

India's Contribution in United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

ARIEF HUSSAIN GANAIE

Research Scholar

School of Studies in Political Science
Public Administration and Human Rights
Vikram University, Ujjain-M.P., India

Abstract:

As a founding member, India has been strongly engaged in supporting the principles and purposes of United Nations and has made significant contribution for maintaining international peace and security. India has been a continuous contributor to the United Nations Peacekeeping activities from time to time in different capacities throughout the globe. India has invariably ranked among the first three highest contributors of personnel to the UN Peacekeeping Operations. The present effort shall explore the role of India in United Nations interim force in Lebanon for the restoration of peace.

Key words: United Nations, Peacekeeping, Palestine, Lebanon, Israel, UNIFIL.

BACKGROUND

The Lebanese crises are inextricably linked with creation of the state of Israel out of Palestine in 1948 and the resultant issue of Palestinian refugees crossing the border into Lebanon. In November 1947, the United Nations plan for partitioning Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab Palestinian state, led

to civil war, the end of age old Palestine and the Israeli Declaration of Independence on 14 May 1948. The ongoing civil war by means of nationhood was transformed into a state conflict between the Israel and Arab States, the 1948 Arab-Israel War. Israel, attacked by the forces of Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia jointly, emerged victorious with a control of 80 percent of pre-partition Palestine from this war. Almost 800,000 Arab-Palestinians fled, emigrated or were forced out of Israel to the neighbouring countries. By 1966, the UN estimated that there were 160,000 Arab-Palestinian in Lebanon confined to various refugee camps. On the initiatives of President Gamel Abdel Nasser of Egypt in 1964, the Palestine Liberation organisation was founded as an umbrella group uniting all the Palestinian groups, including the "Fatah" a militant group dedicated to win a Palestinian state founded by Yasir Arfat in 1959, to push for a Palestinian state. In 1969, Yasir Arafat's Fatah militant group developed into a dominant faction within the PLO and staged up its guerrilla attacks by its fedayeen (men who sacrifice themselves)¹.

Form his base in Jordan; Yasir Arafat launched some spectacular terrorist acts such as the simultaneous hijacking of four air lines on 6 September 1970. Yasir Arfat formed the majority of the population in Jordan and also began projecting himself as the sole spokesperson of the Palestinians. The growing power of the Arafat alarmed the king of Jordan, which led the open warfare between the PLO and Jordan in 1970-71, as a result of which the PLO leadership and their troops fled from Jordan to Syria and finally Lebanon².

In the early 1970, after the moving of Palestinian armed elements from Jordan to Lebanon, tensions along the Israel-Lebanon border increased. Palestinian commando operations

¹ Satish Nambiar, For the Honour of India: A History of Indian Peacekeeping, center for Armed forces Historical research United Service Institute of India

² "Black September in Jordan". Armed Conflict Events Database. 2000-12-16.

against Israel and Israeli reprisals against Palestinian bases in Lebanon intensified³.

By October 1976, Syria dispatched 40,000 troops within Lebanon⁴, through ostensibly meant to support the Maronite dominated government, aligned with the Muslims and PLO and actively battled the Lebanese Christian forces that were being actively supported by Israel.

On 11 March 1978, an attack by PLO militants in Israel resulted in death of nine hijackers⁵ and 38 civilians including 13 children⁶. In response, on 14 March 1978, Israel launched Operation Litani invading Southern Lebanon with a force of 25,000 troops. The objective of the operation was to destroy or at least neutralise PLO positions on Lebanese – Israeli border and to place the whole area under the control of Lebanese Christian militia allied with Israel, the South Lebanese Army (SLA)⁷. The SLA that had arisen during the Lebanese civil war, led by Major Sadd Haddad, served as Israel's proxy in southern Lebanon, often engaging the PLO in combat. However the Israeli invasion failed to destroy the PLO units that were the main targets of the offensive, as the PLO from the name of the operation concluded that the invasion would halt at the Litani River and moved their armed forces towards north, leaving behind a force of a few hundred men⁸. As a result of Israeli military offensive more than 2,000 Lebanese civilians were killed, an estimated 280,000 people were forced to migrate out

³ United Nations: Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/UN/UNIFIL.html>

⁴ Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (October 2005). "Background Note: Syria". U.S. Department of State.

⁵ Deeb, Marius, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process*.

⁶ Federal Research Division (June 2004). Lebanon: A Country Study. Kessinger Publisher. p. 214. ISBN -1419129430.

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ Fisk, Robert (2002). *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press /Nation's Books. p.126. ISBN- 1560254424.

of the area, and with over 6,000 homes were destroyed or badly damaged⁹.

UNITED NATIONS INTERIM FORCE IN LEBANON (UNIFIL) MARCH 1978- TILL DATE

On 15 March 1978, the Lebanese Government submitted a strong protest to the Security Council against the Israeli invasion, stating that it had no connection with the Palestinian commando operation. On 19 March 1978, the United Nations Security Council passed resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978), which called for the Israel's immediate withdrawal from all Lebanese territory and the immediate establishment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with a "mandate to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon, restore international peace and security, and assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring its effective authority in the area"¹⁰. The first UNIFIL troops, reassigned from other UN peacekeeping operations namely the United Nations Emergency Force (UNTSO) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force Zone (UNDOF) deployed in the Middle East and Golan Heights respectively arrived in the area on 23 March 1978.

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon again and laid siege to Beirut. In 15 January 1985, Israel adopted a phased withdrawal plan, but it retained control of an area in Southern Lebanon manned by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and by Lebanese de facto forces (DFF), the so called "South Lebanon Army" (SLA).

On 16 February 1985, Shia Sheik Ibrahim al-Amin declared a manifesto¹¹ in Lebanon, announcing a resistance

⁹ Satish Nambiar-p.165

¹⁰ UNIFIL Mandate- United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unifil/mandate.shtml>

¹¹ Hezbollah (1985-02-16). "An Open Letter to all the Oppressed in Lebanon and the World". Institute for Counter Terrorism

movement called Hezbollah, whose goals includes combating Israel influence in Lebanon; bringing those who committed atrocities during the war to justice; and the establishment of the Islamic government in Lebanon.

On 25 July 1993 Israel launched "Operation Accountability" to retaliate for the death of IDF soldiers in the 'security zone' which Israel had created in 1982 in southern Lebanon to protect its northern borders from both Hezbollah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. On 11 April 1996, Israel Defence Forces mounted "Operation Grapes of Wrath", known in Lebanon as the April War, which repeated the pattern of Operation Accountability, to halt Hezbollah's bombardment of Israeli's northern frontier, which was triggered by Hezbollah Katyusha rockets fired into Israel in response to the killing of two Lebanese by an IDF missile, and the killing of Lebanese boy by a roadside bomb. In 1999, Israel undertook a withdrawal, which concluded in 2000 and enabled UNIFIL to resume its military tasks.

Following the July/August 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war, on 11 August 2006, the security Council passed resolution 1701 (2006) calling for a full cessation of hostilities in the month long war based upon, in particular, "the immediate cessation by Hezbollah of all attacks and the immediate cessation by Israel of all offensive military operations" in Lebanon and called on both Israel and Lebanon to support a permanent ceasefire and comprehensive solution to the crisis¹².

The Security Council also expanded the original mandate of the UNIFIL to monitor the cessation of hostilities, support the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) as they deploy throughout the South of Lebanon, as Israel withdraws its armed forces from Lebanon; Coordinate with the governments of Lebanon and Israel to ensure the success of above objectives; extend its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to

¹² UNIFIL Background –United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unifil/mandate.shtml>

civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons; Ensure the area between Blue Line and the Litani River is only occupied by armed forces of either the Government of Lebanon or of UNIFIL deployed in this area and to help the Government of Lebanon in securing its borders¹³. The Security Council for the first time decided to deploy the Maritime Task force (MTF) on the request of the Lebanese government within the mandate of United Nations Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), as a part of the UN peacekeeping Operation to support the Lebanese Navy in monitoring its territorial waters, securing the Lebanese coastline and preventing the unauthorized entry of arms or related material by sea into Lebanon. The deployment of MTF after the conflict of 2006 was a landmark move that prompted Israel to lift its naval blockade of Lebanon¹⁴.

As of 30 June 2015, the total number of troops in the mission is 10,410 supported by 279 international civilian and 590 local civilian staff¹⁵. As of 31 August 2015 the UNIFIL had 308 Fatalities which includes 291 troops, 2 military observers, 8 international civilian and 7 local civilian.

United Nations interim Force has been highly criticised for being unable to stop the Israeli destruction of civilian buildings and intimidation of civilians during the 1993 and 2006 invasions, as evidenced by the thousands of destroyed buildings and infrastructure in South Lebanon. Moreover both Israel and Hezbollah have accused UNIFIL of bias. Israel accused UNIFIL for being unable to prevent Lebanese acts of aggression towards the Israel, and believes that the UN

¹³ UNIFIL Mandate-United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unifil/mandate.shtml>

¹⁴ UNIFIL Maritime Task Force, <http://unifil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=11584&language=enUS>

¹⁵ UNIFIL- Facts and Figures, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unifil/facts.shtml>

mission allows arm shipments to Hezbollah to continue¹⁶ the aggressions against Israel. "Hezbollah, in turn, said "certain contingents" of UNIFIL are spying for, if not assisting, Israel."¹⁷

INDIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE MISSION

India's contribution to the mission consists of one infantry battalion (Regulars), Level II Hospital comprising 650 peacekeepers from all ranks and 23 staff officers till date. In 1998, India became a Troop Contributing Country (TCC) to UNIFIL mission and till now (November 2015) Seventeen Infantry Battalions of India have had the honour to serve in UNIFIL mission. 8 DOGRA Infantry Battalion is the 17th Indian Battalion currently deployed in UNIFIL and is called as INDBATT-XVII in the UNIFIL environment¹⁸.

2nd Battalion, the Gorkha Rifles (2/4 GR), under Colonel G.S. Batabyal was the first Indian battalion deployed in the southern Lebanon with the overall responsibility of monitoring the Blue Line. This and succeeding Indian battalions deployed in southern Lebanon, covered an area widened up to 340 kilometres, through a series of 19 positions including 9 observation posts along the Blue Line. The Indian contingent's area of responsibility (AOR) was the only one in UNIFIL to have boundaries at the international border with two belligerents: Syria to the East and Israel to the South¹⁹.

The tasks given to Indian peacekeepers in their allotted areas of responsibility were to monitor and report infringements of the Blue Line, dominate it by mobile and static patrols, conduct regular patrols in villages and ensure emergency aid to the civilians. The Indian peacekeepers

¹⁶ Pierre Heumann, "No one will be able to stop Hezbollah", Spiegel online, 2 November 2006, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,446171.html>

¹⁷ By Lamis Andoni (8 March 2010). "Unifil 'on shaky ground' in Lebanon – Focus". Al Jazeera. 5 August 2010.

¹⁸ Baatheet , November 2015, www.indianarmy.gov.in

¹⁹ Satish Nambiar, p. 170

committed their efforts at preventing conflict situations from taking place due to contradictory views of the Israelis and Lebanese about the Blue Line.

Government of India at the request of UN Headquarters on 17 August 2001 deputed Major General Lalit Mohan Tewari as the Force Commander of UNIFIL and served as the Force Commander of the mission for two and half years, up to February 2004. India also provided Deputy Force Commanders to the UNIFIL namely, Brigadier G. Athmanathan from August 2000 to August 2001 and Brigadier J.P Nehra from February 2006 to early 2008. In addition, numbers of staff officers including Chief Operations Officer and Logistics Officer have been deputed by the government of India on a regular basis. The Indian peacekeepers have contributed significantly to the effective conduct of the mission by providing their valuable and professional service to the mission.

The 4th Battalion of the Sikh Battalion, which was deployed in Lebanon during the upheaval caused by the 34-day Israel- Hezbollah conflict (June-July 2006), demonstrated the highest traditions of the Indian Army by remaining at their posts and carrying out their duties besides being in the line of fire²⁰.

The 4th Battalion of Sikh Regiment, popularly known as Saragarhi Braves, under the command of colonel Subash Panwar, continued to man its positions along the Blue Line besides being in the heart of the conflict zone and carried on with the operational activities, while surviving on the meagre supplies. The Unit also launched a number of humanitarian operations saving hundreds of civilians caught in the cross-fire and trapped in damaged homes, by moving them to safer areas from Houle, Ebel Es Saqi, Marjayoun, Kleyya, Ain Arab and

²⁰ UN Missions -The Peacemakers, sainiksamachar.nic.in/englisharchives/2007/feb0107/ h12.htm

Hasbaiya, even under heavy shelling²¹. The Battalion was honoured with UNIFIL Force Commander's Unit Citation, besides the unit citation, 21 officers, eight Junior Commissioned officers and about 45 other ranks of 4 Sikh²² were also conferred with UNIFIL Force Commander's Citation for their outstanding contribution during the 34 day- day Israel- Hezbollah conflict in 2006²³.

15 battalion of the Punjab Regiment which replaced the illustrious 4th battalion of the Sikh Regiment ensured the physical demarcation of the Blue Line in its area of responsibility and removed the haziness of the line that had made it vulnerable for frequent infringement from both Israel and Lebanese sides. The battalion group deployed in volatile south-eastern Lebanon, a Hezbollah stronghold, in January 2007, was honoured by the King of Belgium for its professionalism and dedication. The medals were conferred by the King of Belgium in recognition of the actions of Indian peacekeepers involved in the evacuation of the four seriously injured Belgian soldiers.

The successive Indian battalions serving in the UNIFIL maintained complete supremacy of their area of responsibility by carrying out intensive patrolling both by day and night. The Indian peacekeepers carried out number of operations jointly with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)²⁴.

In the summer of 2007, the 15 battalion of Punjab regiment, in an effort to promote the non violence among the

²¹ Sikh Regiment battalion gets UNIFIL award, Rediff.com India News, <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/sikh/20060906.htm>

²² The Sunday Tribune Spectrum, Sunday, August 26, 2007, "In praise of keeping peace"
<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2007/20070826/spectrum/main1.html>

²³ Indian Army battalion in Lebanon honoured, Indo Asian News Service , Tuesday, September 05, 2006, <http://www.india-forums.com/news/national/1267-indian-army-battalion-in-lebanon-honoured.html>

²⁴ UN Peacekeeping Missions, Monthly Update, February 2010, www.usiofindia.org/cunpk.htm

youth of the war- ravaged Lebanon, organised an exhibition based on the teachings of the Mahatma Gandhi.

The successive Indian contingents serving the UNIFIL were not merely involved in the peacekeeping duties but have actively gone out to win over large sections of the Lebanese by organising humanitarian aid camps, conducting cultural programmes and initiating social welfare projects.

The successive Indian battalions helped the scores of Lebanese victims of landmines and cluster bomb explosions to regain some mobility. The project resulted from a "Jaipur Foot" clinic undertaken by the Indian Battalion at Ebel Es Saqi, in south-eastern Lebanon, where INDBATT is headquartered. The clinic involved specialists, flown in from India, providing free medical examinations and fitting of the Indian- made artificial limb called "Jaipur Foot" to Lebanese nationals who had been injured in mine or cluster bomb explosions. The clinic was the third of its kind. In June 2006, 22 beneficiaries from all over South Lebanon were treated at the inaugural "Jaipur Foot" clinic, and a total of 123 Lebanese patients were fitted with artificial limbs at another "Jaipur Foot" clinic in April 2007²⁵.

Indian battalions carried out various CIMIC activities in its AOR so as to provide Medical, Dental and Veterinary assistance to the poor and needy civilians and to create a favourable environment for UNIFIL and civil authorities to work hand in hand for a prosperous and peaceful future of Lebanon. The multi speciality camp organised by the Indian battalions in their area of responsibility provided free consultancy to the local people besides free medicines and free transport. Moreover the camp also provided opportunity to various villages of INDBATT AOR to avail the service of ENT,

²⁵ Indian Army's Participation In UN Peacekeeping Missions, Monthly Report, 1- 31 October 2007, www.usiofindia.org/cunpk.htm

skin, paediatric, Dermatologist, Gynaecologist and Dental specialists from Indian battalions²⁶.

India's UNIFIL contingent seems to have attracted the goodwill of the South Lebanese population by giving vocational training to the youths and encouraging educational and sports activities. The Indian peacekeepers also took care of children by providing gifts, books, first aid kits and regular dental checkups.

During the month January 2010, number of Yoga camps were organised by the Indian battalion at the Community Hall of Ebel Es Saqi, in which total six participants benefitted from the power of Yoga. The Indian peacekeepers build Children Park at Al-Fradiss, a small town in south Lebanon. The park symbolises the spirit of friendship between the Indian contingent and southerners, and has been appropriately named the "Indo-Lebanese Friendship Park" by the locals²⁷.

CONCLUSION

The involvement of the Indian contingents made valuable contribution to mission performance and was highly appreciated by the UNIFIL mission Headquarters. The Indian contingents serving the UNIFIL were not merely involved in the peacekeeping duties but have generated much goodwill amongst the local population by organising humanitarian aid camps, conducting cultural programmes and initiating social welfare projects. In recognition of role and the determination displayed by an Indian Battalion in the extreme circumstances with least logistic requirements while serving on UN Peacekeeping duties in Lebanon, has been honoured for the high standard of professionalism during 34 days Israel-Hezbollah war, by remaining at their posts besides being in the

²⁶ UN Peacekeeping Missions -Monthly Update ,April 2010, www.usiofindia.org/cunpk.html

²⁷ Satish Nambiar, p-178

line of fire. In addition to this, 73 personnel of 4th battalion of the Sikh Regiment were awarded by the UNIFIL Force Commander's Special Commendation for outstanding performance during the conflict.

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