

Israeli soldiers leave five towns in south Lebanon

■ U.N. forces prepare to expand their presence

By Todd Pittman
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BEIRUT, Lebanon — Israeli forces left five villages in southern Lebanon and were replaced Tuesday by Lebanese troops, and U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said he expected progress within 48 hours on efforts to have Israel lift its blockade under a behind-the-scenes deal negotiated recently.

The Lebanese troops moved into the center of a Hezbollah stronghold devastated by weeks of fighting, witnesses and the U.N. peacekeeping mission said.

U.N. peacekeepers patrolled the area and set up new checkpoints before Lebanese forces took over. A U.N. force is preparing to expand from 2,000 to 15,000 troops and deploy throughout the south with an equal number of Lebanese sol-

diery as Israeli forces withdraw. Turkish lawmakers debated whether to send troops as part of the expanded U.N. force, with the government strongly supporting deployment, but public opinion divided.

Israeli troops withdrew from the villages of Beit Lif, al-Qawzah, Dibel, Ein Ibel and Mhaibeb, all in the southeast corner of Lebanon near the larger town of Bint Jbail, according to the UNIFIL mission.

The mission's Ghanaian Battalion set up seven checkpoints and patrolled the area intensively, confirming that Israeli forces had left, a statement said. About 250 Lebanese soldiers then moved into the area, witnesses and Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported.

Lebanese soldiers who had been at checkpoints on the outskirts of Bint Jbail moved for the first time into the town's



RESIDENTS THROW rice and wave to Lebanese troops Tuesday driving through the village of Hanin, southern Lebanon, on their way to be deployed near the border with Israel.

center. The National News Agency said 120 soldiers arrived in armored personnel carriers, trucks and jeeps. Bint Jbail was the scene of fierce ground fighting between Israeli forces and Hezbollah guerrillas and large parts of the town are in ruins.

Lebanese troops also deployed in the nearby villages of Ainata and Aitaroun. Witnesses said the troops were greeted with dancing as women

showered them with rice and some men slaughtered sheep.

The Israeli army spokesman's office confirmed that troops had pulled out of the towns and surrounding areas, and said the withdrawal would continue in stages in the coming days.

Israel withdrew most of its forces after the cease-fire took effect, leaving small numbers in some border villages where Hezbollah is active.

Annan warns of Darfur crisis after pullout

■ Sudanese government refuses entrance to U.N. forces, saying they would reassert Western colonial control of the country

By Mohamed Osman
ASSOCIATED PRESS

KHARTOUM, Sudan — The U.N. secretary-general warned Tuesday that Sudan would bear full responsibility for the worsening humanitarian crisis in Darfur, as African Union peacekeepers said they will have to pull out because of the government's refusal to allow a U.N.-led force to take over.

The cash-starved and understaffed African Union force, whose mandate ends Sept. 30, has been unable to halt the violence in Sudan's western region. Sudan, which recently launched a new military offensive against rebels in Darfur, has ordered the African Union out if it insists on handing over the mission to the United Nations.

The absence of any foreign troops in Darfur would likely lead to widespread misery or starvation in camps flooded with refugees from a bloody conflict that has raged for the past 3½ years. International aid workers — lacking any protection — would almost certainly pull out if the 7,000 AU troops leave and are not replaced by U.N. peacekeepers. The U.N. has warned of hundreds of thousands more deaths if aid operations collapse.

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir has rejected the U.N. presence as an attempt to impose Western colonial control over his country and has instead offered to send 10,000 government troops to Darfur. Critics say such a move would only inflame the violence.

Despite Secretary-General Kofi Annan's sharp warning, the U.N. and the West — preoccupied with crises in the Middle East — may have little appetite or ability to push Sudan hard to comply. Many observers believe Sudan has dug in against a U.N. deployment in the Texas-sized region because it wants to finish off the rebels, and also fears the international force will hunt down officials and government allies suspected of war crimes.

Annan criticized Sudan's call for the departure of the African peacekeepers and expressed concern at its refusal to accept the 20,000-member U.N. force, which would have a stronger mandate to end the fighting. He warned that Sudan would be unable to address the humanitarian disaster.

"The international community has been feeding about 3 million people in camps, and if we have to leave because of lack of security, lack of access to the people, then what happens? The government will have to assume responsibility for doing this, and if it doesn't succeed, it will have lots of questions to answer before the rest of the world," Annan said in the Egyptian port city of Alexandria after talks with President Hosni Mubarak.

NATO: Latest fighting kills 50 Taliban

By Noor Khan
ASSOCIATED PRESS

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — U.S. artillery and airstrikes killed between 50 and 60 suspected Taliban militants Tuesday, and NATO's civilian chief warned that insurgency-wracked Afghanistan could again become a failed state if the international community loses the battle to stabilize it.

The U.S. troops, operating under NATO command, clashed with the militants in Panjwayl district of Kandahar province,

where an offensive began over the weekend to flush out hundreds of Taliban fighters. NATO has already reported more than 200 Taliban killed in the operation.

Maj. Quentin Innis, a NATO spokesman, said the troops had identified Taliban positions and the two sides had exchanged fire. He said the estimate of 50 to 60 killed was based on reports from troops looking through "weapons sights and other observation devices."

He said there had been no NATO or Afghan troop casual-

ties. It wasn't possible for reporters to reach the battle site to confirm the death toll independently.

A Panjwayl district council member, Haji Agha Lalai, said bombings by NATO warplanes have killed 21 civilians in the past three days in an area called Zungawad.

NATO spokesman Maj. Scott Lundy said he had no immediate details to support Lalai's claims.

The bloody contest between resurgent Taliban militants and U.S. and NATO forces has left

hundreds dead in each of the past four months — the deadliest violence since the pro-al-Qaida Taliban regime's 2001 ouster.

The latest clashes came as NATO's leaders and diplomats were in Afghanistan to sign a security and development accord with President Hamid Karzai and to assess progress in the alliance's mission to tame the volatile south.

"The fight must be won and will be won," NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said.

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- PUBLIC NOTICE -

The U.S. Department of the Navy Announces
Availability of the Record of Decision for
Former Western Hangar Zone - Installation Restoration Site 26
Alameda Point, California

On July 31, 2006, the U.S. Department of the Navy (Navy) signed a record of decision (ROD) for Installation Restoration Site 26 at the former Naval Air Station Alameda (now referred to as "Alameda Point") in Alameda, California. The ROD was also signed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the California Environmental Protection Agency Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), and the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board (Water Board) on August 2, 3, and 7, 2006, respectively. The ROD documents the Navy's no further action decision for soil and remedial action decision for groundwater at Site 26.

Site 26 is located in the central portion of Alameda Point, which is adjacent to the City of Oakland, and occupies 1,734 acres of onshore land. The Navy used the site for aircraft parking, maneuvering, washdown, fueling, and maintenance as well as for painting and finishing operations. As a result of these activities, areas of groundwater were contaminated with volatile organic compounds (VOC). Based on data collected during thorough investigations of the site and assessments of potential human health and ecological risks, the selected remedial action for VOCs in groundwater at Site 26 is Alternative 6, which includes installation of monitoring wells and sampling, implementation of expedient and proven treatment strategies, and short-term land use and access restrictions at the site. The expected outcome of the selected remedial action is to restore the groundwater quality at Site 26 by reducing contaminant concentrations to levels that no longer pose a threat to human health. Remedial action, land use restrictions, and environmental monitoring are not required for Site 26 soil. These findings support the eventual transfer to and redevelopment of the property by the Alameda Reuse and Redevelopment Authority.

Copies of the Site 26 ROD will be available for public review at the following information repository beginning September 19, 2006:

Alameda Point
950 West Mall Square
Building 1, Rooms 240-241
Alameda, California
Telephone: (510) 749-5800

The ROD can also be viewed at the Navy Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Program Management Office's website for Alameda Point at www.bracpmo.navy.mil.

For more information regarding the Site 26 ROD, please contact Mr. Thomas Macchiarella, BRAC Environmental Coordinator, by calling (619) 532-0907 or sending an e-mail message to Thomas.macchiarella@navy.mil.

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