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COMMENTARY

Hezbollah Is Running Rings Around U.N. Monitors in Lebanon

The Security Council should expand the force's mandate—and make sure they do their jobs.

Peacekeepers of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon during a 2016 command-transfer ceremony. PHOTO: REUTERS

By Danny Danon

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Over the past year, I have given dozens of United Nations ambassadors tours of Israel's border with Lebanon. During a recent visit with my American counterpart, Nikki Haley, Israel Defense Forces officers identified Hezbollah positions along our northern border. Our guests appropriately asked where the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon was, and why nothing was being done to stop Hezbollah terrorists from blatantly violating numerous Security Council resolutions.

Our answer was simple. The Unifil force is there, but they are not effectively fulfilling their mandate. The good news is that when Unifil's mandate comes before the Security Council later this month, there are practical steps that can be taken to ensure that this important U.N. force succeeds and another conflict with Hezbollah is avoided.

Unifil was established in 1978 with the goal of restoring “international peace and security” and assisting the Lebanese government in extending its authority over

southern Lebanon. The force was altered in 1982 after the First Lebanon War and again in 2000 when Israel completed its withdrawal from Lebanese territory.

In August 2006, following the Second Lebanon War and the subsequent Security Council Resolution 1701, Unifil's mandate expanded to include monitoring the cease-fire. Most importantly, Unifil was charged with ensuring that the territory south of the Litani River remained free of weapons and fighters other than the Lebanese army.

Unfortunately, these efforts have failed. Over the past year alone, we have shared with the Security Council new information detailing how border towns have become Hezbollah strongholds. One out of three buildings in the village of Shaqra is now being used to store arms or launch attacks on Israel. We also shared with the council intelligence revealing how the Iranians use civilian airlines to smuggle dangerous arms into southern Lebanon. When the Second Lebanon War ended, Hezbollah had around 7,000 rockets. Today, they have more than 100,000.

Hezbollah is lately stepping up its efforts to destabilize the region. In April its fighters posed for pictures with rocket-propelled-grenade launchers during a media "tour" of their positions along Israel's border. Unifil forces did nothing to halt this live, televised violation of Security Council resolutions.

In June, Israel reported to the U.N. that Hezbollah has established a series of border outposts under the guise of an agricultural organization called Green Without Borders. Our intelligence services have determined that these positions are used regularly for reconnaissance operations against Israel. In this instance too, Unifil insisted on turning a blind eye, claiming that it lacked authority to investigate.

To rectify this situation, and avoid a new conflict, the Security Council must make real changes to Unifil's mandate. In addition to generally improving Unifil's performance, the council should insist on three vital steps.

First, Unifil must increase its presence in the territory. This includes meticulously inspecting the towns and villages of southern Lebanon. Hezbollah strongholds, like the one in Shaqra, must be dismantled, and other villages must be kept free of rockets and weapons aimed at Israeli population centers.

Second, Unifil must report all violations of Resolution 1701. The Security Council should not hear about them from us, and definitely not from the media. It is vital that Unifil report on these violations in real time to ensure that the members of the council can take appropriate measures.

Third, the Unifil forces must insist on unlimited access to all suspicious installations under their mandate. As a report by the U.N. secretary-general recently noted, Unifil is regularly obstructed in southern Lebanon. Excuses regarding the activities of nongovernmental organizations or other Hezbollah front groups should not be tolerated.

Israel has been, and always will be, ready to defend its citizens. At the same time, no one wants Unifil to succeed more than Israel does. With Hamas rearming in Gaza and Islamic State increasing its strength along our frontier with Syria, we seek calm and stability on our northern border. To achieve this, the Security Council must step up its efforts to ensure that Unifil's renewed mandate fulfills the goals outlined above. Failing to do so will call into question the efficacy of this U.N. peacekeeping force and endanger the lives of innocent Israelis and Lebanese.

Mr. Danon is Israel's ambassador to the U.N.

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