Michael was a UN soldier in Lebanon: 'We were totally subject to Hezbollah'

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B.T. [Danish newspaper]

<https://www.bt.dk/udland/michael-var-fn-soldat-i-libanon-vi-var-totalt-underlagt-hizbollah>

[Translation by Google]

Already from 10 years ago it was completely crazy. Hezbollah controlled which areas the UN soldiers in South Lebanon could visit, and in certain areas they could neither enter nor take pictures.

This is what a former Danish UN soldier says, who for the first time in his more than 25-year career has chosen to tell his story to BT

Michael, who has asked not to have his last name revealed for private reasons, was himself deployed to South Lebanon 10 years ago as part of the UN mission [UNTSO](https://untso.unmissions.org/)  (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization).

UNTSO, the UN's oldest and longest-running mission, works closely with UNIFIL in South Lebanon, where they often share the same bases.

Their task is to observe and report violations of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 of 2006, which calls for all of South Lebanon to be Hezbollah-free and for the terrorist group to be disarmed.

When Michael looks back on his secondment, he has no doubts about how to describe the UN:

‘We were totally subject to Hezbollah. We clearly had limited freedom of movement. For example, we never operated after dark for fear of Hezbollah. So they had free time in the evening and night hours,' says Michael, who emphasizes that he is speaking as a private individual and not on behalf of the Danish military.

And when Michael and his colleagues from either UNTSO or UNIFIL drove around the various cities, they were often stopped by suspected Hezbollah members when they tried to enter the areas where they believed the terrorist group could operate.

‘They simply blocked the road. They were not visibly armed, but aggressive, and it was quite clear that they were members of Hezbollah - we knew very well who decided things, especially in the Shiite cities. They didn't want us to see what they were doing,' says Michael.

‘When we patrolled the Blue Line, we often saw 'civilians' very close to the Israeli military installations taking pictures. When that happened, we withdrew and observed from a distance – we were simply instructed to do so,' he adds, referring to the 'blue line' that demarcates Israel and Lebanon.

It was also not allowed for Michael and his colleagues to document what was happening in other parts of the cities.

‘It was forbidden to film and take pictures. And if we did, we could end up with the locals confiscating our cameras. It happened to my colleagues in UNIFIL and UNTSO.'

Hezbollah's control of South Lebanon was already massive then, says Michael.

‘The civilians who did not care about Hezbollah, especially the Christians, were afraid to speak out against them. There was a widespread fear of them. But at the same time we experienced cooperation with the Shia Muslims. We had, for example, a number of interpreters who were indoctrinated into Hezbollah. I ended up throwing one of them out of my car once while he was praising Hassan Nasrallah. I simply didn't want to listen to it,' says Michael.

The most frustrating part of the work, however, was the total absence of action and consequences for the flagrant violations of the resolution Michael and his colleagues were there to observe.

‘We reported daily violations of Resolution 1701 to our superiors, including in particular restrictions on our freedom of movement, and we were instructed to report all violations regardless of number. But nothing ever happened,' says Michael and adds:

‘We did not hear back from them and nothing was initiated. It was wildly frustrating and it only confirmed to me what I had experienced in other countries I was posted to; The UN is incompetent,' he states.

According to Michael, however, most of the thousands of UN observers and soldiers had their hearts in the right place.

‘We were there for a reason, after all. Even if several of us had to realize that we couldn't do anything. But of course there were also some who were fervently anti-Israeli. I especially remember one of them from Ireland.'

However, it is beyond Michael how extensive Hezbollah's infrastructure has become since he was there 10 years ago. Especially the tunnels, which [BT has documented](https://www.bt.dk/udland/bt-bag-terroristernes-linjer-hemmelige-missiltunneller-klos-op-ad-fn-bygning) , are about 100 meters from a UNIFIL base, surprises him.

‘We didn't hear or see any digging or tunnel construction when I was there - I would never hide that. On the other hand, several civilian houses and probably also a 'chicken farm' appeared close to the Blue Line while I was there, which of course we could not/were not allowed to inspect. I remember, on the other hand, that the Israelis had a really good handle on where Hezbollah was. We often visited the IDF on the Israeli side of the border to get their presentation of the situation. And they could pinpoint exactly where they had spotted Hezbollah on the other side of the border,' he says.

Israel's firing on UNIFIL bases has created a huge debate worldwide. The UN and a number of countries, including Israel's allies, have strongly condemned Israeli actions.

Israel itself says that it defends itself against Hezbollah, and that Hezbollah uses UNIFIL as human shields.

BT has reached out to UNIFIL and UNTSO for comment.

UNTSO referred UNIFIL who has not yet returned.