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Operation Peace for Galilee: The Israeli-PLO War in Lebanon

E.V. Badolato

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PROFESSIONAL READING

Operation Peace for Galilee is important and should be read not only for its discussion of the campaign in Lebanon and Israeli strategy, but because it contains larger, more far-reaching concepts. These concepts involve the connection between Israeli policy in Lebanon and US regional objectives as well as a classic example of the problems which military forces can have in limited wars with limited objectives.

Colonel E.V. Badolato, US Marine Corps

Gabriel, Richard A. *Operation Peace for Galilee: The Israeli-PLO War in Lebanon*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1984. 242pp. \$16.95

Richard Gabriel has written what will likely be the definitive work on the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. But what really makes *Operation Peace for Galilee* even more appealing is that in addition to analyzing the Lebanese campaign, it ranges deep into Israeli military strategy and policy. Gabriel is well-qualified to do this; he probably knows the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) as well as any Western writer. A former US Army Intelligence Officer turned professor with teaching posts both in the United States and in Jerusalem, he has lectured frequently in IDF schools and, in fact, many of his writings are required reading for the Israeli military. Fortuitously, he was researching a book on the IDF when the invasion of Lebanon occurred. This prior research, along with his well-developed military connections, has provided Gabriel with an extremely interesting perspective on the Lebanese campaign.

Colonel Badolato is assigned to the Office of Policy and Analyses, US Department of State.
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Gabriel's discussion of Israeli military strategy is especially interesting in light of our own recent strategic agreement with them. As discussed in *Operation Peace for Galilee*, the Israeli strategy is based on four underlying assumptions: they lack strategic depth; they must have a fast war; they will never be able to ultimately defeat the Arabs militarily; and they must take into account the effects of any war on the Israeli people in terms of its economic, sociological, political and psychological impact. According to Gabriel this forces the Israelis to operate with high quality closely held intelligence and to mobilize rapidly and strike with surprise for quick and decisive victories prior to any US or Soviet intervention. The book's insightful discussion of Israeli strategy is a useful backdrop for considering the long-term aspects of our military relationship with them, and in his discussion it is obvious that Gabriel comes down on the side of the military analysts who believe that Israel will be an enduring strategic asset for the United States.

Gabriel is an unabashed Israeliophile, yet he still presents a fairly balanced view of the campaign. If there is any weakness at all in the book it is minor, and it stems from his admiration of the Israeli Army and an understandable bias against the PLO. From the 1975 massacre at Ain Rummanah, which became Lebanon's Sarajevo, to the evacuation of Beirut in 1982, Gabriel characterizes the Palestinian Movement as made up of international terrorists whose motivations are greed and self-interest. This description probably will not win him any friends among his Arab readers. Also the Lebanese Muslims might take issue with being generally left out of the descriptions of the fighting in the South and the IDF's subsequent actions to control their rear areas. Gabriel also echoes the IDF complaint that the US Marine positions around Beirut airport formed a barrier which protected PLO ambush teams from Israeli retaliation. *Operation Peace for Galilee* makes no mention of the exasperation the Marines felt on their side of the wire with the aggressive IAF behavior. This situation tapered off only after General Barrow's letter to Secretary of Defense Weinberger criticizing the Israeli actions was made public. But these comments are really differences of perspective, and they do not detract from the overall excellent analysis of the campaign.

When the Israeli cabinet approved the 6 July 1982 attack of Southern Lebanon, it believed that the mission it had agreed to was to push the PLO back beyond the 40-kilometer range and destroy PLO infrastructure in South Lebanon. Unfortunately, this operation began a series of uncontrollable events which would attach the Israelis to the Lebanese tarbaby and eventually also draw the United States into Lebanon. At the outset of the fighting, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon had a larger goal in mind—he wanted to remake the political map of the Middle East—and his real war aim was not against the PLO, but against Syria. Gabriel carefully details the change of the military objectives and Sharon's subtle orchestration of the campaign from what was initially believed to be a limited operation into a two-front war,

with broad regional objectives. Sharon alleges that he previously cleared his objectives with Secretary of State Haig, and the debate over whether Haig actually gave Sharon a green light or even an amber light still continues in the press. According to Sharon, he thought he received the go-ahead and thereupon proceeded with his secret objectives which, in addition to securing Israel's northern border, were to expel the PLO and Syria from Lebanon, create a new government in Beirut, and obtain peace and normal relations with Lebanon.

Operation Peace for Galilee describes in detail how Sharon manipulated both the IDF and the Israeli government during the initial phase of the campaign. The IDF gradually outflanked the Syrians who initially were spectators, thus placing Syrian SAMs within range of IDF artillery. When the Syrians reinforced their SAM sites, Sharon persuaded Begin to authorize a preemptive strike to remove that serious threat to the operation. The attack on the Syrian SAMs along with the loss of large numbers of Syrian aircraft sealed the eventual fate of the Syrians in Lebanon and expanded Sharon's military options. After the strike against the Syrians the campaign broke down into engagements in the flat Bekaa Valley, fighting in the mountains and amphibious landings along the coast termed by Gabriel "a series of minor improvisations . . . each with little relation to the objectives of the other." The Defense Minister had opened his two-front war and was headed for Beirut. Some Israelis have been worried about the decline of civilian control over the Israeli military since the June 1967 War and events described in *Operation Peace for Galilee* will do little to allay those fears.

Less than a month after the invasion the IDF was at the outskirts of Beirut, ready to begin the siege of Beirut. Viewed from a post-campaign perspective, the attempt to seize Beirut was a monumental miscalculation. As Gabriel states "For the first time, the Israeli Defense Force found itself employing tactics and strategies dictated more by political considerations than by military expedience. The struggle for Beirut was far more a test of will, endurance and politics than of military might." (These comments might also fit our own involvement in Beirut.) Gabriel makes it evident that the Israeli government was not prepared for nor had it considered the consequences of the siege of Beirut. First Israel had not considered its own domestic reaction to the heavy casualties it would take. Neither did it take into account the public relations impact that Israeli bombs and artillery shells falling on apartment buildings would have on world opinion. Even though Gabriel describes in detail the Israeli desire to avoid civilian casualties, the besieged Arafat received much prime time media coverage and the PLO won the TV battle hands down. Perhaps the most frustrating development was the inaction of the Christian Militias who waited to see how the operation would turn out rather than launch an attack against the PLO from their side of the city. Also disregarded by the Israelis was the limited wars axiom "before you

get in, plan on how you're getting out." There was no prior concept of how or when or under what conditions to terminate the operation short of military victory.

Besides the serious political problems the Israelis were to face with siege warfare, there was the IDF's lack of urban warfare experience and training. Gabriel points out also that the restructuring of the IDF after the 1973 war had reduced the infantry in its force structure in order to build up its combined arms attack, and it did not have the large numbers of infantry in its brigades to do the job properly. On the other hand, the PLO was able to regroup after fleeing the South and adapt to urban warfare. It had its camps and neighborhoods in Beirut, and it had been preparing its positions, stockpiling supplies and training there for years.

On 29 August, thirty-three days after the siege was ended through negotiations, Israel's problems were only beginning: the Sabra Shatilla massacre, Bashir Gemayel's assassination, the difficulties in the Shuf and South Lebanon, the continuing attrition of Israeli soldiers, Prime Minister Begin's resignation, previously unheard of instances of military disobedience, civilian peace marches, abrogation of the 17 May 1983 agreement with Lebanon, and continued terrorist attacks. Was it really worth it? Gabriel says that the Israelis were militarily successful, but most Middle East analysts agree that Israel failed to obtain its political objectives. The PLO was not destroyed, Palestinian nationalism is as fervent as ever, the volatility of Lebanon continues, the northern borders are not really secure and the IDF occupying force continues to take casualties. In fact, even David Kimche, the Director General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry has stated that as soon as they can achieve some security arrangements on their northern border, "we shall get the hell out of there."

The discussion on Lessons Learned is both interesting and useful. It is interesting because US operating forces are for the most part still waiting to study our own lessons learned from Beirut. The Long Commission Report was helpful, but it was an investigation rather than a detailed tactical study. The military reader will find *Operation Peace for Galilee's* comments and lessons on armor, infantry, artillery, medical care, engineers, logistics and helicopters extremely useful. One interesting comment by Gabriel was his grudging acknowledgment that the Syrian military's fighting ability was "probably the best the Israelis had seen." Gabriel feels that Israeli superiority in manpower and material produced the victory, and if all had been equal, the terrain and Syrian tactics may have made it a close thing. His description of the performance of the Syrian helicopter gunships and their infantry-tank tactics point out that there will not be any more easy wars in the Middle East for anybody. Another interesting lesson which must be relearned by the IDF (but as Gabriel says, probably won't be) is that Israel was preparing for the

again, it was not prepared to fight in the mountains and cities of Lebanon. But if Gabriel has one single important message, it is to study the Clausewitzian dictum that before starting a war, there should be a clear understanding of its political purpose and operational objective. *Operation Peace for Galilee* showed that the Israelis not only ignored Clausewitz, but they paid scant attention to their own strategic assumptions. Further, they ignored the basic ingredients for the successful use of force which they have used so well in the past: it should be in pursuit of vital interests, be used as a last resort, support the diplomatic effort, have clear objectives, have domestic support, and be winnable.

Operation Peace for Galilee is important and should be read not only for its discussion of the campaign in Lebanon and Israeli strategy, but because it contains larger, more far-reaching concepts. These concepts involve the connection between Israeli policy in Lebanon and US regional objectives as well as a classic example of the problems which military forces can have in limited wars with limited objectives.

Coutau-Bégarie, Hervé. *La puissance maritime soviétique*. Paris: Institut Français des Relations Internationales, 1983. 198pp. 95F.

Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, a young French political scientist writing under the auspices of the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI), has taken a major step toward a needed diffusion of knowledge by producing this work. It merits our attention for two principal reasons. First, it is, in its own right, a first-class professional job on a complex topic. Drawing from an extensive bibliography, the author carefully and comprehensively discusses the functional components of maritime power which have been exploited to bring the Soviet fleet to today's place of prominence. The second reason is equally important. H. Coutau-

Bégarie brings a fresh voice and differing insights to the problem. He also represents a continental West European constituency which has a vital stake in Soviet developments. As he notes in his bibliography, most of the major works on the subject are *not* available in French libraries. Only when the dimensions of this relatively new Soviet threat to Western democracies are known to those threatened will national consensus be reached to counter the threat.

The back cover provides a good encapsulation of the author's views:

"Confronted with that new situation, the Anglo-Saxon strategists have reacted in contradictory ways and are mired in Byzantine squabbles over the real import of this new dimension of the Soviet threat. . . .