

WALTZ WITH BASHIR

AN ARI FOLMAN FILM

THE MAKOM VIEWER'S GUIDE



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Renewing Israel Engagement

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"We are invited on a voyage of discovery into Folman's uncharted subconscious after his late-night mercy dash to a friend plagued by nightmares of being pursued by slathering hounds... The dreams, concludes Folman's friend, are connected to a time in the early 1980s when both men were teenaged soldiers during an Israeli Army mission in the first Lebanon war. It is at this point that Folman realizes that, although he knows he was present during the massacre of Palestinian refugees by a Christian Phalangist militia in August 1982 (Sabra and Shatila), he has little concrete recollection of the events. Folman then sets about gathering testimonials from friends and former colleagues to try and color in the virtually blank sheet of his memory." *The Times*, UK

What was Israel doing in Lebanon in the first place?

In June 1982, the Israeli army invaded South Lebanon after Israel's civilians in northern towns had been bombarded by Palestinians for years from Lebanese territory. The Israeli government's original plan was to occupy a 25 mile security zone in Lebanon in order to distance the Palestinian missiles from Israel's border. This mission turned into a full scale invasion of Lebanon, and set off a spiraling of events that led to the massacre of Palestinians by a Christian Phalangist militia in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camp.

Israeli response to the Sabra and Shatila massacre

The moment Israel's connection to Sabra and Shatila became known, Israelis took to the streets in protest. Police estimates put attendance at a key demonstration at 400,000 people. This was one ninth of the Jewish population of Israel. Extrapolated out, this would be the equivalent of 34 million people in the US demonstrating their anger. (Imagine the entire population of 20 of USA's largest cities marching on Washington...)



Within two weeks, an official government enquiry was established. The **Kahan Commission** (named after the Judge at its head) was published just over four months later. It found that Israel had taken no active part in the massacre, but was indirectly responsible for allowing it to happen. Brig. General Yaron was dismissed in disgrace, as was Defense Minister Sharon. Chief of Staff Eitan was severely criticized and retired soon thereafter. Extracts from this report follow.

More than anything else, the First Lebanon War was the first time Israelis wondered whether this was a 'war of no choice'. Up until this point, every war entered into by Israel's Defense Forces had been forced upon them, as a war of 'no choice'. To this day, the significance of this distinction rumbles on...

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FAQ + further information sources

When did all this happen?

The massacres took place between 16th and 18th September, 1982.

How many people died in the massacre?

Sources differ. The lowest estimate puts the death toll at 328, most put the toll at 800, and the highest estimate has it at 3,500.

Who killed all those women and children?

Lebanese Christian Phalangist militants entered the camps full of Palestinian refugees, and murdered men, women, and children.

Who were the Phalangists?

A Lebanese political party and military force. Until his assassination, the Phalangists were led by Bashir Gemayel.

What is Sabra and Shatila?

Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut, Lebanon.

What was the Israeli public's response to this massacre?

400,000 people demonstrated in protest at their own government's actions, calling for an official Governmental enquiry. (This would be the equivalent of the entire population of USA's largest 20 cities marching on Washington.)

What is the Kahan Commission?

The official Israeli government-appointed Commission of Inquiry into the Events at the Refugee Camps in Beirut, chaired by the President of the Supreme Court of Israel, Yitzhak Kahan. The commission, which took on the name of its chair, reported back in February 1983.

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Did the Kahan Commission's report back up the main facts of the film?

Yes, pretty much. But don't take our word for it: take a look at the extracts from the report. You can also read the entire report on the internet.

Who was the Israeli Prime Minister at the time?

Menachem Begin

Who was the Defense Minister?

Ariel Sharon

Wasn't he the Prime Minister?

After the Kahan Commission recommended his dismissal, Ariel Sharon spent many years in the political wilderness. He regained ministerial position in 1996, and became Prime Minister in 2001 – some 18 years after the Kahan Commission's report. As Prime Minister he was responsible for Israel's withdrawal from Gaza ("disengagement") and for the creation of the Kadima political party. In January 2006 he had a massive stroke, and has been in a persistent vegetative state ever since.

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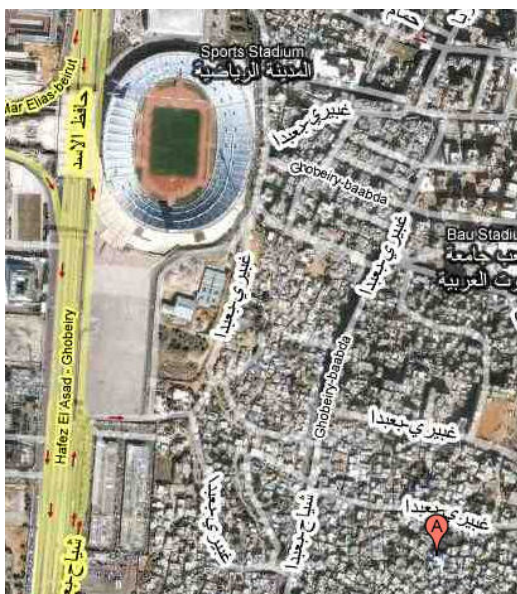
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SOME GEOGRAPHY



Sabra and Shatila in relation to Beirut area

Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Cyprus



Beirut, Lebanon, in relation to Israel's Northern Border



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Links

About the Film

[Waltz with Bashir](#)

A Film By Ari Folman

<http://waltzwithbashir.com/film.html>

[Inside A Veteran's Nightmare](#)

A.O Scott

nytimes.com 26 December 2008

<http://movies.nytimes.com/2008/12/26/movies/26bash.html?8dpc>

[Waltz with Bashir](#)

Rolling Stone

22 January 2009

<http://www.rollingstone.com/reviews/movie/20532240/>

[Waltzing With Beirut](#)

Michael B. Oren

What Israel--and the rest of the world--can learn from 18 years of war with Lebanon

The New Republic 14 July 2008

http://www.tnr.com/story_print.html?id=320e4ee3-e968-42d5-87b9-41cfc93ff06

About the issues

[Conversation: Ethics and Warfare - Aryeh Klapper, Benjamin Ish-Shalom,](#)

[Michael J. Broyde](#)

Meorot 6:1 Shevat 5767 / 2006

Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School

<http://www.edah.org/backend/JournalArticle/TOC-final.pdf>

[Israel's Foreign Relations - Selected Documents -Volume 8: 1982-1984](#)

Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign+Relations/Israels+Foreign+Relations+since+1947/1982-1984/>

[Moral Conflicts: Making and Contesting Interpretations of Sabra and Shatila](#)

Karine Hamilton ,Presentation to the Association for Israel Studies, "Israel: The Prospects for Reinvigoration" (Hebrew University, Jerusalem, June 14-16, 2004)

<http://www.aisisraelstudies.org/2004papers/Hamilton.%20Karine.pdf>

[The Beirut Massacre: The Four Days](#)

Thomas L. Friedman

Nytimes.com 26 September 1982

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9504E4D81138F935A1575AC0A964948260&sec=h&ealth&spon=&pagewanted=4>

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Off the Shelf

Gilbert, M. *Israel: A History*. London, Black Swan.

Harkabi, Y. *Israel's Fateful Hour*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

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WARM UP QUESTIONS:

Give one word to sum up your feelings after the movie

Give two sentences – one ending with an exclamation mark, and one ending with a question mark – that you are left with after the film

How might the film have been changed for you, if the final scene had returned to Ari Folman sitting drinking with Boaz making sense of his dream, rather than the live footage from the massacre?

1



"Maybe I'll discover things about myself that I don't want to know?"

Did the film uncover things for you that you didn't want to know?

How does the film leave you feeling about Israel and Israelis?

Is this a film you'd like your Jewish friends to see?

Is it a film you'd like your non-Jewish friends to see?

2



*"You were going to win the Nobel Prize."
"At age 20 I couldn't be anything at all..."*

At a conservative estimate, at least one in ten Israeli men of that generation took part in the Beirut, just like the characters in the film.

How do you think this complex kind of suppressed trauma affects a society?

3



"Can't films be therapeutic?"

Did you find this film to be therapeutic?

What is it trying to 'do'?

What do you think was the purpose of this film?

Were you left feeling that Folman had forgiven himself by the end?

4



*"Did you fire the flares?"
"What does it matter?"*

Ari Folman's character does not feel there is a moral difference between sending flares, standing by others sending flares, or committing the murders themselves. Do you?

Do you think there is a moral difference between the murderers, and those who inadvertently helped them?

5



"Massacre is not stored in my system."

Though Ari and his friends return to this comment, it appears that an earlier massacre – the Holocaust – is very much stored in Ari's system.

How does his inherited memory of the Holocaust play out in Ari's struggle with what happened in Lebanon?

Does your knowledge of the Holocaust color your 'reading' of the film?

Would you say that the Holocaust affects your understanding of Israel, Israel's actions, and Israelis in general?

Extracts from the Commission of Inquiry into the Events at the Refugee Camps in Beirut, chaired by the President of the Supreme Court of Israel, Yitzhak Kahan. Feb. 1983



Extracts from the Kahan Commission, the Israeli Government-appointed investigation into the Sabra and Shatila massacres headed by Judge Kahan

Who were the Phalangists?

"The main Christian armed force that took part in the civil war consisted mainly of Maronite Christians, though a small number of Shiites joined them. This force comprised several armed Christian organizations, the largest among them being the organizations under the leadership of the Chamoun family and of the Jemayel family. The head of the Jemayel family, Mr. Pierre Jemayel, founded the Phalangist organization; and the leader of this organization in recent years was Pierre's son, **Bashir Jemayel**. In the course of time, the Phalangist organization became the central element in the Christian forces; in 1982, the Phalangists ruled the Christian armed forces...

About the
reputation of
the
Phalangists
and their
leader Bashir
Jemayel

The Phalangist leaders proposed removing a large portion of the Palestinian refugees from Lebanese soil, whether by methods of persuasion or other means of pressure. They did not conceal their opinion that it would be necessary to resort to acts of violence in order to cause the exodus of many Palestinian refugees from Lebanon.

... In all the testimony we have heard, there has been unanimity regarding [the fact] that the battle ethics of the Phalangists, from the standpoint of their attitude to non-combatants, differ greatly from those of the Israel Defence Forces (I.D.F.). It has already been noted that in the course of the civil war in Lebanon, many massacres had been perpetrated by the forces that had taken part in the fighting."

Israel's military links with the Phalangists

"At the beginning of the war, the Chief of Staff [Lt.-Gen. Rafael Eitan] told the Phalangists that they should refrain from all fighting. This order was issued because of the fear that if the Phalangists' force got into trouble while fighting, the I.D.F. would be forced to come to its aid, thereby disrupting the I.D.F.'s plan of action...

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About the way Israel kept the Phalangists out of the fighting

When I.D.F. forces were fighting in the suburbs of Beirut and along the Beirut-Damascus road, the Phalangists were asked to cooperate with the I.D.F.'s actions by **identifying terrorists**, a task at which the Phalangists' expertise was greater than that of the Israeli security forces...

The fighting actions of the Phalangists during that time were few, and in effect the fighting was all done by I.D.F. forces alone. This state of affairs aroused criticism and negative reactions from the Israeli public, and among I.D.F. soldiers as well... The feeling among the Israeli public was that the I.D.F. was "pulling the chestnuts out of the fire" for the Phalangists..."

The Assassination of Bashir Gemayel and the I.D.F.'s entry into West Beirut

"On Tuesday afternoon, 14th September 1982, a large bomb exploded in a building in Ashrafiyeh, Beirut, where Bashir Gemayel was [meeting] with a group of commanders and other Phalangists... Word of Bashir's death reached Israel at about 11.00 p.m., and it was then that the decision was taken... that the I.D.F. would enter West Beirut. In one of the consultations between the Minister of Defense and the Chief of Staff, there was mention of including the Phalangists in the entry into West Beirut. **The question of including the Phalangists was not mentioned at that stage in conversations with the Prime Minister.**"

Sabra and Shatila

Firing the flares for the Phalangists in the camp

"On Thursday, 16.9.82, at approximately 18:00 hours, members of the Phalangists entered the Shatilla camp from the west and south. ... their movements within the camps were not visible from the roof of the forward command post or from the observation sites on other roofs. The Divisional Intelligence Officer tried to follow their movements using binoculars which he shifted from place to place, but was unable to see their movements or their actions... G. (his full name appears in the list of names, Section 1, Appendix B) **requested the I.D.F. to provide illumination** for the force which was moving in, since its entry was taking place after dark. Initially, the illumination

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was provided by a mortar company, and subsequently also by aircraft; but because the illumination from the planes interfered with the evacuation of casualties of an I.D.F. unit, this source of illumination was halted; mortar illumination continued intermittently throughout the night."

What did the soldiers on the ground know?

Rumors of a massacre

"At approximately 7:00 p.m...according to Lt. Elul's testimony... he heard a Phalangist officer from the force that had entered the camps tell Elie Hobeika (in Arabic) that there were 50 women and children, and what should he do. Elie Hobeika's reply over the radio was: "This is the last time you're going to ask me a question like that, you know exactly what to do;" and then raucous laughter broke out among the Phalangist personnel on the roof. Lieutenant Elul understood that what was involved was the murder of the women and children. According to his testimony, Brigadier General Yaron, who was also on the forward command post roof then, asked him what he had overheard on the radio; and after Lieutenant Elul told him the content of the conversation, Brigadier General Yaron went over to Hobeika and spoke with him in English for about five minutes."

About the only Israeli minister who sniffed trouble...

Israeli Government response

Deputy Prime Minister D. Levy said that... the I.D.F.'s continued stay in Beirut was liable to generate an undesirable situation...:

"...When I hear that the Phalangists are already entering a certain neighborhood - and I know what the meaning of revenge is for them, what kind of slaughter... no one will believe we went in to create order there, and we will bear the blame..."

The slaughter reported

"It is impossible to determine precisely the number of persons who were slaughtered. The numbers cited in this regard are to a large degree tendentious and are not based on an exact count by persons whose reliability can be counted on. The low estimate came from sources connected with the Government of Lebanon or with the Lebanese Forces. The letter (exhibit 153) of the head of the Red Cross

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delegation to the Minister of Defense stated that Red Cross representatives had counted 328 bodies... According to I.D.F. intelligence sources, the number of victims of the massacre is between 700 and 800. This may well be the number most closely corresponding with reality...

According to the testimony we heard, no report of the slaughter in the camps was made to the Prime Minister on Saturday... The Prime Minister heard about the massacre on a B.B.C. radio broadcast towards evening on Saturday. He immediately contacted the Chief of Staff and the Defense Minister, who informed him that the actions had been halted and that the Phalangists had been removed from the camps (p. 771).

The confused
Government
response to
the news

When a public furor erupted in Israel and abroad in the wake of the reports about the massacre, and accusations were levelled that the I.D.F. and Haddad's men had taken part in the massacre, several communiqués were issued by the I.D.F. and the Foreign Ministry which contained incorrect and imprecise statements about the events. These communiqués asserted explicitly or implied that the Phalangists' entry into the camps had been carried out without the knowledge of - or coordination with - the I.D.F. The incorrect statements were subsequently amended, and it was stated publicly that the Phalangists' entry into the camps had been coordinated with the I.D.F. There is no doubt that the publication of incorrect and imprecise reports intensified the suspicions against Israel and caused it harm."

The Direct Responsibility

Israeli forces
did not carry
out the
massacre

"Contentions and accusations were advanced that even if I.D.F. personnel had not shed the blood of the massacred, the entry of the Phalangists into the camps had been carried out with the prior knowledge that a massacre would be perpetrated there and with the intention that this should indeed take place; and therefore all those who had enabled the entry of the Phalangists into the camps should be regarded as accomplices to the acts of slaughter and sharing in direct responsibility. These accusations too are unfounded. We have no doubt that **no conspiracy or plot was entered into between anyone from the Israeli political echelon or from the military**

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echelon in the I.D.F. and the Phalangists, with the aim of perpetrating atrocities in the camps. The decision to have the Phalangists enter the camps was taken with the aim of preventing further losses in the war in Lebanon; to accede to the pressure of public opinion in Israel, which was angry that the Phalangists, who were reaping the fruits of the war, were taking no part in it; and to take advantage of the Phalangists' professional service and their skills in identifying terrorists and in discovering arms caches. **No intention existed on the part of any Israeli element to harm the non-combatant population in the camps...**

No one knew
what was
going on
until
afterwards

It was alleged that the atrocities being perpetrated in the camps were visible from the roof of the forward command post, that the fact that they were being committed was also discernible from the sounds emanating from the camps, and that the senior I.D.F. commanders who were on the roof of the forward command post for two days certainly saw or heard what was going on in the camps. We have already determined above that events in the camps, in the area where the Phalangists entered, were not visible from the roof of the forward command post. It has also been made clear that no sounds from which it could be inferred that a massacre was being perpetrated in the camps reached that place. It is true that certain reports did reach officers at the forward command post - and we shall discuss these in another section of this report - but from the roof of the forward command post they neither saw the actions of the Phalangists nor heard any sounds indicating that a massacre was in progress.

Here we must add that when the group of doctors and nurses met I.D.F. officers on Saturday morning, at a time when it was already clear to them that they were out of danger, they made no complaint that a massacre had been perpetrated in the camps. When we asked the witnesses from the group why they had not informed the I. D. F. officers about the massacre, they replied that they had not known about it. The fact that the doctors and nurses who were in the Gaza Hospital - which is proximate to the site of the event and where persons wounded in combative action and frightened persons from the camps arrived - did not know about the massacre, but only about isolated instances of injury which they had seen for themselves, also shows that those who were nearby but not actually inside the camps

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did not form the impression, from what they saw and heard, that a massacre of hundreds of people was taking place. ...

The
Phalangists
carried out
the massacre

Our conclusion is therefore that the **direct responsibility for the perpetration of the acts of slaughter rests on the Phalangist forces**. No evidence was brought before us that Phalangist personnel received explicit orders from their command to perpetrate acts of slaughter, but it is evident that the forces who entered the area were steeped in hatred for the Palestinians, in the wake of the atrocities and severe injuries done to the Christians during the civil war in Lebanon by the Palestinians and those who fought alongside them; and these feelings of hatred were compounded by a longing for revenge in the wake of the assassination of the Phalangists' admired leader Bashir and the killing of several dozen Phalangists two days before their entry into the camps. The execution of acts of slaughter was approved for the Phalangists on the site by the remarks of the two commanders to whom questions were addressed over the radios, as was related above."

Israel should
address
indirect
responsibility
because our
texts teach us
to do so,
and...

The Jewish approach to indirect responsibility

"A basis for such responsibility may be found in the outlook of our ancestors, which was expressed in things that were said about the moral significance of the biblical portion concerning the "beheaded heifer" (in the Book of Deuteronomy, chapter 21). It is said in Deuteronomy (21:6-7) that the elders of the city who were near the slain victim who has been found (and it is not known who struck him down) "will wash their hands over the beheaded heifer in the valley and reply: our hands did not shed this blood and our eyes did not see." Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says of this verse (Talmud, Tractate Sota 38b):

The necessity for the heifer whose neck is to be broken only arises on account of the niggardliness of spirit, as it is said, 'Our hands have not shed this blood.' But can it enter our minds that the elders of a Court of Justice are shedders of blood! The meaning is, [the man found dead] did not come to us for help and we dismissed him, we did not see him and let him go - i.e., he did not come to us for help and we

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dismissed him without supplying him with food, we did not see him and let him go without escort." (Rashi explains that escort means a group that would accompany them; Sforno, a commentator from a later period, says in his commentary on Deuteronomy, "that there should not be spectators at the place, for if there were spectators there, they would protest and speak out.")

...because
our history
as a people
demands we
do so.

When we are dealing with the issue of indirect responsibility, it should also not be forgotten that the Jews in various lands of exile, and also in the Land of Israel when it was under foreign rule, suffered greatly from pogroms perpetrated by various hooligans; and the danger of disturbances against Jews in various lands, it seems evident, has not yet passed. **The Jewish public's stand has always been that the responsibility for such deeds falls not only on those who rioted and committed the atrocities, but also on those who were responsible for safety and public order, who could have prevented the disturbances and did not fulfill their obligations in this respect.** It is true that the regimes of various countries, among them even enlightened countries, have side-stepped such responsibility on more than one occasion and have not established inquiry commissions to investigate the issue of indirect responsibility, such as that about which we are speaking; but **the development of ethical norms in the public world requires that the approach to this issue be universally shared, and that the responsibility be placed not just on the perpetrators, but also on those who could and should have prevented the commission of those deeds which must be condemned.**

...

Everyone
should have
known that
the
Phalangists
were likely to
take a terrible
revenge.

In our view, everyone who had anything to do with events in Lebanon should have felt apprehension about a massacre in the camps, if armed Phalangist forces were to be moved into them without the I.D.F. exercising concrete and effective supervision and scrutiny of them. All those concerned were well aware that combat morality among the various combatant groups in Lebanon differs from the norm in the I.D.F. that the combatants in Lebanon belittle the value of human life far beyond what is necessary and accepted in wars between civilized peoples, and that various atrocities against the non-combatant population had been widespread in Lebanon since 1975. It was well known that the Phalangists harbor deep enmity for the

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Palestinians, viewing them as the source of all the troubles that afflicted Lebanon during the years of the civil war... To this backdrop of the Phalangists' attitude toward the Palestinians were added the profound shock in the wake of Bashir's death... and the feeling of revenge that event must arouse, even without the identity of the assailant being known.

There was no foresight, and action was too slow once the situation was understood

To sum up this chapter, we assert that the atrocities in the refugee camps were perpetrated by members of the Phalangists, and that absolutely no direct responsibility devolves upon Israel or upon those who acted in its behalf. At the same time, it is clear from what we have said above that the decision on the entry of the Phalangists into the refugee camps was taken without consideration of the danger - which the makers and executors of the decision were obligated to foresee as probable - that the Phalangists would commit massacres and pogroms against the inhabitants of the camps, and without an examination of the means for preventing this danger. Similarly, it is clear from the course of events that when the reports began to arrive about the actions of the Phalangists in the camps, no proper heed was taken of these reports, the correct conclusions were not drawn from them, and no energetic and immediate actions were taken to restrain the Phalangists and put a stop to their actions. This both reflects and exhausts Israel's indirect responsibility for what occurred in the refugee camps."

The Responsibility of the Political Echelon

The Prime Minister, Mr. Menachem Begin

Prime Minister Begin is severely reprimanded.

...We find no reason to exempt the Prime Minister from responsibility for not having evinced, during or after the Cabinet session, any interest in the Phalangists' actions in the camps... For two days after the Prime Minister heard about the Phalangists' entry, he showed absolutely no interest in their actions in the camps... It may be assumed that a manifestation of interest by him in this matter, after he had learned of the Phalangists' entry, would have increased the alertness of the Defense Minister and the Chief of Staff to the need to take appropriate measures to meet the expected danger.

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The Minister of Defense, Mr. Ariel Sharon

Defence
Minister
Sharon
reprimanded
and
dismissed.

It is our view that responsibility is to be imputed to the Minister of Defense for having **disregarded the danger of acts of vengeance and bloodshed** by the Phalangists against the population of the refugee camps, and having **failed to take this danger into account** when he decided to have the Phalangists enter the camps. In addition, responsibility is to be imputed to the Minister of Defense for not ordering appropriate measures for preventing or reducing the danger of massacre as a condition for the Phalangists' entry into the camps. These blunders constitute the non-fulfillment of a duty with which the Defense Minister was charged.