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Southern Lebanon: Geographic Perspectives on a Possible Israeli Invasion (C)

A Research Paper

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*Information available as of 16 April 1982
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Chronology of Major Events

1920

Creation of French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon and British Mandate for Palestine.

1922

Demarcation of boundary between Lebanese and Palestinian Mandates.

1943

Unwritten National Covenant between Lebanese Christians and Muslims agrees to an independent postwar Lebanon based on confessional representation in 1932 census which showed a slight Christian majority.

1946

French withdraw, Lebanon gains independence.

1948

Israel is founded; Lebanese participate with other Arab League forces in subsequent attack on new Jewish state. Approximately 100,000 Christian and Muslim Palestinians flee from northern Israel into Lebanon.

20 July 1949

Israel withdraws from the Lebanese territory seized in 1948.

1958

US Marines land near Beirut in response to request for assistance from Lebanese Government.

December 1968

Israeli commandos land at Beirut Airport and damage or destroy 13 commercial aircraft in retaliation for attack on El Al plane in Athens.

1969

Cairo accords between the PLO and Lebanese Government legitimize Palestinian military presence in southern Lebanon.

1969

Palestinian guerrillas begin cross-border shellings and incursions into Israel, prompting Israeli reprisal raids and preemptive strikes into Lebanon. Many Lebanese border villages are abandoned; many homes destroyed.

September 1970

After intense fighting Jordanian military defeats Palestinian forces and restores order. Weak Lebanese Government is unable to resist subsequent Palestinian guerrilla influx.

1970

Israeli raid into southern Lebanon penetrates to a distance of 16 kilometers and lasts 32 hours.

April 1973

Israeli commandos attack homes and offices of leading Palestinians in Beirut, killing three top guerrilla leaders.

May 1973

Clashes between Lebanese Army and Palestinians leave 60 dead and hundreds wounded; Palestinian forces are reinforced by Syrian-based Palestinians; Muslim pressure on Lebanese Government forces Army to suspend major efforts to control guerrilla activity; alarmed Christians begin strengthening private militias.

October 1973

Egypt and Syria attack Israel on Yom Kippur. Lebanon not involved.

1974

Palestinian groups raid Qiryat Shemona and Maalot, killing 40 Israeli civilians.

April 1975

Heavy fighting breaks out between Palestinians and Phalangists in Beirut following ambush of busload of Palestinians. Incident regarded as beginning of civil war.

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March 1976

Civil war in full swing; Lebanese Army splits along sectarian lines.

June 1976

Syrian Army enters Lebanon; US Ambassador and economic officer are murdered.

July 1976

Israel establishes border crossings with Lebanon under "Good Fence" program.

August 1976

Palestinian refugee camp, Tel-al Zaatar in Beirut, falls to Christian forces after a 52-day siege. Signals beginning of last phase of civil war.

October 1976

Riyadh minisummit ending civil war creates 30,000-man Arab Deterrent Force (ADF) that includes mostly Syrian forces.

March 1978

Guerrilla attack on Israeli bus prompts Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon up to the Litani River. UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is created by UN Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426: Resolution 425 calls for Israeli withdrawal and creation of UNIFIL; 426 spells out force's terms of reference.

June 1978

Israelis turn over control of 5- to 10- kilometer-wide border zone to Lebanese Army unit commanded by Major Saad Haddad, a Lebanese Christian.

July 1979

Last of non-Syrian units of the ADF depart Lebanon.

July 1980

Phalange defeats rival National Liberal Party militia, thus establishing control over East Beirut.

April 1981

Heavy fighting takes place between Syrian and Christian forces in Zahlah and across the confrontation line in Beirut; Israeli Air Force shoots down two Syrian helicopters in the Bekaa Valley. Syria moves SA-6 surface-to-air missiles into Lebanon.

24 July 1981

After heavy cross-border shelling, US-negotiated agreement ends hostile military action from Lebanese and Israeli territory.

15 April 1982

Fighting breaks out between Shiite militia (AMAL) and leftist groups including Palestinians in Beirut and southern Lebanon.

25 April 1982

Scheduled Israeli withdrawal from Sinai.

July-August 1982

Scheduled presidential elections in Lebanon.

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Armed Political Entities in Lebanon

Entity	Leaders	Military Strength
Lebanese Government	President Ilyas Sarkis	21,600
Maronite Christians		
Lebanese Front Phalange	Pierre and Amin Jumayyil, Bashir Jumayyil (Militia Head)	30,000
National Liberal Party	Camille Chamoun Dany Chamoun (Militia Head)	
Christians in the south	Major Saad Haddad	2,000-2,500
Zgharta Front	Sulayman Franjiyah Robert Franjiyah (Militia Head)	3,000
Lebanese Muslims		
National Movement Progressive Socialist Party	Walid Jumblat	10,000-12,000
Murabitun Various smaller parties	Ibrahim Qulayiat	
AMAL Shia Militia		7,000-8,000
Syria (Arab Deterrent Force)		22,000
UNIFIL		7,000
Palestinians		
Fatah	Yasir Arafat	7,000-10,000
Saiqa	Issam Qadi	2,000-4,000
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP-GC)	Ahmad Jabril	200-500
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)	Nayif Hawatmah	500
Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)	George Habbash	500-1,000
Front for the Liberation of Palestine (FLP)	Taalat Yaqub	100-200
Arab Liberation Front (ALF)	Abd al-Rahim Ahmad	300-500
Popular Struggle Front (PSF)	Samir Ghushi	Less than 200
Black June	Sabri al-Banna	Less than 200

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**Village Populations in Christian-Dominated
Area Along Israel's Northern Border
(in East-to-West Order)**

Village	Estimated Population	Religious Composition	Village	Estimated Population	Religious Composition
Kafr Shuba	400	Druze	Al Habis	300	Mixed
Halta	0		Yarun		
Al Majidiyah	50	Druze	Aynata	2,000	Muslim
Al Mari	150	Mixed	Bint Jubayl	8,000	Muslim
As Sulayyib	200	Mixed	Harat as Sidri		
Arab al Luwayzah	50	Mixed	Kunin	150	Muslim
Al Amrah			At Tiri	300	Muslim
Mazra at Sarda	0		Ayn Ibil	4,000	Christian
Al Khiyam	0		Hanin	0	
Dibbin	200	Muslim	Dibil	400	Muslim
Al Balat	500	Muslim	Rumaysh	4,000	Mixed
Marj Uyun	8,000	Christian	Ayta ash Shab	400	Mixed
Al Qulayah			Bayt Lif	500	Muslim
Al Khirbah			Al Qawzah		
Dayr Mimas	750	Mixed	Ramyah	50	Muslim
Kafr Killa	3,000	Muslim	Marwahin	0	
Al Udaysah	2,000	Mixed	Shihin	200	Mixed
Rabb ath Thalathin	50	Muslim	Umm at Tut	50	Muslim
Bani Hayyan	50	Muslim	Al Jibbayn	50	Muslim
Tallus	100	Muslim	Yarin	0	Muslim
Markaba	400	Muslim	Ad Duhayrah		
Hula	1,000	Muslim	Tayr Harfa	300	Muslim
Mays al Jabal	900	Muslim	Abu Shash		
Muhaybib	100	Muslim	At Matmurah	0	
Blida	750	Muslim	Shama	150	Muslim
Hayy Bir	750	Mixed	Alma ash Shab	1,200	Christian
Nasir			Al Bayyadah	150	Mixed
Aytarun			Ash Shawmarah	300	Muslim
Marun ar Ras	0		Total	41,750	

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Southern Lebanon: Geographic Perspectives on a Possible Israeli Invasion (C)

The Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire could be broken at any time by renewed cross-border attacks or a full-scale Israeli invasion into Lebanon. The Israelis believe that the Palestine Liberation Organization is using the cease-fire to rebuild its military capabilities in southern Lebanon, and they point out that PLO terrorist attacks have not ceased elsewhere. They also cite the continued presence of Syrian surface-to-air missiles in the Bekaa Valley as an unacceptable attempt to alter the military balance in Lebanon.

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The *de facto* cease-fire of 24 July 1981 contains the following points:

- There will be no hostile military activity from Lebanon directed at targets in Israel—by land, sea, or air.
- There will be no hostile military activity from Israel directed at targets in Lebanon—by land, sea, or air.

The same will apply to hostile military activity directed into Saad Haddad's Christian-dominated area or from it. (U)

An Israeli invasion would be the latest move in a long sequence of events that has destabilized the Lebanese political scene and precipitated the struggle over southern Lebanon. The key events include:

- The flight into Lebanon of large numbers of Palestinians from Israel in 1948.
- The movement to Lebanon in 1971 of the main PLO military forces expelled from Jordan, leading to an increased number of PLO attacks into Israel.
- The breakdown of central government authority and the 1975-76 civil war.
- The entry into Lebanon of Syrian troops as a peacekeeping force in 1976.
- The Israeli invasion to the Litani River, resulting in the establishment of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in southern Lebanon in 1978.
- The subsequent establishment in 1978, along the Israeli border, of Saad Haddad's Christian-dominated area with strong political, military, and economic ties to Israel.

In addition to these and other events that have engendered the present military/political situation in southern Lebanon, a number of more basic factors have a bearing on Israeli interests and potential military operations in the area. These include the religious makeup and distribution of the local population, terrain, and other environmental conditions that favor or constrain military activity and the presence of only partially used water resources that could be more fully developed under peaceful conditions.

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This paper presents the geographic framework of the current tensions and its relevance to possible Israeli military operations in Lebanon. (C)

Military Objectives

Israel has a number of military options, ranging from the shelling of PLO-held areas in southern Lebanon by its Christian allies there to a ground invasion. Israel's likely military objectives in an invasion of southern Lebanon would be:

- To eliminate the armed Palestinian presence south of the Litani River and secure the Tyre area.
- To secure key terrain features in the region between the Litani and Zahrani Rivers to destroy Palestinian military capability.
- To destroy Palestinian artillery within range of northern Israel.
- To maximize casualties among the armed Palestinians, including the elimination of as much of the PLO leadership as possible.

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To accomplish this latter objective ground forces could sweep beyond Tyre along the coastal road, and airstrikes, naval and artillery shelling, and commando raids might be launched against Palestinian strongholds in central Lebanon as well. Likely targets would be Sidon, Ad Damur, Beirut, and perhaps Tripoli in the north. Civilian casualties, both Lebanese and Palestinians, would be heavy.

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The main routes Israeli forces are likely to use to accomplish these objectives are described below and are highlighted on the Southern Lebanon Border Area Map. Use of these routes would largely avoid encounters with UNIFIL forces and would interdict Palestinian routes of escape. Other secondary roads would also be used to reach specific military targets and to accomplish cleanup operations.

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Possible Invasion Routes

Route A. Direct coastal route past UNIFIL Headquarters to Tyre, Sidon, Ad Damur, and Beirut. Two-lane, hard-surfaced highway crosses Litani on temporary bridges that replace main bridge being repaired because of Israeli bombing in July 1981. Bridge over Zahrani intact. Alternate route in south bypassing UNIFIL Headquarters is two-lane, loose-surfaced Israeli-built road from border to Al Jibbany and one-lane, hard-surfaced from there to coastal road.

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Route B. Route from Metulla parallels Litani to north and skirts most UNIFIL positions. Secures crossing sites and bridge over river south of Qaqaiyat al Jisr. Cuts Palestinian withdrawal routes and facilitates clearing the area between Litani and Zahrani. One-lane, hard-surfaced except for short segment south of An Nabatiyah.

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Route C. Route from Metulla to coast bypassing An Nabatiyah. Would secure bridge sites over Litani and Zahrani, (bridges over Zahrani reportedly under repair in early 1982) and cut withdrawal routes of Palestinians south of Zahrani. Hard surface one to two lanes, steep gradients and tortuous alignment in many places.

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Route D. Route to Marj Uyun, Jazzin, and Bekaa Valley from Metulla. Could be used to secure Israeli flank from possible Syrian advance. One- or two-lane, hard-surfaced except for short segments of one-lane, loose-surfaced between Marj Uyun and beyond Litani River. Israelis have capability to bridge Litani quickly in area where they destroyed bridge in July 1981.

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Route E. Route to PLO targets near Hasbaya and beyond to Bekaa Valley. Positions on route would block Syrian forces. Good one-lane, hard-surfaced road with no major river crossings.

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Cross-Country and Road Transportation

Conditions for vehicular cross-country movement are poor to unsuitable on the steep, rocky hills and only slightly better in the narrow, deep valleys of the perennial and larger intermittent streams. The coastal plain and the plains near Metulla have fair movement conditions except from December through March when soils are occasionally too wet for a day or two at a time.

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The main roads in the area are hard surfaced and suitable for two-way military traffic. The network is sparse, however, and alternate routes are few and poor. Sharp curves and steep grades are common, and off-road dispersal would be hindered by the steep slopes. On the coastal plain dispersal would be hindered by stone walls, orchards, and irrigation ditches. (C)

Concealment from ground and aerial observation is limited to scattered patches of trees, caves, and surface irregularities, buildings in the towns and villages, and orchards on the coastal plain. Good cover from flat-trajectory fire is available in the stream valleys. (C)

Physical Geography

Southern Lebanon is predominantly hill country that is deeply dissected by the perennial Litani, Zahrani, and Hasbani Rivers and their intermittent tributaries. A discontinuous coastal plain that fringes the Mediterranean is widest south of Tyre, where it extends about 5 kilometers inland. Other small flat areas extend north and west of Metulla. From the north the Lebanon Mountains extend down into the hill country almost to Marj Uyun. In the east the steep slopes of Mt. Hermon rise to the Syrian border. (U)

The hills of southern Lebanon have elevations generally between 150 and 1,000 meters. Their rounded summits rise about 100 to 200 meters above the narrow valley floors. Slopes are steep, especially along the larger streams and in the mountains. (U)

The coastal plains and adjacent hills have a climate similar to southern California's, with hot, dry, nearly cloudless summers and mild, rainy winters. Temperatures in summer reach from 25° to 35°C (80s and low 90s F) during the day and fall to 15° to 20°C (60s F) at night. Winter temperatures are about 10°C cooler. The 750 to 900 mm (30 to 35 inches) of annual rainfall occurs from November through April. The higher elevations east of the coast are considerably cooler and drier; mountain peaks east of Jazzin and the upper slopes of Mt. Hermon are snow covered in winter. (U)

Water levels in the perennial streams are usually high from early January through April. At that time the Litani is 20 to 75 meters wide and 2 meters deep in most places—too deep for fording by vehicles. The Zahrani is equally wide near the coast, but only 10 to 20 meters wide inland and generally less than 1 meter deep. Fording is possible in places if approaches are prepared. The Hasbani is generally 10 to 20 meters

wide and less than 1 meter deep. The intermittent streams flow for brief periods after heavy rains from early November through April. The low-water season in the perennial streams usually lasts from July through October, when even the Litani is less than 1 meter deep. (C)

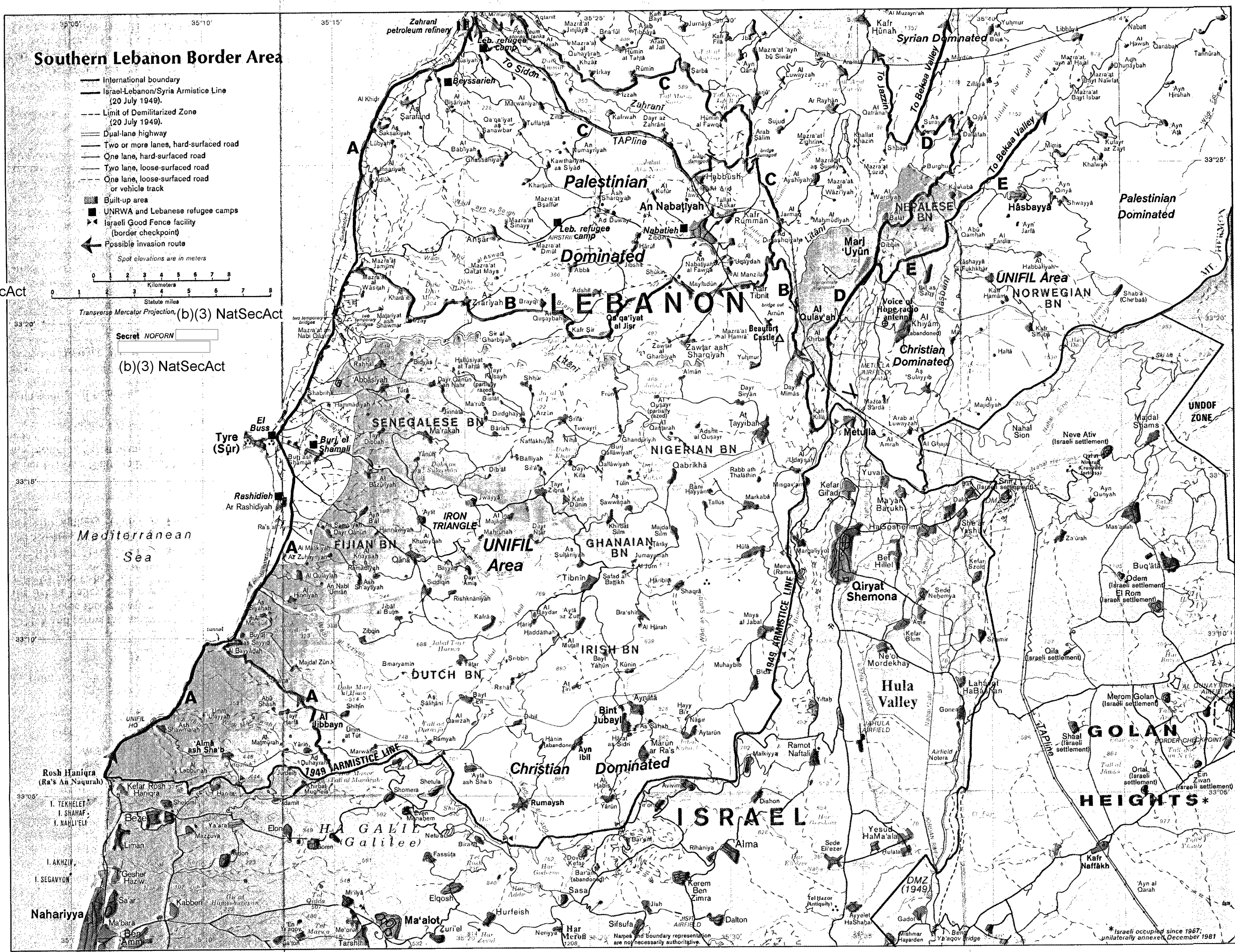
Population

The population of southern Lebanon has suffered radical shifts as a result of the 1975-76 civil war and subsequent conflicts in the area. In 1975 the indigenous population south of the Litani was estimated at 250,000, living in some 155 farming villages. Density was high—about 200 per square kilometer. In addition, the area contained about 50,000 Palestinians concentrated in and near three refugee camps around Tyre. (C)

Beginning in 1969, however, residents had begun to flee northward as a result of Israeli attacks. By the time of the Israeli invasion in March 1978 the population may have declined to less than 100,000. During the next month many of those remaining also fled, as many of the villages south of the Litani were damaged by shelling. Since 1978 perhaps 60 to 80 percent (150,000 to 200,000) of the 1975 population have returned to those villages that were not razed. Those who have not returned remain in the Sidon-Jazzin and Beirut areas. (C)

Religious Composition

Shia Muslims strongly predominate throughout the region. In the Christian-controlled region along the Israeli border 90 percent of the original residents were Shias, 7 percent were Christians, and the remaining 3 percent were Druze, a Muslim sect. The Christian-dominated area's present population of 40,000 is 30 to



40 percent Christian. Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics are concentrated in Marj Uyun and Al Qulayyah villages and Maronite Christians in Ayn Ibi, Alma ash Shab, and Rumaysh. The Druze are in Hasbaya and several other villages near Mt. Hermon. A few villages are evenly divided between Christians and Muslims; almost all have some sectarian minority. (C)

Because representation in Lebanon's confessional system is apportioned according to the size of each religious group, population statistics are important measures of political strength. The last official census was taken in 1932 since then efforts to gather new statistics have been blocked largely by the Christians, who fear that the Muslims, who now have a two-to-one majority, would demand major political reforms. (C)

Most of the 100,000 Palestinians who fled from Israel into Lebanon in 1948 moved into refugee camps, mainly clustered around the coastal cities of Beirut, Sidon, and Tyre, and also Tripoli. Since 1948 this population has grown to about 400,000, of whom some 100,000 remain in camps. The other 300,000 live mainly south of Beirut; of these, 100,000 are naturalized Lebanese citizens and 200,000 are registered either with the United Nations or the government as nonrefugee Palestinians. After the defeat of the Palestinians in Jordan in 1970, an estimated 20,000 to 35,000 Palestinian political activists, officials, and militia also moved to Lebanon, further raising the country's volatility. (C)

Lebanon's Palestinians have suffered and been displaced even more than the indigenous population by the civil war and the Palestinian-Israeli conflicts.

Those living adjacent to PLO facilities and training camps have been the worst affected. For example, the survivors of the Tel el Zaatar United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) camp in Beirut, which was overrun and destroyed by the Christian militia forces during the civil war, are now located in Ad Damur, while attempts are being made to relocate them on land at Beyssarieh. (C)

The locations of the armed Palestinian groups have also shifted. After the Lebanese military granted *de facto* extraterritorial status to the Palestinians under the Cairo Agreement in 1969, Fatah under Yasir Arafat operated in southeastern Lebanon from camps on the slopes of Mt. Hermon. Later, as the central government's authority waned, the guerrillas, aided by Shia supporters, greatly expanded their area of operations along Israel's northern border. Since the 1978 Israeli invasion and particularly the US-negotiated cease-fire of July 1981, they have been largely checked north of the Christian-dominated zone and the UNIFIL demilitarized area. (C)

The Shattered Economy

Although the south was less affected than central and northern Lebanon by the civil war, more than 12 years of Israeli-Palestinian clashes have had a disastrous effect on the poor, almost entirely agricultural economy. Some villages were totally destroyed and most sustained heavy damage. Cultivated fields and orchards were torn up by Israeli military equipment; electrical service, water systems, and irrigation channels were damaged or destroyed. Rehabilitation and resettlement of the area has been slow because of the continuing violence. International relief organizations have assisted in providing food, clothing, medical assistance, and shelter to those that have remained. (U)

The economy of the southern, Christian-dominated area has become largely reoriented toward Israel. During the civil war Israel instituted the "Good Fence" program, permitting local inhabitants to cross into Israel at specified locations to purchase consumer goods and for medical services, vocational training, tobacco marketing, and employment. In recent years up to 1,000 Lebanese have worked in Israeli agriculture, industry, services, and construction. As part of the "Good Fence" program Israel has also provided water, electricity, and agricultural assistance to the Arab villages in Haddad's Christian area. Seven crossing points are now in operation. (U)

The Water Issue

Proposals to divert Lebanon's Litani River southward into the Jordan River have been a recurrent theme within water-short Israel and source of apprehension to Lebanon. Even before the creation of the Palestine Mandate, early Zionist planners tried unsuccessfully to get the British to demarcate Lebanon's southern border so as to place the Litani within Palestine. (C)

Israeli interest in the Litani was reiterated over the years, and in some detail in 1975 when a government official estimated that the Litani could supply Israel with about 500 million cubic meters per year, an increase of about 30 percent to Israel's water supply. This potential water supply may be a contributing factor in Israel's desire to control southern Lebanon. Diversion of the Litani would demand not only secure access to the river but also control over the storage dam at Al-Qirawn, about 40 kilometers north of Metulla. (C)

Key Locations

Towns

Ad Damur (7,000) is a former Christian town that was abandoned and heavily damaged during the civil war and is now inhabited by several hundred Palestinian refugees from Tel al Zaatar, a Beirut UNRWA refugee camp destroyed by the Christians. Frequent target for Israeli commando raids. (U)

Beirut (1,000,000) is the capital of Lebanon and was divided by the 1975-76 civil war into largely Muslim and Christian sectors. West Beirut, under Syrian and Palestinian control, houses the US Embassy and the American University-Beirut as well as the Palestine Liberation Organization and other Palestinian organization offices. East Beirut is under the control of the Phalange-dominated Lebanese Front and the Lebanese Army. (U)

Bint Jubayl (8,000) is the second most important operations center (after Marj Uyun) for Israeli and Haddad forces in southern Lebanon. (C)

Hasbaya (5,000) is the largest Druze village in southern Lebanon and site of artillery positions of leftist Lebanese Arab Army. Shelled by Haddad forces in February 1979. (C)

Marj Uyun (8,000) is the primary Christian stronghold and headquarters for Haddad's Free Lebanon Militia (FLM). Has large Israeli presence and is connected by landline to Israeli base at Metulla. Town is predominantly Greek Orthodox and is former subdistrict administrative center. (C)

An Nabatiyah (5,000-10,000) is the Palestinian-dominated administrative and marketing center for Nabatiyah subdistrict. (C)

Sidon (50,000-60,000) is a key center of Arafat's Fatah organization. City is fourth largest in Lebanon and administrative center for Al Janub Province, which includes the area south of the Awali River. Two nearby UNRWA refugee camps, in Ein el-Hilweh and Mieh Mieh, housed 27,000 Palestinians in 1980. (C)

Tyre (Sur) (15,000) is the nearest Palestinian-controlled city to Israeli border. AMAL, the Lebanese Shia militia, also has a presence here. City is a minor marketing and service center and contains small fishing port. Many residents and inhabitants of the nearby UNRWA refugee camps fled north when the city was heavily shelled during the March 1978 Israeli invasion. City has since been partially rebuilt and some residents have returned. (U)

Zahlah (50,000) is the Greek Catholic center in Bekaa Valley that was scene of heavy Syrian-Phalange fighting in 1981. Syrian mobile surface-to-air missiles are located in nearby hills and Syrian-controlled Lebanese airbase is 8 kilometers to the east. (C)

UNRWA Refugee Camps in Southern Lebanon

Beyssarieh is an UNRWA refugee camp started in 1977 for Palestinians temporarily housed at Ad Damur; site is unsuitable and few moved there. (U)

Burj el Shamali (10,000) is an UNRWA-operated Palestinian refugee camp at Tyre. (U)

El Buss (5,000) is an UNRWA-operated Palestinian refugee camp at Tyre. (U)

Nabatieh (4,000) is an UNRWA-operated refugee camp largely destroyed by Israeli air raids in early 1979; 7,000 of 11,000 Palestinians fled toward Sidon. (U)

Rashidieh (8,000) is an UNRWA-operated Palestinian refugee camp at Tyre. (U)

Other Important Locations

Beaufort Castle is the ruins of a Crusader castle in the big bend of Litani River, overlooking Hula Valley in Israel. Longstanding stronghold manned by elements of most Palestinian and Lebanese leftist groups. Estimated strength 45. Frequent Israeli target. (C)

Iron Triangle is a large Palestinian-controlled area east of Tyre and south of the Litani River from which UNIFIL forces are denied. (Estimated armed strength 800.) Fatah battalions have checkpoints on main road used for smuggling arms and supplies from Tyre. Numerous confrontations between Palestinians and Dutch, Senegalese, and Fijian UNIFIL forces. (C)

Voice of Hope Radio is an unlicensed radio station financed by an American Christian group. Broadcasts in Arabic, Hebrew, French, and English. Used by Haddad as his *de facto* government radio. (C)

Zahrani Petroleum Refinery is near the terminus of the TAPLine from Saudi Arabia on the coast south of Sidon. The US-owned refinery supplies petroleum products to southern Lebanon. Crude oil from here was provided by sea to Lebanon's other refinery at Tripoli until its connecting pipeline to Iraq was reopened last year. This arrangement may be renewed because of the recent Syrian closing of the pipeline. Refinery and TAPLine were targets of Israeli attacks last summer. (U)

There are nine additional UNRWA refugee camps in Sidon, Beirut, Tripoli, and the Bekaa Valley. Several other refugee camps exist in the area that are not affiliated with UNRWA. (U)

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