

A Brief History of UNIFIL and an Analysis of its Efficacy



Pictured: UNIFIL soldier observing Israel/Lebanon border in 2018. The yellow flag is the flag of Hezbollah (Zehavi and Mandel, 2021).

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Introduction to UNIFIL

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was implemented by the UN Security Council following the adoption of UNSC resolutions 425 and 426 on March 19th 1978, which officially called for a withdrawal of all Israeli forces in Lebanon, and the establishment of the peacekeeping force that was to be UNIFIL (Karamé, 2019). The first troops landed in Lebanon days after the adoption of said resolutions, and there has since been a presence of UN peacekeeping forces in Lebanon, a presence which continues today, almost 44 years later. Despite the stated mission to establish and maintain peace and stability, southern Lebanon has seen almost constant conflict since Operation Litani by the Israel Defense Force in 1978, in which Israeli troops successfully invaded Southern Lebanon and expelled the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its sympathizers, who had relocated to southern Lebanon from Jordan. The invasion by Israel resulted in a tactical win for both the IDF and the allied South Lebanon Army (SLA), a primarily Christian paramilitary group which collaborated with the IDF against the PLO. The UNSC adopted resolution 425 exactly five days after the initial Israeli incursion into Lebanon, and UNIFIL troops set up headquarters in Naqoura on March 23, 1978 (Makdisi, 2014). Since 1978, southern Lebanon has barely seen five consecutive years of peace as the struggles for Lebanese sovereignty, Israeli security, and Palestinian national ambition have continued to evolve, which points to a pressing question: has UNIFIL accomplished anything substantial in its mission of encouraging, establishing, and maintaining peace in southern Lebanon? Such a conversation is highly nuanced and requires a deep examination of UNIFIL as an organization as well as the constantly evolving situation on the ground in southern Lebanon and the surrounding areas. This paper will examine the history of UNIFIL, its evolution since its inception, and its current state given current regional status. Once

a solid background has been established, this paper will then explore the overall efficacy of UNIFIL and offer critiques where necessary in order to present a more constructive alternative.

The PLO in Southern Lebanon (1967-1978)

Southern Lebanon had been in a state of political vulnerability for several years leading up to Operation Litani in 1978. Israeli victory in the 6 Day War of 1967 had forced Palestinian leadership and the PLO into Jordan and southern Lebanon, where it consolidated its power and prepared for a further revolutionary assault on Israel. A lack of political cohesion with the Hashemite Kingdom in Jordan led to a complete expulsion of the PLO from Jordan, and thus the PLO relocated to southern Lebanon where it already had substantial support from thousands of Palestinian refugees. By positioning itself as the leader of the Palestinian nationlist movement, the PLO established a semi-autonomous political and military entity consisting of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees housed in refugee camps scattered across southern Lebanon. The PLO continued to launch attacks on Israel throughout the 1970s, ultimately leading to Israeli incursion into southern Lebanon in 1978. Lebanese domestic politics were in a state of collapse in the mid 1970s and civil war officially began in 1975 creating a power vacuum that still exists today to some degree. With no effective Lebanese ruling authority, the PLO was free to dig into southern Lebanon, recruiting thousands of fighters to conduct operations against Christian Lebanese militias and Israel simultaneously. The PLO and other Palestinian factions that had sought refuge in Lebanon took part in the civil war until their eventual expulsion from Lebanon in 1982, and by 1976 most of the southern third of Lebanon was in Palestinian control. In 1976, Syria joined the civil war in support of right-wing Phalangists who were fighting against the Palestinians, exposing a lack of Arab unity in supporting the Palestinian nationlist cause. The Palestinians incurred heavy losses, such as during the fall of the Tal al Zat'ar refugee camp,

which resulted in some 3000 Palestinian and local Lebanese deaths. Despite heavy involvement in domestic turmoil, the Palestinians were still able to launch deadly attacks on Israeli civilians, such as the Kiryat Shmona and Ma'alot massacres, which led to retaliatory strikes from the IDF (Makdisi, 2014)(Siklawi, 2017).

The Palestinian occupation of southern Lebanon marked the 1970s in Israel with several bloody attacks, setting the stage for the eventual Israeli ground invasion in 1978. One of the most significant attacks that led directly to the Israeli declaration of Operation Litani was the Coastal Road massacre of March 11, 1978. The PLO took responsibility for the attack, which was perpetrated by 11 members of the PLO militant wing, Fatah. The militants entered Israel from the sea and proceeded to hijack a civilian bus, leading Israeli police on a miles-long chase culminating in the deaths of 38 civilians and 9 of the 11 attackers. Israel launched Operation Litani three days later, and within a week occupied all of southern Lebanon up to the Litani river with the exception of the city of Tyre.

Operation Litani and UNSC Resolutions 425, 426 (1978)

Due to ongoing peace talks between Israel and Egypt, the international community and the US specifically were keen on maintaining relative peace in the region, and acted quickly and decisively following the initial Israeli invasion. Two UN Security Council resolutions, 425 and 426, were adopted on March 19, 1978, in direct response to the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon, in an effort to halt military operations. Resolution 425 called on Israel to “immediately ... cease its military action against Lebanese territorial integrity” and withdraw entirely, in an effort to highlight the importance of Lebanese sovereignty. The resolution also established “a UN Interim Force for southern Lebanon (UNIFIL),” to achieve three specific goals: to confirm the evacuation of Israeli troops, to restore international peace and security, and to support the

Lebanese government in its reestablishment of territorial sovereignty in the area. Resolution 426 officially approved the deployment and stationing of four thousand UNIFIL troops, subsequently increased to six thousand. In its initial creation, UNIFIL seemed to have a clear-cut goal: establish peace in southern Lebanon, maintain the peace, and support the Lebanese government in reestablishing effective control. However, the Lebanese government wasn't in a position to govern southern Lebanon as it was locked in civil war, and there was still the question of the ongoing Palestinian presence which resisted the Lebanese government, UNIFIL, and most importantly Israel. The mission outlined in resolution 425 was noble and true to UN values pertaining to the acknowledgement, respect, and support of sovereign nations, as seen through the commitment to a restoration of Lebanese civil and military control over the entire country. These resolutions were highly ineffective in the long run, seeing as UNIFIL is still deployed and southern Lebanon is still not in complete control of the Lebanese government. The reasoning behind this ineffectiveness lies in the insistence of the UNSC to remain a neutral party in the various intersecting conflicts occurring simultaneously in southern Lebanon, which will be further explored in later sections.

Reactions to UNSC Resolutions

In this multifaceted conflict of political and religious ideologies in southern Lebanon, every side had serious reservations about Resolution 425, only adding to its long term ineffectiveness and the danger faced by UNIFIL troops during deployment. The Palestinian resistance movement resented that the resolution did not directly call out Israeli 'aggression,' nor did it present a framework for a long term solution. The Palestinians strongly advocated for a long term solution involving a realization of the Palestinian nationalist ambition. The Palestinians were also frustrated with the wording of the Resolution itself, as it did not mention the

Palestinian resistance movement as a party to the conflict. This frustration led PLO leader Yasser Arafat to continue to authorize strikes on Israel from UNIFIL-controlled territories, until UNIFIL commander Kurt Waldheim met with Arafat personally, which led to an informal recognition of the PLO as a party to the conflict (Siklawi, 2017).

The Lebanese government maintained that it was not connected to Palestinian attacks on Israel, not responsible for the presence of Palestinians in the south, and supported UN sentiment of reestablishing Lebanese control and sovereignty over southern Lebanon. The Lebanese government understood their lack of ability to restore national unity to the south, especially in a time of civil war, and hoped that UNIFIL would allow them to focus their resources on spreading Lebanese domestic influence in the south rather than militarily defending their borders.

The official position of the Israeli government was that Operation Litani was necessary and justified in response to the Coastal Road Massacre. It was, though not openly, an opportunity seized by the administration of Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who believed that it was necessary to clear southern Lebanon of PLO forces in order to prevent further attacks, a sentiment that would remain consistent in future Israeli invasions. Israel accepted Resolution 425 and came to a formal agreement with UNIFIL on March 20, 1978, at which point a ceasefire came into effect. Israel maintained a presence in southern Lebanon until June 1978 however, as it refused to fully withdraw until it deemed UNIFIL capable of preventing cross-border attacks by the PLO. Increasing pressure from the US in light of the ongoing peace process with Egypt, however, led Israel to withdraw within three months of the initial invasion, well before planned. During the withdrawal, Israel turned over their positions to their allies in the south Lebanon Army (SLA), a Christian militant organization in southern Lebanon, rather than to UNIFIL as was mandated by Resolution 425 (Karame, 2019). This led to a complex situation in late July

1978, as Lebanon deployed several hundred troops to southern Lebanon in order to restore territorial sovereignty. These troops were halted by the SLA with Israeli authorization despite earlier Israeli commitments to Lebanese sovereignty. Unable to effectively control the southern border, Lebanese forces retreated and the area remained under control of the SLA. UNIFIL maintained positions in the region, and sustained heavy losses as a result of fighting between the PLO and SLA. The lack of Israeli confidence in the ability and commitment of UNIFIL to prevent cross border attacks stemmed from its initial reservations regarding resolutions 425 and 426 which will be further explored in section two. It was these reservations that influenced Israeli military leadership to support the SLA as the dominant force in southern Lebanon rather than UNIFIL. Overall, UNIFIL sustained casualties at the hands of both the PLO and SLA, as well as material losses from Israeli shelling against PLO positions.

Following the Israeli withdrawal in June 1978, Israel continued to respond to attacks by the PLO both directly and through their Christian allies in the south. The mission of UNIFIL to separate the warring parties and maintain lasting peace was virtually impossible due to, according to the Israelis, the initial UNSC resolutions not calling for an explicit removal of PLO forces from Lebanon. In their eyes, if there was a substantial Palestinian presence in southern Lebanon, it was an existential threat to Israeli sovereignty. Prior to the 1982 invasion of Lebanon by Israel, the PLO simultaneously represented one of the primary threats to Lebanese sovereignty and perceived Israeli national security, and Israel had hoped for an official UN call for their exile in Resolution 425 as a way to resolve both of these problems. However, due to the vague language of the Resolution and its lack of official positioning on the conflict between Israel and the PLO, Israel lacked confidence in UNIFIL's ability to prevent the PLO from

reasserting itself on the southern Lebanese border. Thus, Israel entrusted its military positions to the SLA rather than UNIFIL in its initial withdrawal as mentioned before.

First Lebanon War (1982-2000)

From 1978 to 1981, the PLO reestablished itself as a dominant entity in southern Lebanon, drawing reprisal attacks from Israel and their allies, which led to a state of near constant instability and conflict. A US brokered ceasefire in July 1981 broke a cycle of violence that had taken a substantial toll on the civilian population and infrastructure of southern Lebanon, but the ceasefire was in no way a lasting solution. Israel's primary end-goal of eradicating the PLO from Lebanon altogether remained unachieved, but UNIFIL and the respective sides were able to maintain the ceasefire for roughly nine months. The breakdown of the ceasefire began when an Israeli soldier was killed by a landmine in Taibe, Lebanon, and the IDF responded with airstrikes. The escalation culminated in a massive Israeli invasion of Lebanon, consisting of tens of thousands of soldiers and hundreds of armored vehicles. The invasion which began on June 6th, 1982 eventually succeeded in expelling the PLO from Lebanon, though Israel suffered heavy losses both physically and politically, and maintained a presence in southern Lebanon until 2000. UNIFIL was effectively irrelevant during the initial course of the war as Israeli forces pushed right past the Litani river, which was the northern extent of UNIFIL's mandate, and successfully occupied much of Lebanon from the south until Beirut. The invasion and subsequent occupation of southern Lebanon by the IDF marked a period of time in which UNIFIL existed and deployed in its mandated area, but failed to establish Lebanese sovereignty or maintain peace in an effective way. Following the expulsion of the PLO from southern Lebanon, the IDF slowly withdrew from its northern positions, and eventually established a security zone in the south to protect its border from a new threat that had begun to

fill the power vacuum left by the PLO: Hezbollah. Israel fought a guerilla war with Hezbollah forces from 1985 until the official withdrawal in 2000, after which UNIFIL again failed to establish peace and promote Lebanese territorial sovereignty (Makdisi, 2014).

First Israeli Occupation of Southern Lebanon (1985-2000)

Throughout the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon from 1982 to 2000, UNIFIL was tasked with enforcing its mandate over an area in complete Israeli control, effectively nullifying its value. With military operations between Israel and the Litani River being conducted solely by the IDF, UNIFIL shifted its focus to providing humanitarian aid to the civilian population which had been highly affected by the constant regional instability. After the expulsion of the PLO in 1982, the widely ignored Shi'a population in southern Lebanon began to consolidate into a cohesive resistance movement. Unified under the flag of Hezbollah and under the leadership of Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah soon became a legitimate force in Lebanese politics, and the primary resistance movement against the Israeli occupation, claiming their fight was in the name of Lebanese sovereignty under UNSC Resolution 425. The 1989 Taif Agreement which ended the Lebanese Civil War instituted Syria and Saudi Arabia as direct international consultants to the new Lebanese government, which dealt a serious blow to the already decreased Christian representation in government. Furthermore, the new government (directly influenced by Syria) granted Hezbollah official status as an entity of resistance, setting the stage for its rapid rise in power and popularity among the Lebanese population. It is well established UN policy to recognize the right to resist an occupying power. As such, UNIFIL had no mandate to prevent the rise or arming of Hezbollah which would eventually set the stage for the Second Lebanon War in 2006. When Israel finally withdrew from Lebanon in May 2000, the border region experienced its longest peaceful stretch since Operation Litani in 1978. The UNIFIL mandate was reduced to

roughly two thousand soldiers, and there was general sentiment on the ground that the mission was coming to a gradual close (Makdisi, 2014).

Interwar Period and UNSC Resolution 1559 (2000-2006)

During the relative peace that ensued from the Israeli withdrawal until the next conflict in 2006, Hezbollah continued to dig into southern Lebanon militarily, reinforcing its positions and increasing weapons stockpiles with direct help from Iran (Kurtzer, 2017). As UNIFIL was technically operating under UNSC 425 and not the objective goal of establishing and maintaining lasting peace, it was unable to prevent the arming and influential spread of Hezbollah, and the decrease in its mandated soldiers during this peaceful stretch was an oversight by the UN in the wider lens of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hezbollah had declared itself as a primary actor in the resistance movement against Israel and Israel had in turn recognized Hezbollah as one of its most pressing threats to national security. Israeli leadership, during the time of relative peace, still sought a longer term solution to the perceived threat in southern Lebanon, though made it a priority not to act first. On September 2, 2004 the UNSC passed resolution 1559 that called for the disarming of Hezbollah and any and all other ‘militias’ operating in southern Lebanon. While this resolution became highly important in high level discourse surrounding the general Israeli/Lebanese conflict, in the strict context of UNIFIL it had very little impact on the ground. The disarming was supposed to be done internally by the militia groups and enforced by the Lebanese government, which at the time was heavily supported by Syria and held strong anti-Israeli views. At this point in the development of Hezbollah, to task UNIFIL with enforcing its disarmament would have effectively been a declaration of war by the UNSC. Hezbollah was the dominant military entity in southern Lebanon and had massive

regional backing in addition to foreign Iranian and Syrian support, and hence resolution 1559 contributed too little too late in the efforts to contain Hezbollah (Makdisi, 2011)

Second Lebanon War and UNSC Resolution 1701 (2006)

A 2006 cross-border attack which resulted in the deaths of three Israeli soldiers and the capture of two additional soldiers, gave Israel an opportunity to launch a comprehensive invasion of southern Lebanon to again liberate it from the control of a resistance movement. The resulting war lasted about a month, and officially ended with the unanimously passed UNSC resolution 1701, which reframed the badly outdated Resolution 425, upon which UNIFIL had been operating since its inception. Resolution 1701 substantially strengthened the UNIFIL task force, increased troop numbers to fifteen thousand, established a dedicated strategic military office in New York, and considerably developed the UN political office in Beirut. The resolution also made a direct call for the implementation of Lebanese sovereignty over southern Lebanon, something that government forces had been unwilling and unable to do for decades. The wording of Resolution 1701 was somewhat vague with regards to the status of an international weapons embargo on Lebanon, and the disarming of Hezbollah. The official wording of the resolution makes implicit references to Hezbollah, but fails to identify it by name, allowing loopholes for Hezbollah to misidentify itself in defense of the resolution itself. Point 8 of 19 of resolution 1701 establishes “no foreign forces in Lebanon without the consent of its Government,” and “no sales or supply of arms and related material to Lebanon except as authorized by its Government.” Both of these statements imply the disarming of Hezbollah, the prohibition of its operation as a militant force within Lebanon, and the ban of weapons sales within Lebanon to anyone other than the Lebanese government, including Hezbollah. UNIFIL, however, despite receiving substantially more financial support and manpower, failed to effectively disarm Hezbollah

despite initial attempts. With the international community quickly losing interest in the prolonged stalemate and the Lebanese government's continued inability to assert dominance over southern Lebanon, UNIFIL lost its ability to effectively implement the framework of resolution 1701 including the disarming and prevention of the rearming of Hezbollah. UNIFIL continues to man border positions and maintain the integrity of the internationally recognized Israeli-Lebanese border, known as the Blue Line, and also exists as a police force in the acquisition of arms by Hezbollah and other militant factions in southern Lebanon, though with limited enforcement (Makdisi, 2014)(Elron, 2007)(Engberg, 2006).

Reactions to Resolution 1701

The implementation of Resolution 1701, colloquially known as UNIFIL II, was welcomed by the Lebanese government and praised as a supporter and enforcer of its sovereignty. According to the renewed mission of UNIFIL, the area between the Litani river and the Israeli border, also known as the Blue Line, would be an area in which no military group would operate other than UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). As such, there seemed to be an opportunity for the government of Lebanon to reassert itself as the dominant military power in its southern region, supported by and in coordination with the UN forces. As mentioned prior, however, while the wording of resolution 1701 banned military operations by anyone other than the LAF and UNIFIL, there was no written commitment to prevent Hezbollah from rearming and presenting itself once again as a threat to Israel. UNIFIL II had no obligation from resolution 1701 to interrupt weapons shipments to Hezbollah from Syria unless requested by the Lebanese government, and instead committed to supporting the LAF to do so by providing training and other limited resources. This was met with staunch opposition by the Israeli

government, which predicted a rapid rearming of Hezbollah unless forcefully prevented (Elron, 2007)(Engberg, 2006).

Despite substantially increasing troop numbers and adjusting the UNIFIL mandate in 2006, Hezbollah has maintained a campaign of establishing itself as the dominant military and political entity in the south, continuing to arm itself and resisting international efforts to subdue its rapid growth. There are several strategies utilized by Hezbollah which prevent UNIFIL from fulfilling its duty or overseeing their demilitarization, encouraged in a sense by a lack of enthusiasm or desire by the Lebanese government to openly oppose the mission of Hezbollah and enforce resolution 1701. For example, UNIFIL is, according to their mandate, privileged with a freedom of movement in the mandated area, intended to provide UNIFIL with a degree of regional authority as well as assist in their mission of overseeing the deconstruction of weapons caches and other military zones. Hezbollah, however, has openly resisted the authority of UNIFIL by restricting its movement in several ways yet almost never presenting an armed, uniformed force. One of Hezbollah's primary tactics is its utilization of civilian infrastructure and attire as well as the surrounding populations in order to disguise organized resistance and military exercise as a general mobilization of civilians as a means of resistance. As of 2019, the UN reported over 150 examples of restricted movement of UNIFIL, 95 of which came as a result of UNIFIL troops or convoys being stopped while on patrol. These stops are executed almost exclusively by civilians, generally without weapons or else very lightly armed (typically with non-lethal weapons). Such stops generally result in a redirection of UNIFIL troops with provided reasoning being religious sensitivity, inadequate roadways, and private property. In addition to restricting the movement of UNIFIL, Hezbollah has also launched minor attacks on UNIFIL

convoys, employing a native awareness of surrounding areas and villages as well as civilian clothing.

One of the most severe examples of this occurred in 2018 near the Hezbollah stronghold of Majdal Zoun when a mob of civilian-clad Hezbollah members assaulted a UNIFIL convoy, moderately injuring several troops. The result of this attack demoralized foreign contributors to UNIFIL as well as continued Hezbollah's goal of invalidating UNIFIL and mitigating its productive ability to execute UNSC resolution 1701. In its campaign of general disobedience to UNIFIL in southern Lebanon, Hezbollah has effectively created flashpoints and points of sensitivity so as to restrict UNIFIL to its advantage. One of the most direct ways in which Hezbollah prevents UNIFIL from accurately and correctly operating within its mandate is through a campaign of resistance against photography. UNIFIL has no inherent restrictions on its photographic strategies in following its prescribed mandate, though Hezbollah has utilized a supposed resentment of UNIFIL photography in order to counteract intelligence efforts as well as hide proof of violations of resolution 1701. At this point, Hezbollah has effectively nullified the efficacy of UNIFIL II with the help of a non-motivated Lebanese government, a strategic usage of 'civilian-led' resistance (impersonation of civilians by militants), and a general encroachment on the privileges and requirements of UNIFIL according to UNSC resolution 1701 (Orion, 2019).

The current state of southern Lebanon is a fragile balance of status quo, blissful ignorance, and an overwhelming desire for regional peace, regardless of future consequences. Since 2006, Israel and Hezbollah have maintained a period of icy peace, with direct contact limited to minor flare-ups, sometimes aligned with sentiment in the Palestinian population. Israel has launched airstrikes on Hezbollah and Iranian-affiliated targets in Syria in an attempt to

disrupt the flow of weapons from Iran to southern Lebanon, drawing rebukes and occasional limited reprisal from Hezbollah, but the situation on the ground at the Blue Line remains mostly quiet. Hezbollah has continued to build its arsenal of weaponry, mostly consisting of rockets and missiles supplied by Iran via Syria, with very little resistance from the LAF or UNIFIL (Kurtzer, 2017), mostly due to intimidation and civilian camouflage tactics mentioned previously (Orion, 2019). Hassan Nasrallah, the current Hezbollah Secretary General, has repeatedly threatened to unleash his arsenal against the Israeli population in the event of Israeli aggression; it is widely expected that the next major war that Israel fights will be against Hezbollah, with similar if not substantially more significant casualties than the war in 2006 (Elron, 2007). UNIFIL can only take limited credit for the current state of peace in the southern Lebanese border region: while resolution 1701 reestablished the commitment of the Security Council to Lebanese territorial sovereignty and an opposition to any alternative military operations not affiliated with the Lebanese government, the primary factor preventing war between Hezbollah and Israel at this point is strategic timing. The IDF maintains a level of high readiness in the north of Israel and has simulated all-out war with Hezbollah in military exercises in the Galilee and Golan (Ahronheim, 2021). Similarly, Hezbollah has made direct threats to Israel, generally with references to its expansive and destructive rocket and missile capabilities (Times of Israel, 2019). Both sides maintain their readiness in the event of a good enough excuse to attempt to destroy the other; this being the case begs an obvious question: if UNIFIL was initially constructed to ensure and maintain peace in southern Lebanon, why is the region on the brink of yet another war? The mission of UNIFIL has clearly missed *something*, both in the initial resolutions in 1978 as well as in the reformed resolution 1701. Despite the UNSC multiplying UNIFIL troop numbers and reaffirming a support for Lebanese sovereignty, southern Lebanon remains in the

hands of Hezbollah and the civilians of Lebanon and Israel continue to exist in the crossfire of a seemingly guaranteed future conflict.

Why Did UNIFIL Fail?

The answer as to why UNIFIL was unable to effectively execute its mandate is both simple and complex. The implementation of UNSC resolutions 425 and 426 was shaky and lacked a strong ideological foundation upon which to operate. As stated prior, the primary goals of resolution 425 was to confirm the evacuation of Israeli forces from Lebanon, restore “international peace and security,” and support the Lebanese government in re-extending its control and sovereignty in the south. The latter two goals of this resolution are subjective to a degree, and overall this resolution didn’t present the UNIFIL force with a strong mission to follow and commit to. Furthermore, the Lebanese government was barely able to govern the capital Beirut effectively, let alone the far southern border region, as it was entrenched in a bloody civil war. The UNSC was hesitant to commit to a stronger, more direct mission, such as setting up and implementing a fully demilitarized zone in the south for a variety of reasons. Primarily, taking such action would have presented UNIFIL as in opposition to the PLO and therefore assigned the UN to a side in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Had the initial goal of UNIFIL been to demilitarize the PLO, the PLO would have viewed UNIFIL as aligned with the IDF and treated them as such. Furthermore, resolutions 425 and 426 were initially passed only four days after the initial Israeli invasion, with the goal being to swiftly put an end to armed conflict and restore peace in the immediate short term. While bullets may have stopped flying and Israeli troops withdrew from Lebanon initially, the situation broke down quickly, and Israeli forces returned to finish their goal of clearing the PLO from Lebanon in 1982 (Makdisi, 2014)(Engberg, 2006).

UNIFIL operated minimally from 1978 until 1982, maintaining the status quo and policing the border region. When Israel reentered Lebanon in 1982, UNIFIL was “brushed aside contemptuously” (Sherry, 1988), and it remained effectively pointless until the 2006 restructuring of resolution 1701. Since UNIFIL couldn’t take a position on the Arab-Israeli conflict, it couldn’t effectively combat the seemingly endless source of regional dispute stemming from the initial Israeli operation in 1978. From 1982 until 2000, UNIFIL was again rendered ineffective, as the Israeli occupied zone fully encompassed UNIFIL’s mandate, and Hezbollah began to grow exponentially. When Israel left Lebanon in 2000, the next war was already in motion, despite it being six years away. The failure of UNIFIL to establish Lebanese sovereignty in southern Lebanon left the door open for Hezbollah, which quickly increased its military capabilities as well as regional domestic support. Had resolution 425 committed to a UN-enforced demilitarization of southern Lebanon, Hezbollah would have never been able to amass its stockpiles of Iranian-sourced weaponry and the Second Lebanon War may never have broken out in 2006 (Kurtzer, 2017)(Jett, 2016). The Israeli goal in Operation Litani was straightforward: remove the PLO from Lebanon in the name of the protection of the State of Israel. The goal in 1982 remained the same, and following the PLOs expulsion, the goal still remained, though with Hezbollah now assuming the role of the PLO. In 2006 the goal was still the same, and today, even after UN commitments to restoring Lebanese sovereignty in the southern region, the Lebanese government still lacks any meaningful control over its southern border or the surrounding areas (Makdisi, 2014).

UNIFIL III (?) (2006-)

In the initial resolutions of 1978, several vital points were missed by the UNSC which would have more effectively prepared UNIFIL for its eventual decades-long mission. Had

resolutions 425 and 426 included these adjustments, it is possible that after the conclusion of the civil war in Lebanon in 1990 the Lebanese government would have been able to enforce its sovereignty in the south rather than allowing Hezbollah to rise.

First and foremost is a demilitarized and disarmed zone in southern Lebanon, patrolled and strictly enforced by UNIFIL. Given the complexities of the ongoing Lebanese Civil War and the variety of parties involved in the conflict, the UNSC should have made it a priority to recognize the threat of Israeli involvement in Lebanese instability to the people of both Lebanon and Israel. In 1982, the PLO was officially exiled from Lebanon, opening the door for the UNSC to occupy southern Lebanon and prevent the rise of Hezbollah. A hypothetical resolution in 1982 could have called for a full Israeli withdrawal and an international commitment to the integrity of the (future) Lebanese government, with an 'interim' force in southern Lebanon enforcing the demilitarized zone and preventing a future Israel/Lebanon front in the Arab/Israeli conflict. The primary logical basis for this decision making would have been a general commitment by the UNSC to the security of the sovereign states involved, namely Israel and Lebanon.

Second is an equally strictly enforced protection of Lebanese sovereignty from Israel, for the sake of the protection of the people of southern Lebanon who typically relied on local militias or the PLO for protection. As a part of this hypothetical resolution, Israel would have to commit to respecting the integrity of the Lebanese border, something it had very clearly not done in its 1978 and 1982 invasions in addition to various cross-border artillery, air, and naval raids conducted in the name of Israeli border security. In effect, UNIFIL would have acted as a buffer zone between Lebanon and Israel between the Blue Line and Litani River, and strictly enforced a demilitarized zone so as to prevent the eventual rise of Hezbollah.

The final step in this hypothetical resolution would be a road map for the transfer of power from UNIFIL-occupied areas to the Lebanese government once the government was deemed stable enough. Ideally, this transfer of power would coincide with an official peace agreement with Israel, and a commitment to regional security by respecting the integrity of independent states. The current government of Lebanon has no technical quarrel with Israel, and despite ideological differences on a variety of fronts, theoretically they should be able to align against groups that undermine Lebanese sovereignty and threaten Israeli security simultaneously.

In retrospect, the UNSC missed a vital opportunity to secure an extended period of peace in southern Lebanon immediately following the expulsion of the PLO in 1982. Had the mandate been expanded to cover the entirety of the land occupied by Israeli forces in operation Litani, a weapons embargo imposed on non-governmental militant organizations, and priority given to maintaining the status quo in the region until the Lebanese government was strong enough to regain control, it is likely that Hezbollah would have never been able to grow into what it was in 2006. Instead, the Israeli government recognized the shortcomings of UNSC resolutions 425 and 426 and occupied southern Lebanon until the Litani river, which played a vital role in fueling the anti-Israeli sentiment which Hezbollah embodies. UNIFIL could have acted as a strategic ally to both Lebanese and Israeli interests in preventing the rise of Hezbollah and promoting the Lebanese government. As such, it is important not only to identify where the UNSC failed and how it could have adjusted its mission in the past, but also to present a plan that could be legitimately implemented in the future.

At the current time, most Israeli analysts agree that while war with Hezbollah isn't immediately imminent, it is inevitable nonetheless. While the Israel/Hezbollah conflict is not currently on the primary docket of the UNSC, if a major conflict breaks out it would present the

UNSC with an opportunity to redefine the UNIFIL mandate. In the event of a future war with Hezbollah, the IDF would focus its energy on both protecting the citizens of Israel from the hundreds of thousands of rockets falling from the sky as well as inflicting as much damage on Hezbollah military infrastructure and rocket storage as possible (Gross, 2021). Similar to the war in 2006, a future war would see the IDF attempt to eliminate the military capabilities of Hezbollah altogether in the limited time it would have to operate until a UNSC resolution passes mandating their withdrawal. The resulting resolution would, ideally, contain an overhauled UNIFIL mandate focused on preventing the return of Hezbollah, rebuilding the inevitably damaged infrastructure, and supporting the Lebanese people through various methods of aid. Finally, this resolution would come with a joint commitment by the Israeli and Lebanese governments to prevent any further war being fought in southern Lebanon by virtue of a peace agreement between the two states. UNIFIL would then be tasked with preventing the rise of Hezbollah or another similar group and helping rebuild southern Lebanon (possibly with Israeli financial support) and eventually sharing responsibilities with the LAF when possible. This hypothetical “UNIFIL III” would be mandated in support of the Lebanese government, assuming it was able to effectively govern, in the hopes to provide safety and security to the people of southern Lebanon.

Conclusion

Since the passing of UNSC resolution 425 and 426 in 1978, the UN has maintained a constant military presence in the form of UNIFIL in southern Lebanon. Initially established as an ‘interim’ force, UNIFIL has failed to effectively establish or maintain peace in southern Lebanon for a variety of reasons. The border region between Israel and Lebanon represents a major intersection between several sectarian conflicts, both international as well as contained within

Lebanon. These conflicts can not and will not be solved by UNIFIL, nor is it in their mandate to do so. That being said, few in the Levant suffered as acutely and consistently as the residents of southern Lebanon from 1978 to 2006 despite the constant presence of international peacekeeping troops; southern Lebanese residents will also be the hardest hit by a future war between Israel and Hezbollah given the density of Hezbollah infrastructure within civilian areas. The mission of UNIFIL should be to establish a protected area in southern Lebanon for the sake of the Lebanese people, which will in turn assist the Lebanese government in reasserting its control over the entirety of its population. Furthermore, the UNSC needs to recognize and confront the threat that Hezbollah poses to the overall stability of the Levant, both as an Iranian proxy intent on controlling Lebanon as well as a terrorist organization (Robinson, 2021) with a sworn intent to destroy Israel. The State of Lebanon and the State of Israel have an equal right to exist as sovereign states under recognition by the UN, and it must be the priority of the UNSC and UNIFIL to protect the sovereignty of these states, the wellbeing of their people, and regional security overall.

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