

Proxy Wars, Part 2: Opportunity and Risk in the Middle East

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SPEAKERS

Ambassador Ryan Crocker, Dr. Eli Berman Shawna Sinnot, Kyle Atwell

Kyle Atwell 00:01

Thank you for joining us today on the Irregular Warfare Podcast. My name is Kyle Atwell. I am one of the founders and co-hosts of the podcast and before we kick off today's conversation with Ambassador Ryan Crocker and Dr. Eli Berman, I wanted to let you know that we are currently searching for a fourth co-host to join our team. If you are interested, please send an email with your resume to engage@irregularwarfarepodcast.com that is E N G A G E at irregularwarfarepodcast.com. We will accept applications through September 15th, 2020. There are no hard requirements. You can be civilian or military, a researcher, policymaker, or practitioner. The key criteria is that you have a deep interest in learning and sharing knowledge about irregular warfare. All right, thank you again for joining us today. And please enjoy the conversation.

Ryan Crocker 00:57

Think it through: what's the history? What's the current landscape? Who is allied with who? What moves are they likely to make as you move? What would their calculations be? Again, as Dave famously said "tell me how this ends."

Dr. Eli Berman 01:17

One of the principal findings is that the US goes in thinking that the government which claims to share this objective of suppressing this group really thinks of that as their number one objective. And what we find is that the local ally over which the US thinks it has leverage has other number one objectives. And those are maybe the survival of the government itself.

Shawna Sinnot 01:40

Welcome to episode seven of the Irregular Warfare Podcast. I'm Shawna Sinnot, and I will be your host today along with Kyle Atwell. Today's episode is the second installment of a two-part discussion on fighting irregular warfare through proxy forces.

Kyle Atwell 01:54

Our guests draw on both extensive practitioner experience and academic research to discuss the nature of proxy warfare in the Middle East. A central takeaway from the conversation is that principals rarely have as much control over local partners as they would like, and while proxy relationships can be successful for the principal, they also carry significant risks. These lessons are illuminated through discussion on specific cases to include Iran support for the Houthi rebels in Yemen, and Israel's successes and failures influencing different proxy forces during the Lebanese Civil War.

Shawna Sinnott 02:26

Ambassador Ryan Crocker has served as a US Ambassador to Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Kuwait, and Lebanon, and is a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Most recently, he served as the Diplomat in Residence at Princeton University.

Kyle Atwell 02:41

Dr. Eli Berman is a professor at UC San Diego and co-editor of the book "Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence through Local Agents. Before entering academia, Eli was a member of the Israeli Defense Force and fought in the 1982 Lebanon War.

Shawna Sinnott 02:54

You are listening to the Irregular Warfare Podcast, a joint production of the Princeton Empirical Studies of Conflict Project and the Modern War Institute at West Point, dedicated to bridging the gap between scholars and practitioners to support the community of irregular warfare professionals. Here's our conversation with Ryan and Eli. Ryan, Eli, thanks for joining us today. It's really great to have you here.

Dr. Eli Berman 03:26

Great to be with you, Shawna.

Ryan Crocker 03:27

Thanks for having us.

Shawna Sinnott 03:29

So this is the second of two episodes on the topic of proxy wars. And the last one, we talked about proxy wars in Africa. And then today we'll focus on the distinct characteristics of proxy wars in the Middle East. And for both of these, Eli the book you co-edited "Proxy Wars" provides a good foundation for looking at these problem sets. So could I ask you to briefly rehash the general framework of that book and the methodology you used?

Dr. Eli Berman 03:55

Sure, I'll try to do this in a nutshell. But I think economists and political scientists tend to come at this and be surprised that the Pentagon sees these relationships, which are, first of all of capacity building, we tend to see a junior partner, a proxy that doesn't have interests that are aligned with those of the principal. And so it's important not just to build the capacity of the proxy, to do whatever it was the activity together was supposed to be, suppressing Al-Qaeda in Iraq, or suppressing the Taliban, or maybe even the full, full blown state building. So that conditionality incentivization, of the proxy power

has to be part of that. And so what we tried to do was understand how common this problem that the US had faced in Iraq and Afghanistan at being with a local ally, who wasn't so willing to comply with the program and work according to the doctrine. And what we came back with was, I think, kind of studying in its simplicity, the proxies always cheated when given the opportunity. In the six cases that we identified in which the principal applied fairly serious incentives, the proxies shifted to complying. And then there were another three cases or so in which for reasons that kind of puzzled us, the principals decided not to incentivize. And I'm so glad to have Ryan Crocker here to talk to us about this.

Kyle Atwell 05:22

Yeah, absolutely. Ryan, you have extensive experience as a diplomat in the Middle East, from your view, how prevalent and significant is the role of proxy warfare and more broadly, foreign intervention in the region.

Ryan Crocker 05:36

If you look at the broader Middle East as a political construct, it is probably the most interpenetrated region in the world in terms of the frequency and intensity of outside involvement. I began the modern era of this amalgamation, if you will, 1798 when Bonaparte invaded Egypt, and I think we're still in that period, basically. So every single country in the Middle East, from 1798 onward, has been invaded and occupied by at least one foreign power, at least one time. And it created a unique political culture of put up enough of a fight, so that you're not completely shamed, but not too much of a fight, because you want to preserve the assets you have, let the occupier come through because they'll get there anyway, hunker down, recalibrate, recalculate, rearm, rest, and figure out where your adversaries' weak spots are, and start hammering away at that. And we've just seen this over and over and over.

Shawna Sinnott 06:52

So given the complexity that you just described, Ryan, what is the principal trying to get out of these proxy relationships? I mean, what are those strategic objectives, particularly from the perspective of the United States?

Dr. Eli Berman 07:04

Ryan's the expert on US foreign policy in big pictures, but let me just talk about what I, what we've found in our cases. Typical cases are Iraq, Afghanistan, places where the US has a strategic objective, which involves, first of all, suppressing some terrorist organization or insurgent force. And then there are some larger geopolitical exempt objectives as well. But you know, the stated purpose of, of suppressing the Taliban was to reduce international terrorism. And so in those cases, I think, again one of the principal findings that I'd really like to hear Ryan's opinion on this is that the US goes in thinking that the government which claims to share this objective of suppressing this group really thinks of that as their number one objective the way we do, and what we find is that the local, proxy is a strong word, but the local ally over which the US thinks it has leverage has other number one objectives. And those are maybe the survival of the government itself.

Kyle Atwell 07:37

Something Eli just mentioned, and we were going into is, you know, interest alignment, you as, as you know, a member of the diplomatic corps, and as an ambassador, was interest alignment at the forefront

of your thoughts on where to invest US resources and diplomatic efforts? Or were there other things you were thinking about?

Ryan Crocker 08:35

Well, as you know, you, particularly in the kinetic environment, you've got a lot of things that are on your mind. In the case of Afghanistan, I think the strategic objective is pretty clear. 9/11 came to us out of Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda sheltered by the Taliban. Our strategic objective was to make sure that could never happen, again, on Afghan soil. We were less clear on strategic objectives when you get to Iraq, because that's another matter. So everything, for me at least, dependent from that. That's the filter for which I would look at proposed assistance, projects, amping up involvement by other countries, will it contribute to this ultimate goal in ensuring that Afghanistan cannot become again, a strategic threat to the United States?

Shawna Sinnott 09:34

But perceived interest alignment can look very different in practice, right. I think you've alluded to some of those challenges in Afghanistan in the past?

Ryan Crocker 09:41

Now that's where of course the differences started. So do you build vast infrastructure projects as a means of gaining that assurance? Really, really terrible idea, projects that the referees were not particularly interested in and would have no ability to sustain, let alone be carried on the line. But it all comes out of that single strategic objective for me. So alignment of interest, in a sense.

Kyle Atwell 10:09

Eli, Ryan mentioned that the objectives were less clear in Iraq. In your book "Proxy Wars", there's a case study on interest alignment between the Iraqi government and the United States. Can you describe the key findings for us?

Dr. Eli Berman 10:27

David Lake, my colleague at UC San Diego, took on the most difficult task, which is to write the chapter about Iraq, which in many ways is the chapter that motivates the analysis in the book. How often does it happen, that principals are disappointed by their proxies, and end up with, with results that were not what we were planning. What happened was that the Maliki government built a very narrow coalition. And so no particular interest first in governing the Sunni majority areas, in a way that you might think was fair, but also didn't show tremendous interest in controlling the Sunni majority areas. And so when the part of the insurgency that was Al-Qaeda-Iraq, rebelling against the Maliki government, with its American principal, when that rebellion kind of exploded, and now we're talking about, 06, 07, then Ambassador Crocker, and Commander Petraeus, were faced with this with this challenge of how to get the Iraqi military engaged in suppressing this insurgency of Al-Qaeda-Iraq, the thing that would eventually come back to haunt us, or hound the West as ISIS.

Shawna Sinnott 11:47

Ryan, I know, you see this differently from Eli, and you would not characterize on Maliki as a proxy of the US. But in Iraq at this time, were there any other elements over which the US did have sufficient control to consider them an effective proxy?

Ryan Crocker 12:01

Yeah, well, again, it comes down to a pointed definition by, by my definitions, the only proxy force we had in Iraq, would have been the so-called Sons of Iraq, the Sunni tribes that we trained, organized, armed, and paid to be part of the effort against Al-Qaeda. And they were happy to do it, because of the horrors that Al-Qaeda had leveled on them and their families. So you have that alignment, as well as the guarantee. To call any of the other forces there a US proxy just is flat wrong. That includes the Kurds. Very, very close in Iraq and also in Syria, but boy, have they got their own agenda. And for the Iraqi Kurds, part of that agenda is based on the expectation that well, you will screw them again. And we've got a pretty consistent track record in doing so. So it was only the Sons of Iraq that I would qualify as a proxy. And you know, what, both Dave Petraeus and I had the regret that we made them a proxy. That maybe we should have pushed harder and faster on the government, on Maliki personally, to embrace these guys and to pay them. Because, you know, it was a field experience, we had to do something, we needed to get other guns in the fight out in Anbar. So we didn't really have the luxury of trying for the political debate. But just the fact that they were a US proxy probably hurt them and us in the long run.

Dr. Eli Berman 13:38

Alright, I don't disagree Ryan and the definition we were using was the one we chose. So the principal puzzle in the Iraq case, for us as an intellectual exercise, but I think this is the big policy question as well, and this a policy question that now runs throughout the book, is why with all the levers of power that the United States had in Iraq, it didn't manage to induce the Maliki government to suppress the insurgency, and more broadly, to introduce an inclusive form of governance, that would have allowed American forces to exit thinking that the local ally would be like many of our allies, a stable democracy.

Ryan Crocker 14:26

Yeah, and we were pretty cautious on that particular point. You didn't want to send what was a essentially Shia led army into Sunni Anbar. What we saw, of course, was that for many Sunnis, more in Mosul I think, than in Anbar, Al-Qaeda was bad but less bad than the Shia-led governments and its forces. But again, legitimacy is important. Every action has a reaction. You got to try to think through several iterations of that while you gotta get something in the field like now, not tomorrow, now. So lots of field experience, it's what you had to do. Did we think it was perfect? Even at the time we did that, how else you're going to do it?

Kyle Atwell 15:15

It seems like the US is not the only actor trying to influence proxies or partner forces or local allies. There's a confluence of forces working in the region. And I think that's an important point. Could you describe what, are we the only people trying to conduct proxy warfare in this region? Or how do we manage from a US diplomatic perspective?

Ryan Crocker 15:35

Well, the short answer is absolutely no to the first. Everybody is involved in it. Look at Syria today, even more complex than Lebanon, where you've got God knows how many contending Syrian factions. They'll feel out there a very heavy, broad regional presence, Turkey, Qatar, you know, you name it, Iran, obviously, they're all in there with different agendas. And then we've got the outside players, Russia, the US. Turkey is a NATO member, a quasi-outsider, says they're not part of the Middle East, even though they used to own most of it. That is a not infrequent punch.

Shawna Sinnott 16:22

Who's the best at it? If we were to say that one entity is very effective at running proxies more than others?

Ryan Crocker 16:28

Oh, my goodness, Iran. They've got first, second and third place. Well, for them, it was a matter of overwhelming national security. And it is interesting to look at patterns here. So as I think Eli you treated this to your book, The Nixon Doctrine, which said we're not gonna do any major ground wars in Asia, anytime real soon, we will find regional allies to keep peace around the world, and we will give them economic and military assistance as needed. And our twin pillars of security in the world were Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran in the 70s, they well, they seized three islands from the UAE, just to show they could do it. And then they deployed basically a mechanized infantry brigade in the peninsula, at the request of the Sultan of Oman, to put down the so called Dhofar rebellion in the west of the country. And Saudi Arabia, by the way, facilitated that motion of Sunni Saudis and Shia Iranians have always fought each other and always will. Well, not exactly. So for the Shah, that was a very important projection of power, that he was asserting that Iran can deploy armed forces outside its borders, sustain them and will, a message to the rest of the region. What happens in the revolution? The doctrine doesn't change, just the means. That distinct from the regular forces, they were going to develop and use proxies. Which, of course, Hezbollah was the poster boy for it. But they have done it. Brilliantly. In Lebanon of course, now also what we see in Iraq and Syria where they were not going to go down the drain, use their own forces to some extent, but really relied on Hezbollah and other Shia militia they were forming from elsewhere. So yeah, they got the gold cup. When it comes to the management of proxies.

Shawna Sinnott 18:46

would you still say that this level of Iranian proficiency and running proxies is true in a place like Yemen? I think that's a place that seems to have a high association with Iranian influence, but there seem to be a lot of challenges to control.

Ryan Crocker 19:00

Yeah. The Iranian-Saudi Cold War in the region, hot in Yemen, as it is in Syria, when it began in earnest, and when we were publicly accusing Iran of providing significant lethal support to the Houthis, I saw Zarif in New York and he, he sounded hysterical. He said, you know, first, the notion that we are co-religious, we're not, they are maybe just one half step ahead of the Alevis of Syria as a heretical schism, for orthodox Shia, but second, as we put it at that time, we don't need to ship arms to the Houthis, the Houthis could ship arms to us, and I do think it was a bad review by the Saudis and by us

of the nature of the Houthi movement, now that changed over time as this war was prolonged, yes, the Iranians did get into some pretty substantial armed assistance to the to the Houthis. But again, just sometimes we'll miss reading them, what their objectives are, who they are, what are their objectives, who exercises real control. And I would say that Iran exercises very little control over the Houthi.

Dr. Eli Berman 20:31

If I could just add, one of the really interesting things about Yemen is that this long history of foreign powers trying to influence Yemen goes back, at least to the Egyptians, under Nasser in the 1960s. But the United States also attempted this in the 2001-2011 period. Ben Brewer wrote a great chapter on it. And it turned out that the American mistake with our local ally there, the President Ali Abdullah Saleh was to lose sight of the relationship, to basically go asleep at the wheel, it seems, and to stop supporting a local ally, who seemed like he wanted to be compliant, but couldn't understand why the United States wasn't holding up its part of the bargain. Now, this doesn't really directly have to do with Iran, except that if we still had influence in Yemen to this day, maybe Yemen would be a very different place.

Shawna Sinnot 21:35

And Eli, I think that's really illustrative of the fact that the challenges we've been discussing to running proxies in the Middle East are relatively universal, not specific to one principal. So if we were to summarize the major themes you both have introduced us to, it appears that first of all, these situations are extremely complicated. And there are always third-party considerations beyond the principal proxy bilateral relationship. Second, that seemingly overt proxy relationships like Iran and the Houthis, may actually be situations where the principal has very little control. And third, to understand modern proxy relationships, you need to understand historical context. And that's something you, Ryan, have continued to emphasize, because that's how you grasp how these relationships affect contemporary interest alignment. And all of that is a solid baseline from which to deep dive on our main case study today, that of Israel's use of proxies in the 1981-83 war with Lebanon, an event you both have lived through, Ryan as a diplomat in the embassy, and Eli believe, as a soldier on the ground.

Dr. Eli Berman 22:34

Yeah, so I was this kind of the representative, the senior partner in the invasion of Lebanon, in the summer of 1982. And, were the junior partner, if you would, was the south Lebanese army. And, of course, I was a buck private at that point, highly trained, but pretty ignorant. And, and so, you know, you sometimes you go back and research to things that you think you know, or you think you'd like to understand better. And I've certainly found that happening in this project.

Kyle Atwell 23:04

So what were Israel's objectives working through local proxies in Lebanon?

Dr. Eli Berman 23:08

So Lebanon is always as complex. So you have to bear with me for a minute because there were really two different objectives that Israel had in Lebanon, at least. But the main two were these: Israel wanted to secure its northern border, which, because at the northern border, the border with Lebanon, there was uncovered space north of the border in the Lebanese side. And Palestinian terrorists were

infiltrated, infiltrated through that space across the border, and killing civilians in Israel. And Israel wanted to put a stop to that. So that was objective number one, the SLA was going to be the partner and turned out to be an outstanding partner in securitizing that strip of formerly ungoverned space in the south of Lebanon, just north of Israel. There was a second objective, though, which is a little more complicated, because it was, in a way a hidden objective of Ariel Sharon, the defense minister, during the 1982 Lebanon War. And that was to remove the Palestinian Liberation Organization, under Arafat, in particular, his part of the Fatah, to remove them from Beirut and from Lebanon altogether. And that unannounced objective of the incursion, or invasion into Lebanon in the summer of 1982, meant that Israeli forces did not stop at the northern border of this defense zone in southern Lebanon, they just kept rolling. We, because I was involved, just kept rolling all the way up to Beirut, and to the east-west road that connects Beirut to Damascus in Syria. Israeli forces should go into Syria, but they, but Israeli forces laterally moved all the way up to a line which was in Beirut.

Shawna Sinnott 24:54

Ryan, I know you've also described the Israel SLA relationship as one of the most explicit accurate examples of a successful proxy relationship with the requisite control?

Ryan Crocker 25:06

Yes, so words count. And the word proxy counts for a lot. The Lebanon experience would be a great example. Eli just mentioned, the South Lebanon army was an Israeli proxy. They armed them, they paid them, they fed them. And they directed them. That would meet my definition of proxy. In contrast, the Lebanese Forces, were definitely not anyone's proxy. Not, not Israel, not us. And I think some confusion over that we all pay a high price.

Shawna Sinnott 25:46

So Eli How did this case study play out using the analytical framework in "Proxy Wars"?

Dr. Eli Berman 25:52

So that, the case study on Lebanon is a chapter written by Matt Nanes of St. Louis University. Of all the cases that we look at, this is the one in which the proxies' interests are the most aligned with those of the principal, and in which the proxy is really the best behaved. The South Lebanese army just seems to have no reason to deviate from the, from the stated goals of the relationship, because they share this interest in controlling the territory and in minimizing incursions of terrorists through their territory into Israel.

Kyle Atwell 26:34

We're talking about a proxy relationship between Israel and the South Lebanon army, but it also sounds like Ryan, you know, the US Embassy was involved. They're trying to understand it. Could you kind of frame more broadly what this proxy relationship was?

Ryan Crocker 26:50

Yeah, to be honest, we didn't worry too much about the SLA in the early going. And it was precisely because we did see it as a proxy of Israel, in no way able to mount independent action. So we've basically felt that the working assumption was that anything the SLA did would have been not just total

coordination with the idea, but as the direction of the idea. We were in a lot more about the Lebanese forces and what they might do, because nobody had total control over them, except themselves. So again, it comes down to definition. For me as a proxy is a wholly owned subsidiary, which the SLA was, and many of their fighters were not from South Lebanon, meaning they were even more in quality, Israeli, so very little they did anything independent from the Israeli Command.

Kyle Atwell 27:52

Eli based on your research, did he, did Israel have full control over the South Lebanon army? And what did that look like? How did they control those actions?

Dr. Eli Berman 28:03

I'd say, almost full control. Israel had a strong interest, as it still does, in a kind of a secure northern border in the northern border, which would not have incursions of terrorism coming, coming across. And also some interest in reduction of smuggling and other things that most countries care about at borders. And there had been very painful incursions of PLO Fatah terrorists across that border. And so the role was to distance the PLO from the border. Eventually though, Hezbollah with Syrian Support, would put missiles north of that support security zone, missiles, and rockets, which had range that went over the security zone, and the SLA would just become redundant.

Kyle Atwell 28:52

This is an interesting point. So you had a proxy, which is the South Lebanon army, and then the principal, which is Israel, and they had interests alignment, and they were working well together. But at some point, Israel said "this isn't worth our investment". And they had to find a way to off ramp the proxy without damaging the reputation? Or what did that look like?

Ryan Crocker 29:13

Not at all, Kyle. SLA was not gonna, it would last about 13 seconds in South Lebanon when the IDF executed a complete withdrawal, which is what they did. It wasn't any of those fine points. They hold on, the SLA and Israel for 18 miserable years. It was time to quit and go home. The SLA had no home to go to.

Dr. Eli Berman 29:40

Even more than 18 years because the relationship actually predated the 82. But I think the major point is that these relationships require some credibility. Because you don't want to be the proxy of some other country in, you know, for generations and generations, if that's not what your neighbors in the country you live in, approve of.

Ryan Crocker 30:10

Yeah, its beyond proxy. But again, what's the context? What political alliances are forming? What are we seeing? What's the chessboard look like? I don't believe either of us ever took a serious look at that before 82.

Shawna Sinnot 30:27

Eli was the SLA the only proxy relationship that Israel had in Lebanon at the time.

Dr. Eli Berman 30:32

So, I think that these were, these are proxy relationships, proxy now liberally defined to mean a local ally over which maybe the senior partner has some influence. So there were two proxy relationships, the one with the SLA, there was really no tension. The SLA was happy to see Israeli forces enter, and set things up and kind of reinforce their position in a way that would make it easier for them to fight. But there was another proxy relationship that was imagined with a Christian Phalange Forces. The Phalange was a local ally of both Israel and the United States. Bachir Gemayel was and, there was the attempt there was done was a proxy relationship that would, with, one of the objectives of that relationship was to expel the PLO, the Palestinian Forces from Lebanon. So the other important figure in that was the liaison of the Phalange to both Israel and American forces, was a man named Elie Hobeika.

Shawna Sinnott 31:47

It sounds like Israel thought it had more control than it actually did.

Dr. Eli Berman 31:51

Exactly. So those control issues came to light very quickly. So, that proxy relationship failed dramatically in two ways. In one of them, there was an agreement between the Israeli forces and the local allied proxy, if you will, the Phalange, that Israeli Forces would not enter Palestinian refugee camps where the Palestinian fighters were, were sitting. That would be the job of the Phalange. And that arrangement set up the disaster.

Shawna Sinnott 32:25

Right, I know we were talking about this Shatila Massacre earlier and the tragedy that that really was, Ryan, you were on the ground in the aftermath of that. Where was the breakdown between what Israel thought Lebanese Forces, the Phalange were going to do and then what actually happened?

Ryan Crocker 32:42

The mission would be Lebanese Forces enter the Shatila refugee camp and pacify, if you will. What they wound up doing, of course, was murdering hundreds and hundreds of Palestinian civilians, men, women, and children. I know because I counted the bodies. There is a lot of conspiracy thinking. A lot of Arabs still believe that the Israelis were knowing all along and probably directed it. I do not believe that. Israel had a commission of inquiry that produced some pretty feather light punishments for senior commanders. What I think actually happened was the Israelis thought they had more control of the Lebanese Forces than they did, or even worse, thought that somehow the Lebanese Forces would adhere to the same standards and conduct as they would.

Kyle Atwell 33:48

So, this is interesting, it really highlights the risks of engaging in proxy relationships. In this case, the risk for Israel is not just that its immediate security objectives would not be accomplished. But, in fact, there were significant political or reputational costs as Israel has been blamed for a massacre that was conducted by the group it was trying to work through.

Ryan Crocker 34:11

So that's the difference between a semi reliable ally and a proxy, I think you have to know proxies, if you accept my definition, are not terribly hard to control. The patron has all the strings and all the parts. A non-governmental of course that shares some interest, but not all, that gets really tough. So, and here's the kicker on this one. I mentioned Elie Hobeika, who was at the time an Israeli asset. They were pretty upfront about it; Hobeika was their guy. And that of course, made it all the worse. When I got back to Lebanon years later, as Ambassador in 1990 I learned something: at the time the Israelis thought Hobeika was working for them, the Syrians had doubled him. So if we gotta know what we're talking about, and we got to know, what we control and what we don't in the Middle East, it's almost always the case that we don't have quite the influence that we thought we did.

Dr. Eli Berman 35:27

But I think the Hobeika episode, or the Hobeika drama and relationship is indicative of the relationship, I think. I'd like to hear what you want to say on this. What you'd say about this, Ryan, given your experience, that there was never only one principal in Lebanon, and anything that the Israeli government wanted to do with Gemayel brothers had to take into consideration the possibility that the Syrians would have checked and would respond. Is that right?

Ryan Crocker 36:01

Well, yeah, it is. Of course, the '82 invasion, provided the purchase for Israel and the United States to agree on a political course forward for Lebanon. And, again, it's a great example of you can, you can, when you push too far what you think was achievable lashes back in a worse position than we thought. So 18 years in total, with some presence on the ground in Lebanon. And what did they and we get at the end of it? Replacing the PLO with Hezbollah, a far more lethal force in and out of Lebanon. And I don't know the number I heard that in those 18 years, the IDF lost over 1100 troopers in Lebanon, a stunning number when you put it all together, and particularly for a country as small as Israel, everybody knows everybody else.

Shawna Sinnot 37:10

As we take what we've learned today and try to apply it to a future engagement in the Middle East. Eli, what are your recommendations for policymakers and practitioners on the ground?

Dr. Eli Berman 37:19

I'd say that in a narrow sense, in these relationships, starting with the Pentagon, you want to build the relationship in such a way. So recognizing that there's not going to be complete alignment of interests, you want to build the intervention in such a way that you can close the spigot and introduce conditionality, if you want to. Ryan mentioned kind of the big infrastructure projects. But the big infrastructure project is useless until it's finished. And stopping at a quarter of the way, stopping at three quarters of the way, it doesn't provide much of an incentive, unless the local partner is very, very forward looking. Much better to be able to do what I think Ryan and General Petraeus did in Iraq, which is to cut off logistic support, fuel and ammunition, which the local ally might need immediately and can be done at a much lower level, unit by unit, rather than for the entire government. So building interventions in ways that allow conditionality I'd say would be lesson number one.

Kyle Atwell 38:24

Ryan, you're a highly experienced diplomat in the region in the Middle East. And you've worked with a lot of partner forces and proxies. What would be your advice to the diplomatic corps to the military practitioners and policymakers who are looking how to approach the Middle East partnerships moving into the future?

Ryan Crocker 38:45

Well, it's all pretty basic stuff. What are your aims? How achievable are they? And by what mix of American tools, development, diplomacy, defense? What's the history? Is the issue we're involved in something that has echoes from the past? So to me it's clear eyed and analytical as you can possibly be. And to always keep an eye on the price. And how much are you willing to pay to have a shot at achieving the goal you've stated? Distill that further because we're going to tell you everything I learned in the Middle East and you will see that would take hours, it will take the two of minutes I have left. Be careful what you get into. Nice lesson for us, nice lesson for Israel, obviously, in Lebanon, think it through, what's the history? What's the current landscape? Who is allied with who? What moves are they likely to make as you move? What would their calculations be? Again, as Dave famously said, "tell me how this ends". Do we think we can get a clean victory and get out? And if we do, would we lie on the shade until that motion passes? And how much are you willing to pay? The second thing I learned? Be just as careful what you propose to get out of. This engagement can have consequences as great as the original engagement, particularly by military needs. And Iraq, of course, would be the poster child for both. We were definitely not careful getting in and equally careless, getting out.

Kyle Atwell 40:36

You say that's pretty simple. But that sounds very complex to me, actually, that's a lot of a lot of knowledge of history, a lot of knowledge of the world and a lot of sophisticated thinking for a policymaker.

Ryan Crocker 40:46

Yeah, well, the days of the Fulda Gap are never gone, whether Putin may think. It's all going to be a complex, messy, set of little wars from now as far as I can see.

Shawna Sinnott 41:01

And I think that's an appropriate place to stop for today. Ryan, Eli, thank you so much for being here and sharing your insights.

Dr. Eli Berman 41:07

I have enjoyed the opportunity.

Ryan Crocker 41:09

Thanks.

Shawna Sinnott 41:12

Thanks again, for listening to episode seven of the Irregular Warfare Podcast.

Kyle Atwell 41:17

We release a new episode every two weeks. In our next episode, Shawna and Nick will have a conversation with August Cole and Peter Singer, authors of the books "Ghost Fleet" and "Burn-In" about the future of irregular warfare. Following this, episode nine will explore what characteristics of military units determined success in irregular warfare environments.

Shawna Sinnott 41:36

Please be sure to subscribe to the Irregular Warfare Podcast so you don't miss an episode. If you are interested in applying to be an IWP host send an inquiry to engage@irregularwarfarepodcast.com or visit us on Twitter, LinkedIn, or Facebook to request more information. We will be accepting applications until September 15th, 2020.

Kyle Atwell 41:55

One last note, what you hear in this episode are the views of the participants and do not represent those of West Point or any other agency of the US government.

Shawna Sinnott 42:04

Thanks again and we'll see you next time.