



## Boutros-Ghali Observatory on Peacekeeping – February 2026



# Flexibility and adaptability of UN missions: UNIFIL between opportunities and contextual limitations

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## Executive summary

United Nations (UN) peacekeeping, like the UN as a whole, is experiencing a multidimensional crisis. This crisis raises acute questions about the adaptability and flexibility of peace operations to new realities, not only in New York but also in the field where they are deployed. It is in this context that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), deployed since 1978, has been confronted with violent upheavals in its area of operations (AO) in the wake of the attacks of 7 October 2023 perpetrated in Israel by the Palestinian Hamas. The nature and duration of these developments have significantly tested the Force's flexibility and adaptability since then.

This note first reviews the developments that UNIFIL experienced prior to 7 October, since it had already witnessed throughout the decades a series of disruptions affecting key parameters of the Lebanese, Israeli-Lebanese and regional political arenas. The situation had reached a new balance after the hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006, which were brought to an end by Resolution 1701. Since then, UNIFIL's actions had helped to ensure a long period of relative calm on the Lebanese-Israeli border, despite the political deadlock in Lebanon and the repercussions of multiple crises in the region.

The note then analyses the various stages of UNIFIL's adaptation following the attacks of 7 October 2023, which reignited the Israeli-Lebanese front. Three periods are identified: the first, from October 2023 to September 2024, during which the mission sought to adapt by maintaining its operational activities where possible or, otherwise, the simple presence of its contingents and liaison tasks, with the protection of its own personnel as its absolute and constant priority. Then, between September and November 2024, the mission maintained its positions despite Israel's demands that it evacuate. In doing so, it preserved its chances of remaining relevant in the post-crisis period. The signing of the cessation of hostilities (COH) in November 2024 opened a new period of adaptability and new prospects for UNIFIL by transforming the balance of power between the State of Israel, supported in its military operations by Washington and many Western capitals, and Hezbollah, militarily and politically weakened by this new confrontation and several regional developments. UNIFIL quickly resumed most of its activities, some of them more assertively than before.

Mainly operational until the entry into force of the COH and then more strategic, the adaptations of UNIFIL studied in the paper are the result of a combination of factors located at different levels. At the most macro level, there is the UNIFIL leadership's reading of the context and the balance of power between the mission and the actors involved, as well as the political will of the contributing countries. At a more micro level, the personalities and approaches of certain officers in command positions played a significant role. However, the contextual factor is key to understanding the assertive adaptations made after the COH came into force. The decision to end the Force at the end of 2026 also seems to be an important contextual factor, with potentially conflicting effects, as the COH has proved to be fundamentally unilateral with Israel increasing its strikes on a daily basis.

Finally, the paper analyses UNIFIL's adaptations through the prism of reflections on peacekeeping that have been at the heart of UN debates for several years, raising crucial questions about the future of UN peacekeeping. Several points highlighted in the note suggest that the mission is now operating in a context dominated by coercive approaches that are diametrically opposed to peacekeeping, and that it is becoming the objective conduit for such approaches.

# Table of contents

Executive summary .....	
List of acronyms .....	
Introduction.....	1
1. Contextualisation prior to 7 October.....	3
1.1. From UNIFIL I to UNIFIL II: a history of ruptures.....	3
1.2. An increasingly complex local and regional context.....	4
1.3. The contours of a difficult mission and its possibilities .....	4
2. UNIFIL in the face of a crescendo escalation (Oct. 2023 - Sept. 2024).....	6
2.1. The reactivation of the front in Lebanon and the repercussions on UNIFIL.....	6
2.2. Adaptations in the face of a war that dares not speak its name .....	8
3. Between a rock and a hard place: UNIFIL stands its ground (Sept. – Nov. 2024) .....	9
3.1. The military crushing of Lebanon and the pressuring of UNIFIL .....	9
3.2. Adaptations during periods of heightened tension: staying and protecting oneself.....	11
4. UNIFIL's strategic adjustments post-COH.....	12
4.1. A unilateral cessation of hostilities.....	12
4.2. Breaks and continuities in UNIFIL's adaptations.....	13
4.3. Too much or too little: adaptations, mistrust and friction .....	15
5. UNIFIL's strategies and adaptation factors.....	16
5.1. From operational responsiveness to strategic adjustments.....	16
5.2. Analysis of the factors that shaped UNIFIL's adaptations .....	17
6. UNIFIL's adaptation in light of the trap of unilateralism .....	19
6.1. Primacy of the use of force over diplomacy .....	20
6.2. What impartiality and what consent? .....	21
6.3. Weakening of the Lebanese state and victimisation of the population.....	21
6.4. Fragile prospects for peace.....	22
Conclusion.....	23
Recommendations .....	24

## List of acronyms

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data
AO	Area of operations
BL	Blue Line
COH	Cessation of hostilities
DPO	Department of Peace Operations
FCR	Force Commander's Reserve
HQ	Headquarters
IDF	Israeli Defence Forces
JOC	Joint Operations Centre
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
MTC4L	Military Technical Committee for Lebanon
MTF	Maritime Task Force
OGL	Observer Group Lebanon
PA	Principled adaptation
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
PO	Peace operation
SG	Secretary-General
TPCC	Troop and police contributing country
UN	United Nations
UNDOF	United Nations Disengagement Observer Force
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNTSO	United Nations Organisation Supervising the Truce

## Introduction

From Ukraine to Gaza, and in numerous countries in Africa and Asia, conflicts are multiplying at an unprecedented rate since the creation of the United Nations (UN), with their host of massive violations of the UN Charter<sup>1</sup> and the rules and conventions of international law in its various forms.<sup>2</sup> Speaking at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2025, UN Secretary-General (SG) António Guterres made an uncompromising assessment: "*We have entered an age of reckless disruption and relentless human suffering. (...) The principles of the United Nations (...) are under siege. (...) The pillars of peace and progress are buckling under the weight of impunity, inequality and indifference. (...) Peace is our first obligation. Yet today, wars rage with a barbarity we vowed never to allow (...). We have the solutions, but we are siphoning off the fuel that would enable us to move forward*".<sup>3</sup>

Exacerbated by the practices of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) which paralyse its action or take it in directions that contradict the founding principles of the UN,<sup>4</sup> this political crisis is compounded by a liquidity crisis. The latter is largely due to the delays or refusals of Member States, led by the United States, to pay their contributions. This crisis has reached unprecedented proportions, directly impacting peacekeeping.<sup>5</sup> But the crisis affecting peacekeeping goes further than that: in a divided international context where the UNSC's actions are often undermined, many UN missions have been subject to criticism, political resistance or a lack of trust among local populations; such criticism has been amplified by the gap between resources and expectations as well as by misinformation and disinformation.<sup>6</sup>

Faced with these multidimensional challenges, peacekeeping was already being called into question and seeking to adapt to new realities<sup>7</sup> when conflict erupted in the area of operations (AO) of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). This comes after 18 years of relative calm ensured by the mission, the longest period of cessation of hostilities (COH) between Lebanon and Israel in

<sup>1</sup> [United Nations Charter](#), adopted in San Francisco on 26 June 1945, entered into force on 26 June 1945.

<sup>2</sup> ["Global Peace Index 2025: Identifying and Measuring the Factors that Drive Peace"](#), *Institute for Economics & Peace*, June 2025.

<sup>3</sup> ["Secretary-General's address to the Opening of the General Debate of the 80th Session of the General Assembly"](#), *United Nations*, Secretary-General, Statements, 23 September 2025.

<sup>4</sup> ["Vetoing humanity. How a few powerful nations hijacked global peace and why reform is needed at the UN Security Council"](#), *Oxfam*, September 2024.

<sup>5</sup> ["as of 30 April — up from \\$1.7 billion the previous year — and a \\$2.7 billion cash shortfall facing peacekeeping operations."](#) As of 9 May 2025, only 67 Member States were up to date with their contributions to this budget, quoted in ["Severe Cash Shortfall Exposing United Nations to Growing Reputational Risk, Speakers Warn, as Fifth Committee Discusses Organization's Worsening Financial Situation"](#), *United Nations*, UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 19 May 2025.

<sup>6</sup> WANE El-Ghassim, WILLIAMS Paul D., and KIHARA-HUN Ai, ["The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities"](#), *UN*, Department of Peace Operations, October 2024, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Peacekeeping is the subject of several reform projects, including the "Pact for the Future" adopted in September 2024 at the Summit for the Future. For more information, ["The Pact for the Future"](#), UNGA, A/RES/79/1, 22 September 2024. This Pact calls on the Secretary-General to conduct a study on the future of peace operations, an independent study commissioned by the Department of Peace Operations (WANE El-Ghassim, WILLIAMS Paul D., and KIHARA-HUN Ai, ["The Future of Peacekeeping"](#), *loc. cit.*) and a Ministerial Conference held in Berlin in May 2025. For more information, see LIÉGEOIS Michel, ["L'ONU et le maintien de la paix : défis et prospective"](#), *Boutros-Ghali Observatory paper*, 9 April 2025.

several decades, without the “*international community*”<sup>8</sup> stepping in to work towards resolving the conflict between Israel and Lebanon, an integral part of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>9</sup> Initially low-intensity, this conflict will reach extreme proportions in the autumn of 2024. After the entry into force of a COH, it will subside while taking on a unilateral character, with Israel continuing its attacks on Lebanese territory (a brief chronology from October 2023 to the entry into force of UNIFIL is provided in Annex 2). Faced with an evolving and volatile situation both on the ground and at UN headquarters, UNIFIL has been forced to adapt to the multidimensional changes taking place in its environment, especially as it has been challenged politically and targeted militarily.

When it comes to the adaptability of peace operations (PO), there are several levels to consider. At the global level, it refers to the adaptation of peacekeeping to an international context marked by geopolitical shifts, budget cuts, technological challenges, and more complex local environments.<sup>10</sup> At the mission level, it is often associated with the process of evolutionary change in reaction to transformations in the mission's environment, based on principles that enable it to become more effective while retaining its identity, mandate and core tasks.<sup>11</sup> When the change is structural, we tend to talk about adaptability. When adjustments are more *ad hoc* and aimed at dealing with a particular situation, we rather talk about adaptation. In the case of UNIFIL and at a time multiple questions were being asked regarding peacekeeping, two dimensions emerged from autumn 2023 onwards: firstly, operational adaptation aimed at navigating an increasingly volatile environment; secondly, in the post-acute crisis period, a more strategic and structural adaptation, but one whose focus on only a few aspects of the mandate places it in a kind of infra-adaptability.

Based on the upheavals that have been unfolding since 2023, this paper analyses these two dimensions of UNIFIL's adaptation to a succession of multifaceted challenges arising not only from the field but also from the political arena, which, from the UN to Beirut and numerous Western and regional capitals, has kept experiencing strong tensions and polarisation. It attempts to identify the factors influencing the mission's adaptation process and modalities, while questioning their effectiveness and their contribution to peacekeeping.<sup>12</sup>

The first section presents the situation in which UNIFIL used to operate prior to October 2023, highlighting its complexities. The three following sections focus on developments in the mission's environment, the challenges they have posed, and the adjustments that were consequently made from October 2023 to September 2024, then during the paroxysmic crisis period (September to November 2024), and finally post-COH (late November 2024 onwards). The fifth section provides a summary of

<sup>8</sup> This term refers here to all the powers, particularly Western powers, that continue to dominate the international scene (see PAQUIN Stéphane, “[Les organisations internationales dans la théorie des relations internationales](#)”, *Revue québécoise de droit international*, Special Edition, December 2021, p. 11–36).

<sup>9</sup> On the absence of any willingness to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, see AGHA Hussein and MALLEY Robert, *Tomorrow is Yesterday. Life, Death, and the Pursuit of Peace in Israel/Palestine*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2025.

<sup>10</sup> WANE El-Ghassim, WILLIAMS Paul D., and KIHARA-HUN Ai, “[The Future of Peacekeeping](#)”, *loc. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> DE CONING Cedric, “[Adaptive peacebuilding](#)”, *International Affairs*, vol. 94, n° 2, 2018, p. 301-317.

<sup>12</sup> This paper is based on extensive documentary research (scientific publications; relevant think tank publications; UN Secretary-General reports and various UN documents; statements by foreign ministries; news feeds from major international news agencies; general media; social media, etc.), as well as seven formal interviews. Six were conducted with senior officers or generals who served with the UN, particularly UNIFIL, and who were from or close to the latter's European contingents; they requested anonymity. These interviews have a French centre of gravity and are not representative of the diversity of stakeholders. A final formal interview was conducted with Marie-Joëlle Zahar, professor at the University of Montreal and director of the Francophone network of POs. This note was finalised on 26 November 2025 and therefore does not cover events and changes that have occurred since then.

the adaptations and analyses the factors that shaped them, while the last one examines the most significant adaptations in light of the context in which they are being implemented and the priorities of peacekeeping.<sup>13</sup>

## 1. Contextualisation prior to 7 October

### 1.1. From UNIFIL I to UNIFIL II: a history of ruptures

Established by Resolutions 425<sup>14</sup> and 426<sup>15</sup> (19 March 1978) during Israel's first invasion of south Lebanon, UNIFIL, like the latter, has experienced a multitude of situations that have evolved in line with the developments in a multi-level local, regional and international conflict<sup>16</sup> (see also the chronology of Israeli-Lebanese relations in Annex 1). Israel's occupation of south Lebanon, which lasted until 2000, was followed by a unilateral withdrawal in a context characterized by the deadlock in the Arab-Israeli peace process.<sup>17</sup> Hezbollah, which was formed in the wake of the 1982 Israeli invasion and drew largely from the Shiite population of south Lebanon, asserted itself in the region while maintaining its stance of "*resistance*" to Israel. An operation targeting an Israeli patrol in 2006 triggered a 33-day war.<sup>18</sup> Although very costly for Lebanon at the human and material levels, this war was considered a victory for Hezbollah. To bring it to an end, the UNSC decided to strengthen UNIFIL by passing Resolution 1701.<sup>19</sup> The latter provided for an increase in the number of troops, a heavier equipment and a more robust mandate. With this enhanced outlook, UNIFIL found itself acting as the guardian of the terms of the COH and supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) with a view to disarming armed groups – first and foremost Hezbollah – and creating a zone south of the Litani River free of any unauthorised military presence or equipment.<sup>20</sup>

In its new form, UNIFIL was to be able to resort to the "*proportionate and gradual use*" of force beyond self-defence, in particular to: "*ensure that its area of operations is not utilised for hostile activities*"; "*resist attempts by forceful means [...] from discharging its duties [...]*"; "*ensure the security and freedom of movement of UN personnel and humanitarian workers*"; and "*protect civilians under*

<sup>13</sup> This note includes a series of annexes in a separate document. To access them, visit: [https://www.observatoire-boutros-ghali.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/ANNEXES-Flexibility-and-adaptability-of-UN-missions\\_UNIFIL.pdf](https://www.observatoire-boutros-ghali.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/ANNEXES-Flexibility-and-adaptability-of-UN-missions_UNIFIL.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> "Resolution 425 (1978)", UNSC, S/RES/425 (1978), 19 March 1978.

<sup>15</sup> "Resolution 426 (1978)", UNSC, S/RES/426 (1978), 19 March 1978.

<sup>16</sup> For an analysis of developments in the context of UNIFIL's deployment, see: MAKDISI Karim, "[Reconsidering the Struggle over UNIFIL in South Lebanon](#)", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 43, n° 2, 2014, p. 24–41; AOUN Elena, "The evolving regional context of UNIFIL: Old challenges and new threats", in AOUN Elena (eds.), *The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon: Multiple Perspectives on a Multinational Peace Operation*, Peter Lang, 2018, p. 55-80.

<sup>17</sup> In fact, a link has been established between the failure of negotiations between Israel and Syria, Lebanon's guardian power at the time, and Israel's unilateral withdrawal from south Lebanon. See KAYE Dalia Dassa, "[The Israeli Decision to Withdraw from South Lebanon : Political Leadership and Security Policy](#)", *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 117, n° 4, 2002, p. 561-585.

<sup>18</sup> MERMIER Franck and PICARD Elizabeth (eds.), *Liban, une guerre de 33 jours*, Paris, La Découverte, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> "Resolution 1701 (2006)", UNSC, S/RES/1701 (2006), 11 August 2006.

<sup>20</sup> The Litani River marks the northern boundary of the UNIFIL area of operations. The only weapons authorised are those of UNIFIL and the LAF. It should be noted that in 2004 the UNSC passed Resolution 1559 ("[Resolution 1559 \(2004\)](#)", UNSC, S/RES/1559 (2004), 2 September 2004), which requires the disarmament of armed groups throughout Lebanon. As yet unfulfilled, its implementation continues to polarise the Lebanese political scene.

*imminent threat of physical violence*".<sup>21</sup> In fact, it will almost never use coercion to enforce the obligations of the various parties. Israel will continue to occupy the Shebaa Farms, the village of Ghajar and adjacent areas, and to violate Lebanese airspace on a daily basis. On the Lebanese side, the state and its army will endorse a *status quo* allowing Hezbollah to strengthen, with increasingly less discretion, its arsenal in south Lebanon.<sup>22</sup>

## 1.2. An increasingly complex local and regional context

In this context, UNIFIL has become according to some a "*reporting agency*".<sup>23</sup> Understanding the constraints weighing on it requires analysing the developments affecting the local and regional political and security arenas that have impacted UNIFIL's environment and contributed in restraining it.

Firstly, set against a backdrop of regional and local power struggles that intensified after the US invasion of Iraq, the 2006 war strengthened Hezbollah and transformed it into a "*veto player*".<sup>24</sup> This was demonstrated by a series of crises, notably that of 2008 when Hezbollah turned its weapons inwards in response to decisions it considered harmful to its telecommunications network. After a week of armed clashes, the various parties signed an agreement brokered by Qatar on 21 May 2008. In essence, this agreement recognised the impossibility of marginalising Hezbollah while favouring internal dialogue; in so doing, it enshrined the *status quo* favourable to the militia. 2011 brought new challenges with the start of the war in Syria. Even though the Lebanese authorities decided to dissociate themselves from it, the repercussions were manifold: a massive influx of refugees that has strained the country's capacity to accommodate them; security challenges, notably the rise of jihadism, with attacks and unrest that the LAF had to deal with all over the country, therefore reducing its presence in the south. For its part, Hezbollah went to the rescue of the Assad regime, gaining new military experience and regional stature that made it more assertive, including in the UNIFIL's AO.

The situation became more complex when Lebanon defaulted on its payments in October 2019 and experienced massive protests, and on top of that the port explosion on 4 August 2020.<sup>25</sup> All these crises have further strained internal dynamics in which Hezbollah remained central, weakened state structures and the social fabric, and posed new challenges to the LAF, increasing their overstretch. This came at a time when the dramatic decline of the Lebanese pound has drastically reduced the army's resources and rendered military salaries negligible; hence a phenomenon of desertion or disengagement that was difficult to contain and which has weakening UNIFIL's key partner.<sup>26</sup>

## 1.3. The contours of a difficult mission and its possibilities

It is in light of these adverse factors that UNIFIL's role in stabilising the Israeli-Lebanese front for 18 years should be reviewed. This achievement was based on a variety of actions. Firstly, the presence of several thousand peacekeepers with an expanded mandate and greater resources helped to prevent

<sup>21</sup> "[Explainer: What is Security Council resolution 1701?](#)", *United Nations*, UN News, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024; "[Resolution 1701 \(2006\)](#)", *loc. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Both structural and isolated violations have been recorded over the years by UNIFIL II; they can be traced in the sixty or so reports drawn up by successive Secretaries-General since 2006.

<sup>23</sup> "*agence de reporting*", [free translation]; Senior French military official I, interview on 6 November 2025.

<sup>24</sup> This notion refers to actors able of derailing any type of political process, and notably a peace process, which makes their participation in the process necessary for a lasting outcome (TSEBELIS George, *Veto Players: How Political Institutions Work*, Princeton University Press 2002; CUNNINGHAM David E., *Barriers to Peace in Civil War*, Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> "[Lebanon Economic Monitor, Autumn 2021: The Great Denial](#)" *World Bank*, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> ROZELIER Muriel, "[L'armée libanaise rattrapée par la crise](#)", *Le Commerce du Levant*, 11 March 2021.

a security vacuum. By patrolling south Lebanon every month with hundreds of patrols, either in collaboration with the LAF or independently, the UN contingents made it more difficult for Hezbollah to openly consolidate its positions. The sixteen permanent checkpoints and temporary roadblocks, the action of the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force (MTF) to curb arms trafficking, and the observation and recording of violations all acted as "*speed bumps*". In addition, UNIFIL played a key role through its "*tripartite mechanism*", a unique forum bringing together Lebanese and Israeli military personnel, and through its own liaison branch, preventing critical situations from escalating. It also deserves credit for its efforts to nurture positive relations with the local population and to develop projects meeting some specific needs. Furthermore, UNIFIL has played a major role in supporting the LAF, notably through strategic dialogue, joint training exercises including with naval forces, and with more direct material aid in the context of the economic crisis.

However, none of this prevented hostilities from resuming on 8 October 2023, and UNIFIL was retrospectively criticised for its lack of assertiveness towards Hezbollah between 2006 and 2023.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the mandate given to it by Resolution 1701 did not derive from Chapter VII of the UN Charter,<sup>28</sup> the only chapter authorising the use of armed force:<sup>29</sup> it was not intended to disarm Hezbollah by force. Furthermore, on a more political level, such an ambition was difficult for at least two reasons. Due to its nature, history and sociology, Hezbollah is intertwined with the population of south Lebanon; therefore, confronting it would have destroyed any trust with that population. This was all the more true given that the other party, Israel, was in constant violation of Resolution 1701 and confronting it militarily was not an option either.

In a way, the early years allowed a *modus vivendi* to crystallise between UNIFIL and an environment of which Hezbollah is an integral part. The balance has evolved over time, leading to "*a long decline in UNIFIL's effectiveness*" and an erosion of "*will on the ground at the operational level, at the level of peace operations, at the level of the United Nations*".<sup>30</sup> Echoing the diplomatic inertia in resolving conflicts in the region, this trend has been reinforced by a series of deadly incidents. Between 2006 and September 2024, several peacekeepers were killed or wounded in attacks in Lebanon;<sup>31</sup> all of these events were interpreted as contributing to the establishment of limits that UNIFIL could only cross at its own risk. The proliferation of the jihadist threat in Lebanon in the mid-2010s added another card to Hezbollah's hand, with the latter becoming "*UNIFIL's life insurance; that is to say, [it] prevented Daesh from going into the southern zone and targeting Western contingents*".<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The majority of respondents expressed these criticisms; the scientific literature tends to be more nuanced.

<sup>28</sup> [United Nations Charter](#), adopted in San Francisco on 26 June 1945, entered into force on 26 June 1945, Chap. VII.

<sup>29</sup> On the link between Chapter VII and the use of force in peacekeeping and its developments, see NOVOSSELOFF Alexandra, "[Chapitre VII et maintien de la paix : une ambiguïté à déconstruire](#)", *Bulletin du maintien de la paix*, UQAM, n° 100, 2010.

<sup>30</sup> "*d'une longue dégradation de l'efficacité de la FINUL*"; "*volonté sur le terrain au niveau opératif, au niveau des opérations de paix, au niveau des Nations unies*" [free translation]; Senior French military official I, interview on 6 November 2025.

<sup>31</sup> Major fatal incidents: June 2007, deaths of three Colombian and three Spanish peacekeepers; May 2011: six Italian soldiers wounded; December 2022: one Irish soldier killed, three others wounded. During the same period, only one peacekeeper was killed by Israeli fire, according to KASSAM Ashifa, "[Spain calls for Un inquiry into death of Spanish peacekeeper in Lebanon](#)", *The Guardian*, 29 January 2015.

<sup>32</sup> "*assurance vie de la FINUL ; c'est-à-dire qu'[il] empêchait Daech d'aller en zone sud et de targeter les contingents occidentaux*", [free translation]; Senior French military official II, interview on 6 November 2025.

From 2017 onwards, the number of incidents and violations of UNIFIL's freedom of movement has been increasing.<sup>33</sup> More and more places become inaccessible to UNIFIL without the help of the LAF to "break down the barriers". As one official pointed out, "*according to them, south Lebanon is one big private property (...) you can only go on the main roads, which pass through the main villages, and only when escorted by the LAF*".<sup>34</sup> As for the incidents, they take many forms. Some suggest that the population has had enough (stone throwing, blocking patrols, vehicle collisions, etc.). Others point to manoeuvres aimed at preventing UNIFIL from accessing certain areas while some reflected distrust regarding technological tools, with the "*confiscation*" of cameras, mobile phones, GPS devices and maps, all reflecting a suspicion that peacekeepers were directly or indirectly passing information to the Israelis. Three serious incidents occurred at the turn of 2021-2022,<sup>35</sup> attesting to heightened tensions and undoubtedly contributing to the "*internalisation of the constraint*"<sup>36</sup> by UNIFIL's command and leadership.

## 2. UNIFIL in the face of a crescendo escalation (Oct. 2023 - Sept. 2024)

When Hamas launched its attacks in Israeli territory on 7 October 2023,<sup>37</sup> the region, like Lebanon, was mired in a series of deadlocks. Reactivated by the first Trump administration's scrapping of the Iran nuclear deal, the rift between Tehran on one side and Western countries and Israel on the other remained unbridgeable. After twelve years of conflict, Syria was fragmented into a series of regions where separate struggles were being played out. The regime had survived, propped up by its Russian and Iranian allies, as well as allied militias, including Hezbollah. In Israel, power had shifted to the far right with the new government Netanyahu established at the end of 2022, with immediate consequences for Palestinians who saw colonisation and repression reach new heights.<sup>38</sup> The attacks of 7 October all but reinforced polarisation. While the vast majority of Western countries backed Israel and, by inertia, many Arab states, Iran and its non-state allies, led by Hezbollah and the Houthis in Yemen, set out to support Hamas.

### 2.1. The reactivation of the front in Lebanon and the repercussions on UNIFIL

As soon as Hamas' attacks were contained, Israel organised a widespread retaliation that promised to be particularly severe.<sup>39</sup> Hezbollah opened a "*support front*" from the UNIFIL zone to prevent Israel

<sup>33</sup> 2017 saw an exacerbation of regional tensions, including the hostility of the first Trump administration towards the Iranian regime and its allies in the region, as well as Washington's attempts to impose a more assertive mandate during the renewal of UNIFIL in the summer of 2017.

<sup>34</sup> The "they" in the quote remains undefined. "*le Sud-Liban, à les écouter, c'est une grande propriété privée (...) ; vous pouvez aller seulement sur les axes principaux, qui passent dans les villages principaux, et uniquement escortés par les FAI*", [free translation]; Tactical military commander I, interview on 5 November 2025.

<sup>35</sup> "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 26 October 2021 to 18 February 2022. Report of the Secretary-General](#)", UNSC, S/2022/214, 11 March 2022, § 12.

<sup>36</sup> "*intérieurisation de la contrainte*", [free translation]; According to a senior French military official I, interview on 6 November 2025.

<sup>37</sup> BARTHE Benjamin, "[L'attaque du Hamas contre Israël, un séisme politico-sécuritaire](#)", *Le Monde*, 7 October 2023.

<sup>38</sup> See the report published by the pro-Israel yet pro-peace American organisation J Street, "[Tracking the Netanyahu government: A record of far-right actions](#)", *J Street Policy Centre*, 18 September 2023.

<sup>39</sup> The nature of the statements made by Israeli leaders and the actions of the IDF led an Israeli-American specialist in Holocaust and Genocide Studies to quickly warn of the potentially genocidal nature of Israel's response. See SEGAL Raz, "[A Textbook Case of Genocide](#)", *Jewish Currents*, 13 October 2023.

from concentrating its military forces on Gaza, making the cessation of its strikes conditional on the cessation of the war in Gaza.<sup>40</sup> This set in motion an escalatory dynamic that went beyond the Lebanese arena and which the mission was unable to contain (see Annex 2).

Hezbollah's entry onto the scene was carefully calibrated: it began with the targeting of Israeli military positions in the Shebaa Farms that are claimed by Lebanon.<sup>41</sup> There also the Israeli response has been severe and, from 15 October on, it extended north of the Litani River. Between October 2023 and September 2024, when the Netanyahu government decided on a full-throttle offensive on Lebanon, data compiled by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) organisation recorded 10,214 confirmed attacks on both sides of the border: approximately 81.5% were carried out by the Israeli army and were 23 times more lethal than those carried out by Hezbollah<sup>42</sup> (see Annex 3). Echoing the strategy followed in Gaza, these strikes affected civilians as well as civilian infrastructure.

The targeted assassination of Hezbollah leaders and commanders, often by drone, intensified from November 2023 onwards. It expanded in January 2024 with the assassination of Saleh al-Arouri, the second-in-command of Hamas' political bureau in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Following Israel's lead in this vicious circle, Hezbollah responded to each escalation with another escalation, under the illusion that it could deter its enemy. The opposite was also true: despite the increasing number and severity of its strikes, Israel did not succeed in forcing Hezbollah to withdraw its support for Gaza. This standoff translated by mid-June 2024 by a heavy human toll: on the Lebanese side, 95 civilians were killed (including 12 children, 30 women, 3 journalists and 21 rescue workers), 337 members of Hezbollah and 75 members of other militias, and on the Israeli side, 10 civilians and 17 soldiers.

For its part, UNIFIL found itself caught between two fires (see Annex 9, which shows the evolution of the number of incidents faced by UNIFIL over the various periods studied). From the very beginning, its positions (including its headquarters (HQ) in Naqoura) and equipment were hit by direct or indirect fire and strikes, often from Israel. Between 20 October 2023 and 20 June 2024, the mission recorded 89 impacts and, more gravely, several injuries among the peacekeepers, including one serious case on 12 November and another affecting four members of the Observer Group Lebanon (OGL)<sup>43</sup> on 30 March. At the same time, incidents relating to the force's freedom of movement increased significantly. On the Lebanese side, they revealed growing hostility towards UNIFIL, with an increase in acts often symbolic but sometimes outright offensive, both in the mission's AO and elsewhere. The former took the form of stone throwing, damage to vehicles, tearing down of UN flags, or weapon pointing and "*dry firing*" at patrols. However, as targeted assassinations of Hezbollah members

<sup>40</sup> Hezbollah suspended all operations during the first "*humanitarian pause*" in Gaza (from 24 November to 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023), only to resume them immediately after Israel resumed its own operations.

<sup>41</sup> "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 June to 20 October 2023. Report of the Secretary-General](#)", UNSC, S/2023/879, 16 November 2023, § 4. Unless otherwise stated, all factual elements mentioned in this subsection and the following one are based on this report and the following three: "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 October 2023 to 20 February 2024. Report of the Secretary-General](#)", UNSC, S/2024/222, 8 March 2024; "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 February to 20 June 2024. Report of the Secretary-General](#)", UNSC, S/2024/548, 12 July 2024 and "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 June to 20 October 2024. Report of the Secretary-General](#)", UNSC, S/2024/817, 13 November 2024.

<sup>42</sup> For its part, UNIFIL records "*trajectories*" (each of which may involve several projectiles) and specifies that its radars cannot detect certain types of projectiles. Despite these limitations, the figures announced are higher than those of ACLED, totalling nearly 21,000 trajectories between 8 October 2023 and 22 September 2024, nearly three-quarters of which were fired by Israel.

<sup>43</sup> This is a group of observers deployed as part of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) created in May 1974 following the 1973 Arab-Israeli conflict.

intensified exacerbating paranoia, attempts (successful or otherwise) to seize patrols' technological equipment multiplied. One of the most serious incidents occurred on 6 June 2024, when a patrol was confronted by aggressive individuals who went so far as to strike the patrol leader.<sup>44</sup> On the Israeli side, incidents also increased, with shots fired near UNIFIL positions and patrols and laser pointing. While the latter could be understood as intimidation, others indicated that the IDF did not intend to allow the presence of UNIFIL constrain its action. This is evidenced, for example, by an air strike carried out near a UN vehicle on 18 August 2024, which injured three peacekeepers.

## 2.2. Adaptations in the face of a war that dares not speak its name

In reaction to these developments, UNIFIL made several adjustments. The first was internal: on the initiative of the Chief of Staff, a Joint Operations Centre (JOC) was set up around the end of November 2023. All staff units were represented there, enabling better coordination and real-time information sharing.<sup>45</sup> Other and more visible adjustments pertain to operational adaptation, mainly in three areas: protection of Force personnel, adaptation of operational activities and liaison.

UNIFIL's primary concern focused on the safety and protection of its personnel. Drawing up plans to deal with possible contingencies and protect the various categories of personnel, it adopted measures in line with developments to reduce their exposure, starting with civilian personnel and families. At the intersection of operational activities, it reduced by one third the number of peacekeepers deployed in fifteen positions close to the Blue Line (BL) and relocated them to more distant positions. As the crisis dragged on, UNIFIL reinforced the bunkers and fortifications in the positions closest to the BL.

At the operational level (see Annex 8 of the note, which provides an overview of changes in the number of operational activities over the three periods studied), it was out of question to confront Hezbollah, let alone the IDF, as UNIFIL had neither the means nor the mandate to do so.<sup>46</sup> Instead, it sought first and foremost to maintain a visible presence until 22 September 2024, even though security regularly required a dash for cover. From October 2023 onwards, in coordination with the LAF, UNIFIL intensified patrols along the BL (in armoured vehicles when tensions escalate), as well as patrols aimed at countering rocket fire. Noting that on certain occasions militiamen attacked Israel from positions close to its own therefore attracting return fire, UNIFIL increased this type of patrol near its installations. As their use made Hezbollah's weapons more visible, the patrols discovered more and more weapons caches, especially mobile rocket launchers and their ammunition. UNIFIL also maintained permanent checkpoints though it reduced their number from sixteen to eight, giving priority to those located at key access points to its AO. On the other hand, it suspended temporary checkpoints, air operations, foot patrols and visits to local markets. Mine clearance activities were also halted, although UNIFIL had to engage in the neutralisation of unexploded ordnance generated by the ongoing crisis in its own positions or on its patrol routes.

The third aspect of the adaptation concerned UNIFIL's liaison functions that increased exponentially, even though the very possibility of convening tripartite meetings faded away from October 2023

<sup>44</sup> "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 February to 20 June 2024](#)", *loc. cit.*, Annex 1, § 42.

<sup>45</sup> Liaison officer, interview on 13 November 2025.

<sup>46</sup> "*Nous avons un mandat d'interposition, et non pas d'imposition de la paix (...). Notre mission est de constater les violations, et de les rapporter à New York, au siège des Nations unies, qui décide des sanctions*", "*We have an interposition mandate, not a peace enforcement one (...). Our mission is to observe violations and report them to New York, to the United Nations headquarters, which decide on sanctions*" [free translation]; General du Gardin, Chief of Staff of UNIFIL, explained (quoted in DEFANOUX Laurence, "[Au Sud-Liban avec les soldats français de la Finul : 'Le premier qui touche un Casque bleu a perdu'](#)", *Libération*, 29 July 2024).

onwards. Over the months, UNIFIL made hundreds of contacts with Lebanese and Israeli actors to ensure its own protection, that of its activities, positions and medical evacuations, etc. It also ceaselessly mobilised its liaison and coordination mechanisms in the hope of reducing miscalculations and the risks of escalation. It also played a key role with the Israelis in ensuring the safety of the LAF in the execution of their missions, knowing that the Lebanese army was often targeted by the IDF even though it did not take part in the conflict.<sup>47</sup> UNIFIL also involved in facilitating or coordinating hundreds of actions in support of civil and humanitarian activities near the BL: rescue operations, firefighting, etc.<sup>48</sup>

In essence, during this initial period of escalation, UNIFIL has continued to pursue marginal adaptation strategies, much in line with its pre-crisis practices and an acute concern for Force protection. Caught between a Hezbollah that repeatedly insisted that a ceasefire in Gaza was the prerequisite for halting its attacks and an "*international community*" that was unable – or unwilling – to achieve such a ceasefire, its room for manoeuvre was limited.<sup>49</sup>

### 3. Between a rock and a hard place: UNIFIL stands its ground (Sept. – Nov. 2024)

The reasons for which the Israeli government abruptly decided to launch an all-out war in the north while the front in Gaza was still active and without any significant developments on the Lebanese side will undoubtedly take a long time to be fully grasped.<sup>50</sup> In a permissive international context, these two months will in any case be devastating for Lebanon and will constitute a major shock to UNIFIL<sup>51</sup> (see Annexes 3 to 7 for a visualisation of the evolution of attacks on both sides over the different periods studied).

#### 3.1. The military crushing of Lebanon and the pressuring of UNIFIL

On 17 September 2024, a first wave of simultaneous explosions of pagers used by Hezbollah, followed the next day by those of walkie-talkies, killed around 40 members of the group and their relatives, and wounded or maimed nearly 3,500 others, causing shockwaves in Lebanon and beyond.<sup>52</sup> On 23

<sup>47</sup> At least 46 Lebanese soldiers were killed by Israel between 8 October 2023 and February 2025 (["Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 October 2024 to 20 February 2025. Report of the Secretary-General"](#), UNSC, S/2025/153, 12 March 2025, § 10.)

<sup>48</sup> In January 2024, UNIFIL also approved "quick-impact" projects especially to support the Civil Defence, the Lebanese Red Cross and public hospitals in its area of operations, and to respond to the psychosocial needs of displaced persons.

<sup>49</sup> Several diplomatic missions went to Lebanon and/or Israel to try to extinguish this front independently of the Gaza one, but to no effect.

<sup>50</sup> The official reason put forward by the then Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, that is to secure the north of the country so that its inhabitants could return, is generally considered insufficient "[Why Israel is attacking Lebanon](#)", *Al Jazeera*, 24 September 2024; REGAN Helen, "[Israeli strikes cause deadliest day in Lebanon in nearly 2 decades. Here's what we know](#)", *CNN*, 24 September 2024.

<sup>51</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the factual elements presented throughout Part 3 are based on: "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 June to 20 October 2024](#)", *loc. cit.*; "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 October 2024 to 20 February 2025. Report of the Secretary-General](#)", *loc. cit.*; and "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 February to 20 June 2025. Report of the Secretary-General](#)", UNSC, S/2025/460, 11 July 2025.

<sup>52</sup> For factual and legal context on these events, see "[Sept choses à savoir sur les attaques aux bipeurs et talkies-walkies au Liban](#)", *Amnesty international*, 23 September 2024.

September, rejecting a ceasefire proposal by Washington on the sidelines of the UNGA,<sup>53</sup> Israel launched an air offensive across the Lebanese territory: its carpet-bombing technique killed 558 people on the first day, including many civilians. This strategy continued unabated, even though on 27 September Israel assassinated Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, pulverising several blocks of buildings.<sup>54</sup> Although the strikes primarily targeted areas with a Shiite majority (towns and villages in south Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley and the southern suburbs of Beirut), they were not limited to these areas.

The Israeli Prime Minister threatened Lebanon with a fate similar to that of Gaza<sup>55</sup> and the style adopted left no doubt: civilian homes and infrastructure were targeted, as were places of worship, schools and hospitals. Rescue teams and journalists were also killed in the strikes. And, as in Gaza, the lives of hundreds of thousands of Lebanese were bound to the Israeli army's evacuation orders. In addition, Israel used the opportunity to target Palestinians from Hamas and other political movements throughout Lebanon and sought to impose an arms embargo by bombing border crossings with Syria and targeting Beirut's airport, mainly through cyberattacks.

On 1<sup>st</sup> October, Israel launched a limited land operation.<sup>56</sup> Its advances remained modest, with Hezbollah managing to stand up to the IDF while expanding the scope of its own attacks in Israel, something that came as a surprise since the Israeli forces "*did not expect the resilience of Hezbollah fighters after the assassination of Nasrallah*".<sup>57</sup> At the same time, strikes continued on other regions of Lebanon, notably the capital, with staggering human and material losses. At the beginning of December 2024, the death toll on the Lebanese side stood at 4,047 (including 316 children and 790 women) and 16,638 wounded,<sup>58</sup> while on the Israeli side it stood at 45 civilians and 73 military personnel,<sup>59</sup> including 52 killed in northern Lebanon and northern Israel after 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024.<sup>60</sup>

Under such a deluge, the crisis facing UNIFIL proved to be not only military but also diplomatic. On 30 September 2024, Israel ordered the Force "*to vacate its 29 positions located within 5 km of the Blue Line, except the mission headquarters at Naqurah*".<sup>61</sup> This injunction prompted a reaction from UNIFIL: supported by several contributing countries, it refused to evacuate.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, its positions and troops found themselves within the IDF's field of operation. On more than one occasion, the IDF fired on UN positions, manoeuvred and stationed tanks nearby, carried out demolitions, damaged cameras,

<sup>53</sup> ROBERT Virginie, "[Liban : Israël rejette l'appel à un cessez-le-feu](#)", *Les Echos*, 25 September 2024.

<sup>54</sup> Many diplomats felt then that it was time for Israel to halt its strikes on Lebanon, "[Liban: le chef du Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah est mort, 'un tournant historique' pour Israël, selon Netanyahu](#)", *RFI*, 27 September 2024.

<sup>55</sup> "[Netanyahu menace de 'destruction' le Liban, comme à Gaza](#)", *Le Parisien*, 8 October 2024.

<sup>56</sup> BOUVIER Emile, "[Conflit au Liban : point de situation au 8 octobre 2024](#)", *Les Clés du Moyen-Orient*, 8 October 2024.

<sup>57</sup> "*ne s'attendaient pas à la résilience des combattants du Hezbollah après l'assassinat de Nasrallah*", [free translation]; Prof. Marie-Joëlle Zahar, interview on 29 October 2025.

<sup>58</sup> These figures are from 8 October 2023 onwards, but most of the victims died between 17 September and 26 November 2024 ("[Israeli attacks have killed 4,047 people in Lebanon, Lebanese minister says](#)", *Reuters*, 4 December 2024.). These figures do not distinguish between civilians and Hezbollah activists. Human Rights Watch has questioned Israel's practices during this period ("[Lebanon: Indiscriminate Israeli Attacks on Civilians](#)", *Human Rights Watch*, 23 April 2025.).

<sup>59</sup> "[Costs of Israel-Hezbollah conflict on Lebanon, Israel](#)", *Reuters*, 27 November 2024.

<sup>60</sup> Human Rights Watch questioned Hezbollah's practices during this period ("[Israel/Lebanon: Hezbollah Attacks Endangered Civilians](#)", *Human Rights Watch*, 7 March 2025).

<sup>61</sup> "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 June to 20 October 2024](#)", *loc. cit.* § 16.

<sup>62</sup> RÉMY Jean-Philippe and SALLOON Hélène, "[Israël mène des opérations terrestres dans le sud du Liban](#)", *Le Monde*, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024; "[Liban : l'Irlande juge 'scandaleuse' la demande d'Israël de déplacement d'une partie des troupes de la Finul](#)", *Le Parisien*, 5 October 2024.

vehicles and communication systems, broke through protective walls or the entrances to certain positions, occupied UN structures, hit shelters, targeted watchtowers or destroyed them with bulldozers. Between 10 October and 27 November, 27 peacekeepers were injured, mainly as a result of Israeli actions and, less frequently, Hezbollah strikes.<sup>63</sup> In response to these repeated attacks, UNIFIL and the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) protested to the Israeli authorities, "underscoring the responsibility of the parties to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel and premises".<sup>64</sup>

### 3.2. Adaptations during periods of heightened tension: staying and protecting oneself

UNIFIL found itself facing a dilemma: stay, at the risk of suffering losses, or leave and completely fail in its mandate. Against all odds, there was however no "stampede":<sup>65</sup> supported by the UN hierarchy and most of the contributing countries, the mission remained. With "contingency plans ready to be activated in case of absolute necessity",<sup>66</sup> it rebalanced security and presence through "military contingency plans and force protection measures" that allowed it to "reduce its footprint in positions near the Blue Line".<sup>67</sup> In practice, this meant an almost exclusive focus on the safety of its personnel.

Firstly, it suspended the rotation of contingents and, on 23 September, ordered the evacuation north of the Litani River of all civilians from the mission, with the exception of personnel essential to the mission and who were transferred to its HQ. After 1<sup>st</sup> October, UNIFIL gave up maintaining a visible presence and drastically reduced its operational activities, complying with the notifications issued by the IDF asking peacekeepers "to remain at level 2, at base, or at level 3, in a shelter, for their own safety".<sup>68</sup> Although military personnel did not evacuate their positions, they finally spent a great deal of time in bunkers and, at the height of the war, their sorties were limited to essential resupply and repairs, with each decision to go out carrying a heavy responsibility.<sup>69</sup> Without a mandate to "confront either or both sides, [UNIFIL has] no choice but to (...) keep its head down and wait for the storm to blow over".<sup>70</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Eight peacekeepers were wounded on 29 October, probably by rockets fired by Hezbollah or its allies despite calls to avoid endangering UNIFIL. "Le Hezbollah appelle ses hommes à ne pas mettre en danger les Casques bleus", AFP, 7 October 2024.

<sup>64</sup> [Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 June to 20 October 2024](#), *loc. cit.*, § 74. According to one interviewee, the targeting of UNIFIL is mainly the work of isolated Israeli soldiers venting their anger, who have been reprimanded by their superiors (Senior French military official II, interview on 6 November 2025). The recurrence and systematic nature of the incidents do not fit with this perception.

<sup>65</sup> "débandade", [free translation]; Senior French military official II, interview on 6 November 2025.

<sup>66</sup> "plans d'urgence prêts à être activés en cas d'absolue nécessité", [free translation]; according to UNIFIL spokesperson Andrea Tenenti, quoted in PAGELLA Camille, "Des Casques bleus en première ligne", *Le Temps*, 9 October 2024.

<sup>67</sup> [Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 June to 20 October 2024](#), *loc. cit.*, § 72.

<sup>68</sup> [Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 October 2024 to 20 February 2025](#), *loc. cit.*, § 69.

<sup>69</sup> [Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 June to 20 October 2024](#), *loc. cit.*, § 72.

<sup>70</sup> "se confronter avec l'un ou l'autre, ou les 2, [la FINUL n'a] pas d'autre choix que de (...) baisser la tête et attendre que ça se passe", [free translation]; Officer deployed with UNIFIL before the 2020s but following the case at the French Ministry of the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs, interview on 21 October 2025.

The suspension of its operational activities did not however render UNIFIL useless. Even from a safe distance, it held the capacity to observe and record the many violations of Resolution 1701 in its AO and beyond. It bore witness to strikes across the BL, Israeli incursions into Lebanese territory, military activities carried out there, as well as the systematic destruction of civilian infrastructure and clashes with Hezbollah. Lastly, liaison functions focused on protecting UNIFIL and, when necessary, the LAF, which were again bystanders rather than actors in the violence.

Finally, when a COH came into force on the 27 November, UNIFIL was still present and ready to resume service. Negotiated mainly by US envoy Amos Hochstein, this agreement reinstated the parameters of Resolution 1701, at least in appearance, relying on UNIFIL to assist the LAF in its implementation.<sup>71</sup>

## 4. UNIFIL's strategic adjustments post-COH<sup>72</sup>

Unlike in 2006, the outcome of the war in autumn 2024 saw one clear loser, Hezbollah and, beyond, a Lebanon shocked by the brutality of the strikes it had suffered. Hezbollah's setbacks worsened with the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024, following a blitz offensive by the jihadist group *Hay'at tahrir al sham*.<sup>73</sup> Forced to compromise on the Lebanese scene, the party lifted the barriers that had been blocking the election of a president since autumn 2022. Under the watchful eye of American, French and Saudi emissaries in particular, the Parliament elected in January 2025 the favourite of the "international community", Joseph Aoun, head of the army;<sup>74</sup> another favourite, Nawaf Salam, was quickly appointed head of the government. Both asserted the will to restore the state's monopoly on weapons, particularly south of the Litani River, and to extend its sovereignty over the entire territory. UNIFIL therefore found itself in unprecedented circumstances to carry out its mandate.<sup>75</sup>

### 4.1. A unilateral cessation of hostilities

Negotiated by an outgoing US administration, the COH agreement provided for a 60-day period at the end of which Israel would withdraw south of the BL and the LAF would deploy south of the Litani with the help of UNIFIL, to dismantle unauthorised sites and infrastructure and confiscate illegal weapons and equipment. The guns were to fall silent, and the populations on both sides of the BL were to return to their homes. This did not happen.

<sup>71</sup> "Ce que l'on sait sur l'accord de cessez-le-feu entre Israël et le Hezbollah au Liban, entré en vigueur cette nuit", *Le Monde*, 27 November 2024.

<sup>72</sup> On 3 December, Netanyahu declared that the CoH did not mean the end of the war and that his country would "enforce the ceasefire with an iron fist". "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 October 2024 to 20 February 2025](#)", *loc. cit.*, § 36.

<sup>73</sup> This development has deprived Hezbollah of an ally and a bridge to Iran and allowed Israel to strengthen its position; indeed, as soon as Assad fell, Israel expanded its occupation in southern Syria and launched a campaign of aerial bombardments to destroy all types of military infrastructure in Syria, amid surprising international passivity. Furthermore, it has brought to power in Syria a group perceived as posing an existential threat to the Shiites of Lebanon (FOREY Samuel and SALLOON Hélène, "[L'arsenal militaire syrien anéanti par la campagne de bombardements israéliens](#)", *Le Monde*, 16 December 2024.).

<sup>74</sup> AREFI Armin, "[Joseph Aoun élu président du Liban, signe de l'affaiblissement politique du Hezbollah](#)", *Le Point*, 9 January 2025.

<sup>75</sup> Senior French military official I, interview on 6 November 2025. Unless otherwise stated, the factual information presented in section 4 is based on: "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 October 2024 to 20 February 2025](#)", *loc. cit.*; "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 February to 20 June 2025](#)", *loc. cit.*; and "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 June to 20 October 2025. Report of the Secretary-General](#)", UNSC, S/2025/738, 11 November 2025.

Firstly, unilaterally postponed by Washington from 26 January to 18 February, the withdrawal of the IDF provided for in Resolution 1701 has remained incomplete. Accusing Lebanon of not fully implementing the COH, Israel has maintained its presence in five strategic positions and two buffer zones, rejecting UNIFIL's offer to establish "*security arrangements*" to address its security concerns. As for military operations, they have almost completely ceased on the Lebanese side; however, they have continued unabated on the Israeli side.<sup>76</sup> In the first few weeks, the IDF's actions focused on the border area and villages, including beyond the territory reached before 27 November, in order to complete their destruction. From January 2025 onwards, new strikes were carried out beyond the Litani River, including in urban centres such as the southern suburbs of Beirut. The targeted assassination of Hezbollah members resumed, as did the bombing of locations on the Lebanese-Syrian border.

Violations of the terms of the COH also concern the return of residents of south Lebanon and the reconstruction of their villages. Initially, Israel prohibited the Lebanese population from returning to some 60 localities, some of which were located up to 7 km north of the BL. When, at the end of the 60 days stipulated in the agreement, civilians attempted to return, the IDF greeted them with gunfire, killing 24 people and wounding 134. It was only after 18 February that a partial return was authorised, under constant threat from the IDF and new limitations due to white barrels unilaterally installed and prohibiting any passage in certain areas regardless of the positions still occupied by Israel. More fundamentally, the extent of the deliberate destruction was such that the return of the inhabitants was impossible.<sup>77</sup> In fact, the border strip has been methodically destroyed, as described by someone who flew over the area: "*Everything has been razed to the ground: tabula rasa (...). [The Israelis] have decided to raze everything; there are exfoliants; you can see that nothing will grow back for decades (...). It reminded me of Vietnam (...). It's quite impressive*".<sup>78</sup> This intent to prevent the return of residents from south Lebanon, 64,417 of whom remain displaced one year after the COH came into effect, is also evident in the targets regularly attacked by the IDF: civilians, municipal infrastructure, agricultural land, fishing boats, industrial sites...<sup>79</sup> On top of all that, the country's reconstruction (estimated at \$11 billion) and economic recovery have remained contingent on the damning conditions set by donors.<sup>80</sup> Combined with a human toll of 330 dead and 945 wounded as of 22 November 2025,<sup>81</sup> all these factors confirm the unilateral nature of the COH and suggest that the "*international community*" has, at least implicitly, exempted Israel from complying with Resolution 1701.

## 4.2. Breaks and continuities in UNIFIL's adaptations

<sup>76</sup> Through graphs covering the post-COH period, Annexes 4 to 8 provide an assessment of the unilateral nature of the cessation of hostilities and the gradual intensification of Israeli strikes.

<sup>77</sup> "[Lebanon: Destruction of Infrastructure Prevents Return of Displaced Residents](#)," *Human Rights Watch*, 17 February 2025.

<sup>78</sup> "*tout est rasé : tabula rasa (...). [Les Israéliens] ont décidé de tout raser ; il y a des exfoliants ; on voit que ça ne repoussera plus d'ici des dizaines d'années (...). J'ai pensé au Vietnam (...). C'est assez impressionnant*", [free translation]; Senior French military official II, interview on 6 November 2025.

<sup>79</sup> LAFOND Jenny, "[Dans le sud du Liban, la reconstruction est interdite : 'Israël ne veut pas qu'on mette une pierre au-dessus d'une autre'](#)", *La Libre*, 30 October 2025; "[Israel targets Lebanon reconstruction efforts in fiercest attack since ceasefire](#)", *The New Arab*, 17 October 2025.

<sup>80</sup> These are mainly the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United States, the European Union and some of its member states, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. On this issue and its link to the reforms expected of Lebanon and the disarmament of Hezbollah, see: JALKH Jeanine, "[Réformes : le Liban a-t-il fait assez aux yeux des bailleurs de fonds ?](#)", *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 5 August 2025.

<sup>81</sup> "[Israël continue les frappes contre le Hamas et le Hezbollah à Gaza et au Liban, malgré les cessez-le-feu en vigueur](#)", *Le Nouvel Obs*, 22 November 2025.

Writing in the summer of 2024, a French officer estimated that "*the mandate [of UNIFIL] only requires a favourable political framework in order to profoundly change the characteristics of the conflict*".<sup>82</sup> In a way, the exact opposite has happened with this strange COH, since the characteristics of the conflict have now provided a favourable framework for the Force's mandate. With Hezbollah neutralised, UNIFIL has managed to "*regain freedom of action*"<sup>83</sup> to fulfil the mandate it was given by Resolution 1701. Essentially in its Lebanese component.

In its routine activities, UNIFIL continues to observe and record both the progress made with regard to Resolution 1701 and violations of the COH by both sides. It performs liaison functions in all areas: protecting its troops and securing their activities; deconflicting the deployment of the LAF<sup>84</sup> and facilitating their patrols and operations to neutralise explosives or weapons; facilitating evacuations or prisoner exchanges, civilian movements and humanitarian activities. UNIFIL has also resumed activities to reopen roads and repair the barrels marking the BL. Limited for two months to supply requirements, operational activities quickly diversified again, notably through motorised, aerial and then foot patrols.

The adaptation that represents the greatest change has materialised in the support for the LAF and the elimination of unauthorised weapons and infrastructure in the AO. As a priority, UNIFIL has helped the LAF to deploy south of the Litani River by occupying permanent positions (116 in June 2025), increasing the number of soldiers (8,985 in September 2025), and establishing roadblocks as well as 5 checkpoints and 17 observation points along the Litani River to stem the flow of weapons. This cooperation has involved a strengthening of the partnership with the LAF to make it "*more effective through joint operational planning*".<sup>85</sup> Focused on operations, the new approach enhances the interoperability of the two forces and is at the heart of UNIFIL's adaptation plan. The scope is twofold since, beyond the deployment of the LAF, the challenge is to eradicate all unauthorised weapons.

In this regard, either alone or with the LAF, UNIFIL is now very active notably with the support of the Force Commander's Reserve (FCR).<sup>86</sup> Led by a French contingent reinforced by Finnish peacekeepers and equipped with consolidated resources (armoured vehicles, engineering and support units, detachments specialising in the neutralisation of explosives and ammunition, etc.), the FCR has engaged in missions to open up routes, escort convoys and, above all, inspect "*sensitive*" sites. Acting somewhat as a "*showcase for what UNIFIL should be*", the FCR has circulated early on among all the contingents to show them that it was possible to do more than before.<sup>87</sup> In March 2025, this "*UNIFIL 3.0*" broke with the so-called "*patrol sketches*" model, where patrol routes were planned and shared in advance, thus losing their operational effectiveness, and adopted an operating mode free from the "*Hezbollah*" parameter. Focused on operational objectives involving comprehensive controls throughout the AO and sometimes complex operations involving different components of the mission,

<sup>82</sup> "le mandat [de la FINUL] ne requiert qu'un cadre politique favorable afin de modifier en profondeur les caractéristiques du conflit", [free translation]; JOCSAN Samuel, "[La FINUL. Le sursaut nécessaire](#)", *Défense et Sécurité Internationale*, n° 172, July-August 2024, p. 64-69.

<sup>83</sup> "*regagner en liberté d'action*", [free translation]; Senior French military official I, interview on 6 November 2025.

<sup>84</sup> That is, reducing the risk of attacks or unintentional firing.

<sup>85</sup> "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 October 2024 to 20 February 2025](#)", *loc. cit.*, § 84.

<sup>86</sup> This equivalent of a rapid reaction force was created in 2006, and France continues to provide most of its personnel, equipment and leadership. It was the FCR that carried out the always risky resupply operations during the open conflict ("[DAMAN - Engagement de la Force Commander Reserve dans une mission de soutien au bataillon népalais de la FINUL](#)", *French Ministry of the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs*, 8 November 2024.).

<sup>87</sup> "*d'appartement témoin de ce que doit être la FINUL*", [free translation]; Senior French military official I, interview on 6 November 2025.

this *modus operandi* enabled it to achieve much success.<sup>88</sup> By October 2025, it had discovered approximately 350 weapons caches (some of which belonged to the IDF) in addition to those discovered by the LAF, which is responsible for destroying facilities, equipment and ammunition. The detection and inspection of suspicious sites and the uncovering of tunnels and underground structures prolong this often-joint action.<sup>89</sup>

A final adjustment relates to the loss of the monopoly that UNIFIL had between 2006 and 2023 in its role as intermediary between Israelis and Lebanese. In fact, the COH agreement created a "mechanism" for supervising the cessation of hostilities (hereinafter referred to as *the "Mechanism"*) hosted by UNIFIL but chaired by the United States and associating France.<sup>90</sup> Drawing on UNIFIL reports, this five-party "*Mechanism*"<sup>91</sup> has met eleven times but its role as guarantor of the COH and liaising conduit remains unconvincing. However, UNIFIL has remained at the heart of the multifaceted support provided to the LAF and now reinforced by the Military Technical Committee for Lebanon (MTC4L).<sup>92</sup>

### 4.3. Too much or too little: adaptations, mistrust and friction

The end of the open crisis and UNIFIL's renewed diligence in carrying out its mandate do not shield it from incidents and resentment from the various parties. On the Lebanese side, some criticise it for not doing enough to curb Israeli violations and protect civilians and their villages, and for doing too much to dismantle any means of resistance to Israel. On the Israeli side, it is also criticised for not doing enough to eliminate Hezbollah's weapons and presence and, less openly, for hindering freedom of action (see graphs in Annex 9).

In fact, UNIFIL often comes up against the IDF's will to control its environment. Near the areas still occupied north of the BL, white barrels unilaterally installed by Israel, checkpoints, roadblocks, tanks, vehicles or simply Israeli soldiers hinder its freedom of movement. IDF postures are sometimes aggressive, involving the pointing of weapons or lasers, shots (including warning shots) aimed at patrols on mission or their camera equipment, and even UNIFIL positions. Rather than decreasing, these incidents have persisted with periods of intensification. For instance, a series of incidents in October 2025 have led to an unprecedented act by UNIFIL on the 26<sup>th</sup>: in response to an aggressive

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<sup>88</sup> "Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) during the period from 21 February to 20 June 2025", *loc. cit.*, § 74 and annex 1, § 2.

<sup>89</sup> For a media overview of such operations, see ALAMEDDINE Lyana, "[Au Liban-Sud, la FCR de la Finul mène l'une de ses plus grandes opérations depuis le cessez-le-feu](#)" *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 10 July 2025.

<sup>90</sup> Component named "Task Force Cedar"; see "[Liban : superviser la cessation des hostilités](#)", *French Ministry of the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs*, 20 February 2025.

<sup>91</sup> Because it brings together, in addition to the United States and France, Israel, Lebanon and UNIFIL.

<sup>92</sup> The Military Technical Committee for Lebanon (MTC4L) is an international support mechanism launched in early January 2025 to provide assistance primarily to the LAF and their families and to respond to humanitarian emergencies in the aftermath of the COH and the election of Joseph Aoun. Chaired by Italy, it also includes Germany, Spain, France, the Netherlands, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, with Australia, Canada, Egypt, Japan, Qatar, Belgium, Denmark, the European External Action Service, the EU Military Staff, UNIFIL and UNSCOL ("[Une collaboration tripartite pour relever les défis socio-humanitaires](#)", *Ici Beyrouth*, 7 January 2025). It should be noted that when UNIFIL was renewed in 2021, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2591 ("[Resolution 2591 \(2021\)](#)", *UNSC*, S/RES/2591 (2021), 30 August 2021), requesting UNIFIL to support and assist the LAF by providing additional non-lethal equipment and logistical support. From July 2022 onwards, most of the SG's reports include a point on international aid to the LAF in their Annex II or III.

flyover by an Israeli drone, an FCR patrol shot it down and Israeli responsibility was clearly pointed out in the Force's communiqué.<sup>93</sup> All of which prompted a swift denunciation by Israel.<sup>94</sup>

On the Lebanese side, incidents, often symbolic, have also persisted: flags torn down, vehicles damaged, stone throwing, patrols often stopped on the pretext that they are not accompanied by the LAF, and incidents filmed, shared and exploited on social media. Their increase since the end of April 2025 suggests a growing crisis of confidence in a context of routine violations of the COH by Israel. Some relatively serious incidents further illustrate this. For example, on 14 February 2025, after Lebanon suspended flights from Tehran following Israeli threats targeting the airport,<sup>95</sup> a crowd "ambushed" a UNIFIL convoy heading there; one of the vehicles was set on fire and the peacekeepers who escaped from it were attacked: two were wounded, including the Deputy Force Commander.<sup>96</sup> On this Lebanese chessboard too, a new shift has also materialised in UNIFIL's stance. At least four times since May 2025, its patrols have used non-lethal force (tear gas, firing into the air, etc.) to extricate themselves from dangerous situations.<sup>97</sup>

To sum up, due to the dramatic upheavals in the balance of power, UNIFIL became more assertive in 2025. Its most significant adaptations enabled it to fulfil one of the most delicate aspects of its mandate more than ever before: the elimination of all unauthorised presence and weapons in south Lebanon. Despite this, it has been contested and its end set for December 2026 due to hostility from Israel and a Trump administration that is highly contemptuous of multilateralism.<sup>98</sup>

## 5. UNIFIL's strategies and adaptation factors

The context in which UNIFIL has had to adapt since October 2023 is of particular interest as it condenses a number of dimensions relevant to developments in peacekeeping: the intertwining of local, regional and international crises; upheavals in the balance of power; challenges posed by non-state actors; budgetary pressures and the quest for optimisation; the quest for meaning and multilateral revival, etc. Therefore, it is important to analyse both its adaptation strategies and the factors that shaped them, as they reveal the real constraints weighing on peacekeeping beyond the slogans conveyed in speeches and texts on that latter. To this end, it is also as interesting to look at what UNIFIL has done as what it has not done.

### 5.1. From operational responsiveness to strategic adjustments

Between 8 October 2023 and the entry into force of the COH, the vast majority of the adjustments adopted by UNIFIL relate to operational responsiveness. As sections 2.2 and 3.2 have shown, the most visible and significant adjustments touch to three main areas. First comes the protection of both civilian and military personnel of the Force and their dependants. Next, in terms compatible with that protection, come increased UNIFIL's visibility and adaptation of its operational activities so it can still carry out a range of tasks. At the height of the conflict, keeping of peacekeepers in positions along the

<sup>93</sup> BLONDEL Gabriel, "[Drone israélien abattu par la Finul : une première provoquée par une 'accumulation d'attaques'](#)", *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 27 October 2025.

<sup>94</sup> "[Liban : Israël accuse la Finul d'avoir abattu un de ses drones](#)", *Le Figaro*, 27 October 2025.

<sup>95</sup> "[Israël aurait menacé de frapper Beyrouth si des vols iraniens atterrissaient](#)", *Libanews*, 16 February 2025.

<sup>96</sup> "[Un officier de la Finul blessé dans l'attaque d'un convoi dans la banlieue sud de Beyrouth](#)", *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 14 February 2025.

<sup>97</sup> "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 February to 20 June 2025](#)", *loc. cit.*, annex 1, § 28 and 45.

<sup>98</sup> NEWBY Vanessa and RUFFA Chiara, "[US and Israel push to end UN peacekeeping mandate in south Lebanon risks regional chaos](#)", *The Conversation*, 26 August 2025.

BL, though in bunkers, ensured a significant symbolic presence and a watchful eye that may have prevented even more serious violent excesses. The third area is the adjustment of liaison activities to respond to countless needs and attempt to contain the crisis.

These three major operational adjustments were supported by other, less visible ones, which nevertheless made them possible: preparation of contingency plans; creation of the joint monitoring centre; deployment via the FCR of the equipment and skills needed to maintain supply lines to the most isolated units on the BL; increased coordination with New York and troop contributing capitals; and mobilisation of diplomatic and political resources, including the office of Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon. The main blind spot in UNIFIL's adaptation is the protection of civilians, traditionally central if not in practice, then at least in the rhetoric of peacekeeping.<sup>99</sup> In 2024, it is limited to hosting, in specific circumstances, civilians who came seeking refuge in one of the mission's positions, and to providing some training to its personnel in that field.

Following the COH, an opportunity for more strategic adjustments opened up. Strategic flexibility is generally understood as the adaptation by missions of their mandate, resources (including technological ones) and modes of action in response to evolving conflicts, political dynamics and emerging threats. For UNIFIL, this has translated into a more assertive approach to the elimination of military infrastructure and unauthorised weapons and, as a corollary, to its freedom of movement and action. This shift can be summarised in what one actor has called the "*3P doctrine*", which enables a transition from "*a UNIFIL that endured to a UNIFIL that acts*": a more visible presence; an assertive posture in which patrols "*no longer turn back (...) when there is a problem*"; and a modernised profile "*with 21st-century [technological] tools*" to deal with challenges such as drones, cyber security, political communication, etc.<sup>100</sup>

## 5.2. Analysis of the factors that shaped UNIFIL's adaptations

The adaptations that unfolded from the period of escalation after 7 October 2023 until the COH, and those observable in the following period, stem from a set of factors, some constraining, others enabling, located at different levels and of different natures.

At the most macro level, we can identify UNIFIL's reading of the context and the balance of power. When the crisis began, the Force had internalised the limits of its action, accommodating itself to a *modus vivendi* based on a lack of determination that could multiply incidents. In addition, there was an acute awareness of the IDF's military superiority. Thus, at no point did UNIFIL consider intervening between the two sides, each of which was considered to have the capacity and the will to fight, while UNIFIL may have had the capacity but not the will.<sup>101</sup> Hence the decision to prioritise the safety of the Force's personnel. In these circumstances, the protection of civilians became the neglected child. By triangulating different testimonies, two factors seem to explain this: on the one hand, in the face of Israeli strikes, south Lebanon had emptied of its inhabitants; on the other hand, the mission itself was

<sup>99</sup> It ranks second in the "[Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations](#)", UN, Action for Peacekeeping, no date, accessed on 20 November 2025; see also HULTMAN Lisa and CORSANT-COLAT Ornella, "[Being Present Where It Counts: Peacekeeping Responsiveness to Violence against Civilians](#)", *International Peace Institute*, September 2025.

<sup>100</sup> "*doctrine des 3P*", "*une FINUL qui subissait à une FINUL qui agit*", "*ne font plus demi-tour (...) quand on a un problème*" and "*avec des outils [technologiques] du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*", [free translation]; Senior French military official I, interview on 6 November 2025.

<sup>101</sup> This analysis of "*the dialectic of capabilities and will*", "*la dialectique des capacités et des volontés*", [free translation] was offered by a senior French military official (I), interview on 6 November 2025.

in a "survival strategy" and avoided any possible confrontation with the IDF: "people actually preferred to turn a blind eye rather than do anything about the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF)".<sup>102</sup>

However, it was the political will of the various contingents and their respective capitals, in coordination with New York, that enabled the Blue Helmets to maintain their positions despite Israeli orders. A major factor in itself that obviously was not a given,<sup>103</sup> this will was based on several considerations: the belief that the future of peacekeeping depended on UNIFIL and that it had to be saved by ensuring that the mission "held its ground";<sup>104</sup> a desire not to be the first to leave, especially for contingents historically involved in UNIFIL and those for whom the mission sometimes represents a "business model"<sup>105</sup> for their armies; a willingness to create the operational conditions for the renewal of the mandate. Once the decision to remain had been taken by the troop and police contributing countries (TPCCs), most of the contingents played along, with some proving to be "real gems",<sup>106</sup> and more so as the TPCCs provided the necessary equipment (such as France for the FCR) and gave vocal diplomatic support.

On a more micro level, several interviews allowed to infer that the personality and approach of military personnel in command positions were a significant factor. Some senior officers tended to maintain a timid attitude, avoiding confrontation with Hezbollah and displaying "servility" towards the IDF hence the low profile often favoured until the COH. The arrival or affirmation of personalities with a more assertive vision, willing to take difficult decisions, stake personal risks and invest in efforts to persuade and stir emulation among the various contingents, provide clues to understanding the revitalisation of UNIFIL's role, especially from spring 2025 onwards. At that time, the renewals at the top of certain contingents created a dynamic on which the new Italian Force Commander, Diodato Abagnara, has seemed to be willing to build.

However, the contextual factor remains an important key to understanding post-COH adaptations. At the local level, "Hezbollah is at its weakest politically and militarily in 25 years"<sup>107</sup> and the new Lebanese authorities support the full deployment of the UNIFIL in south Lebanon and the eradication of illegal weapons. In addition to Hezbollah's military and technological setbacks, the assassination of a large number of its leaders and hundreds of its fighters, and the damage inflicted on the Shiite community, there are also regional developments in Syria and Iran,<sup>108</sup> in Palestine where violence

<sup>102</sup> "les gens préféraient en fait tourner la tête plutôt que de faire quoi que ce soit vis-à-vis des Forces de défense israéliennes (FDI)", [free translation]; Senior French military official I, interview on 6 November 2025. Another interviewee also shared that "You can't protect civilians by attacking the IDF pre-emptively to protect civilians, it's impossible for reasons we can imagine, i.e. at the slightest shot fired at the IDF, we get hit hard and that's it, the position that fired on the IDF will no longer exist 30 seconds later" ("On ne peut pas protéger les civils en attaquant Tsahal de façon préventive pour protéger les civils, c'est impossible pour les raisons qu'on imagine c'est-à-dire au moindre tir contre Tsahal, on s'en prend plein la tête et voilà, la position qui a tiré contre Tsahal n'existe plus 30 secondes après", [free translation]), Senior French military official II, interview on 6 November 2025.

<sup>103</sup> Tactical military commander II, interview on 6 November 2025.

<sup>104</sup> "tienne son rang", [free translation]; Senior French military official I, interview on 6 November 2025.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> "vraies pépites", [free translation]; Senior French military official II, interview on 6 November 2025.

<sup>107</sup> "Hezbollah est le plus faible politiquement et militairement depuis 25 ans", [free translation]; Officer deployed with UNIFIL before the 2020s but following the case at the French Ministry of the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs, interview on 21 October 2025.

<sup>108</sup> Iran has been attacked by Israel in June 2025 through a large-scale air campaign targeting leaders, military bases, civilian infrastructure and nuclear facilities, and which Washington concluded with strikes on the country's main nuclear sites (BIAD Abdelwahab, "[Attaques contre les installations nucléaires iraniennes : que dit le droit international ?](#)", *The Conversation*, 2 July 2025); in September, European states worked to

borders on genocide, in addition to the passivity of Arab states many of which are hostile to Hezbollah. As for the international arena, it is dominated by a Trump administration aligned with Israel and brutally opposed to Hezbollah, and a group of European and Arab states which, beyond the nuances of their approaches to Lebanon, seem eager to take advantage of the current juncture to force Lebanon into multiple concessions, particularly with regard to neutralising Hezbollah and breaking with Iran. As a result, UNIFIL has seen an unprecedented window of opportunity to help the LAF re-establish the state's monopoly in south Lebanon.

However, other factors have partially hindered UNIFIL's adaptation. Some are internal: complexity due to the presence of some 50 contingents ("50 shades of UNIFIL");<sup>109</sup> certain forms of tension between military and civilian logics; and the cumbrousness of some processes. Externally, the persistent mistrust of a large part of the local population and Israel's lukewarm acceptance of the Force contribute to limiting, if not the adaptations themselves, then at least their potential. One example is Israel's rejection of UNIFIL's proposals for security arrangements that would allow it to withdraw from occupied areas in Lebanese territory. We can also mention the reluctance on both sides of the BL regarding the deployment of more advanced technological equipment by UNIFIL in order "*to improve monitoring and verification; enhance tactical responsiveness; and reassess operational frameworks with the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces*".<sup>110</sup> Another limiting factor stems from the COH's oversight "*mechanism*": novice, approximate in its knowledge of the issues and biased, the latter pre-empts a more important role for UNIFIL despite the experience the mission has accumulated over time.

A final factor whose effects on UNIFIL's adaptations remain to be seen is the decision to terminate the mission. Two different views are discernible. The first suggests that UNIFIL will adapt its action in a rather maximalist manner in the final months of its mandate, in the hope of leaving as clean a slate as possible in south Lebanon. The second fears that the decision pushed by the United States and Israel has already "*neutralised*" the Force and risks diluting its post-COH adaptations. At this stage, it rather appears that UNIFIL remains committed to fulfilling the Lebanese dimension of its mandate. This development inevitably raises important questions regarding the fundamental principles of peacekeeping and its objectives.

## 6. UNIFIL's adaptation in light of the trap of unilateralism

In recent years, both the UN and stakeholders involved in peacekeeping have been reflecting on and debating the changes needed to respond to the challenges facing it.<sup>111</sup> Adopted in August 2018 in support of the Secretary-General's "*Action for Peacekeeping*" initiative and reflecting a broad consensus, the "*Declaration of Shared Commitments on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*" lists as top priorities those aimed at "*advanc[ing] political solutions to conflict and enhance[ing] the political impact of peacekeeping*" as well as "*strengthening the protection provided by peacekeeping*

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reactivate sanctions against Iran ("[Nucléaire iranien : après l'ONU, l'UE confirme avoir rétabli les sanctions contre l'Iran](#)", *Le Monde*, 29 September 2025).

<sup>109</sup> "*50 nuances de FINUL*", [free translation]; Senior French military official I, interview on 6 November 2025.

<sup>110</sup> "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 October 2024 to 20 February 2025](#)", *loc. cit.*, § 84. One exception concerns the deployment of anti-drone devices ("[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 June to 20 October 2025](#)", *loc. cit.*, § 61).

<sup>111</sup> See above, p. 1. Stakeholders include, of course, Member States, but also researchers, experts and advocates involved in this sector and, more broadly, what Fikru has critically termed the "*peacekeeping industry*" (FIKRU Bethelhem, "[Peace as Commodity: The Shadow Economy Behind Global Intervention](#)", *Horn Review*, 31 May 2025).

*operations*".<sup>112</sup> The concept of "*principled adaptation*" (PA) echoes these priorities: it conceptualises a mission's ability to adapt to a new context while preserving the doctrinal principles underlying peacekeeping – consent, impartiality and minimal use of force –,<sup>113</sup> and preventing damage and unforeseen consequences for beneficiary societies.<sup>114</sup> Based on the specificities of the context in which the Force now operates, this section aims to reflect on UNIFIL's adaptations in light of these concerns and their possible contribution to counterproductive outcomes.

## 6.1. Primacy of the use of force over diplomacy

The progress made by Lebanon in implementing Resolution 1701 over the past year is far from negligible, especially given the challenges posed by developments in Syria which potentially pose existential threats to the country.<sup>115</sup> In addition to the almost complete cessation of firing by Hezbollah, the LAF has deployed south of the Litani River, built up its forces there, dismantled numerous military infrastructures and eliminated unauthorised weapons (see Annex 10), largely responding to the demands of the Washington-led "*Mechanism*". This endeavour was consolidated by a decision taken in the summer of 2025 to disarm Hezbollah by favouring a non-confrontational approach; the implementation of a strategic plan adopted for this purpose began in September 2025.<sup>116</sup> Further progress has been made on the demilitarisation of Palestinian factions, notably following the signing of an agreement to this effect on 21 May 2025 by the Lebanese and Palestinian presidents.<sup>117</sup>

However, even though it has always been obvious that the LAF could not, *with a "magic wand"*,<sup>118</sup> eliminate all factions and weapons throughout Lebanon, the Israelis and Americans are using the limitations of the ongoing process as a pretext to advance the use of military and political coercion. For the past year, Israel has been defacing the COH by exercising a kind of monopoly on violence: air violations, operations in occupied areas and beyond, almost daily bombings, air strikes, targeted assassinations<sup>119</sup>... Not only has the *tempo* accelerated, but on the first anniversary of the COH the Israeli government has multiplied statements suggesting that larger-scale operations are on the way.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>112</sup> "[Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations](#)", UN, Action for Peacekeeping, no date, accessed on 20 November 2025

<sup>113</sup> AOI Chiyuki, de CONING Cedric and KARLSRUD John, "Introduction: Addressing the emerging gap between concepts, doctrine, and practice in UN peacekeeping operations", in DE CONING Cedric, AOI Chiyuki et KARLSRUD John (eds.), *UN Peacekeeping Doctrine in a New Era. Adapting to Stabilisation, Protection and New Threats*, Routledge, 2017, p. 1-29.

<sup>114</sup> DE CONING Cedric, "[Adaptive Peace Operations: Navigating the Complexity of Influencing Societal Change Without Causing Harm](#)", *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 27, n° 5, 2020, p. 836-858.

<sup>115</sup> Several interviewees pointed this out during the interviews; these developments led to sometimes serious security incidents on the border between the two countries, forcing the LAF to maintain a strong presence in this area, far from south Lebanon.

<sup>116</sup> "[L'armée libanaise lance la mise en œuvre du plan de désarmement du Hezbollah](#)", *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 5 September 2025.

<sup>117</sup> "[Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 \(2006\) during the period from 21 February to 20 June 2025](#)", *loc. cit.*, § 73 and 74; "[Au Liban, les camps palestiniens ont débuté leur désarmement](#)", RFI, 22 August 2025.

<sup>118</sup> "*coup de baguette magique*", [free translation]; Officer deployed with UNIFIL before the 2020s but following the case at the French Ministry of the Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs, interview on 21 October 2025.

<sup>119</sup> In response to the increase in Israeli strikes in Lebanon in the autumn of 2025, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called for an independent investigation, "[Liban : l'ONU demande des enquêtes face à une recrudescence des frappes israéliennes](#)", *United Nations*, UN News, 25 November 2025.

<sup>120</sup> RABIH Mounir, "[Une délégation onusienne à Beyrouth... et la décision de guerre à Tel-Aviv](#)", *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 1<sup>st</sup> December 2025.

For its part, the Trump administration has kept pursuing a strategy of continuous pressure aimed at the complete neutralisation of Hezbollah, militarily, economically and politically.<sup>121</sup>

Far removed from any diplomatic effort aimed at genuinely supporting peacekeeping, all these factors shift the current context in which UNIFIL is taking on a more active role in disarming Hezbollah away from one of the primary objectives of peacekeeping, namely "*the primacy of politics in the resolution of conflict and the supporting role that peacekeeping operations therein*".<sup>122</sup>

## 6.2. What impartiality and what consent?

This configuration entails harmful effects on two fundamental principles that adaptation of UN missions should preserve: impartiality and consent. In fact, the reality on the ground contradicts Resolution 1701, Article 2 of which calls on Lebanon and UNIFIL to deploy their forces together in south Lebanon "*Upon full cessation of hostilities*".<sup>123</sup> Consequently, the discrepancy between UNIFIL's assertive action in removing unauthorised weapons from its area of operations and its powerlessness in the face of Israeli violations dissolves the very concept of impartiality. Israel's daily failure to comply with Resolution 1701 and, beyond, with the United Nations Charter<sup>124</sup> ultimately leads UNIFIL to contribute, even unintentionally, to creating conditions that allow Israel to operate more freely.

This skewed situation also raises the question of consent. When the COH agreement was being negotiated, Lebanon committed to implementing the terms of Resolution 1701 based on the understanding that these terms would also be binding on Israel. However, the persistent unilateralism of the COH distorts the basis of this consent, placing the Lebanese authorities in a difficult position as evidenced by the repeated yet ineffective appeals made by the President of the Republic and/or the Head of Government, Aoun and Salam, to the "*international community*" to stop Israeli attacks.<sup>125</sup> This might contribute to the country's fragility.

## 6.3. Weakening of the Lebanese state and victimisation of the population

Peacekeeping normally aims to strengthen a state's capacity to consolidate its authority for the benefit of civilian populations. However, both objectives have been undermined by the context that has prevailed since the entry into force of the COH even though UNIFIL's action actively supports the deployment of the LAF, the removal of unauthorised weapons and the formal consolidation of state authority. Indeed, each Israeli strike demonstrates that the LAF is incapable of protecting Lebanese territory and population, thereby legitimising Hezbollah's refusal to give up its weapons.<sup>126</sup> The alternative that seems to be looming in Lebanon is either a new Israeli military assault, which will further weaken the country politically, economically and socially, or a confrontation between the LAF and Hezbollah. However, this scenario would be suicidal: not only it is uncertain that the LAF would

<sup>121</sup> RABIH Mounir, "[Washington dicte ses \(dix\) conditions : la fin du Hezbollah et un nouvel ordre politique](#)", *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 11 November 2025.

<sup>122</sup> "[Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations](#)", *loc. cit.*, § 3.

<sup>123</sup> "[Resolution 1701 \(2006\)](#)", *loc. cit.*, § 2.

<sup>124</sup> Indeed, according to UN experts, Israel's continued attacks after the COH are unjustified and constitute a violation of the UN Charter as well as war crimes, "[Lebanon: Israel systematic attacks and killings threaten peace efforts, UN expert warns](#)", *United Nations*, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 21 November 2025.

<sup>125</sup> "[Attaques israéliennes au Liban-Sud : Aoun et Salam interpellent la communauté internationale](#)", *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 4 September 2025.

<sup>126</sup> "[Le Hezbollah accuse le gouvernement libanais, qui s'est engagé à désarmer le mouvement chiite, de 'livrer' le pays à Israël](#)", *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 15 August 2025.

emerge victorious, but it could lead to civil war or, at the very least, exacerbate the crisis of legitimacy of the state in relation to a large part of its Shiite community. This is all the more so given that, even weakened, Hezbollah retains much of its legitimacy.

Even though the tendency, including among people who have served in UNIFIL, is to view Hezbollah as a malignant entity external to Lebanese society,<sup>127</sup> the party is rooted in the victimisation of the Shiite population in Lebanon. Daily violations of COH only add to the sometimes multiple bereavements of families, reinforcing both Hezbollah's *raison d'être* and its stance of "*resistance*". Added to this are the ongoing forced displacements and the systematic destruction of the homes of tens of thousands of people, their property and their livelihoods, all of which are seeds for future conflict. This is compounded by the fact that the international aid promised for reconstruction has not materialised due to the persistence of Israeli military strikes and the use of aid as a means of pressure.

In such a situation in which Lebanon is indirectly compelled to turn against part of its population even as that population continues to be exposed to violence, it is not surprising that many Lebanese see UNIFIL as representing an "*international community*" biased in favour of Israel and which understands the latter's right to self-defence in absolute terms at the cost of crushing those who perceive themselves as its victims.

#### 6.4. Fragile prospects for peace

The coercive strategy adopted by Washington and which includes the planned termination of UNIFIL, aims to force Lebanon into negotiations with Israel from the weakest position imaginable and to integrate the Abraham Accords.<sup>128</sup> However, knowledge developed in the field of peace and conflict studies shows that processes guided by coercion and the exclusion of key actors are short-lived and nurture future violence.<sup>129</sup> This is all the more true when the promised economic dividends would force the victimised populations into relinquishing their history, grievances and suffering, and to accept a peace without recognition, reparation, reconciliation or justice. Already lacking credibility in light of accumulated knowledge on conflict resolution and contrary to the founding principles of peacekeeping, such a scenario also suffers from the uncertainties entailed by the forthcoming withdrawal of UNIFIL.

It is obvious that by the end of 2026, Lebanon will not have transformed into a strong state enjoying consensual political legitimacy and a monopoly on weapons and whose armed forces could compensate for the departure of the Blue Helmets and prevent a dangerous security vacuum. In the shadow of American diktats and Israeli bombs, many diplomats, especially those of the TPCCs, are now working with the SG to consider alternatives. These could take the form of a multinational force, another UN mission with a distinct mandate, or even a simple observation mission of the OGL of the

<sup>127</sup> Confirming other previous observations, several interviewees projected a vision that essentialises Hezbollah, reducing it to its religious dimension. However, the research highlights the pitfalls of such a vision, both scientifically, since it does not allow for an understanding of the phenomena studied, and politically, since it leads to demonisation. Marie-Joëlle Zahar (interview on 29 October 2025) points out that Hezbollah's attempts to retain its weapons are comparable to those of many armed groups in its situation, such as the Irish Republican Army even after the Good Friday Agreement.

<sup>128</sup> CONNAN Julie, "[Liban : dangereuse escalade, un an après le cessez-le-feu](#)", *La Croix*, 20 November 2025.

<sup>129</sup> See CUNNINGHAM David E., *Barriers to Peace in Civil War*, *op. cit.*; STEDMAN Stephen J., "[Spoiler problems in peace processes](#)", *International Security*, vol. 22, n° 2, 1997, p. 5-53. Most of the literature on this subject focuses on civil conflicts, but the situation in Lebanon has always been hybrid, combining internal and external dimensions, with non-state actors confronting Israel and competing with a Lebanese state that is absent from the issues at stake in its southern part.

United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) (or based on that model), which would support the LAF after wedge-shaped transition in 2026 from a UNIFIL-led/LAF-supporting role to a LAF-led/UNIFIL-supporting role.<sup>130</sup> The type of mandate, the legality on which such forces would rest and their impartiality will all be key parameters for their acceptance by the beneficiary populations or, on the contrary, their rejection.

On the academic side, based on the unilateralism of the COH and what it reveals about current international dynamics including within the UN, analyses are pessimistic. Some foresee a large-scale Israeli operation, perhaps even before UNIFIL's departure; with the latter already scheduled, it is unlikely that any TPCC will want to risk its troops and remain.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, others fear that, against its will, UNIFIL is paving the way for a future occupation through its current actions, a scenario based on the continued occupation by the IDF of five strategic positions within Lebanon.<sup>132</sup> Without Hezbollah's weapons and in the absence of UNIFIL to observe and record violations, the military and political cost of such an undertaking would be considerably reduced for Israel.

## Conclusion

The last 27 months have been particularly difficult for UNIFIL and have tested its flexibility and adaptability. Overall, it has managed to get through this period without suffering heavy human losses while remaining a relevant vehicle for the implementation of Resolution 1701. Today, it is undoubtedly the spearhead of the Resolution's implementation in Lebanon. The UNSC's decision not to renew the Force's mandate beyond the end of 2026 is not the result of a broad international consensus but rather of pressure from a Trump administration hostile to multilateralism; it must not therefore be interpreted as resulting from UNIFIL's inability to adapt.

In an international climate characterized by the normalisation of the use of force and the establishment of intimidation as the main diplomatic tool by the United States,<sup>133</sup> the context of UNIFIL's adaptation to changes in its environment raises fundamental questions about peacekeeping. The absence of any credible diplomatic initiative, the persistence of open violations of Resolution 1701 by the Israeli side, the refocusing of UNIFIL's action on the deployment of the LAF and the removal of all unauthorised weapons in south Lebanon while the protection of civilians and support for their return are *de facto* impossible, all suggest that the mission is now operating in a context dominated by coercive tactics that are diametrically opposed to peacekeeping, and that it has become the objective vehicle for such tactics. Consequently, its own actions could be translated into an unintended vector for future destabilisation.

Ultimately, adjustments to a PO cannot be considered solely as a matter of operational and strategic adaptation to new situations. They have an intrinsically political dimension rooted in their environment and in the diplomatic practices of the powers that dominate the UNSC. If compliance with Resolution 1701 had been enforced on both sides of the BL and had been complemented by credible and balanced efforts to resolve the conflict, UNIFIL's post-COH adaptations would have had much greater legitimacy among the beneficiary populations and strong potential in terms of contributing to peace. In the

<sup>130</sup> Analysis shared by a senior French military official I, interview on 6 November 2025. In other words, there would be a reversal of roles, with UNIFIL ceding its current leadership role to the LAF and taking on a supporting role (the current role of the LAF).

<sup>131</sup> Prof. Marie-Joëlle Zahar, interview on 29 October 2025.

<sup>132</sup> Senior French military official II, interview on 6 November 2025. The various interlocutors emphasise that UNIFIL does not see its action as deliberately facilitating future Israeli action.

<sup>133</sup> On the general decline in peace efforts, see PONI TOMBE Sandra, BERLIN Mark and SISK Timothy D., ["Peacemaking in Crisis : Amid more War, Fewer Peace Agreements"](#), United States Peace Institute, 2025.

current climate, UNIFIL could well become, in its final months, an illustration of the distortion of peacekeeping and, more broadly, of the failure of a UN that has been now captured by a handful of powers.<sup>134</sup>

The experience of other missions also trapped in contexts where the UNSC acquiesces to violations of the UN Charter warrants further study. One example is that of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Syrian-Israeli border that stands idle in the new context of the expansion of Israel's occupation in southern Syria and its increasing military actions there.<sup>135</sup>

The writing of the paper was completed on 26 November 2025.

## Recommendations

These recommendations have been difficult to formulate, given that the foundations of the UN, its Charter, and the various bodies of law that underpin or derive from it, appear to be under threat today. Nevertheless, based on the premise that the UN Charter and the principles and norms that emanate from it must remain at the heart of a viable international order where the logic of raw force and coercion must be curbed, and where peacekeeping must under no circumstances become a new instrument of power at the service of militarised and belligerent states, a series of recommendations has been drawn up below. For the sake of clarity, these are organised by key themes, but they are closely interlinked:

### ***Assess and adjust adaptations:***

- The UN, TPCCs and UNIFIL should evaluate all the adaptations that have enabled the Force to maintain its presence, even at a minimum level, between October 2023 and November 2024, and to resume the implementation of its mandate as set out in Resolution 1701. This assessment should include an analysis of the limitations observed and the technical, material or political reasons behind them. Special attention should be paid to the issue of civilian protection.
- With the support of the TPCCs, UNIFIL should take note of the unilateral nature of the cessation of hostilities (COH) and the continuation of Israeli strikes on Lebanese territory, and consider how to adapt its activities and positions and their consequences in order to adjust them in line with the various dimensions of its mandate and, more generally, the objectives of peacekeeping.

### ***Working towards the effective implementation of the cessation of hostilities:***

- With the support of the TPCCs, UNIFIL should highlight ongoing violations of the COH and Resolution 1701 in all relevant forums and publicly in order to preserve respect for the United Nations Charter and the credibility and legitimacy of the institution in the eyes of the local population.
- Through the UN, the "*international community*", and in particular France and Italy given their traditional roles in Lebanon, should do everything possible to achieve a genuine COH, the return of populations to their villages, and the implementation of a credible reconstruction

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<sup>134</sup> "[Vetoing humanity](#)", *loc. cit.*

<sup>135</sup> "[Israel expands military presence in southern Syria with 10 bases, residents displaced](#)", *Middle East Monitor*, 7 July 2025.

plan. In this regard, the more or less explicit conditions that prevent any rebuilding for the benefit of the population of south Lebanon must be lifted immediately.

#### **Contributing to the consolidation of the authority and legitimacy of the Lebanese state and its army**

- UNIFIL should continue to support the Lebanese army and help it to strengthen its role in south Lebanon, while remaining attentive to the constraints faced by the Lebanese authorities and army so as not to fuel future destabilisation.
- UNIFIL should use its experience and knowledge of the terrain to try to exert greater influence within the five-party "*Mechanism*", with the help of France, which is both a member of this Mechanism and one of the major contributors to the Force.
- Given its experience and knowledge of the ground, UNIFIL should be closely involved in discussions on the solutions to be adopted after its own departure and avoid a security vacuum that could reignite hostilities or even facilitate a new occupation.
- Through the UN, the "*international community*" should promote long-term developments that enable the Lebanese authorities to consolidate their position as a legitimate and credible actor in the eyes of all sections of the population, without exception. This requires restoring the ability to protect civilians, including in south Lebanon, as well as the capacity to adopt and implement public policies that benefit civilians, particularly those in south Lebanon.

#### **Promoting diplomacy, and in a more diverse format, in conflict resolution and peacekeeping**

- The UN, through its Secretary-General, UNIFIL and the main TPCCs, should take the lead in promoting diplomacy rather than coercion in order to bring about real prospects for appeasement on the Israeli-Lebanese border, in the long-term interests of the populations on both sides of the border.
- Through the UN, the "*international community*" should become more assertively and consistently involved in resolving the Israeli-Arab conflict in its Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian components, ensuring respect for the principles of the Charter and the rights of local populations. In this regard, it is necessary to resist the traditional temptation to separate these issues, as they are closely intertwined, as 7 October 2023 reminded us.
- Both the UN and the various diplomatic services involved in the Israeli-Lebanese issue should consolidate their knowledge, collectively and individually, of the history and conditions that gave rise to the belligerent dynamics in south Lebanon, in order to avoid repeating the crushing, exclusion, marginalisation and victimisation that pave the way for further cycles of violence.
- The leadership of peacekeeping operations, such as UNIFIL and other similar forces, should be diversified to include officers and officials from countries in the Global South. Non-Western experiences would bring a new sensitivity that would make it possible to break with approaches that have been shown to perpetuate, in various ways, neo-colonial dynamics and the naturalisation of the use of force against the "*barbarian*".

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## About the author

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Her research is rooted in the field of Peace and Conflict Studies and focuses on conflict dynamics in the Middle East. She seeks to understand the actors and factors that contribute to fuelling or reducing outbreaks of violence and conflict more generally, with a specific focus on long-term and unintended effects. With this in mind, she conducts and directs research on the role of powers outside the region, particularly the EU; the Israeli-Arab conflict in its various dimensions; peacekeeping; international criminal justice; and violent transnational movements or solidarity movements. Her teaching focuses on international relations, security and development.



The Boutros-Ghali Observatory on Peacekeeping is a forum for discussion between experts and French-speaking personalities from troop-and-police-contributing countries. It contributes to strengthening triangular dialogue between Member States engaged in peacekeeping, the UN Security Council, and the UN Secretariat.

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