



RESEARCH NOTES

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The Israel-Lebanon Monitoring Group: An Operational Review

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Renewed clashes in Lebanon over the last six weeks have brought the Israel-Lebanon Monitoring Group (ILMG) under considerable scrutiny. Created after Israel's Operation Grapes of Wrath last year, the Monitoring Group was intended to help prevent another escalation to large-scale military operations. The following report provides an overview of the ILMG, its activities, and the participants' views of its contributions so far.

Since the late 1970s, the border between Israel and Lebanon has been an area of almost constant conflict. The international community moved to address this situation in March 1978, when, following Israel's Operation Litani, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 425 (UNSCR 425) calling for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from south Lebanon and establishing the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to monitor the withdrawal and help restore Lebanese governmental authority. Despite its good intentions, UNSCR 425 failed to solve the problems of Lebanon and Israel.

Today, Israel and its proxy in Lebanon, the Christian-dominated South Lebanon Army (SLA), patrol a security-zone nine miles wide north of the Israeli-Lebanese border. Meanwhile, the Iranian and Syrian-backed forces of Hezbollah continue to wage a relentless campaign of sabotage and ambush against the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the SLA in the security zone, at times attacking across the border into northern Israel. Israel is determined to maintain the security zone as a buffer between Israeli civilians in Galilee and the terrorists who still infest Lebanon, while Hezbollah sees itself as a liberating force trying to rid its country of an occupying power. The two sides battle daily in the last "hot zone" of the Arab-Israeli conflict, with Hezbollah launching Katyusha rockets into the security zone and northern Israel in addition

to ambushing IDF and SLA forces there. For its part, the IDF conducts an aggressive defense of the security zone, retaliating for Hezbollah attacks with airstrikes and commando raids. The series of clashes this past August and September—which saw over 100 Katyushas fired into northern Israel and left at least ten Lebanese civilians dead—was only the latest battle in this seemingly interminable war of attrition.¹

Operation Grapes of Wrath

Because low-level skirmishing between Israel and Hezbollah had become a constant feature of the regional landscape, the Israel-Lebanon border often remained in the background of the region's diplomatic events. This changed on April 11, 1996, when five weeks of escalating violence and increasing violations of the July 1993 cease-fire understanding between Hezbollah and Israel prompted Israel to launch Operation Grapes of Wrath. In this seventeen-day campaign, the IDF fired more than 20,000 artillery shells, flew over 2,000 sorties, and spent over 200 million shekels on military operations to punish Hezbollah and force Lebanese and Syrian authorities to prevent its attacks on Israel.² Before and during Grapes of Wrath, Hezbollah fired approximately 400 Katyusha rockets into the security-zone, and seventy others into the Galilee.³ Even with this increase in violence, however, it was the high number of civilian casualties (over 200 dead and 400 wounded, according to the United Nations)

¹ Douglas Jehl, "5-Nation Group Calls on Israel and Lebanon to Spare Civilians," *New York Times*, August 24, 1997, p. A3.

² Arieh O'Sullivan, *Jerusalem Post*, May 3, 1996, p. 1.

³ Ehud Ya'ari, "Back in the Lebanese Quagmire," *Jerusalem Report*, May 16, 1996, p. 14.

which finally caused the international community to focus on the situation.⁴ The situation reached a climax when Israeli artillery hit a UN refugee base at Qana, killing approximately 100 Lebanese civilians.

The shelling at Qana brought with it finger-pointing and condemnation on all sides. Israel bore the brunt of international outrage for the incident, and was blamed for firing at a refugee camp. Israel asserted that the shelling was an accident and that the artillery overshot the intended targets. It also maintained that the artillery was responding to a Hezbollah Katyusha attack, and was aimed at the area from which the rockets were fired. Israel then blamed Hezbollah for putting civilians in danger by firing from villages, purposely using the civilian population as shields. Israel also objected to the UN and UNIFIL provision of refuge for Hezbollah guerrillas, who would run into the refugee camps to avoid Israeli counterfire the moment they finished launching their Katyushas at Israel.

The finger-pointing and condemnation aside, the incident forced the international community to the conclusion that something had to be done to dampen the conflict and protect the civilians on both sides. U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher and French Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette both began intense diplomatic campaigns to find a way to halt the fighting, at least temporarily. Their efforts devolved into competing shuttle diplomacy with the two of them following each other back and forth between Jerusalem and Damascus in an effort to broker an agreement between Israel, Lebanon, and Lebanon's *de facto* suzerain, Syria. After almost two weeks, all of the involved parties agreed to a cease-fire understanding designed to reduce the level of violence and protect civilians.

The April 1996 Understanding

A key feature of the resolution of the 1996 fighting in Lebanon is that the cease-fire is, in fact, an "understanding" and not an "agreement" because it was not signed by the parties. It should

also be noted that the April 1996 cease-fire understanding (the Understanding) is different from the earlier July 1993 cease-fire agreement because, although the April Understanding was not signed by the parties, it is a written document and not merely an exchange of verbal assurances. The April Understanding consisted of six main points:⁵

- Hezbollah and its allies in Lebanon are prohibited from carrying out attacks of any kind on northern Israel.
- Israel and the SLA will not attack civilians or civilian targets in Lebanon. The two parties further agreed not to launch attacks from populated areas or other civilian sites.
- Both parties retain the right of self-defense for their respective forces.
- A Monitoring Group consisting of the United States, France, Lebanon, Israel, and Syria would be formed to monitor the cease-fire understanding and hear claims of violations from the involved parties. Claims must be submitted within twenty-four hours of the violation and the group would set its own procedures for dealing with the complaints.

- A Consultative Group was established including the U.S., the European Union and Russia to facilitate the reconstruction of Lebanon.

The key to the Understanding—recognized by all of the parties involved—is that it is neither a complete and permanent solution to the problem, nor a substitute for a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and Lebanon. Both sides recognized that the basic differences between Israel and Hezbollah (let alone Israel and Lebanon, or Israel and Syria) could not be solved quickly, if at all, and instead they chose to concentrate on reaching an understanding that could achieve immediate, practical limits on the conduct of the war to minimize its impact. Thus, the April Understanding is simply an attempt to protect civilians from the cross-fire between the IDF and Hezbollah. Likewise, the Understanding was not designed to end the fighting on the Israel-Lebanon border. It contains few limitations on

⁴ Casualty figures provided by the Lebanese Information and Research Center, September 1997.

⁵ For the text of the cease-fire understanding, see Reuters, "Restricting the Violence in Lebanon," *New York Times*, April 27, 1996, p. A8.

the actions of either side in the nine-mile wide security-zone. Israel's operations in the security-zone are not restricted at all, and the only constraint on Hezbollah is that it cannot launch attacks from populated or industry-related areas.

As part of the agreement, Israel agreed to limit its right of self-defense to responses to direct violations of the Understanding. Consequently, the working definition of "launching an attack" from a civilian population became an important issue for Israel because it defines which Hezbollah activities constitute violations of the agreement and therefore justify an Israeli response. Israel found support from the United States on this issue in a "secret" side letter to the Understanding written by Secretary of State Christopher.⁶ This letter states that "the United States understands that the prohibition [on launching attacks] refers not only to the firing of weapons, but also to the use of these areas by armed groups as bases from which to carry out attacks."⁷ This provides Israel with a broad writ to respond to Hezbollah attacks on its forces.

Establishment of the Israel-Lebanon Monitoring Group

The key component of the April Understanding is the monitoring group it created. The Israel-Lebanon Monitoring Group (ILMG) is vital to the cease-fire understanding because of its dual function of protecting civilians and providing a forum for all sides to air their grievances. The U.S. State Department's deputy spokesman emphasized the role of the ILMG, stating that, "We hope and expect that this mechanism will contribute to defusing tensions . . . [and] that it will help to further the climate of stability and tranquillity."⁸ With the membership of Syria in the group, the ILMG also has another purpose for U.S. officials, as ". . . an

important vehicle for bringing Israel and Syria into direct contact during a time when the future of their broader peace negotiations is unclear."⁹ While the official function of the ILMG is agreed on by all parties involved, this secondary role is not (at least publicly). In fact, statements from Lebanon and Syria since the Group was formed deny that it functions as a back-channel for peace negotiations. Sources for the Lebanese delegation have said that no dialogue exists:

. . . because neither the Lebanese nor the Syrian delegations talk directly to the Israelis around the round table. They address their talk directly to ILMG Chairman Ambassador Greenlee. Besides, the discussions do not involve issues that are not within the ILMG's jurisdiction but are restricted to the discussion of the complaint.¹⁰

Composition: The senior representatives for the three involved parties—Syria, Lebanon, and Israel—are each affiliated with their respective country's military. On the other hand, the heads of the U.S. and French delegations are civilians who have military support staffs. Also, the chairman of the ILMG is always a member of either the French or U.S. delegations. The chair rotates every six months, with the United States having taken the first turn. Both the U.S. and French delegations are based full-time in Nicosia, Cyprus, while the other three countries send their delegates as required. (This is changing soon, as the United States will begin to rotate diplomats from regional embassies to the delegation).

Procedures: When either Israel or Lebanon believes that the other country has violated the April Understanding, it submits a report to the Chairman. The Chair then disseminates the complaint to the other members of the group. It

⁶ This letter, dated April 30, 1996, from Secretary of State Christopher outlines which Hezbollah actions Israel can respond to within the rules of self-defense in the Understanding. It also gives a broad definition of "launching grounds for attacks," substantially reducing the extent to which the Understanding restricts Israeli actions. The full text of the "Letter to Prime Minister Peres," was provided by the Israeli Government Press Office.

⁷ "Letter to Prime Minister Peres," April 30, 1996.

⁸ Reuters, "5 Nations Agree on a Strategy To Monitor Lebanon Cease-Fire," *New York Times*, July 13, 1995, p. A2.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ "A Diplomatic Assessment of the Monitoring Group's Work. Discussions in Limbo," *al-Safir*, Beirut (in Arabic), November 6, 1996, p. 2, in FBIS-NES-96-2-17, November 6, 1996.

is then up to the Chair to set the time and date of the meeting to review the complaint(s). Such a meeting must be within three days of the filing of a complaint. The delegations of the five countries then meet at UNIFIL headquarters in Naqura, Lebanon. The group is then "... entitled to dispatch investigating teams [to the site of the alleged violation] to verify information and submit a report specifying the responsibility of the parties"¹¹

Statements: All statements of the group must be unanimous. Given the composition of the group, it is understandably difficult to put out a report which harshly condemns one country or the other, regardless of what happened. As Hezbollah's Shaykh Hassan Nasrallah aptly put it in an interview with *al-Safir*, "Unanimity means that there will be no denunciation because neither Israel nor Lebanon will denounce themselves."¹² This also means that the statements may be vague and superficial, despite the hours of discussion which occurred during the meeting. Nevertheless, since the escalation of military clashes beginning in early August 1997, the Group has made a conscious effort to make its statements more pointed and to assess blame to try to dampen the violence.

Enforcement: The ILMG has no enforcement mechanism, i.e., no authority to punish the party responsible for a violation of the cease-fire Understanding. A writer for the pro-Syrian newspaper *al-Safir* notes that, "Its job is only to blame this party or that for a violation and to repeatedly call on both sides not to target civilians in the course of military activities."¹³ The main purpose of its reports, therefore, is to call attention to violations and instill a sense of accountability in the parties for their actions.

Summary of ILMG Statements¹⁴

The following are summaries of the statements issued by the Monitoring Group after each of its meetings:

August 8, 1996: The Group discussed organizational matters. The statement also alludes to the initial decision by the Group to keep its information confidential for the use of member governments.

August 15, 1996: No statement issued.

September 1, 1996: No statement issued.

September 25, 1996: The group met on September 22, 24, and 25 to review four complaints, three by Lebanon and one by Israel. Two Lebanese complaints involved Israeli shelling of Lebanese villages while the Israeli complaint accused Hezbollah of using these villages for launching attacks. Based on an exchange of information, the group accepted as facts that houses in Jbaa, Ain-Busswar, and Arab Salim were damaged and a civilian was injured by Israeli artillery. The Group then asked all parties to respect the Understanding and to stop disproportionate or indiscriminate shelling that puts civilians in danger.

October 18, 1996: The group met continuously on October 14-18, to consider a complaint by Lebanon regarding Israeli shelling of the village of Safad al-Baltikh resulting in thirteen injuries. Lebanon emphasized that Hezbollah had not used the village to launch an attack on the IDF or SLA. The Israeli representative regretted the injuries and damage, but maintained that the fire was in response to a Hezbollah attack and was proportionate. The Lebanese and Syrian

¹¹ "Lebanon: Buwayz on Friends of Lebanon Meeting, ILMG," *al-Safir*, Beirut, (in Arabic), December 12, 1996, p. 3, in FBIS-NES-96-242, December 17, 1996.

¹² "Lebanon: Nasrallah Interviewed on ILMG, U.S. Policy," *al-Safir*, Beirut (in Arabic), January, 27, 1997, pp. 4-5, in FBIS-NES-97-020, January 31, 1997.

¹³ Ibrahim al-Amin, "Lebanon: Writer Views Latest ILMG Meeting, French 'Surprise,'" *al-Safir*, Beirut (in Arabic), January 9, 1997, p. 2, in FBIS-NES-97-08, January 14, 1997.

¹⁴ The text of the 1996 statements were provided by the Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State. The 1997 "Statement on Behalf of the Chairman of the Monitoring Group," can be found at: <http://secretary.state.gov/www/briefings/statements/index.html>.

representatives voiced the opinion that the shelling was intentional and designed to heighten tensions in preparation for more military activity. Based on a fact-finding mission by a military representative of the Group, the ILMG concluded that the injuries and damage were caused by Israeli artillery fire. Israel, Syria and Lebanon still disagreed on the reasons for the artillery fire.

November 6, 1996: The Group met continuously on November 5-6 to consider two complaints by Lebanon. The first dealt with the issue of expulsions raised on September 25. The Group accepted that there were different opinions on whether or not this was within the Group's jurisdiction and agreed it would be better considered by diplomatic channels on a bilateral level. The Group also agreed that it would consider issues "of common concern to reduce tensions."¹⁵ The second complaint concerned Israeli and SLA shelling of Louaize where one woman was hurt and some material damage occurred. The Group "deplored" the injury and damage and concluded that the shelling was from Israel and the SLA. Opinions on the defensive versus retaliatory nature of the shelling differed. The group further reasserted that combatants are responsible for military operations and must take precautions when operating near civilian areas.

December 12, 1996: The Group met on December 9-12 to consider a Lebanese complaint involving incidents at Kfar Tibnite and Nabatyeh al-Fawka on December 7. Military representatives went on verification missions to both villages. The Monitoring Group again "deplored" the injuries to civilians and damage to houses. The Group again stressed the importance of precautions around populated areas. It also stated that Israeli forces must be accountable for their firing procedures. It also hinted that not all of the necessary precautions may have been taken (by the Israelis) to avoid the incident.

December 16, 1996: No statement was issued.

January 8, 1997: The Group met on January 6-8 to consider three complaints each from Israel and Lebanon, regarding incidents involving a total of six villages. The Group asked for all parties involved to abide by the agreement and take special precautions to protect civilians when acting around populated areas. The Group also noted that its work has helped to reduce the risks to civilians.

January 10, 1997: The Group met on January 10 to consider a complaint lodged by Israel. The Group accepted as a fact that at least one Katyusha rocket was fired from an area in Lebanon into Israel on January 8. The Group viewed this as a violation of the Understanding intended to undermine it. The government of Lebanon said it was doing everything that it could to ensure compliance with the Understanding. The Group once again mentioned the importance of all parties holding to the Understanding to protect civilians.

February 18, 1997: The Group met on February 17 to hear one complaint each from Israel and Lebanon. For the Israeli complaint, it was taken as a fact that five road-side bombs were placed in a village in Lebanon and that a house was damaged by the SLA trying to disarm those bombs. Israel said that these bombs were a threat to civilians while the Lebanese delegation maintained that they were targeting Israeli patrols and did not put civilians at risk. It was also taken as fact that, on the Lebanese complaint, the IDF bombing of a Hezbollah radio antenna injured a shepherd, killed his flock, and damaged several houses in Nahle. The Group again urged the involved parties to comply with the Understanding and to use restraint and caution around civilian populated areas.

February 20, 1997: The group met on February 19 and 20 to consider complaints by both Israel and Lebanon. The Group condemned the February 18 shelling by Israel which affected three villages and killed a Lebanese woman. This

¹⁵ "Statement on Behalf of the Chairman of the Monitoring Group," November 6, 1996, Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State.

was the first time that the Group actually condemned one of the involved parties. The Group also held Israeli forces responsible for the destructive and careless manner of the shelling. The Israeli delegation said that the shelling was in self-defense to counter Hezbollah firing from the villages, while the Lebanese delegation maintained that the shelling was deliberate. The Group once again called for all those involved to abide by the April Understanding.

February 22: No statement issued.

March 4, 1997: The Group met March 3 and 4 to hear a complaint filed by Israel. The Group emphasized the need for the parties to adhere to the Understanding and avoid military operations which put civilians at risk.

March 14, 1997: The Group met on March 13 to consider an Israeli complaint and accepted as fact that a Lebanese armed group detonated a car-bomb by a house near a road. The bomb resulted in one civilian being treated for shock, and material damage to the house and a car. The Group "deplored" what happened and then asked the appropriate authorities to do everything they could to ensure adherence to the Understanding and to stop attacks which affected civilian areas or put people and property at risk.

April 24, 1997: The Group met on April 23 to hear a complaint brought by Israel involving an attack on two Israeli soldiers who were on leave. The attack killed both soldiers and seriously wounded one civilian. The Israeli delegation considered these soldiers to be civilians because they were on leave. The Lebanese delegation maintained that since the attack targeted a vehicle which was transporting "two members of the forces cooperating with Israel and one co-operator associated with these forces,"¹⁶ it was not a violation. The members of the Group expressed different opinions and could only come to the consensus that these types of discussions were useful in and of themselves.

May 1, 1997: The ILMG met on April 29 and 30 to consider one Israeli and one Lebanese complaint. On the Israeli complaint, the Group accepted as a fact that one Lebanese mortar shell aimed at Israeli forces in Lebanon missed and unintentionally landed in Israel. Lebanon countered the Israeli claim that this was a violation of the Understanding by saying that the shells were aimed at military targets and only one landed outside of Lebanon. A second fact accepted by the Group was the launching of Katyusha rockets by an armed Lebanese group toward a village. Israel argued that an indiscriminate attack toward a civilian area violated the Understanding. The Lebanese delegation did not believe that it was a violation because it did not have an impact on civilians and because Hezbollah was aiming at military targets manned by those cooperating with Israel. On the Lebanese complaint, the ILMG acknowledged that a school bus was hit by two rounds from a machine gun. While the Lebanese delegation claimed that the shots were fired from Israeli forces, Israel claimed it had nothing to do with the incident. The Group ended the meeting by calling for all parties to follow the Understanding and take every step possible to protect civilians from the conflict.

May 8, 1997: The Group met May 7-8 to discuss one Israeli and one Lebanese complaint. It was taken as fact that an armed Lebanese group placed an explosive device at a military target near civilian houses, as Israel charged. The explosion wounded civilians and SLA soldiers. The Group also accepted as fact that the detonation of four explosive devices near inhabited houses resulted in two civilian deaths and two other injuries, one of which was serious, as the Lebanese charged. The Israeli delegation maintained that the devices were not detonated by Israeli or SLA forces and may have accidentally been triggered by civilians. The Lebanese delegation countered that Israeli forces detonated the devices by remote control. The Group emphasized the responsibility that the parties have for the

¹⁶ "Statement on Behalf of the Co-Chairman of the Monitoring Group," April 24, 1997, <http://secretary.state.gov/www/briefings/statements/970424c.html>. July 1997.

conduct of their operations and expressed concern over the parties' use of powerful and disguised explosive devices in populated areas. The Group went one step further and determined that the placement of these devices in civilian populated areas was a violation of the Understanding. The Group emphasized the need for the parties to ensure that populated areas are not the target of attacks nor launching grounds for attacks.

June 9, 1997: The ILMG met on June 8-9 to consider one Lebanese and one Israeli complaint. The Lebanese asserted that a road-side bomb, detonated by either Israeli or SLA forces, killed one person and injured another. Israel claimed that the person killed had links to an armed Lebanese group while the wounded man was a member of such a group. The Lebanese said that they were both civilians and that this attack was an extension of the conflict. The Israeli delegate countered that this type of attack is not prohibited by the Understanding. The Israeli complaint dealt with the event raised in the May 8 ILMG meeting concerning the detonation of a device in an electrical control box near a village. The ILMG accepted as fact that the person who died in the explosion was an employee of a Lebanese electric company and was a member of a security unit that cooperated with Israel. The Israeli delegate said that the person was trying to repair a failed electrical line which provided civilians with service. The Lebanese delegate said that the box was in a military zone and provided power solely to military positions.

June 24, 1997: The ILMG met June 23-24 to hear three Israeli and two Lebanese complaints. According to one Israeli complaint, a roadside bomb exploded in an area near a house and killed two people, one of whom was a Lebanese civilian. The Israeli delegation claimed that the attack was perpetrated by an armed Lebanese group. The Lebanese countered that no one had claimed responsibility for the attack yet and said that the other victim had links to the SLA. The second Israeli complaint again dealt with a

roadside bomb which resulted in two fatalities. Israel said that one was an off-duty SLA soldier and the other was simply a civilian. The Lebanese delegate countered that one was a soldier, the other had links to the SLA, and that they were both seen leaving a barracks. The third Israeli complaint dealt with a roadside bomb that exploded in a village and killed two soldiers. Israel considered this a violation because it put civilians at risk, even though none were hurt. The Lebanese delegation said that because no civilians were hurt and no property was damaged, the Understanding was not violated. The first Lebanese complaint concerned an artillery flare which landed in a house causing some damage but no injuries. The Lebanese delegation was concerned that this represented an expansion of the conflict while the Israeli delegation considered it a minor incident because flares are not offensive weapons. The Group also agreed that it had different opinions on whether or not reported Israeli threats against the civilians of a Lebanese village fall under its scope to be heard as a complaint.

July 8, 1997: The ILMG met on July 7 to hear two complaints from Lebanon, and two from Israel. The Lebanese complaints dealt with Israeli shelling of several villages which resulted in several injuries. The Lebanese delegate said that the villages were not near the military conflict and that the firing was in retaliation for attacks on Israeli military forces. The Israeli delegate said that the fire was in self-defense and was a response to attacks launched from the villages. The Group urged Israeli forces to take all possible steps to avoid harming civilians. The Group also acknowledged that two Katyushas had landed in Israel. Though no injuries resulted, the Israeli delegate said that the attacks were designed to escalate the conflict. The Lebanese delegate claimed that the Understanding never categorized Katyushas as ordnance and that they were fired at military targets.¹⁷ The delegate also said that shells falling on Lebanon should count the same as those that land in Israel, as all parts of the Understanding have equal weight. The

ILMG reminded the parties involved that they were responsible for their respective forces' firing and that all should respect the Understanding, reduce tensions, and avoid escalation of the conflict.

July 17, 1997: The ILMG met on July 16 to hear four complaints: two from Lebanon and two from Israel. The first Lebanese complaint concerned a farmer killed by Israeli tank fire. The Lebanese delegation maintained that the area was free from military activity and that the firing was deliberate. The Israeli delegation apologized, explaining that the IDF had mistaken the farmer for a member of an armed Lebanese group. The Group concluded that, regardless of intentions, the incident was indeed a violation of the Understanding. The Lebanese delegation also complained that two fatalities and one injury which occurred on a farm near Berti were the result of "deliberate and indiscriminate" Israeli fire away from military activity.¹⁸ The Israeli delegate argued that the Israeli fire was counter-battery fire to cover the evacuation of wounded troops. The ILMG concluded that it was possibly an unintentional violation.

The first Israeli complaint concerned a Katyusha rocket, fired by an armed Lebanese group, that injured a Lebanese civilian. The Israeli delegation said that the weapon was fired without the exercise of proper discrimination or precaution.¹⁹ The Lebanese delegate countered that the weapon was fired at a military target and that the April Understanding did not prohibit the use of Katyusha rockets. The Group concluded that this was an unintentional violation. The second Israeli complaint concerned a Katyusha rocket fired by an armed Lebanese group that landed in Israel with no casualties resulting. For Israel, this represented a clear violation of the cease-fire. The Lebanese delegation defended the action on the basis that

it was connected to Israeli violations and attacks on civilians, emphasizing that the Understanding is supposed to be for all civilians. The ILMG concluded that this action violated the Understanding. The Group ended with the usual calls for all groups to respect and adhere to the Understanding, be responsible for their missions, and exercise caution. It also stressed that all articles in the Understanding have equal standing. Finally, the group warned of "violence cycles" which could undermine the Understanding.

July 31, 1997: The ILMG met on July 30-31 to consider three Israeli complaints and one Lebanese complaint. All three Israeli complaints focused on attacks by armed Lebanese groups on Lebanese villages in the security zone and attacks by armed Lebanese groups from a village in eastern Lebanon. The Israelis complained that armed Lebanese groups had fired at least one rocket which landed near the village of Kawkabe, as well as several mortar rounds that impacted in the village of Reihan—mildly wounding one Lebanese woman. In addition, they averred that an armed Lebanese group had fired Katyusha rockets at a military target in the security zone, but had done so from a Lebanese civilian locale in the eastern part of Nabatiah al-Tahata. The Lebanese delegation responded that all three Israeli complaints dealt with minor infractions of little consequence, and that Lebanon had previously refrained from bothering the Group with similar complaints. Moreover, it answered that the Katyusha attack on Kawkabe had been a legitimate attack on a military target, while it had no confirmation that any Lebanese group had fired on Reihan or from Nabatiah.

The Lebanese delegation lodged a complaint that Israeli or SLA forces had fired at least three mortar shells which hit the Lebanese village of Habboueh, causing damage to civilian property.

¹⁷ "Statement on Behalf of the Chairman of the Monitoring Group," <http://www.state.gov/www/briefings/statements/970708a.html>, July 8, 1996. Contrary to the Lebanese claim, the text of the understanding states that "[a]rmed groups in Lebanon will not carry attacks by Katyusha rockets or by any kind of weapon into Israel." See Reuters, "Restricting the Violence in Lebanon," *New York Times*, April 27, 1996, p. A2.

¹⁸ "Official Statement on Behalf of the Chairman of the Monitoring Group," July 17, 1997, <http://secretary.state.gov/www/briefings/statements/970717a.html>, July 1997.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Israel stated that its forces were simply fighting back against an armed Lebanese group attacking them from the village of Habboueh. The Monitoring Group called on both sides to abide by the terms of the cease-fire understanding and to bear in mind the consequences of their actions and take greater precautions to ensure that populated areas are not the intentional or unintentional target of military attacks.

August 13, 1997: Beginning on the night of 3/4 August, a series of military operations by Israel and Hezbollah created an escalating spiral of violence that led to numerous complaints filed with the ILMG. On August 10-12, the Group met to consider five Lebanese and six Israeli complaints. With regard to three of the Lebanese complaints—those stemming from incidents at Kfar Houne, Markabe, and al-Kafur—the Group either accepted that the targets were military, or that the evidence was contradictory and therefore no blame could be assessed. The fourth Lebanese complaint focused on the death of two Lebanese civilians and the wounding of seven others at the hands of Israeli warplanes. The Lebanese delegation asserted that the attack was intentional, while the Israeli delegation maintained that these casualties were unintended collateral damage from airstrikes responding to a mortar attack from that position. In this instance, the Group found that the Israelis had not intended to target civilians, but held Israel responsible for the manner in which they conducted the airstrikes. The ILMG stated that although the Israeli actions were only an unintentional violation of the Understanding, they nonetheless had “condemnable consequences.” The last Lebanese complaint accused Israel of shelling the Lebanese villages of Joun and Kfar Melki, killing one and injuring five other Lebanese civilians. In this instance, the Group found that SLA forces had deliberately shelled these villages and were therefore responsible for the loss of life. The Group condemned this action as a violation of the cease-fire Understanding.

Of the six Israeli complaints, three were noteworthy because of the response of the ILMG.

First, Israel complained that an armed Lebanese group had fired mortar rounds at Israeli forces at Shaykh Abbad and that at least one shell had fallen on Israeli territory. The Group acknowledged that although the shell did not cause any damage to persons or property, and although it may have been unintentional, it still violated the provisions of the Understanding. Second, Israel complained that an armed Lebanese group had fired a Katyusha rocket that landed on an orphanage in the village of Safaray, wounding a five year-old girl. The Group found that the action was unintended, and the intended target was legitimately military, but deplored the action nonetheless. Finally, the Israeli delegation complained that an armed Lebanese group had deliberately fired a Katyusha at the Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona, slightly wounding one person and damaging a synagogue. The ILMG condemned this attack as a violation of the Understanding, and the Lebanese government vowed to conduct inquiries into the incident. The Monitoring Group further expressed great concern at the increasing number of serious incidents causing civilian deaths and injuries, and called on all responsible parties to do their utmost to avoid putting civilian lives at risk.

August 25, 1997: Israel and the SLA continued to trade rounds with Hezbollah, with more and more civilians caught in the crossfire. After several such exchanges, Hezbollah started Katyusha attacks on Israeli territory itself, launching over 100 rockets into northern Israel. As the violence between Israel and Hezbollah escalated, the ILMG met again on August 20-23 to consider ten more complaints. Because both sides became increasingly destructive and vengeful, the Group handed down more and more outright condemnations than ever before.

Three Lebanese complaints drew ILMG rebukes of Israel and the SLA. The Lebanese delegation accused the SLA of deliberately firing artillery rounds into the city of Sidon, killing six civilians, wounding forty-two others, and causing extensive property damage. The Group acknowledged the Lebanese claim and condemned the SLA shelling as “a grave violation

of the Understanding.” The ILMG also declared the concept of retaliation against civilian targets incompatible with the Understanding, and called on Israel to prevent the SLA from conducting such attacks. Similarly, the Group accepted a Lebanese claim that the SLA had deliberately fired more than forty rounds into the villages of Joun, Kfar Milke, Jbaa and Kfar Hatta, injuring one civilian and damaging dozens of houses. The Monitoring Group also acknowledged that an Israeli airstrike had deliberately destroyed an electrical power pylon near Jieh and reminded the responsible parties that the Understanding does not permit attacks on civilian targets.

In response to one of the Israeli complaints, the ILMG also admonished Hezbollah for its Katyusha attacks on Israel. The Group acknowledged that an armed Lebanese group intentionally launched more than fifty Katyusha rockets into populated areas in Israel and Southern Lebanon, wounding one Israeli and one Lebanese civilian and causing some property damage. The Monitoring Group “condemned this serious violation of the Understanding and those who carried it out.” It further noted that it was incumbent upon Lebanon to keep the armed Lebanese groups from carrying out such attacks. Fears that the situation was threatening to get out of hand led the parties to the Understanding to reaffirm their commitment to the cease-fire. The members of the ILMG also reaffirmed their conviction that any violations of the Understanding should be brought to the attention of the Monitoring Group “in order that it not lead to a cycle of violence.”

September 9, 1997: The Monitoring Group met on September 8-9 to consider one Israeli and one Lebanese complaint resulting from the continuing clashes between Israeli, SLA and Hezbollah forces. The Lebanese delegation filed a complaint claiming that Israeli forces had conducted a military operation too close to a Lebanese village, resulting in one Lebanese

civilian killed and four others wounded. The Israelis, on the other hand, complained that a Lebanese armed group had opened fire on Israeli forces with recoilless rifles and mortars from a civilian populated area. Both sides denied the respective charges and the Monitoring Group could only urge both Israel and Lebanon to take further precautions to prevent any possible breach of the April Understanding.

Participants' Satisfaction with the Accomplishments of the ILMG

Protecting Civilians. Protecting civilians on both sides of the Israeli-Lebanese border was the primary objective of the Monitoring Group when it was formed after Operation Grapes of Wrath and the tragedy at Qana. At the same time, Lebanese civilians are especially at risk because Hezbollah guerrillas often live in villages near the border, conduct their operations in the vicinity of these areas, and then take shelter there when the operation is over. Consequently, some have criticized the ILMG for the lack of bite behind its bark and feel that it has not done enough to stop violations from occurring. After a meeting with members of UNIFIL, Deputy Muhammed Funaysh, a member of a group in the Lebanese Chamber of Deputies who supports Hezbollah military actions said that, “. . . the ILMG's statements do not remedy anything and do not prevent the Zionist enemy from attacking civilians”²⁰ It should be emphasized that deterrence is difficult within the framework under which the Group was formed because, along with the other parties involved, “Lebanon is aware that the ILMG's task is to monitor, not to call to account. The task is to arrange the firing of weapons in such a way as to spare civilians harm, but not cease fire.”²¹

Even with this in mind, others recognize that the group can deter violence. Faris Buwayz, the Lebanese Foreign Minister, believes that the ILMG “can also forestall certain actions in the field, through preventive consultations to avoid

²⁰ “Hizbullah Reportedly ‘Not Satisfied’ With ILMG,” Ba’lbak Voice of the Oppressed (in Arabic), December 14, 1996, in FBIS-NES-96-242, December 17, 1996.

²¹ “Lebanon: Editorial Views Importance, Limits of ILMG,” Rafiq Khuri, *al-Anwar*, Beirut (in Arabic), p. 1, January 7, 1997, in FBIS-NES-97-007, January 13, 1997.

what might happen.”²² It is also significant that the involved parties feel that violence to civilians has diminished since the cease-fire was implemented. Shaykh Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s secretary-general, attested to this when he said in an interview that, “Despite [Hezbollah’s] annoyance with the continuing Israeli violations, the Understanding did curb the attacks on civilians.”²³ It was further recognized that “the number of casualties and the number of shells fired by Israel has drastically fallen since the ILMG started its mission.”²⁴ Even in the midst of the September 1997 clashes, Israel’s chief of military intelligence, Major General Moshe Ya’alon praised the ILMG as “a very useful tool.”²⁵

Preventing Escalation. Another goal of the Monitoring Group was to prevent the escalation of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. All sides appear satisfied that the group has attained this goal. According to the Israeli representative to the ILMG, Brigadier General David Tzur:

The monitoring group’s effectiveness lies in its role as a tension-curbing mechanism. In a number of instances, had the specific problem arisen before Operation Grapes of Wrath, it would have provoked an escalation Thanks to the understandings achieved after Operation Grapes of Wrath, problems are discussed by the ILMG, which . . . makes its decision, and that’s all there is to it.²⁶

Officials on the Syrian side are also happy with the situation. After Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shar’a met with the U.S. and French representatives to the ILMG, “Sources cited al-

Shar’a’s satisfaction with the activities of the ILMG and the positive role it plays in restraining escalation in the area.”²⁷ A major reason that the Monitoring Group has been able to prevent escalation is that its discussions apparently act as a type of catharsis for the various parties and their grievances, according to many participants. Both Lebanon and Israel can score small political/diplomatic victories which can combine with rhetoric to appease their respective publics. In the words of one observer:

. . . the ILMG has formed a certain dynamism by allowing each party to score points against the other. The complaints lodged by Lebanon or even those specifically made by Israel constitute a commitment not to bring about a large scale military escalation, even nominally. . . They wait for the ILMG report after each incident as if the security of the south has in fact become dependent on it. The concerned parties make efforts to show their good intentions of complying with the lines drawn by the ‘April Understanding’ even though their verbal stands suggest a hardening of position dictated by each party’s internal conditions.²⁸

The Group has also been able to prevent the escalation of the conflict through the hope it provides to all of the parties. Participants and observers have noted that the parties can turn to the ILMG instead of violence and still believe that they are accomplishing something. Hezbollah’s Shaykh Nasrallah addressed this point when he pointed out that, “We [Hezbollah] will not jump the gun as long as there is time and we are wagering on the success of this Understanding.”²⁹ While he regularly reaffirms Hezbollah’s right to

²² “Buwayz on April Understanding, Resistance,” interview by George Bkasini and George ‘Alam, *al-Safir*, Beirut (in Arabic), May 6, 1996, p. 3, in FBIS-NES-96-094, May 16, 1996.

²³ “Nasrallah Interviewed on ILMG, U.S. Policy,” *al-Safir*, January 27, 1997, pp. 4-5, in FBIS-NES-97-020, January 31, 1997.

²⁴ “Lebanon: Foreign Ministry Comments on ILMG Meeting,” Beirut Radio Lebanon (in Arabic), Dec. 12, 1996, in FBIS-TAC-97-003, March 5, 1997.

²⁵ Interview with Major General Moshe Ya’alon (Washington, DC, 1996).

²⁶ “Israel: General on ILMG Role, Meetings With ‘Senior’ Syrian Officer,” report by Or Heller, Tel Aviv IDF Radio (in Hebrew), June 5, 1997, in FBIS-NES-97-156, June 6, 1997.

²⁷ “Syria: Al-Shar’ Receives ILMG Chairman Greenlee in Damascus,” Radio Lebanon, May 21, 1997, in FBIS-NES-97-141, May 22, 1997.

²⁸ “Report Views ILMG’s Prospects, Achievements. ‘The Thin Line Amid the Halt in Negotiations on the Two Tracks. The Monitoring Group Succeeded in One Year in Making the Parties Avoid Escalation,’” *al-Nahar*, Beirut (in Arabic), April 22, 1997, p. 2, in FBIS-NES-97-112, April 23, 1997.

do what it considers necessary, his statements also express his belief that the Group is effective and can successfully preempt the need for Hezbollah to break the Understanding. The head of the French delegation, Ambassador Jean-Michel Gausso, echoed Nasrallah's satisfaction with the effectiveness of the ILMG in dampening escalation, remarking that, "the ILMG is actively participating in a positive role in the south."³⁰ Again the repeated and lengthy sessions of the ILMG throughout the fighting in August and September 1997 underscored the fact that while the Monitoring Group could not impose a cease-fire on the two sides, it could play an important role by providing a forum for all sides to talk. A senior Israeli official observed that, because the ILMG provided a forum in which both sides could be called to account for their behavior before the international community, its presence helped prevent rampant escalation of the violence to indiscriminate attacks on civilians.³¹

The Israel-Syria Channel. Just as the ILMG acts as a safety-valve to prevent escalation of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, participants acknowledge that it has also served as something of a safety-valve between Syria and Israel. The degree to which ILMG meetings act as opportunities for bilateral talks between these two countries is a highly sensitive issue. The Lebanese and Syrian delegations assert that there is no "dialogue" between the two and that whenever Syria wants to say something to Israel, the Chairman must act as a go-between. However, in contrast to this view, one observer notes that:

... the Americans and French participating in the Group's work are talking about a 'climate' and a

'mechanism.' In their view, the ILMG is an existing fact, the round table is a fact, around it are delegations representing the five countries, and the (indirect) dialogue revolves around the security situation in the south, which constitutes a major part of the region's crisis for whose sake the Madrid conference was held and whose principle aim is to reach a peace acceptable to all the concerned parties.³²

The United States and France apparently view the ILMG positively precisely because they "hope the meetings will provide the right political climate that will help the concerned parties return to negotiations in the future, when the deadlock in the settlement process in the region is broken."³³

Despite protests to the contrary, most observers appear to believe that the Group already has done a relatively good job of accomplishing this task. According to Israeli press, Brigadier General Tzur "has been holding contacts with a senior Syrian Army officer for almost a year now far from the eyes of the media—Brigadier General 'Adnan Balul, deputy chief of the Syrian Intelligence in Lebanon and the Syrian representative to the ILMG."³⁴ The fact that the ILMG acts as a channel between Israel and Syria was even hinted at by Damascus, in April 1997, when the Syrian Information Minister Dr. Muhammad Salman denied that Syria [had] suspended its participation in meetings of the Israel-Lebanon Monitoring Group.³⁵ This was significant because it was a period of considerable tension between Israel and many Arab governments, when no official bilateral dialogue existed, and most observers saw this as an implicit acknowledgment from Syria that the ILMG was indeed operating as a back-channel.

²⁹ "Nasrallah criticizes French ILMG Chairmanship," *al-Nahar*, Beirut (in Arabic), April 14, 1997, p. 9, in FBIS-NES-97-106, April 17, 1997.

³⁰ "Lebanon: ILMG's French Envoy Meets al-Hirawi; Comments after talks," Radio Lebanon, April 21, 1997, in FBIS-NES-97-111, April 22, 1997.

³¹ Interview with senior Israeli military official, September 1997.

³² "Lebanon: Paper Assesses ILMG Work, Conflicting Views," *al-Safir*, Beirut (in Arabic), November 6, 1996, p. 2., in FBIS-NES-96-217, November 8, 1996.

³³ "Political and Security Objectives Behind Occupation's Aggressions and Complaints to the Monitoring Group: 'Messages' of Resistance Foil Israel's Siege Attempt," by Hani 'Abdallah, *al-Ahd*, Beirut (in Arabic), May 2, 1997, p. 7, in FBIS-NES-97-126, May 7, 1997.

³⁴ "Israel: General on ILMG Role, Meetings with 'Senior' Syrian Officer," Tel Aviv IDF Radio (in Hebrew), June 5, 1997, in FBIS-NES-97-156, June 6, 1997.

Assessing the Monitoring Group

On the surface, it would seem easy to criticize the Monitoring Group. There are still consistent reports of fighting between the IDF and SLA on the one hand and Hezbollah on the other. The ILMG has no punitive power and it can only issue statements which identify the party responsible for violating the Understanding. However, given the restricted scope and limited power of the Group, these criticisms may be largely unfair.

First, although the ILMG has not managed to bring a halt to the clashes in southern Lebanon, it has contributed to a noticeable amelioration of their impact. In the first four months of 1996, Hezbollah launched Katyushas against northern Israel twenty-four times, while since then there have been only nine such attacks (and only two prior to the recent round of clashes in August-September 1997).³⁶ Similarly, the numbers of Lebanese and Israeli civilians injured in the fighting and the number of Israeli soldiers killed have also diminished appreciably. (See chart, below).

Second, according to the April Understanding, the cease-fire was never intended

to be the foundation for a peace agreement. Therefore, the Monitoring Group should not be criticized for failing to create that peace. The cease-fire does not prohibit Hezbollah attacks on the IDF in the security-zone and Israel is allowed to respond to these attacks. The only restriction on both sides is that civilians not be harmed. The Group has functioned well given its limitations and has reduced violence against civilians while also preventing an escalation of the conflict and providing a link between Israel and Syria at a time when the two countries are not officially talking. So far, the inclusion of France in the Group has provided Paris with a voice in Levantine diplomacy at relatively low cost, helping to make the Syrians and Lebanese more at ease with the diplomatic process of conflict management. In all, the Israel-Lebanon Monitoring Group set its sights low and, by and large, met them. Given the current state of Arab-Israeli diplomacy, that constitutes success.

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Violence in Lebanon	1996	1997 (First eight months)
Katyusha Attacks on Israel from Lebanon*	25 (9 excluding Grapes of Wrath)	8
Israeli Civilian Casualties	34 (None dead)	4
Israeli Soldiers Killed in Lebanon	26	17
Israeli Airstrikes in Lebanon	72	58
Lebanese Civilian Casualties	640+ (31 excluding Grapes of Wrath)	123
Hezbollah Casualties in Lebanon	50+	45

Sources: Agence France Press, American Task Force for Lebanon, IDF Spokesman (<http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/idf>), Lebanon Information and Research Center, *Jane's Defence Weekly* (September 3, 1997).

* Because statistics regarding numbers of rockets fired by Hezbollah at Israel are not available for most days, we consider a "Katyusha Attack" to be any day on which Katyusha rockets were fired at Israel, regardless of the number fired.

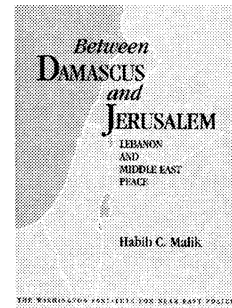
³⁵ "Syria: Information Minister on Peace, ILMG Meetings, Negotiations," Damascus SANA (in Arabic), April 11, 1997, in FBIS-NES-97-101, April 14, 1997.

³⁶ IDF Spokesman, "Rockets Fired From Lebanon to the Security Zone and Israel," <http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/idf/rockets.html>. September 1, 1997; and Agence France Press wire reports, various dates April-September 1997.

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