

Former SLA General Antoine Lahd
opens Seaside Bar in Tel Aviv
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The leader of a disbanded Lebanese militia [SLA] that fought alongside Israel during its 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon has hung up his military uniform and opened a seaside bar-restaurant.



Major General Antoine Lahd, who fled Lebanon after Israel withdrew its forces in defeat in May 2000, was on hand this week to greet the VIP guests who came to wish him well on his new career as a restaurateur.

Standing in the plush two-story lounge-bar with its panoramic view of the Tel Aviv coastline, Lahd, 76, said he had put the past behind him and was concerned only with the future.

Following Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Lahd commanded the Southern Lebanon Army, a militia made up mainly of Lebanese Christians whom Israel trained and outfitted with weapons to help police southern Lebanon. The militiamen ended up battling Hizbollah mujahedin alongside the Israelis for 18 years before Israel pulled out.

The restaurant is called Byblos after an ancient Phoenician city.

The new nightspot is staffed by a number of former SLA officers, including the cook, and security was unusually heavy, even for Israel where all restaurants have a security guard outside to protect against Palestinian martyrdom operations.

Lahd has been sentenced to death in absentia by a Lebanese court for treason and war crimes while collaborating with Israel during the war.

About 2,200 former SLA members and hundreds of others who collaborated with Israel were captured or surrendered to Lebanese authorities following the Israeli withdrawal. Several thousand SLA officers and soldiers fled to Israel with their families.

In May 2000, just before the SLA's demise, General Antoine Lahd announced in Paris his imminent return to "rally" his troops and never showed up. His men left behind the symbols of their defeat: tons of armor, tanks and armored personnel carriers, many of them with their engines still running. The Hizbollah army organized a victory parade of captured equipment amid scenes of jubilation from returning villagers. During the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, the SLA maintained the notorious "torturers den" Khiam detention center.

Suha Beshara said after spending 10 years in the notorious Khiam hell-hole for attempting to assassinate Lahd in 1988, claimed; "The martyr is the minaret which we always inspire."

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