

Lebanon: the latest example of UN peacekeeping action

By Henry Wiseman

The swift establishment of the United Nations interim force for southern Lebanon, UNIFIL, on March 19, 1978, in response to Lebanon's charge of "naked aggression" by Israel, marks a further extension in the complexity and the mandated responsibilities of United Nations peacekeeping. An instrument that had been overtaxed in the Congo, abused in Cyprus and actually expelled from the Sinai, peacekeeping was nonetheless reintroduced in the Sinai and the Golan Heights in 1973, and has now been thrust into the Lebanese crisis. Though subject to its special failings and seldom free of criticism, peacekeeping has been effective as a component of the broader United Nations commitment to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Since UNIFIL has only recently completed its first authorized life-span of six months and since the general situation in Lebanon remains so volatile, no current treatment can do it adequate justice. Nevertheless, its unique mandate, its activities and, as we shall argue, its considerable success to date provide some basis for comparison with other operations and, in general, sufficient evidence of the growing effectiveness and legitimacy of United Nations peacekeeping.

In May 1958, widespread revolt broke out in Lebanon. In June, responding to the claim by President Camille Chamoun of massive, illegal and unprovoked intervention in the affairs of Lebanon by the United Arab Republic (Egypt and Syria), the Security Council established the United Nations Observation Group in Lebanon, UNOGIL, by a vote of ten to none, with the U.S.S.R. abstaining. Its function was to ensure that there would be no illegal infiltration of personnel or arms across the Lebanese borders and, to this end, the Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, defined its role as limited strictly to observation. Its size was estab-

lished at 550, contributed by 20 nations, and its total cost was approximately \$5 million, apportioned as part of the regular budget. It had a life-span of only six months, during which time it was able to provide little evidence of the suspected infiltration. Nonetheless, its presence did help to shore up the pro-Western government of President Chamoun. However, when that government was further threatened by a pro-Nasser *coup* in Iraq, Chamoun requested military aid from the United States. In July 1958, 14,000 Marines were landed in Lebanon to stabilize the situation. Simultaneously, British forces entered Jordan. UNOGIL, though outwardly compromised by this action, was held to its original mandate. Directed by a General Assembly resolution to make "such practical arrangements" as would facilitate the withdrawal of U.S. and British troops from Lebanon and Jordan, the Secretary-General did increase the strength of UNOGIL. For this and other reasons, stability was quickly restored, foreign troops were withdrawn by early November and one month later UNOGIL was disbanded.

However, since UNOGIL had failed to confirm the immediate cause of its own creation and had been subjected to controversy on account of the U.S. military presence, which deadlocked the Security Council and moved the issue to the General Assembly, its political justification was clouded. Coming so soon after the Suez crisis of 1956, it bore the stigma of Western intervention.

Broader scope

Though there are striking parallels between the events of 1958 and 1978, UNIFIL is much broader in scope and significance. In escalated reprisal for a Palestinian commando raid on Tel Aviv that killed 35 persons and wounded 70, Israel launched a determined invasion of southern Lebanon designed to root out Palestinian liberation forces from the area between its border with Lebanon and the Litani River. The action resulted in casualties on all sides and caused a stream of 250,000 hapless refugees to flee northward towards Beirut, beyond the immediate

Stability quickly restored

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