

Arms still smuggled into Lebanon: UN

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united nations • The border between Lebanon and Syria remains porous and weapons smuggling remains active in the region, a UN report said on Wednesday.

Progress over the last year aimed at tightening security on the border "has been insufficient" and "without a decisive impact on overall border security," read a report by the UN's Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team (LIBAT II).

"The overall situation renders Lebanon's borders as penetrable as was the case one year ago," said the report, presented to the United Nations Security Council.

The document notes several weaknesses on the official border crossing points of Arida, Aboudieh, Kaa, Masnaa and Bokayaa.

"The system for passenger control, checking of cargo and selection of vehicles and trucks for more thorough examination was on the whole inadequate" at those points, the report read.

The authors urged the creation of a "multi-agency mobile force focusing on arms smuggling ... with the purpose of ensuring efficient arms seizures through its intelligence and rapid interception capabilities."

It added that cooperation between Lebanese border agents and their Syrian counterparts "should be established, in particular at the operational level, making border security management a joint effort" in order to "prevent illegal cross-border activities," the report read.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called for the formation of LIBAT I and II following the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 in August 2006, which ended a month-long war in Lebanon between Israel and the Lebanese Shia militia Hezbollah.

Resolution 1701 calls for the dismantling and disarming of all militias, foreign and local, operating in Lebanon. Two years after it was approved, the resolution has not been fulfilled.

On August 14 Syria and Lebanon agreed to take formal steps to demarcate their borders as part of a string of decisions to normalize their relations for the first time in decades.

The border is poorly delimited in some areas, particularly the Shebaa Farms, a mountainous sliver of water-rich land at the junction of southeast Lebanon, southwest Syria and northern Israel.

Resolution 1701 also strengthened the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon (FINUL), and charged it with helping Lebanon's army with establishing control over southern Lebanon upon the withdrawal of Israeli forces.

The UN Security Council on Wednesday extended FINUL's mandate for one year in a resolution adopted unanimously. During a debate following its adoption, Israel's deputy permanent representative, Daniel Carmon, denounced the illegal flow of weapons on the Lebanese-Syrian border.

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