

UNIFIL Peacekeeping and Lebanese National Security

by

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ABSTRACT

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The present Strategy Research Project (SRP) addresses the mandate, operations, and regional strategic effect of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), with a particular focus on the national security of Lebanon. The SRP examines UNIFIL's initial deployment and focuses on its expanded peacekeeping mandate, mission, and operations that took place following the armed conflict between the military wing of Hezbollah and Israeli forces in July-August 2006, and the action of the United Nations Security Council through Resolution 1701. The SRP addresses the collaboration between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in safeguarding the peace along the Lebanese-Israeli border and providing domestic stability in South Lebanon. The SRP also analyzes UNIFIL's presence with respect to the national security interests of various regional state actors. The SRP concludes that the strengthening of the LAF capabilities will provide the necessary political parameters for the eventual withdrawal of UNIFIL from Lebanon.

UNIFIL PEACEKEEPING AND LEBANESE NATIONAL SECURITY

Lebanon, a small Arab country in the Eastern Mediterranean, has been in the center of numerous armed conflicts in the Middle East. Lebanon occupies a strategic position in a sensitive and volatile region where nation-states have been in a state of war with each other since the immediate post World War II period, e.g., Syria and Israel, Lebanon and Israel. Various regional wars and armed conflicts between nation-states as well as with non-state actors have adversely affected the national security interests, the domestic politics, and the social fabric of Lebanon itself. For example, for a long time Lebanon has been the home to a Palestinian refugee population that fled from areas that currently constitute the modern state of Israel.

Lebanon itself has been the victim of foreign invasions and military occupations. For example, Israeli forces have carried out numerous military incursions inside Lebanese territory, and in 1982 the Israeli's forces (IF) invaded Lebanon in an attempt to expel the armed guerilla forces of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). This Israeli invasion led to the unlawful military occupation of Lebanese sovereign territory during 1982-2000. Most recently, the Lebanese Hezbollah organization and Israel's forces fought a major war in 2006 that had catastrophic effects for Lebanon's civilian population and economic infrastructure. These regional conflicts and domestic political pressures also culminated in the disastrous Lebanese Civil War of 1975-1990.

The present paper examines the presence and the involvement of United Nations (UN) peace keeping forces and operations in Lebanon. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has conducted peace operations in Lebanon since 1978, and its presence has been anything but "interim." This paper places particular emphasis

on UNIFIL's renewed mandate, reinforced presence, and new role in maintaining peace and stability in a very volatile region following the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel conflict ("the Second Lebanon War"). The paper also examines UNIFIL's relationship and coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in accomplishing its peacekeeping mission which currently is primarily centered in the geographic region of the Lebanese-Israeli frontier (South Lebanon).

Historical Background

In the early 1970s, tension along the Lebanon-Israel border increased, especially after the relocation of Palestinian armed elements from Jordan to Lebanon following the "Black September" armed conflict between Jordanian regime of King Hussein and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) led by Yasser Arafat. The Cairo agreement between the Lebanese government and the PLO enabled PLO forces to operate from camps in Lebanese territory while conducting guerilla raids against Israel while the PLO was engaged in armed struggle for the establishment of a Palestinian homeland.¹

Palestinian guerilla operations against Israel and Israeli reprisals against Palestinian bases in Lebanon intensified. In March 1978 a PLO guerilla raid inside Israel caused a large number of civilian casualties. The IF retaliated with a massive cross-border intrusion and the military occupation of South Lebanon except the city of Tyre and its immediate area.² The Lebanese Government strongly protested the Israeli military invasion and occupation of Lebanese territory to the UN Security Council (UNSC). The Israeli military incursion at that time was undermining certain United States peace initiatives in the region. The United States and other UNSC members quickly acted to eliminate the threat of the Israeli presence in Lebanon by forcing the withdrawal of the IF troops.³

On March 19, 1978 the UNSC adopted resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978), which called upon Israel to immediately cease its military action and withdraw its forces from all Lebanese territory. The UNSC also decided on the immediate establishment of the UNIFIL with three broadly defined purposes: (1) Confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces; (2) restoring international peace and security; and, (3) assisting the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area.⁴ The first UNIFIL peacekeeping forces arrived in the area on 23 March 1978.⁵ UNIFIL assured that the Israeli military forces withdrew from most areas that they occupied in Lebanon by June 13, 1978.⁶ However, the IF did not completely withdraw its military presence. It maintained a “security zone” within Lebanese territory in a depth of seven (7) miles which was controlled by a “proxy” pro-Israeli Lebanese armed militia equipped by the Israelis.⁷



Figure 1. UNIFIL peacekeepers hoist the UN flag in Naqoura, Lebanon, on 15 June 1978

In June 1982 Israel engaged in a strategic military operation with the aim of eliminating or driving the PLO guerilla forces out of Lebanon, and neutralizing to the extent possible the Syrian military forces that were also present in Lebanon since 1976 (Israeli Operation “Peace for Galilee”). The IF in a combined arms operation conducted

a massive invasion of Lebanon, engaged both PLO and Syrian forces, and surrounded and occupied Lebanon's capital Beirut. The intervention of United States diplomacy during the Administration of President Ronald Reagan permitted the withdrawal of the PLO forces from the Beirut area to Tunisia, as well as the eventual and staged withdrawal of the Israeli forces to South Lebanon.⁸

For three years (1982-1985), UNIFIL remained behind the Israeli lines, with its role limited to providing protection and humanitarian assistance to the local population to the extent possible. In 1985, Israel carried out a partial withdrawal, but it retained a security zone in southern Lebanon manned by IF units and by a pro-Israeli "proxy" Lebanese military force, the South Lebanon Army (SLA).⁹ The Israeli occupation of territory in South Lebanon did not go unchallenged. Armed Lebanese Shiite militias of the Hezbollah and Amal organizations launched an unrelenting guerilla war against the IF units and their SLA allies between 1985 and 2000. Israeli military actions and reprisals (e.g., aerial and artillery bombardment) often caused grievous casualties among the Lebanese civilian population. Hezbollah's asymmetric war against Israeli forces led to the IF withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 and the dissolution of the SLA.¹⁰

During 1985-2000, UNIFIL's actions were inherently limited both in terms of capabilities and the situation on the ground. For example, UNIFIL units were not able to effectively patrol and enter areas in South Lebanon that were effectively controlled by IF and SLA forces. UNIFIL did its best to provide for the humanitarian needs of the local Lebanese population and protect it from the escalating violence that involved Hezbollah, the IF and the SLA. UNIFIL outposts on occasion became targets of Israeli artillery strikes, e.g., in 1996 no less than 108 Lebanese civilians sheltering in a UNIFIL outpost

were killed by an IF artillery strike. Despite the situation on the ground, at the request of the Lebanese government the UNSC repeatedly extended UNIFIL's mandate and presence.

Israel announced to the UN Secretary General its intention to withdraw its military forces from Lebanon in May 2000. The Secretary General reported to the UNSC that this Israeli withdrawal had been accomplished by June 2000 in accordance with the UN-established demarcation lines. The government of Lebanon did not accept that the Israeli withdrawal was carried out in accordance with applicable UNSC resolutions because IF units continued to occupy the Shabaa Farms area at the junction of the Lebanese, Syrian, and Israeli frontiers (Israeli forces also continued to occupy Lebanese territory in the Kfarshouba Hills and the northern part of Al Ghajar village). Hezbollah also did not recognize the formal completion of the Israeli withdrawal for the same reasons and because Israel had not released Lebanese detainees that were held in Israeli jails. Thus, Hezbollah refused to suspend its military operations against Israel.

Following the Israeli withdrawal, the situation in the area of UNIFIL operations remained generally quiet. Small units of the Lebanese Army and the Interior Security Forces (ISF) of the Ministry of Interior established checkpoints in the vacated area, controlling movement and maintaining law and order. UNIFIL monitored the line of withdrawal on a daily basis, patrolled the area and, together with the Lebanese authorities provided humanitarian assistance to the local population.¹¹ Until July 2006, despite numerous minor violations of the withdrawal line, the so-called Blue Line, including sea and air violations, and occasional breaches of the ceasefire between Hezbollah and Palestinian militants from one side and Israel from the other, some of

them very serious, the situation in the area remained relatively calm. The focus of UNIFIL operations remained on the Blue Line and the adjacent areas, where the UN peacekeepers in Lebanon sought to maintain the ceasefire through patrols, observation from fixed positions and close contact with the parties on ground and on both sides of the Lebanese-Israeli frontier. UNIFIL continued to provide humanitarian assistance to the local population. UNIFIL also engaged in the clearance of minefields and unexploded ordnance in southern Lebanon which had the immediate economic benefit of returning formerly inaccessible land areas to productive agricultural use.

Developments in the broader Middle East region in 2000-2006 continued to impact the situation in Lebanon and its borders. The terrorist attack against the United States on September 11, 2001, the subsequent “global war on terror” (GWOT), the U.S. military intervention in Iraq in March 2003, and the rising international concern over the Iranian nuclear program, also guided perceptions on Lebanon’s position in the Middle East. For example, following the assassination of ex-Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq EL-Hariri in 2005, international political pressure led to the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon.

The 2006 Lebanon War and Resolution 1701

On July 12, 2006 a guerilla ambush carried out by Hezbollah forces against the IF inside Israeli territory precipitated a major military conflict in the region. Although Hezbollah had very limited strategic goals of effectuating an exchange of prisoners (the Hezbollah raid had captured two IF soldiers) with Lebanese and Palestinian detainees held in Israeli jails, its leaders miscalculated the pre-planned and massive military retaliation that was unleashed by Israel against both Hezbollah and the entire Lebanese state. Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s Secretary General, announced late on July

12, 2006 that “this operation is the right and logical way to release our prisoners from Israeli prison since the international community, international institutions, the regimes, and even the political negotiation could not release one detainee or prisoner from the Israeli prison.”¹²

The Israeli air, ground, and naval operations against Hezbollah were met with fierce resistance by Hezbollah units inside fortified villages in South Lebanon. The IF Air Force aerial bombardment of civilian targets and Lebanese economic infrastructure was eventually answered by Hezbollah rocket fire that was directed against Israeli towns in Northern Israel. The IF attempted to suppress the Hezbollah rocket fire by crossing the Blue Line and attempting an advance towards the Litany River. Hezbollah defenses that included the use of advanced anti-tank guided missiles thwarted this advance and led to the failure of the IF tactical objectives. The 2006 Second Lebanon War lasted for thirty-three days, it caused no less than 1,400 Lebanese dead and 160 Israelis killed, it devastated the Lebanese economic infrastructure with \$3.5 billion of physical damage sustained, and led to more than one million Lebanese being internally displaced.¹³ The LAF also suffered from the results of the Israeli aerial bombardment sustaining the loss of some personnel and physical damage to some of its base camps.

Adoption of the 1701 Resolution

As clashes between Hezbollah and the IF took place in southern Lebanon, Mr. Kofi Atta Annan, UN Secretary General, maintained regular contact with the officials of Lebanon and Israel as well as Hezbollah seeking agreement to the cease fire and not to escalate the situation. In the mean time, UNIFIL continued to occupy all of its positions and played an active and constructive role under its mandate. Despite being severely impeded by ongoing violence, UNIFIL peacekeepers conducted military observations,

assisted in humanitarian efforts and provided medical assistance, all at great risk. The intense fighting in July and August injured 16 United Nations staff, and tragically caused the death of five peacekeepers.¹⁴ On 11 August 2006, the UNSC, following intense negotiations, passed Resolution 1701 calling for a full cessation of hostilities in the month-long war based upon, in particular, “the immediate cessation by Hezbollah of all attacks and the immediate cessation by Israel of all offensive military operations in Lebanon.”¹⁵

“Aware of its responsibilities to help secure a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution to the conflict,” the UNSC created a buffer zone free of “any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL” between the United Nations-drawn Blue Line in southern Lebanon and the Litani river located south of Lebanon, and called for both Israel and Lebanon to “support a permanent ceasefire and comprehensive solution to the crisis.”¹⁶

Expansion of the UNIFIL Mandate: The UNSC 1701 Resolution¹⁷

Following the July/August 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war, the UNSC, by resolution 1701 (2006) of 11 August 2006, has significantly enhanced the capabilities of UNIFIL and expanded its original mandate which was announced in 1978 to:

- Monitor the cessation of hostilities.
- Accompany and support the Lebanese armed forces as they deploy throughout the South, including along the Blue Line, as Israel withdraws its armed forces from Lebanon.
- Coordinate its activities referred to in the preceding paragraph (above) with the Government of Lebanon and the Government of Israel.
- Extend its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons.

- Assist the Lebanese armed forces in taking steps towards the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani River of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL deployed in this area.
- Assist the Government of Lebanon, at its request, in securing its borders and other entry points to prevent the entry in Lebanon without its consent of arms or related materiel.



Figure 2. Lebanese Armed Forces Deploy in South Lebanon, August 2006.

The Ambiguity in the 1701 Resolution

The principal goal of the United Nations is to maintain international peace and security in order to prevent the escalation of violence in this critical area. The Charter of the United Nations consists of 19 chapters. Chapter 6 titled “Pacific Settlement of Disputes” and Chapter 7 titled “Action with Respect to Threats, to Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression” are the Chapters concerned how to achieve peace between countries and maintain international security. The United Nations performs four types of peace operations: peacemaking, peace keeping, peace enforcing and peace building.¹⁸ Peacemaking is the authority granted under Chapter 6 to United Nations to call for peaceful solution between any disputing countries. Peacekeeping is the deployment of the United Nations forces in the area after the agreement of the

concerned disputing countries. This option is used when all the means to find a solution are exhausted. It is a means which prohibits the escalation of the conflict and accelerates the probability to the success of the peace making process. Peace enforcing is the necessary measures taken under Chapter 7 by the Security Council when the dispute threatens “international peace and security.” These measures may include “complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations” and if these measures have proved to be inadequate then the UNSC will take different actions such as “action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations.” Finally, peace building is to strengthen the peace process and the confidence between two ex-enemies to avoid returning to a conflict situation in the future.

The UNSC in its adoption of the Resolution 1701 did not classify it under a particular chapter of the United Nations Charter itself. The spirit of this Resolution seems to be under Chapter 7. Resolution 1701 determined that “the situation in Lebanon constitutes a threat to international peace and security”, and it gave the UNIFIL the right to take all the necessary means to make sure that its area of deployment will not be used for hostile actions and “to protect United Nations personnel, facilities, installations and equipment, ensure the security and freedom of movement of United Nations personnel, humanitarian workers and, without prejudice to the responsibility of the Government of Lebanon ...” Resolution 1701 increased the strength

of the UNIFIL from 2,000 troops to a maximum manpower level of 15,000 equipped with heavy weapons such as self-propelled 155 mm artillery and tanks. The first impression about this Resolution seemed to be that it was promulgated under Chapter 7, but on the other hand, it called for UNIFIL to “[a]ccompany and support the Lebanese armed forces as they deploy throughout the South, including along the Blue Line, as Israel withdraws its armed forces from Lebanon,” and to “[a]ssist the Lebanese armed forces in taking steps towards the establishment of the area.”¹⁹ This meant that the primary authority on the ground belongs to the LAF and that UNIFIL’s mission is to assist the LAF to implement this mandate.

The Deployment of the UNIFIL Forces under the New Mandate

The UNSC adoption of Resolution 1701 mandated an increase in the number of UNIFIL’s troops to a maximum level of 15,000. France, Italy and Spain were the first countries to respond and send their troops to join the UNIFIL already deployed in area and numbered only about 2,000 troops. Feeling the importance of their participation and to prevent the recurrence of armed clashes between Hezbollah and the IF after the cessation of hostilities on August 13, 2006, their troops arrived on 15 September with remarkable speed described as record-breaking speed for any peacekeeping operation of such complexity. From 2006 to 2011 various countries have participated in the UNIFIL operations in Lebanon with national troop contingent contributions. The areas of deployment for particular UNIFIL contingents have been modified depending on the countries participating and the numbers of the troops that they have respectively contributed. Nowadays the area of deployment of UNIFIL south of the Litany River is divided into two sectors: the western sector under Italian command and the eastern

sector under Spanish command while the French forces are in reserve to intervene when and where needed. Since different countries participated and continue to participate in UNIFIL as shown in the list below, their troops are allocated in both sectors. Some of them have their own sub-sector under the command of these two sectors depending on their strength, their equipment and capabilities, and the size and the geographic terrain of the operational area. At the end of 2011 the total UNIFIL strength amounted more than 12,000 troops drawn from 28 countries. These were 11,000 troops deployed on land, and 1,300 navy personnel on board the warships of UNIFIL's maritime task force.²⁰



Figure 3. Map of UNIFIL deployment in South of Lebanon

 AUSTRIA(125)	 EL SALVADOR(52)	 IRELAND(462)	 SLOVENIA(14)
 BANGLADESH(326)	 FRANCE(1304)	 ITALY(1226)	 SPAIN(1044)
 BELARUS(3)	 FYR MACEDONIA(1)	 KOREA(369)	 SRI LANKA(151)
 BELGIUM(99)	 GERMANY(197)	 MALAYSIA(882)	 TANZANIA(154)
 BRAZIL(253)	 GHANA(877)	 NEPAL(1019)	 TIMOR LESTE(11)
 BRUNEI(30)	 GREECE(52)	 NIGERIA(1)	 TURKEY(355)
 CAMBODIA(215)	 GUATEMALA(3)	 PORTUGAL(125)	
 CHINA(342)	 HUNGARY(4)	 QATAR(3)	
 CROATIA(1)	 INDIA(900)	 SERBIA(5)	
 CYPRUS(2)	 INDONESIA(1456)	 SIERRA	

Figure 4. As of 29 January 2012 UNIFIL's force consists of a total 12066 peacekeepers from 36 troop-contributing countries distributed as follows:



Figure 5. Italian reinforcements for UNIFIL arrive on the shores of Tyre August 2006

How Resolution 1701 is Being Implemented

Resolution 1701 established a buffer zone that extends approximately 12 miles between the “Blue Line”²¹ and the Litani River inside south Lebanon. Resolution 1701 aims to create in this area a sector free of “any armed personnel and weapons.” That would exclude both Hezbollah’s military forces and Israeli troops from this buffer zone. To implement this mandate and to be sure that this area is not “utilized for hostile activities of any kind” UNIFIL units perform “day and night-time patrols, establishment of

observation points, monitoring of the “Blue Line” and carrying out clearance of unexploded ordnance and cluster munitions.”²²In parallel UNIFIL conducted medical, developmental, and humanitarian activities in the region of the deployment. Since under Resolution 1701, the responsibility of the area is the mission of the LAF and the duty of the UNIFIL is to assist them, there is a continuous cooperation between them to achieve this mission. The LAF and UNIFIL are conducting common patrols days and nights in all the area and along the “Blue Line.” They also set up temporary checkpoints where it is the duty of the LAF to inspect vehicles and their passengers passing through these checkpoints while the UNIFIL troops that are closely deployed can assist the LAF personnel when needed. Permanent checkpoints are operated by the LAF and they are positioned in key terrain features in the area.



Figure 6. Joint LAF-UNIFIL patrol.

According to Resolution 1701, the duty of the LAF is to maintain peace, stability and secure the area. It is its mission to take all necessary measures “regarding movement of unauthorized weapons or equipment” in the area whether relevant information is coming from UNIFIL sources or others. In case the LAF was faced with a security situation or incident and required assistance, it will be the duty of UNIFIL to

assist in accordance with its mandate. The primary focus of UNIFIL's peacekeeping mission is to patrol the "Blue Line" disengagement boundary in proximity of the Lebanese-Israeli frontier and to prevent incidents that may re-ignite armed hostilities in the area.

There are always recurrent meetings between the LAF and the UNIFIL forces to evaluate the joint missions, identify potential security risks and gaps, and address such situations in a joint and coordinated fashion. On the other hand the UNIFIL has in addition to its land forces, a maritime task force which is "deployed on the request of the Lebanese Government in October 2006 to assist the Lebanese Navy in securing the territorial waters and to help prevent the unauthorized entry of arms or related material by sea into Lebanon; this is the first ever maritime deployment in a United Nations peacekeeping mission."²³ UNIFIL's maritime task force works closely with the Lebanese Navy in executing this mission. Few countries participated in this task force from the time it was established on a rotational basis. At the end of 2011 there were approximately 1,100 naval personnel on board warships from twelve countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Turkey. The maritime task force consists of 1 frigate from Brazil, 3 warships from Germany, 2 from Bangladesh and one each from Greece, Indonesia and Turkey.

The duty of this maritime task force is to control the Lebanese coastline and inform the Lebanese authorities about suspect ships so that they can be inspected. In some cases and upon the request of the LAF, the maritime task force "may divert or inspect suspect vessels or prevent naval units from entering Lebanese territorial

waters.” This task force has reported and referred to the Lebanese authorities approximately 1,500 vessels for inspection. The leadership of the maritime task force is now under Brazilian command since February 2011.



Figure 7.UNIFIL Maritime Task Force



Figure 8. Joint LAF-UNIFIL training



Figure 9. joint LAF-UNIFIL Maritime operation training

Handling of Security Incidents in the Area of Operations

UNIFIL units follow the method of quick reaction to any security incidents that occur along the “Blue Line.” As soon as any incidents across the border happen, UNIFIL patrols are directly sent to the area to avoid any further escalation. Meanwhile the liaison officers on both sides of the border (i.e., LAF and IF) communicate details of the incident to their respective headquarters so that the incident can be contained and come to an end. During UNIFIL’s new mandate all armed clashes that happened across the Lebanese-Israeli frontier were isolated and contained with the exception of what transpired on August 3, 2010. That day’s armed clashes were the deadliest and the most serious incident. Under the Resolution 1701 mandate, UNIFIL’s quick reaction and good handling of the situation prevented a dangerous escalation across the border.

UNIFIL stated at that time: “Our immediate priority at this time is to restore calm in the area.”²⁴ A LAF unit reacted when Israeli troops attempted to uproot a tree facing Adaysse village in South Lebanon on the Lebanese side of the fenced border area along the “Blue Line” which Lebanon considered Lebanese territory (disputed land). The Israeli unit crossed the technical border fence in Adaysse village and into Lebanese sovereign territory. “Despite the intervention of the UNIFIL which tried to stop its advance, the Israeli enemy’s patrol persisted in its violation the thing that pushed the Lebanese Army units to confront that patrol with the adequate weapons.”²⁵ The IF allegedly intended to cut a tree that obstructed the observation from its posts on the Israeli side of the border. The LAF reacted to the Israeli border intrusion, hostile small arms fire was exchanged with the Israeli forces, resulting in the death of two LAF soldiers and a Lebanese journalist, and an IF officer. There were also a number of wounded personnel on both sides of the border.²⁶ UNIFIL peacekeepers immediately deployed in the area and UNIFIL’s command stated: “UNIFIL’s immediate priority is to consolidate the calm and we are urging both parties to exercise maximum restraint.”²⁷ UNIFIL opened an investigation and took measures in order to prevent the occurrence of similar hostile incidents in the Lebanese-Israeli border area.

The latest incident happened on 29 November 2011 where an unguided rocket was launched into Israel from Lebanese territory close to the Lebanese-Israeli border. Israeli forces responded with artillery fires directed against the suspected rocket launch site. There were no casualties on either side of the frontier.²⁸ As soon as the incident occurred both LAF and UNIFIL patrols deployed in the area and the UNIFIL commander did his best to put an end to this incident and to open an investigation about it: “UNIFIL

Force Commander Maj. Gen. Alberto Assarta is maintaining close contact with the parties and has called for maximum restraint in order to prevent any escalation of the situation.”²⁹

The Lebanese government and the LAF constantly protest and report to UNIFIL the continuous air space violations by IF Air Force combat aircraft and Israeli unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Although UNIFIL has been unable to realistically address these air space violations, it has protested and reported them to the UN Secretary General.³⁰

Resolution 1701, UNIFIL, and Regional Security Dynamics

Lebanese Government. Lebanon was one of the founders of the United Nations after World War II in 1945. Lebanon always tried to adhere to all the resolutions issued by the UN since such resolutions form the basis of international legitimacy. The executive branch of the Lebanese state consisting of the president of the republic and the Lebanese government always supported the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1701. The President of the Republic General Michel Suleiman during his annual visit to the UN headquarters in Naqoura, South Lebanon, and while celebrating New Year’s day in 2010, announced his continuous support to the UNIFIL forces and he said “you will contribute in keeping the peace in southern Lebanon in cooperation with the Lebanese army, and your mission is a national, humanitarian, honorable, at a personal sacrifice, and loyalty.” President Suleiman further acknowledged that UNIFIL’s troops were placing themselves in danger “in order to establish peace and security” and he extended “an acknowledgment of gratitude and pride in your [UNIFIL’s] role and message of love from Lebanon and its people...”³¹

Similarly, Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati after assuming his duties in June 2011, visited the United Nations headquarters where he expressed his deep feeling and

appreciation for the role of the UNIFIL in maintaining stability and peace in South Lebanon. Prime Minister Mikati stated: “There is national consensus on UNIFIL and its mission and I am here to stress that again in unequivocal terms.... The people of Lebanon, and I personally, have deep appreciation for the work you are doing, hand in hand with the Lebanese Armed Forces, to maintain the peace and quiet for this part of the country that has suffered from many years of conflict..... My government is committed to the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1701.”³²



Figure 10. President of the Lebanese Republic General Michel Suleiman visited UNIFIL Headquarters

Lebanese Army. The instruction issued by the LAF commander General Jean Kahwaji is to implement Resolution 1701 to the greatest extent possible and to facilitate the mission of the UNIFIL. This Resolution demanded from Lebanon and particularly the LAF to increase its own forces in the area of UNIFIL's deployment to 15,000 troops. The Resolution mandate created competing priorities for the LAF which are traditionally constrained both in terms of available personnel and equipment. The LAF had already

been assigned the mission by the Lebanese government to maintain peace and security throughout Lebanon and to assist and reinforce the role and the missions of the Lebanese Interior Security Forces (ISF). Consequently, the Resolution 1701 mandate provided a redirection of the LAF priorities and despite the existing scarcity of personnel numbers and equipment, the LAF commander General Jean Kahwaji directed that the appropriate level of Lebanese military support be provided to UNIFIL's mission and the implementation of the Resolution 1701 mandate that directly concerned the LAF.

All the instructions issued from the LAF headquarters particularly from the LAF commander emphasized the deepest level of cooperation between the LAF units deployed in the area of UNIFIL's operations in order to facilitate UNIFIL's mission, and achieve the joint LAF-UNIFIL task in implementing Resolution 1701. The appreciation of the United Nation mission was also manifested in the visit of the LAF commander to the United Nations headquarters soon after he was assigned to the LAF command where he stressed the close coordination of the Lebanese Army with the UNIFIL to fulfill Resolution 1701. At the same time most of the "orders of the day" issued on behalf of the Lebanese Army commander during various national events always addressed the importance of the cooperation with UNIFIL so that the two forces would achieve the mandate of Resolution 1701. The last "order of the day" issued on the August 1, 2011 at the occasion of the establishment of the Lebanese Army specifically mentioned "your mission's objectives can only be accomplished through your close co-operation with the International Forces with the aim of keeping stability in that region....."³³



Figure 11. LAF commander General Jean Kahwaji in his visit UNIFIL headquarter

I was an officer assigned at the headquarters of a Lebanese Army brigade deployed in the area of UNIFIL's operations. The instructions of our brigade commander, which reflected his meetings with the LAF commander, were to cooperate and coordinate our operations to the maximum extent possible with UNIFIL. Our Lebanese Army brigade was properly performing its operational mission and assigned security tasks in the vicinity of the Lebanese-Israeli border area, while facing shortages in available equipment, especially in transport and armored personnel carriers (APCs, e.g., U.S.-made M113s), which were being tried because of their continuous use in patrolling difficult hilly terrain in South Lebanon.

The following UNIFIL statement summarizes the extensive program of cooperation between the LAF and the UNIFIL units in their joint area of operations:

“Joint exercises between the two Forces take place at Battalion, Sector and Headquarters levels. These include joint artillery firing exercises, search and rescue, mass casualty exercises and others aimed at contingency preparedness. Such military exercises are complemented by a lecture exchange programme between LAF and UNIFIL officers that covers topics ranging from purely military ones to more social and political issues (such as on social characteristics of Lebanon). This helps strengthen the conceptual basis for operational cooperation, enables exchange of professional experience and facilitates better understanding of the local environment.”³⁴

Our Lebanese Army brigade held recurrent meetings with UNIFIL at different command and staff levels to exchange information concerning our joint mission. Our brigade engaged on many different types of training with UNIFIL units. These included joint exercises, attending lectures concerning our mission, the training of Lebanese Army non-commissioned officers (NCOs) by UNIFIL personnel, executing joint live fire exercises, and even sending Lebanese Army officers to learn the native language of the deployed UNIFIL battalion in the joint operational area, etc.

In order to facilitate the coordination of missions and communications between the Lebanese Army and UNIFIL in the joint area of operations, Lebanese Armed Forces commander General Jean Kahwaji implemented a unified system of command for all the Lebanese Army brigades deployed in UNIFIL’s area of operations by instituting the “South Litani Sector Command.” This Lebanese Army Sector Command not only facilitated the implementation of the directives issued by the Lebanese Army

commander, but it also became a “single point of contact” between all subordinate Lebanese Army units in the area and UNIFIL.

Position of Israel. Israel saw Resolution 1701 and the arrival of a strongly reinforced UNIFIL in South Lebanon as a “diplomatic victory” because they provided degree of control over Hezbollah’s military activities in the immediate vicinity of the Lebanese-Israeli frontier. In short, Resolution 1701 and a reinforced UNIFIL accomplished to some degree what the Israeli military operations in July-August 2006 failed to do.³⁵

In 2006, Israel was not prepared to fight an asymmetric war the parameters of which were largely defined by Hezbollah despite Israel’s overwhelming military superiority and absolute command of the air. An analysis of the 2006 war commented: “the strategies that Israel chose in order to pursue its goals are even more uncertain, and they have changed and expanded in scope during the course of the fighting ... Both Israeli military officers and Israeli’s political leadership placed severe constraints on ground action because of the fear of repeating the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon.”³⁶ Resolution 1701 was accepted by Israel because of “the needs of Israel for conflict termination.”³⁷ The 2006 war inflicted “more Israeli casualties per Arab fighter [involved in the fighting] in 2006 than did any of Israeli’s state opponents in 1956, 1967, 1973.”³⁸ The Israeli strategic goal to eliminate Hezbollah’s military power in the 2006 war was not achieved. The rather simplistic Israeli government view that Hezbollah constituted a proxy military force of Iran and Syria “led the government of Israel to attempt the eradication of Hezbollah through the application of overwhelming military force, an effort that was flawed in design and failed in execution.”³⁹ The ill-defined Israeli

strategic and operational objectives were revealed by their recurrent changes during the campaign. On July 31, 2006 the Israeli Cabinet approved operation “Change of Direction” designed to take and hold “a security zone” several kilometers wide along the entire Lebanese-Israeli border. On August 11, 2006 this Israeli objective was replaced by a focus on a “push to Litany River” to occupy a large segment of territory in South Lebanon. Israel then again shifted its strategy by accepting a cease fire that was ordered by the UNSC under Resolution 1701. Israel had been confronted by a strong popular resistance and had failed to achieve any of its declared objectives thus Resolution 1701 and the enhanced presence of UNIFIL presented the best possible outcome for the Israeli political and military decision makers.⁴⁰

The 12-mile “buffer zone” that was imposed from the Lebanese-Israeli frontier by Resolution 1701 and the mandate that this zone should be free of illegal weapons was consistent with the Israeli strategic and operational goals of imposing controls on the movement of Hezbollah’s arms supplies. In view of the fact that the IF itself had been obliged to withdraw in 2000 from the Israeli-SLA “security zone” extending north of the Lebanese-Israeli frontier under Hezbollah’s unrelenting guerilla warfare, Israel welcomed UNIFIL’s presence that assured a better degree of security policing since it was consistent with the Israeli objectives in the first place.

Hostile Actions Involving UNIFIL Troops after Resolution 1701

UNIFIL forces in Lebanon have suffered 275 fatalities since 1978 due to multiple causes. Following the adoption of Resolution 1701 and the deployment of the reinforced UNIFIL presence in Lebanon, a number of incidents conducted by terrorists has caused additional casualties among the UNIFIL participating contingents. Some of these incidents have involved deliberate hostile action and they are covered below.

On 24 June 2007 a UNIFIL patrol near the town of Kiyam in South Lebanon was targeted by an improvised explosive device (IED) that killed six United Nations peacekeepers, three Spanish and three Colombian.⁴¹ On 27 May 2011 a UNIFIL logistics convoy was targeted by an explosive device in the town of Saida (outside the area of UNIFIL deployment) on their return trip and six Italian UNIFIL peacekeepers were injured in the explosion, one of them seriously and five with moderate injuries.⁴² On 26 June 2011 another UNIFIL logistics convoy was targeted by an explosion again in Saida and 5 peacekeepers were injured three of them were transported to the hospital. The latest incident and the third one during 2011 happened on 9 December 2011 when a UNIFIL vehicle was targeted by an explosion in the village of Bourj al-Shamali near the port city of Tyre in South Lebanon and 5 French peacekeepers were injured. But, in spite of these incidents and the casualties inflicted the UNIFIL mission has not stopped because of the persistence of the United Nations, the countries whose national participating contingents were exposed to these incidents, and the overall cooperation of the Lebanese government. Recently after this last incident, UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Alberto Assarta Cuevas announced “UNIFIL’s determination and commitment to the mandate under UN Security Council Resolution 1701 is even stronger. We will not be diverted from our tasks and we remain focused in our efforts to fulfill our mandate together with the Lebanese Armed Forces.”⁴³ Nicholas de Riviere, Chief of the International Organizations Department at the French Foreign Ministry affirmed in his visit to Lebanon “the continuity of our commitment in south Lebanon. France will keep its presence in UNIFIL in order to maintain stability in Lebanon and the region.”⁴⁴

On the other hand, the president of the Lebanese republic General Michel Suleiman in his annual visit at the end of this year visited the exposed French battalion and expressed his support to achieve their mission. "Today, terrorism exists and is operating secretly and is targeting UNIFIL in order to force it to withdraw from south Lebanon. Therefore, i salute you and the soldiers who did not retreat in the face of terrorism. The attack on you is an attack on UNIFIL as a whole and on the idea of peace and on the United Nations, and of course it is aimed at undermining Lebanon's stability and sovereignty. I am confident that your commitment is final and that the decrease in your numbers does not change your position as UNIFIL and as a French state that always supported Lebanon and offered great sacrifices for Peace in Lebanon and the Middle East."⁴⁵ The Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati affirmed after his meeting with UNIFIL Force Commander after this incident that Lebanon abides by international law and is committed to its cooperation with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in order to bolster security and stability.

Did UNIFIL Maintain Stability In the Area?

The strategic objective of the implementation of Resolution 1701 is to maintain peace and stability in the region in order that the LAF will take the full responsibility for these tasks in the future thus giving the opportunity for UNIFIL to leave the region. There is no doubt that UNIFIL and Resolution 1701 are important factors in keeping peace and stability in the area.

1. As it has been shown above, the quick reaction of UNIFIL forces and their management of major incidents in South Lebanon with the collaboration of the LAF has prevented further escalation of hostile actions in the area in general and specifically along the sensitive "Blue Line" disengagement boundaries.

2. There is a tripartite committee composed of the UNIFIL commander with high representatives of LAF and the Israeli army. This committee holds recurrent meetings and “remained a vital forum in which to address key security and military operational issues, including violations of 1701 resolution and the findings of UNIFIL investigations into incidents. That forum is an essential confidence-building mechanism between the parties and a central element of liaison and coordination; both parties continued to demonstrate their commitment to it.”⁴⁶

3. The level of collaboration and assistance that the LAF has extended to UNIFIL and the orders issued by Lebanese headquarter inspired from the instructions of the LAF commander General Jean Kahwaji to establish close coordination and close cooperation with the UNIFIL forces have assisted the UN forces in Lebanon to achieve their mission in a proper manner according to Resolution 1701.

4. UNIFIL has put recommendations or “critical points” on how to deal in case of incidents in its area of operations and has demanded that both the Lebanese and Israeli forces to implement such guidance in order to preserve stability and peace in Lebanon: “First, they should act with maximum restraint and avoid any kind of unilateral action, including any action that might be perceived as sensitive or provocative by the other side. Second, they should utilize the UNIFIL liaison and coordination mechanism to the full extent, and address all issues of tension through the Force. Third, they should avoid the use of fire in any circumstance, except where clearly required in immediate self-defense. UNIFIL emphasized that it is critical that these measures be applied at all times by all soldiers on the ground.”⁴⁷

What Did the Deployment of UNIFIL Achieve?

The deployment of UNIFIL south of the Litany River achieved a cessation of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel and the safe return of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons. In addition it has achieved a return to a normal way of life in Lebanon and North Israel and has created a zone with better controls over the introduction and traffic of weapons in South Lebanon by non-state actors. UNIFIL deployment has also achieved various strategic and tactical objectives presented below:

1. The deployment of LAF and UNIFIL in the so called “buffer zone” from the south of the Litany River to the “Blue Line” under Resolution 1701 was intended to establish a zone free of any armed personnel, infrastructure intended for military use, and weapons. The increased and more active presence of the UNIFIL and LAF units in the relevant area of operations has led to a more effective peace enforcement and has prevented any serious armed clashes that could have happened between Hezbollah’s military forces and Israel.

2. The deployment of UNIFIL has made its operational area and Lebanon a political focal point for the international community and especially for the countries that have participating national contingents. Therefore, any potential occurrence and escalation of armed hostilities that may involve the territories of Lebanon and Israel will be immediately classified as disrupting and threatening international peace and security.

3. The increased LAF deployment in South Lebanon has served “the critical mission of strengthening the sovereignty of Lebanon’s government, demonstrated by placing Lebanese soldiers on the border with Israel for the first time in decades. Simultaneously the expanded UNIFIL deployment is intended to support the LAF’s

southern deployment and provided political space for the Lebanese government as it tries to strengthen its institutions.”⁴⁸

4. UNIFIL has also provided a great degree of humanitarian assistance especially in the safe removal of Israeli launched unexploded cluster munitions that had contaminated extensive areas in South Lebanon during the 2006 war. In this manner, these areas have been safely returned to gainful agricultural use by the local population.

What will allow UNIFIL to be terminated?

On January 2012 Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati received UNIFIL commander General Alberto Assarta in his farewell visit after the end of his command to these forces and he stressed that UNIFIL mission will not be completed unless transmitting the responsibility to LAF to maintain the security.⁴⁹



Figure 12. Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati received UNIFIL commander General Alberto Assarta

For the same objective and within the framework of achieving our military strategy, LAF commander General Jean Kahwaji in his visit to the United States in October 2011 has held different meetings with General Martin Dempsey Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General James Mattis Commander, United States Central Command, and with other officials in the U.S. Administration, Congress and Senate, where he addressed the needs of the LAF concerning weapons, training and logistics. During his meetings, General Kahwaji, who is focused on strengthening the LAF so that they can fulfill their diverse missions and tasks throughout the Lebanese territory — particularly in South Lebanon — stressed the role of the LAF in safeguarding the sovereignty of Lebanon against any external aggression, and the role of the LAF in fighting terrorism. He also stressed that these missions contribute in maintaining regional stability which is in the interest of all the countries in the region.⁵⁰

In the same field, UNIFIL commander General Alberto Assarta in his visit at the end of his command to the Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati in January 2012 stressed in spite of achieving gradual transfer of responsibilities from UNIFIL to LAF within the framework of the ongoing strategic dialogue, the capability of the LAF concerning territorial and maritime forces still need to strengthen before the LAF can carry out effectively the activities and responsibilities related to the 1701 Resolution in the area of operation.⁵¹ Naturally, the maintenance of peace and stability in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon, is also fully consistent with the national security interests and goals of the United States.

Israel perceives Hezbollah's military power as a threat in the region and this in turn affects the United States military assistance to the LAF, an assistance that the LAF

need to accomplish its different tasks in particular in South of Lebanon. “The United States might consider modifying arms transfer policies to permit the LAF to field a defensive capability (e.g., air defense and anti-tank missiles) providing a credible deterrent to aggression. A credible deterrent is key to the LAF’s ability to replace Hezbollah as defender of the Lebanese people.”⁵²

The Lebanese Minister of Finance Muhammad Al-Safadi announced in his last visit to the United States in December 2011 after his meetings with officials of the U.S. Administration and Representatives of the U.S. Congress that “I know that recommendations have been raised to reduce U.S. aid to the security institutions of Lebanon... the reduction in the military role of Hezbollah is linked to the ability of the Lebanese army to defend the land of Lebanon and its people and to address any possible attack, and this requires providing the appropriate military weapons to be the guarantee of the security of the country.”⁵³

The reduction of the United States military aid to the LAF will not help Lebanon to fully control South Lebanon in order to end the mission of UNIFIL. The reason for such a potential reduction in the United States military assistance could be the fear that weapons of U.S. origin could be given to Hezbollah. Although the Lebanese government recognize and tolerate Hezbollah’s non-state military power and weapons and respect Hezbollah’s resistance role against Israeli military aggression and occupation, neither the government nor the LAF are captive political instruments of Hezbollah. Hezbollah represents “the Lebanese people and exercises its role in [the Lebanese] parliament, as in the government, according to the regulations.”⁵⁴

The LAF is an army respected by all the citizens and never any United States military assistance weapons or any other weapons under LAF control were ever transferred to Hezbollah. “The Lebanese Armed Forces are not Hezbollah’s quartermaster and without increased support, including some lethal weapon capabilities, the Army will never be in a position to secure its border as any sovereign state should be able to do. Nothing provided to the Lebanese Armed Forces has ever ended up with Hezbollah.”⁵⁵

Conclusion

Lebanon is located in a sensitive area of the Middle East where multiple national, trans-national, and non-state interests materially interact and affect regional stability, peace and security. Potential armed conflicts in the region can quickly escalate often with unforeseen results and long-term effects. Thus, it is imperative that such conflicts be prevented, or, if they start, they must be brought to a quick end before they escalate. Peacekeeping operations such as the one undertaken by UNIFIL under the Resolution 1701 are intended to accomplish this result. UNIFIL is accomplishing its assigned mission in Lebanon with the support and cooperation of the LAF that is acting under the overall leadership of President Michel Suleiman and Prime Minister Najib Mikati.

The clear instructions issued by LAF commander General Jean Kahwaji comprehensively addressed the deployment of Lebanese forces in the area and their cooperation and coordination to the greatest extent possible with UNIFIL for the accomplishment of the joint mission mandated by Resolution 1701. UNIFIL has succeeded in keeping stability in the area. There are no doubts that the existence of UNIFIL in the area is vital until the concerned countries equip LAF with the necessary

weapons in order to defend Lebanese borders and to control any instability that could happen in this area.

Recommendations

The objective of UNIFIL is to assist Lebanon to exercise its full authority over the “buffer zone.” A strong LAF is the only way to exercise this authority. Therefore, when the LAF will reach the required capability level there will be no need for UNIFIL assistance and the United Nation can withdraw these forces.

At the strategic level, a strong and well equipped LAF is an important key factor in maintaining stability in the area. Thus, the international community and particularly the friendly countries to Lebanon should provide the necessary level of military assistance that would include various types of defensive weapons that could enable the LAF to defend its sovereignty against any aggression.

The deployment of the LAF to the “Blue Line” was an important factor in strengthening the sovereignty of Lebanon’s government in this area. But, in fact deploying in the area is not enough. The LAF must be well equipped especially with defensive weapons. The ability to defend Lebanon’s territory is a key political factor for convincing Hezbollah which is fully supported by most of the Lebanese citizens in the area of deployment of UNIFIL as a defender of Lebanon to lessen its reliance on its own non-state military power and its weapons that are outside UNIFIL’s area of operations.

The Israeli occupation of some Lebanese territory in South Lebanon (e.g., Shabaa Farms, Kfarshouba Hills and the northern part of the town Algajar) plays an important factor in keeping the tension in the area. Therefore, the Israeli withdrawal from these territories will be an important factor to preserve peace and stability in the area.

The recurrent violations of the Resolution 1701 by flights of Israeli Air Force manned and the unmanned aircraft over Lebanese territory clearly violate Lebanese sovereignty, defy the mandate of Resolution 1701, and should cease immediately.

The joint role of UNIFIL and the LAF in South Lebanon has provided a new dimension of peacekeeping operations in a traditionally volatile region of the Middle East. This role not only has safeguarded Lebanon's national security but it has also ensured broader peace and security in the region.

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