

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

In March, the Netherlands takes over the presidency of the Security Council. It has chosen as its centrepiece an open debate on “[Collective Action to improve UN Peacekeeping Operations](#)”, which is expected to be chaired by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte. Secretary-General António Guterres will brief.

There will be two meetings connected to issues of scarcity of natural resources. The first is a briefing on the [Lake Chad Basin](#), with a specific focus on the root causes of the Boko Haram crisis. The second is a briefing on [Conflict and Hunger](#), which is a follow-up to last year’s August meeting and presidential statement on famine.

The Council will hold its regular quarterly debate on [Afghanistan](#) during which a resolution extending the mandate of UNAMA is expected to be adopted. The meeting will be held on International Women’s Day and may therefore have a specific focus on women, peace and security issues in Afghanistan.

Council members will follow closely the humanitarian situation in [Syria](#) after the adoption of a resolution calling for a 30-day humanitarian cessation of hostilities was adopted on 24 February. The resolution requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the resolution and the compliance of parties every 15 days. In addition, Council members will receive their regular briefing on the political developments in Syria by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura. Instead of the regular briefing on chemical weapons, there will be an informal interactive dialogue on Syria chemical weapons with the Office of Disarmament Affairs and the Director General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons participating.

There will be discussions on several other Middle East issues this month:

- [Golan Heights](#), quarterly briefing on UNDOF;
- [Israel/Palestine](#), monthly briefing and consultations; and
- [Lebanon](#), update on UNIFIL’s activities.

Regarding African issues, the Council will have several meetings on the [DRC](#). A briefing, followed by consultations, on the situation in the DRC is planned for early in the month ahead of the adoption of a resolution to renew the mandate of MONUSCO. In addition, a briefing on the humanitarian situation has been scheduled in order to hear from the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock, who will have visited the DRC in March.

The mandate of the UN Mission in [South Sudan](#) will be renewed in March. There will also be the regular briefing on the Secretary-General’s confidential 30-day report on the deployment of the Regional Protection Force in South Sudan. On [Darfur](#), there will be a meeting on the Secretary-General’s report on UNAMID.

Other African issues on the programme include:

- [Libya](#), update on UNMIL and sanctions;
- [Somalia](#), renewal of UNSOM and consultations on the 751/1907 Somalia/Eritrea Sanctions Committee; and
- [Western Sahara](#), on the activities of MINURSO.

The mandate of the Panel of Experts of the [1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee](#) will be renewed.

Finally, there will be the annual briefing on the activities of the [Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe](#).

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In Hindsight: Procedural Votes

Procedural votes have been quite rare in the past quarter of a century, with some years during that period registering none. The two procedural votes in 2017 marked the first time since 2000 that the Security Council had more than one procedural vote in a calendar year. On 24 October 2017, a Russian motion to postpone a meeting during which it would cast the first of its three vetoes to prevent the renewal of the Joint Investigative Mechanism on the use of chemical weapons in Syria was defeated. Then, on 11 December 2017, China called for a procedural vote in an effort to block the Council's consideration of the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK); however, for the fourth consecutive year, the motion to discuss the situation in the DPRK passed.

Security Council voting procedures are governed by Article 27 of the UN Charter, which distinguishes between votes on "procedural matters" and those on "all other matters". All decisions (i.e., resolutions) require at least nine affirmative votes to be adopted, but those on procedural matters, unlike those on "other matters" (or substantive matters), are not subject to a veto by one or more of the permanent members. Thus, when voting on procedural matters, a negative vote cast by a permanent member does not in itself defeat the decision, and the draft will be adopted, so long as it garners at least nine votes.

On 14 April 1949, the General Assembly adopted resolution 267(3) on "The problem of voting in the Security Council". In this resolution, the General Assembly recommended to the Security Council that it consider as procedural several types of issues listed in detail in an annex. These included inter alia:

- submitting to the General Assembly any questions relating to the maintenance of international peace and security;
- requesting the General Assembly to make a recommendation on a dispute or situation the Council is seized of;
- requesting the Secretary-General to convene a special session of the General Assembly;
- approving annual reports to the General Assembly;
- holding of meetings at places other than the seat of the UN; and
- establishing subsidiary organs the Council deems necessary for the performance of its functions.

Nonetheless, divergences of view persisted throughout the UN's early history regarding what constituted a procedural or substantive issue. This often necessitated a vote first on the nature of the matter—i.e. procedural or substantive—followed by a second vote on the matter at hand. The first vote was referred to as a vote on the "preliminary question", in keeping with the terminology used at the San Francisco conference that established the UN. Depending on the outcome of the vote on the preliminary question, the Council would then proceed to a procedural or substantive vote.

Over time, Council practice indicated an acceptance of the procedural nature of certain issues. These have included, for example, whether or not to include an agenda item, to convene or suspend a meeting, to call for an emergency session of the General Assembly, or to extend invitations to participate in Council meetings.

Procedural votes were common during the Cold War. From 1946 to 1989, 153 procedural votes were recorded. However, they have occurred with much less frequency in recent decades, with members often arriving at procedural decisions by consensus. At times, painstaking efforts to achieve consensus could perhaps be avoided if there were greater willingness to table a procedural motion for a vote.

Between 1990 and 2017, there were 21 procedural votes. Of these, 12 were votes on requests to participate in a meeting, six were on whether to adopt an agenda item, one was to postpone a meeting, one was to adjourn a meeting, and one was to suspend a meeting.

Certain patterns have emerged. In the early 1990s, the procedural vote was almost exclusively used to determine participation in meetings. From 1990 to 1992, there were 11 procedural votes (all of which passed), ten of which pertained to the participation of the Permanent Observer of Palestine in Council proceedings and one of which focused on whether to suspend a meeting on the Occupied Palestinian territories. These votes took place at a time when Israel and the Palestinians were embroiled in the First Intifada. After 1992, there was not another procedural vote in the Council until 2000.

Since 1990, 18 of 21 procedural votes have succeeded. Nonetheless, the vote tally on these procedural motions has demonstrated how controversial they have been. None of

them received more than 11 affirmative votes, and five of them received the bare minimum of votes (nine) needed for adoption. Furthermore, procedural motions have often related to issues that had been or would be the subject of vetoes. Drafts on Israel/Palestine have frequently been vetoed by the US. There have also been procedural motions related to Zimbabwe, Myanmar and Syria since the mid-2000s; resolutions on these issues have been the subject of vetoes.

The fact that procedural motions are not subject to the veto is particularly relevant to the voting patterns. In 17 of the 18 cases since 1990 in which a procedural motion was adopted, one or more of the permanent members registered a negative vote. In other words, these 17 motions would have failed if the veto had been in play.

The three procedural motions that failed to pass since 1990 happen to be based on proposals by Russia. The first occurred on 23 June 2000 regarding whether to allow several speakers to participate in a meeting on the Balkans; the second, during the same meeting, was a vote on whether the Permanent Representative of Serbia should be permitted to participate in the meeting (S/PV.4164). The third was the Russian proposal to postpone the meeting on Syria on 24 October 2017 during which Russia vetoed a draft resolution that would have renewed the Joint Investigative Mechanism.

Six of the seven most recent procedural votes, dating back to 2005, have concerned whether to adopt the agenda in order to hold a meeting on a controversial issue. In these six cases, this entailed Council engagement on politically charged country cases—Zimbabwe (2005), Myanmar (2006), and as noted above, the DPRK (2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017).

The fact that procedural votes are occurring more frequently—there have been five since 2014, whereas there were only two in the decade prior to that—may be a reflection of the difficult dynamics in the Council in recent times, as well as the willingness of members to push for the Council to address specific issues, in spite of opposition from some members. Procedural votes can also be viewed as a useful way to raise awareness and create a record of the Council's efforts to engage on critical issues.

Status Update since our February Forecast

Mali

On 5 February, the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee held its first meeting at which four members of the Panel of Experts were introduced. Although the committee was established in September 2017, it took Council members four months to negotiate its guidelines.

Working Methods

On 6 February, the Council held its first open debate on working methods since mid-2016. Kuwait, which assumed the chairmanship of the Council's Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions on 1 January, stated in the concept note prepared for the debate, that by organising the open debate it wanted "to afford all Member States the opportunity to provide practical proposals that contribute to enhancing the efficiency of the working methods ... thus enabling the Council to better fulfil its obligations in maintaining international peace and security" (S/2018/66). Security Council Report's Executive Director Ian Martin briefed the Council. In addition to all Council members, representatives of 42 member states took the floor (S/PV.8175).

Kosovo

On 7 February, Zahir Tanin, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of UNMIK briefed the Council (S/PV.8176) on the latest report on UNMIK (S/2018/76). Tanin expressed concerns about the attempts of the Kosovo parliament to repeal the law on the special court that is supposed to investigate the crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army during the 1990 war in Kosovo. He also called on all parties to work together to ensure accountability for the assassination of Kosovo-Serb politician Oliver Ivanović. Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia Ivica Dačić and Vlora Çitaku, Kosovo's ambassador to the US, also spoke.

Counter-Terrorism

On 8 February, Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov, the head of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, briefed the Security Council on the Secretary-General's strategic-level report on the threat emanating from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh) (S/2018/80), followed by consultations (S/PV.8178). The director of the

Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Yevgeniy Sergeevich Sysoyev, briefed the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee on 12 February. The Chair of the CTC also participated. On 13 February, the Chair of the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), Gustavo Meza-Cuadra (Peru), briefed the Council on the implementation of resolution 2341 concerning critical infrastructure (S/PV.8180). On 22 February, Igor Sirotkin, the Deputy Director of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, head of the National Anti-Terrorism Committee Central Office, and Deputy Chairman briefed the CTC, the 1267/1989/2253 Committee, and the Afghanistan Sanctions Committee in a joint meeting. The CTC held a meeting afterwards, where the Secretary-General of the World Customs Organization Kunio Mikuriya and a representative of the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate briefed the committee.

Iraq

On 13 February, the Council formally approved the terms of reference for the investigative team to support Iraq's domestic efforts to hold ISIL accountable as mandated by resolution 2379. On 20 February, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of UNAMI Ján Kubiš briefed the Council (S/PV.8184) on the latest report on UNAMI (S/2018/42) and on recent developments. Kubiš's briefing focused on the Iraqi donor conference hosted by Kuwait, preparations for parliamentary elections, and relations between Baghdad and Erbil among other topics.

Myanmar

On 13 February, the Council was briefed by High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi (via video teleconference) and Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Miroslav Jenča (S/PV.8179). This was followed by consultations where, in addition to Grandi and Jenča, representatives from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and OCHA were present to answer questions. The meeting was held at the request of eight members of the Council: Equatorial Guinea, France, Kazakhstan, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, the UK and the US. Grandi warned that a major new emergency was looming as the monsoon season could bring with it flooding or landslides that could affect areas where

some of the refugees were living in Bangladesh. He also said that the lack of humanitarian access was a major concern. Jenča expressed concern over whether the humanitarian needs of the refugees were being met and stressed that humanitarian access should be immediately granted. Jenča also covered developments in Kachin and northern Shan States and how they affected ongoing peace negotiations. A number of Council members highlighted the need for humanitarian access and stressed the need for the safe return of refugees. In addition, there were calls for the implementation of the recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Committee.

Guinea-Bissau

On 14 February, Special Representative and head of UNIOGBIS Modibo Touré briefed the Council via video teleconference from Bissau (S/PV.8182). His briefing included updating Council members on the decision of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to impose sanctions on 19 individuals for obstructing implementation of the Conakry Agreement. Ambassador Mauro Vieira (Brazil), chair of the Guinea-Bissau configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission also briefed. Consultations were canceled and all 15 members made public remarks. On 22 February, Council members issued a press statement, stating their support of ECOWAS's efforts to resolve the ongoing political and institutional crisis in Guinea-Bissau and taking note of its 4 February 2018 decision to impose sanctions. On 28 February, the Council adopted resolution 2403, extending the mandate of UNIOGBIS for an additional year.

Israel/Palestine

On 14 February, Council members received a briefing via video teleconference under "any other business" from Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov on the situation in Gaza, requested by Bolivia and Kuwait. On 20 February, the Security Council held its monthly meeting under the agenda item, "the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" (S/PV.8183). Mladenov briefed the Council, following opening remarks from UN Secretary-General António Guterres. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas also addressed the Council. On 22 February, Kuwait, Bolivia, France and Sweden hosted an Arria-formula meeting entitled, "Prospects

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for the two-State solution for peace”. A statement was delivered on behalf of former US President Jimmy Carter by Ambassador Richard Murphy, followed by briefings by former UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry, former Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees Karen Abu-Zayd, and Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council Jan Egeland.

UN Charter

On 21 February, there was a ministerial-level briefing on the “purposes and principles of the UN Charter in the maintenance of international peace and security” (S/PV.8185). Secretary-General António Guterres and former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon briefed, and Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah presided.

Central African Republic

On 22 February, the Council was briefed on CAR by Special Representative to the CAR and head of MINUSCA Parfait Onanga-Anyanga; the chair of the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoué (Côte d’Ivoire); the chair of the

Peacebuilding Commission CAR configuration Ambassador Omar Hilale (Morocco); the Special Representative of the AU to the CAR, Bédializoun Moussa Nebie (via video teleconference); and the Director General of the EU Military Staff, Lieutenant General Esa Pulkkinen (S/PV.8187). Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Bintou Keita participated in the consultations that followed the briefing. On 27 February, Council members released a press statement, deploring attacks against civilians and incitement to ethnic and religious hatred and violence. They also reaffirmed their support to the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in the CAR as the main framework for a political solution (SC/13226). The 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee amended identifying information regarding an individual on its sanctions list on 16 February (SC/13212). The committee was briefed by the Panel of Experts assisting it in informal consultations on 23 February.

Yemen

On 26 February, the Council adopted resolution 2402, extending the Yemen sanctions regime. At the adoption, members first voted on a draft resolution prepared by the UK, which Russia vetoed, objecting to references to

the Yemen Panel of Experts’ findings that Iran was in non-compliance with the arms embargo. Eleven members voted in favour, China and Kazakhstan abstained with Bolivia also voting against (S/2018/156). Council members then unanimously approved a draft resolution Russia had presented that was based on last year’s resolution 2342, with technical amendments to extend the sanctions measures for a further year. The next day, 27 February, UN Special Envoy for Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed briefed the Council. This was Ould Cheikh Ahmed’s final briefing as the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Yemen. The Director of Operations for OCHA John Ging also briefed, as did Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra (Peru), as the chair of the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee. Consultations followed the public session.

Burundi

On 26 February, the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy, Michel Kafando, briefed the Council (S/PV.8189) on the Secretary-General’s latest report (S/2018/89). The chair of the Peacebuilding Commission Burundi Configuration, Ambassador Jürg Lauber (Switzerland) also briefed the Council. After the briefing, the Council held consultations.

Peacekeeping Operations

Expected Council Action

In March, at the initiative of the Netherlands, the Security Council is expected to hold an open debate on “Collective Action to Improve UN Peacekeeping Operations”. Secretary-General António Guterres is expected to brief the Council at the meeting, which will be chaired by the Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte. A presidential statement taking into consideration the positions stated at the meeting is likely to be negotiated following the open debate.

Background and Key Recent Developments

The open debate will be an opportunity to discuss how to reform peacekeeping operations

to make them respond better to challenges on the ground. In 2015, the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) noted that mandates have become lengthier and more detailed and at times less realistic, manageable or achievable. The report pointed out how mandates are not always in line with the operational challenges in the field, and made extensive recommendations for improving speed, capability and performance for uniformed personnel, many of which then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon accepted in his follow-up report for implementation. Since then, the Secretariat and member states have undertaken some efforts to address the gap between mandates and their implementation.

Among the issues that the Council, member states and the Secretariat face is how to adapt to the deployment of peace operations in complex and high-risk environments where peacekeepers are targeted by asymmetrical attacks. In 2017, 61 peacekeepers were killed as a result of hostile acts, the highest number since 1994. A report on improving the security of UN peacekeepers, commissioned by the Secretariat, was published in December 2017. The report, prepared by a team headed by Lieutenant General (ret.) Carlos dos Santos Cruz, concluded that a change of mindset is needed to adapt to the new contexts in which the UN flag no longer offers “natural” protection, and break from a certain “Chapter VI Syndrome” that leads peacekeepers to deploy

UN DOCUMENTS ON PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2017/27 (21 December 2017) laid out the elements related to peacebuilding and sustaining peace to be considered when reviewing the mandates and configuration of peacekeeping missions. Secretary-General’s Report S/2015/682 (2 September 2015) was on the implementation of some of the recommendations presented in the HIPPO report. Security Council Letters S/2016/924 (1 November 2016) was the Executive Summary of the report of the special independent investigation into the July 2016 violence in Juba. S/2015/446 (17 June 2015) was the HIPPO report.

Peacekeeping Operations

without a full appreciation of security risks and the operational approach needed to address them. The report argues that a more proactive posture will contribute to the credibility of peacekeeping operations and their ability to protect civilians and their own personnel.

Participants in the open debate may also take into account the report of an Independent Special Investigation assessing the performance of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) after a July 2016 crisis in Juba, led by Major General (ret.) Patrick Cammaert. The report described how lack of preparedness, ineffective command and control, deficient leadership, and a risk-averse posture contributed to a failure to effectively protect civilians in need, and made recommendations that the Secretariat committed to implement in UNMISS and other missions.

In addition to increased threats and performance issues, the Council and member states have focused increasingly on the lack of adequate capabilities to fulfil Council mandates. Force enablers such as helicopters and aircraft are critical to the success of missions in high-risk environments. In the case of Mali, for example, the Council has repeatedly urged member states to provide troops and police with the adequate capabilities, training and equipment to fill outstanding gaps and develop creative ways of ensuring critical capabilities, such as through long-term rotation schemes.

At a Council briefing on 6 April 2017 on the review of peacekeeping operations, Guterres stressed that these operations “need clear, realistic and up-to-date mandates from the Council, with well-identified priorities, adequate sequencing and flexibility to evolve over time”. This was in line with one of the key conclusions of the HIPPO report, which underlined that political strategy must drive the design and implementation of peace operations. Over the last year, the Council has requested several strategic reviews of peacekeeping operations (in Cyprus, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and special political missions (in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya). In parallel, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) began commissioning senior independent experts to lead the reviews of various peacekeeping operations in 2017 and 2018. The first such review carried out at the initiative of the Secretariat,

focusing on the operation in South Sudan, has just been completed. The stated aim of these reviews is to examine in depth the conditions for success in each operation and to inform a strategic dialogue with member states on the efficiency, role and perspectives of UN peacekeeping. These reviews are expected to offer bold options and proposals on restructuring and on alignment between mission resources and mandate implementation.

The Council took note of the intention expressed by the Secretary-General to conduct reviews of peacekeeping missions in a 21 December 2017 presidential statement. This statement identified seven areas—linked with peacebuilding and sustaining peace—that the Council said it will consider when reviewing the mandates and configuration of peacekeeping operations:

- assessment of mandate implementation in all its dimensions, including cooperation of the host state, with a view to ensuring the full delivery of the mandated tasks as well as, when relevant, the adjustment of tasks;
- support to the national ownership of the political processes;
- existence of clearly defined goals and objectives guided by specific, agreed-upon milestones towards peacebuilding and sustaining peace;
- periodic strategic and integrated analysis of the opportunities, risks and challenges faced by national and local authorities to build and sustain peace;
- progress in and quality of delivering the political and operational aspects of the mission’s mandate in a coherent manner;
- clarity on roles and responsibilities of UN peacekeeping operations, UN country teams and other relevant actors; and
- existence of an exit strategy that seeks to help lay the foundation for long-term and sustainable peace.

The open debate may provide an opportunity, following discussions in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C34), for the broader membership to address some of the issues mentioned above and devise ways to deliver in a more effective way on the collective responsibility to improve peacekeeping operations.

Key Issues and Options

In a 25 November 2015 presidential statement, the Council underlined “the significant impact its statements and actions can exert in situations of armed conflict or in support of peace processes”. However, the Council has often failed to agree on a political strategy in support of peace operations for many reasons, including decision-making processes that do not favour the emergence of strategic or collective thinking, divergent political priorities, inadequate Secretariat analysis and planning, and the resistance of host states. The Council could use its Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations to draw lessons on how it agrees on strategic objectives for these missions, designs mandates, and monitors the capacity to achieve them. The outcome of such processes could benefit from the engagement of all Council members on the overall direction of the mission before the proper negotiation of the renewal resolution. The Working Group could submit recommendations for the Council’s consideration after engaging with a broad range of actors, including Secretariat officials and troop- and police-contributing countries. As DPKO continues to roll out a new methodology to carry out strategic reviews, including an independent element, the Council could agree on the way in which it expects to consider the conclusions of such reviews. The presidential statement that is expected to be adopted at the meeting could cover how the Council plans to address some of these issues.

Council Dynamics

One of the defining elements of the discussions on peace operations is the gap between those who decide on the mandates of peace operations and carry their financial burden and those who deploy troops and police to implement them. The financial pressure from the US to cut the peacekeeping budget has featured prominently in mandate renewal discussions over the last year. In the past, some of the issues mentioned above, such as the posture of peacekeeping operations or references to performance, have been controversial and further polarised the relationship between the Council and troop- and police-contributing countries.

Côte d’Ivoire chairs the Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is due to renew the mandate of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), known as MONUSCO, which expires on 31 March.

The newly appointed Special Representative and head of MONUSCO, Leila Zerrougui, is expected to brief the Council beforehand.

In addition, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock is expected to brief the Council on the humanitarian situation in the DRC in a separate meeting.

Key Recent Developments

The deplorable security situation in the east has taken another turn for the worse. In response to the increased activities of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) Islamist rebel group in North Kivu—including a deadly attack on Tanzanian peacekeepers on 7 December 2017 that resulted in 15 peacekeepers killed, 53 wounded and one who remains missing—Uganda and the DRC have launched a large military campaign against rebel groups in the region. The DRC said that the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) succeeded in “annihilating” rebel forces loyal to William Amuri Yakutumba in South Kivu since 21 January. Uganda claims that its military has had success in attacking the ADF in North Kivu. One Pakistani peacekeeper was killed and another injured in a rebel group attack on South Kivu on 27 January. Council members issued a press statement condemning the attack.

One effect of the offensive has been the increased movement and activity of rebel groups, resulting in increased violence and massive displacement of civilians. According to UNHCR, 34,000 DRC refugees have arrived in Uganda since the beginning of the year, bringing the total number of refugees from the DRC to about 630,000. UNHCR also warned on 6 February of rising violence in Ituri, where at least 30 people are reported to have been killed amid conflict between the Hema and Lendu ethnic groups over the four previous days.

There continues to be serious concerns on the political front in the DRC. President Joseph Kabila, whose second and last term (under the country’s constitution) ended in December 2016, remains in office. According to an agreement reached between Kabila and the opposition on 31 December 2016, elections were to be held by the end of 2017, and Kabila was not to initiate amendments to the constitution and run for a third term. Kabila, however, has refrained from stating his intentions over the last year, and the opposition fears that Kabila has purposely stalled the elections to remain in power further beyond his constitutional term. DRC Information Minister Lambert Mende directly addressed the issue for the first time on 5 February, saying that Kabila will not run for re-election.

Citing logistical difficulties preventing the elections from being held on time on 5 November 2017, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) announced the publication of a new electoral calendar, including technical benchmarks, for combined presidential, legislative and provincial elections to take place on 23 December 2018. Opposition figures denounced the new calendar and called for protests, but the authorities in major cities have banned protests and have reportedly arrested opposition leaders as part of a wider trend of curbing the political freedom of the opposition and freedom of the press.

Council members issued a press statement on 28 November 2017, taking note of the new electoral calendar and emphasising the critical importance of ensuring that elections are not postponed beyond 23 December 2018. They also called for transparent, credible and inclusive elections.

On 31 December 2017, demonstrations against Kabila in Kinshasa and other cities, organised by Catholic and opposition groups, were met with violence by security forces. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the death toll totalled nine people and 98 others were injured.

Council members issued a press statement on 16 January, noting with serious

concern the continued political impasse and the violent incidents against protesters. They recalled the importance of taking urgent measures to restore confidence between the actors involved and to defuse the political tension, within the spirit of the 31 December 2016 Agreement, including the release of political prisoners and the full implementation of all other confidence-building measures, several of which are yet to be implemented.

Another wave of demonstrations occurred on 21 January, leading to the death of six persons, as well as 68 injured and 121 arrested, according to OHCHR. Tear gas was fired into churches in various parts of the country, and military police also fired tear gas towards at least three UN patrols.

On the initiative of the US, Council members held an Arria-formula meeting on 12 February focused on the DRC elections, co-hosted with Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. In a joint statement, the co-hosts observed that fulfilling the agreement, releasing political prisoners, ending politically motivated prosecutions, and respecting freedom of assembly and expression are essential to creating the political space necessary for credible elections. Noting the CENI’s plan to use an electronic voting system, Ambassador Nikki Haley (US) said that using “an unfamiliar technology for the first time during a crucial election is an enormous risk”. Panellist Ida Sawyer of Human Rights Watch noted that concerns have already been raised about potential fraud during the voter registration process.

Sanctions-Related Developments

The DRC Sanctions Committee held an open briefing on 26 January. The Coordinator of the Group of Experts assisting the Committee, Zobel Behalal, highlighted the group’s findings regarding the involvement of DRC army officials in the illicit trade of natural resources and the diversion of arms to armed groups. He also cited ongoing violations of human rights and international humanitarian law as well as the rise of political and security tensions related to the holding of elections. Representatives of regional countries spoke, including a representative from the DRC,

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DRC [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2348](#) (31 March 2017) renewed MONUSCO’s mandate until 31 March 2018. **Secretary-General’s Reports S/2017/824** (2 October 2017) was on MONUSCO. [S/2017/826](#) (29 September 2017) was a special report on the strategic review of MONUSCO. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8153** (9 January 2018) was a briefing on recent developments in the DRC by Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix. **Security Council Press Statement SC/13186** (29 January 2018) condemned the killing of one Pakistani peacekeeper and the injury of another in South Kivu on 27 January. [SC/13163](#) (16 January 2018) called on all stakeholders to remain committed to the 31 December 2016 Agreement, which remains the only viable path out of the current political situation. [SC/13095](#) (28 November 2017) was on the electoral process in the DRC, in which the Council noted that presidential, legislative and provincial elections are now scheduled for 23 December 2018. **Sanctions Committee Documents SC/13198** (6 February 2018) was a press release about the DRC Sanctions Committee open briefing of 26 January. [SC/13194](#) (1 February 2018) was a press release about the addition of four individuals to the sanctions list.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

who said that private companies from certain states on the Council have been profiting from the illicit exploitation of natural resources.

The committee added four individuals to the sanctions list on 1 February. The listings include Muhindo Akili Mundos, a general in the FARDC, for committing acts that constitute human rights violations or abuses or violations of international humanitarian law.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In January, the UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC (UNJHRO) – composed of the Human Rights Division of MONUSCO and the OHCHR – released a report on the human rights situation in 2017. From January to December 2017, UNJHRO documented 6,497 human rights violations and abuses throughout the DRC, which represents an increase of over 25 percent compared to 2016. Over 20 percent of the violations documented were linked to the restriction of democratic space and fundamental freedoms, with a rise in the number of human rights abuses committed by armed groups and militias. The report documents violations of the right to liberty and security of person; the right to physical integrity, including 759 incidents of sexual violence; the right to property; the right to life, including 1,176 victims of extrajudicial killings by state agents; and an increase in violations related to forced labour.

Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric announced on 12 February that UN and South African investigators would conduct a joint probe into allegations that South African peacekeepers in the DRC beat a 17-year-old and committed sexual exploitation. The probe is said to take up to 90 days. According to MONUSCO, 18 alleged cases of sexual abuse and exploitation by its peacekeepers and civilian personnel were opened in 2017.

Key Issues and Options

The primary political issue for the Council in the upcoming period is ensuring that elections take place as scheduled. The Council may expand on MONUSCO's role in providing logistical assistance to the DRC elections

in its new mandate and act to ensure it has sufficient resources to do so. In this context, the Council could consider asking the Secretary-General to appoint a High Representative for the elections in the DRC, similarly to the action it took in resolution 1603 of 3 June 2005, with respect to Côte d'Ivoire.

Additionally, timely elections should be free and fair and should take place in an inclusive environment conducive to participation in the political process. While renewing MONUSCO's mandate, the Council may, in coordination with regional actors, reiterate its call on all stakeholders to remain committed to the electoral calendar as the only way forward and to refrain from violence. It may also threaten or move to sanction actors that undermine the electoral process.

The ongoing violence in different parts of the country, and the military operations in the Kivus in particular, are of continuing concern, and the protection of civilians remains a top priority for MONUSCO. The Council may review the changes made in the mandate last year—which included a troop reduction and changes in MONUSCO's posture—in light of recent events and reconsider the adequacy of MONUSCO's mandate and posture to address these threats.

The Council could choose to visit the DRC to reinforce the importance of free, fair and timely elections and to assess the security situation and MONUSCO's response to it.

Looking ahead, an option for the Council could be to consider seeking an African member as co-penholder on the DRC to share the pen with France, to enrich the approach with experience from the region.

Council and Wider Dynamics

All Council members remain concerned about the ongoing political crisis and the

security situation. There is a consensus about the imperative of holding the elections on 23 December without further delays, in alignment with the position of regional actors. During the 9 January consultations, several Council members took the position that the Council should remain focused on the DRC throughout the year, including through a possible Council mission.

At the same time, divisions persist as to how to define the political crisis—as a constitutional issue or one with wider national and regional implications—and the appropriate response. The 16 January press statement took almost two weeks to negotiate. Initially, it was supposed to be a short statement condemning excessive force used by the government to crack down on protests. However, some Council members felt that the draft circulated by France was overly critical of the government and should be expanded to address the wider issues. Thus, it took two weeks to negotiate a comprehensive text that was critical of the government (but less so than the original draft) and also called on the opposition to respect the rule of law.

With respect to the mandate renewal, much emphasis is expected to be put on preparations for the elections, with some Council members wanting to ensure that MONUSCO is given appropriate resources to assist in this respect. The efficiency of the mission—and the performance of MONUSCO contingents in particular, which was a main focus for the US during the negotiations over the previous mandate—may lead to further negotiations over possible adjustments to the mandate and review of its contingents, including the Force Intervention Brigade.

France is the penholder on the DRC, and Kuwait chairs the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee.

Afghanistan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council will renew the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which expires on 17 March. It will also hold its quarterly debate on Afghanistan, during which it will consider the Secretary-General's 90-day report on UNAMA. The debate is scheduled to coincide with International Women's Day (8 March), and the Netherlands, the Council president in March, and the penholder on Afghanistan, may encourage members to highlight women's issues in their statements. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, is expected to brief.

Key Recent Developments

The situation in Afghanistan occupied much of the Council's attention during Kazakhstan's presidency in January. The Council went on a visiting mission to Kabul from 12 to 15 January to get a better understanding of conditions on the ground and to demonstrate its support for the government's efforts to restore peace and stability. On 19 January, the Council held a ministerial-level debate on the broader issue of regional partnerships in Afghanistan and Central Asia, focusing on the security and development nexus. During the meeting, the Council adopted a presidential statement that, among other things, emphasised the importance of regional, interregional and international cooperation to achieve stability and sustainable development in Afghanistan and the Central Asian region.

The security situation deteriorated further since the beginning of the year. During January, which was a particularly violent month, the Taliban and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) launched a series of attacks on various civilian and government targets. On 4 January, an ISIL suicide bomber killed at least 15 and injured another 25 people in Kabul. On the night of 20 January, six Taliban fighters laid siege to the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul, killing more than 40 people, including 14 foreign nationals, and injuring

more than a dozen others. The siege ended the next day when government forces took control of the hotel and killed the attackers. On 24 January, ISIL claimed responsibility for an attack on the international humanitarian organisation Save the Children in Jalalabad in which at least five people were killed. The deadliest attack this year occurred on 27 January when the Taliban activated a suicide car bomb in Kabul, killing more than 95 and injuring around 160 people. The Council issued press statements condemning all these attacks.

Last year, the Secretary-General concluded a report on the strategic review of UNAMA and recommended that its findings be incorporated into the next UNAMA mandate. The report states that Afghanistan is not a post-conflict situation where there is adequate stability to allow a focus on institution-building and development-oriented activities. One of the main recommendations in the report is that UNAMA should support all efforts to reach sustainable peace and self-reliance in Afghanistan. Among its main findings was that UNAMA as an impartial actor could play an important mediating role.

The Secretary-General thus recommended that UNAMA increase its role in supporting and promoting bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the aim of enhancing international support for the Afghan peace process. Regarding structural and staff changes, the Secretary-General recommended abolishing the military, police and rule of law advisory units. His report recommended closing the office in Farah province and exploring the possibility of further nationalising functions in remaining provincial offices. Furthermore, the Secretary-General recommended exploring the option of reducing international staff and forming smaller, multidisciplinary teams.

During his last Council briefing, Yamamoto emphasised the importance of holding parliamentary elections in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019, although he acknowledged that there has been little progress regarding preparatory activities for the elections. On 18

January, the Independent Election Commission announced that parliamentary elections, initially planned for July, would be postponed until October. The ability of Afghanistan to conduct inclusive elections will also depend on the security situation, which has continued to worsen over the past several months.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 29 December 2017, the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee published its annual report detailing the activities of the committee. During 2017, the committee removed one individual from the sanctions list. By the end of the year, there were 135 individuals and five entities on the list.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 15 February, UNAMA and the UN Human Rights Office released a joint annual report on the impact of the armed conflict on civilians. According to the report, a total of 10,453 civilian casualties – 3,438 people killed and 7,015 injured – were documented in 2017. Women and children remained heavily affected by conflict-related violence. The report documented 359 women killed and 865 injured, as well as 861 children killed and 2,318 injured. The report attributes close to two-thirds of all casualties to anti-government elements and one-fifth to pro-government forces. Attacks where anti-government elements deliberately targeted civilians accounted for 27 percent of the total civilian casualties, mainly from suicide and complex attacks directed at civilians or civilian objects. In response to the report's findings, High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein said in a 15 February statement that "such attacks are prohibited under international humanitarian law and are likely, in most cases, to constitute war crimes. The perpetrators must be identified and held accountable". The Human Rights Council will consider the High Commissioner's report on Afghanistan (A/HRC/37/45) during its 37th session in March.

Key Issues and Options

The Council faces a variety of ongoing issues that have continued to grow in their complexity. Afghan civilians continue to bear the heavy burden of the worsening security situation as is evident from the latest UNAMA casualty report. The security situation is further complicated by the increased presence of ISIL and other terrorist groups. Insurgency

UN DOCUMENTS ON AFGHANISTAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2344 (17 March 2017) renewed the mandate of UNAMA until 17 March 2018. **S/RES/2255** (21 December 2015) clarified how the 1988 Afghanistan sanctions regime functions in the context of the changing conflict dynamics in Afghanistan. **Security Council Presidential Statements S/PRST/2018/2** (19 January 2018) was on the link between security and development and the need to integrate the economies of Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbours. **S/PRST/2017/15** (24 August 2017) was on the review of the implementation of the measures outlined in resolution 2255. **Secretary-General's Reports S/2017/783** (15 September 2017) was on UNAMA. **S/2017/696** (10 August 2017) was on the strategic review of UNAMA. **Security Council Letter S/2018/37** (12 January 2018) contained the terms of reference for the visiting mission to Afghanistan. **Security Council Press Statements SC/13185** (27 January 2018) was on the terrorist attack in Kabul, which resulted in at least 95 people killed and 158 injured, and for which the Taliban claimed responsibility. **SC/13180** (25 January 2018) was on the terrorist attack in Jalalabad, for which ISIL claimed responsibility, that targeted an international humanitarian organization. **SC/13172** (22 January 2018) was on the attack on the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul, for which the Taliban claimed responsibility. **SC/13153** (5 January 2018) condemned the 4 January terrorist attack on Kabul, which resulted in at least 15 people killed and 25 injured, and for which ISIL claimed responsibility. **SC/13148** (28 December 2017) condemned terrorist attacks in Kabul carried out by ISIL in which more than 40 people were killed and 80 injured.

Afghanistan

in Afghanistan continues to be closely interlinked with illicit drug production and trafficking, activities that reached record levels during 2017. Efforts for negotiations between the government and the Taliban have borne no results so far and are further jeopardised by the Taliban's increased hostilities. Amidst all these concerns, holding credible and inclusive parliamentary elections in 2018 and presidential elections in 2019 is a top priority for the Council.

However, the most immediate issue for the Council is the renewal of UNAMA's mandate. In this regard, the Council could endorse the strategic review recommendations and also consider including specific language in the renewal resolution that:

- deplores the high number of civilian casualties and demands that all sides avoid killing and injuring civilians, recalling that targeting civilians is a war crime;
- underscores the need for the international community—and particularly neighbouring countries—to continue to support and cooperate with Afghanistan;

- stresses the need for holding parliamentary and presidential elections in an inclusive and timely manner;
- emphasises the linkages between extremism, drug production and illegal exploitation of natural resources (e.g. talcum, marble and gold); and
- highlights the importance of reconciliation in an effort to bring an end to the insurgency in Afghanistan.

Council Dynamics

Council members are generally concerned about the progressively volatile security environment and its implications for the civilian population. In addition to concerns regarding the recent surge of hostilities by the Taliban, the presence of ISIL and its violent tactics has added another layer of complexity to the conflict with a potential to deepen ethnic and sectarian tensions. Among permanent members, Russia has continued to emphasise the threat posed by ISIL in Afghanistan, given that the group has now been defeated in its former strongholds in the Middle East. At the last

debate, Russia noted that Afghanistan is now the main centre where the terrorists are concentrated, and that ISIL has “put down roots in the country”. Several other Council members, most notably France, Kazakhstan and Russia, continue to stress concerns regarding the interlinkages between insurgency and drug production and trafficking.

Council members have been generally supportive of the strategic review recommendations and have called for their implementation. Russia and Kazakhstan have both emphasised the importance of the regional context and the valuable role played by regional organisations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, in addressing the situation in Afghanistan. Russia has questioned the utility of the US and NATO presence in the country, which it maintains does not help to stabilise the military and political situation.

The Netherlands is the penholder on Afghanistan, and Kazakhstan chairs the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee.

Somalia and Eritrea

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), which expires on 31 March.

The Council is also expected to receive a briefing in consultations from the Chair of the 751/1907 Somalia and Eritrea Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Kairat Umarov (Kazakhstan).

Key Recent Developments

On 24 January, Special Representative and head of UNSOM Michael Keating briefed the Council on the latest report of the Secretary-General. Speaking one year after Somalia's peaceful transition of power and the election of President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmago, Keating commended the government's national agenda,

which embraces financial reform, job creation, inclusive politics, conflict resolution, and reform of the security sector, stressing that the focus is now on the essential task of developing a plan for security transition. He outlined a number of major challenges faced by the government in implementing its agenda—including the mobilisation of adequate technical and financial capacity, ensuring coherent and coordinated approaches by both national and international actors, and successfully managing such powerful constituencies as the federal member states, parliamentarians, clan power brokers, the private sector, and international partners.

Addressing the state-building process, Keating highlighted the need for progress in three key areas: review of the provisional federal constitution, preparation for the 2020-2021 elections, and conflict resolution

and reconciliation. He noted that the national constitutional convention scheduled to begin in March or April is expected to launch the next phase of the constitutional review process.

Further, he warned that the militant group Al-Shabaab remains a potent threat, despite financial pressures, counter-terrorism operations and air strikes, highlighting the 14 October terror attack in Mogadishu. This was the most deadly attack by an improvised explosive device ever perpetrated, with an estimated 512 people killed, nearly all of whom were civilians.

Concerning the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Keating noted that the Federal Government of Somalia has undertaken an operational readiness assessment of the Somali National Army and the Somali Police Force to provide a much clearer

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA AND ERITREA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2385 (14 November 2017) was on Somalia and Eritrea sanctions with 11 affirmative votes and four abstentions (Bolivia, China, Egypt and Russia). S/RES/2372 (30 August 2017) reauthorised AMISOM until 31 May 2018. S/RES/2358 (14 June 2017) renewed the mandate of UNSOM until 31 March 2018. **Secretary-General's Report S/2017/1109** (26 December 2017) was the latest report on Somalia. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8165** (24 January 2018) was a briefing by Special Representative Michael Keating and Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission Francisco Madeira on the situation in Somalia and the latest Secretary-General's report. **Security Council Press Statement SC/13223** (25 February 2018) condemned two terrorist attacks of 23 February 2018 in Mogadishu. **Sanctions Committee Document S/2017/924** (2 November 2017) was the report on Somalia by the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea.

Somalia and Eritrea

understanding of their capability. The assessment revealed multiple deficits and the enormous challenge ahead in translating the national security architecture into reality on the ground. He asserted that AMISOM's continued presence will therefore be essential. The premature drawdown of AMISOM forces would be a gift to Al-Shabaab, he said, and would risk undermining the gains that have been made, at great human and financial cost, over the past decade.

The Special Representative of the Chairperson of the AU Commission and head of AMISOM, Francisco Caetano José Madeira, also briefed the Council via video teleconference from Addis Ababa. He said that 2018 would be crucial for AMISOM in Somalia, recalling that Security Council resolution 2372 had requested that the mission reduce its troop levels, increase its police contingent, and conduct offensive operations against Al-Shabaab.

Madeira noted that AMISOM was in regular contact with the government to discuss a conditions-based and responsible withdrawal, and said that AMISOM would work with the Somali National Army in carrying out robust operations against Al-Shabaab, although such operations would be subject to the availability of requisite force enablers and multipliers. He said that the AU and AMISOM shared the federal government's assessment that the Somali National Army was not currently in a position to take over from AMISOM forces. The mission was carrying the burden of security and would continue to mentor the Somali military and police, as requested by the Council, until Somalia is ready to fully assume its security responsibilities. He emphasised the need for predictable and sustainable funding for AMISOM and the Somali security forces, stressing that the mission expected generous contributions following the appointment of two AMISOM financing envoys, whose roles would be crucial in the coming months.

The day after the briefing, Council members issued a press statement welcoming Somalia's political commitment to security sector, economic and political reforms, praising the progress made to date, and emphasising that all parties should make 2018 a year of implementation. The members of the Council also reaffirmed the importance of accelerating implementation of the national

security architecture and focusing on a gradual transfer of lead security responsibility from AMISOM to the Somali government. They also noted the importance of UN and AU efforts to explore options available in order to establish future funding arrangements for AMISOM.

The Council also issued a press statement on 25 February that condemned in the strongest terms the two terrorist attacks of 23 February in Mogadishu that killed and injured innocent Somalis.

On 19 February, the Somali government announced that it had appointed new police and intelligence chiefs nearly four months after their predecessors were fired in the aftermath of the 14 October terror attack. Former Deputy Health Minister Hussein Osman Hussein was named head of Somalia's intelligence service, and deputy head of police Bashir Abdi Mohamed was promoted to police chief.

Human Rights-Related Developments

The Human Rights Council will hold an enhanced interactive dialogue on Eritrea and receive an oral update on the situation in the country during its 37th session in March.

Key Issues and Options

Ensuring that UNSOM is properly equipped to support the Somali government in the three priority areas—state-building, security strategy, and socio-economic reform—is the key issue. This includes UNSOM's support for the government in facilitating key political processes—such as the constitutional review; preparations for one-person, one-vote elections; and establishing a functional federal state—as well as advising and assisting the government on security matters and promoting economic development. The most likely option for the Council will be to extend UNSOM's mandate for an additional year, taking the opportunity to make modifications to the mandate to reflect the peacebuilding and state-building gains made in the last year.

Concerning AMISOM, a key issue is ensuring that the mission is equipped to adequately strengthen the Somali forces so they can progressively take the lead in providing security, as a premature handover of security responsibilities would risk undermining Somalia's security and political gains. Closely

related is the need to secure predictable and sustainable funding for AMISOM and Somali security institutions.

On sanctions, the key issue for Council members is assessing how the Somalia sanctions regime can more effectively keep weapons out of the hands of Al-Shabaab and other militants in Somalia, including by taking into account ways to thwart the group's increasing use of improvised explosive devices and its ability to continue to profit from charcoal sales, despite the charcoal ban established by the Council.

A contentious issue in the Council has been how to approach the sanctions on Eritrea in light of the fact that for the fourth year in a row, last year's report of the Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group found no conclusive evidence that Eritrea was providing support to Al-Shabaab. This finding is complicated by the fact that the Eritrean government, which has not allowed the monitoring group to visit the country since 2011, continues to block the group from visiting. Nevertheless, the Council could revisit attempts that began last year to review the sanctions measures on Eritrea and pursue an outcome in that regard, while continuing to seek the cooperation of the Eritrean government.

Council Dynamics

On Somalia generally, Council members are united in supporting state-building processes and in their support for UNSOM, as demonstrated by unified messages conveyed during the Council's visit to Somalia in May 2016 and the uncontested adoption of several recent Council outcomes on Somalia.

Concerning AMISOM, some Council members have expressed more caution about the drawdown of troops than others.

The Council is also largely united on issues pertaining to sanctions on Somalia. On Eritrea, however, members are divided between those who believe the Council should reconsider sanctions measures against Eritrea and those who stress that Eritrea's other activities in the region also warrant sanctions. All Council members would like to see Eritrea increase its engagement with the UN.

The UK is the penholder on Somalia, and Kazakhstan is the chair of the 751/1907 Somalia and Eritrea Sanctions Committee for 2017.

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council will renew the mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the authorisation for the Regional Protection Force (RPF), before their 15 March expiration.

Key Recent Developments

The human cost of the conflict in South Sudan has reached “epic proportions” UNHCR head Filippo Grandi said on 1 February, following his visit to South Sudanese refugee camps in Uganda and Kenya. The number of refugees is now projected to exceed 3 million by the end of this year, making South Sudan Africa’s largest refugee crisis since the Rwanda genocide. UNHCR has launched a funding appeal for \$1.5 billion to support South Sudanese refugees and \$1.7 billion for those in need in the country. Approximately 1.9 million people are displaced inside South Sudan and more than 2 million refugees are in neighbouring countries. Over 5.1 million people (nearly half the population) are severely food insecure.

On 14 December 2017, UNMISS’s current mandate was rolled over until 15 March, to allow for the completion of the independent review of UNMISS initiated by the Secretary-General in October 2017, one of the eight major peacekeeping operations to be reviewed by June. On 20 February, Council members received the Secretary-General’s special report presenting a summary of the review team’s findings as well as observations and recommendations. The review team’s findings included that the mission should increase protection of civilians to the maximum extent possible within existing resources, adjust the RPF’s mandate as the threat of military conflict in Juba has considerably diminished, and reinforce the protection of civic space. The Secretary-General’s observations and recommendations included that the current UNMISS mandate remains valid and should be extended for another year, with some modifications. While the current language on the mission’s protection of civilians mandate was deemed valid, the Secretary-General has directed UNMISS and DPKO to review the current model for providing security to protection of civilians sites

and explore whether a more efficient model requiring fewer troops could be contemplated, with an overall aim to free up more troops for outward projection of the mission’s military footprint. The Secretary-General’s recommendations on the mandate included the addition of capacity-building and training of security and government institutions, and strengthening outreach and advocacy to raise the visibility of the human rights situation. The Security Council should continue supporting the peace process, including by holding the parties accountable.

The second phase of the South Sudan High-Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF), convened by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), took place from 5 to 16 February in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The stated areas of focus at the outset of the second phase were on a permanent ceasefire; the full implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) signed in August 2015; and a revised and realistic elections timeline. According to a 16 February joint statement by the parties attending the second phase, broad consensus was reached on key principles for guiding deliberations and on certain provisions and proposed adjustments to the ARCSS, on which deliberations are set to continue when the forum reconvenes in March. In the joint statement, the parties also recommitted to the 21 December 2017 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA), concluded at the first phase of the HLRF, which has been violated on several occasions. The members of the Troika (Norway, the UK and the US) said in a statement on 16 February that useful dialogue had taken place but that there was much more for the parties to do, calling on them to reconvene as soon as possible without preconditions. The statement also emphasised that elections in 2018 are not viable given the continuing conflict, lack of security, displacement of one-third of the population, and severe food insecurity affecting half the population.

On 2 February, the EU imposed sanctions on three current and former South Sudanese officials implicated in human rights violations and obstructing the peace process. The sanctions come five months after the US took

similar action against the same three individuals. Also on 2 February, the US Department of State announced that it was implementing restrictions on the export of defence articles and services to South Sudan, and that the US was seeking support for a Security Council arms embargo.

The AU Peace and Security Council adopted a communiqué on South Sudan on 8 February, which among other things urged the AU Commission, in consultation with IGAD, to develop and submit possible punitive measures that could be applied against all those who continue to obstruct efforts towards the restoration of peace and security in South Sudan. It also called on UNMISS, the South Sudanese government, and the troop-contributing countries to ensure that the deployment of the RPF was completed in the next three months.

On 27 February, the Council received a briefing on South Sudan from Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Bintou Keita. IGAD Special Envoy for South Sudan Ismail Wais was also expected to brief via VTC (the meeting had not yet taken place at press time).

Human Rights-Related Developments

UNMISS and OHCHR released a joint report on 22 February, on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, documenting 60 verified incidents, including killing, arbitrary arrest and detention; closure, suspension or censorship of newspapers; and blocking of websites from July 2016 to December 2017. The Human Rights Council will hold an interactive dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in South Sudan and consider its most recent report (A/HRC/37/71) during its 37th session in March. The report documents human rights violations against civilians, including massacres; sexual violence; and the destruction of homes, hospitals and schools. The Commission has identified more than forty senior military officials who may bear individual responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the country, whose names have been communicated on a strictly confidential basis to the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Key Issues and Options

An immediate issue for the Council to consider is what changes are necessary to the mandate of UNMISS. The most likely option is for the Council to renew the mandate for one

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOUTH SUDAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2392 (14 December 2017) extended the mandate of UNMISS for three months. S/RES/2327 (16 December 2016) extended the mandate of UNMISS for one year and reauthorised the Regional Protection Force. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2017/25 (14 December 2017) was on the situation in South Sudan, focussing on IGAD’s efforts to revitalise the peace process. Secretary-General’s Report S/2018/143 (20 February 2018) was the special report of the Secretary-General on the renewal of UNMISS’ mandate. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8192 (27 February 2018) was a briefing on South Sudan.

South Sudan

year, maintaining core elements such as the protection of civilians, monitoring and verification of human rights violations, and facilitation of humanitarian access.

In doing so, the Council might consider including language on some of the following findings and recommendations of the special report on UNMISS's review:

- increasing the effectiveness of protection efforts beyond protection of civilians sites;
- encouraging current efforts to make the mission more robust, nimble and proactive;
- reviewing the RPF's mandate to adapt to the current political and security environment;
- including capacity-building and training of security and government institutions on international humanitarian law, sexual and gender-based violence, and other serious human rights violations; and
- urging the mission to increase systematic and detailed documentation of human rights violations through accurate, strategic and timely monitoring and reporting.

Additional language might also be considered in relation to:

- increasing the flexibility of the mission's political strategy and responsibilities to support the ongoing and evolving peace

process and regional efforts;

- encouraging support of local-level mediation and reconciliation efforts, where appropriate;
- emphasising the strategic importance of UNMISS's presence at Juba airport and at the mission's adjacent Tomping base; and
- "appropriate measures" (i.e. additional targeted sanctions and an arms embargo) if the government continues to obstruct the mission.

Another key issue for the Council is how to support IGAD's efforts to revitalise the political process in South Sudan and what consequences it should impose on those who undermine the process. In an effort to reduce the level of violence and exert leverage on the parties, Council members could decide to revisit the proposals for an arms embargo and targeted sanctions. In the context of sanctions, an option would be to involve the chair of the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee as a co-penholder.

Council Dynamics

Council members share deep concern about the crisis in South Sudan, as set out in the presidential statement adopted on 14 December 2017. Given the ongoing instability in South Sudan, Council members believe

that the protection of civilians, the facilitation of humanitarian access, and human rights monitoring should remain core elements of the UNMISS mandate. Members are concerned about the challenging and unpredictable environment UNMISS operates in, the slow deployment of the RPF (currently at less than a quarter of the authorised personnel), and the violations of the Status of Forces Agreement that UNMISS continues to encounter.

Council members are also closely monitoring the political process and are unified in supporting IGAD's efforts to revitalise the peace process, but differences still exist over potential consequences in line with the long-standing divide in the Council over whether to impose an arms embargo and further targeted sanctions. The recent presidential statement refers to the need for "cost and consequences for those who undermine the HLRF process". Potential Council action will likely be determined by assessments of the extent of violations of the CoHA and the level of commitment and progress made by the parties at the third round of the HLRF in March.

The US is the penholder on South Sudan. Poland chairs the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee.

Sudan (Darfur)

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council will be briefed on the 60-day report of the Secretary-General on the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). Ambassador Joanna Wroniecka (Poland), chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, is expected to provide the quarterly briefing to Council members on the Committee's work. The mandate of UNAMID expires on 30 June 2018.

Key Recent Developments

Although major armed clashes between the government of Sudan and Darfur armed groups were last reported in July 2017, no significant progress has been made on the

political process, including implementation of the Doha Document for Peace adopted in 2011 and agreement on a permanent ceasefire. Nor has improvement in the overall security situation translated into a commensurate reduction in the level of human rights violations and abuses, such as sexual and gender-based violence and serious violations against children, which continue to be perpetrated with impunity. With the total population of Darfur estimated at around 10 million, there are still approximately 2.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), including 2.1 million in need of assistance, across Darfur. Inter-communal conflicts remain a source of violence, although at lower levels than in

previous years. The government's mandatory weapons collection programme, launched in October 2017, has strengthened the control of the Sudanese Armed Forces/Rapid Support Forces (RSF) over the security situation. While there have been no major recent incidents, the disarmament campaign has raised tensions in some contexts, particularly at the Kalma IDP camp in South Darfur, considered a stronghold of the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid rebel group.

In accordance with the timeline set out in resolution 2363, UNAMID concluded phase one of its reconfiguration at the end of 2017 and commenced phase two on 31 January. Scheduled to end on 30 June, phase

UN DOCUMENTS ON DARFUR Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2400 (8 February 2018) renewed the mandate of the Panel of Experts on Sudan for one year. S/RES/2363 (29 June 2017) renewed UNAMID's mandate for one year. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2018/4 (31 January 2018) was on the situation in Darfur and UNAMID's reconfiguration. Secretary-General's Report S/2018/12 (4 January 2018) was the assessment report on phase one of UNAMID's reconfiguration. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8155 (10 January 2018) was the most recent UNAMID briefing. Sanctions Committee Documents SC/13203 (8 February 2018) was the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee meeting with Sudan and several regional countries. S/2017/1125 (28 December 2017) was the final report of the Panel of Experts.

Sudan (Darfur)

two will include further reductions of UNAMID's authorised troop and police ceilings from 11,395 to 8,735 military personnel and from 2,888 to 2,500 police personnel. The assessment report of the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the AU Commission, requested in resolution 2363 on phase one of the reconfiguration, found that while it is still early to reach conclusions on the full impact of the reduction and reconfiguration in areas where the 11 UNAMID team sites closed, as required under phase one, no adverse effects have been reported so far. However, the report said that the closure of team sites has created a gap in early-warning mechanisms, and human rights teams continue to have only limited access to verify human rights violations. The report concluded that because of the security situation in Kalma camp, some adjustments will be made to enable continued military coverage for Kalma camp until the end of phase two.

On 31 January, the Council adopted its first presidential statement on Darfur since April 2012. The statement dealt with the security and political conditions in Darfur, the situation of IDPs, and the government's weapons collection campaign. It requested UNAMID and the UN Country Team to continue to monitor closely the impact of the reconfiguration on the situation on the ground. It also specified that the handover of Kalma camp to UNAMID Formed Police Units would be conducted by the end of phase two. It welcomed the signing at the end of January of a memorandum of understanding on the opening of a temporary operating base in Golo, while expressing regret over the government's delayed consent as the base was required to become operational during phase one. The statement requested a written report of the review of UNAMID's mandate by 1 June. (For more details see our What's

In Blue story from 30 January.)

The Council was last briefed on Darfur on 10 January by Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix, who presented the findings of the assessment report on phase one of the reconfiguration and recommended the review of UNAMID's mandate ahead of its 30 June expiration, as called for in the assessment report.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 2 February, the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee met with representatives from Sudan, Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya, South Sudan and Uganda to discuss the implementation of sanctions measures. On 8 February, the Council adopted a resolution extending the current mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee until 12 March 2019. It expressed the intention to regularly review the measures on Darfur in light of the evolving situation on the ground, and requested the Panel of Experts to provide an interim report by 12 August and a final report by 12 January 2019.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue that Council members will want to follow closely is the effect of further troop reductions on the security and human rights situations. An option in this context would be to invite the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide an update on the human rights situation.

Another key issue is to support efforts to break the ongoing impasse in the negotiations between the government and Darfuri rebel movements, leading to a durable cessation of hostilities and a final settlement. One option is to invite Thabo Mbeki, chair of the AU High-Level Implementation Panel, to address the Council on his efforts. Another option moving forward could be for the Council to consider seeking an African member to share the pen as co-penholder on Darfur with the

current penholder, the UK, to enhance African involvement on this issue in the Council.

The Council may also need to tackle how to promote intercommunal reconciliation, given the high levels of intercommunal fighting in Darfur in recent years. An option for the Council would be to request the Joint Special Representative for Darfur and head of UNAMID, Jeremiah Mamabolo, to brief on the issue.

Council Dynamics

Improvements in the overall situation in Darfur, combined with the completion of phase one of the reconfiguration without major incidents to date and the government's cooperation during the process, have created an opportunity for a degree of unity amongst Council members, evidenced by the adoption of the first presidential statement on Darfur in almost six years on 31 January. However, during the course of negotiations of the presidential statement, one of the key issues was determining the appropriate tone to take with regard to the actions of the government of Sudan and the evolving situation in Darfur. While some members advocated more guarded recognition of progress, other members, including Russia and Ethiopia, generally sought to include references to improvements in the situation in Darfur and positive steps the government of Sudan has taken to date.

At the 10 January briefing, seven Council members made statements. Bolivia, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Kazakhstan and Kuwait assessed positively the situation in Darfur and the government's actions in general. Côte d'Ivoire emphasised the need for progress on the political front, while Peru highlighted continued violations of human rights.

The UK is the penholder on Darfur; Poland chairs the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee.

Syria

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council expects to receive the monthly briefings on political and humanitarian developments in Syria, as well as an additional briefing on the implementation of resolution 2401. Council members are also expected to hold an informal interactive dialogue on the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Key Recent Developments

The conflict in Syria enters its eighth year in March amidst a marked intensification of violence. In a 10 February statement, Secretary-General António Guterres characterised the current moment as “one of the most violent periods in nearly seven years of conflict”. Mentioning deadly airstrikes leading to civilian casualties in Eastern Ghouta and Idlib, High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein said the same day that “[t]he term ‘de-escalation area’ is becoming all too reminiscent of the so-called ‘safe areas’ in Bosnia, which proved anything but safe”.

On 6 February, the Humanitarian Coordinator and other UN representatives in Syria had called for a cessation of hostilities of at least one month to improve the humanitarian situation. That statement had drawn attention to the dire humanitarian situation in several parts of the country. It outlined the various areas where the situation is most critical for civilians: Afrin, where military operations by Turkey and the reported blockage of exit points by other forces had trapped many civilians; Raqqa, with the scourge of unexploded ordnance and the lack of services; Idlib, which is densely populated and is being subjected to ongoing military operations by the Syrian government; Eastern Ghouta, where medical evacuations continue to be urgently needed in the midst of continuous besiegement and airstrikes by the government and its allied forces; Foua and Kafraya, which are besieged by armed groups; and the Rukban camp, which remains inaccessible to the UN’s Damascus-based humanitarian team.

In response to this call, Kuwait and Sweden (the humanitarian penholders on Syria in the Council) asked for a briefing from Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs

Mark Lowcock under “any other business” on 8 February. At the briefing, Lowcock elaborated on the urgent need for an immediate cessation of hostilities of at least one month to enable the delivery of humanitarian aid and services, the evacuation of the critically sick and wounded, and the alleviation of people’s suffering. With this objective in mind, Kuwait and Sweden circulated a draft resolution on that same day.

As Council members negotiated the draft, the humanitarian situation in Syria continued to deteriorate. In a statement on 21 February, with the military offensive on Eastern Ghouta resulting in more than 1,200 civilian casualties since early February, High Commissioner Ra’ad Al Hussein asked: “[h]ow much cruelty will it take before the international community can speak with one voice to say enough dead children, enough wrecked families, enough violence, and take resolute, concerted action to bring this monstrous campaign of annihilation to an end?”. On that same day, the Secretary-General reminded all parties, particularly the guarantors of the Astana agreements—Iran, Russia and Turkey—of their commitments regarding de-escalation areas.

On 21 February, Kuwait and Sweden put the draft resolution into blue. Right after that, Russia requested a public meeting on Eastern Ghouta in order to allow all sides to “present their vision, their understanding of the situation and come up with ways of getting out of this situation”, according to its ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia.

At a 22 February briefing, Lowcock told Council members: “You can still save lives in eastern Ghouta—and elsewhere in Syria. I urge you to do so. Millions of battered and beleaguered children, women and men depend on meaningful action by this Council.” At the meeting, Russia, which highlighted the presence of terrorist groups in Eastern Ghouta, announced the circulation of amendments to the draft in blue for the consideration of the Council. Russia’s amendments were related to the role of the Council regarding the cessation of hostilities and the details of its implementation, including timing.

Intense negotiations ensued, and the Council was able to unanimously adopt resolution 2401 on Saturday, 24 February. The resolution demands that all parties cease hostilities without delay and engage immediately to ensure full and comprehensive implementation of this demand by all parties for a durable humanitarian pause of at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria. The resolution also demands that, immediately after the start of the cessation of hostilities, all parties allow safe, unimpeded and sustained access each week to the humanitarian convoys of the UN and its implementing partners, including to hard-to-reach and besieged locations. At the same time, the UN and its implementing partners are to be allowed to undertake safe, unconditional medical evacuations, based on medical need and urgency. Military operations against the Council-designated terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al Qaeda and Al-Nusra Front are not covered by the cessation of hostilities. At press time, violence had persisted in Syria, including indiscriminate attacks in Eastern Ghouta and the use of chemical weapons.

In addition to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, several factors—increased tensions between Israel and Syria, deadly clashes between the US-led coalition to counter ISIL and pro-government forces, Turkey’s offensive against Kurdish forces in Afrin and the incursion of pro-government forces into Afrin to repel the offensive—have further intensified tensions among member states involved in Syria.

On 14 February, UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura briefed the Council on his efforts to bring about a constitutional committee, including to define the mandate and terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure, and selection criteria for its composition. The establishment of a constitutional committee was the main outcome of a conference of Syrians hosted in Sochi on 29-30 January by Russia, along with Iran and Turkey, which had been boycotted by key opposition groups. Earlier that day, the government of Syria questioned the legitimacy of such

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2401](#) (24 February 2018) demanded that all parties cease hostilities in Syria without delay. [S/RES/2393](#) (19 December 2017) renewed the authorisation for cross-border and cross-line aid delivery. [S/RES/2254](#) (18 December 2015) was on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. [S/RES/2118](#) (27 September 2013) was on chemical weapons. [Secretary-General’s Report S/2018/138](#) (20 February 2018) was the monthly report on the humanitarian situation. [Security Council Letters S/2018/121](#) (14 February 2018) was the final statement of the conference held in Sochi. [S/2018/84](#) (1 February 2018) was an OPCW report on progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8188](#) (24 February 2018) was the meeting at which resolution 2401 was adopted. [S/PV.8186](#) (22 February 2018) was a briefing by Lowcock on Eastern Ghouta. [S/PV.8181](#) (14 February 2018) was a briefing by de Mistura on the political process. [S/PV.8174](#) (5 February 2018) was a briefing by Nakamitsu on the destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal.

Syria

a committee. At the Council meeting, Russia reiterated the coherence between its initiative and the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, announcing that it had circulated the final communiqué of the Sochi meeting as an official document of the Council.

Reports regarding the use of chemical weapons in Syria continue. In addition to alleged attacks in January, at least three additional ones have reportedly taken place in February (in Idlib on 4 February, in Afrin on 16 February and in Eastern Ghouta on 25 February). Briefing the Council on 5 February, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu highlighted how the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) continues to believe that there are gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies with the initial declaration of the Syrian government that have not been addressed. At press time, the OPCW fact-finding mission was expected to submit to the Council a report on allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the majority of which involve the use of toxic chemicals, such as chlorine, in areas not under the control of the government.

The polarisation among Council members on the issue of chemical weapons continues. On 23 January, Russia circulated a draft resolution to establish a new investigation mechanism to replace the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). By press time, Council members had met twice on the draft, but Russia had not addressed in a new draft any of the issues raised by other Council members.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 6 February statement, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria expressed deep concern over the further escalation of violence in Idlib governorate and in Eastern Ghouta. Since the beginning of the year, the increase in violence in Idlib has resulted in another upsurge of internal displacement with over a quarter of a million civilians fleeing the fighting, according to reports received by the Commission. The Commission has also received multiple reports, which it is now investigating, that bombs allegedly containing weaponised chlorine have been used in the town of Saraqeb in Idlib and in Douma in Eastern Ghouta, the statement added.

In a 10 February statement, High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein called for "urgent international action after a week of soaring violence and bloodshed, mostly caused by airstrikes, in the opposition-held Eastern Ghouta and Idlib regions". According to the statement, the UN Human Rights Office received reports indicating that at least 277 civilians were killed between 4 and 9 February—230 of them in airstrikes by the Syrian Government and its allies—with a further 812 civilians injured, bringing the total number of civilian casualties during the first week of February to around 1,089. "The no-holds-barred nature of this assault is evidenced by reports that at least nine medical facilities, six of them in Idlib and three in Eastern Ghouta, were hit by airstrikes", the High Commissioner said. "Even by Syria's atrocious standards, these are exceptionally deplorable developments—and a cruel irony given that both have been declared 'de-escalation areas'".

The Human Rights Council (HRC) will hold an interactive dialogue to discuss the report of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria (A/HRC/37/72) during its 37th session in March. There will also be a high-level panel discussion about violations of the human rights of children in Syria, as requested in HRC resolution 36/20.

Key Issues and Options

During the seven years of the war, P5 divisions have limited the options at the disposal of Council members. In order to mark this anniversary, Council members could hold an informal, unscripted and forward-looking meeting at ambassador-level to discuss the concrete steps that the Council could take unanimously to alleviate suffering on the ground, build trust among the parties, and reinvigorate the political process.

Most of the Council's attention to Syria has been spent hearing the conflicting narratives put forward by different member states rather than engaging in active diplomacy able to make a difference on the ground. In this context, the efforts of the humanitarian penholders to respond to Lowcock's call and demand a cessation of hostilities shows the potential role of elected members in the Council. In order to amplify the messages and receive specific suggestions from those affected by the recent wave of violence, Council members could organise a formal or informal meeting to hear these voices.

Following the circulation of the Russian draft to establish a new mechanism to investigate the use of chemical weapons, Council members could negotiate in a genuine effort to achieve consensus. If reaching an agreement proves impossible, Council members could request options from the Secretary-General to devise such a mechanism, taking into account the positions expressed by Council members in the failed negotiations to renew the JIM.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council dynamics on Syria are characterised by increased polarisation, including with regard to humanitarian matters. The 10 February statement by the Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria and other UN officials highlighted how "[t]he humanitarian response has become a hostage to fighting and competing politics" in Syria and characterised this as a "shame for all".

In addition to the difficulties in agreeing to resolution 2401, this dynamic was also made evident in the negotiation of a presidential statement circulated by Kuwait and Sweden in January. The draft, which responded to a request by Lowcock after his first visit to Syria, could not be adopted, as the differences among members in two rounds of negotiations could not be overcome. Russia challenged the prioritisation of five areas identified by Lowcock as needing progress and questioned the need for such a statement by the Council. The penholders, which had minimised references to particular locations in Syria to bypass Council divisions, proposed not to specifically outline in the statement the five areas mentioned by Lowcock, nonetheless urging progress on them. The P3 argued that the language used in the statement was not strong enough, and that the efforts to make it palatable to Russia and others had diluted its substance.

It remains to be seen whether Council members will be able to preserve space for compromise on the Syria humanitarian track in the future.

Kuwait and Sweden are the penholders on humanitarian issues in Syria.

Lebanon (1701)

Expected Council Action

In March, Acting UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Pernille Dahler Kardel, and possibly a representative of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), will brief Council members in consultations on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701, which called for a cessation of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006.

The mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) expires on 31 August.

Key Recent Developments

On 4 November 2017, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced his resignation in a televised address from Saudi Arabia, citing Iran's meddling in Arab affairs and an alleged assassination plot against him. In a statement issued the next day, the Secretary-General expressed concern about the news of Hariri's resignation while reiterating the UN's continued support for the security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon. After spending almost three weeks outside Lebanon, Hariri returned to Beirut, saying he would delay his resignation in an effort to advance the dialogue among political actors on the country's relations with the rest of the region. On 5 December, Hariri formally withdrew his resignation after the government reaffirmed Lebanon's policy of disassociation from the conflicts in the region.

Hariri attended the 8 December 2017 ministerial-level meeting in Paris of the International Support Group for Lebanon (ISG), chaired by France and the UN. A joint statement issued by the group welcomed Hariri's decision to return to his post and the decision of the government to disassociate itself from the conflicts in the region. On 12 December, Ambassador François Delattre (France) briefed Council members under "any other business" on the situation in Lebanon and the Paris ISG meeting. Council members welcomed Hariri's return to Lebanon in a press statement on 19 December.

On 5 February, UNIFIL head of mission and force commander Major General Michael Beary hosted the most recent

tripartite meeting with senior officials from the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The discussions were focused on the IDF's construction of the border wall in the area south of the Blue Line, the border demarcation between Lebanon and Israel. According to media reports, Lebanon has claimed that the wall passes through its territory and thus constitutes a violation of its sovereignty, while the IDF emphasised that all construction work is being done on Israeli territory. At the tripartite meeting Beary noted that, overall, there has been a period of relative calm in UNIFIL's area of operations but acknowledged that there has been increased activity along the Blue Line. He also said that both parties have shown restraint to ease the tensions.

Another point of contention between the two countries has emerged over the prospect of exploring for hydrocarbon resources off the coast of Lebanon. Earlier this year, Lebanon concluded a deal with oil and gas companies Total, Eni and Novatek regarding offshore exploration and production of oil and gas. Israel and Lebanon have unresolved maritime borders in some of the areas where the exploration would take place, and Israel has warned against exploration in the disputed waters. During his visit to Lebanon on 15 February, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson weighed in on this issue, saying that the US would continue to engage with both sides in an effort to end the current impasse. He also voiced his concerns regarding Hezbollah's engagement in regional conflicts and its destabilising effects on Lebanon.

In February, US Acting Assistant Secretary of State David Satterfield held meetings with representatives of both countries in an attempt to mediate the border dispute. According to media reports, the speaker of Lebanon's parliament, Nabih Berri, rejected US proposals on the border issue after meeting with Satterfield on 16 February. In a televised address the same day, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah threatened retaliation against Israel should it exploit gas sites in Lebanese territorial waters. After meeting with Satterfield on 18 February, Israeli energy minister Yuval

Steinitz emphasised that a diplomatic solution would be preferable to both sides.

Issues and options

While the situation in UNIFIL's area of operations has been generally calm, the Council remains concerned about the lack of progress towards implementing the main objectives of resolution 1701, including the permanent ceasefire, more than a decade after its adoption.

A principal issue for the Council is that Hezbollah and other non-state actors still maintain significant amounts of weaponry. This inhibits the government's ability to exercise full authority over its territory, poses a threat to Lebanon's sovereignty and stability, and contravenes its obligations under resolutions 1559 and 1701. Another related issue is Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian civil war and the movement of arms from Syria to Hezbollah.

Last year's UNIFIL renewal resolution requested the Secretary-General to look at ways to enhance the mission's efforts, including increasing its visible presence, patrols and inspections. Some Council members might be interested to hear more on this issue. The Council could request a briefing by DPKO focusing on whether and how UNIFIL's work has changed since the adoption of resolution 2373 and what impact this has had on the overall security situation.

Council Dynamics

Although the Council continues to support UNIFIL and values its contribution to stability in the region and between Israel and Lebanon, there are some differences among members concerning the role of the mission. The US in particular has expressed criticism of UNIFIL. It has advocated for a more proactive role for the mission in confronting the threat of Hezbollah and has been increasingly vocal about what it believes is the rising threat of Hezbollah and its proliferation of weapons. At the last mandate renewal, France and some other members, particularly UNIFIL troop-contributor Italy, which has since left the Council, have been cautious about the prospect of a more proactive approach by the mission, tending to believe that this

UN DOCUMENTS ON LEBANON Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2373 (30 August 2017) renewed UNIFIL's mandate for another year. S/RES/1701 (11 August 2006) expanded UNIFIL by 15,000 troops and expanded its mandate. S/RES/1559 (2 September 2004) urged withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon, disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, extension of the Lebanese government's control over all Lebanese territory and free and fair presidential elections. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2016/10 (22 July 2016) stressed the importance of Lebanon's electing a president by May 2017 in order to maintain stability. Security Council Press Statement SC/13130 (19 December 2017) welcomed the return of Prime Minister Saad Hariri to Lebanon and his decision to continue his term.

Lebanon (1701)

could threaten the fragile calm in southern Lebanon that has been maintained for the past ten years. However, there is a general

consensus among Council members about supporting Lebanon's territorial integrity and security, condemning acts of terrorism, and

recognising the crucial role the LAF plays in responding to security challenges.

France is the penholder on Lebanon

DPRK (North Korea)

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is expected to adopt a resolution to renew the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Sanctions Committee for another 13 months.

The panel's final report is expected to be sent to the Council in mid-March.

Key Recent Developments

The DPRK participated in the Winter Olympics held in Pyeongchang, Republic of Korea (ROK), following inter-Korean talks on 9 January, which focused on the DPRK's participation in the Olympics. The DPRK and ROK marched under a unified flag and fielded a joint women's hockey team. The DPRK sent a delegation of around 280 people, led by Kim Yong-Nam, the country's nominal head of state. The delegation included a number of high-level officials, including Kim Yeong-Jong, the sister of DPRK's supreme leader Kim Jong-Un. On 10 February, the day after the start of the Olympics, the DPRK invited South Korean President Moon Jae-in to visit Pyongyang. At the closing ceremony, the North Korean delegation met with Moon and expressed a willingness to meet with the US.

On 9 February, Secretary-General António Guterres met briefly with Kim Yong-Nam during the opening of the Winter Olympics. Guterres reiterated his hope that all parties would use dialogue to achieve peaceful denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and offered the UN's assistance. Earlier in February, ahead of the opening of the Olympic games, Guterres had said that it was "absolutely essential" for the key players to build on the thaw in relations between Pyongyang and Seoul and to hold serious discussions on the nuclear crisis.

At the Munich Security Conference on 17

February, Guterres once again stressed the importance of not missing the opportunity of a peaceful resolution through diplomatic engagement and said that a military solution would be a disaster and would have "catastrophic consequences".

On 20 February, the ROK Defense Ministry said that plans for the postponed military exercises with the US would be announced by the end of March. The drills, which were originally expected to be held during March, were postponed to improve the political climate ahead of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics and Paralympics.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 9 February, the chair of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Karel van Oosterom (Netherlands), held a briefing with the Panel of Experts' coordinator, Hugh Griffiths, that was open to all UN member states. Van Oosterom focused on the national implementation reports and the need for effective implementation of the sanctions measures in the two most recent resolutions, 2375 and 2397. (Van Oosterom's presentation is posted on the committee's website.) He noted that although there has been a significant increase in the submission rate of implementation reports, a large number of member states still had not submitted their reports, and he reminded member states to do so in a timely manner. The deadline for member states to report on measures undertaken to implement sanctions imposed in resolution 2375 was 10 December 2017, and 52 members had submitted reports. The deadline for reports from resolution 2397 is 22 March, and as of early February, only one country had submitted its report. Griffiths' briefing focused on where the two resolutions established new specific provisions, where they clarified and strengthened existing measures, and where they introduced new measures.

The 1718 Committee met on 21 February to discuss the final report of the Panel of Experts. It seems that while most members were open to the recommendations of the panel, China expressed

some reluctance to move forward on them. The majority of members were concerned about the lack of implementation of the sanctions and in agreement that the recommendations should be seriously considered. Another issue that was raised was the humanitarian consequences of the sanctions and the need for OCHA to update the Committee more regularly.

Van Oosterom briefed Council members in consultations on the quarterly report on 26 February. Among the areas that were covered in the discussion were the final report of the panel and the need for full implementation of all Council resolutions.

Human Rights-Related Developments

The Human Rights Council (HRC) will hold an interactive dialogue with the special rapporteur on human rights in the DPRK, Tomás Ojea Quintana, and consider his report during its 37th session in March (A/HRC/37/69). The HRC will also consider the report of the special rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities on her visit to the DPRK from 3 to 8 May 2017 (A/HRC/37/56/Add.1). According to the latter report, the recent Security Council resolutions condemning the country's pursuit of ballistic and nuclear weapons and strengthening sanctions has led to the country's becoming increasingly isolated, which directly affects persons with disabilities.

Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council is how to lessen tensions in the Korean peninsula. In light of the first signs of a thaw in relations between North and South Korea in years, a related issue is what role the Council can play to encourage the resumption of dialogue. One option for the Council would be to follow up the 10 January elements to the press after a briefing by Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Miroslav Jenča on the inter-Korean talks with a more formal product, encouraging confidence and trust-building measures to reduce tensions on the Korean peninsula.

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DPRK [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2397](#) (22 December 2017) tightened sanctions further in response to the DPRK's nuclear test. [S/RES/2375](#) (11 September 2017) expanded sanctions to additional sectors of the North Korean economy in response to the DPRK's nuclear test. [S/RES/2371](#) (5 August 2017) condemned the 3 and 28 July ballistic missile launches. [S/RES/2356](#) (2 June 2017) condemned the nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development activities, including missile launches, conducted by the DPRK in flagrant disregard of relevant Council resolutions since 9 September 2016. [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2017/16](#) (29 August 2017) condemned the launch of a missile over the territory of Japan and urged the DPRK to comply with previous Council resolutions and presidential statements. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8137](#) (15 December 2017) was the ministerial-level meeting on "Threats and Challenges posed by the DPRK to International Peace and Security". [S/PV.8151](#) (22 December 2017) was the adoption of resolution 2397. [S/PV.8130](#) (11 December 2017) was the fourth meeting on the human rights situation in the DPRK. [Security Council Letter S/2017/1006](#) (1 December 2017) was the joint letter asking for a briefing on the human rights situation. [Other SC/13113](#) (8 December 2017) was the press release from the 1718 Sanctions Committee ahead of its 11 December meeting.

DPRK (North Korea)

Finding the right balance between applying pressure through sanctions and exploring the diplomatic track continues to be an issue. Although the majority of members appear willing to consider ways of bringing the DPRK to the table, the US may be less willing to move from a policy of “maximum pressure” to considering diplomatic options.

An overarching issue related to sanctions is making them more effective. It seems the final report of the panel indicates that in spite of the complex sanctions regime imposed on the DPRK, it is still earning significant revenue from exporting coal, iron and steel, among other banned commodities.

A connected issue is getting agreement in the sanctions committee on the recommendations contained in the panel’s final report. The need for consensus in sanctions committee decisions has led in the past to great difficulty in obtaining agreement on a number of the panel’s recommendations. This time, recommendations on financial sanctions, interdiction and listings are expected to be particularly divisive. If there are recommendations that could improve the implementation of sanctions but may not be accepted by the committee, a discussion at Council level about the panel’s recommendations may be needed. Additionally, further discussion about the role the committee could play in outreach to member states as well as the type of assistance needed to enforce sanctions may be useful.

While the implementation of sanctions

continues to be a serious issue, the renewal of the panel’s mandate is not expected to be controversial. The resolution renewing the mandate has barely changed over the years, and members do not expect it to be any different this year.

An issue related to the panel is whether, given the increasing complexity of the sanctions regime and the new requirements, there is a need to increase the number of experts on the panel to cover newer areas such as maritime interdiction. Currently there are eight experts covering: missile issues and other technologies; air transport; customs and export controls; finance and economics; nuclear issues; maritime transport; non-proliferation, procurement and trade; and other weapons of mass destruction and conventional arms.

The need to mitigate the humanitarian impact of sanctions continues to be a concern of several Council members. The committee could work more closely with OCHA to try to obtain the information it needs for humanitarian exemptions. Another option would be to consider adding an expert on humanitarian issues to the panel who could monitor the impact of sanctions on the civilian population.

Council Dynamics

The current thaw in relations between the DPRK and the ROK as a result of the DPRK’s participation in the Winter Olympics is seen as encouraging by those who would like a greater focus on possible diplomatic

options. However, there is also some scepticism about whether the DPRK is ready to suspend missile tests in order to pursue serious dialogue on denuclearisation of the peninsula. Members are waiting to see whether the DPRK will resume missile testing after the Paralympics conclude in mid-March. The DPRK has warned that joint military exercises between ROK and the US would be seen as a provocative act that would endanger any reconciliation efforts.

The Netherlands, which took over as the chair of the sanctions committee in January, has said that one of its areas of focus will be how to make the sanctions work better. It plans to hold meetings with the regional groups in the coming months.

The US continues to generally advocate maximum pressure through punitive means, imposing new sanctions on 24 January targeting largely Chinese and DPRK companies, shipping firms and vessels. On 23 February it sanctioned one person, 27 companies and 28 ships. In addition, it proposed new listings under UN sanctions. At the same time, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson indicated that he would keep the channels of communication open with the DPRK.

The détente between the two Koreas appears to have strengthened the Chinese position on the need for dialogue and consultation on the Korean Peninsula.

Libya

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is expected to receive a briefing from the Special Representative and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Ghassan Salamé, followed by consultations. Ambassador Olof Skoog (Sweden), the chair of the Libya Sanctions Committee, is also expected to brief the Council.

UNSMIL’s mandate expires on 15 September, and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the Sanctions Committee expires on 15 November.

Key Recent Developments

February marked the seven-year anniversary of the uprising that toppled Colonel Muammar Qaddafi. Despite the signing of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) on 17 December 2015, little progress has been achieved in establishing unified and legitimate institutions with the capacity to deliver basic services.

At a Council briefing and consultations on 17 January, Salamé stated that the Council should remain alert about Libya, since the spectre of violence remains present and “military

forces are flexing their muscles in many parts of the country”. He updated the Council on his efforts to implement the UN action plan that the Council endorsed in October 2017. This plan involves working in parallel to amend the LPA, organise a national conference, finalise a new constitution, and prepare parliamentary and presidential elections. He said that “the fabric of Libyan society is frayed and requires meaningful reconstitution if it is to be mended”, and discussed his initiative to work towards reconciliation from the bottom up by holding town

UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2380 (5 October 2017) renewed the authorisation for member states to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya that they have reasonable grounds to suspect are being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking. S/RES/2376 (14 September 2017) extended UNSMIL’s mandate until 15 September 2018. S/RES/2362 (29 June 2017) renewed the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee and the measures regarding attempts to illicitly export oil from Libya. S/RES/1970 (26 February 2011) referred the situation in Libya to the ICC. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8159 (17 January 2018) was a briefing from Salamé, Sharief and Schoulgjin Nyoni.

Libya

hall meetings and local dialogues between communities formerly in conflict.

While holding elections is a key element of the action plan, Salamé warned that before credible elections can be conducted, much work remains to be done. In addition to the constitutional, legislative, security and logistical measures that need to be in place, there must be a commitment by the parties to accept the results.

A civil society representative, Hajer Sharief, the co-founder of TogetherWe Build It, briefed the Council as well. In her remarks, she criticised the persistence of violence in Libya and reflected on the 2011 military intervention. While resolution 1970 had been a life-saver for many Libyans, hope turned to despair as Libyans realised that the international community and the Council had “no follow-up plan or strategy to empower the Libyan people beyond the military intervention”.

Efforts to implement the UN action plan continue, and the deadline for electoral registration was extended until 15 February. By 1 February, more than 2.25 million Libyans had registered according to the Electoral Commission. On 14 February, Libya’s Supreme Court dismissed a challenge to the draft constitution by an administrative court in the eastern city of Al-Bayda.

Violence in Libya continues, and clashes among armed groups in the east and the west have persisted. On 15 January, clashes near the Mitiga airport in Tripoli resulted in the death of some 20 people and the suspension of all flights to and from Tripoli for five days. A double bombing in Benghazi on 24 January resulted in the deaths of at least 30 civilians, including children. Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the attack and the summary execution of ten individuals reportedly carried out in retaliation by the Libyan National Army (LNA) in Benghazi. UNSMIL also condemned the reports of summary executions and demanded that the LNA commander reportedly involved in the executions, Mahmoud al-Werfalli, be handed over to the ICC. It argued that it had documented at least five similar cases in 2017 alone carried out or ordered by al-Werfalli. The situation in Libya was referred to the ICC in 2011 through resolution 1970, and the ICC issued an arrest warrant against al-Werfalli in August 2017. In early February, al-Werfalli reportedly handed himself in to the military police in eastern Libya.

Between November 2017 and 23 February

2018, UNHCR has evacuated 1,211 refugees from Libya to emergency transit locations from where their applications for refugee status are being processed (770 to Niger, 312 to Italy, and two to Romania). Despite a recent agreement to return internally displaced persons expelled from Tawergha seven years ago, some 40,000 remain stranded and prevented from returning to their hometown.

UNSMIL is poised to increase its presence in Libya, security conditions permitting, following the deployment of a Nepalese guard unit that became fully operational in late December 2017 and which is tasked to protect the UN compound in Tripoli and mission staff.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 17 January, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Sweden, Irina Schougin Nyoni, briefed the Council on behalf of the chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee. At the meeting, she updated the Council on the two vessels that are listed by the Committee for attempting to illicitly export petroleum from Libya. Syria had informed the Committee that a national company had unloaded diesel oil from one of these ships, the Capricorn, although it had instructed concerned authorities not to receive that vessel again. Since then, the Sanctions Committee has amended the entry of the Capricorn to reflect its change of name (Nadine), flag state (Palau) and location (off the coast of Oman, outside of its territorial waters).

The Committee has since considered the interim report of the Panel of Experts, which highlighted how “military dynamics in Libya and conflicting regional agendas show a lack of commitment to a peaceful solution”. The report raised concerns regarding the role of armed groups, often nominally affiliated with official security institutions, in human smuggling and trafficking. The recommendations addressed to the Council, such as the proposal to ban listed vessels from circulating through maritime canals, are expected to be discussed by the Council when it renews the sanctions regime later this year.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 1 February, UNSMIL released a human rights report on civilian casualties for January, which documented 102 civilian casualties – 39 deaths and 63 injuries – during the conduct of hostilities across Libya, a sharp rise from previous months. The majority of civilian casualties were caused by vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, followed by explosive remnants of war, gunfire and shelling, the report said. The special rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs), Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, conducted her first official visit to Libya from 25 to 31 January. In a statement on 2 February, the special rapporteur said “the displacement crisis in Libya is one of huge complexities, exacerbated by the fact

that the capacity of the government to meet the needs of the IDPs is limited, and UN agencies are constrained by a lack of access due to security concerns and a general lack of funding to deal with the internal displacement situation”. She will present a report to the Human Rights Council (HRC) in June. The HRC will hold an interactive dialogue on the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on human rights in Libya (A/HRC/37/46) during its 37th session in March.

Key Issues and Options

Supporting the UN-led mediation efforts is a key issue for the Council. At the appropriate time and in support of Salamé’s work, they might consider a visiting mission to Libya and neighbouring countries to engage with key stakeholders to ensure progress in the implementation of the UN action plan.

Furthermore, the Council could issue a presidential statement condemning any unilateral actions that undermine the political process and question the LPA as the only framework for the political transition. It could also recall that these actions constitute designation criteria in the 1970 sanctions regime.

A long-standing issue for which the Council is responsible, but which continues to be unresolved, is the impact that the freezing of assets resulting from resolution 1970 is having on Libya’s wealth. In his November 2017 briefing, Salamé criticised the mismanagement of frozen assets (by not being reinvested) and urged the Council to revisit this issue. Since 2015, the Panel of Experts has recommended the Sanctions Committee to issue guidance allowing for the reinvestment of frozen assets to prevent economic losses for the Libyan people. The Council has also received several letters from Libya in this regard. An option in this context would be for the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee to address this issue.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Overall, Council members are united in their support to Salamé’s mediation efforts. However, despite recent unanimous Council outcomes, which included the Council’s endorsement of the UN action plan and a presidential statement ahead of the 17 December 2017 anniversary of the LPA, Council members have often had different sensitivities regarding the way forward to achieve a solution.

The UK is the penholder on Libya, and Sweden chairs the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee.

Western Sahara

Expected Council Action

In March, Council members are expected to meet in consultations to receive a briefing from the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy on Western Sahara, Horst Köhler, who was appointed on 16 August 2017, and Special Representative Colin Stewart, appointed to head the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) on 1 December 2017.

The briefing, originally slated for February, is in response to Resolution 2351, adopted on 28 April 2017. In renewing the mandate of MINURSO for an additional year, the resolution requested the Secretary-General to update the Security Council within six months of the appointment of the new personal envoy. The resolution called for information about the ways in which the envoy, working with the parties, was progressing towards a mutually acceptable political solution that would provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara; how MINURSO's performance measures were being developed and implemented; and how structures and staffing could be reorganised to achieve mission goals efficiently.

MINURSO's mandate expires on 30 April.

Key Recent Developments

Köhler has been holding consultations with various actors in relation to Western Sahara. He met representatives of the Polisario Front in Berlin in late January. Reports indicate that he had extended an invitation to Morocco to meet with him separately in Berlin as well. However, this meeting did not materialise. He also met with representatives of neighbouring countries Algeria and Mauritania in Berlin, and with Chairperson of the AU Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat in Addis Ababa on 12 January.

Early in the year, tensions heightened on the ground in the area of Al-Guerguerat, in the buffer strip below the Berm near the Mauritanian border. On 5 January, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) sent a letter to the Council with an update on developments in the context of the "Africa Eco Race", during which vehicles in an auto rally were scheduled to cross through the buffer strip in the Al-Guerguerat area on

8 January on their way to Mauritania.

The note said that on 29 December 2017, three apparently unarmed uniformed personnel of the Polisario Front arrived in Al-Guerguerat and informed MINURSO military observers there that the Polisario intended to stop vehicles participating in the auto rally. On 3 January, three Polisario uniformed personnel temporarily took up position in Al-Guerguerat and stopped several vehicles approaching the border before allowing them to proceed.

Also that day, Polisario's coordinator with MINURSO conveyed to the mission that the group viewed such races as a violation by Morocco of the terms of the ceasefire and that it would not accept the passage of the race through Al-Guerguerat. He also recalled Polisario's warning that, unless the provisions of resolution 2351 were implemented, the Polisario was ready to redeploy to Al-Guerguerat at any time. In particular, the Polisario insisted that the provision contained in operative paragraph 3 of the resolution, whereby the Council recognised that the recent crisis in the buffer strip in Al-Guerguerat "raises fundamental questions related to the ceasefire and related agreements and encourages the Secretary-General to explore ways that such questions can be resolved", must be implemented.

In discussions with Stewart, the Moroccan coordinator on 4 January warned of serious consequences in case of interference with the auto rally and noted that the presence of uniformed Polisario elements, which he characterised as "military", constituted a violation of Military Agreement No. 1 of the 1991 ceasefire.

On 5 January, eight Polisario personnel in two vehicles took up position in the buffer strip at Al-Guerguerat. They wore police uniforms but insisted that they were unarmed and had no orders to interfere with the race. The Moroccan coordinator reiterated his position of the day before, indicating that the mere presence of Polisario personnel, in whatever uniform, was a "provocation", and that Morocco considered their presence unacceptable regardless of whether or not they interfered with the race. In the end, the Polisario personnel remained in place and the race went on without incident.

Council members were last briefed on Western Sahara in consultations on 22

November 2017 by Köhler and the outgoing Special Representative, Kim Bolduc, on her final day on the job.

The last Council outcome on Western Sahara was resolution 2351 of 28 April 2017, which renewed MINURSO's mandate. The resolution called on the parties to resume negotiations under the auspices of the Secretary-General without preconditions and in good faith to facilitate a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution. The resolution reaffirmed the need to fully respect military agreements reached with MINURSO on the ceasefire and called for full adherence to those accords, and it recognised that the crisis in the Al-Guerguerat buffer strip that began in August 2016 raised fundamental questions about the ceasefire and related agreements.

Key Issues and Options

The main issue is that the parties to the conflict remain deadlocked and the political process has stalled because the parties' respective proposals for the basis of a political solution as outlined in 2007 are mutually exclusive. The Council may consider ways in which it can support the new personal envoy in his endeavours to convene a fifth round of negotiations between the parties. Council members may consider how they can encourage the parties, collectively or bilaterally, to approach such talks in good faith.

Council Dynamics

Council members are deeply divided on how they view the conflict. These divisions have rendered the Council largely unable to agree to outcomes on Western Sahara, even during successive recent crises. Following Morocco's expulsion of MINURSO's civilian component in March 2016 and the crisis in Al-Guerguerat that August, the Council remained mostly silent because of the insistence of some members, notably permanent member France, which staunchly supports the Moroccan position concerning Western Sahara.

The African members of the Council do not have a common position. As with the composition of the Council last year, it appears that Ethiopia is the only African member that recognises an independent Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), as

UN DOCUMENTS ON WESTERN SAHARA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2351 (28 April 2017) renewed the mandate of MINURSO for one year. Security Council Letters S/2017/1003 (22 November 2017) was from the Secretary-General, expressing his intention to appoint Colin Stewart (Canada) as his Special Representative for Western Sahara and head of MINURSO. S/2017/462 (25 May 2017) was from the Secretary-General, expressing his intention to appoint Horst Köhler as his new Personal Envoy for Western Sahara. S/2007/210 (16 April 2007) was from South Africa to the Council, transmitting the Polisario plan. S/2007/206 (11 April 2007) was from Morocco to the Council, transmitting the Moroccan plan.

Western Sahara

proclaimed by the Polisario in 1976. Neither Côte d'Ivoire nor Equatorial Guinea recognise SADR, and so once again there is unlikely to be a unified African position in the Council.

No other new Council member recognises

SADR. However, continuing member Bolivia does, and the parliament of another member, Sweden, voted to recognise Western Sahara in 2012. The Swedish government has not implemented this.

The US is the penholder on Western Sahara, and resolutions on Western Sahara are initially discussed among the Group of Friends (France, Russia, the UK, and the US, joined by Spain, the former colonial power).

Lake Chad Basin

Expected Council Action

The Netherlands, as Council president in March, is organising a briefing on the Lake Chad Basin, with a specific focus on the root causes of the Boko Haram crisis. Speakers are expected to include representatives from the Secretariat, possibly the Lake Chad Basin Commission, and a civil society organisation.

Key Recent Developments

The Boko Haram insurgency continues into its ninth year, affecting north-eastern Nigeria, Cameroon's Far North region, the Diffa region of Niger, and the Lac region of Chad. When the Special Representative and head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Mohamed Ibn Chambas, briefed the Council in January this year, he noted that Boko Haram suicide attacks using children numbered 135 cases in 2017, a five-fold increase compared to 2016. The terrorist group, which has declared loyalty to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), has increasingly relied on such asymmetric attacks while regional militaries, including the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), have taken back most of the territory held by the group over the past three years.

According to OCHA, more than 2.3 million people were displaced by the violence across the Lake Chad Basin as of 22 January. Borno State, Nigeria, remains the epicentre of the violence and the humanitarian crisis, accounting for over 1.3 million of the 1.6 million displaced persons in north-eastern Nigeria. Cameroon's Far North region is the second most-affected area, with an estimated 236,000 people internally displaced and hosted 89,000 Nigerian refugees.

On 8 February, the UN launched its 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan for north-east Nigeria, seeking \$1.05 billion in order to reach 6.1 million people with assistance. During its launch, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Nigeria Edward Kallon said the humanitarian response had been significantly scaled up over the previous year and described the "protracted nature of the crisis". By the end of 2017, 3,000 humanitarian workers were present—more than three times as many as in 2016—five humanitarian hubs were established, including in hard-to-reach areas such as Bama and Gwoza, and food insecurity in north-east Nigeria had fallen from 5.1 million to 3.9 million. The 2018 plan outlines a three-pronged approach meant to address: (1) peacebuilding, political and security challenges; (2) further scaling-up and consolidating the humanitarian response; and (3) tackling the root causes of the crisis, including underdevelopment and governance concerns, poverty and climate vulnerabilities. Three months earlier, from 2 to 4 November 2017, the AU and the Lake Chad Basin Commission, an intergovernmental organisation that oversees water and other natural resource usage in the basin, organised a regional stabilisation conference in N'Djamena. The meeting was held as a possible first step towards developing a regional strategy to address the root causes of the Boko Haram crisis.

On 25 February, the Nigerian government confirmed that 110 school girls remained missing following a suspected Boko Haram attack on a boarding school in Dapchi, Yobe State six days earlier.

The Security Council last held a dedicated session on the Lake Chad Basin on 13 September 2017. It considered the

Secretary-General's first report to the Council specifically on the crisis, which the Council had requested in resolution 2349, adopted on 31 March 2017. In a 30 January presidential statement on the West Africa and Sahel region, the Council reiterated that the Secretary-General should include an assessment of the implementation of resolution 2349 in his regular UNOWAS reporting, with specific attention in his next report on the region in July.

The next day, on 31 January, the Secretariat provided a "situational awareness" briefing—these are informal briefings for Council members to be informed by the Secretariat on situations of concern—on the Lake Chad Basin. Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour briefed on behalf of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Boko Haram. Meanwhile, the Council's Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security held a 30 January session on the Lake Chad Basin. Briefers included Kallon and UNOWAS Deputy Special Representative Ruby Sandhu-Rojon. Discussion covered sexual exploitation in internally displaced persons camps and efforts to ensure a gender perspective in the counter-terrorism strategy for a crisis in which women and girls have been subjected to forced marriages and used as suicide bombers.

Issues and Options

The situation in the Lake Chad Basin is characterised as a protection and displacement crisis, with lower levels of hostilities but an increase in asymmetric attacks. The upcoming Council meeting is meant to focus on the root causes of the crisis, which resolution 2349 was notable for highlighting. These root causes were identified as poverty, lack of education, the need for

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE LAKE CHAD BASIN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2349](#) (31 March 2017) was on the Lake Chad Basin. [Security Council Presidential Statements S/PRST/2018/3](#) (30 January 2018) was on the West Africa and Sahel region, which reiterated the Council's call for an assessment of the implementation of resolution 2349 to be integrated into regular UNOWAS reporting. [S/PRST/2017/14](#) (9 August 2017) was on the threat of famine in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and north-east Nigeria. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8156](#) (11 January 2018) was a briefing by Special Representative Mohamed Ibn Chambas on the West Africa and Sahel region. [S/PV.8047](#) (13 September 2017) was a briefing by Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin region. [Secretary-General's Reports S/2017/1104](#) (26 December 2017) was on the West Africa and Sahel. [S/2017/764](#) (7 September 2017) was on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin region.

Lake Chad Basin

job creation and economic development, poor governance, and the impact of climate change and the shrinking of Lake Chad. During the Council visiting mission to the region prior to the adoption of resolution 2349, government and UN officials that the Council met with said that these factors have fostered radicalisation and, unless addressed, are likely to cause continued instability.

Having recently adopted a presidential statement on West Africa and the Sahel that requested more detailed reporting on the Lake Chad Basin, it appears unlikely that the Council will adopt a new product at the upcoming session as it awaits the next UNOWAS report. Council members may issue a press statement reiterating the importance of the response of countries in the region and of the UN in addressing the underlying challenges facing the Lake Chad Basin, expressing support for the 2018 humanitarian response plan, and calling on donors to contribute to the plan.

Council Dynamics

Several members have sought to maintain Council attention to the Lake Chad Basin following the Council's March 2017 visiting mission and adoption of resolution 2349 later that month. Following the Secretary-General's September report on the Lake Chad Basin, he has provided further updates on the situation, as requested in resolution 2349, through UNOWAS and the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), which the UN had already been doing as part of these offices' bi-annual reports on regional developments. Some members have found this arrangement insufficient, and during consultations in January with Chambas on UNOWAS they expressed their concerns about the reporting. Thus, the presidential statement on UNOWAS included a request for more detailed reporting on the Lake Chad Basin in the next UNOWAS report due in July. It seems that this critique may have prompted the Secretariat's situational awareness briefing at the end of January.

One challenge for the Secretary-General in this reporting is that there is no mandated UN presence across the Lake Chad Basin countries to report more closely from the ground than UNOWAS and UNOCA, which monitor developments from Dakar and Libreville, respectively. This has so far also resulted in somewhat fragmented reporting on the situation, as Boko Haram's presence exists across both regions covered by the two offices. A related issue seems to be identifying what greater role the Security Council can play at this point besides generating international attention to the crisis, which for much of its history has been overlooked by the Council and the broader international community. Council members have continued to call for the region to develop a strategy that tackles the drivers that contributed to the emergence of Boko Haram and longer-term development needs.

The UK has served as the penholder on the Lake Chad Basin.

Conflict and Hunger

Expected Council Action

In March, at the initiative of the Council president, the Netherlands, the Council is expected to hold a high-level briefing on conflict and hunger. Possible briefers include representatives of the UN's Rome-based agencies.

Key Recent Developments

In response to a 21 February 2017 letter from Secretary-General António Guterres to member states, the Security Council began focusing considerable attention last year on the risk of famine facing a number of conflict situations on its agenda—north-eastern Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen. In his letter, Guterres highlighted the global food crisis and warned that without decisive action, 20 million people in these four countries were at risk of famine.

Council members sought to respond to this warning, organising an Arria-formula session on the risk of famine in these

countries on 16 June 2017. The Council then adopted a presidential statement on 9 August 2017 that expressed grave concern about the threat of famine presently facing Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and north-east Nigeria. The statement deplored the failure of certain parties in these conflicts to ensure unfettered and sustained access for deliveries of vital food assistance and other aid, and called on member states to provide resources and funding to avert famine.

In October 2017, Guterres briefed the Council on progress towards addressing the famine risks in these countries, an update that the Council had requested in its August statement. The Secretary-General described a scaled-up humanitarian response that had managed to keep famine "at bay". This included donors having delivered on nearly 70 percent of funding requirements for relief efforts. The number of people at risk, however, had increased, which included, according to

Guterres, an additional 5 million severely food insecure people in South Sudan since the start of 2017. Guterres noted that of the 815 million people globally suffering from hunger, 60 percent "live in the shadow of conflict".

Concerns over the risk of famine in Yemen were elevated in November 2017 when the Saudi Arabia-led coalition imposed a complete blockade of the country following the 4 November firing of a ballistic missile by Houthi rebels towards Riyadh. Yemeni government-controlled entry points were reopened after one week, but the coalition did not restore access to the rebel-held Hodeidah port, through which around 70 percent of Yemeni imports pass, until 26 November. The coalition has since announced that Hodeidah would remain open for 30-day periods and allowed in January delivery of World Food Programme (WFP)-procured cranes to replace those destroyed by airstrikes, after having prevented the delivery for a year. A January report

UN DOCUMENTS ON CONFLICT AND HUNGER [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2017/14](#) (9 August 2017) was on the threat of famine in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and north-east Nigeria. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8069](#) (12 October 2017) was a briefing by the Secretary-General on "country-specific impediments to an effective response to the risk of famine in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and northeast Nigeria". [S/PV.7897](#) (10 March 2017) was a briefing on the humanitarian situation in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and the Lake Chad Basin. [Other S/2018/68](#) (26 January 2018) was the final report of the Yemen Panel of Experts. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017. Building resilience for peace and food security.* FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2017.

Conflict and Hunger

by the Panel of Experts monitoring the Yemen sanctions regime described the blockade as “using the threat of starvation as an instrument of war”, and recommended that the Security Council call on the Saudi-led coalition not to misuse the Council-mandated arms embargo as a justification to obstruct the delivery of essential goods and humanitarian aid. The report also described access constraints and diversion of aid inside Yemen by the Houthis.

Meanwhile, in north-eastern Nigeria, a significantly increased humanitarian response over the course of 2017 saw a reduction in the number of people facing food insecurity from 5.1 million to 3.9 million. At the launch of the UN’s 2018 humanitarian response plan for north-east Nigeria on 8 February, UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria Edward Kallon noted that an estimated 930,000 people are in areas that are hard to access because of insecurity. In Somalia, a drought continues, along with violent conflict, to create food insecurity for more than half the population, according to the 2018 humanitarian response plan for the country. On 26 February, the WFP, the United Nations Children’s Fund and the Food and Agriculture Organisation warned that 7.1 million people in South Sudan—nearly two-thirds of the population—could become severely food insecure in the coming months.

Key Issues and Options

The upcoming session is being organised to follow up last October’s Council briefing on the four countries that are threatened by famine. The meeting, however, is not meant to be limited to these four countries. It is intended to also consider more broadly a trend in food insecurity linked to conflict, and to raise awareness of international laws and norms to protect civilian populations from hunger and food insecurity during war. According to last year’s inter-UN agency report *The State of Food Security and Nutrition*, the increase in global food insecurity, in which 2017 recorded the most food insecure people since 2000, can be traced to the greater number of conflicts, often exacerbated by climate-related shocks. The report further states that “conflict is a key driver of situations of severe food crisis”.

Key issues include obstacles to humanitarian access and ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law. Other factors that contribute to hunger in conflict are threats to food sources, such as infrastructure for delivering food and insecurity from fighting that hinders access to farmland; while underlying fragilities, such as climate change, underdevelopment and poverty, make some countries in conflict more vulnerable to hunger crises. In considering the link between conflict and hunger, another issue that may

be raised is how food insecurity can create tensions that lead to conflict.

While no specific Council product is envisioned for this session, issuing a Council statement reaffirming the prohibition on starving civilians during conflict, and the obligations of parties to armed conflict to comply with international humanitarian law could be an option.

Council Dynamics

There have been some divergent views among members about the role of the Council in addressing the issue of hunger and famine in conflict situations. Russia initially objected to the presidential statement eventually adopted in August, feeling the issue was not appropriate for the Council. Several other members during negotiations on the statement also raised concerns about over-emphasising the link between conflict and famine at the expense of other contributing factors.

The P3, Sweden, and last year’s African Council members (Egypt, Ethiopia and Senegal) were among the co-sponsors of the Arria-formula session that initiated Council efforts to more broadly consider the risk of famine facing some of the conflict situations it was seized with. Sweden initiated and served as penholder for the presidential statement.

UNDOF (Golan Heights)

Expected Council Action

In March, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations will brief Council members in consultations on the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). No outcome is expected.

UNDOF was established in 1974 to monitor the ceasefire between Israel and Syria. Its mandate, which is renewed bi-annually, expires on 30 June.

Key Recent Developments

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a rare visit to the Golan Heights on 6 February. Netanyahu was accompanied to a hilltop observation point, some three kilometres from the 1974 ceasefire line, by his security cabinet. According to a statement by the prime

minister’s office, Israel’s armed forces chief and the military commander of the northern region briefed the group on the security situation in the area. In broadcast remarks made during the visit, Netanyahu asserted that Israel is “prepared for any scenario and I wouldn’t suggest to anyone that they test us”.

On 23 January, the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation reported that the Palestinian militant Islamist group Hamas was seeking to set up a military force in the Syrian Golan Heights to fire rockets at Israel. The broadcaster quoted Israeli security sources as saying that Iran had instructed Hamas to set up such a force in order to strike Israel from the north.

The 6 December 2017 report of the Secretary-General, covering the period from 10

September to 24 November, noted that during the reporting period the ceasefire between Israel and Syria was maintained, albeit in a volatile environment attributable to the ongoing conflict in Syria and notwithstanding a number of violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement of 1974.

There were three reports of spillover fire from the Bravo (Syrian) side across the ceasefire line into the Alpha (Israeli) side during the reporting period, on 18, 19 and 21 October. While open sources reported that the IDF responded to the incidents with retaliatory fire across the ceasefire line, UNDOF was unable to confirm the incidents.

According to the report, Syrian armed forces and non-state armed opposition groups

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE GOLAN HEIGHTS Security Council Resolution S/RES/2394 (21 December 2017) renewed the mandate of UNDOF until 30 June 2018. **Secretary-General’s Report S/2017/1024** (6 December 2017) was the report on UNDOF covering the period from 10 September to 24 November.

UNDOF (Golan Heights)

engaged in exchanges of heavy weapons fire in the area of separation and the area of limitation on the Bravo side, while various armed groups, including Jabhat Fath al-Sham, which is listed as a terrorist group by the Security Council, and Jaysh Khalid Ibn al-Walid, which pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, continued to exchange fire in the UNDOF area of operation.

Fighting intensified on 3 November in the northern part of the area of separation and the area of limitation on the Bravo side when armed groups launched an attack involving heavy machine gun, small arms, and indirect fire from the tri-village area of Jubbata al-Khashab, Turunjah and Ufaniyah in the area of separation against pro-government forces in the vicinity of Hadar, largely inhabited by members of the Druze community. Preceding the attack, open sources reported that a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device targeted a pro-Syrian forces checkpoint in Hadar, killing nine people.

On the same day, approximately 200 civilians from Majdal Shams, which is inhabited by members of the Druze community on the Alpha side, gathered at the Israeli technical fence gate leading to UN observation post 73, reportedly in support of the Druze community in Hadar. The civilians dismantled the Israeli technical fence gate and crossed the ceasefire line. Approximately 150 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) personnel, equipped with riot control equipment, were deployed in the area.

During the reporting period, UNDOF made progress towards the limited return to Bravo-side operations, in line with the phased UNDOF plan. Following the completion of phase one of the plan, with the re-establishment of the UNDOF presence at Camp Faouar on 14 November 2016, UNDOF continued to develop the infrastructure at Camp Faouar and steadily improve the living conditions at the camp. Phase two will involve, over a period of six to eight months, the resumption of limited patrolling of the northern part of the area of separation by the Nepalese mechanised infantry company from Camp Faouar.

Human Rights-Related Developments

The Human Rights Council will consider the Secretary-General's report on human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan (A/HRC/37/40) and the report of the High Commissioner for Human

Rights on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan (A/HRC/37/43), during its 37th session in March.

Key Issues and Options

Considering the security situation in the Golan, the full return of UNDOF to the Syrian side seems unlikely in the foreseeable future. This is a significant issue in as much as it constrains the mission's ability to carry out its monitoring tasks.

An ongoing issue for the Council is the violation of the ceasefire on numerous occasions, including the presence of Syrian heavy weapons in the area of separation monitored by UNDOF and Syrian and Israeli airstrikes. No military forces other than those of UNDOF are allowed in the area of separation.

The Council is, however, rather limited in its options for UNDOF. It was established as a Syria-based mission, and how it operates, including the use of enhanced equipment or new technologies, is subject to the disengagement agreement. Any changes require agreement by Israel and Syria, which is unlikely, as is any outcome in March.

Council and Wider Dynamics

There is general agreement within the Council that UNDOF contributes to stability in the region given the absence of a peace agreement between Israel and Syria. The mission's observation role has been limited since its September 2014 relocation to the Alpha side of the ceasefire line. However, the mission's liaison function continues to be considered important in avoiding further negative developments in the region.

Israel and Syria value UNDOF's presence and want to see the mission return to the Bravo side. However, the security situation on the Syrian side is still not conducive to full redeployment of UNDOF troops. Council members continue to support the eventual complete return of UNDOF to the Bravo side but are mindful that this would require a favourable security environment, which is crucial for maintaining the confidence of troop-contributing countries.

Since June 2012, Russia and the US have been the co-penholders on resolutions renewing UNDOF.

Security Council Report Staff

Ian Martin
Executive Director

Joanna Weschler
Deputy Executive Director

Shamala Kandiah Thompson
Deputy Executive Director

Paul Romita
Senior Policy Analyst

Victor Casanova Abos
Policy Analyst

Lindiwe Knutson
Policy Analyst

Dahlia Morched
Policy Analyst

Vladimir Sesar
Policy Analyst

Eran Sthoeger
Policy Analyst

Benjamin Villanti
Policy Analyst

Robbin VanNewkirk
Website Manager

Audrey Waysse
Operations Manager

Maritza Lopez
Administrative Assistant

Kaitlyn Lynes
Research Assistant

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Security Council Report
One Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza
885 2nd Ave at 48th St, 21st Floor
New York NY 10017

Telephone +1 212 759 6394
Fax +1 212 759 4038
Web securitycouncilreport.org
whatsinblue.org