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SPECIAL REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE
UNITED NATIONS INTERIM FORCE IN LEBANON

Introduction

1. Recent days have witnessed a dangerously escalating level of tension in, and adjacent to, the area of operation of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Serious incidents have occurred, which compel me to submit this special report to the Security Council.

2. These incidents have included intense and violent harassment by the de facto forces which have sought to prevent the remanning of long-established United Nations observation posts along the Armistice Demarcation Line by UNTSO observers. The de facto forces have, additionally, since the afternoon of 6 April, forcibly sought to establish a permanent armed presence in the village of At-Tiri in the area of deployment of the Irish battalion.

3. Starting in the evening of 8 April 1980, Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) moved tanks, armoured vehicles, weapons and personnel into South Lebanon, including the area of deployment of UNIFIL. It is relevant to mention that during the night of 6-7 March 1980, Palestinian armed elements attacked the Israeli Kibbutz of Misgav Am. The Arab Liberation Front claimed responsibility for that action.

4. At the time of reporting, the situation in the area is extremely fluid. Details on the situation are provided in the succeeding paragraphs of this report.

Remanning of UNTSO observation posts

5. It may be recalled that five observation posts were established along the armistice demarcation line between Israel and Lebanon in 1972 in pursuance of a consensus approved by the Security Council on 19 April 1972 (S/10611) and on the basis of the General Armistice Agreement of 1949. Those OPs were manned by UNTSO observers under the command of the Chief of Staff of UNTSO until 1978. In establishing UNIFIL in March 1978, the Security Council decided that in fulfilment of its tasks, UNIFIL would have the co-operation of the military observers of UNTSO, who would continue to function on the armistice demarcation line after the termination of the mandate of UNIFIL (S/12611). In its two latest resolutions on UNIFIL, namely resolution 450 (1979) of 14 June 1979 and resolution 459 (1979) of 19 December 1979, the Security Council reaffirmed the validity of the General Armistice Agreement between Israel and Lebanon and called on the parties to take the

necessary steps to reactivate the Mixed Armistice Commission and to ensure full respect for the safety and freedom of action of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization.

6. In accordance with the terms of reference of UNIFIL, UNTSO observers continued to man the five OPs after the establishment of the Force, but they did so under the operational control of the Force Commander. However, in the following months, because of a shortage of UNTSO observers for this purpose, the Force Commander decided that four of the OPs (Khiam, Mar, Hin and Ras) should be manned by UNIFIL troops rather than UNTSO observers. In early 1980, when more observers became available for service in the Israel-Lebanon sector, and taking into account the desire expressed by the Lebanese Government, the Force Commander decided to have the four OPs remanned by UNTSO observers. OP Khiam was to be remanned on 6 March, OP Mar on 20 March, OP Hin on 4 April and OP Ras on 10 April.

7. As a practical arrangement and in order to avoid incidents, the Israeli authorities and the de facto forces were informed of this plan in advance and raised no objection. However, on 4 March, the DFF advised the Force Commander that they no longer agreed with the plan to have the OPs remanned by UNTSO observers.

8. In the event, UNIFIL went ahead with the plan. The Israeli authorities were so informed and asked to ensure that the implementation of the plan would not be interfered with. UNTSO observers took over OPs Khiam and Mar on 6 and 20 March respectively as planned and without incidents. However, subsequently the observers at the OPs were the subject of intense harassment. On 24 March IDF personnel at border pillar 33 fired about 40 rounds of light machine-gun and small arms over the heads of the observers when they appeared on the roof of OP Mar. On 27 March, both OPs Khiam and Mar were forcibly entered into by DFF and occupied by them for two and one-half hours. They damaged the radios at the OPs and removed other equipment. The observers proceeding to the OPs were also stopped at the DFF check-points. On 31 March, the two OPs were again occupied by DFF, who removed the fuses from the radios and painted over the windows before departing. UNTSO resupply vehicles were also restricted in their movement. On 3 April, DFF again forcibly entered OPs Khiam and Mar and removed the radios and observation equipment from the OPs as well as the personal effects of the observers. All these incidents were strongly protested to the Israeli authorities.

9. On 2 April, the IDF Liaison Officer informed the Chief of Staff of UNTSO in Jerusalem that he also wanted the harassment to cease. In order to allow some time for him to contact the competent authorities to this end, he requested that the planned remanning of OP Hin be postponed for a limited period. While making clear that UNIFIL would not compromise on the question of principle, the Force Commander agreed to the proposed postponement for a few days in order to avoid incidents. A meeting was arranged between the Chief of Staff of UNTSO and the Israeli Liaison Officer for 7 April, and it was hoped that the necessary arrangements would be worked out during that meeting and that the remanning of OP Hin could be effected not later than 10 April. However, on 6 April, a new problem arose when a de facto forces unit forced its way into the village of At-Tiri in the UNIFIL area with the stated intention of establishing a permanent position and patrol base there (see below). While discussions regarding the remanning of the observation posts were

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still continuing, the observers at OP Mar were harassed again on 9 April. DFF personnel forced their way into the OP at 0920 hours GMT and prevented the observers from transmitting any messages for about four hours. On 10 April, OPs Khiam, Mar and Hin were all subjected to fresh harassment by the DFF. This harassment continued on 11 April, when armed soldiers of the de facto forces broke into OP Khiam. At the time of reporting, two UNTSO observers who had gone to visit Irish soldiers in OP Ras, were being forcibly held by de facto forces in the adjoining village of Ras.

Situation in the Irish battalion area and in the enclave

10. At 1355 hours GMT on 6 April 1980, a sizeable number of de facto forces personnel, with one armoured vehicle and two land-rovers forcibly entered the village of At-Tiri in the Irish sector of UNIFIL, after ramming aside an Irish vehicle at a check-point at the entrance to the village. The de facto force detachment was immediately surrounded by Irish contingent personnel who began negotiations to effect their immediate withdrawal from the UNIFIL area. The de facto forces stated their intention to set up a permanent position at At-Tiri and to patrol the area as they wished. This intention was not acceptable to UNIFIL.

11. As a result of these developments, Force reserves from the Dutch and Ghanaian battalions were despatched to the Irish area. Later in the afternoon of 6 April, the de facto forces fired mortar, heavy machine-gun and tank rounds at Irish positions in At-Tiri and in Haddathah. At 1716 hours GMT, the de facto forces suspended negotiations, reiterating that they did not intend to leave At-Tiri village. However, it was agreed to resume negotiations at 0800 hours GMT on 7 April.

12. At 0615 hours GMT on 7 April, some two hours before negotiations were to resume, one tank of the de facto forces and an additional land-rover arrived at At-Tiri and, shortly thereafter, the de facto forces opened intense small arms fire at the Irish positions. During this, one Irish soldier was seriously wounded. The Force Commander called forward further reserves from the Fijian and Senegalese battalions and gave permission to return controlled fire. After a brief cessation of fire, the de facto forces resumed hostilities during which a number of armoured vehicles belonging to the Dutch component of the Force Reserve were directly hit by heavy machine-gun fire. Further, nine Irish soldiers were surrounded and taken as prisoners to the village of Saffa-al-Hawa. In At-Tiri itself, the de facto forces remained surrounded by UNIFIL. However, in the morning of 8 April, the de facto forces threatened to kill the Irish soldiers taken prisoner the previous day unless UNIFIL withdrew from At-Tiri. At 1120 hours GMT, the de facto forces opened fire again at Irish positions, two soldiers being wounded.

13. Since the start of this attempt by the de facto forces to establish a position in the UNIFIL area, the Israeli authorities have been repeatedly requested to restrain the de facto forces and to ensure their withdrawal from At-Tiri. It has been made clear that the presence of the de facto forces in this village was totally unacceptable. These contacts have been undertaken on my behalf through the Israeli Permanent Mission in New York, with the IDF in Jerusalem and through IDF

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liaison personnel with whom the Force Commander is in continuous touch. Additionally, Governments in a position to help were requested to assist in the United Nations effort.

14. As a result of these moves, information was received that the Israeli authorities were taking action to obtain the release of the captured Irish soldiers and the withdrawal of the de facto forces from the At-Tiri area. At 1150 hours GMT on 8 April three of the Irish soldiers were released, and at 1622 hours GMT the remaining six soldiers were freed. Further, the tank brought in by the de facto forces on the preceding day, was withdrawn to the enclave at 2230 hours GMT.

15. On 10 April, the de facto forces brought back two tanks to the vicinity of At-Tiri village and shelled the village of Brashit also in the Irish area. On 11 April, the situation in the Irish battalion area continued to be extremely tense. At 0810 hours GMT, a Dutch battalion APC, two UNIFIL jeeps and a water truck were proceeding in convoy along a track between two Irish positions near At-Tiri. The Deputy Force Commander, Brigadier-General Nilsen, together with the UNIFIL press officer and a correspondent for "Newsweek" magazine were in this convoy when the de facto forces opened intense, heavy machine-gun fire at them. Dutch, Irish and Senegalese troops returned controlled fire. There were no injuries in this exchange. Further, in Bayt Yahun village, which is one of the four locations where the de facto forces had earlier established an armed presence in the UNIFIL area, 26 soldiers of the de facto forces were confronting an Irish position. As of the time of reporting, the de facto forces had closed all roads in the enclave to UNIFIL traffic, including the coastal check-point.

Incursion by Israeli Defence Forces (IDF)

16. The attack on Misgav Am on the night of 6-7 April resulted in three Israelis being killed and 16 wounded, in addition to the death of five infiltrators.

17. From the afternoon of 8 April, the presence of IDF tanks, vehicles and personnel began to increase in and around the UNIFIL area of deployment. Armoured vehicles were observed in the area south-west of OP Mar, five of them taking up positions in the enclave, east of the village of Shagra which is in the Ghanaian battalion area. On 9 April, at 0715 hours GMT, four IDF armoured carriers established positions in the Irish battalion area, two near At-Tiri and two near Kunin. Additionally, four IDF armoured carriers and a bulldozer moved to positions between At-Tiri and Bayt Yahun in the Irish area of deployment. The Chief Operations Officer of UNIFIL, who had gone to investigate the situation in the Shagra area, sustained serious leg injuries when his vehicle hit an anti-tank mine.

18. On 9 April, the number of IDF armoured personnel carriers in the vicinity of the village of Kunin had increased to eight. Further, in the enclave, there were 11 IDF tanks, 4 artillery pieces and 12 other vehicles deployed in the general area of Markabe and Houle villages, while another IDF detachment of three armoured vehicles established a position 3 kilometres north-east of the village of Shagra. Each of these positions was well inside Lebanese territory.

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19. On 10 April, there were 9 IDF armoured personnel carriers, 5 jeeps and some 120 personnel still in the area of Kunin, though the IDF position near At-Tiri had been vacated. As regards the enclave, while the 11 tanks had been moved to a position near the border, they were still on the Lebanese side. IDF armoured vehicles and personnel remained in the general area of Markabe and Houle villages and were observed improving their positions.

20. The same day, I sent an urgent message to Prime Minister Begin urging Israel to withdraw its troops from Lebanon. I also requested Israel to assist UNIFIL in its efforts to fulfil the wishes of the Security Council and to prevent the de facto forces from harassing UNIFIL in the discharge of its responsibilities.

21. On 11 April, General Erskine met the Israeli Chief of Staff, General Eitan. The latter stated that the IDF would start withdrawing from Lebanese territory later in the same day and that the withdrawal would be completed shortly. As regards the encroachment and harassment by de facto forces at At-Tiri, General Erskine requested the help of the IDF to put a stop to such activities. Concerning the remanning of OPs Hin and Ras by UNTSO observers, and related problems, General Eitan requested the Force Commander to delay the remanning of these posts by two days so as to enable the Israeli authorities to make adequate arrangements with a view to preventing further harassment.

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22. The violence of the past days, leading to casualties and the loss of innocent civilian life must be deeply deplored. Additionally, the latest incursion into Lebanese territory is a matter of grave concern. In the present situation, far too much of UNIFIL's energy is distracted by efforts to resist the harassment and violence to which it is daily exposed, while its capacity to carry out its functions is greatly reduced by the fact that it cannot operate in a vital part of its area of operations which is at present controlled by the de facto forces. As of the time of reporting, the situation in the UNIFIL area remains very tense. In these circumstances, I would urge all concerned to extend to UNIFIL the co-operation that will enable it to fulfil the responsibilities entrusted to it by the Security Council. I am convinced that this will be in the best interest of all concerned.
