



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 23 November 2019 to 5 March 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 an increase in the number of 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 operations remained stable, there was some military activity both across the ceasefire line and in the area of separation 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 into the area of separation and 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 22 December 2019 and 14 January 2020, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had carried out strikes on infrastructure in Syria. In neither incident did UNDOF hear or observe any airstrikes.

5. On 6 February, UNDOF personnel at observation post 72 heard aircraft flying over the area of separation and observed anti-aircraft fire launched from Syrian armed forces positions in the area of limitation on the Bravo side. At about the same time, United Nations personnel at positions 60 and 80 observed drones crossing the ceasefire line, flying over the area of separation. The United Nations personnel observed one of



the drones being shot down on the Bravo side. United Nations personnel observed two missiles fired from the Alpha side (Israeli-occupied Golan) across the ceasefire line, impacting the vicinities of Nawa and Ankhula in the area of limitation on the Bravo side. United Nations personnel at observation post 56 observed unidentified objects flying from west to east which were engaged by anti-aircraft fire and exploded in the vicinity of Ankhula. The Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had conducted a “precision strike on Iranian Quds Forces operating inside Syria”. The Syrian authorities informed UNDOF that the strikes conducted by the Israel Defense Forces had resulted in 10 casualties, including 2 fatalities.

6. On 13 February, United Nations personnel at positions 80 and 85 observed two aircraft flying from the Alpha side crossing the ceasefire line. United Nations personnel at several positions observed the aircraft being engaged by Syrian armed forces anti-aircraft fire on the Bravo side. Subsequently, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had conducted a “precision strike on Iranian Quds Forces operating inside Syria”.

7. On 23 February, United Nations personnel at positions 60 and 68 observed two aircraft crossing the area of separation from west to east. United Nations personnel also observed Syrian armed forces anti-aircraft fire engaging the aircraft from different locations on the Bravo side. The Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had conducted precision strikes on Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Damascus area.

8. The Syrian authorities informed UNDOF on 27 February that the Israel Defense Forces had carried out a targeted strike in the vicinity of Hadar, in the area of separation, resulting in the death of a Syrian police officer. The Israel Defense Forces did not confirm the incident to UNDOF. Later the same day, UNDOF personnel observed a number of explosions and aircraft activity in the vicinity of Qunaytirah, in the area of separation. The Israel Defense Forces confirmed to UNDOF that they had conducted a strike on Syrian armed forces positions in south-west Syria “where Iranian and Hizbullah operatives are active”.

9. On 2 March, UNDOF personnel at position 73 heard detonations and observed a burning vehicle in the vicinity of United Nations position 16 (Ayn al-Tinah area), which is close to the ceasefire line. Shortly thereafter, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had carried out a “precise strike against a terror element attempting to act against Israeli soldiers”. The Syrian authorities informed UNDOF that a vehicle belonging to a Syrian national had been attacked in a helicopter strike in the Ayn al-Tinah area. United Nations personnel who patrolled the area after the incident observed a vehicle that had been destroyed and a crater on the ground.

10. On 5 March, United Nations personnel at position 80 observed one of two helicopters flying from the northern part to the southern part of the area of limitation on the Alpha side fire one missile towards Tall Ahmar al-Sharqi in the area of limitation on the Bravo side. At about the same time, United Nations personnel at positions 80 and 68 observed 10 missiles fired from the Alpha side towards the Bravo side. Five of the missiles impacted the vicinity of Tall Ahmar al-Gharbi in the area of limitation. Subsequently, Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they “had carried out a precision strike aiming to prevent a terror attack towards IDF forces in the Kudnah area...”.

11. The Israel Defense Forces continued to carry out their planned operation, which they had begun on 1 May 2019, of laying razor concertina wire along the ceasefire line on the Alpha side. UNDOF deployed forces to that area to de-escalate potential tension.

12. 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.

13. The military violations on the Alpha side included the presence of Iron Dome systems and multiple rocket launcher systems, within 10 km 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.

14. 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 close proximity to the ceasefire line. UNDOF continued to place warning signs along the ceasefire line to deter such crossings.

15. UNDOF protested to the parties all violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement that it had observed, including the firing across the ceasefire line and from the area of separation, 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.

16. The security situation in the southern part of the area of limitation continues to be volatile, with open source reporting of assassinations, attacks on government checkpoints, the use of improvised explosive devices and protests increasing. Despite the improvement in the security situation in the UNDOF area of operations, open sources reported continued 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 Nawa, Tasil, Tafas and Muzayrib in the area of limitation on the Bravo side. Open sources also reported a fatal attack against local employees of an international non-governmental organization in the area of limitation on the Bravo side.

17. During the reporting period, UNDOF did not observe any internally displaced persons or tents in the area of separation. On 27 January, at the request of the Israel Defense Forces and with the agreement of the Syrian authorities, UNDOF and the International Committee of the Red Cross facilitated the handover to Syrian authorities of a Syrian national who had been detained by the Israeli authorities after allegedly crossing the ceasefire line. On 10 February, UNDOF and the International Committee of the Red Cross also facilitated through the Qunaytirah crossing the return of the remains of a Syrian national. UNDOF was informed that the individual had been residing in Lebanon and that his remains had been recovered on the Israeli coast of Ashdod on 30 May 2019.

18. UNDOF made progress towards its gradual return to vacated positions in the area of separation. UNDOF currently maintains five positions on Mount Hermon in the northern part of the area of separation, three in the central part and three in the southern part, as well as one on the Alpha side. The Force enhanced its visibility of the area of separation and the ceasefire line through increased patrolling and from its static positions. During the reporting period, UNDOF continued to develop the infrastructure of positions 27 and 80 and improve the force protection measures at these positions.

19. 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 in the area of separation. The focus of the Group remains on continuous static observation and situational awareness.

20. Through Observer Group Golan, UNDOF continued to carry out fortnightly inspections of equipment and force levels in the area of limitation on the Alpha side. Liaison officers from the Alpha side accompanied the inspection teams. With the improvement in the security situation on the Bravo side, UNDOF plans to progressively resume inspections in the area of limitation, which were suspended for security reasons.

21. UNDOF continued to engage with the Israel Defense Forces with a view to addressing restrictions on movement and access to United Nations positions in the area of separation. This was aimed at reducing the delays and challenges experienced by United Nations personnel in crossing the Israeli technical fence to United Nations observation posts. The leadership of UNDOF continued to remind the parties of their obligation to scrupulously abide by the terms of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground and to extend all cooperation to UNDOF in the fulfilment of the tasks under its mandate.

22. UNDOF, in consultation with both parties, continued to review the situation in the area of separation as the Mission advanced its return to vacated positions in the area of separation. During the reporting period, UNDOF maintained its monthly patrols on routes in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side at 836 in February. UNDOF continues to enhance its operational capability and reach on the Bravo side through 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 50 per cent of the area of limitation.

23. UNDOF regularly used the Qunaytirah crossing to move equipment and personnel between the Alpha and Bravo sides. UNDOF continues 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 the United Nations personnel to cross using only documents issued by UNDOF and for an increase in the opening hours of the Alpha gate. With effect from 2 March, the Alpha gate was closed owing to concerns regarding Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), thus affecting the movement of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan personnel between the Alpha and Bravo sides. The administrative procedures involved in crossing have placed a significant additional administrative and logistics burden on the Mission.

24. The developments related to public protests in Lebanon since October 2019 have affected the primary supply route for UNDOF between Beirut and Damascus. This has resulted in significant challenges for the Mission, in particular the movement of UNDOF personnel, fuel, rations and other supplies.

25. 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 from the possible presence of sleeper cells of armed groups, including listed terrorist groups. On 26 November, an UNDOF armoured vehicle travelling as part of a logistics convoy between United Nations positions 60 and 68 in the area of separation was damaged when an explosion occurred near Ruhinah, in the area of separation. No United Nations personnel were injured in the incident. UNDOF investigated the circumstances of the explosion but

could not determine the cause. UNDOF assessed that the probable cause was a buried piece of unexploded ordnance that was triggered when the convoy passed by.

26. In accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolution [2503 \(2019\)](#) and the UNDOF operational concept, UNDOF continued its efforts to deploy appropriate technology to ensure the safety and security of UNDOF personnel and equipment. 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, as well as facilities in Damascus. UNDOF conducted 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 UNDOF operational base at Camp Ziouani and headquarters at Camp Faouar.

27. As at 16 February, UNDOF comprised 1,016 troops, including 41 women. Troops are deployed from Australia (1), Bhutan (3), Czechia (4), Fiji (133), Ghana (13), India (187), Ireland (135), Nepal (366) Netherlands (2) and Uruguay (172). In addition, 75 military observers from Observer Group Golan, including 8 women, assisted UNDOF in carrying out its tasks.

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

28. 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.

29. 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 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

30. 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 22 December 2019, 14 January 2020, 6, 13, 23 and 27 February and 2 and 5 March. 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 further undermine 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.

31. 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.

32. I note the continued support of the parties in facilitating the return of UNDOF to full operations on the Bravo side. It is crucial that the parties provide all necessary support to allow the full utilization of the Qunaytirah crossing by UNDOF in line with established procedures, ensuring the necessary freedom of movement. It is important that UNDOF be able to carry out its operations without facing any administrative obstacles. This is even more important as UNDOF increases its operations on the Bravo side to facilitate effective and efficient mandate implementation.

33. The 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 Mission. I count on the continued cooperation of both parties to facilitate the advancement of the Mission's plans for an incremental return to operations and positions in the area of separation and to ensure that the Mission 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.

34. Given the worrying trend of increased number of violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement during the reporting period, the safety and security of military and civilian personnel in UNDOF and Observer Group Golan is 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. The support of the parties in facilitating the clearance of mines, unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war in the UNDOF area of operations is crucial. It is also necessary for UNDOF to continue to have at its disposal all means and resources necessary for it to return fully to the area of separation, conditions permitting.

35. The support of Member States and the confidence and commitment of troop-contributing countries in UNDOF remain key factors in the Mission's ability to carry out its mandate. I continue to count on the support of troop-contributing countries. I am grateful to the Governments of Australia, Bhutan, Czechia, Fiji, Ghana, India, Ireland, Nepal, the Netherlands and Uruguay for their contributions, commitment, resolve and the consummate professionalism of their military personnel in UNDOF. I am also thankful to the Member States that have contributed military observers to UNTSO.

36. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the leadership of UNDOF and 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.

