



Security Council

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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

(for the period from 13 July 2002 to 14 January 2003)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1428 (2002) of 30 July 2002, by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of six months, until 31 January 2003. It covers developments since my previous report, dated 12 July 2002 (S/2002/746).

II. Situation in the area of operation

2. Since my last report, the situation in the UNIFIL area of operation has returned to one of general stability, with some sites of tension. There was one violent incident in the Shab'a farms area and an attack across the Blue Line on an Israel Defence Forces (IDF) patrol in the western sector. Minor ground violations of the line were few in number, with those from the Lebanese side primarily attributable to crossings by shepherds and occasional vehicles, and with only one ground violation recorded from the Israeli side.

3. There were sporadic Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace, with periodic lulls in such activity punctuated by abrupt increases over periods of several days. On two occasions in November, Israeli overflights exceeded any recorded number since Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000. Many of these air violations penetrated deep into Lebanon, often generating sonic booms over populated areas. The pattern identified in my last report continued, whereby the aircraft would fly out to sea and enter Lebanese airspace north of the UNIFIL area of operation, thus avoiding direct observation and verification by UNIFIL.

4. Hizbollah continued to react to the overflights with anti-aircraft fire and, on at least one occasion, the Lebanese army also fired in the direction of the Israeli aircraft. There were several instances of shrapnel from Hizbollah anti-aircraft fire falling on the Israeli side of the border and causing minor damage to civilian structures. United Nations officials have continued to stress to the parties that Israeli

violations of Lebanese airspace and Hizbollah anti-aircraft fire have the potential to aggravate tensions.

5. One grave breach of the ceasefire took place in the Shab'a farms area during the reporting period. On 29 August, Hizbollah fired 123 mortar rounds and one anti-aircraft missile at two IDF positions on the Blue Line south-east of Kafr Shuba. The IDF retaliated with artillery and mortar fire and one aerial bomb to the Lebanese side of the line in the same vicinity. As a result of the Hizbollah attack, three Israeli soldiers were wounded and one later died of his injuries.

6. In a separate grave breach, on 8 December, a roadside bomb was detonated a few metres from the Israeli technical fence east of Marwahin, on the Lebanese side of the line. Directed at an IDF patrol, it injured two soldiers, one seriously. An unknown militant group claimed responsibility, as retaliation for a 6 December roadside bombing in southern Lebanon which killed a notorious Lebanese national.

7. Demonstrators on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line gathered periodically at the points of friction identified in my previous reports, Sheikh Abbad Hill east of Hula and Fatima gate west of Metulla, to throw stones and other objects at Israeli personnel across the line. There were, in addition, five separate attempted illegal border crossings from Lebanon to Israel, by two Lebanese citizens, one Palestinian refugee and two foreign nationals. These persons were handed over by the Israeli authorities through UNIFIL to the Lebanese authorities.

8. The Lebanese Joint Security Forces, comprised of army and internal security forces, and the Lebanese Army continued to operate in the areas vacated by Israel. They established new positions and took control of several positions vacated by UNIFIL, set up checkpoints and augmented patrols close to the Blue Line. On the whole, the Lebanese armed forces were more active, intervening at their own initiative when there were threats to security in the area. In most instances, the Lebanese authorities responded to UNIFIL protests by taking prompt action to correct violations.

9. Nevertheless, the Government of Lebanon continued to maintain the position that so long as there is no comprehensive peace with Israel, the Lebanese armed forces will not be deployed along the Blue Line. Hizbollah continued to maintain a visible presence near the line through its network of mobile and fixed positions. There were some improvements and new construction of field fortifications by Hizbollah. Hizbollah also continued to extend social, medical and educational services to the local population in areas near the Blue Line.

10. On a few occasions, Hizbollah denied UNIFIL patrols access to some areas adjacent to the Blue Line. The Lebanese authorities generally intervened to enable UNIFIL to carry out its mandated tasks. While the number and severity of such incidents was substantially less than in the previous reporting period, the Government of Lebanon should make every effort to ensure that there is no interference by any party with the freedom of movement of UNIFIL.

11. The United Nations continued to coordinate international assistance to the Government of Lebanon for mine action in southern Lebanon through my Personal Representative and in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). There was significant progress in the implementation of the Operation Emirates Solidarity project, funded by the United Arab Emirates, resulting in the clearance of almost two and a half million square metres of land.

The Lebanese Army engineer regiment deployed teams to clear areas along the Blue Line in the vicinity of Markabe. The Mine Action Coordination Centre in Tyre facilitated the partnership of the United Nations, the United Arab Emirates and the National Demining Office of the Lebanese Armed Forces. Resource support for the national mine action effort was provided by the Governments of Australia, China, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Norway, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America as well as by the European Union. It is hoped that the “trees instead of mines” initiative will receive additional support.

12. The presence of a large number of minefields throughout the UNIFIL area of operation remained a matter of utmost concern. A number of civilian casualties due to mine incidents were recorded. Since July, one civilian was injured as a result of exploding mines and ordnance, while 10 members of the commercial demining personnel were injured during mine-clearing operations. During the reporting period, UNIFIL continued marking and fencing known minefields and demolished upwards of 105 mines and rounds of unexploded ordnance.

13. UNIFIL continued to assist the civilian population in the form of medical and dental care, water projects, equipment or services for schools and orphanages, and supplies of social services to the needy, albeit at a reduced rate due to the downsizing of the Force. Veterinary assistance was provided to some villages. UNIFIL assistance was provided from resources primarily made available by troop-contributing countries. UNIFIL cooperated closely on humanitarian matters with the Lebanese authorities, United Nations agencies, in particular the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the International Committee of the Red Cross and other organizations and agencies operating in Lebanon.

14. Substantial tension developed between Lebanon and Israel over a water project initiated by the Council of the South at the Wazzani Springs on the Hasbani River, located north of the Blue Line west of Ghajar. The dispute reached a peak in September, when it appeared that bellicose rhetoric could lead to military confrontation. Intensive diplomatic activity undertaken with the parties by concerned Member States and by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Terje-Roed Larsen, and my Personal Representative for southern Lebanon, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, averted a crisis. The United Nations is cooperating closely with the United States and the European Union to assist the parties in reaching a mutual arrangement for managing the water issue through diplomatic channels on a continuing basis.

15. Local administration in the south was further strengthened during the reporting period, as a result of the increasing capacity of the official self-governing structures in the south to exercise their authority over the area. Communications, infrastructure, health and welfare systems as well as postal services continued their slow progress towards integration with the rest of the country.

16. My Personal Representative continued to work in close collaboration with UNDP and the World Bank to facilitate the funding and implementation of development projects in the south by privately and publicly advocating the needs of the area. UNDP continued to lead the efforts of the United Nations system in working with the Lebanese authorities for the development and rehabilitation of the south.

III. Organizational matters

17. UNIFIL sought to maintain the ceasefire through mobile patrols, observation from fixed positions and close contact with the parties, the latter with a view to correcting violations, resolving incidents and preventing escalation. The United Nations Troop Supervision Organization (UNTSO), through Observer Group Lebanon, supported UNIFIL in the fulfilment of its mandate.

18. UNIFIL completed its reconfiguration and redeployment and has stabilized at a strength of about 2,000 troops for all ranks, as requested by the Security Council. The repatriation of the Fijian contingent was completed in December, while the Polish logistics and Ukrainian engineering battalions were reduced in October and November, respectively. The Ghanaian and Indian battalions took over sectors vacated by the departing Fijians. Observer Group Lebanon relocated its operations and personnel from Israel to Lebanon, establishing a rear headquarters in Tyre. UNIFIL operations were concentrated along the Blue Line, though the Force maintained a number of rear positions. A map showing the current deployment of UNIFIL is attached.

19. As of 31 December 2002, UNIFIL comprised 2,004 troops from France (204), Ghana (650), India (650), Ireland (7), Italy (53), Poland (240) and Ukraine (200). UNIFIL was assisted in its tasks by 51 military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). In addition, UNIFIL employed 437 civilian staff, of whom 118 were recruited internationally and 319 locally. Major General Lalit Tewari continued as Force Commander. Mr. de Mistura continued to act as my Personal Representative for southern Lebanon.

20. I regret to report the deaths of a Ghanaian member of the Force due to natural causes and a Polish member of the Force due to an accident while on duty. Since the establishment of UNIFIL 242 members of the Force have lost their lives, 78 as a result of firings or bomb explosions, 103 as a result of accidents and 61 from other causes. Firing or mine explosions wounded a total of 344.

IV. Financial aspects

21. By its resolution 56/214 B of 27 June 2002, the General Assembly appropriated the amount of \$117.1 million gross, equivalent to a monthly rate of \$9.8 million gross, for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003. Should the Council decide to extend the mandate of UNIFIL beyond 31 January 2003, as recommended in paragraph 28 below, the cost of its maintenance would be limited to the monthly rate approved by the General Assembly.

22. As at 30 November 2002, unpaid assessments to the special account for UNIFIL for the period since its inception to 30 November 2002 amounted to \$93.9 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at that date amounted to \$1,458.0 million.

V. Observations

23. The UNIFIL area of operation has been calm for the most part, with a substantial reduction in the number of incidents relative to my previous report. The hostility prevailing between the parties has been tempered by a willingness, bolstered by international pressure, to exercise restraint. Tension, however, continues to prevail. Over recent months this tension has been demonstrated most visibly by the unresolved Hasbani River matter, as well as the provocative cycle of Israeli air violations and Hizbollah anti-aircraft fire. The Shab'a farms area also remained a significant source of concern.

24. Each violation of the Blue Line and any provocation emanating from either side risks escalation of tensions and descent into confrontation. I once again emphasize the need for all parties concerned to respect fully the withdrawal line identified by the United Nations, as repeatedly called for by the Security Council, to cease all violations of this line and to refrain from any action that could serve to destabilize the situation on the ground.

25. The Government of Lebanon further demonstrated its capacity to exercise its authority effectively throughout southern Lebanon, strengthening administrative structures and extending the reach of the Joint Security Forces and the Lebanese Army. I reiterate the Security Council's call for the Government of Lebanon to continue these measures and to do its utmost to encourage a calm environment throughout the south.

26. The implementation of my recommendations to the Council for reconfiguration of UNIFIL was completed at the end of 2002. At this stage, no further reduction to the current Force level of 2,000 is envisaged. UNIFIL will continue to discharge its mandate by observing, monitoring and reporting on developments in its area of operation, liaising with the parties to maintain calm. My Personal Representative will continue, in close consultation with the Special Coordinator, to lend the political and diplomatic support of the United Nations to the parties in order to establish lasting peace and security in southern Lebanon.

27. I note that the tensions along the Blue Line are in part a reflection of the highly volatile regional situation, and as such underscore the need to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002).

28. In a letter dated 9 January 2003 (S/2003/36), the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations conveyed to me his Government's request that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of six months. In the light of conditions prevailing in the area, I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL until 31 July 2003.

29. I must again draw attention to the serious shortfall in the funding of the Force. At present, unpaid assessments amount to \$93.9 million. Eventually this represents money owed to the Member States contributing the troops that make up the Force. I appeal to all Member States to pay their assessments promptly and in full and to clear all remaining arrears. I should like to express my gratitude to the Governments contributing troops to the Force for their understanding and patience.

30. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to Staffan de Mistura, my Personal Representative, and to pay tribute to Major General Lalit Mohan Tewari and the men and women of UNIFIL for the manner in which they have carried out their tasks. Their discipline and bearing have been of a high order, reflecting credit on themselves and the United Nations.

