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

The following statement was made today by the Secretary-General during consultations of the Security Council:

I regret to inform the members of the Council that, even as they were considering the complaint brought by the Government of Lebanon on the violence of 2-3 March 1981, further hostilities have broken out in south Lebanon.

This morning, at 0955 hours GMT, a position of the de facto forces located south of the village of Ett-Taibe fired 24 tank rounds into the village of Al-Qantara, in the Nigerian battalion sector of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). A Nigerian captain and a corporal were killed and 11 Nigerian soldiers were injured, according to first reports. The figure may well be higher. Two Lebanese soldiers were also injured. The dead and wounded have been evacuated.

In the course of the morning there were threats from the de facto forces that unless the platoon of Lebanese soldiers was withdrawn from Al-Qantara by 1600 hours GMT (1000 hrs NYT), shelling would be resumed. This threat was carried out at 1615 hrs GMT (1015 hrs NYT), when 10 tank rounds were fired into the village of Yatar in the Dutch battalion area, causing damage to property. The situation in the UNIFIL area is, at the moment, extremely tense.

I think it is important that members of the Council be informed of the background of these latest developments.

On 10 March 1981, a platoon of the Lebanese Army, which was already serving under the command of the Nigerian battalion, was redeployed in the village of Al-Qantara.

On 12 March, the de facto forces issued threats to the Nigerian company at Al-Qantara that the village would be harassed if the Lebanese Army personnel were not removed from there.

On 13 March, at 1015 hours GMT, four Lebanese army medical personnel (a doctor, his two assistants and an ambulance driver) were kidnapped from outside the clinic in Al-Qantara - they were in fact giving vaccinations to the civilian population at the time. Their kidnappers drove them into the enclave controlled by the de facto forces, crashing through check-points manned by Nigerian soldiers on the way.

During the morning of 14 March, the de facto forces fired six tank rounds from south of Ett-Taibe to an area east of Al-Qantara, the rounds impacting close to a Nigerian patrol. In the early afternoon, seven more tank rounds were fired, which also impacted east of Al-Qantara. These hostile acts continued into 15 March, when 13 mortar rounds were fired into the same village from the position of the de facto forces south of Ett-Taibe. Three civilians were wounded.

I wish to inform the Council that, throughout the incidents of the past days, the Commander of UNIFIL has made clear to the de facto forces that there is no question of withdrawing the Lebanese platoon from Al-Qantara. They are part of the Lebanese battalion serving in the UNIFIL area for almost two years. As members of the Council are aware, resolution 425 (1978) which established UNIFIL expressly called upon the Force to assist the Government of Lebanon "in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area".

I wish also to add that, throughout this period, the United Nations has been in touch with the Israeli authorities, urging them to make all possible efforts to bring an end to the irresponsible behaviour of the de facto forces. These efforts continue. The Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defence Forces, General Eitan, has sent a message to the Commander of UNIFIL expressing his shock and sorrow at the casualties suffered by UNIFIL today. He indicated that he will do everything possible to avoid a recurrence of such a tragedy.

I am deeply concerned at the tragedy which today has cost the lives of two Nigerians and wounded 11 more. As I have indicated, and it bears repeating, under the mandate as set out in resolution 425, one of the main functions of UNIFIL is to "assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area". The deployment of a battalion of Lebanese troops in the UNIFIL area was an initial step in this process which cannot be validly challenged by anyone, no matter what their motivation. Moreover, the Lebanese battalion in question has been in the UNIFIL area since April 1979.

Before concluding my statement, I feel obliged to comment that the challenge to the status and functioning of UNIFIL is not confined to the forces of Major Haddad, although today's incident is a particularly gross example of this challenge to UNIFIL. In the past months, UNIFIL has also had to contend with constant efforts to infiltrate its area of operations by various factions of the armed elements to the north and west of its area and, in the process, has, to my deep regret, also sustained casualties including the death of one Fijian soldier in an incident on 17 January 1981.

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One of the most important principles upon which UNIFIL was established was the full co-operation of all the parties concerned. It has been all too clear throughout the history of UNIFIL, and is again underlined by the tragic events of today, that that co-operation is not forthcoming. In other circumstances, this fact might lead to the conclusion that, since the conditions under which it was set up do not exist in reality, UNIFIL should be withdrawn. I do not propose this drastic step because I am convinced that the withdrawal of UNIFIL would lead to an immediate and violent escalation of the conflict in south Lebanon, with disastrous consequences and unpredictable and widespread repercussions which would constitute a major threat to international peace and security.

All possible efforts must, therefore, be made to impress upon those concerned that provocation, harassment and military offensives against UNIFIL cannot and will not be accepted. It is essential that all armed groups in the area extend to UNIFIL the co-operation that is required for the fulfilment of its mandate.

I am sure that the Council will decide upon the steps necessary to deal with the present unsatisfactory situation.
