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The Lebanon War 1982

The first Lebanon War was Israel's longest and most controversial war. In the mid-1970s, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) broadened its presence in Lebanon, establishing military training centers and escalating artillery and cross-border attacks on civilians in northern Israel. Following the attempted assassination of the Israeli ambassador in London, Israel attacked PLO targets in Lebanon on June 4, 1982. The PLO responded with rocket and artillery barrages, and Israel retaliated by sending ground troops into Lebanon, in a mission titled "Operation Peace for the Galilee."

While the original plan called for Israeli troops to undertake a 25-mile incursion to wipe out PLO positions in Southern Lebanon, Israeli troops on the ground quickly overran PLO positions, destroyed Syrian installations in the Bekaa Valley, and reached Beirut by June 9. After battles in West Beirut, the PLO surrendered and agreed to evacuate to Tunisia in September.

On September 16, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon and Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan permitted Israel's Lebanese allies, the Christian Phalangist forces, to enter the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila with the purpose of rooting out remaining PLO forces who had evaded evacuation. The Phalangists, however, brutally massacred Palestinian civilians in the camp. Many Israelis were horrified by the incident, and on September 24, 400,000 gathered in Tel Aviv at the first of many demonstrations to protest the Lebanon War. The Government-appointed Kahan Commission released its report in February 1983 finding Sharon "indirectly

responsible," and concluded that given the well-known Phalangist hatred of the Palestinians, he should have anticipated that they "were liable to commit atrocities." Sharon resigned as defense minister.

In 1983, Israel signed an agreement with Lebanon terminating the state of war between the neighbors. While the PLO state-within-a-state had been dismantled, Syrian troops remained in Lebanon and the Christian-dominated Lebanese Government was too weak to control rival factions from attacking each other and Israel. A year later, under pressure from the Syrian government, Lebanon reneged on its agreement and the country remained volatile. Israeli troops completed a phased withdrawal from Lebanon in June 1985, and created a 9-mile-wide security zone in southern Lebanon along the border. The zone was intended to shield Israeli civilian settlements in the Galilee from cross-border attacks, and facilitated the capture of many terrorists. However, many Israeli soldiers continued to be killed in the security zone by terrorist groups supported by Iran and Syria, particularly Hezbollah.

The high number of casualties incurred in the South Lebanon security zone sparked widespread debate within Israel. In March 2000, the Israeli cabinet voted unanimously for a full troop withdrawal from Lebanon by July. The expectation was that such a withdrawal would be part of an agreement with Syria and Lebanon. However, after Syrian President Hafez al-Assad refused to continue talks with Israel, such coordination was not possible, and Prime Minister Ehud Barak authorized a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon on May 24, 2000.

Israel remains in the Sheba Farms/Har Dov region, which it has held since the 1967 Six Day War. The area is recognized by the United Nations as Syrian, not Lebanese territory, and thus should be the subject of Syrian-Israeli negotiations. Hezbollah insists that it is Lebanese territory and frequently attacks Israeli troops in the area, as well as along the border, and occasionally launches rocket attacks against northern Israeli cities.