



SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT UPDATE REPORT



23 June 2009 No. 3

LIBERIA

Expected Council Action

On Thursday 25 June the Council will meet in closed consultations to discuss the Secretary-General's report on the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) which was issued on 10 June. A briefing by Alain Le Roy, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations who just visited Liberia is likely. UNMIL's mandate expires on 30 September 2009.

There will also be a briefing by the chairman of the Liberia Sanctions Committee, Libyan Ambassador Abdurrahman Mohamed Shalgham. The Committee received the midterm report from the Liberia Panel of Experts at the end of May and met on 16 June. At the time of writing no outcome was expected although the recent visit of a Council mission to Liberia has certainly focused the members' understanding of the issues.

Key Recent Developments

On 19 and 20 May the Council visited Liberia as part of its five-day, four-country mission to Africa. (Its last visit to the country took place in 2004, soon after the establishment of UNMIL.) The main purpose of the visit was to assess progress made and evaluate whether conditions were ripe for a further drawdown of the mission.

The Council's visit included a meeting with the International Contact Group on Liberia (comprised of Monrovia-based ambassadors of Nigeria, the US, the AU, Sweden, France, the UK, Germany, the European Commission, Spain and the Economic Community of West African States who were also joined by representatives of China and Libya), a visit to the Indian female police unit of UNMIL, a tour of Monrovia's largest prison and a visit to a rehabilitation centre for ex-combatants. In addition, the delegation met representatives of civil society, the members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and leaders of key private companies operating in Liberia. The Council also met with Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

In her briefing to the Council after the trip, Ambassador Susan Rice of the US, who led the Council delegation in Liberia, pointed in particular to the security situation as still fragile with several risk factors remaining and potentially destabilising future events like the 2011 elections on the horizon. Much more progress was still needed in developing Liberia's own security institutions. The mission's presence therefore remained of critical importance. Rice also noted that the members of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had argued during their meeting

with Council members against any easing of Council sanctions against individuals under the Liberia sanctions regime.

In June Liberia received other high-level visits from the UN. The new administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Helen Clark, chose Liberia as the first country to travel to after taking up her position. During her visit on 11 and 12 June she expressed satisfaction at progress made and also reaffirmed the UNDP's commitment to help rebuild the country. On 14 June Le Roy arrived in the country for a three-day visit to meet with senior UNMIL and government officials to discuss key security issues.

The Secretary-General's special report on UNMIL of 10 June was issued in response to the Council's request for further recommendations on additional adjustments to the mission. The report's recommendations are based on the findings of a technical assessment mission that visited Liberia from 26 April to 6 May. Similar to the conclusions from the Council's Liberia visit, it notes that several key challenges still remain, including:

- an extremely fragile security situation, mainly due to the limited capacity of the country's security and judicial institutions and destabilising factors like corruption, land disputes and high youth unemployment that are expected to be exacerbated by the global economic crisis;
- the presence of a large number of ex-combatants who have retained their old command structures and are well organised;
- political tensions which are only expected to increase as presidential and legislative elections in 2011 approach, including divisions on the national reconciliation process and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; and
- the situation in the subregion, in particular the uncertain political situation in some neighbouring countries.

The report also provides an assessment of the implementation of the core drawdown benchmarks for UNMIL which were listed in the Secretary-General's August 2007 report presenting the initial drawdown plan. It concludes that progress in achieving the benchmarks has been uneven and points in particular to the fact that key security institutions like the Liberia National Police and the Armed Forces of Liberia still do not have the capacity to operate independently. UNMIL's presence in Liberia is therefore seen as crucial at least until after the 2011 elections.

For UNMIL's third drawdown stage, which would run from October 2009 to May 2010, the Secretary-General recommends a reduction in the mission's military strength by 2,029 troops but no change in the police component. He also recommends that UNMIL maintains the current strength of 250 for the unit in charge of security at the Special Court for Sierra Leone until the court concludes its work (possibly in late 2010). This would bring UNMIL's total military strength down to 8,202 by May 2010 (the initial authorised strength was 15,000) while the police component would remain at 1,375. In addition, a reduction in excess combat equipment is expected to result in substantial savings.

The report foresees no further reductions before the elections. However, the recommendations represent an acceleration of the plan first presented in 2007, which envisaged that the third drawdown stage would run from September 2009 until December 2010. More detailed recommendations on the security needs during the electoral period will be included in the Secretary-General's next report on Liberia, due on 15 August. It will be based on the findings of

a joint Department of Political Affairs/UNDP electoral needs assessment mission that visited Liberia in May.

From 15 to 20 June the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hosted a national conference in Monrovia to discuss the best way to carry forward the process of national reconciliation and rehabilitation in Liberia. Participants included Liberians representing all 15 counties, the diaspora, the private sector, the government and civil society, as well as UN and international NGO representatives. The commission is expected to release its final report to the government by the end of June. In the first volume of its final report, released on 19 December 2008, it recommended that individuals and groups found to be responsible for serious crimes, including violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, should be prosecuted in a special criminal court but said that more detailed recommendations on such a court would be included in the final consolidated report. The commissioners have apparently been divided on the recommendation to establish a court.

In the trial in The Hague of former Liberian President Charles Taylor a request for acquittal by Taylor's defence team was rejected on 4 May. The trial is now scheduled to resume on 13 July when Taylor will present his defence.

On 8 June the Liberia Sanctions Committee removed another individual from the travel ban and assets freeze lists: Talal Eldine (Lebanese businessman and paymaster of former President Charles Taylor's inner circle). It also updated information on others.

Key Issues

While there seems to be agreement that UNMIL's presence remains crucial in maintaining security, particularly for the presidential and legislative elections in 2011, a key question is how large UNMIL needs to be for this purpose. Several potentially destabilising future events must be taken into account, including the release of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in June, the expected verdict in the trial of Charles Taylor in 2010 and the presidential and legislative elections in 2011. A related key issue is the pace of progress in developing Liberian security structures and security sector reform.

Regional issues also remain important. Liberia's security situation could be cross infected from negative developments in neighbouring countries. In addition, destabilising factors such as high youth unemployment, high numbers of underemployed and unemployed ex-combatants, drug trafficking and food insecurity are affecting the whole subregion of West Africa. They are likely to be exacerbated by the global financial crisis, which already seems to have had an adverse impact on the overall situation in Liberia.

Options

The main option for the Council is to whether to endorse the recommendations in the Secretary-General's report. However, the Council is in no rush to make a decision as UNMIL's current mandate does not expire until 30 September and any adjustments before that are very unlikely. In-depth discussions on the drawdown plan will most likely not take place until the Secretary-General's next report on UNMIL, due on 15 August, has been issued.

Council Dynamics

Views differ among Council members on the best approach to UNMIL's drawdown. France seems to prefer a faster reduction in order to release limited peacekeeping resources for use

elsewhere. The Secretary-General's proposal seems partially to respond to such concerns by suggesting that the third drawdown phase be shortened by seven months (it would end in May instead of December 2010 as initially envisaged). Others, however, and in particular the US, are opposed to an accelerated process, arguing that the situation remains very fragile and that what today can be described as a relative success story could easily become another repeated crisis in a very volatile region. Most Council members seem to prefer a balanced approach. There seems to be awareness that Liberia is an important test case for UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

Council members seem to agree on the need to continue the current sanctions regime on various individuals in Liberia.

UN Documents

Selected Security Council Resolutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S/RES/1854 (19 December 2008) renewed the arms and travel sanctions for a further 12 months and extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts that monitors implementation of the sanctions regime until 20 December 2009. • S/RES/1836 (29 September 2008) renewed UNMIL's mandate for 12 months and endorsed the Secretary-General's recommendations for the mission's drawdown.
Selected Secretary-General's Reports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S/2009/299 (10 June 2009) was the Secretary-General's special report on UNMIL. • S/2009/86 (10 February 2009) was the latest regular UNMIL report. • S/2007/479 (8 August 2007) was the Secretary-General's initial drawdown plan for UNMIL.
Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S/2009/290 (5 June 2009) was the midterm report of the Panel of Experts on Liberia. • S/PV.6131 (28 May 2009) was the meeting record from the briefing on the Council mission to Africa. • S/2009/47 (20 January 2009) and S/2009/109 (24 February 2009) were letters from the Secretary-General appointing the members of the Panel of Experts on Liberia.

Other Relevant Facts

Special Representative of the Secretary-General
Ellen Margrethe Løj (Denmark)
UNMIL Force Commander
Lieutenant-General A.T.M Zahirul Alam (Bangladesh)
UNMIL: Size, Composition and Cost
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Strength as of 31 March 2009:</i> 11,345 military and 1,218 police • <i>Key contributing countries:</i> Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Pakistan • <i>Cost:</i> 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010: approx. \$575 million
UNMIL: Duration
September 2003 to present; mandate expires 30 September 2009
Chairman of the Liberia Sanctions Committee
Abdurrahman Mohamed Shalgham (Libya)
Panel of Experts on Liberia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas R. Creal (US, expert on finance) • Wynet V. Smith (Canada, expert on natural resources and coordinator of the Panel) • Hervé Gonsolin (France, expert on arms)

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Security Council Report is published with the support of the Governments of Canada, Greece, Liechtenstein and Norway, The Rockefeller Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. It is incorporated as a not for profit Organisation and operates in affiliation with the Center on International Organization in the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University in New York.

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