

UN in the Arab World

Research Study | June 2013

Irish Peacekeeping in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)

A Historical, Political, and
Socio-Cultural Study

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*Research Associate on a Global Uncertainties Leadership Fellowship
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Abstract

This study explores Irish peacekeeping within UNIFIL, since 1978 through the expanded UNIFIL after its formation in the aftermath of the 2006 Lebanon war, from historical, social, political, and cultural perspectives. The methodological approach relies mainly on interviews with a number of retired and active members of the Irish Defence Forces, academics, and journalists as well as primary and secondary sources including military archives. Among other areas that are examined, this paper focuses particularly on the centrality of humanitarian assistance and civilian protection to the Irish battalions' commitment to the mission in South Lebanon; the multiple, complex facets of Irish "neutrality" in the context of peacekeeping in the conflict-ridden Middle East as well as participation in NATO Partnership for Peace and European Union Military Staff; and the hugely significant history of peacekeepers' training, especially through the internationally active UN Training School in Ireland together with the evolving parameters of involvement in the expanded UNIFIL after its formation in 2006 wherein civil-military coordination mechanisms play an important part.

I. Introduction

A. Brief description of the project and methodology

This study examines Irish peacekeeping in Lebanon from historical, social, political, and cultural perspectives. It explores Ireland's involvement in UNIFIL since 1978 and through the later phase of the expanded UNIFIL ("UNIFIL II") that was formed after the July 2006 war. Among other topics, it analyses the significance of Irish "neutrality" in the context of peacekeeping in the conflict-ridden Middle East, the possible affinities between Ireland and Lebanon that enabled the successive Irish battalions to achieve their mission, and, significantly, the Irish soldiers' interactions with Lebanese civilians especially through the provision of humanitarian assistance.

It also looks at the interviewees' specific experiences by comparing what they knew about the region before their deployment to their evolving knowledge and changing understanding of war and peacekeeping after their experience on the ground in Lebanon. In this context, important sections of the study look at how the training of Irish soldiers deployed with UNIFIL has evolved over the years under the effect of changing geopolitical considerations (particularly Ireland's participation in NATO PfP and EUMS) while exhibiting a greater emphasis on civil-military coordination in UN Integrated Peacekeeping Missions.

A final section investigates, through analysis and interviews, the role of the Irish media in reflecting on Irish peacekeepers' place within UNIFIL and the larger situation in the Middle East. A related question that is briefly tackled here is the role that the expansion of UNIFIL played after 2006 and what effects this has had on Irish decisions regarding peacekeeping in Lebanon.

These topics and issues are addressed mainly on the basis of interviews with a number of retired and active members of the Irish Defence Forces, academics, and journalists (as indicated in the Acknowledgments). The study also relies on primary and secondary sources obtained primarily from the Irish Defence Archives, the National Library of Ireland, and Irish media archives. The study is not intended to be exhaustive but rather it is meant to pave the way for further work in this area and within the larger context of the 'UN in the Arab World,' which is a research initiative based at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs.

B. Historical overview of Irish involvement in UNIFIL

In his book *Ireland and International Peacekeeping Operations 1960-2000: A Study of Irish Motivation*, Katsumi Ishizuka says that, around the time of the Irish withdrawal from UNEFII in 1974, "from the viewpoint of international politics, Ireland had been one of the most faithful countries in peacekeeping, alongside Sweden and Canada"¹. Since 1958, Irish troops served in various peacekeeping missions across the world including Central America, Russia, the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Namibia, Western Sahara, Liberia and East Timor. The current Irish Defence Forces overseas missions include contributions to the following UN and European Union mandated missions: MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara), ONUC (United Nations Observer Mission in Congo), EUTM (European Union Training Mission Somalia), EUFOR-SFOR (European Union Force [Bosnia]), KFOR (Kosovo Force), UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation [Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel]), and UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon: I [1978-2001] and II [2006-present]).

¹ Ishizuka, Katsumi (2004) *Ireland and International Peacekeeping Operations 1960-2000: A Study of Irish Motivation*. London: F. Cass, p. 101

The service of Irish personnel in UN peacekeeping missions is governed by the Defence Act and the Garda Siochana Act. According to the Defence Forces website, participation in overseas peace support operations must satisfy “triple lock” conditions stipulating the following:

- The operation must be authorized/mandated by the United Nations
- It must be approved by the Government; and
- It must be approved by way of a resolution of Dáil Éireann [Irish parliament], where the size of a Defence Forces contribution is more than twelve personnel.

UN authorization is a key factor that informs the Government’s decision in the event of a request for Defence Forces participation.²

Ireland has been involved in UNIFIL since its formation in 1978 on the basis of UN Resolution 425 with a mandate, according to official UNIFIL documentation, “to confirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security and assist the Lebanese Government in restoring its effective authority in the area.” The first UNIFIL troops arrived in Lebanon on 23 March 1978. Lebanon was at the end of its third year of turmoil that particularly affected the South, which suffered several Israeli incursions and invasions and an occupation that lasted until the unilateral withdrawal in 2000. The period was characterized by long stretches of military confrontations among the embattled parties, namely the Israeli Defense Forces, the De Facto Forces (DFF) (particularly the SLA, or South Lebanon Army, founded by Maj. Saad Haddad and subsequently led by Maj. Gen. Antoine Lahad), the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (until the summer of 1982), and various Islamic Resistance factions.

Significantly, it seems that the question of whether Ireland should commit itself to UNIFIL was not contested on a political (especially parliamentary) level in the country. As Ishizuka notes,

The debate about UNIFIL [in the Dáil (Irish parliament) on 9 May 1978] was far less controversial than the previous three peacekeeping debates—ONUC, UNFICYP, and UNEF II. There was virtually no dissent from the deputies of the left, unlike the Congo debate in 1960, when they excessively raised the issue of the local situation and the safety of the Irish contingent. However, it was generally agreed that the local situation in southern Lebanon was tense and did, therefore, jeopardise the safety of the peacekeepers, as it had in the Congo in 1960. In the UNIFIL debate, however, this issue was minimised by the professionalism of the Irish soldiers.³

Although there is no clear indication as to the reasons behind this difference in the degree of the Irish political body’s readiness to support one or the other mission, it seems that after the withdrawal of Irish troops from UNEFII in May 1974, the Irish government was eager to reassert its commitment to UN-mandated peacekeeping missions through UNIFIL. Moreover, the recent experience in the Middle East through UNFICYP and UNEFII may have partially supported the decision to re-engage in a now well-treaded region.

From a logistical perspective, the structuring of the Irish contributing force to UNIFIL evolved over time under the effect of more general UNIFIL readjustments following the 1982 Israeli-Lebanese war that, according to the “History of the 51st Infantry Battalion April 1982-October 1982,” was a period of “doubt about the renewal of the mandate” resulting “from the increased tension in South Lebanon between the various factions and warlike threats coming from the SOUTH from ISRAEL” (original emphasis). Ray Murphy explains that, after the 1982 invasion, the peacekeepers focused their efforts on the delivery of humanitarian aid to the local population and reporting violations of the ceasefire between the parties. While this provided some benefit to the civilian population, it did not justify the continued existence of such a large peacekeeping force.⁴

2 Obtained from the Defence Forces Ireland website, accessible at <http://www.military.ie>

3 Ishizuka, Katsumi (2004) *Ireland and International Peacekeeping Operations 1960-2000: A Study of Irish Motivation*. London: F. Cass, p. 107.

4 Murphy, Ray (2012) “Peacekeeping in Lebanon and Civilian Protection.” *Journal of Conflict and Security Law*, p. 3.

Furthermore, huge readjustments became inevitable after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon to the Blue Line in 2000, as well as in the second stage of the Irish deployment after 2011 under the expanded UNIFIL that followed the July 2006 war.

From 1978 to 2001, the Defence Forces maintained an infantry battalion (comprising approximately 540 personnel) that rotated every six months (amounting to over 32,000 tours of duty by 2001) with a headquarters in Tibnin, in addition to around 100 other personnel in UNIFIL headquarters and the Force Mobile Reserve. Its area of responsibility extended 100 square kilometers including mainly the towns and villages of Tibnin, Ayta az-Zud, As-Sultaniyyah, Dyar Ntar, Haddathah, At-Tiri, Rshaf, and SLA "Christian" enclave posts. This continued until November 2001 when the Defence Forces withdrew from the Area of Operations, leaving behind 11 Defence Forces personnel to handle the transfer of the mission to the Ghanaian battalion.

The expanded UNIFIL, or what is also unofficially referred to as "UNIFIL II," was formed in 2006 after the 33-day Israeli war on Lebanon on the basis of UN resolution 1701 (co-drafted by the United States and France)⁵. The resolution hugely reconfigured and enhanced the existent UNIFIL (from about 2,000 troops just before the war to the authorized level of up to 15,000 military personnel supported by international and local civilian staff), adding a Maritime Task Force that "supports the Lebanese Navy in monitoring its territorial waters, securing the Lebanese coastline and preventing the unauthorized entry of arms or related material by sea into Lebanon."⁶

Security Council resolution 1701 of 11 August 2006 thus:

Decides, in order to supplement and enhance the force in numbers, equipment, mandate and scope of operations, to authorize an increase in the force strength of UNIFIL to a maximum of 15,000 troops, and that the force shall, in addition to carrying out its mandate under resolutions 425 and 426 (1978):

- (a) Monitor the cessation of hostilities;
- (b) Accompany and support the Lebanese armed forces as they deploy throughout the South, including along the Blue Line, as Israel withdraws its armed forces from Lebanon as provided in paragraph 2;
- (c) Coordinate its activities related to paragraph 11 (b) with the Government of Lebanon and the Government of Israel;
- (d) Extend its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons;
- (e) Assist the Lebanese armed forces in taking steps towards the establishment of the area as referred to in paragraph 8;
- (f) Assist the Government of Lebanon, at its request, to implement paragraph 14;

12. Acting in support of a request from the Government of Lebanon to deploy an international force to assist it to exercise its authority throughout the territory, authorizes UNIFIL to take all necessary action in areas of deployment of its forces and as it deems within its capabilities, to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind, to resist attempts by forceful means to prevent it from discharging its duties under the mandate of the Security Council, and to protect United Nations personnel, facilities, installations and equipment, ensure the security and freedom of movement of United Nations personnel, humanitarian workers and, without prejudice to the responsibility of the Government of Lebanon, to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence;

13. *Requests* the Secretary-General urgently to put in place measures to ensure UNIFIL is able to carry out the functions envisaged in this resolution, urges Member States to consider making appropriate contributions to UNIFIL and to respond positively to requests for assistance from the Force, and expresses its strong appreciation to those who have contributed to UNIFIL in the past;

5 Makdisi, Karim (2011) "Constructing Security Council Resolution 1701 for Lebanon in the Shadow of the 'War on Terror'", *International Peacekeeping*, 18:1, p. 4-20.; Makdisi, Karim, Timur Göksel, Hans Bastian Hauck, Stuart Riegeluth (2009) "UNIFIL II: Emerging and Evolving European Engagement in Lebanon and the Middle East", EuroMeSCo.

6 Retrieved from: <http://unifil.unmissions.org>.

14. *Calls upon* the Government of Lebanon to secure its borders and other entry points to prevent the entry in Lebanon without its consent of arms or related materiel and requests UNIFIL as authorized in paragraph 11 to assist the Government of Lebanon at its request;

15. *Decides* further that all States shall take the necessary measures to prevent, by their nationals or from their territories or using their flag vessels or aircraft:

(a) The sale or supply to any entity or individual in Lebanon of arms and related materiel of all types, including weapons and ammunition, military vehicles and equipment, paramilitary equipment, and spare parts for the aforementioned, whether or not originating in their territories; and

(b) The provision to any entity or individual in Lebanon of any technical training or assistance related to the provision, manufacture, maintenance or use of the items listed in subparagraph (a) above;

except that these prohibitions shall not apply to arms, related material, training or assistance authorized by the Government of Lebanon or by UNIFIL as authorized in paragraph 11;

16. *Decides* to extend the mandate of UNIFIL until 31 August 2007, and expresses its *intention* to consider in a later resolution further enhancements to the mandate and other steps to contribute to the implementation of a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution.⁷

On 31 October 2006 for a period of 12 months, the Irish Defence Forces, as part of their UNIFIL II commitment, deployed to Lebanon a Mobile Mechanised Infantry Company Group working in reconnaissance, patrolling, and security roles alongside a Finnish engineering company within a joint Irish-Finnish Battalion. As of 2011, subject to the “triple lock” mechanism that was being implemented, the Irish Defence Forces committed 440-458 troops to the UNIFIL II mission in an area of operations measuring around 140 square kilometers extending from Tibnin in Southern Lebanon to the Blue line along the border with Israel. Its remit would “involve extensive mobile patrolling throughout the Irish area of operations in addition to ground holding and monitoring along the blue line.” Furthermore, “as a Mechanised Infantry Battalion the unit is equipped with MOWAG Piranha III APCs, Light Tactical Armoured Vehicles (GR32), heavy machine guns, anti-tank guns and Javelin missiles, heavy and medium mortars, and reconnaissance surveillance equipment.”⁸ Its features are thus distinguished from those established under UNIFIL I when the military situation was significantly different.

As part of its commitment to UN-mandated peacekeeping missions, the Irish government has thus continually contributed personnel, funding, and logistical and political support to its contingents in South Lebanon. Several Irishbatt soldiers in UNIFIL have been wounded, captured, and/or killed over the years; by 2001 the Irish had suffered 47 fatalities.

In the following section, the Irish Defence Forces’ continued commitment to UNIFIL (and more generally to peacekeeping) will be explained from historical and political perspectives, taking into consideration the complex concept and practice of Irish “neutrality” (through the particular example of the Irish battalion’s response during the At-Tiri battle) and, more briefly, the impact of Ireland’s recent experience with conflict resolution (the Northern Ireland peace process).

7 Security Council. 5511th Meeting (11 August 2006) available at: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8808.doc.htm>

8 <http://www.military.ie>.

II. Historical and Political Factors

A. Irish “neutrality” and peacekeeping

The Irish Defence Forces’ official website states that the foundation of the state’s approach to international peace and security “is set out in Article 29.1 of the Constitution in which ‘Ireland affirms its devotion to the ideal of peace and friendly co-operation amongst nations founded on international justice and morality.’” The evolution of the Irish state, its non-belligerent ideals, the humanitarian ethos of its defense forces, and particularly its involvement in peacekeeping missions are related in many ways to Ireland’s historically complex “neutrality.”

Although some historians trace the origins of neutrality to Irish Republican thought prior to independence and later to principles of sovereignty, Thomas E. Hachey argues that “what seems reasonably clear from both the published record and unpublished archives . . . is that neutrality was not, before World War II, a time-honored and commonly accepted dogma of Irish nationalism as has been sometimes suggested.”⁹ Even during the war, as Hachey points out, Irish neutrality was quite distinctive, especially in its combination of “non-belligerency” with an ambivalent defense coordination with Britain at the time. Significantly, the Irish interpretation of neutrality was unlike the Swiss model in that, at the time, “Ireland never took seriously the need to defend neutrality by creating a credible military force. Irish leaders sought instead to avoid any and all circumstances likely to draw the country into war.”¹⁰

The contours of Irish neutrality are further traced a few years into Ireland’s admission into the UN in 1955. According to Hachey, in that period,

although Dublin continued to be generally supportive of the West, it voted with emerging Third World nations on numerous occasions. Ireland also sent troops to participate in UN peacekeeping operations, and nine Irish soldiers were killed in 1960 during one such mission in the Congo. Public reaction was supportive, however, reflecting a sense of national pride and the high cost in human life was seen ‘. . . as an affirmation of Ireland’s willingness as a neutral state to risk the lives of its soldiers in defense of peace rather than in prosecution of war.’¹¹

International crises (such as the Cold War and other major climates of crisis like the post-September 11 era) as well as foreign policy and economic factors (for instance accession to the European Economic Community in 1973 and subsequently to the European Union) have also contributed to the evolution of “neutrality” - and particularly the principle of not participating in military alliances but rather in UN peacekeeping operations - within the successive Irish governments across the second half of the twentieth-century. Neal G. Jesse argues that historically

Irish deviation from the form of neutrality based on international law [particularly the Hague Convention] that other European neutrals follow—that is, withdrawal from any international commitment that would place the neutral country in a position to have to choose sides in the event of the escalation of conflict—assigns it to a unique place. Moreover, the persistence of the unarmed Irish version of neutrality sets it apart from its contemporary counterparts in Europe: Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, and Austria.¹²

9 Hachey, Thomas E. (2002) “The Rhetoric and Reality of Irish Neutrality.” *New Hibernia Review* 6.4, p. 30

10 Ibid., 31

11 Ibid., 37

12 Jesse, Neal G. (2007) “Contemporary Irish Neutrality: Still a Singular Stance.” *New Hibernia Review* 11.1, p. 75

While in the post-Cold War era, Finland, Sweden, and Austria became “non-aligned” and Switzerland maintained “prototypical,” “impartial” neutrality¹³, Labour Senator Ivana Bacik notes that Ireland’s “ambiguous neutrality status may be contrasted with the more secure legal basis for neutrality of other EU member states, notably Austria,” citing that “Irish neutrality lacks constitutional protection.”¹⁴

For Jesse,

The Irish idea of neutrality has changed as the Irish nation has progressed from escaping British dependence, to asserting its independence, to managing European interdependence. This ‘singular stance’ paints Ireland as unique among the European neutrals. In Ireland, public opinion, party politics, political institutions, leaders, and interest groups all contribute to maintaining Irish neutrality—even as Ireland integrates its economy, military, and society with the European Union.¹⁵

As Iain Attack notes in an introduction to a collection of papers on Irish neutrality, with respect to the European Union, Irish debates “involve interpretations of the meaning and significance of Irish neutrality” and “concern the military and foreign policy components of particular EU treaties, institutions and policies.”¹⁶

The complex debates on these matters have been complicated further by the emergence of the EU Common Foreign Security and Defense Policy (CFSP) applying to both EU NATO members and neutral or non-aligned members. Green Party former Senator Deirdre De Burca argues that

as the missions become more militarily robust, as the scope of the EU’s interventions broadens to include, for example, peace-making and combating terrorism in third countries, Ireland may find it more difficult to continue insisting that it is a ‘neutral’ country, certainly as it is perceived by the rest of the world. The differences that exist between popular and government understandings of Irish neutrality in this country may also prove problematic in the future. The popular conception of our neutrality appears to be much broader than the more minimalist government position of non-participation in military alliances.¹⁷

De Burca further explains that the evolving contours of Ireland’s membership in the European Union render the evolving matter of Irish “neutrality” increasingly complex and in need of a “clear and positive sense . . . which could then be used to the advantage of the EU.” She explains, “As a traditionally neutral country free of much of the colonial baggage that applies to other EU Member States, Ireland could be seen as a very important asset for the Union. Our experience of conflict resolution in Northern Ireland could be used to great effect by the EU in situations of international conflict.”¹⁸

Throughout history, in the rhetoric of most Irish politicians from both main parties (Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael), the concept of “neutrality” has been accepted but sometimes hued with some ambiguity, especially given the parameters of European commitments. The 1996 White Paper on Foreign Policy stated that “participation in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations through the WEU [Western European Union] would not involve Ireland in defence commitments of any kind under the WEU Treaty and would not therefore have any implications for our policy of military neutrality.”

13 Ibid., 90

14 Bacik, Ivana. “Irish Neutrality and International Law.” Published in Attack and McCrum *Neutrality: Irish Experience European Experience* (2009), p.10-12.

15 Jesse (2007), p. 95

16 Attack, Iain and Sean McCrum (2009) *Neutrality: Irish Experience European Experience*. Papers presented at a conference organized by Irish School of Ecumenics 8-9 May 2009, p. 5

17 De Burca, Deirdre. “The Place of Neutrality in Irish Politics.” Attack and McCrum (2009), p. 9

18 Ibid.

Some recent studies on the wider concept of neutrality and its application in Ireland have concluded that defining a practical concept of “military neutrality” could be a useful tool within the realm of international affairs and should be consecrated in an internationally recognized treaty. For example, Simon Deignan, writing in the 2010 Defence Forces Review, argues that

some states, such as Ireland, still value the concept of neutrality and the principles it upholds, using it to their advantage on the international stage, either by projecting an independent stance or increasing the credibility of their peacekeepers. Therefore it is necessary to modify the traditional laws of neutrality and have them recognised in an international treaty or organisation so that neutrality does not become a meaningless concept.¹⁹

The complex nature of Irish “neutrality” within the peacekeeping framework can be understood by taking into consideration the fact that the Republic of Ireland engages in UN-mandated peacekeeping missions, NATO’s Partnership for Peace (after December 1999), and the European Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy. Interviewees for this project²⁰ linked Irish neutrality in the sense of “having no agenda” and acting as “an honest broker” on the one hand to the country’s commitment to UN-mandated peacekeeping missions on the other. One interviewee stressed this point:

We are one of the few nations who go to Lebanon without an agenda but are rather interested in fulfilling the UN mandate. We have a strong national commitment to UN service. We also have a strong pedigree for having served with the UN since the 1950s. We have a strong record on human rights.

Reinforcing most interviewees’ arguments that involvement in UN-mandated “legitimate multinational forces” - as opposed to unilateral or (neo-)colonial forces - fits in with Ireland’s policy of “neutrality,” another interviewee added that

it demonstrates our commitment to the UN and what the UN stands for in relation to conflict resolution. Our commitment to the UN then would arise as an expression of our neutrality. While avoiding military alliances, Irish involvement in missions such as UNIFIL has provided an opportunity to play our part on the world stage as a force for good.

Interviewees recognized the inevitable evocation of empathy with suffering civilian populations in peacekeeping situations, but they also stressed that this does not conflict with neutrality. With respect to the peacekeeping mission in Lebanon, one interviewee stated:

Naturally on a human level there was regard, respect, even empathy, exchanged between the Irish and the people of the South Lebanese Mission Area in which we operated, but that had the possibility to be applied to all peoples of the mission area. Professionally the Irish responded appropriately and proportionately to whomsoever committed hostile acts or were aggressors threatening the UNIFIL mandate; not to do so would undermine the essence of the tradition making us the peacekeepers that we are.

Ultimately, the larger framework of Irish neutrality has been maintained for each of its peacekeeping missions despite the different political nuances in every case. Missions in the Middle East, however, have certainly presented a challenge in this respect. In this regard, Ishizuka advances the following argument:

19 Deignan, Simon (2010) “Does Neutrality Law Matter?” *Defence Forces Annual Review 2010*, p. 81-88. Department of Foreign Affairs (1996) *Challenges and Opportunities Abroad: White Paper on Foreign Policy*. Dublin: Dublin Stationery Office, p. 85

20 See Acknowledgments at the end for the names of the interviewees who contributed invaluable information to this project.

In retrospect, Ireland's policies for peace settlements in the states where it became involved as a peacekeeper, such as in the Congo and Cyprus, were entirely consistent with each other. Ireland consistently complied with UN policy in peace processes. However, in UNIFIL, as an EEC member, it had to take the same stance as the EEC's policy in the Middle East. That is to say, although Irish troops would impartially operate their missions in operational areas as UN peacekeepers, in Dublin the Irish government had difficulty in taking a neutral position on the Middle East, such as on the issue of the PLO legitimacy.

Another significant point is that Ireland, as well as its European colleagues, became involved in a peacekeeping area, namely the Middle East, which deeply concerned its economic interests. Therefore, one of the main principles of peacekeeping, neutrality, was called into question, by Ireland's peacekeeping policy in UNIFIL.²¹

Nonetheless, historical evidence shows that, despite the complex political circumstances of the Middle East and also varied European stances on this issue, Irish peacekeepers worked with other contingents to fulfill the UNIFIL mandate and preserved their values with respect to protecting civilians across the mission area. The impact of Ireland's complex "neutrality," wherein civilian protection plays a major role, on the development of the peacekeeping operations in conflict-ridden South Lebanon can be illustrated through the At-Tiri incident in April 1980.

Confrontation with SLA/DFF in At-Tiri

The battle of At-Tiri is important as an illustration of the Irish battalions' persistence in defending the civilian population of South Lebanon both as part of the UNIFIL mandate and as a basic human responsibility. As Ray Murphy argues in a recent article, "The single greatest challenge to contemporary peace operations is the need to protect vulnerable groups and it is often expressed in terms of the responsibility to protect civilians."²² In this context, the battle of At-Tiri was in some ways an early watershed moment for the Irish and UNIFIL more generally in Lebanon.

The confrontation was preceded by a notable political event in early 1980 when a joint communiqué was issued in Bahrain with the Irish President and Minister for Foreign Affairs who were on an official visit to the country. It stated, "The two sides stressed that all parties, including the PLO should play a full role in the negotiations for a comprehensive peace settlement. In this regard, Ireland recognizes the role of the PLO in representing the Palestinian people."²³ This stance strained relations with Israel and particularly with Major Haddad, who was the head of Israel's proxy militia, the South Lebanese Army. The tension between the Irish peacekeepers (and UNIFIL more generally) and the DFF/SLA at the time is exemplified in the At-Tiri battle.

At-Tiri was important because the village was located at the forward edge of the Irish battalion's Area of Operations (AO) on the only road leading north to the strategically significant Hill 880 from which direct fire could easily reach the towns of Haddathah, Tibnin, Haris, and the Tibnin Valley. To the South of At-Tiri lay the DFF (De Facto Forces) area that stood between the Israeli border and the limit of UNIFIL's deployment area. From the beginning, the village had been a focal point for confrontation between the UN and the SLA. In 1979-80, the 46th Irish battalion "manned observations posts (OPs), listening posts (LPs), checkpoints (CPs), and patrol bases (PBs) right across its area of operations (AO) from RSHAF to BRASHIT to DAYR NTAR as well as four OPs in the area controlled by DFF forces-MHAIDEB, BLIDA, JABAL AS SAFF and RAS."²⁴

21 Ishizuka (2004), p. 108.

22 Murphy (2012), p. 2.

23 Quoted in Murphy, Ray (1980) "Background to the Battle of At-Tiri: A Personal Assessment." Published in *In the Service of Peace: Memories of Lebanon* (From the Pages of An Cosantóir). Ed. Comdt Brendan O'Shea (2001). Dublin: Mercier, p. 61

24 Defence Forces Ireland. Military Archives. *History of 46th Infantry Battalion UNIFIL 1979/80*.

The events at At-Tiri started on Easter Sunday, 6 April 1980. The focus was, as mentioned earlier, what is known as Hill 880, a strategic point that overlooked the Irish battalion area including its supply routes. The village witnessed periods of confrontation followed by calm phases. As *The History of the 46th Battalion* reveals, “DFF leaders indicated that they wished to establish a permanent post in AT TIRI and to patrol the village on a regular basis. This was instantly rejected by IRISHBATT.” The Irish stance was in conformity with UN policy. The text of the message from UN New York to UNIFIL HQ clearly stated, “Major Haddad will NOT be allowed to set up a post in AT TIRI. He is to return to the ENCLAVE” (original emphases).

The initial tactic used by the Irish and the other UNIFIL contingents during the At-Tiri events was negotiation and discussion with the DFF, but UNIFIL vehicles and posts were repeatedly hit by fire. On Monday, and as a result of indiscriminate fire from the DFF, Pte. Stephen Griffin was wounded and killed.²⁵ On Thursday evening of that week, “for the first time, and after much aggravation [including casualties], UN troops returned fire.”^{26, 27}

Henry McDonald notes that, further exacerbating the tensions around At-Tiri, “on several occasions throughout the week Major Haddad himself passed by troops with his entourage on his way to the southern edge of the town to meet his own men! The only way through to his fighters was via Irish positions.”²⁸ There were several verbal altercations between Haddad’s aides and the Irish. A striking example of the extreme belligerence of Major Haddad and his men in dealing with Irishbatt is this text that the Major sent to UNIFIL OPS with the note “FOR INFO IRISHBATT”:

AT-TIRI village is Lebanese and so are it’s [sic] inhabitants. The meeting between the Lebanese forces and the Lebanese inhabitants of that village has been arranged. NO foreign force will prevent such meetings henceforth in the whole of LEBANON. In any case, if IRISHBATT dislike the situation and they are interested in combat, it is suggested they should and go participate in their fight in BELFAST. After they liberate BELFAST, we shall find another mission to keep them busy. In any case, not in the MIDDLE EAST. (original emphases)²⁹

By Friday afternoon, UN troops, both Dutch and Irish, secured At-Tiri village while the DFF retreated with their wounded and, by Saturday morning of that week, At-Tiri was again in UN hands. According to Capt. Ray Murphy in his “Background to the Battle of At-Tiri,”

The defence of At Tiri marked a significant change in the policy of Irish UN troops towards DFF incursions and led directly to the UN Security Council adopting Resolution 467 (1980). This resolution was important in that it made specific reference to UNIFIL’s right to use force in self-defence and vindicated the stance taken by the military commander at the time.³⁰

25 Ibid.

26 “Those Who Were There.” Published in *In the Service of Peace: Memories of Lebanon* (From the Pages of An Cosantóir). Ed. Comdt Brendan O’Shea (2001). Dublin: Mercier, p. 57.

27 *As the History of the 46th Battalion notes*, around the time of the At-Tiri events, there was especially “considerable concern for the safety of the personnel occupying the Enclave Posts,” which due to their “isolation and vulnerability” started to be known as the “hostage posts.” In such a context, in the aftermath of At-Tiri events and after being captured by DFF men, Pte. Smallhorne and Pte. Barrett suffered gunshot wounds and died, and their bodies were returned to Irishbatt at the Norwegian Hospital. A Court of Inquiry found that the person who killed the privates was one of Major Haddad’s men (*History of 46th Battalion*).

28 McDonald, Henry (1993) *Irishbatt: The Story of Ireland’s Blue Berets in the Lebanon*. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, p. 49.

29 Defence Forces Ireland. Military Archives. *History of 46th Infantry Battalion UNIFIL 1979/80*, Annex D.

30 Murphy, Ray (1980) “Background to the Battle of At-Tiri: A Personal Assessment.” Published in *In the Service of Peace: Memories of Lebanon* (From the Pages of An Cosantóir). Ed. Comdt Brendan O’Shea (2001). Dublin: Mercier, p. 61.

In his memoir, Dan Harvey argues that

behind both the present and the new enclave lines, the Israeli army did not want impartial European troops watching their behaviour, monitoring their movements and trying to establish sovereignty of the Lebanese government in an area in which the Israeli army wanted their own militias to hold sway. Thus firing on Irish troops became a near nightly occurrence.³¹

McDonald sums up the complexity of the Irish position by contending that in the 1980s and 1990s

Irish troops themselves were caught between a rock and a hard place. If they prevented PLO or Lebanese resistance fighters from entering the UNIFIL area and attacking the Israelis or their allies, the Irish risked being branded as pro-Israel. And if they blocked IDF and SLA attempts to extend the 'security zone' and depopulate the area, they were accused of having PLO sympathies.³²

However, from the perspective of 2012, one interviewee showed that the issue can be approached more productively in a different way by considering that the humanitarian element and the responsibility to protect civilians are as important as the political considerations: "We [Irish] have shown an affinity with the Palestinians as a dispossessed people and that helps because of the major refugee problem in the Middle East." Likewise, another interviewee explained, "Ireland was never an imperial power and there would be a degree of sympathy with Palestinians because they had become a dispossessed people, did not have their own state, and had become refugees."

Generally, the nuanced "neutrality" and balanced but also compassionate stance on the state of civilians in the Middle East and on the kind of Irish involvement in UNIFIL seem to reflect the Irish Defence Forces' principles as elucidated by one interviewee:

There has been a conviction within the Irish government that the Republic has a historical imperative to stand with small nations like itself while remaining neutral. There was always sympathy here with displaced people all over the world, and Irishbatt in UNIFIL displays that attitude. Although many soldiers had no political stance on the issues in the Middle East, their participation in UNIFIL was part of a tradition of a small country with a small army that was proud of its peacekeeping role.

Thus, history and values as well as adherence to UN mandates are as important as "neutrality" per se. As one interviewee put it, "Our policy of 'neutrality' is not cast in stone but our neutrality within UN missions is maintained in accordance with UN principles. We don't take sides in conflicts. Since WWII, this policy was intended for a particular context and the legislation which catered for it was never repealed afterwards." The political and military application of the Irish policy of neutrality in the context of its peacekeeping operation within UNIFIL was influenced by several factors, most importantly its defense of the rights of civilians, its adherence to UN mandates, and, later, its balanced accommodation of evolving forms of security and defense policies within the EU.

31 Harvey, Dan (2001) *Peacekeepers: Irish Soldiers in the Lebanon* Dublin: Merlin, p. 51.

32 McDonald (1993), p. 44.

B. Impact of Ireland's experience in conflict resolution on approaching tensions in South Lebanon

While there are some differences of opinion regarding the extent to which the Irish conflict resolution experience that culminated in the 1998 Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland impacted the Irish approach to South Lebanon and the larger Arab-Israeli conflict, interviewees seemed to agree that some aspects of the Northern Irish process are relevant. One interviewee remarked, "You can't exclusively superimpose solutions to one conflict onto another. You can take certain elements from it and look at the various political processes: for example, the Oslo agreement has elements from the Good Friday agreement."

In fact, the Oslo Accords (culminating in the 1995 Oslo 2 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip) spanned a period in the 1990s when the Northern Irish peace process was underway and could be compared in some limited ways to the latter process on the levels of multi-party/multinational negotiation and issues of demilitarization, elections, and self-government, all of which emerge in different ways in the Good Friday Agreement. However, despite the general principle of multinational and multi-party negotiation and compromise, the issue of South Lebanon comprises military and political particularities that are both distinct from the larger Arab-Israeli conflict and distinct from the dynamics of the Northern Irish context. From this perspective, another interviewee contended that there are more sides to the conflict in South Lebanon than there are or were in North Ireland.

However, some lessons can be "learned" from the 1998 Irish Peace Agreement, especially as far as what one interviewee described as the task of "accommodating different strongly held views" and what another referred to as the use of "soft power" in order to "approach tensions" and to support the transition of war-torn entities from conflict to post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation. For one interviewee, the larger postcolonial and post-conflict awareness of "religious divides and animosities" enabled the Irish peacekeepers "to relate and understand conflict in another context which countries with nothing to benchmark against are unable to understand." Similarly, another interviewee explained that "the collective memory of the abuse, the suffering, the denial of self-determination, the brutal repression, over a protracted period of centuries, and the still lived-with consequences of that ... granted a keenly 'felt' all too familiar awareness and appreciation of the partisan perspective, the degree of division, (the hate) that is sectarianism" that characterized not only the Catholic-Protestant and Republican-Unionist divides in Northern Ireland but also certain dimensions of the Middle Eastern tensions, specifically in the context of South Lebanon and its borders.

However another interviewee warned that the process of resolving a conflict must happen among the involved parties who must work out a compromise themselves:

People in the mission areas where tensions exist on the ground, must first want to seek a cessation to the conflict and be prepared to compromise (and not necessarily like the compromise) as a precondition almost to beginning to resolve their difficulties. They must reach this stage themselves before the example of the Irish conflict resolution applies.

This complex perspective reflects an understanding of the difficulty of peacekeeping in the Middle East and reveals the greater emphasis of the Irish in this case on non-political roles - particularly humanitarian assistance to civilians - as will be discussed in the following sections.

III. Irish peacekeepers' experiences, contributions and evolving perspectives

A. Interaction with local population and humanitarian assistance

While some interviewees clarified that it was not part of their job to “socialize” with the local population and that the numerous military emergencies made it hard to “fraternize fully and continuously,” they almost all noted what were described as “limited but meaningful interactions with the civilian communities.” These were noted especially in the framework of humanitarian assistance, and particularly the within orphanage in Tibnin (see below) and medical clinics in Tibnin, Haris and Brashit.

Despite the constraint of their location between the IDF and SLA/DFF to the south and the Islamic Resistance emerging from the north, Irish battalions did not stop offering humanitarian aid to the local people. McDonald cites the example of the 64th battalion, which suffered the biggest number of casualties in Lebanon but provided various forms of humanitarian assistance: donating \$1,700 to buy diesel oil for the Tibnin hospital; setting up medical clinics in Ayta Az-Zutt, Brashit and Tulin; buying glass for a damaged mosque in Quabrika, etc.³³ According to one interviewee, during the 1996 “Grapes of Wrath” Israeli attack, UNIFIL was involved in bringing out those who wanted to leave the most affected areas and bringing in food and blankets to those who remained in the conflict zone. The provision of humanitarian assistance by Irishbatt was extremely important during such times of crisis.

The preface to the *History of the 80th Infantry Battalion UNIFIL October 1996- April 1997* states,

The relative security and stability which IRISHBATT brings to its area of operations, along with humanitarian assistance, is much appreciated by the local civilian population. The presence and operational profile of IRISHBATT provides the conditions to allow villagers and rural SOUTH LEBANESE to live in their homes and get on with the normal activities of day-to-day living which would otherwise be well-nigh impossible.

Given that the 80th Battalion served just after the “Grapes of Wrath” Israeli operation, humanitarian assistance was a very important aspect of its contribution. This included, according to the battalion history, repairing Haddathah school that was damaged during the operation.

By 2001, Irish troops had suffered 47 fatalities in Lebanon (out of a total of 293 UNIFIL fatalities). The relevant literature and some of the interviewees’ experiences reveal that many (South) Lebanese greatly appreciate this sacrifice. According to David Murphy writing in the Irish Times in 2012, the Lebanese “are quick to acknowledge that Irish soldiers have had a huge positive impact in the region.” Irish battalions have also literally offered their “blood” to Lebanese people: “In centres like Tibnin local medics at the town’s hospitals find it difficult to get donors among fellow Lebanese citizens. . . . Transfusion is taboo. Irish soldiers have stepped into the breach saving lives that would otherwise have been lost.”³⁴

The Irish commitment to providing humanitarian assistance to the local population of the South is particularly held in high regard. According to *History of the 51st Infantry Battalion April 1982- October 1982, during the 1982 Israeli invasion and the influx of refugees from Beirut*, “the population of the Irish area trebled to a degree which necessitated a significant humanitarian assistance from the battalion. Tents and bedding were provided for the homeless and water and electric power was made available in so far as the battalion resources permitted. Medical assistance was continually available.”

33 McDonald (1993), p. 128.

34 Ibid., p. 124.

David Murphy gives several examples of this commitment and its continuing appreciation on a local level as late as 2012:

Over tea at the girls' orphanage at Tebnine, locals such as Ali Saad, a bank manager and co-ordinator for the Red Cross, spoke fondly of the Irish soldiers. The orphanage itself has been supported by Irish troops since its foundation and he was employed as an interpreter by the Irish battalion while still in his teens, employment that allowed him to go to college.

Others talk of the 'harvest patrols' of Irish troops that accompanied locals to the fields during the 1980s and 1990s to protect them from fire from the Israeli army and south Lebanon-based Israeli-backed forces.³⁵

Still, the most significant and recurrently cited example of Irishbatt's contribution on a multinational humanitarian level in Lebanon is the Tibnin orphanage. The Irish battalion, along with the Dutch and Norwegians, contributed hugely to the reestablishment of the orphanage that was initially set up by a Melkite Christian priest and the assistance of Dutchbatt in 1978. After the Israeli withdrawal in 1985, it was occupied by Amal soldiers and then given back as an orphanage. The 70th Irish battalion raised money and repaired the damage in the building, and subsequently Irishbatt and Dutchbatt collaborated to provide medical support, clothing, and books. More interestingly, as late as 2000, the 86th Infantry Battalion not only contributed food, water, diesel, gas, and toys to the orphanage, but also participated in the construction of a 60 by 20 meter playground mainly through funding from the Norwegian and Dutch governments and additional funding from the Irish government (see *History of the 86th Battalion UNIFIL October 1999- May 2000*).

In addition, during that period, farmers working the land and electricians repairing lines were protected by armored patrols while funding was provided for several local projects: the Safad Church and Mosque; a new prosthesis for a local teenager; the improvement of the basketball court in Hariss; a computer and a printer for the town council in Haddathah and Shaqra elementary school; food parcels and heating oil for the villagers of At-Tiri, a TV and video for the Majdal Slim school and tires for the tractor of the village coop. Moreover, NCOs and officers of the battalion taught English in local schools, and medical clinics were provided (*History of the 86th Battalion UNIFIL October 1999- May 2000*).

Interviewees' mention of the issue of language also appeared to be an indicator of the peacekeepers' interactions with the civilian population. Many interviewees mentioned the importance of having local interpreters who facilitate their interactions and the value of their professional relationship with such interpreters, although one interviewee voiced that not speaking Arabic and relying on an interpreter formed "an obstacle." Moreover, many interviewees anecdotally noted that many South Lebanese learned English with a Dublin, Cork, Galway, or Athlone accent depending on the origin of the Irish soldiers with whom they interacted, a phenomenon the Irish media has also reported on. Henry McDonald of *The Observer* remarked in our interview that "civilians were influenced by the different Irish accents that they were exposed to. Brashit had C Company (from Western Ireland), and the Lebanese youth there would then have Connemara/Galway accents. In Hadatha they had a Cork accent and played hurling. In Tibnin and Tulin they had a Dublin accent." This shows the extent of the Irish battalion's cultural influence in South Lebanon.

A reciprocal cultural effect is also noticed through the impact of returning peacekeepers on their local communities back home. The fact that in many cases multiple family members from successive generations serve in UNIFIL creates cultural impact through the returning Irish peacekeepers who increase their environment's knowledge about Lebanon and its culture.

35 Murphy, David. "Irish Personnel Playing Vital Role in Keeping the Peace in South Lebanon." *Irish Times* (24 March 2012), p. 13.

Interviewees emphasized the mutual “sense of respect” that generally conditioned the exchanges with the local people, whether on the street, in hospitals and schools where they offered assistance, in shops that provided the soldiers with some commodities, in homes to which they were occasionally invited or to which they offered help, or the UNIFIL sites where Lebanese individuals would be employed for particular tasks, thus forming a kind of “micro-economy in a place where infra-structure was lacking.”

As McDonald posits in his book, “A whole economy now orbits around the UN presence since 1978.”³⁶ Several former Irish peacekeepers mention the “Mingy” shops that sold almost anything and everything to the troops. In his recent memoir *Blood, Sweat and Tears: An Irish Soldier’s Story of Love and Loss*, Tom Clonan describes the “Mingy Men” who run the shops as larger-than-life characters. Since Ireland’s first deployment to the Lebanon in the 1970s, the Mingy Men have become intimately acquainted with the odd shopping habits of the Irish male.³⁷ The economic and financial aspects of the Irish presence in South Lebanon seem quite significant.

One interviewee’s experience was particularly interesting since, as part of a liaison team, he spent a lot of time conducting meetings with local community, religious and political leaders, creating several avenues of communication. The communication with South Lebanese community members and the larger postcolonial and post-conflict frameworks seem to have had a positive impact on the Irish experience in Lebanon especially from a humanitarian perspective. In this respect, most interviewees noted the similar histories of occupation and violent conflict within a small nation as historical links between Lebanon and Ireland, whereby the Irish contingent’s relationship with civilians in South Lebanon is cemented by an understanding of suffering and a commitment to humanitarian assistance. This commitment remains within the scope of the UNIFIL mandate but is also strengthened by specifically Irish contributions both by individuals and contingents on the ground and the government in Dublin.

In 2008, at the International Conference for Support to Lebanon, the Minister for European Affairs Noel Treacy announced that the Irish contribution will reach 5 million euros in bilateral humanitarian and recovery assistance in the aftermath of the 2006 war that cost Lebanon 1,200 deaths, over one million displaced, and large-scale destruction. The Irish commitment, in its different forms, was often deeply appreciated by the Lebanese. One interviewee stated, “[in] 2011 when we deployed, the population almost canvassed for us to come to Tibnin. We could take that for granted because we don’t have a colonial past, and we had built up strong cultural and personal links from our previous service since 1978.”

B. Areas of similarity and difference between Lebanon and Ireland

In his memoirs of serving in UNIFIL, Dan Harvey writes: “I could not help comparing [the South Lebanon terrain] with an arid, undulating Connemara or a west Cork terrain, sometimes quite dramatically so, with dry-stone-wall terracing evident everywhere.”³⁸ Tom Clonan writes: “In many respects, Irishbatt’s AO is reminiscent of a barren, rocky Burren. Browner than Ireland perhaps. Less green. A little harsher—the contours sharp and less rounded than those at home. The contrasts between ridgeline and wadi in Lebanon sharper than drumlin and gentle-sloped valley at home.”³⁹ One interviewee also mentioned the similarity between the landscape of the South of Lebanon and the wild landscape of western Ireland, implying some cultural-geographical similarities yet recognizing climate differences.

36 McDonald (1993), p. 133.

37 Clonan, Tom (2012) *Blood, Sweat and Tears: An Irish Soldier’s Story of Love and Loss*. Dublin: Liberties Press, p. 73.

38 Harvey, Dan (2001) *Peacekeepers: Irish Soldiers in the Lebanon* Dublin: Merlin, p. 19.

39 Clonan (2012), p. 112.

Harvey notes cultural and historical similarities describing his arrival to Lebanon as “a return to our own feudal past” with “a high moral code” in which the family is “the binding core.”⁴⁰ An interviewee, who served on several tours of duty in Lebanon, said, “the local population was family-orientated and mainly interested in making a living and raising their families in peace. They were easy to relate to and friendly in their dealings with us.” Clonan highlights other similarities:

A lot of the Lebanese—similar to the Irish—emigrate to the US, Africa, Asia, or further afield in the Middle East to avail of opportunities outside of war-torn Lebanon. The Lebanese, I will discover, are natural raconteurs and communicators. And, like the Irish, they are warm and friendly—charming, but also deeply passionate about their country, culture and history.⁴¹

One interviewee expresses a similar view: “The warmth of the people of south Lebanon is genuine and encourages you to feel welcome in their community.”

Although sometimes incapable of pinpointing the exact areas of similarity between Lebanon and Ireland, most of the interviewees stated that they felt that they connected with the local culture and people on some levels. They mainly mention the following points of likeness: “hospitality,” “openness,” “friendliness,” “sociability,” “love of conversation,” “loyalty to family and village,” and most importantly a lack of a past as “colonisers,” given that Ireland never occupied foreign territory but was itself colonized by Britain from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century (the Irish Free State was declared in 1922). In his memoir, Harvey argues that what makes the Irish good peacekeepers is their “soldierly qualities” and what makes them natural peacekeepers is precisely the absence of a colonial past, a national personality that is “friendly, communicable, courteous and sensitive,” and their “ability to defuse potentially explosive situations through tact, dialogue and humour.”⁴²

Interestingly, in the foreword to the *History of the 51st Infantry Battalion UNIFIL APRIL 1982-October 1982* covering the period of the Israeli invasion in the summer of 1982, Lt. Col. Michael F. Minehane writes that “the special skill of the Irish Units abroad resides in the cheerful, resilient personality of the Irish soldier . . .” One could possibly compare this to Lebanese resilience during the hard times of that particular year (from June 6 1982) when South Lebanon and West Beirut endured invasion, siege, wide-scale shelling, blockades, massive destruction and death among Lebanese and Palestinian militants and civilians.

One noted difference between the two populations, however, is, according to one interviewee, that “while the Irish people have a long folk memory that keeps the history of a Civil War that happened ninety years ago vivid in their minds, the Lebanese tend to forget or want to forget their civil war. They seem to have a short folk memory which has advantages and disadvantages.” Nevertheless, as another interviewee emphasizes, “the Irish past of [British] colonialism, anti-colonial struggle, civil war, and conflict resolution certainly makes Ireland suited for understanding the problems in Lebanon.”

40 Harvey (2001), p. 22.

41 Clonan (2012), p. 31.

42 Harvey (2001), p. 77.

C. Irish soldiers' knowledge about the Middle East and Lebanon prior to their experience on the ground

Those interviewees who are/were interested in history, international relations, and current affairs indicated that they had informed themselves about the mission area - and about the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian issue in particular - before arriving in Lebanon. One interviewee explained his own approach: "a life-long interest, from an early age, in the military, world history and current affairs informed me as to the mission area."

Individual experiences with respect to this issue vary slightly. While one interviewee noted that "apart from official briefings directly related to the upcoming tours of duty, there is surprisingly little/no talk in messes, at coffee time, after hours recreation, etc. about individual experiences of tours of duty," another recounted how he "learned from other soldiers about the culture, the ethnicities, the religions, the language, etc." and that he "knew the image of Beirut as the Paris of the Middle East during the 1950s" and similar anecdotes.

In fact, most interviewees mentioned having heard stories from other soldiers who had been in Lebanon or learned information about the country and region through briefings or a handbook on the mission area during the training period. One interviewee reported, "I read extensively and received in-depth briefings from Irish Army lecturers and from soldiers who served in the area previously." Another interviewee further elucidated the process:

Before going to Lebanon or on any other mission for that matter we were given thorough briefings by the Irish Defence Forces on the political, religious, and cultural features and mores of the host country. These briefings were constantly updated for each successive unit to keep abreast of developments in the mission area and were usually conducted by personnel of the most recently returned units. We were well briefed on what to expect and how to behave so that no offence might be inadvertently given to the Lebanese population.

Another interviewee who spent over two years in Lebanon revealed that most of his knowledge came from his comrades, his father and the latter's friends who served there in the 80s but added, "I can honestly say I still only know a little, but it is a more grounded understanding, based on unique and personal experiences."

D. Changes in peacekeepers' levels of knowledge and understanding of the situation in Lebanon

Clearly, experience on the ground developed, reinforced, and sometimes altered soldiers' understanding of South Lebanon as a conflict zone where several local and regional powers fought and civilians paid a huge price. Some interviewees pointed out that their perspectives on the country and region were influenced by the events and by interaction with the local population and the various armed groups. Many explained that they began to understand the political and religious undercurrents that were part of the South Lebanese society while forming a better assessment of the diversity of the population. Some interviewees commented on their amazement at the engagement of a number of people in South Lebanon in Israeli-backed proxy militias.

Others emphasized their realization that South Lebanon was in chaos and that fear and disenfranchisement were widespread. One interviewee stated that he learned

how much as a people and a state entity Lebanon was NOT [interviewee's emphasis] in control of its own destiny. It was a Battle Space on which was being fought out the confrontation between some Arab nations and Israel. This was so because the internal fractionalized make up . . . rendered it weak and unstable, hence vulnerable to some outside influences that were pursuing their own agendas.

Another interviewee asserted that “the situation geopolitically was not black and white; it was very complicated and it involved a lot of different actors.”

One interviewee who served in Lebanon on several tours of duty noted that he “now look[s] at how the decisions taken by political leaders in all the regional states can have both positive and negative impacts on the lives of the citizens of Lebanon, and this is often most profoundly felt in the poorest southern region.” Reinforcing and developing this point further, another interviewee explained,

I came to see the conflict as a problem that successive governments on both sides of the conflict, regional powers and world superpowers refuse to commit to solving the issues, mainly for their own strategic interests. I saw that the destructive nature of the conflict impacted mainly on the local population on both sides of the conflict, many of whom were ambivalent about the conflict and wanted mostly to raise their families and live in peace.

These realizations about internal and regional complexities, including their impact on civilians, seem to influence to some extent the interviewees’ perspectives on war and peacekeeping, which are discussed in the following section.

E. Changes in perspectives on war and peacekeeping after experience in UNIFIL

The UNIFIL experience seems to have had a formative effect for several interviewees on the level of their understanding of war and peacekeeping. The older generation that is now retired had in many cases served in other missions (Congo or Cyprus, for example) before coming to Lebanon; thus, they compared the UNIFIL experience to earlier ones on the levels of aggression, uncertainty, and the requirements of peacekeeping. The younger group pointed out the ways in which UNIFIL brought into focus the relationship among soldiering, peacekeeping, and the importance of communication with the local population.

Some of those whose UNIFIL experience was their first mission abroad described it as an “eye-opener,” a “baptism of fire,” and a “maturing process” on both cultural and military levels with respect to the responsibilities and complexities of peacekeeping. As one interviewee pointed out, this is particularly the case given the uncertainty and volatility of circumstances on the ground in the South since the situation could “become extremely dangerous in an unannounced manner. The 2006 war is a classic example where overnight you could move from a relatively benign situation to an extremely serious situation, as also in the case of the ‘Grapes of Wrath’ operation.” This makes the Lebanon mission different from, for example, the East Timor one, which is described as less dangerous from the perspective that “there was no threat from indirect weapons.”

One interviewee explained that his UNIFIL experience was an “eye-opener from the cultural perspective and from a military training perspective. In my second and third trips,” he explained, “I was at the UNIFIL headquarters working in a multinational environment while the first trip was with an Irish unit only. War and peacekeeping shifted from an abstract idea to reality.” Another interviewee emphasized, “Irish troops were targeted by forces across the spectrum, and you could fall into some kind of complacency to think that if you are Irish that would give you a metaphorical bulletproof vest because it didn’t.”

However, these complications and realizations of danger do not seem to have essentially affected Irish commitment to the mission. In this respect, all interviewees stressed the continued dedication of the Irish Defence Forces to their mandate and to the “task,” whatever the circumstances and the extent of the violence and loss of Irish lives. As one interviewee noted, “Body bags have affected the US in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. When [three] of our soldiers were blown up in the eighties in Brashit, that could have been a trigger if there was a political willingness to withdraw forces and that could have caused a period of introspection but it didn’t. We remained steadfast.”

Speaking of the “Grapes of Wrath” operation, one interviewee pointed out that it “did not affect Irish commitment which has been steadfast. If there were Irish casualties, there would be heightened concern for Irish troops. But I never felt that there was any wavering, and certainly no wavering from the military side.” According to Ishizuka, in most cases where its peacekeeping forces suffered either casualties or financial problems, the Irish government did not withdraw these forces from operations. He explains, “This patience seems to be characteristic of a state expressing a constant and consistent loyalty towards UN policy.”⁴³

For one interviewee, the experience in Lebanon “brought into focus the impact of military conflict on the local population. And how such actions affect relations between communities divided by geographic boundaries (like the Blue Line). But most importantly it showed how political decisions impact on the lives of ordinary people in the most profound manner.” Another interviewee stated,

I became aware of the geo-political importance of the conflict and how it impacts on the wider Middle East. The tense situation in Lebanon and Israel is the result of political issues not being sorted out by respective governments or their sponsors. The peacekeeper in many situations is treated cynically by neighboring governments and is not respected for the impartial role that they are trying to perform.

As a result, the UNIFIL experience seems to have been hugely important for the Irish Defence Forces on various levels. As one interviewee put it, the experience

gained in the complex, sometimes (often) hostile, peacekeeping environment in South Lebanon was invaluable, as an individual soldier/officer testing your own abilities and self-belief, but also on an organisational (Defence Forces) level reinforcing benefits of training, equipment, organisation, logistical support, etc., or highlighting gaps in these areas. It facilitated comparisons with other armies from other contributing nations. All these lessons learned were applied not only on both future tours of duty there and in later missions elsewhere around the world but also directly at home in Ireland where we had to cope concurrently with a Domestic Internal Security situation in aid to the Civil Power.

The impact of “lessons learned” on training and Irish involvement in the expanded UNIFIL will be explored in the next sections.

43 Ishizuka (2004), p. 100.

IV. Expansion of mission, training, and new considerations

A. New considerations in peacekeeping

Since the mid 1990s, several factors have contributed to changing the dynamics of Irish peacekeeping and impacted the Lebanon contingents, especially later in the context of UNIFIL II. The Irish Defence Forces have reached a phase in which they must strike a balance between continued support to the “traditional” UN peacekeeping operations and the more sophisticated Capability-required Peace Support Operations under the auspices of EU and NATO Partnership For Peace (PfP). (The latter must, however, have provenance in a UN Security Council Resolution in order for the Irish to be able to become involved.) Clearly, participation in PfP activities appears to have been a somewhat delicate matter on an official Irish level. In the discussion of the Irish Senate (Seanad Éireann) White Paper on Foreign Policy on 24 April 1996, Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs Mr. Gay Mitchell stated:

Participation in PFP in no sense impinges on our policy of military neutrality. PFP is a flexible arrangement which allows each participating state to focus on its own interests in the security area: ours are those of peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, and environmental and drugs issues. It is incorrect and misleading to suggest that PFP is somehow a backdoor for Irish entry into NATO.

With respect to peacekeeping in Lebanon, UNIFIL II is “still a peacekeeping Chapter VI force, but it is more heavily equipped” and its “footprint has changed dramatically” from the original UNIFIL, as has been clarified by interviewees and in the historical overview earlier. In the words of one interviewee, as “a lot of the soldiers had served under Chapter VII in Africa (Chad, Liberia...), for them to serve under a Chapter VI, that is a far more nuanced observer mission, that would add to their professional experience.” However, the fact that UNIFIL II was finally consolidated according to Chapter VI of the UN Charter made the mission closer to the traditional form of peacekeeping in which Ireland, as a “neutral” nation, would be involved. In his recent article on “Peacekeeping in Lebanon and Civilian Protection,” Ray Murphy sums up the distinction and its significance for UNIFIL and the Middle East:

Traditional peacekeeping operations are approved under Chapter VI (Peaceful Settlement of Disputes) of the UN Charter and rely on the co-operation of the parties to the conflict. The original UNIFIL mission was such an operation. In recent years, the Security Council has approved operations under Chapter VII (Enforcement Operations) and the mandate and nature of such missions is substantially different from those approved under Chapter VI. Initially, there were mixed signals from the Israeli Government about the plan to deploy another international force, but later they made it clear that the preferred choice was a reconfigured UNIFIL with a ‘robust’ mandate under Chapter VII. Lebanon, as the host state, had the final say and did not support such a change in the mandate. Apart from the dangers of becoming embroiled in conflict, Chapter VII mandates can create expectations that are seldom realized.⁴⁴

UNIFIL is a Chapter VI mission, which means that UN forces have limited powers for peace-enforcement and they are confined mainly to self-defence and protection of life taskings. The “big difference” now, as the UNIFIL mandate implies and as several interviewees pointed out, is that the Lebanese government has been able to extend its presence to the international Blue Line and is working “much more closely” with UNIFIL. If UNIFIL II, despite its force enhancement, did not fundamentally alter the principles under which the Irish contingents have operated in Lebanon, what has evolved in recent years is the training that Irish soldiers receive before they are sent there. The evolution of training in the last decade according to a more sophisticated understanding of the importance of cultural awareness and civil-military coordination is the topic of the following section.

44 Murphy, R. (2012), p. 5.

B. Training⁴⁵

1. Aspects of the Irish peacekeepers' preparation for their mission abroad (expanded UNIFIL in particular)

The core function of the UN Training School Ireland UNTSI that is located in Camp Curragh, Kildare, is to prepare for peace support operations generally and for missions in Lebanon specifically. The school was opened in 1995 and was essentially built on peacekeeping values from a UN perspective, and was hence named the UN Training School Ireland. It is still a strongly UN-influenced institution. Its current Chief Instructor is Lt. Col. Mick Dolan. A considerable number of international students and members of the armed forces of other (56 to this day) countries participate in the training courses at UNTSI. The 1996 White Paper on Foreign Policy states that

the provision of peacekeeping training is an essential component to the success of a mission. Ireland has always attached high priority to equipping its peacekeepers with the skills and knowledge which they require for service overseas. The UN Training School recently established by the Defence Forces at the Curragh contributes to this objective. . . . The Government will seek to make use of Ireland's expertise in peacekeeping, such as that available at the Defence Forces' UN Training School, to assist other countries endeavouring to develop their own training facilities.⁴⁶

In addition to the International Military Observers Staff Officers Course (IMOSOC), and the International Human Rights (IHR) Course, since 2011 there has also been an International Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) course. The International CIMIC course description states that "an essential element of the course is to expose students to the attitude of IOs and NGOs to military operations in the CIMIC environment and to highlight the importance of a positive working relationship between military forces and civilian organizations in theatre." There are eight modules in the course: CIMIC Operations in the Peacekeeping Spectrum; the International Legal Framework: International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law; Rules of Engagement and Code of Conduct; Working with International Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations; Mediation and Negotiation Techniques; The CIMIC Planning Process; Self Defence and Battlefield First Aid; and CIMIC Field Exercise. As the 2012 UNTSI prospectus states, there is also instruction on: "Cultural Awareness (CLAW) and Leadership Training . . . Personal Security Awareness Training (PSAT) for the Department of Foreign Affairs Rapid Response Corps. In terms of mission-specific training for example, UNTSI will carry out pre-deployment instruction for those deployed to the European Union Force in Bosnia (EUFOR Bosnia and Herzegovina), ISAF in Afghanistan, KFOR in Kosovo and UNIFIL in Lebanon."⁴⁷

In this context, Irish peacekeepers are selected for overseas service through a process that requires training, medical examination, fitness tests, and recommendation. Upon selection for overseas service (including UNIFIL), they would undergo a series of briefings on: human rights, cultural awareness, gender awareness, legal aspects (including rules of engagement and law of armed conflict) and medical briefings. Briefings include general briefings on the situation in Lebanon and the operational environment into which they would be deploying, media briefings (specialized), PSS (personnel support services) briefings, critical incident stress briefings, and operational training for specific scenarios that they might encounter (patrolling and joint operation with the Lebanese armed forces).

45 The information in the "Training" section has been supplied through relevant published literature and interviews with Commandant Robert Corbet, Dr. Conor Galvin, and Commandant Johnny Whittaker at the UN Training School Ireland. We acknowledge that this section comprises some direct quotations from the interviewees but these are not indicated as such for efficiency in delivering the factual data provided here.

46 Department of Foreign Affairs (1996) *Challenges and Opportunities Abroad: White Paper on Foreign Policy*. Dublin: Dublin Stationery Office, p. 197.

47 United Nations Training School Ireland. Prospectus 2012, p. 5.

Pre-deployment training is generally spread over approximately two and half months. Elements of this take place at the School. Specifically, the functions of the School are to take the lessons of previous rotations and make them available to those who are getting ready to be deployed (through seminars and workshops, etc.). The entire command structure of a battalion (officer corps, senior non-commissioned officers, NCOs) would come for briefing sessions or seminars where the lessons of previous deployments are worked through. The people who lead these sessions are generally those who have experience leading the various staff and line functions in a previous rotation. They are not formal courses. To be appointed as an instructor in the UN School, one has to have a track record in the area of PSO (Peace Support Operations) and particularly UN work. There is no formal doctrine base for the PSO but rather what they call “embodied doctrine.” School Instructors speak from a very grounded place in PSO terms and this is reflected in their instruction.

Until very recently, the understanding of what works well was based on almost exclusively UN values and UN DPKO (Department of Peacekeeping Operations) experience. Recently, the Irish Defence Forces also became involved in PfP (NATO’s Partnership for Peace) constituting a second thread of information that now feeds into practices and instruction at the School. The Partnership for Peace is “a programme of practical bilateral cooperation between individual Euro-Atlantic partner countries and NATO.” It includes 22 countries. Its activities “touch on virtually every field of NATO activity, including defence-related work, defence reform, defence policy and planning, civil-military relations, education and training, military-to-military cooperation and exercises, civil emergency planning and disaster-response, and cooperation on science and environmental issues.”⁴⁸ Involvement in PfP activities since 1999 has influenced instruction at the UN Training School that would now include both CIMIC (Civil-Military Cooperation) and CIMCOORD (Civil-Military Coordination) perspectives from NATO as well as UN perspectives.

As Graham Heaslip explains with respect to the history of the emergence of civil-military cooperation and coordination:

Since the late 1990s, this push for more unified efforts has led to such innovations as UN Integrated Missions, which combined the political, peacekeeping, and humanitarian arms of the UN system under a unified command. Indeed, many donor countries have now synchronized the foreign assistance arms of government in what has been variously called the “joined up approach,” the “whole of government approach,” or, the “3-Ds” approach, referring to defence, development and diplomacy. The goal has been to use military, political and humanitarian/development instruments in a more synchronized and presumably more effective, manner to achieve security, development and peace in conflict affected countries.⁴⁹

According to the UN DPKO, “UN Civil-military coordination is the system of interaction, involving exchange of information, negotiation, deconfliction, mutual support, and planning at all levels, between military elements and humanitarian organisations, development organisations, and the local civilian population to achieve UN objectives.”⁵⁰ In addition to coordination with the humanitarian actors that are independent from the UN,

civil-military coordination in the UN peace operation and peacebuilding context is likely to include interaction with mission civilian functions such as: political affairs, civil affairs, public information, human rights, DDR, rule of law and/or judicial affairs, SSR, elections, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction, return and resettlement of refugees and IDPs, civil and child protection, etc. and the various entities that make up the mission support component, as well as various civilian actors outside the UN mission such as UN agencies, donor agencies, international development NGOs, private contractors, the local civilian authorities, the local civil society, etc.⁵¹

48 “The Partnership for Peace Programme.” North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Retrieved from: <http://www.nato.int>.

49 Heaslip, Graham (2010) “Challenges of Civil Military Cooperation/Coordination in Humanitarian Relief.” *Defence Forces Annual Review 2010*, p. 49.

50 Quoted in De Coning, Cedric (2007) “Civil-Military Coordination Practices and Approaches within United Nations Peace Operations.” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 10.1, p. 11.

51 Ibid., p. 10.

A third player that has emerged besides the UN and NATO is the European Union Military Staff (EUMS). EUMS is an agency of the European Union established in 2001 that leads on supervising operations that fall within the area of the Common Security and Defence Policy and falls under the military authority of the European Union Military Committee (EUMC). EUMS “implements the decisions and guidance of the EUMC and supports it in situation assessment and military aspects of strategic planning. This concerns the full range of Petersberg tasks, including the European security strategy and all EU-led operations.”⁵² A number of senior people in the Irish Defence Forces have been involved in the EUMS, bringing to it a very distinctive Irish way of understanding the military role in peacekeeping and support and the possibilities that this offers.

Therefore, the recent coming together of NATO PfP and EUMS, along with a well-established and essential set of UN peace operations principles in the Irish Defence Forces’ peacekeeping theory and practice, has affected training, especially on the level of civil-military coordination.

2. Difference between current training and training available in the 1980s and 1990s

One of the great differences between the present-day training and the training available in the 1980s and 1990s is that, previously, there was no specific mechanism in place to capture the lessons of recent and ongoing deployments, whereas now there is a database that contains the information about the people who returned from overseas missions. This helps to call these former peacekeepers in for the seminars and workshops. Similarly, in the 80s and early 90s there was no central venue while now there is the UN Training School that serves as “the focal point of the Defence Forces effort to standardise preparation for Peace Support Operations,” according to the UNTSI website. Having a central facility helps these kinds of developments to take place.

Furthermore, there is now a far greater focus on training, and this is carried out in a more coherent and mission-specific manner. Interaction with other militaries and building experience as an organization allow the development of training to reflect these experiences. With the establishment of the UN Training School, that would have been further developed and fostered. Also interaction with other militaries would have helped to form a more coherent training package. Cultural awareness and gender awareness training would have stemmed also from experiences with other peacekeeping contingents.

The importance of cultural awareness and effective civil-military communication have become mainstream thinking, especially in the aftermath of the recommendations of the 2000 Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, or Brahimi Report. The Report, which recommended several structural adjustments particularly with respect to human rights and civil-military coordination, stated the following:

Effective communication helps to dispel rumour, to counter disinformation and to secure the cooperation of local populations. It can provide leverage in dealing with leaders of rival groups, enhance security of United Nations personnel and serve as a force multiplier. It is thus essential that every peace operation formulate public information campaign strategies, particularly for key aspects of a mission’s mandate, and that such strategies and the personnel required to implement them be included in the very first elements deployed to help start up a new mission.

In the early 1990s this thinking also existed in the sense of being connected with the people, having respect for local culture, and - in the case of Lebanon - deferring to mukhtars (elected heads of villages or towns), for example. Now, however, it is more evolved and standardized in the Irish Defence Forces peacekeeping theory and practice.

52 Military Staff of the European Union. Retrieved from:
http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries_foreign_and_security_policy/cfsp_and_esdp_implementation/r00006_en.htm

3. The effect of the expansion of UNIFIL after 2006 on Irish decisions regarding the format of peacekeeping training

With a different footing and different rules of engagement after 2006, training and preparation within UNTSI were affected. This has to do with the changing understanding about peace support operations (PSO) generally and not just UNIFIL specifically. Once the School started to think beyond Chapter VI-only activities and started engaging with the possibilities of Chapter VII-type activities, that changed the frame on the levels of readiness required and understandings of how and what to prepare for. The Irish Defence Forces have also had Chapter VII deployments, such as to Liberia, for example. Increasingly, they are seeing the need to be prepared to step into the more ambiguous PK/PS arrangements that could rapidly develop into higher-risk situations, i.e. the mission could start as a Chapter VI but before actual deployment or during the mission, it could shift towards a Chapter VII situation.

This has impacted how the School helps pre-deploying HQ groups to train — how the missions are structured and how they view and utilize subcomponents like the civil-military coordination function that has become much more central to Irish DF PSO deployments. Of course these components existed before in small projects like the Tibnin orphanage or playground that were built by Irish mission personnel to make a small difference in the local communities. But now CIMCOORD has become much more systematized. The missions are now more focused on building communication with communities, reaching out to local civil society and involving local peoples in decision-making. The forces employ a more Comprehensive Approach (CA) thinking going into mission preparation and training; much more attention is being focused on what the UN calls an Integrated Mission approach.

Another new factor that affects training is increased interaction with the Lebanese Army. Before 2001, there was little interaction with the Army. Now, interaction with the Army has become a feature on the ground and a feature of training, and that in turn influences cultural awareness in the sense that the peacekeepers now deal not only with civilian communities but also with the Lebanese Army in joint patrolling. Whereas, before, UNIFIL was responsible for security in the area, the Lebanese Army now has the jurisdiction, and the peacekeeping units play a supporting role. According to the interviewees, it is a positive sign that the Lebanese are taking responsibility of their security.

V. Irish media representations of successive phases of Irish presence in the South of Lebanon

A. Areas of interest

Media interest in UNIFIL seems to have been affected by the intensity of the conflict in the South of Lebanon and appears to surge when major events occur. As one interviewee explained:

When major conflict erupted, it came much more to the fore. You would be made aware of what your loved ones were reading and would try to reassure them. During the quieter times, I felt that it was a bit generic. During greater conflict, the accuracy of the coverage with respect to what I was experiencing on a daily basis became much closer.

For example, media coverage became more frequent and extensive in 1982 due to the sense that an Israeli invasion was imminent at a time when UNIFIL was under Irish command. In the summer and fall of 1982, there was a marked increase in the number of *Irish Times* articles on UNIFIL focusing particularly on the mutual distrust between UNIFIL and the SLA led by Major Haddad, the extent of Israeli aggression during the invasion, and the growing concerns over the multinational force's future.

On 9 June 1982, Dennis Kennedy reported the Irish Government's statement that defended UNIFIL's role and its Irish commander, General William Callaghan: "It is clear that UNIFIL, whose role is, and always has been, peace-keeping, and not peace enforcement, is properly discharging its designated functions in the face of the present very difficult situation." Sean Cronin, in an article published on 19 June 1982, reported the UN, US, Israeli, and Irish perspectives on the security situation in Lebanon at a moment when the UNIFIL mandate was extended for two months in the middle of the summer 1982 crisis (in contrast to an automatic six-month renewal). Christopher Walker explained the difficulty of the situation on 26 July 1982: "At Naqoura there is considerable uncertainty about UNIFIL's future, although senior UN sources are confident that the force may succeed in staying on despite the obvious Israeli enthusiasm for its removal." In an article ominously titled "UNIFIL Now Redundant, Say Irish Officers," the *Irish Times* Reporter painted a grim picture of the encirclement of the peacekeeping force by the Israeli army since the invasion, impairing many aspects of its operation.

Interviewees noted that they received most of the information about media coverage from their families and friends in Ireland. One interviewee told the story of how his mother would send him an article on Irishbatt from the *Irish Times* and how she would mention to him the relevant reports on UNIFIL incidents that she got from her friend who was an *RTE* radio producer. Interviewees also frequently mentioned the Irish media interest in the humanitarian endeavors like the orphanage in Tibnin. Commenting on recent media coverage of Irishbatt in UNIFIL, one interviewee reported, "The media gives a very positive focus on Irish Defence Forces presence in Lebanon. It emphasizes the peace-keeping and humanitarian roles of our forces."

Topics that seem to emerge regularly in media reports concern the deployments and homecomings of battalions, the great humanitarian work of the Irish peacekeepers, as well as government and parliamentary debates on the efficiency of UNIFIL, as noted earlier. As such, some interviewees pointed out a need "to focus more on the daily operational taskings that the various units carry out, and what that does to improve the security of that part of Lebanon." Finally, one interviewee summed up: "The media representation varied from being quite good, analytical and detailed to becoming quite blasé." While this variation was to some extent influenced by media policy and public interest and was perceived as such, it could be argued that the kind and scope of media coverage of Irish peacekeepers and UNIFIL more generally may have had some impact on public opinion and public policy regarding the conflict in the Middle East and the peacekeeping mission.

The following section engages more closely with the role of the media through interviews with two journalists who have extensive experience covering Irish peacekeepers in Lebanon and UNIFIL more generally.

B. Interviews (April and May 2012) with journalists Lara Marlowe (currently *Irish Times*, Washington correspondent) and Henry McDonald (currently *The Observer-Guardian*, Belfast correspondent) on UNIFIL coverage

When were you present in Lebanon?

LM: I visited Lebanon for the first time in 1987 and spent several months there in 1988. I moved from Paris to Beirut in early 1989 as a correspondent for the *Financial Times*. From 1991 until 1996, I was Beirut Bureau Chief for *Time* magazine. I left *Time* in 1996 to become the France and Maghreb correspondent for the *Irish Times*. I was a direct witness of what the Israelis call the “Grapes of Wrath” operation. I was in a convoy with an Irish officer just south of Qana when the Israeli bombardment of the Fijian Battalion headquarters started. A Fijian soldier came on the radio, pleading for help. A few minutes later, a Lebanese Army liaison officer came on the radio, shouting: “The people are dying here! We hear the voice of death. Do you understand?”

HM: I was with the British army in Kuwait during the Gulf War, as an embedded reporter. I had been intending to go to Lebanon and actually went there for the first time in June or July 1991. I had made a lot of contacts with the UN ceasefire monitors and Irish senior officers while I was in the Gulf and that was the connection. I also had friends from Belfast who had been in Lebanon and told me that no one had written a comprehensive work about the Irish in UNIFIL so I made several trips over the period of 1991 to 1993, the year when my book (*Irishbatt: The Story of Ireland's Blue Berets in the Lebanon*) was published. Also when I was working for the BBC I made a documentary on Lebanon during 3 trips in 1994 and 1995. In 1998, I was back in Lebanon and then interviewed the Hezbollah commander Kawuk and Amal representatives. I am very familiar with the region from Naqoor to Hadatha.

How often did you cover UNIFIL activities and especially Irishbatt?

LM: UNIFIL, and in particular the Irish Battalion, were a great help to me in covering southern Lebanon during the years I spent there. My first articles from Tibnin – about Hezbollah and UNIFIL, and about Israeli harassment of Irishbatt – were published in the *Irish Times* on August 10-11, 1988. Even after I returned to Paris, I continued to cover Irishbatt on trips to Beirut, for example in February 2000, when four Irish soldiers were killed in a traffic accident on the coastal highway in southern Lebanon.

HM: I did dispatches for Irish and British newspapers throughout the period I was there. I wrote for the *Observer*, *Spectator* magazine, Irish papers and Irish news, *Evening Press*, *Sunday Press*, the *BBC*, in addition to a 3-part documentary for *Ulster TV* at the end of the occupation in 2000. About 70% of my coverage was on Irishbatt but I had interactions with other battalions in the multinational Force Mobile Reserve FMR (especially the Indians and the Finnish) and Timor Goksel.

To what extent do you think media coverage affected Irish popular opinion and Irish official decisions on UNIFIL?

LM: Popular opinion was influenced less by the media than by returning Irish soldiers and officers. There was not constant Irish media coverage. The soldiers who came home from Lebanon told their neighbours, friends, and families about their experiences, and the Irish Defence Forces kept the government informed. Several times, I met taxi drivers in Dublin who knew the names of all the villages around Tibnin. Ireland is a small country and a large number of Irishmen served in Lebanon.

HM: I think that there was a dearth of media coverage up until the time I started writing the book. I am not sure if that was part of a policy but generally not many people were going to that part of the world. Usually there would be some set piece for example on St. Patrick's day or when the minister or the press office would set up something to cheer the troops. I had an advantage because I had friends in the army and I was in the reserve forces myself. Obviously when something happened, the media would be there. The problem was the complexity and the shifting alliances that made Irish people not understand what was going on as for example with the death of Irish soldiers in Brashit. As you know, Ireland is generally speaking pro-Palestinian but with exceptions. The troops on the ground had a very complicated experience of the different sides of the conflict but had a very good relationship with the civilians.

What is your perspective and generally the Irish media perspective on Irish commitment to UNIFIL?

LM: When Ireland was admitted as a permanent member to the UN in 1955, it was a proud and joyous day, an "influence multiplier" for a small, neutral country. UN peacekeeping missions have given the Irish Defence Forces a direct experience of war that they would not have had otherwise, coming from a neutral country. Last St. Patrick's Day, President Barack Obama praised Irish peacekeeping forces when he received the Taoiseach in the Oval Office. The perception of Irishbatt is positive, among the Irish media and public as well as the Lebanese. From Tibnin, Irishbatt engaged in civic projects that made the hard life of the local population a little more bearable. They gave food and shelter to refugees during Israeli offensives.

HM: UNIFIL is the longest ever commitment. It has been accepted that serving in Lebanon is part of the Irish Defence Forces tradition. I think that the next mission will be the most interesting in years because it is right at the border and because of the unstable situation in Syria and with Iran. Most people consider serving in UNIFIL a badge of honour because peacekeeping is real soldiering. I remember once being at a dinner in Camp Shamrock and we were watching what was going on outside as though it was surreal and at any moment we could go to the bunkers. The word "Garryowen" was a codeword from Rugby that you have to get your helmet and jacket and then you would spend many hours in the bunker. Of all the nations involved in UNIFIL, the Irish are probably the most knowledgeable about the terrain and the actors. There is a lot of experience in the officer ranks. It is an Irish general who determined the line between Israel and Lebanon.

Do you think that journalists have in some way contributed to the role/impact of peacekeeping and of UNIFIL specifically?

LM: A journalist's job is to observe and record. Sometimes there may be an interplay between what correspondents report and the UN and public reaction to it. One example was the broad coverage of "Grapes of Wrath." A UNIFIL soldier gave Robert Fisk of the *London Independent* a video of an Israeli reconnaissance drone over Qana, indicating that the Israelis watched the bombardment as they perpetrated it. This added to pressure on then UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali to commission the Van Kappen report on the massacre. In this instance, the media were a precipitating factor when it came to peacekeeping in South Lebanon. That report, like others – for example the September 2009 Goldstone report about the Israeli assault on Gaza in 2008-9 – briefly changed perceptions, but in the end, Israel always seems to avoid accountability. I resigned from Time in 1996 because of the way my editors dealt with the Qana massacre. They were reluctant to publish UNIFIL's official death toll of over 100 dead. They published a photograph of a dead child in the hospital morgue in Tyre with a caption that said the child was killed in "crossfire" at Qana. There was no crossfire at Qana. I do not believe American media give a balanced view of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Despite the best efforts of the Israeli embassy in Dublin, Irish media tend to be more objective.

HM: I think that UN peacekeepers had a bad press because of Bosnia and the ineffectuality in Rwanda. As a journalist, I saw a big contrast with the Irish that have a proud record in Lebanon. I saw that the peacekeepers could not change the geopolitical situation but they could make people's lives easier. I think that the Irish did a good job but that was very underplayed. Maybe because they were worried about public opinion. Public opinion would have been appalled and there would have been a clamour if there were body bags that had to be pulled out. Every casualty is a big tragedy but my big surprise after the 30 years of the Irish being there - and I was there on and off - is that there weren't more casualties. UNIFIL was a slight success story over more than 30 years because presence there was maintained throughout. Some people served in Lebanon and their sons then served there.

There were some restrictions on reporting in South Lebanon there but the key was translators. One of them was very helpful because of his contacts; he got me the interview with Kawuk. The interview stirred some interest in Britain especially that Kawuk mentioned the openness of Hezbollah to membership by Christians for example.

As a result of their experience in UNIFIL, the Irish Defence Forces held an international training week for other armies from around the world (in the Curragh Camp) and I reported on that. The British and American army sent people to be trained on peacekeeping operations by a small army in a tiny country. It was the first time that the British army was back in the Curragh Camp.

IV. Findings and conclusions

In the foreword to the History of the 86th Infantry Battalion UNIFIL Oct 1999- May 2000, Lieutenant Colonel Bernard L. Donagh writes:

Twenty-one years of continuous service with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has generated a special culture within the Defence Forces. A generation of young Irishmen and Irishwomen has contributed to this culture of service. The 'Leb' is a national 'institution.' There has developed through this service a special political, diplomatic and military relationship between Ireland[,] the people of Lebanon, and the people of South Lebanon in particular.

Across Lebanon's conflict and post-conflict history of the last 35 years, Ireland's history of peacekeeping has been established in the Middle East, and specifically in Lebanon, in the form of a continued dedication to UN-mandated multinational forces.

During this period, Irish battalions, as part of UNIFIL and subsequently the expanded UNIFIL, have faced challenges on a military level due to the extreme aggressive acts of many armed forces on the ground, especially the SLA, Israel's proxy militia until the latter withdrew from South Lebanon in 2000. The Irish government persisted in supporting its contingents within UNIFIL on political and logistical levels, maintaining its commitment to the 'Leb' even when the situation on the ground peaked in uncertainty and danger, as in 1982 during the Israeli invasion or when the Irish suffered casualties as in At-Tiri in 1980 and Brashit in 1989.⁵³ As one interviewee put it, "Irish troops are accepted by all sides as impartial brokers without any political agenda. They are viewed as free from previous colonial baggage and consequently gain acceptance easier."

The most remarkable achievements of the Irish forces within UNIFIL seem to fall into two different areas. Primarily, Irish dedication to humanitarian assistance has proven itself practically through targeted projects like the Tibnin orphanage and the continued protection of the civilian population on the basis of sustainable relations based on mutual respect. Secondly, balancing a distinctive geopolitical perspective based on its postcolonial experience and a studied accommodation of EUMS and NATO PFP policies alongside firm UN principles, Ireland seems to have applied a nuanced policy of "neutrality" and adaptation to the complexity and evolution of the military and political circumstances around the world where peace has to be kept. This has tremendously shaped training, especially through the internationally active UN Training School Ireland together with the parameters of involvement in the expanded UNIFIL after its formation in 2006, wherein civil-military coordination mechanisms are playing an important part.

While, given its defined aims, this paper's main focus is on specific aspects of the Irish Defence Forces within UNIFIL, further investigation by other researchers could integrate these and related findings within a larger framework that looks at relations among the different peacekeeping contingents and compares their roles, levels of military and humanitarian engagement in the South of Lebanon, interaction with the population, and evolving perspectives on training especially with respect to civil-military coordination.

53 See the report on the Brashit death of three Irish soldiers Corporal Fintan Heneghan, Private Mannix Armstrong, and Private Thomas Walsh who died on 21st March 1989 when they drove over a landmine. Available at: <http://www.defence.ie/WebSite.nsf/Speech+ID/1ADC2CCC02343EFC80257A000051C591?OpenDocument>

Appendix A: Citations for some *Irish Times* and (Irish) *Independent* articles on Irish peacekeepers in UNIFIL⁵⁴

- "Israel is using secret radar post within UNIFIL area" by McDonald, Frank (28 Apr. 1980)
- "All UNIFIL states may withdraw if Haddad stays" by Kennedy, Dennis (3 May 1980)
- "UNIFIL costs coming down" by Kennedy, Dennis (30 Sep. 1981)
- "UNIFIL had no power to halt invaders" by Kennedy, Dennis (9 June 1982)
- "UNIFIL mandate extended by UN" by Cronin, Sean (19 June 1982)
- "Israel may try to change mandate for UNIFIL" by Murtagh, Peter (12 July 1982)
- "Israelis restrict UNIFIL role" by Walker, Christopher (26 July 1982)
- "UNIFIL now redundant, say Irish officers" (19 Aug. 1982)
- "Collins says no UNIFIL pullout" by Coghlan, Denis (17 Sep. 1982)
- "UNIFIL 'obstructed' by Israel –Callaghan" by O'Cery, Conor (2 Oct. 1982)
- "Tibnin fears over pull-out of UNIFIL" (4 Oct. 1982)
- "Israel may try to change mandate for UNIFIL" (15 Jan. 1983)
- "UNIFIL expects crunch in coming weeks" by Kiely, Niall (4 May 1985)
- "The UNIFIL question that awaits an answer" by Cruise O'Brien, Conor (28 May 1985)
- "UNIFIL mission in Lebanon useless" by Cruise O'Brien, Conor (11 June 1985)
- "Unifil--the view from Jerusalem" (24 June 1986)
- "State made £5m 'profit' from UNIFIL" by Kiely, Niall (10 Sep. 1986)
- "Irish UNIFIL transfer is now unlikely" by Flynn, Sean (24 Dec. 1986)
- "Army sees role in UNIFIL as vital" by Flynn, Sean (12 Jan. 1987)
- "Government to meet over future role in UNIFIL" by Carroll, Joe (15 Jan. 1987)
- "Coping with harassment by Israeli troops" by Marlowe, Lara (11 Aug. 1988)
- "UNIFIL waits uneasily for the temperature to rise" (10 March 1992)
- "No repeat of onslaught --- UNIFIL chief: Michael Jansen talks to the UNIFIL commandant, who expresses confidence..." by Jansen, Michael (23 Aug. 1993)
- "Army beats off rivals to secure top UNIFIL post" by Brady, Tom (5 December 1998), *Independent.ie*
- "UNIFIL role to continue despite progress" by Cusack, Jim (9 March 1999)
- "3,500 Troops to Join UN Force" by Bremner, Charles and Senan Molony (18 August 2006), *Independent.ie*
- "Unifil guidelines a recipe for inaction" by Clonan, Tom (24 Aug. 2006)
- "Unifil vows to continue its mission in Lebanon" by Biedermann, Ferry (26 June 2007)
- "Troops on new mission to Lebanon", by Brady, Tom (15 December 2010), *Independent.ie*
- "President's final overseas trip finishes where maiden visit began: Lebanon" (10 Oct. 2011)
- "Troops put through their paces before deployment to Lebanon" by Stack, Sarah (25 Oct. 2011), *Independent.ie*
- "President Salutes Lebanon Troops" (12 December 2011), *Independent.ie*
- "Irish Personnel Playing Vital Role in Keeping the Peace in South Lebanon" by Murphy, David (24 March 2012)
- "Troops put through their paces before deployment to Lebanon" by Sarah Stack (12 Oct. 2012), *Independent.ie*

54 Unless specified as an *Independent.ie* article, all other articles are from the *Irish Times*.

Appendix B: Interview (May 2012) with Lt Col Dan Harvey about his book *Peacekeepers: Irish Soldiers in the Lebanon* (Dublin: Merlin, 2001).

Why did you write this book?

DH I felt that the soldier's perspective was neither sought nor expressed. While there were many specialist (militarily and politically) reporters who had a great range of perspectives and information, they could never capture the peacekeeping perspective on the ground. I wrote it over a number of years having gone back a couple of times to Lebanon, as I saw that the situation was evolving. The bad media coverage of the army around 2000 was also a trigger for what I already wanted to write. I also realized that a book like mine, though small, had never been written. I of course was worried that publishing it may have bad consequences. But as a platoon commander I had seen a lot of everyday acts of bravery, even when not spectacular, that I believed should be recorded and told. I did not seek commercial success with the book. Members of my platoon, privates and corporals etc, said to me "Sir, you got it," and that was my reward. All I wanted was to tell the perspective of the peacekeepers on the ground. Otherwise, it would not have been told because there has not been anything else since.⁵⁵ Moreover, the commercial hook for the publisher was that the Irish were withdrawing after 23 years so it was a good moment to publish what I had in mind for years. I asked Middle-East specialists (including Robert Fisk) to read it and comment on it then I improved it. The book is both simple and complicated in its message. It took me four years to write it. I did get a small bit of acknowledgment for writing this book especially from young lieutenants who read it. I especially targeted cadets with it but also the general public.

Why did nobody else write such a book or something similar?

DH Many people can start writing but don't follow through with such a project. There was no culture of writing about these experiences in the Defence Forces then or even since. Therefore, this can be explained from an institutional perspective.

Do you think that when soldiers write about their peacekeeping experience, this would complement official military records and academic studies?

DH It is bound to complement them. I wrote it with longevity in mind. In one hundred years there will be academics looking at contemporaneous first-hand accounts. There must be many publications on the experience of soldiers and certainly about the longest participation which is that in Lebanon. I also think and have said that there should be a historian specially commissioned to do this kind of writing within the army. The work would be immense but valuable. I am a little frustrated at this lack. But I try to champion alternative projects like museums and collections that would give the Defence Forces a window out to the public and the people a window into the forces, and that too would complement what I am doing. I am now considering writing a book on Kosovo where I have just finished my first tour.

55 This interview was conducted before the publication of Tom Clonan's memoir.

Acknowledgments

Interviewees (besides Lara Marlowe and Henry McDonald) include (parentheses specify the period of peacekeeping in Lebanon and the rank at the time): Niall Cameron (May- November 1985 Private Soldier), Cmdt Robert Corbet (1992-93 Lieutenant; 1995-96 Captain; 2001-2 Captain), Cmdt Tim Daly (1990, 1991 Platoon Commander; 1993 Staff Officer at Battalion HQ; 2003 Senior Staff Officer in UNIFIL HQ; 2012 Battalion Deputy Commander), Cmdt Rory Finegan (1989-90, 1991 Lieutenant/Battalion Commander in the 66th Battalion and Instructor at UNTSI), Dr Conor Galvin (Reserve Defence Forces Captain and University Lecturer and Director of the Masters in Development Practice (MDP) at the School of Education, UCD Dublin), Lt. Col. Dan Harvey (October 1984-May 1985 Platoon Commander 56th Irish Battalion; April 1987-November 1987 Military Police Officer 61st Irish Battalion; October 1989-May 1990 Military Police Officer UNIFIL HQ), Ret. Lt. Col. Desmond Hearn (November 1979- May 1980; May 1981- November 1981; May 1986- November 1986 Legal Officer), Dr Charles Ivar McGrath (October 1984- April 1985 Private Soldier), Cmdt. Rossa Mulcahy (1992, 1995 Lieutenant; 2005-2007 Cmdt), Professor Ray Murphy (1981-82 Lieutenant; 1989 Captain; Professor, Irish Centre for Human Rights, NUI Galway); Ret. Brig. Gen. J. E. Saunderson (April-November 1984 Battalion Staff (Commandant); October 1988-April 1989 Battalion Staff (Commandant); April-November 1999, Assistant Chief of Staff (Operations) (Colonel)), Cmdt. Johnny Whittaker (October 1991-April 1992 Lieutenant; October 1993-April 1994 Lieutenant; June 2011-November 2011 Commandant Operations Officer HQ Irishbatt, Tibnine; Member of Directing Staff at Command and Staff School, the Military College). We thank everyone for generously offering their time and input on their personal experiences in UNIFIL.

Please note that all opinions offered by interviewees are done so solely on a personal basis and do not reflect official Irish Defence Forces policy or views.

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