

An Excerpt of Beirut Rules, by Fred Burton and Samuel Katz



BOOK ONE: THUNDER AND LIGHTNING

Chapter 1: THE PREAMBLE TO DISASTER

The shahada [martyrs] are the candles of society. They burn themselves out and illuminate society. If they do not shed their light, no organization can shine. — Iranian Ayatollah Morteza Mutaharri1

The Israeli military headquarters in Tyre was a seven-story high-rise situated inland from the sea, and the site from which most of Israel's security and intelligence operations in southern Lebanon were controlled. The building was the administrative nerve center for Israel Defense Forces units operating in the area, and it housed two companies of Border Guard policemen as well. The Border Guards, Israel's paramilitary police arm, were in Lebanon to maintain law and order in the towns and villages of southern Lebanon. The policemen represented the mosaic of Israeli society and included Jews, Druzes, Bedouins, and Circassians. Many of the Border Guard personnel spoke Arabic, and many had spent careers policing a hostile population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The building was more than just a military garrison. The Tyre facility was the Israeli intelligence hub in southern Lebanon. A'man, Israeli military intelligence, ran many of its human intelligence (HUMINT) operations. Handlers from the ultra-secretive Unit 504, the military intelligence unit that ran agents behind enemy lines, used the regional headquarters as a safe and comfortable location where assets could be debriefed and espionage endeavors coordinated.

The Shin Bet, Israel's domestic counterintelligence and counterterrorist agency, was also based inside the building. The Shin Bet was responsible for all counterterrorist investigations in southern Lebanon and for rounding up the last vestiges of Arafat's legions in southern Lebanon.

Business was booming for the Shin Bet. The basement holding cells were full of Lebanese and Palestinian men suspected of belonging to one popular front or another. The detained were often a remarkable source of information.

Many of the men serving inside the headquarters building were reservists – from Israel's citizen army, doing their annual thirty-day stint of call-up service. The reservists were a mixture of middle-aged men happy to have a few weeks away from wives and kids, and men young enough still to be in school, still trying to save enough to get married, and still holding on to dreams of lives out of uniform. Captain Dubi Eichnold, the commander of the Military Police investigative unit at the base, was preparing a small party for some of the officers that evening, November 11, 1982; it was to be a celebration to mark the halfway point of the reservist stint for him and his team.² A small feast, including snacks and soft drinks, was being readied for the party. Everyone was itching to go home.

Captain Eichnold was already sitting with a few of his fellow officers in the mess hall at 7:00 that Thursday morning. The officers were in full kit, battle rattle at their sides. An electric space heater failed to mitigate the bone-numbing cold and the officers wore their olive green winter parkas as they guzzled cup after cup of army-issue rocket-fuel-grade coffee. Upstairs, the Border Guard's morning garrison was getting ready for morning roll call. Downstairs, the prisoners in the holding cell had already eaten. Some were in the middle of morning prayers.

The military policeman standing guard outside next to a small embankment of sand bags could hear the clanking of metal forks scraping plastic plates and he smelled the eggs cooking. He hoped that someone would bring him a cup of coffee soon. A white Peugeot 504 appeared from the west, speeding toward the headquarters building. The rain had intensified. The sky darkened.

At 7:15 on the morning of November 11, 1982, the Israeli military headquarters in Tyre collapsed in a blinding flash of light, the seven stories reduced to rubble beneath a rising plume of black smoke.³ At the time, more than a hundred Israeli soldiers, policemen, and spies had been inside the building; many of those not killed instantly became trapped inside tiny air pockets, their bodies bloodied by the explosion and debris. The Israel Defense Forces had little experience in pulling survivors out of a building hit by a catastrophic blast – there had never been a need; a terrorist might throw a hand grenade into a crowded cinema, but he didn't demolish a building. Rescues were done painstakingly by hand. Combat engineers were flown in, and helicopters shuttled the wounded to awaiting trauma care thirty-five miles away at the Rambam Medical Center in Haifa. The dead were removed, the shattered bodies covered with coarse, olive-colored blankets. Rain created puddles that formed cement-like patches of caked-together blood and dust. By nightfall, the magnitude of the calamity was apparent: sixty-seven IDF and Border Guard personnel were dead, along with nine Shin Bet agents and fifteen local detainees. November 11, 1982, was one of the deadliest days in Israeli military history.

Few understood it yet, but the attack on the Israeli military headquarters in Tyre represented a new struggle for Lebanon's soul — and one that would be pursued with a new tactic, suicide bombing.

Young and impressionable, Ahmed Qasir was obviously infatuated by the powerful and indomitable men in camouflage fatigues and Ray-Ban sunglasses. He felt a sense of pride and privilege being in their company, and a sense of duty when they asked him to carry out small-scale reconnaissance sorties in and around Beirut, smuggling armaments and monitoring the movements of Israeli patrols. Qasir soon began to borrow his father's truck for daylong assignments. He never had a driver's license and his feet barely reached the pedals. His father never knew where he was going, or what he was doing. On the morning of November 11, Qasir disappeared—never to be heard from again. His parents were certain that he had been kidnapped – possibly killed – by Christian militiamen.⁵

Qasir's martyrdom should have been celebrated in Dir Qanoun an-Nahr. The old women of the village would have brought pots of food; the men, including village elders and the local imam, would have been huddled in the living room, drinking sweet tea with mint leaves and chain-smoking cigarettes while proudly gazing at a framed portrait of Ahmed Qasir displayed on a chair with red velvet cushions. But the notion of the boy's martyrdom had yet to be publicly revealed. The men who sent Ahmed Qasir on his mission, the men who purchased the Peugeot and wired it with explosives –including several members of Syrian intelligence and a few senior men who spoke Farsi – were able to convince the teenager that by blowing himself up, he would be re-enacting the sacrifice of Imam Hussein, the core of the Shiite faith, and that as a result he would secure his spot in paradise.⁶ Yet the facilitators of this new brand of terror wanted to keep the Tyre operation a secret. Ahmed's parents wouldn't learn of their son's fate until two and a half years later, when a shrine to the martyr was built in Ba'albek.⁷ They did not know what would have motivated the youngster to perpetrate such an act.

Tehran's emissaries tasked with introducing to Lebanon the cult of the suicide bomber, a tactic that had become a common weapon in the Iran-Iraq War, were determined to redraw the map of the Middle East, a region engulfed in the flames of fundamentalist Islamic fervor. Ahmed Qasir would be the first of what was to be a legion of martyrs fighting both Israel and the United States. November 11, 1982, would be known as the Day of Martyrs.⁸

There weren't supposed to be any martyrs, of course. Israel had never intended to be at war with Lebanon's Shiites. On the morning of June 6, 1982, five months before the attack on the HQ in Tyre, sixty thousand Israeli troops crossed into Lebanon in a three-pronged invasion to remove the Palestinian terrorist infrastructure that threatened the residents of northern Israel. The objective of the incursion, claimed Israeli defense minister Ariel Sharon, was to push Palestinian forces twenty-five miles to the north of the Israeli frontier. The Israeli operation was dubbed "Peace for Galilee."

The war had erupted like many Middle Eastern bloodbaths – with a spark: pro-Iraqi terrorists from the Abu Nidal faction shot and almost killed Shlomo Argov, the Israeli ambassador to London. In retaliation, Israeli warplanes attacked Palestinian terror targets throughout Lebanon; the Palestinians then launched rocket barrages against the towns and cities of Israel's north. The war to secure Galilee commenced.

Full-scale wars in the Middle East never ended the way the politicians and generals intended.

The assassination attempt on the ambassador in London was nothing more than a pretext. For years Israeli intelligence had been working with Lebanon's Maronite Christians to initiate a new regime in Beirut that would rid the country of the Palestinian terrorist presence and launch a new Jewish-Christian alliance to reshape the Middle East for generations. And now, with bullets fired by an Abu Nidal gunman, Israel had the instigation it needed to invade Lebanon.

Full-scale wars in the Middle East never ended the way the politicians and generals intended. Syria's president Hafez al-Assad considered Lebanon to be a province of Greater Syria, and had permanently garrisoned thirty thousand of his troops inside the country. During Lebanon's civil war, the Syrians had protected their interests with brutal and cunning force, intervening to help the Palestinians and the Christians when Syrian concerns were threatened. Now war in Lebanon meant that Israel and Syria would engage in open conflict.

The campaign was hard fought and bloody, yet the Israel Defense Forces advanced quickly and decisively. Palestinian forces that stood to fight were overwhelmed by the mechanized might of the Israeli military; Syrian forces – even with the latest and greatest armor, missile systems, and aircraft that the Soviet Union could provide – proved no match for Israel's technological superiority. The Syrians were humbled in open warfare, and the Israelis reached the outskirts of Beirut in a matter of weeks. In the attempt to rid the country once and for all of the armed Palestinian presence, the IDF laid siege to Beirut, trapping some fourteen thousand of Arafat's men in the western – Muslim – half of the city. American-led international diplomacy worked out a deal wherein international peacekeepers – Italian naval infantrymen, French paratroopers, and US marines – secured the evacuation of Palestinian forces from Beirut. The heavily armed Palestinians were forced to board ships destined for Algeria, Tunisia, Iraq, Yemen, and the Sudan. Israeli officers looked on from the hills above the city.

On August 23, 1982, Bashir Gemayel, the military commander and political leader of the Lebanese Phalange Party, was elected the country's new president. Even though he was the only candidate, Gemayel's election gave many in the West high hopes for Lebanon. Perhaps, American and European diplomats wished, the Lebanese people would be offered a brief respite from the endless cycle of violence. The international peacekeepers withdrew from Beirut on September 10, having completed their mission efficiently, and without incident or casualty.

Hope can be a fleeting currency in the Middle East – especially in a nation repeatedly torn apart by religious enmity and outside manipulation. No plan, no matter how cunning or virtuous, ever works in the Middle East without an insurmountable toll of bodies and generations' worth of misery that would have to be avenged. Israel's grand scheme for its troubled northern neighbor soon imploded with extensive – and unstoppable – collateral damage.

On September 14, the Lebanese president-elect was in the middle of an address to followers in his Beirut headquarters when the room – along with much of the building – was decimated by nearly a quarter ton of high explosives. Three weeks after his election, Bashir Gemayel was dead. A Christian operative working at the behest of Syrian intelligence agents had placed the bomb in an apartment directly above the central meeting hall where Gemayel was speaking. The blast, as one Christian woman would later state, did not kill a man but murdered a country.⁹

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Rumors soon spread that the Palestinians had been responsible for Gemayel's murder, and rumors were enough to sound calls for vengeance. Retribution came fast and with untold carnage. Christian militiamen from Beirut and southern Lebanon converged on the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps and in two days of butchery killed between 760 and 3,500 men, women, and children in cold blood. The international peacekeepers, still on ships off the Lebanese coast, were forced to return to Beirut, this time to protect the Palestinian and Muslim residents and to try – impossibly – to initiate law and order in a city that had seen neither since civil war had erupted seven years earlier. US marines were responsible for the southern tip of Beirut, including the international airport and the Shiite slums; the French and Italians patrolled West Beirut. Israeli forces, faced with the onset of an inescapable quagmire, withdrew to the hills outside the city.

Gemayel wasn't just another high-ranking casualty in Lebanon's bloody war of competing beliefs. And his death wasn't just a loss to stability in Lebanon. In fact, Bashir Gemayel was a highly placed – and highly paid – asset for the Central Intelligence Agency.¹² The CIA had countless assets in Lebanon, ranging from Palestinian terror chieftain Ali Hassan Salameh,¹³ the head of Black September and the architect of the Munich Olympics Massacre (his crypt, or code name, was MJ/ TRUST2), to lower-level Lebanese Christians, Sunnis, Druzes, and Palestinians, as well as Armenians, Kurds, and members of every other tribe and religious faction that made up the fractured glass that was Lebanese society. But with Gemayel's election, the president of Lebanon was to be Langley's man in the country.

Some men had altruistic motivations for working with the CIA; some had in mind a ticket to the States and an escape from the hell of post-civil war Lebanon. Men such as Gemayel and Salameh, however, were in it for the money—millions of dollars, according to reports. The money flowed from CIA Station **[Text Redacted]**, America's eyes and ears inside a colonial-style building in West Beirut that had taken shell and sniper fire during the civil war.

The man in charge was thirty-eight-year-old CIA Chief of Station Kenneth Eugene Haas – the top-ranking American spy in Lebanon. A native of Akron, Ohio, Haas had earned his PhD at Syracuse University before enlisting in the ranks of the CIA, where he became a distinguished operative, serving tours in Bangladesh, Iran, and Oman, among many other places.¹⁴ Bespectacled, with a neatly trimmed mustache and rugged Midwestern looks, Haas landed in Beirut as the capital, already reduced to rubble by civil war, was under relentless Israeli siege, hammered around the clock by artillery, air, and naval bombardment. It wasn't a normal tour by any stretch, and Haas' top asset, an invaluable source of intelligence for his CIA handlers and an intrinsic pillar of policy decisions, was now dead.

A fount of intelligence and influence **[Text Redacted]**, Gemayel had also been the heart and soul of Israeli intentions for Lebanon. Now both the United States and Israel were unsure how to fill such a gaping void. The United States, determinedly, seized the initiative to steer the country in a new and more stable direction. The Reagan administration pledged its unwavering backing – diplomatic, military, and intelligence – for the new Lebanese president, who just happened to be Bashir's younger brother, Amine. Rather than stepping back from the spiraling horror, the United States joined a long list of powers that had tried to fix the ethnic divides that plagued the country.

Under the accords of the 1943 Lebanese National Covenant, the **[Text Redacted]** office of the president was reserved for a Christian, the prime minister's office was the province of the Sunnis, and the position of speaker of the house was earmarked for a Shiite. The Shiites, constituting half of the Muslim majority in Lebanon, were traditionally the poorest and, as a result, the powerless bottom of Lebanese society. The balance of power – especially the numbers of men under arms – usually handicapped the Shiites in the jigsaw puzzle of Lebanese life. The Shiites – especially in the southern portion of the country – were hardworking but clannish, and they had suffered mightily under the yoke of the Palestinian guerrilla factions that controlled the area; the Lebanese Army, Christian-run and largely ineffectual, had little to do with the fortunes or freedoms of the Shiites living in the south. When Israeli forces invaded on June 6, many Shiite villagers greeted the IDF columns of advancing troops as liberators. A Christian-led local militia, the South Lebanon Army, or SLA, recruited Druze and Shiite villagers into its ranks to fight the Palestinians.¹⁵ But this was before the Syrian Military Intelligence Directorate, and the all-powerful Air Force Intelligence Directorate answerable only to President Hafez al-Assad, allowed the Iranian emissaries into the country to create a Shiite underground to battle the Israelis. The narrative that Israeli forces had liberated the Shiites of southern Lebanon would soon be forgotten.

The Tyre bombing highlighted just how little Israel's intelligence services controlled the Lebanese battlefield. So even though it was impossible for Israeli investigators sifting through the debris of the destroyed headquarters not to notice the mangled chassis of the Peugeot 504, and not to have found remnants of Ahmed Qasir, it was better to make no mention of any terrorist involvement. Investigators must have detected the residue from Czech-made Semtex, but admitting that a suicide bomber, one of the human cruise missiles that had come to personify the fanaticism of the Iranian Revolution, had come to the Israeli front lines would have been devastating for the Israeli public, already perplexed by the foreboding reality of a presence in Lebanon that appeared impossible to depart from. To this day the Israelis claim that the First Tyre Disaster* was not a terrorist attack. The Shin Bet website even claims that the "reason for the explosion was probably a gas leakage and inadequate planning and construction of the building. A probe was set up inquiring and deciding that the explosion had nothing to do with a terror attack since no explosives were found at the building or nearby."¹⁸ The Shin Bet did not want it known that nine of its best and brightest were killed by a new terror presence that had flown so blatantly below Israel's radar.

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In targeting the Israeli military and intelligence nerve center in southern Lebanon, the new Shiite entity had temporarily weakened Israel's ability to recover, react, and rebuild networks and files destroyed in the blast. **[Text Redacted]** The CIA Station in Beirut already had its hands full. There were explosions every day in the city and throughout the countryside; the blast in Tyre, with the exception of the death toll, was viewed as nothing out of the ordinary where massacres were commonplace. The new Station Chief was already overwhelmed by the aftermath of war and the presence of US marines as peacekeepers and US Army Special Forces teams advising the ineffective Lebanese Armed Forces.

* A second Israeli headquarters would be destroyed by a Hezbollah suicide bomber a year later. **[Text Redacted]**

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Receiving scant notice as the war in Lebanon progressed was the fact that five thousand Iranian Revolutionary Guardsmen had been flown into Damascus¹⁹ and then deployed across the border into eastern Lebanon, along the smugglers' routes usually reserved for arms merchants and poppy traffickers. While the Syrian president had no inclination to allow the Iranians, fresh off their zealous execution of an Islamic revolution, to start a full-scale war with the Israelis in his backyard (especially as his military was still reeling from the defeat it had been handed months earlier), Assad knew the value of presenting Israel with a proxy war of attrition. What's more, nine million tons of free Iranian oil every year sweetened the deal for Damascus.²⁰ Of those five thousand Revolutionary Guardsmen – all combat veterans of the Iran-Iraq War eager to ply their suicidal skills in a holy crusade against Israel – fifteen hundred were operatives from the Office of Islamic Liberation Movements who set up shop on the Syrian-Lebanese frontier. They possessed ample stores of cash, weapons, explosives, and vehicles. The first November rains signaled winter's arrival to the Beka'a Valley and southern Lebanon. Temperatures dropped, and the Iranian emissaries covertly

covered the back roads where they knew the Israelis didn't patrol.

On November 21, 1982, inspired and controlled by Iran, the emboldened vanguard of the armed Shiite movement in Lebanon established its immovable foothold in the country. At just after dawn that morning, a small force of Shiite militiamen, led by members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, marched into the Sheikh Abdullah Barracks, a sprawling Lebanese army base overlooking Ba'albek, and raised the flag of the Iranian Revolution in the blustering wind.²¹ Alongside it, militiamen raised a new flag, a yellow banner with green Arabic writing. The logo proclaimed Hezbollah, the Party of God, along with the image of a fist raising an AK-47 over the globe.

There was too much going on in Lebanon for the Americans – or the Israelis for that matter – to pay attention to the sudden appearance in the slums of southern Beirut of banners pledging allegiance to the Ayatollah Khomeini. The men speaking Farsi were invisible to the Western intelligence services.

Once again the Shiites had gone unnoticed.