

Chapter 4

PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON



Photo: United Nations

UN peacekeepers on duty in Southern Lebanon, 1978.

Lebanon increasingly became the focus of conflict in the Middle East in the mid- and late 1970s. Many of those who fled the northern and coastal regions of Palestine in 1948 had found refuge in camps around the Lebanese towns of Tyre, Sidon and Beirut. Another wave of Palestinians came in from Jordan in 1970, and unrest steadily increased in southern Lebanon. By early 1972, the situation along the Israeli-Lebanese border had deteriorated. Stating that it was retaliating against raids by Palestinian commandos into its territory, Israel attacked refugee camps in Lebanon. In April 1972, at the request of Lebanon, UNTSO set up a ceasefire observation operation along the border.

Israel invasion of Lebanon, 1978

Israeli forces invaded southern Lebanon in March 1978, following a Palestinian commando raid into Israel. The Security Council called on Israel to withdraw its forces from Lebanese territory and, at the request of Lebanon, established the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), with a mandate to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restore peace and security, and assist the Lebanese Government to re-establish its authority over the south of the country. However, when Israeli forces completed their withdrawal from Lebanon in June 1978, they handed over their positions in the border area, not to UNIFIL, but to Christian and associated militias supported by Israel.

Southern Lebanon remained volatile, with frequent exchanges of fire between the Christian militias and the Israeli forces on the one hand and armed elements of the PLO and the Lebanese National Movement on the other. Efforts by the United Nations and the United States led to a de facto ceasefire in July 1981, and the area remained generally quiet until May 1982. Then, following attacks on Israeli diplomats in London and Paris, Israel carried out air strikes against PLO targets in Lebanon. Fighting broke out once again between Israeli and PLO forces.

On 5 June, in resolution 508 (1982), the Security Council called for an immediate halt of all military activities within Lebanon and across the Israel-Lebanon border. The PLO reaffirmed its commitment to stop all military operations across the border, and Israel informed the Secretary-General that the Council's resolution would be brought before the Israeli Cabinet. The next day, 6 June, Israeli forces invaded Lebanon. UNIFIL positions in southern Lebanon were either overrun or bypassed. The Security Council, in resolution 509 (1982), reiterated its calls for a ceasefire and demanded that Israel withdraw its military forces "forthwith and unconditionally". The invasion continued, and eventually the Israeli forces reached and surrounded Beirut.

Continuing to meet in June, July and August of 1982, the Security Council demanded that Israel lift its blockade of Beirut so that civilians in the city could receive necessary supplies. It authorized the deployment of United Nations military observers, known as Observer Group Beirut, to monitor the situation in and around the city.

In August, during the siege of West Beirut by Israeli forces, France, Italy and the United States, at the request of the Lebanese Government, sent a multinational force to Beirut to assist in the orderly and safe departure of Palestinian armed personnel from Lebanon. The evacuation of Palestinian forces from the Beirut area was completed on 1 September 1982, and the multinational force was withdrawn over the next two weeks.

Tension increased greatly with the assassination, on 14 September 1982, of Lebanon's President-elect Bashir Gemayal. The next day, units of the Israeli forces moved forward into West Beirut. On 17 September, hundreds of Palestinian civilians, including women and children, were massacred in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila by Lebanese Christian militias, which had entered West Beirut with the Israeli forces. The Security Council condemned the "criminal massacre of Palestinian civilians in Beirut", and the Government of Lebanon requested the return of the multinational force.

Contingents from France, Italy and the United States, later joined by a small unit from the United Kingdom, went back to Beirut late in September 1982. The multinational force encountered serious obstacles in its task, and because of heavy casualties, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States withdrew their personnel, followed by France early in 1984, thus ending the 19-month multinational effort.

In June 1983, clashes broke out in eastern Lebanon between different Palestinian factions, causing widespread suffering among Palestinian civilians. Then the focus of tension among Palestinians shifted to northern Lebanon around the city of Tripoli. An agreement was eventually reached between the par-

ties, which provided for a ceasefire and the evacuation of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and the armed elements of the PLO loyal to him. In response to a request by him, the Secretary-General decided, on humanitarian grounds, to authorize the flying of the United Nations flag on ships that would evacuate the PLO forces from Tripoli. The evacuation operation was carried out on 20 December 1983, and thousands of Palestinians sought refuge in Tunisia, Yemen and other countries.

Israel’s “security zone” in south Lebanon, 1985

In January 1985, the Israeli Government announced that members of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) would continue to operate in a “security zone” in southern Lebanon and act as advisers to the so-called “South Lebanon Army” (SLA). The IDF and SLA in southern Lebanon remained targets for attacks by groups opposed to the Israeli occupation. In 1993 and 1996, Israel carried out intense bombardments, causing many civilian casualties.

Israeli withdraws from Lebanon, 2000

On 17 April 2000, Israel informed the Secretary-General that it would withdraw its forces from Lebanon by July 2000 “in full accordance with Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978)”. As a first step, the Secretary-General sent his Special Envoy, Terje Roed-Larsen (Norway), to meet with the Governments of Israel and Lebanon and concerned Member States in the region. United Nations cartographic, legal and military experts, accompanying Mr. Roed-Larsen, examined the technical issues related to the withdrawal.

On 2 May, the Government of Israel notified the Secretary-General that Israel had redeployed its forces in compliance with Security Council resolutions. A United Nations team of cartographers worked on the ground to identify a line to be adopted for the purposes of confirming the Israeli withdrawal (subsequently referred to as the “Blue Line”). On 16 June, the Secretary-General reported to the Council that Israel had with-



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