Our Palestine — Article — 10 July 1981

The 1981 Artillery War | Palestinian Shelling of Northern Palestine and the Ceasefire



In July 1981 the Zionist occupation’s air force and artillery launched a surprise attack lasting two weeks on the positions and offices of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Beirut and southern Lebanon, and the Palestinian resistance responded with rocket and artillery fire that hit the settlements and military sites in occupied northern Palestine. The war ended with a ceasefire on 24 July 1981 that gave the organization indirect recognition from the United States and from the occupation itself. [1]

That war was, according to the Palestinian account in circulation, one of the times the occupation was forced to seek a halt to the fighting after the northern settlements paid a heavy price.

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At a glance

Item	Details
Period	July 1981, about two weeks
Front	Southern Lebanon and Beirut, and occupied northern Palestine
Sides	The Palestine Liberation Organization and the Zionist occupation
Start of the fighting	10 July 1981 according to the account in circulation
Ceasefire	24 July 1981
Scale of Palestinian shelling	More than 88 salvos and more than 1,230 shells, according to the account in circulation
Palestinian targets	More than 33 settlements and military sites, including Kiryat Shmona, Nahariya and Misgav Am, according to the account in circulation
Outcome	A ceasefire that gave the organization indirect recognition

[1]

The context

The war came amid the organization’s armed presence in southern Lebanon, where the northern border of occupied Palestine was a scene of repeated exchanges of fire. The occupation launched its attack by air and artillery on the

organization’s positions and offices in Beirut and the south. [1]

The Zionist bombardment

The Palestinian account in circulation says that on 10 July 1981 the occupation’s aircraft and artillery launched violent rounds of bombardment on hundreds of civilian targets and Palestinian resistance positions from southern Lebanon to its north, causing dozens of dead and wounded.

The Palestinian response

According to the same account, the Palestinian artillery arm responded with concentrated rocket and artillery fire along the settlements and military sites in occupied northern Palestine, hitting more than 33 settlements and military sites, among them Kiryat Shmona, Nahariya and Misgav Am. It fired more than 88 salvos totalling more than 1,230 shells, the shelling marked by intensity, concentration and high accuracy, and computers were used to enter the coordinates and angles for the artillery and rocket batteries.

The account adds that the shelling caused heavy material losses and that convoys of settlers were seen leaving the northern settlements.

The ceasefire

The account in circulation says the occupation appealed to America, and that the Security Council issued a resolution for a ceasefire on 22 July 1981 that the organization rejected, so the occupation declared a unilateral halt on 24 July, followed hours later by the organization’s announcement of a similar halt.

Yezid Sayigh writes that the terms of the agreement covered halting cross-border fire and restoring the previous situation, and allowed the organization to rearm, redeploy and fortify in southern Lebanon. They said nothing of operations on other fronts or inside the occupied territories. According to the northern settlements, no Palestinian rocket was fired after 24 July 1981. [1]

Significance

Sayigh holds that the ceasefire gave the organization indirect recognition from the United States and from the occupation. He adds that Begin’s government saw the organization’s political gains as a threat, that the occupation’s military planning began in July 1981 and it had an operational plan by December 1981, and that the invasion began on 4 and 5 June 1982. [1]

Timeline

Date	Event
July 1981	Zionist air and artillery attack on the organization’s positions in Beirut and the south [1]
24 July 1981	The ceasefire; no Palestinian rocket after it, according to the northern settlements [1]
December 1981	The occupation has an operational plan for the invasion [1]
4–5 June 1982	The Zionist invasion of Lebanon begins [1]

Frequently asked questions about the 1981 artillery war

When was the artillery war?

In July 1981; it lasted about two weeks and ended with a ceasefire on 24 July. [1]

What did it give the organization?

Indirect recognition from the United States and from the occupation. [1]

Did it pave the way for the 1982 invasion?

According to Sayigh, military planning for the invasion began in July 1981 and the operational plan was ready by December 1981. [1]

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Sources and references

1. Yezid Sayigh, “Between readiness and surprise: Palestinian preparations for the 1982 war,” Journal of Palestine Studies, Institute for Palestine Studies (in Arabic).