



# 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 November 2018 to 14 March 2019, pursuant to the mandate set out in Security Council resolution [350 \(1974\)](#) and extended in subsequent Council resolutions, most recently resolution [2450 \(2018\)](#).

#### 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 maintained notwithstanding a number of violations of the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces (Disengagement of Forces Agreement) of 1974, which are set out below. After the cessation of fighting in August 2018 between the Syrian armed forces and various non-State armed groups, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic regained control of parts of the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side that had previously been under the control of the armed groups. There was increased military activity across the ceasefire line, including the firing of missiles. As underscored again by the Security Council in its resolution [2450 \(2018\)](#), there should be no military activity of any kind in the area of separation.

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, are violations of the Agreement. In its regular interaction with both sides, the leadership of UNDOF continued to call upon both parties to exercise restraint and prevent any miscalculation that might lead to an escalation of the situation.

4. During the reporting period, there were several breaches of the ceasefire line by the parties to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. UNDOF observed, on several occasions, firing into the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. On 29 November 2018, UNDOF personnel observed heavy explosions and tracer rounds



of heavy and anti-aircraft machine guns in the vicinities of Turunjah, in the area of separation, and Camp Faouar. UNDOF personnel were forced to go into shelters. The Syrian authorities informed UNDOF that the military activity was associated with air defence weapons of the Syrian armed forces directed at “hostile targets”. The Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they “had not engaged any targets in the Syrian Arab Republic” and that the remnants of a Syrian anti-aircraft missile had impacted an area 5 km from Camp Ziouani. An UNDOF team, accompanied by the Israel Defense Forces, visited the scene of the impact on the Alpha side (Israeli-occupied Golan) and saw remnants of an anti-aircraft missile. On 2 December, the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations sent identical letters to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council in which he reported that, on 29 November, the armed forces of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic had “indiscriminately and abruptly fired a barrage of anti-aircraft missiles across a range of at least 60 kilometres”.

5. On 23 December, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that it had fired towards two armed individuals attempting to cross from the Bravo side to the Alpha side. The Syrian authorities stated to UNDOF that there had been no attempted crossing as reported by the Israel Defense Forces. On 25 December, the Force observed a helicopter on the Alpha side firing four rockets that impacted east of Tall al-Gharbi on the Bravo side. On the same day, the Force heard and observed surface-to-air missiles, anti-aircraft defence guns, rockets and heavy machine guns being fired on the Bravo side. UNDOF was not in a position to ascertain the points of origin or impact.

6. On 20 January 2019, the Israel Defense Forces fired missiles from an Iron Dome system against an alleged rocket attack from the Bravo side. UNDOF observed two projectiles being fired from an Israel Defense Forces position in the northern part of the Alpha side in an easterly direction. UNDOF personnel went into shelters. UNDOF did not observe any rockets being fired from the Bravo side on that day. The observations by UNDOF of military activity coincided with open source reports of Israel confirming that it had conducted a series of air strikes on targets in the Syrian Arab Republic in response to a missile that had been fired by the Syrian Arab Republic on the Alpha side and intercepted by Israel. On 21 January, UNDOF personnel observed one unmanned aerial vehicle flying from the Alpha side and crossing the ceasefire line to the Bravo side.

7. On 11 February, UNDOF observed one Israel Defense Forces tank firing seven rounds into the Qunaytirah area in the central part of the area of separation and one Israel Defense Forces tank firing four rounds across the southern part of the area of separation. On the same day, UNDOF also observed three rockets fired from a south-westerly direction impacting the central part of the area of separation, approximately 800 m from position 37. UNDOF personnel went into shelters. On 3 March, UNDOF personnel heard a heavy explosion in the vicinity of United Nations position 10, near Hadar. Approximately 30 minutes later, UNDOF personnel observed a heavy explosion in the same area.

8. On 13 March, the Permanent Representative of Israel sent identical letters to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council in which he alleged that there was a “vast Hezbollah terror network positioned” on the Bravo side and that “Hezbollah has seized the opportunity to establish a Syrian terror front from which to attack Israel”. He further alleged that the terror network ranged from Hadar to Arnah, Khan Arnabah and Qunaytirah. He also stated, inter alia, that Israel held the Syrian Arab Republic “entirely responsible for any and all acts” from its territory.

9. Sporadic heavy explosions and bursts of heavy machine gun and small arms fire persisted throughout the reporting period in the northern, central and southern parts

of 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 and to celebratory fire by Syrian armed forces. The occurrence of such activity reduced in January and February. UNDOF observed an increase in the presence of personnel 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. New checkpoints were established close to the Qunaytirah crossing and also in the southern parts of the area of separation. UNDOF was occasionally notified that the routes planned for patrol by the military police of the Russian Federation may involve their entering the area of separation. UNDOF was not in a position to confirm the presence of the military police in the area of separation.

10. The military violations on the Alpha side included the presence of Iron Dome systems within 10 km of the ceasefire line. In addition, missile carriers, which are considered unauthorized military equipment in the area of limitation pursuant to the terms of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, were observed within the 25 km zone of the area of limitation.

11. UNDOF continued to observe the daily crossing 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. On 8 and 9 February, UNDOF observed Israel Defense Forces soldiers firing shots from small arms into the area of separation to scare off shepherds who had crossed the ceasefire line. UNDOF personnel also observed, on 12 January, one Israel Defense Forces soldier firing six rounds from small arms into the area of separation.

12. UNDOF protested to the parties all violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement that it had observed, including the crossing of the ceasefire line by civilians from the Bravo side, the presence of unauthorized equipment and personnel in the areas of separation and limitation and the firing into the area of separation and across the ceasefire line.

13. During the reporting period, UNDOF did not observe any internally displaced persons or tents in the area of separation. On 4 November 2018, UNDOF facilitated the return of five Syrian nationals, including two children, and one chaperone from the Alpha side through the Qunaytirah crossing. The Syrian nationals had undergone medical treatment at hospitals on the Alpha side as part of the Israel Defense Forces Operation Good Neighbour, carried out during the conflict on the Bravo side. Their return to the Bravo side followed a request to UNDOF on 8 November from the Israel Defense Forces and the agreement of the Syrian authorities. Representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross were present as the Syrian nationals were handed over by UNDOF to the Syrian authorities at the Bravo gate and transported to Damascus. On 3 January 2019, UNDOF, also in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, facilitated the return to the Bravo side of a Syrian civilian who had been detained on 1 January by the Israel Defense Forces.

14. On 30 January, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that they had detained two shepherds in the vicinity of Mu'allaqah, north of United Nations position 85. The Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that the two Syrian civilians had been apprehended and detained for questioning because they had crossed the ceasefire line. UNDOF could not confirm this allegation. Later in the day, the Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that both shepherds had been released in the vicinity of vacated United Nations position 85. On 31 January, UNDOF was informed by the Israel Defense Forces that they had captured and detained one farmer for questioning in the vicinity of Ma'arriyah, north-east of United Nations position 80A.

On the night of that day, the farmer was released across the ceasefire line. In identical letters sent to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council on 8 February, the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations reported that the Israel Defense Forces had on two occasions crossed the ceasefire line, in the Mu‘allaqah area and the Yarmuk area, respectively, and “abducted” Syrian nationals looking after livestock. The Permanent Representative also reported that, on another occasion, the Israel Defense Forces had crossed the ceasefire line in the Jubbata al-Khashab area and “attempted to abduct a Syrian national, killing” one Syrian national and wounding three others.

15. In its regular interaction with both sides, in particular when responding to the incidents of firing across the ceasefire line and into the area of separation, the leadership of UNDOF continued to call upon both parties to exercise restraint and prevent any miscalculation that might lead to an escalation of the situation.

16. Pending its return to full operations on the Bravo side, UNDOF continued to maintain visibility, albeit limited, of the area of separation and the ceasefire line. UNDOF maintained its positions on Mount Hermon and at Camp Faouar and United Nations positions 32, in the central part of the area of separation, 80, in the southern part of the area of separation, and 22, on the Alpha side. 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 have maintained five fixed and three temporary observation posts along the ceasefire line, as well as four temporary observation posts on Mount Hermon. Observer Group Golan also continued to maintain temporary observation posts in the vicinity of vacated United Nations observation posts 56, 71 and 72. The military observers in Observer Group Golan will not be deployed at observation posts in the area of separation on a permanent basis until such time as the security conditions permit, when adequate accommodation and appropriate force protection measures are in place. The focus of Observer Group Golan remains on continuous static observation and situational awareness.

17. 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. Inspections in the area of limitation on the Bravo side were suspended because of the security situation and did not resume.

18. Engagement between UNDOF and the parties continued, with a view to addressing restrictions on movement and access to United Nations positions in the area of separation and to reducing the delays and challenges experienced by United Nations personnel in crossing the technical fence to United Nations observation posts and positions. The Head of Mission and Force Commander 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.

19. UNDOF, in consultation with both parties, continued to review the situation in the area of separation in order to assess whether the conditions on the ground would permit the return to vacated positions in the area of separation. UNDOF conducted more than 180 operational patrols on routes in the northern and central parts of the areas of separation and limitation. In addition, the UNDOF mechanized infantry company and force reserve company continued to carry out assessment visits and protected patrols to United Nations positions 10, 16, 27, 60, 68 and 85 and observation posts 56, 57, 71 and 72. Liaison officers of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic accompanied UNDOF personnel on all patrols and assessment visits.

20. After the reopening of the Qunaytirah crossing on 15 October 2018, the Force regularly used it to move equipment and personnel between the Alpha and Bravo sides. Pending the completion of the refurbishment of the United Nations position at the Charlie gate and its reoccupation, UNDOF military police continued to deploy at the crossing point during the limited opening hours only, to liaise with the respective sides on UNDOF personnel crossings.

21. UNDOF continued to make progress towards the limited return to Bravo side operations, in line with the phased UNDOF plan (see [S/2018/1088](#)). UNDOF continued to develop the infrastructure of and improve the living conditions at Camp Faouar. Furthermore, the refurbishment and reoccupation of United Nations position 32 was completed on 30 December through the deployment of 35 UNDOF military personnel. The reconstruction of a communications mast at United Nations position 71 is under way.

22. From 24 to 28 January 2019, UNDOF conducted a search and clearance operation of United Nations position 37 in order to verify whether the position was clear of potential hazards, such as remnants of war, including unexploded ordnance and mines. The conditions at the position were verified to be safe for United Nations personnel to continue operations. Consequently, on 28 January, UNDOF commenced a limited reoccupation of position 37 to support engineering work related to the refurbishment of the facilities and security infrastructure at the position. UNDOF also conducted, for the first time, route reconnaissance patrols to United Nations observation post 52 through the area of separation. The route was assessed to be viable but in need of repairs in order to support future use by UNDOF vehicles, in particular heavy vehicles.

23. UNDOF continues to assess that there is 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, in particular in the southern part of the area of separation. UNDOF continues to assess the security situation in the southern part of the area of separation and to ascertain the capabilities that would be appropriate for deployment in that area, conditions permitting.

24. In accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolution [2450 \(2018\)](#) and the UNDOF operational concept, UNDOF continued its efforts to deploy appropriate technology to ensure the safety and security of UNDOF personnel and equipment. A surveillance trailer remained deployed on the Alpha side at Camp Ziouani and United Nations position 22, while another was maintained at Camp Faouar.

25. UNDOF continued to resupply its positions on Mount Hermon and at Camp Faouar from Damascus. UNDOF convoys between Damascus and the United Nations positions were conducted almost daily, using main supply route 7 and Salam highway, with an UNDOF security escort and accompanied by a liaison officer from the office of the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate. UNDOF continuously monitored the situation and took the necessary precautionary measures in planning and conducting its convoys. 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.

26. As at 20 February 2019, UNDOF comprised 939 troops, including 41 women. Troops were deployed from Bhutan (3), Czechia (4), Fiji (248), Ghana (12), India

(194), Ireland (136), Nepal (338), the Netherlands (2) and Uruguay (2). In addition, 68 military observers from UNTSO Observer Group Golan, including 9 women, assisted UNDOF in carrying out its tasks.

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

27. In its resolution 2450 (2018), 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 2019, 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.

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 gravely concerned about the escalation of tension between the parties to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement as shown, among others, by the events of 29 November 2018 and 20 January and 11 February 2019. I note with concern the continued military activities and presence of the Syrian armed forces in the area of separation on the Bravo side. The Israel Defense Forces should refrain from firing 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. These developments jeopardize the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. I urge the parties to exercise maximum restraint at all times. I reiterate that there should be no military forces in the area of separation other than those of UNDOF. I encourage members of the Security Council to support efforts to sensitize both parties to the risk of escalation and the need to preserve the long-standing ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic.

30. It remains critical that the parties maintain their liaison with UNDOF in the first instance to prevent any escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line. All violations of the ceasefire line increase tensions between the signatories to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and undermine progress towards stability in the area.

31. I note the continued support of the parties for the ongoing efforts of UNDOF to return gradually to full operations on the Bravo side. It is important that the parties provide all necessary support to allow the full utilization of the Qunaytirah crossing by UNDOF in line with established procedures. It is critical that UNDOF 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.

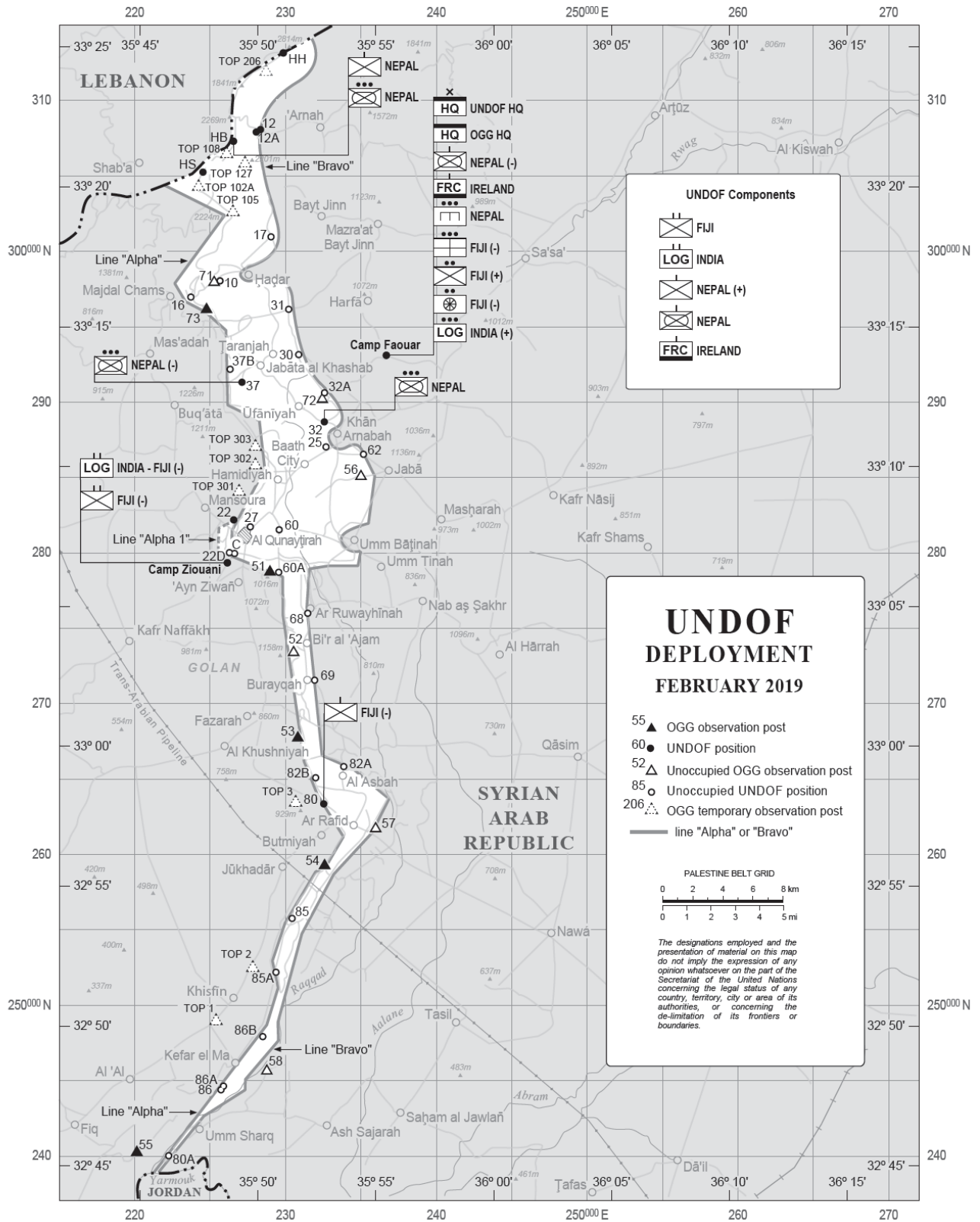
32. As UNDOF maintains its efforts to intensify its operations in the area of separation, it remains critical that the safety and security of United Nations personnel continue to be assured. The circumstances under which the troops and military observers are operating continue to require vigilance and risk mitigation measures. I renew my call upon the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to continue to fulfil its primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the Bravo side.

33. The continued commitment of both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and support for the presence of UNDOF remains essential. The return of UNDOF to full operations on the Bravo side 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 UNDOF can implement its mandate. It is critical that UNDOF be able to deploy the technology and equipment necessary to enhance its observation of the area of separation and the ceasefire line and to augment force protection. In that regard, the support and cooperation of both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic in ensuring that the deployment of the necessary technology and equipment occurs seamlessly and expeditiously remain essential. At the same time, the parties must continue to support the enhancement of the liaison function of UNDOF.

34. It is equally important 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 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 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 confidence and commitment of troop-contributing countries with respect to UNDOF remain key factors in the Force's ability to carry out its mandate. I continue to count on the support of troop-contributing countries as UNDOF proceeds with the implementation of its agreed plan to increase operations in the area of separation. I am grateful to the Governments of Bhutan, Czechia, Fiji, Ghana, India, Ireland, Nepal, the Netherlands and Uruguay for their contributions, commitment, resolve and consummate professionalism. 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 Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Francis Vib-Sanziri, and all military and civilian personnel serving under his leadership, who continue to perform the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council with efficiency and commitment under challenging circumstances.



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