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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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Zeinab Akil

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UNIFIL: Keeping the peace or enabling an occupation?

With a ceasefire in place, UNIFIL's neutrality is under scrutiny again. Long-accused in Lebanon of protecting Israeli interests, ignoring repeated violations, and intercepting resistance efforts, this new phase casts serious doubts on its role as a genuine peacekeeping force.



Photo Credit: The Cradle

During the Israeli aggression against Lebanon, debate has resurfaced about the role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) – the UN peacekeeping contingent established in the Levantine state after Israel's first invasion in 1978 – with several events highlighting a bias toward protecting Tel Aviv's interests.

While ostensibly stationed in Lebanon's southern border areas to keep the peace, these forces have for many years faced accusations of helping Israel violate Lebanese sovereignty. Now, as a new [ceasefire agreement](#) comes into effect, UNIFIL must confront the challenge of proving itself as a genuine guarantor of stability along the border.

Since its inception in 1978, UNIFIL has been mandated to monitor the ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel. However, the reality on the ground tells a different story, with thousands of Israeli [violations](#) of Lebanese airspace annually.

This year alone, UN reports documented over 22,000 Israeli air violations, yet UNIFIL has merely expressed “deep concern” without taking any meaningful steps to prevent these incursions – despite the fact that UNIFIL forces themselves were targeted by Israeli strikes, with [seven intentional attacks](#) occurring in October alone. When queried about the possibility of resorting to self-defense against Israel, UNIFIL spokesman Andrea Tinetti told [Reuters](#), “It is important to calm the tension.”

Double standards abound

In December 2018, Israel's military launched Operation Northern Shield, aimed at uncovering and destroying tunnels allegedly dug by Hezbollah from southern Lebanon towards the occupied Palestinian territories.

On 6 December of that year, UNIFIL [confirmed](#) the presence of a tunnel near the Blue Line on the Israeli side of the border after a technical team visited the site. In stark contrast, a year earlier, in August 2017, UNIFIL showed little interest in documenting the planting of Israeli spy devices inside Lebanese territory. Hezbollah had announced the [discovery of a spy device](#) in Jabal Barouk, which oversees a large area of Lebanese territory, but UNIFIL did not even issue an official statement on the violation.

In October 2024, an Israeli naval commando unit carried out a landing operation on the coastal city of Batroun in northern Lebanon, during which they [kidnapped](#) Lebanese citizen and maritime captain Imad Amhaz, falsely accusing him of belonging to Hezbollah.

According to [reports](#), Israeli “intelligence officials” had monitored Amhaz for an unspecified period in advance of the abduction. Subsequent information indicated that the German battalion in UNIFIL had allegedly facilitated the operation by providing intelligence to Israel. Though the German government denies the accusation, doubts linger in the absence of transparent investigations.

The Lebanese Minister of Public Works and Transport, Ali Hamiyah, has hinted at [UNIFIL's responsibility for the kidnapping](#), as the UN forces are responsible for monitoring the coastal beach lines of Lebanon.

In another incident, Israeli spy devices were discovered planted inside Lebanese territory near UNIFIL sites. As usual, the international forces issued only general statements on the incident, claiming these devices were planted during the July 2006 war while ignoring

evidence suggesting their recent installation. The Lebanese side [criticized](#) this stance as an “unacceptable bias.”

On 5 October 2024, after Israel's latest aggression against Lebanon commenced, the Lebanese army [warned](#) of Israeli attempts to lure citizens into areas designated for spying and intelligence gathering.

Citizens were urged to be cautious and avoid interacting with suspicious content on social media. This warning came amid rising fears of security breaches believed to have been conducted by Israel through local spy networks.

Biased reporting to the UN's top body

In its periodic reports to the UN Security Council, UNIFIL often highlights what it views as Lebanese ceasefire infractions, while downplaying repeated, often daily, Israeli violations. For instance, a [report](#) from the UN secretary-general on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701, covering the period between 21 June to 20 October 2023, focused primarily on rocket launches from southern Lebanon, with only limited reference to continuous Israeli air raids on Lebanese border villages. This biased reporting sets the scene for misinformation, strengthening a grossly inaccurate Israeli narrative of events on the international stage. Threats originating from Lebanon are highlighted and exaggerated in UNIFIL's reporting, while Israeli violations are either ignored or minimized.

Lebanese southern villagers regularly complain about the enforcement of strict restrictions on their movement in border areas, ostensibly for security reasons, while Israeli military incursions, such as building barbed wire inside Lebanese territory or conducting reconnaissance, are largely ignored by UNIFIL.

Ironically, since Operation Al-Aqsa Flood in 2023, occupation forces have [bombed and targeted](#) UNIFIL units whenever they were perceived as uncooperative or obstructive. Despite these attacks, UNIFIL's response has been limited to diplomatic reports.

Selective implementation of Resolution 1701

A [recent incident](#) in the town of Qalawayh that took place on 14 November further illustrates UNIFIL's selective enforcement of its mandate. According to the UN forces, one of its patrols noticed an “ammunition cache” near a road, notified the Lebanese army, and then proceeded on its route. Soon after, the patrol came under fire from “unknown persons” and responded by shooting from its vehicles before moving on without recording any injuries or damage.

However, the Lebanese army provided a different account of the incident, stating that UNIFIL attempted to conduct a patrol in the area despite the army's prior refusal, which was based on the deteriorating security conditions due to repeated Israeli air incursions.

In short, UNIFIL unilaterally decided to proceed from the French unit's center without proper coordination with the Lebanese army. When they attempted to raid what they perceived to be a resistance ammunition depot, they faced warning shots fired in the air to force them to retreat.

Upon inquiring about the coordination breach, UNIFIL leadership in Naqoura responded that “UNIFIL has freedom of movement and does not need the approval of the Lebanese Army.”

This reveals how UNIFIL selectively implements its tasks, moving rapidly when Israeli interests are at stake. During the latest round of conflict, the German UNIFIL warship [intercepted a resistance drone](#) while taking no action against Israeli reconnaissance planes and drones, let alone addressing the occupation state's relentless, punishing bombings of Lebanese villages, residential areas, mosques, infrastructure, and heritage sites.

The role of UNIFIL in the ‘day after’ war on Lebanon

In the aftermath of this week's fragile truce agreement, UNIFIL will allegedly participate in monitoring the peace alongside Lebanon, Israel, the US, and France. However, UNIFIL's current role continues to lean heavily in favor of Israeli interests, which is why Lebanon raised objections and vetoed provisions related to UNIFIL in the ceasefire agreement while Israel favored it.

The focus on UNIFIL may be redundant moving forward, as the latest agreement has established Israel's largest arms provider and most stalwart ally, the US, to guide the post-war landscape inside Lebanon.

Even more ominous for Lebanon's sovereignty and its army's independence is the establishment of the Military Technical Committee for Lebanon (MTC4L), which aims to train 10,000 Lebanese army troops to police the country's south. This committee consists of eight NATO member states – the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Spain – who will take the lead in determining the make-up of the Lebanese forces on Israel's border. Couple this with a Lebanese army commander, Joseph Aoun, who is openly and aggressively backed by Washington for the country's vacant presidential post, meaning “UNIFIL's bias” may no longer be Lebanon's biggest sovereignty problem.

Whatever the outcome, and despite the respite in confrontations, UNIFIL's role in southern Lebanon will inevitably be reshaped based on the entry of these new players into the equation and the war's longer-term outcome.

Should Hezbollah regain its deterrent capability, the resistance may seek to redefine UNIFIL's mission to ensure it acts impartially; otherwise, UNIFIL's role may shift further towards consolidating Israeli tactical gains.

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