

LEBANON CRISIS *Hagai Segal*

Is the UN up to the task of peacemaker?

If the UN Security Council resolution for a ceasefire in Lebanon is to work, much will depend on the effectiveness of the UN force entrusted with implementing it. But previous experience hardly makes one optimistic that it will have either the authority or the trust to do the job.

Arab and Israeli governments have long-standing reservations about the UN and its role in the region. Foremost in Israeli minds is the UN's role in the prelude to the 1967 Six-Day war.

The UN deployed an emergency force in Egypt's Sinai peninsula as part of the 1956 Sinai conflict ceasefire agreement, to serve as a buffer between Egyptian and Israeli forces.

But in May 1967, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, amid growing regional tensions, demanded that the force leave. The UN secretary-general at the time, U Thant, pulled them out without even consulting the secu-

rity council. Within days, Egyptian troops were deploying along the Israeli border, and within weeks the Six-Day war erupted.

Since then, Israel has perceived the UN's actions as proof of its inability to enforce its will in a crisis. These sentiments have only been exacerbated by Israel's routine accusations of pro-Arab bias on the part of two UN groups: the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil), which will be enlarged to help enforce the latest resolution, and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine, the agency responsible since 1949 for humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees.

Arab states have also viewed the UN with suspicion and doubt, angry at its inability to pressure Israel into complying with many UN resolutions. Arab leaders are thus also unwilling to rely on the UN for assistance in resolving key regional issues, turning instead to

leading nations that are actually capable of enforcing their will and delivering on their promises. It is such states, not the UN, that have facilitated and mediated every major Arab-Israeli peace initiative.

The simple, yet troubling, truth is that while historically the UN has proved itself effective at peacekeeping, it has a distinctly less illustrious record of peacemaking.

Yet the current resolution potentially requires Unifil to make peace: its work will include ensuring that the Lebanese government takes control of the south of the country, and that the area is not used as a base for attacks on Israel.

Achieving this aim will largely rely on the ill-equipped Lebanese army, and how well it can work with Unifil.

So there is a real danger that, even if calm can be restored, a "halfway house" sort of reality will emerge:

namely, that Lebanon and the UN will keep Hezbollah in check in the south, but the group will remain a fully armed and unfettered military force. This would be deeply unsatisfactory to Israel and the US in particular, since it would allow Hezbollah to strike with full force in the future. In such a scenario, future hostilities remain likely.

The Lebanon crisis has put the UN's reputation on the line. If the ceasefire does not endure, blame will have to fall on the UN force and the inability of the security council to implement its resolutions.

Such a failure would severely hamstring the UN's ability to play the role of conflict resolver in the future. It will also surely result in the Middle East burning anew.

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