



# 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 May to 20 August 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 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 relatively stable, there was continued military activity, including the firing of missiles, 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 and the crossing of the ceasefire line by aircraft and drones, 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 avoid any activities that might lead to an escalation of the situation between the parties.

4. In the early hours of 15 July, United Nations position 37 and observation post 73 observed a large explosion in the vicinity of United Nations position 32B. Later that morning, the Israel Defense Forces notified UNDOF that they had carried out a strike against a Syrian Arab Armed Forces position close to the ceasefire line. The time and general location of the explosion observed by UNDOF were consistent with the information provided by the Israel Defense Forces. A patrol deployed by UNDOF to the site of the reported incident in the vicinity of United Nations position 32B confirmed that a concrete structure had been destroyed. There were no reports of casualties.



5. Late on 20 July, United Nations personnel at several positions and observation posts observed aircraft flying from the Alpha side (Israeli-occupied Golan) cross the ceasefire line. They subsequently fired missiles on locations on the Bravo side, including in the area of separation. The United Nations personnel also observed missiles being fired from locations on the Alpha side towards the Bravo side, with some impacting locations in the areas of separation and limitation, as well as Syrian armed forces anti-aircraft fire launched from the areas of separation and limitation shooting down others. UNDOF also observed explosions on the Alpha side, consistent with artillery fire. UNDOF was not in a position to observe the point of origin of the artillery fire.

6. On 24 July, UNDOF heard multiple heavy explosions and machine gun fire in the vicinity of Hadar in the area of separation. UNDOF also heard explosions in and observed projectiles originating from the general area of Majdal Shams in the area of limitation on the Alpha side. The Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that firing from the Bravo side across the ceasefire line had caused damage to a property in Majdal Shams. An UNDOF patrol deployed to the area the following day was unable to confirm the alleged incident. Late on the same day, United Nations personnel at position 10A and observation post 73 heard four explosions in the vicinity of Majdal Shams and observed a fire on both the Alpha and Bravo sides in the vicinity of United Nations position 16. Subsequently, United Nations personnel at Camp Ziouani observed an Israel Defense Forces helicopter, flying west of the camp, fire two missiles into the area of separation, impacting the vicinity of Qahtaniyah in the area of separation. The Israel Defense Forces later informed UNDOF that “an anti-aircraft shooting from the territory of Syria was carried out towards Israel, which endangered Israeli citizens and caused property damage. In response, the IDF attacked infrastructure of the Syrian army, which are used by Iran and Hizbullah for intelligence gathering”.

7. On the night of 2 August, United Nations personnel at position 85 observed and heard flares, heavy explosions and small arms fire in the area of separation. Subsequently, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that “an IDF force thwarted an attempt to place explosives on the Syrian border. A special force [...] identified a squad of several terrorists placing explosives near the border fence. IDF forces and IDF aircraft carried out simultaneous firing on the squad that numbered four terrorists and hit them” and that the Israel Defense Forces hold the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic “responsible for any action taken on its territory and will not allow any violation of Israeli sovereignty”. On 3 August, UNDOF personnel escorted personnel of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to an area north-east of position 85 to retrieve the bodies of the four individuals from an area approximately 150 metres east of the ceasefire line, within the area of separation. On 4 August, an UNDOF team conducted an investigation into the 2 August incident. During the investigation, the Israel Defense Forces personnel facilitating the work of the UNDOF team from the Alpha side retrieved an improvised explosive device from a location close to the technical fence, west of the ceasefire line. The investigation team confirmed two locations within the area of separation in the vicinity of United Nations position 85 that were assessed to be the point of impact of the firing. The investigation team assessed, through the evidence gathered and the location where the improvised explosive device was retrieved, that the alleged individuals had crossed the ceasefire line.

8. On the night of 3 August, United Nations personnel at position 10A heard aircraft activity and explosions to the east of their position, south of Majdal Shams and south-west of Camp Faouar. United Nations personnel at position 27 heard an aircraft flying about five kilometres south-west of the position and observed a flare consistent with missile fire, which impacted an area south of the Qunaytirah crossing. Around the same time, United Nations personnel at position 80 observed two helicopters flying north-west of their position fire three missiles across the ceasefire line onto the Bravo

side. Two of the missiles impacted the vicinity of Tall Ahmar al-Sharqi in the area of limitation and one impacted the vicinity of Tall Ahmar al-Gharbi, also in the area of limitation. UNDOF personnel at Camp Ziouani also observed a helicopter flying north of the camp firing one missile, which impacted the vicinity of Qahtaniyah in the area of separation. United Nations personnel at observation post 73 observed flashes east and north-east of their position and heard one high explosive round. Open sources reported the Israel Defense Forces stating that “in response to an attempted IED attack near the security fence between Syria and Israel last night, we just struck SAF targets in Syria” and “we hold Syria responsible”. Open sources also reported that the Syrian army had activated its air defences against “hostile targets” near Damascus.

9. 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. During the reporting period, UNDOF continued to observe drones in the area of separation, crossing the ceasefire line both from 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. 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 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. UNDOF also observed, on a number of occasions, the presence of Syrian anti-aircraft guns within the areas of separation and limitation.

11. 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 deep concern about the crossings, which they stated were a threat to the safety and security of Israel Defense Forces personnel operating in the proximity of the ceasefire line. On 21 June, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had detained a Syrian minor who had allegedly crossed the ceasefire line. The Israel Defense Forces subsequently informed UNDOF that they had released the child on the morning of 22 June into the same area from which he had been taken by the Israel Defense Forces. UNDOF reminded the Israel Defense Forces of the need to utilize ICRC, with the facilitation of UNDOF, to repatriate individuals, in this case the minor, through the Qunaytirah crossing. Syrian authorities expressed deep concern to UNDOF about the detention of the minor.

12. 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 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.

13. UNDOF assisted ICRC in facilitating humanitarian activities in the vicinity of the ceasefire line and through the Qunaytirah crossing. On 3 August, UNDOF assisted ICRC in the retrieval of the remains of the four individuals killed on 2 August by the Israel Defense Forces (see para. 7). On 24 June, at the request of the Syrian authorities, UNDOF, in support of ICRC, facilitated the crossing of a male student, who was returning to the Alpha side, through the Qunaytirah crossing. On 11 August, also at the request of the Syrian authorities, UNDOF, in support of ICRC, facilitated

the crossing of a female patient, who had been in a coma since 2017, from the Bravo side to the Alpha side, through the Qunaytirah crossing.

14. United Nations personnel observed a number of transborder movements of unidentified individuals, some of whom were armed, moving between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, mostly through Mount Hermon in the northern part of the area of separation.

15. 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 carried out against Syrian security forces, other government authorities and former members of armed opposition groups, in addition to attacks on government checkpoints and the use of improvised explosive devices. Such security incidents are occurring increasingly closer to the UNDOF area of operations, including in proximity to UNDOF patrol routes, including in Jasim and Tafas, in the area of limitation in the Dar'a Governorate. Open sources reported that, on 16 July, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated at a checkpoint manned by Syrian authorities south of Bakr, in the area of limitation, and that Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant reportedly claimed responsibility for an improvised explosive device attack on 26 July that targeted a vehicle of the Syrian armed forces in Nawa.

16. 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 cross-border movement. Owing to measures related to the control of COVID-19, since early March, both the Alpha and Bravo sides continue to restrict the movement of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan personnel through the Qunaytirah crossing, which they open only on a case-by-case basis. With the lifting of the curfew on the Bravo side on 1 June, UNDOF has been able to resume its night patrolling. 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. 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. The 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. Both parties continued to suspend inspections conducted by Observer Group Golan in the area of limitation. Furthermore, owing to the COVID-19 outbreak, UNDOF was not in a position to gradually resume inspections on the Bravo side, which had been suspended for security reasons. 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.

18. Progress in the incremental return of UNDOF to the Bravo side has been slowed by the restriction on construction on the Bravo side owing to COVID-19 control measures. UNDOF completed the reconstruction of position 60 and made progress in the reconstruction of position 10A, including the building of the wall and necessary amenities, with completion of the position scheduled for November. This was followed by the reconstruction of observation post 71, which commenced in September.

19. On 4 August, an international staff member of UNDOF tested positive for COVID-19. Owing to prudent steps taken by the staff member and medical staff,

spread was contained and there was no secondary infection. In addition, one military observer in Observer Group Golan on the Alpha side tested positive on 17 August. Both United Nations personnel have since recovered. UNDOF and Observer Group Golan have been implementing the UNDOF COVID-19 action plan, including putting personnel in quarantine, contact tracing and isolation, to ensure the safety of United Nations staff and the local population.

20. 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.

21. During the reporting period, UNDOF monthly operational patrols continued on routes in the areas of separation and limitation, with 999 patrols completed in May, 995 in June and 940 in July. UNDOF continues 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 approximately 55 per cent of the area of limitation.

22. After a temporary suspension following the explosions at the port of Beirut on 4 August, UNDOF resumed the use of the container port and fuel depot at the port, the primary entry point for Mission supplies. 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.

23. 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.

24. 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, in particular as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant reportedly claimed responsibility for attacks in some locations in the area of limitation.

25. 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.

26. As at 19 August, UNDOF comprised 972 troops, including 44 women peacekeepers. Troops are deployed from Bhutan (3), Czechia (4), Fiji (139), Ghana (2), India (154), Ireland (138), Nepal (357), the Netherlands (1) and Uruguay (174). 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)**

27. In its resolution 2530 (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 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.

28. 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. Observations**

29. 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 15, 20 and 24 July and on 2 and 3 August. The Israel Defense Forces should refrain from flying aircraft across the ceasefire line and 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 and the flying of drones across the ceasefire line are also of concern. These developments 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 sensitize both parties to the risk of escalation and the need to preserve the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic.

30. 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.

31. 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.

32. 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.

33. 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 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.

34. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major 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.

