Book Reviews

ISRAEL'S WAR IN LEBANON

Review Article by Mark A. Bruzonsky and Dale Gavlak

Final Conflict: The War in Lebanon, by John Bulloch. London: Century Publishing, 1983. xii + 234 pages. Maps. Index to p. 238. £9.95.

The Longest War: Israel in Lebanon, by Jacobo Timerman. Translated by Miguel Acoca. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982. A Borzoi Book. 167 pages. $11.95.

Israel in Lebanon: The Report of the International Commission, by Sean MacBride, Richard Falk et al. London: Ithaca Press, 1983. xxii + 193 pages. Appends. to p. 280. Acknowl. to p. 282. £4.50 paper.

The Battle of Beirut: Why Israel Invaded Lebanon, by Michael Jansen. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1983. 139 pages. Chron. to p. 142. $17.50 cloth. $6.50 paper.

The Beirut Massacre: The Complete Kahan Commission Report, introduced by Abba Eban. New York: Karz-Cohl Publishing, 1983. xix + 107 pages. Appends. to p. 116. Parliamentary Addresses of 22/9/82 to p. 133. Biog. to p. 136. $14.95 cloth. $7.95 paper.

Surviving the Siege of Beirut: A Personal Account, by Lina Mikdadi. London: Onyx Press, 1983. 148 pages. Chron. to p. 152. £10.95 cloth. £3.95 paper.

It was Arik Sharon's war grafted onto the new Revisionist Israel, and there was considerable American complicity. Both of these views permeate the half dozen books furiously prepared and published within a year of Israel's most controversial, most destructive, and longest war.

Yet the basic historical reasons for and truths about the war come through only indirectly in this selection of often-numbing accounts of the events in Lebanon during the summer of 1982. Except for Timerman's acidic reflections on Sharon and the effects of the war upon Israeli society, these books are primarily personalized reportorials on what happened—not

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really about why and how—as a result of Israel's tragically misconceived attempt to solve her political and moral dilemmas through raw power.

How the events of June–September 1982 really came to be—and how they will change the Middle East—must await more careful, dispassionate historical investigation and commentary. Such analysis will have to intertwine skillfully the events themselves with Israel's evolution to American protectorate and regional superpower, as well as with the changes in its internal political dynamics. All this will then have to be put within the fuller context of Arab disunity heightened by Egypt's defection at Camp David, Palestinian isolation, and Soviet impotence.

And so other authors will have the compelling task of examining in far greater depth the interconnection between what we now call "the" war in Lebanon, Israeli evolution, and American complicity—all of which combined to make 1982's vicious spasm of death and destruction possible. The accounts we have now are instant and often emotive first and second-hand descriptions of what actually occurred and the human grief that ensued.

Reinhold Niebuhr, with his remarkable *The Ironies of American History*, brought Americans in the 1960s a profound appreciation of the moral dangers inherent in American power. And it is an Israeli author among this collection of writers (Timerman, not Eban) who repeatedly touches, but never quite clarifies, the profound need for a contemporary form of Jewish contrition before Israel's soul becomes irredeemably corrupted, and before Israel's military might takes her down a road making future warfare with weapons of even greater destruction inevitable.

Reading Timerman, readers should be assured that Jewish history will never again be the same. A tremendous internal struggle between modern Jewish power and ageless Jewish ethics has emerged from the modern-day destruction unleashed on Lebanon by Israel. Timerman's effort is like a wrenching exorcism of a tormented soul—the "voice of one crying in the wilderness."

An influential publisher and life-long Argentine Zionist, Timerman fled Argentina's repression only to find himself living in another. He was an international Jewish *cause célèbre*, welcomed with much fanfare and ideological hoopla, until he felt the imperative to compare what he had expectantly dreamed with what he had come to experience.

For Timerman, the Zionist ideal itself has been deeply perverted at the hands of Revisionist Israel. The invasion of Lebanon symbolizes the perversion; Arik Sharon the perverter. A sensation when it first appeared in *The New Yorker, The Longest War* is this unique journalist's plea for salvation. It is his appeal to Diaspora Jews actively to seek ways to restore Israel to what Timerman perceives as its original principles—moral integrity and the cultural traditions of the Jewish people. "When the Jews of the Diaspora finally lose their fear of Israel," Timerman hypothesizes, "they will help us abandon our fear of ourselves, and they will help us emerge from our ghetto" (p. 128).

Unfamiliar with both the details of Israel's earlier history and the various critiques which suggest that Israel was destined to pursue the course it is on, Timerman's highly personalized account of Israel's war against the Palestinians in Lebanon actually makes us witness to the author's own metamorphosis—a change in outlook that has now ostracized him in his new homeland and led his son to prison as a kind of Israeli draft-dodger.

Timerman, like many Zionist thinkers before him, puts forth the view that "the Israelis [until recent times] had always waged a clean fight" (p. 13), but now "Sharon's War" represented Israel's "first war in which the objectives were political" (p. 76). Of course, this is a rather naïve approach to those more familiar with the details of and background to Israel's various military campaigns and continuous cloak-and-dagger operations.

Beyond the occasional naïveté, there is Timerman's stylized way of dreaming of the triumph of his own visions. "Once again, Henry Kissinger was wrong in his assessment of the

war in Lebanon," Timerman suggests. "Contrary to what he said . . . this invasion has not opened up a vast array of opportunities. Only one new opportunity has emerged: the mutual recognition of the two peoples, Israeli and Palestinian" (p. 114).

In a sense, with his confusion of political hopes for a precise and analytical awareness of what is actually taking place, Timerman epitomizes the impotence of the Israeli "peace forces." In his call to Diaspora Jewry, he admits the ethical impoverishment of the Israel he thought he had come to join. Outsiders will not rescue Israel; that is one of the lessons of recent Jewish history, for Zionism in its most general sense has replaced religion for much of the Diaspora.

Yet Jacobo Timerman's embrace of humanitarian principles and his instinctual, highly charged writing result in the most memorable book to emerge from Israel's longest war. He combines a tenderness with a profundity that makes it possible to overlook his misperceptions. Although he comes down hard on the PLO, he does so with a remarkable appreciation for the national aspirations inherent in that organization, with a firm awareness that "all those who approached the Palestinians betrayed them" (p. 41), and with an astute understanding that there is in Israel today "an intuition—almost a conviction, almost a presentiment—that the Palestinians have changed their place in our lives . . . that the difficult effort of understanding that place and all its implications awaits us" (p. 105).

In contrast to the nimble and colorful Timerman, Michael Jansen's effort is largely devoid of memorable prose. Instead, it is a terse narrative forcing the reader to wade through a plethora of events, statistics and quotations to find out "Why Israel Invaded Lebanon"—the book's subtitle. Jansen relentlessly levels volley after volley at the Israeli state, providing a blow-by-blow account of the invasion and the massive suffering of its victims. Shocking and disturbing as it is, it nevertheless often makes for tedious reading.

The Battle of Beirut is more indictment than analysis, and for that reason will be touted by many, condemned by others. Jansen draws attention to Israel's use of cluster, vacuum and phosphorous bombs, cynically suggesting that the rationale for Israel's use of these weapons is in Israeli Chief-of-Staff Raphael Eitan's explanation for starting the war in the first place—"if one has an effective, expensive machine on hand, one uses it, simply because it is there" (p. 35).

Jansen uses political poetic license in making claims such as "the real target of the siege [of Beirut] was the Reagan Administration . . ." (p. 42). "Thus Washington was compelled to give Israel in the negotiations what Israel was not prepared to fight for in the streets of Beirut" (p. 44). While often incorporating useful linkages and suppositions, Jansen's arguments are often thin and her analysis is often highly subjective.

Yet she does make some astute, thoughtful observations about Israel's objectives, Haig's complicity and overall American Middle East policy. She notes, for instance, that the Labor Alignment criticized the "expansion of the campaign rather than the initiation of the fighting" (p. 70), something Timerman fails to explain. Likewise, she quotes members of the Western press who claimed that Israel had planned to send Phalangist militia into the Palestinian refugee camps months before the September massacres (p. 99).

What Jansen's effort lacks in style and analysis, John Bulloch's *Final Conflict* remedies in fast-paced, chatty, pragmatic British fashion, ranging from mundane vignettes to stark, vivid descriptions. Bulloch demonstrates a firm grasp of the interaction between political movements and history, enabling him to discuss the background of the war as well as how it was carried out.

Bulloch is harsh both on the leadership of the PLO for failing to assert its minimal political demands at the time of greatest world sympathy, and on the Israelis for excessive and unjustifiable brutality which in the siege of Beirut resulted in a "war crime" that "was brutal . . . unjustified . . . unnecessary . . . and uncivilised" (pp. 17–18).

Bulloch's analysis is usually more convincing than Jansen's, although his penchant for taking the Reagan Administration's protestations seriously and heaping all responsibility on Alexander Haig's shoulders is mystifying. He even devotes the final pages of his narrative to the "radical change in attitude" enunciated in the Reagan Administration's September 1, 1982, position statement, suggesting this was the Arabs' payoff for the summer's torment, but without even the hint that what Reagan says and what Reagan does might conflict. Like the Arab rulers themselves, Bulloch seems to want to believe the Americans and forgive their transgressions.

Both Bulloch and Jansen insist that Israel had warned the US many months in advance of its intention to destroy the PLO. But while Jansen continually implicates Washington, Bulloch works overtime to absolve the US of responsibility, portraying a relationship between the US and Israel that seems far from reality.

The third highly personalized account comes from a talented Palestinian-Lebanese woman, Lina Mikdadi. Her *Surviving the Siege of Beirut* is a tale of thoughts and feelings from one who survived and will bear the psychological scars. It reads quickly, it captures her anguish and her burning desire for understanding both herself and her enemies, yet it adds little in factual terms. Nevertheless, it is precisely this kind of first-hand, emotive release which is too often overlooked and without which one cannot truly appreciate the inner human meaning of such events.

Israel in Lebanon is a unique effort which has received insufficient attention in this country. Unlike the other volumes, this is a "document" attempting to put in historical and legal perspective Israel's aims and methods in the conflict.

A non-governmental tribunal composed of like-minded scholars of international law (Sean MacBride and Richard Falk are the most notable to an American audience), it had no formal competence or mandate, unlike Israel's Kahan Commission. It could not compel testimony or evidence and its audience must be public opinion.

Though useful and thoughtful in its attempt to apply international law precedents to contemporary events, the Commission itself is an example of the unclear boundary that exists between judicial and political functions. Partly relying on precedents established at Nuremburg after World War II, the Commission claims not simply or arbitrarily to single out Israel, but "to build public pressure for law enforcement against Israel as a violator of international law and, more broadly, to create a climate in which public opinion insists upon adherence by all states and political movements to the international law relative to war" (p. xiii). In a world where nations seem only too eager to hypothesize about justifications for nuclear madness, such a mandate could only lead to an idealistic focus on right vs. might. Nevertheless, there remains a continuing need to be constantly reminded of the standards which the most sane among us debate, while the less thoughtful among us continue the carnage and the barbarism which we humans seem unable to avoid.

Using eight questions as terms of reference—questions of aggression, use of outlawed weapons, treatment of prisoners, attacks on non-military targets, systematic destruction of civilian areas, ill-treatment of civilians, justification for warfare, Israeli complicity in the Ṣabrā and Shātīlā massacre—the Commission began its deliberations even before the September massacres. Taking into consideration the identity of the Commission members, it is hardly a surprise that the Israeli government failed to cooperate or that the Commission's findings largely condemn Israel in the extreme.

"The Israeli argument that such vast economic damage and the loss, after Chatila and Sabra, of more than 20,000 lives can be justified on grounds of self-defence lacks credibility," the Commission concludes in one of its more straightforward findings (p. 19). "There is considerable evidence to confirm the view that Israel's interests are served by a divided Lebanon in which sectarian strife is actively fomented" (p. 10) is probably an equally valid

finding, but shows how the Commission often strayed from its specific, self-assigned questions into politically tangential areas.

The Commission is at its best in attempting to make subtle but important moral distinctions that should be the basis for military decisions. Some "civilian objects were adapted to military purposes by the PLO and Lebanese militias . . . and others were on or very near the front lines of engagement so as to be directly in the zone of combat," the Commission states, before reaching its evaluation that "[t]hese zones sustained heavy damage from bombardment, but this is justifiable insofar as the principle of 'military necessity' applies. What is unjustifiable is the infliction by long-range bombardment of total destruction or damage on civilian objects harbouring no military presence whatsoever and nowhere near the scene of any military activity" (p. 44).

After hearing testimony from numerous Lebanese officials, foreign diplomats and journalists, the Commission concluded that "there was at best a disregard for civilian objects; that on many occasions, the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] was careless in its bombardment of making any distinction between military and civilian targets" (pp. 45–6).

In addition, "the Commission concludes that the use of the IDF of fragmentation weapons in an area of high civilian concentration violated the international legal principle of proportionality. The military advantage gained does not appear proportionate to the high level and horrific nature of the civilian casualties caused by use of this weapon" (p. 86). True enough, but in the nuclear age do these standards really have any practical relevance?

Returning to more straightforward political matters, the Commission recommends an immediate withdrawal of all foreign armed forces from Lebanon, that refugee camps be protected by an adequate UN force, that individuals guilty of grave breaches of the laws of war be prosecuted, and that the government of Israel make reparations for much of the damage inflicted by the invasion (pp. 192–3).

Some will consider the Commission a noble effort; others will dismiss it as a one-sided, hypocritical display of anti-Israeli prejudice. Most will not even hear of it. And few will truly appreciate its importance. So much for the International Commission and the *Israel in Lebanon* report.

Of the Kahan Commission report there is, of course, the realization of how Israeli democracy brought it about and how the Begin government thwarted and perverted its implementation. The report is exculpatory of Israel, the country, and the IDF as an institution, attempting to place blame on a few top-ranking individuals—especially Defense Minister Sharon and Chief-of-Staff Eitan.

Abba Eban's introductory remarks are in the same vein—rhetorical and apologetic, openly playing politics by attempting to cast the Likud government in the role of Darth Vader and the Labor opposition as the Force which will again come to Israel's (and the world's) rescue.

Eban can at times be highly accurate, candid and revealing. "If a spokesman for the Israeli government in the first week of June [1982] had declared that the country had never been more secure or so little exposed to violence, it would have been hard to deny the claim" (p. v), Eban correctly observes, undermining his own party's agreement to the "necessity" of invading Lebanon in the first place. "If not for Israel's campaign the Phalangists would never have got anywhere near the seats of power, and Bashir [Jumayyil] would never have won the presidential election, which had been conducted in the Lebanese parliament a few yards from Israeli tanks and guns" (p. xi) is another admission hard to come by from those now ruling the Jewish state.

But Eban's criticisms are selective, and he makes no bows to contrition. He seems insensitive to the scale of human suffering inflicted by his country, claims that the Kahan Commission "spared no truth" (p. xiv), fails to mention how the government of Israel twisted

the Commission's conclusions, and attempts to portray Laborite Israelis as the good guys even though Labor supported the original war aims. Only when the fighting resulted in high Israeli casualties and produced major world protests did Labor find its independent voice.

In absolving both the Israeli army and the Israeli-controlled Ḥaddād forces of any direct responsibility in the Ṣabrā and Shātīlā massacre, the Kahan Commission showed an unwillingness to dig into the long-term relationship that has existed between Israel and the Lebanese Phalangists, going back to the days of Yitzhak Rabin's premiership and the Tal al-Za'tar massacre of 1976.

The IDF was not involved in any "conspiracy or plot" with the Phalangists, according to the Kahan Commission. "We assert that in having the Phalangists enter the camps, no intention existed on the part of anyone who acted on behalf of Israel to harm the non-combatant population, and that the events that followed did not have the concurrence or assent of anyone from the political or civilian echelon who was active regarding the Phalangists' entry into the camps" (p. 54). Such claims are an attempt to diminish even Israel's "indirect" guilt. Unfortunately, they characterize important parts of the report, and raise disturbing questions about its overall credibility.

In reality, the war of summer 1982 did not begin then and has not yet ended. What occurred in 1982 was but a part, to quote Bulloch, of Israel's "vain struggle to subdue the people displaced from Palestine to make way for the Jews" (p. 9).

"The basic Israeli war aim," Bulloch correctly and baldly states, "was to destroy not just the PLO, their leaders and their infrastructure, but the concept of Palestine itself. Israel wanted to expunge from people's minds the idea that one day a State of Palestine might exist; that the three million Palestinians of the world might have a homeland of their own like so many others. The Israelis tried to use guns to shoot a dream; not surprisingly, they failed" (p. 19).

By exerting overwhelming force to intervene massively in Lebanon's civil war and expel the Palestinian national movement from Beirut, Israel continued her quest to negate "the other" and achieve regional hegemony.

Yet, ultimately, Israel's future is being built on fear and a renunciation of the very Jewish values that led to the State's birth. Sooner or later Israel must find herself tormented and possibly shattered by these realities. A reasonable compromise between the two nationalisms of Palestine may be the only salvation for both.