Every one of Israel’s borders with an Arab neighbor has, at some point since 1945, been monitored or protected by a UN or other international peace operation. All these operations are integrally linked to the broader Arab–Israeli peace process. This was true in 1948, when the UN Truce and Supervision Operation (UNTSO) was established as the UN’s first-ever and longest-running operation and is as true today, as the broader peace process and regional dynamics continue to set political and operational challenges for UN peacekeeping.

UNTSO was established by Security Council Resolution 50 to monitor cease-fire lines negotiated in 1948 between the fledgling state of Israel and the Arab governments with which it was then at war. Currently, UNTSO’s primary function is to provide observers and logistical support to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) (through Observer Group Lebanon) and the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) (discussed below). Periodic reviews by troop contributors have confirmed that having UNTSO provide centralized, readily available observers to these missions is more efficient than providing the same services separately through UNIFIL and UNDOF. As such, it provides an interesting model of centralized operational support to multiple missions in a small subregion.

On Israel’s southern border with Egypt, the Multinational Force and Observers Sinai (MFO Sinai) is the major non-UN operation in the region, and it is discussed separately in Chapter 4.15.

On Israel’s border with Syria, UNDOF functions as a paradigmatic example of a UN interpositional disengagement force, one of only a handful of such missions still deployed. Established by Security Council Resolution 350 in 1974, its deployment was called for in an armistice agreement which, still in effect, defined the terms of Israel’s withdrawal from territory it occupied during the 1973 war. UNDOF was established to create a buffer between Syrian and Israeli forces in the mountainous Golan Heights. For all of the vitriol that sometimes passes between these tense neighbors, the buffer between them has been absolutely quiet since it was formed, and UNDOF has helped to ensure that this segment of the broader regional conflict has remained stable.

UNDOF has no mandate to help resolve the impasse between Israel and Syria, its role being limited to observation and reporting of

---

**UN Troop Supervision Organization (UNTSO)**

- **Resolution passage and start date**: 29 May 1948 (UNSC Res. 50)
- **Chief of staff**: Brigadier-General Clive Lilley (New Zealand)
- **Budget**: $29.04 million (appropriations for 2005)
- **Strength as of 31 October 2005**
  - Military observers: 151
  - International civilian staff: 101
  - Local civilian staff: 117
violations of the line of disengagement. Even when Israel and Lebanon were engaged in tense negotiations over Israel’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, and notwithstanding the fact that territory bordering Lebanon and Syria (the Shab’a farms) became entangled in these negotiations, UNDOF’s operational line was never in question. Indeed, its existence helped determine the line behind which Israel had to withdraw. UNDOF is unlikely to see any changes to its mandate unless there is a major escalation between these neighbors or, more hopefully, a resolution of the remaining contentious issues in this track of the regional peace process. The broader political context in which UNDOF was supposed to implement its mandate—namely full cooperation of all parties in a context of Israeli withdrawal—were never established. Following Israel’s partial withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 1985, UNIFIL’s area of operations became an unstable, de facto buffer zone between Israeli and unofficial Lebanese forces.

The same cannot be said of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon. Established in 1978 by Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426 to assist in the provision of security in southern Lebanon following Israel’s invasion of the area, UNIFIL was given a three-part mandate: to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces, to restore international peace and security, and to assist the government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area.

In the first twenty-two years of its existence, the basic political conditions under which UNIFIL was supposed to implement its mandate—namely full cooperation of all parties in a context of Israeli withdrawal—were never established. Following Israel’s partial withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 1985, UNIFIL’s area of operations became an unstable, de facto buffer zone between Israeli and unofficial Lebanese forces.

The first real opportunity to implement UNIFIL’s mandate came in 2000, when Israel withdrew its forces behind a “Blue Line” identified by the UN, which the Security Council confirmed was in accordance with Resolution 425. UNIFIL’s mandate was renewed and the mission was redeployed—and later augmented to include an infantry battalion—to undertake more active monitoring of the Blue Line. Using observation posts (staffed by UNTSO-supplied observers) along the Blue Line itself, as well as helicopter patrols, UNIFIL has monitored land and air violations by Lebanese armed groups and the Israeli defense force and has reported these violations to the Security Council. A flare-up of these violations in November 2005 led to UN and other international efforts to restore relative calm.

By the end of November 2005, a critical element of Resolution 425—the restoration of Lebanese government authority in the south—remained unfulfilled. In the aftermath of the Israeli withdrawal, the government of Lebanon clearly has responsibility for the restoration of order. Some of UNIFIL’s critics believe its presence in southern Lebanon serves as an excuse for the government not to act, especially in terms of confronting Hezbollah. Others, however, argue that so long as Syria maintained its presence in Lebanon, it was unrealistic to believe that the Lebanese government could restore its authority in the south, and that UNIFIL still had a calming effect (including by making a significant contribution to the economy of the south). On 29 July 2005 the Security Council extended UNIFIL’s mandate, but pointedly called on the government to

![UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)]

- Resolution passage and start date: 31 May 1974 (UNSC Res. 350)
- Force commander: Major-General Bala Nanda Sharma (Nepal)
- Budget: $41.52 million (1 July 2005–30 June 2006)
- Strength as of 31 October 2005:
  - Troops: 1,030
  - International civilian staff: 37
  - Local civilian staff: 103
fulfill its responsibilities under Resolution 425, “including through the deployment of sufficient numbers of Lebanese armed and security forces, to ensure a calm environment throughout the area, including along the Blue Line, and to exert control and monopoly over the use of force on its entire territory and to prevent attacks from Lebanon across the Blue Line.” Resolution 1559 also called specifically for “the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.” These Security Council statements add urgency to the issue of the unfulfilled element of UNIFIL’s mandate.

Moreover, the UN’s demand in Security Council Resolution 1559 that Syria withdraw from Lebanon, and Syria’s official compliance some months later, created a new internal dynamic in Lebanon. The launching of a UN investigation into the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri, and the rising tensions associated with that event and the international pressure surrounding it, generated unease within UNIFIL’s area of operations.

All this leaves the thorny question of what role, if any, UNIFIL should play in assisting the government of Lebanon in fulfilling its responsibilities under Resolution 425, and in the context of Resolution 1559 with respect to “militias”—a coded reference to Hezbollah and Palestinian armed groups. Until those questions are resolved, UNIFIL will continue to function in a complex political and operational environment, one fraught with risks to the UN and to the continued viability of the mission.