

## **In south Lebanon, what purpose do UN 'peacekeepers' serve?**

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**Dimitri Lascaris:** Good day. This is Dimitri Lascaris coming to you from southern Lebanon on August 22nd, 2024. I'm standing in what remains of a three storey civilian structure in the Lebanese village of Safad El Battikh. This is situated about 20km, perhaps even less than that, 15km, from the Lebanese-Israel border. I'll just give you a bit of a view of what remains here. This was destroyed about two weeks ago. This three storey structure by an Israeli airstrike. I am told by locals that this was used purely for residential purposes by three members of Hezbollah. They were apparently killed in the airstrike. Also, there were quite a few civilians from the surrounding area who were injured in the airstrike. The area is surrounded by homes and they have sustained quite significant damage. Also, you may be able to see around me that there was an olive orchard here. A number of the trees have been destroyed. Others have been damaged. It certainly has interfered with the operation of the orchard. And we spoke to a gentleman who lived in one of the houses adjacent to this destroyed structure. He tells me that this was his olive orchard. This has caused significant damage to his family's livelihood and he himself was actually injured in the airstrike. If you look off in the distance behind me, you should be able to see, or maybe able to see up on a peak, an antenna, off in the distance. That is a military base of Israel, known as Metula. There is another military base not far from that one, also on a peak, with a large antenna, and that is the Al Manara military base. Those two military bases have been struck repeatedly by Hezbollah militants in the last ten months. In fact, Al Manara, frankly, it's quite surprising that the Israeli military manages to maintain a continuing presence there, because it has been struck so many times and it is effectively surrounded by Lebanese territory on three sides.

In any event, this is our second day in South Lebanon. We arrived yesterday, after stopping inside a coastal city. I've reported on that visit already. We stopped there after an Israeli drone strike killed a senior leader from Palestine. He was standing outside the refugee camp in Saida, which is the largest Palestinian refugee camp outside of occupied Palestine. Then we went to the Litani River and I did a report from there. There were Israeli airstrikes in the vicinity, at that time. And again, I've published that report. From there we moved on to a

private residence, which is not far from here. I'd say it's about five kilometres from here. It overlooks the Al Manara military base, which is off in the distance, as I've indicated, behind me. And during the course of the night, we heard a number of explosions. I would say there were four or five explosions. One of them actually rattled the house, it was so powerful. And then, there was an eerie calm for the second half of the night. We didn't get much sleep. We got up in the morning. It was surprisingly quiet in the morning. A very beautiful morning, from the terrace at the house we were staying at. We could see the military base as it was a clear sky. And then, when we went to lunch at a nearby restaurant, we sat outside on a terrace, all of a sudden, explosions began to sound off in the distance, with considerable frequency. I think in the course of our lunch, we probably heard something in a range of 15 explosions. And, I would say in total, since leaving Saida, and coming up until this point of time, we have probably heard 40, 50 explosions in total. They happened intermittently, but you can barely go three or four hours without hearing some off in the distance. And a number of them appear to be coming from Israeli territory. And of course, a number of them are coming from this side as well.

**Speaker:** The resistance launching a missile attack.

**Text:** Israeli soldier filming an attack on a base in occupied Ghajar.

**Dimitri Lascaris:** The two armies are trading missile strikes, artillery strikes, drone strikes, on a regular basis every day, with casualties, of course, including civilian casualties. The other thing I wanted to talk about before I end this particular update, is that several times during this visit and on all of my prior visits, my four prior visits to south Lebanon, we have encountered at some point or another, numerous points, the forces of the United Nations, the UNIFIL force, the so-called peacekeeping force here in southern Lebanon. That happened again today. In fact, when we were having lunch, there were 12 Irish peacekeepers, unarmed, sitting at a table in the same restaurant as ourselves. And I can tell you that I have encountered nothing but disdain and scorn for the UNIFIL forces here. I think there is a widespread belief amongst the population that these forces effectively act as spies for the Israeli military. I've been told a number of stories to back that up. I'm unfortunately not at liberty to disclose the details of these stories, but what I can say is there is an almost uniform hostility towards UNIFIL. And it's not necessary really to know the details of these particular incidents that have given rise to suspicion amongst the local population. Just look at the big picture. And the big picture is that they are ostensibly here to keep the peace. However, there is no peace. And really there has never been a true and permanent peace, since those UN forces were installed here. And they only have ever been stationed on Lebanese territory, even though an honest, frank assessment of the historical record would lead one inevitably to the conclusion that it's Israel that is the aggressor. Why are the UNIFIL forces stationed on Lebanese territory, trying to impose restrictions on the movements and activities of Lebanese persons, when in fact it is Israel, that has been the aggressor and that has caused infinitely more damage in Lebanon to civilian infrastructure and the civilian population than the the militant forces on the Lebanese side have caused to Israel. It's just a question, really, for which there is no answer. And at this stage, one wonders why there are even UN forces here.

They have clearly failed utterly, to prevent the outbreak of war. I don't think anybody involved in this conflict, certainly not the Israelis and not the Lebanese resistance, are going to be influenced in their determination about whether to escalate the war by the presence of the UN forces. They're not even deterring an escalation, let alone the outbreak of hostilities at this stage. And so why are they here? Particularly if they're not welcomed by the local population? That's a question which no one seems particularly interested in addressing at the United Nations. Certainly the Western countries don't want to address it, which, frankly, does raise a suspicion about why they continue to be present here and to interfere with the lives of the Lebanese people. In any case, tomorrow we hope to visit a village that has been off limits to most, if not all of the media for some time now. It's because of its proximity to the border and the damage it sustained. And the reason why, we think we may be able to gain access there is that a Hezbollah fighter who is from that village, which apparently has been evacuated, has been killed. They're going to hold a funeral. And we have been told at this stage, we will be able to accompany the funeral procession into the village and observe the funeral and also take the opportunity to document some of the extensive damage there. And then later in the day, we hope to interview a very well known Lebanese journalist, in the city of Tyre. But given the circumstances here, one has to play these things by ear. I would close by noting that today, the day after this Palestinian leader was assassinated in Saida, the Chinese government issued a statement urging all of its citizens to leave Lebanon immediately. So, that'll give you a sense of how tense and volatile the situation here is at this moment. In any event, I'm signing off for today. This is Dimitri Lascaris coming to you from southern Lebanon on August 22nd, 2024.

**END**

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