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United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)

Conflict history

Following the events of Black September in 1970, in which Jordan expelled members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the PLO established a state within a state in the south of Lebanon. A full-scale civil war began in Lebanon in 1975, with Maronite Christians fighting Muslim militias and the PLO.

Israel supported the Maronites to establish a friendly Christian government and destroy the PLO, which carried out attacks against Israel from Lebanon.

One of these attacks, the Coastal Road Massacre, killed 38 Israeli civilians and wounded over 70 on March 9, 1978.¹ On March 14, 1978, Israeli forces invaded



UNIFIL peacekeepers from the Mission's Female Assessment/Analysis and Support Team (FAST) carry out a community engagement walk in the Tyre souk, south Lebanon. FAST activities vary from operational activities to community outreach, including foot and market patrols, school visits, as well as community engagements such as this one. Tyre, 6 November 2019. / *Photo by: Pasqual Gorriz/UN*

Lebanon. In response, the UN Security Council passed Resolutions 425 and 426, calling for Israel to withdraw and creating the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Israel's withdrawal was to take place over four stages, though they maintained a presence in the area by ceding the final zone to the South Lebanon Army (SLA), a militia they created and armed.

In 1982, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) re-invaded Lebanon.² UNIFIL forces had no mandate to interfere in the conflict and watched as the parties exchanged rockets and shells.³ From June to July, Israeli forces attacked Beirut and forced the PLO out, at great cost to civilians: 18,000 were reportedly killed and 30,000 injured.

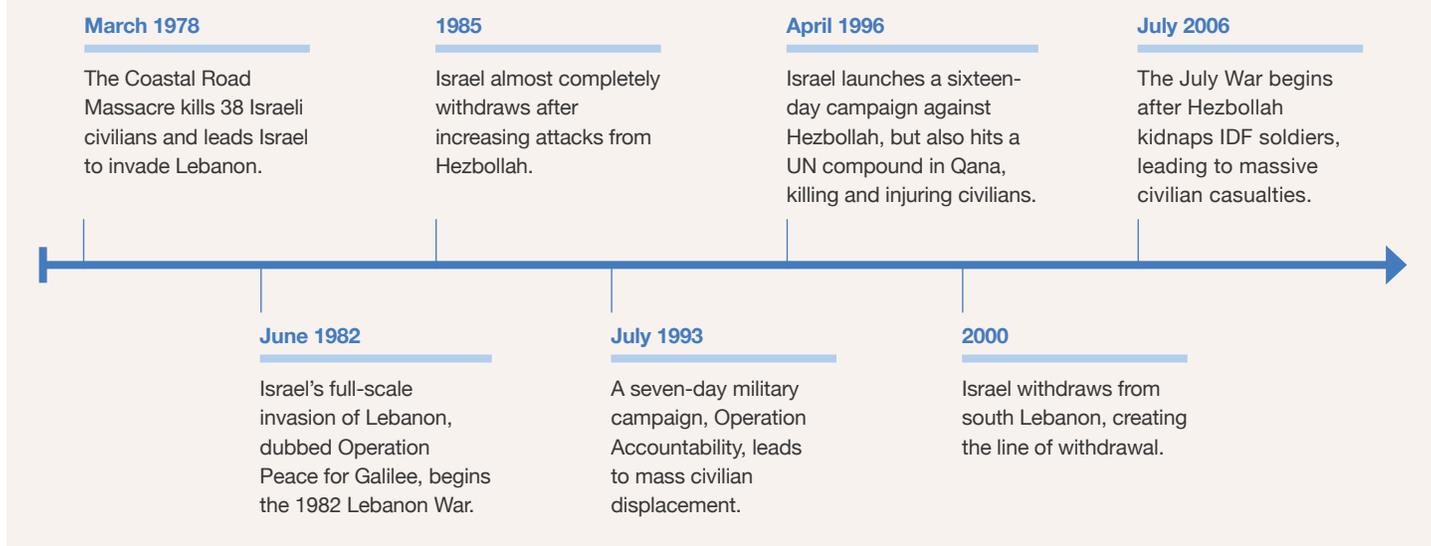
In 1982, Hezbollah emerged as a guerilla-terrorist organization supported by Iran and Syria.⁴ In 1985, Israel

withdrew to the "security zone," an 850 km area of Lebanese territory made up of checkpoints operated mainly by members of the SLA, due to the increasing Hezbollah attacks on IDF troops in 1985. As Israeli scholar Nitza Nachmias put it, "Israel assumed wrongly that Operation Peace for Galilee would eliminate the security threat of the PLO, while failing to recognize the real threat to its security: the growing political, social, economic and strategic power of the Hizbullah."⁵

In 1989, the Taif Agreement, signed in Saudi Arabia and supported by the US, ended the Lebanese Civil War. The agreement established a new power-sharing model and changed the 55:45 ratio of parliamentary seats to 50:50.⁶

In response to escalating attacks from Hezbollah in the security zone, the IDF invaded Lebanon again in

Figure 1: Chronology of Conflict between Lebanon and Israel



July 1993. The operation entailed displacing civilians to Beirut to force the government to address the actions of Hezbollah. The IDF damaged over 55 villages and displaced 300,000 civilians.⁷ Israel launched Operation Grapes of Wrath in April 1996, and as a result, the parties issued another “understanding” to protect civilians and the UN established a monitoring group.⁸

Facing intense pressure from civilian protests and Hezbollah IED activity, Israel withdrew suddenly in 2000 from all regions but Shebaa Farms, the Kfar Shouba Hills, and the southern half of the village of Ghajar. The SLA disbanded, and Hezbollah gained more territory and authority, claiming that they were preventing future Israeli aggression. The line of withdrawal, or the Blue Line, was unmarked and contested.⁹

In July of 2006, Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and killed five.¹⁰ This action was intended to trigger a negotiation over missing Lebanese believed to be held in Israeli prisons. Israel saw this as an act of war and launched airstrikes on civilian infrastructure, an air and naval blockade, and a ground invasion. The July War

lasted 33 days, killing between 1,191 and 1,300 Lebanese and 61 Israelis. UNSC Resolution 1701 brought the war to an end on August 14, 2006.¹¹ Despite being signed on August 11, the ceasefire did not take effect until the 14th, allowing Israel to intensify its bombing campaign and drop a million illegal cluster bombs.¹²

In 2010, a cross-border clash between the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and IDF threatened the fragile peace between the two nations, and four died as a result.¹³ Tension remains high, in part due to Israeli attacks on Iranian-backed militias in Syria and Hezbollah’s shooting down of an Israeli drone over the Blue Line, and the discovery of tunnels running from Lebanon into Israel.¹⁴

Mission background

History—UNIFIL I

UNSC Resolution 425 established UNIFIL in 1978. The resolution aimed to ensure the “withdrawal of Israeli forces, restoring international peace and security, and assisting the Government of Lebanon in ensuring

the return of its effective authority in the area”¹⁵ Soon after that, UNSC Resolution 426 set a six-month limit on the mission. At the same time, UNSC Resolution 427 approved an increase in troops from 4,000 to 6,000.¹⁶ The day after Israel announced a ceasefire, the first UNIFIL troops arrived, where local militias targeted them. In the first four years, 36 peacekeepers died in direct attacks.¹⁷

In its 1978 withdrawal, the IDF was to hand over territory to UNIFIL but instead gave the final area to the SLA. UNIFIL negotiated with the main parties, the SLA and Shiite militias, to operate in the area.¹⁸ After the 1982 invasion, the UN moved and reduced UNIFIL troops to providing aid from behind Israeli lines, making fulfilling their mandate impossible.¹⁹

Although UNIFIL illuminated violations of international law to compel compliance, Israel’s “iron fist” policy of displacing and expelling Lebanese civilians, imposing curfews, and destroying homes worsened UNIFIL’s dilemma of observing with little ability to intervene. The Security Council conceded that UNIFIL’s situation was dire but did little to change it.²⁰ In 1988, a Shiite militia kidnapped three Irish peacekeepers. UNIFIL had to rely on Amal, a moderate Shiite militia, to locate and save them, exposing the absence of the Lebanese government’s authority and the mission’s vulnerability.²¹

Israel’s Operation Accountability in 1993 was its largest invasion since 1982. It involved the displacement of civilians to force the government to confront Hezbollah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP). Operation Grapes of Wrath began in 1996, in which Israeli forces bombed Hezbollah bases, but also hit a UN compound in Qana where civilians were sheltering from the violence, killing over 100.²² Also, in 1996, the Monitoring Group, made up of representatives from the US, France, Syria, Lebanon, and Israel, was established.²³ UNIFIL remained in south Lebanon after the Israeli withdrawal in 2000. It was mandated to return government authority and restore international peace and security.

UNIFIL II

The July War of 2006 “radically changed” UNIFIL’s context and led the international community to call for increased deployment of UN troops.²⁴ UNIFIL was reportedly “caught by surprise” by the violence, as they intended to convert into an observer mission after the Israeli withdrawal. Resolution 1701 called for increasing UNIFIL’s strength from 2,000 to 15,000 troops taking all necessary action to protect civilians, and ensuring that the area is “free of any armed personnel, assets, and weapons.”²⁵ However, the controversial nature of Resolution 1701’s timing and its absolving of Israel’s responsibility hurt the mission’s legitimacy among local civilians, increasing support for Hezbollah.

UNIFIL also expanded its civilian component, including 257 international and 591 international staff.²⁶ Unlike military staff, civilians do not rotate. The deputy head of mission is a civilian responsible for political and civil affairs. The division of duties among offices of public information, civil affairs, and political affairs is often fluid.

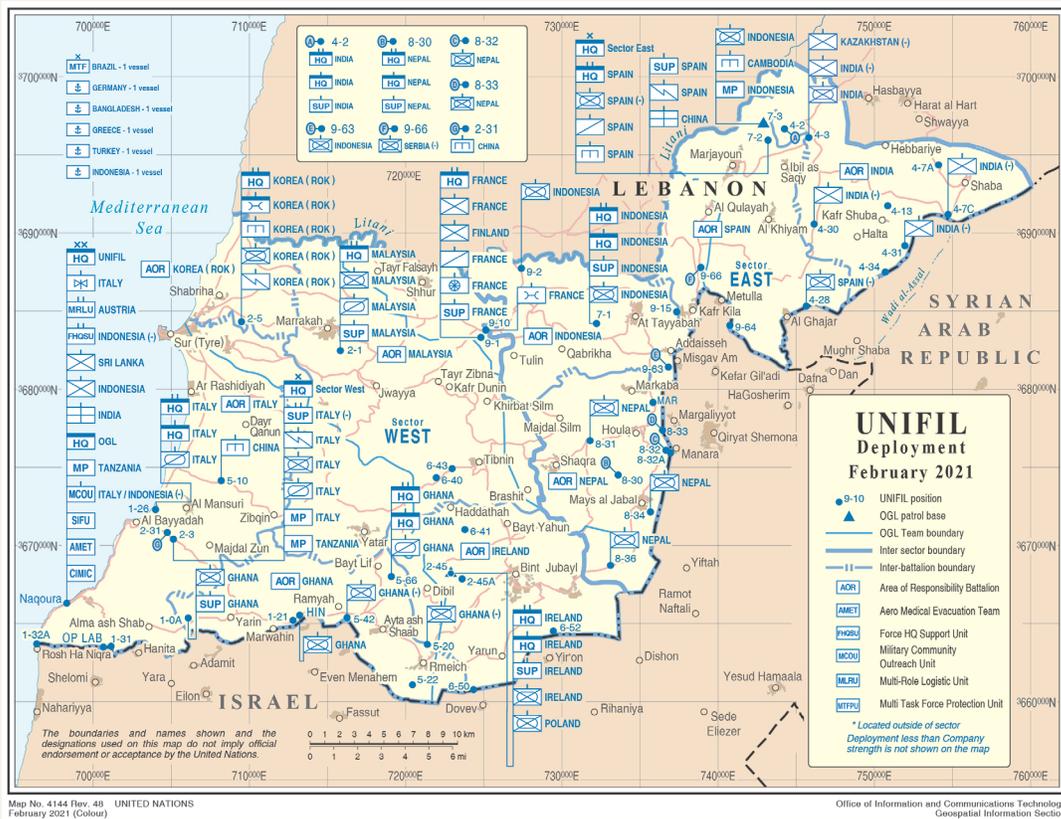
The UN Security Council established a Maritime Task Force (MTF) as part of the peacekeeping mission in 2006. It performed various tasks, including transporting relief materials and preventing unauthorized arms from entering the country. In March 2009, LAF assumed responsibility for naval operations from UNIFIL.²⁷

In 2007, Resolution 1773 established a Line of Withdrawal, or the Blue Line.²⁸ UNIFIL also began the process of demining access corridors to mark the Blue Line, as more than 1,000 marked minefields run along the Blue Line.²⁹ Currently, the Chinese and Cambodian contingents sweep mines.

Composition

As of February 2021, UNIFIL consists of 10,811 peacekeepers from 32 troop-contributing countries (TCCs), the top three contributors being Indonesia, Italy, and Ghana.³⁰ Uniformed personnel consist of 9,777 troops and 204 staff officers.³¹

Figure 2: UNIFIL Deployment (February 2021)



Source: UN Geospatial Network

Resolution 1701 authorized a maximum of 15,000 troops³², and increased the troops on the ground from 2,000 to 15,000.³³ Currently 830 civilian personnel serve in UNIFIL, 71 percent of whom are Lebanese nationals and 30 percent of whom are women.³⁴ 318 UNIFIL personnel have died since the beginning of the mission.³⁵

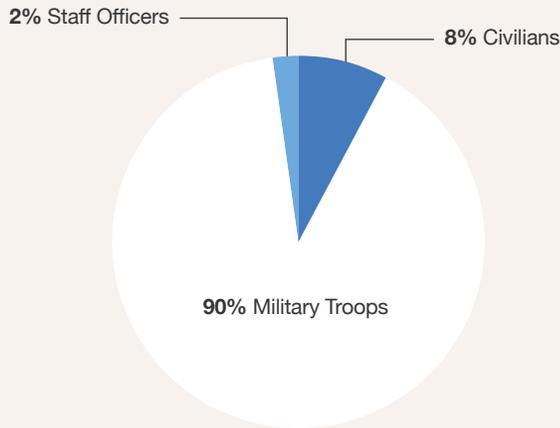
Women, Peace and Security

UNIFIL lacks visible female leadership or a substantial proportion of women among its ranks, but it has made progress on the WPS agenda. The Female Assessment/Analysis Support Team (FAST) conducted its

first all-female foot patrol in December 2017. The UN stated its mission was to help maintain stability, assist in implementing community projects, and communicate better with locals. Another aim was to support the LAF's efforts to recruit Lebanese women.³⁶ Additionally, in 2019, Lebanon adopted its first WPS National Action Plan for 2019-2022, which focuses on implementing the four pillars of Resolution 1325: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery.³⁷

Women UNIFIL peacekeepers faced an obstacle to inclusion in 1992 under the leadership of Erik Wahlgren, the head of the Norwegian contingent. Women

Figure 3: UNIFIL Personnel Composition (February 2021)



Source: [UNIFIL Fact Sheet](#)

peacekeepers from Norway had helped with community engagement, including providing free medical and dental assistance. However, Wahlgren ordered them to adapt to new roles, and restricted them from accessing the community, claiming to avoid “cultural imperialism.”³⁸ The women took their campaign public, succeeded in their efforts for inclusion and were permitted to interact with locals.

There have been six accusations of sexual exploitation and abuse since the current UN tracking system began in 2007.³⁹ Since detailed information became available in 2015, four allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse have been recorded, one of which was unsubstantiated, one is pending, and two resulted in disciplinary action or reassignment.⁴⁰ In 2010, locals called French peacekeepers “provocative and intrusive” for allegedly photographing civilians, particularly women, inside of their homes.⁴¹ Some have voiced apprehension at marriages of male Norwegian peacekeepers to young Lebanese women, though no related instances of misconduct have been reported.⁴²

We conducted 19 semi-structured interviews with uniformed and civilian UNIFIL personnel and civil society actors to examine the gendered impacts on the mission’s operational effectiveness. Stakeholder interviews highlighted both the gendered issues and the role of uniformed women in UNIFIL:

- Gender focal points and task forces are incorporated throughout the mission, with the intention that half of these focal points should be women;
- Intensive training on conflict-related sexual violence is mandatory at the start of each rotation;
- The WPS Action Plan is used to facilitate the integration of women and the WPS agenda within mission leadership;
- Internal research conducted by mission personnel shows that Lebanese women do see female peacekeepers as role models and do want to be involved in the goals set forth by UNSCR 1325.

Respondents had varying opinions about the benefits of women peacekeepers for operational effectiveness. While some thought that women provided added value for certain tasks, others found no differences between male and female peacekeepers. We identified several themes that mission personnel reported:

- Uniformed women have a significant impact as part of community patrols because they communicate with local women more easily and evoke more sympathy from locals, both men and women;
- Uniformed women demonstrate the potential to serve as role models for women who see that they can have military jobs;
- Uniformed women fill important roles in interacting with local women, including searches that men could not perform;

Figure 4: Women’s Representation in UNIFIL

Contributing Country	Number of Women	Women’s Roles
Armenia	4	Contingent Troops
Austria	7	Contingent Troops
Belarus	3	Contingent Troops
Cambodia	32	Contingent Troops
China	22	Contingent Troops
El Salvador	4	Contingent Troops
Finland	5	Contingent Troops
France	61	Contingent Troops
	3	Staff Officers
Germany	7	Contingent Troops
Ghana	122	Contingent Troops
	3	Staff Officers
Greece	19	Contingent Troops
Guatemala	1	Staff Officers
Hungary	2	Contingent Troops
India	3	Contingent Troops
	4	Staff Officers
Indonesia	78	Contingent Troops
	4	Staff Officers

Contributing Country	Number of Women	Women’s Roles
Ireland	25	Contingent Troops
Italy	30	Contingent Troops
	1	Staff Officer
Kenya	2	Staff Officers
Malaysia	40	Contingent Troops
	1	Staff Officers
Nepal	24	Contingent Troops
	3	Staff Officers
Netherlands	1	Staff Officers
Peru	1	Staff Officers
Poland	14	Contingent Troops
Republic of Korea	12	Contingent Troops
	1	Staff Officers
Serbia	15	Contingent Troops
Spain	50	Contingent Troops
	1	Staff Officers
United Republic of Tanzania	19	Contingent Troops
Uruguay	1	Staff Officers

- The integration of uniformed women led to improvement in work environment and discipline;

Women’s participation is viewed as important in peacekeeping to secure peace through addressing women’s needs.

Challenges

The area in which UNIFIL operates lacks government authority. Many civilians are sympathetic to Hezbollah in the south, which often carries out government duties more efficiently than the Lebanese government.⁴³ This presents difficulties in fulfilling UNIFIL’s mandate to restoring the Lebanese government’s authority in south Lebanon.

COVID-19 has complicated both the execution of day-to-day tasks and tightened the budget. In interviews, troops identified a key difficulty of their job as the lack of interaction with the host community due to COVID restrictions. In September 2020, 90 UNIFIL peacekeepers tested positive for coronavirus.⁴⁴ The pandemic reportedly halted efforts for further inclusion, as accommodations built for women in peacekeeping were used instead for quarantining those exposed to COVID.

Mission personnel pointed out several other challenges to their jobs and the mission, including:

- The language barrier, and the time-consuming translation of Arabic to peacekeepers’ languages causing delays in operations;

- Sexism and racism among civilians in south Lebanon impacting local perceptions of peacekeepers;
- The constraints of the mandate and the “interim” nature of the mission;
- Instability in the region, especially the influx of Syrian refugees and continued hostility between Hezbollah and Israel;
- The colonial history of Lebanon leading to local distrust of the mission;
- Cold and icy seasonal weather conditions for mining activities or operating vehicles;
- The lack of progress at the formal political level.

Effectiveness

UNIFIL’s mandated objectives include restoring international peace and security, aiding the Lebanese government in establishing its authority, and securing an area free of armed personnel other than the Gov-

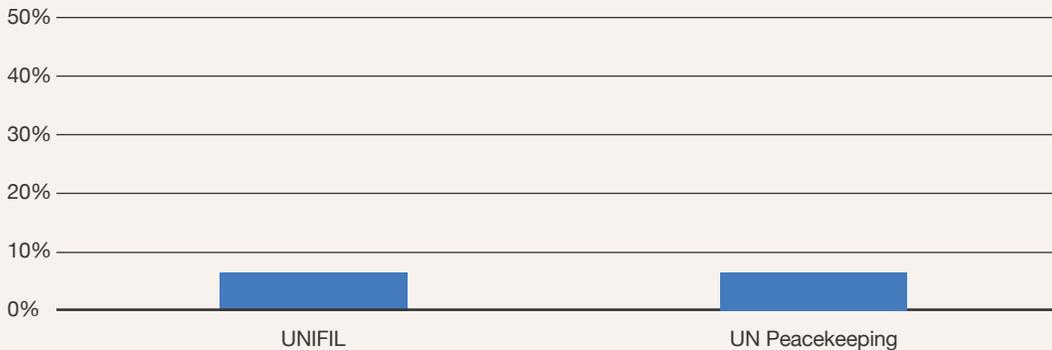
ernment of Lebanon and UNIFIL troops.⁴⁵ In 2007, the Security Council acknowledged UNIFIL’s success in improving cooperation and establishing a new strategic environment.

The 2020 mission report of the Security-General revealed obstacles to operational effectiveness, largely attributed to lack of local buy-in.⁴⁶ The report noted that the Department of Peace Operations launched an assessment with stakeholders to evaluate the mission. To this end, UNIFIL created a working group to explore options to improve the mission’s effectiveness.

In interviews with us, stakeholders emphasized three aspects regarding mission operational effectiveness:

- Budgeting, especially if the WPS agenda is prioritized;
- The necessity to “win the hearts and minds of people”;
- The importance of direct interaction with the community.

Figure 5: Proportion of Female Troops



Source: [UNIFIL Fact Sheet](#)

Endnotes

- ¹ Omer-Man, Michael. "This Week in History: Israel's Deadliest Terror Attack." The Jerusalem Post | JPost.com. January 01, 0001.
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- ¹⁰ Ibid.
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- ²² Nachmias, Nitza. "UNIFIL: When Peace Is Non-existent, Peacekeeping Is Impossible." *International Peacekeeping* 6, no. 3 (1999): 95-112.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Murphy, Ray. "Peacekeeping in Lebanon and Civilian Protection," *Journal of Conflict and Security Law* 17, no. 3, Winter 2012, Pages 373–402.
- ²⁵ "UNIFIL Mandate." UNIFIL. <https://unifil.unmissions.org/unifil-mandate>.
- ²⁶ Newby, Vanessa F. *Peacekeeping in South Lebanon: Credibility and Local Cooperation*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2018.
- ²⁷ Gustavo, Luiz and Aversa Franco. "Peacekeeping at Sea? a Case Study of the Maritime Task Force in Lebanon." *Revista Da Escola De Guerra Naval* 22, no. 2 (2016): 411-440. <https://search.proquest.com/openview/f2a6f489ef3224aa7d-2c128d1220246d/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=4457491>.
- ²⁸ "Resolution 1773." UNSCR. <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1773>.
- ²⁹ Greene, Christina. "UNIFIL Peacekeeping in Southern Lebanon," *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* 15 no. 1, (2011). Available at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol15/iss1/>.
- ³⁰ "UNIFIL Troop-Contributing Countries." UNIFIL. February 2021. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>.

³¹ “United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon Mission Fact Sheet.” United Nations. April 2020. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/unifil_apr2020.pdf.

³² “FAQs.” UNIFIL. November 15, 2019. <https://unifil.unmissions.org/faqs>.

³³ Murphy, Ray. “Peacekeeping in Lebanon and Civilian Protection,” *Journal of Conflict and Security Law* 17 no. 3, Winter 2012, Pages 373–402.

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³⁹ “Allegations.” Conduct in UN Field Missions. <https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-subjects>.

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Cover photo: UNIFIL Indonesian peacekeepers conduct mixed-gender patrols along the Blue Line in the vicinity of El Adeisse, south Lebanon. 23 April 2020. / Photo by: Pasqual Gorriz/ UN

Notes



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