



Security Council

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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force for the period from 29 August to 18 November 2015

I. Introduction

1. The present report gives an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) during the past three months, pursuant to the mandate contained in Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and extended in subsequent resolutions, most recently resolution 2229 (2015).

II. Situation in the area and activities of the Force

2. During the reporting period, the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic generally was maintained, albeit in a continuously volatile environment attributable to the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and notwithstanding a number of significant violations of the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces (Disengagement of Forces Agreement) of 1974, which are set out below. The Syrian armed forces carried out military activities and security operations against armed groups, often in response to offensives carried out by those groups in the area of separation and the area of limitation on the Bravo (Syrian) side. Inside the area of separation, the presence of the Syrian armed forces and military equipment, as well as any other armed personnel and military equipment other than that of UNDOF, is in violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. As underscored by the Security Council in its resolution 2229 (2015), there should be no military activity of any kind in the area of separation.

3. A number of significant incidents occurred across the ceasefire line in violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. On 26 September, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) informed UNDOF that a rocket fired from the Bravo side had landed on the Alpha side (Israeli-occupied Golan). UNDOF personnel did not observe the firing of the rocket from the Bravo side. On the following day, 27 September, United Nations personnel at observation post 51 observed two rockets flying from the Alpha side towards the east, but did not see the points of impact. IDF informed UNDOF that it had fired two rockets targeting artillery positions of the Syrian armed forces in Kurum al Webseh in response to two rockets that allegedly had been fired from Dayr Makir on the Bravo side the previous day. On 13 October, IDF notified UNDOF that it had retaliated against spillover fire



from the Bravo side by firing three missiles at Syrian armed forces positions south-east of Khan Arnabeh in the area of limitation. UNDOF did not observe the alleged mortar-round firing from the Bravo side or ascertain the points of its origin or impact. The Senior Syrian Arab Delegate confirmed that the IDF missiles had targeted the Syrian armed forces positions south-east of Khan Arnabeh. Throughout those incidents, the Force Commander remained in contact with both parties, urging them to exercise the maximum restraint in order to prevent an escalation of the situation.

4. On 30 August, United Nations personnel at observation post 73 observed one unmanned aerial vehicle from the Alpha side flying across the ceasefire line into the area of separation and, after one minute, returning to the Alpha side. On 24 October, IDF informed UNDOF that a civilian hang-glider from the Alpha side had crossed the ceasefire line north of United Nations position 86 and landed in the vicinity of Al Jamlah in the area of limitation on the Bravo side. UNDOF did not observe that incident. On the night of 24 and 25 October, IDF carried out a significant number of air activities on the Alpha side in efforts to extract the individual.

5. Crossing of the ceasefire line by civilians, primarily shepherds, was observed on an almost daily basis. On 12 September, United Nations personnel at observation post 73 observed 12 IDF soldiers detaining one civilian between the ceasefire line and the Israeli technical fence south-east of the observation post. The soldiers removed the detained individual from the location, and United Nations personnel lost sight of the IDF personnel and the detained individual. When asked by UNDOF about the detained individual, IDF did not comment on the incident. On 14 September, UNDOF personnel observed the individual who had been detained on the Bravo side. IDF confirmed to UNDOF that it had released a shepherd whom it had detained earlier. On 15 September, IDF informed UNDOF that it would be releasing another person, without providing any specific details. Subsequently, United Nations personnel at observation post 73 observed four IDF personnel releasing an individual, who then crossed the ceasefire line to the Bravo side.

6. On 18 September, United Nations personnel at observation post 55 observed two individuals from the Bravo side crossing the ceasefire line and working on a road construction site. On 21 September, at a location near observation post 55, United Nations personnel observed six individuals from the Bravo side on two trucks, two motorcycles, one front loader and one excavator, crossing the ceasefire line and carrying out earthwork in the vicinity of United Nations barrel markers, resulting in one of the barrels being buried. After several weeks of work, a field straddling the ceasefire line was cleared and prepared for cultivation. On 9 October, five individuals from the Bravo side were observed crossing the ceasefire line and digging a deep hole and an irrigation channel in the vicinity of the field. The work on the field continued throughout October and November, with civilians crossing the ceasefire line on a daily basis.

7. On seven occasions in October and November, United Nations personnel at observation post 54 observed interaction at the Israeli technical fence gate between IDF personnel and individuals from the Bravo side, some of whom were armed. On 28 October, UNDOF observed individuals from the Bravo side handing over an injured person on a stretcher to IDF personnel.

8. 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. UNDOF protested all firing across the ceasefire line to the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate and IDF. 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, are violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. In his regular interactions with both sides, the Force Commander continued to call upon both parties to exercise the utmost restraint and to prevent any escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line.

9. UNDOF observed and reported almost daily instances of transborder movements of unidentified individuals, some of whom were armed. On 11 September, three armed individuals were observed moving from Lebanon into the Syrian Arab Republic and firing 20 rounds of small arms fire into the air.

10. In the context of the Syrian conflict, fighting continued with varying degrees of intensity in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. Most of the fighting took place in the northern and central parts of those areas. On 25 September, armed groups launched an attack on locations and positions of the Syrian armed forces to the north and east of Jabbata, Trunje and Ufaniyah in the area of separation. During the intense fighting, which lasted for several days, UNDOF observed the firing of more than 1,000 artillery rounds and tens of thousands of heavy machine gun bursts. Syrian armed forces carried out large-scale artillery attacks, as well as machine gun and anti-aircraft gun fire towards New Hamidiyeh in the area of separation. According to open sources, during the offensive, armed groups took control of several hilltops east of Ufaniyah in the area and straddling the Bravo line. Between 6 and 10 October, Syrian armed forces initiated a counteroffensive and regained control over the hilltops and positions that armed groups reportedly had captured several days earlier. On a number of occasions in late September/early October, armed groups attacked positions of the Syrian armed forces in the northern part of the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. Syrian armed forces continued to engage in direct and indirect fire to contain armed groups in Jabbata, Trunje and Ufaniyah.

11. In the central part of the areas of separation and limitation, the situation remained largely unchanged. UNDOF observed intermittent exchanges of artillery, mortar and heavy machine gun fire. The Syrian armed forces, especially in positions in Khan Anarbeh and Al Baath, intermittently directed heavy artillery fire towards New Hamidiyeh. On a number of occasions, UNDOF observed air strikes being conducted in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. On 9 September, the Force observed two air strikes in Um Batinah and Ruihinah in the area of limitation, and on 15 October it observed four missiles fired at targets in Ufaniyah. On 3 November, United Nations personnel at observation post 51 observed six air strikes in the area of Mashara and Tal al-Harrah in the area of limitation. On 28 October, UNDOF observed two air strikes in Namar, and on 29 October it observed two in Namar and Nab'as Sakhr in the area of limitation.

12. Armed groups continued to exercise control over most of the southern parts of the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. UNDOF observed intermittent clashes in the vicinity of Al Magles, Abu Hasar, Lurkasi, Ain Dhakar, Tasil, Abu Harten and Saida in the area of limitation. Although the United Nations does not have the means to verify reports independently, several sources indicated that in the furthest parts of the areas of separation and limitation, fighting continued between the coalition led by the Al-Nusra Front, a listed terrorist group

and an affiliate of Al-Qaida, and the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade, which reportedly has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant group. Since mid-September, the fighting between armed groups has lessened in intensity. Beginning in early October, United Nations personnel at observation post 55 observed armed groups training at and near United Nations outpost 80A in the southernmost part of the area of separation.

13. Several incidents that threatened United Nations personnel and facilities occurred. On 30 September, a mortar exploded in the compound of the Sheraton Hotel in Damascus, which houses the temporary headquarters of UNDOF and provides accommodation for international staff members. There was no injury to United Nations personnel. On 4, 6 and 10 October, United Nations personnel at observation post 51 took shelter when several rounds of artillery fire landed in the vicinity of the observation post. There was no injury to United Nations personnel or damage to United Nations property.

14. During the reporting period, the Syrian armed forces maintained their positions in the area of separation, particularly around the urban centres of Al Baath and Khan Arnabeh and the latter's southern approaches, as well as in the area of Al Wisiyah in the area of limitation, along the main road connecting Quneitra to Damascus. The Syrian armed forces generally deployed tanks in the area of separation and at other locations immediately adjacent to the area of separation. UNDOF observed armed groups using tanks in the area of separation. On 3 September, armed groups were seen moving one tank from Al Qahtaniyah to Ruihinah. On 5 September, a tank used by armed groups was observed south of New Hamidiyeh, and on 7 September it was observed in Al Aishah. During periods of intense fighting, armed groups were observed using tanks in the vicinity of Quneitra and New Hamidiyeh.

15. UNDOF protested the presence of Syrian armed forces and equipment in the area of separation and the firing into and inside the area of separation. The Force Commander again emphasized to the Syrian authorities the obligation of the Syrian armed forces to halt military operations in the area of separation and to cease firing from the area of limitation, stressing the importance of abiding by the terms of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and ensuring the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground.

16. On several occasions during the reporting period, UNDOF observed armed and unarmed persons digging out and removing landmines from around United Nations observation post 54 in the vicinity of the ceasefire line. On 12 October, four individuals were observed collecting anti-personnel mines close to the observation post. On 27 October, three individuals were observed removing a total of 18 anti-personnel mines. In addition, UNDOF observed the digging-out and removal of landmines in the vicinity of observation post 54 on 30 October and 3 November.

17. During the reporting period, UNDOF observed up to five locations where tents had been set up for internally displaced persons in the area of separation. The Force observed approximately 70 tents north-west of Al Aishah village, straddling the ceasefire line, as well as water tanks and limited infrastructure in the vicinity of the tents. Several persons were observed in that camp on a regular basis. In another tented camp, located in an area along the ceasefire line close to the village of Braika, the number of tents increased from 5 to 120 during the reporting period. UNDOF personnel observed persons present in the camp on a regular basis.

Between 10 and 15 tents were observed at a location straddling the Bravo line north-west of the village of Ain Kadi. No individuals were observed at that tented camp. Owing to the closure of the established crossing point between the Alpha and Bravo sides since late August 2014, UNDOF is not currently in a position to facilitate, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, humanitarian crossings, including for students, between the Alpha and the Bravo sides.

18. Since the temporary relocation of UNDOF from a number of positions in September 2014, and pending its full return to the area of separation, conditions permitting, the operations of the Force in its current configuration have remained the same. In that context, UNDOF has continued to maintain visibility, albeit in a modified manner, of the area of separation and the ceasefire line from its positions on Mount Hermon in the northern part of the area of separation and position 80 in the southern part, as well as position 22 on the Alpha side. UNDOF operations continued to be supported by the military observers in Observer Group Golan of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), who maintained five fixed and four temporary observation posts on the Alpha side. The focus of the activities of Observer Group Golan remained on around-the-clock static observation, investigations and situational analysis. 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 Observer Group Golan inspection teams. Inspections and mobile operations in the area of limitation on the Bravo side remained suspended because of the security situation. As in the past, the Force faced restrictions on its freedom of movement, and its inspection teams were denied access to some positions on the Alpha side.

19. On a number of occasions during the reporting period, United Nations personnel observed 155 mm artillery weapons on the Alpha side within 10 km of the ceasefire line, in positions and on flatbed trucks. On 4 September, an anti-tank missile-launching system was observed at an IDF position south of observation post 73. On 7 September, three multiple-launch rocket systems were observed deployed within 10 km of the ceasefire line and 7 km from United Nations observation post 54. On 31 August, United Nations personnel observed an Iron Dome defence system deployed at an IDF position in the vicinity of Buq'ata within 10 km of the ceasefire line. Since 5 November, United Nations personnel at observation post 53 and temporary observation post 4 have observed two missile carriers at two IDF positions within the 10 km zone of the area of limitation on the Alpha side. Observer Group Golan members continued to experience restrictions of movement on the Alpha side related to delays by IDF in opening the technical fence gate when military observers entered and exited United Nations observation posts 54 and 73, located east of the Israeli technical fence. UNDOF peacekeepers remained deployed at observation posts 54 and 73 to enhance the protection of the military observers.

20. UNDOF, in consultation with the parties, continued to review the situation in the area of separation. The ultimate objective of the Force is to make a full return to the area of separation when conditions permit. UNDOF determined that the prevailing security situation in the area of separation was not currently conducive to such a return. In that context, it continued to engage with the parties on practical arrangements to allow it to continue to maintain the ceasefire, monitor, verify and

report on violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and exercise its critical liaison functions with the parties in order to implement its mandate. UNDOF also continued to engage with the parties on the use of technology, including technological enablers to enhance the observation and monitoring of the area of separation and the ceasefire line and offset the loss of situational awareness as a result of its current configuration. The security conditions prevailing in the area of separation and area of limitation on the Bravo side, as well as the lack of agreement on established crossing procedures on the Bravo side in the absence of the Quneitra crossing and temporary observation posts for the Force on the Alpha side, continue to hamper UNDOF operations.

21. UNDOF planning remained focused on maintaining operational effectiveness to support and maintain the Force in its current configuration and under the prevailing conditions. In October and November, in support of the efforts of UNDOF to carry out its mandate in a safe and secure manner, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations conducted a military capability study of the Force. The study made several observations regarding the operational environment, force structure and capabilities of UNDOF and recommended reconfiguration measures aimed at optimizing its operations, focusing in particular on aspects of command and control, operational effectiveness and force protection.

22. UNDOF has continued its efforts to strengthen its positions and presence in the Mount Hermon area. To enhance the ability of the Force to sustain its Mount Hermon positions, including through the winter months, work at positions 12 and 12A to develop additional infrastructure, including accommodation, and force protection measures continued, and an additional 50 peacekeepers were assigned to position 12A. UNDOF completed the stocking of the logistics requirements and necessary winterization preparations for the positions. United Nations position 80 was further developed to accommodate an additional 30 peacekeepers, and major enhancements were made to the position's force protection measures and perimeter security.

23. UNDOF continued to resupply its positions on Mount Hermon from Damascus. UNDOF convoys between Damascus and the Mount Hermon positions are conducted almost daily and with a Force security escort, accompanied by a liaison officer from the office of the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate. UNDOF continued to carry out contingency planning for the reinforcement and evacuation of United Nations positions and observation posts and to update its contingency planning for the relocation and evacuation of United Nations personnel on both the Alpha and Bravo sides, as well as in Damascus. UNDOF, through its Force reserve company, conducted regular rehearsals, exercises and training for all identified contingencies.

24. The implementation of risk mitigation measures continued at observation posts, positions and the operational base at Camp Ziouani. Additional force protection barriers and new observation and defence/protective posts were constructed at United Nations positions 12, 12A, 22 and 80. As a consequence of the repeated mortar impacts at and in the vicinity of the Sheraton Hotel in Damascus and the assessment by the Department of Safety and Security in August that the location was a "very high-risk" area, UNDOF relocated the accommodation for international staff to the Yarfour Hotel, which is close to the Damascus-Beirut highway. The relocation of the main UNDOF temporary headquarters functions to

the Yarfour Hotel is expected to be completed by the end of November. All risk mitigation measures recommended in United Nations security risk assessments are being implemented at all UNDOF locations.

25. As at 13 November, UNDOF comprised 768 troops, including 23 women. Troops are currently deployed from Bhutan (2), the Czech Republic (3), Fiji (300), India (189), Ireland (151), Nepal (121) and the Netherlands (2). In addition, 77 military observers from UNTSO, including 3 women, assisted the Force in carrying out its tasks.

III. Financial aspects

26. By its resolution 69/301 of 25 June 2015, the General Assembly appropriated the amount of \$51.7 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016.

27. As at 12 November 2015, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNDOF amounted to \$12.5 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at the same date amounted to \$1,503.1 million.

28. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 31 July 2015, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 30 June 2015, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

IV. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

29. The Security Council, when deciding in its resolution 2229 (2015) to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a further period of six months, until 31 December 2015, called upon the parties concerned to immediately implement its resolution 338 (1973) and requested the Secretary-General to submit, at the end of the period, a report on developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement that resolution. The search for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, in particular the efforts made at various levels to implement resolution 338 (1973), was dealt with in my report on the situation in the Middle East (A/70/353), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 69/24, on Jerusalem, and 69/25, on the Syrian Golan.

30. Since the discontinuation of indirect peace talks in December 2008, there have been no negotiations between the parties. The Syrian conflict is further reducing 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.

V. Observations

31. I am deeply concerned about the violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement that have taken place. The firing of rockets and guns from the Bravo

side, as well as the firing of IDF missiles, across the ceasefire line jeopardizes the long-term ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. It remains critical that the parties maintain liaison with UNDOF in the first instance to prevent any escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line. The mandate of UNDOF remains an important element in ensuring the stability of the region. For its part, the United Nations will spare no effort in ensuring that the long-held ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic continues to hold.

32. I am gravely concerned about the continuing deterioration of the security situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, its impact on the Syrian population and its potential implications for the stability of the region. These developments have continued to significantly affect the UNDOF area of operations. The presence of the Syrian armed forces and unauthorized military equipment in the area of separation is in violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. The increased use of heavy weapons by the Syrian armed forces and armed groups, including listed terrorist groups, in the continuing Syrian conflict, including air power by government forces in the area of limitation on the Bravo side, is disturbing. I note with concern the increasing presence and use of tanks and heavy weapons by the Syrian armed forces and the armed groups in the area of separation. Armed opposition groups and other armed groups continue to maintain control over significant sections of the areas of separation and limitation in the southern part of the UNDOF area of operations and remain present along the section of the main road connecting the two UNDOF camps. The established crossing between the Alpha and Bravo sides remains closed.

33. There should be no military forces in the area of separation other than those of UNDOF. I urge the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to stop the use of air strikes. I call upon all parties to the Syrian conflict to cease military actions throughout the country, including in the UNDOF area of operations, and to remove all military equipment and all armed personnel from the area of separation.

34. IDF should refrain from carrying out air strikes across the ceasefire line. The continued presence of unauthorized weapons and equipment in the area of limitation on the Alpha side is also of concern.

35. I call upon countries with influence to strongly and urgently convey to the armed groups in the UNDOF area of operations the need to cease any actions in violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic that jeopardize the safety and security of United Nations personnel, and to accord United Nations personnel the freedom to carry out their mandate safely and securely. I remain concerned about the several incidents that have jeopardized United Nations personnel and facilities. Any hostile act against United Nations personnel, including threatening their physical safety, restricting their movement and direct and indirect firing at United Nations personnel and facilities by anyone, is unacceptable. The safety and security of United Nations personnel must be ensured. I reiterate that all military activities in the area of separation carried out by any actor pose a risk to the ceasefire and to the local civilian population, in addition to the United Nations personnel on the ground. I call upon all parties to take all measures necessary to protect civilians.

36. The primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side rests with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic.

37. The continued presence of UNDOF in the area remains essential. Both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic have stated their continued commitment to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and the presence of UNDOF. I call on both parties to actively assist UNDOF in achieving its interim configuration and deployment as quickly as possible to ensure that the Force is in a position to implement its mandate effectively, until such time as conditions allow it to make a full return to the area of separation. I note the assistance provided by the Governments of Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic in facilitating the provision of essential supplies in support of the Force. I also call upon the parties to continue supporting UNDOF in its reconfiguration efforts and to address the pending administrative, logistic and operational aspects. It remains critical that UNDOF have the technology and equipment necessary to enhance its observation of the area of separation and the ceasefire line and to improve force protection. The full return of UNDOF to the area of separation remains a priority for the Force. In planning and preparing for such a return, the safety and security of United Nations personnel remains the primary consideration in determining the exact modalities.

38. It is equally critical 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 in a safe and secure manner and freely. It is essential that the Force continue to have at its disposal all the means and resources necessary to enable it to make a full return to the area of separation as the situation permits.

39. The confidence and commitment of troop-contributing countries with regard to UNDOF remain a key factor for the mission's ability to continue to carry out its mandate. I am grateful to the Governments of Bhutan, the Czech Republic, Fiji, India, Ireland, Nepal and the Netherlands for their contributions and for staying the course. I am also thankful to the Member States contributing military observers to UNTSO.

40. Under the prevailing circumstances, I consider the continued presence of UNDOF in the area to be essential. I therefore recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the Force for a further period of six months, until 30 June 2016. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has given its assent to the proposed extension. The Government of Israel has also expressed its agreement.

41. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the Head of Mission and Force Commander, Lieutenant General Purna Chandra Thapa, and the military and civilian personnel serving under his leadership, who continue to perform with efficiency and commitment under challenging circumstances the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council. I have full confidence that UNDOF will continue to use its best efforts to carry out its mission.

Annex

