

Despite a mandate to maintain international peace and security, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has repeatedly failed to secure the Israel-Lebanon border and support the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to curb the terrorist organization Hezbollah. UNIFIL's 10,000 [peacekeepers](#) from 48 countries have looked the other way as Iran-backed Hezbollah has [grown](#) to more than 45,000 fighters equipped with an estimated 150,000 rockets and missiles. Since Hamas attacked Israel from Gaza on October 7, UNIFIL has proven incapable of preventing Hezbollah from attacking Israel from Lebanon with rockets, guided missiles, and drones.

1. UNIFIL was established in 1978 to end war, restore peace and security

On March 11, 1978, Lebanese-based terrorists massacred 38 Israeli civilians near Tel Aviv, including more than a dozen children. Three days later, Israel invaded Lebanon to push terrorist groups away from Israel's northern border. In response, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) called for Israel to withdraw and established UNIFIL on March 19, 1978, "for the purpose of confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restoring international peace and security and assisting the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area." Following the arrival of UNIFIL forces four days later, Israeli forces withdrew from hard-won positions in Lebanon.

2. Despite UNIFIL's presence, Hezbollah's military infrastructure dominates southern Lebanon

UNIFIL's failure to counter Hezbollah has [enabled](#) an extraordinary military buildup by the Iran-backed group, including its accumulation of an estimated 150,000 rockets and missiles. Israel [assesses](#) that Iran has helped Hezbollah establish facilities in Lebanon to convert rockets and missiles to [precision-guided munitions](#) potentially capable of penetrating Israeli defenses and striking significant, high-value targets throughout Israel. In October 2009, a large [explosion](#) occurred at a house containing a Hezbollah weapons cache south of the Litani River. Hezbollah immediately closed the area to UNIFIL and the LAF and, using large trucks, began transferring salvaged weapons to another location. The incident demonstrated UNIFIL's basic acceptance of Hezbollah's dominance in southern Lebanon.

3. UNSC Resolution 1701 expanded UNIFIL after a 2006 Hezbollah kidnapping triggered war

On July 12, 2006, Hezbollah operatives [ambushed](#) an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) patrol along the Israel-Lebanon border, killing eight soldiers and kidnapping two others. Israel responded with precision air strikes on Hezbollah assets, prompting the launch over the next month of some 4,000 Katyusha rockets targeting northern Israeli cities. At least 157 Israeli soldiers and civilians were killed during the 34-day war, with nearly 400,000 driven from their homes for the duration. An estimated 1,000 Lebanese were killed, including an unknown number of Hezbollah terrorists. Passed in August 2006, UNSC Resolution 1701 ended the hostilities, expanded UNIFIL, required Lebanon to assert its sovereignty in the south, forbade the rearming of terrorist groups, and required the "unconditional release" of the kidnapped soldiers — whose bodies Hezbollah only returned as part of a 2008 prisoner exchange with Israel.

4. UNIFIL's mandate requires southern Lebanon up to the Litani River be exclusively peaceful

UN Security Council Resolution 1701 [expanded](#) UNIFIL's mandate to have its peacekeeping force "[accompany and support](#) the Lebanese Armed Forces" as they deploy in the area between the Blue Line — the informal border with Israel — and the Litani River. The resolution charged UNIFIL with helping the LAF to establish "an area free of any armed personnel, assets, and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL." UNIFIL is to ensure that its area of operations "is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind" and that the peacekeeping force "resist[s] attempts by forceful means to prevent it from discharging its duties." However, despite the United Nations having strengthened and expanded its contingent of peacekeepers in Lebanon, Hezbollah is now the world's [most heavily armed](#) non-state actor, with much of its arsenal concentrated in UNIFIL's area of operations.

5. Hezbollah has repeatedly fired into Israel from UNIFIL's area of operations

Since Hamas attacked Israel from Gaza on October 7, 2023, an [estimated](#) 100,000 residents of northern Israel have had to [evacuate](#) their homes due to the threat from Lebanon. On December 7, a guided missile attack from south Lebanon killed an Israeli civilian, one of 11 Hezbollah attacks that day, prompting Israeli [threats](#) of harsh retaliation if attacks continue. On December 9, 2023, Hezbollah [launched](#) several rockets at Israel, including one that originated 20 meters from a UNIFIL compound. UNIFIL [acknowledges](#) and [condemns](#) Hezbollah activity but does little else. As of January 9, 2024, 12 IDF soldiers and five Israeli civilians have been [killed](#), and over 150 other Israelis injured, in [hundreds](#) of anti-tank missile, mortar, and drone attacks. Without naming Hezbollah, in late November, UNIFIL's head of mission [expressed](#) his "deep concern" about the situation and "the potential for wider and more intensive hostilities." Thus, Israel remains on the precipice of a two-front war in which it will have to confront not just Hamas but also a better-armed adversary on its northern border.

6. The LAF hinders UNIFIL's ability to monitor Hezbollah's activities in south Lebanon

While supplemental U.S. support has enabled the LAF to deploy additional assets in areas where it operates, the LAF repeatedly turns a [blind eye](#) to Hezbollah activity in south Lebanon and prevents UNIFIL from investigating Hezbollah activity. In 2018, the LAF prevented UNIFIL from examining subterranean, cross-border Hezbollah tunnels into northern Israel, claiming doing so infringed on “private property.” According to the Israeli [military](#), the LAF limits UNIFIL’s “access to illicit sites, concealing Hezbollah’s prohibited military operations.” A 2021 congressional [report](#) noted that LAF commanders had blocked UNIFIL from installing surveillance equipment.

7. UNIFIL's mandate remains unfulfilled despite annual renewals, periodic upgrades

In August 2023, the renewal of UNIFIL’s mandate was [complicated](#) by disagreement over language concerning UNIFIL’s freedom of action and coordination with the Lebanese government. Previous U.S. administrations have [threatened](#) to veto UNIFIL’s annual renewal if changes weren’t made to its mandate. During a visit to Israel in late November 2023, Italian Defense Minister Guido Crosetto [called](#) for a “thorough re-evaluation” of UNIFIL’s mission, citing cross-border attacks on Israel by Hezbollah as indications it is not working as intended. The “rules of engagement need to change,” he said.

8. Hezbollah leadership incites against UNIFIL

Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah [claimed](#) in an August 2023 speech that UNIFIL both works for Israel and violates Lebanon’s sovereignty. “This is why [the Americans] want UNIFIL to work for Israel. They want UNIFIL to spy for Israel. They want UNIFIL to replace the Israelis in places where they cannot [operate] ... [Israel’s] drones are not as effective as they have been in the past, and their spies also have various problems. Where Israel’s drones, spies, and cameras cannot reach in order to obtain information, UNIFIL’s cameras are meant to replace them.” He further railed against UNIFIL conducting operations independent of the LAF and indirectly denied the funding and direction that Hezbollah receives from Iran by stating, “Now some wise guy might say that [Hezbollah] is also a military force. We are a Lebanese force, we are the Lebanese people, we are locals. We are not a foreign force.”

9. UNIFIL peacekeepers have been killed or injured in areas controlled by Hezbollah

In December 2023, UNIFIL [said](#) one of its soldiers had been shot by an unknown gunman and that an investigation had been launched. In October 2023, two mortar shells of undetermined origin [hit](#) a UNIFIL base, injuring one peacekeeper, hours after a shell landed inside a separate UNIFIL location. In December 2022, five Hezbollah-linked militants were [charged](#) with conspiracy and murder in a shooting attack that killed an Irish UNIFIL peacekeeper and injured three others. In June 2007, a car bomb [killed](#) six UNIFIL members and wounded two others.

UNIFIL members have also been caught in the crossfire of Hezbollah attacks on Israel. In January 2015, a Spanish peacekeeper was killed by an IDF mortar shell when the IDF returned fire after a Hezbollah attack killed two IDF soldiers and wounded seven others; while [regretting](#) the incident, Israel said it held Hezbollah and the Lebanese government responsible.

10. The U.S. contributes substantial sums to sustain UNIFIL – with insufficient return on investment

The United States contributes annually to UNIFIL’s budget even as the peacekeeping body fails to fulfill its mission. In 2023, Congress [appropriated](#) \$143 million to UNIFIL, accounting for over one-quarter of the peacekeeping body’s approximately \$510 million [budget](#). Since the war in 2006, Washington has spent more than \$2.5 billion to support UNIFIL. The United States has likewise invested a [similar amount](#) in the LAF since 2006, a portion of which is intended to facilitate cooperation between the LAF and UNIFIL in southern Lebanon. Neither the LAF nor UNIFIL lacks the funding or manpower necessary to carry out its responsibilities. The problem is a lack of will.