

**EUROPE REDISCOVERS PEACEKEEPING?
POLITICAL AND MILITARY LOGICS IN THE 2006
UNIFIL ENHANCEMENT**

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IN THE 2006 UNIFIL ENHANCEMENT**

ALEXANDER MATTELAER



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Executive Summary

The war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 came to an end when both conflict parties accepted the plan of reinforcing the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) as a means to enable a ceasefire. In political as well as military terms, European nations were the driving force behind this UNIFIL ‘enhancement’ – marking a difficult return to the UN peacekeeping system since the debacles in the former Yugoslavia. This Egmont Paper explores both the political and military logic underlying the UNIFIL enhancement. On the basis of a detailed analysis of both the political decision-making process and the military planning cycle of the operation it develops two interlinked arguments.

On the one hand, it argues that UNIFIL’s operational strategy relies on its three-dimensional presence as a security buffer, as a mechanism for de-escalation and as an important actor in the local economy. On the other hand, it argues that friction between the political and military levels is at the root of persisting problems in terms of information management, organisational structures and the conceptual foundations of operational planning. As such this Egmont Paper assesses the strategic rationale of the operation, which is shown to be limited, and accounts for a variety of practical problems that hamper an effective functioning of the operation. On the basis of this twofold argument, three main conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, the enhancement of UNIFIL showed that the UN peacekeeping system still constitutes a suitable platform for deploying European armed forces, but under two specific conditions. On the one hand, the question under which organisational flag troops are deployed was answered on a pragmatic basis. The UN framework in this case was chosen because the host nation insisted on it. The Lebanese government excluded the other options, whether NATO, ESDP or an ad hoc multinational coalition. On the other hand, the European troop contributors insisted on redesigning the organisational set-up for the operation, both in terms of expanding oversight via the ad hoc established Strategic Military Cell as well as introducing their own approach to planning operations.

Secondly, the inherent tension between intergovernmental political decision-making process and integrated military planning that is natural to any multinational operation was compounded by a mental gap between the UN political staff and the NATO trained military officers from European contributors. This mental gap boiled down to two competing views on how to manage operations. The UN approach was characterised by a much higher level of political sensitivity – with obvious implications for information management e.g. – and a decen-

tralised approach to operation management. The greater political unity amongst European troop contributors as well as the preference for more robust command structures thus created a structural fault line in the mission set-up early on. Interestingly, the confrontation between both worlds proved to be a learning experience and tensions eased over time. Individual UN staffers came to see that military planning doctrine as standardised by NATO had something to offer in terms of making planning and management processes work smoothly. At the same time, European troop contributors rediscovered UN peacekeeping ten years after leaving it and found it could be made to work better than it had in the past.

Thirdly, peacekeeping in a context such as Lebanon after the 2006 war is fraught with conceptual problems when it comes to operational planning doctrine. The UN's approach to operations, which is procedurally flexible but chronically under-resourced, is very light on the content of operational planning. There is no real peacekeeping doctrine spelling out the causal reasoning how the ambitious goals set out in the mandate can be achieved. Peacekeeping thus relies on a more programmatic approach to planning operations, bringing about conditions that hopefully lead in the right direction. If such hopes prove to be idle, the operation simply goes on in time and becomes part of the scenery. The NATO planning doctrine preferred by European troop contributors does give planners the conceptual toolkit for designing operations, but this conceptual toolkit is only fully applicable to missions with powerful political mandates. Traditional planning concepts such as centre of gravity and end-state remain useful as an intellectual compass, but in a peacekeeping context they lead planners to think far beyond their mandate.

What can be made of the strategic effectiveness of the enhanced UNIFIL? The most straightforward effect was that the enhanced UNIFIL made the ceasefire on 14 August 2006 possible in the first place and contributed to maintaining it ever since. The three-dimensional strategic role outlined in this paper does give a coherent answer to how the operation can foster the intended effects. The enhanced UNIFIL in this sense does harness the use of armed forces for political ends. Yet it is equally true that such a strategy cannot achieve conflict resolution – it can only enable the sort of conditions that make renewed hostilities less likely. An operation with a limited political mandate can only achieve limited objectives. In that sense, the enhanced UNIFIL cannot be strategically decisive: it manages conflict on an interim basis, but does not make peace.

Introduction

The 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah ended with the ‘enhancement’ of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The UN peacekeepers in Lebanon, already present since 1978, were considerably strengthened in numbers and equipment in order to provide an effective security buffer between the conflict parties.² This re-designing of UNIFIL in full crisis mode was made possible by the substantial participation of European nations. France and Italy took the lead in this process, and many others followed suit. For most of these European troop contributors, this marked a return to UN peacekeeping since the debacles in the former Yugoslavia. On at least three accounts, the UNIFIL enhancement qualifies as a critical case study in the research on military crisis management. First, because of its size and cost, UNIFIL constitutes one of the main efforts in the UN peacekeeping system. Second, the regional dynamics and high international stakes in the conflict provide the peacekeepers with an exceedingly complex operating environment. Third, the leadership role assumed by the European troop contributors turned UNIFIL into a genuine laboratory on how to plan and conduct peacekeeping operations and simultaneously displayed under what conditions these states were willing to consider deploying their forces under UN command.

This paper will explore both the political and military logic underlying this enhancement process. It does so in order to account for (a) what could be, realistically speaking, the strategic rationale of the operation and (b) what makes the planning and conduct of the operation so difficult on a practical level. On the one hand, it argues that UNIFIL’s operational strategy relies on its three-dimensional presence as a security buffer, as a mechanism for de-escalation and as an important actor in the local economy. On the other hand, it argues that friction between the political and military levels accounts for persisting problems in the fields of information management, organisational structures and the conceptual foundations of operational planning. The paper will thus be structured in four parts. First, the political decision-making dynamic leading to the enhancement plan will be analysed. Secondly, the military operational planning process will be outlined. Thirdly, an assessment of UNIFIL’s operational strategy – how the use of military means should translate into political effects – will be put forward. Fourthly, the recurring issues of friction discovered during research interviews will be analysed and categorised. As such, one may hope to foster an enhanced understanding of the challenges of peacekeeping in Lebanon as well as of the use of European armed forces in military crisis management.

2. In the academic literature one frequently reads about “UNIFIL II” in order to differentiate between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ UNIFIL. This terminology is not adopted here, as it deviates from official usage and downplays the continuity that can be witnessed in the long-term history of the operation. Furthermore, in addition to the academic literature, this paper relies heavily on information gathered through expert interviews, which have not been referenced for reasons of confidentiality.

The Political Decision-Making: What to Do and Who Does What?

The war between Israel and Hezbollah and the following deployment of extra peacekeepers did not come out of the blue. Since its inception in 1978, in the midst of the Lebanese civil war and the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the outlook of UNIFIL has constantly evolved in response to local circumstances.³ UNIFIL's troop strength went up and down several times as the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) repeatedly occupied southern Lebanon to deal with threats posed by Arab militants. When Israel unilaterally withdrew from Lebanon in 2000, Hezbollah filled the resulting power vacuum. This Shia organisation, inspired by the Iranian revolution, developed into a quasi-state within the state of Lebanon. It built up territorial defences as well as provided social services to the population.⁴ Continuing disputes over the demarcation of the Lebanese-Israeli border as well as over the fate of the Palestinian refugees created by the 1948 Arab-Israeli war provided fuel for keeping conflict alive from one decade to the next. The tense stand-off in the following years abruptly escalated on 12 July 2006, when Hezbollah fighters conducted a raid across the Blue Line – the unofficial border defined by the UN – kidnapping two Israeli soldiers and killing three others and launched rocket fire on Haifa, Israel's third largest city. In response, the Israeli cabinet immediately authorised a sharp military response. This resulted in 34 days of fighting but produced no decisive result. By combining guerrilla warfare with conventional, in-depth territorial defence, Hezbollah managed to survive and – to some degree – resist the onslaught by Israeli forces.

International public outcry over the war came swiftly. As both France – the former colonial power in Lebanon – and the US – Israel's main ally – gave their full diplomatic attention to the crisis, and as UNIFIL was already present on the ground, the UN Security Council proved to be the key negotiating table for hammering out a deal for halting the conflict. While the idea of deploying an international force started circulating quickly,⁵ opinions widely diverged on what kind of force was required. Suggestions for expanding UNIFIL arose early on, but the US and – at least initially – France first proposed a robust interven-

3. A detailed history of UNIFIL since its inception and the context in which it operated lies far beyond the scope of this paper. For further reading, see B. Skogmo, *UNIFIL: International Peacekeeping in Lebanon, 1978-1988*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1989; and J. Hillen, *Blue Helmets: The Strategy of UN Military Operations*, Washington DC, Brassey's, 2000.

4. See A.R. Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2009.

5. It has even been suggested that Israeli leaders from early on in the war counted on the insertion of an international intervention force as an exit strategy to disengage from the fighting: see Z. Schiff, 'Israel's War with Iran', in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, 2006, No. 6, pp. 23-31; and J. Bolton, *Surrender is not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations and Abroad*, New York, Threshold Editions, 2007, p. 402.

tion force with enforcement authority under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.⁶ On 26 July, at an international conference in Rome, the Lebanese government put forward a seven-point proposal, calling for the enhancement of UNIFIL and committing the Government of Lebanon to deploying the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to southern Lebanon and exercising its full sovereignty. In response, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert stated that Israel would require a 15,000 strong international force made up of ‘real soldiers and not pensioners’ before giving up control over the terrain it occupied.

On 5 August, France and the US tabled a draft resolution that still mentioned the option of a Chapter VII international force, but subjected it to both Israeli and Lebanese approval. Reportedly, Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora pushed hard for a more restrictive mandate in order to avoid provoking Hezbollah in the domestic political arena.⁷ For the Lebanese government, only an expanded UN force was acceptable – de facto killing the idea of a multinational force not under UN command. On 9 August, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert informed the US that it would accept the plan for an enhanced UNIFIL.⁸ After the UN Secretary-General assured the US that a robust mandate could be written without reference to Chapter VII, all obstacles to a deal were cleared.

On 11 August 2006, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1701, co-drafted by France and the US. It welcomed the Lebanese government’s decision to extend its authority over its territory and send up to 15,000 LAF troops to the south. It not only called for a full cessation of hostilities, but also for a long-term solution, based on the principles of full respect for the Blue Line, the absence of weapons other than those of the Lebanese government and UNIFIL in the area between the Blue Line and the Litani river, and the full implementation of Resolution 1559, i.e. requiring the disarmament of all armed groups. Regarding the enhanced UNIFIL itself, the Security Council authorised an increase in troops to a maximum of 15,000. Its mandate included the following tasks:

- Confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces
- Restore international peace and security

6. After all, there was a historical precedent for this option as well: in 1982 a multinational force (MNF) consisting of US, French, Italian and British troops deployed to west Beirut in response to Israel’s second invasion of Lebanon and the ensuing massacres in the Sabra and Chatila refugee camps. However, the MNF gradually got drawn into the dynamic of the Lebanese civil war and ended in disaster when suicide bombers killed more than 300 US marines and French paratroopers. See A. McDermott and K. Skjelsbaek, eds., *The Multinational Force in Beirut 1982-1984*, Miami, Florida International UP, 1991.

7. See *Lebanon: Hizbollah’s Weapons Turn Inward*, Beirut/Brussels, International Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N° 23.

8. Bolton, op. cit., p. 408.

- Assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area⁹
- Monitor the cessation of hostilities
- Accompany and support the LAF
- Coordinate its activities in support of the LAF with the Government of Lebanon and the Government of Israel
- Extend its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons
- Assist the LAF in taking steps towards the establishment of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and UNIFIL
- Assist the Government of Lebanon, at its request, to secure its border to prevent illegal arms trafficking

Furthermore, UNIFIL was authorised to take all necessary action to ensure that its area of operations is not utilised for hostile activities, to ensure the security and freedom of movement of UN personnel and humanitarian workers and to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence. This single document constituted both the starting point for the operational planning process and the political reference framework for the entire further operation.

Already early on in the diplomatic process, questions surfaced on how this international force would be commanded and who would contribute to it. While Lebanese opposition ruled out any non-UN force, the Israeli government insisted on the participation of European armed forces. This posed an organisational problem: most European states had left the framework of UN peacekeeping as a result of the traumatic experiences in the former Yugoslavia. In order to overcome this problem, France, which was initially expected to take the lead of the operation, initiated what would become a heated argument with the UN Secretariat. Contrary to the regular command structure of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) – where the political headquarters directly instructs the operational headquarters in the field – France insisted on having a strategic command level in place. Out of mistrust of the DPKO, France, soon followed by Italy and Spain, insisted on having a European four star general that could command the operation in crisis situations. During bilateral talks in Paris between France and UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Jean-Marie Guéhenno a deal was struck that a special military command for UNIFIL could be set up in New York. As Guéhenno returned to New York, however, this deal proved too hard to swallow for the UN Secretariat, which was not willing to give up the command of the operation. As France had already publicly commit-

9. These first three tasks formed the original mandate of UNIFIL as set out in Resolution 425.

ted itself to participating in the operation, Paris felt cheated by the UN's resistance and responded by offering only 200 extra troops in an attempt to force their proposal through.

The eventual compromise was to set up a special Strategic Military Cell (SMC) in New York. This would be a dedicated military structure mainly staffed by officers from the troop contributing countries. Contrary to what France and other Europeans wanted, however, it would not be part of the command chain: the 'Director' of the SMC would be the focal point for military advice, but not a real commander. In theory, its purpose was to augment the strategic planning support of DPKO; in practice, its most important function was to allow for increased oversight by the European troop contributors.¹⁰ At the political-strategic level, therefore, UNIFIL would remain under the authority of the UN Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping. Within the DPKO structure, the SMC would take over all UNIFIL-related military work from the DPKO Office of Military Affairs with the exception of force generation. However, the DPKO Office of Operations would remain responsible for the political oversight of the operation. Not unimportant is the fact that the Under-Secretary-General only issues guidance to the operational level after consultations with and consent of all relevant DPKO units. Considering the heterogeneity of the UN staff, it can be argued that the UN bureaucracy not only supports the political decision-making in the Security Council, but also becomes an important part of the political process itself.

Once it became clear that the UN could offer special procedural flexibility to potential UNIFIL troop contributors, the door for substantial European involvement lay wide open. On 21 August, after a personal request by the Israeli Prime Minister, Italian Prime Minister Prodi announced Italy was ready to take the lead. On 24 August, French President Chirac announced 1,600 extra troops after receiving "a certain number of guarantees for the conditions of efficiency and optimal security of our troops".¹¹ Interestingly, the debate over force contributions, the details of which will be discussed in the next subsection, featured a remarkable degree of multilateralism, involving Israel and Lebanon as well as the EU. The EU dynamic relative to the crisis in Lebanon became most visible at an extraordinary meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 25 August. At this event, the EU foreign ministers held an exchange of views with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and formalised their offers for UNIFIL contributions. In the end, contributions from EU countries would exceed 7,600

10. For an in-depth discussion of the SMC, see R. Hatto, 'UN Command and Control Capabilities: Lessons from UNIFIL's Strategic Military Cell', in: *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 16, 2009, No. 2, pp. 186-198.

11. Quoted in the *Financial Times*, 'France pledges 1,600 troops for Lebanon', 25 August 2006.

troops, or more than half of UNIFIL personnel.¹² This put the Council in a position to claim a leadership role for the Union in UNIFIL.

Only days after the adoption of Resolution 1701, the DPKO circulated drafts of the key planning documents. On this basis, a meeting for troop-contributing countries was held on 17 August. The speed with which the deployment eventually took place surpassed expectations – underscoring what becomes possible if sufficient political will is present. On the one hand, this was made possible because the regular UN procedures were loosened with the aim of facilitating rapid deployment, for example waiving the requirement for signing a memorandum of understanding in advance.¹³ On the other hand, the European troop contributors by and large made use of their own means for putting boots on the ground rather than relying on UN logistics. On 2 September, for example, Italian marines conducted an amphibious landing on the beaches of Tyre. One planner jokingly spoke of a ‘race to Lebanon’.

In drawing up the UNIFIL force requirements, which originally numbered some 12,300 troops, the structure of the enhanced UNIFIL would come to look as follows.¹⁴ The area of operations was divided in two sectors (West and East) which would each feature a brigade-sized mechanised infantry force, which would be supported by a quick reaction force and appropriate combat support and combat service support elements. Italy would take the lead of Sector West, which would be composed of battalions from France, Ghana, Italy and Korea; whereas Spain would take the lead of Sector East, which would be composed of battalions from India, Indonesia, Nepal and Spain. France would provide the Quick Reaction Force, with artillery units and main battle tanks for extra firepower. Italy, Tanzania, Belgium, China, Portugal, Turkey and France would provide combat support units (rotary aviation, engineering and military police), whereas Ghana, Poland, Belgium and China would provide combat service support (logistics and medical).

One important innovation in the enhanced UNIFIL, however, was the addition of a Maritime Task Force (MTF). During the war, Israel had imposed a maritime blockade on Lebanon in order to cut off maritime arms smuggling. The blockade, which was having a heavy impact on the Lebanese economy, was to be lifted as part of the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon. In order to counter

12. For a more extensive discussion of the individual positions of the EU ‘big three’ (France, Germany and the UK), see E. Gross, *The Europeanization of National Foreign Policy: Continuity and Change in European Crisis Management*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

13. One UN official explained there was also an aspect of bureaucratic politics to this. The UN Secretary-General was nearing the end of his tenure and reportedly did not want to finish upon unfinished business.

14. What follows is a general outline of the force structure as it would come to look in 2007 when the expansion was completed (based on an unclassified UN briefing obtained by the author).

maritime arms smuggling, as requested by Israel, the Lebanese government asked for UN assistance in monitoring and patrolling its territorial waters. As this also offered an opportunity for contributing to UNIFIL without putting boots on the ground – i.e. at a lower level of political risk – the plan emerged to complement UNIFIL ground forces with a maritime task force. The MTF would have a maritime interdiction mission in an area stretching nearly fifty nautical miles off the Lebanese coast, for which four frigates, three support ships and a number of fast patrols boats and maritime surveillance aircraft would be required. The lead was taken by Germany, which was keen on showing its support of Israel but wary of arriving in a situation where the Bundeswehr would come face-to-face with the IDF on the ground. For the UN system in general, the MTF was groundbreaking as it was the first time a UN operation included naval assets.

The Military Planning Cycle: From Political Guidance to Operational Plans

As any organisation tasked with commanding armed forces, the UN has developed its own approach to the planning and conduct of peacekeeping operations. How UN peacekeeping should ‘work’ has been the subject of a decade-long series of reforms. Most notable in this regard were the publication of the guidelines for the UN Integrated Mission Planning Process (IMPP) and the Capstone Doctrine codifying the principles and guidelines for peacekeeping.¹⁵ The IMPP especially gives a clear outline of what the UN planning process should look like, if time and resources would allow it, that is. However, as UNIFIL does not qualify as an ‘integrated,’ multidimensional operation, and was planned under great time pressure, the planning cycle was far more ad hoc than what these doctrinal publications may suggest.

The hard core of planning documents that is key to any UN operation is the Concept of Operations (CONOPS), accompanied by a list of Force Requirements and a set of Rules of Engagement (ROE). The CONOPS is a concise sketch of the planned operation, which in the case of the UN mostly boils down to a phased deployment plan. The Force Requirements detail the wish list of what are the desired capabilities for the mission. The ROE, finally, describe in detail the conditions in which force can be used, and who has the authority to decide on this. The essence of these documents is processed into a report of the Secretary-general to the Security Council. What is important to bear in mind is that these documents, contrary to equivalent NATO or EU procedures, are internal DPKO documents that do *not* require the formal approval of the Security Council. Of course, the members of the Security Council and the troop contributing countries are kept informed of their content and can make suggestions during the drafting phase, albeit at a lower level of political ownership. In the summer of 2006, the DPKO authorities produced these initial planning documents in a time span of only days. Later on these would be fine-tuned by the SMC team, while more detailed operational-level planning started as a parallel process. On a conceptual level, however, UN doctrine is notoriously light on how to design operations in substantive terms. As a consequence, the main troop contributors for the enhanced UNIFIL – the Europeans – imported key elements of NATO planning doctrine, such as centre of gravity analysis, lines of operation etc.

15. *Integrated Missions Planning Process (IMPP): Guidelines Endorsed by the Secretary-General on 13 June 2006*, New York: United Nations Secretariat; *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*. New York: UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 18 January 2008.

In this overview of how military planners conducted their mission analysis, operational design and concept development, we need to distinguish between, on the one hand, the transition planning for the UNIFIL enhancement itself and, on the other hand, the planning for how the enhanced UNIFIL would fulfil its mandate once it would be deployed. As far as the transition planning is concerned, the two key elements were the boosting of UNIFIL's numerical strength and capabilities, and the expansion of the area of operations to include the 'pocket' around the city of Tyre. The surge consisting of 10,000 new UNIFIL troops was to be achieved in three waves.¹⁶ The first wave of some 3,500 troops would secure UNIFIL's rear and lines of communication, establish a presence in Tyre and support the handover from the IDF to the LAF. The second wave of another 3,500 troops would expand the UNIFIL footprint and support the LAF in achieving full operating capacity. The third wave of an additional 3,000 troops would enable UNIFIL, in addition to the above, to start verifying and monitoring the compliance of the parties with the provisions of Resolution 1701. Apart from the greater numbers, the new UNIFIL would cover a larger area of operations. For historical reasons, the area around the city of Tyre (a known Palestinian stronghold in 1978) was excluded from UNIFIL's original area of operations.¹⁷ In 2006, however, the area of operations was expanded on the basis of two arguments. On the one hand, Israel insisted on a UNIFIL buffer zone that would be wider than the range of Hezbollah's small rocket fire. On the other hand, the mandate to ensure that the UNIFIL area of operations would not be used for hostile activities required a clearly demarcated and controllable border. The valley cut out by the Litani river provided just such a natural topographical border, with only a limited number of crossing points that needed to be monitored.

Once the new UNIFIL would be operational, its mission would be twofold: (i) to assist the Government of Lebanon, and the LAF in particular, in exercising sovereignty over the entire Lebanese territory and securing its borders, and (ii) to ensure that its area of operations is not utilised for hostile activities of any kind. As such, UNIFIL can contribute to the conditions under which Israeli-Lebanese differences can be resolved through other means. The absence of Lebanese state sovereignty in the south was seen as the key factor in triggering conflict in the past. "Our mission", one general explained, "is thus very simple: it is to keep armed elements out of the area of operations."

In order to accomplish this mission, the enhanced UNIFIL would be active along five lines of operation. Apart from sustaining its own operations, supporting the

16. As outlined in the *Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006)*, New York, United Nations Security Council, 18 August 2006, S/2006/670.

17. See Hillen, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-131.

LAF and stabilising the area through demining and reconstruction activities, its main military role would be to contain the former conflict parties by means of a show of presence. On the Lebanese side, the conflict parties were grouped together under the catch-all formula of ‘armed elements’ (AE), i.e. any group in possession of arms other than the LAF. This category included Palestinian militants as well as Hezbollah and other Lebanese armed groups. The strategic end-state would consist of the full restoration of the sovereign authority of the Lebanese government. A crude outline of UNIFIL’s operational design would then come to look as follows:¹⁸

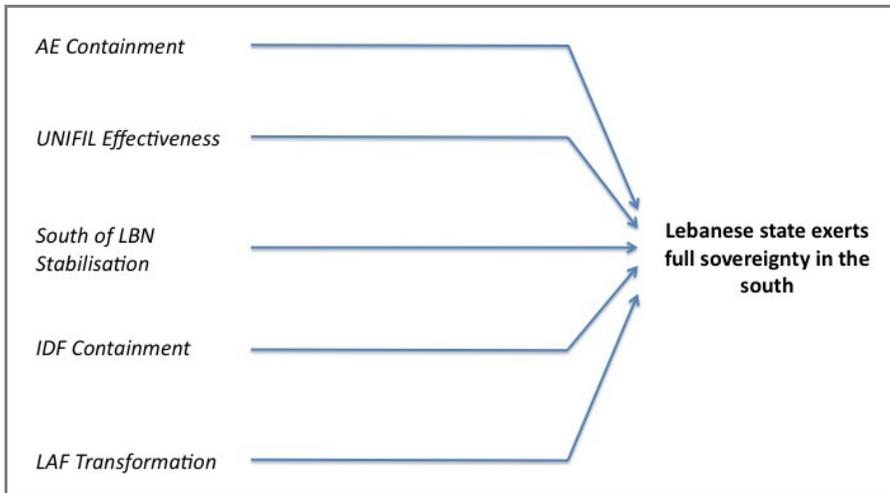


Figure 1: UNIFIL Lines of Operation

The operation was divided into five consecutive phases, each theoretically involving a review of the concept of operations and the accompanying force requirements. The first phase – cessation of hostilities – incorporated the transition to the enhanced UNIFIL. The second phase – IDF disengagement – involved the handover to the LAF. This also led to the force requirements being raised from 12,300 to 14,300 and a shift from engineering units to infantry units for patrolling. The third phase – transition and assistance to the LAF – implied that the LAF would now take the lead in maintaining control over the area. Phase four – stabilisation – would follow upon a more formal ceasefire agreement. This would allow for a reduction of force protection units and thus free up personnel for confidence-building patrolling etc. Phase five would consist of UNIFIL’s drawdown and withdrawal. One must keep in mind that these phases overlap. They merely describe the broad outline of UNIFIL’s functional evolu-

18. It is noteworthy that this level of conceptual clarity was only achieved as the operation got underway and was planned over and over again. In the summer of 2006, no operational design scheme was available.

tion over time: from build-up to gradual handover to the LAF and withdrawal. The operational phasing attempts to sketch greater conceptual clarity in this process and offers an opportunity to regularly review UNIFIL's role and posture. At the moment of writing, UNIFIL was in phase three and preparing for phase four. The Lebanese elections held on 7 June 2009 constituted one turning point in the switch from phase three to phase four; the debate over Lebanon's National Defence Strategy – and the question of Hezbollah's armed status – is another critical factor in this equation.

On the operational level, military planning efforts concentrated around three clusters. First of all, all planning documents need to be continuously reviewed and brought up-to-date. The original, phase one CONOPS was complemented by the UNIFIL enhancement operation plan, which was in turn translated into an operations order and complementary fragmentary orders. With each successive phase, and keeping into account changing circumstances on the ground, this body of documents needs to be rewritten at all levels. The second cluster of UNIFIL operational planning efforts is that of contingency planning. This is done in order to be ready to face a sudden deterioration of the security environment. Such envisaged contingencies ranged from the occurrence of a hostile act to the resumption of full scale hostilities between Hezbollah and the IDF or even the implications an Israeli strike on Iran would have on the situation in Lebanon. The planning for worst-case scenarios is one of the domains in which there was, at the request of the Force Commander, close cooperation between the planners in the field and the planners in the SMC. Because of the importance of this contingency planning, the planning team in the UNIFIL headquarters was also responsible for training efforts. All the exercises conducted by UNIFIL units could thus be organised in preparation of future contingencies. The third task of UNIFIL operational planners is to support the Force Commander and his political team. When more strategic work undertaken by the Force Commander, most notably in the tripartite framework that UNIFIL hosts for IDF-LAF dialogue, leads to newly agreed roles for UNIFIL, these need to be translated into plans as well. A good example is the project for visibly marking the Blue Line in order to minimize confusion over border crossing incidents. In the course of 2008, in order to ensure that the political work and military planning is coordinated at the different levels, a contact group was established within the UNIFIL headquarters.

UNIFIL Operational Strategy: A Three-Pronged Approach

The preceding sections discussed the planning of the UNIFIL enhancement at different levels, ranging from the high political level of the Security Council over the different aspects of the UN bureaucracy down to the level of operational planning in the field. It is now time to replace this descriptive focus with an analytical mindset and draw all aspects together in an assessment of UNIFIL's strategic logic. This means answering the question how UNIFIL's forces and capabilities on the ground are being put to use in function of the political objectives as set out in the mandate. In a nutshell, this section argues that UNIFIL strategy has three dimensions: (i) UNIFIL constitutes a military buffer that both conflict parties try to exploit as a security shield, (ii) UNIFIL provides a de-escalation mechanism through its liaison functions, and (iii) UNIFIL enables and contributes to reconstruction, not in the least through its own economic footprint.

UNIFIL as a Military Buffer

It is the first dimension that is most fraught with controversy. What is the purely military logic behind a peacekeeping force that is in the possession of formidable capabilities – for UN standards – but whose hands are tied by a restrictive mandate? The enhanced UNIFIL cannot do very much beyond showing its presence because it has conceptually remained the same old UNIFIL: it is a force based on the consent of the Lebanese government that acts in support of the LAF. Its new rules of engagement are robust in the sense that the authority to use force is delegated to the lowest possible level, but they remain based on the principle of self-defence. For all other situations, UNIFIL can do nothing else than ask the LAF to take the lead. As one officer ironically remarked: “Aha, we can call the LAF – now everybody starts shaking with fear!”

In discussions with planners, strategic concepts like containment and deterrence featured prominently. These concepts need to be understood in a political sense: the massive presence of UNIFIL may change the way the conflict parties make their cost-benefit analysis. From a public relations perspective, direct confrontations with blue helmets are costly. It can therefore be argued, for example, that the idea of an Israeli Merkava tank facing a French Leclerc tank may instil some restraint in the heads of Israeli decision-makers. Similarly, Hezbollah as well needs to consider domestic politics when defining its posture vis-à-vis the UN: it does not want to be seen as the force driving the country to war again. Yet this

notion of purely diplomatic deterrence does not equate with deterrence or containment in a military sense of threatening retaliation. Militarily speaking, UNIFIL is in no position to stop the IDF in case of a new invasion. Similarly, if Hezbollah forces are able to resist the IDF, they will not be stopped by the use of force by UN peacekeepers with fewer capabilities and even less political incentive to do so.

This notion of diplomatic deterrence is the de facto foundation of the well-known peacekeeping strategy of interposing a buffer force between conflict parties. UNIFIL shields both conflict parties from each other. But like any shield, the UNIFIL presence is not impenetrable. Israeli incursions into Lebanese airspace occur on a daily basis. Similarly, Hezbollah actively maintains arms caches and bunkers within UNIFIL's area of operations.¹⁹ While UNIFIL continuously tries to balance the political sensitivities of both parties and maintain its own credibility, this impartiality is under constant siege as the conflict parties attempt to exploit this shielding buffer to their advantage. *On the one hand, Hezbollah insists that UNIFIL's mandate is to support the LAF.* Considering the fact that the LAF cannot confront Hezbollah without fearing a split along sectarian lines, there is some room for manoeuvre to maintain arms caches in the safety of private homes in the south, as UNIFIL cannot independently search private property unless there is credible evidence of a violation of Resolution 1701. To the benefit of Hezbollah, the presence of UNIFIL restrains Israel and the UN is used for monitoring and condemning Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace. *Israel, on the other hand, insists that UNIFIL's mandate is to ensure its area of operations is not used for hostile activities.* The IDF occasionally provides UNIFIL forces with intelligence about arms smuggling and caches and requests for investigations into suspected sites. Sometimes this leads to a wild goose chase in the middle of the night, with UNIFIL patrols conducting investigations guided by near real-time Israeli intelligence. In a cynical interpretation, UNIFIL can be portrayed as a proxy force that pushes Israel's adversaries further away from Israeli territory.

Both parties thus emphasize that particular part of the UNIFIL mandate that serves their interests best. In an extreme interpretation, this even reduces the role of UNIFIL to a subcontractor of the IDF or the LAF. From a Lebanese perspective, UNIFIL constitutes extra manpower for the LAF to monitor the border in the south. From an Israeli perspective, UNIFIL is useful as a means to severely

19. Until recently, the existence of such caches was a matter of debate, wherein UNIFIL's political officials – in sharp contrast to their military colleagues – maintained there was no hard proof to support this thesis. However, a recent incident provided conclusive evidence. On 14 July 2009, an arms cache exploded in Kherbet Selm, a small village in the middle of UNIFIL's area of operations. The UN investigation that ensued, which was inter alia obstructed by armed militiamen, concluded that the depot was actively maintained and as such constituted a serious violation of Resolution 1701.

curtail the freedom of movement of Hezbollah and other resistance groups. This strategy of inserting a buffer that is as impartial as possible of course depends on the willingness of troop contributors to put forces on the frontline. Considering the massive presence of UNIFIL in the south, a resumption of large-scale hostilities is bound to lead to significant casualties amongst the blue helmets. UNIFIL maintains its credibility by saturating the terrain with patrols in reaction to any incident. This massive presence, conversely, also means UNIFIL is too ubiquitous to hide if fighting would break out. Whether these implications are well understood in the capitals of the UNIFIL troop contributors is a matter of debate.

UNIFIL as a Mechanism for De-Escalation

The second dimension of UNIFIL's strategy is its role as a mediator working tirelessly to de-escalate any confrontation that may occur between the LAF and the IDF. One of the important innovations in UNIFIL's new mandate was its role in coordinating between the LAF and the IDF as the former deployed and the latter withdrew. Only hours after the ceasefire, the UNIFIL Force Commander hosted a meeting where an IDF and a LAF general could coordinate their plans. Later on such meetings were institutionalised on a strategic as well as operational level. The LAF and IDF leadership would continue to meet under the tripartite forum to address military-strategic issues (e.g. the marking of the Blue Line, warnings about upcoming training manoeuvres etc.). Furthermore, a set of UNIFIL liaison officers would mediate the small day-to-day confrontations between both sides (Blue line violations etc.). Such liaison work serves both as a confidence-building measure and as a way to prevent small incidents from developing into potential conflict triggers. While the importance of keeping lines of communications open cannot be over-emphasised, it is equally true that these channels are often used for complaints that seem trivial to an outsider, such as cattle crossing the Blue Line to go and drink from a pond on the other side or water flowing from one side of the border to the other during heavy rainfall.

UNIFIL as a Reconstruction Enabler

The third dimension of UNIFIL's strategic logic, lastly, is the role it plays in the reconstruction of the area. In the immediate aftermath of the conflict in 2006, the engineering capacity that was deployed was put to use in repairing the damaged infrastructure as well as coordinating and participating in the demining efforts – to the benefit of the local population as well as UNIFIL itself. Over

time, as the need for ‘direct’ reconstruction receded, a more indirect way of economic reconstruction developed. Through its CIMIC activities and, even more, its outsourcing to local contractors, UNIFIL has developed into an important factor in the local economy. While this is to some extent a simple by-product of its presence rather than an intentional objective, the fact that it is also publicly perceived as such has important political as well as military consequences, e.g. in securing the local support for UNIFIL’s presence and contributing to force protection and situational awareness.

Together, this trinity forms the core of UNIFIL’s operational-strategic logic. All three elements are important: the first one was treated at greatest length because it is so controversial and open for interpretation. The conclusion of this assessment is that UNIFIL contributes to containing the outbreak of renewed hostilities but does not address the underlying conflict dynamics, which are political in nature and go far beyond UNIFIL’s mandate. The content of the tripartite talks is obviously restricted to what the parties want to talk about, and so far the discussions have been limited to the military-technical realm. Issues with obvious political connotations, such as the issue of kidnapped soldiers, are kept off the agenda. As senior officials admit, it is very hard to envisage any sort of end-state under these conditions. UNIFIL’s role in containing a new war, furthermore, is limited to de-escalating any potential conflict triggers and changing the cost-benefit calculations of the parties concerned. Yet if push comes to shove, it has neither the mandate nor the capabilities to enforce peace.

Politico-Military Relations: How Friction Dilutes the Promise of Strategy

On paper – or in military powerpoint briefings – operations often look surprisingly clear and straightforward. In practice, operations hardly ever run as smooth as one might wish for. Incomplete or ambiguous information, organisational factors, multinationality, conceptual problems and, quite simply, changes in the situation, add various layers of friction that, at the very least, complicate the planning and conduct of operations. In the worst case, they doom an operation to utter failure. This section analyses three categories of such friction that were particularly salient in the planning and implementation of the enhanced UNIFIL. At a fundamental level, these three categories – informational, organisational and conceptual friction – can be related to politico-military relations. In this domain, a contrast can be observed between a political logic characterised by a focus on flexibility and self-interest and a military logic requiring clarity, unity and a sense of realism. Of course, many of the problems discussed here are not new, nor do they pertain only to the case of UNIFIL.²⁰ This section merely chronicles the experience in one particular operation in order to contribute to a broader awareness of the complexity of military crisis management.

Informational Friction

The existence of different attitudes to the management of information constitutes a first category of friction between the military personnel and their political masters in UNIFIL. Military officers are in need of a maximum of information in order to fulfil their mission – both in terms of quantity and clarity. Any issues concerning the sensitivity of information would be managed by the protection of information. On the political level, national sensitivities make the availability of maximum information a distant pipe dream. All issues that cannot be clearly agreed upon are shrouded in diplomatic ambiguity or mere silence. In the most obvious sense, this issue becomes manifest in the bizarre use of terminology. In UN documents, for example, Hezbollah is grouped together with other groups under the label of ‘armed elements’. Military planners objected to this practice as it precludes more detailed analysis of the motives and capabilities of different groups. UNIFIL’s mandate is commonly labelled as ‘robust’, yet many amongst the military personnel have already done tours in other operations – with what they consider genuinely robust mandates – and

20. Cf. e.g. M.C. Williams, *Civil-Military Relations and Peacekeeping*, London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper 321. Incidentally, Mr. Williams currently serves as UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon.

scorn such attempts at diplomatic social constructivism. As hunting is a popular pastime in Lebanon, anybody carrying small arms in the area of operations is commonly labelled as a hunter, even though it is clear to UNIFIL patrols that some of these alleged ‘hunters’ are not hunting at all. Similarly, UNIFIL officers admit they have to tailor their discourse to suit their interlocutor when liaising between the IDF and the LAF. The omnipresence of semantic ambiguities has two functional implications for the planning and conduct of operations, bearing on the use of intelligence and the formalisation of planning documents.

Intelligence has traditionally been a highly problematic issue in UN peacekeeping. As the connotation of espionage and secrecy made intelligence a bit of a dirty word in UN circles, it simply did not exist for a long time.²¹ As peacekeeping operations became gradually more complex, however, the need for good situational awareness grew more acute – for the purpose of force protection as well as for guiding strategy.²² In UNIFIL, various troop contributors are actively gathering operational intelligence, for example using collection assets on board of the ships that form the MTF, but the dissemination of information remains a very sensitive issue. Both in New York and in the field, one can observe that the sharing of information is mainly based on personalities and goodwill between individuals, rather than being the procedural rule. Part of the explanation lies in the absence of a closed ICT system for transmitting documents, which means that very sensitive information is being left out because of the risk of documents being intercepted. Yet the more systemic absence of standard policy and procedures of intelligence management has an important impact on the effectiveness of staff work. As information is treated on a strict ‘need-to-know’ basis – a bit of a surprise in a peacekeeping context, where the ‘need-to-share’ has important merits of its own – there emerges a parallel system of intelligence where the real inside knowledge does not reach all relevant units and thus undermines the unity of effort. For example, the in-house assessments of the conflict parties are not distributed to all staff officers in the planning section of the UNIFIL headquarters, even amongst the personnel from NATO states. Similarly, the UNIFIL Joint Mission Analysis Centre is responsible for threat analysis, but it is not automatically plugged into all information channels.

The most critical consequence of the diverging attitudes on information management can be found in the formalisation of planning guidance and documents. In UN peacekeeping, the Security Council only approves a single document – a resolution – that contains broad objectives rather than detailed planning guidance. In the words of one DPKO official, this means that the planning work has

21. See H. Smith, ‘Intelligence and UN Peacekeeping’, in: *Survival*, Vol. 36, 1994, No. 3, pp. 174-192.

22. See P. Shetler-Jones, ‘Intelligence in Integrated UN Peacekeeping Missions: The Joint Mission Analysis Centre’, in: *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 15, 2008, No. 4, pp. 517-527.

to be based on *assumptions* of what the Security Council wants. Subsequently, the UN Secretariat itself is in charge of formulating guidance down to the lower levels. Often, this takes the form of emails and conversation rather than formal documents. As a result, the limited information that is available does not always trickle down the command chain. In the planning cycle of the UNIFIL enhancement, time constraints as well as political pressure short-circuited the process. Correspondingly, a paper trail of planning guidance was not available. Planners in the field were of the opinion that there was hardly any real guidance to work with at all.

It seems that the issue of limited formalisation of guidance is related to political sensitivities. As one general explained:

On the one hand, we as military personnel, we need a clear mandate and clear orders. The diplomats and political staff, on the other hand, need flexibility. They hope for the best as far as the future is concerned. This is highly problematic for military planners: above all we need to be realistic, and we must be able to manage the worst scenario-case as well.

The very issue of including worst-case scenarios and other politically sensitive questions constitutes an obstacle to formalising planning documents. For example, the phase two UNIFIL CONOPS that the SMC prepared in early 2007 was not signed off by the Under-Secretary-General. The DPKO Office of Operations reportedly objected to some wordings – most notably references to Hezbollah – that were considered as being too explicit. This in turn triggered conceptual problems for the SMC planners: “How can you expect us to be able to justify a list of force requirements including artillery units and main battle tanks if we are not allowed to mention that there are potential bad guys out there?” The non-adoption of military-drafted documents because of being diplomatically non-palatable was considered standard practice in the eyes of UNIFIL planners. The requirement of absolute consensus on all textual details in planning documents de facto implied that many delicate questions were only answered by silence.

Organisational Friction

The second main category of politico-military friction in UNIFIL consists of questions and disagreements about appropriate organisational structures. The UNIFIL enhancement plan necessitated a redesigning of the UNIFIL command and control structure on the level of the UN headquarters in New York as well as the UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura. These reforms fuelled heated debates along multiple fault lines: disagreements between different troop contributors,

disagreements between the European troop contributors and the UN as an organisation and disagreements between military and political personnel.

At the level of the UN headquarters, this dynamic concentrated around the establishment of the SMC. As the SMC idea was born out of frustration with or even mistrust of the standard UN command capabilities, it constituted a direct confrontation between the UN Secretariat and the European troop contributors. As these new troop contributors de facto imported their NATO-inspired approach to operations, the SMC also bred resentment amongst traditional UN troop contributors such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Their major complaint was that the SMC introduced double standards in peacekeeping operations by giving the Europeans a preferential treatment.²³ Consequently, the budgeting committee in the UN General Assembly decided that the SMC would be gradually downsized and subsequently absorbed by the DPKO structure by mid-2010. A third aspect to this debate was that the SMC constituted the single purely military structure in what is otherwise an overwhelmingly civilian staff. Compared to the UN staff, the military personnel from European countries introduced a completely different mindset on how to plan and conduct military operations. What they considered as military professionalism, however, was not greeted with much enthusiasm at the UN. In the view of UN staff, the rationale behind the SMC was flawed in the sense that it failed to acknowledge that UN peacekeeping works as a highly decentralised system light on top-level bureaucracy. Furthermore, as most of the SMC personnel did not have previous UN experience, it cost significant efforts to get the first rotation of SMC personnel familiar with the UN system – leading to an initial loss of planning capacity, from the UN's perspective, rather than a gain. As such the SMC remained somewhat of a *Fremdkörper* in the UN system over which opinions remained quite literally oceans apart.

Similar dynamics can be observed in the workings of the UNIFIL field headquarters in Naqoura. In its structural set-up, the headquarters displays quite a few 'anomalies' compared to military standards. For example, the joint operations centre is not part of the J-3 operations section, but resorts immediately under the Deputy Chief of Staff Operations – thus elevating the real-time conduct of operations one level higher up in the chain of command. Information operations, as another example, do not even fall under the remit of the Chief of Staff, but resort under the Director of Political and Civil Affairs. On the one hand, these anomalies can be seen as the consequence of the organic growth of the headquarters over the course of UNIFIL's history, yet on the other hand they can also be read in terms of politically charged turf wars. The fact that NATO coun-

23. See Hatto, op. cit., p. 191-194.

tries occupied the vast majority of crucial command posts fostered a lingering sense of the ‘West against the rest’ in the UNIFIL headquarters. This was amplified by the fact that European military personnel informally adopted NATO planning doctrine. This in itself is hardly surprising, as there is hardly any substantial UN doctrine available whereas NATO doctrine is a widely accepted multinational standard. Unintentionally yet quite inevitably, this led to the partial exclusion of other (non-NATO) troop contributors. Similar to the rivalry between the SMC and the Office of Operations in New York, a complicated relationship came about inside the field headquarters between the military staff and the office of political and civil affairs. While this was, by and large, gradually overcome through personal contact and growing mutual appreciation, the existence of different expectations of how peacekeeping should work assured that the UNIFIL command and control structure inevitably operated in a medium full of cultural resistance.

Conceptual Friction

The third and arguably most important category of friction when it comes to its impact on operational strategy consists of a set of conceptual problems dogging mission planning. These range from the internal coherence of the mandate, over a partial mismatch between operational planning doctrine and the UNIFIL context, to the issue of how to deal with worst-case scenarios. Together, these issues can be linked to a more overarching debate on the benefits and drawbacks of the UN’s decentralised approach to directing operations.

In the workings of the Security Council, the drafting of mission mandates is by and large a diplomatic preserve.²⁴ The main complaint heard amongst the military personnel tasked to implement these mandates is that they often contain internal inconsistencies and may be dangerously out of sync with the situation in the field. Throughout UNIFIL’s history, this has been a major problem. When UNIFIL’s original mandate was issued in 1978 – in the middle of the Lebanese civil war – it was heralded as “a document that combined morality, naivety and folly in about equal proportions”.²⁵ For example, it mandated UNIFIL to assist the Government of Lebanon, but it failed to recognize that there was at the time no effective government to speak of in the first place. This problem repeated itself with the UNIFIL enhancement in 2006. As described earlier, the expanded force received a dual mission: to assist the LAF and to ensure that its area of operations is not used for hostile activities. Without clear prioritisation, situa-

24. See Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

25. R. Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War*, 3rd ed, Oxford, Oxford UP 2001, p. 134.

tions occur where these two missions may imply conflicting courses of action. For example, if the LAF is unwilling or unable to tackle the construction of armed facilities in the UNIFIL area of operations – in order to avoid splits along sectarian lines within the LAF – to what extent can UNIFIL disregard its role as LAF assistant in order to fulfil the second part of its mission? It was noted above that both conflict parties exploit this diplomatic ambiguity inherent to the mandate. Yet this ambiguity has the same effect internally: all personnel inside the operation are free to interpret the mandate and define what constitutes success along their own preferences. For example, the military personnel from European contributors are generally more inclined to emphasise the ‘ensuring’ part of the mandate than the rest of the staff.

Those elements that can be interpreted as restraining the scope of the mandate to a peacekeeping rather than an enforcement operation provide military planners with intractable conceptual problems. In the most obvious sense, the strategic end-state of the operation – the Lebanese government exercising full sovereignty throughout its territory – goes far beyond anything UNIFIL could hope to achieve on its own. Many of the elements in the enhanced UNIFIL’s operational design are coherent in their own right but simply go beyond the mandate and the means of UNIFIL. For example, one of the decisive points in achieving the strategic end-state would be to deal with the issue of arms in the possession of others than the Lebanese authorities. As the responsibility for disarming the armed elements lies with the LAF – or within domestic politics in Lebanon, for that matter – UNIFIL cannot hope to achieve its own long-term plan on its own. Rather, it can only foster conditions that favour a course of events in the right direction. As one general commented: “A real end-state for UNIFIL is very difficult to envisage. In that sense, our traditional planning doctrine based on the end-state concept simply cannot be applied.”

The question whether operational planning doctrine – especially NATO doctrine that is developed as a toolkit for war planning – is applicable in a peacekeeping context such as the one of UNIFIL is more than valid. While this operational planning doctrine has its merits in structuring the planning process, the key conceptual ideas – centres of gravity, end-state etc – are sometimes impossible to apply sensibly in a peacekeeping context. Put simply, the basic premise of operational art is that one achieves the end-state by neutralising the centre of gravity of one’s opponent. But if there is no clear opponent to begin with, this intellectual framework does not lead planners to a coherent plan. For example, the centre of gravity of the LAF was initially determined to be the establishment of a weapon-free zone between the Litani and the Blue Line. Apart from the fact that such a zone may never have existed in reality, this analysis seems to confuse an intermediate end-state with a source of strength – and thus serves little pur-

pose in orienting operational design. This is not to say that military doctrine is of no use in a peacekeeping context – far from it. Rather, the issue is that when there is a conceptual misfit between the military planning tools on the one hand and the political mandate and the operational context on the other, many critical questions (e.g. force sizing, troop to task analysis...) cannot be answered in any definite sense. In short, such a situation leaves much more room for diverging opinions on the basis of different hopes and expectations. This manifests itself most clearly in the management of uncertainty and contingency planning.

The relative prominence of contingency planning is one of the main features of the planning work in support of the enhanced UNIFIL. Such planning products are intended to cater for various ‘what if’ scenarios. Contingency planning is thus a reflection process designed to make an operation better prepared for future events – most notably worst case scenarios. As an intellectual discipline it is part and parcel of the professional military mindset, as a protective reaction against the infamous uncertainty and unpredictability inherent to military operations. Of course, to engage in contingency planning above the tactical level requires a minimum of extra capacity that can be spared from the day-to-day staff work. The surge in UNIFIL troops and capabilities in 2006 included an influx of a large number of staff officers well versed in operational planning doctrine. Both at the operational level and at the strategic level in the SMC, planners started working on contingency plans. This was driven by the awareness that UNIFIL would find itself caught in the middle of a shooting war in case the ceasefire would not hold. While the Force Commander explicitly requested such contingency plans, planners in the SMC were under the impression that their colleagues in the Office of Operations had little appetite for this sort of work. On the one hand, such contingency plans were drafted on the basis of politically incorrect future scenarios and would assume that one or several of the conflict parties would renege on their responsibilities under the ceasefire agreement. On the other hand, some in the chronically under-staffed and under-equipped UN secretariat were shocked to see so much energy and resources being spent on mere hypothetical worries. Over time, this situation gradually improved. Especially in the context of the Israeli offensive in Gaza in February 2009 – with tensions in southern Lebanon rising rapidly as well – SMC staff found that they were now “surprisingly well-understood”. The recent New Horizon non-paper prepared by DPKO in 2009 reflects this development too, as it explicitly calls for the fostering of a contingency planning culture.²⁶

26. *A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping*, New York, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, July 2009, p. 31-35.

Several of the issues discussed above – the attitude to contingency planning and the usual absence of a strategic level of command – point at a more general feature of the UN peacekeeping system, namely the light and decentralised approach to directing operations. On the one hand, the UN approach to peacekeeping aims to avoid micromanagement and second-guessing the judgement of the commanders in the field. This decentralisation is also made possible by the fact that restrictive mandates reduce the need for permanent oversight. As one official explained: “The Force Commander’s hands are tied anyway: he is not allowed to overstep his mandate. You do not need a strategic command level because the Commander is so limited in what he can do anyway.” On the other hand, it can be argued that this decentralised approach is simply a budgetary necessity. The personnel capacity of the DPKO is very small relative to the scale of the UN’s operations.²⁷ A heavier, more centralised mission management structure would either require the DPKO budget to go up or the mission budgets to go down.

The discussions over the creation and role of the SMC already made clear that many of the European contributors, and especially their defence staffs, took issue with this philosophy. While the arguments above are internally coherent, they may be overtaken by events: when a peacekeeping operation suddenly finds itself in an environment that is dramatically different from the one envisaged in the mandate, it may urgently need new strategic guidance. Adding a strategic command level and increasing staff personnel at all levels would create some level of redundancy under normal circumstances but would also harden the structure against all sorts of contingencies that may cause the light approach to be derailed. In essence, whether one prefers one approach over another depends on how one wants to balance return on investment with risk management and thus boils down to a political choice. The UN approach to directing operations is much more cost-effective as long as the situation remains generally supportive and does not diverge too much from the one anticipated.²⁸ The downside is that this approach may carry greater risks when the envisaged plan is derailed by events taking a turn for the worse. Operations led by Western nations aim to minimise such risk as much as possible, but become exponentially more expensive. In the UNIFIL enhancement planning, the European troop contributors thus insisted on hardening the mission not only in terms of troops and capabilities, but also in command style because they anticipated that Lebanon might make for a volatile operational environment.

27. For example, in the summer of 2006 the Military Planning Service inside the DPKO consisted of only 16 staff officers.

28. Cf. the core argument offered by Hillen, *op. cit.*, that the UN as an organisation has precisely those characteristics needed for peacekeeping in a supportive political environment but lacks those required for managing complex military operations.

Conclusion

This paper started with an outline of the political decision-making and military planning of the UNIFIL enhancement. It subsequently analysed UNIFIL's operational strategy and argued that this was based on a three-dimensional role for the operation, namely that of military buffer, de-escalation mechanism and booster for the local economy. Finally, it analysed the politico-military friction that manifested itself in the enhancement planning and implementation and categorised various issues into three clusters, i.e. friction bearing on information issues, organisational aspects as well as conceptual problems. On the basis of this analysis, three overall conclusions can be drawn.

First, the case-study of UNIFIL enhancement showed that the UN peacekeeping system constitutes a suitable platform for deploying European armed forces, but under two specific conditions. On the one hand, the question under which organisational flag troops are deployed was answered on a pragmatic basis. The UN framework in this case was chosen because the host nation insisted on it. The Lebanese government excluded the other options, whether NATO, ESDP or an ad hoc multinational coalition. On the other hand, the European troop contributors insisted on redesigning the organisational set-up for the operation, both in terms of expanding oversight via the SMC as well as introducing their own approach to planning operations.

Secondly, the inherent tension between the intergovernmental political decision-making process and integrated military planning that is natural to any multinational operation was replicated here, but with the addition of another layer of politico-military friction. To some extent there existed a mental gap between the UN political staff and the NATO-trained military officers from European contributors. Here the contrast was not so much between an intergovernmental versus an integrated logic, but rather between two competing views on how to manage operations. The UN approach was characterised by a much higher level of political sensitivity – with obvious implications for information management etc – and a decentralised approach to operation management. The greater political unity amongst European troop contributors as well as the preference for more robust command structures created a structural fault line in the mission early on. Both views have some legitimacy of their own right, as all the staff have to operate within the confines of risk-averse and sometimes contradictory political guidance. However, as the Security Council is rarely engaged in the details of staff work, the responsibility for political oversight shifts down to the UN administration, making politico-military friction much more of a staff issue than would otherwise be the case. Interestingly, the confrontation between both

worlds proved to be a learning experience and tensions eased over time. Individual UN staffers came to see that military planning doctrine as standardised by NATO had something to offer in terms of making planning and management processes work smoothly. At the same time, European troop contributors rediscovered UN peacekeeping ten years after leaving it and found it could be made to work better than it had in the past.

Thirdly, peacekeeping in a context such as Lebanon after the 2006 war is fraught with conceptual problems when it comes to planning doctrine. The UN's approach to operations, which is procedurally flexible but chronically under-resourced, is very light on the content of operational planning. There is no real peacekeeping doctrine spelling out how the ambitious goals set out in the mandate can be achieved. Peacekeeping thus relies on a more programmatic approach to planning operations, bringing about conditions that hopefully lead in the right direction. If such hopes prove to be idle, the operation simply goes on in time and becomes part of the scenery. NATO planning doctrine does give planners the conceptual toolkit for designing operations in content, but this conceptual toolkit is only fully applicable to missions with powerful political mandates. Traditional planning concepts such as centre of gravity and end-state remain useful as an intellectual compass, but in a peacekeeping context they lead planners to think far beyond their mandate.

In this environment, the concept of operational military strategy remains useful, but only in a limited sense. The enhanced UNIFIL is a military operation that inevitably has political effects. The most straightforward of these was that the enhanced UNIFIL made the ceasefire on 14 August 2006 possible in the first place and has contributed to maintaining it ever since. The three-dimensional strategic role outlined above does give a coherent answer to how the operation can foster intended effects. The enhanced UNIFIL in this sense does harness the use of armed forces for political ends. Yet it is equally true that such a strategy cannot achieve conflict resolution – it can only enable the sort of conditions that make renewed hostilities less likely. An operation with a limited political mandate can only achieve limited objectives. In that sense, the enhanced UNIFIL cannot be strategically decisive: it manages conflict on an interim basis, but does not make peace.