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THE IDF, THE PLO AND URBAN WARFARE:

LEBANON 1982

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Thesis for the Degree of Arts Master in Middle Eastern Studies

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INTRODUCTION

During the 1982 war in Lebanon most military observers' eyes were firmly fixed on the Israel-Syria confrontation in central and eastern Lebanon. The bi-polar nature of international relations at that time necessitated that strategic analysts focus on the performance of the Israelis' American-made weapons and the Soviet-supplied arms of the Syrians. Similarly, measurable victory by either side would serve in varying degrees to validate the tactics of either the Warsaw Pact or NATO. However, the battles between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Israel Defense Force (IDF) will, perhaps, have a greater, more enduring impact on the future conduct of warfare. These battles may point the way non-state nationalisms or even small states will opt to engage the modern forces of powerful opponents, when the situation deteriorates into armed conflict.

In the cities and refugee camps along Lebanon's southern coast, circumstances combined to dull the IDF's qualitative and even quantitative edge. Fighting in an urban landscape against a newly resolute and determined Palestinian militia, the Israelis found themselves facing a dilemma. The armed inhabitants of the camps, bolstered by remnants of PLO semi-regulars that escaped the debacle in the south, refused to quit their dwellings and persuaded or coerced many of the non-combatants of these areas to remain also. Unlike true guerrillas, they chose not to melt away in the face of unfavorable odds. The force structure of the IDF did not provide

the capability to deal with this eventuality without either significant casualties or political or moral cost.

The conventional military equation strongly favored the better led, better trained, better equipped and more cohesive IDF units. Everywhere the Israelis advanced in the coastal, (western) sector, they quickly gained operational control of the area. However, they, like most modern Western armies, lacked the large numbers of infantry necessary to clear built-up areas. Much of the organizational and technological superiority which made the IDF so effective in the open field against the armies of opponents loses its potency in the extremely close ranges encountered in street-fighting. The sophisticated fire control systems of modern tanks and advanced protective armor make little difference at engagement ranges of 100 meters. Moreover, the Israelis were unwilling to accept the large number of casualties among their own troops this manner of urban warfare would cause. Declining to clear these areas with infantry, they had the option to use the IDF's overwhelming firepower to reduce these pockets of resistance to rubble.

In Tyre and Sidon the IDF resorted to this firepower option causing significant numbers of casualties among non-combatants. This development induced morale problems among some of the officers and soldiers of the IDF. Media reports began to mobilize Israeli domestic opinion and world sentiment against this use of artillery and airpower and against the Israeli operation in general.

By the time the Israeli ground forces arrived at Beirut

the lessons of the early actions of the war were absorbed by each side. The PLO knew to make their stand from the city and the IDF knew to avoid sending their troops into it. The television broadcast of images of destruction from Beirut further limited the use of massive bombardment to the extent that it could not be used on a broad enough scale or with the intensity necessary to end resistance by itself.

A new "middle way" of warfare emerged, though through no design of the antagonists. It was not guerrilla warfare with an elusive foe refusing decisive engagement with a superior conventional foe. Neither was it a contest between the armies of two states on the open battlefield as, ironically, both the PLO and the Israelis would have preferred. Rather a low technology, relatively untrained and unseasoned, largely militia force was able to preclude a powerful state army, stripped of its technological edge and limited in the freedom to use its overwhelming firepower, from achieving its war aims.

1. INTENTIONS AND INSTRUMENTS

Unlike previous Arab-Israeli wars, an Israeli victory in the Lebanon war required not so much the seizure or retention of geographical objectives. Rather, success required the IDF to destroy both the military formations and political institutions of the opponent. Ariel Sharon, the Israeli Defense Minister and the generally acknowledged leading proponent of the Israeli operation, listed the following as objectives for the incursion.

1. The main objective is the annihilation of the terrorist threat, i.e., the destruction of their military strength as well as their entire infrastructure, including in particular in Beirut.

2. [A second objective is] to neutralize the Syrians through threatening maneuvers while attempting to avoid real fighting with them.

3. The minimum objective, which should be guaranteed as soon as the operation begins, is to remove all northern settlements from shelling range.

4. These operations should be carried out so that Shi'ites, Druze, and Christians will not be harmed.

5. We have no interest in keeping forces for long periods of time in areas we would capture. Our success in achieving all the above mentioned goals will enable us to withdraw.

6. The operation is not aimed at guaranteeing the integrity or the sovereignty of the government of Lebanon over all its territory. This is a matter for the Lebanese themselves.

7. Linking up with the Christian zone in the north is the precondition for attaining all the above mentioned objectives, since that is the only way to cut off Beirut and the only way to cut the Beirut-Damascus highway without tackling the main Syrian deployment in the Bekaa.

Israel's war aims focused directly on the PLO and on preventing further artillery attacks on the towns and kibbutzim of the Galilee. The mention of the PLO infrastructure clearly implies the Begin government intended to disrupt, through capture or destruction, both the military formation and the political

institutions of the PLO. In their estimation, this would free Israel from the military, terrorist and political challenges the various Palestinian factions presented.

To accomplish these aims, the IDF planned to launch three thrusts northward into Lebanon. The largest of these, under the command of Major General Avigdor Ben Gal, was of corps-size (five division elements with 38,000 troops and 800 tanks). It had the mission of advancing up the Bekaa valley and dealing with the threat of a large-scale Syrian counterattack should the Syrians forcefully come to the aid of the PLO. The thrust in the center consisted of a reinforced division-sized formation and was charged with destroying the Palestinian forces in the heart of "Fatahland" and around Arnoun and Nabatiye. Additionally, it would capture the Beaufort, the Crusader castle situated on a height which commands much of South Lebanon and northern Israel. After achieving these objectives the bulk of this force, under the command of Major General Avigdor Kahalani, was to turn northwest and head in the direction of the coastal area immediately south of Sidon. The remainder of the central forces would continue to advance northward through the Shouf region and cut the Beirut to Damascus highway. In classic blitzkrieg fashion as perfected by the IDF, the thrusts in the east and center were designed to shock, isolate, and psychologically dislocate the enemy, Syrian or Palestinian, so that further resistance was futile.

In contrast to the Israeli forces in the center and east, in the western or coastal sector a reinforced division (22,000

soldiers and 220 tanks) was split into two forces in order to execute a classic hammer and anvil envelopment. Brigadier General Amos Yaron's brigade-sized force, consisting of paratroops reinforced by tanks, would land at the mouth of the Awali river and block any PLO retreat to the north thus acting as the anvil. The second force, commanded by Brigadier General Yitzhak Mordecai, would send one armored brigade, led by Colonel Eli Geva, to drive hammer-like up the coast road through Tyre and Sidon, pushing the PLO fighters into the waiting anvil. The remainder of Mordecai's force would follow in the wake of Geva's brigade and mop-up bypassed PLO elements.

The Israeli forces fighting on the coast were equipped with first-rate equipment though, like the rest of the IDF, they did not possess the absolute cutting edge of Western technology (an exception was the Israeli-developed family of Remote Piloted Vehicles (RPV)). The spearhead armor brigade, commanded by Eli Geva, was equipped with the Israeli-designed and produced Merkava tank though follow-on forces used older, more vulnerable American-made M-60 and British Centurion tanks. Most artillery support was provided by self-propelled, American-manufactured M109 155mm howitzers which fired 98lbs. high explosive or white phosphorus shells. These in turn were supplemented by mortars, among them the excellent Israeli-made 120mm Soltam mortar. Mortars are particularly useful in urban warfare because their extreme high-angle of fire allows their projectiles to strike perpendicularly to the target in contrast to artillery fire which strikes at a shallower angle. Israeli

infantry used the excellent Belgian-made MAG 58 7.62mm machinegun. Individual infantrymen carried the somewhat heavy but reliable and well human-engineered 5.56mm Galil rifle. In some cases, early variations of the American-made M16 5.56mm rifle were used. This weapon, though light, accurate, and ergonomic, was subject to unreliability unless carefully maintained. Additionally, IDF infantrymen made extensive use of the Soviet RPG-7 (Rocket Propelled Grenade) which is probably the most effective light antitank weapon in the world. In most instances, the Israeli infantry rode to battle in American-made but Israeli-modified M113 Armored Personnel Carriers (APC) called Zeldas.

The IDF was extremely skilled at combined arms operations especially in fast-moving offensive operations. The leadership of their small units--platoons and companies--was superior and their combat units tended to be very cohesive. They used their weapons up to the potential of their technology. The efficiency of Israeli close air support is legendary and with approximately 550 combat aircraft in their inventory, the ground forces rarely wanted for air support. However since the 1973 war, the Israelis tended to rely more on firepower than maneuver and the traditional 'internal' self-discipline of its soldiers seemed to be found wanting.²

PLO war aims are less easily defined since they were in the position of reacting to Israeli initiatives.³ Clearly the first priority was organizational survival. Beyond this there seems to have been a great divergence of opinion even

at the highest levels on the most suitable course of action. There was disagreement about what the Israeli objectives were and how the IDF would pursue these goals. Almost all agreed war was imminent.⁴ The Chairman of the PLO, Yasser 'Arafat, almost alone perceived the scope of the pending invasion:

For at least five months before the invasion began, 'Arafat stressed publicly and privately that Israel was preparing a major attack, aimed at trapping the PLO between Israel forces coming up from the south and hostile forces in East Beirut. The terms he used for this were an "accordion" or a "pincers" operation. On other occasions, he referred publicly to the possibility that the attacking forces would reach Damour, Khaldeh, of even Beirut itself.⁵

'Arafat in the face of this threat, determined to defend 'Fatahland' in such a way as to protect its territorial integrity. In a pure military equation such a goal was wildly over optimistic. However, 'Arafat seemed to hope that the international community would quickly intervene to halt such an Israeli action.⁶ Indeed, if the Israeli advance could be delayed until a ceasefire was imposed, the political capital would be enormous. The PLO would appear not as a cacophonous and divisive national movement best known for acts of international terrorism but rather a legitimate state apparatus capable of unifying and mobilizing its constituents and defending its territory, even if that area was not technically Palestine. This strategy was overly optimistic. Had the PLO forces been more highly trained, better led, and possessed greater quantities of modern heavy weapons, especially sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons, perhaps the plan would have been within the outer reaches of possibility. Given the

Syrian experience during the war, even this is questionable.

Despite his correct assessment of Israeli aims, 'Arafat was very mistaken about the capabilities of his forces. At the beginning of the invasion the PLO could field around 15,000 fighters, the majority of them semi-regular infantry. The PLO organized its forces into four infantry brigades with other auxiliary elements being used as supplemental forces. The 6000 men of the Castel brigade had responsibility for the defense along the coast.⁷ The non-Fatah factions also fielded forces nominally under PLO command. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic front for the Liberation of Palestine each fielded units of about 1000 men. These factions did not seem to have specific geographic areas of responsibility but rather a unity of purpose. Two other brigade-size formations, Saiqa and the Palestine Liberation Army were manned largely by Palestinians but were in essence arms of the Syrian army, more responsive to Syrian President Assad than to 'Arafat.

The PLO seems to have possessed about 60 World War II vintage T-34 tanks.⁸ These tanks' guns could not even pierce the frontal armor of modern tanks except possibly at extreme close range. Additionally, the PLO seemed to control between 40 and 50 Soviet-made T-55 tanks possible loaned to them by the Syrian Army.⁹ The T-55 represented 1950s technology and two generations of more advanced tanks had since been fielded by the U.S.S.R. The T-55 had the potential to be effective against Israeli armor if expertly employed. However, most

functioning PLO armor apparently was dug-in and not employed in even platoon (three tank) formations. The PLO also possessed Soviet APCs in small numbers. Many of the Palestinian vehicles were sidelined because of maintenance problems.

The PLO employed approximately 250 Soviet-made towed artillery pieces (130mm and 152mm) and Katyusha multiple rocket launchers (107mm and 122mm). These weapons were rugged and effective when properly employed. The Palestinians were making strides in skillful employment of artillery weapons. They became masters of the techniques of camouflaging gun positions and firing a few rounds, then quickly displacing the guns to avoid counterbattery fire or air counter strikes. Their ability for accurate or massed fire remained very low however.¹⁰

The Palestinians also had numbers of anti-aircraft guns including the very effective Soviet self-propelled ZSU 23-4 quad gun system. They also possessed a few SA-9 Surface to Air (SAM) missile systems. The most effective anti-aircraft weapon employed by the Palestinians in the war was the SA-7, a hand-held system of the same genre as the American-made Stinger of Afghanistan fame. PLO forces shot down an Israeli A-4 Skyhawk with a SA-7 in the only confirmed Palestinian downing of an Israeli jet. The SA-7 in Lebanon clearly was not the weapon the Stinger was in Afghanistan though.

The PLO semi-regular light infantry was probably the Palestinians' strongest suit, having gained experienced and been hardened during the Lebanese civil war. Through a survival of the fittest, the Palestinians became very adept at urban

warfare and made successful techniques institutional knowledge. These forces employed Soviet small arms including the 7.62mmx39 RPD squad machinegun and the Kalishnikov rifle of the same caliber in either the original AK-47 format or in the later AKM format. These weapons are extremely rugged and reliable but the loose tolerances that enhance reliability degrade accuracy. They are also heavy and have only mediocre human engineering. They are designed to be operated by the "lowest common denominator" and are thus excellent for use by those with little training or who are indifferent to weapons maintenance.

Using funds supplied by the wealthier Arab states, the PLO acquired quantities of Western small arms such as the much more powerful and accurate 7.62mmx51 German G-3 and Belgian FN-FAL rifles. They also acquired a number of American made M-16 rifles.

The PLO made extensive and effective use of the RPG-7 anti-tank weapon discussed. If effect on the enemy is the measure rather than technical potential, the RPG-7 was probably the most potent weapon fielded by the Palestinians. It is capable of defeating the side, top, and rear armor of most tanks and can be devastating against APCs. The RPG-7 is also effective against bunkers and other point targets. According to Yezid Sayigh:

Training on individual weapons such as the RPG-7 anti-tank rocket launchers was also generally good, especially as both launchers and rockets were in large supply which allowed lavish consumption in training.

The same could be said of PLO small-arms training in general.¹²

Despite these strengths, the tactical training of the Palestinian infantry units was lacking. Generally they were only capable of maneuvering in units of 50 men or less. Little learned during the cross-border raids against Israeli civilian targets of opportunity had positive transfer to the skills needed for conventional operations or even guerrilla attacks against military targets. At best the PLO forces were only in the initial stages of becoming credible conventional units.¹³ They were far from the extremely high level of tactical proficiency necessary to conduct area defense or delaying operations. They had not mastered the techniques of fire and maneuver and the coordination of artillery fire with ground actions. Moreover, at above platoon and company-level, the technical and tactical proficiency of the leadership was problematic.

Like many military forces, especially in the Third World or among emergent nationalist movements, the PLO possessed requisite quantities of reasonably modern weapons but lacked the human and logistical infrastructure to use these weapons to their technical potential. Maintenance technicians and facilities were lacking as were supply systems to deliver ammunition and fuel to the point of need. The Palestinians did have the foresight to pre-stock or pre-position enormous quantities of ammunition and this was to be decisive in the level of resistance they presented during the war.

Perhaps more important than the PLO conventional forces in the war along the coast, at least prior to the actions at Khaldeh, was the Palestinian militia. The Palestinian militia

was a militia in the traditional definition of the word: "The able-bodied male citizens in a state who are not members of regular armed forces but who are called to military service in cases of emergency."¹⁴ The PLO also seems to have included females in this definition. In a departure from the tradition of Middle Eastern regimes in which an armed citizenry was feared as a threat to the rulers, the Palestinians armed any of their number who desired a weapon. The Lebanese context proved the truth of Lebanese Shiite cleric Musa al-Sadr's contention that "arms are an adornment of men."¹⁵ Perhaps looking at Mao's guidelines for developing local "self-defense" forces, the Palestinians put considerable time and resources into weapons training for their armed population. The armament of this militia was in the main the same as that of the infantry with emphasis on AKM rifles and RPG-7s. The intensity of commitment and motivation the Palestinian militia had in defending their homes introduced a significant new factor in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

NOTES

1. Ariel Sharon, Warrior: An Autobiography, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), p. 436.

2. Richard A. Gabriel, Operation Peace For Galilee, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), p. 25 and Reuven Gal, A Portrait of the Israeli Soldier, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 108.

3. Yezid Sayigh, "Palestinian Military Performance in the 1982 War," Journal of Palestine Studies, Summer 1983, 12, No. 4, 10.

4. Andrew Gowers and Tony Walker, Behind the Myth: Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Revolution, (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1992), p. 197.
5. Rashid Khalidi, Under Siege: P.L.O. Decision Making during the 1982 War, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 28.
6. Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, Israel's Lebanon War, trans. Ina Friedman, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 95-96.
7. Ibid., p. 130.
8. Gabriel, p. 50.
9. Ibid., p. 50.
10. Terry Johnson, Unpublished notes based on observations made while serving as an assistant army attache' at the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv, 1981, p. 3.
11. Yezid Sayigh, "Palestinian Military Performance in the 1982 War," Journal of Palestine Studies, Summer 1983, 12, No. 4, 15.
12. Conversation with Rashid Khalidi, January 1993.
13. Sayigh, p. 8.
14. William Morris, ed., The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), p. 832.
15. Augustus Richard Norton, Amal and the Shi'a, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1987), p. 47.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS OF THE FORCES

As important in predicting the course of a war as understanding the plans and weapons of the forces is to understand the opposing armies' military and societal heritage. The Israel Defense Force traces its ancestry back to the Hashomer organization formed in 1909 by young Jewish settlers in Palestine to protect their communities against the depredations of Bedouin raiders. In 1920 the Labor-Zionists, the majority political block in Jewish Palestine, formed the Haganah, the pre-state forerunner of the IDF. Many forces of non-state nationalisms begin as loosely organized local bands of fighters. Only much later, and usually with much difficulty, do they submit and adapt to a conventional chain of command and develop modern staff and logistical structures. The Haganah, in contrast, first developed a staff, logistical, and training infrastructure and only later fully 'fleshed out' this cadre with operational units.

Early on, most Zionist leaders realized they would always be limited in applying their full military capability to achieving any objective. In the 1930s the Zionist Central Committee, with a keen awareness of British and world public opinion, produced a doctrine called Havlaga or self-restraint. The specifics of this doctrine circumscribed Jewish reaction to Arab attacks to passive self defense of the physical limits of Jewish settlements so as not to appear the aggressor in the eyes of the British and the world at large. Such constraints

on Israeli military action in different form continue to this day.

In all its activities the IDF must be consistently cognizant of public opinion and the sensitivities of the larger powers. At the strategic level, all Arab-Israeli wars have been limited wars; in the bipolar world in which they took place, the degree of victory or defeat inflicted on any belligerent was constrained by the certainty of outside intervention if one side is seriously threatened with total defeat. IDF strategic plans from time of the Haganah centered on delaying external intervention and achieving an operation's or campaign's goals before an externally imposed cease-fire. The war in Lebanon was archetypical of this phenomenon.

Complementing the strategic legacy of Havlaga was the aggressive, offensive-oriented operational and tactical outlook of the IDF. The concept of taking the battle to the enemy is in large part the legacy of a British army officer and Gentile Zionist named Orde Wingate. During the Arab uprising of 1936-39, Wingate trained members of the then illegal Haganah to serve in the British equipped and led Jewish Supernumary Police. Tactically, Wingate taught the young Haganah members, including Moshe Dayan and other future IDF leaders, to defeat Arab raiders by venturing out of the settlements and ambushing the guerrillas as they were enroute to their targets. Fighting the numerically superior Arabs with no space to trade for time, the Jews had to aggressively and boldly sally forth to destroy threats prior to those threats endangering them or before outside powers halted

the conflict perhaps at a point unfavorable to the Jewish State.

The Haganah was the military arm of the Labor-Zionist majority of the Yishuv. The competing Zionist-Revisionists formed parallel military groups. These groups tended to be more urban revolutionary than the Haganah, which by 1940, though still illegal, was organized largely on the traditional lines of conventional armies. The Revisionist arms--the Irgun and the Stern Gang--did not as readily recognize the line between combatants and non-combatants and practiced the sort of indiscriminate 'eye for an eye' retaliatory warfare which, though well developed in Europe, was especially at home in the Levant. Particularly in fighting Palestinian guerrilla organizations, this philosophy remained a current in Israeli security policy and continues to be an element in IDF thinking.

The heavy casualties of the Israeli War of Independence, the often low level of training of many Israeli units, the polyglot mix of weaponry, and the differences in defense needs of an emergent nationalist movement from those of a sovereign state convinced the military leaders of the new state that the 1948 war was not a model for future military development. After the 1956 war, the Israeli military planners decided to make armor forces the nucleus of the Jewish State's ground combat power in order to quickly defeat the enemy on his own territory. They also chose to minimize the role of infantry so as to minimize casualties.

With its emphasis on carrying the battle to the enemy through preemptive strikes, the IDF was tailored for the

operational offensive. Given the multiple missions the IDF faced, the format of a well-trained people's army centered on armor and airpower worked well to meet most of these requirements. However, the area of urban warfare fell outside the parameters of effectiveness of the IDF force structure.

Attacking into urban areas is one of the most costly forms of military operations in terms of both casualties and consumption of munitions. Urban areas put armor-heavy forces at a disadvantage and operations in cities are very infantry intensive. Only foot soldiers checking every building room by room or the rubble thereof can definitively clear an urban area of an enemy. The extremely casualty-sensitive, infantry-poor Israelis thus early on avoided actions against forces established in cities and towns. Neither did they train extensively for such contingencies. The Israeli experience since 1960 confirms their judgment

In June 1967, after Jordanian forces opened fire on Israeli West Jerusalem, the Israeli cabinet decided to wrest the West Bank including East Jerusalem from the King of Jordan. The IDF found itself fighting a significant urban battle in and around the city of Jerusalem. The paratroops fought bravely and successfully but at a great cost. Over a 20% of all battle deaths the Israelis suffered in the Six-Day War occurred during the battle for Jerusalem.¹ The Jordanians, expected orders to withdraw or the imposition of a cease fire. At the lower levels they fought resolutely, but the higher levels of the Jordanian command lacked the determination to fight a pitched

battle to retain the city. On the Israeli side, poor coordination between the paratroop infantry and their supporting armor and artillery insured the battle was a difficult one despite the indifferent opposition. On the second day of the battle, the Israeli paratroop brigade charged with seizing Arab Jerusalem lost the ability to coordinate the efforts of its subordinate units and the fight devolved into numerous independent small unit actions.

In capturing Ramallah to the north of Jerusalem, the IDF used a technique first employed by the American army in Germany in the closing days of World War II. Colonel Uri Ben Ari describes this action:

We decided to go into Ramallah with a battalion of tanks, shooting at all sides as far as possible. We crossed and re-crossed the city several times and it slowly fell silent. We cleared out of it at night and took up positions to the north and south. By morning (7 June) there was no resistance and the town was mopped up.²

Because these tactics produced the desired result quickly, with few friendly casualties, they suited the IDF's armor-heavy force structure. This technique became the IDF's standard approach to urban warfare.³

All effective tactics are tailored to the particular enemy faced and the terrain upon which the battle is to be fought. These 'run and gun' tactics are effective against light or indifferent enemy opposition from unprepared positions in small to medium-sized towns. However, they are ill-suited for more resolute enemies in greater numbers, fighting from prepared positions in large or densely constructed urban areas.

In the 1973 War, the IDF again avoided fighting in urban areas but again found itself drawn into a city battle. Suez City lies at the southern entrance to the Suez Canal. On October 23, 1973, the commander of the Southern Command, Major General Shmuel Gonen, ordered Major General Avraham Adan to seize this relatively modern Egyptian city to improve the Israeli position in the bargaining that would inevitably follow a cease-fire. However, the orders which reached Adan's division to seize the city contained the caveat 'unless it becomes a Stalingrad.'⁴ In the event Suez City was no Stalingrad, but it was a tough enough nut to crack that it foiled the tactics employed seven years earlier at Ramallah, even with a greater degree of infantry-armor coordination than used in the earlier conflict.

Egyptian soldiers were the sole inhabitants of Suez City as the civilian population left during the 1969-1970 War of Attrition. The Egyptian forces resisted vigorously and skillfully. They allowed the Israeli tanks to enter the city and then took them under fire with small arms, killing many of the tank commanders as they stood exposed from their hatches. Using hand-held Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) antitank weapons, the Egyptians knocked out several tanks and other armored vehicles, restricting the city arteries and constraining Israeli maneuver. The bulk of the Israeli infantry was far behind the armor and the Egyptians took them under heavy fire forcing them into buildings where they were pinned down, cut off and surrounded. With casualties approaching 200 killed and wounded, General Adan ordered his forces to withdraw, which they did

under cover of darkness in an outstanding display of leadership on the part of Israeli junior officers and non-commissioned officers.⁵

General Adan in his excellent work, On the Banks of the Suez, summarizes the lessons the Battle of Suez City should have had for the IDF.

The capture of a city is always a complicated operation. A city offers many advantages to a defender, enabling him to put up stiff resistance in house to house fighting. So the conquest of a city always involves a good deal of fighting, takes time, and results in substantial losses. Armored forces are not the most suitable ones for the conquest and mopping up of a built-up area.⁶

Technology such as airpower, sophisticated artillery support, modern tanks, and other armored vehicles may be aids in urban warfare. They do not, however, change the basic requirement that to secure and clear a city of enemy forces, an army, no matter how modern, needs a sizable infantry component. For reasons of economy of force, the IDF has never opted to structure its forces to make them capable of urban warfare.

The Palestine Liberation Organization was organized in 1964 at a conference of Arab nations. From the outset it used national liberation movements such as the FLN in Algeria and the Viet Cong as institutional models. In the event, most of the organization focused on political action and fund-raising. Much energy was consumed in power struggles between prominent figures and in ideological battles. Those factions that saw the Palestinian cause in more purely nationalistic terms and those elements that saw the fight for Palestine through the

perspective of a Marxist world revolution were in frequent conflict.

Militarily, the PLO operated through what was termed fedayeen action or continual small-scale cross-border, usually indiscriminate, raids on Israel. After the devastating Arab defeat of 1967, the PLO began to claim that the belligerent Arab states would be unable and unwilling to destroy Israel through conventional military campaigns. Only the PLO through a Maoist guerrilla strategy of cumulative stages could eliminate Zionism and establish a Palestinian state.⁷ However, the circumstances surrounding the struggle of Palestinian nationalism against Jewish nationalism, irresistibly pulled Palestinian armed activities in the direction of conventional military operations. The various Palestinian elements continued to stage terror raids on targets in Israel or Israeli-held territory. Some of these raids originated from South Lebanon but in the aftermath of the 1967 War, the PLO was based in Jordan and launched most of its guerrilla raids from the Hashemite Kingdom.

Though the military strategy of the PLO was theoretically based on classic hit and run guerrilla raiding, its best military showings were in urban warfare usually fighting on the defense. More importantly, these actions did much more to enhance the political legitimacy of the PLO in the eyes of its constituents, other Arabs and the world at large. What was appropriate for Mao in fighting the Japanese or the Nationalists, or for the Algerians struggling to overthrow French colonialism was of

limited value as paradigm for Palestinian actions. Yezid Sayigh states in his superb article on Palestinian military performance:

The military (as well as economic, social, and political and cultural) criteria and models which have evolved from the experience of other countries or liberation movements are not necessarily applicable to the Palestinian situation. The Vietnamese, Chinese, Soviet or Western military experiences instruct the Palestinians, but cannot be used as a rigid measure.

Mao Tse Tung directs his treatise on guerrilla warfare to the problems of defeating a foreign imperialist invader. Arguably, this scenario could be reasonably applied to the West Bank and Gaza after 1967. However, the express aim of the PLO was to destroy the Jewish State and, depending on the rhetoric, either absorb the Jewish population in a new Palestinian entity or eliminate them from the area. The Israelis viewed the area as their homeland in generally as intense a way as did the Palestinian Arabs. Guerrilla attacks had little chance of inducing them to leave by raising the price of continued presence as it might for the colonial regime of an imperialist power. In the late 1960s, the essence of the conflict was two native peoples warring over political control of the same piece of land. The Israelis had an organized, functioning state whose factions consistently acted in a unified manner on matters of national security. The Palestinians needed their political apparatus to acquire these characteristics for their nationalism to be recognized both by its own people and the world at large. One of the primary functions of a state, even of a people in exile, is the protection of its populace. Guerrilla attacks on Israel and

acts of international terrorism could keep Palestinian nationalism in the public eye. To become legitimate and credible though, the PLO needed a conventional military capability to defend that segment of its people not under occupation from attack by the Israelis or hostile Arab forces. Moreover, after the debacle of 1967, the PLO did not have the luxury of time to progress through Mao's stages of a people's war. Instead the Palestinians moved rapidly to the final stage--deployment of conventional forces.⁹

In 1968 a division-sized element of the IDF attacked the Jordanian village of Karameh in order to retaliate for a recent raid across the Jordan River. The Palestinians and Jordanians received early warning of the the impending Israeli action through intelligence channels. Yasser 'Arafat, then leader of the guerrilla faction of the PLO, convinced the Palestinian guerrillas to stand and fight the Israelis instead of dispersing and withdrawing in the face of superior Israeli force. The fedayeen agreed and stood firm against the Israeli paratroop unit charged with entering the town, causing the Israeli plan to become unhinged. The Israeli armored units, who in the plan were present to provide support to the paratroop assault elements, were draw into the engagement areas of the Jordanian forces deployed around the town and suffered significant casualties. Later in the day, the Israelis did sweep the town but decided to halt any further advance in order to cut their losses. The action, though technically a military defeat for the Jordanians and fedayeen, was a moral victory for the

Palestinian cause. It accomplished more for the sake of the PLO's reputation and recruitment than all the raids on Israel which preceded it.¹⁰ The Palestinian forces acquitted themselves well in the face of first line IDF units and showed the PLO capable of acting in defense of its constituents.

The trend toward development of conventional forces within the PLO continued especially after the expulsion of Palestinian forces from Jordan in 1970 and 1971. The Jordanian actions made it clear that the PLO needed conventional military units to defend itself against its Arab hosts as well as against the IDF. Soon after the PLO resettled in Lebanon, it began to give its fighters standard military ranks and designate its sub-organizations according to military convention, naming them squads, platoons, companies, battalions and brigades according to their size. The PLO also began to acquire significant numbers of heavy weapons such as artillery, tanks and anti-aircraft weapons.

In the early 1970s as the PLO sought to create a state within a state in Lebanon, especially southern Lebanon, Fatah attempted to use its military forces to guarantee the territorial integrity of those areas under its domination. In military parlance they attempted to conduct an area defense. In this type of operation, a force endeavors to prevent enemy incursions into a given area through destruction or repelling of the enemy force. To accomplish this, the defender must either have enough forces to cover the entire area sufficiently to foil an enemy attack or possess mobile forces and the coordinating ability

to move these forces to meet and destroy the enemy incursion or have an effective combination of these two techniques.

A much simpler strategy, and a more economical one, is to determine the point through which, because of topographical or military constraints, the enemy must pass and to defend this point so as to destroy the enemy or deny him passage. As might be expected, this is called a point defense. Relatively inexperienced units with low levels of training can execute point defenses and the requisite level of coordination between arms is also concomitantly less. Inexplicably, the PLO chose to attempt an area defense of much of South Lebanon and it was in this disposition that the Palestinian military units met the 1982 Israeli invasion.

From 1973, and especially after the onset of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, PLO military forces became organizationally more conventional and operationally more involved in urban warfare. Though they at times suffered defeats, the Palestinians, in league with leftist Lebanese elements, generally fielded the most effective of the many militias in that conflict. In 1976 at Sidon, the PLO repelled an incursion by armored forces of the Syrian regular army.¹¹ With the establishment of the Israeli-supported enclave of Major Sa'ad Haddad in South Lebanon, the Syrian-PLO reconciliation in the face of Maronite initiatives, and the Israeli Operation Litani in 1978, the PLO increasingly focused on developing conventional military forces and deploying them to protect the borders of 'Fatahland.' This trend accelerated after the missile crisis in the spring of

1981 and the PLO-Israeli artillery duel of the following July.¹²

Four times between the stalemate and cease-fire which ended the PLO rocket and artillery attacks of July 1981 and the start of the actual conflict, the IDF sat on the start line ready to invade Lebanon. Significantly and ironically, the Israelis were about to embark on a campaign that would force their units to fight the type of actions for which they were least suited. On the other side of the hill, the Palestinian High Command was deploying its best trained and equipped forces in such a way as to bring Palestinian weakness to bear against Israeli strength.

NOTES

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3. Avraham Adan, On the Banks of the Suez, (San Francisco: Presidio Press, 1980), p. 428.
4. Ibid., p. 427.
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3. TYRE: INITIAL ASSESSMENTS

On June 6, 1982, the IDF launched the ground attack into Lebanon. Though there was no strategic surprise in this long awaited offensive, the Israelis achieved a measure of tactical surprise. The results were predictable; the PLO units deployed along the southern edge of 'Fatahland' disintegrated and the Israelis advanced fairly rapidly northward, given the somewhat constricted nature of the terrain and road net for large masses of armor. The IDF was skillfully executing another of the 'blitzkriegs' that make their forces objects of study among the military officers and analysts of many nations.

As the Palestinian units in the south splintered, the survivors fled northward, many to the camps along the coast. The only notable exceptions to this pattern were the defenders of the commanding Beaufort castle and the forces along the road south of Tyre. At Beaufort, the Palestinians died in place defending the fortification, killing six of the equally determined and more highly trained attackers from an elite unit of the Golani Brigade.¹

The advance along the coast of the Merkava-equipped armor brigade of Colonel Eli Geva first encountered determined resistance at the El Bas road junction west of Tyre. Here one of Geva's paratroop battalion commanders did not receive Geva's orders to bypass the junction and instead drove through it. Palestinian RPG teams engaged the Israeli tanks and APCs and the IDF unit was unable to disengage itself. Israeli Defense

Minister Ariel Sharon himself made the decision to use airstrike to break the Palestinian resistance and facilitate the withdrawal of the IDF elements.²

In accordance with the plan for the western sector, the remainder of Geva's force continued to drive north using the 'run and gun' techniques discussed previously. Follow-on forces had the mission of "mopping up" bypassed resistance.

The term "mopping-up" is most frequently applied to eliminating small pockets of resistance belonging to elements which have already been broken and no longer pose a decisive threat to the success of the mission. In this vein those forces bypassed by Geva fit this description. Nothing these forces could have done would have halted Geva's drive north. Yet they were still capable of damaging the IDF's plans and significantly, Geva felt compelled to leave his unarmored fuel and ammunition resupply vehicles south of the El Bas junction until the Palestinian threat was eliminated.³

The follow-on force charged with mopping-up Tyre and the environs found their task neither simple nor quickly accomplished. Particularly in the Rashidiyeh refugee camp, the Palestinian defense was prepared and tenacious. Large stocks of ammunition sat in various underground sites around the camp. A network of subterranean passages linked various parts of the built-up area and allowed the defenders to shift from firing position to firing position. The IDF soldiers thus could be placed under fire from any direction.⁴ From two story buildings and rooftops and from ground level embrasures, the Palestinian

fighters could open fire from above and below. This is extremely important in attacking tanks with RPGs. The RPGs had little chance of defeating the frontal armor of the Israeli tanks but hits on the thinner top, side, and rear armor could be devastating. Additionally, any opponent is more vulnerable when attacked from the sides or rear.

In marked contrast to the strenuous resistance the Palestinians put up in and around Tyre, their reaction to the Israeli landing at the mouth of the Awali river showed the continued weakness of their semi-regular forces. Brigadier General Yaron's reinforced brigade task made the amphibious landing the night of June 6. The Palestinians at first put up no resistance and then they commenced a grossly inaccurate artillery barrage.⁵ The commander of the PLO Castel Brigade, Haj Ismail, refused to accept reports from his forward units that the Israelis indeed had conducted a landing. He finally went forward to see for himself what was occurring and when he saw the extent of the Israeli operation, Haj Ismail conducted a hasty one man retrograde operation all the way to the Bekaa. Leaderless, the Palestinians failed to effectively oppose the landing. Though Haj Ismail's actions are an extreme example of the failure of a Palestinian commander, they show the problems the PLO leadership had to overcome in order to have a hope of its forces being effective on the battlefield.

However, when units like the Castel Brigade crumbled either through poor leadership or by being overwhelmed by the might of the IDF, the Palestinian soldiery remained intent on

continuing the fight against the Israelis. Many individual fighters or small groups drifted back to the refugee camps along the coast or to Beirut. Once there, they did not 'melt' back into the civilian population but continued the fight in league with the Palestinian militia.

B. H. Liddell-Hart, who is believed by some to have influenced Israeli military thinking, emphasizes a remark made by Polybius in describing the battle at Lake Trasimene:

...for as a ship if you deprive it of its steersman, falls with all its crew into the hands of the enemy; so, with an army in war, if you outwit or outmaneuver its general, the whole will often fall into your hands.⁶

Polybius observation seems accurate in proportion to the discipline and solidity of an army's channels of command and organizational framework. Among less disciplined and less established military organizations as the PLO the influence of the commander for either good or ill is less. Thus, when the Israeli onslaught struck the Palestinian forces and destroyed the resolve of many of the leaders, it did not end Palestinian resistance.

Such blitzkriegs work only if the enemy is astute enough to recognize his situation is hopeless according to the textbooks of tactics. They do not work well against the militarily 'naive' who believe as long as they have bullets and a functioning trigger finger they have a chance. Neither are they effective against those knowledgeable of tactics who have resigned themselves to destruction but desire to share their fate with as many of their foes as possible.

As the 'mopping up' continued in Tyre, the IDF discovered that the Palestinians did not accept the verdict in the field or the assessment of some of their less resolute leaders as final or binding. Many of the Israeli planners grossly underestimated the Palestinians. According to Schiff and Ya'ari, Sharon "failed to anticipate the resolve and perseverance of the PLO."⁷ Apparently many of the Israelis assumed that the bulk of the Palestinians would react to the defeat of their forces the way as the residents of the West Bank reacted to the Jordanian defeat of 1967--either by flight or resignation to their fate.

The Israeli units with the mission of eliminating the resistance in the Tyre area underestimated the effort required to complete this task. Tyre was hit in the initial bombardment of PLO targets on June 5. These air and artillery attacks seem to have been targeted on previously identified fixed military targets and collateral damage was not heavy. When Israeli ground troops entered Tyre and the surrounding refugee camps, they at first abided by the initial guidance of the operation to minimize non-combatant casualties among the Lebanese and Palestinians and prevent large scale destruction. With loudspeakers and air-dropped leaflets, the IDF urged the inhabitants to come out of their dwellings and surrender to the Israelis to avoid the coming battle. Some came out, but many, particularly in the camps, did not. Israeli infantry then entered to clear the areas. The slow house to house fighting that followed was fraught with danger for the IDF soldiers.

Conventional military forces tend to disengage when they lose 30% or more of their strength. Often at the platoon level and below when the leader is killed or wounded, even well-trained units take five minutes or so to assess what has happened and to have the next in command take charge. Sometimes it is enough to induce a unit to quit a position or worse yet, panic. The Palestinian militia in the urban areas seemed to operate on the individual level or in groups of two or three. Each fighter simply tried to kill as many of the enemy as possible. In conventional battle this is an invitation for destruction, but in the calculus of urban warfare, this lack of leadership and organization prolonged the duration of the Palestinian resistance. Schiff and Ya'ari quote Eli Geva's description of the methods of these fighters:

They were brave but they acted illogically. A squad would suddenly pop up under a tree to fire on our tanks. We blasted its men from a distance--for the most part before they managed to fire off their weapons. Then, a few meters away, another squad would pop up and attempt to fire on us--even though its men had seen what happened to their comrades--and they, too, were cut down by heavy fire. Israeli soldiers would never behave that way. They wouldn't stand up and expose themselves after witnessing the fate of their predecessors. It was foolish but uncommonly brave. To stand up in front of a tank after seeing what happened a moment before--that's almost irrational. But that's what happened all along the road.

These tactics though less successful along the road, proved more successful in the built-up areas. Leaders in any army are conspicuous targets because of their indicators of rank--they often wear a pistol instead of carrying a rifle, there is usually a radioman next to them or else, even in combat, they are

yelling orders and acting self-important. Had the Palestinians fought in units, it is probable that the Israelis could have engaged and killed the leader or destroyed a portion of the opposing sub-element and the remainder of that Palestinian unit would have retreated. Compartmentalization marks street fighting. Because there was little command and control apparatus over the Palestinians, these actions devolved into scores of little conflicts--a rifleman or two or an RPG team against an Israeli squad or tank. Each of these little battles had to be fought to its deadly conclusion to clear a given conurbation.

The Israelis soon realized that they would have to use heavier firepower to clear the built-up areas or they would never accomplish the mission within the parameters of acceptable casualties and their operational timetable. As the clearing operation progressed, the Israelis began to bring artillery fire to bear on Palestinian strong points and the level of overall destruction rose markedly. Finally, close air support aircraft bombed the Rashidiyeh camp increasing the damage and non-combatant casualties. In the end, the infantry still had to go in and dislodge the last Palestinian fighters. By June 10, the Israelis eliminated the last resistance from the Tyre area.

By the time they were a day or so into the Tyre operation, the Israelis realized that resistance in the Palestinian-occupied urban areas would be considerable. The IDF blitzkrieg and its destruction of Palestinian semi-regular units would not suffice to destroy Palestinian armed resistance. Moreover, because

this resistance rooted itself in urban areas, the Israelis simply did not have the infantry reserves to defeat it without resorting to heavy weapons. The Palestinians, in large numbers, refused or were prevented from heeding Israeli warnings and leaving their homes. Thus the firepower of the Israeli army would inevitably cause large numbers of civilian casualties. The highly mechanized IDF as a tool was ill-suited to the task at hand. Resorting to massed firepower was a military imperative but a moral and political liability.

The PLO leadership was still smarting from the initial blows and incapable of coordinating activities in the field. In a remarkable example of military dumb luck, many of their miscalculations led to fortuitous circumstances. Had the officers of the PLO been more competent, it is likely the PLO units would have fallen back in order and continued to fight a series of insignificant delaying actions or reverted to inconsequential guerrilla strikes. Neither of these would have made much of an impression on the IDF, nor captured much media attention. If the semi-regular units had been more cohesive and not disintegrated so rapidly, many of the PLO fighters that helped cement the resistance in the built-up areas would not have had time to make their way to those locations before they were invested.

The actions at Tyre then allowed both sides to see the realities of the conflict as it really was and not as they hoped it to be. Both began to learn the utilitarian rules of war surrounded by a trapped civilian populace and watched intently

by the world through the eyes of the media.

NOTES

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3. Ibid., p. 120.
4. Trevor N. Dupuy and Paul Martell, Flawed Victory, (Fairfax, VA: Hero Books, 1986), p. 51.
5. Ibid., p. 101.
6. B.H. Liddell-Hart, Strategy, (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 46.
7. Schiff and Ya'ari, p. 305.
8. Ibid., p. 122.

4. PROPORTIONALITY AND THE LIMITS ON FIREPOWER

The IDF found that it could not employ the full weight of its firepower against the PLO in the urban areas without significant cost. Whenever the IDF attempted to do so, the Israeli government found itself castigated by the international media, pressured by the Western nations and questioned by its own citizens. These limits on Israeli action placed the PLO in a more favorable position than the pure military equation would indicate. The Palestinian military effort benefited when the Israelis limited their application of massive firepower. The Palestinian cause gained politically when the IDF resorted to heavy weapons, albeit at significant human cost.

All war is limited war as no conflict has yet met the model Carl von Clausewitz presents as the 'perfect' form--complete, unrelenting violence.¹ The limits can be pre-existing or circumstantial such as the need of individuals to rest periodically, the need to remove weapons systems from the fight to maintain them, or the limit bad weather can have on the use of airpower. Other limits are imposed by man to limit the evil wrought by warfare or to ensure one's forces, in pursuing 'policy by other means,' do not inadvertently harm larger interests of the state. Determining just what these man made limits are and how they should be applied to a given situation is often a difficult and unforgiving political and military task.

The nature of the war along the coast made this determination particularly difficult for the Israelis. The adjusted limits the Israelis imposed on themselves after Tyre

fell short of the expectations of world public opinion as developed through media reporting of the conflict in Lebanon. As a result, the world community imposed tacit limits of its own design on IDF operations in Lebanon.

The Law of War, the international codex of strictures on the use of military force, is divided into two main categories. Jus ad bello law deals with the justice of the war or its aims. Jus in bello law defines what is and is not permissible in prosecuting a war. The object of jus in bello law is curbing the inhumanity of war and its deleterious effects on the fabric of civilization. It contains protections for both combatants and non-combatants and is codified in numerous international agreements such as the Hague and Geneva conventions.

Considerable discussion took place on the jus ad bello aspects of the 1982 war. However, the limitations that facilitated the Palestinian use of a "middle way" of urban warfare arose from the jus in bello assessment of the IDF actions in the cities along the coast and, ultimately, in Beirut. This critical assessment began as soon as reports began to filter out of Tyre.

The censure which induced the Israelis to limit their use of massive firepower in the urban areas resulted from the consensus that the IDF violated the principle of proportionality.

Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Convention 1977, Article 57(2)(b) states:

An attack shall be canceled or suspended if it becomes apparent that the objective is not a military one or is subject to special protection or that the attack may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive

in relation to the² concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.

The International Committee of the Red Cross Draft Rules of 1956, Article 8 states:

The person responsible for ordering or launching an attack shall, first of all:...take into account the loss and destruction which the attack, even if carried out with the precautions prescribed under Article 9, is liable to inflict upon the civilian population.

He is required to refrain from the attack if, after due consideration, it is apparent that the loss and destruction would³ be disproportionate to the military advantage gained.

As is clear from these excerpts the determination of the proportionality of an attack is left to the discretion of the attacker. Few armies would attack an urban area and subject their forces to the increased losses that such operations entail unless they felt it was an important military objective. Such circumstances do not lend themselves to a disinterested judgment of the proportionality of the destruction likely to ensue from their initiatives. A narrow focus on achieving war aims often makes anything likely to accelerate victory worth the cost. Among great powers, violation of the rule of proportionality is something that their defeated opponents did in the last war. Among the world community at large, disproportionate use of force is a frequently leveled charge. Indeed there is no hard and fast rule delimiting what is proportionate and what is not.

The IDF entered the war with standing orders to prevent civilian casualties.⁴ However, as soon as the lead elements of the forces advancing up the coast entered Tyre, it became clear the cost of preventing civilian casualties would be high

Israeli casualties or failure to eliminate PLO resistance in the urban areas.

Had the IDF been differently structured with large infantry formations and had it been willing to absorb massive Israeli casualties, the PLO resistance theoretically could have been broken through small arms fire alone. This is probably the only manner in which the Israeli attack could have been undertaken without violating the ideals of the principle of proportionality. It is also very unrealistic. Of modern conflicts, only the British counter-insurgency in Malaysia operated with such restrictions on the use of heavy weapons and that was a much different sort of war. Once it became clear that the Palestinians resolved to make a stand from built-up areas, Israeli forces, given their lack of infantry, had only two choices--resort to firepower solutions or halt the campaign.

During the war south of Beirut a pattern developed in Israeli actions in the urban battles. At the beginning of the war, Israeli aircraft struck targets identified through aerial photo-reconnaissance such as combat vehicles, gun emplacements and munitions storage sites.⁵ The pilots executed these interdiction missions to a high standard of accuracy but misses occurred with devastating results. Such attacks continued throughout the war. As the ground forces approached conurbations, testimony of those in these areas indicate that long range artillery fire again engaged known targets using map coordinates but without adjustment by ground observers.

This method of engagement is not characterized by pinpoint accuracy, and thus there was collateral damage. This fire was not indiscriminate though.

As the ground forces approached, units with the mission to continue north passed through or by the urban areas as quickly as possible. Given prior Israeli experiences in places like Ramallah in 1967, it is likely they used a form of the 'run and gun' tactics. They did not stop to reduce resistance unless it prevented their further movement. Reducing resistance fell to the follow-on forces.⁶

'Mopping-up' was what these follow-on forces endeavored to accomplish. In reality, clearing the built-up areas was the most intense combat of the war. The IDF in clearing the urban areas did not automatically resort to massive firepower. Yaron Pik, an Israeli armor officer, relates: "Now, there was the first time we tried to enter, there was infantry tried to get inside and they had heavy casualties so they pulled back. And then we decided that we are going to have a psychological war, because we don't want to have any more casualties."⁷ After these first probes, negotiations and calls for surrender went out to the inhabitants. At some point in this process leaflets urging evacuation were also dropped from the air.

The leaflets were never completely effective and inevitably a significant number of non-combatants, through volition or coercion, remained in the towns. Of those who remained of their own accord, many stayed to avoid being refugees again. Others wanted to protect their belongings from the inevitable looting.⁸

Many apparently felt the Israelis would behave like the various factions had in the Lebanese Civil War killing, the non-combatants of the opposing forces to consummate victory.

Dov Yermiya states:

The dazed population simply did not know which choice to make: whether to leave the camps, which looked to them like walking into a guaranteed death-trap prepared for them by the IDF, or to remain and to try to survive in makeshift shelters, and in the trenches and craters between the ruins of their houses, which were, in reality, the actual death traps.

Regardless of the reason they remained, their presence meant all future engagements would be fought in the midst of large numbers of civilians.

After those who left effected their escape, the ground forces then called artillery fire adjusted by ground forces or close air support strikes on Palestinian strong points and continued their advance. However, clearing one sector in this manner in no way meant the next "block" was also clear. Infantry would again be sent in and the Palestinian fighter or fighters would engage and disclose their position often killing or wounding another Israeli in the process. After the Israelis felt they could not sustain this level of casualties, commanders at the brigade and higher level would employ artillery in a less discriminate manner in order to reduce any possible resistance in the sector that they intended to clear next. This final use of artillery when it occurred crossed the line because it was fired at suspected target areas rather than known targets. Given that elimination of Palestinian military resistance was the foundation of Israeli military aims and the

IDF afforded Palestinian and other civilians opportunities to leave prior to concerted clearing efforts, the other elements of this pattern conform to the principle of proportionality.

The Palestinian forces stood accused of violations of the law of war in the course of their preparation for and conduct of the battles in the urban areas. The charge that the PLO held civilians hostage is, in the main, incorrect. Most of the civilians who declined Israeli offers of evacuation did so for the reasons discussed above. Even if the PLO compelled or coerced some of those who remained to do so, this was not the coercion of hostage-taker over hostage. The PLO stood in the role of the governmental authority for the Palestinians and most would agree that governments in time of crisis have the authority to control the movement of their citizens. Michael Walzer, an authority on just war theory, states that in a siege: "Civilians performing essential services for the [besieged] army will not, of course, be permitted to leave; they are in effect conscripted."¹⁰ Offers of escape or evacuation are thus a state to state arrangement; the besieged government may or may not accept the offer on behalf of its citizens. As long as the government is viewed as legitimate by the majority of its citizens, as the PLO was by the Palestinians, it has the legal authority to employ coercion to ensure compliance. The PLO according to Israeli sources did, in instances, use brutal means to enforce their orders. However in the context of this war, the presence of the civilian population seems to have been

a motivating factor for the Palestinian forces, especially the militia.

A great deal of evidence indicates the Palestinian forced deliberately sited military 'objectives' in close proximity to normally protected objects such as hospitals and schools. In the compressed area of operations encountered in urban warfare this is often difficult to avoid. In Sidon, the PLO shifted gun emplacements to the vicinity of these protected objects after they noticed the Israelis refrained from hitting them in their initial air strikes.¹¹ This is a clear violation of the Geneva Protocols of 1977. In practical terms, especially prior to Beirut, it did not greatly increase the magnitudes of civilian casualties or destruction.

By the standards of the law of war and common practice, most of the devastation in the coastal cities and camps was the unfortunate product of the military exigencies of both sides. The IDF stayed within jus in bello standards of proportionality. In this conflict though, the arbiter of proportionality was the world and Israeli domestic public opinion as informed and formed by the media.

By June 15, 1982, sentiment began to be voiced that the common horrors of war as intensified by the urban combat in Lebanon were disproportionate to any Israeli military aim. Shortly thereafter, Western governments began to emplace de facto limits on the use of massive firepower the Israelis needed to win in the cities, given the IDF force structure and sensitivity to casualties.

At the beginning of the campaign, the press seemed to take a mixed view of the Israeli jus ad bello arguments for the invasion. However, shortly after the ground war began much of the journalistic focus shifted to the suffering of civilians in the area of operations, especially those along the coast. On June 8, the Washington Post featured on its front page a picture of a man carrying a wounded child while a second man held aloft an intravenous fluid bag connected to the limp child. Editorials began to question the human cost of the Israeli actions.¹² A New York Times editorial of June 16, 1982 asked: "Do Israel's ends in Lebanon, now also those of America, justify the horrendous means?"¹³ Soon the focus shifted decisively to jus in bello questions of the Israeli conduct of the war.

Initially, the IDF banned the media from accompanying Israeli forces during the war.¹⁴ The PLO hierarchy though militarily inept during the first days of the war, were extremely adept at handling the press.¹⁵ Moreover, the Israeli ban gave the Palestinians monopoly use of this tool. Robert Fisk, a correspondent in Beirut for the London Times at the time relates:

Most of the AP copy running out of Israel was still accompanied by bells, but it also carried a sentence at the top of each dispatch that the report had been submitted to the Israeli military censor. In some cases, the agency said that the censor had ordered material deleted. All of us realized that this was going to be an unprecedented war. There was no censorship in Beirut. For the very first time, the Western press would be operating on both [author's italics] sides of the front line in an Arab-Israeli war--and the foreign journalists in Beirut would have more freedom to tell the truth than their colleagues in Israel.¹⁶

This freedom gave the media the power to transmit the horror of modern urban war throughout the Western world.

Compression is the essence of journalism, especially broadcast journalism. The journalist compresses a day's events into a couple of columns of print or a 90 second sound byte. Compression also characterizes urban warfare. A brigade that in the open field covers a frontage of ten kilometers, in the city may find the entirety of its strength committed to an area of a couple of square kilometers. The dispersion that characterizes the modern battlefield and makes it difficult to chronicle on film, is much less in built-up areas. The cameraman can capture both the action and the devastation with relative ease. Moreover, the facilities of a city, provided they still function, make the technical aspects of collecting and transmitting the news easier.¹⁷

From the very first days of the war, U.S. citizens, the Western public most favorably disposed to the Israelis, indicated 49-to-41 percent that the Israelis deserved criticism for causing civilian casualties. After a second poll in mid-July showed a 52-to-35 result, the pollster Lou Harris remarked: "There is no doubt that the nightly graphic television coverage of civilian deaths and injuries has caused public opinion to be more critical."¹⁸

The court of public opinion clearly found the Israeli tactics in the urban battles disproportionate, even though the majority of these actions passed muster under the law of war and were not out of line with the customary conduct of armies

in similar situations. As the only source of information about this conflict for the majority of Americans was the media, the logical conclusion is that the images, not ideology or legal considerations, led to the rejection of the use of massive firepower in urban warfare.

Elected officials in the U.S. felt pressure to limit Israel's actions. Senator Paul Tsongas described the June 21, meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as the angriest he had witnessed.¹⁹ The Reagan administration put pressure on the Israelis to limit their use of heavy firepower on urban areas, specifically Beirut.

The PLO, by fighting from the cities, made possible the images which greatly reduced the Israelis freedom to bring to bear heavy weapons against Palestinian positions, especially airpower. To be sure, the IDF periodically renewed bombardment against the PLO. The Israelis knew, however, that because of their dependence on U.S. arms deliveries, these actions could damage the IDF's strength just as surely as if the PLO had shot down the attacking jets. For the PLO the effect was also the same--an air attack halted because of television footage is as non-existent a threat as one halted by SAM missiles.

NOTES

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5. SIDON: THE PHENOMENON CONFIRMED

Israeli forces entered Sidon initially on June 7, 1982. As with Tyre, the lead elements of the IDF attempted to punch through the area quickly in order to reach the amphibious force that landed north at the mouth of the Awali river. Reduction of the bypassed resistance again was the mission of the next echelon of Israeli forces. Despite the intensity of the resistance encountered in Tyre, IDF statements still referred to these actions as 'mopping up.' The fighting that followed was a post-graduate version of that in Tyre. By the time the battle came to a fiery end on June 14, both the PLO and the Israelis had absorbed the lessons of this new style of urban warfare and discovered its parameters.

Sidon was Lebanon's third city and, prior to the war, had a population of 150,000. Included in this figure are the Palestinian inhabitants of the neighboring refugee camps of Ain al-Hilweh and Mieh Mieh. Sidon sits on the narrow coastal plain of about a mile in width, bounded by the sea and the foothills of the Lebanon range. The main coastal highway runs through the central part of the city. A second parallel north-south route runs through the Ain al-Hilweh camp, which is adjacent to Sidon proper, just southeast of the city. Armored vehicles could fight through the urban area in the face of the type of resistance the Palestinians offered thus far in the campaign. Unarmored logistical vehicles could not, and thus the Israelis had to secure the area to insure their lines of communication. More importantly, to allow a large number of

armed Palestinians and war material to remain in the area was contrary to the Israeli war aims.

The Palestinian fighters at Sidon acted more on their own initiative than did those in Tyre. Militia, though supplemented by survivors of semi-regular units, bore the brunt of the fighting. Urban combat between irregular forces and conventional units was not new to Sidon. In 1976 combined elements of the leftist Lebanese National Movement and the PLO, known together as the Joint Forces, defeated a Syrian Army attack on the city. Robert Fisk describes the action:

In Sidon, a sudden Syrian armored thrust into the city had ended in disaster when Palestinian and Muslim members of the fragmented Lebanese national army--glorying in the name of the 'Lebanese Arab Army'--trapped the Syrian tanks in Riad Solh Street and destroyed every one, burning their crews inside.

The inhabitants of Sidon did not forget this episode.² Those who chose to oppose the Israelis seemed committed to repeating it.

Brigadier General Avigdor Kahalani's 36th Division was the first IDF formation to reach Sidon. Kahalani's forces were initially part of the middle thrust through central Lebanon and they fought in the battle to capture Beaufort. Afterward, they continued northward and then turned west, driving to the coast at the mouth of the Zaharani river about 10 kilometers south of Sidon. Advancing up the coastal highway, they received the mission to open the passages through the city. Eli Geva's brigade would then pass northward and execute his link-up with Yaron's landing force, an event already behind schedule.

The Israelis discovered they would actually have to fight

four battles in order to secure Sidon. The first two battles consisted of opening the north-south routes through the central city and Ain al-Hilweh respectively. Kahalani's forces had responsibility for these tasks. The second two battles centered around eliminating Palestinian resistance in the casbah or old city center and in the Ain al-Hilweh camp. Brigadier General Yitzhak Mordecai's forces would fight these latter two actions.

Kahalani's forces arrived at Sidon in a piecemeal fashion, having become separated through the action of small but determined Palestinian forces along the route and the delays not related to fighting that almost always accompany large movements of forces. Mobile armored forces often operate best when their sub-units range widely to seek out opportunities to exploit and keep the enemy reeling backwards. The opposing forces try to stay far enough in front of the advancing tanks to establish a line of defense. The indication that this line of defense is effective is when the piecemeal armored forces must slow and concentrate to overcome the opposition by coordinated action. If the enemy is, or is perceived to be, weak, the advancing armor units will attempt to overcome it while still on the march. The Palestinian preparations sufficed to require the Israelis to concentrate and to begin to bring up the full weight of their artillery. Though uncoordinated itself, the Palestinian defense, strengthened by the constraining road net and its location in an urban area, showed itself capable of stopping not only unarmored supply convoys but also in halting, at least temporarily, the Israeli spearheads.

The tentative plan called for the crack Golani brigade to open the route through Ain al-Hilweh and Kahalani's paratroop brigade, specially configured for urban warfare, to open the coastal highway route through Sidon. The Barak tank brigade would swing wide to the east and climb the ridge immediately to the east of the city. It would then penetrate the city's eastern suburbs and take up a blocking position north of Sidon. Geva's brigade would follow the paratroops through the city center.

The battle around Sidon would operate under the same limitations as did the battles in the vicinity of Tyre. First and foremost, IDF commanders had to minimize Israeli casualties. Units that could absorb 30% losses and yet be combat effective, often broke off action after suffering only a few killed or wounded. Secondly, the Israelis had to deal with large numbers of civilians, both Palestinians and Lebanese.

The Israelis began their attack with artillery fire against suspected PLO positions. Kahalani's troops had not fought in Tyre but as they entered the Sidon area, they quickly became acquainted with the manner of fight they faced. An officer in one of the lead tank units of the Barak brigade relates an encounter that occurred as his unit advanced around the outskirts of Sidon:

In another part of the city, they came out and applauded and threw rice on the soldiers and tanks. After we had continued another ten or fifteen meters they opened fire on us from every direction with anti-tank weapons and RPGs. The fire was not light. There were instructions not to injure civilians. The level of our discipline was very high. It was also a matter of the law of war. You could hear the

tank commander shout in the communications system. 'Watch out on the right, there's an old man on the balcony. Don't shoot!' and the moment you passed an RPG would be shot at you.³

As they continued on their axis, the Barak units encountered another problem of urban warfare--streets choked with civilians seeking to escape.

Lieutenant Colonel Dagan, the commander of the Barak brigade, radioed Kahalani for instructions on how to handle some Palestinian citizens his soldiers captured. In his reply Kahalani mentioned the example of Operation Litani, a 1978 attack into South Lebanon, after which the Israelis were strongly criticized for their treatment of prisoners. Kahalani decided to use these captives in a plan to combine an opportunity to escape destruction with some psychological warfare:

In conversation with Dagan, we decided on the following move: a few of the civilians that had fallen in the brigade's hand would be sent inside the city and would request that the forces there surrender. Indeed they were given precise instructions and sent to the headquarters of the terrorists. I held them though until a couple of more aircraft descended on the city, and after that I called a halt to the fire on Sidon.⁴

This alternating series of displays of force and offers of safety set the pattern for the remainder of the battle of Sidon. For the most part the Lebanese took advantage of the Israeli offers while the Palestinians steeled themselves to the onslaught of Israeli force of arms.

The de facto enveloping force suffered little damage as they traversed Sidon but they did not clear the routes of the Palestinian forces. The next unit to use the route would have to run the same gauntlet or worse. Of Kahalani's forces only

the Barak brigade was able to quickly and relatively easily reach its objective.

All wars have their lighter moments; one of the IDF tanks in this column had a broken fuel gauge and was nearly out of fuel. The tank commander solved this problem by taking his place in a line of Lebanese cars at a gas station and waiting for his turn at the pump. While they were waiting Israeli aircraft again began to pound targets around the city.⁵

Lighter moments were more rare for the Golani brigade charged with clearing the axis through Ain al-Hilweh. Following preliminary artillery fire and air strikes, they broke into the camp and immediately became decisively engaged by the Palestinian forces. The Golani brigade found itself in the same sort web of small arms and RPG fire that had characterized the defense of Tyre and the Rashidiyeh camp. The Palestinians, though, used a tank position to stop the Israeli advance.⁶ As evening approached the commander of the Golanis requested permission to withdraw from the camp until morning, his mission incomplete. During the fighting the Palestinians put one Israeli tank and two armored personnel carriers out of action, killing one IDF soldier and wounding fourteen others. Kahalani gave permission to withdraw. This retreat according to Kahalani "was executed under unprecedented pressure."⁷

Again as with the Barak brigade the Israelis found themselves cut off from behind as soon as they thought they succeeded in clearing the route.⁸ This was a very effective tactic on the part of the Palestinian fighters, as according

to Schiff and Ya'ari, "there would be [for the Israelis] no passing through Ein Hilweh without subduing it altogether."⁹ This was a new development from the experience in Tyre. There every section of town might contain resistance and require a fight to clear it but when the Palestinian forces abandoned an area or died defending it, the area remained undefended. The reoccupation of areas from which they had been driven once indicates either an increase of tactical coordination among Palestinian elements or an increasing savvy among individual fighters. It is also one of the most effective ways to negate a blitzkrieg, as such thrusts depend on proportionally small forces securing routes in a more or less permanent manner through shock action. Afterwards, the continuing thrust is critically dependant on large and vulnerable logistical columns using these routes unimpeded in order to meet the spearhead elements' voracious appetite for fuel and ammunition.

The paratroop brigade that had the mission of opening through the coastal road that ran through the center of the city, did not arrive until three o'clock in the afternoon. It immediately sent its forces into action as literally the whole war effort depended on the opening of this route so Geva's brigade could join Yaron's Awali landing force and continue the drive to Damour and then to Beirut. Like the Golani brigade at Ain al-Hilweh, the paratroops penetrated a short distance into the city and then withdrew at nightfall.

The failure of the Israelis to clear either route forced the Israelis to rethink their tactical plan. Geva's brigade

attempted and succeeded in bypassing the city on a steep and rocky trail and advanced northward to join Yaron's forces. Most thought the trail impassable to armor vehicles. A combination of luck and the design characteristics of the Merkava tank, which make it better suited to rocky terrain than most tracked vehicles, enabled Geva to accomplish this.¹⁰

Clearly the IDF forces would still need to clear Sidon and Ain al-Hilweh. Ground forces supported with fairly restricted artillery and air support failed to accomplish the mission within the parameters of acceptable Israeli casualties. The Israelis then resorted to the use of massed artillery fire and air strikes which lasted throughout the night of June 8.¹¹ On the morning of June 9, the paratroop effort to secure the route through Sidon proper resumed. A paratroop captain in the lead element described in broken English the situation and the Israeli approach to using ground forces and firepower:

We were stuck there for the whole night because the way of fighting was that because we didn't want too many casualties from our side, and we want to save them and we were very big troops against what we attacked, so the system was to fight very slow very easy, to use all the ammunition behind us, it means airplanes, and artillery. And of course as a soldier that you know you are going to attack this street, every bomb and every airplane that comes to bomb this main strip was for us something that we were happy because that is to save our lives. So in this situation the morality problem that you have is you don't think about it too much. You know that you have a mission and you want to get out alive. To finish that. So we have some people from this fight in the junction [first junction in the city], we have some of our soldiers killed there, about four soldiers, one of our vehicles was get an RPG and all the soldiers there was killed, and, of course we prepared ourselves for a very strong fight...we called the people to get out from the houses and to concentrate them on the beach. They, in the first hour, nobody went

out, so the artillery and the airplane really made a strong job there on the two main roads and after another hour we called them and again nobody went out and after an hour we called them another time to get out and we promised them nobody will be hurt by our troops and after three hours, they suddenly, you know, in the vacuum system, one went out and after him another and suddenly all the streets there was full and crowded with people, that was very afraid. They actually didn't believe that we are not going to kill them, and we sent all of them to the beach.¹²

Kahalani's forces finally cleared this route in the early afternoon and continued their advance north. The task of clearing the rest of Sidon including Ain al-Hilweh fell to the forces of Brigadier General Yitzhak Mordecai. His units included brigade task force A-7, the same soldiers who cleared Tyre and the surrounding camps. Both the battles of the old city section of Sidon and Ain al-Hilweh followed the pattern described in the previous chapter and resembled the route clearing operation Kahalani's soldiers just completed. The intensity of the Ain al-Hilweh fight exceeded any action of the war. The Palestinian militia forces were commanded by Haj Ibrahim Ghanem, a Shi'a cleric.¹³ He led by a combination of ruthlessness and charisma, shooting those that lost their will to resist or who carried Israeli offers of surrender to those resisting. 100 to 300 Palestinian fighters followed him to the death, fighting as though they were "doing the job of a division."¹⁴

In Sidon the Palestinians showed themselves capable of halting Israeli frontline forces in an urban environment and unhinging the Israeli blitzkrieg. within which the IDF operated. In Tyre, the PLO had not been able to halt the Israeli spearheads and perhaps the IDF could attribute their difficulties to the

problems that traditionally arise as armies fight their first battle of a conflict. Sidon made inescapable the conclusion that the price of victory in urban areas was significant casualties and unacceptable delays.

In the actions in Sidon, the Israelis consistently resorted to massive firepower in the form of artillery barrages and air strikes to break Palestinian resistance. This firepower could not be wielded with the precision needed to hit the PLO targets without causing large numbers of civilian casualties and general destruction. First, given the nature of the resistance, one window or balcony looked like any other until an RPG flew from it, thus precise targeting ahead of the ground forces was illusory. Secondly, the Palestinian defensive positions were by definition better prepared to withstand bombardment than normal dwellings. As an Israeli soldier relates, "Although the bombing had been directed at PLO targets, the guerrillas had been safe in their bunkers, leaving innocent civilians as the main casualties." The ultimate price the Israelis paid though was in negative attitudes among world opinion at large and among the Israeli citizenry toward the policies of the Israeli government.

NOTES

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6. BEIRUT

On June 14, 1982, Israeli forces advanced through the northeastern suburbs of Beirut completing the encirclement of the city. The IDF declined to move into West Beirut, the Muslim half of the city and the center of PLO activity, instead opting to conduct a siege in the classic definition. The Palestinians with the support of some of the Leftist Muslim militias moved to make their stand, perhaps their last one from the city. Both the Israeli and the PLO at this juncture had a fairly well-defined concept of this new "middle way" of urban warfare. Both realized that neither the principles and doctrines governing conventional warfare nor the theories of guerrilla warfare applied completely to the present conflict.

The decision to remain in West Beirut and make a determined, perhaps fatal stand there came only after much deliberation on the part of the inner circle of the PLO leadership. The fierce resistance in Tyre and, particularly, in Sidon was a largely militia phenomenon. Individuals and small groups of Palestinians took up arms to defend their homes from the Israelis or at least relinquish them only at a significant price. Communications between 'Arafat and the south were problematic once the fighting started; even when they functioned, they served mainly to pass situation reports rather than orders.¹ The urban warfare in the south was a local initiative or more accurately a series of very local initiatives, not a component of a comprehensive strategy on the part of the Palestinian leadership.

Mac states: "When encircled by the enemy, guerrillas

disperse to withdraw."² The top echelon of the PLO deduced shortly after the invasion that the IDF's objectives almost certainly included an advance to Beirut. On June 6, 1982, Chairman of the PLO, Yasser 'Arafat, leafing through reports at his headquarters, concluded: "This is not a limited war as the Israelis say, but the all-out war I have been predicting for some time."³ In such a situation, guerrilla warfare theory would indicate a withdrawal of PLO semi-regulars in small groups to the Syrian controlled areas of the northern Bekaa valley or perhaps the Tripoli area (a ceasefire proposal that the PLO rejected provided for the withdrawal of Palestinian fighters to these areas). Militia only would engage the enemy forces as they entered the city, if they were to be opposed at all.

The PLO leadership consciously decided against this course of action, though not without internal debate. Brigadier Abu al-Walid, the PLO Chief of Operations and the Palestinian leader with the most formal military education, advocated withdrawal and dispersion.⁴ The majority of the PLO upper echelon supported remaining and battling the Israelis from within West Beirut and the surrounding refugee camps. This faction, represented by Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyyad), asserted that the Palestinians could hold the Israelis at bay long enough in and around West Beirut to gain a favorable settlement.⁵ One Palestinian officer remarked: "We have grown up fighting in the streets of Beirut. It is what we do best."⁶

Prior to June 11, morale seemed to flag somewhat among the Palestinian forces as they reeled from the Israeli onslaught

and surprisingly rapid encirclement of the city. The battle at the Khaldeh crossroads south of Beirut could be seen from the city and the credible showing the PLO forces made there bolstered the Palestinian fighting spirit.⁷ The on-going battle in Sidon and Ain al-Hilweh infused an increased will to resist in both the rank and file and the leadership of the PLO. For the average Palestinian the effect of the resistance in Sidon was primarily moral. Lina Mikdadi, a Palestinian chronicler of the siege of Beirut, describes her feelings:

Israel was really at the gates of Beirut; we had no news of any one in Doha. The only bright spot was that the people of Sidon were still resisting. The city would fall eventually, but with honour, and that was something no patriot could underestimate. At the refugee camp of Ain al-Helwe on the outskirts of Sidon, thirty people in a bunker refused to give themselves up for days and when they finally did it was because they had run out of ammunition. They inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. The Israeli officer who took the bunker was startled to see thirty children march out, aged between eight and fourteen. He could not help but feel admiration for the thirty boys who had refused to give in because they believed so firmly in their cause--the Palestinian⁸ cause; Palestine, a country they had never set eyes on.

The Palestinians who performed so indifferently in the open field in the south again seemed to harden their resolve when facing the mission of defending an urban area, particularly one in which many of their families resided.

In addition to the emotions that the urban battles in the South elicited from the Palestinian leadership, the actions at Sidon demonstrated the feasibility and utility of a stand in the Beirut conurbation. According to Rashid Khalidi:

The intensity and length of fight in Sidon and Ain al-Hilweh, as well as in Damour and Khaldeh (all far smaller and more easily assaulted than Beirut),

were used to buttress their argument. Moreover, they claimed, a reluctance to enter the city had already been evinced by many quarters in the Israeli military and government, and it would be foolish for the PLO to throw away an opportunity to take advantage of this.

This assessment by Abu Iyyad and, in the end, 'Arafat was correct. The PLO did not have the strength to withstand a determined assault to take West Beirut. However, they did not need it because the IDF would not launch a determined assault. The cost in Israeli casualties would be simply too high.

The weight of the evidence indicates that the Israelis never intended to send their troops into Beirut in force. Rather, Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, the leading proponent of an extensive campaign in Lebanon, intended to delegate this task to the Phalangists. In his autobiography, Ariel Sharon describes the conditions of his agreement with Bashir Gemayel, head of the Phalange in a January 1982 meeting:

Israel will not enter West Beirut. That's the capital, the government, the foreign embassies. Our presence there would cause complex political problems for us. West Beirut is your business and the business of the Lebanese army.

The Phalangists fought in the nearly continual urban combat of the Lebanese civil war, much of it in Beirut, and knew the costs involved even better than the Israelis. Moreover, now that the Israelis had committed themselves to the crushing of PLO power in Lebanon and virtually guaranteed Bashir Gemayel the presidency, the Phalange had little to gain by fighting side by side with the Israelis.¹¹ Both Israel and the Phalange expected the other to do the 'dirty work' of clearing West Beirut. In the end, Israel was unable to use the Maronites to

compensate for the IDF's lack of infantry and Israel's low tolerance for casualties.

After the refusal of the Phalange to move on West Beirut, the siege of Beirut and its resolution became the focus of the whole war. Begin, Sharon and the cabinet realized the low Israeli tolerance for casualties limited the options for any potential IDF conquest of West Beirut. At this point the cabinet decided to delay any decision on how to resolve the situation they now faced. In the interim, the IDF proceeded to improve its positions around Beirut.

On June 22, IDF units struck east from their initial siege position in order clear Syrian forces from the key high ground adjacent to the Beirut-Damascus highway at Aley. It was in large part a grueling infantry battle and very different from the mobile armored warfare at which the IDF excelled. These actions also cost Israel an additional 28 dead and 168 wounded.¹²

Militarily, the operations along the Beirut-Damascus highway were a prudent move because they strengthened the encirclement and prevented Syrian forces from engaging the rear of the IDF besieging units from these heights. It did, however, show to all watching the extent of Israel's war aims. Those Israelis who had supported the campaign when Begin presented it as a limited operation to push the PLO 40 kilometers from Israel's northern borders, began to have second thoughts. Dissent seemed to emanate from those IDF elements encircling Beirut and closest to the action. In the course of the battles around Aley, one Israeli participant angrily questioned the

deputy chief of staff of the IDF, Moshe Levy: "What does the Beirut-Damascus highway have to do with the peace of Galilee, anyway?"¹³ Israeli domestic opinion began to mirror the sentiments of these officers.¹⁴

With the capture of Aley on June 25, the IDF became relatively immune to losses when it sat in its positions encircling West Beirut. Any foray into West Beirut though, even local ones, entailed heavy fighting and significant casualties for the units involved.

After June 25, Sharon and, to a lesser extent, the cabinet took more or less direct control of the conduct of the siege. Frustrated by the nature of the urban limited warfare that characterized this campaign, they sought a way to impose pressure on the PLO forces in West Beirut. At the strategic level, the cabinet chose to react to the situation following the same pattern the IDF commanders at Tyre and Sidon had followed at an operational level. Israeli artillery batteries shelled suspected PLO targets, particularly command post locations. Israeli aircraft dropped leaflets urging the PLO fighters to surrender and the civilian population of West Beirut to flee. The results were also similar to those in the southern cities--the PLO, for the most part, chose to remain and fight.

Sharon, still the driving force behind Israeli military operations, then proposed to the cabinet that the IDF apply the full measure of its firepower to West Beirut. On June 30, Sharon recommended to the cabinet:

...we should take the PLO and act against them with all the firepower we have, with all the air force,

with all the artillery, and destroy them utterly--I know people don't like that expression--to get them to accept our conditions.¹⁵

The less aggressive members of the cabinet understood the media impact such a use of firepower would have on public opinion.¹⁶ They instead decided to continue with the current low intensity of siege operations while Philip Habib, the U.S. special envoy continued to pursue a negotiated PLO withdrawal. Sharon could not abide with this and, without informing the cabinet or Begin, ordered relatively uncoordinated local attacks into the edges of West Beirut to 'tighten the noose' on the city. These attacks, undertaken by small groups of infantry and armor, were intended to gain territory for the IDF without being so prominent as to endanger ceasefires or negotiations. The results of this technique, which came to be known as 'crawling', were mixed against the increasingly well-entrenched PLO units.¹⁷

Sharon began to contemplate increasing the scope of this technique in order to capture West Beirut a sector at a time. The Israeli prime minister, Menachem Begin, saw the conflict in more manichean terms, comparing 'Arafat to Hitler and seemed to favor a more conclusive advance into Beirut if necessary to destroy the PLO.¹⁸ However, despite his personal perception of the PLO, Begin, as well as Sharon and the rest of the Israeli cabinet, remained acutely aware of the cost in Israeli casualties of such an assault. On July 18, when negotiations faltered, the 'doves' in the cabinet, faced with the option of stalemate, ground attack, or the application of massive firepower as Sharon suggested earlier, chose the latter.¹⁹

Within the higher echelons of the IDF, contingency plans for a possible assault were drawn up and disseminated. Dissent within the ranks grew. When it seemed likely to him that the IDF would be ordered into West Beirut, Eli Geva, the brigade commander whose unit led the advance up the coastal highway, resigned in protest.²⁰ His move was unprecedented and the IDF chief of staff, Raphael Eitan, and Sharon sent him to speak directly to Begin. During the meeting, the question of likely casualties in an attack on West Beirut so concerned the Prime Minister, that Geva spent the whole meeting answering Begin's questions about projected casualties. Geva's estimate was 'dozens'; Begin informed him that the chief of staff had estimated just a few.²¹

Geva was not the only Israeli that felt compelled to strongly oppose the war; more frighteningly from an Israeli point of view, he was not the only serving member of the IDF to protest the conduct of the campaign. Most of the early dissent focused on the assault on West Beirut that many in the IDF anticipated and the casualties it would entail. One brigadier general, Amram Mitzna publicly announced he lacked confidence in Sharon's abilities as defense minister.²² As the bombardment of West Beirut continued, many Israeli soldiers began to have doubts about the morality of the use of overwhelming firepower on civilian areas. Such doubts spread through stories told by returning soldiers and through the media to the Israeli public.

The media images of the Israeli use of massive firepower

on West Beirut profoundly affected both the American public and the policy makers of the United States. The coverage of the siege of Beirut was more extensive than that of Tyre and Sidon and the images were more powerful. According to Jonathan Randal, a correspondent for the Washington Post in Beirut:

It was television that hurt [the Israeli cause] the most. There's something strangely beautiful about the orange explosions, the slightly delayed sounds of impact, the billowing clouds of smoke and dust of massive artillery barrages and bombs, especially when filmed at the end of an afternoon, when the harsh light of a Levantine summer gives way to mauves and pastels. The effect is devastating when such scenes are juxtaposed with close-ups of men, women, and children, Palestinian and Lebanese, wounded by cluster bombs and high explosives and white phosphorus; with images of pathetic efforts made to dig survivors out from beneath the rubble of apartment houses. The disproportion between the quality and quantity of Israel's weaponry and that employed against them especially in Beirut, did little to further²³ its traditional image as David facing an Arab Goliath.

Much debate occurred over the accuracy and fairness of reporting on this war and especially the siege of Beirut. There is significant evidence supporting allegations of inaccuracy or bias in some reporting.²⁴ The fact remains though that whatever the objective value of the programming that was broadcast on the siege, it moved the Israeli public and, more importantly, the West to pressure Israel to halt the use of massive firepower.²⁵ President Reagan himself seemed particularly moved by the image of wounded and dead children.²⁶

From the first week in July the PLO retained control of West Beirut against the wishes of the leaders of the Muslim residents of the city.²⁷ Though the PLO leadership had already made the decision to leave, they would do so only under

favorable conditions. At no point did the PLO prevent Lebanese from leaving the besieged city as a matter of policy. However, any property left behind by those that sought safety and fled was usually looted. The Israelis responded to this state of affairs by resorting to the traditional siege practice of increasing the misery of all in the besieged city, soldier and civilian alike. The bombardment of the city became more intense and less discriminate and at various times the IDF halted food and water supplies to the city. Both of these actions brought criticism in the media and increasing American pressure on the Begin government. From the perspective of the law of war, both the PLO and the Israeli approaches during this phase were highly questionable. In terms of achieving war aims, the political advantage shifted in the PLO's favor.

The Israelis found themselves in a vicious and frustrating cycle. Use of massive firepower inevitably resulted in civilian casualties and horrific images broadcast around the world. These in turn prompted Western pressure on the Israeli government, usually in the form of an angry telephone call from President Reagan to Prime Minister Begin, sometimes including threats to end the American-led negotiations. For the IDF not to apply pressure allowed the PLO to regroup and further strengthen its deployments. Moreover, each additional day the PLO survived the siege, the greater its political capital and the less that of Israel. Ground action, especially unsupported by strong preparatory bombardments, became increasingly costly. When, during the first week of August, the IDF launched a strong but

limited attack to seize the southern and eastern edges of West Beirut, the Israelis lost 19 dead and 84 wounded.²⁸

On August 12, Sharon ordered the most massive bombardment of West Beirut to date. Isolated and almost at the breaking point, the Palestinian leadership had accepted the Habib plan in principle. They demanded, however, the deployment of a Multi National Force (MNF) prior to the withdrawal of their forces to guarantee the safety of withdrawing Palestinian fighters and the remaining Palestinian civilians. The Israelis, particularly Sharon, objected to this as they believed the MNF would allow many of the Palestinian fighters to evade the evacuation and remain in Lebanon. Sharon indicates he thought the bombing would bring the Palestinians to withdraw prior to the landing of the MNF.²⁹ The massive application of firepower on an urban area again produced images that worked to the detriment of the war aims of the Israelis. That same day Reagan, in demanding a final ceasefire from Begin, spoke not in the language of diplomacy, leverage and linkage but rather in that of images, angrily telling the Israeli prime minister: 'The symbol of this war,' he [Reagan] reportedly said to Begin, 'is becoming a baby without arms.'³⁰ The Israeli cabinet forthwith accepted the Habib plan as it was and stripped Sharon of his power to independently order further operations.

NOTES

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8. Lina Mikdadi, Surviving the Siege of Beirut, (London: Onyx Press, 1983), p. 37.
9. Khalidi, p. 113.
10. Ariel Sharon, Warrior: An Autobiography, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), p. 439.
11. Schiff and Ya'ari, p. 188.
12. Chaim Herzog, The Arab-Israeli Wars, (New York: Random House, 1982), p. 351.
13. Schiff and Ya'ari, p. 205.
14. Shai Feldman and Heda Rechnitz-Kijner, Deception Consensus, and War: Israel in Lebanon, (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1984), p. 61.
15. Sharon, p. 481.
16. Ibid., p. 482.
17. Khalidi, p. 89.
18. Sasson Sofer, Begin, (New York: Random House, 1988), p. 210.
19. Sharon, p. 486.
20. Eitan disputes that Geva resigned for reasons of conscience. He believes Geva used opposition to the war as a convenient banner to conceal personal reasons for quitting. see Raphael Eitan, Sipor shel Hiyal [Story of a Soldier], (Tel Aviv: Safrit Ma'ariv, 1985), pp. 282-294.
21. Schiff and Ya'ari, p. 216.

22. Reuven Gal, A Portrait of the Israeli Soldier, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 184.
23. Jonathan C. Randal, Going All the Way: Christian Warlords, Israeli Adventurers, and the War in Lebanon, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), p. 254.
24. Thomas L. Friedman, From Beirut to Jerusalem, (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 57 and Trevor N. DuPuy and Paul Martell, Flawed Victory, (Fairfax, VA: Hero Books, 1986), pp. 167-175.
25. Emile F. Sahliyah, The PLO After the Lebanon War, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986), p. 152.
26. Friedman, p. 144.
27. Gowers and Walker, P. 209 and Friedman, p. 147.
28. Dupuy and Martell, p. 160.
29. Sharon, p. 492.
30. Avner Yaniv, Dilemmas of Security, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 147.

CONCLUSION

The Palestinians through choosing to fight from the urban areas of South Lebanon and Beirut were able to negate the vast quantitative and qualitative superiority of the Israel Defense Force. The urban environment nullified the advantages the highly mechanized IDF enjoys in the open battlefield and turned every operation in a built-up area into an intense infantry engagement. These battles resulted in IDF casualties at a level above Israeli tolerance for losses in a campaign which many Israelis viewed as not essential to the nation's survival. When the Israelis turned to heavy airstrikes and intense artillery barrages to reduce their casualties, the civilian casualties and destruction this caused lowered IDF morale and, via media coverage, caused domestic support for the campaign to erode. More importantly, it damaged Israel's image in the West and endangered the crucial special relationship between the United States and Israel. These limitations that urban warfare put on both Israeli ground action and the use of airpower and artillery allowed the PLO to deny the IDF accomplishment of the Israeli war aims.

The outcome of the war between the Israelis and the Palestinians in the cities of Lebanon has continuing implications for security arrangements both in the Middle East and in the world at large. The fighting in built-up areas during the war made common knowledge what students of the Arab-Israeli wars have known for some time: the IDF, like most Western-style armies, does not have a force structure well-suited for urban warfare. It is likely then that should ground hostilities arise

in the future, the opponents of Israel will try to compel the IDF to attack into built-up areas, thus blunting the Israeli qualitative edge. And, as has already happened to some extent with the Intifada, media coverage will be closely coordinated to document the results of the Israeli application of force.

The degree of success that the Palestinians enjoyed though is not cause for unmitigated optimism on the part of leaders of the Arab regimes. Many of the Palestinians' accomplishments' during the war were inspite of the PLO hierarchy, not because of it. Except for the preposition of supplies and the establishment of redundant command and control facilities in Beirut, PLO preparations for the impending conflict were poor and planning was extremely unrealistic. Prior to Beirut, the leadership of PLO semi-regular units performed poorly. The people--the militia--acquitted themselves better than those the leadership promised would protect them. More importantly, it showed the ability of a militia force to frustrate a state army, the best in the region, given an urban battlefield and extensive media coverage. This must be scant comfort to the heads of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes in the region whose power traditionally depends on their state armies. This is compounded by the somewhat increased willingness of the West in the post bipolar world to intervene in cases of violent oppression.

This new "middle way" of urban warfare perhaps will also limit the freedom of the Western powers to use military force. Most Western military forces are similar in structure

to the IDF: light on infantry and heavily dependent on technology and firepower. An intervention which meets the strictest of jus ad bello standards will still produce enough horrible images if fought in or around towns or cities to fill a segment of an evening news broadcast.

Robert Fisk, a correspondent in Beirut during the war, stated: "The consistent and accurate reporting of this human suffering [that of the residents of West Beirut] was our most important journalistic duty now that the earlier battles and the movement of great armies had frozen along the front lines around the west Beirut perimeter."¹ Fisk's comments represent an ethos in modern journalism that the greatest good comes from intense reporting of a particular war's human tragedy in order to bring a halt to the fighting. This outlook seems somewhat successful in bringing an accelerated, though sometimes temporary, halt to a particular action. It is congruent with the view that just and necessary wars are rare if they exist at all. The opposing point of view less dominant in the media is that a just war is like surgery. It is painful, entailing damage to healthy tissue as a consequence of reaching the problem, to be avoided if possible, but sometimes necessary to prevent greater evil.

Wars of competing nationalisms at the sub-state or small state level are becoming the dominant form of conflict. If a Western power confronts the forces of such a nationalism, it is likely that the smaller, less powerful nationalist forces will follow the lead of the Palestinians and withdraw to their

urban areas. There they will make a stand, perhaps using artillery weapons to shell targets in a radius of 15 to 20 kilometers from the urban areas. The intervening army will then find itself facing the difficult dilemma the IDF did--incur significant casualties through ground assault or risk the loss of national or international consensus through the application of heavy firepower.

NOTES

1. Robert Fisk, Pity the Nation, (New York: MacMillan, 1990), p. 20.

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