

## Concepts and Terms

### “UNIFIL”

9.28.2006

#### Definition

This term refers to the United Nations Interim Force for Southern Lebanon (UNIFIL) created by the Security Council in the aftermath of the Israeli “Operation Litani” (3/78) to:

- a) confirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon;
- b) restore international peace and security; and
- c) assist the Lebanese Government in restoring its effective authority in the area.

#### Background

UNIFIL is tasked with seeking to maintain a ceasefire along the 121 km United Nations “Blue Line” dividing Israel (and the Golan Heights) and southern Lebanon, by patrolling, observing, reporting violations and liaising with the parties.

Following the partial Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon (6/85),<sup>1</sup> its activities have centered on monitoring military activity between Hizbullah and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) with the aim of reducing tensions and allaying continuing low-level armed conflict. UNIFIL has also played a role in providing humanitarian assistance.

Following the Second Lebanese War (7-8/06) between Hizbullah and Israel, the Security Council decided (see [Resolution 1701](#)) to expand UNIFIL’s mandate and troop size up to 15,000 soldiers.

The history of UNIFIL can be roughly divided into four periods:

#### **Creation of UNIFIL (1978-1982)**

In the early 1970s, tensions along the Israeli-Lebanese border increased, especially after the relocation of Palestinian armed elements from Jordan to Lebanon.

Following, a deadly PLO terror attack on Israel (3/11/78), Israeli forces invaded Lebanon (3/15/78), and occupied its entire southern part up to the Litani River.<sup>2</sup>

Following a Lebanese protest (3/19/78), the Security Council adopted resolutions 425 and 426, in which it called upon Israel immediately to cease its military action and withdraw its forces from all Lebanese territory.

It also decided to establish immediately a UN interim force for southern Lebanon for an initial period of six months, subject to extension. UNIFIL was initially comprised of 1,990 troops and 50 unarmed military observers.

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<sup>1</sup> Israel withdrew to a “Security Zone” in southern Lebanon leaving an Israeli-supported militia (South Lebanese Army) which was supposed to serve Israel as a territorial buffer.

<sup>2</sup> Israeli forces left out the city of Tyre and its surrounding area.

However, UNIFIL's efforts to implement its mandate met with only partial success. Cross-border fighting continued, Israel did not completely withdraw, and the authority of the government of Lebanon was not restored in the south. The UN reports that under these circumstances, UNIFIL could not fulfill its responsibilities under Resolution 425.<sup>3</sup>

### **Israeli Re-Invasion and "Security Zone" (1982-2000)**

Israeli unilateral withdrawal (6/85)<sup>4</sup> – following its re-invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 – left behind a small residual Israeli force and an Israeli-supported Lebanese militia in a 15 km wide strip "Security Zone".

Nevertheless, the Government of Lebanon, which did not extend its authority to the south, requested that UNIFIL remain in order to pursue implementation of 425. Throughout these years, the Security Council regularly renewed UNIFIL's mandate, including Resolution 511 (6/18/82).

### **Israeli Withdrawal and Establishment of the "Blue Line" (2000-2006)**

With Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, the UN reaffirmed the outline of the "Blue Line" between Israel and Lebanon to confirm the Israeli withdrawal.<sup>5</sup>

Following that, UNIFIL moved southwards and deployed along the Blue Line as Lebanese authorities took control of some of the area vacated by Israel. However, at the same time, the Hizbullah militia also entered the area, exerting de facto control along the Lebanese side of the Blue Line.<sup>6</sup>

### **Expansion of the UNIFIL Mandate (2006)**

Following the Second Lebanese War (7-8/06) between Hizbullah and Israel, the Security Council decided (see [Resolution 1701](#)) to expand UNIFIL's mandate to monitor the cessation of hostilities; accompany and support the Lebanese armed forces as they deploy throughout the south of Lebanon; and extend its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons.<sup>7</sup>

UNIFIL is to be reinforced with up to 15,000 soldiers to operate alongside Lebanese forces. The UN Security Resolution 1701 also states that UNIFIL can "take all the necessary action in areas of deployment of its forces, and as it deems with its capabilities, to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind". However, the enlarged peacekeeping force will not

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<sup>3</sup> See the UN factsheet on its UNIFIL mission: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unifil/factsheet.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The Israeli invasion into Lebanon (6/82) was a response to a Palestinian assassination attempt against Israel's ambassador to the United Kingdom.

<sup>5</sup> The Secretary-General reported to the Security Council (6/16/00) that Israel had withdrawn its forces from Lebanon in accordance with UN Resolution 425 (1978) and met the requirements defined in his report (6/22/00).

<sup>6</sup> The Secretary-General determined (1/01) that: "Of the three parts of its mandate, UNIFIL has essentially completed two. It has confirmed the withdrawal of Israeli forces and assisted, to the extent it could, the Lebanese authorities as they returned to the area vacated by Israel. UNIFIL functions in close cooperation with those authorities and no longer exercises any control over the area of operation. UNIFIL cannot, of course, compel the Lebanese Government to take the last step and deploy its personnel down to the Blue Line." See: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unifil/factsheet.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unifil/>

attempt to disarm Hizbullah nor deploy along the Syrian-Lebanese border in order to prevent the import of weapons to Hizbullah via Syria.<sup>8</sup>

End.

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<sup>8</sup> "UNIFIL peacekeepers will not disarm Hizbullah," **Jerusalem Post**, Aug 15, 2006.  
<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1154525877055&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>