The UN’s Kosher Stamp for Terror

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Tablet

<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east/articles/united-nations-kosher-stamp-terror-unifil-unrwa>

Earlier this week, the Israeli Knesset took a first step toward banning the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) from the country, following a series of revelations over the past year of its intimate, decadelong partnership with Hamas. Predictably, the United States joined the U.N. Security Council in ‘strongly’ [warning](https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/press-statement-united-nations-relief-and-works-agency-palestine-refugees-near-east-unrwa) against any attempts to ‘dismantle or diminish UNRWA’s operations and mandate,’ urging Israel to ‘respect the privileges and immunities of UNRWA.’ Although the agency was shown, among other things, to have paid salaries to leading perpetrators of the Oct. 7 atrocities and allowed the terror organization to locate its combat headquarters and data centers under its schools, there is supposedly ‘no alternative’ to UNRWA, or so the U.S. ambassador to the U.N. [insisted](https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-by-ambassador-linda-thomas-greenfield-at-a-un-security-council-briefing-on-the-middle-east-2/).

UNRWA is not the only U.N. body that is receiving the full-throated support of the Biden administration despite actively cooperating with terrorists. On the northern front, the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) plays a similar role by allowing Hezbollah strike force members to use its bases as physical cover for the terrorist organization’s tunnel networks and for the underground staging areas from which it intended to launch a bloody invasion of Israel’s Galilee. Following the same warped logic it applied to UNRWA, Team Biden-Harris is now making the continuation and indeed the strengthening of UNIFIL’s role in southern Lebanon a key element of its proposal for an end to Israel’s operation against Hezbollah.

UNIFIL, in its current iteration, was given a mandate in 2006 via U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701 to help ensure that the area south of the Litani River would remain free of any armed presence save its own and that of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Resolution 1701 was ostensibly meant to end the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war on terms that would prevent the Lebanese-based terror army from launching more attacks against Israel by giving the Israelis a demilitarized zone on their northern border enforced by international troops. The catch was that UNIFIL would implement its mandate in support of and in coordination with the Lebanese government and the LAF—which are both controlled by Hezbollah. Rather than decrease Hezbollah’s strength on Israel’s border, the group’s armed presence south of the Litani grew exponentially under UNIFIL’s oversight.

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Just how blatantly Hezbollah operated with UNIFIL’s blessing became clear after Israel launched its invasion of southern Lebanon on Sept. 30. IDF units operating close to Israel’s northern border uncovered the openings of elaborate, large-scale Hezbollah tunnel networks a few [yards](https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/hezbollah-tunnel-entrances-abut-u-n-peacekeeping-position-israel-alleges-4b821c03) away from UNIFIL positions. It was clearly impossible for UNIFIL commanders not to have been fully aware of the construction of those positions and their use by large squads of armed Hezbollah militants who moved in and out. Needless to say, the construction and deployment of Hezbollah’s tunnel network, which made a mockery of UNIFIL’s supposed role in demilitarizing southern Lebanon, was never reported back to the U.N. through official channels or made public. Instead, UNIFIL paid local Hezbollah operatives and supporters to act as contractors and provide other services, essentially melding its functions with those of the terrorist army for which it was providing cover.

To be sure, the existence of a large network of Hezbollah attack tunnels near Israel’s border was hardly a secret, even if the scale of the network would surprise the Israeli military. In December 2018-January 2019, the IDF first uncovered cross-border tunnels all in UNIFIL’s area of operation. The tunnels were cut into the rocky terrain of south Lebanon, and would have required the movement of a tremendous amount of earth. Yet the U.N. force in the area somehow heard nothing, saw nothing, and until Israel uncovered the tunnels, said nothing. UNIFIL only bestirred itself to comment when the IDF moved in to dismantle Hezbollah’s infrastructure—not to denounce the terror organization for blatantly abusing its hospitality and violating its mandate, but by refusing to withdraw from its positions adjacent to the terror group’s fortifications in order to keep Israel from blowing them up.

UNIFIL was not the only partner to this comedy of providing cover for terrorists under the guise of peacekeeping. UNIFIL could also blame its Lebanese partner, the LAF, for denying it access to Hezbollah’s tunnel openings. In fact, it was convenient for UNIFIL to do so. Every year since 2018, the U.N. secretary-general reported the LAF’s collusion with Hezbollah as an excuse for UNIFIL’s inaction, and every year, the U.S. renewed UNIFIL’s mandate, and then continued to fund both the U.N.’s terror support force and its LAF partner. Both pillars of UNSCR 1701 were meanwhile serving as shields for Hezbollah.

More direct forms of collusion with Hezbollah were not restricted to the LAF, either. Recently captured Hezbollah fighters have reportedly told Israeli interrogators that the group had bribed UNIFIL personnel to use their positions. Moreover, Hezbollah allegedly took control of UNIFIL cameras installed in their positions near the border and used them to collect intelligence on Israel troop placements and movements inside Israel.

In response to these direct accusations of UNIFIL’s collaboration with Hezbollah, the force’s deputy spokesperson retorted that she ‘would take anonymous stories with a grain of salt,’ adding that ‘Peacekeepers are impartial, though that has not stopped both sides from accusing us of supporting or spying for the other.’

The thing is, though, that accusations of assisting Hezbollah in collecting intelligence have come not just from captured Hezbollah fighters but also from within UNIFIL’s own ranks. In 2018, a [story](http://www.lejdd.fr/international/moyen-orient/au-liban-le-blues-des-casques-bleus-3578882) in the French press quoted a high-ranking Irish UNIFIL officer who relayed how some contingents regularly pass on intelligence to Hezbollah: ‘I can attest that the Indonesian Blue Helmets constantly report Israeli movements to various Lebanese actors,’ the UNIFIL officer said.

Hezbollah has also infiltrated UNIFIL through its civilian employees. In the same French report, a commander in the Finnish contingent of UNIFIL disclosed that several of the Lebanese civilians working for the force ‘do not hide that they belong to Hezbollah.’

Besides acting as human shields, providing intelligence, and employing Hezbollah members, UNIFIL also [boosts](https://unifil.unmissions.org/joint-tour-tyre-senior-unifil-and-local-officials-boost-local-economy) Hezbollah’s local economy and serves as its support base in south Lebanon. In fact, this was the revamped UNIFIL’s calling card right from the get-go in 2006. A couple of months after UNSCR 1701 was passed, the U.N. mission [explained](https://news.un.org/en/story/2006/10/195082) how the peacekeepers stimulate the local economy in the Hezbollah-controlled region by purchasing commodities, renting apartments, enrolling their children in schools, and hosting visitors who help fuel the local tourist industry. ‘The soldiers spend a lot of money here,’ the mission’s then-acting chief administrative officer said at the time. In addition, UNIFIL procures from local companies.

At one point, UNIFIL [claimed](https://www.executive-magazine.com/economics-policy/how-peace-pays) that by employing some 800 staff, it was the largest single local employer of Lebanese, whom it also helped to introduce to other U.N. projects in other countries—possibly helping Hezbollah to expand its global network. ‘Most of the Lebanese who started off with UNIFIL in the early years have now become permanent U.N. staff members all over the world,’ said a former UNIFIL spokesman in 2010.

Moreover, UNIFIL’s symbiotic relationship with Hezbollah has led to the funding of tens of millions of dollars worth of projects in the terror group’s strongholds, including sports fields and rehabilitation facilities, photovoltaic systems to provide electricity, refurbishing dilapidated buildings, and providing medical and dental care at its clinics. These projects were supposed to build trust with the locals in order to allow UNIFIL to implement its mandate and patrol freely.

Hezbollah and its base, and the LAF, have been happy to cash in on a steady stream of UNIFIL dollars while simply ignoring the mandate to demilitarize. For UNIFIL-contributing countries, the process effectively became one of depositing payments in Hezbollah’s bank accounts in order to continue with the fiction of the mandate and to keep their soldiers in the field from being killed by Hezbollah, which controls the region socially, economically, and militarily. Or did, before Israel, having learned its lesson in Gaza, invaded southern Lebanon and destroyed the terror army’s elaborate tunnel systems and bases while decapitating its entire leadership structure countrywide.

While the Biden administration has been particularly eager to fund terror organizations through U.N. cutouts, the first Trump administration was hardly immune to the charms of this deadly dance with Hezbollah under the guise of ‘competing with Iran in Lebanon.’ After the implosion of the Lebanese financial system in 2019, Washington was moved to find ways to send cash and other aid to the LAF. UNIFIL was enlisted through 2022 as a [vehicle](https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/unifil-ramps-logistical-support-to-laf) to provide, as ‘temporary and special measures,’ food, fuel, medicine, and logistical support to the LAF—despite, or perhaps because of, UNIFIL’s and the LAF’s subservience to Hezbollah.

In 2020, then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the Lebanophiles working for him decided that the time was right, shortly before the 2020 election to launch the maritime border delineation process between Lebanon and Israel, which was later forced on Israel by Joe Biden. Washington needed to keep funding UNIFIL and renew its mandate because Hezbollah’s cutouts, with whom the Americans were negotiating, demanded that the talks take place at the UNIFIL headquarters and under the U.N.’s aegis. Moreover, UNIFIL would be essential for the second plank of the deal: demarcating the land border.

In other words, for Washington—much like for France, which has its own investments in Lebanon, and contributes one of the larger UNIFIL contingents—the function of UNIFIL, and the need to keep it funded, has little to nothing to do with its actual mandate of demilitarizing and keeping Hezbollah away from Israel’s northern border. It’s simply one instrument, along with the LAF, to manage relations with the real power in Lebanon, which is Hezbollah’s patron—Iran.

Having a U.N. agency of multinational toy soldiers in white armored personnel carriers backed by the U.S. and ostensibly representing the ‘international community,’ whose actual function is to shelter military positions inhabited by Iran’s chief terror army, presents a real threat to Israel’s national security. Given its function and purpose, UNIFIL will always necessarily be enmeshed with Hezbollah and with its ‘social support base’—employing them, relying on their goodwill, and servicing them. Because this partnership with a terror group serves U.S. objectives, and because UNIFIL’s ability to appear to fulfill its mandate requires it to whitewash and buy off Hezbollah, Israel will find itself having to compromise its security to appease its superpower ally, while the latter will utilize its U.N. instrument to place constraints on Israel’s sovereign decision-making.

By its nature, this dance with a terror army is obscene. Letting that army entrench itself on Israel’s northern border for the past two decades under U.N. protection is a joint act of madness by American policymakers of both parties and especially by Israel’s leaders, who can only thank some form of divine protection for the fact that the attack tunnels that UNIFIL helped shelter were never used to massacre Israeli civilians in the north, on a scale much larger than the attacks that UNRWA helped to support and perpetrate in the south.

Yet it’s no surprise, on the eve of the election, that the Biden administration is tripping over itself to resuscitate the UNIFIL-LAF arrangement in Lebanon and impose it again on Israel—which is what the U.S. peace proposal for Lebanon, leaked by an Israeli TV channel this week, is all about. In addition to beefing up UNIFIL, the administration wants to enlarge the LAF, and underwrite legions of new recruits—many of whom will no doubt come from Hezbollah’s support base, if not Hezbollah itself.

The added twist in the proposal is the formation of a so-called monitoring mechanism which would include the U.S.—an outgrowth of the 2022 maritime deal brokered by special envoy Amos Hochstein, which introduced the idea of Washington as a direct arbiter between Israel and Hezbollah. Now, Hochstein wants to formalize this role. As a bonus, his proposal also calls for picking up where he left off with his maritime deal to initiate a land border demarcation process. Inserting the U.S. in this so-called monitoring mechanism as an official arbiter reaffirms the status of Lebanon as a [special province](https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/israel-middle-east/articles/ottoman-american-empire) under U.S. protection, where Israeli security interests would need to pass through Washington. If Israel has intel about new Hezbollah tunnels, it can pass it along to the CENTCOM security coordinator who will then share the intel with the LAF—which is controlled by Hezbollah—or with a ‘strengthened’ UNIFIL, whose role as Hezbollah’s protector in the south has been well established for the past decades, and at the same time has never been more urgent.

Luckily, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu appears to understand the stakes much better than American politicians do. In an address on Thursday, Netanyahu had this to say about the American plan: ‘The agreements, documents, proposals and numbers—[UNSCR] 1701, 1559—with all due respect, are not the main point. The main point is our ability and determination to enforce security, thwart attacks against us, and act against the arming of our enemies, as necessary and despite any pressure and constraints. This is the main point.’

In the event Donald Trump wins Tuesday’s election, Israel will likely have a wider margin vis-à-vis Iran and its proxies. However, Jerusalem should not underestimate how similar Republican impulses toward Lebanon are to those of Team Obama, even if their ostensible motives are different. On the right, the growing, poisonous sectarianism that’s been infused into Lebanon policy in Washington—a toxicity that the Lebanese (and Lebanese American) lobbyists have consciously encouraged and exploited—fantastically views Lebanon as an arena for ‘empowering Middle Eastern Christians.’ Another, related variant draws on cliches about Lebanon as the ‘Paris’ or ‘Switzerland’ of the Middle East—a naturally pro-Western society that’s just waiting for the proper amount of U.S. political and financial investment, the same way Iraq was a natural democracy waiting for U.S. liberation in order to fulfill the reality-free fantasies of Freedom Agenda ideologues. In reality, Lebanon is a bankrupt terror haven controlled by Iran whose fake ‘state institutions’ are run by sectarian jackals who are unable to supply basic services like electricity to their supporters. Yet that hardly stops Republican lawmakers in Congress from being among the most ardent supporters of the disastrous Obama policy of underwriting the LAF.

None of these deranged fantasies—whether of an American partnership with the mullahs in Tehran that runs through Beirut, or of a ‘Lebanese state’ built on infusions of U.S. dollars into ‘institutions’ controlled by Hezbollah—can alter reality, however. Washington can entertain itself by pumping billions into the UNIFIL-LAF charade to maintain the appearance of running its own special Levantine province. For Israel, such Napoleonic parade ground antics will remain detached from the reality on the ground. Only by preserving its freedom to act independently and at will to remove threats from its northern border will Israel be able to live in peace.