**Vote on a Resolution Renewing UNIFIL**

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What’s In Blue

<http://www.whatsinblue.org/2017/08/vote-on-a-resolution-renewing-unifil.php>

Today (30 August), the Security Council is scheduled to vote on a resolution renewing for another year the mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which expires on 31 August. The draft to be voted on was put in blue last night following several days of difficult negotiations and bilateral discussions, with a final revision this morning.However, at press time it was still unclear how some members might vote.

The negotiating process has been contentious. In recent weeks the US and Israel have ramped up criticism of UNIFIL’s work and leadership and called for a strengthening of its mandate that would allow it to more proactively confront Hezbollah, which the US asserts is illegally stockpiling weapons in the mission’s area of operations. The US has pushed to augment the mission’s mandate against the wishes of other members, in particular those contributing troops to UNIFIL.

Against this backdrop, Council members met in consultations on 23 August, where they were briefed on UNIFIL by Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations El-Ghassim Wane. It appears that all members expressed their support for resolution 1701, which in 2006 called for a cessation of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel. The resolution mandated UNIFIL to assist the Lebanese Armed Forces in taking steps towards the establishment, between the Blue Line and the Litani river, of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the government and of UNIFIL, and to assist the government of Lebanon in securing its borders and other entry points to prevent the entry of arms into Lebanon without its consent.

During the consultations, members expressed differing views over how proactive the mission should be in tackling violations of the resolution, with the US advocating that UNIFIL needed to be more proactive in confronting Hezbollah, including by increasing its access within its area of operations as well as its reporting activities. Other members, particularly troop-contributors France and Italy, as well as Egypt and others, raised concerns that this would threaten the fragile calm in southern Lebanon. Some members also stressed that while the discussion had focused on alleged violations of resolution 1701 by Hezbollah, Israel has also been accused of violating the resolution’s provisions concerning Lebanese sovereignty on a near-daily basis.

On 23 August, US Permanent Representative Nikki Haley issued a statement calling on members of the Council to join the US “in taking real action to make UNIFIL a stronger peacekeeping mission and to stand up against forces of terror in Lebanon and around the region.” Ann Gueguen, the Deputy Permanent Representative of France, which holds the pen on Lebanon, told reporters that it “is of paramount importance for the stability of Lebanon and the region, and in the best interest of all, that UNIFIL keeps its mandate and is in a position to fulfil it, with the full backing and confidence of the Security Council.” The Russian Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia also addressed the press that day, saying he believed the mandate should be renewed without changes.

Following the consultations, France circulated a draft resolution that contained language pertaining to US concerns. It appears that France and the US had been in discussions over the draft text for weeks; however, Council members only met as a whole to negotiate the draft for the first time on 24 August and then held a second round of negotiations on the morning of 28 August.

During the negotiations, the US proposed language that would strengthen UNIFIL’s mandate to confront the illicit acquisition of arms by Hezbollah, including by increasing the mission’s reporting requirements and authorising the mission to enter towns and villages and search private property to uncover and report on potential illicit arms caches. While a few members, including the UK, Ukraine and Uruguay, appeared open to these additions, other members, including Egypt and Italy, strongly supported by China, Russia and several other members, were wary of language that would cast judgement on UNIFIL’s performance or go beyond the scope of the mission’s mandate. They were also of the view that the wishes of the Lebanese government must be taken into account. It seems that the US was still not satisfied with the draft that went into blue last night as it did not go far enough in terms of strengthening UNIFIL’s responsibilities, particularly concerning reporting and restrictions to its access. The final change this morning brought in language that requests the Secretary-General to look at ways to enhance UNIFIL’s efforts, including through increasing UNIFIL’s visible presence, through patrols and inspections. While this may allow the US, which in the course of the negotiations had threatened to use its veto, to vote for the resolution, it is unclear if this change could lead to other members finding it more difficult to support the draft resolution.