

**Briefing on the Twentieth semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)**

Madame President, Good Afternoon Excellencies,

Once again I am pleased to address the Security Council to present the 20<sup>th</sup> semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). During today's session I do not intend to repeat the content of the report, rather situate Lebanon in a broader regional context. I have previously detailed provisions of the resolution which have been implemented since its adoption in 2004 including the withdrawal of Syrian troops in 2005; the conduct of free and fair Presidential elections in 2008, parliamentary elections in 2009 and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon. These are always worth recalling as Lebanon today would be more vulnerable to the conflict in Syria had these steps not been achieved. In earlier briefings I have recalled my continued and the Secretary-General's frustration at the lack of further tangible progress towards the remaining provisions, but today I add a further word of caution about the risk of erosion to gains that have already been made.

Lebanon has demonstrated remarkable resilience since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, some of which can be credited to Lebanese unity – albeit fragile. This unity, most clearly demonstrated in the nomination of Tamam Salam as Prime Minister and the formation of a government of “national interest”. This has however, been sorely challenged during this reporting period.

The failure of parliament to elect a new President is worrying. It undermines the cohesion that has sustained Lebanon so far. The international community have made efforts to encourage politicians to demonstrate flexibility on this issue. These efforts have not yet yielded results. It remains important to highlight the damaging impact of leaving these positions vacant: Head of State, Commander-in-Chief and the most senior Christian political position in the region. This is particularly the case when minorities in the region are under increasing pressure. The international community has consistently supported the need for stability and security in Lebanon. This includes the 26 September Ministerial meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon, hosted by the Secretary-General. During the last opportunity I had to address you collectively, I was asked what more members of the Security Council could do...Again I urge you to re-double your efforts in encouraging Lebanon's leaders to demonstrate vital flexibility and wisdom in electing a new President of the Republic without further delay. You could encourage others in the region to do the same, including through this Council, through the International Support Group for Lebanon, or bilaterally. Lebanese politicians are taking a significant risk concerning the stability of their country if they fail to elect a new President soon. You could also consider visiting Lebanon as a group thereby underlining - in no uncertain terms - the importance of this and related issues to you.

Madame President,

The focus of international attention and support should of course not be confined to politics. During this reporting period, the challenges faced by the Lebanese Army and other official security services have been undeniably linked to the crisis in Syria. The most serious threat to date came between 2-7 August. Extremist groups including ISIL and the Nusra Front attacked

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the Lebanese Army in the eastern town of Arsal. As well as fatalities and injuries on both sides, the militants took hostages from the Lebanese Army and the Internal Security Forces. 13 of the hostages remain captive. The Lebanese Armed Forces has demonstrated resilience, strength and skill in dealing with multiple confrontations, but their capacity in dealing with these extremist groups has been over-stretched.

Madame President,

The international community has been working hard towards building the capacity of the Lebanese Army. I welcome the recent focus on enhancing its counter-terrorism and border control capacity through bilateral support programmes and the International Support Group for Lebanon. I urge members of the Council to use their influence in ensuring such support is delivered as quickly as possible. In order to give the Army a fighting chance of tackling these immediate challenges to Lebanon's security, they require rapid assistance. Delays in the delivery of international support risk damaging the credibility of the LAF particularly if they are unable to respond robustly and successfully to attacks on Lebanon's security. In this context I welcome reports that the details relating to the donation by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of \$3 billion to Lebanon's security have been worked out with France. The delivery of other assistance has already begun.

In this context, I have also been concerned by developments relating to the emergence of local armed groups in the northern and eastern border areas – regardless of sectarian identity. This development highlights the level of concern in local communities as to the scale of threat posed by extremists. However, such armed groups over time, risk developing into new, more permanent militias that could challenge the authority of the State. The capability of local communities to form such groups also runs counter to the spirit of Resolution 1559 (2004). It reminds us of the problem of continued proliferation of weapons outside state control, a key element of the resolution.

Madame President,

I am troubled by reports of vigilante style attacks on Syrian refugee communities in Lebanon during this reporting period. There were a number of violent attacks in August and September against unarmed Syrians in Lebanon. Separately, on 25 September, over 100 Syrian men were arrested during a Lebanese Army operation involving informal tented settlements and a collective shelter in Arsal. During the operation, 95 tents used by Syrian refugees were burnt down. According to the LAF individuals including extremists were responsible for the incident, who the army then pursued. The majority of those detained were later released.

I am also concerned by recent difficulties encountered by Syrian refugees entering Lebanon either for the first time or on return from Syria. There has been no official change in Lebanon's policy, yet new measures aimed at stemming the flow suggest a tangible difference in approach on the ground. Lebanon has been rightly praised for fulfilling its international obligations regarding the Syrian refugee community. While the exceptional nature and scale of the challenge requires careful management by the authorities, it would be of concern if the safety and dignity of refugees were compromised. I urge Lebanon to continue to support Syrian refugees fleeing violence across the border.

Madame President,

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I began by highlighting Lebanon's remarkable resilience and have noted the positive role of the international community in providing political support, as well as practical assistance to the Lebanese Army. But Lebanon is currently facing an unprecedented challenge, a transnational phenomenon that is carving out a new paradigm. Extremist groups like ISIL are using new tactics – they no longer hit and run as has often been the case in the past, rather they take-over and hold on to territory. Lebanon clearly does not exist in isolation to developments in the rest of the region and issues relevant to Resolution 1559 must therefore also be understood through the dynamics of the wider regional context. I hope to shed some light on this using a handful of what I hope are helpful maps. Please note that these are not official UN maps.

(Map of Sykes-Picot / San Remo)

*[Area A indicates territory previously under French influence. It encompassed what we now know as, Syria and north-western parts of Iraq.*

*The area above "A" with horizontal stripes included south-western parts of Turkey, coastal Syria and Lebanon. It was under direct French control.*

*Area B was under British influence and included what we now know as much of Jordan, central-western parts of Iraq – stopping at Feluja. It also included the ports of Haifa and Acre.*

*The area east of "B" included central and south-eastern Iraq and Kuwait which were under direct British control.*

*The San Remo map illustrates what we know generally speaking as the region's territorial borders – (with obvious exception of Israel).]*

You are all familiar with the Sykes-Picot Agreement and San Remo conference, as well as the popular mis-conception that it was the Sykes-Picot agreement that defined what we know as the territorial borders of the Middle East. It was in fact at the San Remo conference in 1920 that the region's borders were defined. Since then, the borders in the Middle East have, broadly speaking, remained unchanged.

However, the emergence of the non-state actor, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the region and specifically its take-over of territory in Iraq and Syria, has raised the question of territorial stability.

(Map of ISIL ambitions)

One irrefutable element of ISIL's stated philosophy is expansionism. As a terrorist, non-state actor, ISIL has so far taken over and laid claim to territory in two countries and has declared its ambition to take over more territory. *[This is the so-called ISIL Five Year Plan map. It allegedly depicts areas related to the restoration of the caliphate from Western Europe to Central Asia. It stretches from Western Europe to Central Asia and in some cases uses medieval names to denote key areas: for example Orobpa refers to central Europe, Andalucia is Southern Spain, Hijaz for Saudi Arabia, and Sham for the Levant which includes Lebanon.]*

This map provoked massive interest in social media even though it is one of several that have been circulated widely. Although we cannot independently verify its authenticity, it is useful to give a visual idea of what ISIL may be planning – namely the restoration of the Caliphate.

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Madame President,

(Map of ISIL gains)

The situation currently on the ground in both Iraq and Syria is obviously changing rapidly, but this map aims to give you an idea of the extent so far of the territorial gains made by ISIL in Syria and Iraq. *[The red dots indicate the towns and villages captured by ISIL. The light orange denotes the greater sphere of the self-proclaimed caliphate by Abu Bakr al – Baghdadi in June. The precise size of the gains are not clear, but if these areas of influence are joined together larger areas of control are created].* What does all of this mean for Lebanon?

Of course Lebanon is neither Iraq nor Syria. But looking back at this same map it is helpful to see the areas which have witnessed many of the major security incidents in Lebanon over the last few months. ISIL and the Nusra Front are fighting battles just across the border with Syria, particularly in the area of Qalamoun. They have also been involved in attacks in Lebanese territory, specifically Aarsal and Brital which are close to the border with Syria.

Just over the last few weeks, there were at least three occasions – on 26 September, 29 September and 9 October, when the LAF clashed with militants from ISIL and the Nusra Front heading towards the town of Aarsal from border areas. The army detected and dismantled two Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) on 1 and 3 October, both close to Aarsal. In a separate kind of incident on 5 October, militants from the Nusra Front attacked a Hizbullah checkpoint close to the town of Brital, close to the eastern border with Syria. There were fatalities and injuries on both sides.

ISIL and the Nusra Front have claimed that their activities in Lebanon are driven by Hizbullah's involvement in fighting in Syria. Hizbullah on the other hand has regularly claimed that its fighting in Syria is aimed at "defeating" extremist takfiri threats, most recently after the 5 October incident.

Madame President,

At the start of the briefing I warned of erosion to provisions already achieved in resolution 1559. The presence of ISIL and the Nusra Front at Lebanon's backdoor is the latest example of how the war in Syria continues to have a direct impact on Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity. These developments are of course on top of the pre-existing and unresolved issues of weapons outside of State control in Lebanon. Of the armed groups in Lebanon, Hizbullah remains the group with the largest, most organised and advanced weapons. Hizbullah claimed responsibility for an explosion that took place on 7 October in the Shebaa Farms injuring two Israeli soldiers. The group claimed that the act was in retaliation for the killing of a Hizbullah militant in September. The absence of a National Dialogue process and Lebanese-led discussion on the development of a national defence strategy, is troubling.

The Syrian refugee population in Lebanon finds itself caught in-between, with all the potential security implications this may have. The Aarsal battle has been a wake-up call for the Lebanese leadership which are fully aware of the new dimension presented by ISIL and the Nusra Front. In his speech to the General Assembly on 26 September 2014, Prime Minister Salam said that Lebanon stood at the cross roads of a turbulent region and was a target of terrorist onslaught. As the Secretary-General's report notes, the unified response across the political spectrum to

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the Aarsal crisis in rejecting extremist violence, supporting the Army and security forces is welcome. So are the efforts by Lebanese leaders on all sides to inject moderation in public discourse between communities as well as vis-à-vis refugees.

The international community so far has been one step ahead in playing a preventive role and assisting Lebanon to protect itself from multiple threats stemming from conflict in Syria and terrorist threats. But the evolving environment requires us to remain both supportive and vigilant, lest we have to become more reactive. I urge you to continue your support, in particular in pressing for the election of a new President. This is surely the best way to ensure the cohesive leadership as the country continues to face numerous challenges. I also encourage you to provide support for the army quickly, so that it can develop in to the sole armed force that protects Lebanon's sovereignty.