Despite a decrease in military violations and increased civilian contact between the north and south of Cyprus in 2012, peace negotiations failed to produce a settlement on political and territorial questions. The UN has two presences in Cyprus, the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), which has been on the ground since 1964, and the UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Cyprus, who since September 2008 has facilitated negotiations between the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot leaders and liaised with other stakeholders, including Greece, Turkey, and the European Union.

An internationally administered buffer zone stretches across the island of Cyprus, dividing it into a predominantly ethnically Greek south and an ethnically Turkish north. The Republic of Cyprus controls the south, while only Turkey recognizes the autonomous north. UNFICYP observes and patrols the buffer zone, monitoring maintenance of the military status quo, and keeps up essential services for Cypriots.

The buffer zone has been largely peaceful, with a downward trend in military violations continuing through 2012. The majority of incidents are civilian activities such as unauthorized farming and hunting, but long-standing unauthorized military positions persist on both sides. UN mine-clearance activities are currently suspended, as both sides continue to withhold access to the four remaining mined areas in the buffer zone.

The mission maintains crossing points along the buffer zone and supports education, infrastructure, and other services in the area. UNFICYP controls permits for civilian activities in the zone, including construction, farming, and other commercial ventures. The number of projects proposed by members of both communities and approved by UNFICYP continued to rise in 2012. Trade between north and south also rose significantly in 2012. The crossings generally function well, but there are some restrictions on movement by both sides and no progress has been made on choosing new crossing points.

UNFICYP helps divided families maintain contact across the island, facilitates religious and commemorative events either held in or that require crossing the buffer zone, addresses legal and humanitarian issues affecting minority members, and liaises with authorities to provide proper welfare services, medical care, and education. UNFICYP civilian police cooperate with both Cypriot and Turkish police forces on intercommunal matters, assist in investigations, and escort civilians and humanitarian supplies through the buffer zone. The mission’s Joint Communications Room facilitates exchange of information and cooperation between the two sides on criminal matters.

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addressing security and military operational issues related to the implementation of Resolution 1701. The parties continued to demonstrate their readiness to engage constructively with UNIFIL to decrease tensions. For example, when Israel began constructing a wall along a portion of the Blue Line, UNIFIL ensured that information on the project was properly shared with Lebanon to avoid misunderstandings that could raise tensions.

UNIFIL generally enjoyed freedom of movement in its area of operation throughout the year, carrying out about 300 vehicle and foot patrols daily, in addition to regular helicopter patrols. Despite isolated incidents against UNIFIL staff, including an April stone-throwing assault and theft of equipment from a UNIFIL public information team, the UN Secretary-General reports that the attitude of the local population toward the mission has remained largely positive.5

A UN strategic review of UNIFIL released in March put forward a number of recommendations, including working closely with the Lebanese Armed Forces through the strategic dialogue, with a view to increasing the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces and engaging with both parties to develop further liaison and coordination arrangements for times of crisis. It also mentioned a possible force reduction in the future. UNIFIL is in the process of implementing the review’s recommendations.

In 2012 several key European UNIFIL troop contributors announced forthcoming reductions in personnel contributions to UNIFIL, an additional consideration for the mission’s future configuration.

All of these developments occur against the backdrop of the deteriorating security environment in Syria. UNSCOL employs good