

Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process:

A Case Study of the Israeli Withdrawal from Lebanon – Failure of Diplomacy

Wassef Serhan

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Abstract

Lebanon has been an open playground for the international players for a very long time, especially when the game gets heated or cools off according to the thermometer of the regional and international environment.

Why Lebanon? It's simply because it has all the necessary elements that make it the perfect place for this game.

The geographic location, in the middle of the hot zone, on the borders of Israel, Syria, and on the Mediterranean.

Its demographic structure makes it a very fertile ground for this, as Lebanon has 17 different religious factions in addition to the presence of various political currents.

The nature of the Lebanese people who are very active politically with known international connections (there are about 15 millions Lebanese in the Diaspora, and 3.5 millions in the country), where the Diaspora is very involved in the politics of their countries of residence, which is reflected on the internal politics.

The last 50 years witnessed major changes in the country as a reflection to the international political changes in the recent decades, but with huge difference for Lebanon, as wars and bloodshed were very prominent along these years.

The game started with the triggering of The Lebanese war among Muslims and Christians in 1975-1976 with the Palestinian issue at the core of this war, which resulted in the bringing of the Syrian army into Lebanon as a peace force.

After that, the Israeli-Syrian struggle, and behind them the international players, was mainly applied on the Lebanese territories, by taking advantages of the Lebanese contradictions.

The long lasting struggle included some major stations, like the 1978 Israeli invasion to the south of Lebanon in order to create a buffer zone they called it “ the Security Zone”, and keep the Palestinian resistance and rockets away from Israeli settlements, by using their Lebanese allies as a local army in the so called “the security zone”.

The failure of this plan was followed by the bigger invasion of 1982 where Israelis entered Beirut and enforced the election of their ally, Bashir Gemayel who was assassinated few weeks after his election, then his brother Amine took over.

This period witnessed the retreat of the Syrian army towards their border in the Lebanese Bekaa valley, and accordingly in diminishing their political influence.

Under the circumstances, in order to regain control, Syria started backing its allies in attacking the Israeli army that started retreating gradually to the security zone under the increasing efficiency and fierce operations of Hezbollah.

Syria took advantage and regained total political control in 1990 after years of internal fighting rounds among the various Lebanese parties and a new Lebanese president, this time an ally of Syria was elected.

At the same time, Hezbollah was gaining a lot of popularity in the country and in the region. For the first time in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the (legendary) Israeli army was forced to get out from a land it occupied, under the attacks of the resistance.

This unusual event had a great impact in the region and in particular in the occupied Palestine, where a similar movement to Hezbollah (Hamas), started adopting this same approach.

This major turning point deserves to be a study case because of its importance & implications on the events in our modern Middle East history

Introduction

The history of the Arab-Israeli conflict never witnessed an event similar to the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon on the 25th of May 2000. This withdrawal was unique in its form, context, political aims and implications.

The Israelis had never left an occupied Arab land unconditionally, without any peace accord or any security arrangement.

Despite the fact that the Israeli government declared that it was applying the Security Council 425 resolution, it is well known that it had obstructed the implementation of this resolution for more than 22 years.

This thesis tries to answer two questions: why did Israel withdraw from Lebanon and how did this withdrawal happen after diplomacy failed to realize it.

The response to the first question deals with the development of the withdrawal option among the different Israeli politicians and governments. This paper will define when and why did Israel decide to leave Lebanon, and what were the factors that contributed to this end. These factors include according to this study the role of Lebanese resistance, the internal Israeli politics, what was the Lebanese official position, and how was it defined and shaped.

It also covers the regional developments mainly The Syrian-Israeli negotiations and the American-Syrian relations.

As to the second question, the dissertation will portray how Israel left Lebanon, Moreover, it will highlight what happened in the talks with the United Nations, in terms of the completion of the withdrawal from all the Lebanese territories and in particular the issue of the occupied Shebaa Farms which remain a point of conflict between the united nations from one part and Lebanon & Syria from the other part.

CHAPTER I

The Background of the conflict

Lebanon has suffered from Israeli attacks since the early days of the Arab–Israeli conflict. The Israeli occupation of south Lebanon came as a final phase of a series of offensives launched by the Zionists even before the formation of the state of Israel.

The truce agreement signed between Lebanon and Israel on the 23rd of March 1949 did not put any end to the hostilities. It was followed by fierce military Israeli intervention during the following 50 years.

From 1948 to 1967 the southern Lebanese borders witnessed fighting between the Palestinian guerrillas who were intensifying their attacks from their bases in the Lebanese territories. During the summer of 1968 and the whole year 1969 these guerrillas augmented their military activity. Then in 1970, they deployed in Lebanon all their efforts after losing their positions in Jordan.

Subsequently, among all Arab countries, Lebanon and mainly its south, endured the fiercest Israeli aggressions. During the period which extended to the next century, Israel launched five large invasions against Lebanon, “The Litani Operation” (1978), “The Safety of Galilee” (1982), “Accountability” (1993), and “Grapes of Wrath” (1996). And the latest one on the 12th of July 2006.

These operations resulted in terrible crimes against the civilian population in Lebanon, and south Lebanon was described in the foreign media as “Hanoi of the Arabs”¹.

In parallel to these military activities, Lebanon concluded a number of accords related to the problem of the conflict with Israel. The first was the Truce accord with Israel (1949), the Cairo accord with the Palestinian resistance (1969), the 17th of May 1983 accord with Israel, and the agreements or “Understandings” of July 1993 and April 1996 with Israel also.

Despite all these agreements, a major part of south Lebanon remained under the direct Israeli occupation. Thus, 1200 square kilometers constituted the so-called security zone where the Israeli army was deployed². It represented almost 10 percent of the Lebanese soil.

This zone represented an old Israeli dream, a dream clearly defined by the consecutive Israeli Prime Ministers, Moshe Sharett, David Ben Gurion and Minister Moshe Dayan who had conceived a plan to intervene in Lebanon and install a Lebanese Christian President who would serve their interests³.

Israel crossed all the red lines in transforming its dream into reality. It occupied the capital of Lebanon, Beirut in 1982, and provided a military cover for its Lebanese allied militia men to carry out the atrocious Sabra and Chatila genocide where some 1500 civilians were cold-blooded murdered.

¹ Monzer Jaber, *The Occupied Lebanese Border Strip: The Paths of Occupation, the Lines of Confrontation, the Fate of the Population*. Institute of Palestinian Studies Beirut, 1999. p17.

² Jaber , *The Occupied Lebanese Border Strip: The Paths of Occupation, the Lines of Confrontation, the Fate of the Population* . p 441.

³ Moshe Sharett wrote about a meeting in which he participated along with David Ben Gurion and Moshe Dayan in 1955 , his notes were published by the Israeli daily Maariv in 9 July 1982, it appeared in the volume IV of Sharett’s *Memoirs*. He quotes Dayan saying that “Israel needs a simple Lebanese army captain, to gain his sympathy or to buy him, and then to convince him to proclaim himself as the savior of the Maronites. By then the Israeli army would penetrate to Lebanon, occupy as much land as possible and proclaim in it a Christian regime allied to Israel. Consequently Israel would annex the zone south of the Litani River. Everything would be settled”. Sharett Moshe, *Journal*, (Beirut, Palestinian Studies Institute),p 430.

Brutality and savageness always shaped the practices of the Israeli occupants. All the territories occupied by Israel were considered as zones of military operations. Any movement from and to these regions was subject to a special permit. Many villages were besieged for several weeks. Civilians were arrested for very long periods in Ansar and Khiam detention camps; they were tortured and prevented from meeting their relatives or any representative of the Red Cross.

One could consecrate thousands of pages to describe the offensive and insulting acts of the Israeli occupation in Lebanon, but this brief overview can easily show how much the Israelis created frustration and anger among the Lebanese people.

Lebanon did not remain passive. An effective movement of resistance faced the Israeli occupiers. This movement developed in its form and content throughout the years. It began as the “Lebanese National Resistance Front” led by the communists, and then the “Islamic Resistance” took the helm and Hizbullah became the leading arm of the attacks against the Israeli occupiers.

Gradually, Hizbullah succeeded in turning the resistance against the Israelis into an attrition war. The “Islamic Resistance” launched a series of suicide attacks that caused the Israeli army huge losses in lives, and showed a transcending military capability for the resistance. Soon it introduced a new type of operations in which the Hizbullah guerrillas occupied positions held by the Israeli army and its ally South Lebanon Army (S.L.A.) for short periods of time. It even succeeded in killing 12 members of an Israeli elite military unit in an ambush in the Ansariyyeh village outside the occupied zone, on September 5, 1997⁴.

⁴ As - Safir, 6 September, 1997.

All through the years, the Israeli occupation and military aggression was the tool for a political project that Israel tried to achieve in Lebanon. Israel had cultivated a relationship with some Lebanese Christian politicians and militia leaders such as the former president Camille Chamoun and his son Dany Chamoun, Pierre Gemayel and his son Bashir the leader of the Christian militia the "Lebanese Forces".

Israel supplied its Lebanese allies, who were positioned in East Beirut and some Mount Lebanon areas, with arms and other different kinds of aid. Hundreds of Christian militiamen were trained in Israel.

The Israeli political project took its most concrete shape after the 1982 invasion. The Israeli Prime Minister Menahem Begin and his defense minister Ariel Sharon planned an invasion of Lebanon trying to secure two targets. The first was the elimination of the Palestinian liberation Organization (PLO), and the second was the election of a new Lebanese president who would sign a peace treaty with Israel along the lines of the Camp David signed with Egypt.

Each Israeli soldier entering Lebanon was given a red and white pamphlet entitled "Lebanon", published by the Israeli army education corps. The 14-page pamphlet stated the political objectives of the invasion, *"The main goal of the Israelis in Lebanon is to secure the existence of the Christians and to make possible a political arrangement that will enable Lebanon to recover its sovereignty"*.

Israel succeeded in deporting the Palestinian leadership with the bulk of its fighters from Lebanon on the 30th of August 1982, after ensuring the election of Bashir Gemayel as president on the 23rd of the same month.

This election was the culmination of the Israeli political project in Lebanon, but soon the downfall of the Israeli "Lebanese" project begun.

Israel wasn't merely assaulting the PLO guerrillas; it was also attacking the Syrian army and the Syrian role and interests in Lebanon. With Bashir's election it looked as if Syria was going to resign itself to an Israeli victory.

But on the 14th of September 1982, Bashir was assassinated and the Israelis realized that they lost one of the keystones of their invasion and their plans for Lebanon.

Following the assassination of Bashir, the Security Council issued the resolution 520 that condemned his murder. This resolution also condemned the Israeli incursions into the Lebanese capital Beirut and the violation of the cease-fire agreements. However this resolution did not only call for an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon. It also called for the strict respect for the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence under the sole and exclusive authority of the Lebanese Government through the Lebanese army throughout Lebanon. This resolution became in the future the tool for all Syria's opponents in Lebanon demanding the withdrawal of its troops from Lebanon. Syria had in fact asserted its influence in Lebanon and became the most dominant power in its neighboring country.

Meanwhile, the Israeli losses in Lebanon were mounting and the massacres of Sabra and Shatila shed an international gloomy image over Israel. Its defense minister Ariel Sharon was forced to resign by a commission of inquiry that investigated the massacre.

Nevertheless, the Israelis did not relinquish their efforts in Lebanon so easily. The brother of Bashir, Amine was elected as his successor and soon he succumbed to the American and Israeli pressures and signed a peace agreement with Israel on the 17th of May 1983. The

agreement included elaborate provisions for protecting Israel's northern border. However, Syria and its Lebanese allies put so much pressure on Gemayel that he could not even consider implementing the document.

As Thomas Friedmann puts it, *"on the first anniversary of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, (Menahim) Begin must have understood that he was really in trouble. Bashir Gemayel was actually dead and Amin Gemayel was politically dead"*.

The Israelis had to face the reality, their political goal that took the shape of the 17 of May agreement became meaningless. They started facing a mounting armed resistance movement in Lebanon, starting from Beirut where they had to retreat while asking the population through loudspeakers not to shoot at them.

The Lebanese resistance took all possible forms. Israeli convoys were pelted with stones, bottles, and boiled oil, then the Israeli troops were attacked anywhere with hit-and-run ambushes, nail bombs, suicide cars, roadside bombs, exploding donkeys, and snipers.

Israel began withdrawing unilaterally from Lebanon following the Sabra and Shatila massacres and the resistance operations in Beirut. It had to start leaving while failing to leave any peace treaty or formal security arrangement behind.

Thus, after a wicked end to Menahim Begin's political career, an Israeli national unity government decided to withdraw its forces unilaterally from a large part of the occupied Lebanese territories. In April 1985, the Israeli army retreated from Mount Lebanon and settled in the southern part of the country, in the area that it called the security Zone. This zone remained for the following 15 years the scene of the resistance military operations that made the life of the Israeli army in the Lebanese territories unbearable.

Moreover the political arena in Lebanon shifted towards a different balance. The Lebanese internal war between the different political factions reached an end after the signing of the Taef Accord in 1989 under the auspices of Saudi Arabia. This was followed by a Syrian-led military operation that removed the former army commander General Michel Aoun from the Baabda presidential palace and allowed the elected president Elias Hrawi to rule from there.

The new Lebanese ruling class had the closest ties ever with the Syrian regime since the independence. While some Lebanese officials like to describe this period as the period of excellent relations with Syria, others call it the era of maximum Syria hegemony over Lebanon. In fact the Lebanese officials turned to Syria most of the time to settle their disputes or to get the final word on some regional issues.

Thus, the Syrians did not spare any effort to annoy the Israelis through Lebanon, mainly by backing the Lebanese resistance, and they had the legitimate reason to do it: Israel was occupying a part of the Lebanese soil. Israel didn't also have a clear political project to implement in Lebanon anymore.

Due to the increased Syrian Influence, Israel lost most importantly all its potential political tools in Lebanon. The South Lebanon Army became the only known Israeli tool in Lebanon and it could not relief the Israeli army from the resistance's security threat in the occupied zone. Vast Israeli assaults (mainly in 1993 and 1996) failed to stop the resistance or to undermine its capabilities.

Getting out of Lebanon seemed to be one of the most effective ways for Israel to relieve itself from the burden of staying in Lebanon.

How did the Israelis conceive this idea and develop it?

CHAPTER II

THE ISRAELI POLICY OF RETREAT

A- The withdrawal as a choice

1- Plans of withdrawal presented by the Labor party

The South of Lebanon was witnessing an open war between the resistance and the Israeli Army. The “Accountability “ vast operation launched against Hizbullah, and the July Accord that followed, did provide some security guarantees to the Israeli Army in Lebanon. Moreover, it didn't lessen the resistance attacks ,which actually increased and became carefully prepared in terms of execution and targets selected.

In July 1993, Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli Prime Minister at that time, presented to the American Secretary of State Warren Christopher a proposition asking him to bring it to the attention of the Lebanese authorities.

The content of this proposition was the following: the “*Lebanese government should disarm Hizbullah, the Lebanese army should be positioned on the southern borders, the Lebanese and Israeli governments should sign a security accord, the South Lebanon Army members would be given immunity and then integrated in the Lebanese Army*”.

In return Israel would withdraw its army from Lebanon who would accept to sign a peace treaty with the Jewish State⁵.

Rabin reiterated his offer during a press conference that he held in Washington on the 13th of September. On that day when he signed the Oslo Agreement with the Palestinians, He said: *“nobody in Israel desires to keep one single square meter of the land or one single cubic meter of the water of Lebanon”*⁶

Two years later, during the operation “Grapes of Wrath”, Shimon Peres who became Prime Minister after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, presented a new project of retreat from Lebanon. The major lines of this new proposal were the following:

- Israel recognizes that its international borders with Lebanon are permanent.
- An immediate cessation of all military operation and all acts of violence on both sides of the borders.
- Lebanon would contribute, with the approval and help of Syria, to eliminate all the possible terrorist threats and dismantle the military infrastructure of Hizbullah and other terrorist Organization.
- The deployment of the Lebanese Army forces on the borders with Israel.
- To guarantee the security of the members of the South Lebanon Army and that of the inhabitants of the security zone.
- A retreat by intervals of the Israeli troops to temporary positions in the security zone. These positions would be fixed through negotiations.
- Any region that the Israeli Army would abandon would be directly submitted to the Lebanese government.
- The armies of Lebanon and Israel would observe the application of this accord⁷.

⁵ Haaretz, 26 August 1993

⁶ International Herald Tribune, 14 September 1993.

⁷ Haaretz, 21 April 1996.

It should be noted here that Peres' proposition did not include a reference to any peace treaty between Lebanon and Israel, it only contained security measures and military relations through coordination missions.

This change in the Israeli official position marked all the conditioned proposals that were presented later on by the different political parties in the Jewish State.

2- Likud's Proposals

When Benjamin Netanyahu reached power in June 1996, the Israeli press was publishing information about a plan called "Lebanon first". It was a plan that Netanyahu presented to the American president Bill Clinton and King Hussein of Jordan⁸. The main elements of the plan stated the following conditions for an Israeli retreat from Lebanon:

- The Lebanese army would maintain security in the zone occupied by Israel and it would guarantee the prevention of any military operation against Israel.
- Hizbullah would agree not to attack the Israeli army behind the borders.
- The South Lebanon Army would be dissolved and its members would be integrated in the Lebanese Army.

Later on, Israel presented additional conditions. On the 1st of August, the former Israeli defense minister Yitzhak Mordehai added that the plan "Lebanon First" consisted in dissolving the Hizbullah and concluding security arrangements with Syria and Lebanon.

He proposed "*to begin with Lebanon first (...) because I think that it is in the highest interest of Lebanon to become a free country with no foreign armies on its soil (...). If Syria permits him, we could reach an understanding with Lebanon in two weeks, we want to conclude an*

⁸ Ibid, 29 July 1996.

accord that would make Lebanon responsible for preventing any terrorist action from its south against Israel, and he should secure the rights of the civil population and the South Lebanon Army”⁹.

No Israeli proposal mentioned a Peace Accord anymore. Israel’s ultimate goal was categorically security arrangements with Lebanon. In other words it was looking for a way to relieve its soldiers from the burden of the resistance attacks, and trying to ensure the safety of the northern settlements from any Katyusha rockets launching or military operations.

Later on, Netanyahu affirmed several times that Syria’s acceptance to guarantee Lebanese - Israeli security arrangements would consolidate the “mutual confidence”¹⁰.

The Syrian President Hafez Assad refused the plan “Lebanon first”, he changed the formula and said “*Syria and Lebanon first*” during a press conference with the Egyptian president Husni Mubarak in Alexandria¹¹.

The Lebanese president Elias Hrawi declared also that Lebanon refused any conditional Israeli withdrawal, and any bilateral accord with Israel without Syria¹².

3- Beilin’s Project

The “Movement for a Peaceful Retreat from Lebanon” headed by Beilin made public the project that proposed that the Israeli army would gradually retreat from south Lebanon and would be replaced by the Lebanese army and the UN forces.

⁹ Ibid, 1 August 1996

¹⁰ Israel News Digest, April 1998, Internet.

¹¹ As - Safir, 8 August 1996.

¹² An - Nahar, 20 August 1996.

It also called the Israeli army to take several measures during a period of one year and a half before its departure from the occupied Lebanese territories. These measures included the installation of radar stations and necessary fortifications to protect the borders and offers the SLA members to reside in Israel¹³.

Beilin also proposed that the Lebanese government should continue the “April Understanding” accord after the withdrawal. Moreover, the project conceived that the UN security council should send additional troops to back the UNIFIL in Lebanon and allow them to use force to prevent any attempt of violence on the borders.

As for the American role, Beilin thought that the American administration should threaten Syria that it would impose an embargo and economic sanctions on it if it tries to prevent a peaceful retreat.

Beilin believed that his country should start leaving Lebanon after the completion of all these requirements¹⁴. The Labor party was divided about Beilin’s project. The main supporters of the project were Shimon Peres, Moshe Shahal, Haim Ramon, Shevah Weiss. On the other hand, the fervent opponents of the project were Ehoud Barak - who was a simple deputy at that time – Abraham Shohat, Uzi Baram and others.

Among all these names the one that concerns us mostly is Ehud Barak. He declared that “*a unilateral withdrawal from south Lebanon would endanger the inhabitants of northern Israel and give an impression of weakness (...) mainly because the Israeli army wouldn’t enjoy the same liberty of action after such an eventual retreat*”¹⁵. He added that it is essential for Israel to conclude an accord with one of the parties behind the borders to make sure that no terrorist

¹³ Haaretz, 9 March 1998.

¹⁴ Ibid, 9 March 1998.

¹⁵ Haaretz, 12 March 1998.

action would be launched against Israel from the evacuated areas. He clearly said that this first phase needs a “*Syrian green light, implicitly or explicitly*”¹⁶.

Another opponent of the Beilin’s project was the Knesset member Ephraim Sneh. He considered that the project suggests a return to the situation that was prevalent prior to March 1978. He argues that nothing has changed since that time and that the Hizbullah fighters will play the same role as the PLO guerrillas, adding that they are more fanatic and better trained. He proposed to sign a deal with Syria and disarming Hizbullah before any withdrawal¹⁷.

Other Israeli voices were asking for the withdrawal from Lebanon. A group of one thousand Israeli reserve army officers asked for a unilateral withdrawal¹⁸. Even the commander of the Israeli Internal Security Service, the “Shinn Bitt” Amy Ayalon declared that he supports a decision to withdraw immediately and unilaterally from Lebanon¹⁹.

Thus, the conditions stated in all the withdrawal plans converged on one demand: the deployment of the Lebanese army on the borders between the two countries.

What could be the explanation for such a demand?

A look at the past shows that before this new Israeli tactic, Israel had always reservations on any deployment of the Lebanese army in the south. A clear example of this happened in July 1978 when a unit of the Lebanese army tried to take positions in the zone controlled by the UNIFIL. The pro – Israeli militia, led at that time by Saad Haddad, fiercely attacked the Lebanese army unit and prevented its deployment near the borders²⁰. The former Lebanese Foreign Minister Fouad Boutros wrote a letter to the Lebanese permanent representative in the

¹⁶ Haaretz, 12 March 1998.

¹⁷ Yediot Ahronot, 19 March 1998.

¹⁸ An – Nahar, 24 February 1998.

¹⁹ An – Nahar, 25 February 1998.

²⁰ Ghassan Tueini, Resolution 425: The Introductions, The Bases, The Facts, the Prospects, Diplomatic Correspondence – Part one : 1977- 1978, (Beirut, Dar An – Nahar, 1996) p. 237.

UN Ghassan Tueini, informing him that the Israelis asked the UNIFIL commander General Arskin not to cooperate with the Lebanese army and even to prevent its advance. Boutros adds that the UNIFIL command informed him that it will not abide by the Israeli demand and considers it as an obstruction to the application of the 425²¹.

The attack was repeated in 1979 when the Lebanese army made another attempt to enter the area in compliance with the resolution 444 of the Security council, Israel and its allies stopped with fire the movement of the Lebanese troops²².

4- Sharon's Project:

Just one week after Beilin's proposal, Ariel Sharon introduced his project, which also falls one month prior to the government's adoption of Mordekhai's plan which will be discussed in the second paragraph.

The fundamental principles of this project were the following: a gradual retreat of the Israeli Army, unilaterally (without a possible agreement with Lebanon), on phase to phase basis , without a precise timeframe And stressing that Israel will take all the measures to ensure the security of its citizens, and would maintain, while progressively retreating, the legitimate right to retaliate against any attack.

Regarding the South Lebanon Army, Israel would remain responsible for the security of the members of the SLA and their families even after the withdrawal²³.

²¹ Ibid, , Resolution 425: The Introductions, The Bases, The Facts, the Prospects, Diplomatic Correspondence – Part one : 1977- 1978, p.235.

²² An – Nahar, 26 April 1979.

²³ Yediot Ahronot, 15 March 1998.

Sharon's project was based on two essential points. Primarily that there is no link between the Israeli – Syrian negotiations and the situation in south– Lebanon. Secondly, Israel holds the Lebanese Government responsible for the interdiction of military acts against the Israeli soldiers, the members of the SLA and their families, and the Israeli settlers in northern Israel.

As for the “necessary measures to guarantee the safety of its citizens”, Sharon meant hitting the infrastructure of Lebanon; the electricity stations, the water supplies, roads, bridges and radio stations²⁴.

5 - Israel Lays Hold of the 425

The failure of all the Israeli attempts from all kinds, political and military, to find an adequate formula to stay in Lebanon with a minimum cost elaborated a general consensus among the Israeli political parties that the Israeli army should leave Lebanon with possible guarantees or even at any price.

It was obvious that the Israelis were drifting from speaking the language of force to adopting the language of necessity .

By the beginning of 1998, Israel launched a surprising vast diplomatic offensive, based on the resolution 425 of the Security Council voted on the 19th of March 1978. For the first time since that date, Israel announced in 1998 that it was ready to apply the resolution 425, but it did not neglect its condition of reaching security accords ahead of its withdrawal .

On the 27th of January 1998, the Israeli permanent representative at the UN Dori Gold submitted to the Secretary General Kofi Anan a letter from his government²⁵. This letter is considered as the first official document affirming Israel's recognition of the resolution 425.

²⁴ Haaretz, 15 March 1998.

All the spirit of the text of the resolution was turned upside down. The letter alleges that the Israeli occupation was an act of self – defense. It adds that “*it is enough for the Lebanese government to engage itself in a process of dismantling the principal structure of terrorism and preventing the attacks against Israel, in order to nullify the reasons of the Israeli presence in south Lebanon*”²⁶.

Dori Gold says in his letter: the resolution 425 does not ask for an unconditional withdrawal and Israel is ready to achieve its withdrawal in accordance to the way defined by the resolution. This way is set in the context of dispositions that guarantees the application of all the points of the resolution, and notably the application of the goals of the UN interim force mission in Lebanon. These goals are clearly stated in the resolution and they are “*the return of international peace and security*”, “*helping the government of Lebanon to employ its effective authority on its territory*”²⁷.

Gold even extends the Israeli explanation of the 425 and considers that the exercise of the Lebanese authority includes the elaboration of measures guaranteeing the security of the inhabitants of the region. Moreover, he clearly invites the Lebanese government to the negotiation table.

As perceived, Israel was intensifying its efforts to find the proper means to get out of Lebanon with the maximum guarantees it could get in order to protect its army and its population, and maybe to avoid going back to it again. Or in other words Israel wanted somebody else to do the job it thought it was accomplishing by occupying south Lebanon.

²⁵ Jerusalem Post, 28 January 1998.

²⁶ Ibid, 28 January 1998.

²⁷ Idem.

Immediately after the cabinet reunion and the issuing of the statement, the Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu held a press conference in which he reiterated the seriousness of his government's offer. But he made clear the point that the retreat of his forces from Lebanon should be preceded by Israeli - Lebanese negotiations. And after his press conference, he called the UN Secretary General who was in China to convey to him his government position.

The Israeli Government had clearly officially adopted the Mordehai project to the detriment of other projects, mainly the projects of Ariel Sharon, who was the minister of infrastructure at that time, and the project of Yossi Beilin one of the Labor party leading figures.

The Israeli government threw the ball and thought that it presented a complete formula to protect its interests for withdrawing from Lebanon. At the same time it was trying to hit two birds with one stone: to leave the Lebanese mine field with maximum guarantees, and to appear in the eyes of the world as a country that respects the resolutions of the UN.

B- The withdrawal as a decision.

1- Barak in power : The Withdrawal Necessity.

The April Understanding Accord of 1996 did not bring any stability to the south Lebanon front. Hizbullah succeeded in overcoming all the restraints of this accord to continue his attrition war against the Israelis. The victims of this war had different impact on each side. Hizbullah considered his human losses as "*martyrs who provided him more moral incentive to continue the fight*"²⁸, while the Israeli public opinion accumulated more reasons to believe in the necessity of leaving Lebanon with every new casualty in the ranks of the Israeli army²⁹.

²⁸An – Nahar , 13 September, 1997 Speech of the Secretary General of Hizbullah Hassan Nassrallah.

The resistance was scoring a mounting success. A simple enumeration of the hardest hits against Israel and its allies in the South Lebanon army, allows to develop a more precise idea about the atmosphere in South Lebanon in 1998-1999. Seven Israeli soldiers were killed in the explosion of bombs during two weeks in November 1998. The commander of the Israeli special forces was killed with other officers in an ambush near Birkit Jabbour in west Bekaa on the 23 of February 1999.

The killing of general Gurstein the head of the Israeli coordination unit in Lebanon on the road of Hasbayya – Marjeyoun on the 28 of February 1999, the attack of the Beyt Yahoun post on the 16th of May 1999 and capturing an armed personel carrier³⁰.

Moreover the evacuation of the Jezzine region on the 1st and the 2nd of June 1999 under the fire of the resistance created a shock in the Israeli public opinion. The former Israeli chief of staff major general Amnon Shahak said that the withdrawal from Jezzine happened in “*humiliating conditions*”³¹.

Facing this rise in the power of the resistance, the Israeli army continued its aggression despite all the withdrawal plans. It placed the village of Arnoun under barbed wire siege. The village became part of the occupied zone, but hundreds of Lebanese students coming from Beirut universities broke the siege and the Israeli army didn't react³². Arnoun was liberated until 15 April when the Israelis isolated the village again³³.

During the first half of 1999, the Israeli warplane attacked almost daily the villages of the South and the Bekaa killing and wounding several people, distinctly violating the April

²⁹ Haaretz. 30 November 1998.

³⁰ Safahat Ez, archives of Hizbullah.

³¹ Yediot Ahronot, 3 June 1999.

³² Al – Hayat, 27 February 1999.

³³ An – Nahar, 16 April 1999.

accord. The resistance started hitting Israeli positions near the borders. On the 24th of June 1999, as the aggressions against the Lebanese civilians continued, the resistance launched Katyusha rockets into northern Israel³⁴.

This fact provided the Israelis with the necessary alibi to attack the infrastructure of Lebanon. In the night of 24 - 25 June, the warplanes bombed the electricity stations in Jamhour and Bsalim and caused sever damages. They also destroyed a number of bridges linking the south to other Lebanese regions and attacked the city of Baalbeck. The resistance retaliated in the same day and launched rockets on two Israeli cities, Kiryat Shmona and Naharriya³⁵.

A remarkable fact occurred that day in Israel. The elected prime minister Ehud Barak, who wasn't exercising his functions yet, said that he did not participate in deciding to attack the Lebanese infrastructure. He declared that he was informed about the raids when they started³⁶.

The Israeli occupation of south Lebanon was in fact one of the major themes of the Israeli electoral campaign in may 1999. Ehud Barak, took upon himself, if he is elected, the task of withdrawing the Israeli army from south Lebanon. He repeated this promise several times during his electoral campaign and went on to announce the 7th of July 2000 as the latest date for retreat³⁷.

The new Israeli prime minister developed a plan to achieve his goal before the time limit he has set. The details of his plan included a new start of the negotiations with Syria and including the Lebanese issue on the agenda of the talks. He suggested that an international force should be stationed with the Lebanese army, considering that any agreement with the Lebanese Government should profit from an international support and guarantee the security

³⁴ As – Safir, 25 June 1999.

³⁵ As – Safir, 26 June 1999.

³⁶ An – Nahar, 27 june 1999.

³⁷ Jerusalem Post, 12 May 1999.

of the South Lebanon Army and their families. Israel would authorize those who wish to leave Lebanon to be installed on its territory near the Lebanese borders³⁸.

It was clear that the Israelis were seeking a speedy implementation of the 425 according to their conditions. Nevertheless the option of a unilateral withdrawal was advancing to the position of a first choice due to three main factors:

- a. The internal Israeli politics where Barak wanted to keep his promise of withdrawal before the 7th of Jul2000.
- b. The continued pressure of the resistance and the official Lebanese position refusing any kind of pre – withdrawal arrangements.
- c. The international political spectrum and mainly the Syrian – Israeli negotiations, which we will portray and discuss in the next chapter.

2- The Withdrawal: from imposing conditions to accepting realities

On the 5th of March 2000, the Israeli Government went a step further in affirming its withdrawal from Lebanon. It declared that it adopted by unanimity a decision of redeployment of the Israeli troops all along the Israeli – Lebanese borders before the month of July 2000, and to guarantee from now on the security of the northern settlements from the new positions of the Israeli Army³⁹.

The governmental statement added that such a redeployment would be more favorable after signing a security agreement with Lebanon, but if such an agreement is unattainable, *“the government will hold a meeting at the appropriate time to determine the ways of implementing its decision”*⁴⁰.

³⁸ Haaretz, 30 June 1999.

³⁹ Jerusalem Post, 6 March 2000.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 6 March 2000.

This new Israeli move occurred with an upsurge of the resistance attacks that attained new dimensions. It killed seven Israeli soldiers during one week⁴¹, in addition to Akl Hachem the second man in rank in the South Lebanon Army, in an attack that showed that Hizbullah had infiltrated the ranks of its enemies⁴². These operations plunged Israel in embarrassment. The Israeli president Eizar Weizman said at that time “*we have to go out (from Lebanon)*”⁴³.

The parents of the Israeli soldiers were putting pressure on their children to convince them not to serve in Lebanon, and some of them even threatened to commit suicide if their sons do not respond⁴⁴. Even the commander of paratroopers unit said “*the Israeli society is not willing to pay the price for the aim we are trying to reach, we have lost our power to resist*”⁴⁵.

Hizbullah was asserting his power while respecting the April Understanding accords, refraining from attacking any civilian Israeli target. His fighters were only launching their operations on Israeli military targets in the occupied zone.

In contrast, Israel was losing its nerves. In the night of 7-8 February 2000, the Israeli warplanes destroyed three electricity station in Beirut, Baalbeck, and Tripoli⁴⁶.

The message was clear. Israel decided a further escalation in the confrontation, it will attack the Lebanese infrastructure each time its soldiers are hit in the occupied zone.

The Israeli foreign minister David Levy confirmed this analysis. He threatened in an enraged speech “*to burn the Land of Lebanon*” if northern Israel is attacked or if other Israeli soldiers are hit⁴⁷.

⁴¹ An – Nahar, 18 January 2000.

⁴² As – Safir, 2 February 2000.

⁴³ As – Safir, 4 February 2000.

⁴⁴ As – Safir, 6 March 2000.

⁴⁵ An – Nahar, 13 March 2000.

⁴⁶ An – Nahar, 10 February 2000.

Moreover, the Israeli security cabinet decided in a meeting held on the 16th of February to delegate to Barak, Levy, and the defense minister Mordehai the authority of ordering to launch air raid against Lebanon without referring to the government⁴⁸. In addition to all this, Israel froze its participation in the April Understanding Committee⁴⁹.

Israel didn't stop its aggression against Lebanon. On the night of 4-5 May it destroyed electricity stations in deep Lebanese territories and other targets near the Syrian borders, alleging that the attack was in revenge for rocket attacks against northern Israel⁵⁰. The Israeli radio announced that 200 thousand citizens in northern Israel will spend two days in the shelters⁵¹. Two days earlier the South Lebanon Army had killed two Lebanese woman with a mortar shell that the Israelis claimed was fired by mistake⁵². The resistance retaliated by firing 30 Katyusha rockets into northern Israel, killing an Israeli soldier and wounding 26 settlers⁵³.

A close look at the developments in Israel at that time proves that its government had taken all the possible measures to accomplish a unilateral withdrawal at least one month ahead of the actual date when it happened, 25 May 2000.

On the 1st of May the Israeli ministry of labor and social affairs announced that it was preparing a program to grant work permits for one thousand foreign worker to replace 2000 Lebanese workers from the occupied security zone who work in Israel. The daily *Haaretz* announced that Israel would most probably use workers from Thailand to replace the Lebanese ones⁵⁴.

⁴⁷ As – Safir, 15 February 2000.

⁴⁸ Jerusalem Post, 17 February 2000.

⁴⁹ As - Safir, 4 May 2000.

⁵⁰ An – Nahar, 5 May 2000.

⁵¹ As – Safir, 6 May 2000.

⁵² As – Safir, 5 May 2000.

⁵³ Jerusalem Post, 8 May 2000.

⁵⁴ Haaretz, 1 May 2000.

The second day, the Israeli press published that UN experts are working in the northern borders to delineate the international borders of 1923. The *Jerusalem Post* added that the experts are members of the UN envoy Terje Rod Larsen team⁵⁵.

As for the South Lebanon Army, a state of total confusion reigned among its ranks. Its leader general Antoine Lahd addressed an open letter to the Lebanese President General Emile Lahoud asking him to pardon all the members of the SLA, a demand to which the President never responded⁵⁶.

In parallel, three thousand persons of the SLA members and their families demonstrated in front of the UNIFIL headquarters in the security zone in Naqoura, asking for an international protection⁵⁷. This demand was soon forgotten.

The news of the imminent withdrawal occupied the front pages of the Israeli and Lebanese newspapers. Day after day it was becoming a reality, but the most remarkable fact was that there were no signs for fulfilling the Israeli conditions.

On the morning of the 25th of May 2000, the Israeli army announced that it had completed its withdrawal from Lebanon at 3:00 am and closed the gates on the borders, almost two months ahead of the the 7th of July ultimatum date set previously⁵⁸.

The Israeli Prime minister Ehud Barak sent a letter to the Secretary General of the UN Kofi Anan informing him about the withdrawal.

⁵⁵ Jerusalem Post, 2 May 2000.

⁵⁶ An – Nahar, 9 May 2000.

⁵⁷ As – Safir, 8 May 2000.

⁵⁸ As – Safir, 26 May 2000.

In this letter, Barak asked “*all the forces in Lebanon to apply self – restriction and bare its responsibilities*”, threatening that Israel will fiercely retaliate against any attack on its sovereignty, its citizens or its soldiers. Moreover he accused Syria of investing all its effort to obstruct the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon⁵⁹.

C - CONCLUSION

This chapter clearly covered the various positions of different Israeli parties and sometimes within the same party. The reason behind this is to show the complexity of the Israeli society when it comes to security issues.

Israel is unique in the sense that it’s a “civil society” where the military enjoys a great political influence & where the people is constantly mobilized for war.

Here it’s worth mentioning that all the Israeli responsables discussed above have been high ranking officers in the army, and they believe or act as if they never left. There is absolutely an absence of a clear distinction between the army and the civil society. As General Yigael Yadin puts it “*the Israeli citizen is a soldier on leave for 10 months per year*”⁶⁰. The famous Israeli General Ezer Weizman, when he was appointed as a minister at the end of his military career in 1969, he said that he considers his position as a continuation to his military service and that he hopes he’ll be able to find the occasion to implement and enforce his ideas⁶¹.

This shows how every Israeli political figure feels he’s directly involved in the security issues and that he can and should come up with plans and initiatives related to these issues, which,

⁵⁹ Jerusalem Post, 26 May 2000.

⁶⁰ Les cahiers de l’orient, No 54-1999, P 163

⁶¹ Alfred Vagts, a history of Militarism, New York: Meridien Books, 1959, 225

in this case, has created a lot of conflicting ideas and created a kind of a mess on the political level, even within the same party.

Checking how much did this withdrawal meet the conditions set by the Israeli government?

There should be first a clear differentiation between the conditions for withdrawing and the aim of retreating from Lebanon. This section is not discussing yet if Israel achieved the goals of its withdrawal, but instead, it's exposing how much the withdrawal was completed in accordance with the conditions that Israel set previously.

It was shown earlier the prerequisites that the governments of Netanyahu (Likud) and Barak (Labor) set for leaving Lebanon. It includes five main points evolving around the principle of security arrangements :

One- Direct negotiations with the Lebanese government ahead of the withdrawal.

Two- the deployment of the Lebanese army on the international borders.

Three- The dismantling of Hizbullah or its disarmament.

Four- The integration of the South Lebanon Army members in the Lebanese army, or at least guaranteeing their security with their families.

Five- The cooperation of the UN in confirming the Israeli withdrawal and redeployment the UNIFIL troops in the former security zone.

The direct facts that were witnessed during the liberation of the Lebanese land, and in its aftermath, prove that the first four conditions were not met, while the fifth one, which could be described as a demand more than a condition, was carried through.

The position of the Lebanese government concerning all this matter will be exposed and analyzed in a coming chapter.

How did Israel deal with the realities?

Many signs indicated that Israel wanted to relieve itself from the burden of its allies in the occupied zone.

On the 4th of May 2000, the Lebanese workers in the Israeli factories were informed that their contracts will be terminated by the 15th of May⁶².

The Israeli newspapers began to release reports blaming the SLA for the last escalations during the first days of May. The chief of staff of the Israeli Army, general Shaoul Mofaz declared that the killing of two women near Jezzine happened because the SLA opened fire without getting permission from the Israelis⁶³.

The Israeli army went even to seize all the heavy weapons from the SLA⁶⁴. The Israelis were in reality worried about their own interest related to the cooperation with the UN. In fact the UN couldn't confirm the Israeli withdrawal while the SLA was still armed and holding positions in the security zone. The report of the UN Secretary General Kofi Anan to the security council was explicit in this regard: "*Israel has to dismantle the South Lebanon Army before the UN could confirm its withdrawal from Lebanon*"⁶⁵.

The Israelis were very cautious about this point. The "*interests of Israel and its allies are starting to diverge*", wrote the Israeli daily Haaretz⁶⁶. Thus, the Israeli withdrawal took place while the commander of the SLA was in Paris, and it was obvious that the Israeli army did not inform its allies about the exact date of its withdrawal⁶⁷.

⁶² As – Safir, 5 May 2000

⁶³ Jerusalem Post, 6 May 2000.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 8 May 2000.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 24 May 2000.

⁶⁶ Haaretz, 24 May 2000.

⁶⁷ Jerusalem Post, 26 May 2000.

Most of the Israeli newspapers compared the SLA members during the retreat to the Vietnamese that the Americans abandoned when they left Vietnam. Thus although Israel allowed almost 5000 of them to enter its territories, this entry happened in a tragic way. These people, unaware of the date of the withdrawal, were so terrified from being left alone that they rushed to the borders leaving their homes and even families behind.

Israel did not secure them any guarantee before retreating and only offered those of them who moved quickly to the borders to become refugees.

CHAPTER III

THE DIPLOMACY TRACK & THE REGIONAL FACTORS.

1- Syrian– Israeli Negotiations

The Israeli government decision to withdraw from Lebanon, in accordance with the electoral promises of Ehud Barak, was not detached from the international developments concerning the Middle East peace process.

Barak came to power with a good image. He adopted, at least verbally, more practical positions towards the peace process than his predecessor Benjamin Netanyahu . In his first visit to Washington after being elected as Prime Minister, Barak spread a lot of promises. He said after meeting the American president Bill Clinton that he is ready for a “*painful solution*” over the Golan Heights with Syria⁶⁸. He added that any settlement with Lebanon would come in the context of an agreement with Syria, saying “*I intend to bring our soldiers out of Lebanon with guaranteeing the security of Israel and the northern borders through an agreement with Damascus*”⁶⁹.

Barak even said in a television interview “*we respect the resolutions 242 and 338 of the Security Council*”⁷⁰. He clarified his position later on, adding that there are number of issues

⁶⁸ An – Nahar, 18 July 1999.

⁶⁹ Idem.

⁷⁰ An – Nahar, 19 July 1999.

to settle before withdrawing from the Golan Heights, Among these issues he enumerated Lebanon, water, opening of the borders, and security arrangements⁷¹.

In return Syria welcomed the positive signs coming from Israel. The Syrian newspaper Ba'ath appreciated the Israeli statement, but added that it should be joined with a clear acceptance to fully withdraw from the Golan Heights to the line of 4 June 1967⁷².

Syria and Israel soon moved from exchanging signals to direct negotiations. On the 8th of December 1999, the American president Bill Clinton announced that the Syrian – Israeli negotiations will re - start on the 15th of the same month in Washington “*from the point where it stopped*”⁷³. He noted that the Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak and the Syrian foreign minister Farouk Al Chara'a will meet in Washington.

Even before the beginning of these negotiations it was clear that Lebanon would be an essential item on the agenda of discussions. President Clinton expected that the Syrian – Israeli talks will pave the way for the negotiations between Lebanon and Israel⁷⁴.

The Israeli prime minister soon declared his agenda for the negotiations. It included seven major points: the size of the withdrawal from the Golan Heights, the installation of an early warning system on the Heights, Lebanon, water, security, establishing diplomatic relations, opening the borders⁷⁵.

The first session of negotiations that took place in Blair House in Washington, began in a relatively positive atmosphere, preceded by an intense movement of American and European

⁷¹ Al Hayat, 21 July 1999.

⁷² Al Ba'ath, 23 July 1999.

⁷³ Jerusalem Post, 9 December 1999.

⁷⁴ An – Nahar, 10 December 1999.

⁷⁵ Jerusalem Post, 14 December 1999.

envoys between Damascus and Tel Aviv⁷⁶. Among the envoys was the American Secretary of state Madeleine Albright and the European special envoy Miguel Angel Moratinos.

Moreover, the number of resistance attacks against the Israeli army in south Lebanon diminished during that period. Although the leaders of Hizbullah insist that it wasn't intentional, even the records of the "Islamic Resistance" show that the Israeli army did not suffer from any casualty⁷⁷ in the occupied zone during that period.

But this mood of optimism didn't last for a long time. There was a big gap between the two countries regarding their different concepts for the withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

The second round of the negotiations, at Sheppards Town in Virginia from 3 to 10 January 2000, led to deception. Israel insisted on adopting the borders drawn in 1923 by Great Britain and France and which makes the "Tiberia" Lake a part of Israel. On the other hand, Syria declared firmly that London and Paris agreed in 1926 on amending these borders and that official documents prove this amendment⁷⁸.

The track of diplomacy and the negotiations were sharply damaged by what was called the "war of documents"⁷⁹. The Israeli daily "Haaretz" published an American document, supposed to be confidential, that was meant to show that the United States will put all its effort to make the final agreement favorable to Israel. Haaretz wrote that the document, delivered by Clinton to Barak and Al Chara'a, suggests that the settlers are allowed to stay in the Golan Heights after the Israeli withdrawal.

⁷⁶ An – Nahar, 16 January 1999.

⁷⁷ Safahat Ez, archives of Hizbullah, p. 309.

⁷⁸ An – Nahar, 17 January 2000.

⁷⁹ Idem.

The American administration denounced the publishing of the document. The state department spokesman James Rubin said that “*it complicates our work and makes the quest for peace more difficult*”⁸⁰. He assured that the published document is a preliminary draft with no official standing, and that it will be amended.

The retaliation came quickly, and the Lebanese Daily As – Safir published the text of the Syrian amendments to the American document. Syria stressed in the text that it wants a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights to the Line of 4th of July 1967. It also asked for a total removal of the Israeli settlements and added that the two countries had already agreed on these two points during the negotiations with the Rabin government⁸¹. Syria wanted to show its full adherence to all its principles. Shortly after, it demanded an Israeli written commitment to fully withdraw to the line of 4 July 1967⁸².

The negotiations were scheduled to commence another time on the 19th of January, but 48 hours before this date, it was announced in Damascus and Tel Aviv that the talks will be postponed to an unknown period.

Moreover, experts from both countries were supposed to meet in Washington by the end of January to discuss the American work document, but the experts never showed up in the American capital.

What was the importance of the Lebanese issue in all this?

The few leaks coming from the negotiations showed that the problem of the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon was raised in the third day of the second round of negotiations in Shepperds Town.

⁸⁰ An – Nahar, 14 January 2000.

⁸¹ As – Safir, 15 January 2000.

⁸² Reuters, 18 January 2000.

The State department spokesman, James Rubin, said that this discussion took place “*considering that there is a relation between establishing peace with Syria and reaching a solution between Israel and Lebanon*”⁸³.

Barak hoped to reach a declaration of principles with Syria within three months, or by May 2000 as a maximum date⁸⁴. He was eager to satisfy the aspirations of the Israeli constituency and to keep his electoral promises.

73 per cent of the Israelis thought that it is not possible to reach an accord to withdraw from Lebanon without concluding a peace treaty with Syria. The Jerusalem Post attributed to a senior source in Barak’s entourage that one of the main reasons why the Syrians had decided to come back to the negotiating table was Barak’s pledge to pull out of Lebanon regardless of whether Syria approves.

The Israeli embassy in Washington issued a statement following the standstill in the negotiations with Syria. It considered that following the stalemate of the Israeli-Syrian peace talks, “*Syria is now conducting a diplomatic campaign to obstruct the full implementation of resolution 425, while continuing to view Lebanon as a bargaining chip to further Syrian interests in its conflict with Israel*”⁸⁵.

Thus, it’s clear that Barak needed a boost for his internal political platform. He couldn’t allow himself to face a double miscarriage on the Syrian and Lebanese issues. He hoped to profit from the negotiations with the Syrians in order to earn guarantees for his withdrawal from Lebanon. But the Syrian track did not offer him this option, the talks were suspended, so he had to move out of Lebanon unilaterally to keep his electoral promise.

⁸³ An – Nahar, 7 January 2000.

⁸⁴ Yediot Ahronot, 3 January 2000.

⁸⁵ Embassy of Israel in Washington D.C. news by internet, 23 February 2000.

2- The Geneva Summit

Following the cessation of the Israeli – Syrian negotiations, the United States undertook exhaustive efforts to bridge the gap between the two countries.

The American President Bill Clinton hoped to end the Middle East conflict with a historic final ceremony joining the leaders of Lebanon, Syria, and Israel, signing, under his auspices, the last required peace treaty to end the enmity of the past 50 years.

Moreover Barak declared that *“we don’t have years, it’s a matter of two or three month to find out if we will reach an agreement with Syria (...) the Syrian president must meet us and President Clinton to solve some difficult questions that remain present. I don’t think it’s possible to reach an agreement before a meeting between Presidents (Bill) Clinton and (Hafez) Assad”*⁸⁶.

The American administration welcomed this proposition to engage the Syrian President personally in the peace talks. The State Department spokesman James Brown said : *“we agree with the Israeli prime minister’s opinion that President Assad has a role to play before the end of the peace operation”*⁸⁷.

On March 16 2000, the Syrian defense minister Mustapha Tlas announced during a visit to north Lebanon that President Clinton is placing huge efforts to restart the negotiations between Syria, Lebanon, and Israel⁸⁸.

⁸⁶ An – Nahar, 13 January 2000.

⁸⁷ An – Nahar, 14 January 2000.

⁸⁸ An – Nahar, 17 March 2000.

The second day, the Swiss foreign minister Joseph Deiss visited Damascus and declared that his country is ready to host a summit between the Syrian and American Leaders in the presence of Israeli leaders or in their absence⁸⁹.

Three days later, President Clinton announced that he will meet the Syrian President in Geneva on the 26th of March 2000⁹⁰.

What were the expectations?

The Syrians seemed to be optimistic. The Syrian official newspaper, Al Ba'ath wrote that the *“summit has an exceptional importance because it represents, as all observers agree, the last chance for the peace process in the near future”*⁹¹.

Separately, but simultaneously, Barak and Assad had begun preparing their respective public opinions for the probability of the advent of peace. Posters in Damascus depicted president Assad with open arms welcoming peace and declaring his (and Syria's) commitment to this worthy endeavor⁹².

Barak as well was involved in public opinion diplomacy. He announced at that time that all the previous Israeli prime ministers had committed themselves to a withdrawal from the Golan as part of a peace treaty with Syria. He accompanied this announcement with promises of a future referendum about the withdrawal⁹³.

The summit took place on Sunday the 26th of March at 3:00 p.m. in Geneva, it ended at 5:45 pm. The statements issued by both sides after the summit indicated that the outcome wasn't

⁸⁹ As – Safir, 18 March 2000.

⁹⁰ An – Nahar, 21 March 2000.

⁹¹ Al Ba'ath, 24 March 2000.

⁹² Miftah news site on the internet, 26 March 2000.

⁹³ Idem.

positive. President Assad did not compromise with his principle, he did not accept to conclude peace with Israel for less than a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. The Syrian presidential spokesman, Gebran Kourieh, clarified the position of president Assad during the talks. Assad considered that the peace negotiations with Israel can only start on the basis of a full withdrawal from the Golan, to the line of 4th of July 1967. The Syrian president also stressed on the concomitance of the Lebanese and Syrian tracks ⁹⁴.

The Syrian expert Patrick Seal said president Assad expected to receive during the summit a promise from Clinton assuring Barak's readiness to fully withdraw from the Golan to the 4th of July 1967 line, and that he gives in return guarantees regarding security, water and normalization. He pointed out that the essential issue of disagreement is that the Syrians want to have access to the lakeside of Tiberia⁹⁵.

In fact the Syrian delegation informed the press after the summit that president Assad told president Clinton that in his youth "*he made barbecues on Tiberia lakeside, swam in its water and sat on its side and ate from its fish, and doesn't intend to abandon this*"⁹⁶.

The American president himself said the second day, while receiving the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in Washington, that he went to Switzerland to clarify to President Assad the options, proclaiming that the "*ball is in Assad's court*"⁹⁷. The implication was obvious, the Americans were saying in other words that it is Assad's unwillingness to play the ball that has doomed the peace process.

The US Middle East envoy Dennis Ross who was dispatched to brief Barak about the summit, added that the differences between Syria and Israel are more "*psychological*" than objective.

⁹⁴ An – Nahar, 27 March 2000.

⁹⁵ Agence France Presse, 28 March 2000.

⁹⁶ Jerusalem Post, 28 March 2000.

⁹⁷ An – Nahar, 28 March 2000.

The implication of this being that psychological barriers can only be surmounted by the parties themselves⁹⁸.

The New York Times wrote that the Syrian President gave President Clinton a lecture in the history of the borders instead of trying to find a mean of interaction that would give hope in peace⁹⁹.

The Israeli daily Haaretz attributed to sources close to the American President that the tone of the talks was very tense, adding that he was very nervous when he left the meeting¹⁰⁰.

3- The 425 as an Offensive Against Syria

Lebanon subject and its direct connection with the summit was very obvious. Barak announced on the same day of the summit failure that he has definitely decided to withdraw his army from Lebanon without any agreement with Syria¹⁰¹.

The Israeli plan was definite, withdrawing from Lebanon in order to remove Syria's primary instrument of pressure on Israel to accept Syrian conditions for a peace treaty.

In the light of the crystal-clear American and Israeli decision to abandon the efforts on the Syrian track, Barak brought the implementation of the resolution 425 to the spotlight.

Immediately after the summit failure, Barak summoned his ministers and declared that *"the door to peace is not yet closed, we are thinking of the possibility of withdrawing from*

⁹⁸ Jerusalem Post, 29 March 2000.

⁹⁹ New York Times, 28 March 2000.

¹⁰⁰ Haaretz, 27 March 2000.

¹⁰¹ An – Nahar, 29 March 2000.

*Lebanon according to the resolution 425, in a unilateral retreat to the international borders*¹⁰².

The Israeli Radio said that after the failure of the Geneva summit, Barak will speed up the preparations for a unilateral withdrawal from south Lebanon, and that he will try to gain an international support for this move¹⁰³. Shortly after, the international signs backing his decision started to appear. The American vice president Al Gore said two days after the summit that Israel assured his government that this withdrawal will happen according to the resolution 425¹⁰⁴.

One day later, the French president Jacques Chirac sent a letter to Barak promising him to help Israel to withdraw unilaterally from Lebanon¹⁰⁵.

The Israeli officials were relating openly and directly the failure of the Geneva summit to their decision to withdraw from Lebanon. Israel's foreign minister David Levy said that there were no changes from the Syrian president regarding the peace process, thus, *"we are going to withdraw from Lebanon unilaterally without an agreement with Syria because it's in our interest to do so"*¹⁰⁶.

Four days after the summit, Barak was more explicit than ever. He declared to the Israeli radio that *"our military presence in Lebanon only serves the interests of Syria and other parties wishing to see bloodshed"*¹⁰⁷. He also blamed Damascus for the failure of Geneva summit¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰² Jerusalem Post, 27 March 2000.

¹⁰³ An – Nahar, 27 March 2000.

¹⁰⁴ Jerusalem Post, 28 March 2000.

¹⁰⁵ An – Nahar, 28 March 2000.

¹⁰⁶ Haaretz, 27 March 2000.

¹⁰⁷ Jerusalem Post, 31 March 2000.

¹⁰⁸ Idem.

The signs of the Israeli seriousness to withdraw from Lebanon reached their peak in April when the UN responded quickly to the Israeli demand for cooperation. On the fifth of April, the UN Secretary envoy Terje Rod Larsen visited the region to examine the Lebanese, Syrian and Israeli official positions regarding the withdrawal¹⁰⁹.

Following this visit, the Secretary General of the UN Kofi Anan informed the Security Council that he is waiting for an official letter from the Israeli government to confirm its intention to withdraw from Lebanon. He affirmed that the UN wouldn't take any action before receiving this letter¹¹⁰.

The Israelis sent the required letter with no delay. On the 17th of April, the permanent Israeli delegate at the UN Ehud Lankry, delivered Anan a letter from the Israeli foreign minister asserting his country's decision to withdraw its forces from Lebanon according to the 425 resolution. Levy maintained that the retreat of the army would be complete by July 2000, assuring that Israel will work closely with the UN and cooperate with it to help carry out its mission as mentioned in the resolutions 425 and 426¹¹¹.

Syria was the main target of the Israeli threats during that period. The deputy defense minister Ephraim Sneh said that the Israeli reprisal should be directly targeted against Syria in case of any assault on Israel after the retreat¹¹². The Israeli army chief of staff general Shaoul Mofaz said the Syrians should know that their strategic interests in Lebanon will be threatened if they don't prevent the military activity of Hizbullah after the retreat¹¹³.

¹⁰⁹ An - Nahar, 6 April 2000.

¹¹⁰ As – Safir, 13 April 2000.

¹¹¹ Jerusalem Post, 18 April 2000.

¹¹² Haaretz, 18 April 2000.

¹¹³ Jerusalem Post, 11 May 2000.

The Syrians were not comfortable with the new Israeli tactic. They lashed out at the Israel's plan to withdraw from Lebanon. Damascus warned the UN *“from falling in the Israeli trap aiming at embroiling it in the moving sands of the Lebanese South”*¹¹⁴.

The Syrian foreign Minister Farouk Al Chara'a stated *“we support a global and comprehensive peace but we refuse any partial and incomplete solution”*¹¹⁵.

The Syrian foreign minister flew to Paris in order to explain the position of his country. He declared after meeting with the French President Jacques Chirac *“the United States is responsible for the failure of the Geneva summit (...) if Israel withdraws totally and unconditionally to the international borders with Lebanon then Syria would be relieved. But if Israel wants to use this withdrawal to put pressure on Syria this won't work.”*¹¹⁶.

The apparent imminent withdrawal impelled the Syrian President Hafez Al Assad to travel to Cairo for a summit with the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak ten days before the withdrawal.

After the summit the Syrian foreign minister gave another clear sign of his country's discontentment. He said that Syria backs the 425 resolution but it doesn't accept the cheating being arranged through this resolution to use it as a pressure card in the region, to threaten the Lebanese resistance and execute a partial withdrawal¹¹⁷. Lebanese officials declared their refusal of the Israeli conditions and affirmed that the Israeli occupation brings them more honor than what Israel is proposing¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁴ Tichreen, 16 April 2000.

¹¹⁵ An – Nahar, 24 March 1998.

¹¹⁶ As – Safir, 26 March 2000.

¹¹⁷ As – Safir, 9 May 2000.

¹¹⁸ Al Hayat, 24 March 1998.

The Israeli withdrawal took place on the 24th of May 2000, swiftly, without prior notice, and unilaterally. Syria was one of the countries that congratulated Lebanon for his victory and senior Syrian delegation visited Lebanon for this purpose¹¹⁹, but the political reaction in Damascus seemed to be disturbed. Thus, Al Chara'a considered that the Israeli scenario for the withdrawal from Lebanon "*failed and turned into a defeat*". He explained that nobody can exert pressure on Lebanon or force it to sign a solitary peace treaty with Israel¹²⁰.

It did not take long before other signs of pressure on Syria in Lebanon started to appear. The publication in Washington of a study criticizing the Syrian presence in Lebanon was significant. The study was prepared by the head of the foreign affairs committee in the American Senate Jessy Helms, the member of the foreign trade committee Eliot Angel, the head of the religious liberties committee in the congress Eliot Abrams, and a number of journalists and academicians. It was entitled "the role of the US in ending the Syrian occupation of Lebanon"¹²¹. The publication of this study came in parallel with the Israeli pressures on Syria.

4- Conclusion

The regional and international players have always been present in the Lebanese politics. Looking back into the recent and short Lebanese history.

Since the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, many external players got involved in the Lebanese internal affairs. These included Palestinians (400,000 palestinians in Lebanon now which is equivalent to 12% of Lebanon's total population), Libyans, and Somalis serving as mercenaries, Kuwaitis and Saudis in the so-called Arab Deterrent Force of 1976, and

¹¹⁹ As – Safir, 2 June 2000.

¹²⁰ An – Nahar, 7 June 2000.

¹²¹ An – Nahar, 6 June 2000.

Americans, British, French, and Italians in the multinational force that was formed and dispatched to Lebanon in 1982-1983 . The United Nations peacekeepers of in south Lebanon (UNIFIL) that was formed after the first Israeli invasion of 1978, and other elements came from the Soviet Union, Iraq, Egypt, and Algeria. However the main regional players were the Israelis and the Syrians.

We've seen that the Syrian presence in Lebanon politics is very strong on many levels. This has to do again with the history of the region.

During the Ottoman Empire in the region, Lebanon was a part of the so-called "greater Syria", and until today there's no demarcation for the border between the two countries, no official diplomatic relations with Beirut, and there has never been an exchange of ambassadors between the two states. Instead, Syria has enforced its interests through a series of bilateral treaties, the most prominent of which are the "Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination" and the "Defense and Security Agreement," both in 1991. These accords tie Lebanon more ever than before to Syria in all the different fields-military, political, economic, and social.

In a famous speech on July 20, 1976, President Hafez al-Assad of Syria conjured up a very repeated syrian refrain : "*Syria and Lebanon were one state and one people...and have shared interests and a common history.*"¹²²

The Syrian interests in Lebanon aren't purely political, since the two economies are deeply enmeshed. Syria has greatly profited from its presence in Lebanon. Syria had an estimated 300,000 permanent workers in Lebanon, this number rises sometimes to one million when taking into consideration the seasonal laborers. Syria also benefits from the fact that 35% of

¹²² The Syrian Occupation of Lebanon , By Mordechai Nisan

Lebanon trade, uses Syria as a transit for its export to the Gulf. In 2005, the overland crossing of this trade amounted to \$700 millions¹²³.

Moreover, Syrian interests in Lebanon were also referred in many instances to the money generated from Narcotics. While Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley was already known for producing high quality hashish when Syrian troops first entered the country in 1976, studies said that it only became a major global narcotics producer under Syrian occupation.

Reports mentioned that this valley was producing more than half of all the Hash and Marjuana seized in western Europe¹²⁴.

There is no doubt that Syria was the most influential element in the regional factors surrounding the withdrawal from Lebanon. The Syrians were trying to maintain all the benefits that Lebanon card was offering to them . They did not limit their action to delivering speeches.They used their influence in Lebanon to diminish the possible impact of the Israeli retreat on them. In order to do so, Syria had to depend on its strategic polotical allies in Lebanon, maily Hezbollah which was gaining more ground in Lebanon and in the region.

The Syrians special ties with Hezboallah are also better understood when looked at, through the prism of the strategic alliance of Syria with Iran, where their support to Hezbollah was the key common element and was translated in the flow of Iranian arms to the party through Syria. So this again shows how the regional factors meet and cross in Lebanon.

¹²³ Syria's role in Lebanon by Mona Yacoubian.

¹²⁴ Associated Press, Nov. 28, 1985.

CHAPTER IV - THE OFFICIAL LEBANESE POSITION

A – Between Confusion and Clarity

Lebanon has always demanded the application of the resolution 425, and even organized annual media campaigns on the 14th of March, the day when the resolution was voted in 1978. Despite this fact, the Lebanese authorities seemed surprised by the Israeli acceptance to apply the 425. The confusion in their statements reflected this surprise.

The former Lebanese President Elias Hrawi said that he doubts that Israel is ready to take concrete steps to apply the 425 and move towards peace¹²⁵. As for the Lebanese foreign minister Fares Boueiz, he considered that the Israeli acceptance of the 425 is still “*a mere declaration lacking the actual and lawful plan complying with the spirit of the UN resolution which demands an unconditional and total withdrawal*”¹²⁶.

The Lebanese officials turned quickly to Damascus to ask it to launch, as soon as possible, a diplomatic reprisal that would pull them out of the embarrassment they fell in because of the Israeli acceptance of the 425.

President Hrawi declared that “*we remain committed to the global and comprehensive peace but we won’t move anywhere without Syria, we will walk with Syria shoulder to shoulder to defend the Arab dignity and our sacred rights*”¹²⁷.

¹²⁵ Al Kabas, 9 January 1998.

¹²⁶ Al Hayat, 13 February 1998.

¹²⁷ An – Nahar, 27 June 1998.

However, going back to his earlier speeches, we'll see the major change. His speech of Madrid Summit, it consisted on the following demands and positions:

- The retreat of Israel on the basis of the 425 resolution.
- Lebanon respects the dispositions of the truce accord concluded in 1949 with Israel.
- The separation of the question of the occupation of South Lebanon (resolution 425) and that of the Arab territories occupied in 1967 (resolutions 242 and 338).
- Lebanon guarantees the security of the borders because the resistance will loose its legitimate right of existence after the withdrawal¹²⁸.

This position was reiterated several times by other Lebanese officials, mainly by the President Elias Hrawi. He assured more than once that he is ready to send the Lebanese army to the south to maintain order in collaboration with the UN after the Israeli withdrawal¹²⁹.

But once Israel announced its will to abide by the 425 resolution and its willingness to apply it, Lebanon took a different stand.

The Lebanese President Hrawi who had previously announced the readiness of Lebanon to guarantee the safety of the borders after the Israeli withdrawal, changed his position. He declared in an interview with An – Nahar that the Israeli plan is a trap and that Lebanon will not ensure the safety of the Israeli borders. Moreover, he suggested that the Secretary General of the UN should play a role in the application of the 425, thus relieving Lebanon from the burden of any direct negotiations with Israel¹³⁰. The Lebanese President sought to soften the embarrassment that Israel caused by its acceptance of the 425, but the Israeli response to his position sent the Lebanese officials into further confusion.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 24 October 1991.

¹²⁹ An – Nahar, 2 August 1996, and 1 July 1997.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 28 April 1998.

The Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that his country did not add any conditions to the 425 resolution and that it welcomed the mediation of the Secretary General of the UN with Lebanon in order to apply the resolution.

Syria didn't seem to be relaxed with these developments in the positions. The Syrian foreign minister soon declared from Washington, where he met the American Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, that his country considers the Israeli proposal regarding the application of the 425 can't be an opening to global and comprehensive peace. He added that peace couldn't be reached through partial and incomplete solutions and "*peace is either a global peace or will never be*"¹³¹. The Syrian message was clear, no way that Syria would accept an end to the Lebanese – Israeli conflict that would leave the Syrian – Israeli track frozen.

The Lebanese officials adopted the Syrian position and put forth effort to translate this adaptation into their political discourse and tried to develop their slogans to shield their rejection of the Israeli proposal.

The Lebanese army issued a declaration in which it considered the Israeli proposal as "*a trap and a manoeuver... Lebanon shouldn't accept any condition and shouldn't offer any guarantee ...the answer is in the context of global and just peace process joining Lebanon and Syria under the principle of Land for Peace*"¹³².

As for the government, it put out a five points - statement detailing the reasons for its rejection of the Israeli withdrawal plan. These points were:

1- The last Israeli proposition bares in itself the reasons for its rejection (...) because it sets conditions for this withdrawal.

¹³¹ As – Safir 22 May 1998.

¹³² Al – Hayat, 26 March 1998.

- 2- *The recent Israeli declarations are part of a diplomatic and political campaign which pretends to aim at withdrawing from Lebanon (...) but in reality is only a continuation of the violation of Lebanon's sovereignty, and an attempt to drag Lebanon into negotiating security arrangements that the Lebanese people refuses.*
- 3- *The Israeli government wants that the Lebanese security forces to be in its service.*
- 4- *The Lebanese government refuses the engagement of "South Lebanon Army" in any security arrangement.*
- 5- *The Netanyahu formula, where security precedes peace, has proven its irrelevance because security emanates from peace, and Lebanon is ready to restart the negotiations from the point where it stopped and on the basis of the Madrid conference principles¹³³.*

The foreign minister Fares Boueiz said that if Israel is serious enough in its recognition of the 425, it only has to withdraw from Lebanon as it came in, *"that is without asking the permission of anyone, knowing that the resolution 425 requires an immediate withdrawal without any negotiations or imposing conditions"*¹³⁴.

The Lebanese government decided to launch a counter offensive through diplomacy. The foreign minister Boueiz sent a letter to the foreign ministers of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and the member states in the European Union saying that the conditions that Israel set for its withdrawal constitute an amendment of the 425 and thus could modify *"its judicial and political structure"*.

In the following months, the Lebanese official declarations started to move away from the 425 and concentrated on the demand of a global and comprehensive peace. This term that was clearly meant to promote the idea of a joint Syrian – Lebanese move towards peace with Israel.

¹³³ An – Nahar, 3 April 1998.

¹³⁴ As – Safir , 12 June 1998.

Thus, the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri declared to CNN that “*Israel wants Lebanon to be responsible for its security on the borders without any peace agreement between the two countries. we consider this impossible because we want a regional peace (...) I said it many times and Syria approves my proposition: Lebanon and Syria are ready to conclude a peace treaty with Israel in three months if Israel shows its readiness to withdraw from Lebanon and the Golan Heights*”¹³⁵.

Moreover, Hariri repeated his support for a global peace in the region during a visit to Washington where he met the American president Bill Clinton. On the other hand he did not answer questions about the Israeli arguments regarding their withdrawal proposal¹³⁶.

It was obvious that the Lebanese officials were trying to find a way to explain their reluctance in dealing with the Israeli offer. Was it out of Lebanese strategic interest or merely because of the Syrian influence?

Lebanon fought for a long time to distinguish between the resolutions 425 and 242. It only accepted to participate in the Madrid conference after receiving a letter from the American President George Bush, guaranteeing that “*the integral application of the resolution 425 is not linked to the achievement of a global and comprehensive peace in the region*”¹³⁷.

Likewise, Lebanon struggled to apply the resolution 425, and consequently returning to the truce accord arrangements, without having to sign a unilateral peace accord with Israel. Therefore why should Lebanon, who had a possibility of liberating its land due to the heroic action of its resistance and the endurance of his people, reject such a proposition or such sign of hope?

¹³⁵ An – Nahar, 3 April 1998.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 17 June 1998.

¹³⁷ An – Nahar, 24 October 1989.

B- The Presidential Memorandum

The presidency of General Emile Lahoud in 1998, brought to power a man who is known for his tight relations with the Syrian leadership.

One of his main political stands during his leadership of the army was his refusal to send his troops to the south even when his government asked him to do it¹³⁸. President Lahoud proudly declared this position in some of the interviews that he gave after becoming president.

Since the early days of his presidency, Lahoud was very clear in defining his strategic vision regarding the issue of the Israeli proposal to apply the resolution 425. In the oath statement that he gave in the parliament after being elected, he considered that Lebanon participated in the Madrid conference out of the belief that “ *a permanent, comprehensive, and just peace is a vital, strategic option*”¹³⁹. Hence he wasn't considering that the resolution 425 was the basis of Lebanon's participation in the Madrid conference, but added the condition of liberating the Golan from the Israeli occupation.

Lahoud put standards for peace with Israel that went beyond the application of the 425, and attached the issue of Israeli occupation to south Lebanon to that of the Golan Heights. Thus, he said in his oath statement that “*a complete peace in our mind, means that Lebanon has a historic, permanent, higher, fixed national interest. It requires, whatever the circumstances or considerations, the indivisibility of the negotiation tracks with Syria's, on the basis of a total and equal Israeli withdrawal from the South and Western Bekaa and the Golan according to United Nations resolutions. Only in this way peace becomes, in all its circumstances and results, for all and includes security and other interests*”¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁸ National News Agency, 4 may 1999.

¹³⁹ As – Safir, 16 October 1998.

¹⁴⁰ Idem.

Nevertheless, President Lahoud soon added another condition that he regarded as essential for reaching a “*just and comprehensive peace*”. He declared during the Francophone summit in Canada that Peace can’t be achieved in the Middle East unless Israel withdraws from South Lebanon and the Golan Heights, and unless it gives the Palestinian refugees the right of return. He described their problem as a time – bomb that could explode in the face of the whole region¹⁴¹. Remarkably, President Lahoud did not mention this condition in his oath statement.

When the Israeli government showed its seriousness in withdrawing from Lebanon, and after the UN direct involvement in treating this matter through the UN Secretary General Kofi Anan special envoy Terje Rod Larsen, Lahoud made a surprising move. He delivered Larsen a presidential memorandum sent to Anan, in which he mainly concentrated on the issue of the Palestinian Refugees. He considered that Israel invaded Lebanon because of the existence of the Palestinian refugees on its territory, and that it plans to withdraw because it failed to find a solution to this problem and it couldn’t bare the resistance attacks anymore. The Lebanese President even asked the UN to disarm the Palestinian refugees in the camps of Lebanon¹⁴².

The presidential memorandum also affirmed that the armed Palestinian groups could try to infiltrate into Israel after the withdrawal and cause “small wars” on the borders. Thus it suggested that it is impossible to “*restore international peace and security and assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area*”¹⁴³ without disarming the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

Moreover, the memorandum clearly rejected the idea of providing any kind of guarantees or security arrangements for Israel before its withdrawal, and demanded compensations for the losses and injuries caused by the Israeli attacks.

¹⁴¹ An – Nahar, 7 September 1999.

¹⁴² As – Safir, 6 April 2000.

¹⁴³ The text of the resolution 425 of the Security Council, 19 March 1978.

Evidently enough, the Lebanese President was trying to play the same Israeli game regarding the 425. Like the Israelis, President Lahoud was giving the international resolution the explanation that he thought suited his country's interest.

The cluster in the resolution that was mostly subject to different Lebanese and Israeli interpretations was the following: *“The Security Council (...) decides upon the request of the Government of Lebanon, to establish immediately under its authority a United Nations interim force for Southern Lebanon for the purpose of confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restoring international peace and security and assisting the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area, the force to be composed of personnel drawn from Member States”*.

In result the Israelis wanted the world to believe that *“restoring international peace and security”* meant in the words of the former Israeli defense minister Yitzhak Mordehai establishing *“cooperation between the Israeli army and the Lebanese army to fight terrorism and violence”*¹⁴⁴. On the other hand, the Lebanese President used the same phrase included in the text of the resolution as a justification for asking the United Nations to disarm the Palestinian refugees.

The answers to both the Lebanese and Israeli conditions did not take much time. On the 22nd of May 2000, The UN Secretary General Kofi Anan presented to the Security Council a report about the Israeli withdrawal, at a time when many Lebanese villages were already being evacuated by the Israeli occupation army. This report did not even mention the Lebanese demand to disarm the Palestinians nor did it mention anything about the presidential memorandum. Anan only praised in his report a statement by President Lahoud in which he assured that Lebanon would work to guarantee the safety of the UNIFIL.

¹⁴⁴ Al Watan al – Arabi, 2 January 1998.

The secretary General of the UN only referred to the armed groups in Lebanon, Lebanese and foreign ones, by asking them to cooperate with the UNIFIL and to support it. Clearly enough, Anan did not accept Lahoud's demand to disarm the Palestinians. Similarly, Anan did not ask in his report for any direct cooperation between the Lebanese and Israeli armies, thus rejecting the Israeli condition.

The UNIFIL spokesman in Lebanon Timor Goksel declared that the mandate of these forces is restricted to the application of the resolutions 425 and 426 and that they are not entitled to disarm the Palestinian camps¹⁴⁵.

The Israelis considered the memorandum as a result of a Syrian pressure on Lahoud in order to preserve the full scope of their strong foothold in Lebanon. The Israeli deputy defense minister Ephraim Sneh said that the Lebanese “*have found a way to say no to our withdrawal in the name of the Syrians*”¹⁴⁶.

Actually, the Palestinian factions allied with Syria, armed and present in Lebanon, gave the Israelis at that time an additional cause to prove that Damascus stands behind raising the issue of the Palestinian camps before the Israeli withdrawal. Thus, in an interview with the Lebanese pro – Syrian daily As – Safir, Ahmad Gebril, the secretary general of the “Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command” said, that if Israel withdraws from south Lebanon “*we as Palestinian forces will study the situation, because there is first the right of return, I can assure you that there are 300,000 Palestinian refugees on the Lebanese territories who will crawl to the south after the withdrawal. They will cross the barbed wires even unarmed, let the Israelis shoot at them and we will see how the world will react. But*

¹⁴⁵ An – Nahar, 7 April 2000.

¹⁴⁶ Haartez, 6 April 2000.

*there are also other options with the rifles and bombs. All means are legitimate and we will use them all at the right time because the enemy only understands the language of force*¹⁴⁷.

Moreover Lahoud considered the military presence of the different Palestinian factions in Lebanon as a serious factor of instability. On that account he accused some armed Palestinian elements of being responsible for the killing of four Lebanese judges in Sidon (Jan 2000), and triggering an attack on the Lebanese army in north Lebanon (Dec. 1999), assuming that these incidents are related to the projects for nationalizing the Palestinians¹⁴⁸.

The Lebanese president, and in an attempt to explain his position to his people, said that his country refused to give Israel any security guarantees because accepting these guarantees would mean accepting the nationalization of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. He justifies this explanation by asking what would oblige Israel to think of solving this issue if we guarantee the security of its borders after a withdrawal that does not abide by the conditions of a total and just peace?

He added that Lebanon is not ready to fight the Palestinians for the sake of Israel¹⁴⁹. The Israeli Prime Minister soon replied to the Lebanese demand concerning the Palestinian refugees. He declared after meeting with the American President Bill Clinton in Washington that Israel is not ready to accept the return of the refugees and is not ready to bare any legal or moral responsibility towards them¹⁵⁰.

However the presidential memorandum had different effects on the international level. The American State Department declared that it takes the memorandum seriously, adding that the return of the Palestinian refugees to the West Bank is a matter that will be decided in the

¹⁴⁷ As - Safir, 8 April 2000.

¹⁴⁸ As – Safir, 15 February 2000.

¹⁴⁹ An – Nahar, 18 April 2000.

¹⁵⁰ Haaretz, 13 April 2000.

negotiations on the Palestinian – Israeli track¹⁵¹. The French Foreign Ministry refused to comment on the memorandum saying that it is addressed to the UN Secretary General, while the European Union special envoy to the region for the peace process Miguel Anjel Moratinos was more positive on the issue. He said after meeting the Lebanese president that the European Union is convinced that there should be a solution for the problem of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and that they shouldn't stay on the Lebanese territories¹⁵².

C- Conclusion

The reasons behind the Lebanese position, was totally dependent on the regional power breakers, in particular, Syria.

It was obvious in Chapter III, that Lebanon modern history has been one of constant overt and covert intervention by regional and international powers. The divide along the different religious and sectarian lines (17 different religious sects in a country of 3.7 million people), have facilitated the involvement of the external powers in the Lebanese politics, and these involvements have been most active in times of crises and their settlements. Lebanon stability is directly related to that of the region, and shifting the balance of the regional situation, often upset the balance of power among Lebanon's communities and political leaders.

The presidential elections of 1943 had been Anglo-French contests with an upper hand to the British, while the 1952 marked a supremacy for the U.S influence in Lebanon which increased with the presidency of Camille Shamoun, but the rise of Gamal Abdul-Nasser in Egypt and his plans to unite the arab world under one nation had its direct impact in the pro-

¹⁵¹ Al – Hayat, 8 April 2000.

¹⁵² An – Nahar 19 April 2000.

western Lebanon, where big part of the Lebanese were very receptive of Nasser's appeal, which polarized the country along pro and anti Nasser lines.

This divide peaked in 1958 and a three-month-long civil war broke out in Lebanon when the rebels called for the immediate resignation of the President Chamoun, who in return asked the Americans to intervene militarily in Lebanon.

As a result, the Americans happily landed in Lebanon with 15,000 soldiers, not only to save their ally but also to maintain regional presence in the wake of the July 14th Iraqi revolution which toppled the Monarchy and established a republican regime.

The 1982 Israeli invasion in Lebanon enforced the election of their ally Bashir Gemayel as a president, but he was assassinated after one month, and his brother Amine succeeded him. He lead a long war against the Syrians and their allies in Lebanon , which ended by giving the Syrians the upper hand , and a pro-syria president was elected in 1990, and started executing the Syrian policy and agenda on the regional and international level.

The above reflects why the official Lebanese stand was totally in favor of the Syrian position, and wasn't conducted according to the national and internal best interest of the country.

Lebanon's reaction to the Israeli acceptance of the 425 proved that Lebanon was not able to disassociate his problem with Israel from the other regional issues, mainly the Israeli occupation of the Golan heights. Even the Lebanese resistance, which provided Lebanon with so much strength in face of the Israeli occupant, was not a valid card to detach Lebanon from the regional conjuncture that forced the Lebanese authorities to adopt a mere policy of reaction to the developments of the situation. In other words, south Lebanon, described between 1968 and 1982 as "Fathland" to symbolize the Palestinian hegemony, became an

integral part of a geopolitical entity that wasn't limited to the Lebanese borders. The slogan adopted by the Lebanese government to end the conflict with Israel wasn't limited anymore to the application of the resolution 425, but it became wider and harder to attain, it was "*the global and comprehensive peace*".

According to the Lebanese officials, this peace could only be achieved by fulfilling three main conditions: the liberation of south Lebanon, the Liberation of the Golan Heights, and securing the right of return to the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

The official Lebanese position was moving to a new situation, tied to regional constraint which led it to develop stands that were not adopted before by the Lebanese government during its conflict with Israel, and wasn't treated according to the narrow interest of the country.

Chapter V

The Withdrawal Process

On the 24th of May 2000, the Israeli government declared that it completed the withdrawal of its forces from south Lebanon to the international borders, in accordance with the UN resolution 425.

The Lebanese authorities did not settle with one memorandum to the Secretary General of the United Nations. When the Lebanese – UN talks started in Beirut, the Lebanese government delivered the UN Secretary General special envoy Terje Rod Larsen a new memorandum addressed to Kofi Anan. It included eight points described as additional details to the presidential memorandum. The essential points in the new memorandum dealt with the question of the borders and stressed that the area called the Chebaa Farms (which is on the southern Syrian-Lebanese borders and which Israel claims that it occupied it from the syrians), was part of the Lebanese territories and that it should be evacuated by the Israelis in the context of applying the resolution 425.

Moreover, it demanded that Lebanon insists on regaining its full sovereignty on all its land, regional water, and airspace. Furthermore, Lebanon reiterated his refusal to give Israel any security guarantees.

Lebanon also asked for the liberation of the Lebanese detainees in the Israeli prisons. Besides this, Lebanon emphasized that nothing can be a substitute for the total and just peace in the region in the context of the concomitance of the Lebanese and Syrian peace tracks¹⁵³.

Soon the Israeli government responded positively. The Israeli Prime Minister ordered his army to cease, after the withdrawal, all kinds of breach to the Lebanese sovereignty. This order included a full termination of any kind of military activity in the Lebanese territories or in the Lebanese regional water or airspace¹⁵⁴. Thus Israel was counting on the fact that the resistance movement will risk international isolation if it continues to launch its military operations against the Israeli army. Moreover, Israel was also aware that Syria would face the same isolation if it continues to sponsor these attacks after the UN confirmation of the Israeli withdrawal.

The American Vice-President Al Gore went a step further, declaring that if Syria allows Hizbullah to continue acts of violence against Israel after the withdrawal "*President Assad will bear a heavy responsibility before the world*"¹⁵⁵.

Despite all the international and internal pressure, the Lebanese government refused to send the Lebanese army to the liberated areas in the south.

The UN Secretary General Kofi Anan openly demanded, in his report to the Security Council on the implementation of the resolution 425, that the Lebanese armed forces should ensure that all national territory falls under the effective authority of the government. He added that the deployment of the armed forces is an essential element of the return of the effective authority of the government in the area¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵³ Text of the Lebanese memorandum to the Secretary General of the UN Kofi Anan. 4 May 2000.

¹⁵⁴ Haartz, 10 May 2000.

¹⁵⁵ The Economist, 27 May 2000.

¹⁵⁶ Report of the UN Secretary General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978). P8. UN Documents.

The Lebanese President gives two main reasons for his refusal to send the army to the south. He asserts that the resolutions 425 and 426 ask the UN to verify the Israeli withdrawal from all the Lebanese territories before the deployment of the army.

Thus despite the fact that the UN confirmed the Israeli withdrawal, Lebanon still doesn't accept this fact arguing that Israel still doesn't respect the international borders between the two countries.

Moreover, Lebanon also insists on the liberation of all the Lebanese hostages and detainees (as well as the return of all the Lebanese corpses) from Israeli prisons, since this situation was related to the period of occupation and its consequences¹⁵⁷.

Lebanon also added that any additional army deployment in the south, would mean providing Israel with security guarantees, and it would allow it (Israel) to neglect the issue of the Palestinian refugees in any negotiations because they will be de facto nationalized in Lebanon and won't present any threat to its borders.

The other important and hidden factor is that the full deployment of the Lebanese army in the south would mean closing the window of conflict with Israel and abandoning the notion of joint tracks with Syria¹⁵⁸.

There is no doubt that Syria, as long as the Golan heights are still occupied, would like to see the Israelis worried about their northern borders with Lebanon where Hizbullah fighters have a total freedom of movement and action¹⁵⁹. Thus, in this context, the non-deployment of the Lebanese army in the south would serve the Syrian interest.

¹⁵⁷ Speech of the Lebanese President to the Lebanese army delegation on the occasion of the Army day. 1-8-2000.

¹⁵⁸ Idem.

¹⁵⁹ Al Hayat, 14 November 2000, Interview with the UN Spokesman Timor Goksel,

A- Chebaa Farms

The Lebanese government - backed by Syria - did not settle with the UN recognition of the Israeli withdrawal. On the 16th of June 2000, the Secretary General of the UN Kofi Anan presented to the Security Council a report in which he confirmed the Israeli withdrawal as an application of the resolution 425¹⁶⁰.

This report triggered a sharp response from the Lebanese President Emile Lahoud. He declared that Anan's report is not accurate and refused to accept that the Israeli withdrawal is complete or conforming to the resolution 425. President Lahoud considered that Israel left two major breaches to the 425: (a) it did not retreat to the international borders, (b) it did not release the Lebanese detainees held in the Israeli prisons inside Israel.

Regarding the issue of the international borders, Lebanon - by the voice of its President- refused the UN adaptation of the so-called "Blue Line" for the purpose of confirming Israel's withdrawal.

Lahoud described the line as "*imaginary*" and even refused to accept the terminology of "*withdrawal line*"¹⁶¹. He asked to adopt the international borders to confirm the withdrawal, and asked that the Chebaa Farms be returned to Lebanon in the context of the application of the 425.

As mentioned before, Lebanon had recently advanced a claim to the Chebaa Farms, a 25 square kilometer area of rich agricultural land on the Western slope of Mt. Sheikh (also called Mont Hermon).

¹⁶⁰ As- Safir 17 June 2000.

¹⁶¹ An - Nahar, 19 June 2000.

According to the Lebanese official position, this enclave, which was seized by Israeli forces during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, is a Lebanese territory. The implication of this claim is that the Israeli pullout from Lebanon is incomplete, legitimizing the continuation of resistance

attacks against Israel. But Anan had a different point of view. In his two reports to the Security Council, on the 22nd of May and the 16th of June 2000, he noted that the international boundary between Israel and Lebanon was established pursuant to the 1923 agreement between France and Great Britain. It was entitled "*Boundary Line between Syria and Palestine from the Mediterranean to El Hamme*". Moreover, Anan asserted in his reports that concerning the border between Lebanon and Syria, no international boundary agreement has been concluded between the two countries. Therefore he adds that he recommended in the 22nd of May report that the line separating the area of operations of UNIFIL from that of the United Nations Disengagement Observers Force (UNDOF) be adopted for the purpose of confirming Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon¹⁶².

Lebanon provided the UN with a map, dated in 1966, which reflected the Lebanese government's position that the farms were Lebanese. Anan almost accused Lebanon of committing fraud by refusing the map and declaring that the UN is in possession of 10 maps issued after 1966 by various Lebanese government institutions, including the ministry of defense and the army, all of which place the farms inside Syria¹⁶³.

Lebanon was engaged at that time in extensive talks with the UN envoy Terje Roed Larsen and his team of experts. The Lebanese government presented to the UN experts a number of old documents issued by the Lebanese Republic proving the ownership of the land by Lebanese citizens.

¹⁶² UN Secretary General report to the Security Council on the Implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1111978) and (426). P 19. UN Documents.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p18.

However it failed to present a map that showed that the farms were part of Lebanon when the international boundaries were established¹⁶⁴. The Israelis themselves did not claim to own the farms.

The Israeli Prime Minister said it openly, but added that this issue should be solved in the context of peace negotiations with Syria and Lebanon and not in relation to the application of the 425¹⁶⁵.

The Syrians backed the Lebanese position but in an arguable way. The Syrian foreign minister Farouk Al Chareh told Anan that according to the principles of the international law and the resolutions of the UN related to the Arab - Israeli conflict, the Chebaa farms is a territory owned by Lebanese citizens that Israel hasn't any kind of sovereignty over it¹⁶⁶. He added that Lebanon and Syria never had any conflict regarding these farms. This means that the farms do not belong to Israel and we will settle the issue with Lebanon once it is liberated.

In his report to the UN Security Council, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan avoided an explicit ruling on the Chebaa farms dispute. Nevertheless, he stated that the Resolution 425 applies only to territory occupied by Israel since its March 1978 invasion, thus refuting allegations that the Israeli withdrawal stipulated by this resolution is incomplete.

Lebanon, however, did not relinquish his demand. All the political statements issued by the Lebanese President and the Lebanese Prime Minister after the Israeli withdrawal insisted that the application of the 425 resolution is not complete as long as Chebaa farms are not liberated.

The Chebaa farms issue remained unsettled and open to further complications. It became the main declared reason for the existence of the resistance.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with General Amin Hoteit, 17 November 2000..

¹⁶⁵ Al Hayat, 14 May 2000.

¹⁶⁶ As - Shark Al Awsat, 17 May 2000.

B- Liberation of 17 Million Meters

The Lebanese assertion that the Israeli withdrawal is not complete was not limited to the Chebaa farms. Lebanon argued that there are large Lebanese territories that were left out of the withdrawal line and still being occupied by Israel.

This Lebanese position stimulated a series of international reactions that might have contributed in convincing the UN to verify the "*Blue Line*" again.

On the 30th of May, the Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharazi declared that Israel did not apply the resolution 425 and that the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon is not complete¹⁶⁷.

In contrast, the second day, on the 31st of May, the American Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk visited the Israeli border line settlement Metullah, and said that the Israeli withdrawal is complete. Besides this, he assured in a press conference that the American administration is going to donate 50 million dollars to Israel in order to protect the northern settlements and the frontline villages on the borders with Lebanon¹⁶⁸.

The Lebanese government was obviously being subject to international pressure trying to make it recognize the Israeli withdrawal as complete.

The culmination of this pressure happened on the night of the 18th of June. The Lebanese President Emile Lahoud received a phone call from the American Secretary of state Madeleine Albright urging him to accept Anan's report that confirmed the Israeli withdrawal.

¹⁶⁷ As- Safir, 31 May 2000.

¹⁶⁸ Jerusalem Post, 1 June 2000.

The phone call lasted almost three hours and the Lebanese President categorically refused to accept the American pressure.

The Lebanese General Amin Hoteit, head of the Lebanese experts team verifying the Israeli violations to the international borders took part in the conversation for one hour and a half when the Lebanese President called him and asked him to talk to Albright in a conference call. He said that she asked him to acknowledge that Israel violated the Blue Line after the release of the UN Secretary General report confirming the withdrawal.

Hoteit said that he did not accept and that Albright asked Lahoud to make a compromise. She proposed to him to publicly accept Anan's report, alleging that she will later on convince the Israelis to evacuate the disputed points¹⁶⁹.

Details of this conversation also were leaked the second day to the press. The Lebanese President did not fall under this pressure. He insisted that Lebanon will always maintain that the resolution 425 is not applied until the Israeli army goes back behind the international borders which includes the withdrawal from the Chebaa farms, in addition to the liberation of all the Lebanese detainees in the Israeli prisons¹⁷⁰.

This conversation took place on the eve of the visit of the UN Secretary General Kofi Anan to Iran, Lebanon, Israel and Syria. This visit was preceded by a tension between the Lebanese officials and UN team in charge of verifying the Israeli withdrawal.

Actually this verification seemed to have been fueled by personal animosity between Lebanese officials and mainly the UN's special envoy in the region Terje Roed Larsen.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with General Amin Hoteit, 17 November 2000.

¹⁷⁰ As - Shark Al Awsat. 19 June 2000

In the words of a senior Washington - based UN official "*there was a profound contempt on both the professional and personal level*"¹⁷¹.

In fact Larsen was a mastermind in the Oslo negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and he was praised many times by the former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres for his friendship to Israel¹⁷². This fact led some Lebanese politicians to doubt his impartiality. The harshest criticism to Larsen came from the Secretary General of Hizbullah Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah who accused him of being an Israeli agent, hinting that his party might consider all his work as illegal¹⁷³.

Upon his arrival to Beirut, Anan assured that the UN did not delineate new borders between Lebanon and Israel and that it is ready to take all the necessary measures to correct any new violations to the Blue line¹⁷⁴. At this stage the Lebanese and UN teams of experts executed a long mission all along the Blue Line to correct the Israeli violations. This mission resulted in the Israeli acceptance to evacuate almost 17,756,000 square meters of Lebanese land from Nakoura to the limits of the Chebaa Farms¹⁷⁵.

What happened behind the scenes?

According to the resolution 425, UN had to verify if the Israeli army retreated from the Lebanese territories. Knowing that the international organization doesn't have the authority to delineate the international borders¹⁷⁶, it used the term delineate the withdrawal.

¹⁷¹ Daily Star, 17 June 2000.

¹⁷² Shimon Peres, *Battling for Peace - Memoirs*, (Orion Books Ltd, London, 1998) P.380

¹⁷³ Haaretz, 5 June 2000.

¹⁷⁵ Interview With General Amin Hoteit, 17 November 2000.

¹⁷⁶ The UN Secretary General Kofi Anan wrote in his report to the Security Council on the 22nd of May 2000: "The United Nations stressed in its consultations with all the parties that it was not seeking to establish an international border, as this was the matter for the states to undertake in accordance with international law and practice". p16.

Hoteit adds that the line of the withdrawal should have been 100 percent identical to the line of the international boundary. This wasn't the case, therefore he accuses the members of the UN experts' team of committing grave mistakes in drawing the Blue line, thus ignoring the Lebanese sovereignty over parts of Misguav'am Israeli settlement, over a piece of land next to Rmeich village, and another next to Metullah Israeli settlement¹⁷⁷. Tens of square meters were left out of the Blue Line.

The Israelis advised the UN experts to adopt what they called the "*practical borders*", an advice that the UN special envoy Terje Rod Larsen¹⁷⁸ and the UN Secretary General wrongly accepted¹⁷⁹.

Hoteit affirms that the UN verification team "*fell in the Israeli trap of the practical borders, but the Lebanese team was able to prove the Lebanese right*". The cartographic and field proof presented by the Lebanese team was convincing enough to the UN experts to make them ask the Israelis to abandon parts of the Lebanese land that they have even occupied in 1948¹⁸⁰. Why didn't they leave the other three regions near Misguav'am, Rmeich and Mettullah?

Hoteit accuses Larsen of complicity with the Israeli authorities. He affirms that the Israelis wanted desperately to avoid destroying constructions and houses in the northern settlements (mainly in Misguev'am and Mettullah), a matter that would have caused them major internal political problems. Therefore, according to Hoteit, Larsen helped the Israeli Prime Minister by ignoring the Lebanese claims in these regions. Consequently, Israel evacuated all the territories where there were no Israeli residents and no Israeli construction or infrastructure.

¹⁷⁷ These violations are registered in the Army's records, according to General Hoteit, as follows: At Rmeich on the Border Pillar 16 (BP16), at Misguev'am from Border Pillar 35 to 37 (BP 35-37), at Metullah from Border Pillar 38 to 39 (BP 38-39).

¹⁷⁸ Statement of UN Special Envoy Terje Roed-Larsen, 29 May 2000. UN Documents.

¹⁷⁹ UN Secretary General reports to the Security Council on the Implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1111978) and (426). P16. UN Documents

¹⁸⁰ According to General Amin Hoteit they include territories in the villages of Manara, Honin, Alma A'chaab.

The UN Secretary General Kofi Anan had his own proposition to settle the issue. In this context he wrote in his report to the Security Council on the 16th of June: "*Any and all claims, by either side (Lebanon and Israel), in relation to the location of the international boundary shall be reserved for the future peace negotiations*"¹⁸¹.

However, the most complicated case of the four regions is the Ghajar village. This village is located partly in Lebanon and partly in Syria. The UN asserts that the Lebanese sovereignty should extend to two thirds of the village¹⁸². The Lebanese side was apparently subject to a de facto Syrian control and united with the Syrian side of the village in 1963; Israel occupied both sides of the village in 1967 and then annexed them in 1981¹⁸³.

The withdrawal line identified by the UN placed two thirds of the village in Lebanon and one-third in the Israeli- occupied part of Syria. This identification was openly declared by the International organization in Anan's report.

During the final phase of the talks with the UN, Lebanon announced an official position regarding this village. It stated that "*regarding the occupied Syrian Ghajar village, that was enlarged by the Israeli occupation to the Lebanese territories, Lebanon has clarified, in an answer to a question asked by the Secretary General of the UN, that it doesn't mind, from a humanitarian point of view, to annex the whole village temporarily to the liberated regions, on the condition that the international boundary line remains in its location prior to the occupation*"¹⁸⁴. This proposition was in fact very difficult to accept by the UN, Israel, and mainly the residents of the village who had Israeli identities, work in Israel and send their children to study in its schools¹⁸⁵.

¹⁸¹ UN Secretary General report to the Security Council on the Implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1111978) and (426), 16 July 2000, p 6. UN Documents

¹⁸² Ibid.p.9.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p 9.

¹⁸⁴ Official Statement by the Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, 14 June 2000.

¹⁸⁵ Al - Hayat 20 July 2000.

Anan had a different point of view. He announced, in his report to the Security Council, that he wrote to the Lebanese President advising him that it "*would not be conducive to the maintenance of public order and peace if either UNIFIL or the government of Lebanon were to deploy military, security or civilian personnel in the village*"¹⁸⁶.

Nonetheless, Anan assures that he has also written to Barak noting "*that there can be no doubt that two thirds of the village lies within the Lebanese territory, and that assisting the government of Lebanon in return of its effective authority in the south of the country was one of UNIFIL's principal tasks*"¹⁸⁷.

So why did Lebanon stop claiming his right in this village and why did the Lebanese officials accept the fact that the UNIFIL won't deploy in it, and for what price?

Interestingly, the Israeli daily Haaretz wrote that Lebanon and Israel have reached a non-written agreement about the Ghajar village that Israel would respect the Lebanese sovereignty on the northern part of the village and that it won't send its military patrols to this part. Haaretz attributed to American senior sources that "*this understanding is a new reality accepted by everybody*"¹⁸⁸.

C- The Detainees

As mentioned earlier, in the memoranda to the UN Secretary General Kofi Anan, Lebanon considered the liberation of his detainees in the Israeli prisons as an essential condition for the recognition of Israel's application of the resolution 425. However, the Israeli withdrawal led

¹⁸⁶ UN Secretary General report to the Security Council on the Implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1111978) and (426), 16 July 2000, p 9. UN Documents

¹⁸⁷ Idem.

¹⁸⁸ Haaretz, 11 July 2000.

only to the liberation of the detainees in Khiam prison located inside Lebanon, while Lebanese prisoners including important Hizbollah figures held inside Israel were not released.

Why did Israel keep the Lebanese detainees in its prisons?

It is no secret that the Israeli government has been using these detainees as bargaining chips for information about Israeli soldiers missing in action in Lebanon. Thus, when the Israeli Supreme Court refused to block the release of 13 Lebanese prisoners, the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak summoned his top security advisors to discuss the case.

He said in a statement that he is leaning toward supporting emergency legislation in the Knesset that could keep the Lebanese detainees behind bars¹⁸⁹. Such a bill would allow the government - not the court - to decide if the prisoners can be held as part of efforts to free Israelis missing in action.

The Israeli military declared that two important additional detainees should not be released, they are Sheikh Abdel Karim Obeid, and Mustapha Dirani. The Israeli army argued that the release of these two persons would weaken the ability of the defense forces to bring back the missing Israeli Air Force pilot Ron Arad whose plane was shot over Lebanon in 1986.

Dirani and Obeid's attorney Zvi Rish said that the state has never before accused the two of being dangerous, adding that "*it is only doing so to justify holding them as bargaining chips*"¹⁹⁰. Moreover, Rish unveiled that Dirani had been deprived from his basic rights as a human being. He declared that his defendant has been brutally tortured during his

¹⁸⁹ Associated Press, 17 April 2000.

¹⁹⁰ Jerusalem Post, 19 April 2000.

imprisonment, where he was beaten, electrified and even raped on several occasions by his investigators of the Israeli internal security¹⁹¹.

In addition to Arad, three other Israeli soldiers were considered missing in action. They are Zachary Baumel, Yehudah Katz and Tzvi Feldman, who were captured during a battle with the Palestinian and Syrian forces near the Lebanese village of Sultan Yaqub in June 1982¹⁹².

The Lebanese officials tried to make the release of the Lebanese detainees in the Israeli prisons a condition for the recognition of the application of the resolution 425.

However, Anan totally ignored any relation between the detainees and the application of the resolution 425. He considered that the UN is only concerned with the release of the detainees held in the Khiam prison on the Lebanese territories, as one of the prerequisites to confirm the Israeli withdrawal¹⁹³.

The issue was presenting a challenge to the UN, specially when Anan came to Beirut and made an unprecedented move by visiting the Secretary General of Hizbullah Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

While Anan refused to speak after the meeting, Hizbullah issued a statement which included the following passage: “ *the cause of the Lebanese detainees in the Zionist prisons is an essential cause, it is in the core of Hizbullah’s and the Islamic resistance preoccupations. We do not accept, and can not be free as long as our brothers are detainees in the prisons. We consider this issue to be of maximum importance and we advice everybody to work for the release of all the Lebanese detainees without relating this case to any other case. We urge the*

¹⁹¹ From the text of a memo sent to the Secretary General of the UN Kofi Anan by the Lebanese National Committee for the Detainees in the Israeli Prisons. 20 July 2000.

¹⁹² Idem.

¹⁹³ Report of the Secretary – General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978) 16 June 2000 . P8. UN Documents.

*United Nations to play its political and humanitarian role in this regard*¹⁹⁴. The statement added that Anan promised to follow up this matter with attention.

D- Water

When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1978 it captured an essential portion of the Jordan river flow by including it as part of the security zone, the Hasbani and Wazzani rivers which arise in Lebanon and flow into Jordan via Israel.

Lebanon had always doubts about the Israeli intention concerning his waters. Zionist interest in the Lebanese waters goes back at least as far as the Paris Peace conference of 1919 when Chaim Wietzman wrote to the British Prime Minister explaining that because of its water requirements, a Jewish homeland in Palestine must include the Litani river¹⁹⁵ which flows and runs deep inside the lebanese territories (20 km from the borders with Israel).

In the 50's, Israeli Prime Minister Moshe Sharett recorded in his diaries that Moshe Dayan's plan for the control of the Litani river was "*to enter Lebanon, occupy the relevant territory, then the territory south of the Litani will be annexed to Israel and everything will fall into place*"¹⁹⁶.

Uri Savir, in his book "the process"¹⁹⁷, wrote "*two thirds of the water of the sea of the Galilee on which Israel depends comes from sources in the Golan Heights & southern Lebanon. We therefore made it clear to our Syrian counterparts that without a satisfactory solution to our water needs, there simply would be no peace agreement*".

¹⁹⁴ An – Nahar, 21 July 2000.

¹⁹⁵ Middle East labor Bulletin, Ronald Bleier, *Israel's appropriation of Arab water: an obstacle to Peace*, , spring 1994. P3.

¹⁹⁶ Idem.

¹⁹⁷ The process- 1100 days that changed the middleeast –p 279– uri savir was the Israeli-palestinian chief negotiator.

According to Thomas Naff of the University of Pennsylvania, Israel has conducted geological and topographical studies of the water in south Lebanon starting 1983. He adds that Israel began construction aimed at diverting the waters of the Wazzani. Moreover he asserts that Israel is already diverting water from the Litani river, as well as the Hasbani river¹⁹⁸.

In his report to the Security Council, Anan wrote that the Lebanese government considers that all the equipments and infrastructure related to water, established by Israel during its occupation of Lebanese territory, should immediately be disconnected as part of the Israeli withdrawal, within the framework of resolution 425. Moreover, Lebanon requested an immediate UN investigation into why the southern part of the Hasbani River runs dry¹⁹⁹.

E – conclusion

The Israeli army left Lebanon in a hurry , in a messy way, where many israeli newspapers described the images produced during the withdrawal as a humiliation resulted from Israel's hastier-than-planned withdrawal. photos and news agencies showed that the retreating Israeli army blew up its outposts and let some tanks, weapons and ammunition slip into the hands of Hizballah.

The collapse began one week after the Israeli Army withdrew from its first major base, handing it over to the S L A. right after that, Hizbullah sent hundreds of his supporters from villagers, mainly women and children, swarming toward the post, which the S.L.A. quickly abandoned. within two days, the S.L.A. fell apart, leaving large areas of the so called “Security Zone” in the hand of Hizballah. It became dangerous for Israel to keep troops in the

¹⁹⁸ Middle East International, Thomas Naff, Fall 1990.

¹⁹⁹ Report of the UN Secretary General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978). P.5. UN documents.

pockets they still held and Israel gave its remaining soldiers an order to leave with no delay, reports mentioned that members of one unit had to run six miles to reach the convoy sent to evacuate them.

As a result, Israel got its boys out of the south without settling many pending issues. It was obvious to many observers that these issues could be a source of trouble, especially when the other party is looking for a reason to extend the conflict. Time Europe wrote that Israel's withdrawal is no guarantee of a peaceful solution to the problem of southern Lebanon. "*There are still unresolved issues, in particular disagreement about where the border is, and the continued detention of Lebanese prisoners in Israel*"²⁰⁰. Israeli Army chief of staff Lieut. General Shaul Mofaz, when he was asked by Time whether the Lebanon affair was over, answered, "*What are you talking about, 'over'? It's a new situation, and we have to see what will be.*"

However, to be objective, these issues couldn't be resolved that easily by the Israelis, specially the water issue and the Chebaa Farms.

It's no secret that in the Middle East, oil is abundant but water is not, even though that water is a renewable resource, it is in short supply, and scarcity means a source conflict. Interestingly enough, according to some experts, oil wars are less likely than water wars²⁰¹.

The issue of Chebaa farms is not very far from this discussion, these farms which are on the slopes of Mount Hermon (the Lebanese side of The Golan Heights in other words), besides their strategic location, they're also a rich source of water. According to historian JC Hurewitz, the importance of the relation between Mount Hermon and its water was brought to light in 1919 in the memorandum submitted by the Zionist delegation to the Paris Peace Conference.

²⁰⁰ TIME EUROPE, June 5, 2000 VOL. 155 NO. 22

²⁰¹ Stauffer, Thomas R. Water and War in the Middle East: The Hydraulic Parameters of Conflict.

"The Hermon is Palestine's real Father of Waters and cannot be severed from it without striking at the very root of its economic life," the memorandum stated.

As for Chebaa farms, the same relation was also publicly stated. Mohamed Afif, director of Hezbollah's media relations, said in an interview with Al-Jazeera *"The water factor motivates us more to liberate the Chebaa Farms"*²⁰².

On the other hand, the time collapsed during the long occupation years has also added complexities to an already complex situation.

The reality of the Ghajar village with two third of its land in Lebanon and the rest in Israel, while members of the one family could be living on both parts of the village, has created a situation with humanitarian aspects stronger than any geographical demarcation, which dictated solutions that might not be in line with the political agendas of the parties. So for the time being, the Ghajar village is still united under the Israeli occupation. And there are villagers with Israeli identity cards living on a land recognized by the UN as Lebanese. (These villagers often demonstrated against the separation of their village²⁰³).

The complexity of the issues above proves that this withdrawal is leaving many unresolved issues that could be used by either side to extend the conflict, based on the interests of the parties, needless to say that it was in Syria's interests at that stage to keep the flame alive.

²⁰² Aljazeera MONDAY, APRIL 25, 2005, 4:43 GMT

²⁰³ An - Nahar, 6 July 2000.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of this paper says, “This thesis tries to answer two questions: why did Israel withdraw from Lebanon and how did this withdrawal happen after diplomacy failed to realize it”.

As a conclusion, yes, Israel withdrew its troops from Lebanon, not as a respect of the U N resolutions or under the pressure of the international community, but due to many other aspects and factors contributed directly to this major event:

- The determination and success of the resistance (Hezbollah military arm), in incurring major losses in the Israeli occupying forces.
- The public and official support of the Lebanese people together with their government to the resistance. This is the most important point, since the strength of Israel had always been to play on the odds and contrasts among the different Lebanese factions.
- The Syrian presence in Lebanon which created a bridge for a constant supply of the Iranian and Syrian rockets to Hezbollah.
- The regional and international (especially European) understanding of the liberation concept of an occupied land.

All these factors combined together, had made the Israeli stay in Lebanon a nightmare. David Kemhi, in his book “the account”²⁰⁴, described Lebanon as “*the Lebanese swamp*”, adding that the war on Lebanon was the one the most disputed, and that Israel got out of this

²⁰⁴ The last account, David Kemhi-(kemhi was the director general of Israeli ministry of foreign affairs in the 80s).

swamp...due to the high cost, and because the word of Lebanon became like a curse for Israel.

By withdrawing, Israel aimed to gain the international opinion to its side, and hoped that the United Nations Forces in Lebanon, together with the Lebanese army would secure the border after the withdrawal, which would corner Syria and deprive her from an important card (the Hezbollah & its resistance) during future negotiations.

However, the results were different from the calculations of the Israelis. Hezbollah was controlling the borders with Israel, launching attacks from time to time against Israeli forces in the disputed Chebaa farms. Thus, Syria was sending the message that it was still holding its cards & that it has the initiative.

The propaganda triumph for Hezbollah was undeniable. It defeated the strongest army in the Middle East. It also promised to continue to fight until it frees its prisoners held in Israel and to liberate the last meter of Chebaa Farms.

The other main factor in the lesson of Lebanon was that Israel could be forced to cede control of occupied territory if it were forced to pay a high enough price. This message was very well received in Palestine. The Al-Aqsa intifada started only a few months later, in September 2000, mainly because the late Yasser Arafat was encouraged to use violence by Israel's pull-out from Lebanon.

Under the circumstances, Israel had to look for different alternatives, so it adopted a new strategy that was initiated from the other geographic end of the borders, from the US, the UN, and Europe (mainly France), by lobbying against Hezbollah and Syria.

The Israeli efforts gave birth to the UN resolution 1559 on the 2nd of sep.2004²⁰⁵, which stated that the Security Council:

1. *Reaffirms its call for the strict respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout Lebanon;*
2. *Calls upon all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon;*
3. *Calls for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias;*
4. *supports the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory;*

In brief, this resolution, called for the withdrawal of the Syrian forces, disarms Hezbollah, and gives the control and security of the border to the Lebanese government and not Hezbollah.

The resolution found many supporters among many different Lebanese factions and parties, who became tired from the Syrian practices and corruption in Lebanon. They also saw that Hezbollah, after it succeeded in defeating the Israelis during the occupation, should lay down their weapons, rather than executing a regional agenda for Syria and Iran, and that the continuation of the attacks are not justifiable for few Lebanese prisoners in Israel or for the Chebaa farms.

The international and local pressure on the Syrians didn't succeed in translating the resolution into reality; however, after five months, one single but huge incident toppled the table.

On February 14 2005, ex-prime minister Rafic Hariri was assassinated via 1000 kgs of explosives in Beirut²⁰⁶. Hariri, a billionaire businessman and politician who had left office in October, had maintained a certain level of independence from Syria, while never moving toward total defiance. But he had shifted towards the opposition in the recent months, and had given a boost to calls for the withdrawal of Syrian troops.

²⁰⁵ S/RES/1559 (2004)

²⁰⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org>

Syria became a suspect of killing Hariri and the international calls to Syria to leave Lebanon became an ultimatum to withdraw its troops. These calls were accompanied by huge Lebanese demonstrations against Syria, which resulted in the full withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon in a humiliating way on the 24th of April 2005 (in less than 2 and a half months after the assassination of Hariri).²⁰⁷

The international and local pressure on Hezbollah were higher than ever, at the time when Syria is cornered (out of Lebanon and the Palestinian government of Hamas is under attack in Gaza), and Iran is under an even higher pressure regarding its nuclear projects.

In the midst of all these factors, on the morning of July 12 2006, Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and killed 8 others, announcing that the operation aims to the exchange of the soldiers for the Lebanese prisoners in Israel²⁰⁸. The Israeli reaction was far from what anyone expected, within hours, the Israeli jets started destroying the entire infrastructure in Lebanon, every bridge in the country, Beirut international airport, all the sea ports, electricity stations, fuel and oil reservoirs, 800 trucks, and 1200 civilians (65 victims, out of them 35 were children in a single raid on a shelter in the village of Qana), were killed during this fierce operation that lasted 33 days. Hezbollah, started retaliating with its rockets on the Israeli cities, and for the first time in Israel history, the city of Haifa (35 km & the 3rd biggest city in Israel) was targeted by Hezbollah rockets causing the death of many people in the city.

It was obvious that Hezbollah leadership was shocked by the Israeli reaction. Despite the disastrous and awful scenes of the Israeli ferocity, Hezbollah found itself isolated and cornered, simply because all the factors that lead to its victory in year 2000 have been reversed now:

²⁰⁷ <http://saroujah.blogspot.com>

²⁰⁸ <http://electronicintifada.net>

- The international community is totally against Hezbollah and its activities, after they had all expressed their support to the UN position that Israel has withdrawn from Lebanon according to resolution 425.
- Most of the Arab regimes want to see the end of Hezbollah, in order to keep this syndrome (revolutionary threat) away from their countries & palaces. Saudi Arabia was the first to announce that Hezbollah should bear the results of its actions. The same position was followed by Egypt & Jordan.
- The Lebanese government is not in favor anymore of any resistance activity. The prime minister of Lebanon announced the 2nd day that the government wasn't aware of the kidnapping and will not take any responsibility for those actions.
- Hezbollah doesn't have the support of the majority of the Lebanese people. Actually, all the non Shiite factions were against Hezbollah action.
- Syria is out of Lebanon, and the military supplies to Hezbollah now seem far from reaching his fighters.
- Another important factor that hasn't been given the importance that it deserves, is the September 11 attacks on the U.S. and later in Spain and threats to European countries. These attacks lead to zero tolerance from these countries towards any military movement that could be eventually used against their countries and interests, regardless of whether the activities of these movement are justified or not. These countries aren't ready to take any more chances, keeping in mind that Al-Qaeda and Oussama Bin Laden were nourished and trained in the beginning, by the same countries that are attacking them now.

In brief, it looked that it's a golden opportunity for Israel and every other country (except Syria and Iran), to get rid of Hezbollah. Even after 21 days of continuous bombing into Lebanon, the US secretary Condoleezza Rice was still refusing to ask Israel for a cease fire.

However, one important question remains, is it that easy to get rid of Hezbollah which is an ideology now rather than an armed group, in addition to the strong determination of its

fighters to fight to the end, taking into consideration the high skills of its members, and willingness to die for their cause.

The operational developments on the battle ground proved otherwise. Once again, Hezbollah was portrayed as a winner. The fierce war had ended, without destroying the physical infrastructure of the party, and failed to harm any of its leadership. This has created a huge dispute inside Israel, and the Israeli army commander Dan Halutz was dismissed from his duties and an investigation committee was created “the Winograd commission” to investigate the Israeli failure.

The Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, in his testimony, told the Winograd Commission that his decision to respond to the abduction of soldiers with a broad military operation was made as early as March 2006, four months before last summer's Lebanon war broke out. But the most important part of Olmert testimony, which also concludes the previous assumptions in this discussion, was that, he stated to the commission that he had decided in earlier meetings that *“Israel's goal in an operation would be the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559, which calls for the deployment of the Lebanese army along the Israeli border and the disarmament of Hezbollah”*²⁰⁹.

As a result, Israel's old policy of imposing solutions by using force has proven hollow and a case of wishful thinking, perhaps even self-delusion. It has also given bigger grounds and support to the extremist movements in the relevant countries, to Hezbollah in Lebanon, which swept the majority of the parliamentary seats in its areas of presence, and to Hamas in Palestine, where it won the majority of the parliament seats and formed the government despite the threats of the U.S. administration and the European Union to Boycott their government.

²⁰⁹ The israeli daily Haaretz, 8 March 2007.

On the other hand, the calls of these extremist movements to have Israel disappear from the world map, are just an illusion, and give Israel the necessary ground to keep on using over exaggerated force, keeping in mind that force will only bring opposite force, and extremism can't bring moderation.

The recent and present history, in the Middle East in particular, has proven that you can't eliminate these movements by dropping bombs on them. Even President Bush has (verbally) acknowledged this fact. In a Statement on the nomination of Karen Hughes to be under secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, Bush said "*Our long-term strategy to keep the peace is to help change the conditions that give rise to extremism and terror...*"²¹⁰

However, it was proven that this was a mere statement. On the contrary, practices have proven the opposite. Statistics show that "*The U.S. war on terror*" has cost more than \$502 billion since Sept. 11, 2001, at the time when the administration has requested \$93 billion this year for the Pentagon's counter-terrorism programs alone, and \$142 billion for 2008²¹¹.

It's no secret that if a small part of this amount was spent on treating the roots of extremism, which is nourished mainly on desperation and poverty, the results would have been much better. But another chapter would open here with a bigger question, is that the ultimate aim of the leading countries, which are also leading the arms export in the world?

The conclusion of the conclusion remains that what we've discussed, was only another round, in the longest conflict of our history, which will keep dragging as long as the diplomacy keeps failing to bring a final, just & fair solution to the middle east conflict, & in particular to the core of this conflict, the issue of Palestine.

²¹⁰ White house documents- 08 march 2005.

²¹¹ L.A. Times – 17 march 2007, by Josh Meyer.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this paper has been done independently and that this work is originally mine:

Wassef Serhan

Date

