

Middle Powers and Peace Operations: Expecting the New Innovation of Conflict Resolutions

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Abstract

The current stalemate of the UN Security Council and its permanent members as a leading role in international security essentially expect the increasing role of the middle powers. The traditional definition of the middle powers discussed by some academic figures such as Bernard Wood is still valid and therefore expect their initiative and even innovation of new peace operations and conflict resolution on the whole. The unsuccessful records of great powers' involvement of international conflicts also illustrate the limitations of their coercive measures. This article will describe the historical background of the creation of the first UN peacekeeping forces in 1956, which was innovated by the two political figures from the middle powers with a considerable enthusiasm. Therefore, this article will advocate the innovation of a new type of peace operations or conflict resolutions which are expected to be practiced by the Asian middle powers, which are Asian Monitoring Missions and Ocean Peacekeeping Operations in Asia.

Keywords : middle powers, peace operations, innovation, monitoring missions, ocean peacekeeping

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1. Introduction

Currently, the role and status as political leaders by the great powers including the permanent members of the UN Security Council has been increasingly declined. It is partly due to the deteriorated relations among P-5, especially, the US, Russia, and China, and partly due to a permanent member's irresponsibly activity, for example, in its maritime region. Especially, in Asia, the Security Council is being completely paralyzed. In this situation, it is essential for the

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international community to expect the leadership and initiative taken by the middle powers.

This short article, therefore, will deal with the potential for the middle powers to play the larger role in conflict resolutions, especially, in Asia. First, this article will argue the traditional definition of the middle powers after the World War II. This article will discuss about why the middle powers are appropriate to be selected as the current and next leaders as peacekeepers and peacemakers. One of the answers to the discussion can be argued from the history of the significant achievement and innovation of two political figures from the middle powers in the Suez Crisis in 1956. Finally, this article will advocate the innovation of a new type of peace operations or conflict resolutions which had hardly been conducted in Asia and are expected to be practiced by the Asian middle powers. The new missions are Asian Monitoring Missions and Ocean Peacekeeping Operations in Asia.

2. What are the Middle Powers?

The middle powers, by nature, are states that hold a position in the international power spectrum that is in the “middle”—below that of a super- and great powers.

In the early post-1945 period, the term of middle powers had been used in discourse about Australian and Canadian foreign policy. According to Andrew Cooper, responsibility in selected areas of international organization was considered to be commensurate with burden assumed. Australia and Canada then directed their attention towards the domains where they held a high degree of resources and reputational qualification. Their stance provided themselves with enhanced status in the international system, which distinguished them from the great and small powers. They were regarded as middle powers, and later their diplomacy was called “niche diplomacy”.¹

In the history, there have been the conceptional contestation in terms of the definition of middle powers. In 1988, Bernard Wood advocated five roles which would define middle powers at regional and global levels: (1) as a regional or sub-regional leader; (2) as a functional leader; (3) as a stabilizer; (4) as a free rider or status seeker; and (5) being a good multilateral citizen, supporting actions such as UN peacekeeping operations.² Meanwhile, in 1994, Andrew Cooper, Richard Higgot and Kim Nosal defined four categories of middle powers. They called “geographic”, “normative”, “positional”, and “behavioural” middle powers. In particular, they summarize the “behavioural” definition as the type of diplomatic behaviour, such as the pursuit of multilateral solutions to international problems, compromise in international disputes, and good international citizenship.³

How different are middle powers from small powers? Compared to small powers, middle powers have a tendency to prioritize enhancing their international influence and status. Militarily, middle powers often invest in offensive military capabilities for regional or global projection, which is uncommon for small powers.⁴ As a result, middle powers strive for achieving leading roles regionally as well as internationally⁵, which is unlike for small powers.

How different are middle powers from great powers? Middle powers are defined to favour multilateral foreign policy and the formation of coalitions rather than great-power-led unilateral decision-making in foreign policy.⁶ They share a preference for confidence-building measures and conflict reduction in promoting international security. Therefore, middle powers have a general preference for multilateral operations including UN peacekeeping operations as well as peace-building.

Traditionally, the middle powers have been considered to be ideal peacekeepers or peacemakers. On the one hand, in a peacekeeping role which mainly focuses on mediation and arbitration, the coercive nature of the great powers and their colonial history will make host states apprehensive. On the other hand, peacekeeping is a para-military role which requires appropriate military equipment, mission skills, discipline of soldiers, and high morale amongst troops. Middle powers can also provide logistical support capability, which is another important factor in peacekeeping missions. Therefore, peacekeeping gives the middle powers a chance to have a leading role in international security issues, which can restrict the superpowers' dominance. This intention has been most of the middle power contribution.⁷

3. Why are Middle Powers Expected as a Leading Role Now?

3.1 *The stalemate of the UN Security Council*

At the time of writing, one can witness the increasing instability of international security, especially, in the Asia-Pacific region. For example, in Myanmar, the humanitarian crisis by the violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state in August 2017 resulted in more than 90,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. In the same state, the military coup occurred in February 2021, and Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained. While the US administration has been ready to impose sanctions against the military regime in Myanmar from a human right perspective, no Security Council resolution has been approved on the issue. Japan is only developed nation that can engage in dialogue with the military.⁸

Meanwhile, the withdrawal of the US military from Afghanistan in August 2021 obviously helped the Taliban regime gain the momentum. In several days, the Taliban occupied the whole territory of Afghanistan. The US administration sent the message that "it's time to end America's longest war" at the time of 20th anniversary of the so-called "9.11 terrorists attack" of 2001. However, China and Russia made approaches to the Taliban. At a meeting of foreign ministers in mid-July 2021, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization of China, Russia and Central Asian countries stressed the importance of Afghan-led dialogue, expressing their status to remove the US involvement.⁹

On the maritime issues in Asia, for example, China has long claimed the territorial right of the South China Sea inside the Nine-Dash Line. In 2011, Indonesia and the Philippines officially objected to China's claim. In 2013, the Philippines instituted arbitral proceedings against China under Annex VII to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. In 2016, the South China Sea Arbitration fully approved the Philippines' claim and offer and dismissed China's claim on the legitimacy of the Nine-Dash Line, its continental shelf and its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The Arbitration insisted that the maritime territory which China claimed in South China Sea is beyond 200 nautical miles from China. The Arbitration did not approve the historical right which China claimed, either. However, China claimed that the judgement of the Arbitration was invalid.¹⁰ In February 2021, Beijing enforced a law that allows the Chinese Coast Guard to use weapons in the Sea, and, reportedly, intimidation by Chinese vessels in the Sea occurred repeatedly.¹¹

Considering of the above cases, it is obvious that several permanent members of the UN Security Council have not played their leading role in the UN for the purpose of the maintenance of international peace and security. In other words, the super- and the great- powers have virtually abandoned the duties of their commitment to creating global security. Therefore, if so, who should replace such great powers as peacemakers or peacekeepers? The answer would be "middle powers".

3.2 *The limitations of coercive conflict resolutions led by great powers*

In the past, several “coercive” conflict resolutions have been tried and identified for peacekeeping or peacemaking operations. However, the history has proved that such resolutions had not resulted in the successful implementation of the mandates but the high number of casualties.

In the Congo back in 1960, then UN Secretary General U Thant considered that using force would be only way to crack down the secessionists in Katanga. Therefore, the UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC), conducted peace enforcement, attacking Katangese roadblocks to restore its freedom of movement. Skirmishing the gendarmerie and ONUC led to a large-scale fighting in December 1961. Eventually, ONUC implemented the mandate of securing the withdrawal of foreign troops from the Congo and ending the secession of Katanga. However, ONUC had 250 UN fatalities which was among the worst records in UN peacekeeping operations during the Cold War period. It also took about 30 years before the UN deployed another mission in Africa. The UN’s reputation suffered tremendous damage as a result of peace enforcement of ONUC.¹²

In the post-Cold War period, especially, in the 1990s and 2000s, most of the UN peace operations were conducted under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Among them, the US troops were heavily involved in the United Nations Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOMII) in Somalia. Contrary to the general optimistic views among Washington, American troops consisting of more than 3,000 forces including Task Force Rangers had been severely defeated by General Aideed-led militias.¹³ Complying with American public’s strong pressure and request¹⁴, the US Government decided the withdrawal of its troops from Somalia without implementing mandates. Following the fiasco of UNOSOMII, peace enforcement was seriously reconsidered to be deployed, and the US administration expressed a more selective stance to deploy the US troops to UN peace operations. By adopting peace enforcement in an inconsistent manner, the UN was also accused of “attempting to do too much or of not doing enough; of relying too heavily on force or of reacting passively to the use of force by others; of trying to run things or failing to be assertive enough.”¹⁵

Above all, the US- and then North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan is a typical case that great powers-led security and stabilization operations do not tend to work effectively in the end. In the so-called “post 9.11” period, ISAF, which was established by UN Security Council 1386 in December 2001 pursuant to the Bonn Agreement, was by far the biggest international security operation for the purpose of creating stability in Afghanistan. By 2010 the US accounted for the majority of troops. At its peak, ISAF had roughly 130,000 troops, and a total of 42 countries, including 30 NATO members, contributed to ISAF. In fact, not only the US but also many NATO states made a shift from UN peace operations to ISAF for their dispatch to peace or security operations. For example, while Poland dispatched 1,097 forces to UN peace operations in December 1996, the state did not send even a single staff to UN operation but instead sent 2,580 forces to ISAF in October 2011. Likewise, while Romania provided 836 forces to UN peace operations in December 1996, the state sent 1,947 forces to ISAF without sending any troops to UN operation in October 2011.¹⁶ However, despite the enduring commitment of ISAF to Afghanistan, the stability of Afghanistan had not been fully recovered until the total withdrawal of ISAF troops in December 2014. Afterwards, the US and several states’ troops continued deploying in Afghanistan. After receiving a serious number of coalition casualties of US and NATO troops¹⁷ caused by improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, for example, the last US troops withdrew from Afghanistan in August 2021, which directly caused the total occupation of the Taliban regime afterwards.

Thus, the above clearly indicates that great powers-led coercive peace or security operations such as UNOSOMII and

ISAF as well as UN-led ONUC had not been successful. Peace enforcement, stability operations and security-building operations as well as robust operations, which can all be called coercive operations, might be effective only in specific cases and in short periods. However, as history indicates, such operations cannot get enduring reputation as stable and legitimate operations. If so, less coercive and stabler operations with more peaceful means will get more legitimacy and support from the international community. Such operations would not necessarily require great powers' heavy and sophisticated troops.

3.3 Similarity to the situation of the Suez Crisis in 1956

Above all, the current situation on the stage of international politics is similar to that at the time of the so-called "Suez Crisis" in 1956, when the UN Security Council did not work functionally. In the Suez Crisis, the two permanent members in the Security Council, Britain and France, in collusion with Israel, invaded a smaller state Egypt after President Abdel Nasser's announcement of the nationalization of the Suez. At the time, the US was unwilling to bring armed force to bear on the invaders, and the Soviet Union was not prepared to make such a move on her own.¹⁸ There were growing concerns that some alternative should supplement or replace great-powers-led collective security measures for conflict management. The new system should ideally embrace the characteristics of complete impartiality and fairness, and encourage the small and middle powers willing to join rather than trusting to military power. During the crisis, the first UN peacekeeping force, namely, the United Nations Emergency Force I (UNEF I) was innovated due to the great ambition and achievement of two political figures from the middle powers; Lester Pearson, the Secretary for External Affairs of Canada, and Dag Hammarskjold, the Swedish Secretary General in the UN. On 7 November 1956, the General Assembly adopted resolution 1001, establishing UNEF I to secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities in the Suez Crisis. The resolution called for an immediate ceasefire and recommended that all Member States refrain from military goods in the area. Without the peacekeeping force, Britain and France would not have complied with the resolution and not have withdrawn from the Suez because of their pride as great powers. Therefore, UNEF I was a face-saving measure to maintain the great powers' status. The US was also enthusiastic about the achievement by Hammarskjold and Pearson on the Middle East in 1956.¹⁹

The situation of international security in 2021, especially, in Myanmar, Afghanistan and South China Sea, is similar to that in the Suez Crisis in 1956. Like in 1956, the UN Security Council cannot directly be involved in the above areas, and the permanent members of Security Council were directly involved in the conflicts; the US in Afghanistan and China in the South China Sea. During the stalemate of the UN Security Council and the direct involvement of great powers, it is essential for one to expect the commitment of middle powers in the conflicting areas mentioned above. Ideally, like during the Suez Crisis, the political figures from the middle powers are expected to innovate the new type of conflict resolution measures to create peace and stability in the conflicting areas.

4. What can be Innovated by Middle Powers?

4.1 Asian Monitoring Missions in Myanmar

In terms of monitoring missions, one can identify several EU Monitoring Missions (EUMM). Former EUMM began opening in July 1991 under the name of European Community Monitor Mission (ECMM) in the former Yugoslavia. Since then, EUMM has been successfully deployed to Georgia, Ukraine and Aceh.

In the case of ECMM in the former Yugoslavia, for example, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was created

between EC and the host governments. The MoU detailed the ECMM's status, area of responsibility and assignment in each republic of the former Yugoslavia. Their tasks included monitoring and reporting on the political, military and humanitarian situations, investigating and reporting breaches of the peace agreement, called the Brioni agreement. The mission comprised about 200 military officers, diplomats and civilian staff of the EC Commission. All monitors were unarmed.²⁰ EU Monitoring Missions are similar to UN Observer Missions. The main objective of both is to observe/monitor and report. The difference is that the UN deploys only military officer in its observer missions while the EU deploys both military and civilians as well. EU Monitoring Missions are required to maintain strict neutrality in their missions, which is also quite similar to UN peacekeeping operations.

It is to be noted that there is one EU Monitoring Mission which has involved Russia, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, which is the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia. EUMM Georgia was deployed on 1 October 2008. The objective of EUMM Georgia was to contribute to the stabilization of the situation, caused by the tension between Georgian military force and Russian armed forces over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in accordance with the six-point Sarkozy-Medvedev Agreement of 12 August 2008. One of "the six point" of the agreement was "Russian armed forces will be pulled back on the line, preceding the start of hostilities."²¹ The main tasks of EUMM Georgia, consisting of 200 EU monitors included monitoring the situation pertaining to the stabilization and normalization building, the return of internal displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees.²² All EU member states have contributed to the mission, which means that smaller states as well as middle powers can deploy their personnel to monitoring missions.

Therefore, it is strongly recommended that Asian Monitoring Missions should be created led by several middle powers in the region. For example, in order to establish a monitoring mission in Myanmar, a "Memorandum of Understanding" would be required with the military regime in Myanmar. The MoU should stipulate the tasks of "Asian Monitoring Mission Myanmar" including monitoring and reporting on the political, military and humanitarian situations in Myanmar, and stabilization building including the return of the Rohingya refugees. Asian Monitoring Mission in Myanmar should consist of several Asian middle powers such as ASEAN states, the states in the Middle East, India, Pakistan, South Korea, and Japan. Especially, Japan's role is highly expected since Japan is only developed nation that can engage in dialogue with the military, as mentioned before. The military regime would accept such a monitoring mission from the Asian middle powers since the regime would desperately need the political legitimacy from the region.

In accordance with the interview with Colonel Colm Doyle, who was head of the EC Monitor Mission to the former Yugoslavia, he argues that for such a mission to be effective, liaison with the EU authorities is to be recommended. From his experience as head of EUMM, Colonel Doyle points out that a lot of policies of EUMM depended on the leadership of the Headquarters and that in addition leadership of the EUMM changed every six months. Since some nation's policy on the issues of conflicting areas in the missions, differed from others, this could be challenging in the potential monitoring mission in Asia.²³

In fact, a short-term monitoring mission of experts from the EU visited Myanmar in terms of human rights and labor rights on 28-31 October 2018.²⁴ With a liaison with EU states, Asian monitoring missions are expected to be innovated and practiced, led by the middle powers.

4.2 Ocean Peacekeeping Operations in the South China Sea

The South China Sea is geopolitically and geoeconomically very important for the international community as well as Asian countries. Essentially, the South China Sea is a significant shipping passage with \$5.3 trillion worth of trade

cruising through its waters every year. The total amount is nearly one-third of all global maritime trade. Therefore, a source of tension in the South China Sea will put global economy in jeopardy. For example, for Japan, a typical middle power's country the South China Sea should be secured for the passage of Japanese oil tankers from the Middle East. Furthermore, Japan is increasingly desperate to secure its economy resources. Japan allocates more budget to participate in the oil and natural gas drilling activities in the South China Sea, searching for alternative energy resources, from diversifying origins. Likewise, the South China Sea is valuable for fishery industries. Around 12 % of the global fish catch comes from the South China Sea. Fisheries traditionally play an important role in food security and traditional cuisine in the Asian countries.²⁵

In terms of the issue of maritime security, the concept of "ocean peacekeeping (OPK)" operations. In fact, the concept of ocean peacekeeping was formulated more than 20 years ago. The ocean peacekeeping is conducted by the regional maritime forces for the stable and sustainable development of oceans. Ocean peacekeeping conducts activities necessary to execute the obligation required in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and coordinates activities by regional arrangement with the objectives of maintaining the maritime order and preventing armed conflicts at sea. Ocean peacekeeping conducts joint monitoring activities by the sea vessels or aircraft from the maritime forces. The activities include monitoring fishing activities beyond the waters under the regional governments' control. It would also extend the service to monitoring of illegal entries, refugees, armed pirates, suspicious vessels and other illegal activities. Therefore, ocean peacekeeping will contribute to the prevention of regional armed conflict.²⁶

In this sense, several Asian middle powers would be able to provide the maritime forces for ocean peacekeeping operations in the South China Sea. For example, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Forces (MSDF) have been deployed with an escort ship at Gulf of Aden in Djibouti, Africa, as the coast guard for the anti-piracy missions. The Japanese MSDF can show its presence in the South China Sea by going through to Djibouti. Furthermore, the Japanese MSDF can take an initiative to create the ocean peacekeeping operations.

In fact, in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Maritime Task Force (MTF) has been deployed since 2006. MTF supports the Lebanese Navy in monitoring its territorial waters and preventing the unauthorized entry of arms. A total of 15 countries have contributed to the MTF. Most of them are European states such as Germany, France, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands, and includes several Asian countries of Bangladesh and Indonesia.²⁷ Therefore, the Japanese, Bangladeshi, and Indonesian maritime forces are expected to establish the ocean peacekeeping operations, possibly with some assistance from European states, in the South China Sea. The ocean peacekeeping operations led by Asian middle powers would prevent intimidation by Chinese vessels in the South China Sea which has occurred repeatedly.

5. Conclusion

This article initially argued the classical definition of the middle powers. At the present time, "niche diplomacy" suggested by Cooper is no more appropriate to be defined for the middle powers. Meanwhile, "a regional leader", "a functional leader", "a stabilizer" and "a good multilateral citizen" defined by Wood is still highly valid for the middle powers. Middle powers prefer confidence-building measures and conflict reduction by multilateral operations. Therefore, they are suitable to conduct a certain kind of peace operations.

Their leading role as peacekeeper or peacemakers is increasingly demanded in the international community. It is mainly due to the stalemate of the UN Security Council led by great- and super powers. The tendency is particularly deteriorated in Asia such as Myanmar, Afghanistan, and the South China Sea, where the Security Council is unwilling to be interested and even worse the permanent member of the Security Council is illegitimately and illegally involved, directly. Noticeably, the author of the article argued that the current situation in Asia is similar to that in the Middle East, the so-called “Suez Crisis” in 1956. At the crisis, two enthusiastic political figures from the middle powers innovated the new mechanism of conflict resolutions, namely, UN peacekeeping forces. Needless to mention, their innovation significantly influenced the whole system of conflict resolution measures afterwards. Therefore, some Asian middle powers’ leaders are also expected to innovate the similar kind of new conflict resolutions or peace operations. This article modestly suggested the two types of new peace operations, which are Asian Monitoring Missions in Myanmar, and Ocean Peacekeeping Operations in the South China Sea. Both types of operations are not new. The similar type of operations to ocean peacekeeping operations has been conducted in Lebanon as Maritime Task Forces in UNIFIL. Monitoring missions have already been experienced by EU states mainly in Europe. However, such operations have not been actively operated in Asia, yet. Past lessons should be learned, and the current Asian crisis should be tackled by the solution to the crisis in the past. The new innovation of conflict resolutions by the middle powers is highly expected.

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³ Quoted from Jeffrey Robertson “Middle-power definitions: confusion reigns supreme”, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 4, 2017, p. 360

⁴ Hakan Edstrom and Jacob Westberg, “The defense strategies of middle powers: Competing for security, influence and status in an era of unipolar demise”, *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2020, p. 184

⁵ Hakan Edstrom and Jacob Westberg, “The defense strategies of middle powers: Competing for security, influence and status in an era of unipolar demise”, *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2020, p. 184

⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/middle-power>. Accessed on 11 May 2021

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⁸ *The Japan News*, 20 February 2021

⁹ *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, 3 August 2021

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¹¹ *The Japan News*, 9 April 2021

¹² William Durch “The UN Operation in the Congo: 1960-1964” in William Durch (ed.) *The Evolution of UN Peacekeeping* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), pp. 346-348

¹³ Eighteen US Rangers were killed in Somalia on 3 October 1993. Katsumi Ishizuka *The United Nations Peacekeeping Operations* (in Japanese) (Tokyo: Soseisha, 2017), p. 42

¹⁴ Donald C. Daniel “5. The United States” in Trevor Findlay (ed.) *Challenges for the New Peacekeepers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 93-94

¹⁵ George Award “Peacekeeping: An Essential Tool”, *New Zealand International Review*, May/June, 1994, p. 24

¹⁶ International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) *Military Balance 2012*, The Monthly Summary of Troop

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- ¹⁷ As of May 2020, there have been 3,502 coalition deaths in Afghanistan as part of coalition operations (Operation Enduring Freedom and ISAF) since 20
- ¹⁸ Alan James *Politics of Peacekeeping* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), p. 2
- ¹⁹ US President Eisenhower indicated the new position of the Secretary General in the world affairs when he said at a press conference on 14 November 1956: “The last thing we must do is to disturb any of the delicate negotiations now going on under the leadership of Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold. We must do nothing that could possibly delay his operations, impede them, or hurt them in any way.” Brian Urquhart Hammarskjold (London: The Bodley Head, 1972), p. 194
- ²⁰ Colm Doyle *Witness to War Crimes: The Memoirs of A Peacekeeper in Bosnia* (Barnsley, England: Pen & Sword Books, 2018), p. 14
- ²¹ Council of Europe *Handbook for the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia, 2009*, p. 11
- ²² *Ibid.* p. 12
- ²³ Online interview with Colonel Colm Doyle, 27 October 2021
- ²⁴ European Commission, press release, “Myanmar: EU mission assesses human rights and labor rights situation”, 31 October 2018
- ²⁵ Semiha Karaoglu “The South China Sea dispute and its challenges to Japan’s economic interests”, an unpublished paper, 31 August 2020, 5 pages
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- ²⁷ UNIFIL Maritime Task Force. <http://unifil.unmissions.org/unifil-maritime-task-force>. Accessed on 29 October 2021

