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MEMO

Israel's Ground Operations Creating Environment for International Force

Israeli ground forces are conducting operations in Lebanon in order to degrade Hizballah's military capabilities and create a buffer zone that will prevent future attacks by Hizballah. Israel's goal is not to reoccupy south Lebanon, but to create an environment that would allow a multi-national force to take control of the area and ultimately pave the way for the Lebanese army to exercise sovereignty over all Lebanon. Israel's targeted ground operations will help create the conditions for a durable cease-fire and the disarming of Hizballah as called for under U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559.

Israel is seeking to create a buffer zone in southern Lebanon to prevent Hizballah from launching future attacks into Israel.

- Israel fully withdrew from Lebanon in May 2000, a move certified by the U.N. Since the withdrawal, Hizballah planned for renewed fighting, stockpiling more than 10,000 rockets and missiles from Syria and Iran and setting up an intricate network of fighting positions, bunkers and booby traps within civilian areas.
- Hizballah's years of extensive preparation contributed to the unprovoked killing and seizing of Israeli soldiers as well as the indiscriminate firing of thousands of rockets on Israeli cities.
- Israel is attempting to expel Hizballah fighters from the Israeli border area and severely weaken their infrastructure in order to create a security zone in southern Lebanon that will prevent the terrorist organization from embarking on ground assaults or continuing to launch short-range rockets into Israel.
- The 12,000 soldiers now operating in Lebanon against Hizballah comprise only a fraction of the total IDF manpower of roughly 600,000 active and reserve troops. Many of these Israeli units spend less than 24 hours in Lebanon before they return to Israel.
- Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has made clear that Israel does not seek "to occupy any Lebanese land. We just don't want the land to be a base of continuous aggression and violence against the people of Israel."

The use of ground troops allows Israel to carry out critical missions while minimizing civilian casualties.

- Although Israel has successfully debilitated much of Hizballah's command and control structure and destroyed many of its rockets through an air campaign, ground units are needed to drive out the Hizballah forces acting autonomously in Lebanon's south.

- Hizballah's rockets are small, mobile and easy to hide, necessitating ground incursions to deplete the terrorist group's arsenal. IDF Lt. Col. Ishai Efroni said a Hizballah fighter "wakes up in the morning, drinks his coffee, takes a rocket out of his closet, goes to his neighbor's yard, sticks a clock timer on it, goes back home and then watches CNN to see where it lands."
- In light of Hizballah's deliberate and cynical decision to position its terrorists in the middle of Lebanese civilian areas, the IDF is limiting the risks to civilians by directly engaging Hizballah fighters on the ground. The IDF has chosen to wage these operations despite the increased risk they pose to its soldiers, dozens of whom have died during the fighting.

The Israeli ground campaign seeks to create the necessary conditions for the full implementation of U.N. Security Resolution 1559.

- Israeli and American officials both have made clear that a cease-fire without the disarmament of Hizballah will not prevent a similar conflict in the future. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said a cease-fire would not be sufficient "if that cessation of violence is hostage to Hizballah's next decision to launch missiles into Israel."
- The aim of the ground operations is to reduce Hizballah's ability to operate in southern Lebanon before an international force or elements of the Lebanese army arrive. Israel's efforts will help ensure that those troops are less susceptible to military encounters with Hizballah and make it easier for them to disarm the terrorist group as called for under U.N. Resolution 1559.
- By destroying Hizballah's stronghold in southern Lebanon, Israel also is creating an environment in which the government of Lebanon can ultimately exercise sovereign control over all of its territory.

Basic Facts Summary

- Israel not seeking to reoccupy southern Lebanon. Its goal is to create a buffer zone in the south to prevent Hizballah from launching future attacks into Israel.
- The use of ground troops allows Israel to carry out critical missions while limiting the number of civilian casualties.
- The Israeli ground campaign seeks to create the necessary conditions for the full implementation of U.N. Security Resolution 1559.