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Introduction

- 1 After the 2006 Israeli invasion of South Lebanon and the ensuing military conflict between Hezbollah fighters and the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1701 (12 August 2006) which redefined the role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)¹. It resolved to increase troop numbers and expand its mandate, thus inaugurating UNIFIL II. Resolution 1701 came to fruition after intense diplomatic efforts by the Italian government which held an international conference in Rome on 26 July 2006. With the adoption of Resolution 1701, Italy contributed a significant number of troops to the peacekeeping mission while also providing the key commanding figures.
- 2 UNIFIL II is generally considered a successful mission. Apart from some objections and criticisms which have taken root, mainly in Europe, it is noteworthy that the Lebanese government and the Lebanese population consider UNIFIL II vital to preserving peace in South Lebanon. Furthermore, UNIFIL commanders are, by and large, trusted by both civilian communities and local political leaders.
- 3 Beyond classical Foreign Policy analysis, this article aims to explain why Italy has been crucial in the successful establishment and management of the UNIFIL II mission from 2006 to the present, all this, whilst building and preserving unanimous recognition and appreciation for its leadership within the UN mission. It contends that the leading role played by Italy within UNIFIL II was decisive in legitimizing the establishment of the mission in 2006 and its evolution thereafter. Legitimacy and legitimization are

theoretically distinguished in peacekeeping operations, with legitimacy being the *de jure* international recognition, while legitimization the *de facto* acceptance of foreign contingents on a sovereign territory by local political actors and populations. Challenges to the legitimization of UNIFIL II in 2006 were potentially dependent on the tie-in of the mission itself with the Arab-Israeli conflict: well-defined political stances of the countries involved could reflect an alleged partisanship and thus question the interposition force as well as imperilling officers on the ground.

- 4 In this article, I argue that two variables made Italy the most trusted power to act as an interlocutor with the Lebanese government, population and political actors involved in the ceasefire, including Hezbollah. First, unlike most of the western powers, Italy's approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict relied on a long-standing tradition of neutrality epitomized by the *equivicinanza* ("equal proximity") policy. Secondly, a positive historic memory of Italian troops in Lebanon (from 1982 to 1984)² rooted among Palestinian and Shi'a communities made Italy the most appropriate façade player within UNIFIL II.
- 5 Italy's successful leading role in UNIFIL II –embodied by the Force command of the mission from 2007 to 2010, and from 2012 until now, as well as in the command of the West sector from 2006 until now– has allowed the UN-sponsored mission to play a significant role in South Lebanon. This is particularly the case in containing destabilizing clashes over the Israel-Lebanon border, thus substantially harmonizing Israeli and Hezbollah interests. Emphasizing national prerogatives in dealing with local actors, Italy also led UNIFIL II towards a *de facto* acceptance of the political order in Lebanon, and in particular the cooperation between Hezbollah and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). This circumvents the *de jure* general principle of UN peacekeeping, which relies on the aspirational restoration of a liberal order, and a Western idea of sovereignty based on the State's monopoly of the coercive force.
- 6 This article builds on theoretical literature on multilateral peacekeeping and historical reconstructions of the Lebanese civil war and the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war. Accounts of Italy's military and diplomatic role in the legitimization process are extracted from 36 semi-structured surveys that I conducted in Beirut, Chatila, Chamaa, Naqoura, and Blida between 2010 and 2014. I, ultimately, relied on official interviews with General Franco Angioni, former Commander of ITALCON –the Italian contingent which took part in the Multinational Force (MNF) in Lebanon between 1982 and 1984– General Guglielmo Luigi Miglietta and General Vasco Angelotti, former commanders of the Italian UNIFIL base in Chamaa, and General Paolo Serra, current Commander of the UNIFIL II.

Legitimacy and Legitimization in peacekeeping operations: a theoretical overview

- 7 After the end of the Cold War, multilateral peace operations have become a privileged tool of international politics, with the purpose of ending conflicts, establishing and maintaining peace, as well as building states and institutions. During the last decade the number of multilateral peace operations has risen to more than 130 missions in 50 countries³. Reiterated failure, lack of effectiveness, as well as objection to peace operations, has raised the question of legitimacy, however.

- 8 According to Ian Clark, three interlinked factors can define legitimacy in International Society: *i)* international political consensus; *ii)* legality and *iii)* moral authority⁴. On the one hand, the first two factors relate to the enforced international mandate, and expect a mission to be more or less legitimate in accordance to the number of members of the international community that agree upon it. The third, on the other hand, considers whether external military or civilian operators are perceived as trustworthy, reliable and truly *super partes* or not. As Jett puts it, failure of peacekeeping mainly occurs when either one side or all involved actors in a conflict do not recognize the authority of the peacekeeping force⁵. In regards to those critics, the United Nations has been stressing the importance of internal, rather than, external consensus of the three basic principles that UN-sponsored peacekeeping operations are based on: *i)* Consent of the parties; *ii)* Impartiality; *iii)* Non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate⁶.
- 9 Those principles are also included in the 2008 “Capstone Doctrine of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)”, which underlines the importance of cooperating with local and national leadership in order to enforce the legitimacy of the mandate, as well as preserving stability once the mission is over⁷. When dealing with local leadership, however, a critical objection can be raised, when considering the selection of local or national interlocutors. Hansen, for instance, has critically examined the criteria according to which the UN usually tends to chose interlocutors on the ground and concludes that arbitrary selection often ends up being a factor of further fragmentation instead of catalysing a comprehensive dialogue between conflicting parties⁸. Selection of interlocutors, in other words, is related to what Richardson sees as the unspoken dimension of peacekeeping operations, which is based on the restoration of peace and the return to stability –thus on the pre-judgment that the ground “was somehow far removed from the liberal conception of a pre-existing peace”⁹. In this perspective, the UN tends to choose interlocutors who are allegedly prone to accept a liberal order and to cooperate with the West. This approach not only contradicts with the empirical durability of conflict dynamics, or “negative peace” in post-peacekeeping areas, but, above all, completely refuses to deal with alternative political orders that adopt methods based on a deep understanding of contextual political, social and economic realities¹⁰.
- 10 Ian Hurd also proposes a critical theoretical approach to international military humanitarian interventions, investigating how legitimacy can be created, manipulated, and misused as a tool of power politics. Combining realist and constructivist approaches, Hurd conceives legitimacy as strictly interlinked with perception and interest¹¹. While legitimacy does refer to a “normative and subjective” belief by an actor that a rule or an institution ought to be obeyed, this belief is “not necessarily shared with any other actor”¹². In line with the classical Weberian distinction between what is legitimate and what is perceived to be legitimate¹³, Hurd argues that individuals experience legitimacy in their perception of the rule or institution, and –as this is the case with all perceptions– it is not directly accessible to outsiders¹⁴.
- 11 Although it has been asserted that UN-sponsored military interventions are statistically perceived as more legitimate than multinational or NATO-backed operations by virtue of their lower politicization, empirical evidence also shows that, when narrowed down to a merely *de jure* definition, legitimacy ends up being significantly insufficient. Following on Hurd’s approach to the “Anarchy of the International System”, I argue

that the legitimacy of peacekeeping becomes a full-fledged concept when it is complemented by “legitimization”. Tracing back to Max Weber’s theory of power, legitimization occurs when people who exercise power are recognized as legitimate in fulfilling their task. Hard also defines legitimization as the “process of internalization of a rule”¹⁵ – a bottom-up recognition by all actors engaged in the perception of a given institution.

- 12 When it comes to international peacekeeping, the most obvious challenge for a foreign contingent is to be perceived as legitimate authority by all the parties involved in a conflict, including actors who *a priori* ideologically refuse liberal organizations and liberal democracy or substantially conform to deep-rooted orders alternative to the liberal paradigm. In this perspective, the conundrum stems from a double-directional identity incompatibility, that is the impossible harmonization between an International Organization grounded on a liberal institutional framework and local actors who govern through different ways of conceiving and living sovereignty. Therefore, the production of conflicting narratives of sovereignty and political order ends up being the main hindering factor to a successful peacekeeping mission.
- 13 In this paper, I consider the peculiar case of liberal institutions tacitly circumventing the identity divide, by attaining a full-fledged understanding of the contextual rules of a given political order and dealing with it accordingly. Beyond façade rhetoric, this dynamic is likely to take place when a liberal institution, such as a UN Agency, pursues a highest interest deriving from its action. This necessarily entails the hidden political interest of a group of States pursuing it through the humanitarian machine. During the 2011 crisis in Syria, for instance, it has been shown that UN humanitarian agencies conducted negotiations with “terror groups”, in order to make food delivery and humanitarian assistance succeed¹⁶. In this case, the everyday experience on the ground of individuals representing the UN apparently contradicts the institution’s identity, applying a realist, rather than a liberal paradigm, in accordance with the so-called Machiavellian principle that the end justifies the means. This means that the UN, although rhetorically bound by its own identity narrative, can arbitrarily choose whether to play inflexibly or not, depending on the hidden interest in its action.
- 14 The case of Lebanon shows that after the 2006 July war, UNIFIL II was only a viaticum to securitize the Israel-Lebanon border. While all actors engaged in the conflict (Israel, Hezbollah, and the Lebanese Government) were potential beneficiaries of the establishment of UN troops in the southern-Litani area, Hezbollah needed guarantees about the maintenance of its prerogatives, in order to accept a ceasefire and Resolution 1701. As neither the US nor France could be relied upon to carry out an informal negotiation, Italy was the only player able to cajole Hezbollah into accepting the UN presence in South Lebanon by virtue of the consensus built from the Lebanese civil war onwards. This example shows that the UN acted in accordance to realistic maxims by tacitly exploiting the national prerogatives of one of its members in order to achieve “legitimization”.

Italy’s diplomatic activism in the promotion of UNIFIL II

- 15 On 12 July 2006, Israel invaded Lebanon in response to the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah; the 34-day long conflict witnessed intense air strikes on Dahiye,

the Shi'a neighbourhood of Beirut and Hezbollah stronghold. 12,000 Lebanese were killed and 4,400 injured. In addition, approximately 1 million Lebanese were displaced from their homes. On the other side of the conflict, 170 Israelis –among which 52 civilians– were killed and around 600 injured.

- 16 During the conflict, the intensity of Italian diplomatic activism was unparalleled in its effort to reach a swift ceasefire. Romano Prodi, the newly elected Prime Minister (April 2006), held a peace conference in Rome, co-chaired by Italy and the United States, in which he expressed the need for establishing an *ad-hoc* peacekeeping mission, also implying that Italy was ready to send its troops to Lebanon. The 15 diplomatic missions attending the conference agreed unanimously to call for a full and immediate ceasefire, and to provide humanitarian relief to the civilians of Lebanon; they jointly expressed “deep concern for civilian casualties and suffering, the destruction of civil infrastructures and the rising number of internally displaced people”, and in their final statement called Israel to exercise its “utmost restraint”, thus paving the way for the adoption of resolution 1701 on 12 August 2006¹⁷.
- 17 UNSC resolution 1701 legitimated the deployment of peacekeeping forces –UNIFIL 2– with the mandate of¹⁸: a) monitoring the cessation of hostilities; b) accompanying and supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in their deployment in South Lebanon, including along the “Blue Line”¹⁹, c) coordinating its activities with the Government of Lebanon and the Government of Israel; d) extending its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons; e) assisting the Lebanese Armed Forces in taking steps towards the respect of borders and territorial control²⁰; f) assisting the Government of Lebanon in securing the border and also preventing the entry of arms or related materiel²¹.
- 18 Two days after the adoption of resolution 1701, the cessation of hostilities went into effect. On September 7 and 8 Israel lifted its air and sea blockade on Lebanon and less than one month later, on October 2, withdrawal was complete. In early September, however, Israel was not fully convinced that calling troops back from Lebanon was the best option, and –again– the solution came out of an Italian initiative: on September 7 Rome’s Minister of Foreign Affairs travelled to Tel Aviv and managed the lifting, offering an Italian Navy vessel to patrol Lebanese waters until a German-led Maritime Task Force would be deployed. The operation concretely started when Israel accepted the offer, and Italian vessels *Garibaldi*, *San Giorgio*, *San Marco*, *San Giusto* and *Fenice* constituted the Interim Maritime Task Force in support of the Lebanese Navy.
- 19 In order to understand the far-reaching success of Italian diplomacy in the adoption of UNSC resolution 1701, it is noteworthy to compare it with moves by the US and France. Indeed, when the war erupted, the United States blamed the “Party of God” in the “strongest terms”, supporting, by and large, Israeli reaction to the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers. Hezbollah argued in response that the kidnapped soldiers were spies but the National Security Council spokesman Frederick Jones, stated: “this is a terrorist attack and it is clearly timed to exacerbate already high tensions in the region and sow further violence”²².
- 20 The French position was very much in line with Washington’s statements. President Jacques Chirac joined the White House in calling for the disarmament of Hezbollah and blamed Iran and Damascus for backing what he considered “a terrorist attack”. It is noteworthy that Chirac did not agree with a major engagement of UNIFIL, while insisting that a solution might be better grounded in Chapter VII of the UN Charter²³.

- 21 Unlike Washington and Paris, Rome expressed its deep concern for a “spill-over effect in the whole region” and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Massimo D’Alema, blamed Israel for its “exaggerated reaction”²⁴, although he never openly sided with one of the two parties preserving a *super partes* standing. In managing a crisis which could potentially affect EU security, Italy also appealed to Brussels for an enhanced engagement, wishing for a European “willingness to become a political player”, after having long been a “payer of economic assistance”²⁵.
- 22 The UN-brokered ceasefire was definitely an Italian success. Beyond the façade, however, it is important to note that after suffering unpredicted casualties among its ranks, Israel had already decided to withdraw from Lebanon. The red line in Israeli military strategy is the human loss and the Hezbollah guerrilla had been framed in accordance to this peculiar vulnerability with the aim of forcing the enemy to a retreat. The underestimation of Hezbollah’s capacity of defence and resistance was, thus, decisive for Israel and the US to turn towards a diplomatic solution. Italy, on its side, was able to capitalize on this juncture, pushing forward its political option, which ended by receiving unanimous international consensus with D’Alema congratulating Washington for abandoning its doctrine of the War on Terror.
- 23 From a purely Italian perspective, a combination of international and domestic factors fostered the newly elected government to push forward a peacekeeping initiative²⁶. After obtaining the parliamentary majority in April 2006, the centre-left coalition became particularly active in boosting a new trend in Italian foreign policy, in order to smoothen Berlusconi’s *tout-court* Atlanticism. After 2001, Italy’s global role had been marked by its unconditional backing of Washington’s War on Terror and emotional support for Israel. Without cutting off US-Italy relations²⁷, the new government tried to balance Atlanticism with Europeanism²⁸. Prime Minister Romano Prodi had been president of the European Commission from 2002 to 2004, and personally engaged in the promotion of the European Neighbouring Policy (ENP). In Prodi’s view, all Europe’s neighbours, including the Mediterranean countries, had to be considered a “ring of friends”²⁹ – a vision that very much influenced Italy’s new Mediterraneanism. Domestic turnover and international context encouraged Italian activism in regards to the July 2006 Israeli-Lebanon war. Some other underestimated factors, however, might be considered in analysing how Italy was not only able to gather international consensus on strengthening UNIFIL’s mandate, but was also identified as the most suitable interlocutor to face the Lebanese counterpart despite conflicting views with Washington and Paris.
- 24 To this end, it is important to underline that, for American and French interests, strengthening the UNIFIL mandate was useful in limiting Hezbollah’s threats to Israel and in securing the Lebanese-Israeli border. For Italy, instead, resolution 1701 was primarily grounded in humanitarian concerns and functional considerations to restrain potential security spillovers. All actors involved needed an implicit or explicit window of dialogue with Hezbollah but neither Washington nor Paris were plausible interlocutors to the “Party of God”. Washington had blacklisted Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in 1982, and France, despite its special relationship with Lebanon, did not entertain any diplomatic relation with the Shi’a party, while its pro-Israel, anti-Syria and anti-Iran bias prevented it from bringing out any kind of serious negotiations³⁰.
- 25 On the other hand, Italy relied on a portfolio of political attitudes, which placed it as the only actor allegedly able to cajole Hezbollah into accepting the ceasefire and to

turn UNIFIL II into a successful mission. First and foremost, Italy does not match up with the colonial past of France and the United Kingdom, and self-rejection of its short colonial experience in Libya³¹ elaborated in the national consciousness of the First Republic, has broadly sheltered Rome from anti-imperialist sentiments of radical Middle Eastern actors. In addition, when it became clear that it would not be granted any colony, Italy embraced the cause of decolonization – a card profusely played in the construction of its pro-Arab stance during the First Republic³². In 2006, moreover, while launching a renewed Italian Mediterraneanism, Massimo D'Alema coined the word *equivicinanza* (“equal proximity”) to describe Rome’s policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict along the lines of the tradition of *equidistanza* (“equidistance”) typical of the Christian democrat party. This was of course aimed at significantly re-adjusting Berlusconi’s enthusiastic and unconditional support of Israel. Since his appointment, D'Alema re-established friendly relations with Arab counterparts, including Hezbollah³³ – a shift stirring up huge disappointment in Tel Aviv, with newspaper titles claiming for “The end of Italy-Israel love affair”³⁴. In addition, after the adoption of resolution 1701, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs clearly stated: “It is wrong to say that our soldiers go to Lebanon to disarm Hezbollah”³⁵. While explaining that UNIFIL II’s role was to assist the Lebanese Armed Force in achieving full control of the territory, he also wished a long-term integration of Hezbollah within the Military³⁶. The “Party of God” declared to accept UNSC resolution 1701 on 12 August 2006 – the day in which the resolution was issued – despite explicit reference to “all militias disarmament” included in the text.

Parallels in history: “Angioni’s peacekeeping pattern” and Italy’s heritage in the memory of Lebanon

- 26 The most important asset Italy was able to employ in its sponsoring action of UNIFIL II’s interposition force was the memory of Italian troops in Beirut between 1982 and 1984. This constituted a pacesetter for establishing a UN mission in which Italy could play as the forefront negotiator.
- 27 On 2 July 1982, the Israelis established a military siege of the Lebanese capital, after having linked up with the Christian Lebanese forces in East Beirut, targeting the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Syrian forces. Israel, however, had no intention of attacking the enemy who blended in with the population. An international crisis erupted: an intervention of UNIFIL was contemplated, but soon discarded. The Security Council was not an affordable viaticum, since it was to a large extent blocked by the 8 June 1982 US veto to a resolution calling for Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, through which Washington had “made evident that it would not accept any decision by the Council that could be interpreted as sanctions against Israel for not having respected Security Council resolution 508 and 509”³⁷. The way out was found by the then Italian Prime Minister Giovanni Spadolini, who proposed a humanitarian option: the evacuation of the PLO and the Syrians. Israel accepted and asked for American troops to supervise operations. The government of Lebanon requested French assistance. Italy was also called to intervene as part of the Multinational Force (MNF). 500 soldiers, of the “ITALCON”, were sent to Beirut to perform the most delicate task: the evacuation of 12,000 Palestinian fighters and 3,000 Syrian soldiers from the besieged capital. The military operation lasted 12 days, after which the MNF was

disbanded. The worst crisis, however, was yet to come: the MNF was called back after the huge massacre perpetrated in the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps by Christian militias and tacitly backed by the Israeli Defence Forces. The so-called MNF II was reconstituted in a hurry by American, French and Italian troops, and was later joined by the French. From a political point of view, Italy had clearly stated in the Venice declaration its neutrality in the conflict and the recognition for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

- 28 In addition, unlike Washington and Paris, Rome was merely led by humanitarian concerns³⁸. This permitted the Parliament to easily approve the dispatching of 2,300 men to Beirut immediately, also with the consensus of the Italian Communist Party³⁹. On the ground, Italians elaborated a new practice of peacekeeping, which can be attributed to General Franco Angioni, marking a difference from US and French troops in the perceptions of local civil populations. The logistic division was favourable: in effect, while US forces settled in the southern zone of Beirut with very limited contact with the population, and the French took control of the western part of the town, Italians were assigned the centre. As Franco Angioni and Maurizio Cremasco put it:

The sector represents an important element in the concept of employment of the military units engaged in peacekeeping operations, because it often influences the decision whether units and population should be separated or merged. Separation of a peacekeeping force from the civilian population can help its political opponents, as it does not permit the military force to demonstrate what it wants and can do for the civilian population. On the contrary, separation increases the opposition's prejudice against the military force and the country it belongs to⁴⁰.

- 29 The position of the Italian contingent was set into an area which contained approximately 600,000 inhabitants, 95 percent of whom were Shi'ites, while in the Palestinian camps of Shatila and Bourj el-Barajneh, the settlements included a large Palestinian population. The main goal of the Italian contingents became the protection of Lebanese and Palestinian civilians, a task that could not be accomplished without the collaboration of the population itself⁴¹. For the US or France, on the contrary, peacekeeping entailed the elimination of the enemy by full-fledged military action. According to Angioni, "this made the greatest difference between the perception of American and French troops and that of Italian troops on the ground"⁴²: a fact that eventually explains why the latter were spared the huge terror attack, in which 299 US Marines and French troops were killed⁴³. Retrospective critical analysis of the MNF have underlined the political mistakes and the error of the intransigent attitude of Washington and Paris which led them to be perceived as occupying forces which, in turn, provoked unnecessary casualties⁴⁴. Not much attention, however, has been put on the strategic errors of the peacekeeping action, compared to the Italian practice. A further intuition of General Angioni was to understand that the troops' turnover, which took place every four months, negatively affected the transparent cooperation with civilians and personal contact, intrinsic in the Italian model, which necessitated continuity in order to be effective. To this purpose, Franco Angioni asked Rome for the permission to maintain unchanged ITALCON's commanding apparatus, and 60 units out of 2,400 remained permanently in Beirut for 18 months⁴⁵.
- 30 Memories of Italian troops in Lebanon between 1982 and 1984 have lingered on not only among the Palestinian populations in the refugee camps, but also in the general consciousness of the Lebanese people. Personal memories, recorded during my visit to

the Shatila camp on 23 October 2010, recounted, for instance, of “the human touch of Italian soldiers”, “the closeness between troops and the people”. Another trump card for Italy was the field hospital, particularly vivid in the memory of the inhabitants of Beirut *Wust-el-Balad* during 1982 and 1984, in which civilians were continuously accommodated.

- 31 Italy’s peacekeeping practice, in harmony with the local population, undoubtedly created support for Italy which capitalized it in 2006, when it became clear that a renewed peacekeeping mission was necessary in South Lebanon. According to General Franco Angioni, “It is not by chance that in July 2006, when the humanitarian option was explored again, the Lebanese Premier, Fuad Seniora, called Rome before either Paris or Washington”⁴⁶.

UNIFIL II and Italy: beyond the mandate

- 32 In 2006, Italy’s diplomatic success was proportional to the importance of its role within UNIFIL. In accordance to the new international mandate, the size of the mission was expanded from 2,000 to 15,000 soldiers. Italy, since 2006, surpassed traditional key players like France, in terms of troop contribution and currently ranks as the second top contributor with 1,097 troops⁴⁷. Washington offered financial support to the mission but never contributed troops to UNIFIL II. Italy’s prestige was also reflected in the number of key places assigned to Italians in the organization’s structure, at both the strategic and decision-making levels. Since 2006 Italy has also been holding the command of Sector West. In 2006, when the UNIFIL mandate was enhanced and the mission renamed UNIFIL II, the French General Alain Pellegrini, UNIFIL Commander since 2004, carried on this role until February 2007. Italian General Claudio Graziano replaced him in the UNIFIL Headquarters in Naqoura, and stayed in office until January 2010. He was followed by Spanish General Alberto Asarta Cuevas, who commanded UNIFIL II for two years. From 2012 to the present day, General Paolo Serra, another Italian commander, has been leading the mission. It is also worth mentioning that in 2006, General Giovanni Ridinò was appointed head of the *ad hoc* Strategic Military Cell (SMC) which was part of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operation in New York. In 2007 Captain Giuseppe Guglietta was appointed Deputy Director, with the task of: *i*) supporting the DPKO with a pool of military experts; *ii*) creating a stronger link between New York and the theatre of operations; and *iii*) involving key troop-contributing countries (like Italy) in strategic military planning⁴⁸.
- 33 Beyond the classical criticisms addressed to UNIFIL II regarding the ineffectiveness of UN troops in disarming the protected zone south of the Litani River, it is also important to evaluate how UNIFIL has contributed in improving and securing the mandate’s zone despite these outcomes not having been prescribed by Resolution 1701. While it is true that UNIFIL troops have never found evidence of weapons allegedly belonging to Hezbollah, a tacit agreement between the UN interposition force and the “Party of God” seems to have determined the zones of influence. There is a general acknowledgement in Lebanon that Hezbollah has moved its training camps from Southern Lebanon to the Beqaa Valley, while training in Syria and Iran has increased. Evidence of Hezbollah’s ongoing preparation for battle can be extrapolated from its decisive action in the Syrian conflict, particularly after the Qusayr battle of April-May 2013. However,

Hezbollah's fighters, after 2006, have not been training within the UNIFIL II area which Israel is able to monitor⁴⁹.

- 34 In addition, the UNIFIL II mandate highlights the importance of UN support for the Lebanese Armed Forces in deploying and re-establishing territorial control in South Lebanon. However, Lebanon's everyday experience and practice of security shows that the Army is not an independent body from Hezbollah, but that the two groups collaborate at both the intelligence level and the strategic level⁵⁰. Liberal definitions of sovereignty, intrinsic in the UNIFIL II mandate, allow only for the national Army to be the official holder of the "monopoly of coercive force". This strengthens the paradigmatic dichotomy of "State vs. non-State". However, in Lebanon, the collaboration between the Army and Hezbollah shows that the State and the non-State are hybridized⁵¹. In addition, South-Lebanon's population is mainly Shi'a, its local politicians are often affiliated to the "Party of God", and the strong presence of Shi'a officers deployed, hides another potential dilemma for UNIFIL II. Therein lies a further conundrum in the composition of an Army in a multi-confessional society⁵²: officers are simultaneously State servants and supporters of a confessional party. It becomes thus obvious that the majority of Shi'a soldiers in South Lebanon simultaneously represent the Lebanese State and Hezbollah. It is widely recognized that Italian troops are involved, more than others, in a number of civilian activities that benefit local populations and are engaged in a political dialogue with the local leadership which is often pro-Hezbollah⁵³. This is in line with the tradition of what I called "the Angioni pattern" which has inaugurated the Italian tradition of peacekeeping grounded on neutrality and comprehensive dialogue⁵⁴. Meetings between UNIFIL Italian troops and local leadership are usually held in public offices where Hezbollah's flags and pictures of the Secretary-General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, are exposed⁵⁵. Since this fact "never hinders those meeting to take place"⁵⁶, it also affirms a *de facto* mutual recognition between UNIFIL and Hezbollah.
- 35 Another tacit compromise between the political reality of UNIFIL member States and the UNIFIL military action on the ground has emerged in May 2013 when the European Union blacklisted the military wing of Hezbollah as a "terror group". Criticism arose immediately from South Lebanon. Ali Zahwi, the pro-Hezbollah mayor of the village of Qabrikha stated: "We, as locals in the south, treated the UNIFIL like sacred guests, we protected them. What do they return? Put us on the terrorist list". Zahwi also affirmed that "people are not going to accept troops living among them and calling them terrorists"⁵⁷. These words not only state *de facto* a sort of equivalence between Hezbollah and the people of South Lebanon, but they also recognize the mutual collaboration between two organizations allegedly incompatible on paper. However, it is noteworthy that, when the European Union finally decided to blacklist Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Emma Bonino, strongly opposed the intransigent European line – a position which was by and large echoed in the Lebanese media, including al-Manar, Hezbollah's official network⁵⁸.
- 36 Commenting on the EU decision, General Paolo Serra affirmed that collaboration between UNIFIL II and local leadership –an essential tool in the strategic philosophy of the mission– was not significantly affected. Although "respecting the political decision", General Serra expressed "concern with a measure which could impact the progressive integration of the military wing of Hezbollah into the LAF in the long-run"⁵⁹. This statement is in line with the 1989 Ta'ef agreement, which legitimized Hezbollah

in keeping weapons in South Lebanon to carry on the anti-Israel *muqāwama* (“resistance”) and formally shaped the peculiar two-faced pattern of security control in Lebanon. It also shows respect for Hezbollah’s promise to put its weapons under the authority of the State, once Israel will no longer be a threat. In practical terms, it stays in line with General Angioni’s conviction that “[d]iplomatic agreements and political instruments may, to a certain extent, be vague, because, once put into effect, they have to allow freedom of movement”⁶⁰.

Conclusions

- 37 This paper aimed to demonstrate that UN peacekeeping missions can tacitly circumvent the rhetoric imperative of acting in order to “re-establish a liberal order”, when backed by a major political interest in securitizing a specific area. The UNIFIL II mission in South Lebanon demonstrates how the UN can deal with a deep-rooted political order which is not in line with the Western liberal paradigm. The *conditio sine qua non* was that all actors involved in the 2006 July war shared interest in maintaining the ceasefire and establishing an interposition force at the border between Lebanon and Israel. In so doing, neither the US nor France were entrusted to represent UNIFIL, given their pro-Israel and anti-Hezbollah political bias, while Italy stood out as the most reliable actor to handle the Lebanese puzzle. Italy’s “*equivicinanza*” policy, its historical unbiased stance towards Arab countries, and, most importantly, its recognition of Hezbollah as a legitimate political player, were tactically acknowledged at the international level as being of key importance in achieving a comprehensive *political* legitimization of resolution 1701. Moreover, capitalizing on the positive memory of ITALCON’s peacekeeping in Beirut, between 1982 and 1984, Italy was also *strategically* crucial in attaining the legitimization of UNIFIL II by the Shi’a populations of South Lebanon. In so doing, Italy was able to assert the continuity of its commitment to post-Cold War multilateralism, and to seek international prestige by associating UNIFIL II with Rome’s national prerogatives.

NOTES

1. UNIFIL was established in 1978, during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) in accordance to UN Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426.
2. During the so called Lebanon I and Lebanon II operations under the Multinational Force (MNF) umbrella –that is, (i) the evacuation of Palestinian and Syrian fighters from Beirut, following the Israeli siege of the Lebanese capital in summer 1982, and (ii) the peacekeeping mission, established after the Sabra and Shatila massacre in September 1982 which lasted until February 1984.
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19. The term "Blue Line" refers to the semi-defined border between Israel and Lebanon.
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42. *Ibid.*
43. The terrorist attack was launched on 23 October 1983 in Beirut.
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ABSTRACTS

Italy's role in the post-2006 United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL II) is generally considered the crowning achievement of Rome's foreign policy. Italy has played a major role in promoting and developing UNIFIL II while also surpassing traditional powers in the region, like the US and France, in importance. Elaborating on the "legitimacy-legitimization" dichotomy in international peace-keeping, this article contends that Italy's prominent role within the mission was decisive in accomplishing the legitimization of UNIFIL II to Lebanese political actors and southern populations. Two factors made Italy the most reliable player to interact with both the society and the government of Lebanon after the Israeli invasion of 2006: a long-standing tradition of "equidistance" (*equidistanza*) towards the Arab-Israeli conflict, and a positive memory of the Italian contingent, ITALCON, operating in Beirut from 1982 to 1984. This article finally argues that, through UNIFIL II, Italy's Mediterranean politics gained an autonomous position while simultaneously affirming a proactive role within the UN.

Pour l'Italie, l'engagement au sein de la Force Intérimaire des Nations Unies au Liban après 2006 (FINUL II) est considéré comme un élément de prestige de sa politique étrangère. L'Italie a joué un rôle majeur dans la promotion et le développement de la FINUL II, montrant un activisme supérieur à celui des puissances traditionnelles présentes dans la région, comme la France et les États-Unis. Cet article reprend la dichotomie « légitimité-légitimation » dans l'action internationale de maintien de la paix internationale pour démontrer que l'activisme de l'Italie a été décisif dans la légitimation de la FINUL II aux yeux des acteurs politiques du Liban et des populations du Liban du Sud. Deux facteurs majeurs doivent être pris en considération: la longue tradition d'une politique d'équidistance dans le conflit israélo-arabe d'une part, la bonne réputation du contingent italien à la suite de la mission ITALCON à Beyrouth entre 1982 et 1984 d'autre part. Ces deux éléments mettent l'Italie en position d'interlocuteur particulièrement fiable face à la société et au gouvernement du Liban après l'invasion israélienne en 2006. Cet article soutient que la FINUL II a permis à l'Italie de s'affirmer et de progresser dans sa politique méditerranéenne, en contribuant également à renforcer son profil d'acteur au sein du système des Nations unies.

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