

Case study

Threats to the security of Polish military contingents in the UN forces on the example of the PMC in Lebanon – experiences and perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to identify threats to the security environment of Lebanon and the prospects for their changes, affecting the activities of Polish military contingents and their personnel, taking into account historical aspects, internal and external threats and contemporary conditions of the security environment of the region and Lebanon. It uses the results of research conducted by the author in the years 2012-2020.

Included in the study there are Polish military contingents operating as part of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) between 1992 and 2009, such as: the Polish Military Medical Unit, the Polish Military Contingent in Lebanon (PMC Lebanon/PMC UNIFIL), and the “new” PMC in Lebanon, which began performing mandated tasks in November 2019.

Polish contingent operations in Lebanon have been affected by the aftermath of the never-ending conflict with Israel since 1948, the civil war in Syria, the growth of terrorist organisations in the Levant region, Shiite Hezbollah, growing in terms of military strength and political influence, and nearly two million war refugees. These factors resulted in a significant increase in threats to peacekeepers and observers serving in Lebanon, and the primary source of these threats is the direct impact caused by the enemy using various heavy weapons, aviation and other arms in attacks on the bases, patrols and posts of the contingent’s subdivisions.

UNIFIL forces, together with the PMC Lebanon, are likely to face the problem of “participation” in another armed conflict, whether small or large-scale. The PMC soldiers, due to their deployment and the nature of their tasks, are likely to be exposed to possible personnel loss and material damage.

KEYWORDS

Lebanon, international security, peacekeeping operations, Polish military contingents, international terrorism



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Introduction

Lebanon's security environment has undergone significant changes in the 21st century. Serious implications for this small country resulted from the conflict with Israel that has not come to an end since 1948, the civil war in Syria, the growth of terrorist organisations in the Levant region, the Shiite organisation Hezbollah (Party of God) gaining military strength and political influence, and nearly two million war refugees. These factors have significantly increased threats to the safety of peacekeepers serving in Lebanon. Hezbollah is considered a terrorist organisation by Israel, Canada, the Arab League, the US and the UK, while Australia, New Zealand and the European Union consider only the military part of the Party of God as such [1-3].

The Polish Army has participated in international missions since 1953, when the then government sent military observers to Korea, whereas compact military subdivisions participated in a peacekeeping operation for the first time in 1973, after the end of the Yom Kippur War. Until 2009, Poland was recognized as one of the leading countries participating in peacekeeping missions, and in addition to soldiers, police officers and civilian personnel were also sent to take part in them. Until 1989, Poland was also the only country in the Socialist Bloc whose armed forces participated in UN missions [4, p. 54].

This paper attempts to identify threats to the security environment of Lebanon and the prospects for their changes, affecting the activities of Polish military contingents and their personnel, taking into account historical aspects, internal and external threats and contemporary conditions of the security environment of the region and Lebanon.

The study includes Polish military contingents operating as part of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon between 1992 and 2009, such as: the Polish Military Medical Unit, the Polish Military Contingent in Lebanon (PMC Lebanon/PMC UNIFIL), and the "new" PMC in Lebanon, which began performing mandated tasks in November 2019.

Historical aspects of PMC activities in Lebanon between 1992 and 2009

The civil war in Lebanon, which lasted from 1975 to 1990, resulted in a change in the country's political climate. One of its consequences was the withdrawal from Lebanon of most of the military forces of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), lead by Yasir Arafat. Syria gradually took control of the country, influencing most elections and political decisions. It wasn't until the so-called *Cedar Revolution*, which started in 2005 following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and the ensuing mass demonstrations by the population, that the end of Syrian domination and the withdrawal of its troops took place.

From 1978 to 2000 South Lebanon was occupied by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF; Hebr. Cawa ha-Hagana le-Jisra'el, CaHal), working with Christian militias. These troops fought Palestinian forces and turned against Hezbollah after their withdrawal. One of the largest Israel military operations was Operation *Litani* conducted in 1978 against the PLO. Since it had failed, Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982. This intervention, which lasted three years, was called the *Peace for Galilee* or the *First Lebanon War*. During this war, Israelis successfully fought the PLO, the Syrian army and other Muslim groups.

Other major military operations included Operation *Accountability*, conducted in July 1993, and the *Grapes of Wrath* in April 1996. IDF withdrew completely from southern Lebanon in 2000, which in turn allowed Hezbollah troops to occupy the area.

UNIFIL forces have been conducting a peacekeeping operation in the same area since 1978. With a limited mandate and lacking heavy weaponry, the forces proved to be ineffective on several occasions. UNIFIL personnel, lacking adequate equipment or competence, could not have prevented the outbreak of war with Israel in 1982, the massacres of the Palestinian population in refugee camps, the shelling of their own bases by Israeli troops, or the artillery attacks on Israeli territory by Palestinian militias – and, after their withdrawal, by Hezbollah. After the IDF's retreat from Lebanon in 2000, military actions against Israel intensified. There were numerous artillery and rocket attacks on the Northern Galilee, kidnappings of Israeli soldiers, which consequently prompted Tel Aviv to launch a military intervention in Lebanon in July and August 2006, also known as the *July War* or the *Second Lebanon War*. The escalation of armed attacks also occurred during the Israeli-led Operation *Cast Lead* in the Gaza Strip in 2008.

Polish soldiers and civilian personnel served in Lebanon from 1992 to 2009, performing logistical and operational tasks. More than 11,000 military personnel performed tasks during this period. The risks in the line of duty resulted in seven of them sacrificing their lives while serving under the UN flag [5, p. 143-164].

The number of personnel in the PMC ranged, according to the resolutions of the Council of Ministers (until 1973) or the President of the Republic of Poland (from 1998), from 78 to 650 persons (2000), reaching around 500 persons in the final period of activity. Under UNSC Resolutions S/RES/425 and S/RES/426 of 1978, UNIFIL's main tasks included:

- monitoring of the withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon,
- restoring security and peace,
- providing assistance in restoring and maintaining power for the Lebanese government.

Additionally, during the First Lebanon War from 1982 to 1985, the force's tasks also included providing protection and humanitarian aid to civilians.

It should be noted that a Pole, Brig. Gen. Dr. Stanisław Woźniak from 1995 to 1997, held the position of UNIFIL Commander (Force Commander) which corresponded to the rank of Deputy Secretary General of the UN [5, p. 154].

Following the end of the Second Lebanon War, under Resolution S/RES/1701, the tasks of the greatly expanded UNIFIL force to approximately 13,000 personnel included:

- monitoring the ceasefire,
- providing assistance in deploying troops to Southern Lebanon for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF),
- coordination of the activities with the governments of the parties to the conflict,
- ensuring access to humanitarian aid for the civilians and enabling safe and voluntary return of war refugees,
- cooperation with the Lebanese Army on the designation of a zone free of military presence and equipment, except for LAF and UNIFIL subdivisions, between Blue line (the line of demarcation between Lebanese and Israeli troops, which is the internationally recognized border between Israel and Lebanon) and the Litani River,
- assistance in securing Lebanon's borders [6].

The participation of Polish contingents in peacekeeping operations in Lebanon and Syria was positively assessed by the representatives of both Polish and Lebanese authorities. Due to

the participation in missions and operations under UN the prestige of Poland and the armed forces increased, which also translated into opportunities to influence the activities of various UN agencies.

Before Poland's accession to NATO (1999), serving with soldiers of other nationalities brought results in the form of getting to know operational and logistical procedures, tactics of operations, characteristics of UN peacekeeping forces' military equipment and subjects concerning the culture, customs and traditions of Lebanon. The research shows that UNIFIL forces and Polish military contingents operating within them prevented the escalation of the Lebanese-Israeli conflict through their activities in southern Lebanon. Therefore, they fulfilled an important but not crucial role in the process of peaceful resolution of the armed conflict that had lasted since 1948 [5, p. 162-164].

Attempts to assess more than seventeen years of Polish participation in the peacekeeping operation in Lebanon also lead to negative conclusions. The participation of PMC in UN missions was not utilised in international relations to promote the economic and political image of Poland, no long-term economic agreements were signed. With Lebanon's foreign trade turnover of \$26 billion, economic relations with Poland were conducted at a low level, not exceeding \$63.4 million in 2011 [5, p. 160].

Polish-Lebanese military cooperation was conducted at an even lower level. It was limited to the free transfer of military equipment (known as the national equipment) to the LAF after its operations in Lebanon ended in 2009. It was done on the basis of an arms transfer agreement between the Minister of National Defense of the Republic of Poland and the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Lebanon [7].

The positive aspects of Polish participation in the UN forces in Lebanon include the revival of Polish-Lebanese political relations. A sign of change was Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's February 2016 visit to Lebanon. It should be noted that this visit was followed by a small increase in mutual trade [8-10]. Since 2017, Lebanon has been included in the *Official Development Assistance* programme run by the Department of Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under which donations and loans worth over 18 million PLN are provided to the country annually [11; 12].

The revival of political and military cooperation took place in 2019 and was related to the reintroduction of the Polish military contingent to the UNIFIL forces. Lebanon was visited by the Minister of Defense, the head of the National Security Bureau and by the representatives of the commands organizing the service of Polish soldiers in this country [13; 14].

PMC's retreat from Lebanon in 2009

In 2009 Polish government ended the activity of military contingents in UN forces (Chad, Lebanon, Syria) that began in 1973. One of the reasons for the retreat was the adoption of the *Strategy for the Participation of the Polish Armed Forces in International Operations* in January of this year of, according to which military operations conducted by NATO and the EU were considered a priority for the armed forces. Personnel and technical limitations have also been pointed out, as it was recognised that the optimal size of forces stationed overseas at the same time should remain between 3,200 and 3,800 soldiers [15]. On this basis, President Lech Kaczyński issued a resolution on 28 August 2009, extending the operation of the contingent until 31 December 2009, deciding to end the PMC operations in Lebanon, as well as in Chad and Syria [16].

The research, primarily involving officers serving in peacekeeping missions in the Middle East, indicates that the effects of the withdrawal of PMC from UN operations were viewed negatively. The most frequently mentioned was the loss of a strong position as a country actively engaged in the international security process. Poland was deprived of the opportunity to participate in peacekeeping missions that prepared our soldiers to serve under the auspices of NATO, moreover, with low maintenance costs and minimal personnel losses [5, p. 162].

The benefits for the state and the armed forces from the involvement of the Polish military contingent in UN missions include gaining experience in performing tasks in international structures. Beneficial and friendly relations between Poland and Lebanon were built, conducive to maintaining contacts on the political, economic and military levels [5, p. 163]. It was emphasized that the withdrawal of Polish contingents from Lebanon was carried out against the UN policy of increasing the involvement of military forces. It did not affect this policy as Polish troops were replaced by soldiers from other countries. However, the withdrawal contributed to a decrease in the prestige of our country in the Middle East and in the UN [4, p. 222].

Conditions of the PMC's return to UNIFIL in Lebanon

Documents published in 2011 show that Polish authorities very quickly changed their minds about leaving UNIFIL forces. Already on 9 December 2009, i.e., at the end of the PMC withdrawal process from Lebanon, an agreement was signed with the UN for the assignment of another logistics battalion and a manoeuvre company to the UNIFIL forces. The agreement was signed by President Lech Kaczyński and countersigned by Prime Minister Donald Tusk. The implementation of this agreement, as is known, did not take place [17; 18].

One of the important indications about the Polish government's consideration of reassigning PMC to the UN peacekeeping forces were the provisions of the *Strategy for the Development of the Polish Security System 2022* of 9 April 2013, adopted by a resolution of the Council of Ministers. For example, the content of objective No. 1.3.2. reads: *Supporting the enhancement of UN effectiveness – participating in peacekeeping operations under UN auspices*, which clearly confirms the plans to return to peacekeeping forces [19].

Another document confirming the possibility of engagement with UN forces was the *White Book on National Security of the Republic of Poland*, published on 24 May 2013, which indicated the plans to “engage more actively in the ongoing debate in the UN on the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations” and to “consider a return of the Polish soldiers to the participation in selected UN-led peacekeeping missions...” [20]. In his speech at the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), President Bronisław Komorowski reaffirmed Poland's desire for greater involvement in UN activities¹ [21].

This direction was maintained in subsequent years. In September 2015, President Andrzej Duda, also at the UNGA, announced the resumption of Polish activity in peacekeeping operations, and a year later, the Ministry of Defense officially declared its readiness to send 80 to 100 soldiers to take part in UN peacekeeping operations in the Middle East [22]. After negotiations with the UN and the Lebanese government, the PMC was sent to Lebanon in November 2019. The basis for the transfer of the military forces was the *Presidential Order of 4 October 2019* [23].

¹ Until 2020, Poland had been a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council six times in the years: 1946-47, 1960-61, 1970-71, 1982-83, 1996-97, 2018-2019.

It can be deduced that the decision to return to UN operations was fundamentally influenced by Poland's presence in the UN Security Council as its non-permanent member in 2018-2019 and the desire to fulfill the commitments of our country to participate in peacekeeping operations announced at the General Assembly of this organisation by the presidents of Poland.

The first shift deployed by the 12th Mechanised Brigade from Szczecin included "up to 250 soldiers", 224 of whom are serving with the UNIFIL forces, totaling over 10,000 personnel coming from 45 countries [24]. The main combat subdivision of the Polish subdivision is a motorised company equipped with 14 Rosomak wheeled armored personnel carriers (KTO). The contingent was also equipped with American-made armored HMMWVs and a medical evacuation truck [25].

The main tasks of the Polish contingent are: protection of civilians, monitoring of the border zone, the so called *Blue line* and providing support for the Lebanese government in maintaining peace and security in the operational zone. The Poles are conducting mandated operations as part of the IRISHBATT (Irish Operations Battalion), and a manoeuvre company has been deployed to SHAMROCK base, near the town of Bint Jubail, considered one of Hezbollah's most important fortified bases [26, p. 70]. As in previous years, staff officers and military police officers (MPCoy) were sent to the UNIFIL Headquarters (HQ UNIFIL) located in An-Nakura [5, p. 152-158]. Based on the aforementioned presidential order, it should be noted that the new task for PMC Lebanon, in contrast with the tasks performed between 1992 and 2009, is to provide protection for the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Beirut, from which diplomatic activities are also performed by the evacuated embassy accredited in Damascus.

Security aspects of Lebanon

The security of the Lebanese state depends on many internal aspects, but also on regional and global processes taking place in the country. Among the most important of these are the geographical location, the specific socio-political and economic system, relations with Israel, Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia, the balance of power in the region and the influence of world powers.

Lebanon's main security threats include weak state structures, political turmoil, religious divisions, the country's economic problems, a war refugee population of more than 1.5 million, corruption, the continued armed conflict with Israel since 1948, and the activities of domestic and foreign terrorist organisations.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, Iran has played a special role in the Lebanese conflict, due to which the Shiite organisation Hezbollah was established in 1983-1985 [27, p. 24, 31, 177-178]. In the Israeli-Lebanese conflict, Hezbollah is currently playing a major role. Against the militants of this organisation, Israel conducted several major military operations after 1992, in the zone of responsibility of UNIFIL forces. In each, the peacekeeping forces suffered personnel and material losses. Operation *Accountability*, known in Lebanon as the *Seven Day War* was conducted from July 25-31, 1993. It was an Israeli response to attacks launched by Hezbollah militants, whose main objective was to force civilians to flee north, which was to result in refugees turning against the militants, consequently forcing the Lebanese and Syrian governments to take effective steps to limit the shelling of northern Israel. During the military operations, CaHal shelled thousands of facilities, resulting in 120 civilians killed, 500 wounded and 300-500 displaced to the north [28, p. 39-47, 91-93].

The primary objective of another operation conducted in 1996, code-named *Grapes of Wrath*, was to eliminate Hezbollah bases and personnel in Lebanon. At that time, the Israeli air force carried out more than 600 air and helicopter attacks, and the artillery used 25,000 shells to fire on the territory of Lebanon. The attacks resulted in 154 Lebanese civilians killed, 351 wounded, and 350-500,000 people were forced to leave their homes and flee north. Several UNIFL soldiers were also injured while on duty at their posts. During the operation, there was a massacre of refugees at a Fijian peacekeeping base in Qana, for which CaHal is responsible. The Lebanese government estimated the material losses incurred as a result of this military intervention at approximately \$1 billion. The Israeli army ended the operation after the Hezbollah leadership agreed to stop shelling the Northern Galilee [29, p. 333-352].

A decade later, the escalating conflict with Hezbollah led to a 34-day war on 12 July 2006. Once again, Lebanon's civilian population suffered heavy losses, estimated at over 1,000 killed, about 3,800 to 5,000 wounded. This time about 1 million citizens were displaced or fled north [6].

The beginning of the 21st century marked the end of the occupation of the south for Lebanon, which Hezbollah took advantage of by deploying militants near the border with Israel, in the area of operations of UNIFIL forces. Similarly, Syria withdrew troops from Lebanon in 2005; however, the Lebanese-Israeli conflict was not ended by a peace treaty as it was the case with Egypt (1979) or Jordan (1994).

Among the serious threats to Lebanon's internal security is the weakness of the model of democracy called the consensus democracy, which does not work and does not guarantee the country's growth, as evidenced by the prolonged and massive demonstrations by opponents of the current political system. Another major problem in Lebanon is the internal division of the population into supporters of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria or the West. The boundaries of this division usually run along religious divisions. The Sunnis are supported by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. Christians, mostly Maronites receive support mainly from the US and France [30; 31]. The aid received by the Shiites from Iran allowed the military divisions of the Party of God to develop a military potential comparable to the government troops, leaving the Lebanese government with little influence over their actions.

A difficult to attain objective of Lebanon's security policy is to bring about the implementation of UNSC Resolution S/RES/1559 of 2004 on the disarmament of Hezbollah [32]. The problem of regaining control of the Sheba Farms area and the water-bearing areas of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains occupied by Israel has also not been resolved.

The policies of successive governments of Lebanon with a population of over 6 million are influenced by a specific religious and social divide. The population is divided into 18 major religious sects, of which 57.7% are Muslim and 36.2% Christian. The 5.2% of the Druze, a small number of Jews, Baha'is, Buddhists, and Hindus complete the breakdown. The Lebanese state is destabilised by the presence of more than 1.5 million refugees, arrived after the successive wars with Israel, the Palestinian conflict with Jordan, and the civil war in Syria. Arranging the return of refugees to their countries of origin or directing them to Western Europe is a major challenge for Lebanese authorities [33].

As a result of the civil war (2011-2019) in neighboring Syria, the Lebanese economy has suffered significant losses. Before the war in 2011, the GDP growth was very high, ranging from 8 to 10%. It is currently estimated at 1.0% or below. The main reasons for this collapse are the loss of a large Syrian market, the influx of refugees into Lebanon, and increased defense spending [33].

While the danger of Lebanon being drawn into the war in Syria has declined in 2019-2020, tension has risen over the possibility of Hezbollah attacking Israel from the bases deployed in southern Lebanon and the Golan Heights region. This is related to the growth of Hezbollah's military power, confirmed attempts to deploy its subdivisions in the area of the hills annexed by Israel in 1981, and a continuous exchange of fire with CaHal forces. The retention of the Golan Heights area allows Israel to move away from the so-called *actual territory* of the area of possible hostilities with Syria. Additionally, the occupation of the Lebanese-owned area of the so-called Sheba Farm and the Mount Hermon massif allows Israel to control the springs of the Jordan River, which accounts for nearly a third of the country's drinking water supply [32; 34; 35, p. 486-508].

The creation of a buffer zone in southern Lebanon did not reduce the number of attacks on Israel, of which Hezbollah carried out about 100 between 1985 and 1989, whereas between 1990 and 1995, the number of attacks increased to more than 1,000. The data also demonstrates the impotence of the Israeli military and UNIFIL forces. Currently, the Israeli Ministry of Defence estimates that Hezbollah has more than doubled its number of militants, from about 20,000 in 2006 (the July War) to about 45,000. The number of missiles and rockets increased almost tenfold, from about 13,000 in 2006 to over 120,000 in 2018 and is growing steadily. The range of the rockets has also been significantly increased, from a distance of 100 km in 2006, to 400 km in 2018, allowing the militants to fire on the entire territory of Israel [36; 37].

In comparison, the Lebanese army includes 75,000 soldiers, 276 tanks, lacks any modern combat aircraft or helicopters, its potential is assessed as very weak and it is unable to control or disarm Hezbollah troops. According to Globalfirepower, the LAF maintains a military ranking of 118 out of 137 countries assessed [33].

Terrorist organisations in Lebanon

A number of organisations considered terrorist operate in Lebanon. Anti-Shia groups include the Sunni Abdullah Azzam Brigades (AAB), as well as remnants of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS). They operate mainly along the eastern border and in the Ayn al-Hilweh refugee camp. Foreign and anti-Israel organisations operating in Lebanon include the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (AAMB). The main purpose of its establishment is to create a Palestinian state in line with the UN General Assembly Resolution 181 of 29 November 1947 [33; 38].

The longest operating terrorist organisations in Lebanon include the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), whose goal is to establish a secular, Marxist Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. Currently, Palestinians rarely take part in military actions against Israel. An anti-Lebanese and anti-Shia profile is also presented by the al-Nusrah Front organisation (derived from al-Qaeda). It is creating a network in Lebanon with the objective of establishing a regional Islamic caliphate. Its activity is concentrated in the eastern part of the Bekaa Valley and in the areas along the Lebanese-Syrian border. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, especially its division called the Qods Force (IRGC-QF), which aims to support Hezbollah as well as fight Israel, also has influence in the Cedar Country [33].

Threats of serving in the PMC

The research conducted between 2012 and 2018 shows that the most important factors influencing the security of PMC UNIFIL personnel serving between 1992 and 2009 are the

knowledge of the political and military situation in Lebanon and socio-cultural and religious conditions.

The greatest threats while serving in the peacekeeping forces included military threats. The most serious of those include the exchange of fire (mortar, artillery, air or tank fire) between the parties to the conflict and all kinds of mines and unexploded shells deployed in the operational zone. Significant internal threats included months of separation from family and failure to follow safety policies and procedures.

Operating in the mission area under the above conditions inherently involved the possibility of exposure to:

- combat-related injuries,
- non-combat injuries (fractures, sprains, traffic accidents),
- mental disorders (stress),
- diseases,
- death [39, p. 173-185].

It was estimated that 425,000 anti-personnel mines deployed on Lebanese territory pose a serious threat to Lebanese communities and UNIFIL members, with additional danger posed by more than 18 sq. km of land remaining contaminated with cluster bombs [40].

Material factors such as base protection and defense (base equipment), individual personnel equipment, financial supplies, medical care, and living conditions, which were rated as good to very good, also affected personnel safety. On the other hand, the level of safety was lowered by the poor quality of individual personnel equipment.

Important intangible factors included the following: different climate conditions, unknown fauna and flora, and the use of free time. The main problems here included alcohol abuse by some PMC personnel.

The reality of the dangers of serving in the peacekeeping forces in Lebanon is illustrated by the fact that a total of 322 UN peacekeepers have died since the beginning of the operations [42].

The scale of the threats to PMC forces in Lebanon is shown in Figure 1 depicting the Hezbollah defense system during the 2006 war. Command posts, firing posts, ambushes, and minefields were deployed in the vicinity of UNIFIL forces posts supplied by Polish logistic subdivisions.

Particularly heavy fighting in 2006 was conducted in the Bint Jubail area, where Hezbollah forces sector headquarters, firing posts and minefields were deployed to secure the approach from the Israeli side. Israeli troops made several unsuccessful attempts in July 2006 to occupy the area in Bint Jubail defended by militants. A UNIFIL base is deployed near this strategically important location, where the majority of the Polish contingent that began service in 2019 is stationed. During hostilities in 2006, UNIFIL personnel maintained all positions and camps, conducting observation of hostilities, and providing humanitarian and medical aid to the wounded and injured within their capabilities. During this fighting, 16 UN personnel were injured and five were killed [6; 26, p. 68, 70, 89].

The situation in southern Lebanon in 2018-2020

UNIFIL soldiers in cooperation with Lebanese troops in 2018-2019 maintained 16 permanent and 163 temporary checkpoints in their area of responsibility, conducting observation of activities carried out by the parties to the conflict. On average, they performed over

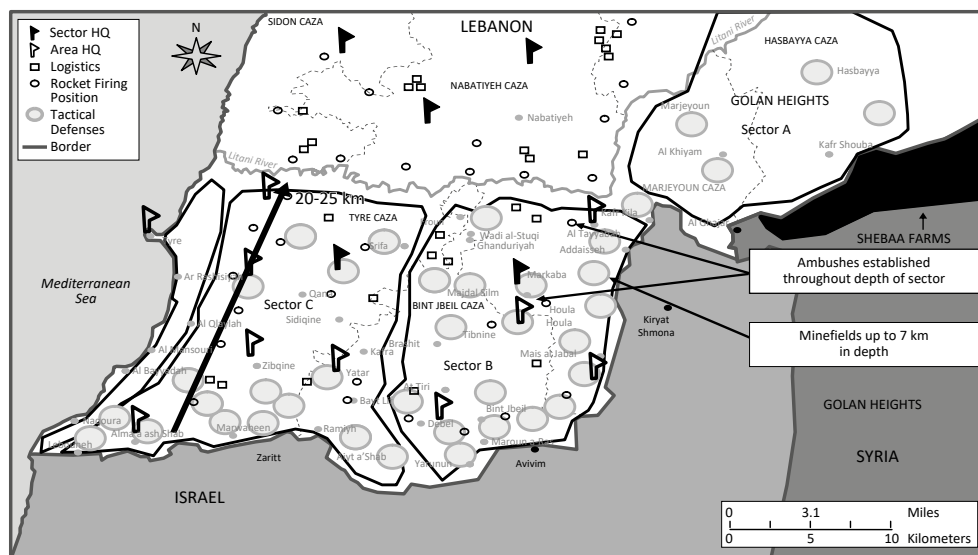


Fig. 1. Hezbollah defense system during the 2006 war

Source: [41, p. 20].

14,000 military operations per month, including over 6,500 patrols. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force (MTF), in cooperation with the Lebanese Navy, conducted surveillance operations in the peacekeepers' area of responsibility, conducting 537 inspections of cargo in transit.

In 2019, both Israel and Hezbollah carried out multiple military operations. Israeli air force conducted combat flights over Lebanon. Numerous unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and reconnaissance drones were also used. Lebanese troops as well as Hezbollah subdivisions were firing on these targets with anti-aircraft weapons. The Israeli air force is taking advantage of the lack of short- and medium-range anti-aircraft defense and fighter aircrafts in Lebanon by launching airstrikes on targets in Syria from over its territory. Several times in 2018 and 2019, Israeli patrols came under fire from anti-tank guided missiles claimed by Hezbollah. In response, the IDF repeatedly shelled targets in southern Lebanon with heavy artillery. There was also a case where a patrol of peacekeepers was stopped by unmarked militants and attempted to block their passage. Fires following missile explosions often result in explosions of mines deployed along the Lebanese-Israeli border [36].

Hezbollah, in preparation for conducting military operations since 2000, has been systematically expanding defense positions and posts, including a tunnel system in southern Lebanon. Israeli troops have conducted various operations to detect and destroy the tunnels under the *Blue Line* built by Hezbollah. For example, in early 2019, 6 of them were destroyed, which indicates that they were being built in areas controlled by UN forces. This is another example of the ineffectiveness of UNFIL's efforts [43].

One of the more serious tasks set by the UNSC in 2004 and not executed by UNIFIL is the disarmament of Hezbollah troops. This task seems impossible given the sharp growth of Hezbollah's military capabilities after the July War, as well as the Lebanese Army's inability to control the group.

The already mentioned important problem is the internal division of the Lebanese people into supporters of the West, Iran, Syria or Saudi Arabia (Sunni states). The Shiites who make

up Lebanon's dominant population receive aid from Iran and Syria, with Iraq's complicity. The political influence of the Shiite bloc is also gradually growing. In the parliamentary elections held in May 2018, Hezbollah won 13 out of 128 seats in parliament, however, together with another Shiite group Amal, they have a total of 40 MPs. They are part of a Shiite-Christian, pro-Syrian and pro-Iranian parliamentary bloc called the March 8 Alliance, which won 80 of the 128 seats, giving the bloc a significant influence over Lebanese politics. It is no coincidence, then, that the president, Christian Michel Aoun, has repeatedly praised Hezbollah for its stabilising role in the state [33; 44].

The influence of Muslim states is balanced in the Lebanese internal conflict by the government's cooperation with the US, the EU, and France, an established ally of Lebanese Christians. The United States has provided over \$2 billion in military assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces over the past 15 years, significantly improving the LAF's capabilities. France, in the wake of the economic crisis in 2018, provided preferential loans and grants of 500 million euros to the Lebanese government to improve its solvency. Similarly, the European Commission launched a €1.5 billion package to support investment in Lebanon, encouraging the government to make structural economic changes [31].

A key support to Lebanese refugees is the work of UN agencies under the Lebanon *Crisis Response Plan* (LEBANON CRISIS RESPONSE PLAN), which provided \$2.6 billion in assistance between 2017 and 2020. The political, economic, and social situation was further aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the destruction of the Beirut port in a fertilizer explosion in August 2020 [45].

Prospects for the development of threats in the area of operations of PMC UNIFIL

Lebanon's multifaceted internal conflict and armed conflict with Israel have no prospects of ending soon. Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in his speeches has urged a military response to the attacks by IDF forces against Hezbollah and Iranian facilities and troops in Lebanon and Syria. However, it seems that IDF is reluctant to enter into another open war with Israel because of the possible costs and losses, bearing in mind the experience of the July 2006 war and the post-war reform of the Israeli army's training as well as the introduction of the most advanced means of combat [46, p. 135]. However, preparations for a possible military clash are underway in southern Lebanon near the LAF and UNIFIL deployment areas. The lack of a firm response from the Lebanese government and the ineffectiveness of its army may result, as Israeli politicians have repeatedly stressed, in the recognition of the state of Lebanon as an enemy, without singling out Hezbollah as one.

The next challenge for Lebanon's government will be to keep the country on a pro-Western path, so that it does not end up in the sphere of Iranian domination, like Iraq and Syria, creating from the area of the so-called *Fertile Crescent* new *Shiite Crescent*.

After the May elections held in 2018, massive anti-government demonstrations are taking place, turning against consensual power sharing, rising unemployment, pervasive corruption, and unresolved problems with garbage and water management. The renunciation of office of Prime Minister Saad Hariri and the formation of a new technical government in January 2020 could be a positive factor in halting the country's decline. However, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs warns citizens about the very tense political situation in Lebanon, recommending avoiding visits to the country [47].

Conclusions

The mandate of UNIFIL operations, the equipping of military contingents with light weapons, and the existing rules on the use of force did not allow peacekeeping personnel to disrupt the full-scale hostilities conducted in Lebanon in 1993, 1996, or 2006, or to effectively protect civilians or even their own bases.

It is then up to the Lebanese and Israeli sides to end the conflict. Neither of them wants another war, however, a few days of increased fighting, shelling of towns and settlements on both sides of the *Blue Line* using rockets, artillery and aircrafts is very likely.

Financial and military assistance from the U.S., EU and others will be welcomed by any Lebanese government; however, it will not expedite political change. It can only perpetuate the current system of power or delay the necessary transition. The Lebanese authorities' apparent lack of influence over the activities of Iranian-dependent Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, and its gradual increase of influence in the Lebanese parliament and government are factors that could limit the aid provided to the country from the West and the Sunni Arab states.

The primary source of threats to soldiers and civilian personnel of the PMC is the direct impact of the enemy's attacks, using a variety of heavy weapons, aircrafts, and other means, on bases, patrols, and posts of subdivisions of military contingents.

UNIFIL forces, together with the PMC Lebanon, are likely to face the problem of "participation" in another armed conflict, whether small or large-scale, in the near future. Soldiers of the Polish contingent, due to their deployment in the area of important Hezbollah facilities and the nature of their tasks will be exposed to possible personnel and material losses.

It is in Poland's interest to stabilise the situation in Lebanon, and an effective continuation of the peacekeeping operation should be supported by political actions within the framework of bilateral relations, as well as within the UN and EU.

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Conflict of interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.


Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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Biographical note

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Zagrożenia bezpieczeństwa polskich kontyngentów wojskowych w siłach ONZ na przykładzie PKW w Libanie – doświadczenia i perspektywy

STRESZCZENIE

W pracy podjęto próbę określenia zagrożeń środowiska bezpieczeństwa Libanu i perspektyw ich zmian, wpływających na działalność polskich kontyngentów wojskowych i ich personelu, uwzględniając aspekty historyczne, zagrożenia wewnętrzne i zewnętrzne oraz współczesne uwarunkowania środowiska bezpieczeństwa regionu i Libanu. Wykorzystano w niej wyniki badań prowadzonych przez autora w latach 2012-2020.

W rozważaniach uwzględniono polskie kontyngenty wojskowe działające w ramach Tymczasowych Sił Organizacji Narodów Zjednoczonych w Libanie (ang. United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, UNIFIL) w latach 1992-2009, takich jak: Polska Wojskowa Jednostka Medyczna (PWJM), Polski Kontyngent Wojskowy w Libanie (PKW w Libanie/PKW UNIFIL) oraz „nowy” PKW w Libanie, który rozpoczął wykonywanie zadań mandatowych w listopadzie 2019 roku.

Na działania polskich kontyngentów w Libanie wpływ miały skutki niekończącego się od 1948 roku konfliktu z Izraelem, wojna domowa w Syrii, rozwój organizacji terrorystycznych w regionie Lewantu, rosnący w siłę pod względem militarnym i politycznym

szyicki Hezbollah oraz blisko dwa miliony uchodźców wojennych. Czynniki te spowodowały znaczny wzrost zagrożeń dla żołnierzy sił pokojowych i obserwacyjnych pełniących służbę w Libanie, a podstawowym źródłem tych zagrożeń jest bezpośrednio oddziaływanie przez przeciwnika za pomocą różnego rodzaju broni ciężkiej, lotnictwa i innych na bazy, patrole i stanowiska pododdziałów kontyngentu.

Siły UNIFIL wraz z PKW Liban prawdopodobnie staną przed problemem „uczestnictwa” w kolejnym konflikcie zbrojnym, małej lub dużej skali. Żołnierze polskiego PKW, ze względu na swoje rozmieszczenie i charakter zadań prawdopodobnie będą narażeni na ewentualne straty osobowe i materiałowe.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE Liban, bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe, operacje pokojowe, polskie kontyngenty wojskowe, terroryzm międzynarodowy

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