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Department of Political Affairs - Security Council Affairs Division
Security Council Practices and Charter Research Branch

The situation in the Middle East

Overview

During the period under review, the Security Council held 16 meetings, including 6 private/closed meetings with the troop-contributing countries,¹ in connection with the item entitled “The situation in the Middle East”, adopting seven resolutions and three presidential statements. The Council primarily addressed three topics in these meetings: a) the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF);² b) the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)³ including [resolution 1701 \(2006\)](#); and c) the Syrian Arab Republic. In addition, at one meeting, the Council met to adopt [resolution 2014 \(2011\)](#) concerning Yemen, by which it demanded, inter alia, that all sides immediately reject the use of violence and that the Yemeni authorities immediately ensure that their actions comply with applicable humanitarian and human rights laws.⁴

The Council renewed the mandate of UNDOF four times for periods of six months.⁵ The Council also renewed the mandate of UNIFIL twice for periods of one year each.⁶

A table lists the meetings held in consideration of this agenda item, as well as related information, including invitees, speakers and decisions adopted.

¹ For UNDOF, see [S/PV.6343](#), [S/PV.6433](#), [S/PV.6558](#) and [S/PV.6680](#). For UNIFIL, see [S/PV.6373](#) and [S/PV.6600](#).

² For more information on the mandate of UNDOF, see part X, sect. I, with regard to peacekeeping operations.

³ For more information on the mandate of UNIFIL, see part X, sect. I, with regard to peacekeeping operations.

⁴ [Resolution 2014 \(2011\)](#).

⁵ [Resolutions 1934 \(2010\)](#), [1965 \(2010\)](#), [1994 \(2011\)](#) and [2028 \(2011\)](#).

⁶ [Resolutions 1937 \(2010\)](#) and [2004 \(2011\)](#).

30 June 2010 and 22 December 2010: renewal of mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force

On 30 June and 22 December 2010, the Council renewed the mandate of UNDOF, respectively, for periods of six months. Immediately following each of these decisions, the Council adopted statements by the President concurring with the statement of the Secretary-General 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.”⁷

On 30 June 2011, following the extension of the mandate of UNDOF until 31 December 2011, the Council discussed the two incidents that had occurred on 15 May and 5 June 2011, when demonstrators crossed the ceasefire line in the UNDOF area of operations, resulting in civilian casualties. Council members expressed concern at the incidents and called upon both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic to respect the terms of the 1974 disengagement agreement, by which both parties were obligated to prevent violations of the ceasefire line and the area of separation. Several Council members referred to the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and called upon its Government to cease the violent repression of its own people.⁸ However, the representatives of the Russian Federation and China stated that the renewal of the mandate of UNDOF and the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic were separate issues and should not be linked, with the latter being an internal affair of that country and not one that posed a threat to international peace and security.⁹ The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, while emphasizing that it was committed to working with UNDOF and ensuring the safety of its personnel, called upon Israel to comply, inter alia, with [resolution 497 \(1981\)](#)¹⁰ and withdraw from the Golan Heights. He further stated that the Council should focus on “real issues” within its mandate, instead of “meddling” in the affairs of a Member State. The representative of Israel stated that the Syrian Arab Republic had not carried out its

⁷ [S/PRST/2010/12](#) and [S/PRST/2010/30](#).

⁸ [S/PV.6572](#), p. 2 (United Kingdom); p. 3 (Germany); p. 3 (United States); and p. 4 (France).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁰ In this resolution, the Council, inter alia, demanded that Israel rescind its decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration in the occupied Golan Heights.

responsibilities in ensuring the security of the disengagement line, in a “blatant” attempt to distract international attention from the violent repression of its own people.

30 August 2010 to 30 August 2011: meetings on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and resolution 1701 (2006)

On 30 August 2010, following the extension of the mandate of UNIFIL until 31 August 2011, the representative of Israel asserted that the most serious challenge to peace and security in Lebanon continued to be the military build-up of Hizbullah and reiterated the need, in accordance with [resolution 1937 \(2010\)](#) just adopted, to establish between the Blue Line and the Litani River an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of Lebanon and UNIFIL. Citing the incident of 3 August 2011 at which one Israeli officer was killed and another wounded by Lebanese gunfire, he further called upon the Government of Lebanon to uphold its responsibilities under [resolution 1701 \(2006\)](#) and respect the Blue Line in its entirety.¹¹ The representative of Lebanon stated that Israel was continuously violating its sovereignty through its occupation of Lebanese territory, such as in Al-Ghajar and the Shab'a farms in Kafr Shuba. He further emphasized Lebanon's commitment to enhancing coordination and cooperation with UNIFIL.¹²

On 30 August 2011, following the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) until 31 August 2011, the representative of Israel reiterated that Hizbullah's continued military build-up, its exploitation of Lebanese civilians as human shields, and acts of violence targeting UNIFIL posed serious threats to peace and security in Lebanon and prevented full implementation of [resolution 1701 \(2006\)](#). He also called upon Lebanon to cease “provocative actions” along the Blue Line, warning that such actions carried serious potential for escalation.¹³ The representative of Lebanon stated that the objective and terms of [resolution 1701 \(2006\)](#) were being constantly undermined by Israel's violation of its territory, airspace and waters, and

¹¹ [S/PV.6375](#), p. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹³ [S/PV.6605](#), pp. 2-3.

called upon the Secretary-General to intensify his efforts to ensure that Israel withdrew from areas such as Al-Ghajar and the Shab'a farms.¹⁴

27 April 2011 to 3 August 2011: briefings on the Syrian Arab Republic

On 27 April 2011, in his briefing to the Council, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs reported that anti-government demonstrations had started in the Syrian Arab Republic in mid-March, following the detention in Dar'a of fifteen schoolchildren for writing anti-government graffiti. He noted that demonstrations had since gradually but steadily increased in scope and participation, and initial demands for greater freedom and political and economic reform were increasingly turning into calls for the downfall of the regime. The Syrian authorities had reacted with a mix of reform measures and increasingly violent repression, including in towns such as Dar'a and Homs, resulting in more than 300 demonstrators being reportedly killed by security forces, as well as wide-scale arrests, torture and detention of protestors and others. Meanwhile, the Syrian Government had stated that most killings of the civilians had been committed by anti-government armed militias.¹⁵ In the deliberations that followed, most Council members expressed deep concern regarding the deteriorating situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. Several Council members explicitly called upon the regime to end its violent repression immediately.¹⁶ Other Council members noted the Syrian Government's announcement of reforms and expressed hope that both parties would engage in an inclusive political dialogue.¹⁷ The representative of the Russian Federation, while expressing his concern regarding the increasing tension and confrontation in the Syrian Arab Republic that had claimed victims on both sides, asserted that the current situation in the country did not present a threat to international peace and security.¹⁸ The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic stated that the ongoing violence was being perpetrated by "extremist groups" whose goal was the fall of his Government. Outlining his Government's various

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁵ [S/PV.6524](#), pp. 2-4.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 4 (United States); p. 5 (United Kingdom); p. 5 (France); p. 6 (Germany); and p. 8 (Gabon).

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 7 (China); p. 8 (India); p. 9 (Brazil); pp. 9-10 (Nigeria); p. 10 (Bosnia and Herzegovina); p. 10 (Portugal); and p. 11 (Colombia).

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

reform efforts, which aimed to respond to legitimate popular demands, and describing the efforts by the Syrian authorities to exercise utmost restraint, he stated that these groups had continued to kill innocent citizens and members of the security forces. He further opined that his country was currently the target of a conspiracy by external parties, including the United States, which were intent on overthrowing his Government through “killing and chaos”. In that regard, he stated that the Syrian Government was defending its people from “seditious plots” by its enemies, and therefore there was no justification for the Council’s discussion focusing on what was essentially an internal affair of his country.¹⁹

On 3 August 2011, the Council adopted a statement by the President by which it expressed its grave concern at the deteriorating situation in the Syrian Arab Republic and, inter alia, called upon the Syrian authorities to cease the use of force and allow humanitarian access.²⁰ Immediately following the adoption of the statement, the representative of Lebanon disassociated her country from the statement, stating that it did not believe that it helped to address the current situation in the country.²¹

On 4 October 2011, the Council voted on a draft resolution,²² which demanded, inter alia, that Syrian authorities immediately cease violations of human rights and the use of force against civilians, and expressed its intention to consider options including drawing on Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations.²³ The draft resolution was not adopted due to the negative vote of a permanent member. Explaining his delegation’s position in opposition to the draft resolution, the representative of the Russian Federation stated that his delegation had been working with several other Council members on a separate draft resolution which emphasized, inter alia, respect for the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as well as the principle of non-intervention in its affairs. However, the draft resolution voted upon had been based on a “philosophy of confrontation”, containing an “unacceptable” threat of an ultimatum and sanctions against the country. Reflecting on the Council’s recent experience in Libya, he

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 11-13.

²⁰ [S/PRST/2011/16](#).

²¹ [S/PV.6598](#), pp. 2-3.

²² Submitted by France, Germany, Portugal and United Kingdom ([S/2011/612](#)).

²³ [S/2011/612](#).

noted that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s interpretation and implementation of the Council’s resolutions regarding the situation in that country had resulted in a full-fledged civil war. In this regard he emphasized that the best way to resolve the crisis was through an inclusive intra-Syrian political process supported by the international community.²⁴ The representative of China, explaining his delegation’s negative vote, asserted that while the international community should provide constructive assistance to facilitate the achievement of a Syrian-led inclusive political process, it should fully respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. Regarding the draft resolution voted upon, his delegation believed that sanctions or the threat thereof did not help to resolve the crisis and could further complicate the situation, and therefore it had voted against it.²⁵ Several Council members expressed regret that the draft resolution had not been adopted despite efforts to gain broad support for the text.²⁶ The representative of the United States expressed “outrage” that the Council had “utterly failed” to address a growing threat to regional peace and security. The arguments against strong Council action were growing weaker by the day, with the Syrian regime continuing its atrocities despite promises of reform. Despite efforts by several Council members and regional organizations to stop the bloodshed, she stated, the Syrian Government had refused to meet its international obligations. By failing to adopt the draft resolution, the Council had “squandered” an opportunity to shoulder its responsibilities to the Syrian people.²⁷ The representative of France stated that his delegation would continue its efforts both in the Council and within the European Union, together with its partners, to ensure that the rights of the Syrian people were recognized and respected, and for those responsible for the violence to one day be brought to justice.²⁸ The representative of the United Kingdom stated that Council members who had made bilateral attempts to engage the Syrian leadership to change course and implement reform, and had blocked the adoption of the draft resolution, must now step up their efforts to persuade the Government to end the violence and pursue genuine

²⁴ [S/PV.6627](#), pp. 3-5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3 (France); p. 5 (Portugal); p. 7 (United Kingdom); p. 9 (United States); and p. 10 (Germany).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

reform.²⁹ The representative of India stated that while it was the responsibility of all States to respect the fundamental rights of their people, they also had the obligation to protect their citizens from armed groups and militants, and therefore could not but take appropriate action when heavily armed military groups resorted to violence against the State authority and infrastructure.³⁰ The representative of South Africa, in explaining his delegation's abstention in the draft resolution, expressed concern about the sponsors' intention to impose punitive measures and institute regime change.³¹ The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic stated that there were certain States that were leading an international campaign to intervene in his country under the pretext of human rights and the protection of civilians. Not only did such countries continue to reject the existence of armed terrorists groups within his country, but were also protecting and sponsoring them. The sponsors of the draft resolution, he asserted, were those that had led the whole world into two world wars that had claimed millions of lives, and who were now seeking to lead it in to a new "colonial era".³²

²⁹ Ibid., p. 7

³⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

³¹ Ibid., p. 11.

³² Ibid., p. 14.

Meetings: the situation in the Middle East

<i>Meeting and date</i>	<i>Sub-item</i>	<i>Other documents</i>	<i>Rule 37 invitations</i>	<i>Rule 39 and other invitations</i>	<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining)</i>
United Nations Disengagement Observer Force						
6352 30 June 2010	Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) (S/2010/296)	Draft resolution (S/2010/346)				Resolution 1934 (2010) 15-0-0 S/PRST/2010/12 Resolution 1965 (2010) 15-0-0 S/PRST/2010/30
6462 22 December 2010	Report of the Secretary-General on UNDOF for the period from 1 July to 31 December 2010 (S/2010/607)	Draft resolution submitted by Austria, Japan, United States (S/2010/650)				Resolution 1994 (2011) 15-0-0
6572 30 June 2011	Report of the Secretary-General on UNDOF for the period from 1 January to 30 June 2011 (S/2011/359)	Draft resolution submitted by France, Germany, Portugal, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, United States (S/2011/385)	Israel, Syrian Arab Republic		China, France, Germany, Lebanon, Russian Federation, United Kingdom, United States, and all invitees	Resolution 1994 (2011) 15-0-0
6693 21 December 2011	Report of the Secretary-General on UNDOF for the period between 1 July to 31 December 2011 (S/2011/748)	Draft resolution submitted by the Russian Federation and United States (S/2011/779)				Resolution 2028 (2011) 15-0-0
United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and resolution 1701 (2006)						
6375 30 August 2010	Letter dated 11 August 2010 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2010/430)	Draft resolution submitted by Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, United States (S/2010/454) Thirteenth report of the Secretary-General on the	Belgium, Israel, Italy, Spain		Lebanon, Israel	Resolution 1937 (2010) 15-0-0

<i>Meeting and date</i>	<i>Sub-item</i>	<i>Other documents</i>	<i>Rule 37 invitations</i>	<i>Rule 39 and other invitations</i>	<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Decision and vote (for-against-abstaining)</i>
		implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2010/352)				
6605 30 August 2011	Letter dated 5 August 2011 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2011/488)	Draft resolution submitted by France, Germany, Italy, Spain, United States (S/2011/545)	Israel, Italy, Spain		Lebanon, Israel	Resolution 2004 (2011) 15-0-0
Syrian Arab Republic						
6524 27 April 2011			Syrian Arab Republic	Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs	All Council members and invitee	
6598 3 August 2011					Lebanon	S/PRST/2011/16
6627 4 October 2011		Draft resolution submitted by France, Germany, Portugal, United Kingdom (S/2011/612)				Draft resolution not adopted (S/2011/612) 9-2-4 ^a
Yemen						
6634 21 October 2011		Draft resolution submitted by France, Germany, Portugal, United Kingdom, United States (S/2011/651)				Resolution 2014 (2011) 15-0-0

^a For: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, France, Gabon, Germany, Nigeria, Portugal, United Kingdom, United States; against: China, Russian Federation; abstaining: Brazil, India, Lebanon, South Africa.