**Briefing Note: 68 Infantry Group UNDOF**

**UN Security Council Resolutions**

On 31st May 1974, the United Nations adopted Security Council Resolution

350 to establish the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). UNDOF’s mandate is to maintain a credible presence in the Golan and use its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and see to it that it is scrupulously observed. The resolution is updated every six months and the mission is currently operating under UN Security Council resolution 2681, until 05 April2024.

On the 16 July 2013 the Defence Forces received authorisation from the Government to deploy with UNDOF. The first mission for Irish troops in UNDOF commenced in September 2013. To carry out the mandate, UNDOF maintains an Area of Separation, (AOS) between Israeli Occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Area of Operations**

UNDOF Area of Operations (AO) is primarily focused on the AOS between the Alpha and Bravo lines. Both lines stretch for a distance of 75 kms from Mount Hermon in the North, to the Jordanian border in the South. The area between both lines is known as the Area of Separation (AOS). At its widest, the AOS stretches up to 9 kms and is 200m wide at its narrowest point. The AOS separates Israeli Occupied Golan to the west of the Alpha Line with the Syrian Arab Republic to the East of the Bravo Line. The 68 Infantry Group Headquarters is located at Camp Faouar.

**68 Infantry Group**



The 68 Infantry Group will rotate into the mission area in October 2023 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver Clear. The group contains

133 personnel of all ranks, consisting of 16 Officers, 116 Enlisted Personnel and 1 Chaplain. A total of 34 personnel are on their first tour of duty overseas. The Group has a wide range of capabilities including Armoured Force Protection, Patrolling and Mobility, Surveillance, Communications, Medical and Operational Expertise. In preparation for deployment the Infantry Group are being tested during a Mission Readiness Exercise which puts commanders and soldiers through a demanding series of scenarios based on the current situation in the Golan Heights and potential threats that may be encountered in the mission area. Troops face a series of scenarios involving simulated explosive strikes, air strikes, helicopter drills, anti-ambush tactics using a variety of advanced weapons systems, detailed planning and traditional peacekeeping methods.

The 68 Infantry Group Headquarters; as well as the Quick Reaction Force and Group Support Elements will be based in Camp Faouar, situated to the East of the Bravo Line in the Syrian Arab Republic. The location of the camp offers superior operational and logistical capabilities and its location increases the force protection and general security. It also gives good visibility of the AOS between Israeli Occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Rules of Engagement**

The Group have undergone extensive pre-deployment training, including scenario-based training. Each soldier has been thoroughly briefed in relation to the rules of engagement and each have received a Tactical Aide Memoire stating these rules which they will familiarise themselves with and carry at all times.

**What are the Irish Troops doing?**

The Defence Forces is deploying a Group Headquarters, Two Mechanised Infantry Platoons, a Cavalry & Artillery Reconnaissance Troop and a Contingent Support Group of 133 personnel to the Golan. The Infantry Group will be carrying out peacekeeping duties under Chapter 6 of the UN Charter.

The group acts as the Force Reserve Company, the main focus of which is constituting a Quick Response Force for UNDOF, as well as supporting the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation, (UNTSO). This group operates Observation Posts along the Alpha line in order to monitor the AOS. This will involve extensive patrolling throughout the AO in addition to monitoring the AOS. In accordance with Security Council Resolution 2530, duties will also include helping to ensure humanitarian access to the civilian population in the area.

**Officer Commanding 68 Infantry Group**



Lieutenant Colonel Oliver Clear is the Officer Commanding the 68 Infantry Group. He joined the Defence Forces in 1993 and was commissioned in 1995 as a member of the 70th Cadet Class. Lt Col Clear has amassed a wide range of experience as an infantry officer across serving in command and staff roles at battalion level in the 2nd 5th 6th and 27th Infantry Battalions. He also has significant experience in the field of Human Resource Management and Training, having served as an Instructor in the Military College in the Cadet School, the Infantry School and the Command and Staff Schools alongside service in the Human Resources Branch (J1) at Defence Forces Headquarters. Lt Col Clear’s most recent military service was as Officer Commanding the 6th Infantry Battalion, Custume Bks, Athlone.

Lt Col Clear has extensive overseas experience in the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. His most recent overseas service was in Syria with UNDOF where he was deployed for a year as the Chief Operations Officer in the Mission Headquarters.

Lt Col Clear’s military education includes successful completion of the Junior Command and Staff Course in addition to being a Graduate of the Irish Defence Forces Command and Staff Course conducted in the Command and Staff School, Military College. He is a

Graduate of Athlone Institute of Technology with a Bachelor of Business Studies, and holds a Master’s Degree in Leadership, Management and Defence from Maynooth University. He is also an alumnus of the Institute of Public Administration from where he graduated with a Master’s Degree in Financial Management.

Lt Col Clear resides in Nurney, Co. Kildare. He is married to Orla Jennings who is also a serving officer of the Defence Forces and together they have two sons Adam and Ryan.

**Senior NCO 68 Infantry Group**

Battalion Sergeant Major Anthony Jinks enlisted in the Defence Forces1994 as a Trooper and currently serves as 7th Inf Bn Sergeant Major assuming this position in September of 2022.

He has served in a wide range of appointments, initially as a Trooper in 4th Cav Sqdn Longford, followed by 26 years as a member of 6th Inf Bn, on promotion Coy Sgt he moved to the 3rd Inf Bn Kilkenny and later took up a position in No 1 Security Coy, and later came back to Sp Coy 6th Inf Bn.

During his service, Sergeant Major Jinks has deployed eight times to overseas missions: Lebanon: 78, 83,104,107,118Bn’s, Kosovo: 39th INF Gp, Liberia: 90th Inf Gp, East Timor: 9th Inf Gp.

BSM Jinks is married to Michelle, they have 4 children all boys ranging in age from 25 to 32, of which 2 have served with the Defence Forces in 1ST Bn Galway and 6th Inf Bn Athlone. In his spare time he coaches and mentors Gaelic & Soccer teams. He also is involved with Team Building/Leadership and Physical Training.

**68th INFANTRY GROUP PERSONNEL PROFILE**

**Troops Disposition (All Ranks): 133 All Ranks**

16 Officers

1 Chaplain

116 Enlisted Personnel

**Average Age:** 31 Years

**Youngest Soldier:** Pte. Matthew Quirke, 20 yrs, 24 MAR 2003

**Most Overseas Tours** Sgt. Enda Fitzpatrick, 13 Trips

**First tour of duty abroad:** 34 personnel

**Accumulated trips:** Over 260 tours of duty

**Troops have previously served in;** UNDOF (Israeli Occupied Golan and Syria), UNIFIL (Lebanon), SFOR (Bosnia), KFOR (Kosovo), EUFOR (Bosnia), EUTM (Mali), MINURCAT (Central African Republic and Chad), EUFOR (Chad),INTERFET (East Timor), UNTAET (East Timor) UNMIL (Liberia), UNMEE (Ethiopia and Eritrea) and TCHAD.

**Female Personnel travelling:** 2

**Total counties represented:** 28 Counties

**Counties Represented:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Antrim | **3** | Laois | **3** |
| Armagh | **1** | Louth | **5** |
| Carlow | **2** | Longford | **5** |
| Cavan | **6** | Limerick | **4** |
| Cork | **3** | Meath | **2** |
| Derry | **2** | Monaghan | **4** |
| Donegal | **6** | Offaly | **8** |
| Down | **4** | Roscommon | **6** |
| Dublin | **7** | Sligo | **2** |
| Fermanagh | **3** | Tipperary | **6** |
| Galway | **3** | Tyrone | **3** |
| Kerry | **3** | Westmeath | **24** |
| Kildare | **12** | Wexford | **3** |
| Kilkenny | **1** | Wicklow | **2** |
|  |  |  |  |

**DOD Press Release on Withdrawal from UNDOF**

Defence Forces’ withdrawal from United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)

From [Department of Defence](https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-defence/)

Published on 7 March 2023

Last updated on 7 March 2023

The Tánaiste and Minister for Defence, Micheál Martin, today informed the government of his decision to effectively withdraw the Defence Forces’ contribution to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights. The date of their withdrawal will now be discussed with the United Nations Department of Peace Operations.

The decision follows the conclusion of an assessment of the sustainability of the Defence Forces’ overseas commitments. As a result of this assessment and on the basis of military advice, the decision has been taken to withdraw the Infantry Group, with approximately 130 Defence Force personnel.

The decision will ensure that the Defence Forces have the capacity to fulfil their commitment to the EU Battlegroup 2024/2025 as well as allowing the Defence Forces to undertake a process of consolidation with regard to their overseas commitments and to prepare for future peace-keeping missions. The withdrawal of troops from UNDOF will also relieve ongoing challenges in respect of the filling of certain specialist roles in overseas deployments.

Speaking after today’s government meeting, the Tánaiste said:

"*Our Peacekeeping commitments and overseas commitments are a priority for the Defence Forces and for Government. The Defence Forces keep the sustainability of these overseas commitments under regular review. At the time the government approved our participation in the EU Battlegroup 2024/2025, I indicated that this decision would require a reassessment of the Defence Forces’ current overseas commitments and the likely withdrawal of personnel and equipment from an existing overseas mission. That assessment has now been completed, and the military advice provided to me was that the Defence Forces’ should reduce our commitments with UNDOF in preparation for our participation in the EU Battlegroup*.”

The Tánaiste also confirmed that the Defence Forces will engage with the United Nations with a view to maintaining some or all of the staff posts currently occupied by DF personnel in UNDOF Headquarters and will explore the possibility of providing a modest increase in our troop contribution to UNIFIL.

The Defence Forces Ireland’s Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York will engage directly with the UN to ensure that the Defence Forces’ withdrawal will be managed in such a way as not to compromise the integrity of the mission and to minimise any necessary disruption caused by the withdrawal.

**Notes to Editors**

The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) was established on 31 May 1974 by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 350 (1974), following the agreed disengagement of the Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan Heights in May 1974. UNDOF supervises the implementation of the Disengagement Agreement, maintaining an area of separation between the forces which is over 75 kilometres long.

Ireland commenced participation in UNDOF on 22 June 2013, when a number of Defence Forces personnel deployed to UNDOF Headquarters on the Golan Heights in Syria at the request of the United Nations. A contingent of the Permanent Defence Force was deployed to the mission as the Force Reserve Company in September 2013 following a further request from the UN after the withdrawal of a major Austrian troop contingent. 43 Inf Gp deployed on 07 Oct 2013 (130 pax).

The role of the Irish Infantry Group includes the provision of a Quick Reaction Force which is on standby to assist with the on-going operations within the UNDOF area of responsibility.

**Additional Notes**

Total Rotations: 21 (Inf Gps; 43, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, 54, 55-68).

Significant activities/operations during this period:

* 2014, Brigadier General O’Hanlon became Deputy Force Commander UNDOF.
* September 2014 notable incident, headline: *Here's How Heroic Irish Troops Rescued UN Peacekeepers Hunted By Syrian Rebels.* Full article can be found [https://www.businessinsider.com/irish-troops-rescued-un-peacekeepers-2014-9](https://www.businessinsider.com/irish-troops-rescued-un-peacekeepers-2014-9" \t "_blank)
* September 2014 UNDOF leaves Syrian side of the Golan Heights due to spill over from Syrian civil war.
* September 2018 UNDOF returns to the Syrian side of the Golan.
* September 2019, Brigadier General O’Brien became Deputy Force Commander UNDOF.