THE MIDDLE EAST MILITARY BALANCE 1985

Mark A. Heller • Aharon Levran • Zeev Eytan

Edited by Mark A. Heller

The Jerusalem Post   Westview Press

JCSS

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Preface

With this edition, *The Middle East Military Balance* moves to a calendar-year basis. The description and analysis in this volume cover the years 1984 and 1985, and the figures presented are correct as of late 1985. Aside from this change, which will be preserved in the future, the 1985 edition follows the format established by the previous two volumes. Part I surveys the major strategic developments in the region during the period under review. Part II presents battle order information on the armed forces in the region and assesses the capabilities of the major military establishments. Part III analyzes various sub-regional military balances. And Part IV provides updated reference materials — comparative tables, a glossary of weaponry, maps and abbreviations.

Although the authorship of each section has been kept separate in order to indicate where ultimate responsibility for its contents lies, this volume is, in many respects, a collaborative effort. Drafts of the various sections were discussed by the authors together and the entire process of organization and revision benefited from the guidance of the Head of JCSS, Maj-Gen. (res.) Aharon Yariv. As in the past, the Center's Executive Editor, Joseph Alpher, also contributed in a variety of ways.

Since the publication of the first edition in 1983, *The Middle East Military Balance* has increasingly become a primary reference source for government and military officials, academic specialists, journalists and readers with a general interest in the area. It is hoped that annual updating and revision will enable this gratifying trend to continue in the future.

M.A.H.
February 1986

PART I

STRATEGIC
DEVELOPMENTS
IN THE MIDDLE EAST

1. Introduction

The Middle East experienced its normal complement of instability, terrorism, war, diplomatic realignments and regime changes — peaceful and otherwise — during 1984 and 1985. There were numerous moments of high drama and several developments of noteworthy strategic significance, especially the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and the Iraqi campaign against Iran's economic infrastructure. But of no event could it be said that it altered the underlying character of Middle Eastern politics in some truly profound manner. One development that could have met this criterion — a breakthrough in the search for a political settlement of the Palestinian problem — seemed, on several occasions, to be possible. Familiar obstacles, however, remained intractable and the apparent possibility for change was not realized.

In the absence of any major upheavals, the containment of the Lebanese, Palestinian and Iran-Iraq conflicts continued to dominate the agenda of Middle Eastern actors and outside powers interested in the region. Growing American and Israeli disinterest reduced the likelihood that large-scale regional or international confrontations would be precipitated by events in Lebanon. At the same time, Syrian preeminence did not imply effective control of that country or an imposed solution of its political crisis; chronic instability persisted in Lebanon, producing pervasive domestic violence and periodic acts of terrorism directed at foreigners. The prospect of an Israel-Arab war also receded somewhat, due to the overall Israel-Arab military balance and the efforts of Jordan, the PLO, Israel and the United States to promote or sustain at least the appearance of diplomatic momentum. As far as the Iran-Iraq War was concerned, there were some indications that it might be moving toward an indecisive conclusion, even though the period under review was marked by escalation. Iraq's attempts to change the balance of attrition in its favor and Iran's responses resulted in serious, though intermittent, disruptions of oil traffic in the Gulf. In 1980, such disruptions would have implied a major threat to the world economy and a danger of internationalization of the war; in 1984-85, far-reaching changes in the global oil market enabled most outside actors to view these developments with relative equanimity.

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A major exception to this generalization was Saudi Arabia. The Saudis had been the primary beneficiaries of the oil boom in the 1970s; they were the primary victims of declining prices and declining demand for OPEC oil that characterized the mid-1980s. In 1980, Saudi oil production peaked at over 10 million barrels per day and generated an annual revenue of over $100 billion. In 1985, production declined at one point to only 2.4 mbd and projected oil revenue was approximately $37 billion. Saudi Arabia (along with Kuwait) was also the main target of Iranian reprisals for Iraqi escalation. Prodigious defense expenditures and extensive American support enabled the Saudis to cope with the Iranian threat. The drawing down of foreign exchange reserves allowed the Saudi government to sustain fairly high spending levels. But the combination of security and economic challenges prompted the Saudis to lower their regional and international profile and revived doubts about longer-term domestic political stability in the kingdom.

Other states in the area also devoted considerable attention to domestic affairs. The July 1984 general elections in Israel resulted in a virtual tie between the two main parliamentary blocs; political paralysis could only be avoided by the formation of a government of national unity. Despite its rather unwieldy character, this government managed to end Israel's debilitating involvement in Lebanon and even to enact some of the radical measures necessary to begin the process of reviving the country's shattered economy. But because of its internal ideological contradictions, the government could not as easily depart from previous policy on issues such as relations with Egypt or a settlement of the Palestinian problem, which were just as urgent but far more divisive.

Egypt also held an election in 1984. Its most remarkable aspect was not the outcome — the government-supported National Democratic Party won 73 percent of the votes and 391 of the 448 seats in Parliament — but rather the relatively free campaign which preceded it. Elections, however, did little to dispel the sense of pervasive drift typified by economic deterioration and growing religious extremism. One indication of the radicalization of Islamic politics was the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood, for many years the most dangerous threat to secular Egyptian governments, had become the most moderate of Islamic political movements, certified to run in the elections and acceptable as a coalition partner to the liberal nationalists of the New Wafd.

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Egypt's domestic problems were reflected in its foreign policy, which centered on eliminating Libyan threats and encouraging a political settlement of the Palestinian problem in order to legitimize the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement and help restore Egypt's leading role in the Arab world. Neither of these objectives was secured but both were pursued with some measure of success. The Libyan-Moroccan unity agreement of August 1984 proved to be of no real strategic significance for Egypt. Tunisia successfully withstood Libyan subversion and economic pressures; and although several Libyan-sponsored terrorist actions were carried out, others, most notably the attempted assassination in Cairo of exiled former Libyan Prime Minister Abd al-Hamid Bakhoush, were foiled by Egyptian intelligence. Even the Sudanese coup in April 1985 that ousted President Ja'far al-Numayri, a close ally of Egypt, did not have particularly damaging consequences; initial concerns that the new Sudanese leadership might adopt a pro-Libyan orientation were mitigated by signs that the overthrow of Numayri might have been a preemptive coup against more radical elements and that no new danger to Egypt would emerge from this quarter. As far as the second objective was concerned, Egypt was unable to bring about a breakthrough on the Palestinian problem. Nevertheless, it was able to renew diplomatic relations with Jordan, to improve ties substantially with Iraq — President Mubarak was received in Baghdad in March 1985, senior Iraqi officials frequently came to Cairo and only a formal exchange of ambassadors was lacking — and to become an important patron of Yasir Arafat, while consistently reaffirming its adherence to the Camp David Agreements and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty.

Israeli and Egyptian domestic constraints and Egyptian regional concerns all intersected at the level of Egyptian-Israeli bilateral relations. The most visible symptoms of the strain in relations were Egyptian unwillingness to carry out full normalization (trade, tourism, the presence of a resident ambassador in Tel Aviv, etc.) and Israeli unwillingness to accede to the Egyptian demand for binding arbitration of the territorial dispute over the Taba enclave. Efforts to resolve these problems through the so-called "Taba talks" were held up by a variety of procedural or political complications, and in October 1985, the environment of Egyptian-Israeli relations was further damaged when seven Israeli tourists in Sinai were shot dead by an Egyptian policeman. Although the resumption of talks at the end of 1985 reportedly produced some

progress, it was not clear that a major, sustained improvement in Egyptian-Israeli relations could be achieved soon or, indeed, that it was at all possible without a simultaneous breakthrough in the Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian context.

At the highest level of generalization, perhaps the most significant trend in the Middle East during 1984 and 1985 was the region's diminishing importance to the rest of the world. Reduced dependence on Middle Eastern oil meant that security of supply was no longer a major strategic problem, and prices, which in decline did not even appear to be subject to the whims of Middle Eastern rulers, implied the same about access to regional markets. The stalemate in the Gulf war and growing cynicism about the Iranian revolution meant that Islamic fundamentalism lost much of its power to shock, or even to frighten. And technology and politics had refocused the superpowers' gaze on their own bilateral strategic relationship. The issues and conflicts that absorbed Middle Eastern leaders in past years took no decisive turn in the period under review and would remain on the agenda in 1986, but it was possible that the rest of the world would view future developments with growing indifference.

2. Conflict in Lebanon

If a single theme can be discerned in the ongoing chaos of Lebanon during the eighteen months from early 1984 to mid-1985, it is the gradual excision of that country from regional and international politics. At the beginning of this period, the western powers in the Multinational Force despaired of any further purpose to their presence and withdrew their contingents from Beirut; by the end of the period, Israel had also effected a withdrawal that was unilateral and virtually complete. Even Syria, which by default had again become the predominant foreign influence in Lebanon, was unwilling to invest the resources and effort necessary for direct control of Lebanon and actually carried out a significant force reduction there in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal.

For those Lebanese who had tended to blame the travails of their country on outside interference, this process should have been a source of encouragement. In fact, the institutionalized enmity among the various indigenous factions obstructed progress toward stabilization and gave little reason to expect a durable improvement in Lebanon's political climate in the near future. The growing disinclination of outsiders to view Lebanon as a promising or plausible arena for strategic gains reduced the likelihood of a major confrontation in or over that country. This represented a net gain for regional stability, but it was small consolation for the Lebanese themselves or for other individuals who might be touched by the violence and anarchy that would almost certainly continue to plague that country.

The first of the foreign forces to extricate themselves from the Lebanese quagmire were the last to arrive — the United States and its European partners in the Multinational Force. The MNF had originally been formed in August 1982 to supervise the evacuation of the PLO from Beirut. After the assassination of president-elect Bashir Jumayyil and the subsequent attacks on the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in mid-September, the MNF returned to Lebanon, this time with a broader mandate to maintain public order and assist in the rehabilitation of the authority and institutions of the central Lebanese government. But the authority of this government rarely extended beyond the city limits of Beirut, and President Amin Jumayyil's position deteriorated even more when

new outbreaks of fighting in early 1984 led to large-scale defections from the Lebanese Army and to its virtual disintegration along communitarian lines. When Shi'ite militias, with the support of the Druze-based Progressive Socialist Party, took control of West Beirut in February 1984, Prime Minister Shafiq al-Wazzan resigned. The elimination of this pretense of normalcy also removed the last rationale for continuing MNF involvement.

The "redeployment" of the Marines was ordered on February 7, and the small British contingent was withdrawn the following day. By the time the Amerian withdrawal was completed at the end of the month, the Italian contingent had also left; the French, who had already returned part of their Beirut force to UNIFIL duty in southern Lebanon, pulled out their last troops a month later. On March 30, the American warships, to which the US Marines had been redeployed, sailed away from Lebanese waters.

The departure of the Sixth Fleet marked the end of active American involvement in Lebanon. American officials had already been disillusioned by the non-implementation of the Israel-Lebanon Agreement of May 17, 1983, which had been reached through the direct mediation of Secretary of State George Shultz, and they were now inclined not to waste more resources in the futile search for a solution to Lebanon's problems. During the months that followed, the United States was requested by Israel to help secure Syrian authorization of an alternative agreement with Lebanon which Israel then believed was a necessary condition for its own withdrawal. In the fall of 1984, Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy made several trips to the region, which included discussions in Damascus. But the Syrians, having successfully ousted the United States from Lebanon, were not about to concede any political gain to Israel, and the Americans, for whom a settlement in Lebanon was no longer perceived as a vital national interest and whose leverage with Syria was in any event minimal, could do little to promote this, or any other outcome to the impasse in Lebanon.

Once the failure of the American effort to rehabilitate Lebanon was acknowledged in early 1984, the main US connection with Lebanon was as a victim of terrorism. During the period under review, the president of the American University of Beirut was shot to death, eight other American citizens in Lebanon were kidnapped and held hostage (one managed to escape in February 1985), the US Embassy Annex in East Beirut was bombed, and a

TWA airliner departing Athens was hijacked and held in Beirut for two weeks, during which time an American naval officer was murdered. All of these actions were attributed to radical Lebanese Shi'ite groups, but not all of them were linked either to American support for the Jumayyil government or American inability/unwillingness to bring about an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. The hostages, both those taken individually and the TWA group, were offered in return for Shi'ites held prisoner by Kuwait and Israel, whose governments were presumably subject to American influence. It was the United States' preeminence as a global power, even after its withdrawal from Lebanon, that left it exposed to the terrorism that continued to fester in and emanate from Lebanon.

Israel understood, even before the United States, that positions adopted in the summer of 1982 were not tenable; the partial pullback from the Shouf Mountains in September 1983 was the clearest indication of this. Israel, however, took longer than the United States to conclude that the only feasible alternative to these positions was complete withdrawal. Instead, the Israeli government, fully aware of Syria's adamant opposition to any political "reward" for Israeli withdrawal, continued to pursue the chimera of a new security accord even after Lebanon formally abrogated the May 17 Agreement at the beginning of March 1984. Throughout the rest of the year, Israel sought from the Lebanese government some sort of official security arrangement for the area of southern Lebanon to be evacuated by the IDF. In both the informal diplomacy and the formal talks at Naqurah that went on intermittently between November 1984 and January 1985, Israeli emphasis tended to shift between UNIFIL, the South Lebanon Army (SLA) of General Antoine Lahd and the regular Lebanese Armed Forces as prospective substitutes for the IDF. But Israeli demands to change the UNIFIL mandate, i.e., to deploy the UN force further north beyond the Litani River, were rejected, and the Lebanese government, whose own army was manifestly incapable of imposing control over southern Lebanon, refused to permit responsibility for the border strip to be assigned to the SLA, which was viewed as an Israeli surrogate. Israeli attempts to reach an agreement with the Shi'ite Amal Organization were also frustrated by Amal leader Nabih Berri's refusal to be directly associated with Israel.

Under the Likud government, Israel evinced little confidence in security arrangements that were not enshrined in some formal