



Security Council

Distr.: General
3 June 2021

Original: English

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 February to 20 May 2021, pursuant to the mandate set out in Security Council resolution [350 \(1974\)](#) and extended in subsequent Council resolutions, most recently resolution [2555 \(2020\)](#).

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. The overall security situation in the UNDOF area of operations was volatile, with continued military activity in the areas of separation and limitation in violation of relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution [2555 \(2020\)](#).

3. In employing its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and ensure 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 line, as well as the crossing of the line by aircraft, drones and individuals, 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 them.

4. Late on 28 February, United Nations personnel at positions 68 and 80 and at observation post 55 heard two fighter aircraft crossing the ceasefire line from east-north-east to west-south-west and subsequently heard an aircraft crossing from west to east. At around the same time, personnel at various United Nations positions and observation posts in the area of operations observed flares and explosions on the Bravo side that they assessed to be anti-aircraft missile fire engaged from Syrian air defence systems outside the area of limitation. Late on 28 February, open sources reported air strikes being carried out by the Israel Defense Forces on locations in southern Damascus, in the vicinity of Sayyidah Zainab. Neither party confirmed any kinetic activities associated with these reports.



5. On 16 March, personnel at United Nations positions 32 and 37, observation post 72 and Camp Faouar heard a detonation from an unknown location within the UNDOF area of operations, with personnel at several United Nations positions noticing multiple flares east of United Nations position Hermon South and in the vicinity of Umm Batinah on the Bravo side. United Nations personnel at observation post 51 observed two explosions east of their position in the vicinity of Umm Batinah, with those at observation post 73 observing two rockets being launched and anti-aircraft fire east of Harfa in the area of limitation on the Bravo side. Later on 16 March, the Israel Defense Forces conveyed a message to UNDOF stating that, “in Syria, infrastructures that are connected to transfer and storage of Iranian weaponry exist”, “despite the numerous warnings regarding the Iranian activities in Syria’s land, with emphasis on the weaponry transfer to the State, it continues” and “Israel will respond severely against all mobilization of troops against Israel from Syrian territory”.

6. Early on 22 April, open sources reported strikes by the Israel Defense Forces on Syrian air defence positions in the vicinity of Damascus and a surface-to-air missile fired from the Syrian Arab Republic landing in the Negev area of Israel. The Israel Defense Forces responded with strikes on locations in the Syrian Arab Republic, injuring four Syrian armed forces personnel. Reaffirming their earlier public announcement, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF of their assessment that a surface-to-air missile had been fired from the Syrian Arab Republic into “Israeli territory, near the southern Negev”, and that they had responded by striking “the battery from which the missile was launched, as well as additional surface-to-air batteries in Syria”. On 22 April, United Nations personnel at position 68 sighted multiple tracer rounds from east-north-east of their position, consistent with anti-aircraft fire in the area of limitation on the Bravo side.

7. Late on 5 May, United Nations personnel at observation post 73 noticed an aircraft on the Alpha side (Israeli-occupied Golan) fire a projectile in a south-easterly direction into the area of separation and subsequently noticed an explosion on the horizon, also in the south-east. Open sources reported an Israel Defense Forces helicopter targeting a suspected militia position in the vicinity of Jubbata al-Khashab. This report was not confirmed by the Israel Defense Forces.

8. On 10 May, United Nations personnel at position 10A heard explosions east of United Nations position 16 in the area of separation. Syrian State media and other open sources reported an Israel Defense Forces helicopter conducting two strikes on a house west of Hadar, which is adjacent to the area of separation, injuring one person. The Syrian armed forces confirmed to UNDOF the open-source reports, including the reported injury. There was no confirmation of the reported strikes by the Israel Defense Forces.

9. On 14 May, personnel at United Nations positions 27, 80 and 85 and observation post 54 heard three explosions east of their positions. Shortly thereafter, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that three rockets had been fired from the north of Tasil, in the southern part of the area of limitation on the Bravo side, with one “landing short on Syrian territory” and the other two “landing within Israeli territory”. Syrian authorities informed UNDOF of their awareness of the incident, denied involvement and assessed that Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (also known as Da’esh) was responsible for the attack. Open sources reported the firing of three rockets from the Syrian Arab Republic towards Israel, with no casualties resulting.

10. In a letter addressed to the President of the Security Council and to me dated 22 April (S/2021/391), the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic relayed the information that, on 22 April, “the Israeli occupying authorities had once again attacked the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic, firing successive salvos of

missiles from the occupied Syrian Golan towards the area around the capital, Damascus”. On 14 May, he conveyed that, on Wednesday, 5 May, Israel had launched “a missile attack against the coastal area south-west of Ladhqiqyah and Masyaf area”, resulting in the death of one Syrian civilian and injury to six others, including a child and his mother. It also caused material damage and losses (see [S/2021/453](#)). In the same letter, he reported that, “on Thursday, 6 May, an Israeli helicopter fired a missile from over the occupied Syrian Arab Golan at one of the outposts in the town of Jubbata al-Khashab, without causing damage”.

11. On 27 March, personnel at United Nations observation post 54 observed two armed individuals from the Bravo side, whom they assessed to be Syrian security personnel, crossing the ceasefire line east of their position, engaging in conversation with some shepherds in the area and subsequently returning to the area of separation. On 8 April, personnel at United Nations observation post 53 observed three main battle tanks and two bulldozers of the Israel Defense Forces east of the technical fence removing stone walls and barbed wire, and subsequently crossing the ceasefire line in the vicinity of observation post 53 and moving into the forest in Kudnah in the area of separation. After approximately 80 minutes, United Nations personnel observed the tanks and bulldozers returning to the Alpha side.

12. During the reporting period, UNDOF personnel twice experienced restrictions of movement in the areas of limitation on the Bravo and Alpha sides. On 10 March, an UNDOF patrol observed four armed individuals in the village of Umm Batinah blocking the roads from the village to Jaba and Mumtinah in the area of limitation on the Bravo side. On 19 April, an Israel Defense Forces soldier blocked an UNDOF patrol for 15 minutes from moving east at a road junction south-west of Odem in the area of limitation of the Alpha side. The patrol subsequently used another route.

13. The presence of Iron Dome systems, artillery systems and a multi-launch rocket system on the Alpha side constitutes a military violation in each case. Pursuant to the terms of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, the presence of any unauthorized military equipment in the area of limitation is a violation.

14. On 17 March, personnel at United Nations position 85 observed an aircraft flying from the Alpha side across the ceasefire line and over the area of separation. On 16 March, United Nations personnel at position 80 observed a drone cross the ceasefire line from north-north-west to north-east of their position. On 16 May, personnel at United Nations positions 60 and 80 observed three drones flying on the Bravo side. UNDOF was unable to determine the point of origin of the aircraft and drones or to attribute responsibility for them to either party.

15. UNDOF continued to observe daily crossings of the ceasefire line by unidentified individuals from the Bravo side. It assessed that the individuals were shepherds and farmers from the surrounding areas tending livestock as well as hunters carrying hunting weapons. The Israel Defense Forces continued to express concern about the crossings, which they stated were a threat to the safety and security of their personnel operating in the proximity of the ceasefire line. The Israel Defense Forces increased their operations in response to the crossings, including by firing warning shots on 35 occasions to discourage individuals from the Bravo side from approaching the Israeli technical fence.

16. On 7 March, personnel at United Nations observation post 53 observed six Israel Defense Forces personnel east of the technical fence apprehending one Syrian national east of their position for allegedly crossing the ceasefire line. The Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had released the person, but did not provide the exact time and location of the release. Syrian authorities informed UNDOF on 10 March that two Syrian nationals had been apprehended and detained by the Israel Defense Forces for allegedly crossing the ceasefire line. On 11 March,

Syrian authorities also informed UNDOF that the Israel Defense Forces had released the Syrian nationals at the location where they had been apprehended.

17. 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 the military activity was the result of controlled detonations of unexploded ordnance as part of clearance and training by the Syrian armed forces. UNDOF observed the continued presence of Syrian armed forces personnel, some of whom were armed, staffing several checkpoints within the area of separation, in violation of the Agreement on Disengagement. UNDOF also observed, on several occasions, the presence of Syrian anti-aircraft guns within the area of limitation.

18. Between late 30 April and early 1 May, personnel at United Nations positions 60 and 68 and observation post 56 observed several bursts of small arms fire and a total of 11 exploded hand grenades in and around two Syrian armed forces positions near Tall al-Kurum, at least 200 metres south of observation post 56. The personnel also heard and observed several shots, illumination flares, tracer rounds and explosions in the vicinity of their positions, with personnel at observation post 56 observing 15 armed persons moving towards a compound and clearing the area.

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

20. During the reporting period, UNDOF assessed that the overall security situation on the Bravo side remained volatile. Open sources reported continued attacks by unknown armed elements involving improvised explosive devices and small arms targeting Syrian security forces in the UNDOF area of operations. On 30 April and 1 May, unknown armed elements reportedly attacked a position of the Syrian armed forces between Jaba and Umm Batinah close to the area of separation in the northern part of the area of limitation. The Syrian armed forces reportedly reinforced their presence in the vicinity of Umm Batinah. In the central part of the area of operations, UNDOF observed kinetic activity around a Syrian security forces position close to observation post 56 (see para. 18). In the southern part of the area of operations, open sources continued to report almost daily attacks, some involving improvised explosive devices and assassinations, targeting Syrian security forces checkpoints and convoys, other government authorities and former members of armed opposition groups. Such security incidents reportedly continued in the area of limitation, including in Jasim, Muzayrib, Nawa and Tafas, where attacks reportedly occurred on or close to UNDOF patrol routes.

21. On 16 March, open sources reported an attack by armed elements affiliated to a former opposition commander on a Syrian armed forces convoy on the road between Yadudah and Muzayrib, within the area of limitation, that left 22 personnel dead and 5 others injured. The open sources also reported the subsequent build-up of Syrian armed forces personnel in the area, followed by assassinations of Syrian security services personnel and reconciled former members of armed groups in the area. Open sources contained reports of assassinations of members of the Syrian security forces on 15 April and 14 May by unknown armed elements in the vicinity of Nawa and on 21 April in Ghadir al-Bustan, with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant claiming responsibility. There were also open-source reports of violence in other parts of Dara'a Governorate.

22. On 18 March, UNDOF supported the International Committee of the Red Cross in facilitating the crossing of a woman from the Alpha side to the Bravo side through the Qunaytirah crossing to attend a funeral, and also her return on 24 March.

23. 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 limitations on the movement of United Nations personnel and their mandatory testing and quarantine after any crossing between the two sides and any cross-border movement. Since early March 2020, the Alpha side continued to restrict the movement of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan personnel through the Qunaytirah crossing, which it opens on a case-by-case basis only, affecting the operational and administrative activities of the mission. UNDOF continued to liaise with the Israel Defense Forces on their facilitation of the crossing of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan personnel at the Qunaytirah crossing, and in particular on the need for United Nations personnel to cross using only documents issued by UNDOF at the Alpha gate and to return to the established crossing procedures.

24. On 20 April, 16 UNDOF personnel tested positive for COVID-19, resulting in affected personnel being placed in isolation. UNDOF also put in place other COVID-19 control measures, including the strict isolation of contingents and a telecommuting arrangement for international personnel and national staff. As at 17 May, there were 15 active COVID-19 cases among UNDOF personnel, including military and international staff and Observer Group Golan personnel, with others having recovered. On 30 April, UNDOF launched the vaccination of its personnel, which is ongoing.

25. Both parties continued to suspend inspections of their positions in the area of limitation conducted by Observer Group Golan, citing COVID-19 as the reason therefor. Neither party agreed to the inspection mechanisms, including physical distancing, that UNDOF recommended to them, in order to resume inspections. However, both sides recently agreed to resume inspections on the basis of new modalities agreed upon between UNDOF and the parties taking into account the COVID-19 context.

26. 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 temporarily suspended owing to COVID-19 restrictions.

27. Progress in the incremental return of UNDOF to the Bravo side continued despite being slowed by the restrictions on construction owing to COVID-19 control measures. The additional work to extend United Nations position 60 also continued. UNDOF began the construction of the new United Nations position 86B at the location of the former United Nations observation tower in the southern part of the area of separation. The reconstruction of United Nations observation post 71 continued, and the post is scheduled for completion and reoccupation by the end of July 2021. The reconstruction of United Nations observation post 57 also began, with completion scheduled for August 2021.

28. 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. The focus of Observer Group Golan remains on continuous static observation and situational awareness.

29. UNDOF monthly operational patrols continued on routes in the areas of separation and limitation, with 1,174 operational activities carried out in February,

1,318 in March and 1,166 in April 2021. UNDOF patrol routes cover approximately 97 per cent of the area of separation and 70 per cent of the area of limitation.

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

31. UNDOF continued to assess that there remains 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. In addition, the deterioration in the security situation in the central part of the area of operations and the volatile security situation in the southern part have continued to slow progress on the opening of new routes in the area of limitation.

32. UNDOF continued to conduct 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 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.

33. As at 17 May, UNDOF comprised 1,109 troops, including 60 women peacekeepers. Troops are deployed from Bhutan (3), Czechia (4), Fiji (151), Ghana (5), India (199), Ireland (136), Nepal (399), the Netherlands (1) and Uruguay (211). In addition, 70 military observers from Observer Group Golan, including 14 women, assisted UNDOF in carrying out its tasks.

III. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

34. In its resolution 2555 (2020), the Security Council called upon the parties concerned to immediately implement its resolution 338 (1973). It decided to renew the mandate of UNDOF for six months, until 30 June 2021, and requested me 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/75/297), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 74/14 on the Syrian Golan.

35. 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 a 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

36. The General Assembly, by its resolution 74/291 and decision 74/571, appropriated the amount of \$63.3 million for the maintenance of the mission for the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

37. As at 14 May 2021, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNDOF amounted to \$20.1 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$2,028.8 million.

38. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 31 December 2020, as has reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

V. Observations

39. I am concerned about the continued violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement in a particularly volatile time for the region, including the breaches of the ceasefire that occurred on 16 March, 22 April and 14 May, which also posed a risk to United Nations personnel. The Israel Defense Forces should refrain from firing across the ceasefire line. I remain concerned by the continued presence of the Syrian armed forces in the area of separation and the firing of rockets from the Bravo side. 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 Bravo sides, as well as the flying of aircraft and drones across the ceasefire line, is also of concern. These developments are in violation of the 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 with regard to the risk of escalation and the need to preserve the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic.

40. 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 undermine stability in the area. The continued liaison by UNDOF with the parties has contributed to de-escalation during times of heightened tension.

41. 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 and to ensure that the Force can implement its mandate fully, including inspections on both sides. At the same time, the parties must continue to support the enhancement of the liaison function of UNDOF.

42. 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 its influence to bear on the parties concerned to ensure that UNDOF is accorded the ability to operate safely and securely and is allowed to operate freely in accordance with the Agreement. It remains important that the parties also continue to facilitate the deployment of all personnel to UNDOF for effective mandate implementation.

43. The continued support of Member States, and in particular the confidence of troop-contributing countries to UNDOF and their commitment to its mission, remain key factors 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 and the commitment, resolve and consummate professionalism of their military personnel in UNDOF. I am also thankful to those

Member States that have contributed military observers to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization.

44. I consider the continued presence of UNDOF in the area essential. I therefore recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the Force for six months, until 31 December 2021. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has given its assent to the proposed extension. The Government of Israel also has expressed its agreement.

45. 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 and 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.

