

TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF ISRAEL



LEBANON AND ISRAEL ידידים נוצרים של ישראל

BBC Media coverage of Israel's occupation and now withdrawal from the South Lebanon Security Zone, and her replacement by triumphant Hizbollah fighters, while 'happy villagers' returned to their homes has generally portrayed Israel as an illegal occupying force. It was not explained why thousands of Lebanese have been fleeing into Israel before the advancing Hizbollah

Lebanon's tragic history since 1970, and more particularly since Israel's entry into Lebanon during the *Peace for Galilee* operation in the Spring of 1982, has been grossly misrepresented by the western media. Sometimes this misrepresentation was because sympathetic journalists in Beirut were murdered by the PLO, sometimes because accurate reporting was not judged to be good copy by their western editors⁶

The level of deliberate distortion was almost unique. A typical example was recorded by one TV viewer who said: "On TV news I saw that Israel had almost completely destroyed Nabatiye. Then I went to Lebanon and saw Nabatiye. Yes, a few buildings were destroyed and weeds were growing inside. - these buildings had been destroyed during the past seven years by the civil war and the PLO (and not by Israel)." The International Red Cross initially claimed that 10,000 civilians had been killed or wounded in southern Lebanon following Israel's action in June 1982. Lebanese Mayors and Government doctors gave a figure of around 460 dead and 1,100 wounded.⁴ Countless other examples from the western media indicated a cynical disregard for reporting accuracy.

Up to 1982 the PLO had been developing Lebanon as a base for international terrorism, with many training schools for terrorists from all over the world being located in refugee camps in S.Lebanon¹. Not only did the PLO store their arms in civilian schools, hospitals and homes as a matter of policy, but vast quantities of armaments were found in the coastal cities of Damour, Tyre and Sidon, some in vast underground tunnels, and enough to equip an estimated 250,000 troops.²

A full coverage of the events leading up to and following Israel's entry into Lebanon would be, and is, the subject of books. So much however is forgotten that a few facts need to be re-established.

The PLO having been driven out of Jordan in 1970 and having made its home in Lebanon in effect set up a 'state within a state'. Even prior to this Syria had been brutally pursuing her policy of expanding her rule into Lebanon so that by 1982 she controlled almost 65% of the country. Only the Christian community, who had a share in the government, stood in the way of total Syrian control and therefore Syria was slowly exerting brutal pressure on the Christians³.

The PLO during their occupation between 1975 and 1982 terrorised the Christians of south Lebanon, even exceeding what the Nazis did in their brutality. A PLO film showed young terrorists wearing Palestinian head scarves throwing babies into the air and shooting them as they fell. The full record of their treatment of Christian civilians is so horrific that it is hardly suitable to print^{2,7}. The Israelis put an end to this brutal PLO oppression so that they were received as liberators, and women and girls said that for the first time in 8 years they could walk the streets without purposely making themselves look ugly.

I visited southern Lebanon in June 1982 as part of a journalistic team and saw the Israeli soldiers being received with rejoicing and with flowers and heard expressions of gratitude to Israel. U.S Representative Charles Wilson (who had no previous record of support of Israel), after visiting S.Lebanon in July 1982 was recorded as saying: "The News media have failed in not indicating the genuine joy of the Lebanese in being freed by Israel from the PLO."⁴

There were many examples of Israeli soldiers risking their lives to safeguard the lives of Lebanese and Palestinian civilians, a policy sometimes taken advantage of by the PLO so that Israeli soldiers fell into ambushes with civilians used as a bait, suffering injury and death as a result.¹⁵

The record of Israel's involvement in Lebanon has, by all reasonable standards, been benevolent. Long before June 1982, Israel was helping Christians of Southern Lebanon. In the 1970s, in response to a perceived need of the inhabitants of S.Lebanon, Israel opened a crossing point near Metulla through which Lebanese could enter

Israel for medical treatment and go to work in Israel. Called the "Good Fence", thousands crossed daily into Israel to work.

Up to 1981 some 160,000 residents of S. Lebanon had received medical treatment from Israeli doctors at the border and those requiring further treatment were taken to Israeli hospitals. Also up to 1981 some 8,000 Lebanese villagers had crossed daily to work in Israel, receiving the same wages as their Israeli counterparts.

After June 1982 Israel Government funds subsidised the work of 15 hospitals in the Tyre and Sidon areas, while some Lebanese patients were taken to Israeli hospital to be treated freely at a cost averaging £20,000 per day⁵. Israel's troops distributed tons of food to the people, with Israeli soldiers even sharing their rations with the children.

The hospital in Marjayoun (a mainly Maronite-Christian village and the headquarters of the SLA) was rehabilitated by Israel in 1985 and almost entirely funded by Israeli money to serve the S. Lebanese people. A dental clinic was located here in which Beverley Timgren, a Canadian Dental hygienist, supported from time to time by CFI, worked tirelessly.

Christians should remember the motto of the militant Palestinian-Islamic factions: "On the Sabbath we kill Jews and on Sunday we kill Christians", as written on the walls of S. Lebanese houses. Indeed, before the Six Day war in 1967, the cry was heard throughout the Arab world, "First the Saturday people, then the Sunday people." The same cry is still widely proclaimed. Those fleeing from S. Lebanon into Israel know this too well.^{7,8}

Hizbollah's recent treatment of the Christians of Lebanon is illustrated first by an account from the beginning of this year.

"During the evening of 3rd January 2000, the naked body of a 60 year-old Maronite nun from Kfarchima in East Beirut was found lying near the Science Faculty between Hadeth and Kfarchima. According to unconfirmed security reports issued shortly after the discovery, Sister Antoinette Zaidan had been raped and then strangled by Islamic militants on her way home to the local convent. On the same day, two Christian women in the village of Kfar Abou in north Lebanon were massacred by the Islamic group "Al-Takfir Wal Higr". The victims were Salwa Yazbek and her pregnant daughter-in-law, Sarah Yazbek. The militants beheaded Sarah and then dismembered her body."⁹

As of now recent reports say:

"Despite the allegations by the Lebanese regime, its President Emile Lahoud, and the assurances of the United Nations and Western Governments that "all measures will be taken to insure security in the southern Lebanese enclave, Hizbollah started the cleansing of Christians. Underground sources confirmed this afternoon that Hizbollah armed men kidnapped and executed two Christian men in the town of Qolaia: Akl Mussa and Merhi Khoury. In Ain Ebel, Hizbollah kidnapped Nicholas Haddad and Atallah al Hasrouni.

Hizbollah armed elements destroyed the statue of Major Saad Haddad (in Marjayoun), the Christian founder of the enclave. *Lebanon Bulletin's* delegates reported that Hizbollah's militiamen desecrated Christian graveyards in several Christian towns and villages. Hundred young men and women are reported to be hiding in the valleys."¹⁰

"Hizbollah terrorists took an unknown number of SLA soldiers to the roofs of houses in villages in the former security zone and shot them to death. A senior officer in the northern command confirmed the reports. According to Lebanese Army sources, two-thirds of SLA fighters - over 1,600 fighters - did not come to Israel, but rather turned themselves in to Lebanese forces or terrorist organisations.¹¹ Many Israeli organisations have offered their services to the Lebanese refugees - including the opening of eight medical clinics, youth activities, and more. Kibbutz Gesher HaZiv has absorbed 120 families.

The IDF estimates that a total of 6,000 south Lebanese will arrive in Israel, although many of them will ultimately not remain in Israel. Housing has already been found for many of the refugees, but another temporary camp has been set up near Korazim, north-west of the Kinneret. A small demonstration was held this afternoon outside Defence Ministry offices, against what the protestors called the 'abandonment' of the SLA."¹²

Let us remember that the complaint of Lebanese Maronite Christian leaders was that when the Christians were in dire straits in the early 1980s their pleas for assistance fell on deaf ears in Europe, and the official

churches of the West said and did nothing. “The Israeli government and Israeli people were the only ones who responded to our pleas for assistance.” (Chamille Chamoun, former President of Lebanon) ¹³. “No one came to our help except God - and Israel.” ¹⁴ The least we can do is to pray that Israel will do all she can to receive and help such who have fled for refuge, and ourselves to understand.

References

1. David Pileggi *Background Information for Operation Cedars of Lebanon* June 1982 p.14-15 (ICEJ)
2. Gary Bergel *Operation Cedars of Lebanon - A Report for Prayer* p.2-3 (Intercessors for America)
3. David Pileggi *op cit* p.4
4. *Despatch from Jerusalem* (Ed. Dave Foster) Autumn 1982
5. *Ibid*
6. Frank Gervasi *Media Coverage: The War in Lebanon* Center for International Security, Washington D.C.
7. Ludwig Schneider *Lebanon's Bells are Ringing Again* Sept 1982
8. David Pileggi *op cit* p.1
9. *Christian Solidarity Worldwide* quoted by *Lebanon Bulletin*, January 7, 2000
10. *Lebanon Bulletin* May 24, 2000 *World Lebanese Organisation* (www.wlo-usa.org)
11. *Arutz Sheva News Service* May 24, 2000)
12. *Ibid*
13. David Pileggi *op cit* p.9
14. Gary Bergel *op cit* p.1
15. John Laffin *The Desperate War* British Army Review April 1983

Derek White 27 May 2000

Further current information can be obtained from:

The World Lebanese Organisation www.wlo-usa.org

Embassy of Lebanon www.embofleb.org/lebanon.htm

Stop Press: A report dated 26th May tells of the safe escape of Beverley Timgren. A copy is available from CFI UK.

CFI Communications

PO Box 2687

EASTBOURNE. E.Sussex BN22 7LZ

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