Chapter IV

CIVIL WAR, SYRIAN INTERVENTION AND THE ISRAELI RESPONSE
The Four Phases of the Civil War

The Lebanese Civil War which broke out in April 1975 following the Ayn al-Rummana incident, passed through a number of phases before the conflict was finally brought to a halt eighteen months later. For the purposes of this study the Civil War has been divided into four distinct phases with each phase having certain distinctive traits. The four phases are briefly discussed below following which an attempt will be made to analyse the Israeli response to the different phases of the Lebanese conflict.

(a) The First Phase - Battles in Beirut and Beyond, April-December 1975

During the first few months much of the fighting was centred on the capital city Beirut and involved the Kataib and the NLP's militia against the various NM militias. During this period the principal Resistance Organization Fath as well as PLO leaders refrained from allying themselves openly with the NM. Smaller Palestinian organizations, however, were actively involved in the fighting.

On 15 May Premier Rashid Solh resigned and in a surprise move President Franjieh appointed a military cabinet on 23 May under Nureddin Rifai, a former commander of the Internal Security Forces. The Army Commander Iskander Ghanem was made Defence Minister.¹ The appointment

of Rifai, a political non-entity was interpreted by the Lebanese Muslims as an attempt to undermine the power and prestige of the Muslim premiership. Muslim leaders of all sects came together in demanding the immediate resignation of the military cabinet. The powerful combined opposition of the Muslim community made it impossible for Rifai to continue for long. Rifai's military cabinet was forced to resign on 27 May and Rashid Karami, the sole candidate acceptable to the Muslims was asked by Franjieh to form a new cabinet. With the formation of Karami's six man 'Salvation Cabinet' fighting, which had been continuing all this while, temporarily subsided.

The relative calm was shattered in late August when fighting broke out in Northern Lebanon where the Tripoli-based 24 October Movement fought pitched battles with the Zghorta Liberation Army (ZLA) led by Tony Franjieh. Maronite leaders demanded that the army intervene to stop the battle. This stand was supported by Franjieh whose hometown was under siege. Recognizing that the army under Ghanem was likely to favour Zghorta, Karami refused to allow the army to intervene. It was only after the President had replaced Ghanem with Colonel Hanna Said did Karami allow the army to be deployed between Tripoli and Zghorta. Soon after its deployment the army began siding with ZLA allowing its militiamen to violate the ceasefire with impunity while

coming down heavily on the Nasserite group in Tripoli. Further disputes arose over the possible use of the army in Beirut when violence erupted there. On 17 September the Kataib and NLP militiamen initiated a full-scale attack on downtown Beirut. Souks were set ablaze by the massive shell fire while the attack devastated much of Beirut's commercial sector. The bombardment and destruction of commercial areas was intended to duplicate in Beirut the circumstances that prompted army intervention in Tripoli. Persistent calls by Maronite leaders for army intervention, however, met objections by Muslim leaders who insisted that the army could be deployed only if its command structure was overhauled to provide greater Muslim participation. The formation of a National Dialogue Committee (NDC) on 24 September failed to check the spiralling violence and in December some of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War took place in Beirut especially in the hotel district.

Towards the year end Beirut, was split into two sectors - one Christian and the other Muslim separated by a no-mans land. Throughout the country migration of


6. Petran, n.4, pp.182-84.
Christians from Muslim dominated areas and vice-versa also occurred on a large scale. Maronite leaders now began to openly discuss the possibility of partition i.e., setting up a separate Christian state in Mount Lebanon with the addition of the Christian sectors of Beirut.  

(b) The Second Phase: Siege of Palestinian Camps and Indirect Syrian Intervention, January-March, 1976

The new year began with a qualitative change in the nature of the Civil War. The Maronite militias had in the past refrained from attacking the Palestinian camps and in a way the conflict till now had been Lebanese in character. This was true despite the fact that some of the Palestinian organizations had from the outset not only trained but also supplied weapons to the various leftist and Progressive forces constituting the NM. The principal guerilla organization Fath had, however, tried not to commit its forces in any significant numbers to the successive battles that had taken place from April to December and kept the bulk of its forces deployed in the south.  

Thus from April to December, the PLO leadership tried to avoid large scale involvement and maintained that it was essentially a domestic conflict. All this, however, changed when


on 4 January the Kataib initiated a siege of two Palestinian camps, Tall al-Zatar and Jisr al-Basha. A week later the Kataib and NLP laid a siege of yet another Palestinian camp, Dubay, on the outskirts of Beirut.

There were basically two reason behind this Maronite move. First, the Maronite leadership wanted to draw the main body of the PLO forces into the conflict. Once this was accomplished Arafat would no longer be able to claim that the PLO was 'neutral'. It could be argued that the presence of 'foreign' Palestinian forces constituted an 'invasion'. Maronite leaders could then plead for 'internationalization' or more specifically for Western or Israeli intervention which would go in their favour. The second reason was purely strategic. The camps were strategically located along the exits from east Beirut commanding the main road to the central Metn region. Since September, access to this road had been blocked by Palestinian forces in the Tall al-Zatar and Jisr al-Basha camps. The Kataib viewed the blockade of their lines of communication as a military threat and the camps themselves as alien enclaves in a Maronite sphere of control.9

The siege of Tall al-Zatar and Jisr al-Basha and the fall of Dubay on 14 January forced the PLO to abandon its official stance of neutrality in the Civil War. In order to

prevent the fall of the two camps still under siege Fath began diverting the bulk of its fighting forces away from the south into the Lebanese war effort.10

The commencement of this new round of Maronite offensive produced extreme concern in Damascus; Syria agreed to a Palestinian request for a demonstration of support. On 19 and 20 January, armoured units of the Yarmouk Brigade of the PLA crossed the border from Syria and engaged in battles with the Christian militias in the Biqa valley.11 The Syrian move has to be analysed from the point of view of the developments that had been taking place at the regional level during the two years following the October war.

The move towards a second Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement had produced considerable alarm in Syria. The Agreement signed in September 1975 left Damascus totally isolated. The Syrian capability to confront Israel was extremely weakened once Egypt withdrew from the confrontation against Israeli occupation. Kissinger who had taken a position in favour of a second Israeli withdrawal from the Golan soon abandoned that objective in the face of Israeli intransigence. As Egypt abandoned its Syrian partnership, Damascus sought to construct alternative alliances. These

10. Cobban, n.8, p.68.
were meant to buttress its military defence, to give it the political stature needed to mobilize Arab pressures to check Egypt's separate course and to demonstrate to the US the futility of a partial peace that ignored Syrian and Palestinian interests. The construction of a block in the Arab East encompassing Syria's immediate neighbours who shared either a border with Israel (Lebanon and Jordan) or Syria's stake in ending the Israeli occupation (Jordan and PLO) was the most natural and immediately realizable alternative to the Egyptian partnership.12

It was in the light of this Eastern Front strategy that Syria had to formulate its policy towards the Lebanese Civil War. The conflict was viewed by the Syrian leadership both as an opportunity as well as a threat. Syria acted as a patron for a number of organizations represented in the NM. Consequently, gains scored by the NM in its conflict with the Maronites would certainly enhance Syrian leverage over Lebanon as well as over the PLO in Lebanon. However, should the conservative Christian forces gain an upper hand in the conflict, Syria would then come under strong pressure to intervene on behalf of the NM-PRM. Such an intervention could lead to a confrontation with Israel for which Syria

was ill-prepared. On the other hand a clearcut victory for the NM-PRM would have led to foreign intervention - either Israeli or US - on behalf of Christians. Given the complexity of the situation the Syrian policy was one of support to the NM while trying at the same time to defuse the crisis by working out a compromise solution acceptable to both the Muslims and Christians.

From April to December 1975, the Syrian Foreign Minister Abdul Halim Khaddam and the Chief of Air Force Naji Jamil made a number of visits to Lebanon to mediate between the warring sides. Syria's attempts to mediate, however, reached a deadlock when it became apparent that the Maronites were intent on giving the conflict a Lebanese-Palestinian colour and ultimately effecting a partition. Partition, however, was an anathema for the Syrians. It would have seriously jeopardized the Eastern Front strategy. First, the establishment of a Christian state over a part of Lebanon having close ties with Israel would have further weakened Syria's ability to confront Israel. Second, Syria felt that the disintegration of Lebanon would give Israel an opportunity to occupy Southern Lebanon, increasing thereby Syria's strategic vulnerability. The Israelis could engage the Syrians on the Golan Heights while at the same time undertaking a quick thrust at Damascus through the Biqa valley. Syria knew that it did not possess the capability to confront Israel on two fronts simultaneously.13

Apart from pragmatic considerations, there were certain sentimental reasons too for Syrian opposition to partition. Syrians had always regarded Lebanon as a part of Greater Syria. Though "explicit Syrian demands to reintegrate Lebanon or parts of it faded during the years, an implicit claim was maintained through the refusal to establish normal diplomatic relations with Lebanon." Syria does not have an embassy in Lebanon and there are no travel restrictions between the two countries. Given this lingering irredentism, in no case could Syria countenance the creation of a compact Christian state - a Maronite Zion - on a part of the Lebanese territory. Secondly a partition of Lebanon on religious grounds would have exposed "the conceptual and operational weakness inherent in the zealously espoused and highly publicised aspirational goal of a 'secular democratic Palestine'". Israel would then be in a position to argue that if the Arabs professing different religious faiths could not live in peace in one country due to their religious differences "why should the Palestinians and their Syrian mentors expect Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims and Christians to live harmoniously in a future secular state?"


Thus in early January as the threat of partition loomed large Khaddam declared that Syria would take over Lebanon if any attempt were made to partition the country. He said, "Lebanon used to be a part of Syria and we will restore it if we see any real attempt being made to partition it. Any move towards partition would mean our immediate intervention. Lebanon can either stay united or it will have to return to Syria".  

The despatch of PLA troops effectively foiled the maronite strategy to bring about a partition. The indirect Syrian intervention quickly shifted the Lebanese military balance in favour of the NM-PRM. By early February the whole country with the exception of East Beirut and the northern sector of Mount Lebanon was under NM-PRM control. Satisfied with the outcome of the PLA intervention Syria now sought to impose a political solution. On 21 January a three-man mediatory team composed of Khaddam, Jamil and Hikmat Sihabi, the Chief of Staff, arrived in Beirut to workout a ceasefire accord. A Syrian-sponsored ceasefire came into effect the following day and a Syrian-Lebanese-Palestinian Higher military Committee was set up to implement it. The Syrian mediators then set forth to devise

a programme to reform the Lebanese political system. A Syrian sponsored reform plan, known as the Constitutional Document was finally unveiled on 14 February.\textsuperscript{19}

(c) The Third Phase: Syria Changes Sides, April-May 1976

Syria's attempt to impose a political solution in Lebanon received a jolt when in March 1976, the Lebanese Army disintegrated. An incipient revolt had been brewing among the ranks of the army since January when the Air Force had been ordered by Franjieh to go into action against the NM-PRM forces. Muslims in the army had become demoralized by this action of the President. Shortly after the use of the Air Force, Lieutenant Ahmed al-Khatib had announced the formation of a Lebanese Arab Army (LAA). Khatib believed that the army under Franjieh had lost its neutral and secular character and was now only an instrument to serve Christian interests.\textsuperscript{20} He was soon joined by Major Ahmed Mimari and Major Salim Hamada and by mid-February they had won over a large number of recruits. On 11 March Brigadier Aziz Ahdab, Commander of the Beirut barracks seized the capital's radio and T.V. stations, proclaimed himself Provisional Military Governor and declared a state of emergency. Holding Franjieh responsible for the situation which had led to the formation of LAA, Ahdab demanded his

\textsuperscript{19} For details of the Constitutional Document see \textit{Arab Report and Record}, no.3, 1-14 February 1976, p.78.

\textsuperscript{20} Deeb, n.18, pp.83-84; Gilmour, n.3, pp.132-33.
resignation and the election of a new President. Khatib who had supported Ahadab's action now accelerated his efforts to strengthen the LAA. A 'battle of the barracks' thus ensued in which Muslim and Christian soldiers seized garrison towns and heavy equipments belonging to the army.

The NM viewed the disintegration of the army as a propitious development. Junblatt had remained dissatisfied with the Syrian sponsored constitutional document. The proposed reforms contained therein were much below the NM's expectation. The disintegration of the army now provided the NM an opportunity to take over power and bring about a total change in the sectarian political system. Junblatt believed that an alliance with LAA together with NM-PRM forces was capable of achieving that goal. As he later explained:

We could not let slip this historic opportunity finally to transform these confessional and outdated institutions into truly secular and democratic ones. A revolution is an unforgiving affair; the propitious moment has to be seized immediately (before) victory comes within your reach. True, there is something adventurist about the whole thing, but then life itself is a calculated and deliberate adventure.


22. See Arab Report and Record, no.5, 1-15 March , p.153

Junblatt came out in support of the LAA and with its assistance launched a fresh offensive against Maronite positions in Beirut and Mount Lebanon.

Syria, however, shared none of Junblatt's enthusiasm. From the Syrian viewpoint it was essential to restore political stability in Lebanon under conditions that would ensure the Baathist regime's ability to steer, shape and direct the course of Lebanese politics. A radical provocative government under the leadership of the intrasistent Kamal Junblatt would in all probability lead to an erosion of Syrian influence in Lebanon. Such a state would also have weakened the Syrian hold over the PRM, a hold which Syria was attempting to tighten in the light of its desire to play the Palestinian 'card' during future negotiations with the Israelis and Americans. Moreover, Syria felt that were the NM to achieve a decisive military victory, it would certainly have led to an Israeli intervention. Finally, Syria believed that a decisive military victory would leave the Maronites permanently embittered.

As President Assad told Junblatt:

...this is an historical opportunity to re-orient the Maronites towards Syria, to win their trust and to make them realize that their source of protection is no longer

24. In a speech to members of the newly elected Syrian provincial councils, on 20 July 1976 President Assad repeatedly referred to the dangers of foreign, particularly Israeli intervention had Syria allowed the NM to proceed with its military campaign against the Christians. For the text of this speech see Rabinovich, n.7, pp.183-218.
France or West.... I cannot allow you to defeat the Christian camp; they would be permanently embittered.

As fierce fighting once again engulfed Lebanon, Syria tried to soften Junblatt's stand. With regard to NM's demand for the resignation of Franjieh, Syria prevailed upon the latter to agree to a constitutional amendment arranging the early election of his successor. However, so intent was Junblatt upon securing a military solution that he was no longer prepared to heed the Syrian advice of restraint. As the military situation for the Lebanese Front became increasingly desperate, on 9 April forces of Saiqan as well as some Syrian regulars entered Lebanon in support of the Christian militias. With the Syrian intervention the reversal of the military situation began and the possibility of a Christian military defeat diminished.

Following the entry of the Syrian army there was a brief lull in fighting during which period the Syrian-backed candidate Eliyas Sarkis was elected to the Lebanese Presidency.


26. Article 73 of the Lebanese Constitution required a Presidential election to be held not more than two months before the expiry of an incumbent's tenure which in Franjieh's case was 23 September 1975. Therefore, the new elections could be held no sooner than July. Under the new amendment, a presidential election could be held six months prior to the expiry of an incumbent's tenure which meant that elections could be held in April

The NM had boycotted the Presidential elections and immediately after Sarkis' election, a new round of conflict flared up in the country.28

During the initial phase of the break between Syria and NM, the PLO leadership had maintained a cautious attitude trying to play the role of a mediator. But as Syrian involvement on the side of the Lebanese Front deepened the PLO leadership began to feel apprehensive regarding Syrian intentions in Lebanon. Fath in particular resented the way in which PLA and Saiqa troops were being used to serve Syrian policy objectives in Lebanon. In May as heavy clashes took place and Syrian-sponsored Palestinian units engaged in fighting on the side of Christian militias, Fath started siding increasingly with the NM-LAA forces. Soon a rift developed in the PRM with the pro-Syrian Saiqa forces on one side and the Fath and Rejectionist guerilla organizations headed by the PFLP on the other.29

(d) The Fourth Phase: Direct Syrian Intervention and an All Arab Settlement, June-October, 1976

Having failed to impose its will on the NM and a majority of the Palestinians with the help of the limited


29. See Deeb, n.18, pp.109-12, for the reasons behind the PLO decision to align with the NM and oppose the Syrians.
PLA and Saiqa forces, Syria now decided to launch a full-scale offensive against its erstwhile allies in Lebanon.

The Syrian offensive began on 31 May 1975 when a Syrian armoured column consisting of 2000 troops and sixty tanks entered Lebanon. The following day 4000 additional troops backed by two hundred tanks advanced in eastern Lebanon through the Biqa valley. Soon the strength of Syrian troops in Lebanon was doubled and total number of Syrian and pro-Syrian Palestinian troops rose to 25,000. 30

The Maronite leadership welcomed the Syrian intervention while Junblatt and Arafat turned to the Arab world asking for its support against Syria. Under Arab pressure Syria agreed to a meeting of the Arab Foreign Ministers on 9 June to deal with the Lebanese conflict. The meeting ended with a call for immediate ceasefire and the formation of a token Arab Security Force (ASF) "in order to preserve security and stability in Lebanon" and replace the Syrian troops. 31 Syria's agreement to the despatch of the Arab Security Force was partly the result of Arab pressure and partly the hope that it would be able to crush the NM-PRM combine before the arrival of the Arab Security Force. 32


32. The first contingent of the Arab Security Force arrived in Beirut on 21 June 1975. They were composed of 5000 Libyan and 500 Syrian troops. Saudi and Sudanese troops arrived a week later. The project soon got bogged down in rhetoric and political manoeuvrings. Protracted negotiations over its composition and deployment gave the Syrian army time to reorganize and launch fresh offensive against the NM-PRM.
In the meantime, the Maronite militias with Syrian backing initiated a second assault on the two main Palestinian camps Tall al-Zatar and Jisr al-Basha. While Jisr al-Basha fell to its attackers towards the end of June the fighting over Tall al-Zatar continued for many more weeks. Syrian pressure against NM-PRM forces in many parts of the country drained the latter's energies preventing them from mounting an effective defense of the camps. After a siege of fifty-two days, Maronite militias finally over-ran this camp on 13 August amidst scenes of unprecedented savagery.33

The fall of Tall al-Zatar produced extreme concern in Riyadh.34 On 15 August Saudi Arabia along with Kuwait called for a summit meeting of the Arab League in mid-October to take stock of the deteriorating situation in Lebanon. To assure its preferred military and political outcome Syria realized that it would have to intensify its military operation against the NM-PRM before other Arab states constrained its action. Syria waited for Sarkis to assume the office of the President on 23 September 1975 and then launched a new military offensive against the NM-PRM forces from most of their strongholds.35

In mid-October while the fighting continued the Saudi King Khaled invited five Arab leaders for an emergency conference to be held in Riyadh. (These were President Assad, Sarkis, Sadat, Arafat, Prince Sabah of Kuwait.) The six leaders as members of the Arab League met in a limited Arab Summit in Riyadh from 16-18 October 1976. The mini-summit then worked out a series of agreements to resolve the Lebanese crisis. It called for an immediate ceasefire and the establishment of a 30,000-man Arab Deterrent Force (ADF) under the command of President Sarkis. The required forces would be formed by strengthening the ASF already in Lebanon in agreement with the Lebanese President who would be free to determine the size of each contributing country's force. The Riyadh resolutions were then ratified by the full plenary summit of the Arab League in Cairo on 25 and 26 October.36

The Riyadh and Cairo Summit Conferences amounted to a partial victory for Syria. It legitimized Syria's continued military presence in Lebanon. Syrian units made up most of the ADF and the only factor restraining Syria's freedom of action in Lebanon was an ADF coordination committee composed of representatives of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Kuwait besides the Syrians.

36. For the text of the Riyadh and Cairo Resolutions see Arab Report and Record, no.20, 16-31 October 1976, pp.651-52.
By the end of 1976 a relative calm descended on Lebanon as the Civil War gradually came to an end. Though tensions continued to linger throughout the country, the ferocity of violence of the past eighteen months subsided.

(ii) Syrian Intervention in the Civil War and the Israeli Response

"The Lebanese Civil War was political manna to the Israelites."37 The breakdown of national consensus and the collapse of the Lebanese state could not but have caused immense satisfaction to the Israelis. A short while after the onset of the civil war a special committee was created in Israel in order to deal with the situation in Lebanon. The participants in this committee included Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Foreign Minister Yigal Allon, Defence Minister Shimon Peres, Minister without Portfolio Yisrael Galili, Chief of Staff Mordechai Gur, Head of the Mossad, Head of the Military Intelligence Service (AMAN) and some senior officials from the Defence and Foreign Ministries.38

During the first few months of the civil war, with the Christian camp quite clearly on the offensive, Israel felt quite satisfied with the military developments


in Lebanon. This satisfaction, however, soon gave way to alarm with emerging signs of growing Syrian involvement in the Lebanese conflict.

Syria has always been viewed by Israel as the most hostile and radical of all the confrontation states. Following the Syrian rejection of Sinai II, it was perceived as intent on forming an hostile alliance against Israel. Syrian activities in Lebanon, therefore, aroused deep Israeli suspicion. As the patron of Palestinian guerilla organizations as well as the NM, Syria was seen by Israel as scheming to bring Lebanon under its hegemony.\(^{39}\) The first explicit warning that Israel would respond militarily in the event of large scale Syrian intervention in Lebanon was made by Premier Rabin on 31 October 1975.\(^{40}\) A little while later the Israeli Chief of Staff, Mordechai Gur, said during a lecture he gave at the press club Beit Sokolov: "If an Arab, and particularly a Syrian force, enters Lebanon, it would be a matter of great military significance. It would be another front against Israel in an area that is sensitive ...and we should be obliged to make some reply". Gur made a distinction between a situation arising from the conflict in Lebanon "in which she remained independent" and a situation leading to a geopolitical change. A Syrian

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39. Ibid., p.31.

military presence in Lebanon according to Gur would constitute a clear geopolitical change in the situation and would oblige Israel to respond. He added: "We must make sure that Lebanon does not become a confrontation country." 41

The warning given by the Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam in early January 1976 to the Lebanese Front that Syria would take over Lebanon if they persisted in their drive towards partition immediately heightened Israeli concern. The Israeli Defence Minister Shimon Peres declared that any Syrian intervention in Lebanon "cannot leave Israel indifferent". Israel would "have to consider taking steps". 42

Early in January 1976 the Maronite militias went on an offensive and laid siege to various Palestinian camps. Syria decided to back its diplomacy with a show of force and sent in the PLA to relieve the besieged NM-PRM forces. The PLA intervention further heightened Israeli concern regarding Syrian moves in Lebanon. There were reports that Israeli troops backed by armour were massing along the border with Lebanon and the IDF on the Lebanese frontier was placed on full alert. 43 As tension mounted the American government got in touch with both the countries in a

bid to defuse the crisis. American reassurance to Israel that Syria would not intervene directly in the conflict was instrumental in restraining Israel. Syria, on its part, not wishing to provoke Israel any further quickly moved to bring about a political resolution of the Lebanese conflict once the military situation on the ground had been reversed in favour of the NM-PRM forces.

In February and March Syria intensified its efforts aimed at working out a political compromise. However, they failed due to the NM-PRM opposition to the Syrian sponsored constitutional reforms. The disintegration of the Lebanese Army in March further emboldened the NM which now insisted on a total military victory over the Lebanese Front and a complete overhauling of the Maronite dominated sectarian political system. As the NM demands were incompatible with the Syrian objectives in Lebanon, a rift began to develop between Syria and her allies in Lebanon. A new alliance between the Maronites and Syria began to consolidate during this period. Assad began to contemplate direct intervention against his erstwhile allies in order to discipline them but he could not proceed without American assurance that Israel would be restrained from counter-intervention.

Syria began to seek American support through its contacts in Washington for the projected Syrian military intervention. The US was requested to restrain Israel from

intervening once the Syrian army entered Lebanon. Syria repeatedly emphasized that it was being requested by President Franjieh, the Shamunists and the Phalangists to intervene in the conflict. 45

Although the US was opposed to foreign intervention in Lebanon, in this particular case there was a convergence of American and Syrian interests. Both feared the likelihood of a transformation of Lebanon into a radical Arab state which would have a destabilizing effect on the region. The US in particular felt that the emergence of a radical regime in Lebanon would adversely affect the American-sponsored peace process now underway. Since Syria alone was capable of restoring order in Lebanon, the US agreed to the projected Syrian move in Lebanon. 46 In March 1976 the US government got in touch with Israel in order to communicate the Syrian intentions and discuss the possibility of evolving a joint American-Israeli strategy vis-a-vis Lebanon. In the face of American mediation, Israel became increasingly prepared to accept a Syrian intervention provided it would be directed against the NM-PRM forces in Lebanon. On 24 March, Israel communicated to the US its tolerance threshold on Syrian intervention. These were a set of conditions, known as 'red lines', laying down the geographical as well as functional limits beyond which Syrian

45. Evron, n.38, p.46.

activity in Lebanon would not be allowed to escalate.\(^47\)

Though the 'red lines' agreement has never been officially published by Israel as it was a secret understanding, it is generally believed to have included the following.\(^48\)

(a) Syria was not to station SAM Missiles on Lebanese territory;
(b) It was to respect the rights of the Lebanese Front;
(c) Israel was permitted open skies above Lebanese territory;
(d) Syrian units were not to be deployed south of a line stretching from Zahrani on the Mediterranean to Mashki in the Biqa Valley (see Map 3); and
(e) Israel was to be given a 'free hand' south of this Zahrani-Mashki line.

The acceptance of Syrian intervention in Lebanon had a number of advantages for Israel. First, Israel was spared from undertaking a costly and large-scale military operation itself in order to save the Christians from defeat. Moreover, a large-scale Israeli military action in Lebanon at that point of time would have in all probability jeopardised the interim settlement with Egypt and reoriented the latter

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47. Evron, n.38, p.46.

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Map 3
The 'Red Line'

towards a renewal of military activity. Second, Israel calculated that if a part of Syrian military resources were diverted to the Lebanese conflict, Syria's ability to confront Israel in a war would be reduced as the Syrian forces on the Golan would be weakened. "The Israelis were quick to perceive that it rather entailed a dispersion of Syrian military energies and logistical resources in a potential "Vietnamese" situation. Such a situation absolved the Israelis from the task of making blatant moves that could create unwanted international repercussions." Third, Israel expected that a Syrian intervention in Lebanon would impose severe financial burdens on the country's already weak economy compelling the Assad regime to turn to the conservative Arab states in the Gulf for aid. This in turn would help reduce the Syrian militancy. Fourth, Israel anticipated that a long drawn-out presence in Lebanon would weaken the morale of the Syrian army as well as foster indiscipline and corruption within its ranks.

49. It should be kept in mind that it was in Israel's security interest to detach Egypt from the line-up of confrontation states. Neutralization of Egypt in the Arab-Israeli conflict would rule out a serious Arab war option for many years to come. The removal of the Egyptian military forces in one full sweep would reduce Arab capabilities by almost two-thirds. While Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq might contemplate military action against Israel's other borders, they would undoubtedly run a great risk of an overwhelming retaliation.

50. Khalidi, n.37, p.92.

51. Yaniv, n.48, p.60.
Finally, the Syrian action was bound to lead to deep divisions within the Arab world. As one political commentator stated after the large-scale entry of Syrian army in Lebanon:

Peace and quiet are now obtained on Israel's frontier, the Arab World is fragmented... and the dispute between Syria and Egypt is a source of contentment for Israel, as is the dispute between Syria and the PLO which affects policy in Damascus and bolsters relatively moderate views there. 52

Thus on April 1976 as the first limited entry of Syrian troops took place, the Israeli reaction was low-key with the Israeli concern being focused only on the south. The recognition by Israel that there was indeed a commonality of interest in Lebanon was publicly voiced by Rabin who observed: "Syria is currently in a state of war with Fath. Its forces killed last week in Lebanon more Fath elements than the Israeli army has killed in two years". 53 During the summer of 1976 Syria further reinforced its drive against the NM-PRM. Increased Syrian pressure against the NM-PRM ultimately activated the other leading Arab states. This resulted in the Riyadh and Cairo conferences where a compromise was worked out in which Syria attained most of its objectives. During this period Israel could not but have watched with satisfaction Syria actively aiding the Maronites and vigorously suppressing the NM-PRM forces.


53. Quoted in Cooley, n.28, p.41.
(iii) The Development of Autonomous Christian Enclaves in Southern Lebanon

While agreeing to a limited Syrian military intervention in Lebanon as a temporary and expedient measure, Israel was at the same time building up an extensive network of contacts with Maronite leaders, supplying the Maronite militias with huge quantities of arms and ammunition and laying the groundwork for the de facto annexation of parts of Southern Lebanon.

During the first few months of the Civil War, the Maronite group having particularly close links with Israel were the Shamunists. As early as September or October 1975 Israel had established contacts with Dany Shamun, leader of the Tiger Militia. Contacts with the Maronites were gradually broadened in early 1976 as extensive links began to develop with the most powerful Maronite political group in Lebanon - the Phalangists. In March 1976 the Phalange secretly sent an emissary to Israel who met some of the top Israeli leaders. The Israeli government reciprocated by sending its own two emissaries - high ranking Israeli intelligence officers. A secret meeting was held between these two intelligence officers and the two sons of Pierre Jumayil, Amin and Bashir on an Israeli missile boat anchored

outside of Jounieh harbour. The first high level meeting between the Israelis and Maronites took place in April 1976 when the Israeli Premier Rabin and Defence Minister Peres met with Kamil Shamun and then Pierre Jumayil aboard an Israeli gunboat off the coast of Jounieh. At this meeting Israel undertook to supply the Lebanese Front with foodstuffs, fuel, ammunition and weapons. The IDF would undertake to help the Lebanese Christians help themselves by training Lebanese personnel who would be transported for that purpose into Israeli territory. (This was to be done in order to avoid direct Israeli involvement in the actual fighting on Lebanese soil). Very soon after this high level meeting, more than a thousand Christian militiamen were sent via Cyprus to Israel for training. There was also a significant increase in the volume of weapons-delivery to the Christian militias. According to a Western source the total Israeli aid to Lebanese Christians during the Civil War amounted to $100 million out of which $35 million was direct and the rest the cost of such services as naval blockade and air patrols along the Lebanese coast. The Israeli military aid included the provision of 12,000 rifles, 5,000 machine guns and 110 tanks.  

56. Randall, n.54, pp.201-3.  
secret parleys with different Maronite groups continued throughout 1976 and small delegations of Israeli military and intelligence officials undertook frequent trips to Lebanon to assist in the planning and implementation of battlefield strategies.58

Another important facet of the Israeli policy during the Civil War was its covert links with the Christian residents of Southern Lebanon. The village of Kleia in the eastern sector of the Lebanese-Israeli border with a population of about 6,000, mainly Maronites, was the first to initiate contacts with Israel towards the end of 1975. When the Lebanese army disintegrated in March 1976, most of the army units in the South joined the anti-establishment LAA. The inhabitants of Kleia, however, refused to declare allegiance to the LAA and appealed to Israel for assistance. Israel responded by extending humanitarian as well as military aid. It offered to house the displaced residents of Kleia in temporary camps inside Israel, provided them with medical assistance and even permitted them to work in the Upper Galilee region. The IDF, meanwhile, set about putting in place a small Lebanese Christian militia for the defence of the Christian villages in the South which were willing to cooperate with Israel.

During the spring and summer of 1976, as cooperation between the residents of Kleia and Israel intensified, the

58. See Schiff and Yaari, n.55, pp.19-22.
latter sought to extend its influence to other Christian villages in the South. The village of Rmeish in the central sector and Alma as-Shaab in the western sector soon became the recipients of direct Israeli assistance, both humanitarian as well as military (see Map 4). The IDF soon created a South Lebanon Command or ADAL (in Hebrew: Ezor Drom Levanon) headed by Colonel Benyamin Ben-Eliezer with its headquarters in Metulla to look after Israel's ties with the Christians of the South.59

The humanitarian aspect of the cooperation between Lebanese Christians of the South and Israel was made public in June 1976 when Israel officially inaugurated its 'Good Fence' policy. Under it field clinics were set up for the Lebanese along the frontier at Metulla, Dover and Hanita. Over a period of one year, nearly 30,000 Lebanese received medical aid at these clinics. Serious cases which could not be attended to there were invariably sent to Israeli hospitals for treatment. Israel also began to provide Lebanese border villages with water, food and fuel, and Israeli agricultural officers offered free counselling to the South Lebanese farmers. Lebanese were also taken on conducted study tours of Israeli farms. Israeli merchants purchased 300 tonnes of Lebanese tobacco valued at $447,000 and a large number of Lebanese commuted daily to Israel for work. Lebanese residents were allowed to visit relations

Map 4
South Lebanon Border Towns and Villages

in Israel and Israeli Maronites were allowed to visit their relatives in Southern Lebanon. A bi-weekly bus service was also started and a mobile postal unit accepted mail for despatch via the Israeli postal system.\textsuperscript{60}

Needless to say that there were a variety of motives behind this Israeli programme of providing humanitarian aid to the residents of South Lebanon. First, Israel hoped to create conditions that would make it impossible for Palestinian guerillas to return and resume operations in Southern Lebanon. Second, Israel wished to consolidate its influence among the population of the South, and especially among the Christians. Third, this policy also represented the cultivation of proxies to promote Israeli objectives in the South and for the expansion of Israeli influence as far north in Lebanon as possible. Finally, the 'Good Fence' assured a steady and detailed flow of information about the Palestinians and the course of the war to Israeli intelligence.\textsuperscript{61}

(a) \textbf{Appointment of Major Saad Georges Haddad}

The fledgling Christian militia that Israel had clandestinely set up in the South required a leader who could command the respect of his men and give it a sense of purpose and direction. For this, Israel turned to Saad

\textsuperscript{60} Misha Louvish, "Israel" in Colin Legum, ed., \textit{Middle East Contemporary Survey}, vol.1, 1976-77 (Tel Aviv,1978), pp.470-71

\textsuperscript{61} Cooley, n.28, p.46.
Haddad, a Major in the Lebanese Army. Haddad was considered ideal for the job due to a variety of reasons. Born of a Roman Catholic father and Maronite mother in the Southern town of Marjayoun, Haddad had received his commission in the Lebanese Army as a second lieutenant in 1960. He had become a Major in 1974 and was widely admired by the Christians of the South. Haddad was well known for his anti-Palestinian and chauvinist Christian views. At the start of the Civil War in 1975, Haddad was serving in Marjayoun as the second-in-command to the sector commander, the commanding officer of the eastern sector. When the Lebanese army disintegrated in March 1976 Haddad moved north to Beirut and joined the Christian controlled Trabulsi barracks.

In October 1976, Haddad was approached by Lieutenant Adnan Homsi, a native of the South who was working for Israel with the offer to head the Israeli controlled Christian militia in the South. Haddad accepted the offer and in November went to Aqua Marina, the Christian controlled port in Jounieh, from whence he was transported by an Israeli patrol boat to Haifa. After a two month stay in Israel, during which time he was introduced to high ranking officers of the IDF, Haddad was finally appointed officer-in-charge of the three Christian enclaves around Kleia, Rmeish and Alma-as-Shaab in the eastern, central and western sectors.

62. Hamizrachi, n. 59, pp. 69-70, 73.
Soon after the appointment of Haddad, there was a rapid expansion in the size of the enclaves, as one by one neighbouring Shiite villages were systematically brought under Israeli subjugation. Dir Mimas, Tel Lubia, Kila and the village of Adeisse adjoining the eastern enclave were captured in quick succession by Haddad's militia. 63 El Khiam with a population of twelve thousand was now the only place left in the area that had not been taken over by Haddad's militia. From a purely geographical point of view the town's inclusion in the enclave was of utmost importance. The Shiite population of the town was sympathetic to the Palestinian and LAA forces stationed there, denounced the links between the enclaves and Israel, and supported military attacks against the enclaves. Preparations for the capture of El Khiam started in late January and on the 19th of February 1977, Haddad's militia equipped with Israeli armour and backed by Israeli artillery moved against the town. Outnumbered and outgunned, the LAA-PLO forces defending the town surrendered after battle. 64

(b) Military Setbacks

The Christian enclaves which had been established in the central sector of the Lebanese-Israeli border consisted

63. Ibid., pp.84-87.
64. Ibid., pp.88-90.
of four villages, Rmeish which was the largest followed by Ein Ibel, Dibel and Kosah. A few Shiite and mixed Shiite-Christian villages lay between them which cooperated off and on with the Israelis. To the west and just on the other side of the Israeli border lay the village of Alma as-Shaab around which had developed the western enclave.

In contrast to the situation in the eastern enclave defence in the central and western enclaves was relatively lax as there were very few professional soldiers. Until the arrival of Haddad, the lack of a recognized leadership had made it impossible to organize a defensive system among the villages or to develop an overall local strategic attitude, either militarily or politically. With the appointment of Haddad as the overall leader of the three zones, things began to change.

Haddad helped the Israelis in organizing the defences of the central and western enclaves and in the setting up of a unified militia for all the three sectors. Aggressive armoured patrols were sent from these enclaves to the neighbouring villages like Naqoura, Deheira, Yarin and Yaroun. The patrols led to frequent skirmishes between Haddad's militia and the Lebanese and Palestinian fighters. The skirmishes reached a climax in August 1977 when a patrol under George Farah, the local commanding officer in the western enclave attacked Yarin. The PLO and their
allies had a strong presence in Yarin and during the past few weeks had blocked the South Lebanon highway preventing the flow of traffic between the central and western enclave. During the exchange of fire a number of volunteers from Somalia who had joined the PLO were killed. Farah was unable to storm the PLO stronghold and had to retreat. He mounted another attack on Yarin a few days later but his force came under heavy fire from a detachment of Somalis. Farah was hit in the head and died shortly afterwards. The attackers retreated to Alma as-Shaab which was by then itself being heavily shelled.65

The military situation in the eastern enclave had also deteriorated during the past few months. In April the LAA-PLO forces attacked Taibe which had been taken over by Haddad's militia and drove out the Christian forces from the town.66 Haddad's militia launched a counter-attack shortly thereafter but his men ran into an exceptionally strong defence of Taibe by the LAA-PLO troops and Haddad himself narrowly escaped death. When news of this setback reached the IDF, General Eitan himself arrived at the 'Good Fence' worried about Haddad's fate and decided to send him to an Israeli hospital for rest and recuperation.67

at the Taibe was followed by yet another setback when on 7 April LAA-PLO forces stormed and retook El-Khiam. The fall of El-Khiam prompted the Israeli Foreign Minister Yigal Allon to publicly warn that Israel "shall not tolerate activity against Lebanese villages that are so close to the borders" and that such activity in all likelihood could lead to a general West Asian War. Syria which was discreetly aiding the LAA-PLO offensive in the South realized that any further military action might lead to a direct Israeli intervention. Together with Sarkis, Syria, therefore, exercised a restraining influence on the PLO and a ceasefire was worked out which brought a period of temporary calm in the border region.

The fall of Taibe and El-Khiam badly affected the morale of the Christians in the three enclaves. In order to deal with the issue of morale, the IDF called to special duty Captain Yoram Hamizrachi, an Israeli TV correspondent in northern Israel who had been involved on a voluntary basis in the activities of the ADAL. Captain Hamizrachi along with other IDF personnel started by spending most of their time with the Lebanese inside the enclaves. Another proposal aimed at boosting morale put forward by ADAL was the building of a radio station for Haddad's forces. Colonel

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68. Quoted in Lewis W. Snider et al "Israel" in Haley and Snider eds., n.12, p.95.

Ben-Elezier suggested that the IDF transfer to Haddad a mobile radio transmitter which had been acquired by Israel in the early seventies for its Kurdish allies in Iraq. The IDF, however, turned down the proposal because of opposition from the Lebanese Front in the north who feared that it would give Haddad too much political propaganda power. A third Israeli initiative for improving morale in the Christian enclaves was the establishment of military courses for young Lebanese women and girls. These courses were conducted clandestinely in military camps in northern Israel and after training the girls joined active duty in defence of the Christian held areas. 70

On 8 April 1977 Haddad's existence was publicly revealed when for the first time he was introduced by Israel to a select band of journalists, near the 'Good Fence' near the Metulla. Haddad who had a strong media presence immediately became a favourite of the Israeli press. In the weeks to come daily reports in the Israeli press and TV created in the minds of the average Israeli citizen a deep sense of solidarity and sympathy for the Christians of the South. This, together with the electoral victory of the Likud Party in the Parliamentary elections of May 1977 prepared the grounds for a further deepening of Israeli involvement in Southern Lebanon in the years to come.

70. Hamizrachi, n.59, pp.135-37.
Conclusion

The Civil War which erupted with the Ayn al-Rummana massacre passed through four distinct phases. The first phase was characterized by fighting among the Christians and Muslims. In the second phase the conflict took on a Lebanese-Palestinian character when the Maronites started a siege of the Palestinian camps in Beirut. This phase also witnessed an indirect Syrian intervention on the side of the NM-PRM forces. The third phase was characterized by a continued NM-PRM offensive against the Maronites who were on the losing side. This phase also saw the disintegration of the Lebanese Army and the abortive coup of Brigadier Ahdab. In the face of the continued offensive, Syria, changed sides and in April 1976 there was limited Syrian military intervention in support of the Christians.

The Syrian intervention was the result of certain developments that had taken place after the October 1973 war. Syria sought to develop an independent power base after the removal of Egypt as a confrontation state when the latter concluded a separate deal with Israel. It was to rest on Syrian influence in her immediate Arab environment comprising Lebanon, Jordan and the PLO. Such a grouping would permit negotiations with Israel from a position of strength. It was in this context of implementing the eastern front strategy that Syria formulated its policy toward the Civil
War. However, if the NM and PRM were to be a part of this alliance, they had to be under Syrian control. So it became necessary to stop them from gaining outright victory. If they would have won, they would have installed a government in Lebanon over which Syria would have little control. Hence Syria changed sides and began supporting the Maronites.

With the Syrian military intervention the Civil War entered its final phase. During the early stages of the Syrian intervention, the Arab League got involved in the war when it sent a token ASF to separate the combatants. The Syrians launched a second major offensive against the NM-PRM in late September. This led to the convening of the six-nation Riyadh Summit in October 1976 at the behest of Saudi Arabia. It was instrumental in establishing the ADF and putting an end to the conflict.

The Syrian intervention had the tacit approval of Israel. The acceptance of Syrian intervention had a number of advantages for Israel. It was spared from undertaking a large-scale military operation itself in order to save the Maronites from defeat. Second, a large-scale Israeli intervention would have jeopardized the interim settlement with Egypt. Third the Syrian intervention led to the dispersal of Syrian military energies in a potential "Vietnamese" situation. While giving its tacit approval to a limited Syrian intervention, Israel set certain geographical as well as functional limits known as 'red lines'
beyond which Syrian activity in Lebanon would not be allowed to escalate.

While agreeing to a limited Syrian military intervention as an expedient measure, Israel was at the same time building up an extensive network of contacts with Maronite leaders, supplying the Maronite militias with arms and ammunition and laying the ground work for the de facto annexation of parts of Southern Lebanon. Covert links with residents of Southern Lebanon led to the establishment of three autonomous Christian enclaves bordering Israel. These enclaves received humanitarian as well as military assistance and a renegade Major of the Lebanese Army Saad Haddad was appointed as the officer-in-charge of the three enclaves.

Soon after the appointment of Haddad, there was a rapid expansion in the size of the enclaves as one by one the Shiite villages neighbouring these enclaves were captured by Haddad's militia. While violence subsided in much of Lebanon after October 1976, peace continued to elude the South throughout 1977. Israel's war by proxy in the South led to frequent clashes and created severe hurdles in the Lebanese government's efforts to restore order.