Institute for Palestine Studies

THE SOUTH LEBANON BORDER ZONE: A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

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To make sense of what was to become the "security zone" of south Leba-
non, one must go back to the Palestine tragedy of 1948, when tens of
thousands of Palestinians were either expelled or fled over the border into
Lebanon, mainly from the Galilee. The people of south Lebanon, both
Christian and Muslim, traditionally had close ties—of trade, work, friend-
ship, even kinship—with the people of northern Palestine, and indeed the
cities of Haifa and Acre were better known to them than was Beirut. The
weekly markets of south Lebanon, not only of agricultural produce but espe-
cially of local manufactures, thrived because of Palestinian patronage, while a
number of Lebanese worked or had small businesses in northern Palestine;
some even settled in Haifa and Acre. One of the paradoxical effects of the
creation of Israel was to promote a greater national coherence in Lebanon by
redirecting the economic activity of the southern region northwards; the rural
exodus from the south likewise began in earnest after 1948 because of the
economic fallout of the loss of Palestine in terms of work opportunities and
markets.

The people of south Lebanon felt keenly the Palestine tragedy. When the
Palestinians arrived as refugees, many were aided and sheltered by the local

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based on a series of interviews conducted by Linda Butler at the end of June
1991.

population. While a number of camps were set up in the south, there were none in the border region stretching from the Arkub in the mountainous east to Tyre on the coast. Yet, thousands of destitute Palestinians settled in that strip of land, working mainly in agriculture, particularly in tobacco cultivation. Hundreds of Palestinians, for example, settled in my village of Bint Jubayl, where they enjoyed good relations with the population aside from the normal frictions one always finds between families and clans.

But sometime in the 1950s, both for security reasons and to end the smuggling that had sprung up between Galilee and south Lebanon with the arrival of the refugees, the Lebanese government passed a measure calling for the removal of the Palestinians from the border zone, forbidding them access to nearby villages without a military permit; in principle they could only reside in villages that were, say, 10 km from the border. I still remember as a boy when the Palestinians had to leave our village to resettle in the region of Tyre.

From 1948 to 1968, the region was basically quiet, except for a certain nibbling away at the frontier on the part of the Israelis, who moved the border stakes 20 meters here, 50 meters there, encroaching without distinction on both Christian and Muslim agricultural lands. Still, there were no important incidents.

Palestinian Military Implantation

Guerrilla raids across the Lebanese-Israeli border began on a limited scale even before the June 1967 war. It was primarily afterwards, however, that the Palestinians began to organize themselves militarily, emerging from their camps and establishing bases more or less close to the border. This led to friction and a number of clashes with the Lebanese army. It ultimately led to the November 1969 Cairo agreements that in effect gave the Palestinians the right to launch operations from Lebanese soil.

Thus, at the end of the 1960s, the Palestinians reentered the region they had been forced to leave more than a decade earlier. This time they came as military men, members of armed organizations, rather than as refugees with their families. It is noteworthy that they did not try to establish themselves in the Christian villages, just as they had not moved into Christian villages in 1948. They settled primarily into the Sunni region of the Arkub—later the "Fatehland" of the international press. They also set up bases in the Shiite areas around Taibeh and Khiyam, in the Marjayun district, and around Bint Jubayl.

Not surprisingly, the new Palestinian presence mobilized the militant segment of the population, obviously a minority. It also gained a certain following among the masses, who were sensitive to the heightened Arab nationalism of the time. There is no question that the local population accepted the principle of the Palestinian struggle, having witnessed firsthand the unfolding of the Palestine tragedy and having shared the bitterness of the 1967 defeat. But despite their positive feelings towards the Palestinian cause,

- - - - Security zone in 1979

———— Security zone in 1990

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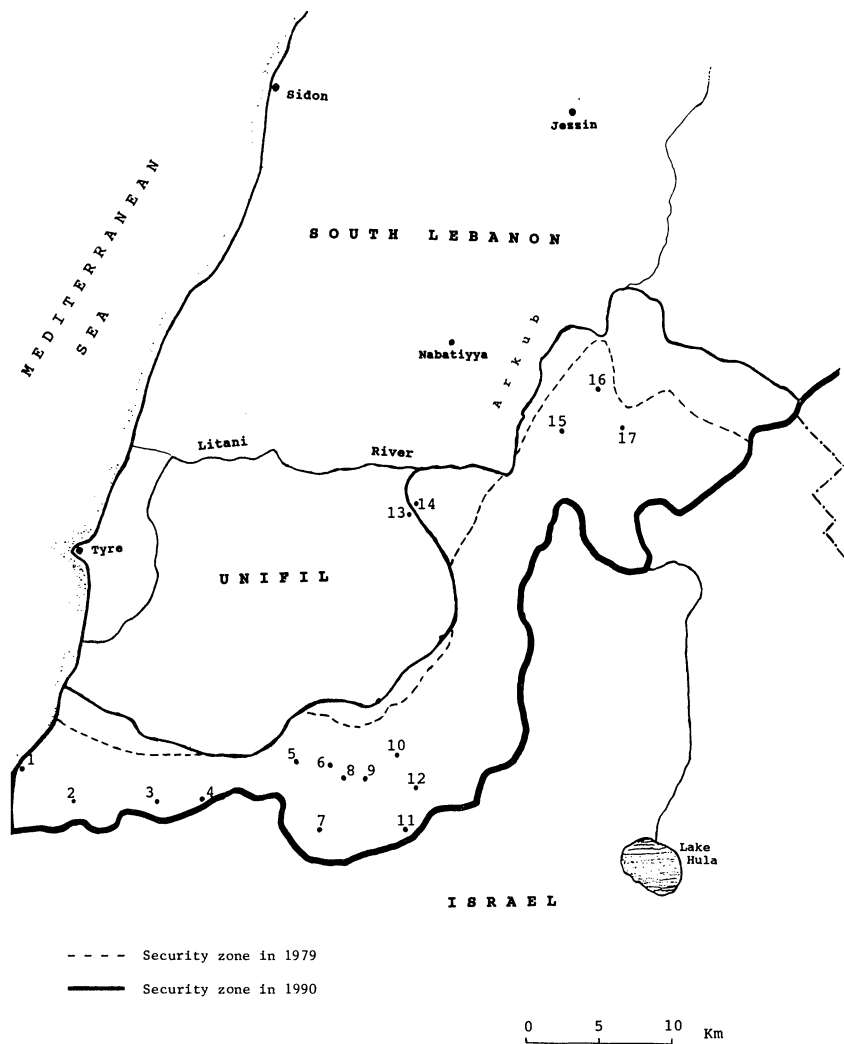
1. Nakkura	10. Bint Jubayl
2. Alma	11. Yarun
3. Yarin	12. Marun al-Ras
4. Marwahin	13. Ghanduriyya
5. Kawza	14. Qantara
6. Deble	15. Koleiya
7. Rumaysh	16. Marjayun
8. Hanin	17. Khiyam
9. Ain Ible	

most people were against the implantation of the guerrillas in the region, which they considered dangerous. It is the nature of the masses, absorbed by daily worries, to prefer the stability of the status quo, however unsatisfactory, to the risks of an adventure without guarantees; they become mobilizable only if pushed by an undisputed authority or a patent absence of authority. While the Palestinians and their local allies already constituted an embryonic authority, it was not sufficient to mobilize the people as a whole. On the other hand, the only authority capable of countering the growing military presence was the Lebanese army, which most people saw as the arm of a corrupt and partisan central authority indifferent to the fate of the peripheral regions.

Given this unpopularity, the army, with a command structure dominated by Christians, could hardly have served as a focus for mobilization against Palestinian military implantation in the region. Moreover, the traditional balances of the Lebanese political system, combined with concern for popular reactions in Beirut and other cities far from the border zone, constrained the role of the central authority and virtually paralyzed the army. The traditional local leaders, more or less linked to the power circles in Beirut, were likewise partially paralyzed and ended up becoming intimidated by the armed Palestinian presence. The rivalries among the local elites, as well as their reading of the balance of power, led some to seek favors from the Palestinian organizations, others to remain silent. It was largely because of this situation that the true attitude of the local population, which was complicated and nuanced, was unable to emerge.

At the same time, the Palestinians were being drawn into local contradictions. The Lebanese leftist and nationalist organizations that had facilitated their implantation in the region—the communists, the Organization for Lebanese Communist Action, the Ba'ath, the Arab Nationalist Movement, and so on—were competing with one another in their drive to extend their relatively limited influence in the region at the expense of the traditional leaders (zu'ama). But while the Lebanese organizations, due to Palestinian arms and political support, became more influential and more feared, they simultaneously became more isolated from the essential core of the population, which began to see in them a threat to the traditional authority structures within their villages, and hence to their political stability. It should be stated that the Palestinians were not always very prudent in this regard, and instead of directly addressing themselves to the population at large, they increasingly relied on their local allies.

Meanwhile, the Israelis did not remain idle as the Palestinians built up a military presence and began launching operations from Lebanese territory. The Israelis began carrying out raids, first against the camps themselves, then against the military bases set up far from the camps, especially in the Arkub region. Most often the attacks consisted of artillery barrages and perhaps a few aerial bombings. It was not until May 1970 that the first land battle took place—the Battle of Arkub, which is still remembered in the region for the

resistance shown there. (The Palestinian tactic generally was to withdraw at the time of the attack rather than face Israel's superior equipment and numbers.) About a month later, the Israelis bombed my village of Bint Jubayl, one of the larger of the area, causing a number of civilian dead and wounded. From that time forward, attacks against villages escalated both in air strikes and in ground incursions aimed at killing or capturing fedayeen. In September 1972 there was even a limited invasion, when the Israeli army entered the south full force in retaliation for the Munich Olympics killings. They remained for forty hours, withdrawing after having killed some 140 people, including 80 civilians. The Israelis generally made incursions against Palestinians or against Lebanese reputed to be in contact with them, but from time to time they carried out operations with no other purpose than to terrorize the civilian population and make them understand the price of tolerating the Palestinian presence.

Under the impact of Israeli bombings and civilian deaths, local enthusiasm for the Palestinian and Lebanese organizations began to wane. With the continuation of Israeli raids, the villagers started pressuring the guerrilla units to withdraw from their villages. Finally, in early 1972, the Lebanese government, acting in response to a number of petitions received from southern villages, asked the Palestinians to pull back from the populated areas. The Palestinians carried out this directive only partially, tending to remain in villages of tactical importance where the leftist/nationalist organizations had a sufficiently strong presence. Even when they did withdraw, they remained in the vicinity, and the "vacated" villages would be caught in a "belt of fire" as the Israelis intensively shelled all around them, night after night.

By the mid-1970s, then, relations between the Palestinians and the local population had deteriorated, primarily because of the Israeli bombings and punishment of the civilian population, and secondarily because of the disruption in traditional village structures caused by Palestinian support for the leftist and nationalist parties against the *zu'ama*. Moreover, the Palestinians' nervousness over the population's changed attitudes worsened the situation, causing them to act in authoritarian ways that greatly angered the people, such as setting up checkpoints and controlling peoples' movements for security reasons. As a result of all this, the Palestinians very largely lost the support of the population. This must be understood in order to understand what happened after 1975.

The Civil War

The Lebanon war erupted in April 1975, but the south remained relatively quiet for over a year. Indeed, the various phases of the war were felt in the south mainly through the successive swelling and shrinking of the villages, each of which had at least as many native sons in Beirut and its suburbs as had remained behind. This meant that at each flareup in violence, thousands

of refugees would flock to the security of their home villages and then return
to Beirut again during the next period of calm.

This relatively benign phase (for the south) ended in the summer of 1976,
a crucial period that paved the way for the subsequent establishment of the
"security zone." In early August, less than two weeks before the fall of the
Palestinian camp Tal al-Zaatar, Beirut's northern Shiite suburbs of Naba'a,
Dekkoueneh, and Bourj Hammud were overrun by the Christian rightist
forces, their populations driven out with significant loss of life. The flight
towards the south was apocalyptic, with tens of thousands of homeless, desti-
tute refugees—Naba'a alone counted 200,000 people, most of them from the
south—converging on villages ill-prepared to shelter them. In Bint Jubayl,
for example, the normal population of 12,000–13,000 inhabitants ballooned
to 24,000 in the space of a month, giving rise to nightmarish scenes of up to
50 persons crammed into two-room houses, sleeping on rooftops, in gardens,
on balconies, wherever there was space. The perception that the Palestinian
organizations and their Lebanese allies charged with the defense of the sub-
urbs had not put up a fight at the time of the final onslaught heightened
bitterness and the sense of abandonment by forces once seen as protectors.

Around the time that the Shiite villages were being overwhelmed by the
massive influx of refugees, another phenomenon was occurring with crucial
repercussions for the future of the south. This was the influx into the
Maronite border villages of hundreds of demobilized soldiers returning home
after the Lebanese army split along sectarian lines that began in early 1976.
There were a number of such villages strung along the frontier—Alma in the
west; Deble, Ain Ible, Kawza, Rumaysh, and Yarun (religiously mixed) in the
center; and Koleiya and Marjayun in the east. Primarily agricultural, largely
poor, the villages were distinguished by the disproportionate number of their
young people who embarked upon military careers. (Indeed, the majority of
the rank and file in the Lebanese army came from the deprived regions of the
peripheries, which for the Christians meant the Akkar in the north, the east-
ern Bekaa, and the villages of the extreme south.) The militarization of the
villages was furthered by an implicitly anti-Palestinian auxiliary force, the
"Partisans of the Army" (Ansar al-Jaysh), which had been set up even prior to
the war's outbreak. The armed, angry soldiers flooding back to their home
villages after their barracks had been taken over by Ahmad Khatib's Muslim
Lebanese Arab Army (LAA), had been politicized and confessionalized—one
could even say fanaticized—in the growing polarization of the war. They
were bitter against the Palestinians, the essential strike force on the other
side, and bitter against the Palestinians' Muslim allies whom they blamed for
the mutiny in the army.

It was against this background that the Israelis began to intervene more
aggressively, and at a number of levels. As far back as the late 1960s and
early 1970s, they had begun to exploit the inter-confessional phenomenon in
the border region and had tried to set up networks of informers, both Chris-
tian and Muslim. The effort remained very limited, however, and it was only

when the civil war broke out that the Israelis began seriously to play the sectarian card.

First, they initiated the "good fence" policy aimed principally but not exclusively at the Maronite villages. They distributed food and supplies, and, the Lebanese medical services being in chaos, offered emergency services to the displaced population and accepted some Lebanese patients in their hospitals. Soon some people from this economically devastated area were given permits to work in Israel.

At a second level, the Israelis intensified their contacts with the Maronite border villages, which had hitherto coexisted peacefully with their Muslim neighbors, exchanging visits on the occasion of funerals and days of mourning, weddings, and religious feast days. As a youth in Bint Jubayl, I remember how young people used to walk to the neighboring village of Ain Ible for a beer (prohibited in Shiite villages) and to watch the pretty girls out strolling of a summer evening. And although the Christians began to share their fears about the growing Palestinian military presence with their Shiite friends and the Shiite notables, relations between the two communities remained excellent through the first year of the war.

It soon became clear that the Israeli goal was to cut the Maronite villages off from their Muslim environment. None of the villages was more than 3 km from the border, which made it easy to provision and arm them so as to open a new front against the Palestinians. In implementing this policy, Israel worked through the Kataeb party, which it had been secretly assisting throughout the war and which already had a limited presence in each of these villages.

Even given the rising polarization and anti-Palestinian sentiment heightened by the war, and even given the militarization of the villages with their influx of armed, idle, angry soldiers, Israel's takeover of the border villages through their local Kataeb proxies was not always easy. It is true that certain villages, for example Koleiya, quickly fell under Israel's sway. With some 400 demobilized soldiers—a staggering number for a village of 3,000 inhabitants—Koleiya was highly militarized and, in the prevailing atmosphere, may have feared repercussions for its support for Camille Chamoun,* who was anathema to the Palestinian-Muslim-Leftist alliance which maintained a large presence in the town of Khiyam next door.

At the other end of the spectrum was Ain Ible, a very beautiful, relatively prosperous village that lived primarily from remittances from the Gulf. Ain Ible, far less militarized than the other Maronite villages, enjoyed correct relations with the Palestinians, who made certain the village received its rations of flour, gasoline, fuel, and so on, and had no wish to be destabilized. The few Kataeb elements in the village were neither strong enough nor disci-

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* Lebanon's president during the 1958 civil war and a Maronite hardliner, Chamoun was head of the National Liberal Party and militia and a member of the Lebanese Front, the Kataeb-dominated coalition of Christian conservative organizations. He died in 1987.

plined enough to impose a collective attitude hostile to its environment and the Palestinians. But during the summer of 1976, a vanguard of fifteen heavily armed Kataeb militants were dispatched by sea from Junieh in the Christian north via Haifa in Israel and thence on Israeli vehicles to Ain Ible. There they assembled all the villagers at the municipality and announced their intention of opening a front against the Palestinians with Israeli support. The vigorous and angry protests of the inhabitants, alarmed at the prospect of bringing war to their town, were to no avail. The newcomers were armed to the teeth, and, playing on various rivalries, soon began distributing weapons to unemployed young people willing to go to Israel for training. So that was how Ain Ible fell to Israeli control. The resistance at Rumaysh was weaker because of its stronger military tradition—there were at least 100 demobilized soldiers and gendarmes in the town after the army disintegrated and the "Partisans of the Army" were installed there. Likewise with Deble. Moreover, both villages were already involved in Israel's "good fence" policy. It was thus that, playing on minoritarian fears and vulnerabilities against the background of civil war, the Israelis and their Kataeb allies succeeded in doing what the Lebanese leftist and nationalist organizations had failed to do against the traditional leaders in Shiite villages through the Palestinians. By the end of summer 1976, all the Maronite border villages were under Israeli control.

In September, armed elements from Koleiya, with Israeli backing, began to block the route to Marjayun, site of a Lebanese army barracks now under the control of the Palestinian-backed Lebanese Arab Army. Meanwhile, a number of incidents of which the Palestinians were implicitly accused, though without any evidence, added to the tensions. At the end of September 1976, an incident in Ain Ible involving Palestinians and armed elements was on the point of being peacefully resolved through traditional mediation led by the notables from Ain Ible and Bint Jubayl, when without warning the first mortar shells were fired on Bint Jubayl from its Maronite neighbor. Those who had come to open the front, had opened it. At the other side of the region, to the east, the same phenomenon took place with Koleiya began to bombard its neighbors Khiyam and Taibeh. The shelling of Shiite villages from their Christian neighbors marked a point of no return; by October 1976, the Christian villages were completely cut off from their hinterland.

It was following the bombardment of September that the Israelis named Major Saad Haddad, a Lebanese army officer originally from Marjayun, to centralize the military effort and coordinate the local militias, which at the time were basically disparate village units operating more or less independently from each other, though all telecommanded by Israel through the local Kataeb outposts. In October, Haddad's men with Israeli help wrested the Marjayun barracks from Ahmad Khatib's LAA and established their general headquarters there. These were the beginnings of what was to become the South Lebanon Army (SLA), and from that time forward Haddad set about forging the framework of the force. He had the help of two or three other

dissident officers from the Lebanese army, but mostly command of the units was entrusted to noncommissioned officers who rapidly rose in the ranks, jumping grades.

During the same period, the first steps were taken to "clean out" the Muslim/Palestinian-held areas separating the three Maronite border enclaves in the west, center, and east. In order to pass from either Deble or Ain Ible to Rumaysh, for example, one had to go through the Shiite village of Hanin where there was a Palestinian and Lebanese Ba'ath presence. In November 1976, Hanin was overrun by the Christian forces with Israeli cover and support, the population was driven out and the entire village razed to the ground—all that remains today of a village of 3,000 souls is a single house, which was rebuilt and is inhabited by the old mukhtar and his wife. Similarly, to go from Rumaysh in the center to the Christian villages of Alma and Nakkura in the west, one had to pass through the Sunni villages of Yarin and Marwahin. Both were razed and their populations expelled that same autumn (though some years later the villagers were allowed to return and rebuild, and some did). The Shiite villages of Marun al-Ras and al-Qantara suffered the same fate. These operations consolidated the Maronite enclaves themselves, but stretches of Muslim-Palestinian territory continued to separate the segments under Israeli control. The linking of the enclaves would have to await the 1978 invasion.

There was no respite from the shelling during the entire year of 1977. Around the time that the Maronites and Israelis opened the new front, many of the Palestinians who had withdrawn from villages in the early 1970s under pressure from the Shiites returned, which aggravated Shiite-Palestinian relations. By 1977, the "Palestinian-Islamic-Progressive" side comprised Palestinians of all factions, Iraqis, militiamen of the Imam Musa Sadr* who had come in from other regions, and the PPS (Parti Populaire Syrien) from Mount Lebanon. The local Lebanese militiamen had virtually disappeared once the war began in earnest, often on the pretext of accompanying their families to safety and then simply not returning.

Indeed, under the heavy shelling from the Israelis, the border zone was fast emptying. Bint Jubayl, for example, went from a high of 24,000 people in August 1976 to a mere 400 several months later, and the predominantly Muslim Khiyam, the largest and richest town of the south which had a population of about 20,000 before the war, was similarly emptied. The few inhabitants who remained amidst the devastation were forcibly driven out in 1978, and the derelict town was used by the Israelis as a training ground for urban military maneuvers, with tanks and armored vehicles waging mock battles among sad carcasses of roofless buildings pierced by the gaping holes of mortar shells. (After 1981, people were allowed to return to the rubble

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* The charismatic, populist head of Lebanon's Shiite hierarchy and founder of the Shiite Movement of the Disinherited and its military arm, Amal. The Imam disappeared in Libya in 1978.

that had been their houses, and a few thousand did come back to set about rebuilding.)

It should be stated that the Christian villages held up much better against the tendency to emigrate, largely because they knew that the Israeli presence would prevent their villages from being overrun. They had to withstand only mortaring, whereas in the Shiite villages there was not only bombardment but also the danger of invasion and massacre, of which precedents were not lacking.

The Israeli Invasions and the Consolidation of the Security Zone

The "security belt" came into being in the wake of the invasion of March 1978, when the Israeli forces surged into Lebanon with the declared objective of occupying a 10-km-wide belt north of the border to prevent Palestinian attacks against Israel. Instead, the forces pushed all the way to the Litani river, occupying more than a tenth of Lebanese territory. Faced with strong international pressure, in the form of UN Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426, which called for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from all Lebanese territories and the establishment of a special UN force, UNIFIL, Israel partially withdrew in two stages. But just before it was to make the final withdrawal in June 1978, it turned the remaining 10-km strip over to its proxy militia under Major Haddad. And while Israel had officially withdrawn, it was no secret that the SLA continued to be "thickened" by Israeli soldiers and that Israeli officers were a permanent presence. UNIFIL was prevented from entering the area. The "security belt" was born.

The local population has suffered greatly during the 1978 invasion. The Israeli army, guided by Christian militiamen often recognized as being from neighboring villages, pushed into the Shiite villages and wreaked havoc. In Bint Jubayl, they rounded up the 400 persons who had remained and herded them to the village reservoir. The villagers were made to wait without shelter for three days, under heavy guard, while the Israelis and their allies meticulously searched each house, looting and vandalizing along the way. All the houses in which they found some trace of a Palestinian presence, in whatever form, were systematically blown up, whether or not the houses had been freely offered or requisitioned. Most of the public buildings were likewise razed. This pattern was repeated all over occupied south Lebanon; tens of thousands of additional people were thus made homeless, and hundreds were killed, some gratuitously—about seventy unarmed civilians were massacred in a mosque in Khiyam.

In the weeks following the occupation, the inhabitants who had fled the invading forces were progressively authorized to return in small groups to their devastated villages. Many did so, no longer able to endure life in tents, mosques, and schools; several thousand people were camped under the trees at the northern entrance to Sidon, and the cold season was not yet over. In all the villages, the returning groups were screened with the help of local

auxiliaries well-suited to the task by virtue of their intimate knowledge of their neighbors and fellow citizens.

The establishment of the "security belt" necessitated an important over-hauling of the SLA, hitherto an almost exclusively Maronite force composed of local boys—mainly Lebanese army deserters, Kataeb militants, and more recent recruits. Prior to the invasion, one of the force's major problems had been the reluctance of the local units to serve anywhere other than in their own villages. With the new situation, the formation of mobile units became essential to controlling the entire area. An intensive recruitment and training drive was undertaken, aimed at the Shiites as well, not only to expand the force's numbers but also to avoid the stigma that would accompany a purely Maronite force patrolling a large Muslim region.

Recruitment was carried out through the "village committees" set up under Israeli supervision in each village in the wake of the invasion. These local committees were called upon to organize community services in effort to re-place somewhat the municipalities that had largely ceased to function. Com-mittee members also acted as informers. Concerning recruitment, the SLA would determine the overall number of new recruits needed, and then assign each committee a quota in accordance with the village size.

Not surprisingly, the first to rally to the force were the most marginal and despised elements of society. Some had already served in Palestinian or pro-Palestinian organizations; the Israelis accepted them after a short period of detention and "reeducation," which consisted mainly of beatings. But in general, recruitment was hard going. Families sent their sons of "military age" to relatives outside the zone; to this day, the last three classes of high school are almost entirely made up of girls. Often the parents accompanied their children, contributing to the depopulation of the region.

The Israelis soon found ways of countering reluctance to join the SLA. Against a background of extreme economic hardship, a new system was in-augurated whereby a family member of each soldier was permitted to work in Israel. Payment was in dollars, and a worker could earn about $300 a month instead of the average $30–$40 per month (in Lebanese pounds). This sum, in addition to the soldier's wage of about $150 before benefits, gave the fam-ily an income of $450 in hard currency in a country where a cabinet minister earns $300.

In addition to economic factors, considerations relating to power or influ-ence within the village affected the SLA recruitment drive. If a clan was induced to allow one or more of its members to join the SLA, rival clans would feel threatened and stripped of protection. Given the delicate local political and inter-clanic·balances, it was enough for a few members of one clan to join the SLA for other clans to encourage a few elements of their own to join as well.

Other factors related to sectarian concerns and prestige between villages. In the immediate wake of the invasion, the SLA units sent into the Shiite villages to "provide law and order" were composed almost entirely of ele-

ments from one or at most two Maronite villages. Bint Jubayl, for example, was patrolled by elements from its neighbors Deble and Rumaysh. This was seen as particularly galli·g. Added to this was the inter-sectarian dimension. By that time, there was deep bitterness over the Maronite collaboration with the Israelis, the Maronite shelling of Shiite villages, and the role played by Maronite militias during the invasion. Moreover, the SLA soldiers were not just ordinary Maronites but often had been fanaticized against Muslims during the war and hardened by their war experiences. Frequently they were of low moral character; above and beyond the other complaints some did not behave in seemly fashion with the young ladies of the villages. This was not tolerated, and motivated villagers to request setting up their own force in their villages. The assumption, which has been largely borne out, was that villagers would have a certain control over forces made up of their own sons, insofar as they would be bound by the entire web of traditional relations and inhibitions.

Thus, ever since the late 1970s, the core of the SLA units in the Shiite villages has been local, although the officers in charge are almost always Christian. To this day there are no Shiites in the command structure of the SLA, and only limited numbers in the middle echelons that have some authority at the village or village cluster level. But some 40 to 50 percent of the rank and file is Shiite. This is a substantial figure, though less so when one considers that Shiites constitute about 80 percent of the population.

With the ubiquity of the SLA and the informer networks, the "security zone" was soon pacified. Indeed, there had been little resistance. As mentioned, the border region at the time of the invasion had already been seriously depopulated during the relentless shelling of the previous eighteen months, when villages showing any inclination to resist, for example by hindering traffic to one of their Christian neighbors, had been partially or totally razed. The devastation of the major Muslim or mixed towns such as Khiyam, Marjayun, and Bint Jubayl had a profound disorganizing effect on the life of the surrounding villages. Moreover, most of the young men of an age to mount a resistance had left the region during the early days of the occupation to avoid being enrolled in the SLA.

When Israel launched its massive invasion in June 1982, its army swept through the "security zone" without hindrance. But the fighting was intense as the army pushed towards Beirut. Thousands of civilians were killed. An unbelievable tonnage was rained on the capital by Israeli bombers, mortars, and artillery. Numerous families who had been displaced from the border zone since the 1976–78 period decided to return to their villages on the reasoning that since half the country was occupied anyway, they might as well return home where at least they would be safer.

In the very first days of the invasion, it is true that there had perhaps been something akin to relief on the part of many Shiites in the south. People were fed up with the war, fed up with the reign of the militias, both Palestinian and Lebanese, fed up with the divisions within the country. People were

temporarily misled by Israel's declarations concerning a Lebanese solution following the liquidation of the armed Palestinian presence; a strong central authority capable of inaugurating an era of national reconciliation and dissolving the militias was to be established, and the Israelis would withdraw forthwith. There was, too, the paradoxical sense that an Israeli occupation would end the Israeli bombings—in a word, that Israel would free Lebanon from Israel.

But people quickly realized their mistake. As in 1978, there were repeated and arbitrary searches and interrogations. Villagers were forced to assemble, sometimes several times a day, for "verification of identity," and made to stand for hours in the beating sun. Again there was vandalism and sometimes desecration. Again houses were blown up on apparent suspicion of having harbored a militia presence, which again added to the legions of homeless. Again local residents were arrested and taken away for no apparent reason. Hundreds of those returning to their native villages to escape the war zone in the north, especially those with some kind of a political past, were immediately arrested and dispatched to the Ansar camp or other prisons in Israeli territory. (Arrests in the newly occupied zones and among the Palestinians were, of course, far more numerous.) Except for those captured with arms in hand during the Israeli push towards Beirut, whose incarceration could be assumed to be virtually indefinite, the period of detention was totally unpredictable—the detainee could be released after a few days of cursory interrogation, or he could rot in the camp until it was closed several years later. No trials were ever held; most often everything depended on the whim of an officer, on whether or not he liked the prisoner's face, how he talked, or what was known about him.

The Lebanese resistance was born with the Israeli occupation of Beirut in September 1982. It developed rapidly in the south as of the end of the year. Resistance in the border zone was limited for the same reason it had been limited in 1978—the dearth of young men and the fact that those who remained were easy to spot given the abnormally high proportion of old men and women in the area. Compounding this were the effects of four years of occupation. But the inhabitants of the zone, like everyone in the south, were proud of what they saw as *their* resistance. All the parties of the former National Movement and the Islamic organizations took part in the action, but the resistance had an undeniably southern and Shiite character. It was overwhelmingly dominated by the two main Shiite organizations, Amal and Hizballah. It should be noted, however, that the population at large identified far more with Amal than Hizballah, which was always isolated at the popular level. Like the Communist party elsewhere, the Hizballah was well organized and coherent internally but unable to project its influence beyond the inner core of followers among whom it proselytized; its ideology and line of behavior differed too sharply from anything corresponding to a collective aspiration.

The resistance was tremendously effective. For more than two years, the Israeli losses approached the unprecedented average of one soldier killed a day. These losses also outstripped those among the resistance—another novelty. The Israelis, who had swaggered through the towns and cities in the early days of the occupation, were obliged to make themselves more and more invisible. In the last analysis, the resistance achieved what the regular Arab armies had until then failed to achieve—a forced Israeli withdrawal from an occupied Arab territory.

In June of 1985, the Israelis completed the third stage of their withdrawal from the occupied south. The area they refused to evacuate they handed over to the nominal control of the SLA. As was the case in 1978, however, the Israelis remained, albeit in reduced numbers, their permanent presence in the zone more discreet. The effectiveness of the resistance declined significantly due to a number of factors that are beyond the scope of this paper. Israeli losses in the region by this time were no longer significant. The SLA losses, a little larger, did not appear to unduly concern the Israelis. The SLA soldiers, after all, are paid to die—according to a widespread expression, they are the "sand bags" of Israel.

The new, post-1985 "security belt" added two new pieces of territory (in the east and in the center-west) to the former border zone of 1978. In contrast to the former southwest–northeast "crescent," the new "security zone" traced somewhat of a semicircle. It was no longer just a buffer zone insulating the Israeli border. It allowed the Israelis to keep their heavy machine guns, not to mention their large cannons, trained on the heart of the Bekaa, on part of Mount Lebanon (the essentially Druze and Sunni part), and the totality of the south, including Sidon, Nabatiyya, and Tyre. Finally, the guns were trained on all the Palestinian camps in the region. Not to mention the fact that the vital road skirting the coast towards Beirut and the north could be cut at any time, as could many axes of communication used by the Syrian troops stationed in Lebanon. In short, compared to the 1978 zone, the new "security zone" had a much-enhanced *offensive* value for the Israelis.

The Zone Today

Despite the return of many villagers to the border zone following the 1982 invasion (in Bint Jubayl, for example, the population gradually rose from its low of 400 to almost 6,000), the region as a whole continues to lose population. The population of the zone today numbers from 130,000 to 150,000, half its prewar level, a quarter or at best a third of what it would have been, given a normal growth rate, based on 1975 figures. And while people have begun to return to the rest of Lebanon, the new era of peace has had no impact on the Israeli-SLA occupied border zone. There, emigration has been steady, relentless, and often permanent—to the United States, Australia, Canada, and other countries.

People leave for many reasons. One of the most important is the prevail-
ing atmosphere of suspicion, the sense of being watched and of having to
carefully monitor one's conversation to remain within the narrow range of
permissible opinions (the apparent limit being preference for Lebanese sov-
ereignty). Israeli intelligence is everywhere through its vast network of in-
formers. Without question, the network has been effective, and since the
official establishment of the "security zone" in 1985, operations in the area,
always rare, have become far more so. Above and beyond infiltration from
outside the zone, any cells of resistance established inside were regularly dis-
mantled, the militants dispatched to the prison in Khiyam. Most of them are
still there.

Equally important is the near total isolation from the rest of the country,
the sense of being wedged between narrow and suffocating horizons. The
ostensibly unofficial border of the "security zone" constitutes a far more for-
bidding barrier than the frontiers between most sovereign states. Barbed wire
flanks each of the three or four points of access, observation posts from
which any movement can be seen line the border, and mine fields have been
laid where the terrain makes control difficult. Permits for non-residents to
enter the zone must be obtained at the entry points, today generally manned
by SLA soldiers alone rather than the mixed SLA-Israeli units of the early
years; few are granted. Moreover, aside from international officials of such
organizations as UNICEF, the Red Cross, or Save the Children, few outsiders
try to obtain them. People with families still living in the region are generally
allowed in, although there is always the risk of being detained and, in not a
few cases, sent to Khiyam prison. In the past, local residents had to obtain a
permit in order to enter the zone, but current regulations require a permit in
order to leave.

Corruption is rife. Whatever one needs to do in the border zone—build a
house, obtain any kind of permit or license—requires the approval of the
SLA. It is still ostensibly the Lebanese state that actually grants permits, but
nothing gets done without the SLA, and nothing gets done without a bribe.
The Israelis and the SLA have also allowed a handful of individuals to exer-
cise a virtual monopoly in certain branches of commerce; fortunes have been
amassed.

Economically, the border zone is virtually sealed off. Needless to say, no
merchandise or produce from the area is allowed to enter Israel so as not to
compete with Israeli products. There are also severe constraints on "ex-
ports" to the rest of Lebanon—special permits requiring arduous procedures
must be obtained from the SLA, payoffs must be made, tariffs and taxes paid.
Until recently, once goods made it outside the border zone there were
problems getting them to Beirut because of repeated searches and tariffs in all
the mini-states controlled by the various militias, united only by their suspi-
cion of anything coming from the border zone (and hence, possibly from
Israel). For all practical purposes, then, the only market in the border zone is
an internal market, which is extremely limited. Thus, the businesses that

existed before—an important shoe manufacturing industry that supplied not only Lebanon but several Arab countries with military footwear, ceramics manufacturers, reed products such as mats and hats, knit and clothing goods, and so on—have all either closed down or moved to Tyre or Beirut where they can operate more normally.

Similar difficulties exist for "importing" goods. Since virtually all manufactured goods and much agricultural produce, especially meat, must be brought in from the outside, prices are exorbitant. Goods and produce entering from north Lebanon are subject to multiple restrictions. Once again, special permits must be obtained, the products are heavily taxed, and strict limitations are placed on the numbers of vehicles (taxis and trucks) authorized to enter the zone. Conversely, and not surprisingly, there are no restrictions on products entering from Israel, but people generally avoid buying Israeli agricultural produce, considered inferior.

Meanwhile, tobacco cultivation, once the main livelihood of the region, has greatly declined since 1976. This fact, combined with the economic fallout of the area's forced isolation, has resulted in an extremely depressed economic situation. Most people are engaged in manual labor (such as construction), small trade, and agriculture, often on a subsistence basis, although recently greenhouse farming has been introduced to supply the local market. Others continue on the payroll of the Lebanese government as teachers or local officials. Another source of income, greatly diminished since the Gulf crisis, is remittances from relatives working abroad.

Residents of the "security zone" are not allowed to work in Lebanon beyond the zone but, as already mentioned, some 4,000 to 5,000 persons (with priority going to relatives of the SLA), are transported to and from Israel every day through several predetermined access points. They are employed especially in the services sector, such as in cafés, hotels, or restaurants; others work in agriculture and to a lesser extent in industry. Residents of the zone can also obtain temporary permits to travel to Israel. Many residents of the zone go to Tel Aviv to obtain visas (the embassies in Beirut not functioning) for destinations abroad. Paradoxically, it is easier for Lebanese to get visas in Israel than it would be in Beirut or Damascus because the Western embassies consider their very presence in Israel as a certificate of good behavior. Moreover, since El Al airlines is considerably cheaper than others, many people use it to fly out of Tel Aviv for the West, although they try to hide the fact.

A World of Ambivalences

One of the bitter harvests of the occupation is the damage to long-term relations between the Marônites and the Shiites, two communities once interwoven into a common fabric, now sundered by a powerful legacy of fear and hatred on both sides. On the Muslim side, there are memories of the excesses committed by Maronite militiamen at Israel's side during the 1978 and 1982 invasions, and the ongoing humiliations at the hands of certain

Maronite members of the SLA. Although most Shiites make the distinction between good and bad elements and are well aware that collaboration is not an exclusively Christian phenomenon (and that even among Christians collaborators are a minority), still, there is the rancor that comes from being a majority governed by a minority seen to be doing the bidding of Israel. The sense of separateness was exacerbated by a rise in Islamic feeling in recent years, deriving both from the pride in the Shiite resistance against Israel and the increasing inter-confessional bitterness. The Islamism in the zone appears to be on the wane now, as everywhere else.

On the Christian side, there is the sense that the Muslims sided with the Palestinians and thus caused the civil war, and the enduring perception that Muslims look to Syria or to other Muslim powers. But these feelings are overshadowed by a certain malaise concerning Maronite treatment of the Muslims in the zone. As an example, the former president of the municipal council of Ain Ible refused from 1978 until his death a few years ago to return to Bint Jubayl, where he had not dozens but hundreds of friends, where he was honored and liked by everyone. He let it be known far and wide that he would not set foot again in Bint Jubayl because of his shame at what certain elements of his village had done there. That feeling is not uncommon among the Christians.

There is no question that the potential exists for a bloodletting in the event of an Israeli evacuation, although perhaps not on the scale of what happened in the Shuf in 1983 after the Israelis set the Maronites against the Druze and then abruptly withdrew.* But in my opinion, if a strong security force under a firm central authority is in place at the time of an Israeli withdrawal, nothing will happen. Only a handful of collaborators—those with much blood on their hands—are deeply hated by the population. For the most part, people make a distinction between the various degrees of collaboration and the various extenuating circumstances.

After all that has happened, a certain xenophobia has washed over the country, a kind of allergy to all the parties who became involved in the Lebanese drama—Palestinians, Syrians, Iranians. Contrary to widespread belief, the Shiites considered the Iranians strangers from the beginning. The Iranians repeatedly stressed their historic links with the community, but people today find it hard to be moved by the fact that in the 16th century shaykhs of Jebal Amal journeyed to Iran to serve the dynasty. It is true that according to established tradition, shaykhs, especially from certain renowned religious families, are welcomed throughout the Shiite world in keeping with the family's aura and charisma, but there is a world of difference between itinerant

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* During its occupation of Lebanon, Israel introduced and developed a Kataeb presence in the traditionally Druze-dominated Shuf mountains (mixed Christian and Druze), until then one of the regions least touched by the civil war. Up to 1,000 Lebanese civilians were killed in the bitter fighting and reciprocal massacres that followed Israel's sudden withdrawal in September 1983, after having supplied arms to both the Kataeb and Druze militias.

holy men and Iranian militants dispatched by the Iranian government to set up armed organizations.

It is the Palestinians who come in for the greatest share of the bitterness. By nature, people prefer simple explanations, and it seems that the function of the Palestinians today is to be held up as the party whose behavior can explain what happened to the Lebanese. It is true that the Palestinians committed enough errors that one might almost say they appointed themselves to this role. A few years ago while on a trip abroad, I met a PLO official who had been in Lebanon who said to me: "We did what we did in Lebanon. We know we harmed you, but we didn't mean any harm; you shouldn't hold it against us. It wasn't our intention. The harm we did to you was a secondary phenomenon, an accident." At the time, I was silent. But later I regretted not saying that his words almost made things worse. His statement boiled down to the fact that the harm they might have caused us was not even a subject of reflection for them. The Lebanese collectivity, especially in the south, never really counted for the Palestinians. They concentrated on certain pro-Palestinian elements of the population who favored opening a front against Israel—people like myself—and didn't want to see clearly that this situation would end by turning against the local population, not to mention against themselves. They preferred to take refuge at worst in an obliviousness, at best in a mythic image of the attitude of this collectivity—that the Lebanese were Arabs and Muslims like themselves, had historic bonds with Palestine, hated Israel, and so on—and refused even to consider the consequences of their acts. Some of those who remained in Lebanon have learned something. Others, confronted with the negative reactions of the population, have merely become cynical.

But it must also be said that the Shiites, for all their disappointment and anger against the Palestinians, are the first to know the primary cause of their woes. They have been intimately involved with the Palestine problem from the very beginning, and they cannot forget what they have seen. There is also a question of identity. It's like how relations within a family can be fraught with bitterness and rancor, more even than might exist between the family and strangers. It can even come to the point of spilling blood, yet the relationships at the level of identity cannot be altered. At some level, there is a deep reciprocal knowledge, unspoken, taken for granted. It is like that between us and the Palestinians. Between the Christians and the Palestinians it is more complicated—the element of identity is there, however much some may wish to deny it, but because of the difference in religion, there is an additional level where the possibility of opposition exists. But even for the Maronites, relations with the Israelis are an entirely different matter: the Israelis are alien, external in a way the Palestinians or Syrians could never be. They are profoundly, irremediably, "Other."

In general, people hate Israel, Christians as well as Muslims; indeed, this is a unifying factor. Among the Christians there was never sympathy for the Israelis; there was a logic of necessity. The Christians feel they have been

used by Israel. They have given the Israelis a certain mastery over them, and they know the Israelis despise them. They know they are cut off from their own country and that a large question mark hangs over their future. They know that it will not be easy for them, after all that has happened through Israel's encouragement and initiative, to live a normal life with their neighbors. It is still possible, but it will not be easy; there is something that has been lost, broken.

The Shiites, meanwhile, have suffered more than any other community, except the Palestinians, at Israel's hands. They have felt the full weight of Israeli occupation. Their antipathy is not abstract, ideological, rooted in notions of Arabism or right and wrong; it is rooted in a lived experience of constant bombings, harassment, death. After more than twenty years, the Shiites have their own dispute with Israel. This does not mean that they are ready to reopen the front—that era is gone forever. And if people are happy on the rare occasions when a resistance operation claims SLA or Israeli casualties (so long as it takes place far from their village and doesn't entail reprisals), in general there is a growing disenchantment with the Shiite organizations and anger when operations (the planting of mines, for example) cause civilian victims. A new element in recent years is the widespread Shiite realization that Israel will not be expelled by force, and that the occupation can end only through peaceful negotiation.

If there is any cause for hope in south Lebanon it is in the universal and profound desire for Lebanese sovereignty to be restored. In the last analysis, apart from a handful of profiteers who control trade in the zone, practically no one truly benefits from the occupation; even the soldiers of the SLA and those employed in Israel know they could live and work normally in their own land if the region were not occupied. Despite the passage of years, people have not accepted the situation. Hence the eagerness with which all elements of the population seize upon scraps of rumors predicting the imminent withdrawal of the Israelis, supporting their assertions with elaborately constructed explanations and theories. Hence, also, the way that any event, regional or international, is interpreted solely in relation to its possible impact on the chances for Israeli withdrawal.

Are the Lebanese optimistic or pessimistic about the chances of settlement? It depends on the moment, on the present conjuncture. Sometimes they are optimistic, sometimes discouraged. But all the same, as in all human beings, it is the hope that dominates.