

Analysis:

America Should Nix—Not Try to Fix—UNIFIL

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Executive Summary

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has continuously failed to fulfill its mandate of restoring peace and security in southern Lebanon. Originally intended, as its name suggests, to be an interim force, UNIFIL should at long last be dismantled. The United States has a chance to do exactly that when UNIFIL comes up for its annual mandate renewal vote at the United Nations Security Council this August.

UNIFIL is ineffective and a waste of U.S. funds. The force's dismal 47-year track record includes pervasive anti-Israel bias, serial risk aversion, and a manifest failure to prevent—and, at times, complicity in—Hezbollah terrorism, all at a rough cost of \$140 million annually to U.S. taxpayers.¹ For two decades, UNIFIL did nothing to prevent Hezbollah's military buildup despite repeated requests from Israel. Captured Hezbollah terrorists even admitted in recent months to having [successfully bribed](#) UNIFIL personnel, enabling Hezbollah to use UNIFIL facilities and equipment for terrorist activity.

Now, UNIFIL is profoundly incapable or even unwilling to do what is needed to build on the current momentous opportunity for peace, security, and sovereignty in Lebanon: preventing Hezbollah from reconstituting. Worse still, UNIFIL's existence disincentivizes the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) from assuming the role and responsibility of sole provider of Lebanon's security, which should be the ultimate objective of U.S. policy.

Efforts to reform UNIFIL are unlikely to be fruitful. Past international efforts to inject life into UNIFIL by strengthening its mandate yielded no changes to the force's ineptitude. The United States should veto UNIFIL's mandate when it comes up for its annual renewal vote this August.

UNIFIL's Dangerously Poor Track Record

UNIFIL has demonstrably failed its mission, made explicit in United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 425, which created the force in 1978, to restore peace and security to southern Lebanon. UNIFIL was formed during the Lebanese Civil War, several days after Israel's March 1978 invasion to combat Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) terrorists operating in southern Lebanon. UNSCR 425 gave UNIFIL

¹ The United States does not allocate sums directly to UNIFIL but instead funds it through the Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities (CIPA) account, which provides payment for the U.S. share of all United Nations (UN) peacekeeping forces. According to the Congressional Research Service's latest [report](#) on UNIFIL, for "FY2023, the estimated U.S. UNIFIL assessment is \$143 million," and that at the time, the overall "U.S. peacekeeping assessment (including for UNIFIL) is 26.94 percent." The United States [spent](#) \$1.37 billion on the CIPA account in FY2024 and [allocated](#) \$1.2 billion to the CIPA account in FY 2025, of which \$203 million has been [rescinded](#) by Congress.

a mandate to confirm Israel's withdrawal, restore "international peace and security," and assist Lebanon in restoring its effective authority in southern Lebanon. For 47 years, UNIFIL failed to achieve its objective of restoring peace and security to the area, and, since the 1990s, has tacitly accepted Hezbollah's expansion into a formidable military force. Because the peacekeeping force is meant to be interim, its mandate must be renewed annually by the United Nations Security Council.

UNIFIL's Failure to Prevent Hezbollah's Vast Military Buildup

Despite its generous [annual budget](#) of over \$500 million, of which the United States typically [contributes](#) around 30 percent, UNIFIL passively allowed Hezbollah's extensive military buildup under its peacekeepers' noses leading up to October 2023. Though southern Lebanon has among the densest concentration of peacekeepers anywhere in the world, Hezbollah terrorists created a weapons arsenal rivaling most countries' militaries. The Iran-backed terror group amassed over 100,000 rockets, stockpiled hundreds of precision-guided missiles and drones, built a vast tunnel network, and established numerous terror sites across southern Lebanon, including directly on Israel's northern border.



Source: JINSA Data

UNIFIL cannot plead ignorance to Hezbollah's vast military buildup. Israel routinely provided intelligence to UNIFIL and the United Nations' Department of Peace Operations (UNDPO), which oversees UNIFIL, about Hezbollah's activity. As former JINSA fellow and prior head of the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) International Cooperation Division Brigadier General Effie Defrin detailed in a November JINSA [report](#), he provided UNIFIL and the UNDPO detailed information—including imagery and geographic coordinates—about Hezbollah's construction of tunnels, above-ground terror compounds, and tactical posts near the Lebanon-Israel border. None of these requests, numbering in the dozens, yielded any known UNIFIL action.

UNIFIL's Glaring Inaction Leading Up to the 2023-2024 War

Israeli officials tell JINSA that, in the four months leading up to Israel's October 2023 war with Hezbollah, Israel alerted UNIFIL to 168 instances of Hezbollah terrorists operating along the Lebanon-Israel border but to no avail. Among the more egregious examples were Hezbollah terrorists' construction of temporary structures inside Israeli territory in direct view of UNIFIL posts; terrorists shining lasers, in view of a UNIFIL patrol, into Israeli border towns; and terror operatives tampering with the border fence in view of UNIFIL observation posts. And, by October 2023, Hezbollah had built 32 terror compounds along the border, according to JINSA data.

Israel's war with Hezbollah from October 2023 to November 2024 displayed the tragic results of UNIFIL's negligence. Hezbollah launched over 16,000 rockets and missiles into Israel, according to JINSA's [datasets](#), killing over 130 people and forcing approximately 100,000 Israelis to vacate their homes. Lebanese civilians also tragically suffered as a result. Hezbollah's military strength, permissively tolerated by UNIFIL, could have inflicted worse outcomes: had Hezbollah staged a major invasion of Israel during or after the October 7 attack, Israeli officials estimate that thousands of Israelis could have been killed.

Hezbollah's Exploitation of UNIFIL During the War

UNIFIL's unhelpful role grew more dangerous during the war itself, presenting obstacles to Israel's operations and—in some cases intentionally—aiding Hezbollah's assaults on Israel.

Hezbollah took full advantage of UNIFIL's laxity, operating directly next to UNIFIL facilities in hopes of deterring Israeli retaliatory strikes. As JINSA previously [documented](#), “in a one-month span between mid-September and mid-October [2024], Hezbollah launched over 25 rockets and missiles from sites within 300 meters—and often closer—of UNIFIL facilities.” Israeli forces also [located](#) an elaborate Hezbollah tunnel network just 300 feet away from a UNIFIL facility.

UNIFIL also refused to get out of the way and let Israel do the job it declined to do: disarming Hezbollah. During Israel's 2024 operations in Lebanon, UNIFIL [rejected](#) Israel's requests to evacuate from combat zones and [castigated](#) Israel for operating near UNIFIL positions—playing into Hezbollah's tried-and-true human shields [strategy](#) to deter and delegitimize Israeli operations.

Most egregiously, confirming Israel's worst fears, Hezbollah operatives bribed UNIFIL personnel to directly aid Hezbollah during the war. In an October 2024 exposé, the *Israel Hayom* news outlet [revealed](#) that captured Hezbollah terrorists admitted to having successfully bribed UNIFIL peacekeepers, who granted Hezbollah access to UNIFIL observation posts, cameras, and other equipment to monitor and sabotage Israeli operations.

What Explains UNIFIL's Serial Failures?

UNIFIL's irredeemable flaws are a feature, not a bug, of the peacekeeping force. Several factors, none of which can readily be reformed, explain UNIFIL's decades-long track record of failing to counteract Hezbollah's terror activity.

UNIFIL's Structural Flaws

UNIFIL suffers from the same systemic problems which generally plague UN peacekeeping forces. These include the hodgepodge of unaccountable international actors involved, virtually none of whom have any real stake in bringing stability to the host country.

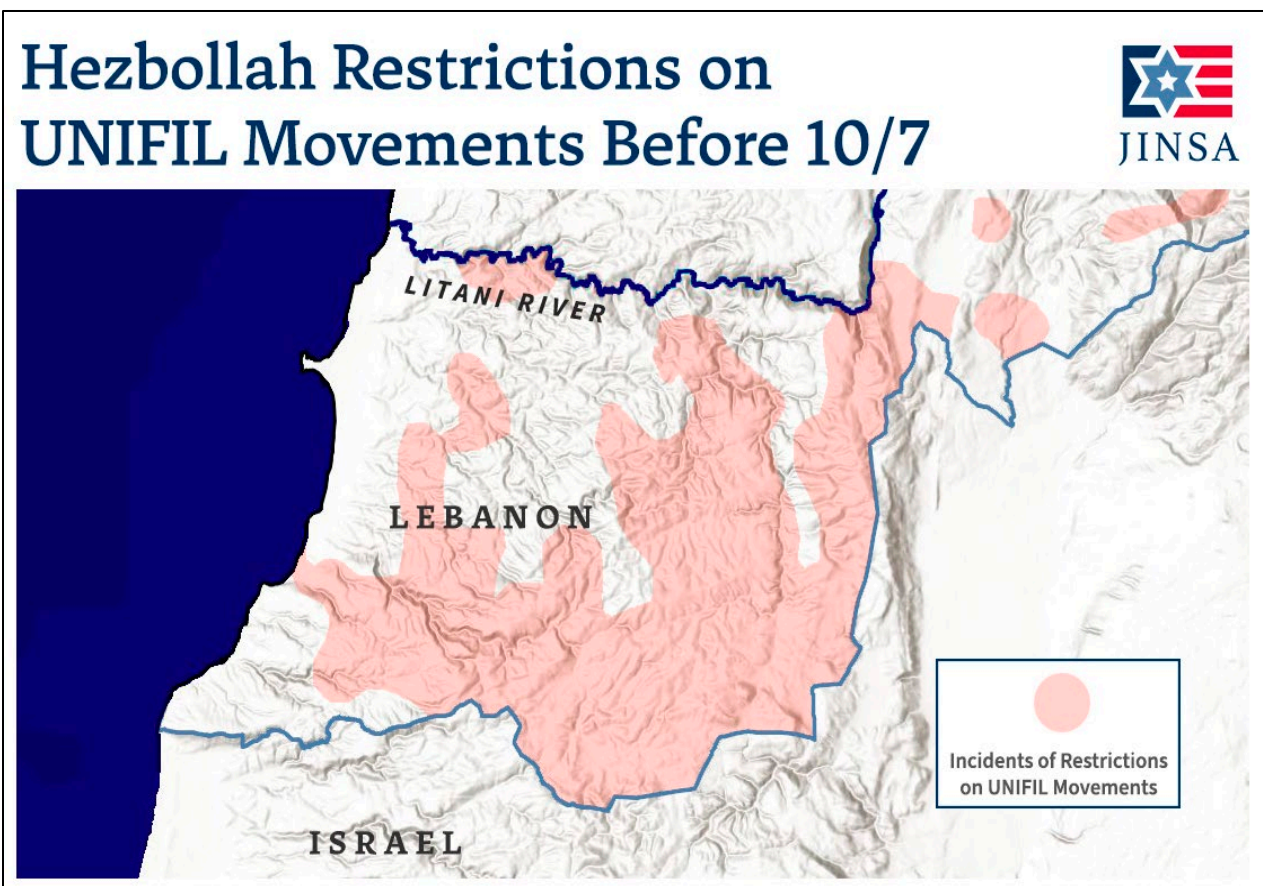
Ireland Defense Forces Brigadier General (ret.) Ray Murphy, who served three tours of duty with UNIFIL—including as a deputy sector commander—has [documented](#) several of these endemic flaws, including:

- The lack of “real sanction” if peacekeepers ignore their commanders’ orders;
- The multinational nature of the force causing “significant differences in priorities and standard operating procedures” among personnel in the field; and
- That, “in military terminology, there is no concept of operations ... the command and control structures and rules of engagement are also uncertain.”

General Murphy concluded that based on his firsthand experience, “the UN is not equipped or prepared for the kind of operation required” in southern Lebanon.

UNIFIL’s Serial Aversion to Using Force

One of UNIFIL’s chief failings is its serial aversion to using force, which all but disqualifies it from being effective. Hezbollah has routinely stifled UNIFIL’s freedom of movement for years, as UNIFIL’s [triannual reports](#) chronicle in great detail. From January 2007 to December 2019, UNIFIL [reported](#) roughly 200 such cases, and—representing a major uptick—another 135 such [cases](#) between January 2020 and June 2023. Yet, UNIFIL congenitally [refused](#) to “take all necessary action,” as its mandate authorizes, to secure its personnel’s freedom of movement. This passivity has prevented UNIFIL personnel from accessing, over the course of decades, vast swathes of its area of responsibility across southern Lebanon.



Source: JINSA Data

These incidents continue through the present day. In its latest reporting period from February 21 to June 20, 2025, UNIFIL [reported](#) 43 freedom-of-movement incidents at the hands of Lebanese actors, many violent. These included:

- On May 16, a mob of over 50 individuals—armed with axes and firearms—surrounding a UNIFIL patrol vehicle, ultimately opening fire on it;
- On June 10, a mob of at least 100 individuals swarming a UNIFIL vehicle;
- On June 10, an attempted grenade attack on a UNIFIL patrol; and
- On June 11, a mob of roughly 40 individuals ambushing and attacking a UNIFIL patrol.

None of these incidents spurred any significant UNIFIL response. Out of these 43 instances, UNIFIL personnel used force just once after being shot at. And these reports only show a fragment of the on-the-ground reality. According to former Israeli officials, UNIFIL faces far more impediments to its movement than it publicly reveals.

UNIFIL's Operational Lethargy

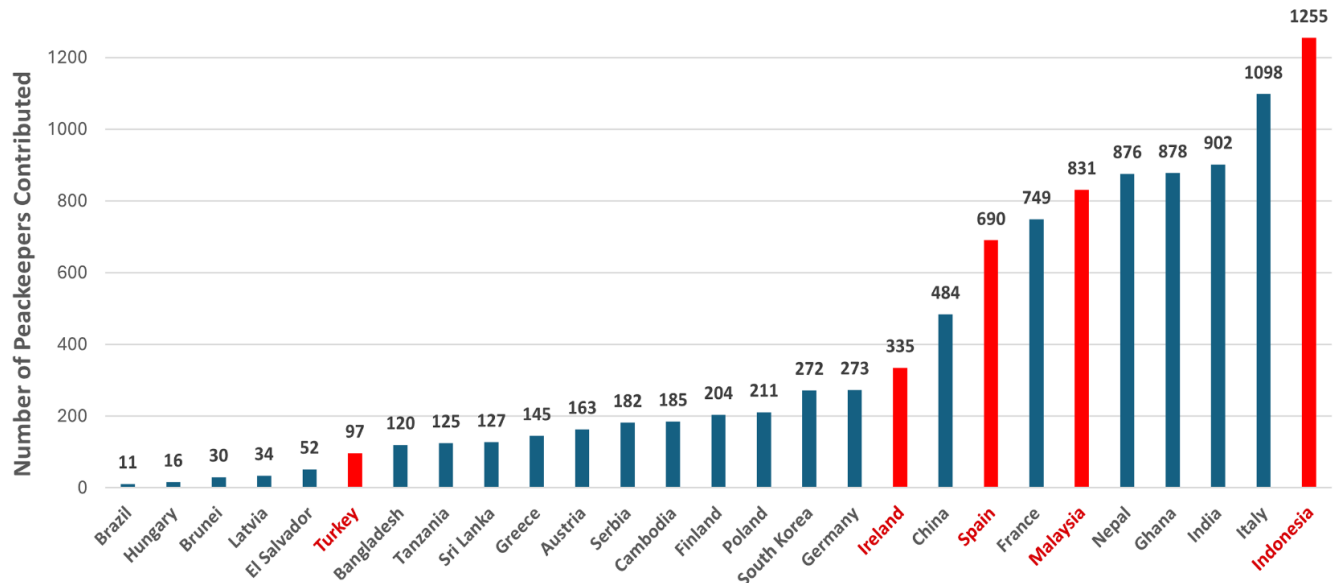
While UNIFIL self-reports its monitoring activity, supposedly including thousands of monthly patrols, these metrics are little more than window-dressing. These box-checking exercises misleadingly give the impression that UNIFIL is actually doing something. However, these patrols are restricted to a small subset of main roads and rarely result in UNIFIL personnel exiting their vehicles for any purpose. Rarely have UNIFIL patrols entered the many remote areas and villages across southern Lebanon where Hezbollah operated for years with impunity.

At the crux of this issue is UNIFIL's [assertion](#) that its personnel cannot access so-called private property, even if they are Hezbollah terror compounds, without a court order. This claim contravenes UNSCR 1701's clear language authorizing UNIFIL to use any means necessary to ensure its area of responsibility is "free of any armed personnel, assets, and weapons" other than those of UNIFIL and the LAF. In addition, UNIFIL did not intervene to stop Hezbollah's military buildup in public open areas along the Lebanon-Israel border, further weakening UNIFIL's dubious claim. And yet, UNIFIL has adopted this rationale to excuse its inaction.

UNIFIL's Corruption, Conflicts of Interest, and Anti-Israel Bias

UNIFIL's failures should come as no surprise given its force composition and leadership makeup. Many UNIFIL peacekeepers, and at times the holder of UNIFIL's rotating chair, hail from countries indifferent to Israel's security threats or openly hostile towards Israel. UNIFIL's current force contingent includes forces from Malaysia, Spain (the prior UNIFIL chairholder), and Turkey. Even short of documented cases of egregious UNIFIL [corruption](#), it is unlikely that peacekeepers from such countries would risk life and limb to counter Hezbollah.

Anti-Israel Bias in UNIFIL Composition (2025)



Note: Figures represent the current UNIFIL contingent according to the latest UN data released in May 2025. Only countries contributing 10+ peacekeepers are listed.

Red shading indicates countries hostile towards Israel. See footnote for more information on criteria.²

Displaying its institutional bias, UNIFIL’s triannual reports make scant mention of the elephant in the room, Hezbollah, but often level blame against Israel. In an anecdotal but representative episode, during a JINSA delegation to Israel in 2009, two UNIFIL officers who met with the group [sharply criticized](#) Israel but did not utter the word Hezbollah once during the briefing. This dynamic persists at the leadership level. During a JINSA [webinar](#) in March, the former chief IDF liaison to UNIFIL, BG Defrin, stated, “if you pick up the phone and call General [Aroldo] Lazaro, [then the] Spanish commander of UNIFIL” and “ask him what the most important thing in south Lebanon [is] now, he will tell you that Israel [must] withdraw immediately.” Indeed, General Lazaro subsequently [voiced](#) this exact view.

Reforming UNIFIL’s Mandate is Not the Answer

Reforming UNIFIL’s mandate would have little effect on UNIFIL’s institutional problems, including its perennial risk aversion, operational lethargy, susceptibility to Hezbollah coercion and bribes, unaccountability, and pervasive anti-Israel bias. Strengthening or reforming UNIFIL’s mandate is therefore not a viable solution, as history shows.

After the 2006 Second Lebanon War, which exposed Hezbollah’s military buildup and ability to operate freely along Israel’s border, the United States spearheaded an effort to strengthen UNIFIL through UNSCR

² Criteria for determining “hostile” status includes UN voting record, policies, and public statements regarding Israel. These include Indonesia’s November 2024 [call](#) for Israel to have its UN General Assembly membership revoked; Ireland’s official [position](#) that Israel is committing genocide and its efforts to [boycott](#) West Bank-based companies; Malaysia’s extensive [ties](#) with Hamas, full [boycott](#) of Israeli maritime trade, and [support](#) for Iranian missile attacks against Israel; and Turkey’s numerous threats against Israel and material support for Hamas, as JINSA extensively documented in an April 23 [policy brief](#).

1701. The resolution raised UNIFIL's troop ceiling to 15,000 and expanded its mandate by authorizing the force to:

- Disarm non-state armed actors in Lebanon and help the LAF secure Lebanon's borders;
- Take "all necessary action" to ensure the area south of Lebanon's Litani River is "free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon" and those of UNIFIL; and
- Ensure its area of responsibility is not used for "hostile activities" and use any means necessary to prevent interference with UNIFIL's duties and freedom of movement.

U.S.-led efforts in 2006 to broaden UNIFIL's mandate in UNSCR 1701 did nothing to help the situation, an important lesson for today. UNSCR 1701's *de facto* vote of trust in UNIFIL to help prevent Hezbollah's vast military buildup resulted in the postponement—not the prevention—of another major Israel-Hezbollah war. The United States should not repeat this mistake. At bedrock, UNIFIL's institutional weakness, cautiousness, and bias—not the substance or scope of its mandate—have been the primary impediments to its success.

A Better Way Forward

What happens if UNIFIL ceases to exist? Given the force's minimal contributions, and periodic obstacles, to peace in Lebanon, UNIFIL's dissolution could only improve the situation. Eliminating UNIFIL will transfer full responsibility for Lebanon's security to the Lebanese state. In addition, without UNIFIL meddling, Lebanon can more directly work with Israel, the United States, and the multinational U.S.-led International Monitoring and Implementation Mechanism (IMIM).

Lebanon, since the 1980s, has been under the control of a Hezbollah shadow government propped up by Syria's Assad regime and Iran. Now, with two of those entities significantly weakened and one extinct, and Lebanon under new political leadership, there is hope for peace. President Joseph Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam, elected in January and February, respectively, have both [pledged](#) to [disarm](#) Hezbollah. President Aoun, to restore, in his words, Lebanon's "state monopoly on arms," has directed the LAF to operate across traditional Hezbollah strongholds in southern and eastern Lebanon, with considerable success.

Since November, the LAF has, thanks to Israel's battlefield success, unprecedented military parity with—if not superiority over—Hezbollah. As a result, the newly emboldened LAF has:

- Achieved [80 percent](#) of its objectives to disarm Hezbollah in south Lebanon;
- Carried out [over 450](#) operations targeting Hezbollah personnel and assets;
- Dismantled [over 500](#) Hezbollah terror infrastructure sites and arms depots; and
- Coerced Hezbollah into ceding control of [190 terror sites](#) to the LAF.

Of course, the LAF cannot achieve Hezbollah's full dismantlement overnight, and Israel will still need to act preemptively against emergent Hezbollah threats well into the future. Washington must therefore make crystal clear its continued support for Israel's freedom of action. The United States should also accelerate efforts to strengthen the LAF as a force capable of preventing Hezbollah's resurgence. To this end, the United States [unfroze](#) \$95 million in then-suspended military aid to Lebanon in March and, in mid-July, the U.S. State Department [approved](#) a \$100 million sustainment deal for Lebanon's A-29 light attack aircraft.

But this aid should be contingent on the LAF being serious about, and effective at, countering Hezbollah. Considerable U.S. leverage—including not just foreign military financing but also America's [role](#) as the supplier of 85 percent of LAF equipment—should be brought to bear to ensure the LAF makes necessary reforms, including terminating any Hezbollah cooperation, effectively sealing Lebanon off from inbound

arms and cash infusions en route to Hezbollah, and cooperating fully with Israel and the U.S.-led IMIM mechanism.

In tandem, the United States should push U.S. allies, as JINSA noted in its November [report](#), *Suppressing Iran's Ring of Fire in Lebanon*, to help strengthen the LAF. These include:

- The United Kingdom, which funds, provides special forces training to, and helps construct border posts for, the LAF;
- Germany, which trains the Lebanese navy;
- Jordan, which contributes armored vehicles to the LAF's infantry units; and
- Saudi Arabia, which used to provide Lebanon military aid but has since terminated it.

Ending the Rubber Stamp of UNIFIL's Renewal

UNIFIL's mandate—and thus existence—is renewed annually by a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) vote each August.

The mechanism for UNIFIL's mandate renewal, or termination, is a simple one. UNIFIL's authority to exist—which automatically expires on August 31—will be put up for vote in the form of a UNSC resolution introduced by the UNSC Lebanon agenda penholder, France, in the coming weeks. After being introduced, the mandate renewal resolution will be voted on by all five permanent UNSC members (P5) and all ten non-permanent UNSC members. To pass, the resolution would require the affirmative vote of at least three of the P5 countries—the United States, United Kingdom, France, China and Russia—but could be torpedoed by the veto of any P5 nation.

These votes typically generate little fanfare or pushback. Just once, in 2020, did the United States [threaten](#) to veto the mandate in an attempt to push reforms.

This time, the United States should make good on that threat. The United States should veto any UNSC resolution authorizing UNIFIL's mandate renewal between now and August 31. Since UNIFIL's mandate must be renewed by August 31 or it will cease to exist, the United States has the power to effectively terminate UNIFIL.

UNIFIL, the supposedly interim peacekeeping force, has a 47-year track record of failure and is beyond reform. By eliminating UNIFIL, and supporting the LAF, the United States can save over \$100 million per year in taxpayer funds while making Lebanon, and Israel, safer.