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Interview:
Geir O. Pedersen



UNIFIL
magazine

Pulling Together





Lebanese Army and UNIFIL officers reviewing patrol plan for joint operation

Second to only one

We've been working on this second issue of *Al Janoub*, in thrall to the first. Thanks to the encouraging response of our readers -from comments as complimenting and challenging as "You have set yourselves a high standard", to some frank (and welcome) expressions of disapproval like "Lost in translation". No wonder the proverbial blues of a writer who attempts a second bestseller in a row!

Lost in translation has indeed been a lesson learned. The nuances of the Arabic and English languages being as profoundly different as they are, a reproduction of one into the other is forever a challenge. "It is like making prose out of poetry," muttered our translator, at pains to find apt English phraseology to match the Arabic. Even as we strive to improve on this, the parallel to real life situations cannot be missed: the potential for language-driven misunderstandings that underscores the significance of this magazine as a forum for dialogue between the peacekeepers and the population they serve.

This issue features a special interview with Geir O. Pedersen, the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, as we try to capture his experience in, and vision for, Lebanon at the end of his tour of duty. Mr. Pedersen talks at length about his three years in Lebanon, elaborating the achievements and pitfalls on the road to implementation of UNSC resolution 1701. Watching him talk, one can sense his passion for his job translate into one for the country he promises to come back to "in one way or another".

We invited veteran journalist Rami Khouri, during one of his recent jaunts to south Lebanon, to share his impressions of this "nuanced landscape of piety and pluralism" as he describes it with characteristic flair.

Mr. Khouri's perspective is echoed in the 'Culture' column that brings out aspects of the inclusive culture of south Lebanon in the unique gesture of the Tyre Festival Committee to organise Christmas celebrations for UNIFIL peacekeepers. Committee Chairperson Randa Berri talks to

Al Janoub about the idea behind the event.

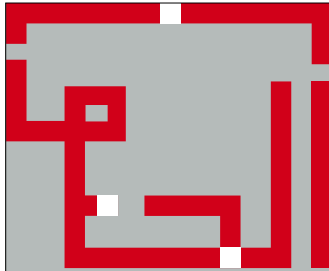
The 'Mayor's word' this time is from Marjayoun. Mayor Fouad Hamra hails the improved security environment heralded by UNIFIL troops after the 2006 war, and deplores its rude interruption by the heinous attack on a UNIFIL patrol in Marjayoun last June that has negatively impacted on the economic prospects of the municipality. He hopes for the restoration of closer interactions between peacekeepers and the people.

'Till peace do us part' manifests the symbiotic relationship between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces. *Al Janoub* explores the new dimensions of a growing strategic partnership that promises to endure until peace...that it is disposed to deliver.

The road to peace is laden with risk, progress painstakingly slow, but sure in coming: this is the message underlying the feature on UNIFIL's demining operations. A story of how the Mission's operational resources have taken on a humanitarian agenda in responding to the real needs of the people of south Lebanon. The 'Humanitarian' section also provides insight into the disproportionately high incidence of burn cases in south Lebanon, bringing focus on preventative measures.

We hope what is 'lost in translation' will be found in the 'Photo-feature' dedicated to the children of south Lebanon as they relate to peacekeepers in a language that transcends linguistic barriers. The theme for the cover of this issue draws from this very bond that celebrates the joys of growing up in peace and security.

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A stormy rescue at sea



On 29 January the Maritime Task Force (MTF) of UNIFIL was engaged in a search and rescue operation off the coast of Lebanon that saved the lives of 14 sailors from a sinking Lebanese ship.

In the early morning hours of the day, UNIFIL MTF received distress signals from a merchant vessel 'Gevo Victory'. The crew members had lost control of the Lebanese container ship and were in imminent danger of

drowning in the stormy seas.

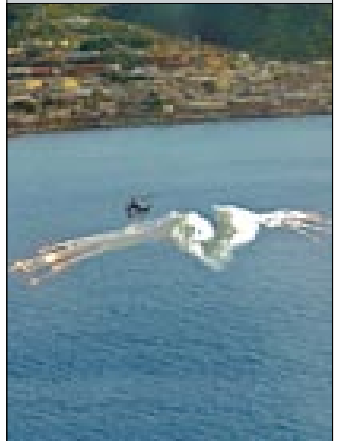
UNIFIL's Naval Operations Centre immediately pressed into action the MTF's 'FGS Bayern' to search for the disabled ship that was finally located 80 kilometres south of Beirut port. The operation was assisted by French Navy's 'FS Siroco' that was in the area for rotation of UNIFIL troops during the maritime amphibious landing exercise carried out in the preceding week.

On finding the ship in distress,

an extensive rescue operation was launched despite the extreme weather conditions with strong winds and rain. During the four hour long operation, helicopters from the MTF and French ships were used to airlift the sailors from 'Gevo Victory'. All the 14 crew members were safely rescued, with only one sustaining light injuries. After initial medical examination and treatment aboard the 'FGS Bayern', the rescued seamen were evacuated to Beirut and handed over to the Lebanese authorities.

Expressing relief at the rescue of the sailors, UNIFIL's Force Commander Major General Claudio Graziano congratulated personnel from UNIFIL MTF and the FS Siroco for the successful operation. "There cannot be a higher human endeavour than to save valuable lives," he said, "We in UNIFIL share a special relationship with the people of Lebanon and that bond extends also at sea."

Heli flares



On 5 January UNIFIL helicopters from ITALAIR conducted an aviation training exercise that involved firing of anti-missile flares. The purpose of the training was to increase flight safety and to carry out routine exercise.

Explosive attack

In the afternoon of 8 January, a UNIFIL vehicle was damaged by a roadside explosion along the coastal highway at the northern entrance to Saida in south Lebanon, outside UNIFIL's area of operation. Two military members of UNIFIL who were in the vehicle were lightly wounded and were treated in a hospital in Saida.

UNIFIL as well as Lebanese authorities have launched an official investigation and are working in close cooperation.

The UN Secretary-General and the Security Council condemned the incident. The Secretary-General said that he was deeply disturbed by the attack on UNIFIL and reiterated that the security and safety of all UN personnel in Lebanon is of paramount importance.

On his part the UNIFIL Force Commander described this as an act directed at destabilising the situation in southern Lebanon and reaffirmed UNIFIL's commitment to pursue its mandate together with the Lebanese Armed Forces.

Festivities



The New Year, combined with Eid Al Addha and Christmas, saw UNIFIL personnel at

all levels join the local communities in festivities through December. As the

blue berets assumed colourful hues, it was time to celebrate the trust, confidence and respect shared between UNIFIL and the people of south Lebanon in the common pursuit for security and stability.

UNIFIL contingents across the area of operations donned the familiar garb of Santa Claus and UNIFIL staff members pooled in to buy Christmas gifts for children.

UNIFIL's Force Commander Major-General Claudio Graziano, Deputy Force Commander Brigadier-General Jai Prakash Nehra and Chief of Staff Brigadier-General Francois Estrate, among others, toured several villages to greet children with gifts and share their hopes for a prosperous future.

Artillery fire

On 10 January the Field Artillery Group, part of the Quick Reaction Force of UNIFIL, carried out a live fire training exercise near UNIFIL Headquarters at Naqoura in close cooperation with LAF.

The exercise was the second of this nature and was directed at honing the skills of the battle group.

Amphibious landing

On 18 January UNIFIL conducted a three-day maritime exercise off the coast of southern Lebanon in cooperation with the Lebanese Navy to improve cooperation and establish coordination mechanisms between the different naval and land forces. The exercise

involved amphibious landing of military personnel and equipment by the sea route.

Participating in the exercise were naval units from France and Italy, as well as from UNIFIL's Maritime Task Force (MTF) and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF).

UNIFIL's French Contingent used this exercise to carry out regular rotation of their equipment and troops. About 190 French soldiers and 21 vehicles, including 19 armoured vehicles, landed in Naqoura.

Two specialized ships participated in the exercise: the 'Siroco' from the French Navy and the 'San Giorgio' from the Italian Navy.

The two ships were under the tactical control of UNIFIL Force Commander for the duration of the operation.



Humanitarian update



Youth empowerment training session in Naqoura

UNIFIL Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) units and the Office of Civil Affairs have been actively engaged in humanitarian initiatives aimed at improving the lives of people in south Lebanon. Several quick impact projects were completed recently:

In the village of Wadi Jilu the road leading to the governmental elementary

school was paved, enabling easier and safer access to the school for the entire community. This complemented previous UNIFIL assistance in connecting the school to the main electricity network.

Ainata, a village close to the Blue Line, had been severely hit during the last war. Here a concrete water tank

was constructed to provide a steady flow of water from the artesian well to the village's main water reservoir. Additional pipelines were laid to connect the remaining one quarter of the village to the water network.

The project will benefit villagers for both household and farming purposes.

In the municipality of Al Qantarrah, a 135 kv generator has been installed to boost electricity supply for the village and a public school located there.

CIMIC and Civil Affairs have organized training sessions on youth empowerment for 120 youngsters in five villages across south Lebanon. The project will be implemented by the Lebanese NGO Naba'a that specializes in working with the youth on educational projects. UNIFIL will join some of the training sessions in order to meet the young participants, gain their feedback and respond to questions.

During mid-November 2007 to the end of January 2008, there were 7,851 instances where UNIFIL Peacekeepers provided medical assistance in the area of responsibility, while dental care was provided on 321 occasions and veterinary services on 1,458.

It's not about me... it's about Lebanon

Representing the Secretary-General: Geir O. Pedersen [right] with UN SG Ban Ki-moon in Beirut.

Geir O. Pedersen relinquished office in mid-February after having served a year as the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, what some would describe as one of the most difficult jobs in the world.

It was three years back in March 2005 that Mr. Pedersen, the senior most UN official in Lebanon, first arrived as the Personal Representative of the UN Secretary-General for southern Lebanon and, soon after, for the whole country. A people he grew to love.

His first direct association with this part of the world dates back to 1993 when, as a Norwegian diplomat, he was involved in the secret Oslo negotiations that led to the signing of the Declaration of Principles and the mutual recognition between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel. Later, he served for five years as the Norwegian Representative to the Palestinian Authority, prior to his appointment as Director of the Asia and Pacific Division in the UN Department of Political Affairs in 2003.

In his latest capacity in Lebanon - representing the UN Secretary-General on all political aspects of the organization's work, besides coordinating the work of the UN in the country and being in charge of following up the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 - Mr. Pedersen's diplomatic plate was forever full as Lebanon encountered one misfortune after another, generating new demands on the UN's multi-dimensional presence here.

Shortly before his departure from Lebanon, Mr. Pedersen shared with *Al-Janoub's* Neeraj Singh, his impressions from his assignment, his hopes and disappointments through the chequered course of Lebanon's continuing quagmire. With a calm, balanced composure that characterised his stint in Lebanon, he talks at length about the broader dynamics of resolution 1701, the stumbling blocks in its full implementation and the way forward... forever an optimist. Excerpts:



This has been the calmest period in the history of the South since 1978. What is remarkable is that this has been achieved despite all the problems in Beirut... it has been a very successful deployment of UNIFIL, coupled with the historic achievement of the Lebanese Army going to the South after the war.

Singh: Mr. Pedersen, three years in Lebanon can be a lifetime's experience. Much has happened since you arrived, but what flashes in your mind in a snapshot?

Pedersen: Just before my arrival a terrible incident happened - the killing of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Following this, on the request of the Lebanese Government, the Security Council decided to appoint an independent commission to investigate. Before that, we had the whole issue about the re-election of former President Lahoud and the issuing of Security Council resolution 1559. Keeping the calm along the Blue Line was an important aspect of my job, until the outbreak of the war in 2006. The war in 2006 was really a watershed event in the sense that it created a new political climate inside of Lebanon and it brought new challenges to the situation in south Lebanon.

How was resolution 1701 received here?

There was a national consensus [in Lebanon] on 1701. It has been supported by all political parties, both from the majority and the opposition. There is in Lebanon a feeling of ownership towards 1701 and this is extremely important, because it is through this ownership that we can hope to implement the resolution. Another very important aspect of the resolution is a close cooperation between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces [LAF]. Also the cooperation and support from the people in south Lebanon. Without the consensus, without the support of the local population, and without the cooperation between UNIFIL and the LAF, we cannot implement the resolution.

At the time the resolution was adopted it was a cessation of hostilities. We had hoped that this should have been developed into a ceasefire and then into an armistice agreement, which the resolution calls for. I am afraid that has not been possible.

Why is that?

I think that is linked to several issues. One is the issue of the prisoners, the two Israeli soldiers captured by Hezbollah

and the Lebanese being held in prison in Israel. The Security Council appealed for immediate solution to this crisis and the Secretary-General has appointed a negotiator, a facilitator, who is dealing with Hezbollah and the Israeli government and trying to find a solution.

Then we have the issue of the Israeli over flights, which are continuing and which should stop.



With UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Claudio Graziano

Another very important aspect, which has a great impact on the livelihood and the daily lives of people in the South, is the cluster bombs that were dropped by the Israelis during the last few days of the war. The Secretary-General has appealed for the release of the strike data for these cluster bombs, but so far we have not been able to get any information from the Israelis on this. Despite this, the UN Mine Action Coordination Centre and UNIFIL have had enormous success in locating and destroying the cluster bombs, but the challenge remains.

Arms smuggling is another important issue that we have been working on with the Lebanese authorities and they have now established a pilot project with support from Germany. This has been welcomed by the UN and by the Security Council. After a few months there will be an assessment of this initiative and then we hope for its further development. This is also a question of sovereignty - for Lebanon to be able to control all of its borders.

And then we had, for the first time in a Security Council resolution, the Shebaa farms being mentioned and the Secretary-General had been tasked to come up with ideas on how to move forward on this issue. In 2000, after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, the Security Council confirmed that the Israelis had withdrawn from all Lebanese territory.

This policy still stands. But without pre-judging the outcome of border negotiations between Syria and Lebanon in the future, the Council has tasked the Secretary-General to look into the issue of Shebaa farms. We have been working on this and the UN cartographer came up with a provisional definition of what the Shebaa farms is all about, which could serve as a foundation to move forward on the issue.

Again, on Gadjar, we have been working on different ideas and I am hopeful that soon we will come up with something that will be acceptable to the Lebanese Government and that will make the Israeli Forces withdraw completely from the area. Of course there are no Israeli soldiers in the area today, but it is not being evacuated by the Israelis.

Also there is the issue about Hezbollah's weapons. Here there has been a firm conviction of the Secretary-General from the very beginning that this should be a Lebanese issue; that it should be dealt with through a Lebanese political process, and that only through such a process can it be dealt with successfully.

To be able to implement the wider perspectives of the resolution, we need to find a solution to the political crisis in Lebanon. We need to have a president elected, have a new government in place and have the parliament functioning again. These are great challenges for Lebanon, but with the solution of this crisis, I am also optimistic about the further implementation of all the different aspects of the resolution.

And how has UNIFIL fared?

UNIFIL has been very successful in keeping the calm in the South. This has been the calmest period in the history of the South since 1978. What is remarkable is that this has been achieved despite all the problems in Beirut.

We have had some isolated incidents, but by and large UNIFIL has managed to keep the calm and, when we have had a crisis, to prevent any escalation. I think it has been a very successful deployment of UNIFIL, coupled with the historic achievement of the Lebanese Army going

to the South after the war.

How sustainable will this success be without progress on the political front?

If we do not see progress in the areas that I mentioned, we will not be able to sustain this in the long run. So there is an obligation on both sides to make sure that we move forward on the long term solutions envisaged in the resolution. And my hope is that we will be able now to see a regional development that will open up for a successful implementation of resolution 1701, and that regional environment will facilitate, not complicate, this process.

How does the larger UN role in Lebanon relate to 1701?

1701 made an immediate appeal for economic and development support to Lebanon. The UN country team played an important role at the Stockholm conference. And I had the pleasure of being together with the Secretary-General at the Paris Conference January last year where there were more than \$7 billion committed to the development of Lebanon.

The UN family is one of many actors contributing to the development here and I think we have been able to play an important role together with the Arab States, the EU and other key donors. We have been following the reconstruction and recovery in the South and here in Beirut. There are still many things left to be done, but the UN family is committed and will try to successfully complete the development agenda of the South.

Very often people confuse the role of UNIFIL with UN's involvement in issues like arms smuggling...

UNIFIL's mandate is limited to the area south of the Litani river. So when it comes to the issue of smuggling of weapons between Syria and Lebanon, this has nothing to do with UNIFIL and will have nothing to do with UNIFIL. UNIFIL could only be engaged in this upon a request from the Lebanese government. After my discussions with Prime Minister Siniora and the government, it is obvious that there is no plan to involve UNIFIL in this. UNIFIL is not engaged in the discussions either of the prisoners issue or of the Shebaa farms, because these are not part of their responsibilities.

Having known the challenges that confronted you in this job, would you say that things have gone the way you expected?

No, I think it's fair to say that it has not gone as we expected. First of all, I think the war was a disaster; it was something that

should have been avoided. It was a failure for all of us. That obviously was a serious setback, first and foremost for the people in the south and for the people of Lebanon, but also for the international community and for the UN. It took more than a month to pass the [UN Security Council] resolution that stopped the war. The Secretary-General at the time immediately called for a cessation of hostilities, but because of disagreements, the Security Council was not able to pass the resolution before all those people were killed. That was also a big disappointment. But the fact that UNIFIL after that has managed to keep the peace in the South has been a big achievement despite all the troubles here.

The second big disappointment has been the political crisis in Lebanon since the war. Obviously the war had a great impact on the Lebanese society both within the communities and on the relationship between the different communities. This then had consequences for the government and we saw the withdrawal of the Shia ministers from the government. It is something that we obviously would have hoped to have seen a solution to.

The third disappointment is that the Lebanese have not been able to elect a new president. Though there now seems to be a consensus around the candidacy of Gen. Suleiman, the fact that he is still not elected is for all of us a deep disappointment.

But these disappointments should lead us to discuss seriously now what we can do to help facilitate a sound political development in Lebanon.

Personally for you, how demanding has this assignment been?

[laughs] You know the thing that gets you going in Lebanon is that you learn very easily to love the Lebanese. They are a wonderful people and despite all the challenges, you feel that you can have your batteries going again very quickly. There is always a positive aspect to your meeting with people here. That has been the more fascinating aspect of this job.

Yes, from time to time you get upset,

you get angry. But in the end, I am here as a representative of the international community to help the Lebanese: it's not about me, it's not about the UN; it's about Lebanon.

We all know that it should be possible to find a solution to the crisis and it is not difficult to point out what we need to do. But the key element now is the deep mistrust between the different political parties, and this mistrust the international community should help to heal, so that the Lebanese could move together to protect their sovereignty, stability, security and their independence. But in the end the decisions are up to the Lebanese.

Do you leave with a sense of satisfaction that you have made a difference despite all the hurdles?

I think the UN family – UNIFIL, different agencies, my office – we all collectively have helped to stabilize the situation. UNIFIL soldiers have sacrificed with their lives. The UN family was here during the war, trying to help to find the solution to the crisis. And now we will be here to help to stabilize the situation through the different programmes, through UNIFIL and

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through the traditional good offices of the Secretary-General.

For me personally, despite the setbacks, the frustrations and the disappointments, it has been an extremely rewarding experience and I know I am going to miss this place terribly. But I will come back in one way or another, because this is a place where both I and my family have learnt a lot. It's a wonderful place.

What is your message for the people of Lebanon?

Do not allow mistrust and suspicion to cloud the necessity of finding the solutions. Instead of focusing on the differences, focus on what is necessary to keep the unity, stability, independence and sovereignty of Lebanon. My message is for the people to think of Lebanon as something more than the individuals, more than the communities; and for the politicians to rise above the different communities and to think about the interest of Lebanon as such.





There is much to share between peacekeepers and the people they serve. With children, however, sharing takes an altogether more pleasurable hue. **Some moments:**





South Lebanon:

nuanced landscape of piety and pluralism

I have only visited south Lebanon a few times in recent years, but every time I make the trip I return with enhanced respect for the powerful forces and currents that define that rich but stressed landscape.

The most striking thing about south Lebanon for the casual visitor is the combination of complexity and serenity. Beneath the surface of a quiet, almost sleepy, society is a powerful amalgamation of local and regional identities alongside an equally bountiful array of political and military forces.

While many around the world – some sinister, some ignorant – portray south Lebanon one-dimensionally as a hotbed of Hizbullah militarism, anti-Israeli terrorism, and anti-Western defiance, the reality is much more complex, and certainly less ominous. People are free to make any political criticisms they wish – the Lebanese themselves do this to an Olympian degree every day – but in describing an entire society they should make the effort to accurately acknowledge the many different strands that collectively weave the fabric of south Lebanon's impressive and diverse human community.

Nowhere else in the Middle East, perhaps even in the world, is there such a concentration of military forces as there is along the south Lebanon border. The Lebanese army, Hizbullah, UNIFIL and the Israeli army each defines a slice of the landscape, in places within a few dozen metres of one another.

The parallel political environment is equally vibrant, with assorted Lebanese and a few pan-Arab and pan-Islamic groups making their presence felt, even if only tacitly, perhaps with a banner or a flag hanging from a lamppost here and there or a poster in a café or butcher's shop. South Lebanon mirrors the full constellation of personal, political, tribal, religious and national identities that is such an important part of Lebanon's unique character.

Sunnis, Shiites, Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Druze and secular Lebanese coexist in adjacent villages and urban neighbourhoods. Secular and religious people seem to live comfortably in a shared environment that honours both piety and pluralism. The banners, symbols, advertisements, clothes, shops and public facilities throughout south Lebanon speak clearly about a society of multiple, and nuanced, priorities and values – religion, patriotism, nationalism, resistance, self-improvement, and enjoying day-to-day life are all components of the shared identity of this region. That identity has been forged by centuries and millennia of settled life, along with the ordeal of five decades of warfare, occupation, destruction, neglect and rebuilding.

What most strikes the visitor to south Lebanon, however, is not the politics or militarization of the place, but its sheer humanity: the irresistible need for ordinary people to live normal and satisfying lives, despite repeated warfare, a history of economic deprivation, and continued political tensions.

Some towns and villages in south Lebanon have experienced destruction and reconstruction two or three times in recent decades. Death is a common tormentor that stalks many places and families. Low-income and poverty stress are common ailments. And many communities live in a perpetual war zone, due to the constant danger of cluster bombs left behind from assorted Israeli invasions. The region, like other parts of Lebanon and the region, now also endures the new threat of Salafist militancy.

Despite all this, southern Lebanon exudes noteworthy serenity and normalcy: attributes and aspirations that are

...southern Lebanon exudes noteworthy serenity and normalcy: attributes and aspirations that are apparently shared by the rest of the country and the world that have sent troops to keep the peace, and give the residents of south Lebanon a chance to live a normal life for the first time in many decades.

apparently shared by the rest of the country and the world that have sent troops to keep the peace, and give the residents of south Lebanon a chance to live a normal life for the first time in many decades.

South Lebanon cannot be assessed in isolation from events throughout the rest of the country and the region. Its pressures and problems reflect the consequences of recurring clashes of political forces within that wider context; its persistent will to rebuild, though, and to live in security, sovereignty and dignity, is very much a homegrown attribute that is more evident today than ever before.

Rami G. Khouri

The writer is Editor-at-large for the Daily Star newspaper in Beirut and Director for the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs.



The economics of security

The best thing to have happened to us since the 2006 war was the arrival of the Lebanese Army and UNIFIL [in its new enhanced form]. It has restored in us the trust in our regions and in the lands we love and can never give away, namely Marjayoun. It is the land of history, where the people were always keen on preserving the dignity of every visitor. This land, which has for generations witnessed diverse human beings speaking the languages of the world, stands today before the peacekeeping forces: troops of a true and dignified origin quite like ours.

Among the multiple nationalities serving under the banner of the United Nations, we would like to make particular mention of the Spanish battalion, their soldiers and officials who participate in our daily life in Marjayoun and work in coordination and cooperation with the Lebanese Army and security forces, for the benefit and best interests of the area.

The arrival of UNIFIL in our area, brought smiles on the faces of our children. They now feel safe sitting in their classrooms. After the harsh conditions that affected Lebanon as a whole, people were now inspired to initiate medium and large size projects to provide a living for their families, attracting a large number of diverse passers-by that opened up business prospects. This led us to hope that UNIFIL's presence would improve both the security and commercial situation.

Alas, things went against our will. We were deeply pained and angered by the attack on the Spanish patrol [on 24 June 2007], which only a wicked mind removed from the traditions and practices of the people of Marjayoun could perpetrate. The assault had a negative impact on the movement

of that battalion's troops, whom we truly consider the protectors of our country's border and our brothers in humanity.

Such precautionary measures have forced many citizens to close down the shops and facilities they opened when UNIFIL first arrived here. As a result, the people of this area are plagued with unemployment and may eventually leave their homes and lands in search for a living.

Citizens in this area reiterate their continuing support and welcome to UNIFIL, and express their wish to bring life back to the area by facilitating the free movement of soldiers and officers. They have virtually moved to remote security zones while citizens have high hopes on their presence among them to preserve a security presence on the one hand, and generally contribute to the economic benefit of the area on the other.

We therefore believe that it is our duty to highlight this urgent and serious problem that vitally relates to the continuity of life in the area of Marjayoun. We insist that this security presence is restored so that we can work together for a comprehensive and just peace in all of Lebanon, as well as



Citizens in this area reiterate their continuing support and welcome to UNIFIL... to preserve a security presence on the one hand, and generally contribute to the economic benefit of the area on the other.

for a free and dignified life for all the people of this area, one that would become a model for the world, hoping that together we may reach that long awaited peace.

Fouad Hamra
Mayor of Marjayoun



Till peace do us part

On 24 August, 2007, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1773. The resolution echoed many of the points contained in resolution 1701 – but it also contained newer elements which reflected changes on the ground in UNIFIL’s area of operations, brought into effect by UNIFIL’s deployment as well as that of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF).

The Council noted that the deployment of the two Forces has helped establish a new strategic environment in southern Lebanon, and it looked forward to increased cooperation between UNIFIL’s peacekeepers and their counterparts in the LAF in the discharge of UNIFIL’s mandate.

UNIFIL and LAF have been quick to respond, with several joint exercises carried out in the past few months.

“Over the past several months there has been tremendous progress in our partnership with the LAF and this has been a major contributor to stability in south Lebanon. Dozens of joint exercises of different kinds have been carried out and continue on a weekly basis,” said **Major-General Claudio Graziano**, UNIFIL’s Force Commander.

The exercises have included Exercise East Gate and West Gate, each held separately in the corresponding eastern and western areas in which UNIFIL operates.

These exercises simulated incidents in violation of UN Security Council resolution 1701, and this action then required LAF and UNIFIL troops to jointly carry out both an operational and a medical response.

The two exercises were directed at improving the existing cooperation between the LAF and UNIFIL and to check their combined ability to react to different developments in the mission’s area of operations.

A range of operational areas have been

“Over the past several months there has been tremendous progress in our partnership with the LAF and this has been a major contributor to stability in south Lebanon. Dozens of joint exercises of different kinds have been carried out and continue on a weekly basis.”

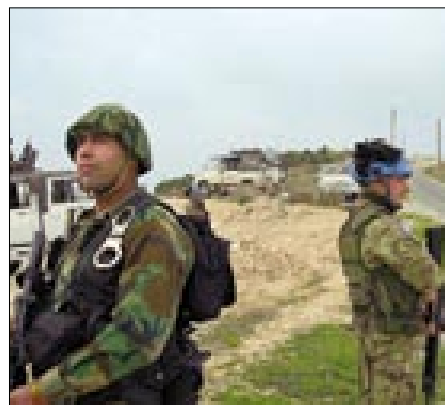
**Major-General Claudio Graziano,
UNIFIL Force Commander**



covered in the different joint exercises, some as specialized as long range artillery firing and aerial search and rescue activities. The land-based coordinated activities are complemented by the sea-based exercises being conducted by UNIFIL’s Maritime Task Force (MTF) and the Lebanese Navy. The most recent example is the maritime amphibious landing exercise conducted by UNIFIL MTF jointly with the French, Italian and Lebanese navies.

“These joint activities are the result of months of intensive work and coordination between the LAF and UNIFIL,” explained **Brigadier-General Paul Matar**, LAF Commander for the South Litani Sector, “Initially we faced several problems on the ground - logistic, organizational and language differences - but now we are very proud of the successful outcome of our efforts.”

The cooperation has not been limited to joint exercises alone. Other activities that UNIFIL peacekeepers and their LAF counterparts have engaged in include co-located checkpoints and coordinated patrols throughout southern Lebanon.





“The collocated checkpoints and coordinated patrols between LAF and UNIFIL have been created to enhance cooperation and security in order to minimize violation of 1701 and increase confidence among the people of the south,” **Brigadier-General Matar** said. He added: “Those patrols started as a monitoring exercise along the blue line and they have now been expanded in order to control a larger part of the territory. There are gaps, but there is no entry of weapons in the area of operations.”

Major-General Graziano confirms: “The increased level of cooperation between LAF and UNIFIL has been tremendously beneficial for our mandate and helped us in better understanding the needs of the people.”

It is a feeling shared by those on the ground - the UNIFIL peacekeepers and LAF soldiers who carry out these regular patrols. *Al Janoub* followed a coordinated patrol in early January:

The LAF patrol commander **Captain Fadi Abou-Diwan** expressed genuine satisfaction at the initiative. “I feel really positive about our joints patrols,” he said, “The interaction we have been having with the population has been extremely positive. The people in the south have been really supportive of our role and very thankful for the humanitarian work carried out by UNIFIL contingents.” **Captain Abou-Diwan** has been serving with the Lebanese Armed Forces for the last 18 years and has worked in coordination with UNIFIL since the adoption of SC resolution 1701.

Lieutenant Luigi Carla, the UNIFIL commander of the patrol, came to Lebanon three months ago. “During the period I have been in the south of Lebanon the activities and relations with LAF have

improved tremendously,” he said, “We have been coordinating together all the joint patrols, but the LAF are and will be the main actors in this theatre.”

During the joint-patrols LAF and UNIFIL drive through villages and interact with the local population: “These joint patrols are helping to convey a message of friendship, stability and security to the local population and show our effort to build a long and lasting peace in the south of Lebanon,” said **Lieutenant Luigi Carla**.

Captain Abou-Diwan sees this as evidence of “our constant effort to make the south a safer place”. He said: “During our patrols people come and talk to us to get more information about our role in the south. I firmly believe that this cooperation is paramount for the full implementation of our mandate and for the safety of the south.”

Brigadier-General Matar views the initiative from the longer term perspective: “UNIFIL and LAF are joining their efforts, but LAF has the final authority over the territory.

It is the first time in 35 years. We are the Army of all the Lebanese people and we will remain here after UNIFIL leaves.”

Ari Gaitanis & Andrea Tenenti

“These joint activities are the result of months of intensive work and coordination between the LAF and UNIFIL. Initially we faced several problems on the ground – logistic, organizational and language differences – but now we are very proud of the successful outcome of our efforts.”

Brigadier-General Paul Matar, LAF Commander for the South Litani Sector



Deathly harvest of war



Fruits of gratitude: farmer presents oranges for clearing his orchard of cluster bombs



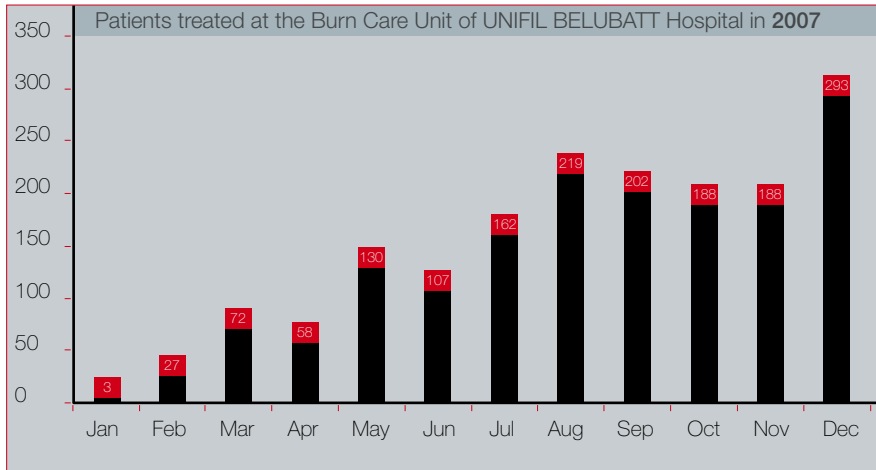
Safety sweep: UNIFIL de-miner at work

Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) and cluster bombs from the 2006 war pose a serious threat to public safety in south Lebanon. Scores of civilians have since been killed or wounded by these. This also has serious implications for the social and economic livelihood of the region.

Last fall, Mahmoud Alnassri and Hussein Alzien were worried men. As they gazed fondly at the silvery green thickets of their olive plantation, they could see the fruits ripening for harvest. The olives would be ready for picking soon. Yet they knew that the fruit remained beyond their reach with the land around dangerously contaminated with cluster bomblets. Their village of Al Hinnayah, located close to the coastal road between Tyre and Naqoura in south Lebanon, had been target of cluster bomb strikes by the Israeli Air Force during the 2006 war.

Having missed the harvest last winter, this time Mahmoud and Hussein were desperate to salvage what they could of the rotting fruits. So they approached the UNIFIL de-miners from the Chinese battalion in the neighbourhood. The de-miners got to work in the orchard and, after one month of painstaking labour, the plot was cleared of all cluster bombs, well in time for the harvest. In a touching gesture of gratitude, Mahmoud and





245 Patients - 1649 Treatments



Burning need for prevention

The UNIFIL hospital in Tibnin run by the Belgian battalion attends to dozens of local patients every day. The highest incidence of patients seeking treatment here relates to burn injuries.

Last December the number of burn patients reached its peak, with 293 consultations for 57 registered patients. This is the equivalent of 10 treatments a day and approximately 4 to 5 hours of uninterrupted work every day.

Burn accidents occur in every layer of the Lebanese population, young children being particularly vulnerable to domestic accidents. The main reported causes are injuries caused by hot objects, especially during the winter season, as well as season-independent thermal injuries from boiling liquids. Unlike in Western countries, however, injuries caused by flames are less frequent.

On observing the burns, the causes and the measures taken by the patients themselves, it was clear to the doctors that preventive efforts were urgently needed. Accordingly, the medical detachment of BELUBATT organized educational workshops in the schools of Tibnin and surrounding villages. By educating children and their teachers alike on ways to prevent burn accidents and, if they occur, how to react in an appropriate way, they hope to reach the larger population.

Adj. Porcu R. & 1Sgt. Maj. Turi D.

Hussein visited the Chinese peacekeepers with gifts of fruits and bread on behalf of their landowner, the Ubabi brothers.

UNIFIL de-mining teams from Belgium, China, France, Italy and Spain are engaged in the dangerous task of clearing areas in south Lebanon of mines and unexploded ordnance from the war. Besides meeting the mission's operational requirements, de-mining assets are employed for humanitarian purposes to free dwelling areas, farms and other locations from this menacing infestation.

The explosive leftovers are of varied nature and accordingly the disposal units possess diverse specializations, in personnel and equipment, to handle particular types of explosives. Last August, for example, a UNIFIL Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team from the Belgian battalion responded to a request in As Siddiqin village, where two unexploded bombs dropped from the air in the last war had pierced through the roof of a house and got embedded into the floor. The bombs were dangerously poised and hard to access through the concrete. Slowly and meticulously, the expert deminers dug through the impact holes to reach the explosives and successfully destroyed them. The entire operation took eight days to complete.

Similarly, in December a UNIFIL EOD team from Italy worked for 18 days near a house in the village of Al Qulaylah to dig out two impact holes from artillery shells. They found two 155 mm artillery shells. The ordnance was safely disposed off.

Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) and cluster bombs from the 2006 war pose a serious threat to public safety in south Lebanon. Scores of civilians have since been killed or wounded by these. This also has serious

UNIFIL demining assets have disposed almost 30,000 UXO/mines and cleared more than four million square metres of land.

implications for the social and economic livelihood of the region.

Deployed primarily to meet the operational requirements of the mission, UNIFIL demining assets have increasingly acquired a strong humanitarian dimension as the brave de-miners undertake high-risk mine clearance jobs in response to calls from the people of south Lebanon.

Until January 2008, UNIFIL demining assets have disposed almost 30,000 UXO/mines and cleared more than four million square metres of land. This is in addition to the large scale demining operations conducted by the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre (UNMACC) that is working with UNIFIL in south Lebanon. UNMACC has to date cleared more than 22 million square metres of land that has involved disposal of almost 50,000 cluster bomb units and about 4,000 UXO/mines. Besides, LAF Engineers have destroyed as many as 65,000 cluster munitions.

The quick destruction of remaining unexploded ordnance, particularly cluster bomb sub-munitions, is critical to restoring normalcy to the region and, ultimately, to a secure and lasting peace.

Lt. Col. Wang Zhi Qiang
Chief/Combat Engineer Section of UNIFIL

Christmas in Qana

The village of Qana, in southern Lebanon, is well-known for a variety of reasons.

These include the miraculous -it is believed by many to be the location where Jesus Christ is said to have performed his first miracle of turning water into wine -to the tragic: in modern times, on two occasions the village has suffered scores of civilian deaths from Israeli air strikes, first in 1996 and, more recently, during the 2006 war.

Yet on 23 December, 2007, a new and special event was held, one that the organizers hope to make an annual occurrence -the singing of Christmas carols in honour of the peacekeepers serving with UNIFIL.

The event was organized by the Tyre Festival Committee along with the municipal authorities of Qana. There were two main aims: to show the world something of Lebanese humanity and hospitality, and to show gratitude for the peacekeepers who found themselves far from home during the festive season.

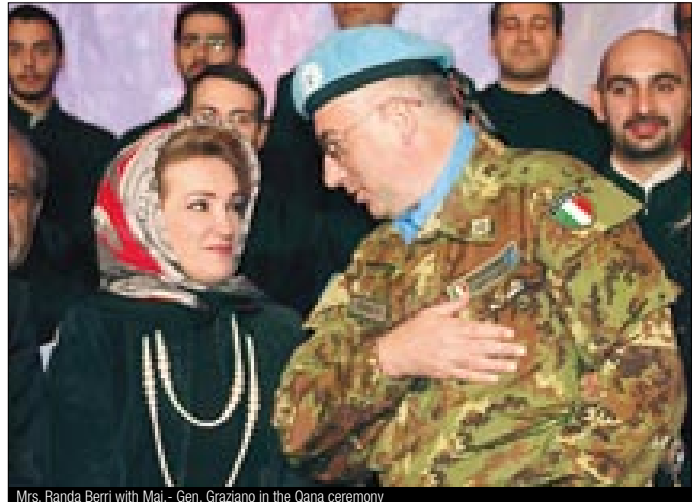
"The soldiers, commanders -all the members of the peacekeeping forces -they are away from their families during a very important event that they used to share together," said Randa Berri, the chairperson of the Tyre Festival Committee, in an interview soon after the carol. "We wanted to take the place of their families and tell them thank you in another way. To tell them that you are not strangers here, we are one family."

The guests were made up of community and religious leaders, and included the UNIFIL Force Commander, Major-General Claudio Graziano; the mayor of Qana, Mohamad Attayah; the Undersecretary of State for Italian Defence, Senator Giovanni Lorenzo Forcieri, who was in Lebanon to visit Italian peacekeepers; the Greek Catholic Bishop of Tyre, Georges Bakaouni; as well as local members of parliament, municipal officials and representatives of the LAF Commander.

But the special guests of the evening were UNIFIL's peacekeepers. More than a hundred peacekeepers from a variety of nationalities were invited to represent the more than 13,000 peacekeepers on duty in the field in southern Lebanon.

In his speech during the event, Major-General Graziano reflected the feeling of the peacekeepers based in southern Lebanon -one of appreciation for the thoughtfulness and effort involved in organizing the night's activities.

"I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the Lebanese population for your valuable support and your friendship that you have been extending towards UNIFIL," Maj-Gen. Graziano said.



Mrs. Randa Berri with Maj- Gen. Graziano in the Qana ceremony

"I feel respect for the Lebanese Army when I see its soldiers on the road in their country, often far from their families and home areas... I see this as a huge sacrifice. So you can imagine the respect I feel for UNIFIL peacekeepers and the sacrifice they make, when they cross oceans to come here, thousands of kilometers away from their own homes."

Randa Berri **Chairperson of the Tyre Festival Committee**

Mrs. Berri said the feeling of appreciation that Maj.-Gen. Graziano expressed in his speech is mutual.

"I feel respect for the Lebanese Army when I see its soldiers on the road in their country, often far from their families and home areas, sometimes a soldier from northern Lebanon is serving in the south -I see this as a huge sacrifice," Mrs. Berri said.

"So you can imagine the respect I feel for UNIFIL peacekeepers and the sacrifice they make, when they cross oceans to come here, thousands of kilometers away from their own homes."

At the event, the Force Commander also took the opportunity to look ahead to the impending new year.

"I want to re-assure all of you that the Blue Helmets are working to the best of their capabilities to fulfill their duties. And even if we are required to face challenging and most of the time unforeseeable situations, we will never lose our track, resolve and commitment for peace," Major-General Graziano said. "I hope that we will further build upon and strengthen these relations so that we can look to the future with the hope that 2008 -despite many challenges and apprehension we are currently facing -will take us even closer to the peace and stability in the region."

With plans to make the Christmas carols an annual event, and other activities being planned, Mrs. Berri and the rest of the Tyre Festival Committee will also be hoping to further build and strengthen those relations.

Ari Gaitanis



في أحد أيام الصيف كانت دورا تلعب في حديقة
المنزّل برفقة صديقها بابوش و الأرنب
الصغير . وبينما كان الأرنب يلعب بالطايرة ،
توجه بابوش نحو دورا و قال لها: " عذري
رغبة بالذهاب إلى ساحة القرية للعب بالمرجوحات
فما رأيك ؟ "

دورا : " وأنا أحب اللعب بالمرجوحات
إن أسأل أمي وأطلب منها السماح . "

SAFE LEARNING: mine-risk education booklet for school children in South Lebanon



UNIFIL Maritime Task Force peacekeepers brave the storm to save sailors from a sinking Lebanese ship.