



Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1999/61
19 January 1999

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE UNITED NATIONS INTERIM FORCE IN LEBANON

(for the period from 16 July 1998 to 15 January 1999)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted in pursuance of Security Council resolution 1188 (1998) of 30 July 1998, by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of six months, until 31 January 1999. It covers developments since the previous report, dated 16 July 1998 (S/1998/652).

II. SITUATION IN THE AREA OF OPERATION

2. During the past six months, hostilities continued between the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and its local Lebanese auxiliary, the de facto forces (DFF), on the one hand, and armed elements who have proclaimed their resistance against the Israeli occupation, on the other. UNIFIL recorded 386 operations conducted by armed elements against IDF/DFF (34 in the second half of July, 80 in August, 64 in September, 69 in October, 71 in November, 47 in December and 21 in the first half of January). This is the highest number in a long time. There were also reports of some 280 operations north of the Litani River. The vast majority of those operations were carried out by the Islamic Resistance, the military wing of the Shiite Muslim Hizbullah organization. The Shiite movement Amal took responsibility for some 30 operations; a few were attributed to other Lebanese groups. The armed elements employed small arms, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, anti-tank missiles, recoilless rifles, rockets and explosive devices. They fired some 3,000 mortar rounds, rockets and anti-tank missiles, as compared to about 3,500 rounds in the previous reporting period.

3. IDF/DFF, in response to attacks or in operations they initiated, employed artillery, mortars, tanks, helicopter gunships, fixed-wing aircraft and explosive devices. IDF continued its practice of conducting pre-emptive artillery bombardments but reduced long-range patrols forward of its positions. UNIFIL recorded close to 18,000 rounds of artillery, mortar, tanks and missiles fired by IDF/DFF, an increase of 70 per cent over the last reporting period. IDF conducted seven air raids in UNIFIL's area of operation: near Shaqra

(3 November), Zibqin (12 November), Brashit (17 November), Yatar (18 November), Rishknaniyah (27 November), Tallet Hugban (3 December) and Zibqin (13 January). Another 58 air raids were carried out against targets north of the Litani River. As before, the Israeli navy patrolled the Lebanese territorial waters in the south and continued to impose restrictions on local fisherfolk.

4. UNIFIL continued its efforts to limit the conflict and to protect the inhabitants from the fighting. Through its network of checkpoints and observation posts, an active programme of patrolling, and continuous contacts with the parties, the Force did its best to prevent its area of operation from being used for hostile activities and to defuse situations that could lead to escalation. The Force was also deployed, as necessary, to provide a measure of protection to villages and to farmers working in the fields. Nevertheless, civilians were again killed or injured in UNIFIL's area of operation as follows: a civilian was injured in Majdal Zun on 9 August by IDF/DFF fire. Firing by armed elements injured two civilians near Rihane on 11 October and wounded another near At Tiri on 4 December. On 7 December, a civilian was wounded in At Tiri by IDF/DFF fire. On 17 December, a civilian was killed near Shaqra by IDF fire. On 8 January 1999, a civilian was killed and three others were wounded near Markabe by rockets fired by armed elements.

5. A number of serious incidents were also reported from outside the area of operation. On 31 July, a civilian was killed by a roadside bomb placed by armed elements. On 5 August, a civilian was killed by IDF fire. On 25 August, following the death of a DFF member, IDF/DFF shelled Mashghara (western Bekaa), wounding six civilians. The same evening, the Islamic Resistance fired at least 40 rockets into northern Israel, causing injuries to Israeli civilians. On 13 November, a civilian was killed and another was wounded near Arab Salim by IDF fire. The most serious incident occurred on 22 December, when a woman and her six children were killed in an Israeli air raid in the Bekaa Valley. The next morning, the Islamic Resistance fired more than 40 rockets into northern Israel, causing minor injuries to Israeli civilians. On 3 January, seven civilians were injured in an Israeli air raid in the Bekaa Valley.

6. Within the Israeli-controlled area (ICA), Israel continued to maintain a civil administration and security service. The infrastructure in ICA (road system, electricity, water supply, public buildings) continued to be improved with funds provided by the Government of Lebanon. However, ICA remained economically dependent on Israel, where more than 2,500 of the inhabitants go to work every day. Late in October, Israeli civilian contractors removed topsoil from the al-Marj area and took it to Israel. This activity ended after UNIFIL raised it with IDF.

7. IDF/DFF continued to conduct search operations in several villages in ICA and, from time to time, restricted the movement of the inhabitants. A number were arrested and imprisoned in Khiam, while others were expelled from their villages and ordered to leave ICA. On 2 September, a local civilian employee of UNIFIL was arrested and sent to Khiam; he was released on 1 October.

8. In carrying out its functions, the Force at times encountered hostile reactions from both sides. On 31 July, in the Irish battalion sector, armed elements threatened and fired close to United Nations personnel investigating a

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possible arms cache. UNIFIL protested through the Lebanese army. On 12 August, following an altercation at a United Nations checkpoint, UNIFIL learned of an order by local IDF/DFF security personnel in Hasbaniya to fire at United Nations vehicles. The next day, a UNIFIL armoured personnel carrier came under small arms fire near Hasbaniya. The matter was resolved through negotiations.

9. In July 1996, UNIFIL obtained a commitment from IDF to respect a safety zone around UNIFIL positions and received assurances from the Islamic Resistance that it would not operate in the vicinity of UNIFIL positions. Although both sides, by and large, showed restraint in this regard, there has been some slippage. Incidents of armed elements operating close to United Nations positions became more frequent, and firings at or close to United Nations positions and personnel increased to 98 (70 by IDF/DFF, 25 by armed elements and 3 by unidentified elements) from 72 during the last reporting period. On 19 August, four artillery rounds fired by IDF landed near a United Nations vehicle, injuring a Polish soldier. On 16 September, a foot patrol of the Norwegian battalion near the village of Blat came under fire from an Israeli tank; a Norwegian soldier was wounded. UNIFIL protested these incidents to the authorities concerned.

10. UNIFIL continued to assist the civilian population in its area of operation and ICA in the form of medical care, harvest patrols and the distribution of educational material and equipment to poorer schools and orphanages. In addition, water projects, equipment or services for schools and orphanages, and supplies to social services and needy people were provided from resources made available by troop-contributing countries. UNIFIL medical centres and mobile teams provided care to an average of 4,200 civilian patients per month and a field dental programme treated approximately 200 cases per month. UNIFIL also assisted the Government of Lebanon in transporting and distributing supplies to villages in ICA when they faced shortages owing to restrictions imposed by IDF/DFF. Throughout the period, UNIFIL cooperated closely on humanitarian matters with the Lebanese authorities, United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other organizations and agencies operating in Lebanon.

11. As in the past, UNIFIL continued the disposal of unexploded ordnance in its area of operation. In all, 41 controlled explosions were carried out. The Force also helped to fight the fires which devastated large tracts of land in August and September.

12. The monitoring group set up in accordance with the understanding of 26 April 1996 held 16 meetings at UNIFIL headquarters to consider complaints by Israel and Lebanon. UNIFIL provided facilities for the meetings as well as transport for the members of the group.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

13. At the end of November, an Indian battalion was deployed in the east sector, replacing the Norwegian unit, which departed UNIFIL after more than 20 years of service. As of December 1998, UNIFIL comprised 4,483 troops from Fiji (588), Finland (492), France (247), Ghana (646), India (617),

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Ireland (611), Italy (46), Nepal (604) and Poland (632). UNIFIL was assisted in its tasks by 51 military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). In addition, UNIFIL employed 486 civilian staff, of whom 142 were recruited internationally and 344 locally. Major-General Jioji Konousi Konrote continued as Force Commander. The deployment of UNIFIL is shown on the attached map.

14. Since the establishment of UNIFIL, 222 members of the Force have lost their lives: 76 as a result of firings or bomb explosions, 92 in accidents and 54 from other causes. A total of 334 have been wounded by firing, or by mine or bomb explosions.

15. UNIFIL maintained close contact with the Lebanese authorities on matters of mutual concern. Those authorities provided valuable assistance in connection with the rotation of troops and logistic activities in Beirut. The Lebanese army was helpful in defusing confrontations with armed elements. It also provided accommodation for some UNIFIL contingents while on leave in Lebanon. The Force continued to cooperate with the Lebanese Internal Security Forces on matters pertaining to the maintenance of law and order.

16. The problem of the rents owed by the Government of Lebanon to the owners of the land and premises used by UNIFIL has still not been resolved. Not all owners have received payment and there is continuing controversy over the lists of owners prepared by the Lebanese authorities.

IV. FINANCIAL MATTERS

17. The General Assembly, by its resolution 52/237 of 26 June 1998, appropriated to the Special Account for UNIFIL an amount of \$143.0 million gross, equivalent to a monthly rate of \$11.9 million gross, for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 1998 to 30 June 1999. Therefore, should the Council decide to extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further six months, the cost of maintaining the Force during that period would be limited to the monthly rate approved by the General Assembly.

18. As at 31 December 1998, unpaid assessments to the Special Account for UNIFIL for the period since its inception to 31 January 1999 amounted to \$112.9 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at that date amounted to \$1,593.2 million.

V. OBSERVATIONS

19. During the past six months, fighting in south Lebanon continued at an increased pace and the situation in the area remained volatile and dangerous, with a heightened risk of escalation. Regrettably, civilians were again killed and injured. As before, UNIFIL did its best to limit the conflict and to protect the inhabitants.

20. No new developments emerged from my recent contacts with the parties and others concerned regarding the implementation of Security Council resolution

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425 (1978). I shall continue to follow this matter closely and revert to the Council should there be any change in the situation.

21. The Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, in a letter addressed to me on 8 January 1999 (S/1999/22), conveyed his Government's request that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of six months.

22. While UNIFIL continues to be prevented from implementing the mandate contained in resolution 425 (1978), its contribution to stability and the protection it is able to afford the population of the area remain important. I therefore recommend that the Security Council respond positively to the request of the Government of Lebanon and extend the mandate of UNIFIL for another period of six months, until 31 July 1999.

23. I must again draw attention to the serious shortfall in the funding of the Force. At present, unpaid assessments amount to \$112.9 million. This represents money owed to the Member States contributing the troops that make up the Force. I appeal to all Member States to pay their assessments promptly and in full and to clear all remaining arrears. I should also like to express my gratitude to the Governments contributing troops to the Force, in particular those of developing countries, for their understanding and patience in these difficult circumstances.

24. In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to Major-General Jioji Konousi Konrote and to the men and women under his command for the manner in which they have carried out their difficult and often dangerous task. Their discipline and bearing have been of a high order, reflecting credit on themselves, on their countries and on the United Nations.

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