



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 6 March to 20 May 2020, pursuant to the mandate set out in Security Council resolution [350 \(1974\)](#) and extended in subsequent Council resolutions, most recently resolution [2503 \(2019\)](#).

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 increased violations of the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces (Disengagement of Forces Agreement) of 1974. While the overall security situation in the UNDOF area of operation remained stable, there was some 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 [2503 \(2019\)](#).

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, 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 prevent any miscalculation that might lead to an escalation of the situation.

4. On 11 March, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had carried out a “precision strike against an Iranian base in the area of Albu Kamal”, outside the UNDOF area of operations. UNDOF did not observe any related activities in its area of operation.

5. On 30 April, UNDOF personnel at United Nations position 80 observed the firing of what UNDOF assessed to be a projectile from main battle tank from a position on the Alpha side (Israeli-occupied Golan) across the ceasefire line, impacting the vicinity of Sidon, in the area of limitation on the Bravo side. Shortly



thereafter, UNDOF personnel observed a helicopter on the Alpha side firing a missile across the ceasefire line towards Tall al-Gharbi in the area of limitation on the Bravo side. On the same day, UNDOF personnel at Camp Ziouani observed the firing of two missiles from the Alpha side across the ceasefire line, impacting the area of separation. In addition, UNDOF personnel at observation post 55 observed one rocket fired from the north-east towards the east, followed by one large explosion east of the observation post. The Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had conducted precision strikes on the Bravo side. During the reporting period, UNDOF also observed six aircraft and a significant number of drones from the Alpha side flying across the ceasefire line and over the area of separation.

6. The military violations on the Alpha side included the presence of Iron Dome systems and artillery systems within 10 kilometres of the ceasefire line, which are considered unauthorized military equipment in the area of limitation pursuant to the terms of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement.

7. Sporadic heavy explosions, 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 this military activity was due 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, including in the vicinity of Ba‘th and Khan Arnabah, as well as along the main road connecting Qunaytirah to Damascus. UNDOF also observed that there was no presence of main battle tanks or anti-aircraft guns in the area of separation.

8. UNDOF continued to observe daily crossings of the ceasefire line by unidentified individuals from the Bravo side. UNDOF assessed that these individuals were shepherds and farmers from the surrounding areas tending livestock. The Israel Defense Forces continued to express deep concern about these crossings, which they stated were a threat to the safety and security of Israel Defense Forces personnel operating in proximity of the ceasefire line. UNDOF continued to place warning signs along the ceasefire line to deter such crossings.

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

10. The security situation in the southern part of the area of limitation on the Bravo side continues to be volatile, with open sources reporting increasing attacks, including assassinations, attacks carried out against Syrian security forces and other government authorities, as well as on opposition leaders that had “reconciled” with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in Saham al-Jawlan, Tafas and Dar‘a al-Balad, in addition to attacks on government checkpoints and the use of improvised explosive devices. These security incidents are occurring increasingly closer to the UNDOF area of operations, including in proximity to UNDOF patrol routes. In addition, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant reportedly claimed responsibility for attacks in the Dar‘a Governorate, including in Nawa, Kafr Nasij and the vicinity of Harrah in the area of limitation on the Bravo side.

11. UNDOF continues to implement its mandate in the context of the measures, including curfews, adopted by the authorities of the Syrian Arab Republic and Israel to control the COVID-19 outbreak. Since March, UNDOF has been implementing an action plan aimed at maintaining operational capability and limiting any potential spread of COVID-19 in the Force. This plan incorporates the screening of personnel

entering United Nations positions, restrictions on movement between positions and telecommuting arrangements for United Nations national and international civilian personnel. Both parties supported the testing of UNDOF personnel and have provided medical facilities if required. UNDOF also temporarily suspended night patrolling owing to the curfew on both the Alpha and Bravo sides and cancelled inspections conducted by Observer Group Golan in the area of limitation on the Alpha side. Furthermore, due to COVID-19, UNDOF was not in a position to gradually resume inspections on the Bravo side, which had been suspended for security reasons. Progress in the UNDOF incremental return to the Bravo side has been slowed by the restriction on construction on the Bravo side owing to COVID-19 control measures. During the reporting period, UNDOF resumed the restoration of the barrels marking the ceasefire line, which had ceased for security reasons and had been temporarily suspended owing to COVID-19 restrictions.

12. UNDOF operations continued to be supported by the military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) 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.

13. UNDOF continued to engage with the Israel Defense Forces with a view to addressing restrictions on movement and access to United Nations position in the area of separation. The number of incidents of restrictions of movement of UNDOF on the Alpha side increased during the month of March.

14. During the reporting period, UNDOF monthly operational patrols continued on routes in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo Side, with 816 patrols completed in March and 796 in April. UNDOF continued to enhance its operational capability and reach on the Bravo side by progressively opening new patrol routes in the areas of separation and limitation. UNDOF patrol routes covered approximately 95 per cent of the area of separation and about 55 per cent of the area of limitation.

15. Since early March, the movement of UNDOF personnel through Lebanon has been restricted owing to measures related to COVID-19. The route between Beirut and Damascus via the Judaydah and Masna' border crossing, which is a primary resupply route for UNDOF, remained open for the commercial movement of goods. However, developments related to public protests in Lebanon have the potential to further restrict UNDOF movements, particularly the movement of fuel, rations and other supplies. On 4 April, UNDOF utilized, for the first time since November 2011, Damascus International Airport for the rotation of its troops.

16. In addition, owing to measures related to the control of COVID-19 since early March, both the Alpha and Bravo sides severely restricted the movement of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan personnel through the Qunaytirah crossing, owing to the requirement of a quarantine period of 14 days after any crossing. The crossing was only opened for UNDOF on an exceptional basis. UNDOF continued to liaise 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 the established crossing procedures.

17. 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, and also probable threats from the possible presence of sleeper cells of armed groups, including listed terrorist groups.

18. UNDOF continued to conduct and update its contingency planning for the reinforcement and evacuation of United Nations 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 United Nations positions and observation posts and at the operational base at Camp Ziouani and headquarters at Camp Faouar.

19. As at 18 May, UNDOF comprised 1,014 troops, including 44 women peacekeepers. Troops are deployed from Australia (1), Bhutan (3), Czechia (4), Fiji (139), Ghana (11), India (186), Ireland (139), Nepal (356) the Netherlands (2) and Uruguay (173). In addition, 75 military observers from Observer Group Golan, including 10 women, assisted UNDOF in carrying out its tasks.

III. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

20. In its resolution 2503 (2019), the Security Council called upon the parties concerned to immediately implement its resolution 338 (1973). It decided to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a period of six months, until 30 June 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/Rev.1), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 72/15 on Jerusalem and 72/16 on the Syrian Golan.

21. Since the discontinuation of indirect peace talks in December 2008, there have been no negotiations between the parties. I look forward to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic in line with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) and the resumption of efforts towards a comprehensive, just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Council in its resolution 338 (1973) and other relevant resolutions.

IV. Financial aspects

22. The General Assembly, by its resolution 73/321 and decision 73/555, appropriated the amount of \$69.4 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020.

23. As at 31 May 2020, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNDOF amounted to \$18.1 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$2,099.5 million.

24. The reimbursement of the costs of troops and formed police personnel, as well as for contingent-owned equipment, has been made for the period up to 31 December 2019, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

V. Observations

25. I am concerned about the increased number of violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement during the reporting period, in a particularly volatile time for the region, including the breaches of the ceasefire that occurred on 30 April. 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. 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 is also of concern. These developments have the potential to jeopardize 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 sensitize both parties to the risk of escalation and the need to preserve the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic.

26. It remains critical that the parties maintain their liaison with UNDOF to prevent any escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line. 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.

27. 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 through inspections on the Bravo side. At the same time, the parties must continue to support the enhancement of the liaison function of UNDOF.

28. 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 parties concerned 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 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. It remains important that the parties also continue to facilitate the deployment of all personnel to UNDOF for effective mandate implementation.

29. The continued support of Member States, and in particular the confidence and commitment of troop-contributing countries in UNDOF remain key factors in the Force's ability to carry out its mandate. I am grateful to the Governments of Australia, 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 the Member States that have contributed military observers to UNTSO.

30. 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 a period of six months, to 31 December 2020. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has given its assent to the proposed extension. The Government of Israel also has expressed its agreement.

31. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the leadership of UNDOF, as well as to all military and civilian personnel of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan serving under their leadership, who continue to perform the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council with efficiency and commitment under challenging circumstances.

