

Middle East

On 27 December 2008, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip. This assault was a response to rocket attacks from Palestinian militants in Gaza, which had increased following the failure of Egyptian mediation efforts to renew the *tahdiya* (“calming” in Arabic) between Hamas and Israel. The government of Israel’s stated objective was to bring “an improvement in the security reality for the residents” of southern Israel.¹

Over 1,300 Palestinians were killed during the conflict, which also resulted in substantial destruction of infrastructure.² Ten Israeli soldiers and three civilians were killed. Although violence was mainly confined to Gaza, the conflict threatened to destabilize the broader Middle East: demonstrators clashed with police across the region, and rockets were fired from Lebanese territory toward Israel. The war attracted huge diplomatic and media attention.

At midnight on 17 January, Hamas and Israel declared unilateral cease-fires. Since then, the region has been calmer but there has been little progress toward resolution of various interconnected conflicts. Negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians have not resumed. The Palestinian territory remains divided between the West Bank, ruled by President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority, and Gaza, which is controlled by Hamas. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Israeli government refuses to freeze settlement construction. Arab states have not implemented confidence-building measures as requested by the United States.

In Lebanon, the 14 March coalition enjoyed unexpected success in national elections in June. Saad Hariri is expected to head the next Lebanese government, but there has been a long delay in its formation. Meanwhile, a series of

incidents has increased tensions between Lebanon and Israel. In May the government of Lebanon uncovered a network of spies working for Israel, and in July an explosion at an arms cache provided evidence of Hezbollah rearmament in south Lebanon. Israel continued to conduct surveillance overflights of Lebanese territory and to occupy the northern part of Ghajar.

In Iraq, provincial elections in January proceeded successfully. The country nonetheless remained highly unstable and bomb attacks killed hundreds of civilians. Tension remains high as the United States proceeds with its military pullout, and internal and regional issues remain unresolved in the run-up to national elections. In Iran, presidential elections were contested and security forces responded violently, causing hundreds of deaths and injuries. Tensions persist, though President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad remains in power. Political change in Iran would have regional repercussions, as will ongoing negotiations relating to Iran’s nuclear program.

The Gaza conflict had grave humanitarian consequences. Palestinian civilians were unable to flee fighting, and hospitals in Gaza were scarcely able to address the needs of the injured. During the conflict, the Security Council met at the ministerial level and on 8 January adopted a resolution calling for, among other things, “an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza” and for “unimpeded provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance.” Israel ceased its operation on 18 January, and withdrew its forces two days later.

Despite the physical and human devastation, the overall political and security impacts of the conflict were limited. Hamas remained



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in power in Gaza. The assault did not pressure Hamas into freeing captive Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, or prompt a breakthrough in Egyptian-mediated talks between the divided Palestinian factions. Official crossings into Gaza remain mainly closed, while large-scale illicit trafficking

in goods, including arms and munitions, continues via tunnels from Egypt. No cease-fire has been established and Palestinian militants continue to fire rockets into Israel.

The international boycott of the Hamas leadership in the Strip remains in place, so two

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	\$589.8 million (1 July 2009–30 June 2010)
• Strength as of 31 October 2009	Troops: 12,341 International Civilian Staff: 324 Local Civilian Staff: 663

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international security assistance missions that are deployed to train Palestinian security and police services—the US Security Coordinator and the EU Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS)—have been unable to resume their work there. The EU Border Assistance Mission at Rafah (EUBAM Rafah) has remained on standby.

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was affected by tension during the Gaza conflict. During January, rockets were fired twice from UNIFIL's area of operations toward Israel. Israel responded with artillery shells. UNIFIL engaged in daily dialogue with Israeli and Lebanese interlocutors during this period, both bilaterally and via the Tripartite Committee. UNIFIL also intensified its reconnaissance activities with the Lebanese Armed Forces. This period was, according to a senior UNIFIL official, the “biggest test yet” of the security mechanisms established since 2006 to prevent escalation of tensions between Israel and Lebanon. The violence was largely controlled and no “second front” opened along the Blue Line.

The UN Disengagement Force (UNDOF) was affected by increased tension during this period. Two other peace operations—the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and the Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai (MFO Sinai)—were slightly affected: UNTSO increased its patrolling of villages in south Lebanon, and the MFO (which is located close to Gaza) intensified its focus on staff security.

Background

UNIFIL is the largest UN peace operation in the region. First established in 1978 by Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426, UNIFIL was tasked with confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces 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, as the Lebanese government was unable to deploy forces in the south. In 2004, the Security Council again demanded extension of Lebanese government authority throughout Lebanon, and called for withdrawal of Syrian troops (accomplished in 2005) and “the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.”³

War erupted in Lebanon in July 2006 when Hezbollah attacked an Israeli patrol and abducted two soldiers. Israel bombed Lebanon, including Beirut, and invaded Lebanese territory; 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 with the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1701. This resolution established a new mandate for UNIFIL, adding to its original responsibilities the tasks of monitoring the cessation of hostilities, ensuring that no foreign forces would be present in Lebanon without government consent, assisting the Lebanese Armed Forces in preserving an area free of unauthorized armed personnel between the Blue Line and the Litani River, and fully implementing the Taif Accords. Resolution 1701 allowed for the expansion of UNIFIL up to 15,000 troops. UNIFIL and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations are currently undertaking a technical review of the operation.

Key Developments

Security

UNIFIL can claim significant successes in the three years since its mandate was enhanced at the conclusion of the 2006 war. A long period

of relative stability was maintained in 2009, despite continuing regional tensions.

Significant security challenges nonetheless remain. The government of Lebanon has so far not established, between the Blue Line and the Litani River, “an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL,” as called for in Resolution 1701. Rockets were fired from south Lebanon into Israel in January, February, and September 2009, to which Israel responded with artillery shells. On 14 July, a large explosion occurred at an arms cache in Khirbit Silim, a few kilometers north of the Blue Line. UNIFIL peacekeepers seeking to investigate the site were blocked by local residents, and fourteen peacekeepers were injured. Subsequent investigations found that this cache was being actively maintained. UNIFIL force commander, Major-General Graziano described this as a “tough incident” but not unique, citing similar findings in 2006.⁴ The incident appeared to prove what Israel has long been arguing, that Hezbollah has been rearming south of the Litani. Further suspicions were aroused by a fire possibly caused by another explosion in the village of Tay Falsay on 12 October; this incident is under investigation by UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces.

Beyond Hezbollah, other serious challenges face UNIFIL. Tensions have escalated following several violations of the Blue Line, particularly when on 17 July a group of Lebanese civilians deliberately crossed into Israel in protest at the erection of an Israeli watchtower.

The activities of what UNIFIL describes as terrorist organizations linked to Palestinian camps continue to threaten Lebanese and regional security. Some camps, especially Ein al-Hilweh, “continue to provide safe haven for those who seek to escape the authority of the state.”⁵ Such organizations were probably responsible for rockets fired across the Blue Line in 2009. In September, the Lebanese Armed Forces arrested members of a non-Lebanese group linked to Fatah al-Islam who were accused of planning attacks on UNIFIL. Serious security incidents have also occurred in and around Tripoli. Reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared

refugee camp has been suspended pending archaeological investigations, and this will likely exacerbate tensions between Palestinians and Lebanese citizens in the north. It is not clear how these tensions might affect the situation in the south.

Progress toward the establishment of an arms-free area south of the Litani continues to be impeded by lack of effective border controls between Syria and Lebanon. UNIFIL has, to date, been asked only to assist the government of Lebanon in securing Lebanon’s maritime borders. Despite broader international efforts to secure the land borders, parts of the Syria-Lebanon border remain easily penetrable and Palestinian militias maintain de facto control in some areas.⁶ Smuggling of arms and munitions continues and some weapons inevitably end up south of the Litani. UN officials in Lebanon argue that stemming the flow of weapons depends on both enhanced technical border controls and a further transformation in the political relationship between Syria and Lebanon.

The parties have taken some steps toward implementation of Resolution 1701. In May, Israel provided technical data on the location of cluster bombs, which helped the UN and Lebanese parties to proceed with removal of unexploded ordnance—though funding shortages continue to affect this work. Delineation of the Blue Line has proceeded gradually. Overall, there has been little progress toward resolving the most difficult outstanding Israeli-Lebanese issues. Israel continues to conduct overflights and to occupy northern Ghajar, and UN efforts to secure Israeli withdrawal from the village have so far failed. There has also been no visible progress in broader UN efforts to resolve the dispute over the Shebaa farms area,⁷ or to establish permanent cease-fire arrangements.

Maintaining security for UNIFIL peacekeepers remains a serious concern. When the government of Lebanon uncovered a network of Israeli spies in May and June, some local media alleged that UNIFIL had helped spies across the Blue Line. Hezbollah also accused UNIFIL of bias in its investigation of Israeli spying devices that were discovered in south Lebanon in October. UNIFIL is authorized to



Italian UNIFIL contingents inspect the site of an explosion between the villages of Meis al-Jabal and Houla in south Lebanon, 18 October 2009.

investigate claims regarding the illegal presence of armed personnel or weapons within its area of operations if specific information is received, and to “resist attempts by forceful means to prevent it from discharging its duties.” In deciding how forcefully to resist efforts to impede its operations, UNIFIL must weigh benefits against the potential costs, which include casualties and damaged community relations. After the Khirbit Silim incident there were calls from the US Congress and elsewhere for UNIFIL to intervene more robustly. However, UNIFIL’s mandate was renewed without changes in August 2009, reflecting troop contributors’ preferences and UNIFIL’s assessment of what is feasible.

UNIFIL continues to make substantial efforts to minimize the disruption caused by the presence of a large force with an intrusive mandate. It maintains that community relations have not worsened since 2006. According to some UN officials, however, many Lebanese perceive that UNIFIL is present to “protect Israel.” If this is the case, hostility to UNIFIL may rise despite the force’s historically good relationship with the local population.

Political

Despite appalling violence in Gaza at the beginning of 2009, the Middle East experienced moments of optimism during the year. The success of Iraqi and Lebanese elections offered hope of peaceful political change. President Barack Obama brought a new tone to US policy in the Middle East, and his administration engaged promptly and energetically in the region.

Genuine political progress has remained elusive, however. At the time of writing, Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri had not formed a government, despite the passage of almost five months since the elections. Hariri is obliged, given Lebanon’s complex internal and regional relationships, to include opposition members in his government and to satisfy key regional states. Hariri’s efforts to balance these various interests have not yet borne fruit, despite a Syrian-Saudi summit in early October that was expected to ease political tensions in Lebanon. Lebanon remains in the hands of a caretaker government, which has been able to move forward on some issues relating to Resolution 1701 implementation, including borders and de-mining. The political deadlock is nonetheless potentially dangerous: without a legitimate government in place, Lebanon’s internal national dialogue remains on hold and the state is ill positioned to deal with potential crises or to negotiate key regional issues. The deadlock also erodes faith in Lebanon’s political system, indicating that regional interests and those of elites in Lebanon carry more weight than the popular vote.

Israel’s political situation has not encouraged resolution of regional political issues. In February, Kadima won national elections by a narrow margin, but party leader Tzipi Livni proved unable to form a government. Benjamin Netanyahu took power at the head of a coalition that includes his Likud party, the right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu, and Labor, headed by Ehud Barak. This Israeli government’s approach to Resolution 1701 has not differed substantially from that of its predecessor. However, Prime Minister Netanyahu has taken a hard line on issues relating to the Palestinians—notably

settlements. This has brought him into conflict with the United States as it seeks to restart the peace process. Palestinian disunity has also impeded US efforts toward peace.

Violence has continued gradually to drop in many parts of Iraq. Fighting between Arabs and Kurds in the north threatens to spiral upward, however, highlighting the need for resolution of the Kurdish question.

Other Missions

UNTSO

The UN Truce Supervision Organization 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. A new chief of staff was appointed in 2009, and there was a reorganization of the military staff in UNTSO headquarters, including establishment of a joint operations center. UNTSO did not undergo any formal changes to its mandate or authorized strength during the year.

UNDOF

The UN Disengagement Observer Force was established in May 1974 to supervise the cease-fire and disengagement agreement between Israel and Syria. During 2009, the cease-fire was maintained and UNDOF's area of operation remained generally quiet. The force faces several challenges, including a "substantial increase" in the Syrian civilian population (which enhances risk of incidents adjacent to the technical fence) and increasing smuggling in the area. During the Gaza conflict, shots were fired at an Israeli Defense Forces patrol. The patrol did not retaliate but asked the UNDOF force commander to mediate. UNDOF maintained trusting relationships with both parties during the year, and liaison activities improved. The mission was renewed by the Security Council for an additional six months in December.

EUBAM Rafah

The EU Border Assistance Mission at Rafah was established in 2005 to help implement the Israeli-Palestinian Agreement on Movement and Access by providing a third-party presence at the Rafah crossing. When Hamas forces took control of Gaza in June 2007, EUBAM suspended its operations. The mission has not carried out any training or other work with Palestinian partners since, although the preparation of training programs for Palestinian Authority customs and border police personnel has continued. Increased security measures were introduced during the Gaza conflict.

EUPOL COPPS

The EU Coordinating Office for Palestinian Po-

UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)

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| • Authorization and Start Date | 29 May 1948
(UNSC Res. 50) |
| • Chief of Staff | Major-General Robert Mood (Norway) |
| • Budget | \$69.8 million
(1 January 2008–31 December 2009) |
| • Strength as of 31 October 2009 | Military Observers: 151
International Civilian Staff: 96
Local Civilian Staff: 129 |

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UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)

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|----------------------------------|--|
| • Authorization and Start Date | 31 May 1974
(UNSC Res. 350) |
| • Force Commander | Major-General Wolfgang Gilke
(Austria) |
| • Budget | \$45.0 million
(1 July 2009–30 June 2010) |
| • Strength as of 31 October 2009 | Troops: 1,039
International Civilian Staff: 40
Local Civilian Staff: 103 |

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EU Border Assistance Mission at Rafah (EUBAM Rafah)

- Authorization Date 5 November 2005 (Agreement on Movement and Access), 12 December 2005 (Joint Action 2005/889/CFSP)
- Start Date October 2005
- Head of Mission Colonel Alain Faugeras (France)
- Budget \$3.9 million
(1 October 2008–30 September 2009)
- Strength as of 30 September 2009 Civilian Police: 11
International Civilian Staff: 12

EU Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS)

- Authorization Date 14 November 2005
(Joint Action 2005/797/CFSP)
- Start Date January 2006
- Head of Mission Chief Constable Paul Robert Kernaghan (United Kingdom)
- Budget \$8.3 million
(1 October 2008–30 September 2009)
- Strength as of 30 September 2009 Civilian Police: 21

Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH)

- Authorization and Start Date 15 January 1997 (Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron), 21 January 1997 (Agreement on the Temporary International Presence in Hebron)
- Head of Mission Brigadier General Britt Brestrup (Norway)
- Budget \$3.5 million
(1 October 2008–30 September 2009)
- Strength as of 30 September 2007 Civilian Police: 27
International Civilian Staff: 37

began operating in January 2006 with the aim of enhancing EU support. The operation trains Palestinian police in a number of areas, including traffic control, drugs interdiction, and public order. EUPOL COPPS has also improved police infrastructure, and fosters cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian police services. In October 2008 a rule of law section was inaugurated.

EUPOL COPPS did not participate in the city-by-city security campaigns that took place throughout the West Bank in 2008–2009. The Palestinian Civil Police played a major role, alongside the Palestinian National Security Forces, which are trained by the US security coordinator. The capacities of the civilian police in public order, reduction of violence, and proportionate use of force were also tested during demonstrations in the West Bank during the Gaza conflict. According to EUPOL COPPS, the civilian police “did well in maintaining order in the West Bank and avoiding major disturbances and loss of lives.”

EUPOL COPPS is not active in Gaza, but maintains low-level contacts with civilian police members there.

TIPH

Established by an Israeli-Palestinian agreement in 1994, TIPH is mandated with providing security for Hebron residents and promoting stability through monitoring, reporting, and assistance. TIPH is coordinated by Norway and staffed by personnel from Denmark, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey. TIPH’s mandate, pending approval from the Israeli and Palestinian parties, is renewed at six-month intervals.

Palestinian demonstrations took place in Hebron during the war in Gaza. TIPH plays no direct role in controlling such demonstrations, though it intervened to advocate against use of specific riot control measures.

MFO Sinai

MFO Sinai was established in 1981 following withdrawal of the UN Emergency Force II and conclusion of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty.

lice Support (EU COPPS) was established in 2005 to support and advise the Palestinian Civil Police. A follow-up mission, EUPOL COPPS,

The MFO supervises implementation of the security provisions of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. On 1 September 2005, the MFO took on responsibility for monitoring the deployment of guards along the Egyptian side of the Egypt-Gaza border. The force verifies that this deployment is consistent with the terms agreed between Egypt and Israel.

A new director-general, David Satterfield, was appointed to the MFO in 2009. The mandate and mission of the MFO remained unchanged. The force is not mandated to monitor the area of the Sinai immediately adjacent to Gaza, and was not directly affected by breaches at the Rafah crossing.

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 David M. Satterfield (United States)
• Budget	\$68.6 million (1 October 2008–30 September 2009)
• Strength as of 30 September 2009	Military Observers: 1,660 Civilian Staff: 16

Notes

1. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, press briefing on Israeli Defense Forces operation in the Gaza Strip, 27 December 2008.

2. According to the *Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict* (UN Human Rights Council, A/HRC/12/48, 23 September 2009), most nongovernmental organizations place the overall number of persons killed at between 1,387 and 1,417, and the Gaza authorities report 1,444 fatalities. The government of Israel provides a figure of 1,166. The mission concluded that “data provided by non-governmental sources on the percentage of civilians among those killed are generally consistent and raise very serious concerns about the way Israel conducted the military operations.”

3. UN Security Council Resolution 1559, 2 September 2004.

4. 28 September 2009, www.saidaonline.com/en/new.php?go=fullnews&newsid=14820.

5. United Nations, *Tenth Report of the Secretary-General on Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559*, 2 September 2004, para. 33 (advance copy distributed to members of the Council).

6. *Ibid.*, para. 21 (advance copy distributed to members of the Council).

7. In Resolution 1701, the Security Council “requests the Secretary-General to develop, in liaison with relevant international actors and the concerned parties, proposals to implement the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords, and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), including disarmament, and for delineation of the international borders of Lebanon, especially in those areas where the border is disputed or uncertain, including by dealing with the Shebaa farms area.” UN Security Council Resolution 1701, UN Doc. S/RES/1701, August 2006.