



Not so bad in theory

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The UN Security Council cease-fire resolution is not so bad in theory, but everything will depend on how it is implemented, and there are some very big problems on that front.

There are two basic parts of the resolution. The introductory ("PP") paragraphs, which set out the framework for interpreting it, and the operational paragraphs ("OP"). Every word is carefully chosen, often fought over by American and French diplomats, and has significance.

In the opening section there are a number of points that fit the original US conception and are fair to Israel:

* The war and resulting deaths are blamed on Hizbullah attacking Israel (PP-2).

* The purpose of the cease-fire is defined as not only ending the current fighting but changing the situation which brought about the conflict. (PP-3)

* The unconditional release of Israel's soldiers is mandatory (PP-3).

* The goal is to have a long-term, permanent solution to the problem (PP-9).

Four other provisions are intended to meet Lebanese demands but are not necessarily very much inimical to Israel.

* The issue of the three Lebanese prisoners is to be "settled." This does not mean they will be freed. It is a sign of the depravity of the present world that the UN has to have a resolution about the fate of three murdering terrorists - one of whom

killed a father in front of his son and then shot the child dead - convicted in a properly constituted court. But again, this issue is merely to be discussed. (PP-4)

* Israel's withdrawal is supposed to be at the "earliest possible" time and not immediately as the Lebanese government had demanded (PP-6).

* It takes note of Lebanon's current claim to the Shaba Farms area but does not accept it. Since the claim is so weak and Syria is unlikely to support it officially, nothing is likely to happen on this issue. (PP-7)

* Lebanon will send its army into the southern part of the country (which Israel also wants).

The new international force will be called UNIFIL (as Lebanon wanted), but will effectively be an entirely new institution (PP-6). Instead of a small number of observers it will be comprised of 15,000 troops.

It is understandable why the United States and Israel agreed to the above wording since, while it doesn't give them everything they want, it is reasonable given what might be expected.

But all this wording is also only a prelude to the list of things to be done, the OP section. Here, too, the shape of the resolution is not so bad except for whether - given three key problems - it will be implemented properly. The three problems are:

* Hizballah, Iran, and Syria will not cooperate.

* The Lebanese government will be too weak, afraid, and sympathetic to them to force implementation.

* The international community is too craven, ignorant, and cowardly to act toughly. And even if it wanted to do so (see below) it needs the permission of the Lebanese government.

The question then is whether the ceasefire will work well enough to be minimally acceptable or not.

Returning to the actual text, however, a number of the original points pushed for by the United States have survived. These included the restriction only on "offensive" Israeli action (OP1). Does this mean Israel could, for example, send planes over Lebanon to hit a Hizballah rocket launcher that is about to or has just fired? That isn't clear but it is possible.

Moreover, Israel only has to withdraw when the Lebanese army moves in and not, as the Lebanese government wanted, immediately (OP2). On the negative side, though, this means Israeli forces would probably have to leave before the large international force arrives. The longer it takes for international forces to get there, the worse this is.

There are other positive sections: Lebanon will have full sovereignty, there should be no weapons or any other authority in anyone's hands but the government (OP3). Of course, there is no mention of the fact that Hizballah is part of the government coalition, a problem to which we will return later.

The internationally recognized border is to be respected (OP4). International aid is to be given to Lebanon for reconstruction. (It is interesting to ask why no one has ever called for international reconstruction aid for Israel.) And all this should result in a long-term solution (OP8), perhaps a hint that Lebanon should make peace with Israel.

This all brings us to the key provision: "The establishment between the [international border] and the Litani River of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL...." The question, of course, is whether this is going to happen.

A second important point is that no foreign forces - Syrian, Iranian, and Palestinian - will be in Lebanon without government consent. Equally, no arms are supposed to come into Lebanon without government authorization. As UN members, Syria and Iran are being asked to cooperate in this effort. It is a safe bet that they will not do so. Will anyone dare to report such behavior publicly, much less do anything about it?

As for disarming Hizbullah, this is said to be the government of Lebanon's job (i.e., the international force will do nothing on this issue) and presumably nothing will happen here either.

There were other things that could have been done easily - but were not. For example, there could be an international naval force to inspect

ships coming to Lebanon or a unit at the airport to look at cargo planes. Instead, everything is being left in the Lebanese government's questionable hands.

But the central contradiction in the document is between OP11 and OP12. OP11 basically makes UNIFIL action dependent on the Lebanese government asking for help. In other words, only if the government asks UNIFIL to fight against terrorists in southern Lebanon or interdict arms smuggling can it act.

It should be noted that the Lebanese armed forces are a polite fiction. Just as Hizbullah is part of the government coalition, it has also deeply infiltrated the army. Half or even more of the soldiers sympathize with Hizbullah and will not do anything to - as they think of it - "protect" Israel from attack. It is not a highly disciplined military with a reliable chain of command. If a Lebanese soldier fires at Hizbullah, the entire army could split into two warring factions, something the government and politicians will want to avoid at any cost.

Yet OP12 says UNIFIL can take "all necessary action" in its area of deployment to fulfill its mission. This could be interpreted, for example, to mean that the UNIFIL units will attack terrorists south of the Litani without being explicitly asked to do so by the Lebanese government. Everything depends on who will command UNIFIL and what its rules of engagement are going to be. Will it honestly report violations or just look the other way? Will it only

do what the Lebanese government expressly asks or take action to prevent cross-border attacks?

A lot will also depend on what strategy Hizbullah adapts and what Damascus and Teheran urge it to do. There is no chance of Hizbullah being destroyed, disarmed or moderated. But it can choose how high a profile it will have.

In a low-profile strategy, Hizbullah would rebuild its forces, smuggle in arms to reequip, but basically stay north of the Litani. This would minimize conflict with the ceasefire - though of course they would break its rules - and the Lebanese government and UNIFIL would almost certainly look the other way. Israel would not be happy but could or at least would live with this situation.

In a medium-profile strategy Hizbullah will send men to the south who will live anonymously among the villagers (from whom many of them are recruited any way), organizing underground, and setting up arms caches, tunnels, and other harder-to-spot fortifications. In other words, they would be preparing for the next war. This is a bolder

breaking of the ceasefire provisions. Israel would demand action and some might or might not be taken.

Under a high-profile strategy, Hizbullah would send units to the south that would function as such, push to see if the Lebanese army and UNIFIL would react. It might even try cross-border raids and rocket firings, probably under the deniable cover of newly created front groups. If there were no tough response, they would escalate further. Israel might then take military action and the whole ceasefire could collapse.

Thus, the ceasefire agreement is not necessarily a disaster for Israel though it certainly isn't a solution either. It may provide some years of peace.

For Lebanon, though, it is a political disaster. Certainly, the terms are not going to let a strong Lebanese government emerge or stymie Syrian and Iranian ambitions. It will permit an end to the current war and reconstruction, but only until Hizbullah, Damascus, and Teheran decide they want to fight on Lebanese territory again..

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