**UNIFIL: An opportunity for change**

By: Eugene Kontorovich

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On Oct. 7, 2000, an IDF patrol vehicle was attacked by a powerful bomb near Mount Dov. Hezbollah operatives crossed the border fence and abducted soldiers Adi Avitan, Omar Souad, and Benny Avraham. The attack was carried out with the help of a distraction from protesters on the border near Moshav Zerit, and mortar fire on IDF positions. An investigation of the incident discovered that surprisingly, Indian UNIFIL soldiers who were on duty at nearby outposts had filmed the events in real time and even opted not to report it to the IDF. The footage was discovered eight months after the incident. In addition, the UN troops also filmed the transfer of the kidnapped IDF soldiers some 16 hours later, and again, did not hand the footage over to Israel in time for it to take action.

There are other instances in which the UN temporary peacekeeping force – UNIFIL – has directly or indirectly hurt Israel's defense and security interests in the area and limited the IDF's ability to respond. The main claim voiced in the defense establishment at the time was that the forces had no real power and were too small to carry out their mandate of restoring peace and security and helping restore control to the South Lebanese Army.

But in 2006, after the Second Lebanon War was over, that idea crashed on the rocks of reality. The UN Security Council resolved to increase UNIFIL forces nearly fivefold, to 10,900 personnel, and expanded both its enforcement mandate and budget. Nevertheless, the increased forces failed in both motivation and efficacy when it came to taking action against violations on the Lebanese side of the "Blue Line." Since then, Hezbollah has dug attack tunnels under the border into Israel under the very noses of the UN troops, with the hope of carrying out a mega-terror attack against communities in northern Israel.

In biased reports to the UN Security Council and by its very presence in the region, UNIFIL "whitewashes" violations by Hezbollah and the Lebanese army, allowing them to act freely. If another war in the north takes place, UNIFIL's presence will likely hamper the IDF's ability to maneuver in south Lebanon, and serve as a de facto human shield for Hezbollah.

The next few weeks will bring a unique opportunity to improve security in the North and reduce the UN's biased intervention against Israel. This has to do with the nature of the UNIFIL mandate, which is extended on an annual basis in the Security Council. The next date for an extension is Aug. 31. Our leaders would do well to take advantage of the window of opportunity in which our friends in the Trump administration still have diplomatic influence and demand the cancellation of the mandate or that the forces be cut significantly. This request would fall in line with the Trump administration's aspiration of cutting back on bloated, ineffective international missions.

It would be a mistake for Israel to trust the illusion of stability created by the UNIFIL forces. The reality is fluid, Hezbollah is sedulously preparing for the next war, and the IDF needs to be ready for a rapid strike, without having its maneuvers restricted by UN soldiers. Cancelling or cutting back the mandate will be helpful to Israel's strategic interests in the region and will illustrate the defense ethos that Israel defends itself, by itself.