

Conference

“A hope for peace in the Middle East?”: UNIFIL

Centre for Middle Eastern Studies
of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture
CEMOFPSC

Brief Introduction

The 2006 Lebanon War, known in Lebanon as the July War and in Israel as the Second Lebanon War, was a military conflict in Lebanon and northern Israel. The principal parties were Hezbollah paramilitary forces and the Israeli military. The conflict started on 12 July 2006, and continued until a United Nations-brokered ceasefire went into effect on 14 August 2006, though it formally ended on 8 September 2006 when Israel lifted their naval blockade of Lebanon.

The conflict killed over a thousand people, most of whom were Lebanese, severely damaged Lebanese infrastructure, displaced 700,000-915,000 Lebanese, and 300,000-500,000 Israelis, and disrupted normal life across all of Lebanon and northern Israel. Even after the ceasefire, much of Southern Lebanon remained uninhabitable due to unexploded cluster bombs. As of 1 December 2006, an estimated 200,000 Lebanese remained internally displaced or refugees.

On 11 August 2006, the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved UN Resolution 1701 in an effort to end the hostilities. The resolution was adopted after weeks of stalling by US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. The resolution, which was approved by both Lebanese and Israeli governments the following days, called for disarmament of Hezbollah, for withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon, and for the deployment of Lebanese soldiers and an enlarged United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) force in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese army began deploying in southern Lebanon on 17 August 2006. The blockade was lifted on 8 September 2006. On 1 October 2006, most Israeli troops withdrew from Lebanon, though the last of the troops continued to occupy the border-straddling village of Ghajar until 3 December 2006. In the time since the enactment of UNSCR 1701 both the Lebanese government and UNIFIL have stated that they will not disarm Hezbollah.

Some of the conclusions of the third report to secretary general on implementation of the resolution, issued in March 2007, stated:

Positively:

- The overall commitment by the Governments of Israel and Lebanon to Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) remaining strong.
- The near full deployment of a strengthened UNIFIL together with the deployment of the Lebanese Army north of the Litani River as well as the absence of any positions other than that of the LAF and UNIFIL along the Blue Line.

Negatively:

1. The acute and continuing political crisis in Lebanon as background.
2. The mounting Israeli concerns about the unauthorized transfer of arms across the Lebanese- Syrian border.
3. No progress concerning the Israeli captured soldiers and the Lebanese prisoners, as well as the delineation of the borders of Shab'a Farms.
4. Continuous Israeli overflights.
5. Continuing dangers posed to Lebanese citizens in the south of Lebanon due to the extent of contamination from unexploded ordnance (UXO), namely from cluster bomblets and sub-munitions, by the Israeli (this contamination covers more than 34 million square meters).
6. Observed armed groups probably of Hizbollah, North of the Litani river and presence of Israeli military north of the Blue Line inside Lebanese territory, through its control of the northern part of Ghajar village.

Questions to debate

- What is UNIFIL meant to do: the war last summer. Discussion of the legal framework under UNSC resolutions 425, 426 and 1701; and of the debate on 'terms of engagement'.
- What are the dangers or problems it is facing or could face: Hizballah's movements, Arms smuggling, Israeli overflights, dangers of escalation.
- Prospects of a resolution of the conflict and a cease fire: A broad vision of what it would take to reach a cease fire. The players, Israel, Iran, Syria, Hizballah, Lebanese government, USA etc.
- Wrap up and discussion. Possibility of a regional Grand Bargain that would defuse the situation.

Structure and disposition according to the subject during the conference

The conference would have three broad questions in four sessions of 1.5 hours each. Each session will have 3 speakers with discussion. Last session is wrap up.

Each session will have a moderator-rapporteur, he /she will be an expert responsible for the content of the presentations and the final conclusions.

Duration, date and place

The Seminar will be held in Madrid the 25 and 26 of June 2007, in the Semicircular Meeting-room of Enterprise Institute, C./ Maria de Molina, 27.

Participants in the seminar

It has been considered that the most appropriate number of participants would be 35 representatives from the political world, the mass media, the academic world, the business world, the development agents and civil society agents.

The countries and organisations that will take part in the Seminar will be from Spain, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, France, Turkey, Lebanon, Palestine and European Union.

Visibility

Brochures, posters and publication of minutes will clearly show the identity of the seminar's fund-raisers.