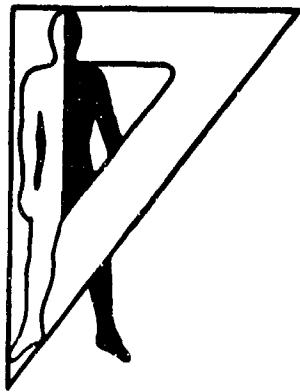


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Technical Memorandum 8-86

THE BATTLE OF ZAHLE

R.D. McLaurin

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER Technical Memorandum 8-86	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO. ADA174085	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle)  THE BATTLE OF ZAHLE	5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED  Final	
	6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER	
7. AUTHOR(s)  R.D. McLaurin	8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)	
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS Abbott Associates, Inc. P.O. Box 2124 Springfield, VA 22152-0124	10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS  AMCMS Code 612716.H700011	
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS Human Engineering Laboratory Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland 21005-5001	12. REPORT DATE September 1986	
	13. NUMBER OF PAGES 50	
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)	15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report)  Unclassified	
	15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE	
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report)  Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)		
Urban Warfare                      Military Operations on Urban Terrain MOUT                                      Psychological Operations Zahle                                        Foreign Military - Syria Lebanon - Conflict		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)		
<p>► This report is a study of urban combat during the Syrian Army's 1981 siege of Christian paramilitary forces in a Lebanese town. Weapons, tactics, communications, and psychological operations are addressed. The study further reveals the influence of political considerations on urban military operations during a limited conflict. ◀</p>		

THE BATTLE OF ZAHLE

R.D. McLaurin

September 1986

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## PREFACE

This report is an account largely based on interviews and questionnaires. The format of these interviews/questionnaires centers on responses to key issues developed in previous research in Military Operations on Urban Terrain (MOUT). The information gained from these interviews is augmented by some information, for example, chronological data, extracted from newspapers, books, and journals in Arabic, French, and English.

This "journalistic" approach is necessary to obtain information on recent battles, but suffers some limitations. Battles are confused affairs. Each participant has only a limited view of the overall engagement and his intense personal involvement usually precludes detached observation. Recollections are often contradictory immediately after a battle, let alone after weeks, months, or years. Access to veterans is not always balanced in terms of reaching representatives from both sides and all levels of command. When questionnaires are used, it is not always possible to follow up in search of additional details on a potentially revealing piece of information (See Appendix A). Finally, it must be remembered that the conflicts in Lebanon are ongoing. It is reasonable to assume that some respondents, for reasons of security or prejudice, have occasionally "edited" their answers. For these and other similar reasons, desirable details will sometimes be lacking.

This report is not intended to be a "blow-by-blow" narrative history of the battle of Zahle. Some operational information is provided for an understanding of the overall tactical context of the battle, but the focus of the report is on specific tactics, techniques, weapons, and equipment. (Details of unit deployment would be sketchy since there is no access to such official records as may have been kept.) It is important that the reader remain aware that, apart from chronological information, the facts and conclusions in this report solely reflect the perceptions of the interviewees.

ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

AAA anti-aircraft artillery  
 ADF Arab Deterrent Force (Syrian-controlled "peacekeeping" force)  
 APC armored personnel carrier  
 AT antitank  
 BMP Soviet infantry fighting vehicle (Russian acronym)  
 C<sup>3</sup>I command, control, communications, and intelligence  
 COMSEC communications security  
 FSI Internal Security Forces  
 HQ headquarters  
 IAF Israel Air Force  
 ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross  
 IDF Israel Defense Force  
 km kilometer(s)  
 LAA Lebanese Arab Army (break-away predominantly Sunni rebels from  
 Lebanese Forces)  
 LF Lebanese Forces (combined Christian militia)  
 LOC lines of communications  
 m meter(s)  
 MG machine gun  
 Milan French wire-guided antitank missile  
 mm millimeter(s)  
 MRL multiple rocket launcher  
 NLP National Liberal Party  
 PLO Palestine Liberation Organization  
 PSYOP psychological operations  
 PTT post, telegraph, and telephone  
 RL rocket launcher  
 RPG shoulder-fired antitank rocket launcher (Russian acronym)  
 RR recoilless rifle  
 SA Syrian Army  
 SAF Syrian Air Force  
 SAM Surface-to-air missile  
 SSNP Syrian Social Nationalist Party (Syrian controlled)  
 Tanzim A quasi-military militia organization close to some Lebanese  
 government elements in its views but supportive of Christian  
 interests  
 TOE table of organization and equipment  
 UN United Nations  
 U.S. United States  
 VRC 46 type of vehicle-mounted radio



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### THE BATTLE

Syrian Army units (about 20,000 men) assigned to the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF) surrounded, cut off, and besieged the town of Zahle (population, including refugees, 120,000-150,000) in the Beqa'a Valley in Lebanon. Inside the town were 200 Lebanese Forces (LF) fighters and about 2,500-3,000 Zahlawi armed supporters. Syria claimed to see in the Zahle outpost a threat to its own supply lines in Lebanon; the Lebanese Forces claimed Syria was trying to annihilate this Christian town. Syria sought to eliminate the Lebanese Forces and dominate the town. The Lebanese Forces sought to protect the town from Syrian control and possibly force a showdown that might invite outside intervention and thereby fundamentally change the situation in Lebanon.

The outcome of the Zahle confrontation was a tactical victory for Syria and a strategic victory for the Lebanese Forces. In accordance with Syrian demands LF personnel were removed from Zahle. Public demonstrations and the presence of armed LF personnel on the streets were prohibited. Eventually, LF offices in Zahle were closed.

The importance of the Zahle battle is threefold: 1) Politically, in generating the series of developments that led to American involvement in Lebanon; 2) Militarily, in forcing Syria to reconsider its tactical organization for combat; and 3) Dramatically demonstrating the value of effective psychological operations in prolonged urban warfare (siege) situations.

### WEAPONS AND TACTICS

Antitank (AT) weapons were the most useful for the defenders, and artillery and antiaircraft artillery (AAA) were used heavily by the Syrian attackers. Minimum arming ranges limited the effectiveness of AT weapons, but the Syrian Army displayed substantial fear of the effects of such weapons, and the LF was often able to secure Syrian withdrawal simply by redeploying AT assets in a visible way.

Syrian tactical sophistication was not visible in Zahle. Armor often advanced without infantry protection, even after armored fighting vehicles fell victim to AT weapons. In the aftermath of Zahle, the Syrian Army began to experiment more with independent battle groups because of the command and control problems experienced including the frequent cases of friendly fire casualties. The Syrians did not seem to use available equipment in a manner designed to optimize its effectiveness. They did not, for example, fight at night even though their night combat equipment would have given them a substantial advantage.

LF tactics were premised on inferior firepower and the desire to keep Syrian units tied down in the buildings at the center of Zahle rather than to capture the structures the Syrians occupied.

#### COMMAND, CONTROL, COMMUNICATIONS, AND INTELLIGENCE (C<sup>3</sup>I)

The ADF constantly intercepted LF communications, but so too did the LF intercept the ADF. In battles of this limited magnitude it is natural that larger and more sophisticated armies can deploy the communications resources to listen in on local communications. The LF answer was to communicate false deployments that would mislead the Syrians. Both sides had excellent tactical and strategic intelligence on each other.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS

Strategic PSYOP was dominated by the LF who deftly employed international public opinion to secure maximum pressure on Syria. Both sides used tactical PSYOP as well, but the LF dedicated greater assets and dominated the field. Communication linkages between LF field and national headquarters proved especially effective. Any Syrian move in isolated Zahle was immediately communicated to the world as an aggressive act toward the Christian community.

The Zahle conflict was important in demonstrating the value of psychological operations in limited conflicts and the ability of small but highly organized groups to exploit this tool as long as they have links to the outside world. A besieged civilian community even in an isolated town can place itself on the front page of foreign news as long as it can maintain a telephonic link with the outside world.



## THE BATTLE OF ZAHLE

### BACKGROUND

The Battle of Zahle fits less easily into the context of the fighting in Lebanon in 1980-81 than it does into the context of Lebanese-Syrian relations and the emergence of the Lebanese Forces as the principal element of the Christian community. Zahle was the test of strength between these two powerful forces in Lebanon -- the increasingly united and dynamic Lebanese resistance and Syria.

The Battle of Zahle was essentially a siege in that there was relatively little attempt to maneuver warfare or to make "advances" within the city proper, although there was substantial movement in the nearby mountains during the battle. What makes Zahle an interesting case is the effective use of communications by the Lebanese Forces and the psychological, political, and military errors committed by the Syrians.

Some background information has been included in order to provide insight as to what factors led to the Battle of Zahle. The main focus of the text deals only with the battle for the city itself.

Zahle was not a factor in the 1975-76 internal conflicts in Lebanon between the Palestinians and Lebanese and among the Lebanese themselves.<sup>1</sup> There was virtually no violence on any significant scale around Zahle during this period. The only Palestinian presence in the Beqa'a Valley was in the Wavell refugee camp near Ba'albekk, and the Palestinians in that particular camp maintained only an internal security apparatus that no one considered a threat. Thus, insulated from the large fire raging in Beirut and the South, Zahle appeared calm.

The growing number of small incidents in the surrounding area, such as kidnappings, and intimidation, had a clear sectarian character. This impelled some residents of Zahle toward defense preparations in the event the situation changed. A number of Zahlawis approached the Tanzim as early as the summer of 1975 about the possibility of training some of the young men of the town. (The Tanzim is a paramilitary militia organization close to some Lebanese government views, but supportive of Christian interests.) Two groups totaling about 60 men were trained in this period. In the face of continuing threats in the vicinity, town leaders appealed to the Tanzim to undertake a larger training effort, and the organization agreed to train about 600 men in September 1975.

The 600 men completed their training in September at the Tanzim's training facility in the Kisrawan mountains. After the end of their training in the mountains, they traveled on foot back to Zahle. The route is about 25 km on the map, but is through rugged mountain terrain. The trek is significant in that it was later used during the siege as the supply line to the Christian forces defending Zahle.

The Zahlawi leaders were pleased with the training, and there were other trained residents, especially from the Kataeb militia, in the town. A Tanzim training team was also received in the town for three weeks in November-December 1975. A general plan for the organization of the defense of Zahle was started at this time. This plan closely resembled the defense that was used during the Battle of Zahle in 1981. The plan could not be implemented immediately, but developed into a working formula in the following years.

Zahle itself remained to some extent outside the conflicts in Lebanon. A number of small engagements were fought between the town's Christian residents and some Palestinian groups in the winter of 1976. Over the years there was an influx of Christian refugees from other Beqa'a Valley areas. The Syrian entry into Lebanon, which began in January, increased dramatically in the spring, culminating in the intervention of the Syrian Army in June. This intervention was later blessed by the Arab League under the support of which the Syrian presence became the "Arab Deterrent Force" (ADF). The Syrian presence essentially blocked any attempts of outsiders, including Palestinians, to use force against Zahle.

From the beginning of the Syrian intervention, Syrians were stationed in small units in Zahle. These units were special forces and mukhabarat (intelligence/internal security). They circulated freely in Zahle and were on relatively good terms with the residents of the town, often visiting for dinner. They also collected and transmitted intelligence to Damascus on political and other matters.

The Syrian political strategy toward Zahle in the period after 1976 was one that concentrated on winning the "hearts and minds" of the inhabitants through cooperation rather than coercion. Syria portrayed itself as the protector of Zahle. Syrians directly and indirectly hinted to the Zahlawis that the demographic growth of the Shi'as and the growth in firepower of the Palestinians represented a threat to which the isolated Christian community in Zahle had no adequate response except by turning to Syria. This approach played to an already significant current within Zahle that supported collaboration with Syria for precisely these reasons.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning in 1980 the Syrians started a more active approach in Zahle. Concerned with the growth in the popularity of the resistance and with increasing inclination of the Zahle population toward the Lebanese forces, Syria undertook to plant new party cells in Zahle that would look to Syria. The Syrian Social Nationalist Party and (pro-Syrian) Ba'th Party both attempted to establish headquarters in the town. Similarly, a (Lebanese) National Liberal Party (NLP) faction responsive to Syria rather than to the leadership of the party undertook to seize the NLP headquarters. These elements, led by Elias Hanache, were all non-Zahlawis and totally unacceptable to the residents of Zahle. In addition, Syria used clandestine violence (e.g., assassinations and bombings) against individuals and shops in order to create a level of tension, distrust, and unrest that would force Zahlawis to request the introduction of Syrian "peacekeeping" units in the town to separate and disarm the various factions. Throughout the 1975 to 1980 period, the three bishops of Zahle played an active and critical role in keeping alive the spirit of resistance of the community.

Some have assumed that the Lebanese Forces (LF) by late 1980-early 1981 were provoking an over-reaction by Syria. Now, it is clear that internationalizing the Lebanese crisis was a sine qua non to acceptable resolution. In that light, a crisis might have been expected to lead to Israeli intervention. While there is no evidence to prove that the LF commander had this in mind -- and his immediate subordinates in Zahle and Beirut do not believe this was his intent -- Zahle was certainly the best possible focus for pressure. Syria was unlikely to back down given the location of Zahle, which is close to the Beirut-Damascus highway so vital to the protection of Syria's forces in Lebanon. Besides, Bashir Gemayel, the LF leader, had talked of the necessity of internationalization to some of his advisors.

The initial fighting at the end of 1980 was limited. The Hanache group tried to seize the National Liberal Party (NLP) offices was immediately confronted by Lebanese Forces elements, and was disowned by NLP leadership at the national level. Firefights between LF and the pro-Syrian Hanache group ensued for several days. In one of these engagements a Syrian Armored Personnel Carrier (APC) ventured into the line of fire of the LF and was hit by an RPG killing five of its occupants. The Syrians were believed to have been collecting intelligence on the parties to the battle and on the fighting itself when they were hit. Attempting to retrieve their vehicle and dead occupants, the Syrian Army was engaged by the LF. The Hanache group and the Syrian Army then were hit by LF artillery and ambushes as they took up positions in the mountains overlooking Zahle.

This brief engagement at the end of December 1980 was militarily unimportant but substantively related to the later battle. It pointed up the increasing tensions in and around Zahle, and also highlighted to Syria the degree of its vulnerability and the extent to which the LF had become rooted in the town. The Lebanese Forces concluded that the situation in Zahle was likely to deteriorate. They also first recognized the substantial emotional appeal that could be generated in the West over a siege of Zahle.

The general course of events in Lebanon played an important role in the events of Zahle. Syrian leaders appeared to be moving toward pushing their preferred candidate (Suleiman Frangieh) in the Lebanese presidential election scheduled for September 1982. Some believe that such an event was completely unacceptable to Bashir Gemayel. They assert that he believed he had sufficient assurances of Israeli intervention in the event of a direct, powerful, and open Syrian move. Aware of Syria's sensitivities concerning the Beqa'a Valley the LF decided to pursue a forward approach in Zahle.

Between the end of the December 1980 fighting and the outbreak of the Battle of Zahle itself in April 1981, the LF and the Syrian Army began to build up their forces in preparation for the unavoidable fighting over the town. In January and February 1981 the LF dispatched Joe Iddi, who had distinguished himself in a number of earlier engagements elsewhere, and others to further train Zahle's residents and reorganize the city's defenses for the more specific threat. Beginning on March 10, tension was becoming obvious.

The Syrians soon learned of the presence of LF training personnel, and began to increase their fortifications on the hills surrounding the town even as the LF was building its own fortification system (and particularly an extensive system of trenches) within and immediately around Zahle. Throughout the winter of 1981 the two sides periodically attacked each other's bulldozers with RPGs or other antiarmor weapons, causing small firefights. Minor settlements to these incidents were negotiated only to allow further preparation. (This period is often referred to as the "war of the bulldozers.") At the end of March, bulldozers were coming under tank fire. After its commanding officer was hit, the LF moved its operational headquarters in Zahle from the Hotel Qadr to the College Orientale at the town's northwest corner. Later, the Headquarters was moved to a bank in a more secure area.

The LF initially built about 1.5 km of trenches, but continued digging them throughout the battle. By the time the conflict was resolved, there were 8 km of trenches in and around Zahle, with reinforced, sandbagged shelters about every 50 meters. The trenches were prepared over a period of about 3 months, and stretched as far as the hospital. (On several occasions, Syrian forces made telephonic contact with LF personnel to demand the latter stop building the trenches.)

The LF was improving the path over the mountains that linked Zahle via Qaa ar-Rim with the Christian heartland. The ADF had already made clear its opposition to the improvement of this latter route, and had kidnapped the regional Kataeb head in retaliation.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BATTLE

The historic importance of the Battle of Zahle derives from the fact that, as a result of the combat in the mountains surrounding the town, Syria introduced surface-to-air missiles into Lebanon, leading to the diplomatic intervention of the United States, whose government feared a serious outbreak of Israeli-Syrian conflict. The U.S. effort was in process when PLO shelling and Israeli bombing created another immediate threat 3 months later, and the U.S. negotiating team was diverted from the "missile crisis" to the PLO-Israeli issue where the team succeeded in bringing about a cease-fire. Without the U.S. involvement over the missile issue it is highly unlikely that Washington would have taken such an active role in the PLO-Israeli issue. It was American involvement in this cease-fire negotiation and conclusion that mandated a U.S. role when the cease-fire broke down in the Lebanon war of 1982.<sup>3</sup> The historic importance of the battle has nothing to do with its significance to each of the combatants at the time. Syrian planners, who would have been concerned with active hostile control over the principal routes through Zahle in any case, were probably more disturbed about the growth of the power and influence of the Lebanese Forces and were determined to administer a setback to the LF. The LF initially saw Zahle in similar terms, but soon came to the conclusion that the confrontation in Zahle could be used to bring greater international (especially Israeli) attention to and involvement in the Lebanon problem. Toward the end of the crisis and in the years after it, the LF began to see the growing interest of the United States as an important factor.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE CITY

Zahle is one of the major cities of Lebanon, though much smaller than the principal coastal cities of Beirut, Sidon, Tripoli, and Tyre. Its population has been about 100,000-110,000, but swelled with the influx of Christian refugees from nearby areas after 1975-76, and was approximately 120,000-150,000 at the time of the battle. (For propaganda purposes, larger figures and Zahle's population were used both by the LF and by the Lebanese government.) Zahle is nestled against some of Lebanon's highest mountains, lying at the foot of them and opening onto the plain of the Beqa'a Valley. The city's importance lies in several factors: (1) it is the largest predominantly Christian town in Lebanon and the Midd' East; (2) it lies only about 5 km from the intersection of the Beirut-Damascus highway and the major north-south road in eastern Lebanon (a road that runs through the Beqa'a); (3) Zahle is also only a few km from Rayaq, Lebanon's principal air force base; and (4) Syria's headquarters in Lebanon is located at Shtaura, only about 5 km from Zahle (See Map 1 Appendix B).

The outline of Zahle forms an inverted "T" with the bar lying along the north-south road, which is really northeast-southwest at this point (See Map 2 Appendix B). At the southwest end of Zahle is the Hosh al-Omara district, at the northeast end of Maalaga district. The rest of the "T" extends up into the hills along the Bardouni River which dissects the Hosh al-Omara-Maalawa "bar" when it crosses the road.

West of Zahle is a predominantly Shi'a area (as the Beqa'a Valley is in its entirety). Across the north-south road is the Median Sinaia ("Industrial City") section, as its name implies, is characterized by small industry and plains.

Most of Zahle's buildings are relatively small and low, averaging two or three stories. All its streets are relatively small. Predominant features and buildings are as follows:

Northwest	Northeast	West	East	South
College Oriental	Casino	Tel Shiha	Electric Co.	RR Station
Convents	lycee	hospitals	Serail	abattoir
prison		bridge		
College Technique				

High points around the north-south road are Tel Shiha (1041 m) and Tel Hammar (1071 m), both above the road. As one moves north and northwest along the Baradouni River elevations increase quickly. Only 3 km from Qaar-Rim elevations are as much as 1800 m.

## THE SITUATION

### The Combatants

#### The Lebanese Forces

The defenders had very limited personnel and equipment. Apart from the 200 LF fighters who entered Zahle on April 13, there were approximately 3,000 armed residents of the town. About 30 of the 200 LF fighters were deployed along the main north-south road (with 6 RPGs), and another 30 were deployed in the hills sector. Virtually all residents played a role in the defense as everyone was considered "auxiliary." Civilians who did not want to fight were drafted to make bread. Groups of people prepared food for the defenders, carried messages, cleaned, and repaired equipment.

There were also between 60 and 100 Internal Security Forces personnel who assisted in the defense at a later stage of the battle.

The defenders had 106 mm and B10 85 mm recoilless rifle (RR), RPGs, 81 and 82 mm mortars, 120 mm mortars, 4.2" mortars, Browning .50 cal machine guns (MGs), and the two Milan systems brought in just before the north-south road was closed. They also had some M16s, AK-47s, old Sten guns, mines, and some grenades (smoke and explosive). There was no ammunition for the B-12s or the .50 MGs. Due to limited ammunition supplies, the defenders were unwilling to use their mortars and depended largely on external artillery fire support. This support was provided by LF 130 mm and 155 mm artillery positions in mountains near Zahle. These emplacements were firing at maximum range against Syrian positions in the hills around the town.

Shortages of ammunition were accompanied by limitations on food and medicines. Food stocks were low by Lebanese standards. (The Lebanese typically keep much more food on hand than do Americans.) Medical supplies were at normal levels, but not enough for a siege.

#### The Syrian Army

Prior to the fighting, Syrian forces were deployed around Zahle, only a few km from one of the Syrians' key positions in Lebanon at Shtaura. These forces included two Special Forces (commando) battalions and one armored battalion. Well before the Battle of Zahle, Syrian forces were located in strength both in Shtaura (southwest of Zahle) and along the Beirut-Damascus Highway in positions northeast of the town. After January 1981, Syrian forces increased due to growing tensions and after April 1 as a result of the fighting. By mid-April 1981 substantial additional forces had been added: five more Special Forces battalions, one additional armored battalion, and a rocket launcher battalion. Syrian armor was principally T-54/55s, but included some T-62s as well. As the battles in the mountains around Zahle continued, Syrian forces were augmented yet again. Syrian air power was also available in limited quantities. The Syrians controlled the Lebanese Air Force base at Rayaq, only about 5 km from Zahle. At this field some Syrian fixed wing and a number of rotary wing aircraft were based.

At the height of the battle, several Syrian Army (SA) units, totaling about 20,000 troops, were within an area 10-20 km around Zahle. These units were as follows:

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Deployment</u>
35th Brigade (Special Forces)	Dhahr, Zahle, Hosh al-Omara, Medina Sinaia, Qsara, and around the Lycee
41st Brigade (Special Forces)	Shtaura
47th Brigade (Mechanized Infantry)	
51st Brigade (Ind. Armored)	Karak, Ablah, Nabi, Rayak
62nd Brigade (Mechanized Infantry)	Dhahr al Baydar
67th Brigade	Along border with Syria, SW of Medina Sinaia

About 100 Syrian Army Special Forces troops were located inside Zahle, principally in two buildings at the center of the town. The Syrians had originally been stationed in several buildings, but moved into two. About half were in a building in the center of Zahle at the bridge that carries the town's major road over the river, and the other half were in the post, telephone, and telegraph (PTT) building nearby. Several Soviet-made BMP infantry fighting vehicles were deployed by the Syrians in Zahle at critical points. Syrians also occupied some of the hills and high points around the town, and from the beginning had an armor position and infantry at some of these locations (like in the tower of the Virgin only 50 meters above the hospital and overlooking all of Zahle).

In addition to its tanks, APCs and helicopters, the Syrian Army deployed 160 mm and 240 mm mortars, and BM-14 and BM-21 multiple rocket launchers (MRLs). The 7.62 mm Dragunov was used as a sniping rifle.

The Lebanese defenders of Zahle were outnumbered and outgunned by the Syrian units of the "Arab Deterrent Force" (ADF) surrounding Zahle. However, limitations imposed by public opinion, by Israel, and by other Syrian responsibilities significantly strengthened the Lebanese Forces. A full-scale assault on Zahle would have hurt Syria's position in the Arab world. Use of air power was prohibited as a result of secret agreements with Israel on the rules of engagement of the Syrian "peacekeeping" forces in Lebanon. Syria's simultaneous bombardment of positions around Beirut reduced the amount of attention Syria could devote to Zahle. However, the bombardment of Beirut, the focal point for the media in Lebanon, also diverted international attention that might otherwise constrain the Syrians at Zahle.

## CONCEPTS OF OPERATIONS

### Syria (Arab Deterrent Force)

The Syrian objective was to avoid fighting inside the city in any way that would generate Syrian casualties and increase the level of physical combat between Syrians and the local residents. At the same time, Syrian objectives were to secure the major north-south road running through Zahle (the same road that runs north-south in the Beqa'a Valley), and to isolate, to reduce, and eventually to destroy the LF base within the city. Military objectives deriving from these goals included: (1) establishing firm control along the length of the north-south road, including the elimination of any positions that were or might become hostile; (2) severing the link between the city and the outside LF; and (3) removing the LF from Zahle by inflicting a military defeat on the LF that would reduce the credibility of the LF and leave Syria in a dominant position.

### The Lebanese Forces

City residents did not want their homes destroyed, and LF planners would have preferred to establish the first line of defense for Zahle outside the town. However, the defenders were mostly Zahle's residents, untrained or little-trained militia members who were determined to defend their homes and neighborhoods, but were uneasy at the prospect of defending outside or at the outskirts of the town. The initial responsibility for stopping attacks from Syrian forces lay with the outward-looking neighborhoods, the streets and quarters at the edge of the town. A high proportion of the extensive trenchwork was on the outskirts of Zahle. A mobile force was maintained within Zahle of residents who were rushed to different sectors as needed. A civil defense force within the city was responsible for maintenance of various services such as fire control and prevention, and manning dispensaries.

LF defenders believed that with a proper orchestration of international communications, stubborn defense, and a high-profile resistance the confrontation around Zahle would take one of two possible salutary courses -- A "win" (meaning a Syrian decision to abandon its hopes of controlling Zahle) or Israeli intervention. Intervention became a less likely outcome when on April 8 Israeli leaders made it clear to LF commander Bashir Gemayel the Israeli decision not to intervene except in very specific circumstances. Nevertheless, the belief Israel might intervene remained a central focus of discussions among the defenders throughout the siege.



## TACTICAL PLAN

### Syria (Arab Deterrent Force)

The initial Syrian approach to the Zahle problem was limited to the major north-south road, where an attempt was made to establish firm and uncontested control along the length of the road. LF capture of a bridge over the Bardaouni River on April 1 and subsequent continuing fire on Syrian positions along the road made it clear that this technique would not work short of physically invading Zahle with sufficient force (and at high enough cost) to crush the resistance. A broader Syrian plan then evolved to, first, cut off Zahle and its environs from outside sources of support; second, isolate the outlying defensive strongholds (e.g., the Industrial City, Qaa ar-Rim) from the city; and third, squeeze the city into submission through a combination of military harassment, especially cross-fire from Syrian positions in the hills, and psychological pressure.

### The Lebanese Forces

Defense was based on the concept of concentric circles. Outside the town itself observation posts were established in the nearby mountains and were linked by footpaths carefully prepared by LF personnel. The second circle consisted of positions along the outskirts of the town. These positions were linked, many by trenches, others by other means of communications, so that all movement could be coordinated by the senior LF commander, Joe Iddi. Finally, key positions inside the town were based on neighborhood defense.

Although it would have been desirable to base the entire defense well outside the city in order to save it and to give the residents an incentive not to retreat, this was not feasible. First, permanent defense of the mountains could not be effected due to the extremes of climate which could isolate defenders and in any case preclude effective supply or movement of heavy weapons. Second, such combat would become a contest of artillery, and local forces had no heavy weapons, though they had some artillery support based in the Christian heartland. Third, the people of Zahle were not trained military personnel; they would fight for their home, but could not be expected to carry out quasi-conventional military operations in mountain terrain. This was the reason a more concentrated defensive effort was not effected at the outskirts of Zahle.

The defense plan for Zahle divided the area into four sectors, the city itself being one. These sectors were (1) the jebel (mountains), (2) the West, (3) the East, and (4) the South, the last-named being the city. Each sector was further divided into sections as follows:

Mountain	West	East	South
Qaa ar-Rim	Rasiyye	Midan	Hosh al-Omara
Wadi al'Arayesh	Mar Elias	Hosh az-Zara'ana	Maalaga
mountains	Tel Shiha	Berbera Hamnar	Medina Sinaia

(Qaa ar-Rim is a village some three km to the northwest of Zahle itself, while Wadi al'Arayesh lies just to the northwest of Zahle's northwest edge. Both are on the same road.) Each section within the city itself (the South sector) makes up a neighborhood, as they were largely the recognition of existing neighborhood boundaries. The Medina Sinaia is the Syrian quarter, but each of the three sections had its own sociological idiosyncrasies. This division eased the selecting of section leaders, because each neighborhood was dominated by one or more traditional families. These families were given the leadership role within their sectors in order to avoid disputes over leadership and other petty jealousies. Each section had six to eight defensive positions.

The overall organization for the defense of Zahle also involved other leading figures in the town. Thus, the traditional families had a role, but so did the three bishops. The military (actually, paramilitary) organization was subordinate to the political leadership.

Zahle residents recognized they could not break out of encirclement, as the city was isolated from the Christian heartland. They also recognized that the presence in Zahle of Syrian soldiers was useful, as they became hostages to the Zahlawis. From Zahle's point of view, the battle was one for survival and independence.

## OPERATIONS

### Course of Combat (See also Chronology Appendix C)

The Syrian command had recently demanded the turning over of two additional and key buildings to Syrian control, but after discussing the situation with LF personnel, Zahle leaders objected. On April 1, LF units attacked approaching Syrian units on the bridge over the Bardaouni River near Zahle. Despite the preparations they had witnessed, the Syrian forces did not anticipate any massive resistance in Zahle. Taking the Syrians by surprise, the LF inflicted severe losses and captured the bridge. Syrian losses included at least two tanks that were hit by shots fired from the small streets. Typical of the Syrians' military behavior, they attacked several times, but failed to recapture the bridge; this incident directly led to the siege of Zahle even though the ADF had been increasing its hold around the city for months. In the process of their attacks they took losses.

The heavy Syrian artillery barrages delivered against Zahle on April 1-2 appear to have been designed to destroy support for the resistance by demonstrating the magnitude of the cost to Zahle of such support. The LF was relatively well established in Zahle by this time. Its integration of the city defenses, its linkage with local authority, the perception that Zahle was under siege as a Christian town, and the heavy-handed Syrian approach only galvanized the LF resistance. From this point, both sides escalated the conflict.

Syrian forces had been deployed in four buildings in Zahle before the fighting started. Three of the four buildings were captured, two at an early stage by the LF, and another one later. As a result of the artillery bombardment of Zahle by the ADF, LF personnel left Syrian Army personnel in a contested building following the shelling. The Syrian position remained throughout the battle, and was hostage to the LF. This threat is believed to have played a part in restraining Syrian behavior. The needs of the Syrian personnel in this building for resupply of medicine, food, and other essentials provided a respite for Zahle and facilitated negotiations that allowed entry of Red Cross and other parties into the city.

One Syrian response for the long-awaited battle was the preparation of emplacements for SAM-6 missiles in late March. The positions were quickly prepared but not used. Another response, in early April (April 7), was to make clear to the LF of Syria's position -- that the siege could be lifted if all LF personnel were to leave Zahle. For their part, the LF and the larger Lebanese Front once again requested Israeli intervention in secret meetings with the Israeli prime minister.

Major roads to Zahle were under control of the ADF and were closed to LF reinforcement. The paths through the mountains were still open until the Syrian offensive took over the mountains and completely cut off Zahle on April 13-14. Recognizing the confrontation that was emerging in Zahle, the Lebanese Forces, like the Syrians, decided to take a stand there. There were several reasons for this decision: (1) Zahle appeared likely to emerge as a further unifying and rallying point for the Christian community; (2) It bode well to mobilize Lebanese and some international Christian opinion; (3) A stand could promote greater U.S. interest in Lebanon or at least U.S. opposition to Syria; and (4) Zahle also might be used to bring Israel to a greater level of activity against Syria in Lebanon. The LF organized and dispatched three companies -- two commando and one infantry -- consisting of about 200 men with additional ammunition and armaments. Two Milan antitank (AT) systems with 40 missiles and a number of RPGs were included. These units were led by two of the LF's best officers, Dr. Elias Zayek and Joe Iddi. The three companies just made it into Zahle before the hill positions were closed by Syria. Zahlawis were not generally permitted to leave Zahle, although exceptions were granted.

After April 13-14, when the last road (over the mountains) into Zahle was cut the siege of Zahle was under way. The battles to close the road involved Syrian capture of LF positions in the nearby mountains, especially Mount Sannin. These battles were not fought on urban terrain and will not be dealt with here, but some understanding of them is useful in order to grasp the events of the Battle of Zahle and its historic importance.

Syrian operations against LF positions took place at the same time as the shelling of Zahle and Beirut. The operations in the mountains had greater military significance since a Syrian victory would place Syrian forces in a position to dominate the highest points of the Lebanon range, notably the Frenchman's Room, at the top of Mt. Sannin. Syria already controlled most of this range, but the area from Mt. Sannin down to Zahle was in the hands of the LF. Syrian control of Sannin further insured that LF elements in Zahle were cut off from all sources of supply. The last link had been cut on the 13-14th with the closing of the road.

The Syrians began moving against the mountain positions once they controlled the major roads into and out of Zahle about the first of April. Initial moves consisted of artillery shelling and looking back it is difficult to determine whether Syrian objectives at this time (April 6) were limited to counterbattery defensive fire against LF positions in the mountains, or whether this was intended to be the initial part of an offensive against the mountain defense of the LF. In any case, the battle was joined, and large-scale artillery exchanges began about April 7. Syrian reinforcements entered Lebanon the next day, and by April 10 it was clear that Syria was undertaking a major offensive against the LF positions in the hills. At that time, the Syrians were also reported to be bringing commando units into battle by helicopter. The Syrians were so engaged in the mountain battle that no shelling of Zahle occurred.

The Syrian offensive continued for a week during which sporadic shelling of Zahle and its environs was limited while the battle in the mountain continued. The LF units under Joe Iddi were dispatched to Zahle during this period. Secret contacts with Israel took place, and in a meeting with David Kimche on April 8 Bashir Gemayel, LF commander, was told the LF should remain firm, but that Israel had no intention of directly intervening. He was informed that the Israeli Air Force (IAF) would, however, join the fray if the Syrians used air power. Meanwhile, Israel would continue to provide such supplies as the LF needed and would press a diplomatic settlement that might result in Syrian departure from Lebanon.

In the course of their military operations in the hills the Syrians had used helicopters to transport troops and supplies. At times these helicopters used on-board weapons systems against the LF, which had little means to respond. Morale began to plunge as the stories of helicopter gunships gained circulation (varying reports stated that the helicopters may have been MI-8s or Gazelles and maybe both) and as the position of the Zahle Christian community worsened with the increasing siege. Substantial questions arose within the Christian community (both in Zahle and Beirut) about Israeli intentions and why the IDF had not come to the aid of the LF and the besieged Christian community of Zahle.

Israeli deliberations were complicated. Israeli military intelligence doubted the wisdom of any intervention and tended to see the confrontation in Zahle as LF provocation designed specifically to trigger such intervention. Mossad (Israel's foreign intelligence organization) was somewhat divided, partly because of its close relationship with the LF. At a cabinet meeting on April 28, a tentative decision was taken to carry out a limited air strike.

Near the end of the mountain battle the IAF finally struck, destroying two Syrian troop-carrying helicopters on April 28. (At the time of the attack, these were thought to be gunships.) This attack was seen as a limited warning that Syria should not use helicopters in its military operations. (By agreement between Israel and Syria assisted by the United States in 1976, Israel was to tolerate a Syrian presence and Syrian peacekeeping operations in Lebanon, but certain geographical and functional limits were imposed upon those operations. Among the restrictions was the prohibition of Syrian combat air operations and surface-to-air missiles. Helicopter operations were not talked about, and it is likely neither party had given the subject any thought in 1976.) The Syrians responded immediately by positioning SAM-6 surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) in the positions previously prepared.

The introduction of the SAMs suddenly created a major international crisis in which Israel and Syria seemed on the brink of at least a limited war. The Israeli government quickly committed itself to removal of the missiles. The United States government enlisted a distinguished retired diplomat, Philip Habib, to negotiate a settlement to the dispute. His negotiations continued for some months and eventually led to a general cease-fire in Lebanon, but the missiles remained.

## WEAPONS AND TACTICS

### Weapons

#### Air Power

Although Syria did use its helicopters, they played little if any role in combat inside the city of Zahle. The helicopters were used to carry troops for the battles on the surrounding mountains, and at times engaged some of the LF forces in those mountains. Other Syrian Air Force planes served only for intimidation in overflight maneuvers. The heliborne troops permitted rapid capture of all the surrounding hills, isolating Zahle from re-supply. However, Syria could eventually have captured the hills without the use of helicopters.

## Armor

Tank fire was deemed to be most effective in breaking through the walls of structures in Zahle. (Most buildings were not made of reinforced concrete but of much less substantial material.) In the absence of dismounted infantry, armor's vulnerability to antitank (AT) munitions was shown once again very clearly in Zahle. A number of tanks were either immobilized or otherwise "killed" by RPGs and Milans. However, the Syrians used armor very effectively in firing tank guns against structures and positions at the edge of the city. The psychological threat of tanks was also a factor. ADF commanders with a clear view deployed tanks to demoralize and frighten the population. Many young and poorly trained fighters were, in fact, intimidated by the presence of weapons that appeared beyond their capability to defeat.

The Syrians used BMP-1s in Zahle. 360° turret traverse and speed were the BMPs' greatest assets. Armored personnel carriers were not helpful to the Syrian cause since their armor was easily penetrated by AT weapons (especially the RPG) and personnel inside were susceptible to physical injury.

## Artillery

Syrian artillery preparation preceded the several attempts to advance. The LF defenders soon came to look upon heavy artillery fire as a signal of an upcoming movement by Syrian armor into Zahle. Typically, artillery fire might begin at 7 p.m. and last until 4 a.m. to be followed by an armored thrust a half hour later.

In general, Syrian artillery caused a number of LF casualties and was effective in inducing a sense of siege among the Zahle population. Artillery siege attack seemed to galvanize popular will. Artillery appeared to be a more effective tactical weapon than a strategic one.

Antiaircraft artillery (AAA) was used against buildings and proved to have devastating effect, especially on newer ones. Even on older buildings AAA created a great deal of damage. AAA was also used from upper floors of buildings as a terror weapon by the ADF, and was quite effective because of the volume of fire.

## Mines

Mines were used by the ADF on the roads from Qaa ar-Rim as a means of cutting the lines of communication (LOCs) between Qaa ar-Rim and Zahle. They were not completely effective, but did cause some consternation among LF personnel unequipped with means for removing mines. The LF also used mines, but with practically no effect.

## Antitank Weapons

The RPG was used extensively by both sides. The LF defenders used RPGs against ADF tanks and APCs. They found the weapon effective, but were unable to penetrate tank armor at angles of incidence less than 90° except when turrets were targeted from above or tracks were targeted (mobility kill). RPGs were quite effective against APCs because of thinner armor. The single major problem faced by the LF with its RPGs was the weapon's minimum arming range. Given the proximity at which the RPG was used (often 20 m), it was not possible to fight within the weapon's parameters. Consequently, many rockets were fired -- perhaps 20 -- for each successful "kill."

The Syrian Army used RPGs against strong points (see next section on tactics) and RPGs and Sagers against buildings. RPGs proved of limited value against buildings, but quite useful against strongpoints in the mountains.

The Milan system, of which two were deployed in Zahle by the defenders, was described as very effective. Early kills by the Milan created substantial fear of the weapon among the Syrians. Shifting of the two Milans to threatened sectors within Zahle invariably intimidated the Syrians into rapidly withdrawing their armor.

## Tactics

Syrian Army tactics in the fighting around Zahle was unimpressive. Tanks or tanks and APCs advanced three abreast. Personnel in vehicles remained closed up. Armor did not enter the built-up area protected by infantry. Outside the city approximately five soldiers accompanied the tank on foot, the tank invariably left its infantry protection behind and entered the built-up area without any protection. In most attacks, two or three tanks led the way, followed by about nine tanks, three abreast.

The Syrians did not utilize darkness very much although they had some night-fighting equipment. Few attacks took place either very late at night or prior to first light.

Syrian tactics in assaults on strong points, especially Special Forces or commando attacks, often utilized RPGs fired alternately, five at a time by two different groups. The RPG barrage dazed and overpowered the defenders. Syrian sniping tactics differed from those of the LF. Syrian snipers often preferred higher floors since the LF had no artillery to threaten them. Syrian AAA was also used on higher floors of buildings as a terror weapon. Apart from considerable destruction, the noise and ricocheting rounds from these heavy automatic weapons were very intimidating. Syrian snipers used the Dragunov sniping rifle very effectively.

Prior to Syrian attempts to move armor into Zahle heavy artillery preparation was consistently used.

LF attacks on buildings did not correspond to LF doctrine. That doctrine stresses that the best way to attack buildings is from the top down. The circumstances of the battle in Zahle prevented this approach, and therefore the few cases of attacks on buildings by the LF were carried out from the ground. In these instances four or five men attacked the building, and its Syrian defenders immediately moved upstairs. (Syrians were located in the taller buildings of the city.) They were inclined not to defend the building but instead to immediately call for help as soon as they came under fire.

Lebanese Forces' snipers stayed in lower floors to reduce their vulnerability to artillery. Snipers kept Syrian forces stationed inside Zahle pinned down, but there were no attacks against these positions.

The LF used smoke grenades when available to cover movement and the laying of booby traps. The use of smoke was marginal during the course of combat because only about 50 smoke grenades were available.

#### COMMAND, CONTROL, COMMUNICATIONS, AND INTELLIGENCE (C<sup>3</sup>I)

LF communications assets included radios (PRC 25), about four VRC 46s (which were used primarily for intercept purposes), citizen band radios, a field telephone, commercial telephone, walkie-talkies, and couriers. An important means of LF communications was the human voice: personnel shouted to each other. The PRC 25 is reported to have encountered difficulties with interference from buildings when operating within the city. The LF also had a portable scrambler. However, most communications paid scant attention to communications security (COMSEC).

Communications of the defenders were based on telephone and ground links. The ground links were severed on April 13, but telephonic communications continued throughout the battle. Commercial telephone service to the city as a whole was partially severed as early as the 2nd, but service to most of the city including LF headquarters continued. The telephone was used for internal communications within the city, for tactical redeployments, and for directing fires of weapons. The operations room in LF headquarters in Beirut communicated directly with local staff sections.

Perhaps the most valuable strategic communications instrument was the commercial telephone. The LF made calls to and received calls from the outside world throughout the siege. Links with France and the United States were particularly important to generate and maintain international pressure. Zahlawi placed a call to the White House, and spoke with U.S. Vice President George Bush.



ADF command and control is unclear. Overall Syrian command authority was exercised at the nearby Syrian intelligence center at Shtaura. The close quarters where fighting took place led to numerous incidents of Syrian artillery shelling locations where only Syrians were present. Command, control, and communications appeared to be inadequate to address relatively close combat when key decisions were taken away from the battlefield and local commanders insisted on following orders.

The ADF was equipped in accordance with Syrian table of organization and equipment (TOE), using the PRC 77 and other gear of similar sophistication. The Syrian Army has traditionally preferred wire communications for security purposes, but around Zahle recourse to radio and other means of communication was common. The Syrian Army appeared to the defenders to be using practically all wavelengths, because LF personnel commented it seemed they heard the ADF on any channel.

Both the LF and the ADF intercepted each other's communications, but the greater resources of the ADF enabled Syria to more systematically eavesdrop on the LF. Intercept capability was not secret: the two forces talked to each other over radios and telephones. The Syrians frequently informed the LF that the ADF was aware of the LF's plans. LF personnel used deception based on their awareness of ADF intercept activities on several occasions. Syrian armor personnel were very concerned about the Milan, and the LF therefore talked over radios about dispatching the Milan to specific sectors under Syrian pressure when they had no intention of doing so. On more than one occasion such deception persuaded the Syrians to withdraw armor.

Both sides enjoyed relatively good intelligence. From the outset of the Syrian intervention in Lebanon in 1976, Damascus saw its role as heavily political and assigned a high priority to intelligence. The Shtaura center was run by Syrian intelligence, and the operations around Zahle were always coordinated much more effectively with intelligence than they were among combat units. All negotiations included key Syrian intelligence officers. The Syrians had a relatively good idea of the size and nature of the forces they were facing in Zahle, but underestimated the motivation of both these forces and the Zahle community as a whole, which they never seemed to have understood very well. For their part, the LF also had good intelligence on the Syrian Army deployments. They knew positions, equipment, and were aware of force movements. They also had good information on the key unit commanders, and used this information to frame their psychological operations appeals.

#### Medical

The medical arrangements of the defenders were limited since Zahle had had only two hospitals and one was too close to the front to be depended upon. The hospitals were located in Maalaqa and in Tel Shiha. Maalaqa was the scene of much of the fighting and was not able to play a major medical support role. Physicians and other medical personnel were fighters.

Two clinics were used, and the LF created a major "field hospital" in the basement of a local apartment building (Imeuble Nicholas Houry) and a major one in the below-ground floors of the Hotel Qadri. The hotel hospital

was established three floors below ground. A form of triage was used to determine the order of medical attention and activity. The clinics had very inadequate medical supplies and were under constant Syrian shelling. Medical procedures, including relatively sophisticated surgery, were carried out by local physicians. There was no systematic means of evacuation of seriously wounded personnel from the town; however, the Red Cross was allowed into Zahle several times in order to evacuate wounded personnel.

Transportation of wounded during the height of the battle had to wait until nightfall, regardless of the seriousness of the wound.

Minor wounds are believed to have been about 2.5 times more common than serious wounds among the LF. Most injuries resulted from tank rounds with artillery and sniping the next most frequent causes.

For the Syrians, LF artillery is believed to have caused the greatest number of casualties. Little else is known about Syrian medical issues.

### Psychological Operations (PSYOP)

Syria used loudspeakers and radios in its attempts to influence LF and Lebanese noncombatant behavior. Syrian forces urged residents of Zahle to depart the city. This message was intended to help reduce noncombatant casualties by keeping noncombatants out of the way of military operations. In addition, water, telephone, and electricity were intermittently cut as a means of exerting pressure on both the defenders and the civilian population.

Lebanese Forces' PSYOP was only in the midst of being organized when the Battle of Zahle opened. PSYOP was conducted through four principal outlets. Overseas, PSYOP was spread through indigenous news media (foreign newspapers, radio, television stations, and organized interest groups) and through LF liaison offices. Within Lebanon, strategic PSYOP activities were the focus of the Lebanese Forces G-5 branch in Beirut. In Zahle itself, a branch of G-5 had the primary responsibility for PSYOP, but much of the community participated in important ways.

### Strategic PSYOP

There were four main targets for strategic PSYOP -- The Christian and other Lebanese, Israel, the West (especially the United States), and Syria. Information and propaganda destined for the Christian community in Lebanon was of a motivational nature, designed largely to consolidate the Christian community and reinforce its resistance to the Syrian threat on Zahle and Beirut. (Beirut, especially Ashrafieh and East Beirut generally, which was also a preserve of the LF, was under a limited siege during the same period.) PSYOP aimed at Israel was designed to suggest that there was a legitimate threat to the survival of the Christian community which Israel had pledged to protect and to stress the implied threat to Israel of Syrian conquest of all of Lebanon. Propaganda aimed at the Western world was heavily religious and humanitarian in orientation, stressing the genocidal threat to the Christians. Believing public opinion in Syria was of little importance in Syrian actions, LF communication directed toward Syria was designed to restrain Syria from waging unlimited war.

Zahle's plight was used both during the siege and, even more, afterwards to reinforce the solidarity of Lebanon's Christian community in the face of Syria. The siege itself caused the Christian community to think principally of its Christian identity, submerging other loyalties and ties that might conflict with that identity. Zahle, known as the "fiancee of the Beqa'a," was portrayed on a popular poster designed by the head of LF G-5 as a beautiful woman dressed in white (a wedding gown) and holding a bullet-ridden Lebanese flag, and emerging from Zahle's famous Wadi al'Arayesh Hotel. And in large letters on the poster was the name, "Zahle." This poster was distributed worldwide by the LF, and was particularly popular in East Beirut.

It was not possible to mobilize other Lebanese communities over the Zahle issue, but the LF felt it was possible to maintain at least the neutrality of support of non-Christian communities close to Zahle. For all intents and purposes, this meant the Shi'as who dominate the Beqa'a. About a month prior to the outbreak of hostilities in Zahle a clash had erupted in Ba'albekk, the major city of the Beqa'a. Ba'albekk Shi'as were treated in a hospital at Zahle. When the fighting in Zahle started, the LF broadcast messages to Ba'albekk requesting help against the Syrians who, it was alleged, were trying to impose their influence over Lebanon. Thanks were given to Ba'albekk for its help in defense of the Beqa'a, a reference to the earlier clash. When an ambulance with blood for the wounded in Zahle was dispatched, it was shelled by the Syrians and the driver and nurse were hit. The LF thanked the people of Ba'albekk (Shi'as) profusely, and offered their condolences. They also pointed to the attack on the ambulance as a case of Christian and Shi'as blood being spilled together in defense of the Lebanese Beqa'a.

Strategic PSYOP objectives regarding Israel were to secure intervention on as great a level as possible. The themes stressed the threat to the Christian community and to Israel. Emphasizing the destruction of the Zahle Christians, the LF attempted to encourage and then coax Israeli leaders to enter the conflict because of their earlier pledges to defend Lebanon's Christians. The entry of Syrian SAMs into the Beqa'a as a function of the confrontation around Zahle was exploited to show again Syria's threat to interest deemed important by Israel. An example of excellent PSYOP was the presentation of televised pictures of the SAMs in place in the Beqa'a on the same program wherein the Israeli prime minister insisted that no proof existed of Syrian SAMs in Lebanon. These pictures were taken as a result of an LF-sponsored foreign journalist visit to the Beqa'a, and were smuggled out of Lebanon quickly through LF efforts.

Strategic PYSOP aimed at the rest of the world was a joint responsibility of G-5 and the LF Foreign Relations Department. While the themes were developed cooperatively, with the greater contribution being made by G-5, the bulk of the actual effort overseas was carried out by the Foreign Relations Department and its liaison offices in Washington, Paris, and elsewhere. Appeals to the United Nations (UN) and its secretary general's political organization in the United States; and general pleas tended to focus on the issue of genocide. The theme was Syrian influence, and the message genocide. The introduction of the missile crisis later led to a shift in which the missiles were portrayed as a major threat to regional peace and security.

The humanitarian aspect of the siege of Zahle was also given extensive play in propaganda efforts. Because the Syrians were shelling a civilian population that had certain similarities with the West (primarily the Christian faith), this element was critical. The LF had prevented Zahlawis from leaving the city, however, and this could have appeared at least as unhumanitarian to the outside world. Consequently the LF claimed it was Syria that prevented entrance into (which was true) or exit from (which was not true) Zahle. Syrian refusal to allow foreigners into the city gave acceptance to the LF claim that Syria was bent on annihilating Zahle.

Linkages between LF personnel on the ground in Zahle and communications channels to the outside world were such that virtually any Syrian move led immediately to charges that Syria was once again attacking the town and its innocent inhabitants. International political pressure was brought to bear on Syria both directly from the United States and France and indirectly through Arab interlocutors to induce Syria to cease its pressure on Zahle. That the Syrians were compelled to compromise in order to cause an end to the crisis suggests strongly that the international pressure was effective.

Strategic PSYOP relative to Syria was very limited. The principal channel was military operations, and in this sense LF leaders believed that the greatest number of Syrian casualties would be the best PSYOP by placing pressure on the Syrian regime from Syrian families. Syria, perhaps sensing that casualties in Lebanon would not be a positive element politically, delayed shipping corpses home for over two weeks.

#### Tactical PSYOP

LF tactical PSYOP was aimed at Syrian forces exclusively.

LF personnel used loudspeaker appeals to Syrian forces, but also used radio, television, posters, and military operations. Probably the primary means of communicating with Syrian forces was through entering their own communication channels. With relatively good intelligence -- some of it from captured Syrians -- the LF appealed to Christian officers by name and asked why they were fighting their fellow Christians. To non-Christian Syrian soldiers, the bulk of the Syrian forces, the LF asked why the Syrians were fighting and dying in Lebanon or in Zahle. Why weren't they in the Golan fighting Syria's real enemy?

Another means of PSYOP was by using Syrian intercepts. Aware that the Syrians were listening in on their communications, when the LF encountered armored positions that subjected their forces to heavy fire they at times used the radio to suggest that their Milans were being shifted to that sector. Syrians frequently withdrew their armor under these circumstances. In response to a determined Syrian armored thrust in Maalaqa, LF artillery shelled Shtaura, the site of Syria's headquarters (and its important intelligence center) in Lebanon. This approach worked, and the armored attack was called off.

LF PSYOP went through its christening in Zahle. Although the LF had sought from the outset to "score points" from the Syrian determination to attack the city, few realized how far-reaching would be the LF gains from PSYOP. However, PSYOP from Zahle proved less compelling and effective than Lebanese Forces' support to PSYOP generated within other countries on a variety of themes. The Syrians were unprepared for the international effectiveness of LF PSYOP. The outcome can be seen as a negotiated settlement designed to remove international pressure from Syria in exchange for a return to previous existing conditions and a recognition that the LF would remain a political force to contend with in Zahle.

Syrian tactical PSYOP included many of the military operations in Zahle, because the siege was itself largely an attempt to secure objectives while avoiding casualties inherent in close combat. Syrian troop movements were often carried out to frighten Zahle's inhabitants, not to alter the military situation. Syrian jamming of LF communications was also intended to scare the LF, and shelling was designed to intimidate both LF fighters and noncombatants.

#### Innovations

At least one group of LF personnel made booby traps by inserting blasting powder in light bulbs. Presumably, these devices were hooked up to explode when the light was switched on.

The LF also used large water tanks to flood some areas making them impassable to tanks.

On three or four occasions, LF personnel succeeded in exploding hydrogen/oxygen containers directly in front of tanks. This technique worked well, either disabling the tanks or frightening the Syrian crews sufficiently to stop the tank.

#### OUTCOME

The outcome of the Zahle confrontation was a tactical victory for Syria and a strategic victory for the Lebanese Forces. In accordance with Syrian demands LF personnel were removed from Zahle. Public demonstrations and the presence of armed (LF) personnel on the streets were prohibited. Eventually, LF offices in Zahle were closed.

A chain of events was begun that led inevitably to the outbreak of the war in 1982. No less inevitable was the increasing involvement of the United States and the greatly enhanced interest of the West (in general) in the evaluation of the Lebanon situation.

Syrian missiles remained in the Beqa'a Valley, and Syria retained its newly captured positions in the mountains around Zahle. A planned Israeli attack on the missiles on April 30 was cancelled because of bad weather. The concentrated involvement of Ambassador Habib and the commitment of the United States to a peaceful solution prevented attacks thereafter.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Weapons and Tactics

AT weapons were the most useful for the defenders, and artillery and AAA were used heavily by the Syrian attackers. Minimum arming ranges limited the effectiveness of AT weapons, but the Syrian Army displayed substantial fear of the effects of such weapons. The LF was often able to secure Syrian withdrawal simply by redeploying AT assets in a visible way.

Syrian tactical sophistication was not visible in Zahle. Armor often advanced into the city without infantry protection, even after armored fighting vehicles fell victim to AT weapons. In the aftermath of Zahle, the Syrian Army began to experiment more with independent battle groups because of command and control problems experienced in Zahle, including the frequent cases of friendly fire casualties. The Syrians failed to use available equipment in a manner designed to optimize its effectiveness. They did not, for example fight at night even though their night combat equipment would have given Syria a substantial advantage.

LF tactics were controlled by the superiority of Syrian firepower and the desire to keep Syrian units tied down in the building they held in the center of Zahle rather than to capture the structures they occupied.

### Command, Control, Communications, Intelligence (C<sup>3</sup>I)

The ADF constantly intercepted LF communications. In battles of this limited size, it is natural that larger and more sophisticated armies can deploy the communications resources to listen in on local communications. The LF answer was to communicate false weapon deployments that would mislead the Syrians.

### Psychological Operations

Strategic PSYOP was dominated by the LF who employed international public opinion to secure maximum pressure on Syria. Both sides used tactical PSYOP as well, but here to, it appears that the LF, which dedicated greater assets controlled the field. The communication linkages between LF field and national headquarters proved especially effective. Any Syrian move in isolated Zahle was immediately communicated to the world as an aggressive act toward the Christian community.

The Zahle conflict was important in demonstrating the value of PSYOP in limited conflicts and the ability of small but highly organized groups to exploit this tool as long as they have links to the outside world.

The Syrians failed to recognize that their military actions toward a civilian community could be displayed effectively to the world instantaneously and that the impact of modern communications could effectively limit the power of their guns. This lesson applies much more directly to low-intensity conflicts such as Zahle, where political values often weigh heavily, than to full-scale conflicts. Yet, to fail to take into account the political and military impact of modern communications is a military error of substantial size because it significantly detracts from the ability to realize military objectives.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>There are a number of works on the conflict in Lebanon in English, French, and Arabic. The only detailed study of the military operations of the conflict is by Paul A. Jureidini, R.D. McLaurin, and James M. Price, Military Operations in Selected Lebanese Built-up Areas, 1957-1978 (Aberdeen, MD: US Army Human Engineering Laboratory, 1979). See also Marius Deeb, The Lebanese Civil War (New York: Praeger, 1980); Walid Khalidi, Conflict and Violence in Lebanon (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for International Affairs, 1979); and Kamal Salibi, Crossroads to Civil War (Delmar, NY: Caravan, 1976), for the best overall descriptions of this period in Lebanon. Itamar Rabinovich, "The Limits of Military Power: Syria's Role," in P. Edward Haley and Lewis W. Snider, eds., Lebanon in Crisis: Participants and Issues (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1979), Chapter 3, and Aaded I. Dawisha, Syria and the Lebanese Crisis (New York: St. Martin's, 1980), discuss the Syrian role, while Itamar Rabinovich, The War for Lebanon 1970-1983 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), and Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, Israel's Lebanon War (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984) give the best political treatment to the Israeli role.

<sup>2</sup>Ironically, the Palestinians were not a factor at all in the Battle of Zahle. Indeed, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) advised Bashir Gemayel to "stall" in Zahle and politically found itself more in the corner of the LF than in that of the Syrians. PLO-Syrian relations were anything but cordial at this stage. The best explanation of the PLO's position and the most revealing portrait of PLO actions are found in Karim Pakradouni, La Paix Manquee: Le Mandat D'Elias Sarkis, 1976-1982 (Beirut: Editions FMA, 1984), pp. 229-230.

<sup>3</sup>For discussion of the American role in Lebanon, see R.D. McLaurin, "Lebanon and the United States," in Edward E. Azar et al., Lebanon and the World in the 1980s (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 1983), Chapter 5; and Edward E. Azar and Kate Shnayerson, "United States - Lebanese Relations: A Pocketful of Paradoxes," in Edward E. Azar et al., The Emergence of a New Lebanon; Fantasy or Reality, (New York: Praeger, 1984), Chapter 9.



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## INTERVIEWS

Fouad Abu Nader, G-3 of the LF during the Battle of Zahle

Fadi Hayek, G-5 of the LF during the Battle of Zahle (G-5 is Public Affairs)

Joe Iddi, Senior LF commander in Zahle during the battle

Ze'ev Schiff, Military correspondent for HA'ARETZ during the period of the battle

Elias Zayek, LF commander in Zahle during the Battle of Zahle

Five other LF fighters who participated in the battle

Residents of Zahle

**APPENDIX A**  
**DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT AND INFORMATION**

## DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT AND INFORMATION

### Planning and Tactics

- 1a. What was the tactical plan for the defense of Zahle? Where were defensive strongpoints located? How did these defenses relate to large, strong buildings? Did the defenses relate to key bridges and intersections?
- 1b. What appeared to be the tactical plan for the attack on Zahle? How did the Syrians appear to have decided to approach the built-up areas? To enter it?
2. Had attention been given to the urban characteristics of the operation and how the enemy might employ those characteristics?
3. Were equipment or tactical modifications made to armor, artillery, or other systems because of the urban environment? Did you observe modifications to Syrian equipment or tactics for this reason? What were these modifications?

### Operations

4. To what extent was rubble a problem? How? How was it created?
5. How were buildings used offensively and defensively?
6. What tools, devices, or weapons were used? Provide estimates of quantities and manner of use.
7. Where barricades used? How? What was their composition?
8. Did personnel try to shoot through holes? How? With what? What was the effect on the target, the shooter, the aperture, and the room?
9. Was smoke used? How? Why? With what effort? How was it created?
10. Was flame used? How? Why? With what effect? How was it created?
- 11a. Did noncombatants impede offensive or defensive operations? In what ways? To what extent?
- 11b. Did noncombatants contribute to defensive operations? In what ways? To what extent?
12. Was the city prepared for defense? How? (Barricades? Tunnels? Wire communications? Demolitions? etc.) Were the preparations effective? If not, why not?
13. To what extent and how were snipers used? Did the Syrians use snipers? How effectively were snipers? Was sniping integrated systematically into offensive or defensive operations? Were snipers used to delay an attack? Were snipers isolated?

14. Were roving anti-armor teams based on a defensive position used? How? With what effect?
15. How were snipers attacked or defended against?
16. Were there any subterranean operations (tunnels, sewers)? If so, what were their nature and outcome?
17. How were parallel, perpendicular, and other dependent street patterns used in offense and defense?
18. Were topographical features exploited by the offense or defense? How?
19. How trafficable were streets after artillery shelling? Armor shelling? Mortars?
20. How did personnel move within buildings? Between buildings?
21. What were typical distributions and deployments of personnel within contested buildings (i.e., how many per floor or per building)? Which floors were preferred for which types of operations?
22. How were buildings cleared by Lebanese Forces (what techniques were used)? How was their security maintained once cleared? Where they reoccupied?
23. How were buildings cleared by Syrian forces? How was their security maintained once cleared? Were they reoccupied?
24. What was the organization of Lebanese Forces tactical units? Were problems observed in command and control that derived from either the organization of the units or from the city environment? What were they?
25. What was the organization for medical operations?
26. What expedients were adopted in transportation, drugs, communications, hygiene, treatment of dead and wounded, evacuation, etc.?
27. How and to what extent did disease degrade operations?
28. How were casualties identified?
29. Break down types of wounds (% serious, % facial, % thoracic, etc.)
30. Identify causes of wounds (% artillery, % accident, % hand-to-hand, etc.)
31. Secondary wound effects a problem? What precautions were taken to guard against secondary wounds?
32. Can you answer any of these questions (25-32) for Syria?

33. What equipment was used for communications purposes? What equipment was used by the Syrians for communications? How were communications assets distributed among Lebanese Forces personnel?
34. What frequencies (number, range) were used? How much power did communications equipment have?
35. To what extent did offense and defense intercept each other's communications? What precautions were taken for communications security?
36. What notable successes and failures arose in communications?
37. What differences arose between night and day operations?
38. What types of equipment seemed to be most effective in suppressing enemy fire from buildings or other structures? What was most effective in suppressing friendly fire?
39. What types of equipment seemed to be most effective in breaching walls?
40. What types of equipment seemed to be most effective in stopping assaults?
41. Comment on employment, effects, and effectiveness of AT, mortar, and small arms. On Syrian armor, AAA, and artillery. (See chart on next page.) comment.

**System Employment**

**Effects**

**Effectiveness**

Pistol  
 Rifle  
 Machine Gun  
 Hand Grenade  
 RPG  
 AT missile  
 Recoilless rifle  
 Mines  
 Tanks  
 APC  
 Field Artillery  
 AAA  
 Mortars  
 Rocket systems

42. Were energy or water source/supply for the city's defenders interrupted? Was the telephone interrupted? How? With what effects?
43. Was the telephone used by the defense? How? How effectively?
44. What functions were performed by Syrian helicopters or other air support?

45. Were there sectors within the built-up area that were considered safe? What factors led to their status as safe?

46. Were there any combat innovations you saw in Zahle that were singularly appropriate to fighting in cities? What are they? What was their effect?

47. What would you do differently if you were faced with the same situation once again? That is, what lessons did you draw from the battle?

**APPENDIX B**

**MAPS**







— LF Trenches      ▲ Site of initial LF attack on ADF tanks      ▲ Syrian positions

Map 2. Zahle (1:20000).

**APPENDIX C**

**CHRONOLOGY**

## CHRONOLOGY

- 12/15/80 Hanache tries to take over NLP HQ & barracks. LF and NLP respond. ADF moves into area (Hosh al-Omara).
- 12/16/80 ADF takes over NLP office. Hanash withdraws. ADF demands closure of all party officers.
- 12/17/80 ADF armor patrols city.
- 12/19/80 ADF vehicle hit by LF RPG, killing 5 SA soldiers inside. Led to SA(ADF)-LF firefights.
- 12/20/80 Syrian 48-hour ultimatum to turn over those responsible. Rapid build-up of troops, equipment. Some helicoptered into area. Fatah deployed in Ksara, Lebanese Arab Army (LAA) from Ksara to Saadnayel, Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) in Karak, Syrians in mountains.
- 12/21/80 Expiration of ultimatum. Syrians surrounded city, close approaches. Heavy shelling by 160 mm, 240 mm mortars, tank and 130 mm artillery. Shells concentrated on Hosh al-Omara Blvd., al-Maalaga, & al-Hammar with heavy and medium weapons. Syrian commandos helicoptered into city (landed in industrial center near eggs cooperative). Syrian artillery knocked out power station for city. LF appeals to UN. Agreement reached between Lebanese, Syrians on 12/21:
- all "armed manifestations" eliminated from town
  - commercial life and city life normalized effective 12/22
  - FSI will maintain security in city and patrol
  - ADF roadblocks will remain inside city; supplied directly by SA
  - siege to be lifted, people can come and go without restriction
- 12/22/80 Syrians shell Zahle from hilltops using tanks guns. Blockage still enforce. LF, locals, NLP fought ADF. Cease-fire in afternoon. Fatah may have supported ADF (according to LF). ADF attacked Hosh al-Omara and Tallet al-Hammar. Syrian jets overflew (reconnaissance). LAA abductions in Tannayel. Cease-fire broken by a third party firing on ADF and LF near Saadnayel.
- 12/23/80 Syrian overflights. Continued Syrian artillery shelling.
- 12/24/80 Calm.
- 12/25/80 Heavy artillery shelling against area around Virgin Mary statue and heights.

- 12/26/80 Artillery exchanges. Two-pronged ADF tank attack (according to LF) against hills (near Dahr al-Migha) surrounding Zahle. Cease-fire.
- 3/31/81 ADF shells Zahle. Barricades increase in Tallet Hammar. Maalaga and part of Hosh al-Omara are shelled with artillery.
- 4/1/81 LF attack on Bardaouni River Bridge succeeds in capturing bridge and destroying several Syrian AFVs. ADF uses MG, artillery and rocket launchers. Fire traded in Hammar, al-Forzol, Qaa ar-Rim, Hosh al-Omara. ADF claims it's to stop LF road construction around Forzol and Hammar designed to surround ADF. Kataeb says PLO T-62s have reinforced the ADF position.
- 4/2/81 0730: Syrian shelling begins again, tank and rocket fire, directed at quarters facing ADF (Hammar, Maalaga, industrial city, entrance to city). Sniping, too. Electricity off night of 4/1-2. Dushka -- Multiple Rocket Launcher (MRL) -- and AT rounds hit city until 0500 4/2. Then, sniping till 0730, then artillery (Palestinian and Syrian). Some phone lines down. Hospital at Tel Shiha under rocket fire.
- 4/3/81 Cease-fire for 1 hour that allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to enter town with food and medical supplies. ADF rocket and artillery shells. LF says it got 3 Syrian tanks. Mortars, MG. Snipers. Another cease-fire in evening. A 6-story building (Nicholas Absi, owner apartment building) collapses after more than 1000 rounds hit it, killing 35. No electricity, fresh food lacking. Artillery hit everywhere in city.
- 4/4/81 Cease-fire breaks down after 10 hours at dawn. Both sides use heavy artillery and rockets. Voice of Lebanon (VOL) claims ADF fired Grad missiles, As-Safir says LF had used Milan vs. ADF armor and claims ADF has driven LF from buildings on Zahle outskirts. ADF shelled Lebanese Red Cross center, hit ambulance.
- 4/5/81 ADF T-54 tanks at 150-foot intervals firing into city. Also 120 mm guns. Muslim quarter suffers heavy damage. Electricity cut off. Thousands of rounds.
- 4/6/81 LF using B7's, RPGs, and 120 mm artillery vs Syrian artillery (160 mm) bombarding Zahle. Syrians also using counterbattery fire. Shelling reduced, but continued.
- 4/7/81 LF hitting Shtaura, ADF try to drive LF from hill positions. Syrian artillery shelling villages in Metn, Kisrawan (probably LF positions). Syrians (Khadam) demand all LF leave Zahle; all mountains around Zahle, including the crests of Mt. Sannin, being controlled by ADF; Syria control gendarmerie units that may be sent to Zahle; Bashir Gemayel must sever relations with Israel.

- 4/8/81 New Syrian troops enter Lebanon. Cease-fire (1330) allows ICRC to enter Zahle to evacuate seriously wounded. Internal Security Forces (FSI) took up positions on road linking Jisr el-Maalqa to Hos al-Omara. The ICRC arrived with medicine, food, and 4 French doctors. Israel communicates with LF: (1) stand pat; (2) IAF will respond if Syrian Air Force (SAF) intervenes; (3) meanwhile, Israel will continue to provide arms; (4) also, Israel will use diplomatic leverage. PLO also communicates with LF: (1) remain strong but flexible; (2) Syrians trying to entrap LF; (3) PLO supports LF position, will try to reinforce it among Arab leaders.
- 4/9/81 Some gunshots and brief exchange of shells in hills, but cease-fire still holding in evening. ICRC got 11 ambulances and evacuated 20 people. Syrians reinforcing artillery positions. "Ominous."
- 4/10/81 ADF shells hills around Zahle. LF shells Shtaura. FSI enters city. LF mans front lines in city in great numbers. Power off since 4/2. Both sides preventing civilians from leaving. Syrians used heavy artillery and MRLs vs. hills. Syria heliported troops in, landing at Jabal Niha. No shelling of city itself, but in Forzol and Tallet Zeina.
- 4/11/81 Syria heliports more troops into battle of hills. Syria artillery shells Qaa ar-Rim, Dahr al-Mighr, Tallet al-Rassiyeh, and reinforcements moved into Mtein and Zaarour.
- 4/12/81 Battle of hills continues. Syrian troops mopping up. Heavy Syrian shelling of Qaa ar-Rim, Herkat, Kalaat Aramta. Syrians attack Qaa ar-Rim. No shelling in city.
- 4/13/81 Zahle shelled. Food/medical supply blockade. Light shelling. All hills around Zahle in Syrian hands.
- 4/15/81 Sniper fire. 9 ICRC vehicles allowed entry and civil defense team to remove rubble of Absi building and remaining bodies buried there. Syria prevented entry of UN delegation. Some light shelling.
- 4/17/81 ADF denies it prevents anyone from leaving Zahle.
- 4/20/81 Sporadic shelling.
- 4/22/81 ADF artillery and tank shelling commenced again. Cease-fire at 1830 (became effective at 1930). ICRC evacuates 38 people (2 injured, 6 foreigners, 4 nuns, 26 sick due to health conditions in Zahle). Discussions begin (Shtaura) between Mohammed Ghanim (head of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon), Skaff, Hrawi, Salim Maalouf (deputy from Zahle), Henri Lahoud (Beqa'a's governor), COL Salim Darwiche (FSI), and MAJ Rafic Peghali (FSI) on security in Zahle, blockade of Zahle.

- 4/24/81 Agreement at Shtaura: (1) 250 FSI under command of Darwiche will assure security inside Zahle. (2) FSI will control road between Zahle and Karak. (3) Armed elements (i.e., IF) will leave Zahle. (4) Prohibition of appearance of armed activities and political-military demonstrations. (5) LF will leave Sannin Heights. (6) Joint Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), FSI, Syrian Army (ADF?) committee to implement. (7) Enters into effect 4/25.
- 4/25/81 Heavy battles around Sannin Heights. Ends 3 days' cease-fire. Syrian Army artillery barrage, then heliported Syrian commandos (under cover of artillery) fight at Shir el Ahmar. Gazelle helicopters machine-gun LF positions. (Frenchman's Room, built by French in 1939, dominates Beqa'a, Metn, Kisrawan, is 2678 m (alt given elsewhere is 8790 ft., but 2 figures don't match.) SSNP also participated in shelling LF positions. Exchanges involved artillery, light and heavy mortars, and automatic weapons.
- 4/26/81 Battles continuing around Frenchman's Room. Field artillery, rocket launchers, tank guns. In the morning, Syrian helicopters used rockets vs. Heights. Syrian artillery in Ain Toura, Bfillanah (?), and al-Quwani (?) also participated. Syrian jets overflew but did not fire or bomb.
- 4/27/81 Battle continuing. Syrian helicopters fire on LF positions and LAF positions around Mzar. US notifies Lebanon US has contacted USSR, Syria, and Saudi Arabia to the effect that Syrian actions around Zahle are aimed at challenging the status quo in a way contrary to US interests and implies that Israel may act.
- 4/28/81 Syrians continue to use helicopter gunships vs. LF positions. 2 IAF Phantoms shoot down Syrian helicopter with air-to-air missiles at 1200. At About 1500 or 1600 another helicopter shot down. Syrians then carry out heavy shelling of Zahle (Hosh al-Omara). 18 houses destroyed. Shelling stopped at 1900, but sniping on Tallat Humayda (?) and Hammar continued.
- 4/29/81 No more helicopter attacks, but Syria moves already prepared SAM-6s into area. Beginning of "missile crisis."
- Over next few days, Kahaddam meets with Lebanese and Palestinian leaders, including Pakradouni, Naaman, Jumblatt, Birri, and Abu Lutif.
- 5/4/81 Government of Lebanon asks Syria to allow LAF to take over Sannin positions, allow FSI into Zahle. Package deal -- but LF has to sever links with FSI.
- 5/4/81 - 5/14/81 Habib plan develops. Habib arrives in Beirut (5/7). Plan has four essential elements: (1) LAF takes over mountains. (2) Outside LF leaves Zahle, but locals can stay. (3) LAF/FSI take over Syrian positions around Zahle and LF positions inside. (4) Syrians withdraw reinforcements, SAM-6s.

5/14/81 Syrian artillery opens up on Hammar, industrial city, Maalaga, Hosh al-Omara.

5/15/81 More shelling.

5/16/81 More shelling, ICRC evacuates 27 wounded. SSNP and Syrians fight again in mountains.

5/17/81 More shelling.

5/20/81 Syrian tanks fire on Zahle.

5/24/81 Syrian forces shell Qaa ar-Rim.

5/25/81 Syrian Army shells Zahle for second consecutive day.

5/26/81 Sniping attack on medical convoy.

5/27/81 Heavy artillery shelling against Zahle and Qaa ar-Rim. Syrian helicopters overfly Zahle.

5/29/81 Shelling.

5/30/81 Syrian artillery shelling Zahle, Hosh al-Omara, Qaa ar-Rim. Cease-fire at 2030 did not hold in Hosh al-Omara. Gunfire, rocket salvos.

6/1/81 Heavy shelling -- Syrian mortars on center of Zahle.

6/2/81 Heavy shelling. More than 1500 shells and rockets. Maalaga, Hosh al-Omara.

6/3/81 0900: Syrians open up on Hosh al-Omara. 1105: Syria opens intensive artillery and rocket attack on Zahle for 1 hour. Arab Socialist Action Party and LAA said to have participated in shelling.

6/4/81 Population reported escaping at night. Believed down to 120,000. Water and electricity scarce.

6/5/81 Sniper fire.

6/6/81 Heavy artillery barrage.

6/8/81 Syrian artillery and rocket barrage broke out just before ceasefire to take effect, lasted 3 hours.

6/9/81 Heavy Syrian sniping on Qaa ar-Rim and western Hosh al-Omara. B7 shells and Dushka (MRL) bursts on Qaa ar-Rim started at 2150.

6/12/81 Heavy artillery and mortar bombardment on Zahle (especially Hosh al Omara). Continued Syrian fortifications being built up. LAA said involved.



6/13/81 Zahle shelled for second consecutive day. Suburbs, city and Qaa ar-Rim.

6/15/81 Violent shelling on Qaa ar-Rim, Hosh al-Omara.

6/16/81 Intermittent shelling of Zahle.

6/17/81 Syrians shelled Hosh al-Omara and city for several hours.

6/18/81 Very heavy bombardment. 30 shells/rockets per minute at height. Field artillery, tanks, mortars (heavy and light), rocket launchers, MRLs -- all used on residential and other areas. Syrian Army tried to move into Hosh, but driven out.

6/19/81 Artillery barrage.

6/20/81 Heavy shelling resumed.

6/21/81 Syrian forces shelled Hosh al-Omara and Hammar.

6/22/81 Heavy shelling.

6/23/81 Shelling for 3 hours.

6/24/81 Heavy shelling (up to 40 rounds/minute). ADF tried to advance in Hammar-al-Midan axis, but stopped.

6/25/81 Cease-fire violated at 1200. Heavy shelling for 15 hours (especially Hosh al-Omara, Mar Elias, Tall Barbara, Midan). Shells at rate of 10/minute.

6/27/81 Intermittent shelling.

6/29/81 Meeting between Major General Ahmad al-Haj (head, FSI), Brigadier General Darwish, and Lieutenant Colonel Rafiq al-Fighali (Commander, Zahle gendarmerie detachment).

6/30/81 FSI enters Zahle. 95 LF evacuated by FSI busses. ADF refused to evacuate positions in Maalaqa and Hammar.

5,000 buildings damaged (some slightly). Worst damage at southern and northern edges of Zahle.