



Security Council

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Letter dated 29 October 2020 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

The present letter is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution [2539 \(2020\)](#), in which the Council welcomed my report on the assessment of the continued relevance of the resources of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) ([S/2020/473](#)) and requested me to present the first elements of a plan to implement the recommendations of that assessment. Planning and implementation are proceeding in close collaboration between the Secretariat and UNIFIL and in consultation, as relevant, with the parties, troop-contributing countries and Council members.

The first elements of implementation fall into the categories of capabilities, operations, new technology, the Maritime Task Force and operations support. They include:

- (a) Replacement of heavy armoured personnel carriers with lighter vehicles;
- (b) Augmentation of liaison and coordination capacity;
- (c) Adjustments to the Force headquarters configuration;
- (d) Consolidation of United Nations positions;
- (e) Improved use of new technology;
- (f) Reconfiguration of the Maritime Task Force;
- (g) Optimization of the mix of enabling capabilities;
- (h) Repatriation of surplus equipment and shift from United Nations-owned equipment to contingent-owned equipment;
- (i) Review of the regional information and communications technology support structure;
- (j) Review of civilian staffing.

Capabilities

Replacement of heavy armoured personnel carriers with lighter vehicles. Partial implementation has already been achieved. Of a total of 10 infantry units, 5 have already deployed lighter combat vehicles, in the form of high-mobility light tactical vehicles and reconnaissance vehicles, in adequate numbers. For the remaining battalions, UNIFIL is analysing the appropriate structure and suitable mix of combat vehicles required in the light of the different terrains in which the battalions operate. Initial informal coordination with troop-contributing countries suggests that some of them do not have such vehicles in their national inventory, meaning that the process to procure the vehicles and deploy them in UNIFIL may take up to two years.



Augmentation of liaison and coordination capacity. Implementation will be achieved by deploying two additional teams, one on each side of the Blue Line. UNIFIL has identified existing resources among its military staff officers, whose functions will need to be reprofiled, in consultation with the troop-contributing countries concerned, and six officers are being reassigned to the Liaison Branch. The timelines for the establishment of the two new teams in the Branch and their positioning in Israel, as well as potentially in the Lebanese Armed Forces headquarters, will be subject to coordination with the troop-contributing countries and an exchange of letters with the Israeli and Lebanese authorities. Initial contacts in that regard with both parties have been positive. UNIFIL continues to advocate with the Israeli authorities the establishment of a liaison office in Tel Aviv.

Within the tripartite framework, UNIFIL is exploring with the parties the creation of additional subcommittees to address salient recurring matters and to facilitate their agreement on contentious areas along the Blue Line.

Adjustments to the Force headquarters configuration. The mission has implemented the adjustments to the Force headquarters configuration, with the aim of enhancing civil-military functional integration in the areas of information analysis, air operations, training, gender and technology, by co-locating relevant staff and strengthening the coordination mechanisms, including the internal system for intelligence coordination of the mission, and embedding the military technical staff of the Command, Control and Communications Branch within the Field Technology Section of the Mission Support Division.

Operations

Consolidation of United Nations positions. UNIFIL has identified five positions in its area of operations that will be closed, with their responsibilities being absorbed by the remaining layout of the Force. Two of the positions will be closed during the 2020/21 budget period, and the remaining three during the 2021/22 budget period. Troops from those positions will be accommodated in nearby United Nations positions in proximity to the Blue Line. The proposed closure of those positions further supports the reposturing of forces, the rebalancing of troop density and the increasing of focus on Blue Line monitoring, without losing sites that are of high value operationally.

Improved use of new technology. UNIFIL has initiated discussions with the parties regarding the improved use of new technology. The mission has completed a comprehensive plan for enhanced video surveillance at 19 selected United Nations positions along the Blue Line and reprioritized relevant resources to allow for the procurement of the pilot phase of the camera system during the current fiscal period. The remaining requirements will be included in the budget for the 2021/22 period. Other technology assets will be deployed as contingent-owned equipment, such as radar capabilities aboard Maritime Task Force vessels and ground radar augmentation. The possibility of deploying uncrewed aerial vehicles is being carefully examined in close consultation with the parties.

Reconfiguration of the Maritime Task Force. It was noted in the assessment that the Maritime Task Force might be in a position to make a partial transition of some maritime interdiction responsibilities to the Lebanese Navy if the efforts to build the capacity of the latter were maintained. UNIFIL will continue to support further plans by the Lebanese Armed Forces and Navy for the required gradual transition of United Nations responsibilities to the Government of Lebanon, working with the international community for continued and increased support. The Secretariat is assessing applicable factors and requirements for the future configuration of the Task Force on the basis of those elements and recent developments, including the impact of the explosions in Beirut on 4 August 2020, as noted in Security Council resolution [2539 \(2020\)](#).

Mission operational support

Optimization of the mix of enabling capabilities. UNIFIL is reviewing the current structure of its mission support components with a view to ensuring that it maintains an effective mix of enabling troop-contributing country capabilities and civilian-contracted services. The budget for the period 2021/22 will reflect the necessary changes.

Repatriation of surplus equipment and shift from United Nations-owned equipment to contingent-owned equipment. Discussions have been initiated with troop-contributing countries to identify and agree on surplus contingent-owned equipment, and adjustments have begun to reduce enabling capacity to meet the current mission requirements, including by amending pertinent memorandums of understanding. Subject to agreement with the relevant troop-contributing countries, the surplus contingent-owned equipment will be repatriated in 2021/22.

The Secretariat is engaging with the appropriate troop-contributing countries to decrease the reliance on ageing United Nations-owned equipment and ensure that all such countries deploy with fit-for-purpose contingent-owned equipment, in accordance with the reconfiguration under way. The shift being cost-neutral, it will be implemented following the approval by the General Assembly of the next budget for UNIFIL and the readiness of the relevant countries to deploy contingent-owned equipment, beginning in mid-2022. The financial implications will be reflected in future budgets.

Review of the regional information and communications technology support structure. The technical review of the regional information and communications technology support arrangements will have implications for other entities in the region. The Secretariat is planning to undertake a comprehensive review in 2021. Any related changes in support arrangements will be reflected in the budget processes for the period 2022/23.

Civilian staffing review. The review is close to completion. A UNIFIL internal working group has completed comprehensive consultations with all components of the mission and with the staff unions and the Secretariat. The structure of the Mission Support Division and the staffing requirements for the strategic planning capabilities in the Office of the Head of Mission/Force Commander have been included, and the civilian component of UNIFIL has been fully aligned with the reconfiguration of the uniformed component. The review will be completed in time to ensure that all required reconfigurations will be included in the budget submission for the period 2021/22.

I am confident that, with the cooperation of both parties and the continued support of members of the Security Council and troop-contributing countries, the implementation of all aspects of the assessment is feasible and will result in the optimization of the mission's configuration and operations. I also expect to see, as a result, that the mission's capacity to fully and efficiently implement its mandate is enhanced. However, it is important to recall that that capacity also depends to a very large extent on the full support and cooperation of the parties.

I should like to express my appreciation for the continued united support of the Security Council for UNIFIL.

I should be grateful if you would bring this matter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) António Guterres