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Itamar Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon, 1970–1983*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984. Pp.243; \$19.95.

Dan Bavly and Eliahu Salpeter, *Fire in Beirut: Israel's War in Lebanon with the PLO*. New York: Stein & Day, 1984. Pp. 261; \$18.95.

Richard A. Gabriel, *Operation Peace for Galilee: The Israeli–PLO War in Lebanon*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1984. Pp. 242; \$16.95.

When American troops and ships left Lebanon, they ended one of the shortest and most ignominious military efforts in US history. In response, many Americans drew two wrong conclusions. They threw up their arms at the very mention of Lebanon, declaring it a hopeless country permanently at war with itself; they assumed that the United States, having tried once and failed, has no possible further role in Lebanon.

But these conclusions are ill-advised. Lebanon has not always been consumed by civil war. The people living in that area have been at peace with each other through most of the modern times with the major exception of two lengthy civil wars, from 1840 to 1860 and from 1975 to the present. It is therefore safe to say that the war now in progress will some day end, though that might not be for many more years. There is reason to spend effort thinking about ways to achieve peace in Lebanon – the cause is not hopeless.

Further, today's situation is by no means final: although the United States suffered a defeat in early 1984, it may yet return to win another round in the future. The Syrians lost in 1982 but won in 1983, so why should the Western allies not rebound too? Becoming acquainted with Lebanon and its mysteries therefore has more than historical interest; there is a need to be prepared for the next stages.

Should the Western states become involved again, they will need goals to work for. Last time, the guiding assumption was that Lebanon's troubles resulted from the activities of foreign troops (those of the PLO, Syria and Israel) on Lebanese soil.

According to this line of reasoning, it was the outside forces that created the political imbalance that precipitated warfare and then kept the violence alive. Working on this assumption, the US government therefore directed its policies towards the withdrawal of all foreign forces.

But Itamar Rabinovich, Director of the Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University and a leading authority on Syria and Lebanon, leans toward the other explanation in his book, *The War for Lebanon, 1970–83*. He ascribes Lebanon's problems primarily to internal factors, stressing the immobility of the country's political system and pointing to the increased dissatisfaction with it, especially among Muslims. These resentments culminated in the hostilities that began in April 1975. He considers 'the conflict between two rival camps over the identity of the Lebanese entity and the distribution of power within the Lebanese state and political system' to have been 'the root cause of the Lebanese crisis' (p.96).

According to Rabinovich, rapid population growth in Beirut brought together many insular Lebanese from the countryside, people not used to the more tolerant spirit required for living together in the capital city. The Shi'is emerged in the early 1970s as a politicized and radical community; having been the least represented people in Lebanon, their awakening made confessional tensions grow far more acute. The oil boom of the early 1970s created a mood of assertiveness among the Muslims in Lebanon, fostering the sense that they needed no longer to accept a system in which Christians had the upper hand. Increased political stability in Syria under Hafiz al-Asad gave that powerful neighbour more freedom to interfere in Lebanese affairs in pursuit of its irredentist goals. And finally, the PLO moved into Lebanon from Jordan in 1970 (after its defeat by the forces of King Hussein) and used Lebanon as a base for attacks on Israel, provoking Israeli retaliations and splitting Lebanese opinion. Debate over the origins of the civil war has direct implications for the future of the conflict and its eventual resolution. If foreign troops did precipitate the fighting in 1975, it follows that their removal is the *sine qua non* of peace. With the PLO no longer a force in Lebanon, Syrian and Israeli troops become the key obstacles. This view postulates their evacuation as the highest priority for US policy in Lebanon.

But if, as Rabinovich argues, internal Lebanese tensions caused the war, then foreign forces are more a symptom than a cause of Lebanon's problems. In this view, the fighting will come to an end only when the Lebanese themselves take the necessary steps. In particular, they will have to agree on altering the inequitable political structure that with time has increasingly favoured some communities at the expense of others. Given the record of the past nine years, no observer can feel optimistic about the likelihood of such changes, but they remain the necessary prerequisites for peace in Lebanon. The Lebanese themselves began this war and they alone can end it. Negotiations between the Lebanese factions holds out the only hope: to the extent that the US remains involved in Lebanon's affairs – or that it will be once again in the future – this goal must inform US policies.

Rabinovich does an excellent job of explaining the more inscrutable aspects of Lebanese public life. He clarifies, for example, why the Syrians reversed their position in Lebanon twice, in 1976 and 1980, and why the US reversed itself on the matter of Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 1983. The chapter on 'Political Parties and Factions' lists 18 major actors on the domestic scene, bringing their otherwise enigmatic factional and ideological differences to light.

But why include a 36-page appendix, one-fifth the length of the text, with the complete translation of a speech by Assad in July 1976? Interesting as it is, the main points could have been excerpted in a page or two.

What to Rabinovich is merely the last phase in a long story – the 1982 war – forms the main topic of the other two books. *Fire in Beirut* provides an overview and *Operation Peace for Galilee* concentrates on the military dimension.

Dan Bavly and Eliahu Salpeter, authors of *Fire in Beirut*, are both journalists, though Bavly worked in the office of the Israeli Military Spokesman during the 1982 war. Writing with a press background, they tend to stress new information about Israeli conduct, mostly unflattering to the leadership. A few examples concerning Israeli diplomacy:

While Prime Minister Menachem Begin was still in intensive care recovering from a thigh operation in November 1981, the cabinet met in his hospital room to approve the draft of a Memorandum of Understanding with the US. As the prime minister dozed off intermittently under the influence of sedatives, the cabinet officers took turns in reading the single copy of the draft written up by the aides of the Defence Minister, Ariel Sharon. On doctor's orders, the cabinet session broke up after less than an hour, at which time Sharon flew off to Washington to initial the accord with the American Secretary of Defense. 'Thus, without formal vote by the cabinet, which had not had a chance to study it thoroughly, Israel approved what the Prime Minister and the Defense Minister afterward described as one of the most important foreign relations agreements in the country's modern history' (p. 230).

Then, in a meeting on 8 September 1982 between Begin and Bashir Gemayel, President-Elect of Lebanon, Begin began the talks with a peremptory demand that Gemayel sign a peace treaty with Israel the moment he reached office. Gemayel answered that this would destroy his support from the Lebanese Muslims; but were Begin patient, a treaty could be negotiated within a year. 'Begin would have none of it. The atmosphere dropped to nearly freezing point as he tried to bully the Lebanese. Bashir held out his wrists and explained that Mr Begin could have him handcuffed and arrested but could not force the treaty on him' (p. 192).

Still in search of an agreement with Lebanon two months later, as well as something to bolster his sagging public image, Ariel Sharon reported a 'breakthrough' that he had achieved in negotiations with Amin Gemayel. According to Sharon's aides, he had a written agreement on normalization of relations across the board – borders, trade, tourism, diplomatic representation, and security. According to Bavly and Salpeter, however, 'what Sharon claimed was an "agreement" with the Lebanese was actually an unsigned draft for the agenda of the talks' (p. 200)!

The first chapters of *Fire in Beirut*, dealing with the background to the war in 1982, are a bit weak, but the authors reach their stride with the outbreak of hostilities. Perhaps the most powerful chapter is the one dealing with press coverage of the fighting, for they have appalling tales to tell of biased coverage. For example, they point to the 2 August 1982 issue of *US News and World Report* that illustrated the tragic consequences of Israeli actions by showing a woman mourning by a grave in Beirut. But the gravestone itself was dated (in Arabic writing) 10 August 1980, nearly two years before the Israelis entered Beirut. Photographers flocked to an especially damaged block of houses in the centre of Sidon, ignoring the intact buildings nearby, leading local citizens to call that area Television Avenue. Bavly and Salpeter also recount the widely quoted UPI dispatch based on the testimony of Franklin Pierce Lamb, a notorious enemy of Israel, that the Israelis had used an American-made 'vacuum bomb' to flatten an eight-floor building in Beirut. It made a good story; the only trouble was, no such bomb exists in the US or Israeli arsenals. (Life imitates art: perhaps Mr Lamb had been inspired by Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana*.)

Richard A. Gabriel has written an engrossing military analysis of the 1982 war, focusing on the Israeli campaigns and assessing how the war affected Israel's military standing. Ironically, then, the one book under review not written by an Israeli dwells most on the Israeli role.

Gabriel has the admirable ability of bringing military data to life. He divides the warfare into constituent parts, clarifying and making sense of it in a way that this reader, at least, had not seen before. He calls the 1982 conflict a two-front war, one pitting Israel against the PLO, a second against Syria, and argues that 'the objectives of each ... had no relation to the objectives or the outcome of the other' (p. 68). Going further, he proposes that once the PLO had been beaten, Israeli aims changed: 'Having achieved the minimum goal of driving the PLO back beyond artillery range and destroying its infrastructure, the Israeli government began to define new political goals to justify the war. The political dynamic got out of hand' (p. 127). Like so many other observers, Gabriel approves of the limited war against the PLO but condemns the attacks on the Syrians and on the PLO in Beirut. He accuses the Israeli leadership of forgetting that war must serve political ends (and not the reverse).

Because he is so critical of the political conduct of the war, Gabriel's favourable analysis of the ethics of Israeli conduct takes on additional interest. Some of the finest sections of the book take up the questions of civilian casualties and Israeli military morality. Gabriel vindicates the Israeli army doctrine of *Tohar Haneshek*, 'purity of arms', noting that Israel took greater casualties than it had to because of its care for non-combatants in urban warfare. Israeli medics gave care to all the wounded, even PLO fighters, 'without question' (p. 174). During the entire war and the subsequent occupation of Lebanon, 'not a single Israeli soldier has been charged with a major crime. Rape, murder, brutality ... have been *totally* absent' (p. 175 – italics in original). Judging the record as a whole, Gabriel concludes that the Israeli forces were 'more restrained than any modern army that comes to mind' (p. 176).

On the matter of the Sabra and Shatila massacre, he condemns the Israeli leadership for its passiveness but points out that the Kahan Commission of Inquiry created new standards of ethics by raising the doctrine of indirect responsibility to the status of law. As a result,

officers, soldiers and politicians could be held responsible not only for what they had done or knew but for what they *should* reasonably have known and what they should reasonably have done. This act alone, the establishment of a new doctrine of international law to which the Israelis were unilaterally prepared to subject themselves, redeemed the [military] and its civilian government in the eyes of many (p. 220 – italics in original).

The most questionable aspect of Gabriel's analysis concerns his assessment of the human costs of war. The figures are as follows:

Fighting	Israelis killed	Arabs killed (approximate)	Israeli:Arab ratio
Israel v. PLO in south Lebanon	25	1,400	1:56
Israel v. PLO in Beirut	88	1,000	1:11
Israel v. Syria	255	2,000	1:8
Total	368	4,400	1:12

Perhaps as a result of miscalculating the Israeli:Arab kill ratio (on p. 182) to Israel's extreme disfavour, Gabriel makes the magnitude of Israeli casualties a major theme.

Given the above ratios, it was hard to agree with the author that the PLO 'fought extremely well' (p. 152) and that the Israelis sustained 'heavy casualties' (p. 152) against it. How does Gabriel conclude that the Israelis 'did not take a heavy toll of PLO fighters' (p. 166), much less that 'the Israeli Defence Forces appears to have suffered disproportionately far more casualties . . . than did the PLO' (p. 167)?

Such odd assertions epitomize the problems that confront even the most careful accounts of Arab-Israeli fighting: because information comes so predominantly from Israel, the warfare is viewed through an Israeli perspective. In *Operation Peace for Galilee* nearly every assessment – moral, economic, political, military – concerns Israeli performance. Although perhaps inevitable, this does have the unintended effect of distorting conclusions.

Politically one of the most complex conflicts of our times, Operation Peace for Galilee and its aftermath remains a topic of contention in Israel and a source of anguish in many Arab countries. There are no profound lessons yet to be drawn from the war and final statements are premature. In the interim, the three books under review provide the best basis for judging what has happened until now and what it means.

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