

## Middle East

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### Lebanon

Tensions between the Lebanese government and opposition militias escalated during the first five months of 2008. Parliament was deadlocked over failure to agree on a candidate for president, and assassinations of leading political figures contributed to a growing crisis. Efforts by several mediators failed to resolve these issues during the spring; and in May, when the government declared Hezbollah's communications network illegal, gun battles broke out between pro-government forces and opposition militias in central Beirut. As violence spread to other areas of the country, many feared the renewal of civil war.

The crisis in Lebanon was defused on 21 May, when Lebanese parties, meeting in Doha, agreed on steps to resolve the political deadlock. These included the appointment of a consensus presidential candidate, General Michael Suleiman, the establishment of a government of national unity, and the initiation of a national dialogue aimed at extending government authority throughout Lebanon. Since the Doha meeting, Beirut has been calm and the opposition has dismantled its protest camp. Violence elsewhere in the country, notably in Tripoli, has nonetheless continued, and security issues remain, including reports of arms traffic across the Syria-Lebanon border, the growth of Sunni extremism in the north, and the growing prominence of militias in Palestinian refugee camps.

In southern Lebanon, where the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is deployed, the situation generally remained calm. The events of May did not have direct impact on UNIFIL. The apparent ease with which Hezbollah seized parts of the capital was clear evidence of its

continued military strength north of the Litani River. UNIFIL was challenged in 2008 by armed elements operating in the south. Israel remains deeply concerned that Hezbollah is rearming, and is also worried by the formation of a government of national unity that includes Hezbollah, which espouses the right to resistance against "Israeli occupation."

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### Background

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon is now the largest UN peace operation in the region. First established in 1978 by Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426, UNIFIL was initially tasked with confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restoring peace and security, and helping the government of Lebanon to reestablish control over the south. In May 2000, UNIFIL assisted in the withdrawal of Israeli forces behind a "Blue Line" identified by the UN.

Conditions remained unstable, however, with occasional cross-border incidents. The Lebanese government did not deploy forces in the south. Other factors, notably the Syrian armed presence in the rest of Lebanon, led in 2004 to the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1559. The Security Council reiterated the demand for an extension of the Lebanese government's authority throughout all of Lebanon, also calling for a withdrawal of Syrian troops (accomplished in 2005) and "the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias."<sup>1</sup>

War erupted in Lebanon in July 2006 when Hezbollah attacked an Israeli patrol inside Israel and abducted two soldiers. A major military campaign ensued: Israel bombed Lebanon, including Beirut, and invaded Lebanese territory;



of hostilities; accompanying and supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces in their deployment to the south, including along the Blue Line; extending its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons; assisting the Lebanese Armed Forces in taking steps toward the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani River of an area free of any personnel, assets, and weapons other than those of the government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL; ensuring that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind; protecting UN personnel, facilities, installations, and equipment; ensuring the security and freedom of movement of UN personnel and humanitarian workers; and, without prejudice to the responsibility of the government of Lebanon, protecting civilians under imminent threat of physical violence. Resolution 1701 expanded UNIFIL's authorized strength to 15,000 troops. As of November 2008, UNIFIL stood at 12,733 military personnel, supported by some 321 international civilian and 640 local civilian staff.

The UN has a number of mandated tasks in addition to those assigned specifically to UNIFIL. Resolution 1701 set out several political tasks for the UN, and a UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon represents the good offices of the Secretary-General. The UN has also been mandated to conduct an investigation into the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri, and in May 2007 the Security Council decided to establish an international tribunal to try those involved in the Hariri assassination.

### UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)

• Authorization and Start Date	19 March 1978 (UNSC Res. 425/426)
• Force Commander	Major-General Claudio Graziano (Italy)
• Budget	\$688.8 million (1 July 2008–30 June 2009)
• Strength as of 31 October 2008	Troops: 12,733 International Civilian Staff: 321 Local Civilian Staff: 640

For detailed mission information see p. 279

Hezbollah fired hundreds of rockets into Israel. Over a thousand Lebanese and 161 Israelis were killed, and thousands were displaced on both sides.

The war ended after five weeks with the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1701 in 2006. That resolution established a new mandate for UNIFIL, adding to its original responsibilities the tasks of monitoring the cessation

### Key Developments

#### Security

Since UNIFIL's 2006 enhancement, the Secretary-General has reported continued commitment by the governments of Lebanon and Israel to implementing Resolution 1701. The area south of the Litani has "witnessed the longest period of relative stability in many years."<sup>2</sup> The Secretary-General, however, pointed out "areas of concern

that continue to impede the establishment of a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution between the parties.”<sup>3</sup> One such issue was resolved in July 2008, when Hezbollah returned the bodies of two Israeli soldiers abducted in 2006, in exchange for the release by Israel of five Lebanese prisoners. In other areas, however, serious problems in the implementation of 1701 persist.

Resolution 1701 calls for “security arrangements to prevent the resumption of hostilities, including the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani river of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL.” UNIFIL’s most challenging task is to “assist the Lebanese Armed Forces” in establishing this area.<sup>4</sup> The force is mandated to “accompany and support the Lebanese Armed Forces as they deploy throughout the south,” and also 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>5</sup> Hezbollah is believed to be adept at concealing its military operations; much of its military buildup had been hidden from Israeli intelligence before the 2006 war. The task of verifying that Hezbollah is not rearming is therefore a huge challenge.

Successive political and security crises elsewhere in Lebanon during 2007 and 2008 have impeded the work of the Lebanese Armed Forces in implementing Resolution 1701. Competing security responsibilities—in 2007 in the Narh El-Bared camp, and in 2008 in Beirut and the north—have drawn the Lebanese Armed Forces away from the south and curtailed some of their coordinated operational activities with UNIFIL. By September 2008, the Lebanese Armed Forces had again deployed to the south, and the “operational tempo” of work with UNIFIL had resumed. It was hoped that the political change in Beirut would lead to more consistent Lebanese Armed Forces–UNIFIL cooperation during the coming year, and that President Michael Suleiman would give priority to the implementation of Resolution 1701.

The porous nature of the Syria-Lebanon border complicates the efforts of UNIFIL and

the Lebanese Armed Forces to control the area south of the Litani. Resolution 1701 calls upon the government of Lebanon to secure its borders, and authorizes UNIFIL to assist in this effort—but only at the government’s request. It also calls on states to prevent the supply of arms or military training to individuals or entities except those authorized by the government of Lebanon or UNIFIL. The UN has assumed both advisory and operational roles in promoting better border control. UNIFIL’s Maritime Task Force performs interdiction operations to prevent unauthorized arms smuggling. The Secretary-General has also twice dispatched a team of border security experts (the Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team [LIBAT]) to assess border monitoring and propose measures to improve border control. However, the second LIBAT mission found in July 2008 that “Lebanon has not yet succeeded in enhancing the overall security of its borders in any significant manner.”<sup>6</sup>

Despite security threats against UNIFIL, the mission continues its efforts to monitor and report developments in its area of operations.<sup>7</sup> UNIFIL’s monitoring presence is substantial; in 2008 it maintained 64 permanent positions and 136 observation posts. However, UNIFIL continues to be threatened by “armed elements,” which in some instances have prevented the force from carrying out effective investigations.

UNIFIL has also been unable to prevent persistent violations of Resolution 1701 by Israel. The Israeli Air Force conducted a large number of flights over Lebanese airspace in the first quarter of 2008, using both manned and unmanned aircraft, and continued in the second part of the year despite the release of the bodies of the two abducted soldiers. Israel maintains that overflights are a necessary security measure “that will continue until all the measures set out in resolution 1701 (2006) are implemented in full.”<sup>8</sup>

While the measures set out in Resolution 1701 are therefore far from being fully implemented, UNIFIL has nonetheless made some progress since 2006, as the Blue Line has been remarkably quiet. The size of the force acts as a substantial buffer in the region, and a deterrent to unauthorized military activity.



REUTERS/Haidar Havila

Italian members of the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) investigate the site of a rocket attack on Israel in Yaroun village, southern Lebanon, 8 January 2008.

UNIFIL has also succeeded in building confidence between the parties and resolving practical disputes. It continues to facilitate the tripartite meeting of senior representatives of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces, chaired by the UNIFIL force commander, at which senior Lebanese and Israeli military officials meet to discuss military and security issues. Through this tripartite forum and day-to-day liaison efforts, UNIFIL has defused several tense situations. Negotiations are also under way in the tripartite forum toward agreement for pullout of the Israel Defense Forces from northern Ghajar, a village that is bisected by the Blue Line.

Although public attitudes to UNIFIL are hard to assess accurately, the force appears to have maintained a level of public confidence on both sides of the Blue Line. In Lebanon, the Secretary-General reports that “the population’s attitude towards the Force remained generally positive.” This is in part due to the fact that UNIFIL “continued its humanitarian assistance activities . . . as well as the identification and disposal of unexploded ordnance.” But UNIFIL’s efforts to clear ordnance continue to

be impeded by Israel’s refusal to hand over detailed information about the location of such ordnance. To enhance relations with the local community in south Lebanon, UNIFIL also uses television and a print magazine to improve the local population’s understanding of its mandate and to respond to their concerns.

Despite public criticism of UNIFIL by Israeli government officials, especially in 2006 and early 2007, the government of Israel supported the renewal of the mission’s mandate in August 2008, and Jerusalem-based UN officials note that Israeli attitudes toward the force have actually changed significantly since 2006. The relative quiet along the Blue Line has been noted, and former prime minister Olmert has spoken about the “robust international force” acting as a buffer in the area between the Litani and the Blue Line. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who succeeded Olmert as leader of the Kadima Party, argues that “there is no doubt that the change in the situation in southern Lebanon and the movement of Hizbullah northwards, away from the border, is a direct response to activities carried out by UNIFIL and the Lebanese army.”<sup>9</sup>

#### *Political*

UNIFIL’s substantial presence has helped to create a period of unusual calm in southern Lebanon. Since August 2006, no shot has been fired between the parties, despite the absence of a formal cease-fire. This period of quiet has enabled the Lebanese and Israeli governments to address domestic constituencies and begin low-key negotiations around outstanding sources of conflict. UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Michael Williams, argued in September 2008 that a renewal of conflict between Lebanon and Israel was unlikely in the coming twelve months.

Underlying the current calm, however, is the threat that Hezbollah rearmament might be taking place. Hezbollah has asserted that its resistance continues throughout Lebanon. The question remains as to whether UNIFIL should be more aggressive in enforcing its mandate, or at least clearer about areas of the south that it has been unable to search.

Overall, the situation in Lebanon is far from stable, despite some positive political developments. Government efforts to extend control throughout the country still face numerous obstacles. In addition to Hezbollah's continued military strength, the growth of extremist groups operating in northern Lebanon is a source of grave concern. Instability in northern Lebanon has implications for the Lebanon-Syria relationship. Syrian president Bashar Assad has described northern Lebanon as "fragile" and a bastion of extremism. Syria's decision to send thousands of troops to the Lebanese border in September 2008—officially to stop smuggling—prompted Lebanese commentators to speculate that Syria might again intervene and reestablish its military presence.

To ensure a long-term solution to the Israeli-Lebanese conflict and movement toward comprehensive regional peace, political progress in a number of different arenas will be essential. Within Lebanon, continued progress in the national dialogue could help to push forward implementation of Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701. The process and outcome of the 2009 elections will also be crucial in determining how much progress the government of Lebanon can make in consolidating state control over the country. Syria's relationship with Lebanon and with other regional and international actors is another central element in implementation of Resolutions 1559 and 1701. During 2008, Syria was increasingly engaged in international dialogue at a number of levels, and may soon establish normal diplomatic relations with Lebanon. There is potential for a change in Syria's regional role if this process of reengagement continues in 2009.

Further, the direction of engagement in the post-Bush and Olmert eras, remains to be seen. A new US administration will remain engaged, but the fact of transition in and of itself constituted a significant challenge as the year drew to a close.

The role of the United States continues to be of prime importance to developments in the Middle East. The new US administration's approach toward Iran, Iraq, and Syria will shape

regional developments and help to determine broader international policy in the region.

### Other Missions

Negotiations to resolve other aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict did not yield many dividends. Indirect, Turkish-mediated dialogue between Israel and Syria continues. The Annapolis Process, launched by President George W. Bush to promote agreement on Israeli-Palestinian final status issues, has been under way since November 2007. The Annapolis Process has, however, been limited by the domestic weakness of both parties, as well as by the 2008 presidential transition in the United States. Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert resigned in September under pressure. The Palestinians remain divided, with Hamas still in control of Gaza, which is still subject to Israeli border closures. Further complicating this situation was the outbreak of fighting in Gaza in the final days of 2008, a development that will certainly shape the situation in the coming year and have an impact on the various peace operations in the region.

### UNDOF

The UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) was established under the 1974 disengagement of forces agreement between Israel and Syria to provide a buffer between their forces in the Golan Heights. The general situation between Israel and Syria in 2008 was calm. UNDOF reports that both Israel and Syria generally respect the current peace agreement and the presence of UNDOF in the region, although occasional tactical-level violations continue to occur. During 2008, the IDF announced stricter measures against civilians who cross into the territory of the occupied Golan; in response, in an effort to prevent escalation, UNDOF has been proactive in preventing farmers and shepherds from crossing up to the technical fence. UNDOF has also been monitoring the Syrian government's extensive antimuggling campaign.

UNDOF has not been affected by indirect Israeli-Syrian peace talks that took place during

### UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)

- Authorization and Start Date 31 May 1974 (UNSC Res. 350)
- Force Commander Major-General Wolfgang Jilke (Austria)
- Budget \$45.7 million  
(1 July 2008–30 June 2009)
- Strength as of 31 October 2008 Troops: 1,041  
International Civilian Staff: 38  
Local Civilian Staff: 100

*For detailed mission information see p. 262*

### UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)

- Authorization and Start Date 29 May 1948 (UNSC Res. 50)
- Chief of Staff Major-General Ian Campbell Gordon (Australia)
- Budget \$31.5 million  
(1 January–31 December 2008)
- Strength as of 31 October 2008 Troops: 52  
Military Observers: 99  
International Civilian Staff: 97  
Local Civilian Staff: 133

*For detailed mission information see p. 372*

### EU Border Assistance Mission at Rafah (EUBAM Rafah)

- Authorization Date 12 December 2005 (EU Council Joint Action 2005/889/CFSP)
- Start Date November 2005
- Head of Mission Major-General Pietro Pistolese (Italy)
- Budget \$7.1 million  
(October 2007–September 2008)
- Strength as of 30 September 2008 Civilian Police: 13  
International Civilian Staff: 5

2008 under Turkish auspices, nor as yet by Lebanon-Syria discussions about the Shaba farms area.

### UNTSO

The UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) was established in 1948 to monitor observance of cease-fires negotiated between Israel and its neighbors. UNTSO provides observers and logistical and financial support to UNIFIL and UNDOF, as well as a small observer group in Egypt at the request of its government. UNTSO did not undergo any formal changes to its mandate or authorized strength during 2008.

### EUBAM Rafah

The EU Border Assistance Mission at Rafah (EUBAM Rafah) was established in 2005 following Israeli disengagement from Gaza. EUBAM Rafah aims to assist in implementing the Israeli-Palestinian Agreement on Movement and Access by providing a third-party presence at the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt, to ensure continued opening of the crossing and to build confidence between the parties.

When Hamas forces took control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, EUBAM Rafah suspended its operations. Official openings of the Rafah crossing were rare during 2008, and EUBAM Rafah was not present. Smuggling between Gaza and Egypt continues, and the wall at Rafah has occasionally been breached, leading to uncontrolled border traffic.

The EU has decided to keep EUBAM Rafah on standby pending a change in the situation. On 10 November 2008, the EU Council adopted a joint action extending the mandate of the mission until 24 November 2009.

### EUPOL COPPS

The EU Coordinating Office for Palestinian Police Support (EU COPPS) was established in 2005 to support and advise the Palestinian Civil Police. A follow-up mission, the EU Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS), began operating in January 2006 with the aim of enhancing EU support and implementing the Palestinian Civil Police Development Program.

Like many international operations, EUPOL COPPS was not permitted to engage with the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority or the Government of National Unity. After June 2007, with the establishment of a new Palestinian Authority government led by Salam Fayyad, EUPOL COPPS resumed its work in the West Bank. The operation currently trains Palestinian police officers in a number of areas, including traffic control, interdiction of illegal drugs, and maintenance of public order. EUPOL COPPS has also improved police infrastructure, and helped to foster cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian police services.

During 2008, the mandate of EUPOL COPPS was expanded to include work on criminal justice and rule of law. Focus on and funding for its operations increased following a conference on Palestinian security in June 2008. The mission is expected to include fifty-three international staff by the end of 2008.

EU COPPS has not been authorized to work in Gaza while Hamas remains in control of the Strip.

#### *TIPH*

Established by an Israeli-Palestinian agreement in 1994, and temporarily withdrawn and reestablished in 1997, the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) is mandated with providing a secure environment for the residents of Hebron and promoting stability through monitoring, reporting, and assistance activities. TIPH is coordinated by Norway and staffed by personnel from Denmark, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey. Its mandate is renewed pending approval from Israel and the Palestinian Authority every six months.

#### *MFO Sinai*

The Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai (MFO Sinai) was established in 1981, pursuant to the withdrawal of the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) II in 1979 and the conclusion of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. MFO Sinai's mission is to supervise the implementation of the security provisions of the peace treaty and to

prevent any violation of its terms. On 1 September 2005, MFO Sinai took on the additional responsibility of monitoring the deployment of border guards along the Egyptian side of the border between Egypt and Gaza. MFO Sinai monitors the border guard force by verifying that its deployment is consistent with the terms agreed between Egypt and Israel (amended on 11 July 2007). MFO Sinai is not mandated to monitor the area of the Sinai immediately adjacent to Gaza, and has thus not been directly affected by serious problems in Gaza and breaches in the Rafah crossing that occurred during 2008.

#### Conclusion

The Middle East continued to host several peace operations in 2008, most notably the expanded UNIFIL, which have contributed to defusing

#### EU Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS)

• Authorization Date	14 November 2005 (EU Council Joint Action 2005/797/CFSP)
• Start Date	January 2006
• Head of Mission	Colin Smith (United Kingdom)
• Budget	\$6.8 million (October 2007–September 2008)
• Strength as of 30 September 2008	Civilian Police: 28 Civilian Staff: 16

#### Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH)

• Authorization and Start Date	17 January 1997 (Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron)
• Head of Mission	Brigadier-General Roy Grøttheim (Norway)
• Budget	\$2.8 million (October 2007–September 2008)
• Strength as of 30 September 2008	Civilian Staff: 62

### Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai (MFO Sinai)

• Authorization Date	3 August 1981 (Protocol to the Treaty of Peace)
• Start Date	April 1982
• Head of Mission	Ambassador James A. Larocco (United States)
• Budget	\$66.2 million (October 2007–September 2008)
• Strength as of 30 September 2008	Military Observers: 1,687 Civilian Staff: 15

tensions and maintaining security in its area of operation. The region witnessed several initiatives, including efforts to establish an inclusive Lebanese government that is capable of extending its authority throughout the country. The Annapolis Process has yet to yield results, and in summer and fall 2008 the political context was heavily shaped by Israeli political transition and the US presidential election. In the meantime, the EU and UN continued to play critical roles in the region through their support for the various peace operations and direct political engagement with the parties. As the year drew to a close, the conflict between Hamas and Israel in Gaza ensures that the Middle East will remain high on the international political agenda and will be the focus of heightened efforts in the year ahead.

### Notes

1. UN Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004).
2. United Nations, *Seventh Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701*, 27 June 2008, para. 64.
3. *Ibid.*, para. 1.
4. UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006), paras. 11, 8.
5. *Ibid.*, 1701, para. 12.
6. Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team, 27 August 2008.
7. The most deadly recent attack occurred in June 2007, when a roadside bomb killed six Spanish peacekeepers.
8. United Nations, *Sixth Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701*, 28 February 2008, para. 18.
9. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, news release, 26 October 2007.