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

General situation

1. According to reports submitted by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the situation in the UNIFIL area of operations has remained stable during the period under review, but there have been a number of firing incidents, particularly in the eastern sector.
2. The fourth and last phase of the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon took place on 13 June 1978. The operation was completed on the same day according to schedule.

Strength and composition of the Force

3. As of 13 June 1978, the strength of the Force was as follows:

Infantry units

Fiji	-	500
France	-	703
Iran	-	714 (including 190 temporarily detached from UNDOF)
Ireland	-	665
Nepal	-	642
Nigeria	-	669
Norway	-	723
Senegal	-	634

Logistic units

Canada	-	102 (including 11 temporarily detached from UNEF)
France	-	541
Norway	-	207
Total		6,100 (including 201 temporarily detached personnel)

4. In addition 42 military observers of UNTSO assist UNIFIL in the performance of its tasks.

5. The remainder of the Nigerian battalion, as well as the main bodies of the Fijian, Iranian and Irish contingents, has now arrived in the mission area. Following deployment of the Nigerian battalion in the central western sector of the area of operations, the company of the UNEF Swedish battalion, which had been temporarily assigned to UNIFIL, was returned to its parent unit in Sinai on 17 May 1978. Similarly, the Iranian company temporarily detached from UNDOF will rejoin its parent unit on the Golan Heights on or about 15 June, when the new Iranian battalion has completed its deployment.

6. The airlift of the Iranian and Nigerian contingents was arranged by their own Governments. The United Kingdom Government provided the airlift facilities for the personnel of the Fijian contingent, and the United States Government for the Irish contingent and for some equipment of the Fijian contingent. All these airlifts were made available free of charge to the United Nations. I wish to record my deep gratitude to the above-mentioned Governments for their generous voluntary contributions.

Deployment of the Force

7. The deployment of UNIFIL forces up to 13 June was essentially as described in the previous progress report (S/12620/Add.4), with the newly arrived Fijian, Iranian and Irish troops preparing to take over positions in their assigned sections.

8. Following the withdrawal of the Israeli forces on 13 June, UNIFIL plans to redeploy its troops with a view to extending its area of operations to the armistice demarcation line in the following way:

(a) The Senegalese battalion will remain in the northern half of the western sector, with its base camp at Marakah. It will also maintain a guard detachment at Zahrani.

(b) The Fijian battalion is being deployed in the southern half of the western sector, with its battalion headquarters at Qana.

(c) The Nigerian battalion continues to man the central/western sector, with its base camp at Tayr Zibna.

(d) The Iranian battalion is being deployed in the central sector, with its base camp at At Taibe. Some of the positions previously manned by the Nepalese battalion are being taken over by the Iranians.

(e) The Nepalese battalion continues to man the central/eastern sector between the Iranian and the Norwegian battalions. It is taking over some Norwegian positions in the Kaokaba area.

(f) The Norwegian battalion continues to man the eastern sector, with its base camp at Ebel es Saqi.

(g) The French battalion is being redeployed in the south-western sector of the area of operations, with its battalion headquarters at Tibnin.

(h) The Irish battalion is scheduled to be deployed in the south-eastern sector of the area of operations.

(i) The Canadian signal unit continues to provide communication facilities for the Force.

(j) The French logistic component, less its engineer unit, is co-located with the Force headquarters at Naqoura. The engineer unit continues to be stationed at the village of Al Mantarah.

(k) The Norwegian logistic component is deployed in two locations; the maintenance company in the village of Tibnin, and the air unit and the medical company with the Force headquarters at Naqoura.

(l) UNTSO military observers continue to man the five existing observation posts along the Israel-Lebanon border. Selected observers serve in staff positions at UNIFIL headquarters at Naqoura. Other observers are providing liaison with the various forces in southern Lebanon. A team of two observers is now stationed at Chateau de Beaufort north of the Litani River to ensure liaison with the Palestinian command in that locality.

(m) A composite force of about 100, all ranks, to be composed of members of all eight infantry battalions of UNIFIL, will man the Tyre barracks as from 14 June.

Contacts with the parties

9. At my request, Mr. Roberto E. Guyer, Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs, visited the area from 19 to 24 May 1978 to discuss with the parties concerned certain problems concerning the implementation of Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978) which required urgent clarification.

10. On 20 May, Mr. Guyer met with President Sarkis, Prime Minister El-Hoss and Foreign and Defence Minister Boutros in Beirut. On 21 May, he proceeded to Damascus, where he had an exchange of views with the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Khaddam. While in Damascus he also met with Chairman Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). On 22 May, he met with the Foreign Minister of Israel, Mr. Dayan, in Jerusalem.

11. The Chief Co-ordinator of the United Nations Peace-keeping Missions in the Middle East, Lieutenant-General Ensio Siilasvuo, has continued his contacts with all parties concerned on the steps to be taken for the speedy implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), especially with regard to the withdrawal

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of Israeli forces. The Force Commander, Major-General E. A. Erskine, and the contingent commanders at the local level have been in constant touch with the parties on matters concerning the deployment and functioning of the Force.

12. During their meeting of 22 May, Foreign Minister Dayan informed Mr. Guyer of the decision of the Israeli Government to withdraw its forces completely from Lebanon by 13 June 1978. The modalities for the withdrawal were later the subject of intensive discussions between the Israeli authorities and Generals Siilasvuo and Erskine.

13. The meetings held by Mr. Guyer with the Lebanese authorities in Beirut were helpful in clarifying certain points pertaining to the implementation of the UNIFIL mandate. President Sarkis emphasized that the objective of UNIFIL was ultimately to assist in the restoration of the authority of the Lebanese Government in southern Lebanon. This presupposed total withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanese territory and the prevention of any armed elements not under the command of the Lebanese Government from infiltrating into or undertaking hostile activities in the UNIFIL area of operations. In this context, the President stated that the implementation of Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978) was totally independent of the position that the Lebanese Government might finally take concerning the Cairo Agreement of 3 November 1969, which dealt with the presence of Palestinians in Lebanon, and he indicated that "while reserving its future position regarding its rights and interests in that Agreement, the Government of Lebanon considers that no obstacle, from whatever party, should hinder the implementation of resolutions 425 and 426 on the terrain for whatever pretexts or justifications". The clarifications given by President Sarkis to Mr. Guyer were confirmed in a letter which the President addressed to me on 30 May.

14. During his meeting with Mr. Arafat, Mr. Guyer reviewed with him the PLO commitment to co-operate fully with UNIFIL in the fulfilment of its tasks in southern Lebanon. This question was later pursued by General Erskine with Mr. Arafat and his advisers. Mr. Arafat confirmed that in pursuance of the guarantees already given to the Secretary-General, PLO would co-operate with UNIFIL and that it would not initiate hostile acts against Israel from southern Lebanon, although it would continue such acts from other areas. While the question of the PLO presence in southern Lebanon was a matter to be settled between PLO and the Lebanese Government, PLO would facilitate UNIFIL's tasks in response to the Secretary-General's appeal. In particular, PLO would refrain from infiltrating armed elements into the UNIFIL area of operations. The assurances given by PLO are in line with a five-point agreement concluded between Prime Minister El-Hoss and Chairman Arafat. Arrangements have been worked out to improve liaison between UNIFIL and PLO in order to avoid incidents. In the context of that agreement, for humanitarian as well as practical reasons and as an ad hoc interim arrangement, UNIFIL has agreed to allow the delivery, under UNIFIL control, of certain non-military supplies - food, water and medicine - to limited Palestinian groups still in its area of operations.

15. Following the announcement of the Israeli decision to withdraw from the

remaining occupied area by 13 June, intensive discussions were held between United Nations representatives and the Government of Lebanon regarding the deployment of UNIFIL in the area to be evacuated and, in particular, regarding its relationship with the Christian armed elements under the command of Major Haddad in that area.

16. Pending full establishment of Lebanese authority, including military forces, in the UNIFIL area of operations, the Lebanese Government has taken the following position:

(a) That Major Haddad is provisionally recognized by the Lebanese Government as de facto commander of the Lebanese forces in his present area for the purpose of facilitating UNIFIL's mission;

(b) That the army command will issue instructions to Major Haddad to facilitate UNIFIL's mission and deployment. To this end the Lebanese army will appoint two senior officers to liaise with UNIFIL headquarters and will, as soon as possible, take measures to regularize the situation of Lebanese regular forces in the south;

(c) That the Lebanese Government has decided to move Lebanese army units to the south as soon as possible;

(d) That all border problems shall henceforth be discussed with UNIFIL and in the framework of a reactivated Israel-Lebanon Mixed Armistice Commission, a meeting of which was held on 12 June, the Lebanese Government being represented by senior military officers from Beirut;

(e) That the Government of Lebanon wishes UNIFIL to exercise its full functions under Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978) and will lend all assistance and support to this end.

17. In the light of the above position of the Lebanese Government, UNIFIL is engaging in the necessary discussions in the area, with a view to working out practical arrangements for its deployment and the fulfilment of its mission throughout the area of operations.

Activities of the Force

18. Up to the withdrawal of Israeli forces on 13 June, UNIFIL was deployed in a strip of land immediately south of the Litani River, the width of which varies from some 18 km in the western and central sectors to from 2 to 7 km in the eastern sector. The main activities of the Force were aimed at ensuring the peaceful character of its area of operations. In this context, UNIFIL observed and supervised the cease-fire called for by the Security Council and controlled the movement of personnel and matériel into and within its area of operations.

19. This control was exercised mainly by manning checkpoints at various points of entry in co-operation with Lebanese gendarmes. UNIFIL troops prevented the

entry into the area of all armed personnel that were not under the command of the Lebanese Government. Wherever such personnel were discovered within the area of operations, efforts were made to keep them under surveillance and, through negotiations and persuasion, to get them out of the area. Thus, when a sizable group of armed Palestinian elements were discovered south of Barish on 12 May, intensive negotiations were carried out with PLO, both at the local level and in Beirut, which led the PLO leadership to issue an order withdrawing the group.

20. There were a number of firing incidents during the period under review. Most of these were isolated cases of firing, although major exchanges of fire took place on three occasions.

21. On 9 May, the post of the Norwegian battalion at Kaokaba came under fire from Palestinian positions north-west of the village. One Norwegian soldier was wounded by this fire, and the Norwegian unit returned the fire in self-defence. The Norwegian battalion commander subsequently made contact with the PLO representative in the area and succeeded in restoring the cease-fire. A protest was lodged by UNIFIL headquarters with the PLO leadership in Beirut.

22. On 13 June, the Israeli forces withdrew from the remaining occupied area in southern Lebanon. The withdrawal process was verified by six teams of United Nations military observers. By 1700 hours GMT, all Israeli positions in the area of operations had been evacuated, and the Commander of UNIFIL confirmed to me that the Israeli forces had completely withdrawn from southern Lebanon, as called for by Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Five of the positions evacuated by the Israeli forces have been taken over by UNIFIL: two by the Irish battalion and one each by the French, Nepalese and Norwegian battalions. Previously scheduled reconnaissance patrols have been carried out by the French, Nepalese and Irish battalions in anticipation of the occupation by them of nine additional positions by early 14 June. As indicated earlier, UNIFIL is engaging in the necessary discussions in the area with a view to working out practical arrangements for its deployment and the fulfilment of its mission throughout the area of operations.

23. With the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from all Lebanese territory and its confirmation by the Force Commander, the first part of the mandate entrusted to UNIFIL by the Security Council has been fulfilled. As indicated in my report of 19 March 1978 (S/12611) on the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) which was approved by the Security Council in its resolution 426 (1978), I envisaged the responsibility of UNIFIL as a two-stage operation. In the first stage, the Force would confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanese territory to the international border. Once this was achieved, it would establish and maintain an area of operations as defined. In this connexion, it would supervise the cessation of hostilities, ensure the peaceful character of the area of operations, control movement and take all measures deemed necessary to assure the effective restoration of Lebanese sovereignty. The second phase has now begun in the entire area of operations. The tasks that face UNIFIL in the days ahead are both extremely important and enormously complex. The Force will be able to fulfil and to carry out its tasks only with the co-operation of all parties concerned. I earnestly hope that this co-operation will be extended to UNIFIL in full measure.

24. In concluding this progress report, I wish to pay a special tribute to the Chief Co-ordinator of United Nations Peace-keeping Missions in the Middle East, Lieutenant-General E. Siilasvuo, the Commander of UNIFIL, Major-General E. A. Erskine, to the officers and men of the Force and its civilian staff, as well as to the military observers of UNTSO assigned to assist UNIFIL in the fulfilment of its responsibilities. All of them have performed with efficiency, dedication and courage the important, difficult and often dangerous tasks entrusted to them by the Security Council.
