



# 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) from 21 May to 20 August 2021, pursuant to the mandate set out in Security Council resolution [350 \(1974\)](#) and extended in subsequent Council resolutions, most recently resolution [2581 \(2021\)](#).

#### II. Situation in the area of operations and activities of the Force

2. During the reporting period, the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic was generally maintained, several violations of the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces of 1974 notwithstanding. 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 [2581 \(2021\)](#).

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 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 activities that might lead to an escalation of the situation between them.

4. In the early hours of 1 June, United Nations personnel at position 32 heard an explosion to the north-west. An UNDOF patrol deployed to the area of the explosion found that a structure made of stones, located on the Alpha side (Israeli-occupied Golan) approximately 500 metres from the ceasefire line, had been destroyed using explosives. The Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that day that they had been “forced to act against one of the [Syrian Arab Armed Forces] military posts within Israeli territory” and that they would not “under any circumstances tolerate such infringements on Israel’s sovereignty and [would] act appropriately where deemed necessary”. In a video clip released publicly, the Israel Defense Forces showed personnel destroying a structure using a controlled explosion detonated by command wire.



5. Early on 17 June, United Nations personnel at Camp Ziouani, the Charlie gate and observation post 51 observed Israel Defense Forces personnel fire 10 rounds from a main battle tank located on the Alpha side approximately 700 metres north-east of observation post 51 towards Qahtaniyah in the area of separation. The Israel Defense Forces relayed to UNDOF that “the activities of Iran and its proxies in the area of [south-west] Syria and in the [area of separation] are a violation” and “demanded that the Syrian regime take responsibility for the activities that occur in its territory to prevent violation of [the] agreement and to take action in removing all of Iran and its proxy forces and weaponry from the area”. Open sources reported the destruction of a military position of the Syrian armed forces by the Israel Defense Forces in the same location in the area of separation.

6. On 6 July, United Nations personnel at position 32 and observation post 73 and on patrols noticed Israel Defense Forces personnel constructing a temporary firing position near the latter’s position located approximately 200 metres south-west of observation post 73. Some four hours later, United Nations personnel observed Israel Defense Forces personnel with one main battle tank, two bulldozers and two armoured personnel carriers move from the newly constructed position and cross the ceasefire line in the vicinity of a barrel marking the line north-east of Mas’adah. The Israel Defense Forces personnel remained on the Bravo side for approximately 35 minutes before returning to the Alpha side. Late on 6 July, United Nations personnel at observation post 73 saw the same Israel Defense Forces vehicles on the road east of the ceasefire line in the vicinity of the same barrel for 30 minutes before returning to the Alpha side.

7. On 17 August, United Nations personnel at positions 10A and 37 and observation posts 71, 72 and 73 observed an air strike against a radio relay station of the Syrian armed forces in the vicinity of the village of Hadar within the area of separation. Subsequently, United Nations personnel at position 32 and Camp Faouar heard a strike near the town of Alweisiyeh Comwel Maisia in the area of limitation on the Bravo side, with personnel at position 10A and observation post 71 entering bunkers. Immediately after the strikes, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that “there are infrastructures located in Syria which serve the Axis settlement”, that “Syrian army posts in southern Syria have become the ‘eyes of Hezbollah’ and serve them regularly” and that Israel “will respond harshly against every force of action against Israel from Syrian territory”. On 18 August, open sources reported that the Israel Defense Forces had launched two missiles against Syrian military posts, resulting in material damage.

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

9. On 26 May, UNDOF observed a drone from the Alpha side cross the ceasefire line and fly above an UNDOF patrol in the area of separation in the vicinity of United Nations position 86B. The drone subsequently returned to the Alpha side. On three separate occasions, on 13, 14 and 17 July, United Nations personnel at positions 60, 80 and 85 observed drones flying above the area of separation. UNDOF was unable to determine the points of origin of the drones or to attribute responsibility for them to either party.

10. On 26 July and 1 and 12 August, the Israel Defense Forces denied UNDOF personnel entry along a metalled road to a temporary observation point on the Alpha side located in the vicinity of an Israel Defense Forces position south-west of United Nations position 85 to conduct static night patrols.

11. Sporadic heavy explosions and bursts of heavy machine gun and small arms fire persisted throughout the reporting period. UNDOF assessed that the military activity was the result of controlled detonations of unexploded ordnance as part of clearance and training by Syrian armed forces personnel. 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 Disengagement of Forces Agreement.

12. 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 presence of unauthorized equipment and personnel in the areas of separation and limitation, and the crossings of the ceasefire line by the Israel Defense Forces and by drones, as well as by civilians from the Bravo side. UNDOF closely liaised with the parties to de-escalate the situation, including during periods of heightened tension.

13. On 6 August, UNDOF was in a state of high alert following the firing of rockets from Lebanon into the northern part of the area of limitation on the Alpha side. United Nations personnel at positions Hermon South, 10A and 37 and observation post 73 observed and heard numerous explosions that UNDOF assessed could have been the interception of rockets by the Iron Dome system. United Nations personnel at various positions on Mount Hermon sheltered in bunkers for approximately one hour. During that period, UNDOF restricted the movement of its personnel and patrols in the northern part of the area of operations to ensure their safety and security.

14. 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 29 July, open sources reported numerous clashes between Syrian armed forces and armed elements in the southern part of the area of limitation. Open sources continued to report attacks 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 Jasim, Nawa, Ankhal, Tasil, Shajarah, Zayzun, Bakkar, Tall al-Jabiyah, Tafas and Yadudah in the area of limitation. Owing to the security situation, from 29 July to 1 August UNDOF temporarily suspended the movement of its personnel, including patrols, along its routes in the area of limitation on the Bravo side.

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 deep 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.

16. On 10 August, UNDOF, at the request of the parties, facilitated the rapid transfer from the Alpha side to the Bravo side, through the Qunaytirah crossing, of a Syrian woman who had been apprehended earlier that day by the Israel Defense Forces for allegedly attempting to cross the ceasefire line in the vicinity of observation post 54.

17. 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. The measures include limitations on the movement of United Nations personnel and their mandatory testing and quarantine after any crossing between the two sides and cross-border movement between the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon. Since early March 2020, the Israel Defense Forces have been restricting the movement of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan

personnel through the Qunaytirah crossing, opening it on a case-by-case basis only and thereby 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. During the reporting period, three UNDOF personnel tested positive for COVID-19 and have since recovered. UNDOF enhanced its capabilities to test for COVID-19 by establishing a testing facility at Camp Ziouani, in addition to that at Camp Faouar. It also continued to vaccinate its military and civilian personnel.

18. On 9 August, UNDOF, through Observer Group Golan, inspected military positions of the Syrian armed forces in the northern part of the area of limitation on the Bravo side. It was the first time that UNDOF had carried out inspections on the Bravo side since 2014, when they had ceased owing to the deterioration in the security situation. The Israel Defense Forces continued to suspend inspections on the Alpha side, citing a surge in the number of COVID-19 cases in Israel.

19. As part of the return to full mandate implementation, UNDOF resumed the restoration, repainting and refurbishment of the barrels marking the ceasefire line and the Bravo line, which delineate the area of separation, with 7 barrels restored along the ceasefire line and 23 along the Bravo line. UNDOF continued to consult the parties on the barrel restoration activity.

20. Progress in the incremental return of UNDOF to the Bravo side continued, the delays caused by the restrictions on construction owing to COVID-19 control measures notwithstanding. The construction of the new United Nations position 86B in the southern part of the area of separation continued, with completion scheduled for the end of November. The reconstruction of United Nations observation post 71 was completed, with the post reoccupied on 2 August. In addition, the reconstruction of United Nations observation post 57 continued, with its completion delayed from August to September owing to COVID-19 control measures and the security situation in the southern part of the area of operations.

21. 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 eight fixed observation posts within the UNDOF area of responsibility and one temporary observation post along the ceasefire line. The focus of Observer Group Golan remains continuous static observation and situational awareness.

22. UNDOF monthly operational patrols continued on routes in the areas of separation and limitation, with 1,218 operational activities carried out in May, 1,674 in June and 1,639 in July. UNDOF patrol routes cover approximately 97 per cent of the area of separation and 70 per cent of the area of limitation. The deterioration in the security situation in the central part of the area of operations and the volatile security situation in the southern part continued to slow down progress in opening new patrol routes in the area of limitation on the Bravo side.

23. The movement of UNDOF personnel through Lebanon has been 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 during the reporting period. As part of its contingency measures for sustained fuel resupply, on 16 August UNDOF carried out an assessment visit aimed at evaluating the road and required customs procedures from Camp Faouar to Mafraq in Jordan, via the Nasib-Jabir border crossing.

24. UNDOF continued to assess that there remained a significant threat to United Nations personnel in its 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. On 7 June, an UNDOF explosive ordnance disposal team detected and disposed of an explosive reactive armour panel during a search in the vicinity of United Nations observation post 72.

25. 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, observation posts, the operational base at Camp Ziouani and headquarters at Camp Faouar.

26. As at 20 August, UNDOF comprised 1,118 troops, including 65 women peacekeepers. Troops are deployed from Bhutan (3), Czechia (4), Fiji (151), Ghana (6), India (197), Ireland (135), Nepal (410), the Netherlands (1) and Uruguay (211). In addition, 73 military observers from Observer Group Golan, including 13 women, assisted UNDOF in carrying out its tasks.

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

27. In its resolution 2581 (2021), 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 31 December 2021, 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/76/194), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 75/24 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 continued violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement during the reporting period, at a particularly volatile time for the region, including breaches of the ceasefire that occurred on 17 June and 17 August, which also posed a risk to United Nations personnel. The Israel Defense Forces should refrain from firing into the area of separation and 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, as well as the flying of drones across the ceasefire line, is also of concern. Those 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 of 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 undermine 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 inspections on both sides. 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 and the volatile security situation in the southern part of the area of limitation on the Bravo side, 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.

33. The continued support of Member States, and in particular the confidence of troop-contributing countries in UNDOF and their commitment to its mission, remain key to 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. I am also thankful to those Member States that have contributed military observers to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization.

34. 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.

