

international support for Lebanon's sovereignty. The only international involvement was a German technical support team that began a project to help Lebanon improve its border security in the north.

Despite this project, the popular uprising in Syria today shows that the border is not secure, due to a lack of both expertise and political will. Current tensions along the border and the commitment of the Lebanese government to the 'Resistance' against Israeli occupation make it unlikely that any serious moves towards border demarcation will take place in the near future.

Under current conditions, Lebanese security cannot curb smuggling and the realisation of arms shipments to

Hezbollah. Lack of Syrian and Israeli will to address the key issues of the Chebaa Farms, Kfar-Shuba and Ghajar means that these areas will remain potential flashpoints between Hezbollah and Israel. After Israel's withdrawals in 2000 and in the 2006 war, Hezbollah has increasingly looked to the Chebaa Farms as a focus for its resistance. Lebanese officials have failed to support repeated claims to the Chebaa Farms with documentary evidence. Syria has used the ongoing disagreement over the farms between Lebanon and Israel to defer progress on demarcating its own border.

Interview by Alexander Ramsbotham

BOX 8

UNIFIL's contribution to peace in Lebanon

A conversation with Timur Goksel



Timur Goksel is a former spokesperson and senior advisor to UNIFIL. He currently teaches in the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration at the American University of Beirut.

What have been the main changes between UNIFIL I (1978) and UNIFIL II (2006)?

The revision of the UNIFIL mandate in 2006 by the UN Security Council meant a major expansion in terms of force strength, and of breadth of Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs). In particular, powerful European Union (EU) Member States, such as France, Germany, Italy and Spain, agreed to provide personnel. The 2006 expansion therefore enhanced UNIFIL's political authority, and local and international credibility. High profile EU interest raised the political stakes for the parties.

But political benefits of expansion were balanced by military and practical trade-offs, in particular operational challenges. UNIFIL's 12,000-strong military contingent (as at August 2011) comprises troops from 37 different countries, with divergent command and control and other logistical priorities, as each TCC tries to balance international obligations with national interests, and answers to national capitals as much as mission headquarters.

Does UNIFIL offer Lebanon better protection from Israel?

When UNIFIL was first deployed in 1978, Israel occupied south Lebanon. Israeli cross-border incursions at that time

were therefore comparatively inconspicuous. But following the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon in 2000, Israeli troop movements across the border have been more apparent – and more controversial.

Ultimately, UNIFIL is a peacekeeping mission: it can defend itself, but it is not mandated to fight a war. Member States contributing troops to UNIFIL are not prepared for aggressive action. In relation to border security, UNIFIL is there to observe and report, and to promote dialogue. This latter function is very important and UNIFIL fulfils a vital role.

But it is important to acknowledge what the mission is there for. Local people in south Lebanon understand UNIFIL's role well: its strengths, weaknesses and limitations. But politicians in Beirut are less well-informed – or see UNIFIL as an easy political target – and make impractical demands on the mission.

How can UNIFIL support border security in south Lebanon, in view of challenges of both regional conflict and internal tensions?

Although UNIFIL primarily comprises military personnel, its main advantage is political. A vital function is to act as a neutral third party link between Lebanese and Israeli militaries. UNIFIL legitimacy comes from its UN Security Council mandate; but in practice its legitimacy has latterly (post-2006) been strengthened by the international breadth of participation in the mission, and by increased resources and capacity.

UNIFIL's international status allows it a level of neutrality. It has used this to promote dialogue between the parties across the border. A tripartite mechanism between the



Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), and facilitated by UNIFIL, promotes dialogue between Lebanese and Israeli militaries.

It is important to acknowledge the extent of the impact of this dialogue: these conversations are not going to deliver peace in Lebanon; but they are a major contribution to stability in circumstances where cross-border communication is very limited.

What is UNIFIL's contribution to the returning of state sovereignty in" south Lebanon, especially through cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces?

UNIFIL's original 1978 mandate required the mission to "[assist] the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority". This was wholly unrealistic at a time when Lebanon was beset by multiple civil wars, and was also a theatre for transnational conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. In south Lebanon in particular, there was at that time no national Lebanese military or police presence. And UNIFIL was neither mandated nor resourced for such a role.

After the Palestine Liberation Organisation left Lebanon in the early 1980s, Lebanese from the south began to return

home: the population swelled from 15,000 to 400,000. Increased civilian presence supported greater governance and accountability.

Enabling this return was a major achievement for UNIFIL. Lack of state presence in the south – either security or service provision – meant local people looked to the UN to uphold their day-to-day security and welfare. Since then, Beirut has failed to provide services to the south, which remains detached from state authority.

In terms of the border, after the Israeli withdrawal in 2000, Syrian influence meant that LAF troops failed to deploy as far as the Israeli border and did not deal with border security, despite major international pressure. This has meant there is a continued emphasis on UNIFIL's role.

Hezbollah's subsequent dominance along the border has caused significant problems for UNIFIL, not least in terms of its relations with Tel Aviv, Beirut and New York.

Is UNIFIL II a tool for peacebuilding in southern Lebanon?

UNIFIL's direct contact with communities in South Lebanon has, in fact, diminished since the withdrawal of the Israelis and the arrival of the LAF in 2000, as the LAF has since become an interlocutor between UNIFIL and local communities.

UNIFIL's main focus is conflict-management. UNIFIL supports local development initiatives, such as helping to build water distribution facilities. And it provides employment opportunities in areas where it is operational. But its peacebuilding function is indirect. The most essential peacebuilding function for UNIFIL is to prevent or defuse potentially explosive tensions across the border.

Interview by Alexander Ramsbotham