

22

Maelstrom in the Levant

As the 1980's began, the document that set out the best guide to the Middle East's future (although not precisely in all the directions intended by its author) was one by an Israeli. General Ariel Sharon, then Israel's minister of defense, laid out his recommendations for Israel's strategy in a speech at Tel Aviv University on December 15, 1981. His program for the future, more than any other, set in motion the tragic events that were to characterize the maelstrom in the Levant throughout the 1980's, and it was Lebanon that he addressed in the first part of his plan.

So much has happened in so many troubled areas that it may be well briefly to refocus our memories on the complex issues that arose in Lebanon. Although these issues are of course interrelated in intricate ways, for analytical purposes I will divide them into the Lebanese polity, the Palestinian presence, the Syrian involvement, the Syrian-Palestinian relationship, the Syrian-Soviet alliance, Israeli strategy prior to June 1982, the Israeli invasion, the American involvement, and the aftermath in Lebanon. These events will take our narrative to the occupied territories and, finally, to the *Intifada* (or uprising against Israel), Israel's attempted repression, and the current situation. Let us begin with the evolution of Lebanon as a political entity.

Since the time it was a province of the Ottoman Empire, Mount