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INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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ISRAELI LIAISON WITH LEBANESE AUTHORITIES DISCUSSED

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[Interview with Colonel Tzvi El-Peleg, commander of the civilian population aid unit in southern Lebanon, completed his military service in the area. Several hours after he took off his uniform, still lying next to his duffel bag at the entrance to his apartment, Tzvi El-Peleg said: "I must deny the reports which appeared in the communications media suggesting that my release is related to differences of opinion that arose regarding the policy in southern Lebanon. The truth is that I have completed my reserve service and have simply returned home."

Tzvi El-Peleg is the commander of the military government unit in the General Staff, the function of which is to administer territories to which the IDF has come during times of war. In all the wars of Israel to date, the unit's objective was clear. However, in the wake of the Lebanon operation, the situation has changed. "We have trained the personnel of the unit to function in occupied territory among a hostile population while fulfilling its organizational and administrative functions in order to provide services to the civilian population. After the Six-Day War, for example, all the department heads and senior officials of the Jordanian government fled the West Bank to Jordan. A similar thing happened in Gaza when most of the Egyptian representatives and the senior officials fled to their country. This required us, at least in the first stage, to carry out functions which are generally assumed by officials, police, the municipality, etc. It was only later that the situation changed, but the senior officials have not yet returned to the territories. In Lebanon the situation was completely different, requiring thoughtful arrangement and innovative implementation. From the beginning we had the sympathy and cooperation of the civilians and the village heads in southern Lebanon, most of the department heads in the municipalities, and the representatives of the central government who fled for their lives when the terrorists came to the area in 1976-77. They have now returned from Beirut to southern Lebanon and have presented themselves to us and have offered to cooperate with us."

[Question] Why is it that now after you have completed your assignment are they limiting the scope of activity of the unit?

[Answer] It's logical. The unit must only be a liaison group between the Lebanese government and the Israeli authorities on everything connected with and to the Lebanese citizens. The more our presence is decreased in the area, the better the Lebanese authorities will function. We must evacuate as soon as possible the government buildings which we seized and turn them over to the Lebanese officials for the performance of their functions. The schools and other public institutions must also be returned as soon as possible to their original purpose.

[Question] There is considerable talk about the need to change the situation in Lebanon and establish a central government as soon as possible. Is this possible under existing conditions?

[Answer] In Lebanon a community organization has always existed alongside the central government. It has never replaced the central government. It has served as a spokesman and representative for groups and communities, a kind of lobby. However, in the seventies an element entered the picture which was opposed to the central government and sought to dominate the elected administration. I am referring to the PLO with all its organizations.

[Question] Will the blow which the PLO has absorbed now help in changing the situation in Lebanon?

[Answer] This is a major question which is related to the current situation in Lebanon. The inter-community fragmentation made it easy for the PLO to seize control. This was undoubtedly the main reason for the build-up of its strength in Lebanon. Everyone in the country acknowledges today that this was also to blame for the situation in Lebanon. This is what all the Lebanese personalities with whom I have talked in recent weeks have told me. Without the community and social fragmentation, a PLO administration would never have arisen. The PLO exploited and used the existing antagonism and exacerbated the strife between all the population groups in order to control them. Lebanon is in a psychological stage which will make it easy for the communities and their heads to draw conclusions from past experience. They understand that without a reasonable settlement and without solving the situation of the discriminated communities, the exploited groups, and the funds which are allocated on the basis of closeness to their department, there is no possibility for an independent Lebanese existence, and there will always be the danger of the return of the PLO or a similar element. Without Lebanese unity, there will be no answer for its independence.

Trend Toward National Reconciliation

[Question] Is there a reasonable chance of establishing a central government?

[Answer] A much greater chance than in the past. Among all public circles and among the decision makers, there are increasingly strong voices leaning toward national reconciliation. There is an increasingly strong voice on the part of those who understand that as long as there are those who are discriminated against and a strong minority dominating a new majority, there will be fertile ground for foreign elements, and the nightmare of the

Syrian invasion or the entrance of the terrorists will recur. It must be understood that Lebanon lacks a national consensus, and as long as the public does not become unified, there will be the danger of foreign domination of the country. It must also be understood that the Syrians, the Iraqis, the Libyans, and the terrorists entered Lebanon at the invitation of various elements who tried to gain the upper hand over their adversaries with the help of the invaders. They did not understand that in this way they would be obligated to them for a long account.

[Question] Does the remaining presence of the terrorists in Beirut constitute an obstacle for the achievement of Lebanese independence?

[Answer] As long as there are terrorists in Beirut, there is no chance for an independent Lebanon. When they came to the country in the late sixties, they stated that they would do no violence to the central government. Their presence created a momentum and a focal point which converted them from the recipients of aid to encroachers upon the central government. This will recur as long as they remain in Beirut. A situation was created in which Lebanese soldiers were prohibited from moving freely on the roads, and they were actually confined in their camps. The Lebanese police had the responsibility to collect fines on sanitation cases only whereas crimes, thefts, and murders were under the exclusive control of the terrorists. The terrorists did not tolerate competitors, and Lebanon and its government were a nuisance for them.

[Question] Much has been said about the intention of the terrorists to establish a state within a state.

[Answer] They wanted to wage war against Israel. When an independent Lebanese government was established, it represented an obstacle to PLO activities in Lebanon. Therefore, the terrorists sought the erosion and destruction of the Lebanese establishment which did not join them. For example, they did not touch Public Security and certain arms of the government that preferred to serve under them and not to disappear. The PLO gave the officials in Lebanon the choice of cooperation or disappearing from the area.

[Question] Will the central government that is to be established in Lebanon succeed in imposing its will on Lebanon?

[Answer] The Lebanese government and its arms have not yet become strong enough to impose its will on the population and to block attempts to sabotage the government. Every one of the cabinet members is still within reach of the Syrians and the terrorists. They feel that they are still vulnerable and can be killed. The police and the army have still not recovered from the damage in morale, equipment, and personnel which they suffered in recent years. Whoever has sat for 7 years with crossed feet will find it difficult to stand up and walk in 1 day. This was the condition of the security forces in Lebanon.

Strong Lebanese Army

[Question] Have we succeeded in establishing connections with the civilian population in southern Lebanon and reaching an understanding with them?

[Answer] There are today Lebanese who are prepared to go abroad and tell of the rapes, murder, torture, and the cutting off of children's fingers which the terrorists perpetrated on the civilian population. But they are the courageous minority. Most of the residents are still afraid of the future. With the departure of the IDF from the area, there will be no one to protect them from the possible return of the terrorists. This is a delicate matter and it must be understood. I have no doubt that most of the civilian population in southern Lebanon has high regard for the IDF and Israel. They have never known such a reality--a military administration which comes to assist and not do violence to the civilians.

[Question] Is the population of southern Lebanon capable of defending itself without the assistance of a central government and without the protection of the IDF?

[Answer] Without a strong Lebanese army, backed by a central government which knows what it wants to do and is prepared to exercise its authority, the collaborators with the terrorists will once again rise up and do violence to the loyal citizens of the country. There were residents who became rich from the presence of the terrorists. Tens of thousands of residents of southern Lebanon fled out of fear of the terrorists, and among them, many preferred to cooperate with the terrorists in order to save their lives.

[Question] Various elements are competing for control of the Lebanese government: Haddad, the Phalangists, the Al-Amal organization, etc. What do you believe is the best solution for both Lebanon and Israel?

[Answer] The best thing for Israel and Lebanon is the establishment of a strong central government which will impose its control over all of Lebanon. Not the left, not the right, not Haddad and not the Phalangists as independent elements. A central government represents an address with which a settlement can be reached, a peace treaty signed, and mutual security agreements established in order to prevent the return of the terrorists and to assure that the northern border will be a security border for Israel and Lebanon.

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