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The Palestinians of Sabra-Shatila: 26 years after the Massacre - Part One

Franklin Lamb



"Our Resistance continues, the Sacred Cause of all people of good will endures, and the Dream of our full Return shall never die!" - 14 year old Fairouz Husseini, Shatila Palestinian Refugee Camp, Beirut, Lebanon

On September 16, 2008, at precisely 10:30 am, Fairouz Husseini and a gathering of survivors, relatives and friends of the Sabra-Shatila massacre victims, some foreign delegations, students, NGO representatives, a few government officials, dignitaries, and members of the Camp community will gather outside the Kuwaiti Embassy roundabout, on the edge of Shatila Palestinian Refugee Camp in Beirut, Lebanon.

Their assembly point will be less than 100 yards from where on September 16, 1982, Ariel Sharon, Gen. Raphael Eitan, Gen. Amos Yalon and their henchmen, Lebanese Phalange Intelligence operatives Elie Hobeika and Fadi Frem, had encouraged, organized, monitored, supplied, assisted directed and finally, when the World learned of the carnage, after 43 hours of carnage, initially denied knowing anything about it.

Hobeika, who former US Ambassador Robert Dillon, at his 8th floor desk at the Beirut Embassy when it was bombed on April 18, 1983, refers to as "a pathological killer" was providing a running commentary to his friends at his East Beirut Phalange Headquarters from atop the the Kuwaiti Embassy. His Israeli sponsors were also present during one of the most barbaric massacres in history, gawking down into the Camp with binoculars and also perched atop the seven storied former Kuwaiti Embassy, as they all monitored the killing, between sunset on

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Thursday 16 through midday on Saturday the 18th.

"I was in Austria at the time. I first heard about it as you did from the news bulletins", Hobeika claimed for years during Media interviews, until he contemplated turning 'States evidence' against Sharon in the Belgium case filed on June 18, 2001. Belgium scrapped the case after US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, told Belgium:

"It's your goddamned Sharon Trial or NATO Headquarters, you choose!"

Once the word was out in Beirut about that Hobeika was considering turning on Sharon, he was assassinated en route to his lawyers office on January 24, 2002, by a method very similar to that used against Hezbollah military commander Hajj Radwan (Imad Mughnieh) last February (Interestingly, Forensic evidence of the Mughnieh assassination, including his shoes, signature green cap, clothes and personal affects found in his pockets when he was killed, and now on display by Hezbollah in Nabehiyeh, near Sidon, Lebanon, establish that the bomb used to kill him was filled with unique BB sized pellets that sprayed throughout his body. The same with Hobeika.)

As the mid September 1982 chopping of camp residents with axes, disemboweling with knives, shootings with Israeli supplied silencers, hangings, burnings, live burials, and rapes entered its second day, the Beirut media started to hear 'rumors'. Among the first heard from frantic women was that the Israeli forces were sealing the camps. It was learned three days later that this action was coordinated with the Phalange militia and the Israeli created army in South Lebanon named the "South Lebanon Army" (SLA), under the Command of Saad Haddad, and kept hundreds of women and children from fleeing for their lives. By the second morning (Saturday September 18), following several media and diplomatic inquiries, panic seized the Israeli command post and the organizers tried to cover up their project and flee the area.

The World was horrified at the spreading images and even US Envoy Richard Draper, who like many American officials in the current period of history grovel to the Israel lobby, until after leaving office when he became more 'nuanced', blamed Israel. "You sons of bitches! You were in control and you gave us your word" Draper roared to Sharon on Sunday September 19, 1982 according to Israeli military affairs writers, Ze'ef Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari.

It was journalist David Lamb who first wrote about the 'walls of death':

"Entire families were slain. Groups consisting of 10-20 people were lined up against wall and sprayed with bullets. Mothers died while clutching their babies. All men appeared to be shot in the back. Five youths of fighting age were tied to a pickup truck and dragged through the street before being shot" (LA Times, Sept. 20, 1982).

"False accusations like these" Israeli PM Menachem Begin, lectured reporters called into his office, "constitute a blood libel against every Jew, everywhere", as he tried to dampen the international ground swell of accusations. Begin then added, "Goyim kill Goyim and they want to hang the Jews. We are the real victims".

Fairouz, who did not know what either 'blood libel' or 'Goyim' meant, until this observer explained, will join the others assembled, on the

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short Memorial Walk to Martyr's Square off Rue Sabra inside the 1982 killing field to pay her respects to the perished and receive a student laptop in a US citizen initiated project to raise the level of education in Palestinian classrooms.

According to one of the American organizers of the Sabra-Shatila Laptop Initiative which plans to distribute more than 200,000 laptops in Lebanon's Palestinian Camps, to be used in a special Internet based teaching paradigm developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology:

"While it is true that this time the American Embassy rejected our request to sponsor even one laptop, citing budget shortfalls, hundreds will be distributed during the launching event at Sabra-Shatila on September 16th. Perhaps American taxpayers will encourage their government to assist later. Imagine the enormous educational benefit to disadvantaged Lebanese and Palestinian children here if the US government provided just one student laptop to Lebanon in 2008 for every cluster bomb dropped 2006".

Fairouz, a completely sweet and charming child, whose grandparents were forced from their homes and into Refugee Camps in Lebanon in April of 1948, will join international delegates including nearly 50 from Italy alone, and American nurses who were witnesses to the barbarity and who worked in Camp hospitals at the time, and help release more than 1000 helium filled balloons, each meant to represent one person who was murdered or who disappeared during the carnage.

"I really hope the wind blows all the balloons into Palestine so maybe their souls can rest in Peace in their real homeland", Fairouz says, while explaining how just three months ago, when new 30 inch diameter concrete sewage lines were laid six feet deep along Rue Sabra, the 'main street' (or swamp, depending on the weather) of Shatila Camp, the workers uncovered yet more decomposed bodies and skeletons that no one but the killers, who nearly 20 years ago were given amnesty, knew were there.

" We think there are very likely still bodies all over this section of the camp", Ahmad, the sewer project crew chief explains, as he gestures toward the entrance to the camp diagonal from AKKA hospital. "The killers were directed first into this area from across Kuwaiti Embassy road, the Bir Hasan neighborhood, and most of the first hours of killing took place in this area and then they fanned out from the main road here and from alleys along the Horst Tabet area, toward the East, West and North in the direction of Gaza Hospital and Shatila Mosque".

Since being forced from their homes in Palestine starting in 1947-48, more than 120,000 Palestinians arrived in Lebanon and as of 1951, 106,800 had registered with the newly created International Institution, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). Many Palestinians did not register with UNWRA because they supposed their emigration to be temporary or, being a proud people; they were too embarrassed to be seen accepting welfare.

Palestinians forced into Lebanon: 1948-1969

Following initial post-Nakba humanitarian aid and solidarity extended by the Lebanese people, the Refugees soon became thought of as a burden, and at 94% Sunni, a threat to Lebanon's delicately balanced National Pact. Starting in 1951, severe security restrictions were

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imposed to keep the Palestinians inside the camps including not being able to build housing, work or settle into new areas.

A pointed finger and the taunting words, "Those are refugees!" were images burned into the memories of the new arrivals and they remain, among many, to this day. Lebanese hatred toward the Palestinians increased and had it not been for the Gulf states during the 1950's and 1960's absorbing into their economies and workforce thousands of Palestinians who remitted cash to the Camps, many of the Palestinian families in Lebanon may not have survived.

Due to increased Israeli shelling and internal pressure 4 of the original 16 camps were destroyed including Nabatiyeh, Jisr al-basha, and Tel al Za'tar, with Dbayyeh Camp being partially destroyed. Today, some Palestinians inside Shatila explain that their families moved from Nabatiyeh to Tal al Za'tar to Shatila or Damour and finally from Damour to Shatila.

Pressure on the Refugees increased monthly with detentions without trial, and preventing movements between camps, even for family weddings or funerals, was becoming the norm in this period. Torture, collective punishments, random beatings on spurious grounds by the notorious Deuxieme Bureau, increased.

From Welcoming to wanting them out

The Palestinian Refugee File was transferred from humanitarian agencies to the Ministry of the Interior on March 30, 1959 and in conjunction with Presidential decree, No. 927, on the same date, the Lebanese government targeted Palestinians with military cadres who brutally enforced the spirit and the letter of the scheme which was aimed at surveillance, control of refugees' movements, political association, and complete neglect of the Refugees socio-economic needs.

One Shatila Massacre survivor summarized for this observer the period of the 1950's and 1960's:

"The Deuxieme Bureau came more than once and arrested my father, beat him in front of our eyes and took him away. To say the truth, we Palestinian Refugees suffered a lot...until the Revolution came".

1970-1982 Lebanon: 'A garden without a fence for Palestinian refugees'

The second period, from 1970-1982 saw the rise of Palestinian resistance organizations and the Cairo Agreement which gave the Palestinians some dignity until the latter Treaty was abrogated by the Lebanese Parliament in 1989.

The growth of the Palestine Liberation Organization following Black September in 1970 provided a relative economic boon and increased security for the Refugees in Lebanon. Given the power of the PLO, the social, health, education, housing (for the first time Refugees could 'legally' build more than one level to their homes), and the employment situation increased dramatically.

Camp boom towns

A general prosperity began in Shatila and the other camps which included asphaltting of Rue Sabra, sewer lines added in 1975 and a

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doubling the number of schools. Norway and Denmark, as well as other countries and Palestinian popular committees such as women's and labor unions, encouraged the growth of cottage industries and 'solidarity' projects.

Also alleviating pressure were some wealthy 'Gulf Palestinians' who invested in the Camps and Palestinians working abroad who remitted cash to their families. With the PLO covering their backs, Palestinians were able to realize many more civil rights. 1970-1982 was arguably the 'best' period for many Refugees during their 60 years in Lebanon.

1982-2008 Still controversial 26 years later, the fateful PLO decision to depart Lebanon in late August 1982

Israel's occupation of nearly half of Lebanon, some 801 villages, the siege of Beirut, the departure of the PLO fighters and the collapse of PLO funded institutions left the Palestinians completely unprotected and marked the beginning of their most precipitous decline since their arrival in Lebanon.

This observer witnessed on August 8, 1982 one intense exchange on the subject of whether the PLO should leave, between the late Janet Lee Stevens, an American journalist, researcher, and Burj al Barjneh Camp volunteer, and Yassir Arafat (Abu Ammar). The confrontation took place in one of Arafat's bunkers in the Fakahani District near Arab University. It was around 8:30 am on what later became known as Black Thursday, that Janet insisted on going to see 'the old man' about something that had been bothering her for days.

As Makmoud Labidi, in 1982 the Press Relations Director for the PLO, (Makmoud, later broke with Arafat partly over the departure which he strongly opposed and 15 years later he and Arafat finally reconciled) ushered us down three rubble strewn floors below street level, no one knew that the unusually heavy shelling that morning would turn into 14 hours of Israeli frenzy bombing and shelling becoming known as 'Black Thursday' and killing 250 and quite nearly Janet herself. Following the meeting, Janet walked thru the bombing south to 'her people' in 'the Burj' while her companion, sought shelter. "You will just slow me down, Janet said, "Meet me at AUB at 3 o'clock! ",she ordered."

Janet had slept little the night before, was not happy and got directly to the point with the PLO leader. She demanded to know the truth about the rumors that the PLO was going to 'abandon the camp residents to the Israelis and cut and run'.

Before Arafat recovered from his shock of Janet's strong language, and wrapped Janet in his arms, she intoned the reasons leaving Beirut would be a huge mistake. "You must launch a 'Stalingrad defense'; the international public will support it, Sharon is just using psychological warfare with Israeli threats to burn Beirut, yes the people have suffered in West Beirut, but we can take more, and the Soviets will not allow this to continue and will intervene, and you cannot believe the Reagan Administration Abu Ammar! Women and children are terrified of what might happen if their husbands and brothers leave them alone!! And you know the fayadeen don't want to leave. You know that! They are not afraid of the Israelis and they want to fight them and drive them away from Beirut!"

Tears flowed down Janet's face and welled up in Arafat's eyes as well

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as Labadi's, this observers and those of Arafat's bodyguards including, quite possibly, Imad Mughneyeh. Imad was one of Arafat's most trusted and skilled members of Force 17, who had joined Fatah eight years earlier at age 16 and was to leave Fatah the following year switching to Lebanon's nascent Islamic Resistance.

Some have argued that had the PLO not left Beirut, some of their best people would not have left the PLO. Would Hezbollah have even been organized had it not been for the vacuum created by Arafat's decision to depart?

As the very distraught Janet Stevens beat Arafat's shoulder with her clinched fist, in front of his wide-eyed Kalashnikov toting security and cried, Abu Ammar patted her long brown hair and tried to console her: "Miss Janet, please Miss Janet" the fatherly military commander softly whispered. "Our Lebanese hosts have sacrificed enough for us. We are no longer welcomed here and we must leave."

Regrets?

Arafat knew better, he later admitted to this observer, than to tell Janet Stevens that the Camp residents would be protected by American guarantees, a written copy of which he carried in his shirt pocket and an argument he used on others to reassure the Popular Committees in the Camps and well as some of his colleagues. "Janet would have beaten me more", Arafat later admitted, as he smiled, "but perhaps she was right".

Another doubter of the wisdom of the catastrophic evacuation that left Shatila and the other Camps unprotected, was the PLO's number two, Khalil al- Wazir, (Abu Jihad), Arafat's most trusted Deputy.

The model of discretion, Abu Jihad remained tight lipped before the International media during the period under review but he spoke frankly and with sadness with fighters who came to ask, within hours of sailing, what he thought they should do, for many were undecided. Janet, like many, urged them to stay. Abu Jihad told them:

"I can't tell anyone to stay or leave...Our people are here, our children, in Shatila, in our camps, our hospitals and our schools; but I say to the one who stays that the Lebanese state isn't about to come and build him a house and offer him a salary. The state may imprison him, just like all the Arab regimes, we have to face that fact."

Then Abu Jihad became angry, an emotion he did not often exhibit, "For myself, I don't want to leave you alone, I'd like to stay with you, but this is what's happened, and those are our circumstances" (Sabra Shatila 1982, Bayan Al Hout, Pluto Press 2004).

The Camp residents' protection gone, the Massacre followed within days and the steep slope into abject poverty and despair for today's Palestinians resulted.

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Part II - 26 years after the Sabra-Shatila massacre and the founding of Hezbollah: Can the Party of God deliver the Palestinians from exile?

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September 16, 2008 *Martyr's Square, Shatila Palestinian Refugee Camp, Beirut.* Franklin P. Lamb, PhD Director, Americans Concerned for Middle East Peace, Wash. DC-Beirut Senior Fellow, The Institute for Middle East Policy Dialogue, USA. He can be contacted directly at: fplamb@gmail.com. Franklin Lamb's book "[The Price We Pay: A Quarter Century of Israel's use of American Weapons against Lebanon \(1978-2006\)](#)" is available at: [Amazon.com.uk](#), Lebanese Bookstores, and in the USA at [www.LebaneseBooks.com](#) (soon also in Arabic) and currently enjoys Free Standard Shipping. "[Hezbollah: A Brief Guide for Beginners](#)" Expected Soon in Arabic and English.



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