



# Security Council

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## United Nations Disengagement Observer Force

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report provides an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) for the period from 21 August to 19 November 2020, pursuant to the mandate set out in Security Council resolution [350 \(1974\)](#) and extended in subsequent Council resolutions, most recently resolution [2530 \(2020\)](#).

#### II. Situation in the area of operations and activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force

2. During the reporting period, the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic was generally maintained, despite several violations of the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces of 1974. While the overall security situation in the UNDOF area of operation remained relatively stable, there was continued military activity both across the ceasefire line and in the areas of separation and limitation, in violation of relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution [2530 \(2020\)](#).

3. In employing its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and see that it is scrupulously observed, as prescribed in the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, UNDOF reports all breaches of the ceasefire line that it observes. All incidents of firing across the ceasefire line, as well as the crossing of the ceasefire line by individuals, aircraft and drones, constitute violations of the Agreement. In its regular interactions with both sides, the leadership of UNDOF continued to call upon the parties to exercise restraint and avoid any activities that might lead to an escalation of the situation between the parties.

4. Several explosions were heard and observed in the area of limitation on the Bravo side late on 31 August. United Nations personnel at positions 68, 80 and 85 observed several jet aircraft flying over the area of separation and crossing from the Bravo side to the Alpha side (Israeli-occupied Golan) at various locations. Open sources reported alleged Israel Defense Forces air strikes on 31 August on targets in southern Damascus and eastern Dar'a.

5. Late on 20 October, United Nations personnel at positions 22 and 27 and observation post 51 heard four explosions south-east of position 27, in the vicinity of



Qunaytirah, in the area of separation. The first two explosions created a smokescreen that covered position 27 for approximately 15 minutes, forcing the peacekeepers at the position to take shelter in the bunkers for approximately one hour. While in their bunkers, the peacekeepers heard two more explosions. Later that night, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had conducted a strike because they believed that the activities of Iran and proxies in the area had endangered Israel, and that Israel had acted accurately and responsibly in a precision strike against infrastructures that allowed that entrenchment. On 21 October, UNDOF personnel confirmed that an observation post at the “old” hospital in Qunaytirah, in the vicinity of position 27, had been destroyed and that shrapnel and other debris had landed within the position. The Syrian authorities have since reconstructed the post.

6. On the night of 22 October, United Nations personnel at Camp Ziouani, at position 37 and observation post 73, heard and observed the firing of anti-aircraft tracer rounds from the area of separation, which UNDOF assessed to be related to the presence of a drone that was flying in the vicinity of those positions at the same time.

7. Military violations on the Alpha side included the presence of Iron Dome and artillery systems within 10 kilometres of the ceasefire line and, on nine occasions, a multiple-launch rocket system within the area of limitation, which are considered unauthorized military equipment in the area of limitation, pursuant to the terms of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. On 13 October, UNDOF personnel observed an Israel Defense Forces patrol operating east of the technical fence, crossing the ceasefire line by five metres.

8. Sporadic heavy explosions and bursts of heavy machine gun and small arms fire persisted throughout the reporting period in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. UNDOF assessed that that military activity was related to controlled detonations of unexploded ordnance as part of clearance and training by the Syrian armed forces. UNDOF observed the continuous presence of the Syrian armed forces, some of whom were armed, staffing a number of checkpoints within the area of separation, as well as, on several occasions, the presence of Syrian anti-aircraft guns within the area of limitation.

9. During the reporting period, UNDOF continued to observe drones in the area of separation, crossing the ceasefire line from both the Alpha and Bravo sides. UNDOF was not in a position to determine the points of origin of the drones or to attribute responsibility for them to either party.

10. UNDOF continued to observe daily crossings of the ceasefire line by unidentified individuals from the Bravo side. UNDOF assessed that the individuals were shepherds and farmers from the surrounding areas, tending livestock. The Israel Defense Forces continued to express its deep concern about the crossings, which they stated were a threat to the safety and security of Israel Defense Forces personnel operating in proximity to the ceasefire line. On a number of occasions during the reporting period, the Israel Defense Forces fired warning shots to discourage individuals from approaching the technical fence.

11. On 14 September, Syrian armed forces notified UNDOF that the Israel Defense Forces had crossed the gate of the Israeli technical fence and apprehended a 17-year-old Syrian shepherd. Later, the Israel Defense Forces confirmed that a Syrian individual had been identified while crossing the ceasefire line and had been apprehended for questioning. Syrian authorities expressed their deep concern to UNDOF about the detention of the minor. On the same day, UNDOF assisted the International Committee of the Red Cross in facilitating the crossing of the minor to the Bravo side through the Qunaytirah crossing.

12. On 26 October, United Nations personnel at observation post 73 observed 15 Israel Defense Forces soldiers with two dogs east of the technical fence, detaining two civilians, a 17-year-old boy and an elderly man from the Bravo side, who had been restrained and blindfolded. The Israel Defense Forces subsequently informed UNDOF that the minor had later been released to the Bravo side at the same point along the ceasefire line from which he had crossed to the Alpha side. The elderly man remained in the custody of the Israel Defense Forces until 27 October, when UNDOF assisted the International Committee of the Red Cross in facilitating his return to the Bravo side through the Qunaytirah crossing. He had suffered a “mild” heart attack and a dog bite on his arm and had been admitted to a hospital on the Alpha side before his transfer to the Bravo side. The Syrian authorities expressed their deep concern regarding the detention of the two civilians and their treatment by the Israel Defense Forces.

13. On 17 November, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had discovered several improvised explosive devices in the vicinity of an unmanned Israel Defense Forces position east of the technical fence. On the same day, the Israel Defense Forces showed UNDOF personnel three improvised explosive devices that they had removed and disarmed, as well as footage of the detection of the devices using a drone. The Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that the devices had been discovered in the same general area of separation in the vicinity of position 85 where they had found improvised explosive devices on 2 August 2020 (see [S/2020/945](#), para. 7). On the same day, United Nations personnel at position 85 had observed a drone flying north-west of their position. Early on 18 November, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had carried out a retaliatory operation against targets used by the Iranians and their proxies or those that assisted them in their activities in the area and that they held the Syrian Government responsible for every action that had occurred in their territory. On that day, UNDOF personnel were not able to observe any aircraft or missile activity in the UNDOF area of operation. Earlier on 18 November, open sources had reported air strikes targeting locations in Damascus, with the Syrian Arab News Agency reporting three Syrian armed forces soldiers killed by the strike and that air defence systems had struck down a number of missiles. UNDOF engaged with both parties, urging them to exercise maximum restraint and prevent escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line.

14. UNDOF protested to the parties all violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement that it had observed, including the firing into and from the area of separation and across the ceasefire line, the crossing of the ceasefire line by aircraft and drones, the presence of unauthorized equipment and personnel in the areas of separation and limitation and the crossing of the ceasefire line by civilians from the Bravo side. UNDOF communicated closely with the parties, including during periods of heightened tension, to de-escalate the situation.

15. On 23 September, United Nations personnel at observation post 53 observed Israel Defense Forces soldiers with two bulldozers and three main battle tanks, constructing defensive tank positions east of the Israeli technical fence, close to the ceasefire line. During the construction, the gun of one of the main battle tanks was aimed directly at observation post 53, resulting in UNDOF engaging with the Israel Defense Forces to cease pointing the gun at the observation post.

16. On 24 September, UNDOF observed one large silver balloon approximately 600 metres from the ceasefire line, north-west of an Israel Defense Forces position. The balloon was tethered, and equipment was attached to the middle section of its rope, which was assessed as likely to be surveillance equipment observing the area of separation.

17. During the reporting period, United Nations personnel observed a number of movements of unidentified individuals, some of whom were armed, between Lebanon

and the Syrian Arab Republic, mostly through Mount Hermon, in the northern part of the area of separation.

18. The security situation in the southern part of the area of limitation on the Bravo side continues to be volatile, with open sources reporting attacks, including assassinations, carried out against Syrian security forces, other government authorities and former members of armed opposition groups, in addition to increasingly violent clashes resulting from local disputes. Such security incidents have been occurring increasingly closer to the UNDOF area of operations, namely in the areas of Jasim, Nawa, Tafas and Tasil, in Dar'a Governorate. Low-intensity violence in Dar'a Governorate, which periodically escalates into larger armed clashes, continues to be reported. Although UNDOF personnel are not directly threatened, the risk of collateral damage cannot be ruled out.

19. UNDOF continues to implement its mandate in the context of the measures adopted by the authorities of Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic to control the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, including limits on the movement of United Nations personnel and their mandatory testing and quarantine after any cross-border movement. Since early March, the Alpha side has continued to restrict the movement of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan personnel through the Qunaytirah crossing, which it opens only on a case-by-case basis, affecting the operational capacity of UNDOF. UNDOF has continued to communicate with the Israel Defense Forces with regard to their facilitation of the crossing of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan personnel at the Qunaytirah crossing, in particular the need for United Nations personnel to cross using only documents issued by UNDOF at the Alpha gate and to return to established crossing procedures.

20. Since March, UNDOF has implemented an action plan aimed at maintaining operational capability and limiting the potential spread of COVID-19 in the Force. The plan incorporates the screening of personnel entering positions, restrictions on movement between positions and telecommuting arrangements for national and international civilian personnel.

21. Both parties continued to suspend inspections conducted by Observer Group Golan in the areas of limitation, citing COVID-19 as the reason for the suspension. Neither party agreed to the inspection mechanisms, including social distancing, that UNDOF and Observer Group Golan had recommended in order to resume inspections.

22. As part of the return to full mandate implementation, UNDOF had resumed the restoration, including repainting and refurbishment, of the barrels marking the ceasefire line, which had ceased for security reasons and continues to be suspended temporarily owing to COVID-19-related restrictions.

23. Progress in the incremental return of UNDOF to the Bravo side had been slowed by the restriction on construction on that side owing to COVID-19-related control measures. With the easing of some restrictions, UNDOF completed the reconstruction of position 10A. A UNDOF-mechanized company reoccupied the position on 12 November. Additional work to extend position 60 has commenced. The reconstruction of observation post 71, which is continuing, is estimated to be completed at the end of March 2021.

24. UNDOF operations continued to be supported by the military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in Observer Group Golan, who are under the operational control of UNDOF and maintain seven fixed and one temporary observation posts along the ceasefire line. Observer Group Golan remained focused on continuous static observation and situational awareness.

25. During the reporting period, UNDOF rotated four contingents while adhering to the requirements of the United Nations and host nations with regard to COVID-19-related

measures. UNDOF had to place the contingents in quarantine for 14 days while ensuring adequate safety and security throughout the rotation and quarantine periods.

26. UNDOF monthly operational patrols continued on routes in the areas of separation and limitation, with 831 patrols completed in August, 657 completed in September and 694 completed in October. The requirement that rotating contingents quarantine for two weeks upon arrival in the Force affected the ability of UNDOF to patrol at previous levels during the quarantine periods. UNDOF continued to enhance its operational capability and reach on the Bravo side by opening new patrol routes progressively in the areas of separation and limitation. UNDOF patrol routes covered approximately 95 per cent of the area of separation and some 55 per cent of the area of limitation.

27. The movement of UNDOF personnel through Lebanon continued to be restricted owing to measures related to COVID-19. However, the route between Beirut and Damascus, through the Judaydah and Masna'a border crossing, which is a primary resupply route for UNDOF, remained open for the commercial movement of goods.

28. UNDOF continued to engage with the Israel Defense Forces with a view to addressing restrictions on movement and access from the Alpha side to United Nations positions in the area of separation.

29. UNDOF assessed that there continued to be a significant threat to United Nations personnel in the UNDOF area of operations from explosive remnants of war, including unexploded ordnance and mines, as well as a probable threat from the possible presence of sleeper cells of armed groups.

30. UNDOF continued to carry out and update its contingency planning for the reinforcement and evacuation of positions and observation posts on both the Alpha and Bravo sides, in addition to conducting regular rehearsals, exercises and training for identified contingencies. Risk mitigation measures, including force protection measures, continued to be developed at positions and observation posts and at the operational base at Camp Ziouani and headquarters at Camp Faouar.

31. As at 12 November, UNDOF comprised 1,104 troops, including 57 women peacekeepers. Troops are deployed from Bhutan (3), Czechia (3), Fiji (137), Ghana (3), India (196), Ireland (139), Nepal (408), the Netherlands (1) and Uruguay (214). In addition, 60 military observers from Observer Group Golan, including 10 women, assisted UNDOF in carrying out its tasks.

### **III. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)**

32. In its resolution 2530 (2020), the Security Council called upon the parties concerned to implement immediately its resolution 338 (1973). It decided to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a period of six months, until 31 December 2020, and requested the Secretary-General to report every 90 days on developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement resolution 338 (1973). The search for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, in particular the efforts made at various levels to implement resolution 338 (1973), was addressed in my report on the situation in the Middle East (A/73/322), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 72/15 on Jerusalem and 72/16 on the Syrian Golan.

33. Since the discontinuation of indirect peace talks in December 2008, there have been no negotiations between the parties. The Syrian conflict further reduces the prospects for their resumption and for progress towards peace between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. I look forward to peaceful resolution of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the resumption of efforts towards a comprehensive, just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution 338 (1973) and other relevant resolutions.

## IV. Financial aspects

34. The General Assembly, by its resolution [74/291](#), appropriated the amount of \$63.3 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

35. As at 12 November 2020, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNDOF amounted to \$22.8 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$2,655.1 million.

36. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 30 June 2020, while reimbursement of the cost of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 March 2020, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

## V. Observations

37. I am concerned about the continued violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement during the reporting period, at a particularly volatile time for the region, including the breach of the ceasefire that occurred on 20 October, which also posed a significant risk to UNDOF personnel. The Israel Defense Forces should refrain from firing across the ceasefire line. I remain concerned about the continued presence of the Syrian Armed Forces in the area of separation. There should be no military forces in the area of separation other than those of UNDOF. The continued presence of unauthorized weapons and equipment in the area of limitation on both the Alpha and the Bravo sides, as well as the flying of aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles across the ceasefire line, is also of concern. Those actions are in violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. I urge the parties to the Agreement to exercise utmost restraint and comply with the Agreement. I continue to encourage members of the Security Council to support efforts to raise the awareness of both parties of the risk of escalation and the need to preserve the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic.

38. It remains critical that the parties maintain their liaison with UNDOF. All violations of the ceasefire line increase tensions between the signatories to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and contribute to undermining stability in the area. The continued liaison by UNDOF with the parties has contributed to de-escalation during times of heightened tension.

39. The continued commitment of both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and support for the presence of UNDOF remain essential. The full return of UNDOF to the area of separation continues to be a priority for the Force. I count on the continued cooperation of both parties to facilitate the advancement of the Force's plans for an incremental return to operations and positions in the area of separation, as well as to ensure that the Force can implement its mandate, including the conducting of inspections on both sides, fully. At the same time, the parties must continue to support the enhancement of the liaison function of UNDOF.

40. Given the worrying trend of continued violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, the safety and security of military and civilian personnel in UNDOF and Observer Group Golan are of particular concern. It is therefore of particular importance that the Security Council continue to bring to bear its influence on the concerned parties to ensure that UNDOF is accorded the ability to operate in a safe and secure manner and is allowed to operate freely, in accordance with the Agreement. It also remains important that the parties continue to facilitate the deployment of all personnel to UNDOF for effective mandate implementation.

41. The continued support of Member States, in particular the confidence and commitment of troop-contributing countries in UNDOF, remains a key factor in the

Force's ability to carry out its mandate. I am grateful to the Governments of Bhutan, Czechia, Fiji, Ghana, India, Ireland, Nepal, the Netherlands and Uruguay for their contributions, as well as for the commitment, resolve and consummate professionalism of their military personnel in UNDOF. I am thankful for the Member States that have contributed military observers to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization.

42. I consider the continued presence of UNDOF in the area to be essential. I therefore recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the Force for a period of six months, to 30 June 2021. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has given its assent to the proposed extension. The Government of Israel has also expressed its agreement.

43. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the Head of Mission and Force Commander, Lieutenant General Ishwar Hamal, and to the military and civilian personnel serving under his leadership in UNDOF, as well as to the military observers in Observer Group Golan, who continue to perform the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council with efficiency and commitment under extremely challenging circumstances.

