



THE WAR FOR LEBANON

1970-1985

REVISED EDITION

Itamar Rabinovich

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ITAMAR RABINOVICH

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REVISED EDITION

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ITHACA AND LONDON

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In memory of my father,
Gutman Rabinovich,
1913–1983

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Preface to the Revised Edition

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS's decision to publish a paperback edition of *The War for Lebanon* in the summer of 1985 confronted me with several choices. Clearly the book had to be updated, but how much did it have to be revised? The events of the past three years do put those of the preceding twelve in a different perspective; memoirs and other kinds of books have been published, and I have had occasion to learn more about many of the issues, episodes, and personalities discussed here. Surely if I were to write the book now, parts of it would be written differently; but I came to the conclusion that the changes in perspective and fuller information afforded by the passage of time do not warrant revisions in the text itself. I rather chose to delete the postscript and to add a full chapter dealing with the Lebanese crisis during the past three years.

I. R.

June 1985

Preface

THE TITLE OF THIS BOOK may be somewhat misleading. The war for Lebanon—a conflict of domestic and external forces seeking to shape and control the Lebanese entity—began long before 1970 and unfortunately did not end in 1983. But these years form a particularly significant phase in the history of both Lebanon and its immediate environment.

The events of the period unfolded through four distinct stages: the collapse of the Lebanese political system between 1970 and 1975, the civil war of 1975–76, the lingering crisis of the years 1976–82 and the war of 1982. A new postwar phase began in September 1982 and is dealt with in chapter six and in the postscript.

Lebanon became Lebanon because of its relative insulation—for centuries rugged Mount Lebanon attracted minority communities escaping governments bent on enforcing orthodoxy and uniformity. And yet the history of modern Lebanon reflects a continuous interplay between domestic forces and external actors whose intervention has ranged from intellectual and economic influence to forceful occupation. The existence of the independent Lebanese republic during the thirty years following World War II was based on a delicate balance of domestic and external elements. In this respect the play of events between 1970 and 1983 represents a historical continuity. But there are three significant differences. One, the scope and intensity of external intervention were very much greater during these years. Two, the crisis in Lebanon had left the

periphery and become central to Middle East politics. Three—and most striking—is that the three main external actors have themselves been profoundly affected. The Palestine Liberation Organization found an advantageous base in Lebanon, but its establishment brought the organization to clash twice with Syria and made it vulnerable to a concentrated Israeli attack. It survived the fighting with Syria in 1976, but Syrian pressure in 1982–83 is proving more fateful. For the Syrian Ba'ṯhi regime, its intervention in Lebanon triggered the domestic crisis of 1977, which nearly brought the regime down. In 1983, it made a remarkable recovery from the military defeat of June 1982 and used its standing in Lebanon in order to build a position of regional and international influence. But its sense of achievement must have been tempered by a realization of the precariousness of Syria's standing in Lebanon and of the possibility that all might change with another swing of the pendulum.

In the early 1970s Israel was a marginal actor in the Lebanese crisis, which, in turn, did not rank high on its own agenda of priorities. Twelve years later, the evolution of the crisis and of Israel's domestic politics and regional policies led Israel into a principal role. The long-term significance of the 1982 war in Lebanon for the state of Israel has yet to be measured, but its short-term effect on the government that launched the war was disastrous. The minister of Defense was forced to resign his post eight months later, and the prime minister resigned in September 1983 against a backdrop of continuing deep Israeli involvement in Lebanon with no satisfactory end in sight.

It is this interplay of the past few years between Lebanon's domestic politics and developments in the larger Middle East that this book primarily seeks to explore. Special emphasis has been laid on the 1982 war and the events leading to it for a number of reasons—their significance, their intrinsic interest, and the absence as yet of authoritative works, which are available for the earlier phases of the crisis. For the same reason the chapters that deal with the years 1977–82 seek to combine an interpretation with a narrative account while those that deal with earlier periods and with the subject as a whole put a greater emphasis on interpretation.

A book on a still unfolding crisis raises a number of obvious questions and difficulties. Is there a perspective from which these

recent events can be judged and evaluated? Are there sources available for a proper understanding of military moves, political ties, and diplomatic initiatives, many of which are still shrouded in secrecy? Can the author rise above the passions and controversies that the war for Lebanon has aroused?

I obviously believe that all these questions can be answered in the affirmative, but a few words about approach and method seem to be in order. The writing of contemporary history is hampered by limited information and by the certainty of changes in perspective that the passing of time, new events, and fresh revelations are bound to produce. These can be offset only by firmly grounding the interpretation and the narrative in a historical perspective. I am aware that the full story of the war for Lebanon in the years 1970–83 cannot yet be told. We still do not know exactly how the Lebanese civil war broke out in April 1975, what political and diplomatic moves preceded Syria's entry into Lebanon, or what the American and Israeli governments agreed upon in May 1982. But the book does not purport to tell the story in such a fashion; rather, it suggests an outline of events which fits into an analytical framework.

The sources for this study vary with the subject and the period. Some are well documented through memoirs, secondary sources, press coverage, and the rich polemical and apologetic literature that the parties to the conflict have produced during the years. Some of the other aspects particularly of more recent ones are scantily documented. Among the sources used for writing about contemporary Middle Eastern history, radio broadcasts occupy a special place. Radio is often the medium through which speeches, political sermons, and raw information are transmitted. Arab and Israeli radio broadcasts are faithfully recorded by three monitoring services: the BBC service, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) in Washington, and the Israeli monitoring service. They have all been extensively used in researching the subject of this volume. Then too, I was able to discuss the events of the past few years with Israeli, American, and Lebanese participants. These were not formal interviews and they are not referred to as such in footnotes, but they did provide me with insight into attitudes and outlooks for which I am indebted to my interlocutors.

My thanks are due to many others as well. The Shiloah Institute at

PREFACE

Tel Aviv University has in the past twelve years been much more than my work place. I thank my colleagues at the Institute, Hanna Zamir, in particular, and the Institute's staff, Amira Margalith, Edna Liftman, Tali Mor, Lydia Gareh, Maggie Mahlab, and Ami Salant and his staff at the documentation system. Hanna Ben Artzi has been an effective research assistant in this and other projects.

Much of the writing was actually done while I was on leave in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Cornell University. The faculty, staff, and students all helped in the effort. Part of the manuscript was read and discussed during the Middle East seminar at the Lehrman Institute in the winter and spring of 1982–83. I thank Robert Tucker and Nick Rizopoulos for organizing an excellent seminar and them and the other participants for their criticism and suggestions. Walter Lippincott, Jr., now the director of Cornell University Press, and Fouad Ajami, Carl Brown, and Elie Kedourie read the manuscript and made numerous suggestions that contributed to its improvement. I remain responsible for the lingering deficiencies. The Ford Foundation through Israel's Foundations Trustees facilitated much of the research that underlies this book. And finally, my gratitude and love go to the other members of the team—my wife, Efrat, and my daughters, Iris and Orna.

ITAMAR RABINOVICH

Tel Aviv, Israel

Chronology

August 31, 1920	Establishment of Greater Lebanon by France.
May 23, 1926	Establishment of a Lebanese constitutional republic under French mandatory control.
1936	French-Lebanese treaty (suspended in 1939).
June 1941	Anglo-Free-French invasion of Lebanon and formal declaration of independence.
1943	Lebanese National Pact; Lebanese-French clashes.
1946	Completion of French evacuation of Lebanon.
September 1952	Bloodless coup d'état ends Bishara al-Khuri's administration and begins Camille Chamoun's administration.
1958	First Lebanese civil war; end of Chamoun's administration, beginning of Fu'ád Shihab's administration.
1964	Beginning of Charles Helou's administration.
December 1968	Israeli raid on Beirut airport; beginning of conflict in Lebanon over Palestinian issue.
November 1969	Cairo Agreement between Lebanese Government and the PLO.
1970	Beginning of Suleiman Faranjiyya's administration; the PLO transfers its main base from Jordan to Lebanon.
May 1973	Confrontation between the Lebanese army and the PLO.
April 1975	Opening phase of the second Lebanese civil war.
January 1976	Indirect Syrian intervention in the civil war.
February 1976	Syrian effort to formulate a political compromise in Lebanon.

CHRONOLOGY

March 1976	Failure of Syrian effort; abortive coup d'état by General Aziz al-Ahdab.
June 1976	Full-fledged Syrian invasion, stiff Palestinian opposition.
September 1976	Second Syrian offensive in Lebanon; formation of Lebanese Front and Lebanese Forces.
October 1976	The Riyadh and Cairo agreements, which end the Lebanese civil war.
July 25, 1977	The Shtura Agreement between Syria, Lebanon, and the PLO—another attempt at implementing the Cairo Agreement.
February 2, 1978	The Fayadiyya incident, which marks the beginning of Syria's conflict with the Lebanese Front.
March 16, 1978	Israel's Litani Operation in southern Lebanon.
June 13, 1978	Killing of Tony Faranjiyya by a Phalangist squad.
August 31, 1978	Disappearance of Musa al-Sadr, the Shi'i Imam, during a visit to Libya.
January 22–31, 1980	First phase of Syria's redeployment in Lebanon.
July 7, 1980	Phalangist raid on the Chamounist militia.
December 20–27, 1980	First phase of Syrian-Phalangist fighting in Zahle.
April 2, 1981	Second phase of Syrian-Phalangist fighting in Zahle; developed into the missile crisis.
July 1981	Israeli-Palestinian fighting; cease-fire negotiated by U.S. Ambassador Philip Habib.
June 6–11, 1982	Israel's Operation Peace for Galilee and the Syrian-Israeli cease-fire.
August 1982	Bashir Jumayyil elected president of Lebanon; the PLO evacuates Beirut.
September 1982	President Ronald Reagan's Middle East peace initiative; assassination of Bashir Jumayyil; massacre at Sabra and Shatila; beginning of Amin Jumayyil's administration.

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