

The May 17th Agreement was signed between the Lebanese and Israeli governments in 1983 under the auspices of the US government. Abukhalil explained that it was intended to insulate Lebanon from the Arab-Israeli conflict, that is, from the Palestinian question and the state-to-state dimension of the conflict. It called for commitments to Israel that would supersede all other commitments to Lebanon's Arab neighbours, and in particular to the Joint Defence Pact of the Arab League. Other articles of the agreement banned armed Palestinian organizations, nullified previous accords between the Lebanese government and the PLO, and prohibited all "hostile" propaganda.

This agreement did not end hostilities in Lebanon. By September 1983, intensive fighting between the Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and the Lebanese Forces broke out in the Shouf. The fighting spilled over into Beirut, and American and MNF positions came under fire. The US Navy retaliated, shelling Souq el Gharb. In October, barracks of the US and MNF contingents were bombed.

The Geneva talks of November 1983 were to focus on Lebanese internal reconciliation, but centred exclusively on the need to nullify the May 17th Agreement. Gemayel was clearly trying to accommodate all viewpoints at the meeting in order to prolong the American military presence. Faced with a Shi'ite/Druze rebellion in February 1984 against his rule in West Beirut, and evidence that the Americans were going to leave anyway, Gemayel finally succumbed to pressure to cancel the agreement in March 1984.

Participants contended that the abrogation of the May 17th Agreement reflected, in part, the reassertion of Syrian authority by 1984. In addition, the agreement was totally unacceptable to a considerable number of Lebanese because it embodied the desires of Israel, completely alienating Lebanon from its Arab context.

In fact, it served to mobilize the Shi'ites and to crystallize support for the rising Hizballah movement. Some participants noted it was obvious that not even Israel was