

UN Peacekeepers on Syrian Border Halt Night Patrols

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Peacekeepers from the UN's UNDOF mission have ceased patrolling the Israel-Syria Golan Heights border area at night, for fear of being kidnapped or hurt in the violence in the area, Israeli TV reported on Friday night.

The IDF has urged the remaining three UNDOF (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force) member-nations — Austria, India and the Philippines — not to abandon the 40-year mission, after Japan and Canada withdrew their forces in recent months, and Croatia announced plans to do so, a Channel 2 report said.

The news came as the UN continued efforts to extricate 21 members of UNDOF from the Philippines who have been held captive since being kidnapped Wednesday by rebels from a group calling itself the Martyrs of the Yarmouk Brigades. Their convoy was stopped on the outskirts of Jamlah, a Golan village less than a mile from the Israeli border. Eight more UN peacekeepers fled to Israel Friday, abandoning their posts to escape the fighting between the rebel groups and forces loyal to President Bashar Assad.

The reduced patrols in the buffer zone, which extends for some 50 miles along the border, are already enabling al-Qaeda forces among the Syrian rebels to take greater control of the Syrian side of the Israeli border, and Israel has accelerated work to bolster security at the fence, Channel 10 reported Friday night. Israel has also deployed troops from the standing army to replace the reservists who usually guard the border, the report added.