The Loneliness of the long-distance peacekeepers: the experience of UNFICYP and UNIFIL

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Introduction

The United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remain two of the longest running operations in UN peacekeeping history (dating from 1964 and 1978 respectively). The great changes wrought by the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War seem to have passed the two forces by and the prospects for peaceful settlements appear to be as distant as ever. In the context of seemingly inexorable growth in demands upon UN peacekeepers, coupled with worsening financial pressures on the UN, the value of these long-standing and apparently hopeless missions is being reassessed.

Why, it is asked, when there is an ever increasing pressure on the UN's limited resources should the UN bear the burden of such major forces, with all their attendant manpower, material and financial costs merely to help preserve unsatisfactory *de facto* geopolitical situations? The *"failure"* of UNFICYP and UNIFIL to resolve the disputes in Cyprus and Lebanon is advanced by some as a justification for their run-down and eventual abandonment. Indeed, this trend is already evident in Cyprus where UNFICYP may yet become little more than a token monitoring force.

Are such criticisms of UNFICYP and UNIFIL valid? Have the two UN Forces succeded or failed? One point that should be emphasised from the outset is that peacekeepers cannot by themselves bring about the resolution of a particular conflict. Their role in conflict management is clearly secondary. That is, whilst peacekeepers can help to create the right environment within which an agreement may be more easily achieved, lasting political settlements remain the province of the conflicting parties involved. Thus, any assessment of the *"success"* or *"failure"* of UNFICYP and UNIFIL should be made in the light of the inherent limitations of the peacekeepers' roles. This paper seeks to address the questions raised above and highlight some of

the on-the-ground political-geographic realities and difficulties the UN forces in Cyprus and Lebanon have encountered over the years. The two forces' mandates are examined and it is argued that, in these two cases at least, the peacekeeper's activities have extended far beyond the narrow bounds of their original mandates. The paper concludes with an analysis of current dilemmas and prospects facing UNFICYP and UNIFIL, an assessment of the dangers of removing these peacekeeping operations prior to any political settlement, and the lessons to be learnt from their joint experience in UN conflict management.

UNFICYP

In June 1993 the British contingent of UNFICYP took over patrols and monitoring of the "green line" of Nicosia from the departing Canadian soldiers. Almost three decades ago, in December 1963, it was the British Army that was responsible for drawing what was supposed to be a temporary *cordon sanitaire* between the fighting Greek and Turkish Cypriots in the old walled city of Nicosia (Figure 1). In fact this line has become a symbol of ethnic segregation and what is called the Cyprus Problem. Prior to the creation of the United Nations Force in March 1964, the British were involved in *"tacitly partitioning parts of the country"* (Stagenga, 1968: 40), in an effort to stabilise and contain inter-communal violence between the two main communities. Thus, by the time a multi-national force (including the British) started its peacekeeping mission, the island of Cyprus was already criss-crossed with fortifications and *de facto* political barriers. Indeed, as soon as UNFICYP was authorised:

> *"Both Cypriot communities were aware*
> *that once this force was deployed the then*
> *existing patterns of coercive control*
> *throughout the island would be "frozen".*
> *Both sides therefore were intent on*
> *consolidation or extending their control*

Figure 1: The UN Buffer Zone in Nicosia
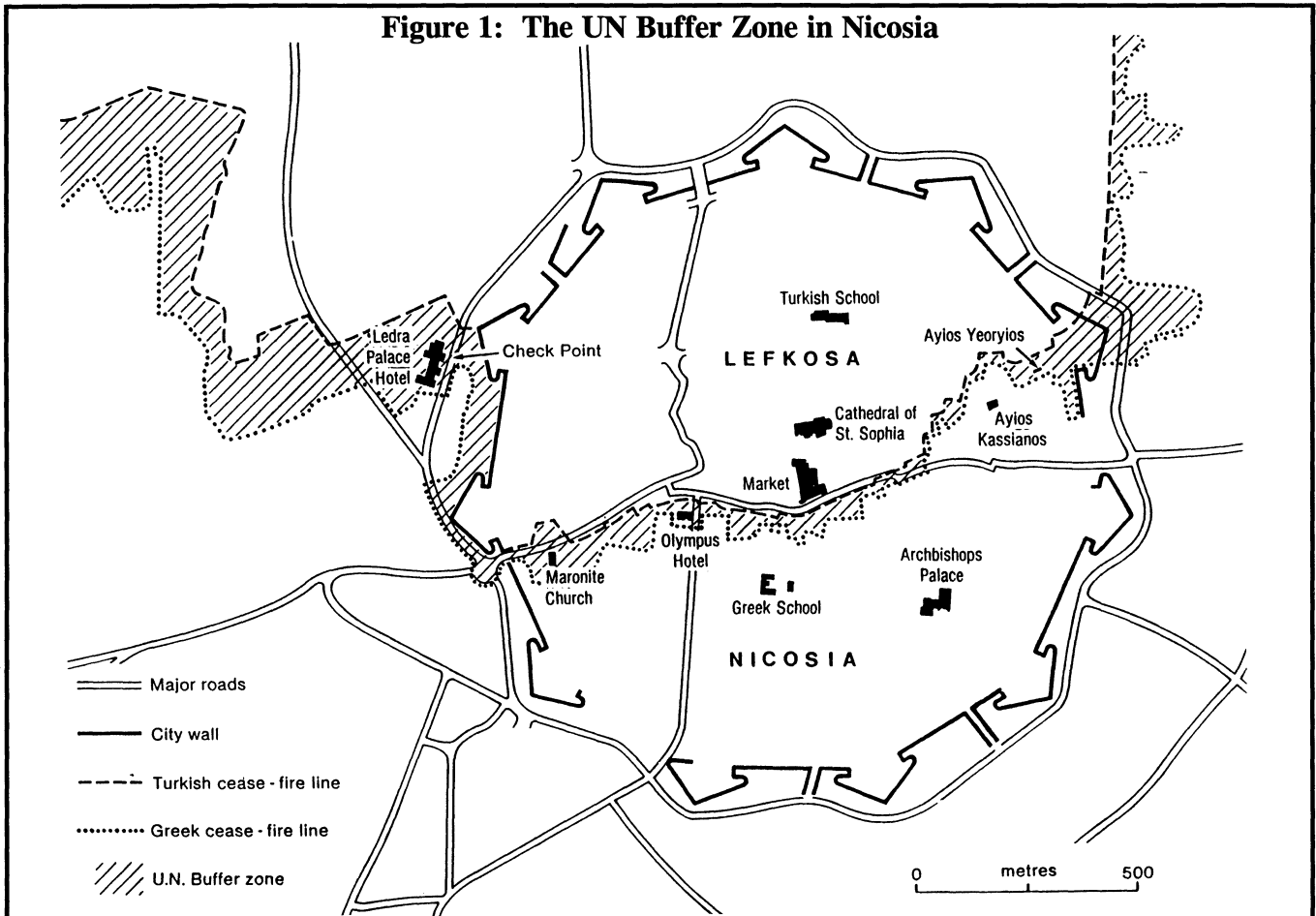
before UNFICYP could intervene" (Patrick, 1976: 60).

In the summer of 1974 the island was partitioned into two, after an abortive *coup d'etat* organised by extremist Greek Cypriots and the Greek junta in Athens, followed by a military occupation of 37 per cent of the island by the mainland Turkish Army. UNFICYP's role was changed from that of an inter-communal constabulary force throughout the island into that of a buffer zone monitoring operation. In 1993 this role continues and once again Britain, the old colonial force is the main peacekeeper. It may well be asked, what has this long-standing operation achieved? The two Cypriot communities seem no nearer a solution, and the troop-contributing governments are increasingly impatient at the lack of progress. As UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali noted prior to UN sponsored inter-communal negotiations in 1992:

> *"If a Force has for 28 years maintained conditions in which a peaceful settlement to a dispute can be negotiated but negotiations have not succeeded, it has to be asked whether that Force has a priority claim on the scarce resources which*

Member States can make available to the Organisation's peacekeeping activities" (UN Doc. S/23780, 3 April 1992, para. 33).

UNIFIL

The UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon came about as a direct consequence of Israel's March 1978 incursion into south Lebanon codenamed "Operation Litani". The Israeli offensive was ostensibly triggered by a *fedayeen* raid in Israel on 11 March that year. Palestinian guerrillas captured an Israeli bus on the Tel-Aviv - Haifa road. The ensuing gun-battle between the Palestinians and the Israeli security forces left 37 dead and a further 82 wounded. This act of terrorism gave Israel a good international public relations foundation from which to justify an invasion.

The swiftness and scale of "Operation Litani", launched on the night of 14-15 March and involving some 20,000 to 30,000 Israeli troops, made it clear that the invasion of south Lebanon was a well planned and prepared endeavour rather than simply a knee-jerk retaliatory action in response to the *fedayeen* raid. By 19 March the

Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) had completed the occupation of southern Lebanon south of the Litani river save for a few small areas, the most significant of which was the "Tyre Pocket" (Figure 2). The Israelis thus captured some 1,100 km^2 of Lebanese territory at the cost, according to Lebanese sources of 1,168 Lebanese dead, approximately half of whom were civilians, and the creation of some 285,000 refugees. For their part the Palestinian fighters suffered relatively light casualties as most guerrillas withdrew in the face of such overwhelming odds.

Figure 2: *"Operation Litani"*
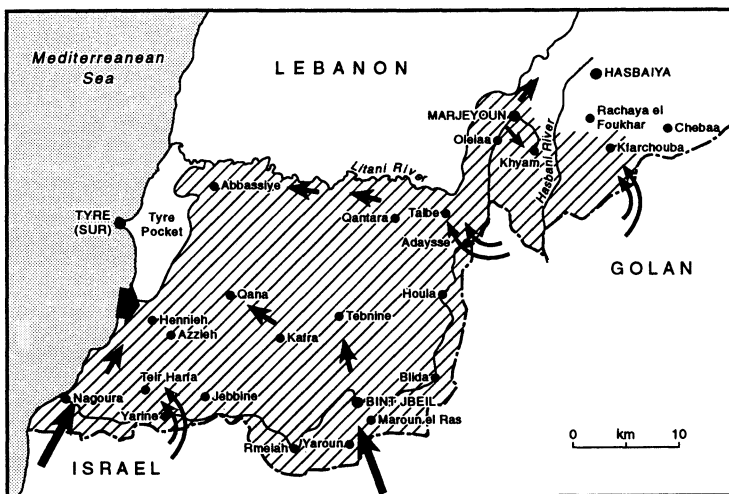
The Israeli action seriously threatened to derail the Carter administration's Camp David strategy in the Middle East, the objective of which was to bring about an Israeli-Egyptian rapprochement and peace accord. A prolonged Israeli occupation of south Lebanon raised the strong possibility of a breakdown in US mediated negotiations between Egypt and Israel, then at a delicate stage. Washington acted swiftly to save its Middle East policy. The United States chose to operate through the United Nations and precipitated a UN response of almost unheard of alacrity. On 19 March the US proposed the formation of a peacekeeping force to replace the Israeli military presence in Lebanon. In a little under 24 hours the UN Security Council adopted Resolutions 425 and 426 creating UNIFIL, which began its deployment in south Lebanon on 22 March.

Over sixteen years after that initial deployment, UNIFIL remains in south Lebanon, as do the Israeli presence and the *"security zone"* the force was brought into being to replace. UNIFIL is apparently no closer to fulfilling the terms of its mandate than it was in March, 1978, and it is clearly ironic that the word *"Interim"* was chosen

as part of the peacekeeping force's title. Many of UNIFIL's problems and *"failings"* can be traced back to the unrealistic terms of its original mandate given only partial cooperation of the conflicting parties. This is also partly true of UNFICYP which had a more feasible mandate than UNIFIL, but one that was open to opposing interpretations from the rival parties.
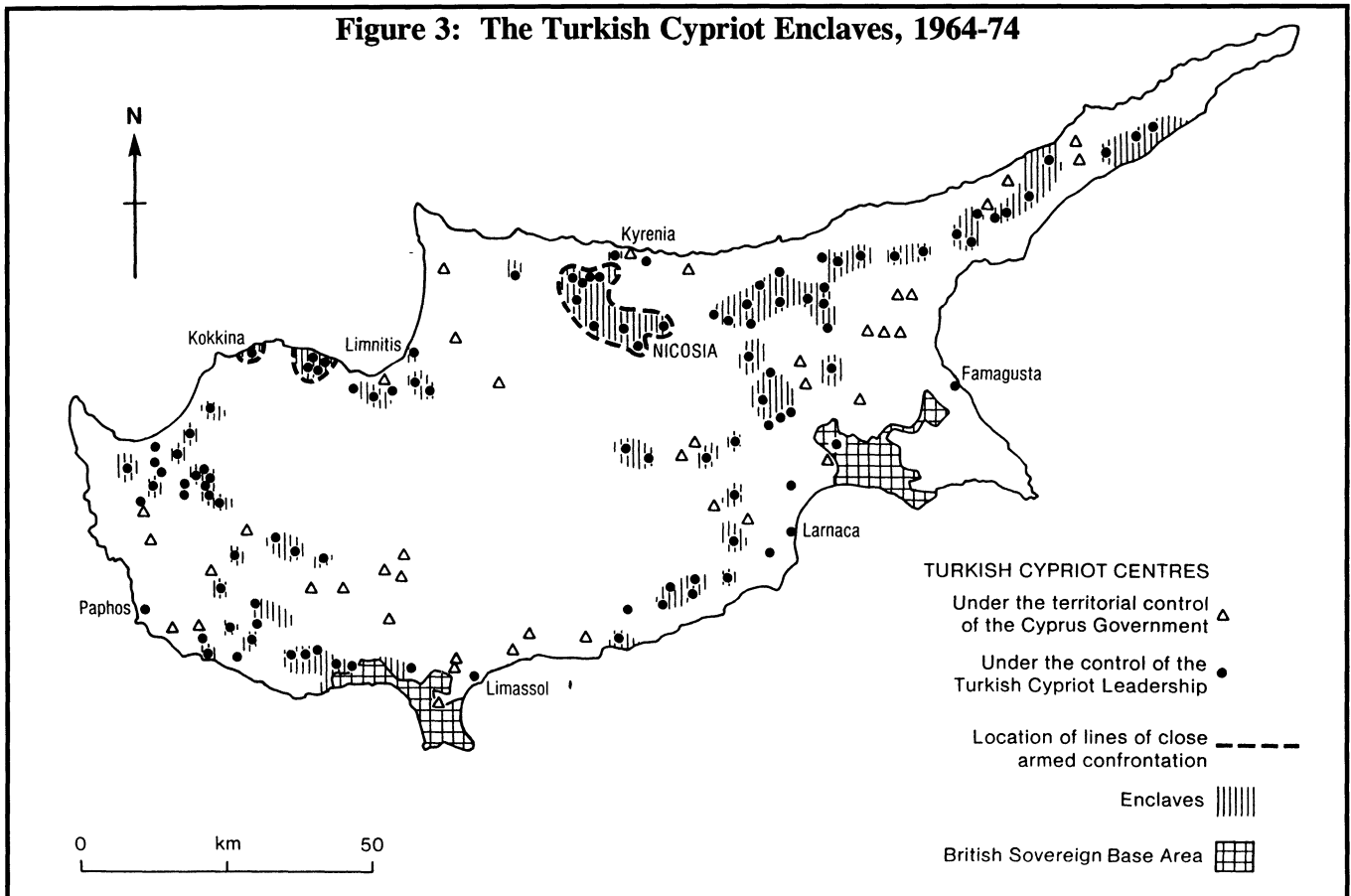
UN mandate and the cooperation of the parties

UN Security Council Resolution 186 which established UNFICYP recommended:

> *"that the function of the Force (UNFICYP) should be in the interest of preserving international peace and security, to use its best efforts to contribute to the maintenance and restoration of law and order and a return to normal conditions."*

During its first four years of operations UNFICYP had helped to reduce the level of violence in Cyprus. By 1968, the monthly average of armed incidents had dropped from 350 (in 1964) to less than ten. The reduction in armed fighting created the degree of calm necessary for political negotiations to resume (Harbottle, 1970). So in its military role UNFICYP was successful.

Nevertheless, one of the key problems facing UNFICYP was the fact that both sides adopted their own self-serving interpretations of the UN mandate. The Greek Cypriot leadership wanted to extend their effective territorial control over the whole island, including the tiny Turkish Cypriot held enclaves (Figure 3). Whilst the United Nations had effectively recognised the legitimacy of the Government of Cyprus, even without the Turkish Cypriot leadership, UNFICYP could not be seen to be *"as an arm of the (Greek Cypriot) government"* (U Thant, UN Doc. S/5950, 10 September 1964, para. 220). The Greek Cypriots saw the UN's role as basically one of eliminating the efforts of the Turkish Cypriots to create a territorial patchwork partition. In this sense, the stationing of 'blue berets' around vulnerable Turkish enclaves was interpreted as helping to preserve an unsatisfactory *status quo* by freezing *de facto* lines of division. But UNFICYP could not

Figure 3: The Turkish Cypriot Enclaves, 1964-74

TURKISH CYPRIOT CENTRES

Under the territorial control
of the Cyprus Government △

Under the control of the ●
Turkish Cypriot Leadership

Location of lines of close ____
armed confrontation

Enclaves ||||||

British Sovereign Base Area ▦

simply allow Greek Cypriot fighters to have their way, which would have led to even greater bloodshed. The Turkish Cypriot leadership sought UN protection, but they also argued that the Greek Cypriot administration should not be viewed as the legitimate authority for the whole island. This meant that it was impossible for UNFICYP to please both sides at once.

The ambiguous part of the mandate asking UNFICYP *"to contribute to a return to normal conditions"* was a particularly delicate matter. The Secretary-General sought to avoid any interpretation of this phrase that would serve the political interests of one community over the other. Thus, the UN peacekeepers sought to render assistance *"in the amelioration of day-to-day administrative, economic, social or judicial difficulties arising from the division of the communities"* (U Thant, UN Doc. S/6102, 12 December 1964, para. 24). To do this, UNFICYP became an important communication bridge to sort out the every day problems created by artificial physical barriers between the two communities (Patrick, 1976; Grundy-Warr, 1987). Whilst activities such as escorting farmers to fields close to lines of confrontation, taking in essential supplies to beleaguered and isolated Turkish Cypriot villages, and encouraging local-level

meetings between the representatives of both sides, did help to restore some measure of mutual trust between ordinary Cypriots, UNFICYP could do little to alter the entrenched opposition of the leaderships of both communities. UNFICYP did not succeed in dismantling many of the physical barriers, but it was the activities of political leaders on either side, the interference of outside powers, particularly Athens and Ankara, in Cypriot affairs, and the localised trouble-making of extremist groups, that tended to harden politico-territorial divisions in Cyprus.

UNFICYP was in no position to prevent the eventual political partition of the island, although they did succeed in preventing the Turkish Army from capturing the Nicosia International Airport. They also assisted refugees wherever they could. Immediately following the island-wide cease-fire on 16 August 1974, the blue berets set about establishing a demilitarised area separating the Turks from the Cyprus National Guard (Figure 4). The first two years of buffer zone deployment were very tense, and there were considerable population exchanges of Greek Cypriots leaving their homes and land in the Turkish-held north and of a smaller number of Turkish Cypriots moving south to north. Although the period from 1974 to the present day has witnessed cease-fire violations and

Figure 4: The *de facto* Partition of Cyprus

(situation prior to withdrawal of Canadian and Danish contingents 1992-93)
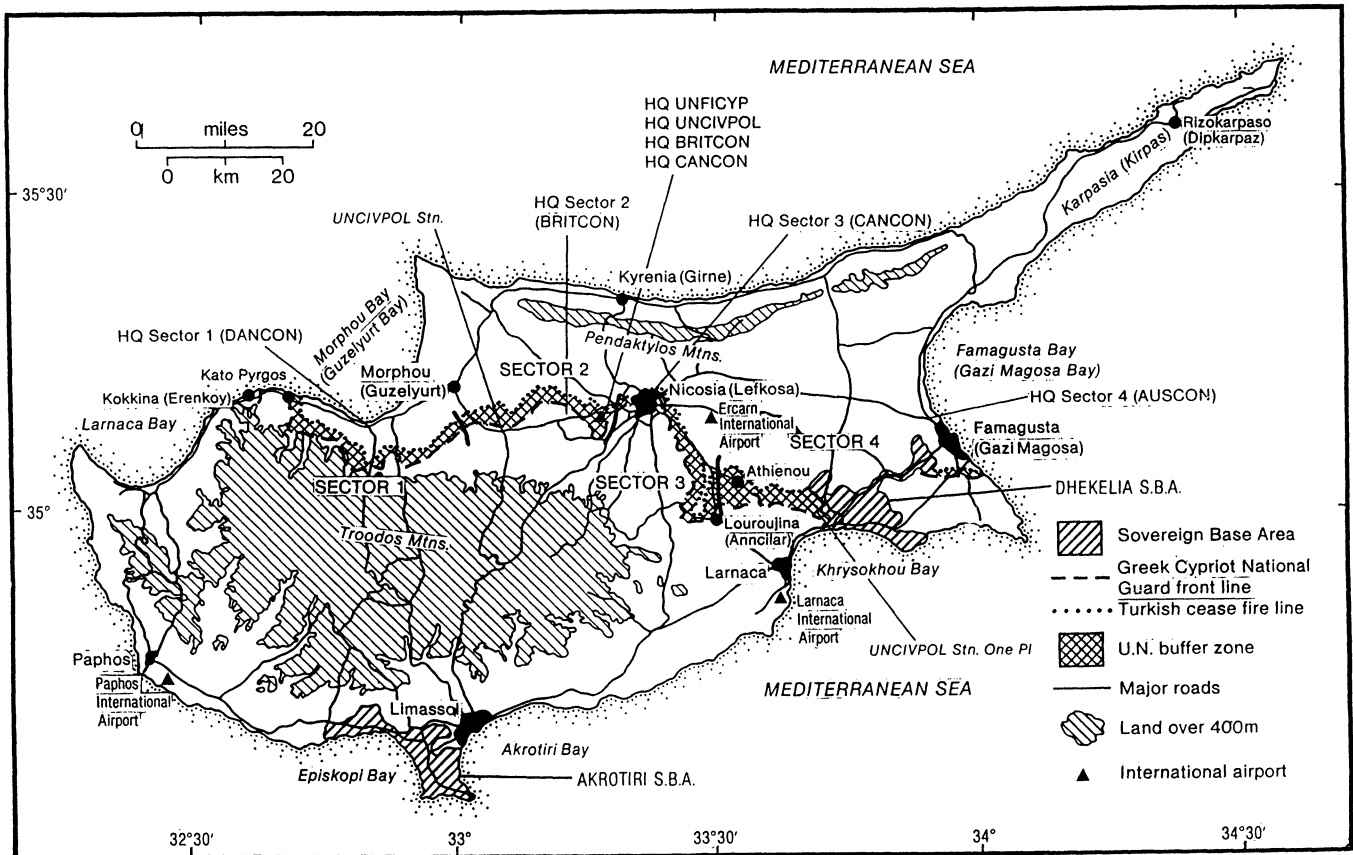
unauthorised movements within the UN-monitored buffer zone, the military *status quo* has been maintained. In fact, the situation has sometimes been so quiet that it can be summed up by the words of one former UNFICYP officer, *"when a frog croaks in the buffer zone the commander wants to know about it"*.

Whilst the military observation role of the UN is primary, UNFICYP has carried out measures within the buffer zone that have helped to alleviate day-to-day problems associated with a strip of land that divides the natural resources of a small island. Farmers of both communities, but mostly Greek, work within the demilitarised area. UNFICYP also monitor and help to manage precious cross-buffer zone water resources, mostly sub-surface and piped. These activities are a continuation of the pre-1974 socio-economic tasks performed to help towards the ambiguous *"return to normal conditions"*. Of course, life is far from normal to anybody who lives and works near to and within the buffer zone. The cease-fire line forming the zone's northern edge remains a much more

impenetrable barrier to most ordinary Cypriots than any *de jure* international boundary.

Peacekeepers can only do their job well if they have the formal or tacit support of the host government and opposing groups. The Cyprus Government (Greek Cypriot administration) has given UNFICYP its full support, not least because it is able to publicise and argue its case through UN channels. In contrast, the Turkish Cypriot leadership of the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' (following the unilateral declaration of independence in November 1983) is not recognised as a legitimate state by the UN or the international community. This has restricted UNFICYP's relations with the northern authorities and freedom of movement in the north. For example, UN personnel have only been allowed to move along certain main roads, and their major movements in the northern territory have been mostly restricted to a regular 'northwind patrol' taking humanitarian supplies to the enclaved and dwindling Greek Cypriot population still living on the Karpas peninsula. Even so, Turkish Cypriot frustration

with the UN Organisation falls short of complete opposition to UNFICYP, which after all forms a blue buffer between their *de facto* state and the larger Greek Cypriot population and territory to the south. A more important security guarantor for the Turkish Cypriots has been the presence of upwards of 30,000 mainland Turkish troops in the north.

"Mission Impossible" in Lebanon

The key objectives of UNIFIL's mandate as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 425 were:

1. to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli Forces
2. to help restore international peace and security; and
3. to assist the government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority to the area.

The urgency attending the initiation of the peacekeeping operation precluded any possibility of adequate advanced planning. This factor, coupled with the ambiguity of its mandate, the nature of the conflict and the almost complete lack of cooperation from the parties concerned presented UNIFIL with a well nigh impossible operational task. Indeed, Heiburg (1990) argues that *"almost every assumption on which UNIFIL was based and most of the guidelines the Force received proved to be insufficient, inappropriate or unworkable"*. For example, as James (1990) points out the the third aim of the mandate outlined above simply glossed over the fact that *"..the Government* [of Lebanon] *had not controlled the area for a number of years, and was in no position to attempt to reassert its authority"*.

Not only did UNIFIL lack the full backing of the UN Security Council, the USSR having abstained and the US being more concerned with its strategic alliance with Israel in the Middle East (notwithstanding the US role in initiating the operation), but the UN Force also lacked the backing of the parties involved in the conflict save for the ineffectual Lebanese government.

Israel's consent to the plan to deploy peacekeepers in south Lebanon was neither granted nor sought. Only intense international pressure, particularly from the US, which had, after all, inspired the plan, brought about reluctant and partial Israeli compliance. From the outset the Israelis regarded UNIFIL as having been imposed upon them by the US without adequate consultation. Indeed, Israeli Foreign Minister of the day, Dayan, pressed Washington for a two day delay in the Security Council's action so that the Israeli case could be heard. The request was refused, provoking frustration and resentment in Israel. The Israeli view that developed thereafter was that UNIFIL posed a threat to Israel's security on its northern border, undermining and inhibiting the security arrangements the Israelis had developed in southern Lebanon. The Israelis accused the UN Force of devoting its efforts too much to confronting Israel's proxy militia in the area, the South Lebanon Army (S.L.A.), rather than interdicting Palestinian *"terrorist"* activities. Furthermore, Israel alleged that UN commanders on the ground were engaging in *"sweetheart deals"* with the guerrillas, that is turning a blind eye to *fedayeen* activities in return for a quiet life and that they were providing "terrorists" with sanctuary from IDF pursuit and counter-measures.

In contrast, UNIFIL blamed the Israelis for forcing the UN peacekeepers to *"face both ways"* by supporting the SLA in the south and maintaining an IDF presence there, thus detracting from UNIFIL's capacity to prevent Palestinian attacks on Israel. Despite the distractions presented by the SLA and IDF, the UN stated that the peacekeeping force was remarkably effective in forestalling infiltrations and that attacks on Israel were usually of the *"over the head"* type - long range shelling of Israel from guerrilla positions north of the UNIFIL area. Some Israeli leaders have apparently admitted that it was precisely because UNIFIL was so successful in preventing infiltrations through their zone that the guerrillas were forced to resort to long-range shelling and rocket attacks, circumventing the UN presence (Pelcovits, 1984). Allegations that the UN force was guilty of being "passive" or even of "collaboration" with the PLO were vehemently rejected by the UN, which pointed to the willingness of UN peacekeeping detachments in Lebanon to sustain losses as evidence to the contrary.

For its part, the PLO conditionally accepted UNIFIL as a useful buffer against Israeli reprisals, but frustrated the force's moves to occupy Tyre and retained some 300 fighters (700 according to the Israelis) in UNIFIL's area of operations citing

the 1969 Lebanese-PLO Cairo Agreement in support of their right to do so.

UNIFIL's problems were exacerbated by territorial constraints. On their withdrawal from Lebanon the Israeli forces handed over only part of the territory captured during "Operation Litani" to the UN. Instead, what later became known as the "security zone" of approximately five to ten kilometres depth north of the Israeli-Lebanese border, encompassing some 500-600 km² of Lebanese territory was handed over to the SLA. The result of this action was the fragmentation of UNIFIL's deployment on the ground, as the "security zone" divided the UN's now restricted area of operations into two (Figure 5). UNIFIL's role as a buffer between the opposing parties was therefore incomplete. This lack of full integration was further complicated by the somewhat rash decision to site UNIFIL's headquarters at Naqoura, only four kilometres from Israel's northern border on the Mediterranean and thus isolated deep within the Israeli-dominated "security zone".

UNIFIL was therefore faced with a *"mission impossible"*:

> *"It was left with an area of operation inadequate to the task of ensuring against infiltration and shelling. In addition, Israel insisted on looking after its own*

border security, without regard for UNIFIL's mission". (Pelcovits, 1984)

The source of many of the UN Force's shortcomings can be traced back to the fundamental lack of cooperation afforded to UNIFIL by the parties, cooperation which was assumed would be forthcoming in the original mandate.

UNIFIL therefore failed to fulfil the terms of its mandate. In addition the UN force was powerless to prevent Israel's subsequent June 1982 invasion of Lebanon ("Operation Peace for Galilee"), was summarily swept aside and as a result gained the dubious distinction of becoming the first UN peacekeeping force to operate under the military occupation of one of the parties to a conflict. The IDF finally withdrew to the "security zone" in 1985.

Such a seemingly damning assessment of UNIFIL's performance does, however, ignore a whole range of vital activities and roles the UN force undertakes in south Lebanon. UNIFIL enhances the stability and security of its area of operation; has become a significant economic force in the south injecting some US $ 35-40 million into the local economy yearly and thus raising living standards; provides significant humanitarian assistance to the area; maintains the international spotlight on the area

Figure 5: UNIFIL Deployments in 1978
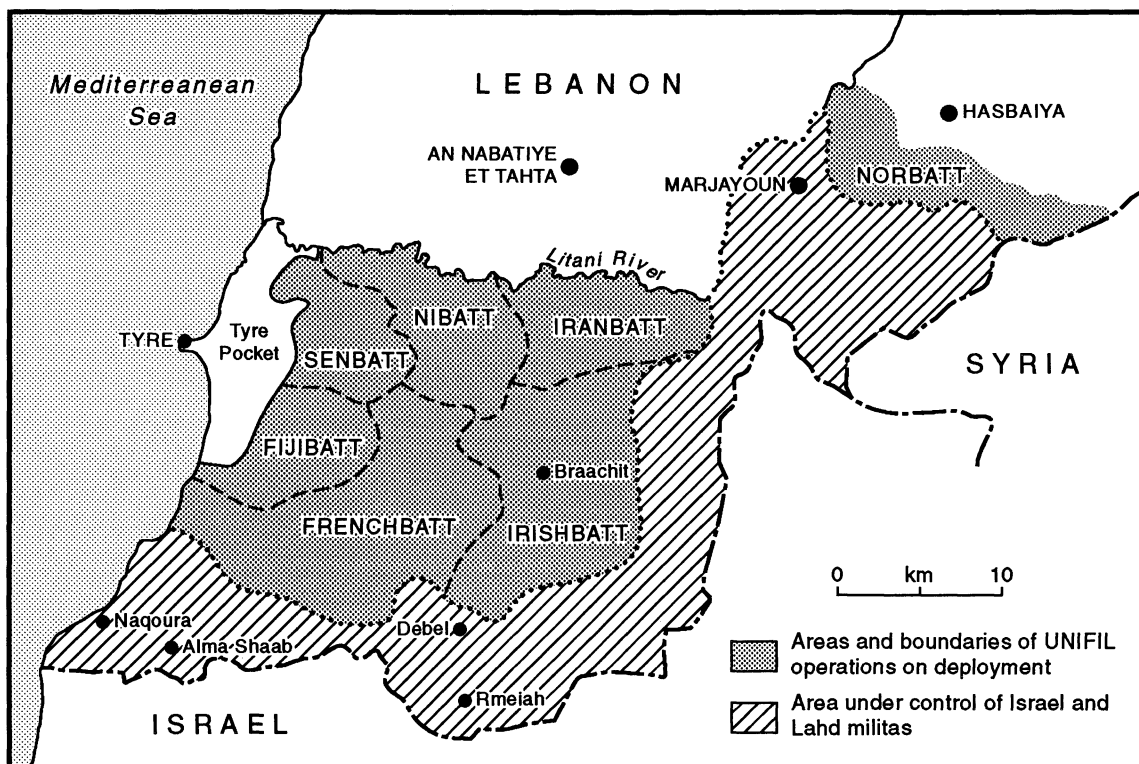
arguably making the Israeli intervention milder; provides a buffer, however porous, between Lebanese based guerrillas and Israel; and significantly, provides a further buffer between the Israelis and the Syrians reducing the potential for an inadvertent confrontation. (Heiburg, 1990).

Perhaps the best way to assess the value of UNIFIL would be to examine the probable consequences of its withdrawal. The removal of UNIFIL would inevitably create a security vacuum in the south and a scramble among the combatants for control of the Force's vacated area of operations. An escalation in conflict between guerrilla forces and Israel and potentially between Syrian troops and the IDF would be highly likely. In addition the relatively stable haven for the civilian population of south Lebanon represented by the UN zone would be removed and a renewed exodus from the south probable.

In light of these important functions, that the force provides, can UNIFIL really be regarded as a "failure"?

Current dilemmas and prospects: UNFICYP rundown

In the period from December 1992 to June 1993, the size of UNFICYP was reduced from over 2,000 personnel to below 1,000. Two of the longest serving contingents in UN peacekeeping history, the Danes and the Canadians, pulled out of the Cyprus mission, leaving only the contingents from Britain and Austria to monitor events in the buffer zone. Figure 4 shows the situation along the buffer zone prior to the troop reductions. Even with the addition of around 350 soldiers from Argentina, which has responded positively to the UN's request for troops, UNFICYP's ability to respond quickly to any cease-fire violations or incidents in or near the buffer zone is limited by overall troop reductions. The problem is that it can take only a relatively minor incident to create serious cross-buffer zone tensions.

There have been some occasions when a thin line of blue berets were unable to prevent Greek Cypriot demonstrators from crossing over to the Turkish-held side. Without the presence of peacekeepers acting as a buffer force there is a greater likelihood of a shooting incident or an outbreak of inter-communal violence, which would

immediately intensify mutual mistrust and suspicion at all levels of society on both sides of the *de facto* partition. Thus, the ground-level micro-diplomacy of peacekeepers is intimately connected to peace-making efforts at the political level. UNFICYP could do little to prevent a major military advance by either side, but it has done much to defuse localised inter-communal incidents which could easily escalate into something far more serious without third-party intervention.

Deadlock

The rundown of UNFICYP is a manifestation of the growing frustration of the troop-contributing states to the continued lack of progress towards a bizonal, bicommunal federal solution. As Day (1993) reported in an earlier issue of the *Boundary and Security Bulletin* (April 1993), the Turkish and Greek Cypriot sides remain opposed on very crucial elements relating to the future political character of the island. These elements include: fundamental differences over proposed territorial adjustments to the Turkish-held zone; the right of return and the status of settlers; the compensation to be paid to persons dispossessed of their property; rights to property; the highly contentious sovereignty issue (the Turkish Cypriots arguing for two separate sovereignties for the two zones); the extent to which each administration could conduct its own foreign policy; and post-settlement transitional arrangements.

The latest UN approach to Cyprus is to suggest a package of confidence-building measures. These were highlighted in UN Resolution 789 (UN Doc. S/24841, 24 November 1992) and most of them imply an enlarged role for UNFICYP, which seems at odds with troop reductions. Amongst the measures suggested are further de-manning arrangements along the buffer zone, particularly for the sensitive *"green line"* of Nicosia; the implementation of UN Resolution 550 (1984) calling for the hand-over of Varosha, a former Greek Cypriot suburb of Famagusta, to UNFICYP. This would allow some 30,000 Greek Cypriot refugees to return to their former properties. It was also suggested that there be a promotion of people-to-people contacts by reducing restrictions of movement across the buffer zone; ending restrictions on the cross-border movements of foreigners; and the implementation of bi-communal projects. All these measures would help to reduce

the almost impenetrable character of the current *de facto* partition.

Such measures were formally proposed during the inter-communal negotiations held in New York between 24-31 May 1993. Nevertheless, the Turkish Cypriot side has firmly rejected these ideas, even with the carrot offered of a partial lifting of a Greek Cypriot economic boycott on the northern territory which has been in place since the partition of 1974. One of the problems on the Turkish Cypriot side is an on-going disagreement over tactics between Rauf Denktash, the president, and his prime minister, Dervis Eroglu. Whilst Denktash has never given away concessions he has been willing to maintain negotiations. Eroglu prefers to confront the UN by arguing the case for a recognition of the *de facto* reality of two separate states in Cyprus, not for some kind of federation. This all means that the prospects of a political settlement in the near future are poor.

Current dilemmas and prospects: UNIFIL overrun

Israel's "Operation Accountability" launched at the end of July 1993 amply demonstrated UNIFIL's shortcomings. The week-long artillery and air assault, prompted by the killing of six Israeli servicemen in the "security zone", left approximately 130 people dead, the majority of whom were civilians; created in excess of a quarter of a million refugees and caused substantial physical damage. UNIFIL was powerless to hinder Israeli activities significantly.

Of course, UNIFIL is in no position to seriously oppose the overwhelming military force of the IDF in southern Lebanon. However, the perceived failure of the UN force, the high cost of the operation, and its seemingly interminable nature has prompted observers to question whether such an expensive, open-ended commitment is justified. There have therefore been calls for a redefinition of UNIFIL's role and possibly a Force rundown in a similar manner to that undertaken in Cyprus.

In fact the US brokered "understanding" between Israel, Lebanon, Syria and the guerrilla forces represents a step (albeit a small one) towards the fulfilment of UNIFIL's mandate. Israel's commitment to only conduct operations against "terrorist" targets rather than south Lebanon's

population as a whole, coupled with the guerrilla's agreement to cease attacks on Israel proper and concentrate on the "security zone", represent a significant change in the ground rules governing the conflict in south Lebanon. The "understanding" limits and manages the conflict and enhances *"international peace and security"*, one of UNIFIL's key mandated aims. Somewhat surprisingly, the "understanding" held despite the fact that nine IDF soldiers were killed by Hezbollah land mines in the "security zone" on 19 August. Israel's only reaction was an air-raid on a Hezbollah target in the Bekaa valley which, the Israelis stressed, was far removed from civilian areas. The conflict will, however, continue, as Syria and Lebanon refuse to restrain and disarm the resistance forces whilst Israel maintains its occupation of south Lebanon.

The agreement also allowed some 300 soldiers of the revitalised Lebanese army to take up positions within UNIFIL's area of operations, thus conforming to the UN forces objective of assisting the Lebanese government to reassert its *"effective authority"* in the south. Attempts have been made in the past to redeploy Lebanese troops to the south in order to take over UNIFIL's positions and role, hitherto with little success. Instead of seeking to replace the UN Force, the Lebanese army is currently engaged in efforts to co-deploy in positions alongside those of the UN.

There is no sign as yet, that Israel is seriously contemplating a withdrawal from south Lebanon. The secret Israeli-PLO breakthrough encompassing recognition and the Gaza-Jericho first plan, formalised by the signature of a joint Declaration of Principles on 13 September 1993 does, however, appear to offer some grounds for optimism. Traditional Israeli thinking regarding south Lebanon, however, dictates that if there are few attacks on the "security zone" then it must be working and should not be lightly given up; alternatively, if the rate of incidents rises, the perceived value of the zone also increases and fuels the argument that the "security zone" should be retained.

It should also be remembered that Israel's concerns in south Lebanon go beyond mere border security. Israel's position in Lebanon is regarded as a strategic asset in her confrontation with Syria. The "security zone" offers the IDF defensible space and early warning facilities in the event of attack from the north as well as a base from which to thrust

north into Lebanon and threaten both Beirut and
Damascus. In this context Lebanon in the
aftermath of the 1991 Treaty of Brotherhood,
Cooperation and Coordination with Syria (termed
an "Anchluss" by Israel) is regarded as nothing
more than a Syrian district. Thus Lebanese
soldiers are seen simply as Syrian troops in a
different guise. South Lebanon also provides Israel
with an opportunity to play off the Lebanese
factions against one another in order to tie-up and
neutralise the threat posed by her main opponents
in the area: Syria, the Palestinians, and Hezbollah.
It is therefore difficult to forsee an Israeli
withdrawal from south Lebanon (paving the way
for UNIFIL to fulfil its mandate) without a
comprehensive peace deal with Syria encompassing
all Israel's security concerns on her northern
borders.

It may even be the case that having effectively
neutralised the Palestinian threat at little cost to
themselves an Israeli withdrawal from south
Lebanon has become less likely. Indeed, were an
Israeli-Syrian peace deal reached over the Golan
Heights, it is conceivable that tacit Israeli
acceptance of Syrian hegemony in most of Lebanon
could be traded for Syrian acquiescence to a
continued Israeli presence in the south. The
prospects for a settlement in south Lebanon in the
foreseeable future thus seem to be as grim as those
in the UNFICYP case.

Conclusions

UNFICYP continues to play an important role
managing a curious *de facto* strip of land through
the heart of Cyprus constituting three percent of
the island. Its ability to respond quickly to minor
incidents within the zone is hampered by troop size
reductions. This is a serious issue given the
potential for tiny, seemingly trivial incidents to
provoke counter-actions and eventually violence
between the two communities. Similarly UNIFIL,
despite working under well nigh impossible
operational conditions, manages to provide a highly
valuable stabilising function, significantly reducing
the potential for an escalation in the south Lebanon
conflict.

Those who argue that UNFICYP and UNIFIL
simply serve to help preserve unsatisfactory *status
quos*, although partially correct, miss the point that
a scaling down or even withdrawal of the forces,

whilst it may increase the urgency for a solution,
may not necessarily bring the conflicting parties
any closer to agreement. Indeed, such rash action
may provoke a renewal or escalation in the
conflicts making political compromise even harder
to attain. Neither UNFICYP or UNIFIL can
resolve the problems of Cyprus and Lebanon on
their own, but even after almost three decades in
the case of the former and in excess of a decade
and a half for the latter the presence of
peacekeepers in these two troubled areas remains
vital to ensure a degree of peace and stability on
the ground to enable the search for peace to
continue.

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