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Prelude: From Minneapolis to Beirut

In June 1979, my wife, Ann, and I boarded a red-and-white Middle East Airlines 707 in Geneva for the four-hour flight to Beirut. It was the start of the nearly ten-year journey through the Middle East that is the subject of this book. It began, as it ended, with a bang.

When we got in line to walk through the metal detector at our boarding gate, we found ourselves standing behind three broad-shouldered, mustachioed Lebanese men. As each stepped through the metal detector, it would erupt with a buzz and a flashing red light, like a pinball machine about to tilt. The Swiss police immediately swooped in to inspect our fellow passengers, who turned out not to be hijackers bearing guns and knives, although they were carrying plenty of metal; they were an Armenian family of jewelers bringing bricks of gold back to Beirut. Each of the boys in the family had a specially fitted money belt containing six gold bars strapped around his stomach, and one of them also had a shoe box filled with the precious metal. They sat

next to Ann and me in the back of the plane and spent part of the flight tossing the gold bricks back and forth for fun.

When our MEA plane finally touched down at Beirut International Airport, and I beheld the arrival terminal's broken windows, bullet scars, and roaming armed guards, my knees began to buckle from fear. I realized immediately that although I had spent years preparing for this moment—becoming a foreign correspondent in the Middle East—nothing had really prepared me for the road which lay ahead.

In Minneapolis, Minnesota, where I was born and raised, I had never sat next to people who tossed gold bricks to each other in the economy section on Northwest Airlines. My family was, I suppose, a rather typical middle-class American Jewish family. My father sold ball bearings and my mother was a homemaker and part-time bookkeeper. I was sent to Hebrew school five days a week as a young boy, but after I had my bar mitzvah at age thirteen, the synagogue interested me little; I was a three-day-a-year Jew—twice on the New Year (Rosh Hashanah) and once on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). In 1968, my oldest sister, Shelley, spent her junior year abroad at Tel Aviv University; it was the year after Israel's dramatic victory in the Six-Day War—a time when Israel was very much the "in" place for young American Jews. Over the Christmas break of 1968 my parents took me to Israel to visit my sister.

That trip would change my life. I was only fifteen years old at the time and just waking up to the world. The flight to Jerusalem marked the first time I had traveled beyond the border of Wisconsin and the first time I had ridden on an airplane. I don't know if it was just the shock of the new, or a fascination waiting to be discovered, but something about Israel and the Middle East grabbed me in both heart and mind. I was totally taken with the place, its peoples and its conflicts. Since that moment, I have never really been interested in anything else. Indeed, from the first day I walked through the walled Old City of Jerusalem, inhaled its spices, and lost myself in the multicolored river of humanity that flowed through its maze of alleyways, I felt at home. Surely, in some previous incarnation, I must have been a bazaar merchant, a Frankish soldier perhaps, a pasha, or at least a medieval Jewish chronicler. It may have been my first trip abroad,

but in 1968 I knew then and there that I was really more Middle East than Minnesota.

When I returned home, I began to read everything I could get my hands on about Israel. That same year, Israel's Jewish Agency sent a *shaliach*, a sort of roving ambassador and recruiter, to Minneapolis for the first time. I became one of his most active devotees—organizing everything from Israeli fairs to demonstrations. He arranged for me to spend all three summers of high school living on Kibbutz Hahotrim, an Israeli collective farm on the coast just south of Haifa. For my independent study project in my senior year of high school, in 1971, I did a slide show on how Israel won the Six-Day War. For my high-school psychology class, my friend Ken Greer and I did a slide show on kibbutz life, which ended with a stirring rendition of "Jerusalem of Gold" and a rapid-fire montage of strong-eyed, idealistic-looking Israelis of all ages. In fact, high school for me, I am now embarrassed to say, was one big celebration of Israel's victory in the Six-Day War. In the period of a year, I went from being a nebbish whose dream was to one day become a professional golfer to being an Israel expert-in-training.

I was insufferable. When the Syrians arrested thirteen Jews in Damascus, I wore a button for weeks that said *Free the Damascus 13*, which most of my high-school classmates thought referred to an underground offshoot of the Chicago 7. I recall my mother saying to me gently, "Is that really necessary?" when I put the button on one Sunday morning to wear to our country-club brunch. I became so knowledgeable about the military geography of the Middle East that when my high-school geography class had a teaching intern from the University of Minnesota for a month, he got so tired of my correcting him that he asked me to give the talk about the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula while he sat at my desk. In 1968, the first story I wrote as a journalist for my high-school newspaper was about a lecture given at the University of Minnesota by a then-obscure Israeli general who had played an important role in the 1967 war. His name was Ariel Sharon.

During the summer that I spent in Israel after high-school graduation, I got to know some Israeli Arabs from Nazareth, and our chance encounter inspired me to buy an Arabic phrase book and

to begin reading about the Arab world in general. From my first day in college, I started taking courses in Arabic language and literature. In 1972, my sophomore year, I spent two weeks in Cairo on my way to Jerusalem for a semester abroad at the Hebrew University. Cairo was crowded, filthy, exotic, impossible— and I loved it. I loved the pita bread one could buy hot out of the oven, I loved the easy way Egyptians smiled, I loved the mosques and minarets that gave Cairo's skyline its distinctive profile, and I even loved my caddy at the Gezira Sporting Club, who offered to sell me both golf balls and hashish, and was ready to bet any amount of money that I could not break 40 my first time around the course. (Had two racehorses not strolled across the ninth fairway in the middle of my drive, I might have won the bet.)

In the summer of 1974, between my junior and senior years of college, I returned to Egypt for a semester of Arabic-language courses at the American University in Cairo. When I came back to Brandeis, where I was studying for my B.A., I gave a slide lecture about Egypt. An Israeli graduate student in the audience heckled me the entire time asking, "What is a Jew doing going to Egypt?" and "How dare you like these people?" Worse, he got me extremely flustered and turned my talk into a catastrophe I would never forget. But I learned two important lessons from the encounter. First, when it comes to discussing the Middle East, people go temporarily insane, so if you are planning to talk to an audience of more than two, you'd better have mastered the subject. Second, a Jew who wants to make a career working in or about the Middle East will always be a lonely man: he will never be fully accepted or trusted by the Arabs, and he will never be fully accepted or trusted by the Jews.

After graduating from Brandeis in 1975, I decided to study with the masters of Middle Eastern Studies—the British. I enrolled at St. Antony's College, Oxford University, where I took a master's degree in the history and politics of the modern Middle East. St. Antony's was everything I had hoped for by way of formal education, but I learned as much in the dining room as in the classroom. As the center of Middle Eastern studies in England, St. Antony's attracted the very best students from the Arab world and Israel. Since there were only about 125 students in the college and we ate three meals a day together, we got to know each other

very well. At Brandeis, I was considered knowledgeable about the Middle East, but among the St. Antony's crowd I was a complete novice. I learned to be a good listener, though, and there was plenty to listen to.

My years at St. Antony's coincided with the start of the Lebanese civil war. I shared a bathroom with an extremely bright Lebanese Shiite, Mohammed Mattar, and a lunch table with Lebanese Christians and Palestinians; my closest friend at St. Antony's was an Iraqi Jew, Yosef Sassoon, whom I had met, along with his wife, Taffy, in the laundry room. Watching them all interact, argue, challenge each other at lectures, and snipe at one another at mealtimes taught me how much more there was to the Middle East than Arab versus Jew. A spectator of their feuds, an outsider, I managed to stay on friendly terms with all of them, as well as with the Israelis on campus.

While studying in England, I began my career in journalism. One day in August 1976, I was walking down a street in London and noticed a headline from the London *Evening Standard* which read: CARTER TO JEWS: IF ELECTED I'LL FIRE DR. K. The article was about how candidate Jimmy Carter was promising to dismiss Secretary of State Henry Kissinger if elected President. How odd, I thought to myself, that a presidential candidate could curry favor among American Jews by promising to fire the first-ever Jewish Secretary of State. I decided to write an Op Ed article explaining this anomaly. My girlfriend and future wife, Ann Bucksbaum, happened to be friendly with the editorial-page editor of the *Des Moines Register*, Gilbert Cranberg. Ann brought him the article. He liked it and printed it on August 23, 1976; thus did I find my calling as a Middle East correspondent. Over the next two years, I wrote more such articles, and upon graduation from St. Antony's I had a small portfolio of Op Ed pieces to show for myself.

Shortly before graduating from Oxford in June 1978, I applied for a job with the London bureau of United Press International. I had decided that the academic ivory tower was not for me and that if I was ever going to be able to hold my own on the Middle East, I had to live there and experience the place firsthand. Fortunately, Leon Daniel, the UPI bureau chief in London, was ready to take a chance on me—despite the fact that I had never so much as covered a one-alarm fire—and gave me a job as a starting reporter. I was so nervous my first week that I kept getting bloody

noses and eventually ended up in the hospital, much to the amusement of the grizzled and not always sober UPI veterans, who had more than a few laughs about "the Oxford kid who thinks he can be a journalist." My first news story was about the death by drug overdose of Keith Moon, the drummer for the rock group The Who. It was not exactly the kind of news I had hoped to be covering, but my opportunity would come, much sooner than I expected.

The Iranian revolution broke out soon after I joined UPI, and the world oil situation became a major story. UPI had no oil expert, so I jumped into the void. My only previous contacts with oil were confined to salad dressing and whatever went under the hood of my car. Fortunately, upstairs from UPI was the London bureau of *The Petroleum Intelligence Weekly*, an oil newsletter, and by hanging around their staff I picked up just enough basic jargon to fake it. My big break, though, came in the spring of 1979, when UPI suddenly had an opening in its Beirut bureau. The number-two correspondent there had decided Lebanon was not for him, after being nicked in the ear by a bullet fired by a man who was robbing a jewelry store. The job offer was accompanied by words to this effect: "Well, Tom, the guy before you got hit with a little piece of bullet, but don't pay any attention to that. We think you're the perfect guy for the job."

Nevertheless, with a lump in my throat and a knot in my gut, I jumped at the opportunity. My friends and family all thought I was insane. A Jew? In Beirut? I didn't really have a response for them; I didn't really know what awaited me. All I knew was that this was my moment of truth. I had been studying about the Arab world and Israel for six years; if I didn't go now, I would never go. So I went.

Lebanon was once known as the Switzerland of the Middle East, a land of mountains, money, and many cultures, all of which somehow miraculously managed to live together in harmony. At least that was the picture-postcard view. It was not the Lebanon that greeted Ann and me in June 1979. We came to a country that had been in the grip of a civil war since 1975. Our first evening at the Beirut Commodore Hotel I remember lying awake listening to a shootout right down the street. It was the first time I had ever heard a gun fired in my life.

Like most other foreign reporters in Lebanon, we found an

apartment in Muslim West Beirut, where the majority of government institutions and foreign embassies were located. Ann got a job working for a local merchant bank, and later for an Arab political research organization. These were the "Wild West Days of West Beirut." Although the civil war raged on, it was at a very low boil. Roads were open between East and West Beirut and much business and commerce was going on amid all the sniping and kidnapping.

After more than two years in Beirut with UPI, I was offered a job by *The New York Times* in 1981 and asked to come to Manhattan in order to learn the mysterious ways of that newspaper. After eleven months in New York, however, the *Times* editors decided to send me right back to Beirut, in April 1982, to be their correspondent in Lebanon.

When I returned to Beirut, I found the city abuzz with two different sets of rumors. One set involved an explosion of violence inside Syria, which had just happened, and the other an explosion of violence from Israel, which was expected to happen at any moment. The Syrian rumors, which most people found impossible to believe at first, alleged that the Syrian government had put down a rebellion launched from its fourth-largest city—Hama—and killed 20,000 of its own citizens there. The Israeli stories revolved around speculation that the Phalangist militia leader, Bashir Gemayel, had struck a deal with the Israeli government of Prime Minister Menachem Begin to mount a joint effort to drive the PLO and the Syrians out of Lebanon forever. Both rumors turned out to be true.

For the next twenty-six months, I reported on the Hama massacre, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, the evacuation of the PLO from Beirut, the arrival of the U.S. Marine peacekeeping force, the suicide bombing of the American Embassy in Beirut and the Marine headquarters, the departure of the Marines from Lebanon, and the ongoing fighting in the Lebanese civil war that accompanied all these momentous events.

Following these tumultuous years in Beirut, I was transferred by *The New York Times* to Jerusalem in June 1984, to be the newspaper's correspondent in Israel. My editor at the time, A. M. Rosenthal, thought it would be "interesting" to see how someone who had covered the Arab world for almost five years

would look at Israeli society. Abe also wanted to dispense with an old unwritten rule at *The New York Times* of never allowing a Jew to report from Jerusalem. Abe thought he had broken that ban five years earlier when he sent my predecessor, David K. Shipler, until he boasted about it one day at a meeting with editors and was informed that Shipler was a Protestant; he just looked like a rabbi.

When the day came for me to transfer from Beirut to Jerusalem, I actually drove overland by way of several Arab and Jewish taxis. Altogether the trip took only six hours, but the driving time was no measure of the real distance or proximity between them. In some ways they were the same city with some of the same basic problems, and in other ways, they were worlds apart.

This book is about my journey between these two worlds, and how I understood the events and the people whom I met along the way. On one level, it is about a young man from Minnesota who goes to Beirut and confronts a world for which nothing in his life had ever prepared him. On a second level, it is about a student of Middle East politics who, upon graduation, actually goes out to the region and discovers that it bears little resemblance to the bloodless, logical, and antiseptic descriptions he found in most of his textbooks. On a third level, it is about a Jew who was raised on all the stories, all the folk songs, and all the myths about Israel, who goes to Jerusalem in the 1980s and discovers that it isn't the Jewish summer camp of his youth but, rather, an audacious and still unresolved experiment to get Jews to live together in one country in the midst of the Arab world. Lastly, it is a book about the people in Beirut and Jerusalem themselves, who, I discovered, were going through remarkably similar identity crises. Each was caught in a struggle between the new ideas, the new relationships, the new nations they were trying to build for the future, and the ancient memories, ancient passions, and ancient feuds that kept dragging them back into the past.

It is a strange, funny, sometimes violent, and always unpredictable road, this road from Beirut to Jerusalem, and in many ways, I have been traveling it all my adult life.

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The events which I witnessed during my nearly decade-long journey through the Middle East cannot be understood without some historical perspective.

The roots of the Lebanese civil war, which is the backdrop for the first half of this book, can be traced back to the very foundation of Lebanon. The post–World War I modern republic of Lebanon was based on a merger between the country's two then-dominant religious communities, the Sunni Muslims and the Maronite Christians. The Maronites, an Eastern Christian Church founded in Syria around the fifth century by a monk named Maron, acknowledged the supremacy of the Pope and the Catholic Church in Rome, but also retained their own distinctive liturgy. They managed to survive for centuries in a sea of Muslims by entrenching themselves in the rugged terrain of Mt. Lebanon, and by regularly seeking help from, and forging alliances with, Christians in the West—from the Crusaders to modern France. By the late 1700s, their expanding population, openness to modernization, and high degree of communal organization made the Maronites the most powerful religious community on Mt. Lebanon. The second-largest religious community in the region were the Druse, a splinter sect of Islam whose exact religious beliefs are a communal secret. The Druse, too, had been drawn to Lebanon's mountaintops in order to practice their faith in solitude, without fear of conquering armies.

Following World War I and the collapse of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, which had controlled the Middle East for some four hundred years, the area that is now Syria and Lebanon fell to France. In 1920 the Maronite leadership managed to convince France to set up a Lebanese state which the Maronites and the other smaller Christian sects allied to them would dominate. But in order to make that state economically viable, the Maronites appealed to France to include in it not only their traditional Mt. Lebanon enclave—which was about 80 percent Christian and 20 percent Druse—but also the predominantly Sunni Muslim cities of the coast—Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, and Tyre—as well as the Shiite Muslim regions of south Lebanon, the Akkar, and the Bekaa Valley. In this "Greater Lebanon," the Maronites and other Christian sects comprised only slightly more than 51 percent of the population, according to the 1932 census.

The Sunni and Shiite Muslims roped into this new state of "Greater Lebanon" were not consulted, and many of them deeply resented it, since they would have preferred to become part of Syria—with its Arab–Muslim majority and orientation.

The Muslims of the world have long been divided between Sunnis, who are the majority, and Shiites. In the seventh century, shortly after the death of Islam's founder, the prophet Muhammad, a dispute arose over who should be his successor as spiritual and political leader, known as caliph. One group, the majority, argued that Muhammad's successor should be appointed through the process of election and consensus by the elders of the community, as was the tradition of the desert. *Sunna* in Arabic means tradition, and those who held this view became known as the Sunnis.

A minority faction, however, argued that Muhammad's successors should come exclusively from his own family and their descendants. They insisted, therefore, that his first cousin and son-in-law—Ali—be appointed as leader of the community. Those who held this view became known in Arabic as the Shia, or "partisans," of Ali. The Shiites were clearly influenced by the notion of divine-right monarchy of pre-Islamic Persia (Iran). The Sunnis eventually defeated the supporters of Ali and installed their own chosen caliphs. Nevertheless, the Sunni–Shiite split has continued down through the ages of Islam, and a whole body of theological and even cultural differences developed, distinguishing Shiites from Sunnis. Summarizing these differences, Islam expert Edward Mortimer observed in his book *Faith & Power*: "Sunni Islam is the doctrine of power and achievement. Shi'ism is the doctrine of opposition. The starting point of Shi'ism is the doctrine of defeat: the defeat of Ali and his house. . . . Its primary appeal is therefore to the defeated and oppressed. That is why it has so often been the rallying cry for the underdogs in the Muslim world . . . especially for the poor and dispossessed."

Back in the 1930s and 1940s, the Sunnis of Lebanon, who were the second-largest religious community after the Maronites, tended to be the wealthiest, most urbanized, and best educated of the country's Muslims. The Shiites, who were the third-largest group, tended to live in the countryside and were less economically advanced and less well educated. Despite the initial reluctance of the Sunnis and Shiites to be drawn into the Maronites'

Greater Lebanon, their leaders eventually reached a political understanding with the Christians in 1943 that enabled the Lebanese republic to become independent of France. The Muslims agreed to abandon their demands for unity with Syria, while the Maronites agreed to sever their ties with France and accept the notion that Lebanon would be an "Arab" country. This unwritten agreement, known as the National Pact, also stipulated that the Lebanese President would always be a Maronite and that the parliament would always have a 6:5 ratio of Christians to Muslims—to ensure Christian predominance—while the Prime Minister would always be a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of the Parliament always a Shiite—to ensure the country's Arab–Muslim character.

This understanding held up as long as the Maronites and other Christians made up roughly 50 percent of the population. But by the 1970s, rapid demographic growth among Lebanon's Muslims had turned Lebanon upside down. The Christians had shrunk to a little more than one-third of the population and the Muslims and Druse had grown to roughly two-thirds, with the Shiites becoming the largest single community in the country. When the Muslims demanded that political reforms be instituted to give them a greater share in power by strengthening the role of the Muslim Prime Minister, the Maronites resisted. They wanted Lebanon on its original terms or none at all. In order to support the status quo, the Maronites formed private armies. Most notable among them were the Phalangist militia, originally founded by Pierre Gemayel and later led by his son Bashir, and the Tigers militia founded by former Lebanese President Camille Chamoun and later led by his son Danny; the Lebanese Muslims and Druse established similar private armies to enforce their desire for change.

Around the same time that Lebanon's congenital Christian–Muslim tensions were heating up in the early 1970s, another major intercommunal conflict in the Middle East—that between Palestinian Arabs and Jews—was also coming to a boil. As it happened, I would be on hand when the two conflicts merged in Beirut.

The conflict between Jews and Palestinian Arabs began in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, when Jews from

around the world began flocking back to their ancient biblical homeland in Palestine, driven by a modern Jewish nationalist ideology known as Zionism. The Zionists called for the ingathering of the Jews from around the world in Palestine and the creation there of a modern Jewish nation-state that would put the Jews on a par with all the other nations of the world. Most of the early Zionists either ignored the presence of the Arabs already living in Palestine or assumed they could either be bought off or would eventually submit to Jewish domination. Following World War I, Palestine fell under British control, in the same way that Lebanon had fallen to the French.

Out of the broad region known as Palestine, Britain carved two political entities in 1921. One entity consisted of the area of Palestine east of the Jordan River; it was named the "Emirate of Transjordan," and later simply "Jordan." There, the British installed in power Abdullah ibn Hussein, a Bedouin tribal chieftain educated in Istanbul, whose family hailed from what is now Saudi Arabia. Jordan's original population was about 300,000 people, half of whom were nomadic Bedouin and the other half "East Bankers," or Palestinian Arabs who resided on the East Bank of the Jordan.

In the western half of Palestine, between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, Palestinian Arabs and Zionist Jews wrestled for control under the British umbrella. As the Jewish–Palestinian conflict sharpened in the wake of a massive influx of European Jewish survivors of World War II, Britain announced its intention to withdraw from the western half of Palestine and wash its hands of the problem of who should rule there. London turned over to the United Nations responsibility for determining the fate of this disputed territory, and on November 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly voted 33 to 13 with 10 abstentions to partition western Palestine into two states—one for the Jews, which would consist of the Negev Desert, the coastal plain between Tel Aviv and Haifa, and parts of the northern Galilee, and the other for the Palestinian Arabs, which would consist primarily of the West Bank of the Jordan, the Gaza District, Jaffa, and the Arab sectors of the Galilee. Jerusalem, cherished by both Muslims and Jews as a holy city, was to become an international enclave under UN trusteeship.

The Zionists, then led by David Ben-Gurion, accepted this

partition plan, even though they had always dreamed of controlling all of western Palestine and Jerusalem. The Palestinian Arabs and the surrounding Arab states rejected the partition proposal. They felt that Palestine was all theirs, that the Jews were a foreign implant foisted upon them, and that they had the strength to drive them out. Just before the British completed their withdrawal on May 14, 1948, the Zionists declared their own state, and the next day the Palestinians, aided by the armies of Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq, launched a war to prevent Jewish independence and to secure control of all of western Palestine.

In the course of that war, the Zionists not only managed to hold all the areas assigned to them by the United Nations but to seize part of the land designated for the Palestinian state as well. The other areas designated for the Palestinians by the United Nations were taken by Jordan and Egypt; Jordan annexed the West Bank, while Egypt assumed control of the Gaza District. Neither Arab state allowed the Palestinians to form their own independent government in these areas. In fact, Jordan's annexation of the West Bank dramatically altered its own ethnic makeup. The 450,000 Bedouins and East Bank Palestinians who had made up Jordan's population before the 1948 war were joined by 400,000 West Bank Palestinians and some 300,000 Palestinian refugees who had either fled or were driven out of areas which became Israel. In 1951, King Abdullah was assassinated by a disgruntled Palestinian in Jerusalem. He was soon succeeded by his grandson Hussein, who remains the King of Jordan to this day.

Following the 1948 fighting, Israel signed separate armistice agreements with Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. These agreements notwithstanding, the Arab states frequently allowed various Palestinian resistance groups to use their territory to launch raids against Israel, particularly from the Egyptian-occupied Gaza Strip. Eventually, in 1964, the Arab League, inspired by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, organized the Palestinian resistance groups under one umbrella, which became known as the Palestine Liberation Organization. The PLO in those days was essentially a tool of the existing Arab regimes—intended to control the Palestinians as much as to support them.

In June 1967, Israel launched a preemptive strike against Egypt,

Syria, and Jordan, after Nasser had declared his intention to annihilate the Jewish state and forged military alliances with Syria and Jordan for that purpose, building up troop concentrations along his border with Israel and blockading shipping to the Israeli port of Eilat. The six-day war that followed Israel's surprise attack ended with the Israeli army occupying Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, Syria's Golan Heights, and Jordan's West Bank.

In the wake of this massive 1967 Arab defeat, a revolutionary mood swept through the Arab world. One immediate impact of that new mood was that radical independent underground Palestinian guerrilla organizations—known in Arabic as *fedayeen*—which had sprung up in the late 1950s and 1960s outside Arab government control, were able to take over the PLO apparatus from the Arab regimes. In 1969, an obscure Palestinian guerrilla by the name of Yasir Arafat, who headed the al-Fatah ("Victory" in Arabic) guerrilla group, was elected chairman of the PLO's executive committee. Then as now, the PLO was composed of a broad range of Palestinian guerrilla organizations representing many different political tendencies. Although Arafat carried the title Chairman of the Executive Committee, he would never wield complete and uncontested control over all the PLO factions.

The PLO guerrilla groups were granted significant economic aid by the Arab states in order to carry on the battle with Israel, while they watched from the sidelines. The PLO used this support and political backing to take control of Palestinian refugee camps in the weaker Arab countries, particularly Lebanon and Jordan, and to use those camps as bases of operation against targets in Israel and against Israeli targets abroad. In both Jordan and southern Lebanon, the Palestinian guerrillas assumed quasi-sovereign authority over certain regions bordering on Israel. Their raids on Israel brought about Israeli retaliations, which created tensions between the Palestinians and Lebanese and Palestinians and Jordanians.

Matters came to a head in Jordan in September 1970, when radical Palestinian guerrillas brought to Jordan three hijacked airliners and prevented the Jordanian army from getting near the planes or rescuing the passengers. Recognizing that he was on the verge of losing control over his whole kingdom, King Hussein decided to wipe out Arafat and his men once and for all by launching a full-scale offensive against the PLO-dominated Pal-

estinian refugee camps and neighborhoods in the Jordanian capital, Amman. The PLO guerrillas responded by calling for Hussein's overthrow and vowing to wrest Jordan from his hands. In the end, King Hussein, who was supported by both Jordan's Bedouin-dominated army and many East Bank Palestinians who appreciated the order and prosperity the King had brought to their lives, prevailed. Arafat was forced to flee Amman disguised as an Arab woman.

But for Arafat this was not the end of the road by any means. He and the PLO immediately fell back on their other "state-within-a-state," which they had established in the Palestinian refugee districts of Beirut and south Lebanon. It was at this point that the Lebanese–Lebanese conflict became fully intertwined with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Arafat and his men, most of whom were Muslims, were welcomed by the Lebanese Muslims and Druse, who identified with their cause and, more important, thought they could use the PLO guerrillas to bring pressure on the Maronite Christians to share more power. The already serious strains between Lebanese Muslims and Lebanese Christians intensified in the early 1970s as the PLO increasingly used Lebanon as a launching pad for operations against Israel, and Israel responded by wreaking havoc on Lebanon. The Lebanese Christians demanded that the Lebanese army be deployed to break the PLO state-within-a-state the way King Hussein had in Jordan. The Christians wanted the PLO out not only because it was disrupting Lebanese life but because without the Palestinian guerrillas, the Lebanese Muslims would be unable to press their demands for more power. The Muslims, in turn, opposed any crackdown on the PLO, which, in effect, had become their biggest private militia.

As a result of this political deadlock, the Lebanese government and army became paralyzed—a situation that served Arafat's interests. Under the circumstances, the Christians felt impelled to turn to their own private armies—particularly the Phalangist and Tigers militias—to deal with the Palestinians. On April 13, 1975, unidentified gunmen riding in a speeding car opened fire on a church in the Christian East Beirut suburb of Ain Rammanah, killing four men, including two Phalangists. Late that same day, twenty-seven Palestinian civilians riding in a bus through East Beirut were ambushed and killed by Phalangists as revenge. The

next morning, Palestinian guerrillas backed by Muslim militiamen fought pitched battles in the streets of Beirut with Christians from the Phalangist and Tigers militias. Eventually, Christian elements of the Lebanese army sided with their tribe, Muslims did the same, and Lebanon soon found itself in a civil war.

This Lebanese civil war proved to be a stalemate; neither side was able to impose its political will on the other. Besides the thousands of casualties it inflicted on Lebanese civilians, the war's main victims were the Lebanese government, which was stripped of all power, and Lebanese territory, which was informally partitioned. South Lebanon and the predominantly Muslim western half of Beirut became the power base of the PLO and various Lebanese Muslim militias, while the Christian eastern half of Beirut and the Christian enclave on Mt. Lebanon, to the north and east, became the turf of the Phalangists and their Christian allies. The rest of Lebanon—basically the northern port area of Tripoli and the Bekaa Valley—fell under Syrian control, after Syria dispatched its army to Lebanon in April 1976, ostensibly to try to end the civil war. The Syrians have remained ever since.

Between 1976 and 1979, Beirut limped along as a fractured city. The worst fighting of the war was over, and a measure of normality returned to the place, despite the sporadic flare-ups. One month the Syrians and Christians would fight against the Palestinians, another month the Syrians and Palestinians would fight against the Christians, and, in between, everyone would do business with everyone else. There were so many private armies running around the country, each being amply funded by one or another Arab regime, that dollars were plentiful and the Lebanese currency remained very stable amid the chaos.

It was in this bizarre city, caught between a Mercedes and a Kalashnikov, that my journey began.

BEIRUT

drawn by Barbara Mullin