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SPECIAL REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE UNITED NATIONS INTERIM FORCE IN LEBANON

Introduction

1. As a result of a series of serious incidents in mid-August in the area of deployment in southern Lebanon of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), I decided to send to the area a mission of inquiry under the direction of Mr. Marrack Goulding, Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs, to consider, in co-operation with the Commander of UNIFIL and in consultation with the Lebanese Government, measures to be taken to improve the security of UNIFIL personnel. The mission was also to consult with the parties on how progress could be made towards the implementation of resolution 425 (1978). Following a particularly serious incident on 4 September, in which three French soldiers were killed by a remote-controlled bomb, I brought forward the departure of the mission which left that day for the area.

2. At the Security Council's meeting on 5 September, the President made a statement on behalf of the members of the Council on this subject. After expressing their sorrow and indignation at the attacks against soldiers of UNIFIL, the members of the Security Council, given the worsening of the situation in the UNIFIL area, considered it essential to adopt with all urgency measures aimed at the effective reinforcement of the security of the members of the Force and requested the Secretary-General to undertake all necessary steps to that effect. The members of the Security Council also expressed their appreciation to the Secretary-General for his immediate dispatch of a mission led by the Under-Secretary-General, which was to carry out, in consultation with the Lebanese Government, an in-depth examination of the measures to be taken to enable UNIFIL to carry out its mandate as laid down in Security Council resolution 425 (1978), effectively in the necessary conditions of security. They invited the Secretary-General to submit to the Security Council, as soon as possible, the report which he would prepare following the mission. They also unanimously expressed their confidence in the Secretary-General and the Commander of the Force in the current difficult circumstances.

3. Mr. Goulding, who visited the area from 5 to 15 September and held extensive discussions with the Force Commander and his staff and with the various parties concerned, has now submitted to me his findings and recommendations. The present

report describes the conditions under which UNIFIL is at present operating and the security measures already taken and sets out my observations on the future of the Force.

Recent incidents

4. Recent weeks have witnessed a dangerously high level of violence in UNIFIL's area of deployment.

5. Late on 11 August, two men, one of them a local leader of the Amal movement in southern Lebanon, were shot by a sentry of the French contingent in a confrontation at a UNIFIL checkpoint near the village of Abbasiyah, in the French battalion's sector of UNIFIL. Regrettably, both men died shortly afterwards. It was reported to the Force Commander that the sentry had been threatened and had acted in self-defence. Later the same night, members of Amal and other armed elements attacked nine different French battalion positions as well as the UNIFIL transit base at Tyre. These attacks, in which light machine guns, small arms and rocket-propelled grenades were used, were particularly intense in and around Ma'rakah, where the French battalion has its headquarters. This initial and intense round of attacks ended in the early afternoon of the following day, 12 August, but UNIFIL positions continued to come under sporadic attacks until 22 August, not only in the French sector, but also in the sectors entrusted to Fiji, Finland, Ireland and Nepal. A total of 17 French soldiers were wounded during these attacks.

6. On 21 August, in an apparently unconnected but very grave incident, an Irish lieutenant was killed by a remote-controlled roadside bomb while leading a patrol in the southern part of the Irish sector.

7. After 22 August, there was a period of comparative calm during which UNIFIL made strenuous efforts, with the co-operation of the Lebanese authorities and leaders of the Amal movement, to reduce tension and re-establish calm in the area. Despite those efforts, however, another serious incident occurred on 4 September when three men of the French contingent were killed by a remote-controlled bomb near the village of Jwayya in the French battalion sector. The bomb was detonated deliberately against five members of the French contingent who were on a morning road-running exercise.

8. On 5 September, a detachment of some 30 Israeli soldiers carried out a helicopter raid in the village of Zibqin in the Nepalese battalion sector. UNIFIL immediately dispatched two mobile teams to the village and the Force Commander strongly protested against this incursion to the Israeli authorities. An Israeli soldier was killed during the raid and four Lebanese villagers were abducted by the Israelis.

9. In the early hours of 11 September, an unidentified group of armed elements raided a "South Lebanon Army" (SLA) position near the village of Kafra in the Nepalese battalion sector. Two SLA personnel were killed and three others wounded, and an armoured personnel carrier belonging to SLA was captured. Three of the attackers were killed. Following this incident, four SLA positions in the "security zone" maintained by Israel in southern Lebanon fired on the villages of

Yatar, Kafra, Haris and Haddathah in the UNIFIL area, using mortars, tanks and artillery. One UNIFIL position was hit and five Nepalese soldiers were injured, one seriously.

10. On 13 September, an armoured patrol of the French battalion was attacked with a remote-controlled roadside bomb near the village of Bafliyah in the French battalion sector. One French soldier was killed and three wounded, one seriously.

Assessment of the security of UNIFIL personnel

11. As indicated above, the first part of the task entrusted to the mission I dispatched to the area on 4 September was to assess the threat to the security of UNIFIL personnel and to agree with the Force Commander on immediate practical measures to protect UNIFIL against that threat.

12. The mission has reported to me that many of the dangers to which UNIFIL personnel are currently exposed result from a discrepancy between its terms of reference and the situation on the ground. The Council will recall that the Force's terms of reference include the requirement that it "use its best efforts to prevent the recurrence of fighting and to ensure that its area of operation is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind" (S/12611, para. 2 (d)). This requirement was based on the assumption that Israel would withdraw its forces and that UNIFIL would operate with the full co-operation of all the parties concerned. Unfortunately Israel's refusal to withdraw its forces has invalidated that assumption ever since UNIFIL came into being, despite constant efforts to bring about such a withdrawal. The Force has in the meantime, in accordance with its mandate, sought to maintain a degree of peace and security in southern Lebanon by controlling movement of armed personnel and weapons and munitions into and through its area of deployment and by disposing of any mines or roadside bombs it discovers.

13. In recent months Israel's continuing occupation and the behaviour of its allies in SLA have increasingly provoked armed resistance by various groups in southern Lebanon. UNIFIL's activities, in execution of its mandate, have in these circumstances brought a growing risk of confrontation between it and the armed groups which wish to attack the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and SLA. In previous reports to the Council I have described incidents to which such confrontations have given rise, e.g. those involving the French and the Ghanaian battalions earlier this year (S/17965, paras. 28 and 30). The incident in the French battalion sector on 11 August and its aftermath was a particularly serious example of this kind of confrontation. Equally serious was the murder of the Irish officer on 21 August. This is reported to have been the work of armed elements who resented the Irish battalion's dismantling of roadside bombs aimed against SLA.

14. A new and very disturbing development in recent weeks has been the series of premeditated attacks against the French contingent. The initial incident of 11 August was, after some days, defused in the normal way through contacts between the command of UNIFIL and leaders of the Amal movement. However, after the incident had been resolved to the satisfaction of the latter, sporadic attacks continued against French positions and these were followed by the remote-controlled

roadside bombs exploded against French personnel on 4 and 13 September. No organization or individual has claimed responsibility for these crimes and the mission was unable to establish whether they represented a continuing reaction to the incident of 11 August or whether they were the work of an armed group opposed either to French participation in UNIFIL or to UNIFIL as a whole and to resolution 425 (1978). Many of those whom the mission consulted on this question in the area speculated that the attacks might be directed against UNIFIL as a whole and could be linked to certain recent statements criticizing resolution 425 (1978); but no firm evidence was produced to corroborate this.

15. A further source of danger to UNIFIL personnel lies in the intensifying conflict between IDF/SLA and armed groups attacking the "security zone". As previously reported, that zone overlaps a sizeable part of UNIFIL's area of deployment, including the whole of the Norwegian sector, more than half of the Finnish sector and the southern parts of the Irish and Nepalese sectors. Attacks by armed groups against the "security zone" almost always result in retaliatory action by IDF and SLA. This often includes indiscriminate shelling of villages near where the attack has occurred. UNIFIL personnel risk being caught in such retaliatory fire, as happened to the Nepalese position on 11 September.

Security measures

16. After the initial clashes in mid-August, the Force Commander took various measures to improve the security of his troops, especially those of the French contingent. After the murder of the Irish officer on 21 August, he was instructed by Headquarters to alert all units to the possibility that that attack might portend a general campaign against UNIFIL and to take the necessary precautions. Further measures were implemented following the mission's discussions with the Force Commander and his staff. These measures included:

- (a) A crash programme to provide reinforced shelters for those positions which did not already have them and to accelerate an existing programme to improve the physical defences of all positions;

- (b) The closure of certain vulnerable and exposed positions and redeployment of their personnel to strengthen the remaining positions;

- (c) Fresh instructions to all units to take special precautions against possible attacks on their positions;

- (d) Additional instructions relating to duty travel in the area of deployment and restrictions on movement of personnel for recreational purposes.

17. More recently, on the recommendation of General Hägglund and the mission, I have authorized certain redeployments within the UNIFIL area of deployment to improve the security of the French contingent. In summary these are:

- (a) Redeployment of about half the French battalion to UNIFIL headquarters at Naqoura to act as the Force's mobile reserve;

(b) Concentration of the remainder of the French battalion in and around Jwayya, where it will, inter alia, provide protection for the French engineer company;

(c) Transfer to the Finnish and Ghanaian battalions of certain positions in the eastern part of the present French sector;

(d) Deployment of a reinforced Nepalese company to take over positions in the western part of the existing French sector.

18. It has to be recognized, however, that UNIFIL is widely dispersed in some 214 positions throughout southern Lebanon and that security measures of the kind described above can provide only partial protection against determined attacks. The mission urged all concerned within the area both to make every effort to identify and apprehend those responsible for the recent premeditated attacks against UNIFIL personnel and to intervene with those who might have influence with those responsible in order to get the attacks stopped. All the leaders to whom the mission spoke condemned these attacks and undertook to make every effort to ensure that there was no repetition.

Position of the parties

19. The second part of the task entrusted to the mission was to pursue consultations with the parties on how progress could be made towards the implementation of resolution 425 (1978).

20. In Lebanon, all the leaders to whom the mission spoke expressed unequivocal support for the continued presence of UNIFIL and for urgent implementation of resolution 425 (1978). Many public statements were made in this sense while the mission was in Lebanon and subsequently, and rallies in support of UNIFIL have been held in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese leaders insisted on the need for Israel to withdraw its forces and dismantle the "security zone" if the present deterioration of the situation in southern Lebanon was to be arrested. They also urged that the Security Council should assume its responsibilities in that regard. The mission suggested that, if the Lebanese leaders succeeded in their current efforts at national reconciliation, the Lebanese Government might wish to deploy a small unit of the Lebanese army to the north-western part of the UNIFIL area of deployment as a first step towards the return of its effective authority in the area. This suggestion was noted, although concern was expressed at the risk that Lebanese units deployed in the south might be attacked by IDF or its allies, as had happened at Kaoukaba in 1978 (see S/12845, paras. 49-51).

21. The Syrian Government also expressed unequivocal support for resolution 425 (1978) and for UNIFIL. Syrian leaders attributed the blame for the current state of affairs to Israel's refusal to withdraw its forces. They too urged that the Security Council should assume its responsibilities in this matter. They repeated their support for the position of those in Lebanon who had expressed their determination that, if Israel withdrew its forces and dismantled the "security zone", there should be no return to the situation that had existed in the area before 1982.

22. The Government of Israel reaffirmed the position it has previously communicated to the United Nations. The Israeli authorities said that the only reason for their continuing military presence in Lebanon was to ensure the security of northern Israel and that they had no wish for their forces to remain in Lebanon indefinitely. However, in the prevailing circumstances in Lebanon, they felt that they had no alternative but to maintain the "security zone", including SLA. They said that they did not want UNIFIL to be withdrawn but that they were not prepared to take any risks with their security in order to keep it in place. They gave no indication that there would be any early change in Israel's position or that they would withdraw their forces from all Lebanese territory in accordance with resolution 425 (1978).

Observations

23. It has been suggested that, given UNIFIL's inability to fulfil its mandate as originally conceived, changes should be made in that mandate and/or in the means provided to the Force to carry it out. The mission discussed this question with the Force Commander of UNIFIL, and I have given careful thought to the question of whether I should recommend any such changes to the Security Council.

24. It has to be remembered that as a peace-keeping operation UNIFIL cannot use force except in self-defence and is not therefore in a position to enforce the Security Council's will. Like all peace-keeping operations, its effectiveness depends on the voluntary co-operation and consent of the parties to the conflict - and of the troop contributing Governments, the importance of whose role cannot be overemphasized. If the necessary co-operation is not forthcoming from the parties to the conflict, the Council could in theory revise the Force's mandate or terms of reference in a manner that would win the co-operation of all. In practice, however, the possibilities are very limited. As regards the mandate, i.e. the provisions of resolution 425 (1978), that resolution has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the Security Council and its provisions remain of fundamental importance to the Government of Lebanon. As regards the Force's terms of reference, as set out in the then Secretary-General's report which was approved by the Security Council in its resolution 426 (1978), I have considered various possibilities. One would be to require the Force to control the movement of heavy weapons only, i.e. artillery and armour. This might reduce the risks of confrontation with armed elements but it would greatly reduce the Force's ability to exercise some control over the level of hostilities in its area of deployment. The same objection would apply to another possibility, namely that the Force should be converted into an observer group. A third possibility would be to revise the Force's area of operation in order to eliminate the overlap between it and the "security zone". This would involve a major contraction of UNIFIL's area, including complete withdrawal from the Norwegian battalion sector and would run counter to the thrust of resolution 425 (1978), thus making it unacceptable to many, including the Lebanese authorities. Nor would it seem likely to reduce the risk of UNIFIL casualties; all but one of those described in paragraphs 5 to 10 above occurred outside the "security zone". I conclude, therefore, that changes in UNIFIL's mandate or terms of reference would be unlikely to resolve its present difficulties.

25. As regards the means available to the Force, I believe that useful changes

could be made, on the assumption that the Council decides to maintain the Force in existence and that the necessary resources can be made available. The Force Commander has advised me that many of UNIFIL's checkpoints and positions, having been established some years ago and in different circumstances, are now of limited operational value and in some cases difficult to defend. He has therefore recommended that UNIFIL's deployment be consolidated by having fewer, stronger and better located positions, in accordance with the Force's existing operational situation. General Hägglund has further recommended various measures (in addition to the urgent measures described in para. 16 above) to strengthen the defences of UNIFIL's positions. He also recommends that the two battalions which do not at present have armoured personnel carriers should be supplied with such vehicles in order to give them better protection while on the move.

26. As regards armament, General Hägglund takes the view that, given the Force's need for the co-operation and consent of the local population, it should not be provided with weapons heavier than it has at present. He believes that UNIFIL's tactical concept should be to avoid violence by being able to deploy superior force quickly if threatened. Increased holdings of armoured vehicles will provide the desired mobility, flexibility and protection. In addition, General Hägglund recommends that the armament available to his Force should be revised to ensure greater accuracy of fire and to keep casualties to the minimum in any confrontations that may occur.

27. I believe that these recommendations respond well to the situation in which UNIFIL finds itself. However the preliminary estimate of their cost is in the region of \$30 million, and it would be essential that extra finance should be provided so that they could be implemented without further detriment to the already reduced reimbursement that the troop contributing countries receive from the United Nations.

28. To sum up, UNIFIL faces a major crisis. The recent violent incidents have brought to a head difficulties which from the beginning have been inherent in its situation because of the failure of various of the parties at various times to give it the full co-operation the Security Council assumed it would have when setting it up. In particular, Israel's refusal to withdraw completely from territory occupied during its invasion in Lebanon in 1982 has led to steadily growing military activity against IDF and SLA. In spite of the international community's desire, expressed unanimously in resolution 586 (1986), that UNIFIL should be permitted to implement its mandate, it has not so far proved possible to persuade Israel to withdraw. In these circumstances it has been impossible for UNIFIL to prevent its area of deployment from being used for hostile activities and some parts of that area have become the scene of almost continuous hostilities, with the consequent dangers to the Force's personnel described above.

29. I share the view that this is an intolerable situation for a United Nations peace-keeping force, and it is not surprising that the question has been whether it is still justifiable to keep in being a force which costs the international community some \$140 million per annum and, after eight-and-a-half years, is still prevented from carrying out the task it was originally given. In successive reports to the Council, especially since the "security zone" was set up early last year, I have repeatedly expressed the gravest concern that the situation of UNIFIL

would become untenable unless early progress was made towards implementation of resolution 425 (1978). Recent events have shown, alas, that those concerns were justified.

30. But, uncomfortable and dangerous though its position may be, UNIFIL nevertheless continues to make an important contribution to such peace and stability as exists in southern Lebanon. If it were withdrawn, there would, I believe, be an immediate intensification of hostilities between IDF/SLA and the various armed groups which wish to drive Israeli forces out of Lebanon and, in some cases, to attack Israel itself. The mission was left in no doubt by the Israeli authorities that in that event Israel's reaction would be very severe and expansion of the "security zone" would not be excluded. There would thus be a grave risk of the conflict spreading. The main sufferers would be the civilian population of southern Lebanon who would again be forced to flee their homes and abandon their land to the combatants.

31. For these reasons I cannot recommend that the Council decide to withdraw the Force. At the same time, I am very conscious of the sacrifices which the troop-contributing countries are being asked to make. Their contribution is beyond praise, and the whole membership of the United Nations is in their debt. They have all along been worried, as have I, about the security of their personnel, about the non-implementation of the mandate and about the increasing financial burden they have to bear because of the failure of some Member States to pay their assessed share of UNIFIL's costs. On all three counts the present outlook is grim. If the Council is to continue to ask those Governments to put the lives of their nationals at risk in the dangerous situation now existing in southern Lebanon, I believe that they must be given reason to hope that their sacrifices have not been in vain and that a solution to this long-standing problem is in sight, that their soldiers must be able to operate in conditions of reasonable security and, finally, that they must be reimbursed at the rates laid down by the General Assembly.

32. The solution lies in complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanese territory and the deployment of UNIFIL to the international frontier where it can play the role originally assigned to it of restoring international peace and security. I and my staff have done everything in our power to bring about that result. I regret to have to report to the Council that our efforts have not succeeded. I believe that the only hope of progress now lies in a determined effort by the Security Council itself.

33. I accordingly recommend that the members of the Council, both collectively and individually, should take urgent action to unblock the present impasse and make substantial progress towards implementation of resolution 425 (1978), which will be the best way of improving the security of the personnel of UNIFIL. If such progress is not achieved soon, I believe that the Council may be compelled to give serious consideration to withdrawal of the Force, despite the very damaging consequences that could result.
