

First Semi-Annual Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004)

I. Introduction

1. The present report details progress made on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) since my report to the Security Council of 1 October 2004 (S/2004/777). It is submitted pursuant to the Security Council's request, expressed in the Statement of its President of 19 October 2004 (S/PRST/2004/36), that I continue to report on the implementation of the resolution to the Council every six months.

2. Resolution 1559 (2004), adopted by the Security Council on 2 September 2004 (S/RES/1559), reiterated the Council's strong support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognized borders. It called upon all parties concerned to cooperate fully and urgently with the Security Council for the full implementation of this and all relevant resolutions concerning the restoration of the territorial integrity, full sovereignty, and political independence of Lebanon. In addition, in the resolution, the Council:

- (a) called upon all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon;
- (b) called for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias;
- (c) supported the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory;
- (d) declared its support for a free and fair electoral process in Lebanon's then upcoming presidential election conducted according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence.

The Council also reaffirmed its call for the strict respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout Lebanon.

3. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004 (S/2004/777), I concluded that the requirements set out in the resolution had not been met. Pursuant to the Council's request of 19 October 2004, I herewith present my report on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) since 1 October 2004.

II. Background

4. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, I set out in brief the relevant political history of Lebanon, the tragic civil war that raged in the country between 1975 and 1990, and the steps taken since to overcome the divisions in Lebanese society and leave behind the vestiges of the past.

5. In the six months since I submitted my report, the situation in Lebanon has become increasingly tense and has, in particular since the beginning of this year, deteriorated significantly.

6. Following the extension of Lebanese President Lahoud's term by the Lebanese parliament on 3 September 2004 and an assassination attempt against former Minister Marwan Hamadeh that left one person dead and two, including Mr. Hamadeh, injured, Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri resigned on 20 October 2004. Mr. Hariri was replaced by Prime Minister Omar Karami, who formed a new government on 26 October 2004. Mr. Karami's government was widely perceived as favorably disposed towards a Syrian presence and influence in Lebanon. A standoff ensued between those loyal to Damascus, supporting Mr. Karami's government, and those broadly opposed to what they saw as excessive Syrian influence and presence in Lebanon.

7. On 14 February 2005, former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 20 others were killed in a callous terrorist attack in central Beirut. Pursuant to a request by the Security Council (S/PRST/2005/4), I dispatched to Lebanon a Mission of Inquiry into the Causes, Circumstances, and Consequences of the killing of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri under the leadership of Irish Deputy Police Commissioner Peter FitzGerald and forwarded its report to the Council on 24 March 2005 (S/2005/203). That report stated that the assassination seemed to have unlocked the gates of political upheavals and that it furthered polarized the political scene to a threatening level. The report's main finding was taken up by the Security Council in resolution 1595 (2005), which requested that I establish an international independent investigation commission to assist the Lebanese authorities in their investigation of all aspects of this terrorist act, including to help identify its perpetrators sponsors, organizers, and accomplices.

8. On 28 February 2005, Prime Minister Omar Karami resigned during a parliamentary debate on the assassination of Mr. Hariri. Ten days later, on 10 March 2005, President Emile Lahoud asked Mr. Karami to form a new government. Mr. Karami conditioned formation of such a new government on it being joined by the opposition in a national unity government. The opposition voiced a number of demands: an independent international investigation into the assassination of Mr. Hariri; resignation of the heads of Lebanese security agencies, which the opposition held responsible for the assassination; a complete withdrawal of Syrian forces deployed in Lebanon; formation of a neutral government overseeing the Lebanese parliamentary elections; and conduct of those elections without delay, i.e. prior to the end of May 2005. Mr. Karami's efforts to form a new government continued, and the Prime Minister was widely expected to present a cabinet on 10 April 2005. Unable to do so, Mr. Karami resigned again on 13 April 2005. Two days later, on 15 April 2005, President Lahoud tasked Nejjib Mikati with forming a new government, after 57 members of the parliament had nominated him, compared to 38 who expressed their preference for Defense Minister Abdel Rahim Mrad. Mr. Mikati had received the support of the opposition

bloc in the nomination. Mr. Mikati presented his new, 14-member government on 19 April 2005. On 22 April, the new Prime Minister declared that elections would be held on 29 May 2005. On 25 April 2005, Gen. Jamil Sayyid, head of the General Security, resigned. Earlier, he and Gen. Ali Hajj, head of the Internal Security Forces, had put themselves at the disposal of the Prime Minister's office.

9. The Lebanese people began expressing their political views publicly in frequent demonstrations, most of which took place in the central districts of Beirut. After a number of protests staged by the opposition, a large rally in support of Syria and its presence, organized principally by Hizbullah, took place in Beirut on 8 March 2005. On 14 March 2005, an even larger demonstration staged by the opposition was held in Beirut. The increasing instability prevailing in the Lebanese political arena was also reflected in a spate of bomb attacks, apparently directed against Christian targets in and near Beirut. On 19 March 2005, a car bomb exploded in Beirut, leaving six people injured. On 22 March 2005, a bomb was detonated in a commercial complex in Jounieh, killing three people and wounding seven. On 26 March 2005, a third such bombing left two people dead and eight injured. On 1 April 2005, a fourth bomb attack left at least seven people injured. In repeated statements, I called on the Government of Lebanon to bring to justice those responsible and to prevent the situation from deteriorating and urged all concerned parties to do their utmost to safeguard Lebanon's stability and national unity. I also expressed my belief that this latest violence had to stop, and that the Lebanese people should be allowed to decide the future of their country free of violence and intimidation. On and around 13 April 2005, the 30th anniversary of the eruption of the Lebanese civil war, a number of public events took place with participation of large segments of Lebanese society to reaffirm the national unity of Lebanon.

III. Implementation of Resolution 1559 (2004)

10. Since my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, the parties concerned have made noticeable and significant progress towards implementing some of the provisions contained in resolution 1559 (2004). Regarding the implementation of other provisions of the resolution, the parties have made no progress to date.

A. Withdrawal of Foreign Forces Deployed in Lebanon

11. Resolution 1559 (2004) calls on all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon.

12. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, I stated that to the best of our ability to ascertain, the only significant foreign forces deployed in Lebanon, as of 30 September 2004, were Syrian. Israeli troops, which had remained on Lebanese territory for a significant period following the Civil War, had withdrawn its forces from all Lebanese territory in May 2000 in accordance with resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978), as I reported to the Council on 16 June 2000 (S/2000/590) and as the Council subsequently confirmed in its endorsement of my report and its conclusions on 18 June 2000 (S/PRST/2000/21). In my report on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) of 1 October 2004, I also stated that according to the Syrian government,

there were a total of about 14,000 Syrian troops in Lebanon, including non-uniformed military intelligence officials.

13. On 5 March 2005, Syrian President Assad pledged in a speech before the Syrian parliament that Syria was “going to withdraw our forces in Lebanon completely to the Bekaa Valley, and then to the Lebanese-Syrian borders.”

14. President Assad confirmed this intention on 12 March 2005 in Aleppo when he committed to withdraw all Syrian troops and intelligence from Lebanon in fulfillment of resolution 1559. President Assad also expressed his unequivocal commitment to the full implementation of resolution 1559 and reiterated his intentions and his commitment to me during a meeting in Algiers on 21 March 2005 and in a number of telephone conversations. The President stated to me that the full and complete withdrawal of Syrian troops and the intelligence apparatus would be carried out in two stages: the first stage would see the relocation of all military forces and the intelligence apparatus into the Bekaa Valley by the end of March 2005. A significant number of these Syrian troops, including intelligence – representing about one-third of all Syrian troops in Lebanon, according to Syrian authorities – would withdraw fully from Lebanon into Syria during this stage. A second stage of withdrawal would lead to a complete and full withdrawal of all Syrian military personnel, assets and the intelligence apparatus. Following an earlier meeting between Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Lebanese President Emile Lahoud and endorsement of the two-phased withdrawal plan by the Syrian-Lebanese Joint Military Committee on 7 March 2005, the first stage of the Syrian withdrawal began on 8 March.

15. In reiteration of the commitments given to me, President Assad, Foreign Minister Sharaa and Vice-Foreign Minister Walid Muallem assured the United Nations on 3 April 2005 that the second stage of the complete and full withdrawal of all Syrian troops, assets, and the intelligence apparatus would be completed latest by 30 April. This commitment implied that all Syrian security forces and equipment would be withdrawn from Lebanon in fulfillment of the requirement of resolution 1559 as regards the withdrawal of Syrian security forces from Lebanon. The Syrian-Lebanese Joint Military Committee met on 4 April and endorsed the second stage of the full and complete Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, which began on 7 April.

16. During the meetings of 3 April 2005, the Government of Syria also informed me that Syria had, as a first step and in line with its earlier commitment, redeployed all its troops in Lebanon to the Bekaa Valley. It also declared that it had already withdrawn 4,000 troops into Syria and that it had closed Syrian intelligence offices in Beirut.

17. **On 26 April, the Government of Syria submitted to me a letter stating** that it had completed its full withdrawal of Syrian troops, military assets, and the intelligence apparatus from Lebanon, in fulfillment of its commitments to me, and in fulfillment of this requirement of resolution 1559. As of 26 April 2005, I have not yet been able to verify the full Syrian withdrawal; or to certify the implementation of the provision of resolution 1559 that calls on all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon. However, I have, with the agreement of the Governments of Syria and Lebanon, dispatched a United Nations mission to verify whether there has been a full and complete withdrawal of all Syrian troops, military assets and the intelligence apparatus from Lebanon. This mission, which is a technical team composed of military experts, is taking up its work in the week beginning on 25 April 2005. It will report to me and complete its

work as soon as possible. I have requested the Government of Syria and the Government of Lebanon to extend their full cooperation to this mission and to provide it with all relevant information and documentation available concerning the former deployment of all Syrian troops, military assets and the intelligence apparatus in Lebanon.

18 Representatives of the Government of Lebanon have assured me that as Syrian forces have progressively withdrawn, the Lebanese Armed Forces have gradually assumed responsibility for the vacated areas. Both the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Government of the Republic of Lebanon had earlier indicated to me that they had concerns for the stability of Lebanon in the aftermath of a full Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. Lebanese officials, however, have also assured me that the Lebanese Armed Forces had the necessary capacity to guarantee security and stability.

B. Sovereignty, Territorial Integrity, Unity, and Political Independence of Lebanon

19. Resolution 1559 reaffirms the Council's call for the strict respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout Lebanon. It also calls upon all parties concerned to cooperate fully and urgently with the Security Council for the full implementation of this and all relevant resolutions concerning the restoration of the territorial integrity, full sovereignty, and political independence of Lebanon.

20. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, I described widespread allegations in Lebanon that the Syrian military presence, including a substantial component of non-uniformed intelligence officials, afforded the Syrian Arab Republic considerable leverage over Lebanese domestic affairs.

21. I have assigned the matter of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence of Lebanon the highest priority in my efforts over the past six months. I have met with Presidents Assad and Lahoud and have stayed in direct contact with other senior representatives of the two countries and other parties concerned. I have done so out of concern over the increasing domestic political polarization in Lebanon and the deteriorating security situation. I have also taken into consideration the impact of the withdrawal of Syrian military forces, including the intelligence apparatus, on the restoration of the sovereignty, unity, and political independence of Lebanon. I have further deemed it important to assign a high priority to this element of resolution 1559 because of the parliamentary elections scheduled to be held in May 2005. Free and credible elections according to constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence are a central indication of the sovereignty, unity, and political independence of any democracy. Finally, resolution 1559 places a great emphasis on this matter itself by explicitly incorporating all relevant Security Council resolutions related to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon and by underlining the importance of free and fair elections according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence.

Syrian Intelligence Apparatus in Lebanon

22. Syria's involvement in Lebanon, which began with the deployment of Syrian troops in the country in May 1976, has been characterized by many observers as going beyond the reasonable exercise of cooperative or neighborly relations. The recent report to the Security Council of 24 March 2005 of the Mission of Inquiry into the Causes, Circumstances and Consequences of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, which has also made that characterization, further discusses aspects of the relations between the two countries regarding governance in Lebanon.

23. In this context, it is of particular significance to note the commitment made to me by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic on 3 April to withdraw all its troops, military assets and the intelligence apparatus from Lebanon latest by 30 April, **and the letter the Government of Syria submitted to me on 26 April 2005, stating that it had completed its full and complete withdrawal.** The Government of Syria also declared on 3 April that it had closed Syrian intelligence centers in Beirut.

24. The United Nations inspected the site of the Syrian intelligence headquarters in Beirut, near the Hotel Beau Rivage in Beirut, on 5 April. In addition, a preliminary probe undertaken by the United Nations to verify the withdrawal of Syrian forces under the first stage of the withdrawal plan between 8 and 10 April 2005 found that the Syrian intelligence apparatus had vacated some sites previously occupied in locations throughout the country.¹ The preliminary probe also confirmed that there was ongoing movement to withdraw Syrian troops from the Bekaa Valley into Syria, in conformity with the implementation of the second stage of the full and complete Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon.

25. Some member states, as well as members of the Lebanese opposition, have asserted to me that Syrian military intelligence has taken up new position in the south of Beirut and elsewhere, and has been using headquarters of parties affiliated with the Government of Syria as well as privately rented apartments for their purposes. The Governments of Lebanon and of Syria have assured me that this is not the case. Representatives of the Government of Lebanon and other parties have also asserted that difficulties of completing a full withdrawal of all persons associated with the Syrian intelligence apparatus in Lebanon might arise due to the family ties that Syrian officials have established in Lebanon over the past 30 years, and due to the existence of a network of informers among Lebanese citizens.

26. It will be the task of the United Nations mission I have dispatched to verify that all Syrian troops, military assets and the intelligence apparatus have been withdrawn from Lebanon.

¹ The preliminary verification mission visited sites where Syrian troops had formerly been deployed in the following locations: In the Mount Lebanon area, Dhahr al-Wahsh, Aley, Dhahr al-Abadiyeh, Bhamdoun, and Mdeirej; in the North of the Lebanon, Madfun, Hammat/Chekka, Tripoli (several sites), Deir Ammar, Amarein, Qlai'at, and al-Arida; in the Metn and Mount Lebanon, Duwar, Ayroun, Dhour Choueir, Bologna, Mrouj, and Majdal Tarchich/Tarchich; in the Bekaa Valley, near Sifri village, around Ba'albeck (several sites), Douriss, between Ba'albeck and Deir Ahmar, near Rayak, near Talia village, Maksé, and Qabb Elias.

Establishment of Mutual Diplomatic Representation

27. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004 on the implementation of resolution 1559, I stated that it had been noted that the Republic of Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic did not maintain diplomatic representation in one another's capitals. Former members of the Government of Lebanon have pointed out that a Lebanese representative office was established in Damascus in 1970 as a first step towards the establishment of formal ties between the two countries. This office allegedly functioned into the 1980s. A Syrian representative office slated to be opened in Beirut was never established.

28. I have discussed this issue with the Governments of Syria and Lebanon, both of whom have stated that this is a bilateral issue. They have assured me, however, that in the wake of the full and complete withdrawal of Syrian forces, they aspire to a formalization of relations between the two countries.

Lebanese Parliamentary Elections

29. Resolution 1559 (2004), in its preamble, underlines the importance of free and fair elections according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence. As I have outlined above, elections are also a means to reaffirm the full sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence in any given democracy.

30. The term of Lebanon's parliament expires at the end of May 2005. Consequently, parliamentary elections were scheduled to take place in Lebanon before that date. In the current context in Lebanon, the holding of free and credible elections in Lebanon according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence has taken on an even higher degree of importance and priority.

31. In preparation for the parliamentary elections, the Government of Lebanon under Prime Minister Omar Karami approved a revised electoral law on 27 January 2005, which envisaged electoral constituencies based on administrative districts (*Qadaa*) and appeared to represent a compromise acceptable to both the government and the opposition.² The parliamentary vote on the draft law, scheduled for 28 February 2005, did not take place, however, as the parliament instead urgently decided to debate the repercussions of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on 14 February 2005.

32. In the context of the resignation of the Government of Lebanon during this session and the prolonged inability of Mr. Karami to form a new cabinet, time was running increasingly short to organize and administer the elections before the current term of the Lebanese parliament expired. Prior to Mr. Karami's renewed resignation on 13 April 2005, the so-called Ain al-Tineh Gathering had repeatedly alluded to its intention to withdraw the government's draft electoral law as approved by Mr. Karami's first cabinet on 27 January 2005, and to submit a revised electoral

² A revised electoral law had become necessary as Lebanon's last parliamentary elections were conducted in accordance with an exceptional electoral law applicable only for the 2000 elections. Since 1996, a new electoral law has been adopted for each election. The number of constituencies in the elections has varied between 1992 (12), 1996 (10), and 2000 (14).

law envisaging adoption of the principle of proportional representation and the drawing of electoral constituencies on the basis of the Lebanese governorates (*Muhafiza*).

33. Prime Minister Nejjib Mikati has stated that his government was to be a “symbol of moderation and national unity,” and that it would have three primary goals: to prepare for the forthcoming parliamentary elections, to cooperate with the international independent investigation commission established through Security Council resolution 1595 (2005), and to address the economic situation and build confidence in Lebanon and among its neighbors about the state of the country. As of 26 April 2005, Lebanon does not yet have a law for the parliamentary elections. The new Prime Minister has pledged to organize and conduct the elections on time, i.e. prior to the end of May 2005, and presented a new government tasked with doing so on 19 April 2005.

34. Both the Lebanese government and the opposition have stated to me that their highest priority is the holding of free and credible elections. Such elections should be held according to schedule and in accordance with an electoral law which is broadly accepted by the Lebanese people.

35. In order to ensure that such elections, based on an electoral law commanding broad acceptance among diverse Lebanese political interests, can be conducted in a free and credible manner, and in response to statements by President Lahoud and Prime Minister Mikati, I have been discussing with the Government of Lebanon the possibility of extending United Nations technical assistance at its request. I have further encouraged the idea that international governmental and/or non-governmental electoral observers be invited to monitor the elections and am awaiting a request to this effect from the Government of Lebanon.

Israeli Over-Flights Violating Lebanese Territorial Integrity

36. Since my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, Lebanese territorial integrity has regularly been violated by Israeli aircraft flying into Lebanese airspace. The Government of Israel maintains its claim that these over-flights are carried out for security reasons. My representatives in the region and I have regularly reiterated our call on Israel to cease these over-flights.

C. Presidential Election Process in Lebanon

37. In resolution 1559, the Security Council declared its support for a free and fair electoral process in Lebanon’s then upcoming presidential election conducted according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence.

38. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, I described the process whereby President Lahoud’s term was extended by three years on 4 September 2004.

39. In the above, I have reported on the related issue of the Lebanese parliamentary electoral process, scheduled for May 2005, in the context of the resolution’s provisions on the strict respect and restoration of Lebanon’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence.

D. Extension of Lebanese Government Control over All Lebanese Territory

40. Resolution 1559 (2004) supports the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory. It also calls upon all parties concerned to cooperate fully and urgently with the Security Council for the full implementation of this and all relevant resolutions concerning the restoration of the territorial integrity, full sovereignty, and political independence of Lebanon.

41. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, I stated that the Government of Lebanon had not extended its control over all of its territory.

42. Several incidents over the past six months have illustrated the fact that the Government of Lebanon does not fully exert control over all its territory. However, the Government of Lebanon has stated to me that it is not constrained in extending its control over all Lebanese territory.

43. Along the Blue Line, there has been no noticeable change in the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces. Representatives of the Government of Lebanon have acknowledged that it has not yet deployed forces to the far south of the country. As I have stated, more needs to be done to meet the Security Council's call for extended measures to ensure the return of effective governmental authority throughout the south of Lebanon, including through the deployment of additional Lebanese armed forces. I have repeatedly urged the Government of Lebanon to do its utmost to ensure calm and to exert full control over the use of force across its entire territory.

44. Although the situation along the Blue Line has by and large been characterized by a tense calm over the past six months, there have been regular violations, at times causing deaths and injuries. On 9 January 2005, a Hizbullah roadside bomb attack against an Israeli military patrol vehicle killed one IDF soldier and wounded three others, and subsequent IDF tank and machine gun fire killed a French officer serving with the United Nations Observer Group Lebanon and wounded a Swedish colleague. I issued a statement on this incident and the grave violations of the Blue Line that had occurred, condemning the military escalation along the Blue Line, urging both parties to exercise maximum restraint, and reminding the Governments of Lebanon and Israel to ensure the safety of UN personnel deployed in the region. On 14 and 17 January 2005, Hizbullah detonated explosive devices along the Blue Line, fortunately without causing any casualties. In response to these attacks, Israel carried out immediate air-strikes against Hizbullah targets in southern Lebanon, reportedly injuring two Lebanese civilians. In another worrying development, on 7 November 2004, Hizbullah had launched an unmanned aerial vehicle from the Lebanese side of the Blue Line into Israeli airspace, which reportedly flew over Israeli territory before re-entering southern Lebanon and landing in the vicinity of Naqoura. Hizbullah launched a second such unmanned aerial vehicle on 11 April 2005, which crossed the Blue Line into Israeli airspace before returning to its base in southern Lebanon.

45. Palestinian armed elements based in Lebanon have likewise violated the Blue Line from the Lebanese side. On 28 October 2004, Palestinian armed elements based in Lebanon launched a rocket across the Blue Line into Israeli territory, which exploded in the vicinity of Shlomi. On 15 November 2004, a Katyusha rocket was launched against Israel by hitherto unknown Palestinian

elements. In the aftermath of the latter attack, the United Nations called on Lebanon “to double its efforts in order to ensure an immediate halt to serious violations” of the Blue Line. I was pleased to note that the Lebanese authorities spoke out against the incident and launched an investigation, but reiterated my call on the Government of Lebanon to extend its authority over all its territory and to prevent such attacks.

46. Regarding the extension of Lebanese government control over all Lebanese territory vacated by Syrian forces, the Government of Lebanon has stated to me that the Lebanese Armed Forces are gradually assuming responsibility for the vacated areas. The Government of Lebanon has assured me that the Lebanese Armed Forces have the necessary capacity to guarantee security and stability in those areas from which Syrian troops are withdrawing. At the same time, the Government has expressed a number of concerns regarding the extension of its control in the Bekaa Valley, where the enforcement of law and order remains circumscribed by the operations of organized car theft, drugs trade, tribal feuds, and an ongoing unrest among disadvantaged Shiite elements.

47. Some parties have expressed concern over the Government’s recent decision to decrease the service period of conscripts to six months and to increase the extent of exemptions granted, reducing the number of Lebanese troops from a previous total of 65,000 to 45,000 by May 2005, consisting of 35,000 professional troops, 5,000 conscripts, and 5,000 newly recruited professionals. The Government has stated to me that it is increasing defense expenditure in order to counter-balance the reduction in troop strength, and that it is confident that an increasing professionalization of the Lebanese Armed Forces will similarly have positive effects.

E. Disbanding and Disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese Militias

48. Resolution 1559 (2004) calls for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.

49. In my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, I stated that despite the Government of Lebanon’s successful efforts to significantly reduce the number of militias present in Lebanon, several armed elements remained. I also reported that the most significant such group was Hizbullah.

50. Throughout the reporting period, the United Nations has conducted a dialogue with some relevant parties on the issue of the disbanding and disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, but has not yet reached operational conclusions on this matter. It is noteworthy that the 1989 Taif Agreement, in full consistency with resolution 1559 (2004) on this matter, calls for the disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, and the delivery of their weapons to the Government of Lebanon.

51. As far as I have been able to ascertain, there has been no noticeable change in the status of Hizbullah since my report to the Council of 1 October 2004. The Government of Lebanon has maintained its position on Hizbullah as outlined in that report, asserting that Hizbullah is a resistance movement fighting to “liberate” the Shab’a farms area. However, this position is incompatible with Security Council resolutions. The Council has recognized the Blue Line as

valid for purposes of confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all Lebanese territory in fulfillment of resolution 425 (1978). The Government of Lebanon should heed the Council's repeated calls for the parties to respect the Blue Line in its entirety and extend its sole and exclusive control and authority over all of its territory.

52. As set forth in paragraph 44 above, activities by Hizbullah along the Blue Line over the past six months have highlighted the need for the Government of Lebanon to extend its control over all of its territory under its sole and exclusive authority. Hizbullah has maintained a visible presence, notably near the Blue Line, through a network of mobile checkpoints, fixed positions and patrols. Hizbullah has further established several new positions and observation points, some of them close to UN positions.

53. Hizbullah also operates as a political party with representation in parliament. In the context of the current political situation in Lebanon, Hizbullah leaders have stated their continued commitment to the stability and national unity of Lebanon, but have vowed to maintain their armed stance vis-à-vis Israel for the time being. I have also taken note, however, that senior Hizbullah representatives have begun considering a possible disarmament of their group.³

54. In addition to Hizbullah, as I stated in my report to the Council of 1 October 2004, there are armed Palestinian groups in Lebanon. There has been no noticeable change in the status of such groups since my report. The Government of Lebanon has maintained its position regarding such groups as outlined in that report.

55. The increasingly tense political situation in Lebanon has led to the establishment and operation of so-called armed vigilante groups. These are not formal militias, but could signify the beginning of a return to the days of a widespread existence of armed groups and militias in Lebanon. We have cautioned against this worrisome development and discussed it with representatives of the Government of Lebanon, who have stated that preventive action would be taken.

IV. Observations

56. As of 26 April 2005, the requirements of resolution 1559 (2004) have not yet been met. However, the parties concerned have made significant and noticeable progress towards implementing some of the provisions contained in the resolution. Of particular importance is the Government of Syria's commitment to me to withdraw all its troops, military assets and the intelligence apparatus from Lebanon latest by 30 April 2005, **and its letter to me of 26 April 2005, stating that it had completed the full withdrawal of its troops, military assets and the intelligence apparatus. There has been no progress on the implementation of other provisions of the resolution.**

³ In an interview with Le Monde, published on 15 April 2005, Hizbullah Secretary-General Sheikh Nasrallah declared that the group was "ready to discuss any topics with other Lebanese parties, including the issue of the weapons of the Islamic resistance."

57. Lebanon has reached a critical juncture in its post-Civil War history. In my last report to the Council, I expressed the sentiment that more than 14 years after the end of hostilities and almost five years after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, it was time for all parties concerned to set aside the remaining vestiges of the past, and to end, with finality, that sad chapter of Lebanese history.

58. The full and complete withdrawal of Syrian troops, military assets and the intelligence apparatus would represent a significant and important step towards this goal and towards ending the heavy-handed foreign interference that has characterized Lebanese politics for decades. In my conversations with President Assad, I reached agreement with the Syrian and Lebanese authorities that a technical UN verification mission would be dispatched in order to verify the full Syrian withdrawal. This mission, which is a technical team composed of military experts, is taking up its work in the week beginning on 25 April 2005. It will report to me and complete its work as soon as possible. I have requested the Government of Syria and the Government of Lebanon to extend their full cooperation to this mission and to provide it with all relevant information and documentation available concerning the former deployment of all Syrian troops, military assets and the intelligence apparatus in Lebanon. I will forward my conclusions based on the report of this mission as a supplement to the present report to the Council for its consideration.

59. The full and complete withdrawal of Syrian troops, military assets, and the intelligence apparatus from Lebanon in fulfillment of the commitments made to me by the Government of Syria and in full compliance with resolution 1559, will also require the Governments of the Syria and Lebanon to re-define the special relationship that exists between them. In this regard, I expect that the two countries will make significant progress towards the establishment of mutual diplomatic representation and an appropriate formalization of their special relationship prior to my next report to the Security Council on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004).

60. In my efforts over the past six months, I have assigned the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon, specifically the pullout of Syrian forces, and the matter of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence of Lebanon the highest priority. I have concentrated my efforts on the latter provision because of the increasing political polarization in Lebanon and the deteriorating security situation. I have also been concerned over the impact on the economy of the deteriorating security situation. In addition, I have been particularly concerned about the holding of parliamentary elections as a test of the sovereignty, unity, and political independence of Lebanon.

61. It is highly unfortunate, in my view, that a six-week long political stalemate in Lebanon raised the specter of a delay of the parliamentary elections. Such a delay would contribute to further exacerbating the political divisions in Lebanon and threaten the security, stability, and prosperity of the country. Both the Lebanese government and the opposition have told me that their highest priority is the holding of free and fair elections. Such elections should be held according to schedule and in accordance with an electoral law which is broadly accepted by the Lebanese people. In this context, I welcome Prime Minister Mikati's pledge to conduct the elections on time and as scheduled.

62. In order to ensure that such elections can be conducted in a free and credible manner, I have been discussing with the Government of Lebanon the possibility of extending United Nations technical assistance at its request. I have further encouraged the idea that international governmental and/or non-governmental electoral observers be invited to monitor the elections and am awaiting a request to this effect from the Government of Lebanon.

63. I urge all parties concerned to comply with all requirements of resolution 1559 without delay and fully implement this and all other resolutions related to the restoration of the territorial integrity, full sovereignty, and political independence of Lebanon.

64. I continue to believe that the implementation of resolution 1559 should proceed in a way that would best ensure the stability and unity of Lebanon, Syria, and the wider region. In this context, I also remain committed to the implementation of all Security Council resolutions and the ultimate achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

65. I remain at the Disposal of the Security Council and stand ready to continue to assist the parties in the full implementation of resolution 1559.

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