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Las tropas desplegadas por la OTAN, para proteger a Israel, no a los libanesesThe UN troops claim they are in Lebanon to protect Israel.

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In English down this page.

Por Robert Fisk

[The Independent](#). Qana, 17 de noviembre de 2006.

La bandera azul y blanca de la Organización de Naciones Unidas (ONU) luce bien esta mañana sobre las suaves y pálidas colinas. Durante 28 años ha ondeado al lado de batallones irlandeses, nepaleses, senegaleses, finlandeses, toda suerte de batallones de cada digna nación neutral que uno pueda imaginar. Pero ahora restalla al viento sobre batallones franceses, españoles, italianos, unidades navales alemanas, arriba de las oficinas de cuatro generales de la Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte (OTAN) : dos franceses, un español y un italiano.

La FINUL, es decir -esperen a oír esto- "Fuerza Interina de Naciones Unidas en Líbano", es hoy en los hechos una fuerza de la OTAN dotada de todo este poderío y de misiles antiaéreos, tanques y artillería esparcidos sobre estas hermosas colinas. Es una fuerza de "amortiguamiento", según afirma, para las comunidades chiítas entre las cuales vive. Está allí para "protegerlas" de los israelíes que las bombardearon con tanto salvajismo luego que el ejército libanés chiíta Hezbollah capturó a dos soldados israelíes y mató a otros tres, en julio pasado, y más tarde echó del país al ejército israelí tras 34 días devastadores de combates en los que perecieron casi 100 civiles israelíes y mucho más de mil civiles libaneses (10 a uno es la cuenta normal por estos rumbos).

Pero la vida ha cambiado. La FINUL no es el ejército suave y amistoso que solía ser, apoyado por soldados indios -entre los mejores-, nepaleses -entre los peores-, fijianos -entre los más amigables- y ghaneses, sino un ejército "robusto" -para usar la definitivamente poco robusta semántica de Tony Blair- de combatientes de la OTAN adiestrados para responder fuego con fuego y no permitir tonterías a los milicianos del sur de Líbano o al ejército israelí. A lo cual a uno no le queda más que responder : sí, cómo no.

Hace unos días, por ejemplo, soldados franceses estuvieron "a dos segundos" de lanzar sus misiles antiaéreos a un piloto israelí que simuló atacar el cuartel del batallón francés en Bourj Qalawiyeh. Al menos esto es lo que dijo la ministra francesa de defensa al objetar continuos sobrevuelos israelíes en Líbano. La realidad es un poco diferente : desde que sufrió bajas por el ataque un helicóptero en Costa de Marfil, París no despliega tropas sin artillería de 155 milímetros, tanques Leclerc y misiles antiaéreos. Los cohetes están programados para disparar cuando una nave de ataque no equipada con transpondedor de señales se acerca a las posiciones francesas ; los soldados que trataban con desesperación de impedir que sus misiles se dispararan contra un indisciplinado piloto israelí lograron sacar el disco de la computadora del mecanismo de disparo apenas dos segundos antes de que se accionara.

Pero éstos son incidentes, no política. La realidad es que los pobladores del sur de Líbano -musulmanes chiítas y unos cuantos cristianos- saben muy bien que la nueva fuerza está allí para proteger a Israel, no a ellos. Si su misión fuera proteger también a Líbano, estaría en ambos lados de la frontera. En palabras de un terrateniente libanés que dice beneficiarse de la presencia de la ONU, están aquí "para hacer lo que Israel no pudo durante sus operaciones militares : mantener a Hezbollah lejos de la frontera".

Pero no es el caso. El general Alain Pellegrini, comandante francés de lo que los franceses gustan de llamar FINUL-plus, deja en claro que no es su trabajo desarmar al ejército guerrillero libanés que combatió a los israelíes este verano. La resolución 1701 del Consejo de Seguridad sólo lo obliga a ayudar al ejército libanés a realizar esa tarea. Y como este ejército -más de la mitad de cuyos soldados son chiítas- no lo hará, los chicos de la ONU no van a quitarle los misiles a Hezbollah. De hecho, las únicas armas que ha encontrado el ejército libanés cruzando por el

país son cohetes que se envían de regreso a Siria para tenerlos a buen resguardo, lo cual no es precisamente la versión israelí de la realidad.

Entonces, ¿para qué está aquí la FINUL ? Como símbolo del ardiente deseo de Occidente de llevar "paz" a Medio Oriente (a saber qué sea eso). Como intento de "desemponzoñar" a Irán al desarmar a sus protegidos de Hezbollah. Pero no hará tal cosa. "No debe tener esa fijación de preguntar todo el tiempo si FINUL va a desarmar a Hezbollah", espetó el general Pellegrini esta semana a un reportero libanés. La guerrilla sigue estando bien armada al sur del río Litani y, según su dirigencia, lista para la próxima guerra contra Israel. Razón por la cual Sayed Hassan Nasrallah, comandante de Hezbollah, exige más carteras en el gobierno de Líbano.

Ahora Pellegrini habla de los peligros del "desgaste" en su zona de la ONU, y tiene razón. Uno de los búhos más sabios de Líbano, Timur Goksel -el ex asistente turco del comandante de FINUL-, hizo alguna vez una predicción acertada y peligrosa de la capacidad de la misión. "Si una misión de la ONU empieza bien -dijo-, puede que funcione. Pero si empieza mal, fracasará". Hablaba de la Unprofor de Bosnia, pero podría haberse referido a la FINUL.

Y esta misión no empieza bien. Los israelíes sobrevuelan Líbano a diario porque, dicen, quieren saber qué hace la FINUL para prevenir el flujo de armas hacia Hezbollah. Los franceses han pedido a George W. Bush que ponga fin a los vuelos, pero éste no tiene la voluntad política para ello. Y entonces los chiítas libaneses preguntan por qué la FINUL no los protege de la aviación israelí, que dio muerte a tantos de sus seres queridos este verano.

Pero existen otros signos más peligrosos para la misión de la ONU. En las ciudades sunitas del norte -en Sidón y en Trípoli- hay familias que han enviado a sus hijos y primos a Irak para combatir a los estadounidenses. Tienen videocintas de esos jóvenes cuando partieron para ir a manejar coches bombas o a cometer ataques suicidas contra las fuerzas de ocupación. Me han mostrado esos videos. Y también ellos ven a la "nueva" FINUL como fuerza de la OTAN.

Por ejemplo, en estos días corre un rumor en el campo de refugiados palestinos de Ein el-Elweh. Que si uno sabe manejar bien, está a la cabeza de la lista. En otras palabras, si uno maneja bien es el próximo de la lista de atacantes suicidas. Los franceses toman en serio esos rumores. Hacen bien. Por eso rodean sus campamentos con barreras de concreto, al estilo Bagdad. Al Qaeda ya amenazó al nuevo ejército de la FINUL en el sur de Líbano. "No somos ocupantes", ha anunciado repetidas veces Pellegrini. Pero, ¿por qué tienen que decirlo ?

Con buena suerte -algo que la ONU debe venerar en algún altar especial de Nueva York-, su ejército en el sur de Líbano acaso pueda sobrevivir. Si logra evitar que los soldados italianos asalten comercios en Haris -los soldados involucrados han sido repatriados en desgracia- y que los israelíes dejen de hacer vuelos de reconocimiento en la frontera, puede que cumpla su "misión".

Pero las barreras políticas al éxito son altas. Estados Unidos, por ejemplo, ansía aún culpar a Siria del asesinato del ex primer ministro Rafiq Hariri, cometido el año pasado, pero los sirios insisten en que el presidente Bashar Assad no tuvo nada que ver. La investigación de la ONU sobre el asesinato se desintegra poco a poco. El último juez -un belga- poco a poco se va olvidando de los sirios. Ya no se menciona a Assad en los reportes. El dedo apunta al último ministro sirio del Interior, que misteriosamente se suicidó el año pasado. Su hermano, según detractores de Assad, también se ha suicidado. ¿Se estará despejando el camino para la ayuda de Siria a Estados Unidos en Irak ? ¿Tiene Damasco poder suficiente sobre la resistencia a las fuerzas estadounidenses en Irak para volver a ser poderoso en Líbano ? La respuesta : sí, probablemente.

Acá en el sur libanés, desde luego, hay otros argumentos. Los franceses, españoles e italianos -e incluso los

irlandeses han retornado a su amado sur de Líbano con 160 hombres- están creando una nueva economía : compran leche, recuerdos, chalecos de camuflaje y cedros para plantar, y son buena razón para mantener a la FINUL a la vista de los chiítas. Y los guerrilleros de Hezbollah -he aquí un hecho que no se acomoda bien con los John Bolton del mundo en la ONU- observan todo auto que viaja al sur del río Litani. Porque saben que si se comete un ataque suicida contra los franceses, los culparán a ellos. Y no quieren ser culpados. Son los militantes sunitas de Al Qaeda en el norte los que quieren atacar a la OTAN. Así que Hezbollah será el más poderoso defensor de los ejércitos europeos en el sur de Líbano. Vaya que es algo que da qué pensar.

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Traducción del inglés para [La Jornada](#) : Jorge Anaya

CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST IS MISSION IMPLAUSIBLE

The UN troops claim they are in Lebanon to protect the Shia. The Shia think they're there to protect Israel from Hizbollah. Is this because the peacekeepers are really a Nato army in disguise ?

By Robert Fisk

[The Independent](#). London, 15 November 2006

The blue and white UN flag looks good in the morning over these soft, pale hills. For all of 28 years, it has flown beside Irish battalions, Nepalese battalions, Senegalese battalions, Finnish battalions, all kinds of battalions, from every worthy neutral nation you can imagine. But now the flag snaps over French battalions, Spanish battalions, Italian battalions, German naval units, over the offices of four Nato generals, two French, one Spanish and one Italian.

Unifil, the United Nations - wait for it - Interim Force in Lebanon, is now in effect a Nato force which has all this power and anti-aircraft missiles and tanks and artillery spread over these beautiful hills. It is a "buffer" force, so it claims to the Shia villages among whom it lives. It is there to "protect" them from the Israelis who bombarded them so savagely after the Lebanese Shia Hizbollah army captured two Israeli soldiers and killed three others last July - and then fought off the Israeli army for 34 devastating days in which almost a hundred Israeli civilians and well over a thousand Lebanese civilians were killed (10 to one being a normal casualty count around here).

But life has changed. The Unifil force is not the friendly, neutral, soft army it used to be, backed up by Indian troops (among the best) and Nepalese (among the worst) and Fijian (among the friendliest) and Ghanaian soldiers, but a "robust" army - to use Tony Blair's distinctive un-robust semantics - with Nato soldiers trained to fire back and to take no nonsense from the militias of southern Lebanon or from the Israeli army. To which one can only say : ho hum.

A few days ago, for example, French troops got to within "two seconds" of firing their anti-aircraft missiles at an Israeli pilot who was making mock attacks on their battalion headquarters at Bourj Qalawiyeh. This, at least, is what the French Defence Minister said when she objected to Israel's continued over-flights of Lebanon. The reality is somewhat different. Ever since they took casualties from a helicopter in Ivory Coast, the French government will not deploy troops without 155mm artillery, Leclerc tanks and anti-aircraft missiles. The rockets are programmed to fire when a non-transponder attack aircraft approaches French positions ; French troops - desperately trying to prevent their own missiles from firing at an indisciplined Israeli pilot - were two seconds short of allowing their rocket to shoot at the Israeli when they managed to pull the computer disk out of the firing mechanism.

But these are incidents, not politics. The reality is that the people of southern Lebanon - Shia Muslims and a few Christians - know very well that the new force is there for Israel's protection, not for theirs. If it was to protect Lebanon as well as Israel, it would be on both sides of the border - in Israel as well as in Lebanon - which it is not. It is, in the words of one Lebanese landowner who stands to profit from the UN's presence, "placed here to do what Israel failed to do during its military operations - to keep the Hizbollah away from the frontier".

Only, of course, that is not the case. General Alain Pellegrini, the French commander of what the French like to call Finul Plus, makes it clear that it is not his job to disarm the Lebanese guerrilla army which fought off the Israelis last summer. UN Security Council Resolution 1701 requires him only to assist the Lebanese army in performing such a task. And since the Lebanese army - more than half of whose troops are themselves Shia - will not be doing this, the UN contingent will not be taking missiles off the Hizbollah. Indeed, the only weapons moving across Lebanon which the Lebanese army have come across were rockets being sent back to Syria from here for safe-keeping - which is not exactly the Israeli version of reality.

So what is Unifil here for ? As a symbol of the West's earnest desire, no doubt, to bring "peace" to the Middle East (whatever that means). As an attempt to "defang" Iran by disarming its protégés in the Hizbollah. But it will not do that. "You mustn't have this fixation about asking all the time if Unifil is going to disarm the Hizbollah," Pellegrini snapped at a Lebanese reporter this week.

Hizbollah remains well-armed, south of the Litani river, and, according to its leadership, ready to fight the next war against Israel. Which is why Sayed Hassan Nasrallah, the Hizbollah commander, is demanding more seats in the Lebanese government.

Pellegrini now talks about the dangers of "deterioration" in his UN zone, and he is right. One of the wisest owls in Lebanon, Timur Goksel - the Turkish former assistant to Unifil's force commander - once made a dangerous, accurate, prediction of UN mission capability. "If a UN mission begins well, it might work," he said. "If it begins badly, it will fail." He was talking about Unprofor in Bosnia, but he might have been talking about Unifil. And this mission is not beginning well. The Israelis are daily over-flying Lebanon because, they say, they want to know what Unifil is doing to prevent the flow of arms to Hizbollah. The French have asked George Bush to end the flights, but Mr Bush hasn't the political will to do this. So the Lebanese Shias are asking why Unifil does not protect them from the Israeli aircraft which killed so many of their loved ones this summer. But there are other, more dangerous signs for Unifil.

In the Sunni Lebanese cities to the north - in Sidon and in Tripoli - there are families who have sent their sons and cousins to Iraq to fight the Americans. They have videotapes of these young men as they set off to car-bomb - to suicide-bomb - the US occupation forces in Iraq. They have shown these videos to me. They, too, see the "new" Unifil as a Nato force. In the Palestinian refugee camp of Ein el-Helweh, for example, there is now a rumour. That "if you can drive well, you are at the top of the list". In other words, if you can drive well, you are the next in the list for suicide bombing.

The French take this seriously. They should. Which is why they are using concrete stockades to surround their camps - Baghdad-style - from the bombers. Al-Qa'ida has already threatened Unifil's new army in southern Lebanon. "We are not occupiers," Pellegrini has repeatedly announced. But why did he have to say this ?

With good fortune - something the UN should worship at a special altar in New York - its army in southern Lebanon might just survive. If it can prevent Italian troops from shoplifting in the village of Haris - the relevant soldiers have been sent home in disgrace - and stop Israeli troops from recrossing the Lebanese border, their "mission" might be accomplished. But the political barriers to success are high. The United States, for instance, is still keen to blame Syria for the murder of ex-prime minister Rafik Hariri last year, but the Syrians are insisting that President Bashar al-Assad had nothing to do with this.

The UN's inquiry into the assassination is slowly disintegrating. The latest judge - a Belgian - is tacking away from the Syrians. Assad is no longer mentioned in UN reports. The finger is being pointed at the late Syrian minister of the interior who mysteriously killed himself last year. His brother, according to anti-Assadists, has also now killed himself. Is the way being cleared for Syria's assistance to America in Iraq ? Does Damascus have enough power over the resistance to US forces in Iraq to make it powerful again in Lebanon ? Answer : probably, yes.

Down here in southern Lebanon, of course, there are other arguments. The French and the Spanish and the Italians and even the Irish, who have returned to their beloved southern Lebanon with 160 men, are creating a new economy, buying up the milk, souvenirs, camouflage jackets and cedar trees on sale - a good enough reason to maintain Unifil in the eyes of the Shias.

And the Hizbollah - here is a fact which will not sit happily with the John Boltons of this world at the UN - are watching every car that drives south of the Litani river. For they know that if a suicide bomber attacks the French, they - the Hizbollah - will be blamed. They will not be to blame. It will be the Sunni Muslim al-Qa'idists to the north who wish to attack Nato. So Hizbollah will be the most powerful defenders of the European armies in southern Lebanon. Now there's something to think about.

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