

Graziano Denies Hezbollah Rearming

Contributed by David Bedein & Sam Harari, T; The Bulletin
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Major General Claudio Graziano, force commander of the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), took questions from reporters on the situation in Lebanon yesterday.

Mr. Graziano, blaming Israel and exonerating Hezbollah in regards to abiding by Resolution 1701, said, "Hezbollah is one of the parties that agree with 1701 and support 1701."

"We have been able to maintain the ceasefire and fulfill the larger part of the mandate," Mr. Graziano said, claiming that UNIFIL has been successful.

Mr. Graziano denied allegations made by Israeli intelligence sources and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah that Hezbollah had rearmed, including south of the Litani River.

"In the country, I cannot make a comment. In terms of our area of operations ... we cannot ensure 100 percent, but we are in control," Mr. Graziano said.

In related news, Israeli Minister of Defense Ehud Barak launched an unprecedented attack on Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni this week, stating that Ms. Livni's August 2006 accomplishment - U.N. resolution 1701, which mandated that UNIFIL would position troops in Southern Lebanon to ensure the permanent removal of Hezbollah from Southern Lebanon - was "worthless."

The Bulletin asked Mr. Graziano what UNIFIL could possibly do if it found evidence of rearming in South Lebanon. Mr. Graziano replied, "UNIFIL has no commitment to the disarmament of Hezbollah." He had also mentioned that, "We are a peacekeeping force, not peace enforcement."

Mr. Graziano said that Israel had made no official request that UNIFIL change its mandate, something suggested by Mr. Barak. Mr. Graziano cited Israeli flyovers, continued military presence in Lebanese Ghajar, and its refusal to turn over maps for areas filled with cluster bombs as the main obstacles that UNIFIL faces.

When asked about whether or not UNIFIL was patrolling the Syrian-Lebanese border, an area long suspected of being the gateway for arms smuggling, Mr. Graziano said that UNIFIL was not patrolling the area because the government of Lebanon had not asked them to. He reemphasized that UNIFIL only operated south of the Litani River.

Asked about what UNIFIL's policy would be towards a downed Israeli pilot, Mr. Graziano said that it was policy to turn over any detainees to the Lebanese Army. The Bulletin also asked how robust the UNIFIL patrols are, and if they are indeed substantial enough to catch any arms smuggling.

Mr. Graziano said that UNIFIL was using observation points, checkpoints, and patrols. He also mentioned that UNIFIL was working in South Lebanon with the Lebanese army. Many have reason to be skeptical of how effective the Lebanese Army would be at stopping Hezbollah.

For example, a policy statement drafted and approved by a council of Lebanese government ministers guarantees "the right of Lebanon, its people, army and resistance to liberate or recover [occupied lands] ... by all legitimate and available means." The term "resistance" is understood to refer exclusively to Hezbollah.

Timur Goksel, a former spokesman for UNIFIL, said that the new policy statement had "put an end to any dreams of disarming Hezbollah. It secures Hezbollah's armed existence."

Furthermore, Mr. Goksel noted that the Lebanese government had "put its signature to a clause that allows Hezbollah to take actions in the fields listed without seeking government approval."

For the past two months, the Intelligence Information Center in Herzliya has been publicizing weekly-accumulated documentary evidence that Lebanon and the United Nations forces under UNIFIL have allowed Hezbollah terrorists to once again take up positions throughout Southern Lebanon.

This is in direct violation of U.N. Resolution 1701. That center posted a fully filmed report on its site from May 27 when Hezbollah conducted a military exercise in which its operatives stormed a hill representing an IDF outpost. The

information is posted on their website <http://www.intelligence.org.il>.

As if to confirm the assertions of Mr. Barak and the Intelligence Information Center, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has repeatedly boasted that Hezbollah has once again resumed its perch overlooking the northern border of Israel, waiting to pounce on Israel once again, fully rearmed and embedded in the civilian population.

Under the noses of the UNIFIL troops, Hezbollah is once again ready for another missile war Israel. Hezbollah knows full well that the Jewish state holds a moral military code of ethics that forbids retaliation against a civilian population even these civilians harbor a missile battery.

One does not need complex intelligence reports to learn of Hezbollah's return to its positions. Motorists on Israel's northern road can easily see the yellow Hezbollah flags proudly flying in the wind over the border.

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