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UN rejects Russian offer to send peacekeepers to Golan Heights



Russia's offer to replace peacekeepers from Austria in the Golan Heights was not accepted by the United Nations on Friday.

The UN rejected the offer due to an agreement between Israel and Syria which bars permanent members of the Security Council from the UN observer mission, Reuters news agency reported.

"We appreciate the consideration that the Russian Federation has given to provide troops to the Golan," UN spokesman Martin Nesirky told reporters.

"However, the Disengagement Agreement and its protocol, which is between Syria and Israel, do not allow for the participation of permanent members of the Security Council in UNDOF," Nesirky added, referring to the peacekeeping contingent known as the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force.

Russia, a longtime ally and arms supplier to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, along with the United States, Britain, France and China is a permanent, veto-wielding member of the 15-nation Security Council.

The Russian government has supported Assad's forces in their fight against opposition fighters trying to overthrow him and his government.

In response to the UN, Russian UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin said his country was well aware of that limitation in a document signed four decades ago, which is why Putin said that it would depend on whether countries in the region - namely Syria and Israel - and the United Nations wanted Russian troops there, Reuters reported.

"We believe that times have changed," Churkin told reporters, adding that it was theoretically possible to amend the protocol that bars permanent council members from UNDOF.

“The document was signed 39 years ago at the height of [the] Cold War and the whole context of the [Arab-Israeli] war in 1973,” he said. “Now the context is completely different and UNDOF seems to be in dire straits. So we are offering essentially to rescue UNDOF.”

The departure of the Austrians is the latest blow to the monitoring force. There have also been several recent incidents in which Syrian rebel forces detained UNDOF monitors, signaling an escalation of violence in the Golan Heights.