers, and the Golani Brigade. Israeli control of the air was completely uncontested, allowing the IAF to pound Syrian armored units as they rushed west from the Bekaa valley: dozens of Syrian tanks and vehicles were destroyed. The Paratroopers Brigade drove east on Jamhur Bhamdoun as the Golani Brigade attacked west toward Bhamdoun. Division 162 drove north on Sofar. Even though holding strong defensive positions, Syrian troops withdrew. They fell back in good order with the 85th Brigade retreating into Beirut and the 62nd Brigade pulling back east toward the entrance to the Bekaa. In many cases, Israeli commanders on the ground allowed Syrian forces to withdraw without a fight. By 25 June, the IDF occupied both the southern and northern approaches to the highway, effectively cutting off Beirut from outside help.<sup>23</sup> Arafat and the PLO, his fighting and terrorist formations largely intact, were trapped inside Beirut.

Begin and Sharon had no intention of letting Arafat and the PLO out of Beirut and back into southern Lebanon. Despite massive international pressure, especially from the United States, Israeli forces closed in on the city and prepared for a long siege. On 3 July, Israeli troops entered East Beirut and advanced as far as the Green Line, which cut the city in two. The next day, the Golani Brigade attacked PLO positions south of Beirut, driving them out of the towns of Hai es Salaam and Souqel Gharb. The cruelties of the siege played into Arafat's hands and sparked international outrage. By the end of July, Sharon felt compelled to try to force matters and ordered the IDF to drive deeper into Beirut in an effort to increase pressure on Arafat. On 1 August, the Golani and Paratrooper Brigades hit the airport and drove the PLO out after several hours of hard fighting. They then pushed up the coast road for the PLO stronghold in the Ourzai district, engaging in heavy fighting along the way.

While the IDF and PLO were fighting for Ourzai and the airport, the Israelis were reinforcing their positions along the Green Line. On 4 August, Israeli army columns at the Port Crossing (in the north) and to the south at the Museum Crossing attacked PLO positions in West Beirut. The northern attack was just a feint to draw PLO forces away from the southern column, whose target was PLO headquarters in the Fakhani section of West Beirut. The Israelis suffered heavily in the brutal urban fighting, losing 19 dead and 64 wounded. Sharon decided that the advanced could not be justified against its human cost.<sup>24</sup>

On 6 August Arafat agreed in principal to withdraw from Beirut and Lebanon, though the details of where he and the PLO would go and how would still need to be worked out. As negotiations continued, Israeli air and artillery pounded PLO areas of the city, with 12 August seeing a massive bombardment of all PLO positions in west Beirut, inflicting hundreds of civilian casualties. That night, the Israelis and the PLO agreed to a ceasefire. On 21 August, under the auspices of international peace keepers, PLO forces began withdrawing from Lebanon.

The Israelis maintained a strong presence in central and southern Lebanon for the next three years. During this time, there was constant skirmishing between the IDF and various militias and terrorist organizations. A steady stream of Israeli casualties made the Israeli occupation politically untenable. In

1985, the Israelis withdrew inside a self-proclaimed Security Zone south of the Litani River. Occupied by 20,000 soldiers and the Israeli trained Southern Lebanese Army, the Security Zone kept Lebanon's various terrorist groups at bay until the summer of 2000, when the Israelis withdrew entirely from Lebanon.

Over the course of Operation Peace for Galilee, the Israelis suffered 368 dead and 2,383 wounded. 140 tanks (M-60s, Centurions, and Merkevas) were damaged or destroyed, with a total of 40 being un-repairable. 135 APCs were also knocked out. These losses were suffered by a nation of five million in a geographic space about the size of New Jersey, a land where everyone knows everyone else. Richard Gabriel points out that if one were to calibrate these figures to the American population in 1982, they would amount to more than 32,000 dead and 163,000 wounded.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps a greater blow was dealt to the Israeli conscience. For the first time, Israelis questioned the necessity of war and, as details emerged, its conduct. It is clear that Sharon misled the cabinet as to his intentions and drove them toward a conflict with the Syrians, which was not the public aim of the war. Eli Giva, 211 Brigade's commanding officer, resigned rather than lead his men into urban combat in an Arab city. Worse, Israeli troops, and by extension Sharon, were complicit in the Shatila and Sabra massacres, in which Phalangist militia murdered hundreds of Palestinians under the noses of Israeli troops.<sup>26</sup> When the Khan commission found Sharon at least partially responsible for the atrocity, he resigned from the cabinet.

Even though Operation Peace for Galilee brought about great controversy in Israel, the PLO did not win the war: they were expelled from Lebanon. PLO leadership and the guerilla/terrorist apparatus survived, simply by virtue of the fact that they ran away. Ironically, it was the PLO patron, the Syrians, who suffered heavily. Some 1,200 Syrian soldiers were killed and another 3,000 were wounded. The Syrian army lost more than 300 tanks, 150 APCs, and 100 artillery pieces. Worse for the Assad regime, the Syrian air force was humiliated, losing 86 jets in two days of air battles with the IAF. The Israelis lost no aircraft. Additionally, 19 SAM batteries were destroyed in the Bekaa Valley.<sup>27</sup> Though the Israelis won yet another military victory, the political goals of the invasion were not met. The Maronites were not able to assert control over Lebanon. The Syrians stayed in the country until 2004.

Despite the crisis of confidence and conscience brought about by the war, Operation Peace for Galilee must be judged a success. Yasser Arafat and the PLO were removed from Lebanon and forced to relocate to distant Tunisia. One cannot emphasize enough that between 1982 and 2000 Israeli's northern border was secured against the terrorist bombardment it had endured for much of 1981 and 1982. In stark contrast, Hezbollah maintains a well-trained and well-equipped army of thousands on the Israeli border with an arsenal of tens of thousands of rockets capable of reaching deep inside Israel. The bloody stalemate fought by Israel in 2006 is just a preview to the massive war which surely lies in that nation's near future, a war which will see millions of Israelis huddled in bomb shelters as Iranian-made Hezbollah rockets rain down upon the Jewish state. Seen in this light, Operation Peace for Galilee was a necessity and a success.

## **Order of Battle**

### **Israel**

#### Coastal Thrust

##### Division 91

211 Brigade

(plus three mechanized infantry brigades, six infantry brigades and one artillery brigade)

##### Division 96

35<sup>th</sup> Paratroopers Brigade (Sidon landing)

(plus one tank brigade)

#### Central Front

##### Division 36

Golani Brigade (later to coastal thrust)

188<sup>th</sup> Barak (Lightning) Brigade

##### Armored Division 162

(two tank brigades, one mechanized brigade)

##### Bekaa Forces Group

###### Armored Division 252

7<sup>th</sup> Armored Brigade (less 77 Battalion)

(plus two infantry brigades and one artillery brigade)

###### Reserve Armored Division 90

(three tank brigades, one artillery brigade)

##### Vardi Forces Group

###### Armored Brigade 460

###### Reserve Armored Division 880 (corps reserve)

### **Syria**

#### At Large

10 commando battalions

#### Central Front

85<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Brigade

#### Bekka Valley

1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division (June 7)

91<sup>st</sup> Armored Brigade

78<sup>th</sup> Tank Brigade

58<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Brigade

3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division (June 9)

82<sup>nd</sup> Armored Brigade

47<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Brigade

62<sup>nd</sup> Armored Brigade

### **PLO**

Karamah Brigade (Mount Hermon)

Kastel Brigade (Sidon)

## Yarmuk Brigade (Kaft Huna)

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- <sup>1</sup> See Global Security's entry for the Lebanese civil war, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/lebanon.htm>
- <sup>2</sup> Gabriel, Richard A. *Operation Peace for Galilee: The Israeli-PLO War in Lebanon*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1984, 64.
- <sup>3</sup> For a good account of Syrian operations during this period see Pollock, Kenneth, *Arabs at War*, Lincoln: Bison, 2002, 514-522.
- <sup>4</sup> Schiff, Ze'ev and Ya'ari, Ehud. *Israel's Lebanon War*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984, 33-35. This is an excellent book with many brilliant firsthand accounts of the fighting. However, the authors despise Ariel Sharon and used disgruntled military officers for much of their inside accounts. It is an agenda driven book.
- <sup>5</sup> Rabinovich, Itamar. *The War for Lebanon: 1970-1985*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985, 102.
- <sup>6</sup> Herzog, Chaim. *The Arab Israeli Wars*. New York: Random House, 1982, 480-485, Solley, ch III. These were (and are) not tent cities but built-up urban areas of multistory concrete structures.
- <sup>7</sup> Solley, Major George C. *The Israeli Experience in Lebanon: 1982-1985*. Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Marine Corps Development and Education Command, Quantico, Virginia, 10 May 1987, 26.
- <sup>8</sup> Gabriel, 51.
- <sup>9</sup> Herzog, 385; Solley, 55.
- <sup>10</sup> Previously the PLO had operated out of Jordan. In September of 1970, Arafat had tried to overthrow King Hussein. The Jordanian army, fanatically loyal to the Hashemite monarchy, utterly crushed the PLO and expelled tens of thousands of Palestinians.
- <sup>11</sup> Operation Litani (1978), Ynetnews Published: 03.15.09
- <sup>12</sup> Solley, 40-42.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, 48.
- <sup>14</sup> ibid, 57; Schiff and Ya'ari, 118, 123.
- <sup>15</sup> Schiff and Ya'ari, 157-159.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid, 168.
- <sup>17</sup> Gabriel, 92-95.
- <sup>18</sup> Katz, Samuel. *Fire & Steel*. New York: Pocket Books, 1996, 260
- <sup>19</sup> Gabriel, 83-84.
- <sup>20</sup> Solley, 67; Schiff and Ya'ari, 139-141.
- <sup>21</sup> Schiff and Ya'ari, 141-150; Katz 147, 148
- <sup>22</sup> ibid 192-193.
- <sup>23</sup> Gabriel 111; Solley 87; Pollack, 540.
- <sup>24</sup> Gabriel, 153-154.
- <sup>25</sup> ibid, 177.
- <sup>26</sup> Schiff and Ya'ari cover the massacre in great detail, devoting an entire chapter to it.
- <sup>27</sup> Pollock, 540.