

World Celebrates Israeli Retreat

People all over the world celebrated what they saw as a victory over the apartheid state of Israel, though some worry that Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon happened so quickly it threatens stability.

The Israeli pullout from land it has invaded twice and occupied since 1982 marked the first time Israel withdrew from Arab land without negotiating a settlement – a situation that makes the event more chaotic – but to many, far sweeter. This is a clear sign that determination and will can lead to the liberation of an occupied homeland.

Hezbollah, the Lebanese freedom fighter group that led the effort to drive Israel out, is being widely praised throughout the world. In the past, the world in general has supported Hezbollah's goals but distanced themselves from it, trying to avoid quarrels with a U.S. government that considers Hezbollah a terrorist organization.

Now, many people are saying that Syria should borrow Hezbollah for the Golan, or set up its own. This could cut the long negotiations short for them.

The peace talks between Israel and Syria – the main power in Lebanon – that were aimed at eventually returning most or all of the Golan Heights to Syria have been stalled since January. Damascus state-run radio called the withdrawal a “sound defeat to Israel” and credited the “cohesion between Syria, Lebanon and the heroic (Lebanese) resistance.”

Israel started pulling its troops out of southern Lebanon six weeks ahead of its July 7 deadline and rushed to finish the withdrawal after the rapid collapse of its militia ally, the South



A Palestinian woman from Lebanon shouts and waves at her relatives living in Israel through a barbed wire fence in the northern village of Jurdeikh May 31.

Lebanon Army. Palestinian negotiator Yasser Abed Rabbo said the pullout proves that occupation, no matter how long it lasts, will end – referring to Israel's 33-year presence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

On behalf of the 22-member Arab League, the group's Assistant Secretary-General Saeed Kamal said, “We congratulate Lebanon and the Lebanese people for this historic achievement by forcing out occupation forces.”

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa of Egypt, the first Arab nation to sign a peace deal with Israel, said the withdrawal was a necessity and the “faster it is carried out the better.” If the situation remains tense too long, it

will hurt the peace process, he said.

Kuwait University political science professor Massouma al-Mubarak, however, warned in an article in Al-Siyassah newspaper that the “sudden pullout will certainly upset Lebanese security arrangements.”

Muslims and other non-Zionist American groups in the United States congratulated the people of Lebanon on their victory and urged them to exercise restraint. The victory is a landmark in the struggle for human rights and dignity. It shows that apartheid cannot last long, said Shaikh Omair Baqaullah, a young Muslim religious leader.

Following are key facts and a chronology of Israel's military occupation of Lebanon that ended on May 24.

OCCUPATION ZONE

Israel has controlled parts of south Lebanon with the help of militia proxies since its 1978 “Litani operation” invasion. Its occupation zone, about 15 km (nine miles) deep, was carved out in 1985 after it pulled back from a line further north, held since a 1982 invasion reaching Beirut.

FATALITIES

According to Israeli army figures, more than 900 Israeli soldiers were killed in Lebanon from 1978. Around 250 soldiers have been killed, since the latest occupation zone was established. Since the beginning of the year, eight Israeli soldiers were killed.

Antoine Lahd, commander of Israel's South Lebanon Army (SLA) proxy, has said that more than 650 SLA men and some 350 civilians were killed in the zone.

TROOPS

About 1,000 Israeli soldiers and an estimated 2,500-3,000 SLA militiamen patrolled the zone.