

As UN Ceasefire Resolutions Loom, Diplomatic Gaps Remain

by [David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](/experts/david-makovsky)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](/experts/david-makovsky)

David Makovsky is the Ziegler distinguished fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations.



Brief Analysis

As diplomacy to end hostilities between Israel and Lebanon intensifies at the United Nations, with a first resolution passed perhaps on Monday, conceptual gaps between the parties remain. The differences range from substantive to procedural. France has been at the center of diplomacy surrounding the passage of a UN Security Council resolution, since it is expected to lead the multinational force to southern Lebanon. From the outset of its consultations with the United States, which are at the center of UN diplomacy, France has sought two Security Council resolutions; this plan has won the backing of U.S. secretary of state Condoleezza Rice. The first resolution would declare an immediate ceasefire and establish general principles to guide the period after the ceasefire. The second resolution would, among other things, define the scope and mission of the multinational force.

Some skeptics wonder whether, once a ceasefire is reached, there will be the political resolve to establish a multinational force. In broad terms, even if such a force is brought into being, there is a question of political will that winds its way through the disputed issues—namely, whether the international community views its task as genuinely implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1559, which was passed two years ago, and being an agent of change in actively disarming Hizballah, which has established itself as a militia within a state, or whether the international community views the function of an international force in the narrow sense of a human buffer between two more or less morally equivalent belligerents. If the latter is the case, such a force could unwittingly shield Hizballah from Israeli retaliation.

Here are some of the questions surrounding possibly imminent UN actions that remain under dispute.

Scope of Mission and Implementation of the Multinational Force

For Israel, the most important question in the UN diplomacy is whether a multinational force, working alongside the Lebanese Armed Forces, will be permitted in theory and practice to disarm Hizballah. While both the Saudi-backed Taif agreement in 1989 and Resolution 1559 in 2004 explicitly called for the dismantlement of Lebanese militias, in practice Hizballah remained the one militia that did not disarm. Skeptics doubt that the multinational force will be given the robust mission to engage Hizballah in combat, and if it is, whether it will be effective in this task. Moreover, the last multinational force deployed in 1983 was the target of Hizballah bombing. After 241 US Marines were killed, the United States, France, Italy, and Britain aborted their mission. In an interview with the Italian newspaper *Corre Della Serra* on Thursday, Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert made clear that his model for a multinational force

would be more akin to the robust mission of the 18,000 NATO troops in Afghanistan, where they are working to pacify the countryside alongside the Afghan military. Some analysts have pointed to the success of peacekeepers in 2000 in preventing an outbreak of civil war in Sierra Leone, but others say the circumstances differ.

Moreover, it remains unknown to what extent the multinational force can coordinate with Israel, and whether Israel's hands will be tied if it believes the multinational force is not implementing its commitments.

Chapter Seven

According to the UN Charter, Security Council resolutions passed under the terms of Chapter Seven require mandatory implementation at the risk of sanction. The United States and Israel have held consultations over whether sanctions will indeed be imposed on Iran and Syria if they are discovered to have contravened the embargo on providing weapons to Hizballah that will be a part of the impending resolutions.

Sequencing

France has made clear that it seeks the "immediate cessation of hostilities" even before issues relating to the multinational force is agreed upon. Since Paris intends to lead the deployment of the multinational force (and is proud of its robust peacekeeping role in the Ivory Coast), this has provided France with leverage. The French insist that diplomacy to sort out the multinational force's mission will take time, but Paris refuses to send troops unless a ceasefire is first established. In contrast, Israel's position has been less clear. At first, it rejected a ceasefire until the multinational force was deployed. Now, it seems that Israel wants to reserve the right for "defensive action" until the multinational force is deployed, interpreted by many to mean some continued air strikes. France opposes this.

Israel is currently creating a security zone in southern Lebanon six to eight kilometers from its border that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) would hold until the multinational force is deployed. According to France's proposed wording, all forces would have to immediately leave the delineated zone for the multinational force in southern Lebanon; only the Lebanese Armed Forces and the multinational force would be allowed in the deployment area. This would mean expelling both Hizballah and the IDF. However, Olmert has made clear that Israel will not leave until the multinational force is deployed in order to avoid creating a vacuum that he fears Hizballah will fill. He told the Times of London in a story published Thursday, "There should be overlap in terms of time so that we will pull out and they will come in without a time gap that will allow Hizballah to rebuild their position in the south of Lebanon." In remarks broadcast on Thursday night, Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah said that Hizballah would not stop firing at Israel until Israel leaves Lebanon.

Some UN diplomats have called for beefing up the existing UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) until a multinational force is deployed. Israel repeatedly has made clear that it views UNIFIL observers as irrelevant, saying their monitoring since in 1978 had not stopped a single Hizballah attack. Israel wants to keep its forces in place until a multinational force is deployed. No timetable for the deployment of a new multinational force has been reached, since its mandate has not been resolved.

Shebaa Farms

Israel withdrew from Lebanon in May 2000 and the UN demarcated the border. The Security Council even passed Resolution 1310 on July 27, 2000, which affirmed the UN demarcation of the border and Israel's exit. At the time of the Israeli pullout, Hizballah claimed that Israel should also pull out of a twenty-five-square-kilometer area abutting the Golan Heights called Sheba Farms. It subsequently claimed that if it would regain Shebaa, it would lay claim to eight other villages in the Galilee, thereby reinforcing Israel's concern that Shebaa was always a red herring. The UN envoy for Lebanon, Terje Roed-Larsen, said the UN rejected the Shebaa Farms claim. For its part, Syria has never publicly ceded its claim to Shebaa Farms. According to Security Council resolution 1680, Syria and Lebanon are to demarcate the Syria-Lebanese border but this has not occurred. It is curious that Hizballah, which claims to

spearhead the drive for Shebaa Farms as a justification for its role as a “resistance” organization and which prides itself on its close ties to Damascus, failed to get a Syrian commitment to cede Shebaa Farms. Moreover, Syrian-Lebanese relations have been tense ever since a groundswell of Lebanese public opinion led to the ouster of Syria from Lebanon early last year in the aftermath of the assassination of beloved Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri, a killing for which Damascus is widely believed to have been responsible.

Citing the Lebanese government, France wants the Shebaa Farms issue to be part of a ceasefire package. At different times, Rice has indicated that she agrees. The White House has to date not publicly echoed this view. For its part, Israel believes that the UN demarcated the border, and therefore Shebaa Farms is a moot issue. When asked by the Times of London about Shebaa Farms, Olmert replied, “It is an excuse, but nothing else. This is precisely why we shouldn’t even consider it at this moment.” Moreover, Israel views ceding Shebaa Farms at the end of this crisis as a victory for Hizballah, which could only embolden the group in the future.

While Israel may feel it is justified in ignoring Shebaa Farms, since there was a UN demarcation, one compromise position would be to reinstate the Israel-Lebanon Armistice Agreement of 1949. Lebanese prime minister Fouad Siniora has repeatedly raised this option; were it to choose this course, Israel would not be yielding anything to Hizballah, but it may offer a way for Olmert and Siniora to help each other.

The Acquiescence of Hizballah and Third Parties

Israel sees Hizballah as being forced to accept any ceasefire terms acceptable to the parties, but it does not view the group as a legitimate partner from which to wrangle concessions. So far, it seems that the outside world’s communication with Hizballah has been conducted via Siniora and Lebanon’s parliamentary speaker Nabih Beri, who is the veteran leader of Amal, a rival Shiite group to Hizballah. A major concern is that the Lebanese government will be deferential to Hizballah, because of the group’s role in the governing coalition, and will dilute the mandate of the multinational force. Since its troops are on the line, France seems not only to be solicitous of Hizballah’s acquiescence, but also seems to have a back channel for dealing with Syria and Iran. Earlier this week, the French and Iranian foreign ministers met in Beirut, and the French official astonished many when he praised Iran’s “stabilizing role” when in fact Iran has been Hizballah’s biggest financial backer and weapons supplier (though he publicly retracted his statement afterward).

Conclusion

Gaps remain in the diplomatic bid to end the current crisis. France will likely seek to use its role in leading a multinational force as a lever to gain a broader role in postconflict diplomacy. This may even include more European-driven peace feelers to Damascus or even Teheran, which are viewed inside Europe as key to a lasting solution.

David Makovsky is a senior fellow and director of the Project on the Middle East Peace Process at The Washington Institute. ❖

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