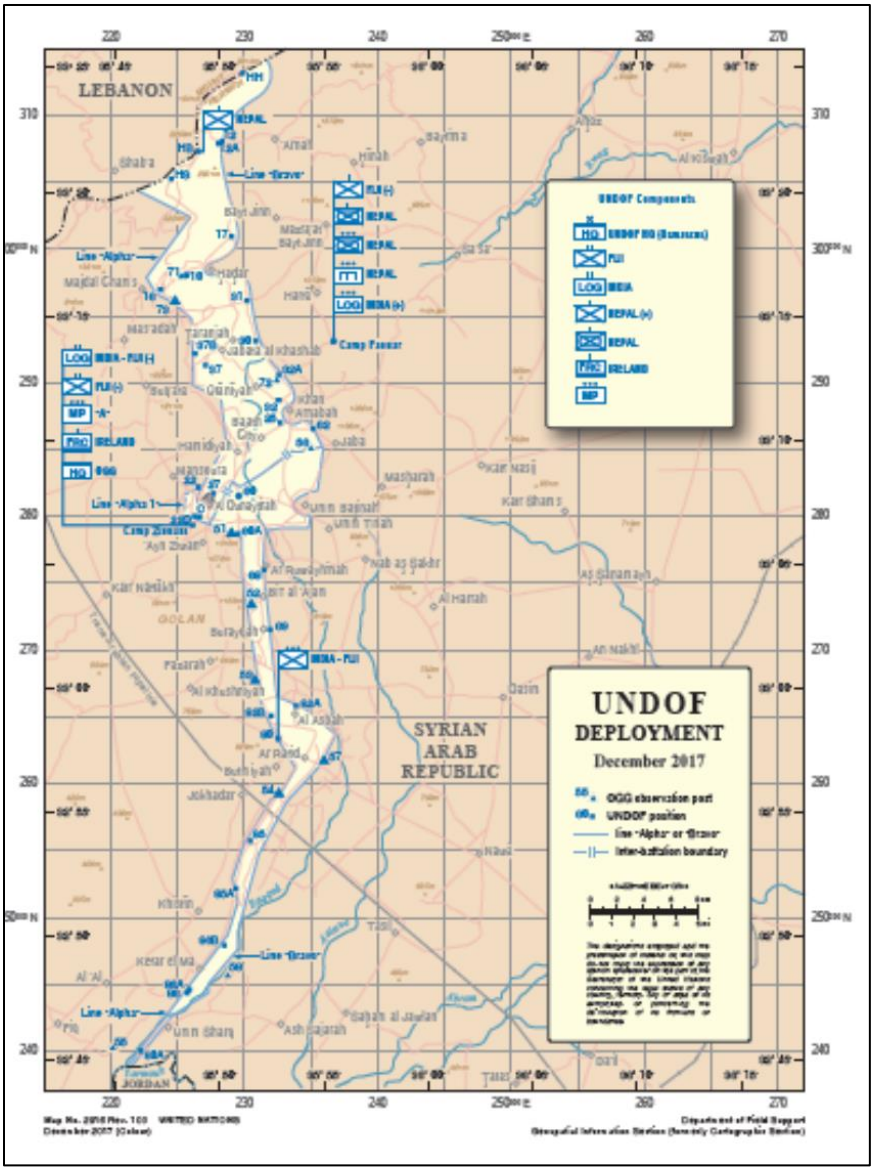
Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI)
Peace Operations Estimate – UNDOF

United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (Golan Heights)
(updated 28 January 2018)



[UNDOF Mission Website]
[UNDOF Deployment Map (December 2017)]
[CIA World Fact Book (Israel)]
[CIA World Fact Book (Syria)]

UNDOF Executive Summary

UNDOF of the Golan Heights is one of five current missions with a Chapter VI mandate (sometimes referred to as a "traditional" mandate). Since 1974, the mission tasks have been to maintain the ceasefire between Israel and Syria and to supervise the areas of separation and limitation, as defined by the Separation of Forces Agreement between Israel and Syria (also known as the Agreement of Disengagement, which is the same title of a similar agreement between Israel and Egypt). However, in the 43 years of UNDOF—and the 50 years since the 1967 Six-Day War which resulted in the current disposition of borders—not much else has occurred to resolve the conflict. Instead, many contemporary factors further the complexity of the situation, to include: the ongoing Syrian civil war; larger regional concerns of transnational terrorism and other security issues; and the multi-generational Israeli occupation with its interwoven economic concerns.

Some considerations include:

- The 2017 mandate review by the United States (U.S.) Ambassador to the UN suggested a refocus on political solutions to ongoing peace operations. Implied in such "cost-cutting" discussions is the perception of failure of long-term UN missions, of which UNDOF is an example. Yet most observers suggest that UNDOF achieved—and continues to maintain—the success expected of it in that Syria and Israel have not resumed open warfare in the past four decades, despite the provocations of the greater regional transnational terrorism and the Syrian internal conflict. Perhaps in part an

acknowledgement of this success, this operating year's UN expense plan saw the UNDOF budget increased by over 30%, in order to facilitate the peacekeepers' return to Syrian observation positions that were abandoned after the attacks on peacekeepers in 2013 and 2014.

- UNDOF mandate tasks, its related composition, and its current operations are in conflict with each other. A key issue is the mission's inability to carry out its monitoring tasks due to its physical posture. The 2014 relocation of Mission assets from Syrian side (Bravo) to Israeli side (Alpha) observation posts and camps significantly limited the peacekeepers' capacity to supervise the ceasefire. Yet, the ongoing reoccupation of the Bravo posts and camps creates the same situation described by a Philippines government official in 2014 after the Filipino contingent was attacked by armed militants. At the time, he suggested the UNDOF mandate contained an inherent contradiction which, in effect, promotes peacekeeper self-defense while also expecting peacekeeper impartiality while under attack. In summer 2017, UNDOF's then-Force Commander warned of the impact of "third party belligerents" on the UNDOF operational area, and also:

  > …spoke of the mission changing from a light infantry force to one with armoured *[sic]* protection and firepower as critical force protection measures, and stressed that due to the constantly evolving nature of peacekeeping, the UN must be agile, learn quickly, and respond accordingly, including through increasing peacekeeping budgets when necessary.

- While open warfare between Israel and Syria remains checked, there continue to be many violations of the Separation of Forces Agreement between Israel and Syria (often called "spillover" or "retaliatory fire"). In May 2017, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process warned the Security Council "…the complex dynamics on the ground are however creating an explosive environment." A June 2017 news report further alleged that Israel was surreptitiously supporting "Syrian rebels" by providing salaries, food, fuel and medical supplies. The summer of 2017 saw a series of Israeli attacks on Syrian military targets after Syrian projectiles landed in the Israeli-occupied Golan. The UN Secretary-General reports for September and December 2017 reiterated the concerns regarding "spillover" violence in the Golan, observing that "…various armed groups that have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) have continued to exchange fire in the UNDOF area of operation."

  For the past three years, UNDOF documented interactions between Syrian opposition fighters and the Israeli military. Israel claims these interactions are limited to treating the wounded—regardless of ethnic, religious, or political affiliation.

Mission Overview

1. Background. Israel has occupied much of the Golan since the 1967 Six-Day War. After the 1973 Yom Kippur War between Egyptian and Israeli forces (Suez Canal and the Sinai), and between Israeli and Syrian forces (Golan), the UN established the United Nations Emergency Force II (UNEF II) for the Suez region, but no corresponding Mission for the Golan. By 1974, however, with the Golan situation still deteriorating, an international diplomatic initiative (led by the US) concluded with the **Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian forces [S/11302/Add.1, annexes I and II].** The Agreement was reinforced by UNSCR 350(1974), which established UNDOF.

UNDOF's earliest authorized strength level was 1,250, which was comprised predominately of contingents from Austria, Canada, Peru, and Poland. The area of supervision is only 700 square miles of the Golan Heights' geographic region. It was—and remains—inhabited. While only UNDOF military forces are permitted in the area, the 1974 agreement gave the space to Syrian governance and policing. However, in actuality, an Israeli military administration governed the space up to the ceasefire line (Alpha)

from 1967 until 1981, when an Israeli law (Golan Heights Law) was enacted. The Golan Heights Law applied tenets just short of formal annexation and allowed for Israeli civilian governance and administration. While the UN determined the Golan Heights Law to be "null and void" via UNSCR 497 (1981), Israel continues to govern in the Golan and provides benefits to the citizens there, which now number in the several thousand due to aggressive Israeli settlement programs.

In addition to the ceasefire monitoring and observation (which was in conjunction with the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, or UNTSO), UNDOF engaged in mine clearance and humanitarian activities. However, those latter activities have not been prominent for some years now.

2. Mandate. In December 2017, the UN Security Council unanimously renewed the UNDOF mandate with UNSCR 2394(2017) until **June 2018**. Among the repeated encouragements for all parties to implement all previous UN Security Council resolutions, the Security Council noted "…that the situation in the Middle East is tense and is likely to remain so, unless and until a comprehensive settlement covering all aspects of the Middle East problem can be reached." It reiterated its admonishments to all actual or potential belligerents in the area, expressing "grave concern at all violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement…there should be no military forces in the area of separation other than those of UNDOF," calling on "all parties to the Syrian domestic conflict to cease military actions in the UNDOF area of operations and to respect international humanitarian law," and condemning "the use of heavy weapons by both the Syrian armed forces and armed groups in the ongoing Syrian conflict in the area of separation, including the use of tanks by the Syrian armed forces and opposition during clashes…"

The revised mandate repeats the concerns about the safety and security of UN peacekeepers and their equipment, "*recalling* that the theft of United Nations weapons and ammunition, vehicles and other assets, and the looting and destruction of United Nations facilities, are unacceptable," and later, "c*alls on* all groups other than UNDOF to abandon all UNDOF positions and the Quneitra crossing point, and return the peacekeepers' vehicles, weapons and other equipment…"

Other mandate highlights from previous versions are still included:

- Reaffirmation of the UN Security Council's "readiness to consider listing individuals, groups, undertakings and entities providing support to the **Islamic State of Iraq in the Levant (ISIL**, also known as ***Da'esh***)(emphasis added) or to the *Al-Nusra* Front, including those who are financing, arming, planning or recruiting for ISIL or *Al-Nusra* Front and all other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with ISIL and Al-Qaida as listed on the ISIL (*Da'esh*) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List, including those participating in or otherwise supporting attacks against UNDOF peacekeepers,"

- Recognition of "the necessity of efforts to flexibly adjust UNDOF's posture on a temporary basis to minimize the security risk to UNDOF personnel as UNDOF continues to implement its mandate", and "the need for UNDOF to have at its disposal all necessary means and resources to carry out its mandate safely and securely, including technology and equipment* to enhance its observation of the area of separation and the ceasefire line, and to improve force protection, as appropriate,"

  *Later described in the mandate as "…appropriate technology, including counter-improvised explosive device (IED) capabilities and a sense and warn system…"

- Commendation of "the establishment of a new temporary crossing point for UNDOF personnel between the Alpha and Bravo sides for contingency situations, in the absence of the established crossing at *Quneitra*"…and "the return of an initial UNDOF contingent to Camp *Faouar*…"

- Appreciation of UNDOF's efforts "to implement the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and to ensure full compliance of its personnel with the United Nations code of conduct…"

3. Deployment. As of December 2017, the largest UNDOF Troop- or Police-Contributing Countries (T/PCCs) are: Nepal (327), Fiji (294), India (189), and Ireland (130). The remaining T/PCCs contribute less than five persons to the Mission: Bermuda, Cyprus, Finland, and the Netherlands. **There are no U.S. uniformed personnel currently assigned to UNDOF.**

(as of December 2017) Strength:

1,117 total, including:

Troops: 940
Staff officers: 50
Civilian personnel: 127

There are only **38** women assigned to the uniformed contingents, or **3.8%** of the total. Notably, Lieutenant Colonel Mary Carroll of the Irish contingent is the first woman to command armed troops in support of UNDOF, and also the first female Irish officer to take command of an overseas unit.

At one time, the Austrians provided about 380 troops to UNDOF. However, in 2013 they began the withdrawal of their forces, shortly after anti-Assad militant groups briefly seized the UNDOF-observed crossing (known as *Quneitra*) between Israel and Syria. The Austrian Chancellor said, in part: "Freedom of movement in the area de facto no longer exists. The uncontrolled and immediate danger to Austrian soldiers has risen to an unacceptable level." Japan and Croatia also withdrew their troops from UNDOF that year for similar reasons.

The Philippines also considered leaving UNDOF that same year after 25 of their peacekeepers (of the 300 assigned to the Filipino contingent at the time) were briefly detained by Syrian armed groups in two separate incidents. However, they remained in place until 2014, when another attack on their positions by non-state armed groups out of Syria occurred. At that point, the Philippines also withdrew their forces from UNDOF, although some observers suggest the UN directed their removal because of the earlier allegations of disobedience and cowardice.

The Filipino forces allegedly disobeyed (then) UNDOF Force Commander, (India) Lieutenant General Iqbal Singh Singha's direct orders by escaping an encirclement of another Syrian-based non-state armed group, rather than risk becoming hostages. Singha claimed that he had not ordered the Filipino force to surrender, but directed them to maintain their positions—yet not fire on attackers—while negotiations were ongoing for the release of several Fijian peacekeepers, taken hostage in an earlier attack.

*The Filipino troops' escape was allegedly conducted with the assistance of other UNDOF contingents and some "other-than-UNDOF" forces, to include the Syrian **and** Israeli governments' forces, and other elements from the US and Qatar. At the same time, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) saved a contingent of 130 Irish UNDOF soldiers "from being killed or taken hostage by Islamist militias," according to a contemporary report of the Irish Independent newspaper.*

Until 2017, UNDOF personnel had not engaged in sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) misconduct that has afflicted other UN peace operations. However, one soldier from Fiji was accused in 2017. The allegation is still under investigation.

In the ten years of records (2007-2017), only **45** UNDOF personnel (civilians and uniformed) are alleged to have engaged in "other misconduct." The vast majority of the "other misconduct" was committed by uniformed personnel (87%), and almost half of the total misconduct allegations (21) occurred in a single year (2016). All of UNDOF's "other misconduct" allegations are considered "category 2"—such as driving under the influence and infractions of regulations.

> *"Other misconduct" may range in behaviors from traffic violations to extortion, embezzlement, and other abuses of authority. They are also categorized by levels (1 or 2, with "1" being more severe), "depending on the risk such incidents would present to the organization."*

4. Casualties. UNDOF has suffered only 49 fatalities since 1974, of which 94% were uniformed personnel, but only eight are attributable to "malicious acts." Of that number, half occurred in the Mission's first year. Notably, the largest types of UNDOF fatalities are categorized as "accidents" or "other," for a total of 70% of the fatalities in the past 43 years. Austria suffered 50%, or 23 of the 46, of UNDOF's total number of fatalities—regardless of type.

> *The UN Development Program, Malicious Acts Insurance Policy, February 4, 2003, defines "malicious acts" as fatalities as a result of "war; invasion; hostilities; acts of foreign enemies, whether war be declared or not; civil war; revolution; rebellion; insurrection; military or usurped power; riots or civil commotion; sabotage; explosion of war weapons; or terrorist activities." In contrast, "accidents" is defined to include "stray bullets, friendly fire, and road accidents" and other incidents, such as natural disasters.*

The number of UN peacekeeper fatalities is steadily rising across all current missions. UNDOF is among them, in that deliberate attacks on peacekeepers by armed groups have increased in number, particularly in 2013 and 2014 (the Syrian civil war's early years). The armed groups' attacks against peacekeepers were conducted as political statement or provocation, theft, or any combination of factors. Yet, despite the attacks upon and captivity of over 100 UNDOF peacekeepers, there was only one fatality in this period due to malicious acts.

A 2016 UN casualties analysis indicated that "overall UN fatalities are not substantively on the rise" once data is controlled for deployment numbers and recognizes the "more risky" environments—where UN members are deliberately targeted—in which they are currently deployed. However, the UN's "Cruz Report"—released in January 2018—argues that "a lack of leadership and a reluctance to move aggressively against potential attackers are responsible for the worst spate of United Nations peacekeeping fatalities in the organization's history." The report identified four broad areas where the UN "must take actions to reduce fatalities":

> *In November 2017, the UN Secretary-General appointed Lieutenant General (Retired) Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz to conduct a review of peacekeeping fatalities and injuries due to hostile acts and to make recommendations. Lieutenant General (retired) Cruz was a Brazilian military officer with 40 years of experience, to include service as Force Commander of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO). His review did not address mandates, but focused on operational issues in the five "most dangerous" of the UN's current missions: MONUSCO, the UN Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), and the UN-African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID).*

(1) Increase personnel awareness of the risks and empower them "to take the initiative to deter, prevent, and respond to attacks";
(2) Equip and train personnel "to operate in high-threat environments";
(3) Achieve a "threat sensitive mission footprint," aligning mission mandates to limit threat exposure; and
(4) Ensure leadership accountability to prevent fatalities and injuries.

Situation

5. Drivers of Conflict. In a strictly geo-strategic sense, the Golan Heights has been an important piece of ground for thousands of years. Its unimpeded vistas all around the region made this key terrain for military engagements for centuries. In addition to its strategic topography, it is a water source that feeds the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River, which provides a third of Israel's water supply. The land is fertile, in the midst of an otherwise arid region, and is used for agriculture and recreation (such as Israel's only ski resort).

In the past fifty years, the Golan has been contested between the populations of Syrian Arabs (most of which fled during the Israeli occupation) and the Israeli Jews who moved into the region beginning in the late 1960s as part of an aggressive settlement program. Estimates of the Golan population at this time suggest a parity of 20,000 Israelis and 20,000 Syrians, mostly Druze.

> *The Druze, also known as the "Sons of Grace," are essentially a religious sect with origins to Egypt from a thousand years ago. They believe that God was incarnated on earth in the form of their leader, al-Hakim bi-Amrih Alla. They are of mixed ethnicity, predominately Arab but also have Iranian, Kurdish, and European heritage.*

About 20 years ago, negotiations to resolve the claims to the disputed area faltered over two key points. Those same points will hamper any future negotiations, when (or if) Israel and Syria are again able to meet. They are:

Control of the Sea of Galilee (Water Access). Syria demands full Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 border which would give Syria control of Galilee's eastern shore. Israel claims the border is actually a few hundred meters to the east of the shore, which would allow Israel to retain control of Galilee.

Land Rights/Right of Return. Return of any portion of the Israeli-occupied Golan to Syria is expected to result in the removal of the Jews that currently reside there—some of whom have lived there since the 1960s. However, their removal will, in part, allow for the return of the Syrian Arabs that fled or were forced from their properties in during the wars in 1967 and 1973, as well as during other crises of the past several decades.

> *While estimates vary, one source suggests 130,000 Syrian inhabitants – approximately 95% of the population – were forcibly transferred or displaced from their Golan homes following the 1967 Israeli occupation.*

Future negotiations may also include an element of Golan Heights' "**self-determination**." However, any referendum regarding the future State conducted among the Golan resident population will have to address issues of internationally-recognized citizenship. Israel is likely to insist that only those with Israeli citizenship may be allowed to vote regarding the Golan's "self-determination." However, given that almost half of the Golan population consists of Israeli Jews or their descendants that settled in the area in the aftermath of the 1967 occupation, the international community are not likely to consider those residents as "legitimate" and therefore authorized to vote in a referendum. However, no negotiations to resolve

> *The principle of "self-determination" features as one of the UN's purposes in the first Article of the UN's foundational treaty, "Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice" (1945): To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace…*
>
> *Throughout the years, "the Security Council has discussed situations with a bearing on the principle of self-determination and the right of peoples to decide their own government…" relating to "the questions of independence, autonomy, referenda, elections, and the legitimacy of governments." Examples include the UN's "Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples" (1960) and 2013's Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) which reinforced: "The right to self-determination was an integral element of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms…"*

these issues have occurred in the past decade, due primarily to the ongoing Syrian civil war and other security concerns derived from the instability of the entire region.

6. Significant Events.

a. Recent Events.

- **21 December 2017**.The Security Council adopted resolution 2394 (2017) which renews the UNDOF mandate until 30 June 2018.
- **November 2017**. Several violent incidents occurred in the UNDOF-controlled area (or the near-vicinity) throughout November, to include:
  - On 3 November, the Al-Nusra Front reportedly carried out a car bombing that killed nine Druze men, several of whom were Israelis, in the village of Hader in the Syrian-controlled Golan Heights.
  - On 11 November, Israel shot down a Syrian reconnaissance drone over the Golan Heights. Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman said Israel viewed the incident gravely and would respond to any provocation.
  - On 16 November, the Syrian Army's 42nd Brigade accused the Israeli military of launching an airstrike on their positions near the Beit Jinn pocket, killing four of their soldiers.
- **July 2017**. Russia, Jordan, and the US declared a cease-fire near the triangular borders of Israel, Syria, and Jordan. (At time of report, all groups present in the declared zone – the Syrian army and all the rebel groups as well as ISIS and al-Qaida – are respecting the cease-fire, and Russian military police are authorized to supervise it.)
- **29 June 2017**. UNDOF mandate renewed until December 2017.
- **8 June 2017**. The Secretary-General submitted his report on the UNDOF Mission activities from 2 March to 16 May 2017. He highlighted an increasing level of military engagement in the Golan from both sides of the UNDOF zone, during the 10-week period.
- **26 May 2017**. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, briefed the Security Council regarding the current situation in the Middle East, highlighting the complex dynamics on the ground…creating an explosive environment."
- **24 May 2017**. UN Mission Force Commanders met regarding current challenges to UN peacekeeping efforts.
- **7 May 2017**. Israeli Transportation and Intelligence Minister repeated calls for President Donald Trump to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights.
- **27 April 2017**. Israel shot down "a target" over the Golan Heights; reportedly a drone. This occurred just after Israel was accused of launching a missile strike at a military site near the Damascus International Airport; Syrian rebels reportedly said the strike hit an arms depot maintained by the Lebanese Shi'a militia Hezbollah.
- **26 April 2017**. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu remarked in an interview that the Golan Heights would remain forever under Israeli sovereignty.
- **23 April 2017**. Israel attacked a Syrian government military camp at Camp *Faouar* near *Quneitra*, claiming it was in retaliation to Syrian mortar attacks in the Golan just a few days prior. While Israel's released statement indicated its understanding the mortars seemed to be "spillover from fighting within Syria" and were not a deliberate attack targeting Israel, it remains Israeli policy to retaliate on cross-border fire.
- **20 April 2017**. Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov said that a "perfect storm" had engulfed the region, with divisions opening the door to foreign intervention and manipulation.
- **28 March 2017**. Security Council members held consultations on UNDOF and repeated calls for all parties to adhere to the Disengagements Forces Agreement.

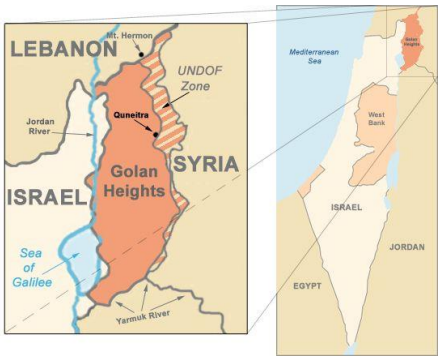
- **15 February 2017**. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked President Trump to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan.

b. Upcoming Events.

- **30 June 2018**. Mandate renewal for the UNDOF Mission.

Operational Environment (GPMESII)

7. Geographic. At approximately 700 square miles, the Golan Heights are smaller than Rhode Island (1200 square miles). Mount Hermon in the north is its highest point, with views of southern Lebanon, the Golan plateau, and much of southern Syria and northern Israel. To the east, a range of volcanic hills offers downhill access to Galilee in the west and to Damascus in the east. To the west, the Golan plateau overlooks Israeli metropolitan centers.



Most of the regional water is sourced from the Golan: The headwaters of the Jordan River (from Mount Hermon); the *Baniyas* spring; the Sea of Galilee; and the Yarmuk River.

UNDOF maintains an area of separation over 75 kilometers (46.6 miles) long and varies in width between approximately 10 kilometers (6.21 miles) in the center to 200 meters (0.12 miles) in the extreme south.

8. Political. The Israeli-occupied Golan is administered as a northern district of Israel. The Golan Heights Law—not recognized by any nation but Israel—allows **all** Golan inhabitants to claim Israeli citizenship (which provides an Israeli driver's license and free travel privileges throughout Israel, among other benefits). According to some reports, the majority of the non-Jewish population have declined that offer thus far. Instead:

> …they hold a form of permanent residency status while their nationality is categorised *[sic]* as 'undefined'. This status causes significant uncertainty and difficulty. It may be revoked…Since 1982 around 100 Syrians have had their permanent residency status revoked following travel and residency abroad. This status means that Syrians are only awarded an Israeli 'Laissez-Passer' document, which creates onerous restrictions and costs for international travel.

The perception of Israeli citizenship may be changing among the Golan's non-Jewish population, particularly among the Druze. Given Syria's "disintegration," some Druze observers suggest "it is hard to imagine a stable state (of Syria) to which the (Golan) could be returned." Consequently, there are indications of greater cooperation and acceptance of the Israeli state and its services among the Golan Druze population. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) Home Front Command actively coordinates with Druze elders to prepare for the emergency evacuations of their local communities and other security contingencies in the case of attack by armed parties based out of Syria. Many of the younger Golan Druze study in Israel, or currently serve in the IDF or the Israeli government.

9. Military/Security. While no major security incidents have occurred in recent months in the Golan, security remains precarious. Israeli forces apparently patrol in the UNDOF-observed Area of Separation on a regular basis. In summer of 2017, Major General Jai Shanker Menon (India), then UNDOF's Force Commander, indicated the greatest threat to UNDOF and the population is from the non-state armed groups out of Syria—most of which are understood to be aligned with one or the other of the regional Islamic militant entities, but all are in armed rebellion against the Syrian government. The UN Secretary-General's September 2017 report indicated several violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, from both sides, with corresponding restrictions on UNDOF operations:

> The Syrian army and non-state armed opposition groups engaged in exchanges of heavy-weapons fire in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo (Syrian) side…there were five incidents of spillover fire across the ceasefire line during the reporting period. The military violations on the Alpha (Israeli) side included 95 reports of the presence of unauthorised *[sic]* personnel and military equipment…including M-109 self-propelled guns, Iron Dome anti-missile systems, missile carriers, light armoured *[sic]* vehicles and armoured *[sic]* patrol vehicles. There were three incidents of firing into the area of separation and more than 87 instances of restrictions of movement of UNDOF by the Israel Defense Forces recorded...

a. State Armed Forces. The two primary state armed forces operating in the Golan are the Syrian and the Israeli militaries.

Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The IDF consists of land, naval, and air entities with associated intelligence assets. Military service is compulsory for Jews and Druze citizens at 18 years of age. Both men and women are conscripted, although for different periods of time (essentially 32 and 24 months, respectively). Officers are directed to serve at least 48 months and military aviation officers have a 9 year obligation. An obligation to the Reserves remains after active service to age 41-51 (men) and age 24 (women). Volunteers may join the IDF as young as 17 years of age. Military service is voluntary for Christians, Muslims, and Circassians.

The IDF reportedly "took advantage of the chaos of the Syrian war" and made attacks against arms shipments from Iran to Hezbollah (in Lebanon) that crossed Syria.

Syrian Armed Forces. The Syrian Armed Forces consist of land, naval, air, and intelligence assets. There is both conscription (18 months) as well as voluntary service for men of 18 years of age or older. Women may volunteer but are not conscripted.

The Syrian Ministry of Interior also supervises: the Political Security Directorate, the General Intelligence Directorate, and the National Police Force.

b. Non-State Armed Groups. Compounding the already complex Golan security environment are the various non-state armed groups, with their intertwined relationships and alignments between themselves and regional state actors—to include, allegedly, Israel. Those relationships and alignments are often based on near-term advantages rather than definitive ideologies. In one recent report, a Golan citizen referred to the various non-state armed groups about him not as "good or bad neighbors" but as "stable or unstable." The non-state armed groups out of Syria are predominately affiliated or aligned with Sunni Islamic terrorist organizations, such as the al-Qaeda-affiliated *al-Nusrah* Front or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, or *Da'esh*). They believe the Druze to be heretics, and are known to have massacred entire Druze families in the Golan in the past few years. Some of the non-state armed groups operating in the area are:

Free Syrian Army. Syrian Army deserters formed the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in 2011. Based primarily in Turkey, it is a loose coalition of predominately secular anti-Assad (President Bashar Assad, current

leader of Syria) armed groups. In 2012, other international and Gulf Arab state actors sought to assist a centralized FSA, forming the Supreme Military Council (SMC) as a moderate alternative to the more militant Islamist groups in Syrian, such as those affiliated with al-Qaeda or *Da'esh*.

For much of 2017, the FSA and its affiliates did little fighting, instead seeking allies and resources. One report suggested:

> Their options are limited — one is to line up behind Turkey, which is recruiting groups to fight its own war in Syria, primarily against Syrian Kurds but also Islamic State militants. Another option is to ally with al-Qaida's affiliate, the strongest opposition faction. Despite differences with Washington, all of them hope for support from the United States. But they feel it has abandoned them, throwing its weight behind the Syrian Kurds.

The FSA's January 2018 offensive--a military operation into Syria alongside Turkish military forces—confirms their partnership with Turkey authorities. However, it remains to be seen if Turkey will assist the FSA in its own campaign against Assad.

Turkey was actively engaged in training elements of the FSA into a group described by some as the Turkish Free Syria Army (TFSA). The TFSA is intended to operate in northern Syria in areas seized by Turkey against Da'esh elements in an engagement (Euphrates Shield) from August 2016 to March 2017.

Syrian Kurds claimed the Turkish presence as an occupation force, while Turkey highlighted its role in eliminating Da'esh occupation and allowing the return of "more than a million" individual displaced persons (IDPs) to their homes.

Al-Qaeda and *Jabhat Fath al-Sham* (also known as the *al-Nusrah, or al-Nusra,* Front). The *al-Nusrah* Front was identified as al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate in 2011 by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (at the time, al-Qaeda in Iraq's leader and now a leader of self-named **Islamic State**, or IS). Usually well-trained and resourced, the group claimed responsibility for several suicide bombings and the 2013 and 2014 attacks on UNDOF, which included the detention of several tens of peacekeepers.

When al-Baghdadi announced his departure from al-Qaeda and the formation of IS, *al-Nusrah* Front, continued to affiliate itself with al-Qaeda. The subsequent fighting between the entities resulted in *al-Nusrah's* loss of its eastern Syria bases and their related oil fields, significantly reducing their available resources. By the summer of 2015, the *al-Nusrah* Front controlled Syria's north-west province and established its own rule of law and provided government-like services.

However, perhaps due to exclusion over the years from all the Syrian peace talks—particularly the February 2016's "cessation of hostilities" agreement—as well as most coalition negotiations, by summer of 2016, *al-Nusrah* Front allegedly changed its name to the ***Jabhat Fateh al-Sham*** (Front for the Conquest of Syria/the Levant) and ostensibly leaving the al-Qaeda "umbrella." However, it is most often referred to as *al-Nusrah* or *al-Nusra*.

Jabhat Fath al-Sham remains dominant in the north-west of Syria. It appears to have a relationship with the FSA (or elements of) and have apparently fought together against both Syrian government and IS forces. Yet, they also have engaged in confrontations between each other.

The vast majority of *Jabhat Fateh al-Sham's* 5,000-10,000 fighters are Syrian. Its focus remains on eliminating Bashar al-Assad and his government from Syria.

Qatar may have ties to the group, although Qatar denies it.

***Da'esh* (Islamic State/ISIS/ISIL) and *Khalid ibn al-Walid* Army**. Khalid bin Walid Army was formed in May 2016 from the merger between Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade, the Islamic Muthanna Movement and the

Army of Jihad that operates in southern Syria around the border with Jordan. The affiliation of ***Khalid ibn al-Walid*** **Army** to Da'esh is assumed, since the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade (the largest element of the ***Khalid ibn al-Walid*** **Army**) was openly supporting the Islamic State by summer 2014.

Some suggest the Khalid bin Walid Army is only about 600 persons, but includes at least dozen tanks, predominately in the area southeast of the Golan Heights. However, the Khalid bin Walid Army's February 2017 attacks in the area of Daraa (close to Jordan) suggests the number may be closer to 1,500 fighters. The group is also among the most violent of the Da'esh-affiliates, known to massacre civilians indiscriminately as well as post on-line pictures and video of its actions.

Hezbollah. Based out of Lebanon with Iranian sponsorship since 1982, Hezbollah was formed, in part, to "fight for the liberation of the occupied territories and the ejection of the aggressive Israeli forces." It is predominately a Shi'a organization and it allegedly conducts operations in many diverse areas beyond Lebanon and Syria, such as Germany, Mexico, Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Continued Iranian sponsorship promotes Hezbollah's involvement on behalf of the Syrian government, to include its activities in the Golan Heights. Notably:

> Until September 11, 2001, Hezbollah was responsible for killing more Americans than any other terrorist organization. Among other deadly attacks, Hezbollah has been linked to the 1983 attack on U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon; the 1992 suicide bombing at the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina; the 1994 suicide bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association in Buenos Aires; and the 2012 bombing of an Israeli tourist bus in Bulgaria. Hezbollah is also suspected of involvement in the February 2005 Beirut suicide bombing that killed 23 people.

Social services provision in Lebanon created an environment to allow Hezbollah political influence. It has been a member of the Lebanese government since 1982. In 2008, Hezbollah elements conducted a coup d'état, taking over much of Beirut while the Lebanese army—and other political groups—did not engage. To resolve the conflict, Hezbollah was accorded "veto power" in the Lebanon government. Even today, most international and regional organizations are careful to distinguish between the Hezbollah's armed wing (considered a terrorist organization by many) and its political wing—although such distinction may be contrived.

Both UN Security Council members and Israel have expressed concern over the growing Hezbollah presence in Syria and along the Golan's northern border with Lebanon. Hezbollah's own rhetoric fuels this concern. According to one report:

> Hezbollah had already finished preparing the Golan Heights as an additional front to south Lebanon and had transferred high quality and specialized weapons there…the sources reportedly made this assertion two days before *Harakat al-Nujaba*, an Iranian-controlled Iraqi militia – which once described itself and Hezbollah as "twins of the resistance" – announced the formation of its "Golan Liberation Brigade" to fight Israel.

Fursan al-Joulan **(Knights of the Golan)**. According to some reports, Israel is surreptitiously supporting several anti-Assad armed groups, which may include those of al-Qaeda or *Da'esh*-affiliation. The *Fursan al-Joulan*, with only 400 fighters, is among these allegedly Israeli-supported groups. While it does not appear to be FSA-affiliated, it is unclear if it al-Qaeda or *Da'esh*-affiliated.

According to some reports, Israel provides the *Fursan al-Joulan* $5,000 a month and medical care and supplies. Israel acknowledges it provision of humanitarian assistance to sick and injured fighters found along its occupied borders, regardless of affiliation or religion.

If the Israeli support to specific anti-Assad groups is occurring, the relevant policy and process may be similar to that used in Lebanon after the civil war broke out in 1975. At the time, Israel enacted what was termed the "Good Fence Policy." It leveraged both covert and open networks of south Lebanon residents to promote security, financial stability, and other social services.

c. Other International Actors. Many other nations and international organizations have direct or indirect interests in the Golan Heights. Of them all, **Lebanon** is the most entwined, geographically and politically, as it shares both a disputed border and issues of security between—and with—Israel and Syria in the Golan.

The Shebaa farms area is another Israeli-occupied part of the Golan, of which both Syria and Lebanon claim belong to Lebanon. In 2007, the UN reinforced its support to Lebanon's claim to the Shebaa farms with a survey conducted by a UN cartographer. Israel, of course, denies it.

Iran allegedly has a military presence in the Golan Heights as well, but it is unclear if the focus in on assistance to Syrian state forces against any and all rebels, or to agitate for "a new war in Lebanon." Of course, both purposes may be served by their engagement in the area.

In late 2017, **Turkey**'s relationship with both Israel and Syria became increasingly argumentative, if not antagonistic.

The U.S.' December 2017 announcement regarding recognition of Jerusalem as the Israeli capital (and ultimate location of the U.S. Embassy by 2019) generated a "war of words" between Turkey and Israel, which also appears to contribute to some diplomatic "tit-for-tat." As examples, in mid-January 2018, Israel detained six Turkish citizens that were conducting a protest at the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. Within a week, Turkish authorities repatriated an accused spy to Lebanon, despite Israeli intervention on his behalf.

Turkey is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). While Israel does not have membership in NATO, is it designated as a "major non-NATO ally" (MNNA) and is a member of NATO's "Mediterranean Dialogue." Turkey and Israel "normalized" their relationship in 2016. In November 2016, Turkey assisted Israel with wildfire abatement. By 2017, both countries announced their support for an underwater gas pipeline construction from Israel to Turkey with a $3.75 billion investment decision.

Near simultaneously, Turkey's activities against Syria have become more overt. In January 2018, Turkey launched a military operation in conjunction with the FSA with expressed purpose of eliminating the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) from the area. The YPG was supplied by and partnered with the U.S. in actions against *Da'esh* elements in the vicinity. However, Turkey believes the YPG to be closely related with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)—a Kurdish-ethnicity based separatist movement that is illegal Turkey.

On January 28, 2018, an YPJ fighter conducted a suicide bombing attack on the Turkish military in Syria. Several Turkish soldiers were killed and a tank was destroyed.

10. Economic. The soil and water access in the Golan ensure a sustainable agricultural market; the scenery and the topography allows for a viable tourist and recreational market**.** Tourism is one of the biggest industries, including guest houses, nature parks, archaeological sites, a winery, and a ski resort.

However, current occupation policies and practices ensure that the Syrian Arab/Druze population and businesses are economically disadvantaged as compared to the Israeli Jewish settlements. The Druze businesses and villages do not receive an equitable distribution of water and other resources, and they can find their land easily confiscated by the government.

Prior to the Syrian civil war, most of the Druze sold their products to the Syrian market, through the UNDOF-supervised *Quneitra* crossing. After the *al-Nusrah* Front attacked the crossing, that trade route was eliminated.

11. Social. Many estimate the Golan population to be a near-equal number of Israeli Jews and Syrian Arabs, although some report a slightly higher number of Arabs at this time. Among the Syrian population, the vast majority are Druze.

> *Traditionally, Druze are not considered to have a homeland and have instead settled in isolated areas of Lebanon, Syria, and Israel, among other countries (to include the United States). They tend to identify with their country of residence. Consequently many of the Golan Druze have considered themselves "Syrian". In recent years—perhaps due to the Syrian civil war violence; perhaps a result of the 50 years of occupation—that allegiance may be shifting to Israel. Yet, the Druze are keenly aware of the Israeli policies and programs that discriminate against them (and other Syrian Arabs in the Israeli-occupied Golan) thus far.*

There is also a very small population of Alawites (Shia' Moslem) that live close to Lebanon.

The general education and health of the population reflects the averages of both Israel and Syria, although in some respects, the Golan Syrians—Druze and others—are becoming more educated and experiencing better-than-average health as compared to their contemporaries in Syria at this time.

a. Rule of Law. Legal matters appear to be addressed in accordance with Israeli law throughout the Israeli-occupied Golan. In other areas, Syrian laws may be in effect, in theory. In practice, however, it is assumed that village elders or militant groups (that occupy some areas) are enforcing some Rule of Law concepts.

b. Human Rights. On 7 April 2017, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) released its resolution A/HRC/RES/34/27 referencing "Human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan." In addition to its demands that Israel remove its occupation of the Golan—"to comply with the relevant resolutions…in particular Security Council resolution 497 (1981)"—and to reaffirm the peace process, the UNHRC called on Israel to:

- desist from its continuous building of settlements…and to desist from changing the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure and legal status of the occupied Syrian Golan…
- (allow) the displaced persons of the population of the occupied Syrian Golan must be allowed to return to their homes and to recover their property…
- desist from imposing Israeli citizenship and Israeli identity cards on the Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan, and to desist from its repressive measures against them and from all other practices that obstruct the enjoyment of their fundamental rights and their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights…
- allow the Syrian population of the occupied Syrian Golan to visit their families and relatives in the Syrian motherland…(and)
- release immediately the Syrian detainees in Israeli prisons, some of whom have been detained for more than 30 years… (and) allow delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit Syrian prisoners of conscience and detainees in Israeli prisons…

Further, the resolution "expresses grave concern about the Israeli practices in the occupied Syrian Golan in particular the arbitrary arrests of Syrians, the lack of due process guarantees afforded to Syrians and the unlawful mine-laying practices of the Israeli occupation forces in the occupied Syrian Golan…"

While the resolution passed, it was with a vote of 26 in the affirmative and 3 in the negative (Togo, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States) and a large vote of abstention (18).

c. Humanitarian Assistance. While there is no current large-scale humanitarian action for the Golan, there are innumerable small and/or discrete humanitarian assistance events happening in the area routinely, particularly in Druze villages and nearby areas targeted by the non-state armed groups out of Syria. Generally, in such cases, the humanitarian assistance is based out of Israel. While UNDOF is mandated to assist in humanitarian efforts, very little of such assistance occurs currently.

12. Information. Media outlets and assets in the Golan vary from town to town. Most residents, regardless of religion or ethnicity, have access to media and information, as well as internet and cell phone usage.

13. Infrastructure. There is generally adequate infrastructure in the Golan, although many observe less modern capacity in the Syrian Arab or Druze villages and homes. In some cases, the difference is due to available economic resources or discriminatory policies.

Peace Operations Functions

14. Command and Control.

Head of Mission and Force Commander: Major General Francis Vib-Sanziri (Ghana)

15. Intelligence. The current mandate reiterates the expectation for UNDOF to "have at its disposal all necessary means and resources to carry out its mandate safely and securely, including technology and equipment to enhance its observation of the area of separation and the ceasefire line, and to improve force protection, as appropriate" which may—or may not—include intelligence assets (drones are often mentioned). If UNDOF does not have dedicated intelligence assets, it is assumed to have access to other sources of intelligence that operate in the region.

In a discussion in May 2017, Major General Menon (then-UNDOF Force Commander) indicated that:

> …UNDOF had carried out a detailed study on the extra technology needed to carry out its mandate and was currently building up that capacity. It had already brought in night vision devices and surveillance cameras, he said, adding that the introduction of all new technology was shared with both Israel and Syria.

16. Operations. In 2015, UNDOF vacated four of its observation posts and a camp—all on the Syrian side (Bravo) of the border—due to severe deterioration of security. However, in late 2016, UNDOF began to occupy those positions again. UNDOF operations consist of observation and monitoring. Humanitarian assistance appears limited to emergency medical support. There does not appear to be any further de-mining operations at this time. In a May 2017 discussion, Major General Menon (then-UNDOF Force Commander) said:

> … mission personnel now travelled in armoured *[sic]* vehicles instead of the "soft-skinned" ones previously used, and all movements were coordinated with both Syria and Israel in order to keep staff safe. Operations had changed significantly, he said, pointing out that troops no longer worked in small, isolated pockets.

17. Protection.

a. Mission Protection. UNDOF is one of five current missions with a Chapter VI mandate. In the early part of this decade, UNDOF reported of itself:

> There has also been a rise in the nature, number and gravity of incidents involving United Nations personnel on the ground, including abductions of UNDOF and UNTSO observers, the direct and indirect firing at them by the Syrian Arab armed forces or armed members of the opposition, the theft of UN weapons and ammunition, vehicles and other assets, and the looting and destruction of facilities.

By 2014, the majority of peacekeepers were redeployed to the Israeli-controlled side of the ceasefire line as a result of the deteriorating security situation and subsequent to the kidnapping by *al-Nusrah* Front of more than 40 peacekeepers, who were eventually released. In November 2016, UNDOF began a phased deployment of its troops returning to Camp *Faouar* on the Syrian-controlled side. This deployment is not complete.

b. Protection of Civilians. There is no Protection of Civilians task in the current UNDOF mandate. However, in May 2017, Major General Jai Shanker Menon, then-UNDOF Force Commander, while speaking to a panel of other UN Force Commanders, pointed out:

> …violence against civilians had reached new levels of cruelty, marked by a rise in ethnic cleansing, genocide, rape, forced displacement and the use of chemical or other banned weapons. That cruelty had led to the emergence of another principle — the need to protect civilian populations, human rights and humanitarian operations.

18. Sustainment. UNDOF operates in an environment of adequate infrastructure. In its latest appropriation for peacekeeping missions, the UN General Assembly approved for UNDOF:

> …the Special Account for the Force the amount of $61.30 million for the period 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018, including $57.65 million for the maintenance of UNDOF, $2.92 million for the support account for peacekeeping operations and $729,100 for the United Nations Logistics Base.

Issues and Considerations

19. Issues. Among the issues confronting UNDOF at this time are:

- The sporadic violation of the ceasefire by both Israel and Syria, as well as by "third party" (armed militants)
- UNDOF's capacity to conduct its monitoring tasks while remaining protective of its assets
- Any indications of greater violence to the population—on either side—by non-state armed groups which may result in specific Protection of Civilians tasks in future mandates

20. Considerations.

a. U.S. The Trump Administration has not yet announced any policy changes or modifications to the United States approach specific to the Golan Heights, although Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked President Trump to recognize Israel's sovereignty over the Golan in February 2017. However, the December 2017 U.S. decision to unilaterally recognize Jerusalem as the Israeli capitol unfortunately creates opportunity for divisive language from many—if not most—of the countries surrounding the Golan Heights (and Israel and Syria). The most vitriolic of the responses was from

Turkey, an ally of the U.S. through the membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Turkish President Recep Erdoğan indicated that Washington, D.C. was "complicit in the violence" that may occur in the region, subsequent to the U.S.' Jerusalem decision:

> The ones who made Jerusalem a dungeon for Muslims and members of other religions will never be able to clean the blood from their hands…With their decision to recognise *[sic]* Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the United States has become a partner in this bloodshed.

b. UN and the Golan Heights. An UNDOF self-assessment noted: "The (Security) Council is somewhat constrained in its options for UNDOF. It was established as a Syria-based mission, and how it operates is subject to the disengagement agreement, with any changes requiring consent by Israel and Syria." The statement further noted that a renewed UNDOF mandate could:

- reiterate the need for all parties to exercise restraint;
- reiterate support for the incremental return of UNDOF forces, as the security situation allows, to positions and observation posts in the area of separation and the area of limitation vacated in 2014;
- urge Israel and Syria to allow the use of new technologies so UNDOF could better fulfil its observation tasks
- urge Israel and Syria to allow the use of enhanced equipment for UNDOF's force protection capabilities
- urge Israel and Syria to agree to establish more UNDOF crossing points between the Alpha and Bravo sides; and
- urge Israel to allow UNDOF to establish more temporary observation posts on the Alpha side, given the mission's limited mobility there.

These recommendations are included in the current mandate.

In May 2017, Major General Jai Shanker Menon, then-UNDOF Force Commander, described the unprecedented challenges of the contemporary UNDOF mission as compared to its earlier decades. Specifically, he address the emergence of non-state armed groups ("third belligerent party"), "not bound by any previous agreement or established conventions." He further indicated that:

> UNDOF (is) an excellent example of the challenges facing Chapter VI peacekeeping…that the mission observed and reported on an agreement between two sovereign States attempting to avoid war, (but)…all changed since 2011, and the mission was now required to fulfil its mandate in whatever manner it could manage…

He suggested that, "in such context, a peacekeeping mission must have":

- a clear and robust mandate, but
- also remain flexible and adaptive,
- able to respond to challenges, (and)
- tailor its forces and alter its deployments

In summary, UNDOF may be considered a success in that it achieves its original and primary objective—the avoidance of war between Israel and Syria. Yet the UN has yet to attain its political objective of the Golan Heights' return to Syria control. As the Syrian civil war continues, and the Golan population moves into yet another generation under Israeli occupation, the likelihood of the Golan return to Syria grows increasingly remote. Therefore, some observers may be tempted to close the UNDOF mission, given the political resolution continues to elude policy makers. However, removing UNDOF's presence may upset the precarious security balance in the Golan, allowing for greater violence against the population and contributing yet another part to the instability of the greater region.

Resources

21. Key Documents and On-line References.

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