



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

UNDERSTANDING CRISIS RESPONSE: THE CASE OF  
UNIFIL AND PEACEKEEPING IN SOUTH LEBANON

by  
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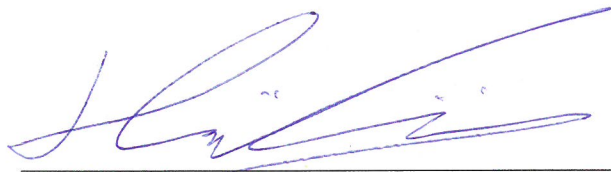
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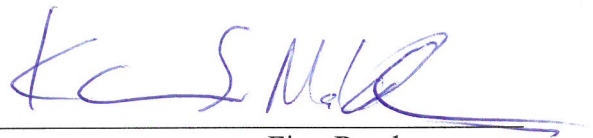
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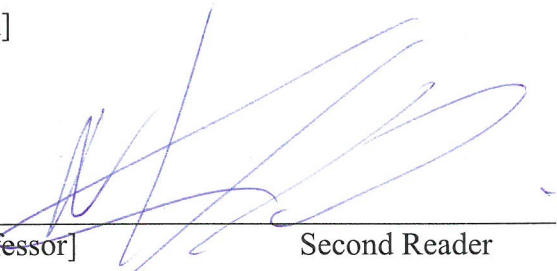
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Special thanks to Mr. Andrea Tenenti for his great help in facilitating my entries into the UNIFIL HQ in Naqoura, facilitating interviews with civilian and military personnel of the force, and providing valuable information and insight on the peacekeepers activities in South Lebanon and the imageries surrounding UNIFIL.

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Finally, I would like to extend my recognition and thanks to my mother, whose nature has taught me to pursue objectivity and question the authenticity of things, and my father, whose experience in the UN has helped me select and go forward with the subject of this project.

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

Lorenzo Guicciardini Corsi Salviati for Master of Arts  
Major: Public Policy and International Affairs

Title: The United Nations In South Lebanon: A Case Study Of Different Representations Of International Peacekeeping

UNIFIL arrived in South Lebanon in 1978 with the mission to ensure the retreat of Israeli military forces from the country, protect the local civilian population and survey the non-violation of the demarcation line separating Israel from Lebanon. The missions' mandate was extensively modified in the summer of 2006 after a month long war between Israel and Hezbollah, which caused great amounts of civilian deaths and damage to infrastructure on the Lebanese side, and extended the size of the mission from about 2000 to 15000 soldiers. UNIFIL has thus undergone important changes in its nature, broadening its mission from ceasefire monitoring and protection of civilians to providing humanitarian aid and services to the people of South Lebanon. However, many critics argue that UNIFIL is merely a tool, disguised as a necessary actor for the development of South Lebanon, that serves the interests of the United States of America and its allies, mostly within the Liberal International Order (LIO), and is intended to restrain the activities of Hezbollah and ensure that Lebanon, and/or any force within its borders, would not be capable of posing any type of threat to Israel. With this critique come notions of neocolonialism, forceful involvement of the LIO and neoliberalism into Lebanon, as well as a questioning of the definition of international peacekeeping.

This project examines the crisis management strategies and guidelines of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in order to better understand how this peacekeeping force is intended to, and how it currently operates. In clarifying this aspect of UNIFIL, this project would make use of their crisis management strategy as an introductory case study to be used in a critique of the peacekeeping mission. My research focused on UNIFIL civil affairs and military personnel using quantitative research to provide an understanding of the crisis management strategy. Then, in order to provide insight on existing critiques of UNIFIL, a qualitative analysis was conducted based on both the feedback given by the aforementioned informants as well as secondary academic and research sources.

Through the case study of UNIFIL's crisis management strategies and guidelines, this project aims to provide a platform with which both representations of this peacekeeping force – as a necessary and useful presence in terms of humanitarian aid and development versus an actor that serves the interests of the LIO – may be contrasted and compared.



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## CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

On the morning of December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the Israeli army initiated “Operation Northern Shield” to search for, discover and destroy tunnels they suspected had been dug by Hezbollah from Lebanon into their territory. The operation was two years in the making and involved extensive preparation on behalf of the Israelis, involving underground radar and seismic location techniques.<sup>1</sup> The operation discovered at least six tunnels crossing the border, one of which reached the astonishing depth of 80 meters below ground, was equipped with electrical lighting, rails intended for equipment transport and even a garbage disposal system. The Israelis declared the tunnels to be infrastructure that Hezbollah intended to use to carry out “terrorist” attacks on civilian and military targets in their territory. A rapid escalation in tensions followed. Israel assigned responsibility of these tunnels to the Lebanese government, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) peacekeepers UNIFIL long deployed in southern Lebanon as an interposition force. This led to a confrontation between the IDF and LAF along the Blue Line (the border demarcation between Israel and Lebanon, defined by the UN in 2000 as the line of withdrawal of Israeli forces).

Ultimately, through the mediation of UNIFIL, this confrontation was resolved in a non-violent way and to the satisfaction of all the relevant parties who had no interest in escalating. UNIFIL’s successful action in defusing this situation was part of its prepared crisis management strategy. This strategy entailed the rapid deployment of

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<sup>1</sup> Judah Ari Gross, *IDF releases seismic audio of Hezbollah digging into Israel*, Times of Israel, 10 December 2018

interposition forces; the immediate conduct of thorough investigations, in tandem with the Lebanese authorities; the disabling of the tunnels that were deemed a violation of the relevant UN resolutions; and the facilitation of indirect talks between the IDF and LAF.<sup>2</sup>

This project explores in more detail UNIFIL's crisis management strategy and procedures. In so doing, it will provide insight into how sudden tension between Lebanon and Israel can be resolved to preserve the delicate truce. It examines how UNIFIL's personnel perceive and react to the situation in South Lebanon, as well as how they must balance realities and the overall uncertainty on the ground with the general and rigid boundaries imposed upon it by superior bodies, such as the United Nations Security Council and/or the foreign policies of countries like the US and Israel. The project seeks to better understand the challenges related to UNIFIL's crisis management process, both physically (eventual military maneuvers) and discursively (reports, announcements, public relations). Finally, after discussing UNIFIL's understanding of crises and its reactions to them we will see how their responses have, in certain cases, attracted critique from a mostly academic sphere. Indeed, some scholars consider UNIFIL to be an actor through which the US and its allies in the Liberal International Order hope to reduce Hezbollah's influence, a strategy Israel strongly supports. Others however see it in a more positive light, considering it to be a necessary actor that actively contributes not only in defusing tensions between the Israeli and Lebanese governments, but also in developing infrastructure in the South of the country.

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<sup>2</sup> Un.org/press, *Tunnels under 'Blue Line' between Lebanon, Israel Violate Resolution 1701 (2006), Peacekeeping Chief Says, Urging Calm in Briefing to Security Council*, United Nations Security Council, 19 December 2018

## **A – Methods**

Overall, this project employs two methods. The first relies on data analysis drawn from relevant primary (UNIFIL publications, UN resolutions, interviews etc.) and secondary sources (scholarly articles, books and policy briefs). The idea here is to provide the historical and political context of UNIFIL's presence in southern Lebanon; and analyze the various actors involved, namely UNIFIL, the UN Security Council and its relevant Member States, as well as the local actors in Lebanon. The second method is based on semi-structured interviews, observation and field notes. These provide a realistic and original account of UNIFIL personnel narrative regarding the situation in general and by extension, about the processes and procedures involved in the creation of a response to various crises.

### ***1. Contextualization and Secondary Sources Analysis***

In order to introduce the main issues around crisis management and response UNIFIL has to face, literature on peacekeeping forces in general will be studied. Sources such as UNIFIL publications were an interesting source of material, as they provided an understanding on how the peacekeeping force treats particular incidents. The vocabulary with which they described the various issues or procedures was also very indicative of how UNIFIL perceived the mission it had to undertake in South Lebanon, making efforts in order to ensure the utmost neutrality. Press publications were also part of the research as they directly contributed to the formulation of a crisis,

and provide the opinion, or at least the vision, actors other than UNIFIL have about particular situations. Furthermore, secondary sources of academic origin were also an interesting source in terms of broader contextualization and historical detail, as well as content relevant to the critique of the peacekeeping mission's crisis response strategies. These secondary sources did not only provide information on how UNIFIL functions within its theatre of operation, but also helped understand the underlining effects peacekeeping forces such as UNIFIL may have when deployed on peacekeeping missions. In this case, the peacekeepers have been known to touch both sides of this spectrum: on one hand, the locals profit from their presence (bars serving alcohol in Tyre target UNIFIL personnel as clientele, sports and tactical equipment stores with signs in English, French and Italian on the road leading up to UNIFIL's HQ in Naqoura etc). On the other, locals have often accused UNIFIL of violating their sovereignty and have even physically clashed with its peacekeepers.<sup>3</sup> Both these elements critically affect the object of research of this project, namely what limitations is UNIFIL subjected when it comes to crisis response.

## ***2. Interviews***

The interviews will provide first hand testimonies concerning UNIFIL's perception of the existing situation and how they view themselves in its regard. The interviews I conducted were held either in the UNIFIL HQ in Naqoura, or in various public spaces in Beirut. The interviews were based on a semi-structured format and the data I acquired through them would complement observations done in the HQ as well as in various areas around South Lebanon, that I have had the chance to visit during my

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<sup>3</sup> Lamis Andoni, *UNIFIL "on shaky ground" in Lebanon*, Al-Jazeera, 3 August 2010

two-and-a-half years stay in the country. In total, I interviewed six UNIFIL staff, one of which had to retract their statement as it had not been authorized by their superior officer, three of which were officially interviewed and two of which preferred not to be named/mentioned at any point in my research. Of the three officially interviewed, one was Andrea Rossi, a Military Information officer from the Italian contingent, working for UNIFIL rather than his contingent. The second was Andrea Tenenti, head of the Strategic Communications and Public Information office, and the third was Imran Riza, the Deputy Head of Mission and head of the Political and Civil Affairs office. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour and a half, were conducted in Italian, French or English. For the most part, the UNIFIL staff would speak to me freely, albeit certain cases would often employ “textbook UN” answers in order to ensure neutrality or refrain from making any dangerous statement. UN bureaucracy made it so that it was difficult for me to enter UNIFIL HQ, although as a friendly compatriot, Andrea Tenenti was an invaluable asset and greatly facilitated my multiple entries on the base. Furthermore, I had the chance to speak with UNIFIL soldiers, from the Indonesian and Spanish contingents, and understand how they viewed the situation they were in and what they believed they were doing as part of this peacekeeping mission.

### ***3. Observation and Field Notes***

Additional data was collected through observation. The typology of observation adopted would vary according to whether or not interviews would be conducted on that day, and if interviews are conducted on UN military bases, where I would obviously be seen as a civilian. Otherwise, I had the chance to observe UNIFIL operations (mostly

patrols) during trips to South Lebanon to visit friends or their families in the area. During these observations I managed to observe how UNIFIL operated roadblocks, in coordination with the LAF, patrols, with jeeps in certain areas – or with Armored Personnel Carriers in others.

## **B – Lessons Learnt from Field Study**

The various identities that I had during the time I was conducting research for this project have had decisive impacts, both positive or negative, on the access to sources or channels of information relevant to this study. As a student enrolled at the American University of Beirut (AUB), the notion of academic research was automatically carried with any introduction or interview request I would send via email or other types of messaging platform. For the more “institutionalized” audience targeted, mostly UN staff, this meant that whatever exchange that followed would have been inscribed in a specific framework – in this instance that of research for an authentic, justified academic body – and therefore subjected to a set of rules.

For example, this meant that any interview conducted was preceded by a short introductory talk about the rules that applied, mostly about confidentiality and how the information gathered would be stored and treated. In fact the first “direct” contact with UNIFIL, namely an introduction to Andrea Tenenti, head of their office of Strategic Communications and Public Information, was facilitated by AUB professor Karim Makdisi. The latter was my thesis advisor, and having extensive experience in writing about the UN both in Lebanon and on an international level, had equally vast knowledge of UN staff that was relevant to this research project. Thus I must have come

to Andrea Tenenti's attention not only as an academic and as a friend of a friend, equipped with the appropriate tools and mentorship to conduct research on the subject of the UN, but also as a compatriot, as both of us are Italian nationals. The fact that we could converse via email, telephone or during the interviews in Italian also must certainly have had an impact on the quantitative and qualitative aspect of our exchanges. These advantages, namely the academic identity provided by AUB, the experience, knowledge of the subject and personal contact as guaranteed by my thesis advisor Karim Makdisi (and at that point in time, with Andrea Tenenti), also facilitated contact with Imran Riza, the head of UNIFIL's Political and Civil Affairs office, who provided important additional information for various aspects of this project. The Italian aspect of my identity also came in handy in establishing "personal" contact with Andrea Rossi, who was introduced to me by Andrea Tenenti later on. He was, at the time, a soldier serving with the Italian contingent and therefore not part of the UNIFIL civilian staff that I had been introduced to by contacts established beforehand. Finally, the advantage of speaking four main European languages, all of which were represented by contingents at UNIFIL, allowed me to have relative independence in their headquarters in Naqoura. This granted me the opportunity to easily approach and converse with soldiers or civilian staff serving or working with UNIFIL, both on as well as off-base, providing general information of how these people perceived their role and that of the mission in Lebanon as a whole.

The advantage of being a European AUB student conducting field research was beneficial in interacting with the UN, or UN affiliated parties. It was not however with the local population, whom I was told would not be inclined to share information with somebody who was not only not Lebanese, but not from that particular region of the



country, who did not speak Arabic, and who's intention was to ask a set of questions about the presence of foreigners (some of which were of my nationality) on their land. Although I did not even approach any local inhabitant of South Lebanon with the intention of interviewing them officially, limiting my interactions with them to the regular ones I would have when visiting the region "off-duty" as to say, I was discouraged from doing so by various Lebanese professors at AUB as my intentions could have potentially been misinterpreted and observations skewed by their interaction with a foreigner, and indeed a national of a large UNIFIL contingent. My project was thus not about local perceptions.

Having said that, people that are originally from, or live in, South Lebanon that knew me or whom I was introduced to by friends were very eager to provide their opinion on the presence and activities of UNIFIL in their areas. On one particular occasion, a person that was introduced to me in a situation unrelated to any research for this project did provide invaluable help for it, unbeknown to both of us. This person greatly facilitated my acquisition of a permit to visit South Lebanon (it is required for any foreigner to have said permit in order to visit most of the southern part of the country) with Lebanese Intelligence by introducing me to relevant people, thus speeding up the usually slow bureaucratic process needed to acquire said permit.

Thus, the various identities I carried with my during the researching phase of this project had both positive and negative results. Indeed, it went from facilitating access to the South of Lebanon, as well as creating a comfortable environment in which the UN staff would converse with me, to almost entirely barring any form of questioning relevant to this project vis-à-vis a the population living in the area.

## CHAPTER II – CONTEXTUALIZING UNIFIL AND THE PLAYING FIELD IN SOUTHERN LEBANON

### **A – The Snake Biting its Own Tail: UNIFIL’s Battle Hardened Peacekeepers**

The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) attacked and invaded South Lebanon on March 14, 1978, in order to establish a security buffer zone as a response to attacks from Palestinian resistance groups based in Lebanon. UNIFIL was subsequently established through UN Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426 of the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1978, its mission being to ensure the withdrawal of Israeli troops and the respect of Lebanese sovereignty, and saw its first troops deployed in Southern Lebanon four days later. Israeli forces withdrew soon afterwards, with the exception of the Shebaa Farms and the village of Ghazar (territory that is still contested today by both countries), and left in its place its proxy Lebanese militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA) in order to assert its hegemonic position. The SLA, in turn, illegally prevented UNIFIL forces and the Lebanese army from entering the border area per the UN resolutions. However, Israel launched a much bigger and more violent invasion once more in the summer of 1982, with the declared intention of eliminating Palestinian resistance forces there and establishing a friendly Lebanese government. It fully occupied South Lebanon and laid siege to Beirut. Whilst Lebanese and Palestinian resistance groups soon pushed Israeli forces out of Beirut, Israel maintained its occupation of Lebanon south of the Litani River. This meant that not only had Israel troops unlawfully crossed the entirety of

UNIFIL's area of operations in violation of resolution 425, but UNIFIL peacekeepers were in an unprecedented situation of operating within an occupied territory. Since it was unable to effectively implement its core mandate, after 1982 UNIFIL began focusing its efforts on the provision of humanitarian aid to civilians in its areas of operations, and the recording of various violations by all sides in its regular reports sent to the UN secretary general and Security Council.<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the unforeseen result of Israel's 1982 invasion was the replacing of Palestinian resistance groups (that had to redeploy outside of Lebanon following a US-mediated plan) with nationalist, leftist and Islamist Lebanese ones. Following its formal establishment in 1985, Hezbollah slowly became the main resistance force against Israel's occupation in Lebanese lands. The IDF invaded Lebanon three more times: during "Operation Accountability" in July 1993, with "Operation Grapes of Wrath" in April 1996 and the last time during the "Second Lebanon War" in August 2006. In these instances UNIFIL often got caught in the crossfire, forbidden to actively participate in the events militarily or to respond with a defensive strategy, thus becoming a somewhat sedentary bystander hiding in plain sight. The peacekeeping force is still active in the area today, forty-two years after its initial intervention, which raises questions over the efficiency or success of what is one of the longest ongoing peacekeeping missions in United Nations history.

### ***1. A More Robust UNIFIL in the Aftermath of the 2006 War***

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander Mattelaer, *The Politico-Military Dynamics of European Crisis Response Operations*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013

Following Israel's invasion in the summer of 2006, the Security Council passed Resolution 1701 that beefed up UNIFIL's mandate, scope, and numbers. The peacekeeping force was to now carry out its mission, within the same Area of Operations (AO) as before, located "between the Litani River in the North and the Blue Line in the South," by carrying out the following activities: <sup>5</sup>

- Monitor the cessation of hostilities (without naming specific parties to the hostilities) and ensure the non-violation of the Blue Line;
- Assist in the deployment of Lebanese armed forces in South Lebanon and along the Blue Line and coordinate such activities with both the Governments of Lebanon and Israel;
- Create an "area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL" in its area of operation. <sup>6</sup>

More controversially however, due to the dual-identity of Hezbollah as a political party, in the eyes of the Lebanese state and people, and a "terrorist" organization in the eyes of the LIO, UNIFIL was from then on mandated

- To ensure "the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, so that, pursuant to the Lebanese cabinet decision of 27 July 2006, there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State." <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> UNIFIL, *UNIFIL Operations*, retrieved from UNIFIL's website

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1701*, 11 August 2006

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*

Since 2006 and the re-haul of UNIFIL via Resolution 1701, southern Lebanon has witnessed overall peace and stability thanks, in part, to the efforts of the peacekeepers. The Tripartite mechanism, which refers to meetings brokered by UNIFIL that bring the IDF and LAF around a negotiating table, is one of the multiple crisis management strategies employed by the peacekeepers, and who have effectively contributed to 14 years of continuous peace in the area.

Following the election of Donald Trump in 2016 as the president of the United States, the US, in close collaboration with Israel, began to take a more aggressive stance towards UNIFIL and its perceived slow progress and ineffectiveness in disarming Hezbollah. In 2017, UNIFIL's normally routine yearly mandate renewal sparked a big debate as the US tried to change its terms. Ultimately, UN Member States reached a compromise of sorts, with UNIFIL agreeing to take a more active approach while maintaining its strict adherence to its mandate under Chapter VI of the UN Charter; and respect of Lebanon's sovereignty, represented in particularly by its partnership with the LAF.

Resolution 2373 (2017) requests UNIFIL "to take all necessary action in areas of deployment of its forces and as it deems within its capabilities, to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind."<sup>8</sup> The US has accused UNIFIL of being ignorant about what was really going on in the field concerning Hezbollah more than once, particularly through the Trump administration's former ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley.<sup>9</sup> She had managed to include "more bellicose

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2373*, 30 August 2017

<sup>9</sup> Karim Makdisi, *The UN Mission in Lebanon, Saved From the US Ax for Another Year*, PassBlue – Independent Coverage of the UN, 2018

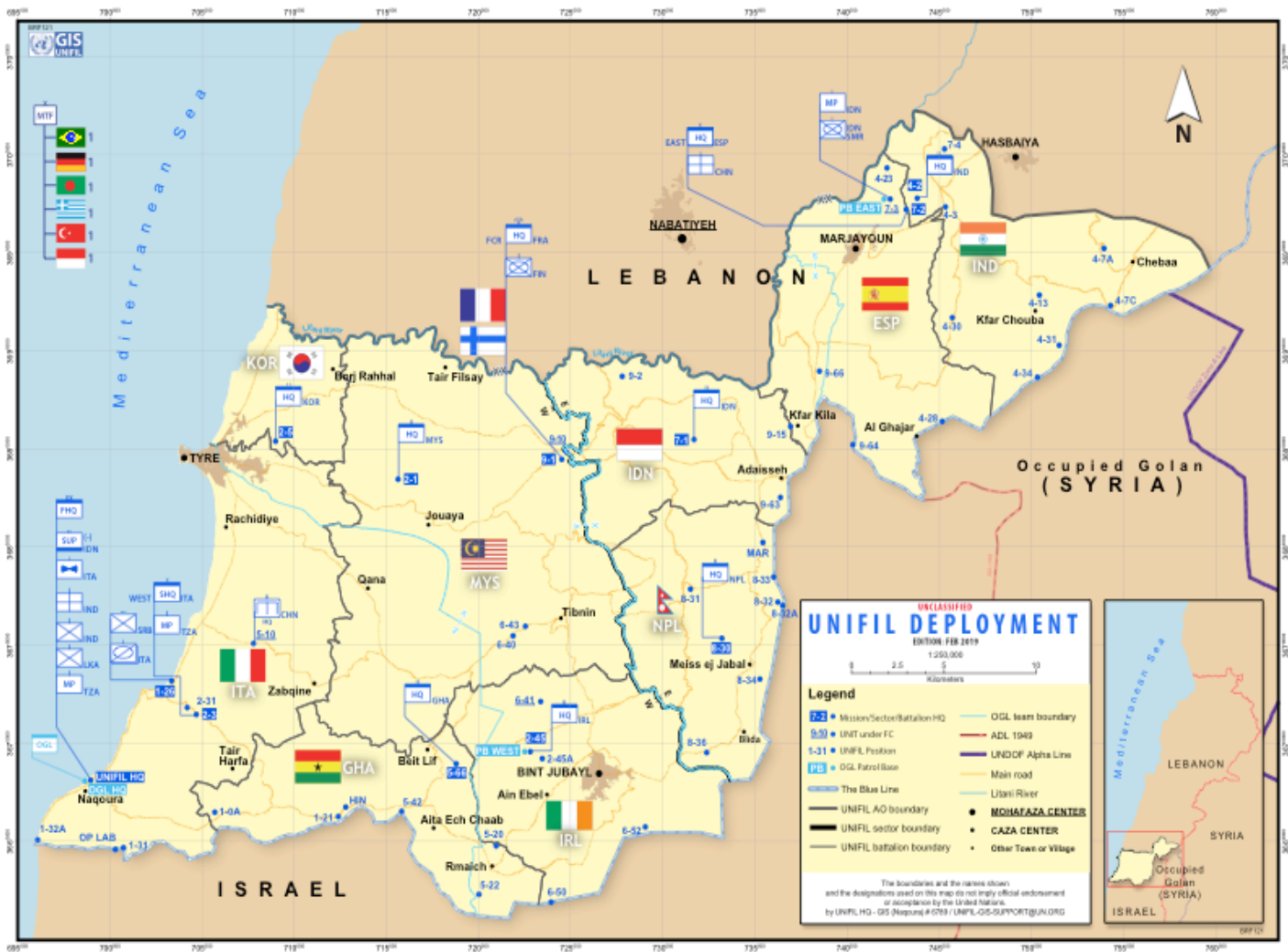
language concerning UNIFIL’s mission to find and disarm Hezbollah’s arms by taking “all necessary action”” in two UN Security Council Resolutions (Resolution 2373 in 2017 and Resolution 2433 in 2018) concerning the peacekeepers mandate.<sup>10</sup> This is reflected by the last mandate renewal through Resolution 2485 in 2019, which tasks UNIFIL to focus on the deployment of the so-called LAF “Model Regiment,” a unit of the Lebanese army that is meant to become the border guard for the country, provide surveillance on its border with Israel and ensure that no violations of the Blue Line – from either side – were to happen. This regiment is therefore the physical replacement of UNIFIL once the UN would terminate their mission.

Resolution 2373, as seen previously, has requested UNIFIL to be more direct in enforcing the strict non-military nature of Southern Lebanon. More importantly however, Resolutions 2373 and 2433 requests that the UN peacekeepers conduct more patrols in their area of operations in order to “increase its “visible presence” in southern Lebanon.”<sup>11</sup> This, in addition to the last and more controversial requirement in UNIFIL’s mandate, contribute in feeding the idea of it being a police force meant to keep Hezbollah in check, under the command of the US government via the UN Security Council, rather than a peacekeeping force with aims to improve the civil infrastructure in South Lebanon.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>11</sup> Karim Makdisi, *The UN Mission in Lebanon, Saved From the US Ax for Another Year*, PassBlue – Independent Coverage of the UN, 2018



*Map of UNIFIL's Area of Operations as of February 2019.*

*Source: UNIFIL online photo gallery.*

## 2. Catch 22

Thus, although its objectives seem straightforward, there are a couple important aspects that ultimately constitute UNIFIL's Catch 22. Because the mission operates in Lebanon at the consent of the government, it must communicate and receive approval for any search of private property. Such searches are meant to discover weapons caches,

which may or may not belong to Hezbollah operatives. However, Hezbollah is an official political party in Lebanon, with strong influence within the government as well as with local municipalities in the South, thus allowing them to exert pressure vis-à-vis the government's granting of consent for searches of private property to UNIFIL. Furthermore, the peacekeepers also find themselves having to compete with organizations belonging to or partnering with Hezbollah in the provision of social and economical aid via development projects in the same region, which as we have mentioned above, is something that Hezbollah does, and does so very effectively.<sup>12 13</sup>

## **B – South Lebanon as a Geopolitical Arena**

What follows is a description of the various actors UNIFIL must work with (or around) in order to fulfill its objectives, which consist mainly of ensuring a cessation of hostilities in South Lebanon, assisting the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in the area and monitoring any violations of the Blue Line.

The first thing to consider when examining UNIFIL's track record are the dynamics surrounding Israel and its interests in the region, which when regarding Hezbollah, are closely linked to those of the USA. Israel has been at war with every neighboring country since its creation in 1948. It has invaded Lebanon multiple times (three of these were full fledged invasions, other operations would last a week or less), each time met with opposition and resistance from various military and paramilitary entities. Indeed, Hezbollah, or the Resistance as it is called in parts of Lebanon, has

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<sup>12</sup> Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, 8 March 2019

<sup>13</sup> Susann Kassem, *The United Nations Peacekeeping Practice In Southern Lebanon: "The International Community" And Local Autonomy*, American University of Beirut, October 2011



gained its popularity and credibility by resisting the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon from 1978 to 2000 as well as its managing to repel this larger and better-equipped foe in the month-long 2006 war. Hezbollah's strong ties to Iran may explain its rapid rise in both military/infrastructural capabilities since its foundation in 1985. However, it is the organization's administration of vital services such as security and education and most importantly healthcare that truly helps them "win the hearts and minds" of the Lebanese population. It is one of the largest providers of social welfare in Lebanon, "currently operating at least four hospitals, 12 clinics [...] medical care is also cheaper than in most of the country's private hospitals and free for Hezbollah members."<sup>14</sup> The Taif Agreement, which was the result of lengthy negotiations in between various parties and actors, constituted the framework for a return to normalcy in Lebanon, established timeframes for the withdrawal of Israeli and Syrian troops that were occupying the country and reassert authority of the Lebanese government in the entirety of its territory. This agreement also stipulated that Hezbollah was to be the only armed group to not be disarmed after the Lebanese Civil War, as it had gained its stripes and legitimacy by resisting the Israeli invasion in the south of the country. Therefore, it still constitutes a capable vector today for Iranian influence (in both Lebanon and Syria), as well as a powerful military threat to Israel, and, by extension, the USA.

In addition, there is an ongoing regional Saudi-Iranian "Cold War" that makes Lebanon and the political affiliations of its population (made up of eighteen religious, social and sectarian groups) one of the most heterogeneous playing fields in this context. Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies, backed by the United States, are strongly opposed to Iran and its attempt to extend its sphere of influence, essentially Syria and

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Speetjens, *The many hands and faces of Hezbollah*, The New Humanitarian, 26 March 2006

Lebanon. Anti-Iranian sentiment, in addition to the USA's close relations with the Saudi alliance and Israel, brings America closer to the Jewish state. In Syria the government itself, and most of the population, is pro-Iran. In Lebanon however, the situation is more complicated as certain parties support the Saudi axis and others the Iranian one. This division is seen both in Parliament and the government, but it also translates itself to the greater population, according to ethno-sectarian distribution domestically.

Therefore, the goal of the USA, Israel, and the Saudi alliance to reduce Iran's influence in the region would require reinforcing the Christian and Sunni dominated Lebanese state via economic, military and diplomatic support, whilst weakening Hezbollah by any means possible. As direct intervention by the US is politically and diplomatically impossible, UNIFIL thus constitutes a means to channel indirect US influence via the UN Security Council. As will be seen in greater detail below, UNIFIL's mandate includes assisting the LAF, the official military force of Lebanon, to regain full control of the South of the country from Hezbollah. However results to date have been poor due to the lack of coordination within the Lebanese government: it does not fully exercise the functions of a nation state such as providing security and welfare in the area, something that Hezbollah has been doing since the Lebanese Civil War (1975 – 1990). A population will tend to support the organization or militia that takes care of them and, although this is true around the world, it is even more so in the case of post-war Lebanon (both the Civil War and the 2006 Israeli invasion).<sup>15</sup> In addition to popularity gained through the provision of social services, Hezbollah has also grown more visible in its representation of its constituents – mainly the Shi'a of southern

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<sup>15</sup> Judith Harik, *The Public and Social Services of the Lebanese Militias*, Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1994

Lebanon and the Beqa'a – in official Lebanese politics and institutions.<sup>16</sup> Thus, because the Lebanese government does not effectively provide social services in areas where Hezbollah does, and that the LAF have not been present in South Lebanon since after the 2006 war, there is a duality of power in the region.<sup>17 18</sup> Here, both the State and Hezbollah share legitimacy, control, and the ability to make use of violence. Hezbollah can thus be described as a state within a state.

### **C – Limitations Applied by These Parties**

UNIFIL thus operates in a very fragile and complex situation: on one hand it must enforce its mandate and ensure that Southern Lebanon is under the complete control of the Lebanese government, but on the other it cannot violate the rights of civilians by aggressively raiding their houses with the objective to seize or raid Hezbollah weapon caches or tunnel entrances for example. In practical terms, UNIFIL is in a difficult position because if it were to aggressively pursue its mission of ensuring that Hezbollah should be incapable of conducting any military operation – thus removing one of its facets of control in South Lebanon; it would lose favorable support on behalf of the civilians it is protecting and helping, and by extension “converting” its support for Hezbollah to that for the Lebanese government. But if it were to cooperate with them in order to better accomplish its mission through co-operation with local, Hezbollah dominated, municipalities – which includes providing educational and

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<sup>16</sup> Eyal Zisser, *Hizballah in Lebanon*, Lebanon: Liberation, Conflict and Crisis; Palgrave MacMillan, 2009

<sup>17</sup> Judith Harik, *The Public and Social Services of the Lebanese Militias*, Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1994

<sup>18</sup> Andrea Rossi, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019

humanitarian assistance to the local population, something the “Party of God” is already carrying out – UNIFIL not only goes against its mandate rules, but it also risks incurring the anger of key UN Security Council actors such as the US, as well as actors on a regional scale such as Israel. The two portrayals of Hezbollah – as an officially supported and popular resistance group or as terrorist force – are incompatible. Confusingly however, Resolution 1701 – and by extension, UNIFIL’s mandate – incorporates both of these perceptions.<sup>19</sup>

With these difficulties, UNIFIL has very little space to maneuver in, and all it can really and effectively do is to maintain calm and stability in South Lebanon. Not only does this provide a safe environment for the inhabitants of the region, which is one of the main requirements of its mandate, but it also makes the implementation of its humanitarian programs possible. It is important to remember, however, that these two elements are complimentary. As underlined by Alexander Mattelaer, “crisis response operations represent an instrument to contain conflict by maintaining or re-establishing a minimum level of physical security. [...] Efforts’ may include political negotiations, humanitarian aid and development assistance, or relate to military assistance intended to influence the local balance of power. As such, crisis operations represent an instrument that is politically versatile but militarily inflexible.”<sup>20</sup> Because humanitarian aid may be considered as a strategy to divert attention from conflict, UNIFIL is criticized in the sense that they are not really helping South Lebanon develop its infrastructure through purely benevolent intentions, but rather as to pacify the local population in order to

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<sup>19</sup> Karim Makdisi, *Constructing Security Council Resolution 1701 for Lebanon in the Shadow of the “War on Terror”*, *International Peacekeeping*, 18:1, 4-20, 2011

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Mattelaer, *The Politico-Military Dynamics of European Crisis Response Operations*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013

better conduct policing activities over Hezbollah.<sup>21</sup> UNIFIL's presence already contributes to infusing its military culture into the civilian world surrounding it, but with the implementation of Resolution 2373 and UNIFIL stepping up its patrols both in quantity and duration (particularly with its new, joint UN-LAF 36-hour patrols),<sup>22</sup> this visibility could potentially have counterproductive effects as it could reinforce the image of it as an occupation force rather than peacekeepers. Indeed, academics such as Chiara Ruffa and Alexander Mattalaer, as well as UNIFIL decision makers have identified that over militarization of the peacekeeping force is detrimental to their image.<sup>23</sup>

So UNIFIL is trapped in between a mandate it cannot fulfill, and even without being able to do so, it is still criticized by certain delegates at the UN Security Council, and to a certain extent, the US and its closest allies, for not policing Hezbollah strongly enough. Thus, currently, in order to carry out its mandate, the peacekeeping force must proceed with extreme caution, as a hard line in any direction could destabilize the fragile equilibrium it has achieved. UNIFIL must therefore juggle between following the orders of the UN Security Council to the best of their ability, and the realities, or limitations, imposed to them on the ground by Hezbollah, Lebanese law and sociopolitical realities. Every move UNIFIL makes must be preceded by careful analysis of these realities not only in South Lebanon, but also in the country as a whole. This being said, one of the most critical parts of UNIFIL's *modus operandi* in this regard is their crisis management procedure, which is what this project will address in

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<sup>21</sup> Susann Kassem, *The United Nations Peacekeeping Practice In Southern Lebanon: "The International Community" And Local Autonomy*, American University of Beirut, October 2011

<sup>22</sup> UNIFIL, *Al-Janoub: In Pursuit of Lasting Peace*, issue n°22, September 2018

<sup>23</sup> Chiara Ruffa, *Military Cultures and Force Employment in Peace Operations*, in *Security Studies*, p.391-422, 2017; see also Alexander Mattalaer, *The Politico-Military Dynamics of European Crisis Response Operations*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013

the following section. Understanding the mechanics and dynamics of this procedure will provide a base from which to look at UNIFIL as a whole in a critical manner.

### CHAPTER III – THE MECHANICS OF UNIFIL’S CRISIS MANAGEMENT

This chapter seeks to provide a technical overview of how UNIFIL responds to crises, and specifically the hierarchical order and processes through which such events are detected, analyzed and (generally) gradually de-escalated. When a crisis arises, UNIFIL has a “short-term” response system that begins with a network of information gathering and transmission. This network is built both vertically and horizontally: the former follows strict military-like hierarchical pattern, whereas the latter employs a more sociologically oriented approach. Once information on a crisis is conveyed through this communications network, both the (deputy head of mission...) head of the Political and Civil Affairs unit and the Head of Mission and Force Commander (HMFC) interpret the nature and scope of the immediate crisis and initiate a commensurate short-term response plan.

UNIFIL also heavily focuses on long-term analysis, which consists in a more preventive type of crisis response and resolution (one could say “crisis aversion”). This first level of crisis management could be considered as a form of soft-power, where humanitarian aid, development projects, economic aid, social programs etc. are tools employed by UNIFIL to “tenderize” the local population, confirm to them that their mission in South Lebanon is meant to benefit them, as to create a secure environment

for the peacekeepers to carry out their activities by appealing to the local population as a positive element in their daily lives.

We will now present four of the most essential crisis management strategies employed by UNIFIL, namely the short term crisis response which is itself linked to an intricate information chain, long term crisis prevention strategies based on both “humanitarian” efforts and the Tripartite meetings mechanism, and finally the ability for UNIFIL to resort to diplomatic assistance from its Troop Contributing Countries.

## **A – UNIFIL and its Short Term Crisis Prevention**

### ***1. Vertical Information Chain***

With UNIFIL being composed of mostly military personnel, it is no surprise that a component of crisis management as crucial as information and communication be handled in a very structured manner. Andrea Rossi, a UNIFIL information officer of the Italian contingent, explains:

*“Every brigade [sector] has it’s own, they’re called Tactical Operational Centers (TOC’s) and they are the lowest level. They monitor patrols, when they go out and when they come back, they know what is happening – if there is an incident, like “I blew a tire” to “people are throwing rocks at us” – they report it. All TOC’s reports go to the Joint Operations Center (JOC), which is ours, and we therefore gain a general vision of the entire area of operations. We monitor it 24/7, it works the same during the night as during the day, thus telling us everything that is happening at any time.”<sup>24</sup>*

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<sup>24</sup> Andrea Rossi, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019

In addition, because UNIFIL possesses the first and currently only naval task force attached to a peacekeeping mission, it also has a Naval Operational Center (NOC) which monitors incidents reported by the Maritime Task Force (MTF) in its area of operations.<sup>25</sup> There are two TOC's, one for each sector; one NOC that takes care of all maritime reporting; and one JOC, based at the Naqoura HQ. The intelligence gathered from these sources, which is also referred to as J2, the NATO codename for military intelligence, constitutes a verified source of information UNIFIL as it is gathered following thorough UN-guidelines and requirements.

Therefore, the information gathered by the 450+ daily patrols throughout UNIFIL's area of operations is automatically reported and archived by the Operational Centers. This not only enables the immediate crisis response cell to have up-to-date information in order to provide adequate responses to heated events, but also provide an important database to be used in the long-term analysis and prevention side of UNIFIL's crisis management strategy. The patrols provide a main source of information that reaches the JOC, however there are other founts of intelligence that feed its database, one of which is data provided by both the LAF and IDF, usually through direct contact UNIFIL's HMFC. Either he (or she, although there has not been a female HMFC yet) initiates contacts officials from the LAF or IDF, or one or both parties contact him to inform UNIFIL about ongoing or impending events that could potentially create disturbances.<sup>26</sup> Therefore the HMFC's role is critical in the gathering of up-to-

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<sup>25</sup> Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019

<sup>26</sup> Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019



date intelligence through his communications network with the military forces of Lebanon and Israel.

## ***2. Horizontal Information Chain***

This approach compliments the previous, more military-organized system. It is more sociopolitical in nature, as it does not rely on UNIFIL personnel but rather on local inhabitants for information, which by extension contribute to the design of prevention strategies. As explained by Andrea Tenenti, head of the office of Strategic Communications and Public Information, civilians constitute a great asset in terms of up-to-date information, as they are constantly present on the scene.

*“The link we have with the local press/population constitutes an early warning system and [is something very important to us]. [...] Actually, when something happens we usually get the first call from a local journalist or street contact. They tell us “we heard an explosion here, something there, we heard there was a violation of the Blue Line” and then we inform the JOC. [...] Many times, logically, we have to verify it. Anything we report has to be verified by the mission before communicating it externally. But, I have to say that about 80% of the time where news comes from local journalists, something actually has happened. Maybe not at the level that was communicated to us in the first place, but there is always something. So the function of the office of Strategic Communications and Public Information is also to check with JOC if certain events*

*actually happened, violations of BL, shepherds being taken by the IDF etc. These are things that start our [crisis response] procedure.”<sup>27</sup>*

The civilian staff of UNIFIL is largely composed of Lebanese nationals, which also constitute a source of information when it comes to eventual crises. Their friends or relatives may resort to contacting them directly through private channels instead of official UNIFIL communication lines, in which case the information would therefore end up being brought forward by a staff member. However, this does not exclude the information from having to be verified. UNIFIL also surveys the local populace in order to understand how their policies are perceived by the inhabitants. These surveys therefore provide the peacekeepers with an idea of how they are perceived by the locals, which gives them the insight on how they could potentially better their ways of operating, and therefore their image. However, the perceptions offered by these surveys are to be taken with a pinch of salt, as is mentioned by Imran Riza, the head of the Political and Civil Affairs office: “I’m very careful about the perception surveys because they can be so influenced by particular events and particular times, and so one has to really triangulate the data a lot to understand what is happening.”<sup>28</sup>

To summarize, the JOC gathers and stores information from the peacekeepers’ patrols, local journalists and in some cases civilians with “personal” contacts within UNIFIL’s Strategic Communications & Public Information or Political & Civil Affairs departments, the LAF and IDF via the HMFC. The information is verified to ensure its

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<sup>27</sup> Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019

<sup>28</sup> Imran Riza, *Interview of Imran Riza*, April 17th, 2019

authenticity, which then leads to the eventual activation of crisis resolution procedures. Although this vertical information and communication apparatus serves mostly the requirements of an immediate crisis resolution process, it may also be used to develop long-term strategies in order to avoid the occurrence of certain incidents. This responsibility is what the offices of Political and Civil Affairs (headed by Imran Riza) and Strategic Communications and Public Information (Headed by Andrea Tenenti) take care of.

Once intelligence of a particularly heated situation reaches headquarters, UNIFIL can then lay out the options available in order to calm things down between the actors involved. We will now see how UNIFIL has made use of these information chains in terms of its crisis management strategy.

### ***3. The Case of Israeli shellings***

On April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1996, the Israel attacked Lebanon in response to skirmishes between IDF soldiers and Hezbollah fighters that had been ongoing since beginning of the month of March 1996. The IDF struck civilian infrastructure and residential areas outside of the area in which fighting was happening, including in Beirut. Within South Lebanon however, some residents had sought refuge in UNIFIL bases and compounds, which are clearly marked by black and white UN signs. The UN compound near the village of Qanaa, which had been marked on Israeli maps for 18 years, was struck by the IDF in retaliation to Hezbollah artillery fire, which originated from an area close to the compound. The ensuing shelling from the IDF killed 106 Lebanese civilians who had sought shelter in the compound, and injured hundreds of others including UNIFIL

peacekeepers. Andrea Tenenti spoke to me about a similar event during that had happened during 2006 war, in which four unarmed peacekeepers from the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)<sup>29</sup> were killed, stating the following:

*“The Israelis also retaliated on the Observer Group Lebanon [UN military personnel tasked with observing and reporting], military observers, and the base. I went to see it immediately after the bombardment happened in 2006, the base is on high ground/hill, and it’s very clear [clearly identified]. It’s a white building with UN written on it, it’s huge, and there’s nothing else. And it had been hit two or three times, taking out everyone inside it. Anyway in that case, Israel said it was a mistake, that Hezbollah was around there. There has never been a true justification for killing those UN observers.”*

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In this particular case, the previously mentioned communication channels served as a means to quickly gather information about the incident that occurred on the ground. They allowed UNIFIL to warn its personnel about the impending Israeli strikes, in order to seek shelter for them as well as for the civilians living in the area, which helped reduce casualties. The Head of Mission and Force Commander is the incarnation of this communication role, as he is in contact with officials from both the Lebanese and Israeli side in order to acquire up-to-date information and to try and quell tensions when they arise. Furthermore, once he is aware of the severity of the crisis thanks to information from the TOCs and NOC or from local civilian contacts, he can send out orders to all

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<sup>29</sup> UNTSO was founded in 1948 with the main task of providing a military headquarter for peacekeeping operations in the Middle East, including UNIFIL, facilitate their jobs when it comes to carrying out their mandates and to monitor the multiple ceasefires in the region.

<sup>30</sup> Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019

UNIFIL personnel in order to commence preparations for defense and protection. He is therefore one of the most important assets when it comes to mediation and de-escalation of tensions; for example, as explained to me by Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi, if a crisis were to escalate to a level in which UNIFIL would expect a violent action or retaliation of some sort (which is usually delivered from the Israeli side, although UNIFIL personnel is occasionally targeted by Hezbollah militiamen), the commander activates his direct communication network with high ranking officials in the IDF and LAF, with whom he has previously been in contact with and maintains a somewhat “familiar” relation.<sup>31</sup>

This is the quick reaction tool UNIFIL has at its disposal when it comes to situations like IDF shelling in its Area of Operations. By using this network of information, UNIFIL is able to prepare its soldiers as well as local civilians in the event of shelling from the Israelis, thus reducing or avoiding casualties altogether. Another mechanism the peacekeepers have at their disposal is the Tripartite meetings, which provide a different type of protection. Indeed, this particular mechanic, unlike the one we have just discussed, serves a medium to long-term purpose of de-escalation and conflict management.

## **B – The Tripartite System**

### ***1. Tripartite meetings as alternative communication channel***

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<sup>31</sup> *Interview of internal UNIFIL source*, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019; see also Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019

The Tripartite meetings (or just “the Tripartite” for short) are reunions between officials from the LAF and IDF, brokered by UNIFIL, where both parties discuss military and strategic issues, such as military movements and static presence, observation posts, the demarcation of the Blue Line, or incidents that have occurred along the Blue Line for example.<sup>32</sup> The Tripartite happens in a building located on the coast, just south of the UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura, in a small stretch of land in-between both sides of the Blue Line, so technically located neither in Lebanese nor Israeli territory. One of the most important topics at the Tripartite, at least in terms of something part of UNIFIL’s de-escalation toolkit, is that of the Blue Line demarcation negotiations. When a crisis flares, this is a topic on which UNIFIL can attract the attention of both parties, who take it extremely seriously because it essentially means they are drawing the border in between their countries. One must understand that in the Middle East, much of the borders have remained unchanged from a time in which colonial powers drew them without any consultation to the local populations during high-profile events such as the Treaty of Versailles (1919) or the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine (1947). Now, the Blue Line is the demarcation for the line of withdrawal imposed by the international community. However, it can be considered as a *de facto* border, as if one were to cross it they would risk either being shot at or creating an international conflict, which seems to pretty strictly define a boundary in between Lebanon and Israel. The Tripartite brings officers from the IDF, officers from the LAF (and sometimes “*some men in jeans and t-shirts, not wearing any uniform but with*

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<sup>32</sup> Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019; see also Alexander Mattelaer, *The Politico-Military Dynamics of European Crisis Response Operations*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013

*military boots,*” thus most probably Hezbollah members <sup>33</sup>) together to undertake a task that is very similar to that traditionally reserved to politicians, kings or emperors. <sup>34</sup> It is understandable how this task could easily calm tensions by tapping into the egos of military officers on both sides of any potential hostility along the Blue Line, and therefore be used as a crisis-quelling tool. During the Tripartite, the LAF and IDF officers are accompanied by UNIFIL peacekeepers and other UN observers who act as spectators, who assist in facilitating the meets and provide the following service: after the meetings in the aforementioned designated building, all parties physically visit the contentious border areas, and by using maps and GPS, agree on where the demarcation should run through. Then the group watches as UNIFIL physically marks the agreed border with blue pillars anchored in concrete blocs, topped with a large barrel painted in blue and bearing the markings “UN - BLUE LINE – LINE OF WITHDRAWAL 2000 - DO NOT TRESPASS” in both English and Arabic. According to UNIFIL, the Blue Line demarcation procedure constitutes a crisis management/resolution mechanism to the extent where the peacekeeping force manages to transfer tensions emanating from both parties from a potential battlefield to the meeting table. <sup>35</sup> Naturally, as explained by Andrea Tenenti, it does have its limitations insofar as there is only so much territory that can be demarcated, as after “13 years of stability, [which] was something unthinkable for South Lebanon, the only issues left to solve are the “hot,” more complicated ones. There is however the problematic of the last 13 reservation points.”

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<sup>33</sup> Andrea Tenenti during a presentation of UNIFIL’s activities to students from the American University of Beirut at the UNIFIL HQ in Naqoura, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>35</sup> UNIFIL, *unifil.unmissions.org*; see also Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019; see also Alexander Mattelaer, *The Politico-Military Dynamics of European Crisis Response Operations*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013

<sup>36</sup> These last areas of contention remain practically untouchable by UNIFIL because, at the end of the day, a peacekeeping force does not have the political power to draw borders, and both Israel and Lebanon disagree on who would own which of these 13 areas. This particular issue will therefore remain a point of friction until a solution is found through political and diplomatic channels. Andrea Tenenti explains:

*“This doesn’t mean that it will stop the mission, but it is important to focalize on these aspects and think on how to go about solving them. This means more bilateral meetings, more tripartite meetings with the commandant and also having the international community supporting the mission. So having important countries outside [uninvolved] of the mission should also support the peace process, moving from a temporary ceasing of hostilities to a permanent ceasefire.”*<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019

<sup>37</sup> Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019





*One of the demarcation pillars along the Blue Line with inscriptions in English and Arabic.*

*Source: UNIFIL online photo gallery.*



*UNIFIL and LAF personnel verifying the exact positioning of one of these pillars via GPS in 2010.*

*Source: UNIFIL online photo gallery.*

## ***2. The Case of the Olive Trees***

As the Blue Line runs across private property owned by Lebanese farmers, and because their physical markings are pretty recent, an incident flared up in August 2010 when IDF soldiers cut down olive trees in the area of Al Adeisse, within territory that both the Lebanese and Israelis claimed to be their own. The LAF fired shots towards the soldiers, to which the IDF responded with small arms fire, shelling and airborne attacks. This confrontation led to the death of one IDF officer, three LAF soldiers and one Lebanese journalist. UNIFIL confirmed the trees were on the Israeli side, and that it had

been notified by the IDF about imminent “maintenance operations.”<sup>38</sup> This was the most notable of these types of incidents, although many similar ones involving agricultural land/issues have occurred on multiple occasions. One of these, for example, involved a relatively old man who attempted to harvest olives from his olive tree plantation sparked a non-lethal, but yet tense, confrontation between both sides. The farmer crossed the Blue Line (either knowingly or unknowingly, as it is difficult to confirm that the markings were evident – if even present – at the time) to pick up fallen olives that had rolled down a depression in the terrain into the Israelis claimed to be their own.<sup>39</sup> The main issue in these cases was that the Blue Line was not completely agreed upon by both sides, and therefore not completely and efficiently marked. However, UNIFIL has managed to temporarily solve these types of incidents through the Tripartite talks:

*“There are seasonal agreements, for example when there is olive harvesting, in the region of Bleeda (RDV location). The trees are on one side of the olives fall on the other, so every time it’s a mess because the farmers want to cross to pick up their olives, or to access the wells. So we came up with an agreement, which is kind of lasting with the IDF, where when the picking season comes we [UNIFIL] assist to the olive picking process. These are agreements that are done in order to decrease tensions and make it that the local population does not have problems.”*<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Unknown author, *Tree that sparked deadly border clash on Israeli side*, says UN, The Guardian, 4 August, 2010

<sup>39</sup> *Interview of internal UNIFIL source*

<sup>40</sup> Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019

The Tripartite therefore provides a clear advantage in terms of crisis management. By being able to meet all parties, UNIFIL constructs a relationship with them that can help pursuing the short-term strategies as seen in the previous section on vertical and horizontal information chains. Furthermore, the Tripartite can be credited with reaching agreements such as the seasonal olive harvesting one, which is a clear representation of the efficiency of this mechanic. In the following section we will see how UNIFIL can make use of its relations with the sovereign states that contribute troops to its body. Bilateral communication with them is constant, and can be easily and efficiently coordinated by the men and women serving these countries under the UNIFIL mission.

## **C – Diplomacy: What Nation-States Can Provide to UNIFIL**

### ***1. Diplomacy as a crisis-management tool***

The solicitation of external help from countries is another important tool UNIFIL has at its disposal in terms of crisis management. It usually involves Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs as the peacekeepers call them) through diplomatic contact. For example, in the event of a crisis, the HMFC can contact the Italian ambassador in Lebanon who in turn could use the influence Italy has with both countries to try and reduce tensions. Or the HMFC could contact the French ambassador in Beirut, who in turn could contact his or her counterpart at the UN in New York, which could lead to the French exerting pressure at the UN Security Council, influencing for or against a particular vote, as an attempt to reduce tensions in Lebanon.

<sup>41</sup> This diplomatic option is not limited to UNIFIL Troop Contributing Countries however; Andrea Tenenti mentioned how sometimes ambassadors could use their influence to try and have non-contributing nations help through political leverage or economic clout. <sup>42</sup>

The non cordial relations between the LAF and the IDF seem to come from the lack of motivation both countries have when it comes to conducting negotiations between each other, which in turn is most likely fueled by the constant bellicose attitude and expansive strategy of the Israeli government and the hatred of the latter by the people and government of Lebanon. It should not officially be the job of a peacekeeping mission to reduce tensions between the two countries, but rather for discussions to be held by diplomatic missions or at peace conferences. However this confirms that, throughout the years, UNIFIL has evolved from monitoring a ceasefire to an entity providing a platform through which at least some diplomatic contact between Lebanon and Israel is conducted, and to some extent an actor in the negotiations and relations between both countries.

## ***2. The Case of Italy and its role in UNIFIL***

After the summer 2006 invasion of Lebanon by the IDF, which included airstrikes and airborne operations all around the country, Italy played a leading role in terms of reaching a ceasefire through the UN and the international community, establishing the renewed UNIFIL through Resolution 1701 and provided a large amount of troops, resources and equipment to the peacekeeping force. In Italy, the then recently

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<sup>41</sup> *Interview of internal UNIFIL source*, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019

<sup>42</sup> Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019

elected government led by Romano Prodi had the objective of establishing the country as a powerful player in the Mediterranean, as well as acquiring a more important role in international affairs – including through organizations such as the UN and its peacekeeping operations.<sup>43</sup> Italy managed to convince the Israelis to lift the blockade of Lebanon in exchange for having Italian Navy patrol the coast until the Maritime Task Force was established, they are the second largest TCC for UNIFIL (with 1078 soldiers, 231 less soldiers than Indonesia, the largest TCC), operates the ITALAIR helicopter task force (thus being the only country conducting airborne operations for UNIFIL) and four out of six of the force commanders have been Italian since the war. Furthermore, Italy has contributed about €415 million in 2009, directly to UNIFIL, as well as over €200 million in funding for emergency programs in Lebanon through the ministry of foreign affairs.<sup>44</sup> The Italian contingent, as well as the Italian embassy, facilitates financing for local civil society projects, as mentioned by Andrea Rossi: “*Donors are put in contact by the Italian CIMIC directly with the projects [...]. Italy is only the middleman; it does not take the donor’s money. It puts the donor in contact with the final user.*”<sup>45</sup> The importance of UNIFIL as a diplomatic tool for the Italian state affects the willingness, speed and efficiency with which Rome may interact with its contingent there, the peacekeeping force as a whole, as well as the relations with the country of Lebanon. In fact, the small country represents one of the biggest economical interests in the Mediterranean for Italy, as shown by the mutually enthusiastic signing of offshore

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<sup>43</sup> Lucia Marta, *The UNIFIL II Mission in Lebanon: Italy’s Contribution*, Security and Defense n°125, Real Istituto Elcano, 2009

<sup>44</sup> Lucia Marta, *The UNIFIL II Mission in Lebanon: Italy’s Contribution*, Security and Defense n°125, Real Istituto Elcano, 2009

<sup>45</sup> Andrea Rossi, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019

exploration and drilling rights of the Bloc 4 and Bloc 9 oil fields to the Italian Eni energy group, amongst others.<sup>46</sup>

This is a clear example of how bilateral relations can be taken advantage of by UNIFIL in order to reduce tensions in South Lebanon, particularly when other, more localized solutions are insufficient. In the following section we will address one of UNIFIL's long-term solutions, which is probably more relevant to the notion of conflict aversion rather than conflict resolution.

## **D – Civil-Military Cooperation**

### ***1. CIMIC and the case of QIP's***

Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC) essentially consists in coordinated efforts, mostly humanitarian in nature, between UNIFIL and the local population, and they are often financed by UNIFIL contributing countries. These projects contribute to creating a peaceful and stable environment for the peacekeepers to carry out their activities – at least from the Lebanese side. These projects and activities, as defined in the CIMIC section of the UNIFIL website, range from liaison and coordination with “*local government representatives, community leaders, religious figures, civil society groups and international agencies engaged in development activities*” (i.e. a Spanish funded community center in Marjayoun intended to serve as grounds for facilitating the organization of healthcare, educational and environmental activities); supporting local communities by advising “*on funding support from external donors for projects in*

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<sup>46</sup> Mauro Indelicato, *Il Libano “Chiama” l’Italia: gli Interessi Economici in Ballo*, Inside Over, 7 February 2019

*South Lebanon*” (i.e. by having UNIFIL cooperate with local civil-society and NGOs to carry out projects); socio-cultural activities to “*build relationships*” between the peacekeepers and the local population (i.e. the South Korean battalion offering martial arts classes or the Indian battalion teaching yoga to schoolchildren); or via direct support from UNIFIL peacekeepers to communities “*using the skills and technical expertise*” of specific battalions to provide tailored services (i.e. the Indian battalion providing veterinarian services to livestock).<sup>47</sup> Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) are the physical embodiment of the CIMIC strategy. These are, still according to UNIFIL, “small-scale, low cost projects, funded by our missions, that are planned and implemented within a short timeframe. QIPs aim to build confidence in the mission, the mandate or the peace process.”<sup>48</sup> CIMIC can thus take various forms, physically via QIPs, where infrastructure is constructed/repared etc., but also through the socio-cultural activities and support to local communities mentioned above. Therefore the QIPs, or the CIMIC strategy as a whole, do create, renovate or replace public infrastructure and provide employment, education and healthcare for the local population living within UNIFIL’s area of operations, and therefore become a part of the development of the region. From public street lighting, (sometimes even solar-powered as seen on parts of the *corniche* of the city of Tyre – more advanced than what can be seen in certain cities of the very country that pays for this particular project, in this case Italy), the rehabilitation of a football field in Marhawin, to fixing roads in Kafer Chouba or installing a water network in the town of Sribbin, humanitarian efforts undertaken by UNIFIL unquestionably have some positive effects in terms of development, and because they vary quite a lot in nature, and thus have an effect on

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<sup>47</sup> UNIFIL, [unifil.unmissions.org/unifil-civil-interaction](http://unifil.unmissions.org/unifil-civil-interaction)

<sup>48</sup> [peacekeeping.un.org](http://peacekeeping.un.org), Quick Impact Projects For Communities



various tranches of the local population.<sup>49</sup> In certain cases, CIMIC provides services that would not exist if they were not the responsibility of UNIFIL, in particular that of public professional veterinary services to local shepherds and livestock farmers.<sup>50</sup> This impacts the image of UNIFIL in South Lebanon in a positive way: they are liked by the local population because of the assistance they provide. This in turn helps to create a safer environment for the peacekeepers to operate in.



*UNIFIL soldier from the Indian contingent vaccinates a goat in July 2018.*

*Source: UNIFIL online photo gallery.*

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<sup>49</sup> UNIFIL, *Quick Impact Projects File*, from [unifil.unmissions.org/unifil-civil-interaction](http://unifil.unmissions.org/unifil-civil-interaction), last updated 13 September 2019

<sup>50</sup> *Interview of internal UNIFIL source*

## ***2. Humanitarianism or Soft Power***

However this strategy has raised issues and criticism of UNIFIL as a whole, because of the very fact that CIMIC and QIPs are a tactic meant to provide strategic gains for the peacekeepers, contributing to ensuring the smooth running of UNIFIL operations in the area, rather than stemming from genuine humanitarian motivations.<sup>51</sup> For the supporters of this criticism, the logic UNIFIL is adopting here relates to the proverb “do not bite the hand that feeds you,” where as long as the locals actually need the peacekeepers, they will tolerate their presence and potentially dissuade any hostile action against them. By placing itself as such, the peacekeepers aim to not only improve their image in the eyes of the local population; but also to provide an alternative “developmental” solution to the tranche of population who does not fully support Hezbollah, and thus win their “hearts and mind” by fulfilling good deeds. Furthermore, although UNIFIL has its projects sanctioned by the Lebanese authorities, it is not the only provider of basic goods and financier of public works for the population of South Lebanon: it competes with groups such as Hezbollah, who have public support and admiration in the region, in terms of the provision of public services. Nevertheless, the fact remains that primary services are, in the case of CIMIC, being provided to the local population by foreign powers instead of local authority (or authorities), who are not humanitarian workers but soldiers with weapons and military vehicles, which makes it easily understandable how this could be considered by some as a form of neo-colonialism. Susann Kassem, a former AUB student from South Lebanon, wrote her thesis about UNIFIL and its peacekeeping practice, putting forwards many arguments

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<sup>51</sup> Susann Kassem, *The United Nations Peacekeeping Practice In Southern Lebanon: “The International Community” And Local Autonomy*, American University of Beirut, October 2011

relating to neocolonialism and Western control over the area and its population. As mentioned previously, UNIFIL and Hezbollah are essentially competitors in terms of infrastructure development and/or in the provision of public services. This, however, creates a dependency of the population towards UNIFIL, allowing for the provision of humanitarian and developmental aid to become a tool for propaganda and political control, used to legitimize their presence in South Lebanon.<sup>52</sup> Neoliberalism and neocolonialism seem to merge here, whereas we have this idea that humanitarian aid is a means through which peace and democracy can be achieved by creating a safe environment for such enterprises to flourish, we also have armored vehicles crisscrossing the countryside roads of South Lebanon, manning checkpoints (albeit alongside the LAF, but most often in larger and more imposing vehicles than the local authorities) which is somewhat resembles military occupation.<sup>53 54</sup> The international ideologies behind such criticism will be addressed with a larger scope and in greater detail in section IV, subsection C, and focus on the crisis management and stability implementation “tools” UNIFIL has in its arsenal.

We have seen how UNIFIL’s crisis management and response strategy functions by incorporating both a very bureaucratic/administrative approach to intelligence gathering and interpretation, reflecting the military face of this peacekeeping mission; a more pragmatic approach that relies on local contacts (civilian or military/governmental) for information and assistance; and a more diplomatic tool,

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<sup>52</sup> Susann Kassem, *The UN Peacekeeping Agenda in a Southern Lebanese Village – “The International Community” and Local Autonomy*, American University of Beirut, October 2009

<sup>53</sup> Alexander Mattelaer, *The Politico-Military Dynamics of European Crisis Response Operations*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013

<sup>54</sup> Mandy Turner, *Completing the Circle: Peacebuilding as Colonial Practice in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, *International Peacekeeping* Vol. 19, 2012

which could either come as aid or influence from foreign powers, or through the Tripartite system by involving both Lebanese and Israeli authorities in negotiations; as well as the provision of goods and services to the local population. There are various critiques of each of these responses to crises, for example, the provision of humanitarian aid, which UNIFIL justifies as a pragmatic solution that effectively reduces tensions by improving their relationship with the local population, has been criticized by some as being more of a “soft-power” or political tool rather than actual humanitarian actions. These critiques are what the following chapter discusses.

## CHAPTER IV – UNIFIL’S LIMITATIONS AND CRITIQUE

The difficulties UNIFIL encounters in the exercise of its activities do not only come from its area of operations in South Lebanon itself, some of them escape the rules and reach of the aforementioned crisis management and resolution mechanism. Indeed, some of the biggest issues UNIFIL has to deal with come either from its hierarchy (the United Nations General Assembly, UN Security Council, UNIFIL contributing countries) or from international diplomacy (foreign policies of countries such as the US or Israel). As we have seen, these foreign policies may often provoke crises within UNIFIL’s Area of Operations, to which the peacekeeping mission has an elaborate array of options in order to respond to these crises. However, there are various criticisms of the crisis response strategies as well as the peacekeeping force itself, which is something we will see in this section.

## **A – The Intricate Relationship Between Hezbollah and UNIFIL**

Before we address each of the four main crisis response strategies listed in chapter III, it is essential to understand the relationship between UNIFIL and Hezbollah. This relationship is one of the most common critiques concerning UNIFIL's activities within its area of operations: how can UN peacekeepers function in an area that is almost completely controlled by a group with which they are not allowed to work with, let alone contact? How can the peacekeepers, in relations to the short term crisis response mechanism that we saw in chapter III section A, communicate with Hezbollah, who is one of the two actors usually involved when conflict arises?

As mentioned in the introduction, resolution 1701 incorporates two portrayals of Hezbollah that are incompatible. The group is recognized and legitimized by a great portion of the Lebanese people as a resistance group, which fought back against Israeli military presence in South Lebanon since its creation until their withdrawal in 2000, and again against the IDF during the war of 2006.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore its political wing is an officially recognized party in the country, which receives a large amount of votes during both local and national elections, and is currently represented within the Lebanese cabinet. However, the US, the Liberal International Order (LIO) and a various UN Security Council member states recognize Hezbollah as being a terrorist organization, meaning that UN policy in general, and by extension UNIFIL, cannot recognize them as an official entity.<sup>56 57</sup> As per later resolutions 2373 and 2433, the peacekeepers are

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<sup>55</sup> Karim Makdisi, *Constructing Security Council Resolution 1701 for Lebanon in the Shadow of the "War on Terror"*, *International Peacekeeping*, 18:1, 4-20, 2011

<sup>56</sup> US Department of State, *Designation of Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, Federal Register Vol. 62 – N°195, 8 October 1997

<sup>57</sup> UK Home Office, *Proscribed Terrorist Groups or Organisations*, April 12th, 2019

meant to search and seize weapons caches belonging to Hezbollah. Ironically however, this must be done in coordination with the LAF, as the US, LIO and by extension UN recognize the legitimacy and authority of the Lebanese state, backing their support with the argument that its government is democratically elected (which contains members of Hezbollah). Needless to say that this situation makes it practically impossible to see a Lebanese government that is strongly enough opposed to the group in order to order what is essentially the disarming of its military wing. This duality is probably the biggest inconsistency and weakness of resolution 1701 and UNIFIL's mandate, and because of this, as Karim Makdisi explains, UNIFIL can only exercise part of its mission and “*monitor the cessation of hostilities*’, *‘accompany and support the Lebanese army as they deploy throughout the South*’, and *otherwise assist in humanitarian issues.*”<sup>58</sup> But even carrying out the other tasks in their mandate constitutes a Sisyphean task for these peacekeepers, particularly because of, but not limited to, the following reasons:

- Lebanon's continually sees its airspace violated, its land shelled and its infrastructure threatened by the Israeli military, which in turn prompts Hezbollah to conduct retaliatory actions against Israel either directly or through/from Syria.<sup>59</sup> These actions constantly risk provoking retaliations from both sides, and therefore civilian casualties, and reinforce the idea that UNIFIL is useless as a ceasefire monitoring and peacekeeping force.

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<sup>58</sup> Karim Makdisi, *Constructing Security Council Resolution 1701 for Lebanon in the Shadow of the “War on Terror”*, *International Peacekeeping*, 18:1, 4-20, 2011

<sup>59</sup> Ray Murphy, *UN Peacekeeping in Lebanon : A Case Study*, *International Relations and Security Network*, 2008

- The Lebanese army is stretched thin both geographically, as it has just recently finished fighting the Islamic State on its eastern border, and politically, as the Lebanese government has announced recently that it would cut funding for the salaries and pensions of current LAF members and veterans respectively, which has had some effects on its integrity, and thus its ability, to carry out operations normally.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, increasing its presence in South Lebanon would not appeal Hezbollah, who would inherently see it as an attempt to overthrow its military presence in the area. This means that the possibility to replace UNIFIL with the LAF's Model Regiment is delayed for the time being.
- As mentioned previously, Hezbollah is responsible for much of the welfare and public works in South Lebanon, intended to promote its image vis-à-vis the local population, and its role is also boosted by the fact that the Lebanese government has long ignored that region in terms of public spending, leaving a gap to be filled in terms of political admiration/affiliation.<sup>61</sup> UNIFIL therefore has to compete with a local actor that has enormous amounts of funds dedicated to infrastructure and development programs, as well as tremendous legitimacy in the eyes of the population, whilst representing a foreign entity, mostly made up of European nations (and thus ex-colonial powers). This can only reinforce

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<sup>60</sup> Hajia Houssari, *Lebanese Military Veterans Protest Nonpayment Of Demobbed Soldiers*, Arab News, October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019. See also: Laila Bassam, Angus MacDowall and Issam Abdallah, *Retired Lebanese Soldiers Picket Central Bank Over Cuts*, Reuters News, May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 & Unknown Author, *Lebanon's Retired Army Officers Block Highways in Budget Protest*, Asharq Al-Awsat, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019

<sup>61</sup> Owain Lawson, "Phase "A": Lebanese Engineers, the World Bank, and the Remaking of the Litani River, 1931-1970" lecture, Public Policy and Foreign Affairs from the American University of Beirut, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018

the idea of UNIFIL as a foreign element attempting to replace Hezbollah's influence in the area.

## **B – The challenges of UNIFIL's Short and Medium Term Crisis Responses**

In this section we will see how these elements feed criticism of UNIFIL and its crisis response techniques, by starting with the short-term strategy seen in chapter III section A, as well as the Tripartite meeting and bilateral diplomatic assistance. More specifically, the Head of Mission and Force Commander find himself in need to communicate with Hezbollah, who is one of the two actors usually involved when conflict arises, in order to ease tension. So how can UN peacekeepers function in an area that is almost completely controlled by a group with which they are not allowed to work with, let alone contact?

As seen previously, UNIFIL has an important role when it comes to mediation between Israel and Lebanon. As Hezbollah are often more involved in military escalation and crisis situations with Israel than the LAF or the State of Lebanon itself, they constitute a crucial actor when crises arise. Therefore, when UNIFIL is attempting to open communication channels with the IDF in order to convince them to stop shelling Lebanon, it also sees the need to ask Hezbollah to avoid pursuing any violent action against Israel. It is interesting however to note exactly how UNIFIL communicates to, and is told things by (because it is almost never a two-way discussion), Hezbollah.<sup>62</sup> UNIFIL goes around the issue of not being authorized to

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<sup>62</sup> Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, 8 March 2019



interact with Hezbollah by using the LAF's intelligence branch, nicknamed "LAF Intel" by the peacekeepers or *mukhabarat* in Arabic, as a bridge in order to pass on information to the group, as they have stronger contacts with the local population than UNIFIL or even LAF leadership itself.<sup>63</sup> In this way, the peacekeepers go around the fact that they do not recognize Hezbollah (and thus do not "work" with them) by using a totally legitimate means to communicate with them, therefore making the short-term crisis response strategy possible.

This tactic has its drawbacks: in the event of an immediate crisis, UNIFIL's delivery of a short-term solution would be delayed by having to go through a "middle-man" (in this case the LAF Intel) rather than communicating directly with somebody close to Hezbollah leadership, which could potentially increase the efficiency and rapidity of this crisis response mechanism. However, in practical terms, UNIFIL has managed to go around a limitation imposed upon it in theory by the US, Israel and more generally the LIO, and in practice by its mandate, by using the LAF Intel.

A similar point can be raised when addressing the issues around the Tripartite mechanism. With Hezbollah bearing such a significant responsibility, along with the IDF, in terms of crises arising in South Lebanon, it is ironic that they are not part of the Tripartite meetings whereas the Israelis are. Although Hezbollah remains very present in UNIFIL's Area of Operations, and does show up during events where the IDF and LAF meet outside of the Tripartite meeting facility (during the Blue Line demarcation for example), it is not officially part of UNIFIL's crisis response mechanisms. As it stands right now, there is little to do about this considering the diplomatic and legal

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<sup>63</sup> *Interview of internal UNIFIL source*

relations Hezbollah has with the LIO and, in turn, the LIO's predominance in bodies such as the United Nations Security Council. This concern is also problematic when it comes to bilateral diplomatic relations between Troop Contributing Countries and the IDF. As we have seen in chapter III section C, when the Italian government managed to convince the Israelis to remove their naval blockade of Lebanon, they had provided a valuable service to the country – and by extension UNIFIL. In return for lifting the blockade, the Israelis were promised the MTF: military vessels under the UNIFIL banner that would patrol the coast of Lebanon and ensure that Hezbollah could not import weapons via sea. One of the first ships to arrive were part of the German Navy, and an international incident almost erupted when Israeli fighter jets repeatedly flew at dangerously low altitude right over these ships, despite the German's multiple warnings and eventually, retaliatory threats.<sup>64</sup> This to say that UNIFIL's crisis de-escalation tactic of resorting to bilateral diplomatic discussions between Troop Contributing Countries and Israel is not always effective. Other countries' relations with Israel may be strong, but that has not stopped them from disregarding good diplomatic exchanges when it comes to more local issues it has with Hezbollah for example.

### **C – UNIFIL's Depiction as a Neocolonial Project**

Although it may be possible for UNIFIL to “ignore” members of Hezbollah during their patrols – and thus avoid crossing the lines imposed by its mandate – it is impossible for the peacekeepers to avoid them when carrying out CIMIC operations in South Lebanon, as many administrative and political officials may have tight ties with,

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<sup>64</sup> Karim Makdisi, *Discussion with Karim Makdisi and Nikolas Kosmatopoulos*, 14 February 2019

and in some cases may even be members of Hezbollah. The peacekeepers are obliged to work with local municipalities, as they are composed of elected representatives and officials, and thus are an extension of the Lebanese government. But these bodies can include democratically elected Hezbollah members, in which case working with them would go against UN regulations, because it would philosophically recognize the elected official as a member of that party that just happens to have been elected to a public function. When I asked Major Nina Raduha, the first female contingent commander in UNIFIL history, how they addressed this issue after she spoke at a conference hosted by AUB, she responded saying that UNIFIL see and addresses individuals by their official function – i.e. as mayor – rather than a member of Hezbollah. Like a cat chasing its own tail, UNIFIL is trying to win over the hearts and minds of the population in order try to reduce Hezbollah’s influence, but in certain cases, refusing to affiliate with them means they have less options to work with and they inherently distance themselves from a large part of the population. In situations of crisis where UNIFIL has been too aggressive against Hezbollah, this means that the local population supportive of the group may dislike the peacekeepers even more, and that local municipalities could also purposefully hinder the implementation of CIMIC operations. However ironic this may be, this seems to be the only way UNIFIL can successfully carry out at least a portion of their mandate without crossing any lines imposed by either local (inhabitants, Hezbollah, Lebanese government and officials) or international (UN, US, Israel, LIO) actors.

UNIFIL is criticized as being a neocolonial agency, mostly due to its inability to prevent Israeli violations, which can be interpreted as a strategy in line with the interests of the LIO, as well as its highly militarized nature. There are several arguments that could qualify UNIFIL as biased or as being a proxy serving the interests of the US or Israel, which include but are not limited to its unequal presence along the area of contention; the lack of enforcement vis-à-vis Israeli violations of the Blue Line; the fact that it does not restrict the Israelis as much as it does the Lebanese; that it does not recognize and/or work with Hezbollah or that CIMIC operations are intended to promote neoliberalism, create a favorable environment for the peacekeepers to operate in and replace local public service providers.

In terms of the high-profile militaristic nature of UNIFIL, which can feed the idea that it is “imposing” itself in South Lebanon, the re-design it received after the 2006 war (with Resolution 1701) the peacekeepers maintain a relatively “loud” grip over South Lebanon:

*“Over 60 positions, as well as a series of checkpoints and observation posts, and conducts around 400 vehicle, foot and air patrols over any 24-hour period (both day and night) throughout its area of operations, in both rural and urban areas. These operate in addition to the LAF’s four brigades and a separate artillery regiment, which together carry out 60 patrols over a 24-hour period and maintain more than 100 checkpoints.”*<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> UN Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006),” 29 October 2007.

During a field trip with one of my classes from AUB to UNIFIL's HQ in Naqoura, a briefing explaining the role and mission of the peacekeepers was given to us. During this exposé we were told about a particular type of patrol, called "Area Domination Patrols." These patrols were meant to increase UNIFIL visibility/presence in particular areas that seemed to be more problematic than others, in what I could only expect to be a result of their requirement to apply pressure upon Hezbollah. The extensive military nature of UNIFIL (Assault Personnel Carriers, heavy caliber armor-piercing machine guns atop of their vehicles, bullet proof vests and helmets with assault rifles worn by the soldiers) creates an image that echoes the aforementioned neocolonialist theory: the population of South Lebanon is subjected to an occupation by foreign forces who have, to a certain extent, the power to establish checkpoints, search people, cars and private property.<sup>66</sup> UNIFIL has been confronted to this criticism many times before, and has acted to better its situation on various occasions: European contingents "changed" their vehicles (the French contingent stopped patrolling with the over exaggerated "Leclerc Heavy Modern Battle Tank," which had created much controversy as the Lebanese saw a return of the mandate, to more adapted Renault 4x4 jeeps) or their soldiers, some of whom came from much different operations in countries such as Afghanistan, and trained them in peacekeeping strategy, briefed them on the particularities of the situation in Lebanon and how to act in a way that would improve locations with the local population.<sup>67 68 69</sup> However, as of March 2019, the

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<sup>66</sup> Susann Kassem, *The United Nations Peacekeeping Practice In Southern Lebanon: "The International Community" And Local Autonomy*, American University of Beirut, October 2011

<sup>67</sup> Andrea Rossi, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019

<sup>68</sup> Chiara Ruffa, *Military Cultures and Force Employment in Peace Operations*, in *Security Studies*, p.391-422, 2017

French soldiers (note – not officers) I had the chance to talk to during my visits inside the UNIFIL area of operations had very little to no idea how their presence in Lebanon could bring back negative sentiments in the local populations, and according to Andrea Rossi, only Italy had an official training program for CIMIC and peacekeeping operations for soldiers of its contingent.<sup>70</sup> Needless to say, mistakes committed during operations can instantly reverse all the training in peacekeeping mentioned above:

*“The [CIMIC] project had failed because of the miscommunication between UNIFIL and the municipality of Khiam during the tense relationship in the early summer, when UNIFIL tried to enter a house (suspected of being a hidden weapon-depot) in Khirbet Slim without being accompanied by the LAF.”*<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, any effort made in terms of bettering their image through long-term education and sensibility of the soldiers vis-à-vis the local population can all be discredited by speeches held at the UN Security Council by representatives of a more hard-lining school of thought, a mere tweet by somebody like Donald Trump or a speech by Matteo Salvini in Tel Aviv against Hezbollah, and reinvigorate the idea of UNIFIL being a pro-US/Israel occupying force in the eyes of the Lebanese.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Karim Makdisi & Timur Göksel, Hans Bastian Hauck, Stuart Reigeluth, *UNIFIL II: Emerging and Evolving European Engagement in Lebanon and the Middle East*, EuroMesco, January 2006

<sup>70</sup> Andrea Rossi, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019

<sup>71</sup> Susann Kassem, *The United Nations Peacekeeping Practice In Southern Lebanon: “The International Community” And Local Autonomy*, American University of Beirut, October 2011

<sup>72</sup> Crispian Balmer, *Italy's Salvini criticised by allies for calling Hezbollah “terrorists”*, Al-Jazeera, December 12th, 2018

After the fall of the Soviet Union, US and Western nations redirected their military power to focus on training foreign armies and police forces, quelling civil disorder, providing disaster relief.<sup>73</sup> This so called “Hot Peace” resonates with another argument relating to criticism of UNIFIL and Western peacekeeping in general as being a neocolonialist enterprise: the use of securitization and material support (i.e. the CIMIC development projects) as a type of supercilious First-to-Third World type of relationship that actually aims to serve the interests of the peacekeepers rather than the actual needs of aid beneficiaries.<sup>74 75 76</sup>

*“The United Nations has taken on the role of militarized transnational peacekeepers, even when local communities protest their presence.”<sup>77</sup>*

The notion of *mission civilisatrice*, the underlying principle used by European powers to justify colonization in from the 15<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, resonates in today’s Western-led peacekeeping operations such as this one, insofar as they have to goal “*of ‘developing’ the local population and preparing them for statehood – or at least some version of ‘self-governance’ or conditional autonomy.*”<sup>78</sup> This affirmation particularly stands out during the inauguration ceremonies organized by UNIFIL after the successful

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<sup>73</sup> Catherine Lutz, *Homefront: Military Restructuring, Civilian Camouflage, and Hot Peace*, Beacon Press, 2001

<sup>74</sup> Susann Kassem, *The United Nations Peacekeeping Practice In Southern Lebanon: “The International Community” And Local Autonomy*, American University of Beirut, October 2011

<sup>75</sup> Hugh Gusterson, Catherine Besteman, *Cultures of Militarism*, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 60, February 2019

<sup>76</sup> Mandy Turner, *Completing the Circle: Peacebuilding as Colonial Practice in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, *International Peacekeeping* Vol. 19, 2012

<sup>77</sup> Hugh Gusterson, Catherine Besteman, *Cultures of Militarism*, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 60, February 2019

<sup>78</sup> Mandy Turner, *Completing the Circle: Peacebuilding as Colonial Practice in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, *International Peacekeeping* Vol. 19, 2012

completion of one of their development projects, which for some could stand out as something describable as a White Savior complex:<sup>79</sup>

*“According to the former mayor of Blida, they (UNIFIL) require them to do that, to publicize their work and stay visible. Indeed, the rituals itself are of higher importance to UNIFIL than it is to the citizens of the villages, as they are always very richly documented by the UNIFIL staff but never well visited. After all, they have to legitimize themselves towards both, local people and the international community.”<sup>80</sup>*

Both of these examples feed the idea that UNIFIL represents an extension of American foreign policy, disguised under the notion of “Hot Peace” to justify itself as providing a chance at a better future for Lebanon by securing the south of the country, providing it with humanitarian aid, assistance in developing its infrastructure and other public services. However, we have seen, this aid interferes with that provided by local forces and can be considered as undesired by certain portions of the population, which could in turn reinforce the idea that UNIFIL provides forced or unwanted aid via ambiguous authorization procedures for political/security gains rather than humanitarian requirements.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, the militaristic structure of UNIFIL reinforces the idea of foreign occupation in a country that has previously been subject to colonial rule, ironically by the French who as of October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019, have 668 soldiers in this peacekeeping operation (the 7<sup>th</sup> largest troop-contributing country).<sup>82</sup> However it is important to note that there is a difference between UN civilian staff and UN military

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<sup>79</sup> Susann Kassem, *The United Nations Peacekeeping Practice In Southern Lebanon: “The International Community” And Local Autonomy*, American University of Beirut, October 2011

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>82</sup> [unifil.unmissions.org](http://unifil.unmissions.org), UNIFIL Troop-Contributing Countries



personnel when interacting with locals. Because the former lives in the country the mission operates in, and therefore has much more contact with the local population, has a better understanding of the issues at hand. But the military personnel is “quarantined” inside their bases and essentially only get out and interact with the locals during their operations (in uniform, with military gear, equipment and vehicles).<sup>83</sup>

Of all UN peacekeeping missions around the world, UNIFIL is the one with most fatalities as of August 2019, standing at 316 (since the beginning of the mission in 1978). Of the total number of fatalities, only 14 were civilian staff.<sup>84</sup> It is true that UNIFIL military personnel is on the metaphorical “front line” when it comes to conducting operations, and therefore have a higher probability of injury or death, however it should be taken into account that there is correlation between these accidents, the hard-liner agenda pushed onto UNIFIL by the UN Security Council (mostly initiated by the US and backed some of its allies like France, the UK or Israel), the lack of training in peacekeeping matters (resulting in unnecessary aggressive behavior on behalf of the soldiers), the geopolitical situation on the ground (lack of unity and/or communication between all local actors – Israel and the IDF, the Lebanese government and LAF, LAF Intel, and Hezbollah respectively) and the opinion of the local population vis-à-vis the peacekeepers.<sup>85</sup> These reasons explain why CIMIC, as a crisis preemption strategy, may come under criticism as being a neocolonialist project.

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<sup>83</sup> Andrea Rossi, *Interview of Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019

<sup>84</sup> [peacekeeping.un.org](https://peacekeeping.un.org), Total Fatalities Since 1948

<sup>85</sup> Catherine Lutz, *Homefront: Military Restructuring, Civilian Camouflage, and Hot Peace*, Beacon Press, 2001; see also Susann Kassem, *The United Nations Peacekeeping Practice In Southern Lebanon: “The International Community” And Local Autonomy*, American University of Beirut, October 2011; Hugh Gusterson, Catherine Besteman, *Cultures of Militarism*, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 60, February 2019; Mandy Turner, *Completing the Circle: Peacebuilding as Colonial Practice in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, *International Peacekeeping* Vol. 19,

## CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION

There are innumerable factors that make UNIFIL's mission difficult (if not impossible). International political fractures such as that between Lebanon and Israel, with the US, France and the UK (all permanent members of the UN Security Council) being more benevolent towards the latter, transform into internal issues between UNIFIL in Lebanon and their "command" in New York, which becomes detrimental to the performance of the peacekeepers on the ground.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the existence of Hezbollah as a predominant, locally lauded actor, with which the UN cannot officially interact, makes it difficult for UNIFIL's to materialize its long-term peacekeeping strategies through the provision humanitarian aid and public welfare/infrastructure. These limitations are represented through various UN Security Council resolutions and UNIFIL's mandate (which incorporate several inconsistencies such as the double identity of Hezbollah – both a recognized political party and a terrorist organization), local jurisdiction issues and Lebanese/international law (limits search operations that would constitute breaches of private property) and radical foreign policies, actions or statements done by foreign leaders (such as Nikki Haley's comments we have seen above, or Matteo Salvini calling Hezbollah "terrorists," endangering the Italian UNIFIL peacekeepers operating in South Lebanon for example).

Despite these political and legal restrictions, UNIFIL has managed to find ways to circumvent these difficulties after more than forty years of experience in the field, making it one of the most long-lasting peacekeeping missions, and certainly the most

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2012; Hugh Gusterson, Catherine Besteman, *Cultures of Militarism*, Current Anthropology, Vol. 60, February 2019

<sup>86</sup> Delphine Resteigne, Joseph Soeters, "Inside UNIFIL's Headquarters in Lebanon," *New Wars, New Militaries, New Soldiers: Conflicts, the Armed Forces and the Soldierly Subject*, March 2015

costly in terms of lives. Various loopholes represent opportunities through which UNIFIL can make its way towards accomplishing certain aspects of its mandate: LAF Intel, through which the blue helmets can indirectly “communicate” with Hezbollah without infringing any rules; receiving up-to-date information from local journalists or civilians during moments of crisis, communicating with representatives of foreign governments in order to exert political pressure over the actors involved are examples of these legal “unofficial” means. Other strategies allow UNIFIL to be seen by the local population as being less of a threat and more of a potential partner. CIMIC and other infrastructure/development projects organized, paid for and built by UNIFIL help create a favorable climate for the peacekeepers to maintain their presence in South Lebanon and continue the mission that is expected of them by UN brass and the LIO, in addition to physically creating or improving infrastructure that provides services to the inhabitants of the area.

However, even with these positive aspects, which cannot per se be considered as resulting from solid political reform, but rather temporary adjustments made *in extremis* and on a case by case basis, UNIFIL is still faced with a Sisyphean task. Having very little space to maneuver without crossing any lines, which may and have provoked stark comments by Western leaders, or provoked Hezbollah into what could potentially turn into physical violence, the peacekeepers have to make do with what they have, and in a sense, make peace with the fact that their seemingly aimless mission they have been required to undertake for more than forty years. Thus, maintaining a fragile balance between the aforementioned harsh requests by the UN Security Council, US and LIO versus the image UNIFIL have vis-à-vis the local population, political entities and armed actors in Lebanon is the only thing the peacekeepers can actually

really do as long as they are ordered by their superiors to remain in South Lebanon. UNIFIL's crisis management is a central element of this strategy, as it is both a necessity for them in order to keep their ship afloat, as well as one of the only things it can, legally speaking, do without stepping out of line in addition to CIMIC activity. It is important to remember that UNIFIL does not have the political power to do much, if not anything, about the tense relations between Lebanon, Israel, and Hezbollah. However, it would be a mistake to underestimate the benefits of the communication channels the peacekeepers constantly maintain between the IDF, the LAF, the Lebanese *mukhabarat*, and various governments including, but not limited to, those of Lebanon, Israel and UNIFIL contributing-countries. If this mission were to be disbanded tomorrow, the triangular communication between the Lebanese authorities, Hezbollah and Israeli authorities that happens at the Tripartite would have to be reassessed and a new system would have to be designed in order to have a quick communication channel available deescalate tensions and avoid that any one of the recurrent crises end with disastrous results.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, even if we were to consider UNIFIL's usage of CIMIC, and more specifically that of the QIP's and similar development projects, as a bribe to local actors in exchange for security or proof of neocolonial or Western neoliberal peace-keeping, it could still be argued that, in any case, these projects repair, renovate or create infrastructure destined to public use. Ideally, this task should be undertaken independently by local entities, however the Lebanese government does not have a strong track record in terms of investment in public services and infrastructure in the area, thus reinforcing the importance of CIMIC in quantitative terms, and Hezbollah

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<sup>87</sup> Alexander Mattelaer, *The Politico-Military Dynamics of European Crisis Response Operations*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013

uses this tactic for practically the same reasons as the LIO.<sup>88 89</sup> Removing UNIFIL would contribute to the reduction of public services distribution, granting political parties like Amal and Hezbollah more opportunities to “buy” constituents. Although this would result in having such public welfare investments undertaken to serve political interests rather than humanitarian needs, which is what is currently what UNIFIL is criticized for, it would be interpreted by some as a positive point as the provision of services would be returned to a “Lebanese to Lebanese” dichotomy.

Indeed, certain activities conducted by the peacekeepers, such as the so-called “Area Domination Patrols” or CIMIC constitute a materialization of a foreign, somewhat imposed (through the obligatory inauguration ceremonies for example), political power. UNIFIL’s projects fuel negative imagery vis-à-vis certain academics and/or members of the local population and Lebanese government, which has consequences on the mission’s image. Other elements reinforce this criticism of it being a colonial enterprise or a military occupation by foreign powers: it is made up of many European soldiers, has almost exclusively been led by Western European commanders and is heavily militarized. Furthermore, it is seen as biased by these aforementioned critics as UNIFIL does not patrol, conduct house searches with sniffing dogs etc. on the Israeli side; it does not respond to Israeli violations of the ceasefire agreement and the Blue Line; or the use of heavily aggressive measures for patrols (like the French Leclerc tanks or the “Area Domination Patrols”).<sup>90 91</sup> Maybe UNIFIL provides positive

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<sup>88</sup> The October 2019 revolution in Lebanon shows how the absence of public services, soaring corruption, a poor economy and high unemployment has pushed the people to nation wide protests against an ineffective and inefficient government.

<sup>89</sup> Owain Lawson, “Phase “A”: Lebanese Engineers, the World Bank, and the Remaking of the Litani River, 1931-1970” lecture, Public Policy and Foreign Affairs from the American University of Beirut, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018

<sup>90</sup> Susann Kassem, *The United Nations Peacekeeping Practice In Southern Lebanon: “The International Community” And Local Autonomy*, American University of Beirut, October 2011

elements to South Lebanon as a community in terms of infrastructure, humanitarian aid, communication or even security, but it carries with it a negative aspect that cannot be understated. The activities of the peacekeepers are not only intended to “develop” local population, but also to pacify them in order to facilitate UNIFIL’s presence there, and according to critics such as Catherine Lutz, Hugh Gusterson and Catherine Besteman, maintain a channel open to deliver a mostly Western-based ideology to the local population, much like American missionaries did in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century throughout the world and especially in the Middle East and North Africa region. Why should these peacekeepers, which are sometimes considered a mix of soft and hard power serving the LIO with neocolonialist intensions, be the ones providing these services to a people that are not theirs? Marxist accelerationist theorists would support the claim that the mission is merely an airbag of sorts, delaying the ultimate collision between Israel and its allies and the realities of their imperialist pressure over the people living areas such as South Lebanon (amongst others, where the situation for civilians is blatantly worse than in Lebanon) – or that between the people of South Lebanon (and by extension the rest of the country) and the Lebanese government, who has failed to develop public infrastructure and provide any type of welfare to its citizens, and may purposefully avoid in doing so as long as UNIFIL takes care of it.<sup>92 93 94</sup> This theory, in my opinion, is the baseline to most criticism I have encountered on UNIFIL and the UN in general, where they are merely the embodiment of a tool through which great powers

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<sup>91</sup> Andrea Tenenti, *Interview of Andrea Tenenti and Andrea Rossi*, translated from Italian, March 8th, 2019

<sup>92</sup> *Interview of internal UNIFIL source*, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019

<sup>93</sup> Michael Barnett, Martha Finnemore, “*Political Approaches: the UN as a Tool of Great Powers*,” *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*, June 2018

<sup>94</sup> Susann Kassem, *The United Nations Peacekeeping Practice In Southern Lebanon: “The International Community” And Local Autonomy*, American University of Beirut, October 2011

can legitimize what is essentially a modern interpretation of colonialism and the exploitation of the Global South by the LIO.

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