

Talking Points: The Palestinians in Lebanon

1. The Shatila-Sabra camps massacre was not an isolated incident. It is increasingly apparent that the killings were part of a larger campaign by extremist Christian factions in Lebanon to intimidate the Palestinian community (as well as Lebanon's Muslims) and encourage Palestinians to emigrate to the Syrian-controlled Biqa Valley and ultimately to Syria itself.

- The US Embassy in Beirut has reported that Palestinians throughout Israeli-occupied Lebanon are living in fear and a few have been subjected to random acts of violence by Phalange extremists.
- A well-informed Lebanese newspaper reported this week that the Lebanese government is considering a plan to transfer all refugees to the Biqa as a step toward deporting 75% of all Lebanon's refugees.
- Israel's highly respected military correspondent Zev Schiff recently noted that his sources report the massacre "was not a spontaneous act of revenge... but an act that was planned beforehand with the objective of causing a mass flight of Palestinians from Beirut."

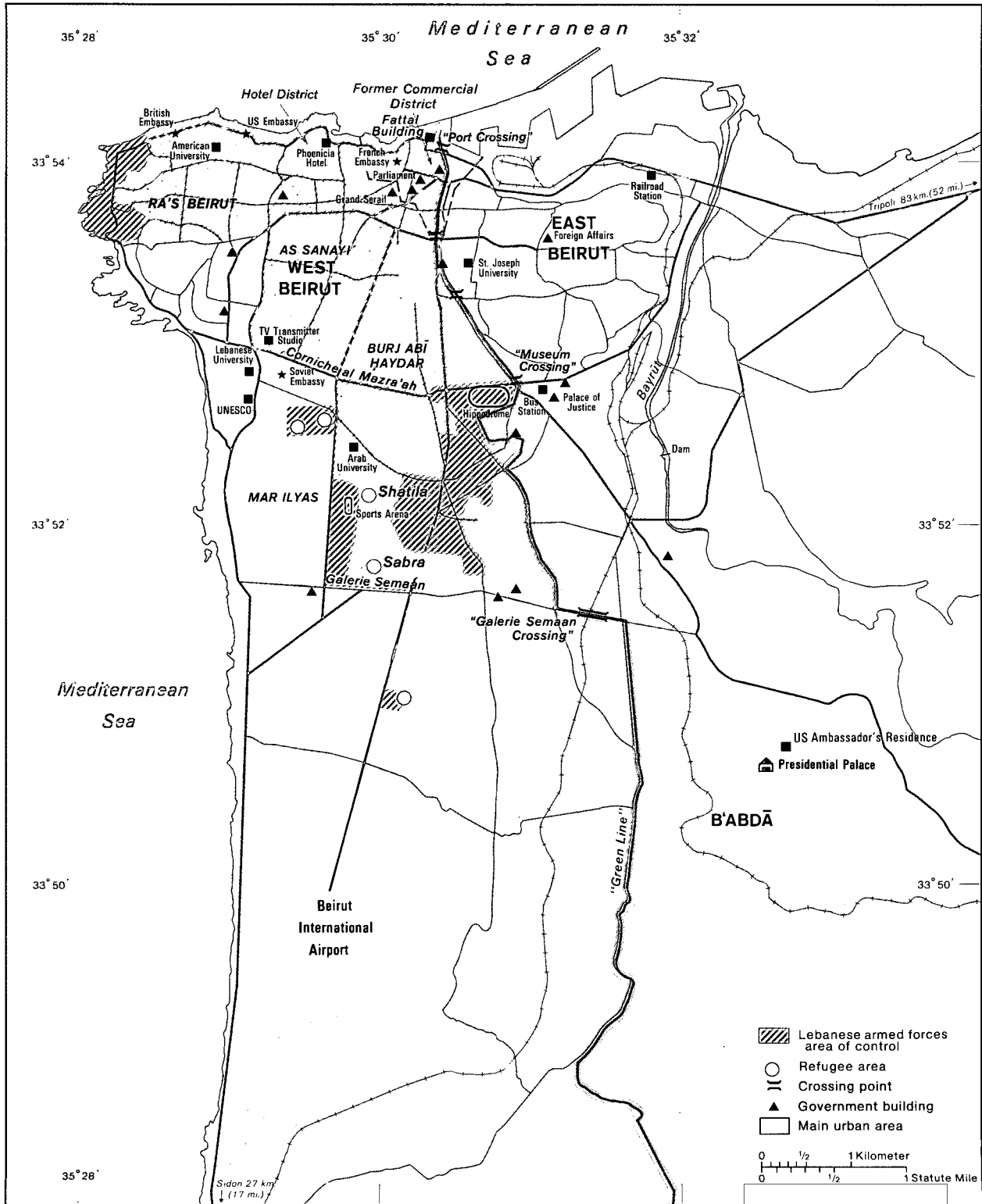
There is no evidence that Israel is actively participating in this campaign and it has sought to maintain law and order in the south. Nonetheless, Tel Aviv's interests are served by the emigration of Palestinians from the border region, a fact Begin and Sharon are well aware of.

2. A Palestinian emigration from Beirut and south Lebanon could have other effects as well. In Lebanon, a large-scale migration to the Biqa will serve to further destabilize that area and further entrench the PLO presence in the valley and in Tripoli where several Palestinian refugee camps already exist. Moreover, while Lebanese Muslims often show little love for their Palestinian brothers, a heavy handed campaign against them serves to weaken President Amin Jumayyil's credibility as a leader above all Lebanese factions. A large-scale migration to Syria could undermine the stability of the Assad government and strengthen the hands of its extremist Islamic opponents.

3. In broader terms, a campaign against the Palestinians in Lebanon will damage US credibility in the Arab world. We have adopted the role as the refugees' protector by negotiating the PLO's evacuation from Beirut and by sending the MNF into the city. Arab popular opinion already holds the US partly responsible for the massacre and will judge our credibility as an even-handed peace negotiator in part by the protection we afford Lebanon's Palestinians.

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