

UNITED NATIONS INTERIM FORCE IN LEBANON (UNIFIL)

FACT SHEET

BACKGROUND

- The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, UNIFIL, is one of the UN's oldest peacekeeping operations. Its nearly 2,000 troops and 50 unarmed military observers are tasked with seeking to maintain a ceasefire along the 70-mile (121 km) United Nations "Blue Line" between Israel and Lebanon, by patrolling, observing, reporting violations and liaising with the parties.
- UNIFIL was established in 1978 by the United Nations Security Council (Resolution 425). The Council authorized "a United Nations interim force for Southern Lebanon for 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...."
- The Council's action followed years of tension along the Israeli-Lebanon border, a March 1978 attack in Israel by Palestine Liberation Organization fighters coming from Lebanon and a subsequent Israeli invasion of south Lebanon.
- Cross-border fighting continued, Israel did not completely withdraw, and the authority of the government of Lebanon was not restored in the south. Under these circumstances, UNIFIL could not fulfil its responsibilities under 425.
- In June 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon and subsequently established its own security zone inside the country, which remained until they withdrew in June 2000. 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.
- With the departure of the Israel Defence Forces, the UN established the "Blue Line," conforming to the internationally recognized boundaries of Lebanon, to be used to confirm the Israeli withdrawal. UNIFIL moved southwards and deployed along the Blue Line as Lebanese authorities took control of some of the area vacated by Israel. At the same time, Hezbollah militia also entered the area, exerting de facto control along the Lebanese side of the Blue Line.
- In January 2001, the Secretary-General determined 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."
- UNIFIL was to remain focused on "restoring international peace and security" with the functions of an observer mission.
- At the request of the Government of Lebanon, the Security Council has regularly renewed UNIFIL's mandate, which is currently set to expire on 31 August 2006. Over the past six years, the Security Council has deemed that UNIFIL's presence has been helpful in promoting stability. Although punctuated by frequent ceasefire violations and occasional serious incidents from both sides of the Blue Line, relative calm existed until 12 July 2006 (when full-scale hostilities erupted).

- In January 2006, UNIFIL noted that the situation along the Blue Line had grown more tense, and Secretary-General Kofi Annan appealed to the parties not to endanger the lives of civilians in the area. As he had done repeatedly over the years, he urged the Lebanese authorities to take responsibility for security in the area and to deploy sufficient forces to protect the population and stop Hezbollah attacks from Lebanon into Israel, reiterating that UNIFIL stood ready to help. He also called on Israel to cease its air incursions into Lebanese air space.
- In his July report on UNIFIL, covering the period from 21 January through 18 July 2006, the Secretary-General observed that the start of the new hostilities on 12 July had “radically changed the context” in which the mission operated. “In the current environment, circumstances conducive to United Nations do not exist”, he said, adding that the Force was restricted from carrying out even basic activities, such as the ability to re-supply its positions and to conduct search and rescue operations on behalf of its personnel.
- With UNIFIL’s mandate due to expire on 31 July, the Secretary-General recommended that the Security Council extend it only for one month pending consideration of other options for future arrangements in South Lebanon. The Council agreed with the Secretary-General’s recommendation and, by its resolution 1697 of 31 July, extended UNIFIL’s mandate until 31 August 2006.
- Along with UNIFIL, the Secretary-General’s Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian Authority (Alvaro de Soto) and the Secretary-General’s Personal Representative for Lebanon (Geir Pedersen) have worked together to attempt to defuse crises and to promote a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East. In that effort, they are joined by Terje Roed-Larsen, the Secretary-General’s Envoy for Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004).
- Based in Naqoura, in south Lebanon, UNIFIL consists currently of some 1,990 troops, who are assisted by 50 military observers from the nearby UN Truce Supervision Operation (UNTSO) based in Jerusalem. UNIFIL is supported by 95 international civilian personnel and 295 local civilian staff. The Force Commander, Major-General Alain Pellegrini, hails from France, one of the troop contributors along with China, Ghana, India, Ireland, Italy and Poland.
- UNIFIL operates on a budget of \$94.2 million annual budget, however it has suffered from chronic budget shortfalls and unpaid assessments to troop contributing countries currently amount to approximately \$68 million.

UNIFIL’S ACTIVITIES

- Before the current escalation of hostilities, UNIFIL’s activities included:
 - ⇒ Maintaining the ceasefire through patrols, observation from fixed positions and close contact with the parties;
 - ⇒ Within its limited means and thanks to contributions of Troop Contributing Countries, assisting the civilian population with medical care, water projects, equipment or services for schools or orphanages and supplies of social services to the needy;
 - ⇒ Clearance of mines and unexploded ordnance.
- In the current situation, UNIFIL has seen its freedom of movement severely impaired, yet it continues to occupy all of its positions.
- Despite the restrictions to its freedom of movement, and at great risk to its personnel, UNIFIL continues to carry out the following humanitarian activities, albeit in a limited manner:
 - ⇒ Evacuation of civilians away from the areas of greatest conflict;

- ⇒ Escort of a humanitarian convoys;
- ⇒ Distribution of food and water to vulnerable populations;
- ⇒ Evacuation of wounded civilians;
- ⇒ Treatment of civilians at UN medical facilities;
- ⇒ Provision of water to local hospitals;
- ⇒ Evacuation of foreign nationals.

DPI, updated 10 August 2006