

Evaluation of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)

28 May 2025

IED-25-004

INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function *“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;”* ([General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

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Contents

Summary.....	3
I. Introduction and objective.....	4
II. Background.....	4
III. Scope and Methodology	6
IV. Evaluation Results.....	7
A. Within the deteriorating conflict and security context of the mission, UNDOF continued to undertake its core functions of reporting, monitoring and observing	7
B. The significant restrictions placed on UNDOF, as well as internal challenges, negatively impacted its ability to fully implement its mandate.....	11
C. While UNDOF’s initiatives to prevent the escalation of tensions had mixed results, its presence and activities appeared to have contributed towards greater civilian safety in the AOS	13
D. The implementation of Quick Impact Projects, although well intended, faced challenges that made any potential benefits unclear.....	16
E. While the mission made some progress on gender and environment considerations, there was a lack of integration of disability	17
V. Conclusion	18
VI. Recommendations.....	20
Annexure.....	21

Summary

The Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED) of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an evaluation of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) to systematically and objectively assess its relevance, effectiveness, and coherence. The evaluation covered the period from January 2019 to August 2024.

UNDOF was established in 1974 to maintain the ceasefire between Israeli and Syrian forces and supervise the implementation of the disengagement agreement. Despite the deteriorating conflict and security context, UNDOF continued to undertake its core mandated functions of observing, monitoring, and reporting violations of the disengagement agreement. The mission adapted its reporting to the changing conflict setting and consistently observed and reported violations from 2019 to 2024. UNDOF gradually reoccupied positions that it had temporarily vacated in 2014 as a fallout of the Syrian conflict, thereby increasing its visibility and patrolling activities in the Area of Separation (AOS) and limited parts of the Area of Limitation (AOL). The mission also effectively executed its liaison function to de-escalate tensions between the parties and support humanitarian activities.

However, significant restrictions placed on UNDOF by both parties negatively impacted its ability to fully implement its mandate. Such restrictions on movement hampered patrols, inspections, reoccupation of positions, and logistical support. The number of monthly inspections conducted by UNDOF significantly dropped after April 2020 due to COVID-19 constraints and the prevailing safety and security situation. Internal challenges, such as lack of political expertise on the ground, no mission-wide knowledge management mechanism, and inadequate sharing of situational awareness further hindered the mission's mandate implementation.

UNDOF undertook several initiatives to prevent the escalation of tensions, particularly in deterring inadvertent civilian crossings of the Alpha line. Despite these efforts, the level of civilian violations remained steady, indicating that the initiatives had no discernible impact. However, UNDOF presence and activities appeared to have contributed to greater civilian safety in the AOS, with an observable increase in human settlement activities between 2016 and 2024.

The implementation of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) faced challenges, including a lack of direct engagement with the local population, non-competitive contracting processes, and issues related to the sustainability of some projects. While the mission made progress on mainstreaming gender and environmental considerations in its activities, disability inclusion was less well integrated.

The fall of the Assad regime in Syria in late 2024 created opportunities for UNDOF to have renewed communication with the new authorities on the Bravo side and potential improvements in the selection, design and implementation of QIPs. Leveraging these opportunities will be crucial for UNDOF's ability to adapt to the evolving security landscape and maintain its role as a stabilizing presence in the region.

OIOS made two important recommendations to UNDOF to:

- develop and implement a knowledge management system; and
- conduct a comprehensive needs assessment before project selection and implementation of QIPs.

I. Introduction and objective

1. The objective of this Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluation was to assess, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness and coherence of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). The evaluation conforms with the norms and standards for evaluation in the United Nations System.¹
2. Comments on the draft report were sought from UNDOF and considered in the final report. The UNDOF management response is included in Annex I. OIOS wishes to acknowledge and thank the evaluation focal points who assisted with the conduct of the evaluation.

II. Background

Context

3. On 6 October 1973, war erupted in the Middle East between the Egyptian and Israeli forces in the Suez Canal area and the Sinai, and between the Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan Heights. After an initial ceasefire failed, a second ceasefire was imposed through the United Nations Security Council Resolution 340 (1973), effectively ending the conflict on 25 October 1973. However, tensions remained high in the Israel-Syria sector, and the situation became increasingly unstable in March 1974. Against this background, the United States undertook a diplomatic initiative, which resulted in the conclusion of an Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian forces.²
4. This Agreement provided for an area of separation and two equal zones of limited forces and armaments on both sides of the separation area and called for the establishment of a United Nations observer force to supervise its implementation. The Agreement was signed on 31 May 1974, and, on the same day, the Security Council adopted resolution 350 (1974) to establish UNDOF. Since then, UNDOF has remained in the area to maintain the ceasefire between the Israeli and Syrian forces and to supervise the implementation of the disengagement agreement.

Mandate

5. Since its establishment in 1974, the UNDOF mandate has been renewed every six months, with the current mandate last renewed on 20 December 2024, to:
 - a. Maintain the ceasefire between Israel and Syria and to see that it is scrupulously observed; and
 - b. Supervise the agreement and protocol thereto with regard to the areas of separation and limitation.
6. To carry out its mandate, UNDOF maintains an Area of Separation (AOS), which is over 75 kilometers long and varies in width between approximately 10 kilometers in the center to 200 meters in the extreme south. The line delineating the AOS on the west is known as the “Alpha Line” and is not to be crossed by Israeli Forces, whereas the line delineating the AOS in the east is known as the “Bravo Line” and is not to be crossed by Syrian Forces. The AOS also borders Lebanon in the north and Jordan in the

¹ United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). Norms and Standards for Evaluation, 2016

² S/11302/Add.1, annexes I and II

south. No military forces or activities, other than those of UNDOF, are permitted in the AOS by the Disengagement Agreement.

7. On either side of the AOS, there is an Area of Limitation (AOL) with three zones: a zone of 0 to 10 kilometers (6.21 miles) from the AOS; a zone of 10 to 20 kilometers (12.43 miles) from the AOS; and a zone of 20 to 25 kilometers (15.53 miles) from the AOS. With the support of United Nations Truce Supervision Organization's (UNTSO), military observers serving in Observer Group Golan (OGG) under the operational control of UNDOF inspect fortnightly the military positions of the parties in the respective areas of limitations to ascertain that the agreed limitations in armaments and forces are being observed and report the results of these inspections to the parties.
8. The responsibility for governance and policing in the AOS remained with the host nations, notwithstanding the presence of various armed groups within the area. In September 2014, due to the evolving Syrian conflict, UNDOF had to relocate to the Alpha Side. In 2016, UNDOF commenced a gradual re-establishment of its presence in Camp Faouar on the Bravo Side. As the security situation improved in 2018, UNDOF commenced limited patrolling of the Area of Responsibility (AOR)³ and had since continued to increase its patrolling activities in the AOS and limited parts of the AOL.

Leadership and Structure

9. UNDOF is headed by a Head of Mission and Force Commander. The mission is further organized into the following offices: (a) Office of the Military Chief of Staff, (b) Mission Support; and (c) Security Section. As of November 2024, UNDOF had 1,171 troops against the authorized strength of about 1,250. Troop contributing countries included Argentina, Australia, Bhutan, Czech Republic, Fiji, Ghana, India, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Nepal, South Korea, Uruguay, and Zambia.⁴

Safety and Security Situation

10. The security situation in the UNDOF AOR significantly deteriorated over the evaluation period. Data from Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED)⁵ indicated a steady rise in fatalities and security incidents within and around the AOR from January 2019 to June 2024. Similarly, Janes⁶ reported an increase in terrorism and insurgency incidents from 2019 to 2021, with most incidents in 2021 occurring on the Bravo side. While this number declined in 2022 and 2023, it surged again in 2024, with most incidents shifting to the Alpha side.

³ The UNDOF area of responsibility (AOR) comprised of area of separation (AOS) and limitation (AOL) on both sides.

⁴ [S/2024/875](#), para 40.

⁵ [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data](#) (ACLED) is a disaggregated data collection, analysis, and crisis mapping initiative which collects information on the dates, actors, locations, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protest events around the world.

⁶ Janes is a global open-source intelligence company specialising in military, national security, aerospace, and transport data and analysis.

III. Scope and Methodology

11. The evaluation covered the period from January 2019 to August 2024. During this timeframe the mission went through several observable changes regarding deployment, coverage, and operational capabilities in the UNDOF AOR.
12. The evaluation employed a mixed-method approach for data collection. The following qualitative and quantitative data sources were used:
 - a. **Document review** of budget performance reports, Secretary-General reports, Security Council resolutions, OIOS Internal Audit Division reports, Office for Peacekeeping Strategic Partnership reviews, end of assignment reports, daily situation reports, code cables, Joint Operations Centre flash reports, and situational awareness reports.
 - b. **Interviews** with 36 individuals (36 per cent of whom were women), including 27 civilian and military personnel from UNDOF, 4 staff members from United Nations Headquarters, and 5 representatives of the Permanent Missions to the United Nations of France, Israel, and the United States.
 - c. **Survey** of 139 UNDOF personnel, of which 102 responded, representing a 73 per cent response rate (24 per cent of respondents were women).
 - d. **Secondary data analysis** of the following data sources:
 - i. *Janes and ACLED* to understand the security and conflict situation in the UNDOF AOR over the evaluation period. Data from these sources were mapped using a geographic information system software called QGIS.
 - ii. Geospatial analysis of data from Landsat-8 images to compute a Normalized Difference Built-up Index (NDBI), which was used to measure the change in human activities in the AOS during the evaluation period.
 - iii. Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise (SAGE) data to assess violations, hazards, incidents, activities, events, and other observations recorded by UNDOF personnel during the evaluation period. SAGE is a web-based database system that allows UN military, police, and civilians in UN peace operations to log incidents, events, and activities.
 - iv. Natural Language Processing (NLP) to identify the level of fatalities (number of injured and deaths) from the SAGE data. As the mission had only started using SAGE from 2019 onwards, the data from this year was not as comprehensive as it was for other years. The evaluation team wrote python scripts and used NLP techniques to extract data on violations, patrols, and inspections from the daily situation reports.
 - v. Comprehensive Planning and Performance and Assessment System (CPAS) data to triangulate trends in civilian violations, operational activities, and inspections.

Limitations

13. The evaluation team faced several challenges that hindered data collection. First, due to the heightened security situation in the region, the evaluation team was unable to travel to the mission and directly observe operational dynamics and conditions on the ground and lacked access to external stakeholders at country level, including the Golan International Liaison Office (GILO), the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate (SSAD), UNTSO, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for the conduct of virtual interviews. Despite the initial agreement of the SSAD to participate in a written interview, OIOS was unable to further engage with that stakeholder. Furthermore, with the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024, the team was unable to meet with any representatives of the

Permanent mission of the Syrian Arab Republic. Lastly, survey platform functionality issues in Syria resulted in a delay in redeployment of the survey, which may have negatively affected the overall response rate.

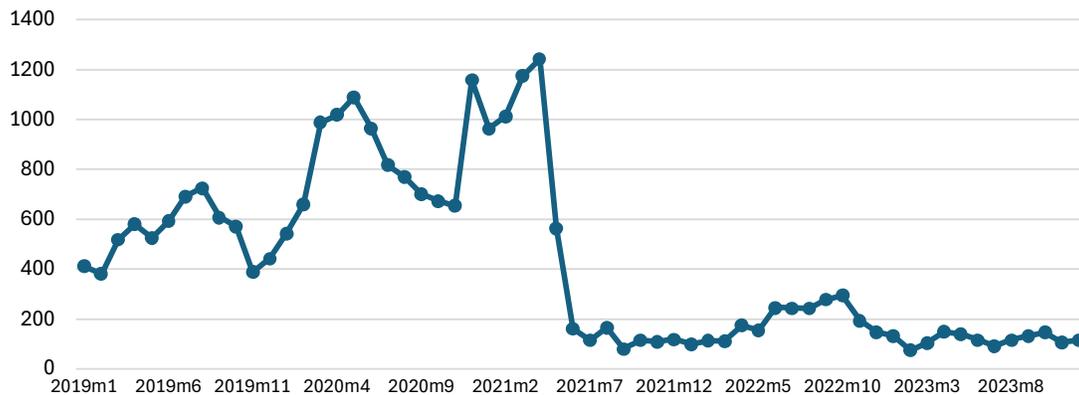
IV. Evaluation Results

- A. Within the deteriorating conflict and security context of the mission, UNDOF continued to undertake its core functions of reporting, monitoring and observing

UNDOF reported on violations to the disengagement agreement by adapting its reporting in line with changes to the conflict setting

- 14. UNDOF met its mandate to report on violations to the agreement through various means. It did so through its daily situation reports and situational awareness briefs; for egregious and permanent violations by the parties, it reported to the United Nations Headquarters through flash reports, after-action reports and code cables. Furthermore, the violations were reported through the quarterly reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council, which were prepared by the mission.
- 15. An analysis of the violations recorded in the DSRs, as shown in Figure 1, suggested that UNDOF consistently observed and reported on violations from 2019 to 2023. Within this timeframe, the significant drop⁷ in DSR reporting in mid-2021 was primarily due to COVID-19 restrictions and increased armed group activities on the Bravo side. Overall, the mission appeared to report on what it observed.

Figure 1: Number of violations recorded in DSRs



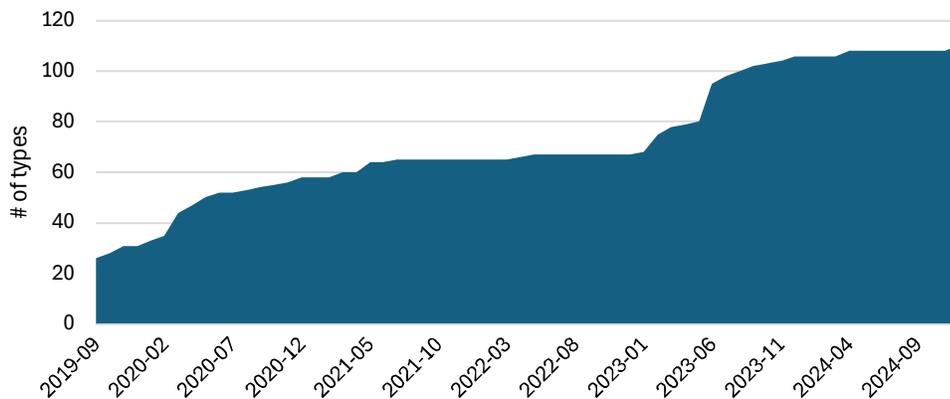
Source: UNDOF daily situation reports (2019-2023)

- 16. While the mission primarily reported on violations that were related to the unauthorized presence of personnel or military armament, as well as incidents of firing in the AOL, as the nature of the conflict changed and violations became more diversified and complex, it responded by categorizing those violations with greater nuance. This more nuanced reporting of violations can be seen by the types of violations that were recorded by UNDOF in its SAGE system, which increased by 323 per cent from 2019 to 2024, as shown in Figure 2. While SAGE was implemented in early 2019 and it was plausible to expect a higher baseline of violation category, the significant increase in cumulative new categories

⁷ The violations observed and reported in the DSR were first-hand visual observations either through observation posts or patrols. COVID-19 restrictions and increased armed group activities affected the missions' ability to do so. Consequently, the mission relied more on secondary sources to record potential violations in their SAGE system which showed consistent reporting and an uptick from November 2022.

over the period suggested that the mission more effectively and appropriately categorized the violations in its reporting.

Figure 2: Increase in types of violations recorded by UNDOF

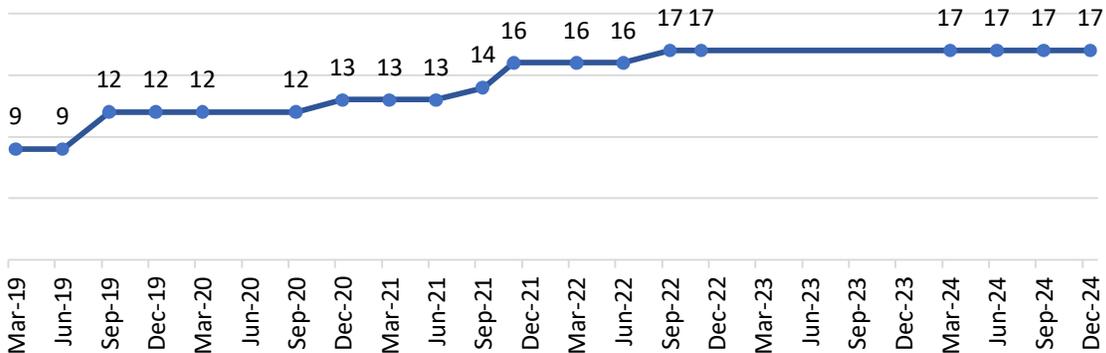


Source: UNDOF SAGE (2019-2024)

UNDOF’s gradual return to the vacated positions on the Bravo side also enabled it to continue its mandated reporting

17. UNDOF was consistent in gradually reoccupying the positions that it had to vacate temporarily in 2014 due to the deterioration in security situation, as shown in Figure 3, thereby returning to full mandate implementation on the Bravo side. While OGG was able to occupy all its permanent observation posts, except one⁸, UNDOF had reoccupied nine positions by May 2024⁹. This enabled the mission to increase its visibility in the southern part of its AOR through increased patrolling and maintaining static presence. Seventy-three per cent of the mission staff members surveyed considered that the mission was effective in reoccupying positions that it had vacated in 2014.

Figure 3: Number of reoccupied positions (UNDOF and UNTSO/OGG)



Source: Reports of the Secretary-General on UNDOF¹⁰

UNDOF increased its patrolling coverage of the AOS and AOL in fulfillment of its monitoring and observing mandate

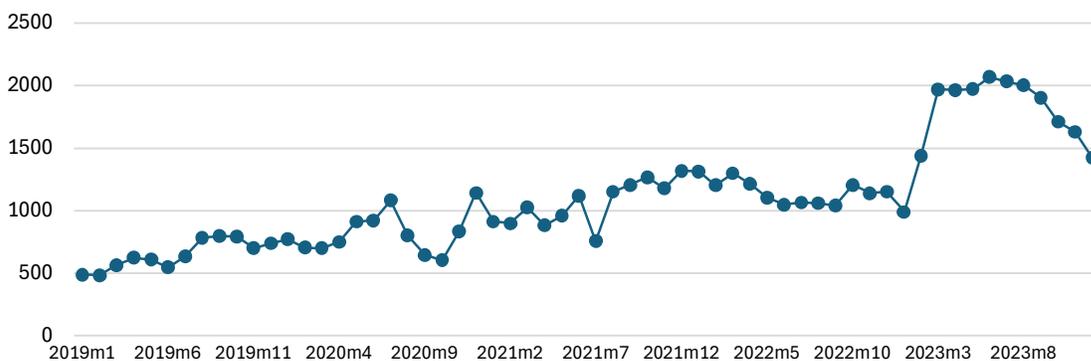
⁸ OGG managed to partially access the position, OP52, by December 2024 (S/2024/875).

⁹ S/2024/433, para 28 and Figure II.

¹⁰ S/2019/248, 467, 774, 923; S/2020/219, 945, 1159; S/2021/282, 516, 833, 994; S/2022/247, 447, 711, 887; S/2023/203, 400, 699, 935; S/2024/242, 433, 693, 875.

18. Patrolling was one of the most important modalities through which the mission ensured its coverage over the AOR to achieve full implementation of its mandate. This was particularly significant in areas where UNDOF had yet to reoccupy positions. UNDOF had increased the number the monthly patrols from 2019 to 2024, as seen in Figure 4. Although there were month-to-month fluctuations, the overall trend in both foot and vehicular patrols had been increasing until January 2023. Thereafter, UNDOF started reporting on total operational activities including patrols, among others, which explains the jump in numbers in February 2023. The decrease in patrols in the subsequent months of 2023 was potentially due to the October 7th incident¹¹ in Israel and the increase in military activities in the AOS and AOL, and across the ceasefire line.¹²

Figure 4: Number of monthly patrols conducted by UNDOF



Source: UNDOF daily situation reports

UNDOF also effectively executed its liaison function as part of its mandate implementation

19. Liaising was an additional modality UNDOF used to de-escalate tensions between the parties. The mission was in a unique position to play this role given that the parties had no mutual diplomatic relationship; most survey respondents (53 per cent) reported that the mission undertook the role effectively. Consequently, UNDOF played a significant role as a conduit between the parties to either de-escalate existing tensions or protest alleged violations of the agreement. The UNDOF liaison branch maintained regular contact, sometimes several times a day, with their interlocutors on both sides. Furthermore, the mission not only engaged the parties on the issue of potential violation of the agreement but also worked as a conduit in raising one party’s issue with the other. For example, the Syrian authorities requested UNDOF to liaise with the IDF regarding two Syrian nationals who had gone missing. The mission confirmed their detention from the IDF and facilitated their release the same day.¹³

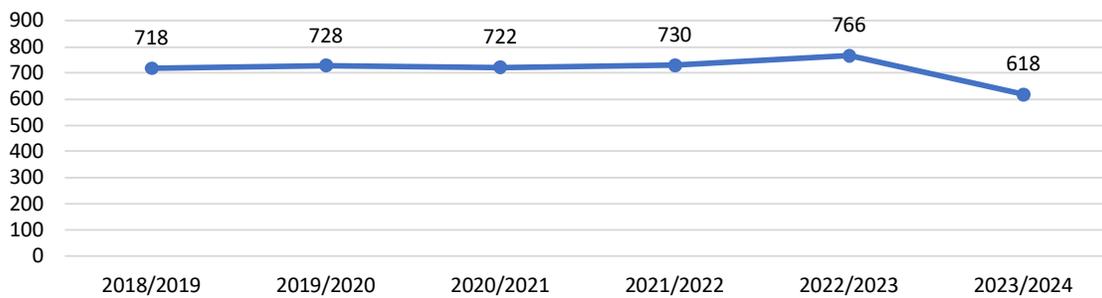
20. UNDOF raised the issues of violation of the agreement with the parties through protest letters. This function was primarily executed by the liaison branch of the mission. As shown in Figure 5, the number of protest letters from UNDOF to the parties had remained the same over the temporal scope of the evaluation. This indicated that the level of engagement with the parties remained consistent. The decline in 2023-24 was primarily due to the evaluation scope ending in August 2024, and therefore, not covering the entire year.

¹¹ Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General regarding the situation in the Middle East, 7 October 2023.

¹² S/2023/935.

¹³ S/2023/935, para 16.

Figure 5: Protest letters from UNDOF on violations of the agreement



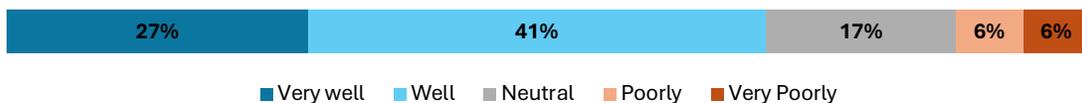
Source: UNDOF Budget performance documents

21. Additionally, UNDOF utilized its liaison function to support humanitarian activities. Although this was not part of the mandate, the mission facilitated humanitarian crossings with the ICRC; provided occasional medical assistance to the local population; tried to prevent accidental civilian crossings by improving reaction time, providing ID cards to shepherds; and provided humanitarian assistance in response to the massive 7.8 magnitude earthquake that hit northern Syria in February 2023.
22. Staff views on the effectiveness of the liaison function were mixed. While, as noted above in paragraph 19, most survey respondents (53 per cent) considered that UNDOF was effective in liaising with the parties, in interviews staff expressed more mixed or negative views on the function. They noted limitations with the mission’s liaison function, especially on the Alpha side with the IDF. Interviewees also remarked that the local liaison officer, a General in the IDF, was difficult to reach, and the GILO was unavailable around the clock. While the senior mission leadership engaged with the authorities on the Alpha side, it was perceived by staff interviewed as not being proactive and lacking consistency.¹⁴

UNDOF adapted its core functions to the conflict and security context

23. In response to the context it worked within, UNDOF demonstrated adaptability by implementing a range of strategic adjustments to deliver its core functions. First, mission leadership leveraged backchannels and personal connections to engage with senior interlocutors on both sides, facilitating dialogue and maintaining some operational access. To address fuel shortages, the mission identified alternative supply routes, ensuring continued mobility and logistical support. Additionally, UNDOF prioritized Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in schools located closer to UN positions, enhancing security for teachers and students while fostering goodwill with local communities. The mission also significantly improved its response time when liaising with the parties, ensuring that concerns were acknowledged promptly, which in turn strengthened trust and cooperation. Furthermore, recognizing the financial strain caused by rising fuel prices, UNDOF transitioned to solar power where possible, reducing dependence on conventional energy sources and improving long-term sustainability. These adaptive measures enabled the mission to navigate a highly volatile environment while delivering its core functions. Overall, two-thirds of survey respondents (68 per cent) considered that the mission was able to adapt its operational activities in response to the challenges it faced, as shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: How well did the mission adapt its operational activities to the challenges?



Note: "Don't know" not included in the analysis

Source: OIOS survey of UNDOF staff

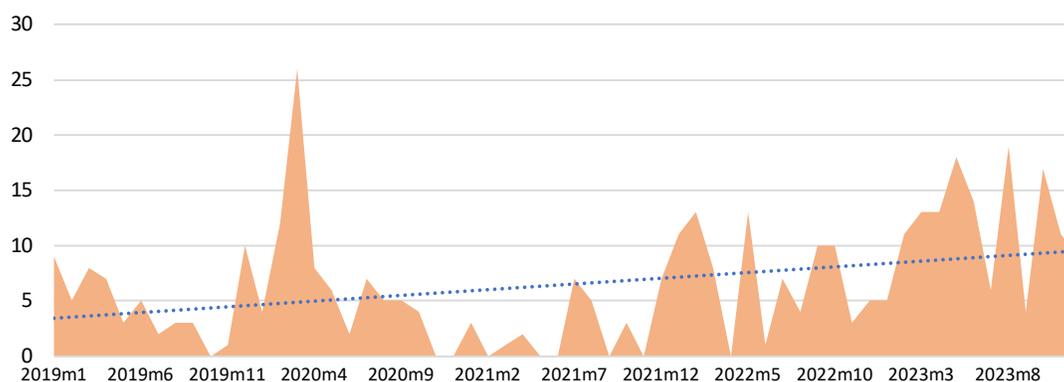
¹⁴ NVivo analysis of interview notes on the issue of UNDOF’s liaison with the parties (Q5).

B. The significant restrictions placed on UNDOF, as well as internal challenges, negatively impacted its ability to fully implement its mandate

UNDOF faced increased restrictions on its movement, hampering some of its activities

24. Despite the results discussed regarding carrying out its core functions in Result A above, UNDOF still faced severe restrictions by both the parties to move freely in the AOR, which affected its full mandate implementation. These restrictions hampered the mission’s ability to conduct patrols along certain routes or in areas, inspections as per their schedule, reoccupy positions, and refurbish barrels in certain areas. Restriction of movement also affected UNDOF support operations including logistics and administrative functions, troop rotation, and resupply of essential items such as food and fuel. As shown in Figure 7, an analysis of daily situation reports showed that there was an increasing trend in the monthly number of restrictions of movement imposed by both the parties on UNDOF from 2019 to 2023. Additionally, the restriction of movement was the main challenge cited in carrying out their mandate by UNDOF personnel interviewed¹⁵.

Figure 7: UNDOF restrictions of movement



Source: UNDOF Daily situation reports

25. The restriction of movement on UNDOF was imposed by both the parties, albeit varying in degree, as shown in Figure 8. The numbers on restriction of movement from the Secretary-General reports showed that there was an increasing trend, with more restrictions from the Alpha side after August 2022. According to mission staff members interviewees, the most common reasons cited by the parties were the prevailing safety and security situation, and COVID-19. Furthermore, patrolling in the southern sector of the AOS on the Bravo side was restricted by the Syrian authorities¹⁶ due to the prevailing safety and security situation, and the heightened activity of the Syrian armed forces in relation to the presence of other armed groups and elements.

¹⁵ Mentioned in 68 per cent of interviews (21/31).

¹⁶ This was until the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024. UNDOF reportedly managed to patrol areas that it was unable to access earlier due to the prevailing security situation and denial by the Syrian authorities.

Figure 8: UNDOF restrictions of movement by side



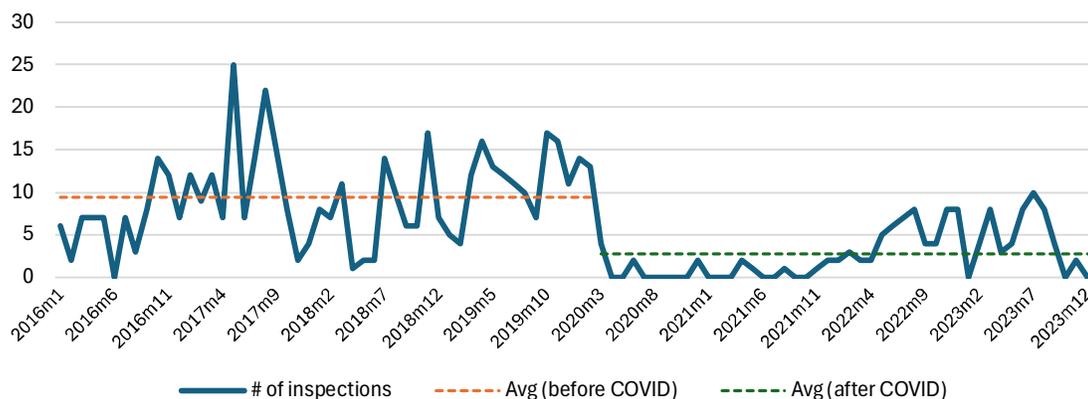
Source: Reports of the Secretary-General on UNDOF

26. Restriction of movement had increased on the Alpha side, especially since early March 2020 when IDF restricted the movement of UNDOF and OGG personnel through the Qunaytirah crossing. IDF placed an additional requirement of advance notice of movement, and approved crossings on a case-by-case basis. This was in addition to limiting the opening of the Alpha gate.¹⁷ Since the incident of October 7th, 2023, the IDF further limited these movements at the crossing permitting only two weekly crossings by UNDOF and OGG personnel.

UNDOF also conducted fewer inspections

27. Inspection was another important modality to undertake its core mandated functions, through which UNDOF verified compliance of the parties with the agreed limitations in armaments and forces on both sides of the AOS. As shown in Figure 9, there was a significant overall drop in the number of monthly inspections conducted by UNDOF over the past seven years. The average number of monthly inspections conducted by UNDOF before COVID-19 was 9.4, which fell to 2.7 thereafter. The possible reasons proffered by the interviewees were restrictions due to COVID-19, restrictions of movements imposed by both the parties on UNDOF troops, and the prevailing safety and security situation, especially on the Bravo side. Notably, the level of monthly inspections never reached those prior to April 2020.

Figure 9: Number of monthly inspections conducted by UNDOF



Source: UNDOF Daily situation reports (2016-2023)

¹⁷ End of Assignment Report by Lieutenant General Hamal (2022), and Reports of the Secretary-General on UNDOF for years 2020-2024.

Reoccupying observation posts was hindered by lack of access and grave security threats

28. While UNDOF gradually reoccupied positions it had vacated in 2014, the progress in the southern sector on the Bravo side was slow. UNDOF increased its patrols from the reoccupied positions; however, the lack of security escorts from the Syrian authorities impeded its ability to establish new patrol routes and avoid certain areas entirely. In some cases, UNDOF also had limited access to observation posts for several years that needed rebuilding. For example, the UN Observation Post 52 (UNOP52) was vacated in 2014, and UNDOF gained partial access for rebuilding only in 2024¹⁸. Access to the position was restricted by the Alpha side as it was behind the IDF technical fence gate.

Additional internal challenges hindered the mission's mandate implementation

29. To facilitate its operational and logistical needs, UNDOF was required to communicate with the host country through a designated official known as the SSAD, and the mission faced challenges with this communication. Being a single point of contact with the host country, the SSAD exercised significant influence over the movement of personnel and goods entering and exiting UNDOF AOR. As such, the mission was highly dependent on timely and expeditious approvals from the SSAD to ensure smooth rotations of personnel and delivery of supplies, which were not always forthcoming. This led to several allegations by UNDOF staff of wrongful interference by SSAD in troop rotations, procurement, staff recruitment, and the general patrol or inspections conducted by UNDOF.

30. Furthermore, an independent review of UNDOF conducted in 2018 identified several opportunities for improved performance, particularly regarding having additional capabilities, including new technology for observation and force protection¹⁹, which had not come to bear yet. The Secretary-General sought the support and cooperation of both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic in ensuring that the deployment of necessary technology and equipment occurred seamlessly and expeditiously.²⁰ However, UNDOF interviewees reported²¹ that the mission was unable to procure new technology such as a "sense and warn" system and night vision binoculars for better monitoring of violations, as it was blocked by one of the parties.

31. Additionally, mission staff and stakeholder survey respondents and interviewees identified several additional internal challenges that UNDOF faced, including:

- a. Lack of political expertise on the ground: the mission's political affairs officer post was vacant since November 2015 and the mission had to rely on political analysis and advice from the United Nations Headquarters in New York;
- b. Lack of institutional memory and poor knowledge management due to frequent troop rotations and the lack of a mission-wide systematic information management mechanism; and
- c. Inadequate sharing of situational awareness and conflict analysis outputs across the functional units.

C. While UNDOF's initiatives to prevent the escalation of tensions had mixed results, its presence and activities appeared to have contributed towards greater civilian safety in the AOS

UNDOF undertook several initiatives to deter inadvertent civilian crossings of the lines

¹⁸ S/2024/875, para 32

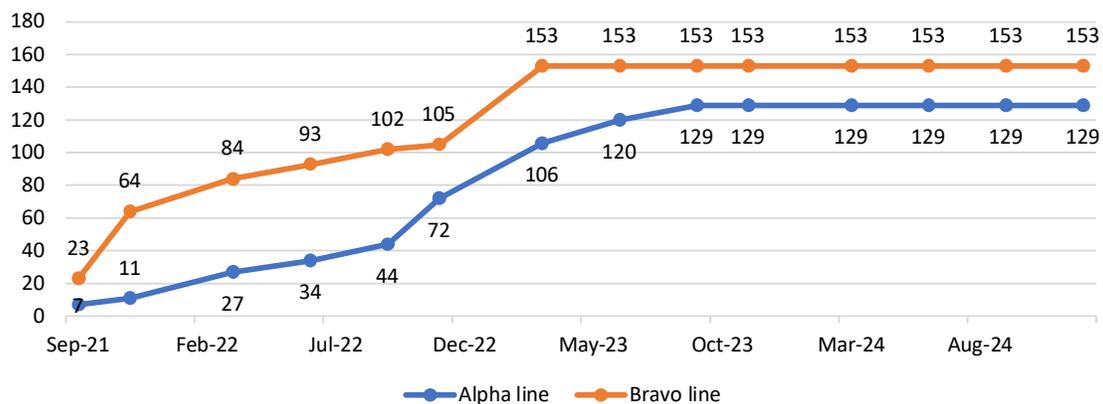
¹⁹ S/2018/1088, para 25

²⁰ *ibid.*, para 40

²¹ Mentioned in 22.5 per cent of interviews (7/31).

32. UNDOF undertook several initiatives to prevent escalation of tensions between the parties, especially on the issue of civilians crossing the Alpha line. While one party considered these civilians as shepherds or farmers engaged in grazing or agricultural activities, the other party suspected them to be either spies or members of armed groups operating in and around the area. This suspicion led to the detention or in a few cases, killing of civilians who inadvertently crossed the Alpha line.
33. To address this situation, UNDOF liaised with both the parties to help shepherds and farmers obtain Syrian-issued Identification (ID) cards;²² however, this initiative was short-lived as it did not have any mechanism to allay one party's suspicion of the civilians being spies of the other party's armed forces or armed groups. Moreover, in response to complaints from the IDF about increased civilian crossings, in 2019 UNDOF placed several warning signs or signposts in known hotspots along the Alpha line. Additionally, in March 2021, UNDOF deployed mobile and static patrols to monitor sensitive grazing areas to prevent any inadvertent civilian crossings that could escalate existing tensions or have any unintended outcomes.
34. Furthermore, UNDOF also made progress in the refurbishment and restoration of barrels along the Alpha and Bravo lines. As shown in Figure 10, the mission made steady progress in restoring barrels on the Bravo line, where it restored 153 out of 156 barrels, but less progress on the ceasefire line, where it restored 129 out of 153 barrels, the gap being due to access issues and dispute between Israel and the United Nations on the exact coordinates.²³ The existence of a clearly visible, well-marked barrel was meant to inform civilians and uniformed personnel of both parties of the position of the Alpha and Bravo lines, thus deterring inadvertent crossing by civilians.

Figure 10: Progress towards restoration of barrels



Source: Reports of the Secretary-General on UNDOF

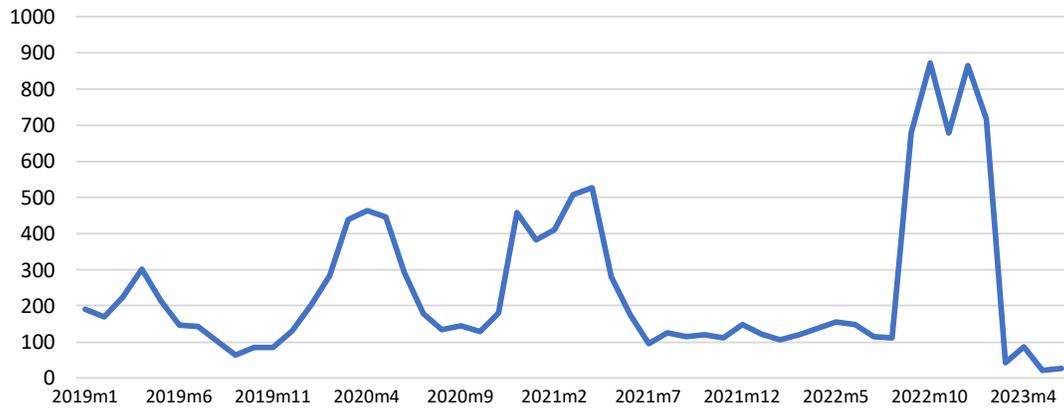
The initiatives, however, appeared to have had no impact on the issue of civilian crossing

35. Despite the UNDOF initiatives discussed above, the level of civilian violations, which were primarily civilian crossings, remained steady, as shown in Figure 11. Although the trend showed seasonal fluctuations, consistent with increased grazing activities between February and April, there was no visible downward trend in civilian violations that would suggest a decrease in civilian crossings over time.

²² In February 2022, UNDOF issued ID cards to farmers and shepherds in certain areas as part of a pilot project. Sources: End of Assignment Report by Lieutenant General Hamal (2022), S/2022/247, S/2022/447, S/2022/711, S/2022/887, S/2023/203, S/2023/400, S/2023/699, S/2023/935, S/2024/242.

²³ Key informant interview dated 15 November 2024

Figure 11: Number of civilian violations

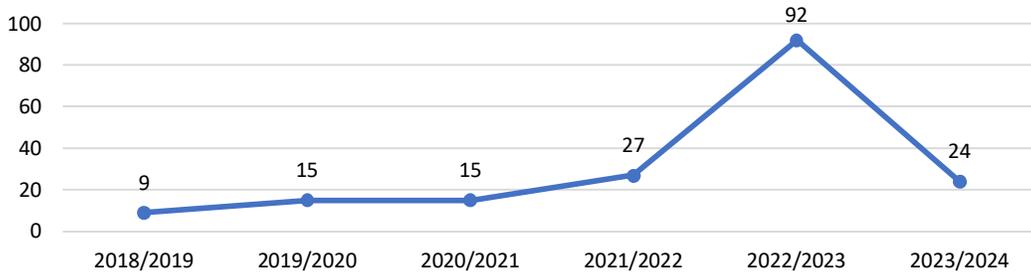


Source: UNDOF Daily situation reports

The presence of UNDOF appeared to have contributed towards improved civilian safety in the AOS

36. UNDOF conducted demining activities in the AOS, as shown in Figure 12. These efforts were primarily aimed towards protecting UN personnel and equipment as those were conducted around the UN positions, OGG observation posts, barrels, and along the patrol routes. These demining efforts had a positive spillover effect on civilian safety, as this enabled shepherds and farmers to move freely without the risk of getting affected by landmines. Consequently, there were no reported incidents of UNDOF personnel or civilians getting injured or killed by mines or UXOs in the AOS.

Figure 12: Clearance of mines, UXOs, and IEDs in AOS



Source: UNDOF Budget performance reports

37. Also, as shown in Figure 13, the Normalized Difference Built-up Index (NDBI)²⁴ significantly increased from 2016 to 2024 in the AOS. This suggested a significant uptick in human activities such as construction of buildings or houses, agricultural activities or grazing, or any activity that would reduce the green cover.

²⁴ Please see para 12(d)(ii) for details on NDBI

Figure 13: Normalized Difference Built-up Index (NDBI) for 2016 and 2024 of UNDOF AOS



Source: OIOS recreation of UNDOF AOS based on coordinates provided by UNDOF

38. Overall, the gradual return of UNDOF after the Syrian civil war and its reoccupation of positions in the AOS, along with its demining activities around the UN positions, ceasefire and Bravo lines, barrels and patrol routes, may have improved the general security situation in the AOS. This improvement contributed towards increased human activities in the AOS.

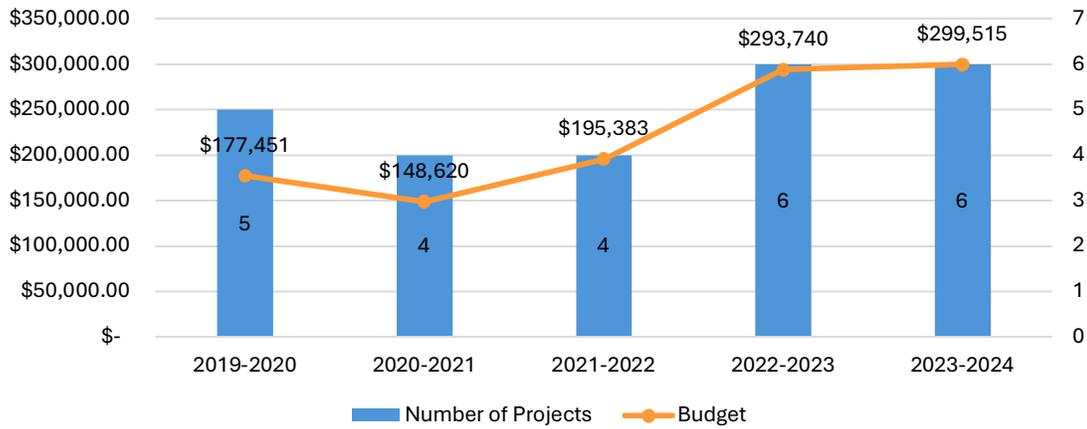
D. The implementation of Quick Impact Projects, although well intended, faced challenges that made any potential benefits unclear

39. With the temporary relocation of UNDOF from most of its positions in the AOS in 2014 during the Syrian Civil War reportedly harming the mission's reputation with the local population, Quick Impact Projects (QIP) were introduced in 2019 to win back their trust. These QIPs were intended to improve the perception of the mission as an impartial actor in the ongoing conflict and as a partner in the reconstruction and rebuilding of communities within the AOR.²⁵ The projects were implemented jointly with local contractors while UNDOF troops volunteered their labor to whatever work was not covered in the service agreement. This helped to reduce costs and aimed to improve the perception of the mission among the local population by associating UNDOF uniforms with the projects.

40. Since 2019, the mission had completed a total of 25 QIPs, with the total annual budget for QIPs increasing from \$148K in 2020-2021, to almost \$300K in 2023-2024, as shown in Figure 14. The mission implemented between four and six QIPs each year, typically focusing on the construction or renovation of schools, medical centers, water wells, parks, playgrounds, and roads.

²⁵ End of Assignment Report by Maj Gen Kharel (2019).

Figure 14: Number and budget (USD) of completed QIPs



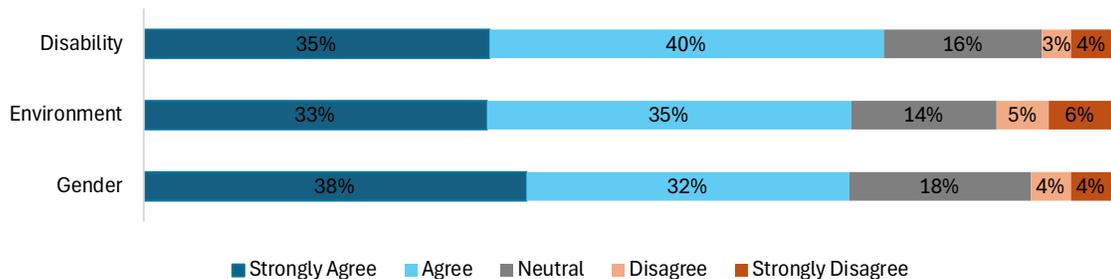
Source: QIPs data provided by UNDOF

41. The QIPs faced many challenges. First, the Syrian authorities did not allow mission personnel to have any contact with the local population, outside of facilitating humanitarian crossings and providing occasional medical assistance. Projects were proposed by the Syrian government in collaboration with local governors without directly taking into consideration the needs of the local population as they were not consulted at any point in the project selection or design process. The contracting process to select vendors was also not competitive: the same five or six companies from a list of government-approved vendors kept being awarded contracts.
42. The potential benefits of QIPs were also unclear. No evaluation was conducted to measure the effectiveness of the projects or their impact on the perception of the mission among the local population. Mission personnel were also not allowed by the Syrian authorities to visit the project sites on their own. They had to obtain permission and be accompanied by a representative of the Syrian government. Lastly, there were issues related to the sustainability of some projects. For example, parks, playgrounds, and medical centers were abandoned after completion because the government and communities did not have the resources to maintain them. As a result, the mission shifted the focus of QIPs to schools because these were potentially more sustainable given their constant use.

E. While the mission made some progress on gender and environment considerations, there was a lack of integration of disability

43. UNDOF staff survey respondents gave mixed ratings to the mission regarding integrating cross-cutting issues into its work, as shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15: UNDOF staff ratings on integration of cross-cutting issues by UNDOF



Source: OIOS survey of UNDOF staff

44. Regarding the integration of gender, the mission conducted regular briefings and trainings on gender for personnel, as well as gender focal points who were trying to improve conditions for women in the mission. There was a military gender focal point who sat in all key meetings with the leadership team, highlighted gender-related issues that had been overlooked, and suggested ways to improve things from a gender perspective. The Civil Affairs Officer initiated conversations between women in senior leadership, started a programme for women to be together a few hours per week, and arranged special timings for only women to use the gym. Furthermore, UNDOF met its gender balance target of at least 28 per cent international civilian staff in 2022/2023.²⁶ This number remains the same as of January 2025²⁷. Yet, UNDOF struggled with gender balance among uniformed personnel from troop contributing countries (TCC) due to the hardship condition of the mission.
45. However, the roles and responsibilities for gender focal points were not clear. The military gender focal point was assigned her role with 12 weeks remaining in her mission tour of duty and had been provided no job description. The Civil Affairs Officer fulfilled the role of the civilian gender focal point, although this was not in writing anywhere.
46. Regarding the environment, to mitigate health and environmental risks, UNDOF undertook various measures. It enhanced its waste management capabilities through the installation and upgrade of water and wastewater treatment plants, and through the engagement of one Waste Management Officer and one Waste Management Assistant.²⁸ It also reduced its carbon footprint and enhanced its self-sufficiency by installing and training staff on solar power systems, drilling water wells, and installing drinking water fountains at various locations around the mission to replace the use of plastic water bottles.²⁹ The shift to solar power led to a reduction in electricity expenditure on the Alpha side from USD 362,834 in 2019-2020, to USD 102,000 in 2023-2024. The shift also generated a total of 435,547 KWh on the Bravo side during 2023-2024, which reduced fuel consumption by 181,478 litres. Consequently, the total efficiency from the fuel reduction amounted to \$168,775, based on a fuel cost of \$0.93 per litre.³⁰ This was important given the rising fuel prices in recent years, making diesel rations one of the biggest expenses in the mission's budget.
47. Disability inclusion was also not fully mainstreamed within the mission. The medical clinic was accessible with a ramp, but otherwise, there were no other accommodations for people with disabilities in the mission (e.g., ramps, lifts, special vehicles, etc.). Surveyed and interviewed UNDOF personnel confirmed that there was limited focus on disability inclusion, in large part due to the mission's limited engagement with civilians.

V. Conclusion

48. Since its inception, UNDOF has operated as a traditional mission with a narrowly defined mandate to observe, monitor and report to the Security Council on violations of the disengagement agreement. For 50 years, its mandate has been subject to technical rollovers every six months, with no significant changes anticipated despite recent dramatic developments in the region³¹ due to being anchored in the disengagement agreement between the parties. However, the agreement itself has come under increasing strain³², particularly following the fall of the Assad regime in Syria and the subsequent entry,

²⁶ <https://psdata.un.org/dataset/DOS-INDICATORS>

²⁷ <https://www.un.org/gender/content/un-secretariat-gender-parity-dashboard>

²⁸ A/76/547.

²⁹ A/75/615, A/77/594, A/78/582, A/79/587.

³⁰ A/79/587.

³¹ The 7th of October 2023 incident in Israel, the Israel-Hamas war thereafter, and subsequent fall of the Assad regime of Syria in December 2024.

³² Associated Press News (updated [link](#)), 23 February 2025

continued presence and activities of the IDF into the AOS³³. Despite these challenges, UNDOF has continued to fulfill its reporting obligations, documenting permanent violations of the agreement and issuing press statements on critical developments.

49. During the evaluation period, UNDOF managed to perform its core mandated functions up to a certain level despite restrictions of movement imposed by both the parties. The situation deteriorated significantly following recent regional developments³⁴ and the IDF's presence and activities in the AOS, which has resulted in crippling limitations on the mission's operations. The number of daily patrols, which previously ranged between 50 and 60, plummeted to just five after December 8, 2024.³⁵ If these severe restrictions persist, the mission's ability to implement its mandate will be severely compromised, raising concerns about its relevance and effectiveness.
50. The fall of the Assad regime in Syria has also created an opportunity for the mission to establish renewed communication with the authorities on the Bravo side, potentially facilitating unfettered movement for UNDOF personnel. Additionally, the shift provides an opening for negotiations with Syrian authorities on implementing QIPs that align with the needs of the local communities. Leveraging these opportunities will be crucial for UNDOF's ability to adapt to the evolving security landscape and maintain its role as a stabilizing presence in the region.
51. Lastly, given the evolving ground realities, it is critical that UNDOF continues to report on grave violations of the agreement by the parties to the Security Council. This is crucial in ensuring continued political and logistical support to UNDOF mandate. Increased engagement with the parties by senior mission leadership is necessary to reinforce the mission's freedom of movement and ability to fully fulfill its mandate, while enhancing coordination with other United Nations agencies and regional organizations operating in the vicinity is needed to strengthen the mission's situational awareness and risk mitigation. While UNDOF remains a key stabilizing force in the region, its effectiveness will ultimately depend on the sustained political will of the parties as well as the international community, adequate resourcing, and its ability to adapt technologically and diplomatically to a fast-evolving security environment.

³³ UNDOF press statement on 13 December 2024

³⁴ Ibid,

³⁵ A Key informant interview conducted on 20 December 2024

VI. Recommendations

52. OIOS makes two important recommendations to UNDOF to improve the relevance and effectiveness of its operational activities.

53. **Recommendation 1 (Results A, B, C, and E):**

UNDOF should develop and implement a Knowledge Management System (KMS) to ensure effective record-keeping, seamless leadership transitions, and efficient transfer of knowledge to rotated troops. The KMS should consider including guidelines on data collection by the mission and protocols to validate its accuracy before it is processed by the mission's Joint Operations Centre (JOC) and/or entered in the SAGE system. The implementation of such a system may also include regular staff training on knowledge management best practices.

Indicator of implementation: Existence of a structured KMS with documented handover procedures, data collection guidelines and validation protocols.

Expected change(s): Improved continuity and efficiency in leadership transitions and troop rotations; reduced operational disruptions due to leadership changes; and strengthened institutional memory.

54. **Recommendation 2 (Result D):**

UNDOF should conduct a comprehensive needs assessment before project selection and implementation for all its Quick Impact Projects, which includes a clear implementation strategy compliant with procurement rules, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess progress and use. This will enhance the transparency and sustainability of its interventions.

Indicator of implementation: Existence of a documented needs assessment process including an implementation strategy with measurable progress and outcome indicators for all Quick Impact Projects.

Expected change(s): Improved alignment of QIPs with the needs of the local population; enhanced transparency and accountability in project implementation; and greater sustainability and long-term impact of interventions.

Annexure

Comments received from the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)



DOF/FC/57/25

27 May 2025

To: Ms Demetra ARAPAKOS
Director of the Inspection and Evaluation Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

From: Major General Anita ASMAH
Head of Mission and Force Commander, UNDOF

SUBJECT: FORMAL COMMENTS ON THE EVALUATION REPORT OF UNDOF

Dear Ms Arapakos,

1. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) presents its highest compliments to the Office of Internal Oversight Services and has the honour of conveying its gratitude for your continued support, assistance and guidance.
2. The purpose of this letter is to formally indicate UNDOF's receipt and acceptance of the OIOS evaluation report on UNDOF dated 5 March 2025. UNDOF has noted the recommendations made in the report to improve the Mission's relevance and operational activities.
3. As proposed in the report, the Mission will take steps to enhance existing systems to improve record keeping, transition and knowledge transfer between leadership and rotated personnel. Additionally, the processes for selection and implementation of future QIPs will be reassessed to increase sustainability and impact on communities.
4. I take this opportunity to express our appreciation to your office and the evaluation team for their cooperation and efforts to improve the Mission's relevance and mandate delivery.

Yours sincerely,



Anita ASMAH
Major General
Head of Mission and Force Commander