

1976-1983, Lebanon: Another CIA President in Lebanon

By Bob Woodward, co-author, *All the President's Men* (1974); assistant managing editor, *Washington Post*.

Israel was giving covert paramilitary support to the main Christian militia in Lebanon – the right-wing Phalangist party, headed by Bashir Gemayel, a babyfaced, ruthless warlord. [The Christian Phalangist party, named after fascist movements in Italy and Spain, was founded in 1936 by Bashir's father, Pierre.] At 34, Bashir was one of Lebanon's most important and charismatic leaders, forging a unique and powerful future role. The Israeli game plan was working, and Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon wanted \$10 million in CIA paramilitary support for Bashir.

In 1978, Bashir's forces attacked the home of Tony Frangieh, political heir to a rival faction of Lebanese Christians, slaughtering him, his wife, their two-year-old daughter, bodyguards and domestic staff. In 1980, Bashir's militia almost wiped out the rival Christian militia of Lebanon's ex-president Camille Chamoun.

Bashir was a savage murderer, but there was something else. In the 1970s, after studying political science and law in Lebanon, Bashir worked for a Washington law firm and was recruited by the CIA.

Bashir was paid CIA money regularly and used a special, coded designator so his reports could circulate widely with very few knowing their source. The payments were initially token amounts of several thousand dollars – a straight exchange of cash for information. In 1976, after he took charge of the militia, the payments and his importance to the CIA grew. The CIA soon considered him a major asset. He evolved into a leader with wide appeal, a patriotic visionary who spoke of a "new Lebanon."

By 1982, the Israelis were cooking up something. They had too much influence in Lebanon and were seeking more. Sharon, through former U.S. general Al Haig, turned up the heat on the Reagan Administration.

The CIA station in Beirut saw Bashir as a barbaric, cynical manipulator who played off the Israelis and the Americans to obtain support and equipment. The CIA's Tel Aviv station, reflecting the Israeli-Sharon view, saw Bashir moving up fast; a likely leader to stabilize Lebanon. Reagan

signed a top-secret finding authorizing \$10 million in covert aid to Bashir's militia.

When CIA director Bill Casey met Sharon in early 1982, Lebanon and PLO strongholds there were on Sharon's mind. He spoke of countermoves – if Lebanon does this, Israel will do that; if the PLO strikes here, Israel will strike there. Sharon said "Don't be surprised. Let's get the cards on the table. If you don't do something, we will. We won't tolerate it."

Casey concluded that Sharon wanted to create circumstances to justify an Israeli military move. Things will happen in Lebanon and there will be no choice, Sharon said. It was clear that Sharon had Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin mesmerized. Sharon was calling the shots.

On June 6, Israel invaded Lebanon (code-named "Operation Peace for Galilee") and declared its intention

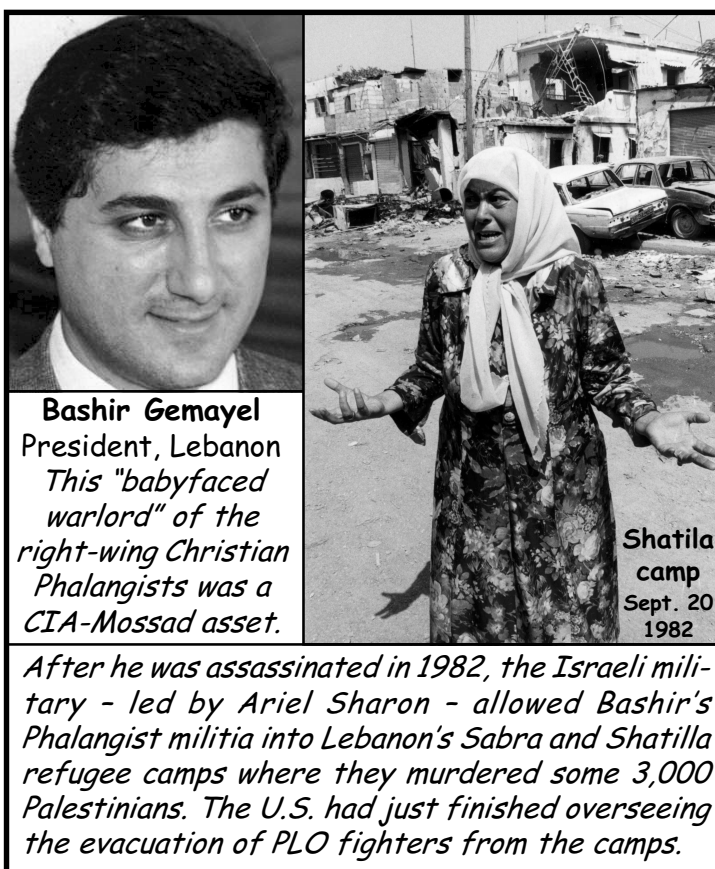
to drive the PLO out of southern Lebanon. Israel cited the attempted assassination of its ambassador to London three days earlier as justification. Israeli intelligence, the CIA and the British knew that this stated reason was bogus. The Israeli ambassador's assailants were part of the Abu Nidal faction that was at war with the mainline PLO in Lebanon. The Israelis were striking the wrong Palestinians, but that made little difference. Within days, the Israeli military was on Beirut's outskirts.

CIA analysis painted a picture of great opportunity and great risk. When Casey convened a meeting, one question was whether Israel was

using U.S.-supplied weapons. Many at the meeting voiced concern that the U.S. would be seen as an accomplice and Congress would raise questions. "I don't give a fuck about that," Casey said. "The situation is fluid.... How do we turn this to our national interest? That's the question I want answered."

The CIA man, Phalangist leader Bashir Gemayel, played an increasingly important role. He had close relations with Sharon and the Mossad. The CIA had played matchmaker, putting Christian Phalangists and Israelis in touch and making Bashir a shared CIA-Mossad asset.

There were indications that Bashir was headed for the presidency. He had eliminated his competition among the Christian factions. His good relations with the invad-

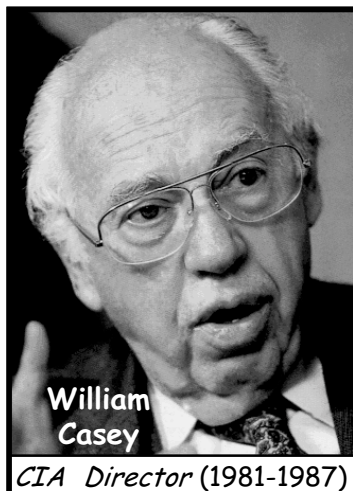


Bashir Gemayel
President, Lebanon
This "babyfaced warlord" of the right-wing Christian Phalangists was a CIA-Mossad asset.

After he was assassinated in 1982, the Israeli military - led by Ariel Sharon - allowed Bashir's Phalangist militia into Lebanon's Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps where they murdered some 3,000 Palestinians. The U.S. had just finished overseeing the evacuation of PLO fighters from the camps.

Shatila camp
Sept. 20
1982

UN Relief & Works Agency



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"I don't give a fuck about that.... The situation is fluid.... How do we turn this to our national interest?"

ing Israelis gave him a lever. The pro-Israeli elements in Lebanon saw Bashir as the new light. The anti-Israeli elements considered him the only person who might get the Israelis to withdraw. Bashir had become the rallying point.

As Bashir was thrust more into the limelight, his relationship with the CIA was one of the most guarded secrets. An exposure could end his career, if not his life. On August 23, Bashir was elected president. The well-financed PLO still had a presence in Lebanon, though the evacuation of 11,000 PLO fighters from Beirut, including Chairman Arafat, had begun. [In early September, the U.S. and several other countries, sent troops to oversee the PLO evacuation.]

Allied with Israel and the U.S., a Lebanon under Bashir would upset the regional balance of power. Syria had occupied Lebanon's Bekaa Valley since 1976 and considered Lebanon part of greater Syria. Facing an internal and external enemies, Bashir requested covert security and intelligence assistance from the CIA.

Casey felt the CIA was obliged to help. A large-scale covert operation was necessary. The CIA would have to become more closely involved with Lebanese intelligence and share sophisticated weapons, surveillance and communications equipment. Reagan approved an expenditure of about \$600,000. That grew quickly to between \$2 and \$4 million per year.

Then, on September 14, Bashir was assassinated. Within two days, Israeli forces allowed Phalangist units to enter the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatilla in Beirut on a mission of revenge. Accounts of the slaughter stunned the civilized world – bodies of diapered babies, the elderly, corpses in stacks. Breasts and penises had been cut off; a Christian cross was carved into the flesh of some victims. Pregnant women had their wombs torn open. [Editor: Many estimate that as many as 3,000 were murdered.]

Within two weeks, the U.S. Marines returned and took up a strategic location near the airport.

On September 23, Bashir's brother Amin Gemayel was elected president and sought the protective umbrella of the U.S. Amin agreed to the White House suggestion that Wadi Haddad become Lebanon's national security-advisor. Haddad, who had worked for the World Bank, was known as "the American" because of his close ties to the U.S. Casey met him in early 1983. Both were worried about Syrian influence in Lebanon and about Amin himself. The tension

between Haddad and Amin was obvious.

On April 18, a truck exploded near the U.S. Embassy and 63 died, including 17 Americans. Among them were Robert Ames [chief CIA analyst for the region], the CIA station chief, the deputy station chief and another half-dozen CIA officers.

On May 17, Lebanon and Israel signed an agreement on the withdrawal of Israeli troops and guarantees for Israel's northern border. Because the agreement with Israel united internal factions in Lebanon against him, Amin needed an American pledge. So, on the day of the agreement, Reagan sent Amin a secret letter. It was a guarantee, promising that the U.S. would not let Lebanon be attacked or suffer as a result of the agreement with Israel.

Just as Bashir had been promised CIA support and protection, now his brother was promised secret U.S. support, the continued presence of U.S. Marines in Beirut.

The May 17 agreement said Lebanon was not to have contact with the Israelis. But Amin allowed his intelligence service to continue relations with the Mossad and to pass them information on the whereabouts of Palestinians. The Israelis had standing orders to allow attacks on Palestinians in Lebanon without approval from the top; air raids were conducted with increasing frequency.

Source: Excerpts from *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987* (1987).

1983: Bombing Lebanese Villages

By John Quigley, professor of Law and Political Science at Ohio State University.

On October 23, 1983, with the U.S. Marines in Beirut just over a year, a member of a Shia Muslim militia drove a truck laden with explosives to the Marine barracks in Beirut. The explosives detonated killing 241 Marines. U.S. officials called the bombing terrorism, while the U.S. press covered the killing as a senseless act against men who were trying to help Lebanon. To the Shia militias, the Marines were the enemy, because the U.S. sided with the Phalange. To make matters worse, the U.S. had helped consolidate power for a Lebanese government that worked hand in glove with Israel, which was strongly disliked for depriving the Palestinians of nationhood.

Even after this bombing, Reagan continued to back Amin Gemayel's government. Since Syria had troops arrayed against the Phalange, Reagan ordered the U.S. navy to shell Syrian positions in Lebanese villages. This angered the nationalists even more, because the shelling killed civilians. In February 1984, Reagan withdrew the Marines from Lebanon but kept U.S. ships offshore.

Throughout the episode, the U.S. administration successfully sold its version of the events. Congress and the public did not realize the Marines were acting not in a neutral but in a distinctly partisan role, which is what led to the bombing of the barracks.

Source: Excerpted from "Lebanon: Death on the Beach," *The Ruses for War: American Interventionism since World War II*, 1992, pp.194-195.