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REDEFINING 'INTERIM':

UNIFIL'S TANGLED MISSION IN LEBANON

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INTRODUCTION

Lebanon has never found itself far from the heart of Middle East conflicts. In recent decades, this small Mediterranean state has found itself dominated by sub-state militias, occupied by foreign powers, and divided by conflicting political currents in the region. The Lebanese government has repeatedly struggled to assert its authority inside of its borders, and the emergence of Hezbollah as a political force has compelled the government to cooperate and coexist with a non-state actor that provides social welfare and defense. Partially as a result of Hezbollah's strength, war with Lebanon's southern neighbor Israel never seems as if it should be written off. With the question of national sovereignty remaining a perennial issue in Lebanon and future war with Israel being a question of "when" and not "if," the presence of international peacekeepers seems both an obvious solution and a complicating obstacle to Lebanon's path towards peace and stability.

When the UN Security Council passed Resolution 425 in 1978 and created the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), its mission was to confirm the withdrawal of the Israeli forces that had recently invaded and to assist the Lebanese government in regaining its authority in this area. The first objective proved to be easier said than done; the UN would not be able to confirm Israeli withdrawal until 2000, 22 years after Resolution 425. The second objective has yet to be completed, and arguably never will be under the current status quo. In the meantime, both the capabilities and the expectations of UNIFIL have vastly increased. It has become one of the caretakers of South Lebanon, competing with Hezbollah and the Lebanese government, and its presence has slowly become the norm for many Lebanese. Amidst the

evolution of this peacekeeping force, the criteria and consequences of its departure have likewise intensified.

While this project explores the factors surrounding the relationship between UNIFIL, Hezbollah, Amal, and the Shia of South Lebanon, it soon became apparent that stepping back and questioning UNIFIL's presence and niche in Lebanon reveals deeper issues. For a force that has seemingly been given everything it could have hoped for since 2006, its utility to act as a stabilizing presence in the south remains at the mercy of the two main protagonists in the border area: Israel and Hezbollah. While the international community expects UNIFIL to help prevent future unrest in South Lebanon, few have any sort of faith in this endeavor and they are immediately dismissed as impotent and irresponsible when hostilities arise. Although UNIFIL intends to be a neutral force used to mediate conflicts, its tense area of operation, organizational characteristics, and fluctuating international makeup make it difficult to convince observers that it is genuinely objective.

RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

This project seeks to fill the research gap that exists between studies of Lebanon and studies of conflict management and peacekeeping. While a plethora of publications exist on Lebanon's history and the conflicts that have marred its territory, most of these works tell little of how the United Nations fits into the Lebanese narrative. Specific UN Security Council resolutions are mentioned, as are major developments such as the creation of UNIFIL, yet the details of UNIFIL, how they operate, and Lebanese attitudes towards this international peacekeeping force are scarce. Lebanese historian Fawwaz Traboulsi gives very little mention of UNIFIL in his comprehensive *A History of Modern Lebanon*, only stating that the deployment of UNIFIL

troops in 1978 “did not solve much of the thorny southern question, except that these troops served as a safety net to reinforce Israel’s control over the border strip.”¹ Such sentiments critical of UNIFIL are echoed elsewhere, and reinforce the notion that UNIFIL is frequently seen as sympathetic to one side over another. Research and writings on South Lebanon and Hezbollah have multiplied since these subjects entered the spotlight in 2006, yet these tend to discuss ideologies, arsenals, and international law, not the limitations and activities of UNIFIL. Scholar of Lebanon’s Shia Augustus Richard Norton rarely mentions the peacekeeping force in his study *Amal and the Shia: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon*, despite UNIFIL’s coexistence with Amal and the South Lebanese Shia. Journalist Nicholas Blanford’s *Warriors of God: Inside Hezbollah’s Thirty-Year Struggle Against Israel* is an extremely comprehensive study of Hezbollah and frequently mentions their relationship with UNIFIL, yet it this is done through the movement’s lens and does not detail UNIFIL itself or their relations with Amal and the Shia.

On the other side of this gap are the studies of peacekeeping and conflict management that give Lebanon as a case study. These works are somewhat more theoretical, and ask questions such as what exactly the role of a peacekeeping force is and how peacekeepers should interact in the communities in which they are deployed. Ones that give UNIFIL as a case study may detail the characteristics of contingents, criticize UNIFIL’s formation and framework, or discuss the shortcomings of peacekeeping for the country, yet they rarely fully explain the Lebanese political context surrounding UNIFIL. International law scholar Ray Murphy’s study *UN Peacekeeping in Lebanon, Somalia, and Kosovo: Operation and Legal Issues in Practice* is fiercely critical of UNIFIL’s deployment yet only discusses its initial years and interaction with Israel and the PLO for examples. Former UN diplomat Marrack Goulding takes a similar

¹ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 206.

approach in his memoir *Peacemonger*, which gives attention to Lebanese politics yet focuses on law and UNIFIL's formative years. Some studies from an international legal perspective do detail UNIFIL's recent challenges, such as Karim Makdisi's article *Constructing Security Council Resolution 1701 for Lebanon in the Shadow of the 'War on Terror,'* yet there is still a significant chronological gap between UNIFIL's performance at the height of the Lebanese Civil War and post-2006 UNIFIL.

This study utilizes all of these secondary sources in an attempt to bridge the existing gaps between them. It also incorporates documents translated from Arabic, UN Security Council resolutions, and a series of interviews conducted in Beirut and Marakeh, Lebanon. Figures interviewed include UNIFIL officials, a journalist, members of the Amal Movement, and a Hezbollah affiliate.

CIVIL WAR

When a skirmish between Palestinian and Christian militiamen erupted in Beirut on April 13, 1975, it was the culmination of decades of tension between Lebanon's religious communities institutionalized in its confessionalist political system. Fighting between pro-government Christians and Muslim/leftist opposition forces could not be seen as unexpected, especially with Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) having effectively run a "state within a state."² However, it would be difficult to foresee urban street battles between two fairly distinct sides escalating into a highly complex fifteen-year conflict that would pull in both regional actors and the international community.

² Traboulsi, 182-183.

The initial phase of the Lebanese Civil War is generally seen to have ended in 1976 when Lebanese President Suleiman Franjeh requested Syria to intervene and disarm the PLO and combat their allied anti-government militias. This intervention led to an Arab League summit later that year set to end the conflict, yet tension did not subside during the one-year lull that followed. The assassination of Druze and opposition leader Kamal Jumblatt in 1977 reignited tempers in Lebanon, the consolidation of Lebanese Christian militias into the Lebanese Forces, and perennial PLO strikes ensured that tempers would be reignited and Lebanon would remain divided.³

On March 11, 1978, the PLO launched a particularly violent attack in Northern Israel. Dubbed the “Coastal Road Massacre,” this incident provided Israel with a reason to both punish the PLO and to insert itself into the Lebanon conflict. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin approved of an invasion of Lebanon called “Operation Litani,” and on the night of March 14, 1978 the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) first entered Lebanon.⁴ They moved exceptionally fast, reaching South Lebanon’s Litani River by March 16, yet this speed does not mean the PLO was weak. Strong concentrations of PLO fighters in the city of Tyre and in a concentration of three villages known as the “Iron Triangle” (Qana, Dir Amas, and Juya) meant the IDF would not challenge these areas due to the potential heavy losses.

US President Jimmy Carter was alarmed at the Israeli incursion, seeing the invasion as going beyond retaliation for the PLO attack and knowing that the ongoing Camp David Accords negotiation process required him to take some sort of action about the South Lebanon situation. Therefore, he contacted US ambassador to the UN Andy Young to push a Security Council

³ Alan James, “Painful Peacekeeping: The United Nations in Lebanon 1978-1982,” *International Journal* 38 (Autumn 1983): 613-614.

⁴ Nitza Nachmias, “The Impossible Peacekeeping Mission: UNIFIL,” *Peacekeeping & International Relations* 25 (September/October 1996): 14.

resolution that would call for the Israelis to withdraw and install a peacekeeping force.⁵ The Council acted quickly, and on March 19, 1978 the UN Security Council unanimously passed (with two abstentions from the USSR and Czechoslovakia) Resolution 425.⁶ This Resolution called on Israel to "immediately cease its military action" in Lebanon and "to withdraw forthwith its forces from all Lebanese territory." It also called for the creation of an interim force in South Lebanon with the purpose of "confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restoring international peace and security and assisting the government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area."⁷ Resolution 426 was approved on the same day, affirming the creation of an interim force in South Lebanon "for an initial period of six months" with the possibility of renewal if approved by the Security Council.⁸ These Resolutions marked the birth of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and despite the visions of its initial proponents, its presence would be anything but "interim."

UNIFIL would be fraught with difficulties from its inception, as its US proponents were motivated more by the pressure to take action than well thought-out scenarios for alleviating Lebanese conflict. General Ensio Siilasvuo, then chief coordinator of UN peacekeeping in the Middle East, strongly opposed the idea of peacekeepers in Lebanon, seeing the situation as inappropriate for force deployment. Others in the UN worried that any long-term peacekeeping mission would get bogged down and increasingly overwhelmed, and the "interim" label was included in UNIFIL due to their concerns. They felt trying to apply "peacekeeping" to Lebanon

⁵ Naomi Joy Weinberger, "Peacekeeping Options in Lebanon," *Middle East Journal* 37 (Summer 1983): 349.

⁶ James, 616.

⁷ UN Security Council, *Security Council Resolution 425 (1978) [on establishment of a UN Interim Force for Southern Lebanon (UNIFIL)]*, 19 March 1978, S/RES/425 (1978), available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/425%281978%29 [accessed 14 April 2012]

⁸ UN Security Council, *Security Council Resolution 426 (1978) [approves the guidelines for UNIFIL]*, 19 March 1978, S/RES/426 (1978), available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/426%281978%29 [accessed 14 April 2012]

was useless, as the conditions were deemed too volatile at the time and it seemed highly unlikely that Israel, the PLO, and the warring Lebanese factions would cooperate with UNIFIL.⁹ President Carter had ignored these detractors, more concerned with the success of the Camp David process, and pressured Israel to withdraw from Lebanon as soon as possible. However, Israel's goal in Operation Litani was not only to push the PLO north in an attempt to disrupt their ability to shell northern towns, but also to ensure that the PLO would never be allowed near the Israeli-Lebanon border again. Thus, its invasion allowed it to establish a buffer zone running along the border, which was to be patrolled by Lebanese militia co-opted by Israel called the "South Lebanon Army" (SLA).¹⁰

With UNIFIL's first goal being the confirmation of Israeli withdrawal, UNIFIL's area of operation was designated to be all Lebanese territory Israel occupied south of the Litani River. The PLO argued that the IDF never took Tyre or the "Iron Triangle," and UNIFIL was forced to concede that they could not enter these areas. This concession frustrated Israel and the SLA, which demanded that UNIFIL be denied entry to the SLA-controlled buffer zone. The Israelis used the same reasoning as the PLO, claiming that they never occupied the border strip – the SLA did – yet this overlooked the fact that the SLA was fully funded and equipped by Israel and was effectively their client militia.¹¹ Regardless, UNIFIL was forced to concede to Israel as well. The area of operations for UNIFIL has not changed since this time, and they are still not permitted to patrol these areas.

The insertion of a peacekeeping force into an active warzone was not made easier by the ambitions of the UN and international community. UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim

⁹ James, 618.

¹⁰ Traboulsi, 206.

¹¹ Weinberger, 343.

envisioned that UNIFIL would be able to function as a capable military unit in South Lebanon, and called for the implementation of Resolution 425 almost immediately. With this drive, the first UNIFIL troops were deployed by March 23, 1978, and their number reached 4,000 by mid-April 1978.¹² The UN was no stranger to Lebanon, as the UN's first peacekeeping operation, the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) had been monitoring the Lebanon-Israel border since 1949. Due to the rapid execution of Resolution 425, the first commander of UNIFIL, Major-General E. A. Erskine, was drawn from UNTSO, and UNIFIL has since remained technically part of UNTSO (renamed "UN Observer Group Lebanon"). Some 421 seasoned observers joined UNIFIL immediately. The first brigades, drastically underequipped for their assigned mission, were actually drawn from the nearby United Nations Disengagement Observer Force of the Golan Heights (UNDOF) and the Sinai Peninsula.¹³ The UN hoped for a line of command from UN headquarters to UNIFIL, yet the force was highly decentralized initially, and General Erskine did not have the chance to meet with individual contingent commanders before their deployment. Making matters worse, UNIFIL made the impulsive decision to locate their headquarters in Naquora, which was actually within the SLA-controlled buffer zone and cut off from the remainder of UNIFIL's area of deployment.¹⁴ Despite the speed of its formation, UNIFIL would remain one of the weakest players in the south of Lebanon and was consistently outmatched by the warring factions in the area.

With these circumstances established, the objectives for UNIFIL outlined in Resolution 425 seem both vague and overly idealistic. Unlike the UNTSO and UNDOF that served to monitor armistice lines, UNIFIL was not a genuine "peacekeeping" force in that it was thrown

¹² Nachmias, 14.

¹³ Ibid, 15.

¹⁴ Weinberger, 343.

into the midst of a warzone. It was not prepared to handle this situation, and the proponents of Resolution 425 should not have expected UNIFIL to be able to have a deterrence or enforcement capacity. UNIFIL Senior Political Adviser Milos Strugar described the UNIFIL mandate as simultaneously too narrow and too broad; it is too narrow because it deals exclusively with security, not diplomacy, politics, or development, and is too broad due to its lack of explicit instructions as to how to restore “international peace and security.”¹⁵ Additionally, UNIFIL lacked the cooperation of the parties of the conflict, particularly Israel, the PLO, and the South Lebanon Army, and intense violence was bound to continue without their support. Under international (particularly US) pressure, Israeli forces withdrew from Lebanon by June 1978, yet their SLA client militia remained behind and the IDF was granted free movement within their enclave. This meant UNIFIL could not actually fulfill their goal of “confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces.” Israel accepted UNIFIL’s presence begrudgingly, and it accused the peacekeeping force of consistently working against its interests. It did not trust international peacekeepers to keep the PLO at bay, hence its creation of a buffer zone with a dependable client force.¹⁶ It had some reason for this mistrust, as the PLO immediately began creeping back into the UNIFIL area of operations as soon as Israel withdrew. UNIFIL tried to prevent such incursions with checkpoints, observation posts, and surveillance technology, and it was reasonably successful at denying entry or negotiating with would-be armed infiltrators. However, it could not use force to prevent these violations, only persuasion, and when it began confiscating PLO weapons it was obliged to return them to liaison officers that subsequently reequipped the gunmen.¹⁷ While Israel warmed slightly to UNIFIL for its efforts to curb PLO

¹⁵ Milos Strugar, personal interview, January 13, 2012.

¹⁶ James, 617.

¹⁷ Ibid, 622.

incursions and commended its efforts to create neutral space, it knew that UNIFIL could not be relied on to actually enforce its security. However, Israel's lukewarm reception to UNIFIL paled in comparison to the open hostility of their SLA proxy militia towards UNIFIL.

Aside from their unwillingness to share Lebanon's southern border strip with UNIFIL, the SLA saw the peacekeeping force as impotent and routinely confronted its forces. Without a consistent Israeli military presence in South Lebanon, the SLA was delegated to protect Israel's northern border against the PLO. The two non-state actors quickly became staunch enemies, and UNIFIL found itself right in the middle of their conflict.¹⁸ Expectedly, the SLA greatly resented UNIFIL's inability to curb PLO infiltration into the South, and began to view UNIFIL as tacitly supporting Palestinian militants. Their hostility to UNIFIL ranged from restricting their freedom of movement within their security zone to outright armed confrontations with UNIFIL forces. In April 1979, the SLA even shelled UNIFIL's Naqura headquarters within its enclave and did not cease fire until Israeli Northern Command demanded the militia stop.¹⁹ Essentially, the opinions of the Israelis and SLA regarding UNIFIL were conditional on its ability to act against the PLO, highlighting the problem of peacekeeper objectivity in Lebanon.

On the other side of the South Lebanon conflict, the PLO and Syria were somewhat more eager to support UNIFIL, although this too was rooted in UNIFIL's stance towards their enemies. Israel had made the Litani River a red line with Syria, and Syria did not dare cross this line lest it fear a powerful Israeli reprisal. This meant that Syrian soldiers rarely came in contact with UNIFIL forces, yet the Syrian Foreign Ministry supported what it saw as a UN endeavor to push Israel and its allies out of Lebanon. However, it reacted with both disappointment and sympathy when it realized UNIFIL's inability to achieve this goal, knowing it was outgunned

¹⁸ Nicholas Blanford, personal interview, January 10, 2012.

¹⁹ Weinberger, 346.

and outnumbered by all other parties.²⁰ Palestinian forces in Lebanon were much more ambivalent, knowing their gateway to attacking Israel was now occupied by international forces. The PLO's leadership, including Yasser Arafat, willingly backed UN Resolution 425 and its stated goal of Israeli withdrawal, yet this sentiment was not shared by the scattered Palestinian gunmen throughout Lebanon. Like the Israelis and the SLA, they saw UNIFIL as frequently working against their interests; UNIFIL's deployment and mandate meant less freedom of movement, and their roadblocks and surveillance designed to limit incursions into South Lebanon were frequently met with hostility. Some Palestinian gunmen, particularly those opposed to Arafat's leadership, encroached into the South and refused to capitulate to UNIFIL calls to disarm, while others utilized ambushes, hijackings, and targeting of patrols to intimidate the peacekeeping force.²¹ For UNIFIL, it seemed impossible to appear neutral in the zero-sum Israeli-Palestinian Conflict that unfolded in South Lebanon.

The lack of support from these parties reinforces the criticisms of Resolution 425, as expecting a full Israeli withdrawal, let alone restoring peace, security or Lebanese authority, seemed an impossible task for the peacekeeping mission. While the UN was supposed to be assisting the Lebanese government and did receive some support from what was left of the Lebanese Army, the idea of UNIFIL slowly regaining territory and turning it over to Lebanese administration was not feasible given that the state had virtually no authority in the South. While the international community and Syria enthusiastically backed the idea of the Lebanese Army and UNIFIL restoring order in the South, claiming this to be an exit strategy that would keep UNIFIL as an "interim" force, the Lebanese Army had essentially fragmented along sectarian

²⁰ Weinberger, 248.

²¹ James, 622.

lines at the outset of the Civil War.²² Without an authority to transfer power to, UNIFIL could only establish buffer zones, mediate conflicts, and hope that tension would not escalate into open warfare. While UNIFIL managed these small-scale objectives for four years, it found that it was powerless to stop any large-scale action, and it likely did not anticipate exactly how overwhelmed it would be when Israel invaded in June 1982.

When Israel launched what it called “Operation Peace for Galilee” on June 6, 1982, it had the ambitious objectives of totally evicting the PLO from their Lebanese base and installing a friendly government under Christian militia leader Bashir Gemayel. UNIFIL was not informed of Israel’s plan until 28 minutes prior to its initiation, showing that Israel did not trust the force and knew its invasion would provoke international condemnation.²³ UNIFIL knew it could do nothing to stop columns of Israeli tanks from storming through its area of operations, and its attempts to delay the invasion by blocking roads were easily bypassed and are best seen as symbolic acts of resistance. This invasion would completely change the power dynamic of South Lebanon, as Israel successfully expelled its perennial enemy the PLO from the country yet created a new and more powerful foe in the process – the Shia.

AMAL AND UNIFIL

The Lebanese civil war exacerbated the already deep religious and sectarian divides that existed in the country, and it was out of such an environment that the Shia Amal movement emerged. Amal, an Arabic acronym for “The Lebanese Resistance Detachments” that literally means “hope,” was formed in the run-up to the civil war, and remains a major player in domestic politics today. Although Amal itself was co-founded by Imam Musa al-Sadr and Hussein al-

²² Weinberger, 351.

²³ James, 625.

Husseini, the organization came out of a long history of Shia activism. While much of the existing literature points to the 1979 revolution in Iran as the seminal event for Shia mobilization throughout the Middle East, this ignores decades of political awakening that was taking place in Lebanon. Augustus Richard Norton posits that this activism is, in fact, the “outcome of a long process of modernization.”²⁴ The very country was founded on the tenets of sectarianism and confessionalism, so it is no surprise that the Shia had emerged as a formidable political bloc.

Imam Musa al-Sadr did not explicitly intend to found the Amal movement, though it was a rational outcome of this phenomenon. Imam Musa was born in Qom, Iran, but he claimed Lebanon as his ancestral home and moved to Tyre in 1959.²⁵ While he initially came to Lebanon to replace a deceased mufti, he soon became a vastly popular figure in the community. Imam Musa realized the potential for political mobilization that existed among Shia in rural South Lebanon, and soon capitalized on his social standing to build partnerships among communities in the South in hopes of creating a unified Shia identity out of fragmented villages. Imam Musa continued to be a significant political force throughout the 1960s and 1970s, but his increased stature in the Lebanese sphere led him to become an opponent of the expanding Palestinian presence in the country. While he supported the Palestinian efforts to achieve statehood, he viewed the PLO as a force of anarchy and greatly feared the destabilizing effects that their presence could have not only on the region but also on the increasingly delicate situation facing Lebanese domestic politics.²⁶

As the Lebanese Civil War broke out in 1975 and violence swept across the country, Imam Musa oversaw the official incorporation of the Amal Movement as the military wing of his

²⁴ Augustus Richard Norton, *Amal and the Shia* (Austin, University of Texas Press: 1987), 13.

²⁵ Norton, 39.

²⁶ Nicholas Blanford, *Warriors of God* (New York: Random House, 2011), 48

²⁶ Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies* (London: Zed Books, 1994), 169.

political organization.²⁷ Although he still enjoyed great influence in southern Lebanon, even Imam Musa's leadership of Amal did not immediately make it a major player in the Civil War. There can be no doubt, however, that his years of political mobilization in among the Shia communities was massively beneficial to his cause, and he quickly saw large number of young Lebanese men clamoring to join ranks with Amal. The most important period of time in Amal's early history, however, occurred between early 1978 and 1979. In March 1978, the Israeli military launched Operation Litani into southern Lebanon, which killed 1,000 people and destroyed thousands of acres of territory. While this incursion targeted the South because of its dense Palestinian presence, the Lebanese Shia were caught in the middle and experienced a disproportionate level of violence. Although the initial IDF presence in Lebanon lasted little more than a week, this violence proved to be deeply damaging and mobilizing to the Shia psyche. They had previously begrudgingly accepted the Palestinian presence in South Lebanon, relatively powerless to stop them, but after the PLO retreated north and abandoned all of the territory south of the Litani River it became clear that the Lebanese themselves would be the ones bearing the brunt of this Israeli aggression. Additionally, the Shia had long felt abandoned by the Lebanese State, which created a long-lasting feeling of alienation between the two parties. The Shia of the South quickly realized that they had no one else upon whom to rely but themselves.

The other formative event for Amal was the disappearance of its founder, Imam Musa Sadr. Imam Musa went to Libya in August of 1978 for unknown reasons, but after only a few days in the country his whereabouts became unknown. He was thought to have boarded a plane to Italy, but conspiracy theories as to his true outcome abound. While this may not seem like a

²⁷ Norton, 48.

watershed moment, Amal was able to use Imam Musa's disappearance as a rallying cry for its members, and he proved to be more influential in disappearance (or death) than he was as the acting leader of the organization. Imam Musa prided himself on his ability to unite the disparate Shia communities of southern Lebanon, and his apparent martyrdom only increased his stature. After Imam Musa's disappearance, leadership of the Amal movement was transferred briefly to its co-founder, Hussein al-Husseini, who resigned his position in 1980 and was succeeded by current leader Nabih Berri. While neither al-Husseini nor Berri commanded the same amount of charisma as al-Sadr, they nonetheless continued to oversee Amal's most important shift: that from a force for political mobilization to violent resistance.

The Amal movement began to undergo a shift to resistance under Imam Musa Sadr in 1978, but reached its zenith after Israeli forces once again invaded Lebanon in June 1982. This incursion by the IDF once again targeted Palestinian militants entrenched in southern Lebanon, but this operation was exponentially larger than that of 1978. Although the UNIFIL troops that had been installed in southern Lebanon since the first Israeli withdrawal were meant to prevent such a repeated incursion from happening, the attempted assassination of the Israeli Ambassador to the United Kingdom proved too serious a threat to ignore. As the Israeli troops entered Lebanon, they were surprisingly initially welcomed by the southerners - Amal supporters and civilians alike.²⁸ The Shia of southern Lebanon had been persecuted by the Palestinians living there for decades, and many believed that the Israeli leadership would rid them of the Palestinian project. Not all Lebanese were so welcoming, though, and soon after the invasion Mohammed Saad, an Amal member from the southern village of Marakeh, began to organize a resistance movement in the surrounding villages. His brother Hassan spoke of the difficulties that

²⁸ Nicholas Blanford, *Warriors of God* (New York: Random House, 2011), 48

Mohammed faced in the early days of his campaign, as many Lebanese including Shia religious officials and the senior Amal political leadership were reluctant to mount an armed resistance against an enemy who had bested them many times before.²⁹ Saad was persistent in his organization, though, and was slowly able to draw people to his movement. Along with Saad, Amal held a rally in Tyre that was attended by over 100,000 people, and formally launched their military operations against Israel.

After this rally, Amal became the leading opposition organization in southern Lebanon, and soon earned the ire of the IDF troops. Although the Israeli forces were better trained and used better weapons, Saad and the other Amal fighters were able to hold their own against them. Saad made his own hand grenades and explosives, and the seven villages of the south provided these resistance fighters with money and supplies. While the PLO and IDF received outside aid, Amal was the only organization fighting without the sponsorship of a state; it was a purely grassroots movement.³⁰ The organizational structure and character of Amal allowed its members to build cordial relations with the UNIFIL peacekeepers stationed in southern Lebanon.

A key component of Amal's popularity was its ability to tap into the communal aspects of Shia identity: rather than emphasize a strict hierarchical structure in which members competed against one another for power and influence within the organization, Amal instead placed a premium on maintaining a united front against the IDF and encouraging members from different villages to collaborate with one another in their resistance efforts. Though they were a religious organization, many Amal members - including those in leadership positions - were not ideological hard-liners nor actual Islamic clerics. Their opposition to the Israeli forces was based not on religious ideology, but rather on nationalist terms where they saw a foreign entity

²⁹ Hassan Saad, personal interview, January 11, 2012

³⁰ Sayigh, 176.

infringing upon Lebanese territorial sovereignty. Although the presence of foreign UNIFIL troops on Lebanese soil could have further inflamed Amal's members, they realized that having United Nations personnel on the ground was an incredible asset, as they would be able to maintain surveillance on Israeli activities in Southern Lebanon and report them to the international community. UNIFIL is seen as a fairly neutral force for relaying peace violations given its international legitimacy, and Amal has come to see it as a "protector" against what it sees as repeated Israeli provocations.³¹ Mohammad Saad, Musa al-Sadr, and Nabih Berri all urged Amal members to maintain friendly relations with UNIFIL, and they have maintained a relatively peaceful coexistence in South Lebanon since 1978. UNIFIL even maintained two posts by Saad's home village of Marakeh, and friendships began to emerge between the peacekeepers and Amal.³² This pragmatism allowed Amal to see the value in fostering a working partnership with the UNIFIL forces, a relationship that has persisted until today.

One of the main reasons Amal and UNIFIL developed such a strong relationship lies in Amal's appreciation of the development work UNIFIL has done in South Lebanon. Most UNIFIL contingents have not only patrolled to monitor conflict-related activities, but also have provided for the Shia communities of the South in some way. For example, the Italian contingent donated a generator to a local school, and the Korean contingent built the main road to Marakeh village. There have been smaller gestures as well, such as the Turkish contingent providing Iftar dinners for Shia villagers during Ramadan and the Korean contingent hosting cultural festivals, even taking some South Lebanese on trips to South Korea. This has created lasting friendships between villagers and UNIFIL, and some highly trust the peacekeepers and let them into their homes. This is fairly significant, as UNIFIL staff officers reside in Israel and

³¹ Ali Hamdan, personal interview, January 12, 2012

³² Hassan Saad, personal interview, January 11, 2012

many UNIFIL peacekeepers spend their holidays there.³³ However, their trust and strong working relationship, enhanced by development work, overrides any wariness that could result from this situation. While the Shia aligned with Amal see UNIFIL as protectors, enjoying their company and cultural exchanges, it is important to note that in the areas where most Shia are aligned with Hezbollah, such a relationship does not exist.

HEZBOLLAH AND UNIFIL

While the Amal Movement represents a grassroots and nationalist Shia faction that held a favorable view of UNIFIL, Hezbollah represents a revolutionary ideology that always viewed the peacekeeping force with suspicion.

The Amal Movement may receive credit for mobilizing the Shia and initiating their fight against the Israelis, yet many Shia grew discontent with the Movement around 1978-1979. Al-Sadr's disappearance marked a great blow to the Amal Movement, as no future figure would be able to match his charisma and his successors were seen as susceptible to corruption. The 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran spurred a new wave of fervor within the sect, and Shia inspired by Ayatollah Khomeini's *vilayet-e-faqih*, or guardianship of the jurist, began seeing an Islamic solution to Lebanon's problems. Additionally, when Israel invaded South Lebanon in 1982, President Elias Sarkis formed a US-sponsored "Salvation Committee" of representatives from Lebanon's major sects to function as a makeshift government. Nabih Berri joined this Committee to represent the Shia alongside Israel-backed Bashir Gemayel joining to represent the Maronite Catholics, and many in Amal chided their leader for supporting what they saw as an

³³ Hassan Saad, personal interview, January 11, 2012

Israeli and American project.³⁴ These events set Islamist advocates within Amal over the edge, and they strongly condemned the Movement for not taking a solid stance against the Israelis. These Islamists formed their own splinter group of the movement that was to be called “Islamic Amal.”

Around this time, a Shia cleric named Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah began to attract a strong following among Shia Islamists in Lebanon. Originally from Najaf, Iraq, Fadlallah founded the Lebanese Union of Muslim Students and began preaching pan-Islamic and strong anti-Zionist ideals. He would be joined by other clerics that had studied in Najaf, Sheikh Ragheb Harb and Abbas al-Musawi, and they formed a Lebanese Islamist Dawa Party inspired by the Iraqi movement of the same name. After the Iranian Revolution, Lebanon’s Eastern Bekaa Valley began to emerge as the base for Lebanon’s Shia Islamists and radicals. Following the Israeli invasion of 1982, Harb and another Lebanese cleric, Subhi al-Tufayli, traveled to Iran to petition the Islamic Republic to sponsor a new Shia resistance force against Israel. They responded by dispatching around 1,500 Revolutionary Guards to Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley to train this resistance force.³⁵ At the same time, the leadership of Islamic Amal, the Lebanese Dawa Party, and the Union of Muslim Students began to form a loose political coalition with a shared radical Shia Islamist and pro-Iranian vision. Under their tutelage, a stream of Khomeini-inspired fighters began to flow from the Bekaa Valley to South Lebanon to fight the Israelis. When initially asked if they were aligned with the Palestinians or the Amal Movement, they responded that they were aligned with neither party, claiming only allegiance to “the Party of

³⁴ Traboulsi, 214-215

³⁵ Nicholas Blanford, *Warriors of God: Inside Hezbollah’s Thirty-Year Struggle Against Israel* (New York: Random House, 2011), 26-30, 43-46.

God,” or Hezbollah in Arabic.³⁶ This moniker would remain with the group, and their pioneering of radical tactics and unrelenting anti-Western ideology would make them distinctive from the other warring militias.

While UNIFIL was culminating friendly ties with the Amal Movement at this time and remained frustrated with the IDF for their unprecedented and unannounced full-scale invasion of Lebanon, Hezbollah already had formed its opinion of UNIFIL. Guided by the Iranian view that the UN was not to be trusted, as it was seen as an instrument of the US, Hezbollah deemed UNIFIL to be an imperialist intrusion and a foreign occupying force that was to be confronted. Aspects of UNIFIL that could be construed as showing any degree of sympathy to the Israelis, such as the quartering of UNIFIL staff officers in Haifa, Israel and not Lebanon, were overlooked by the trusting Amal but were seen as treachery by Hezbollah.³⁷ Thus, it began to openly target UNIFIL, particularly European contingents like the French, with roadside bombs and ambushes. They saw UNIFIL actions such as disarming bombs intended for Israeli targets on par with collaborating with the enemy state, and refused to believe the peacekeeping force could be neutral or sympathetic to its cause. This reactionary and violent response to UNIFIL angered the Amal Movement, and the killing of an Irish UNIFIL officer named Aongus Murphy by a roadside bomb in 1986 triggered a violent conflict between the two Shia factions.³⁸ Relations between Hezbollah and UNIFIL would remain hostile until after the Civil War, although it was not the War’s end that cooled tension between the two.

After the signing of the Taif Accords in 1989, the Lebanese Civil War began to finally draw to a close. While the Accords called for the disarmament of Lebanon’s abundant militias,

³⁶ Hassan Saad, personal interview, January 11, 2012.

³⁷ Timur Goksel, personal interview, January 12, 2012.

³⁸ Nicholas Blanford, personal interview, January 10, 2012.

Hezbollah was granted a notable exception, as is evident to this day. The War ended with 35,000 Syrian soldiers still occupying Lebanon, and Syria exercised de facto control over the country's policies as a result. Israel too continued to occupy Lebanon, particularly its Southern border strip with the SLA, and Syria looked favorably upon Hezbollah's anti-Israel zeal and was impressed with its armed capabilities. Therefore, Hezbollah became not only a proxy of Iran in Lebanon, but also a strategic partner of Syria that benefited from its tutelage.³⁹

In 1992, Hezbollah Secretary-General Abbas al-Musawi was assassinated in an Israeli helicopter attack, and a young cleric named Hassan Nasrallah would take his place. Hezbollah underwent a dramatic reformation once Nasrallah took power, as his leadership set the foundation for the Hezbollah that dominates Lebanon today. It began to participate in Lebanese politics, styling itself as an alternative to Amal for Shia voters, and used its active armed resistance against Israel to gain political support. However, this formal entry into the political realm also meant that Hezbollah would have to actively appeal to the masses, and this in turn meant moderating the party to a degree.⁴⁰ This included not only the abandonment of the pursuit for an Islamic state, but also the cooling relations with UNIFIL, as Nasrallah began to realize that the peacekeeping force was not a threat to its ongoing armed campaign against Israel.

Nasrallah spent significant time in South Lebanon and started in the Amal Movement, meaning he had previous exposure to UNIFIL that made him somewhat in line with the Amal view. While Nasrallah arguably had a more tempered view relative to Amal's trust of the peacekeepers, he believed it necessary to coexist with the force; essentially, this meant that they did not have to like each other, but also did not have to shoot each other. He appointed an

³⁹ Blanford, 93-95.

⁴⁰ Nicholas Blanford, personal interview, January 10, 2012.

official liaison to UNIFIL, and a somewhat cordial relationship emerged between them.⁴¹ At a press conference in 2000, he would state of UNIFIL: “we fought the occupying [Israeli] forces without colliding with them; we want to fight the occupation and it is not our intention to collide with emergency [UNIFIL] forces.”⁴² While Hezbollah ideologically remained at odds with the peacekeeping presence, it would not seek to make UNIFIL into an active enemy.

As Hezbollah became more focused on South Lebanon for support, Nasrallah was forced to acknowledge that UNIFIL was not seen as an imperialist intrusion by most of its Shia residents and instead was appreciated for patronizing their shops and maintaining friendly relations. Additionally, many of the South Lebanese Shia grew up with a UNIFIL presence in the area by the 1990s and learned to trust the force. This strongly contrasted with the early leadership of Hezbollah from the Bekaa Valley, as these members were seen as more militant, stern, and distrustful of outsiders.⁴³ This difference in culture has persisted to this day, with UNIFIL generally being favored by Hezbollah members from the South.

This is not to say that Hezbollah as an organization began to look highly upon UNIFIL, as they still do not see the force as wholly impartial or neutral. Much like Israel, the SLA, and the PLO during the Civil War, Nasrallah saw South Lebanon as engaged in a zero-sum conflict. Regarding Hezbollah’s relationship with UNIFIL, he asked: “Is their mission to protect the Zionist Entity’s border or is their mission to protect Lebanon?” implying they could not protect both at the same time. Nasrallah did not see UNIFIL as an adequate protector of Lebanon, a role he believed only Hezbollah could fulfill, and said that their performance since 1978 “has not been encouraging.” Going further, he accused UNIFIL of a pro-Israel bias by stating: “If Israeli

⁴¹ Timur Goksel, personal interview, January 12, 2012.

⁴² Hassan Nasrallah, “Transcript from a Hezbollah Press Conference Discussing Developments in the South” (translated from Arabic), May 23, 2004.

⁴³ Nicholas Blanford, personal interview, January 10, 2012.

aircraft came tomorrow and violated Lebanese airspace, will we see emergency [UNIFIL] forces and the Security Council making something of it? If Israeli ships opened fire on Lebanese fishermen in territorial waters will we see the emergency [UNIFIL] forces making something of it?”⁴⁴ Amin Hoteit, a former brigadier general in the Lebanese Armed Forces known for his closeness to Hezbollah, echoed this sentiment. He believed that UNIFIL is heavily biased in favor of Israel, as they ignore bad behavior and border violations from this state. In contrast, he alleges that border incursions by the Lebanese into Israeli territory are strongly protested by UNIFIL and cause the West to pressure the Lebanese government.⁴⁵ Although his comments are likely exaggerated, as every UNIFIL report from 2001-2006 condemns Israeli incursions into Lebanese airspace, it does show the potential of Hezbollah-supporting UNIFIL critics to undermine its credibility by portraying it as biased in favor of Israel.⁴⁶

In May 2000 Israel unilaterally withdrew from South Lebanon, which was seen by Hezbollah as a resounding victory. They attributed the event to their years of low-intensity guerrilla warfare making the continuing occupation unpopular in Israel, and they quickly moved to occupy the long-held border region now that Israel had fled and its SLA proxy was disbanded. For UNIFIL, this meant they had finally witnessed one of the tenets of Resolution 425: the withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon. However, since Hezbollah now occupied the South instead of Israel, the UN deemed that the Lebanese government still lacked authority in the region and extended UNIFIL’s tenure. This may make the UN seem overly idealistic as they pushed UNIFIL to fulfill a mission that they arguably would never accomplish, yet in the immediate aftermath of the Israeli withdrawal the UN anticipated major hostilities arising from Hezbollah

⁴⁴ Hassan Nasrallah, “Transcript from a Hezbollah Press Conference Discussing Developments in the South” (translated from Arabic), May 23, 2004.

⁴⁵ Amin Hoteit, personal interview, January 11, 2012.

⁴⁶ See “UNIFIL Background” at official UNIFIL website < <http://unifil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1501> >

claiming the border area. This can be seen in UNIFIL growing to 7,900 troops at this time, their highest authorized number since deployment. Such a number would prove unnecessary though, as there would be no intense violence between Israel and Hezbollah at the border and UNIFIL shrunk to 2,000 after a year of relative peace.⁴⁷ Most of these peacekeepers would be deployed right on Lebanon's unofficial border with Israel, the UN-designated Blue Line. Given these circumstances, it seemed as if UNIFIL could actually draw down and work as a functioning peacekeeping force, yet Hezbollah's perennial dominance still made the transfer to Lebanese authority in the South seem distant.

Although Israel had withdrawn from Lebanon, Syria continued its large-scale occupation to Hezbollah's benefit. The Syrian government routinely manipulated Lebanon's political institutions to suit its own interests, and in 2004 it pressured the Lebanese Parliament to extend the term of pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud by three years. The US and France caught wind of this wrangling, and amidst their escalating War on Terror went to the UN Security Council in an attempt to stop the Lebanese Parliament from giving in to Syria.⁴⁸ What resulted was UN Security Council Resolution 1559, the West's attempt at asserting its own interests in Lebanese politics to counter Syrian interests. The Resolution affirmed international support for Lebanese sovereignty, calling on "all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon" and also calling for "the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-state militias."⁴⁹ The Resolution split Lebanon along pro-Syrian and anti-Syrian lines, with pro-Syrian factions denouncing it and anti-Syrian factions praising its tenets. Hezbollah in particular was outraged at both the demands

⁴⁷ Nicholas Blanford, personal interview, January 10, 2012.

⁴⁸ Karim Makdisi, "Constructing Security Council Resolution 1701 for Lebanon in the Shadow of the 'War on Terror,'" *International Peacekeeping* 18 (February 2011): 8.

⁴⁹ UN Security Council, *Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004) [The situation in the Middle East]*, 2 September 2004, S/RES/1559 (2004), available at: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/498/92/PDF/N0449892.pdf?OpenElement> [accessed 14 April 2012]

for the withdrawal of its Syrian sponsor and international calls for its disarmament. Hezbollah Deputy Secretary-General called the Resolution “an international resolution into Lebanese affairs” that sought to make Lebanon “an extension of the American-Israeli project.” He proclaimed Hezbollah “the hands that freed Lebanon” and promised that it not allow future colonization.⁵⁰ Hezbollah managed to avoid its disarmament by having the Lebanese representative to the UN proclaim it “the national resistance” and not a “militia.” This was enshrined in the Lebanese government’s declaration that national defense was entrusted to “the state, the people, and the resistance,” allowing Hezbollah to retain both its arms and a degree of official legitimacy.⁵¹ Syria however would be forced to leave Lebanon the following year in the wake of popular protests known as “the Cedar Revolution” that blamed the state’s agents for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

From 2001 to 2006, Hezbollah and Israel remained engaged in low-intensity conflict with sporadic cross-border exchanges of gunfire and artillery. Hezbollah claimed that Israel occupied a small tract of Lebanese land called the Shebaa Farms, using this to justify its continuing armed presence and struggle, yet UNIFIL remained uninvolved in this conflict as the UN had deemed the area to be part of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights of Syria. UNIFIL continued to monitor the border with its 2,000 member force from during this time, condemning the periodic outbreaks of violence and working to ensure they were contained. However, like the 1982 Israeli invasion, it was powerless to stop the escalation that followed a Hezbollah cross-border raid on July 12, 2006.⁵² What followed was a 34-day war that would devastate Lebanon, bring Hezbollah into the spotlight, and change the nature of UNIFIL.

⁵⁰ Naim Qassem, “The Position on Resolution 1559” (translated from Arabic), November 30, 2004.

⁵¹ Makdisi, 9

⁵² Blanford, 292-293.

Knowing that decisive action had to be taken following this War, the West began to contemplate how it could disarm Hezbollah using an international coalition. After briefly considering deploying a NATO coalition, France and the US pushed the UN Security Council to pass what became Resolution 1701. For Lebanon, this Resolution called for the Lebanese Armed Forces to deploy 15,000 soldiers in South Lebanon as the Israelis withdrew. This resolution also critically changed the nature of UNIFIL, authorizing an increase in the force strength “to a maximum of 15,000 troops,” tasking it to “assist the Lebanese Armed Forces,” and to “coordinate its activities with the government of Lebanon and the government of Israel.” For Hezbollah, it called for the creation of “an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the government of Lebanon and UNIFIL” between the Blue Line and the Litani River.⁵³ This was an incredibly dramatic shift from the status quo, and while it did create a new and “robust” UNIFIL force that worked hand in hand with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), it ultimately failed to curb Hezbollah’s power or influence.

Surprisingly, Hezbollah accepted the tenets of Resolution 1701, as they did not equate its terms with their disarmament. Since Resolution 1701 created a special zone of disarmament south of the Litani River, Hezbollah seemingly was afforded a loophole where it could retain arms north of the River and therefore not disarm as an organization. This is to ignore the vital fact that Resolution 1559 calls for nationwide disarmament and Resolution 1701 reaffirms Resolution 1559 in its preamble, yet the lack of a UNIFIL presence north of the Litani makes only South Lebanon’s disarmament observable, let alone enforceable.⁵⁴ To Hezbollah, only

⁵³ UN Security Council, *Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006) [The situation in the Middle East]*, 11 August 2006, S/RES/1701 (2006), available at: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/465/03/PDF/N0646503.pdf?OpenElement> [accessed 14 April 2012]

⁵⁴ Amin Hoteit, personal interview, January 11, 2012.

Resolution 1701 mattered now, as they had never agreed to Resolution 1559 and believed it to be superseded by this more recent decree.

After Resolution 1701, direct contact between UNIFIL and Hezbollah would cease and the party would distance itself from the peacekeepers. The majority of the new UNIFIL force came from Spain, France, and Italy, and Hezbollah was not pleased to be dealing with such blatantly powerful Western countries. These peacekeepers were not interested in winning hearts and minds, and were relatively cold to the Shia of South Lebanon. Many had experience as part of the NATO coalition of the War in Afghanistan, and these soldiers saw Hezbollah as if they were the Taliban. Hezbollah knew that UNIFIL was to function as a support mission for the LAF as per Resolution 1701, and could not inspect houses or establish checkpoints without LAF permission. This did not stop the newly deployed UNIFIL forces from attempting to bend the rules and work independently of the LAF, which roused significant protest from the Lebanese government, Hezbollah, and angry Shia residents.⁵⁵ The Spanish contingent in particular began to scrutinize Hezbollah and intensely monitor their suspected areas of operation, and Hezbollah in turn grew frustrated that UNIFIL peacekeepers were more concerned with looking north at their activities instead of keeping an eye on the Israeli border. Therefore, when a professionally made car bomb struck two Spanish UNIFIL armored personnel carriers in 2007, it was immediately suspected the Hezbollah was sending a message for the contingent's forces to mind their own business.⁵⁶ This violent intimidation worked, as the Spanish henceforth toned down their monitoring of Hezbollah and instead focused on supporting the LAF. Hezbollah knew that UNIFIL was incredibly vulnerable, easily intimidated, and that its new member states were not willing to lose soldiers despite their impressive force strength.

⁵⁵ Amin Hoteit, personal interview, January 11, 2012.

⁵⁶ Nicholas Blanford, personal interview, January 10, 2012.

POST-WITHDRAWAL UNIFIL

Although the United Nations installed a peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon during the Civil War, it was not until 2000 that UNIFIL forces became a dynamic force in the region. The *raison d'être* of UNIFIL was the monitoring of the Israeli-Lebanese border and the groups who would seek to destabilize it, and the decision by the Israeli government to fully withdraw their troops from the Litani River area seemed to be the very embodiment of U.N. Security Council Resolution 425. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan was notified of the Israeli decision to withdraw on April 17, 2000 and negotiations between Israel, Lebanon, and other Arab states began soon after, with the express purpose of mapping out the Israeli line of withdrawal.⁵⁷ Although all of the involved parties were eager to discuss the logistics of the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory, the committee did not have the authority to create a final border between the two countries. Such a border – the Blue Line – would be treated as an international border, something that was not only far beyond UNIFIL's mission and jurisdiction but also an incredibly complex and tense issue that could not be agreed upon in a timely fashion.⁵⁸ The solution undertaken by the committee, therefore, was to implement a line of withdrawal that could be agreed upon by both Israel and Lebanon. Although the line could not be treated as an international border, it would be drawn as close to the existing border as possible so as to ensure that Israeli troops withdrew from Lebanese territory to the best of their ability.

While relations between Israel and Lebanon during this time could not have been described as particularly warm, the Israeli's willingness to withdraw their forces nonetheless provided the perfect opportunity for the untested UNIFIL forces to fulfill their mandate and act

⁵⁷ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of S/Res 425 and Res 426*, 22 May, 2000, (S/2000/460), available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2000/460 [accessed 12 April 2012]

⁵⁸ General Amin Hoteit, personal interview, January 11, 2012

as the stabilizing force in Lebanon that they were intended to be. Although the supervision of territorial negotiations was not explicitly included in the UNIFIL mandate, it should have proved an excellent opportunity for this multinational force to act as an unbiased mediator between Israeli and Lebanese parties. The management of the border negotiations was far from successful, however, according to retired Lebanese Armed Forces General Amin Hoteit, who was the Lebanese representative on the demarcation committee. Hoteit commented that the demarcation of what would become the Blue Line took place without Lebanese consent, and was a joint UN and Israeli effort. While this should not disregard the authenticity of the line, it does reflect poorly on UNIFIL that they were unable to ensure that this effort was accepted by both involved parties. The Blue Line was drawn as close to the internationally accepted border between Israel and Lebanon as possible, but near three villages (Riveg, Addayse, and Metulla) the Line crossed the international border and ceded additional territory to Israel. The actual amount of land lost in this dispute is minimal (less than one total kilometer), but this loss of Lebanese territorial integrity, seemingly given the United Nations stamp of approval, is a damning fact for UNIFIL.

Although the Blue Line negotiations did not go as smoothly as any of the involved parties would have hoped, the Israeli forces remained committed to withdrawing their troops from Lebanon and in May 2000 – much earlier than UNIFIL had originally anticipated – began to pull back their forces. The full withdrawal of IDF forces was completed a month later, and on June 16, Secretary General Annan reported that the full terms of Resolution 425 had been met.⁵⁹ Immediately following the Israeli withdrawal there were several incidents in which IDF patrols

⁵⁹ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary General on the implementation of S/Res 425 and Res 426*, 16 June 2000, (S/2000/590), available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2000/590 [accessed 13 April 2012]

were found to have crossed the Blue Line while conducting surveillance operations, but overall the years following the 2000 withdrawal were peaceful ones for UNIFIL. Prior to the Israeli withdrawal, UNIFIL maintained a force of 4,500 peacekeepers south of the Litani River. After the April announcement that withdrawal was imminent, this number was increased to 7,900 in anticipation of heightened tensions along the border.⁶⁰ These additional forces oversaw the transition period and remained at this level throughout 2000. After the initial violence abated and the Blue Line maintained stability, UNIFIL force levels were further reduced; per its original charter UNIFIL's mandate in Lebanon must be re-examined every six months, and in January 2001 the decision was made to further reduce UNIFIL's troop levels in Lebanon but to remain in the country.⁶¹ In his report, Secretary General Annan outlined the progress that had been made thus far: UNIFIL had successfully fulfilled its mandate to oversee the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and to assist Lebanese authorities in maintaining peace in the vacated territory. Its focus then shifted to the third part of its mandate, in which UNIFIL seeks to maintain the ceasefire along the Blue Line and work towards "the restoration of international peace and security." Annan expressed doubts that entrusting such monitoring only to an unarmed observer force would be effective, and recommended a hybrid group of both armed infantry and unarmed observers in the country. This force reconfiguration was approved and was completed by the end of 2001.

With UNIFIL maintaining its presence on the ground, tensions on the Lebanese-Israeli border remained fairly low during the following years. Troop levels were further decreased to

⁶⁰ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of S/Res 425 and Res 426* 22 May 22 2000, (S/2000/460), available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2000/460 [accessed 12 April 2012]

⁶¹ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon* 22 January 2011, (S/2001/66), available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2001/66 [accessed 13 April 2012]

2,000 by the end of 2002, which reflected the confidence that United Nations leadership had regarding UNIFIL's ability to carry out its remaining mission.⁶² This confidence would prove to be misplaced, however, as it would become clear in the near future that the UNIFIL peacekeepers were unable to effectively prevent major conflict between Israel and Lebanese actors from breaking out. Tensions between the IDF and Hezbollah increased in early 2002 and reached the highest levels since the Israeli withdrawal. UNIFIL officials called on both parties to respect the authority of the Blue Line but were prevented from taking any further action. The repeated refusal of the Lebanese Armed Forces to deploy their troops to the Blue Line also has also contributed to the continued regional instability. Although in its reconfigured state UNIFIL sought to respond flexibly to the new situation on the ground in Lebanon, its inability to address the root causes of conflict between Israel and its Lebanese neighbors and to compel these actors to take responsibility for their own security meant that any security gains were doomed to be short-term solutions only. The low-level tensions between Hezbollah and Israel that began in 2002 continued with increasing hostility for several years, until the two parties both engaged in air incursions in January 2005.⁶³ While UNIFIL troops tried every avenue available to them to diffuse these tensions, violent animosity between Hezbollah and Israel only increased until, in the summer of 2006, war broke out.

⁶² UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon* 12 July 2002, (S/2002/746), available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2002/746 [accessed 13 April 2012]

⁶³ UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon* 21 July 2005, (S/2005/460), available at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2005/460 [accessed 13 April 2012]

UNIFIL II

Following the disastrous effects of the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, the United Nations could no longer justify the threadbare peacekeeping force on the ground in Lebanon. Rather than addressing the root causes of the conflict, mainly the lack of a comprehensive regional peace process, the United States and its western allies instead focused on Hezbollah and the security actions that could be taken against it. Following the cessation of hostilities 34 days after they began, the United Nations unanimously passed Resolution 1701, which greatly expanded UNIFIL in both size of mission and depth of mandate.⁶⁴ More than merely supplementing the boots that were already on the ground in Lebanon with additional forces, this new version of UNIFIL – now comprised of up to 15,000 peacekeepers – was virtually unrecognizable from its predecessor. Early UNIFIL patrols had an almost friendly attitude to them, but newer patrols have a colder demeanor with forces rapidly driving through villages to avoid potential gunfire. When these new peacekeepers were sent to Lebanon, it was not uncommon for them to treat it as a similar battlefield to the ones they had encountered in the past.⁶⁵ Their experiences fighting al-Qaeda or the Taliban had engrained in them a certain way of dealing with an enemy, regardless of the fact that they are vastly different from Hezbollah. While UNIFIL peacekeepers typically deploy for only one-year terms in the field, most serve out their entire stay in the villages to which they are assigned without ever traveling to Beirut, making their main concern living out their deployment and not getting to know the country of operation. Additionally, many of the new contingents, particularly the French and Spanish, neglected the cultural exchanges and fostering of friendships that villagers had come to

⁶⁴ Karim Makdisi et al, “UNIFIL II: Emerging and Evolving European Engagement in Lebanon and the Middle East,” *EuroMeSCo* 76 (January 2009), 22.

⁶⁵ Hassan Saad, personal interview, January 11, 2012

appreciate. The relationships that UNIFIL peacekeepers build with individuals in their communities are the first line of defense against Hezbollah and other destabilizing forces, and it is in their best interest to foster them as much as possible.

Resolution 1701 also provided for the first time in the history of UNIFIL the creation of a Maritime Task Force (MTF) to be stationed in the Mediterranean Sea to monitor the security of Lebanon's coasts. While the MTF did have the somewhat unintended benefit of breaking the Israeli sea embargo of Lebanon, to this day it remains largely inadequate and does not have the resources to effectively monitor weapons shipments or the jurisdiction to take action against those committing crimes. It is permitted to hail ships, inquiring about their origin, destination, and cargo, yet cannot stop or board them.⁶⁶ This is yet another example of a symbolic overture that, while meant to increase UNIFIL's capacity and cooperation with Lebanese military forces, fails to produce effective security results.

The lack of power of arrest remains one of UNIFIL's most critical weaknesses, but in recent years it has steadily increased its partnership with the Lebanese Armed Forces. The gradual yet sustained empowerment of the LAF through joint patrols and training exercises is one of the most important steps that UNIFIL can take to ensure that Lebanon is prepared to provide for its own security. Their mandate explicitly states that UNIFIL should work to support Lebanese sovereignty, but in reality these peacekeepers have been given an impossible mission.⁶⁷ Their resources and training are not able to solve the longstanding tension between the Lebanese state and Hezbollah, not to mention the conflict with Israel, nor should they be. UNIFIL's greatest liability is that it is vital to the safety and security of the Lebanese state; as a

⁶⁶ Nicholas Blanford, personal interview, January 10, 2012

⁶⁷ Muriel Asseburg, "European Conflict Management in the Middle East: Toward a More Effective Approach," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* 14 (February 2009), 10.

peacekeeping force they should not be responsible for the long-term stability and rule of a country. The confusion surrounding UNIFIL's mandate poses the greatest threat not only to the feasibility of the peacekeeping mission itself but also the overall stability and effectiveness of the Lebanese state.

CONCLUSIONS

From its inception, UNIFIL has been given mandates that it could in no way realistically fulfill. This peacekeeping presence in South Lebanon has been in place for over 30 years, during which time it has borne witness to several bloody and destructive conflicts waged in the very territory where it was tasked by the international community to keep a non-existent peace. While UNIFIL arguably created some safeguards and defused some tension, its only stated goal that has since come into fruition was confirming the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon in 2000, 22 years after its initial deployment and in no way due to UNIFIL's presence. The 2006 War between Israel and Hezbollah provided an opportunity for UNIFIL to reassess its mission and mandate in South Lebanon, but instead the changes that were approved have had a negative impact on UNIFIL and its relationship with the Lebanese Shia in the South. This multinational force is now expected to act as a mediator between the Lebanese government and Israel, even though no such mediation is outlined in their mandate. As long as there is no peace between the Israeli and Lebanese states, UNIFIL will continue to face structural challenges in its mandate to preserve stability in southern Lebanon.

UNIFIL was unable to prevent large-scale conflicts such as the 2006 war from breaking out between Israel and Hezbollah, and its continued – and expanded – presence along the Blue Line still has not created a peaceful or stable border. During the summer of 2010, IDF soldiers

cut down a tree along the Blue Line, angering LAF soldiers who fired on IDF positions and killed a high-ranking commander. This incident occurred on the Israeli side of the Blue Line near the disputed border surrounding Addayse and Misgav Am, an area that UNIFIL knew was a position of particular concern. Although UNIFIL had peacekeepers stationed along this section of the Blue Line and they arguably did all they could by relaying messages between the IDF and the LAF, they were still unable to prevent this cross-border conflict from occurring. The Israeli Army proceeded with the tree trimming even after UNIFIL had urged them to delay, as they had not given the LAF sufficient notice. This power play between the IDF and LAF could have erupted into a wider conflict like the 2006 war, and the only reason it did not was the fear of mutual destruction on both sides. UNIFIL had all of the international community's resources at its disposal and arguably performed its role as a mediator, yet it was once again powerless to stop this conflict from occurring. To be sure, monitoring the Blue Line is a critical part of maintaining regional security, but this task certainly does not require a 12,000 member force.

While it would be remiss to ignore the positive effects that UNIFIL has had on the character of Lebanon through its development work and cultural exchanges, their continued presence in Lebanon should produce serious concerns for those concerned with the long-term stability and governance of the country. Both the Israeli and Lebanese armies, as well as Hezbollah, view UNIFIL as a partner on the ground, and often use the peacekeepers as a means of relaying messages to the other side in the absence of formal political relations. Additionally, the presence of neutral peacekeepers on the ground has proved to be a valuable asset in decreasing tensions along the Israeli-Lebanese border by raising the stakes for both sides when it comes to accountability, and UNIFIL has arguably prevented some small-scale disputes from escalating. However, the long-term presence of UNIFIL in southern Lebanon could be seen as a

disincentive for Israel and Lebanon to reach a comprehensive peace agreement. The problem with UNIFIL's current mandate is that it does not address the situation after the peacekeepers withdraw from Lebanon. This lack of foresight has created an environment in which UNIFIL – created as an interim force – has become a part of the state infrastructure. If there is ever to be durable stability in the south, the Lebanese government and armed forces must work with UNIFIL to create a timetable for withdrawal.

It is true that the withdrawal of UNIFIL troops may further destabilize the area south of the Litani River, which is why the partnership with the Lebanese state and the LAF should be expanded. While UNIFIL currently engages in humanitarian assistance and rebuilding efforts in the South, the Lebanese government should take over leadership of these actions to strengthen its presence in the region and should encourage the growth of civil society by removing bureaucratic obstacles. Additionally the LAF already enjoys high approval among the Lebanese people, so increasing its capacity to operate in the South should be met with public approval. The territory of southern Lebanon is especially critical to the stability of the Lebanese state, as well as the region, and its security must be a critical priority of Beirut. The government is not yet ready to manage this area on its own, but neither should its oversight be left solely to UNIFIL. By strengthening the institutions of the Lebanese state and withdrawing UNIFIL peacekeepers, the South will be able to become a stable and functioning part of Lebanon.

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