

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

During its April presidency of the Security Council, China plans to organise two open debates, one on the issue of [counter-terrorism](#) and another with a focus on [piracy in the Gulf of Guinea](#) in the context of peace consolidation in West Africa.

Early in the month the Council is expected to adopt a resolution on the [review of the UN peacebuilding architecture](#), which member states have been negotiating since mid-January. It will be adopted as concurrent resolutions in both the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Sudan/South Sudan issues will feature prominently on the Council’s programme of work. Council members are considering whether to impose an arms embargo on [South Sudan](#) to put pressure on the parties to comply with the August 2015 peace agreement. It is unclear if any of the longstanding divisions among Council members regarding a possible arms embargo can be overcome by the time the 2206 sanctions regime expires on 15 April. There will also be the regular meetings to discuss developments in relation to [UNAMID in Darfur](#), [UNMISS in South Sudan](#) and [UNISFA in Abyei](#).

Other African issues the Council will consider in April are:

- [Central African Republic](#), the renewal of MINUSCA;
- [Côte d’Ivoire](#), the activities of UNOCI and

action on the 1572 sanctions regime;

- [Mali](#), the activities of MINUSMA; and
- [Western Sahara](#), the renewal of MINURSO, which is expected to be particularly contentious following the evacuation of dozens of mission staff in March at Morocco’s request.

Council members will continue to monitor [Syria](#), including the talks in Geneva, how the cessation of hostilities is holding and humanitarian access. Council members will receive their regular monthly briefings on the political, chemical weapons and humanitarian tracks in Syria.

Other Middle East issues that will be considered this month are:

- [Israel/Palestine](#), the quarterly open debate; and
- [Yemen](#), the regular briefing held every other month.

In late March France revived negotiations on a Council outcome on [Burundi](#), circulating a draft resolution expressing the Council’s intention to strengthen the UN’s presence there through a police component. The text was originally circulated as a draft presidential statement in February, but consensus could not be reached.

Finally, Council members will be closely following efforts to form a government of national accord in [Libya](#).

In Hindsight: Making Effective Use of “Any Other Business”

Over the last year, there has been a marked increase in the use of the agenda item “any other business” (AOB) by Council members. As a standing agenda item for any consultations, it allows Council members to discuss a range of issues. In 2015, there were 56 substantive discussions under AOB relating to issues on the Council’s agenda as well as some that were not. This was more than double the number in 2014, and it appears to be a growing trend: there were 14 substantive AOB discussions this February.

There are a number of reasons for the greater use of the AOB format. In part, this trend can be traced to a renewed interest in making better use of conflict prevention tools at the Council’s disposal and the discontinuation of the Secretariat providing “horizon-scanning” briefings, which were used to bring emerging issues to the Council’s attention. While the formal request to discuss an issue comes from a Council member, the Secretariat has initiated a briefing under AOB more than 20 times in the last two years. The most recent was its request

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In Hindsight: Making Effective Use of “Any Other Business” (con’t)

to brief on Western Sahara on 18 March, when Morocco announced that it intended to reduce the civilian component of the UN mission there. Secretariat requests are in line with the spirit of Article 99 of the UN Charter, which states that the Secretary-General may bring to the Security Council’s attention any matter that may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.

Over the years, Council members have used AOB to introduce drafts, discuss specific incidents, or allow chairs of subsidiary bodies to brief on a particular issue. While it is still used for these reasons, there has been a significant increase in substantive briefings under AOB. The humanitarian situations in Palestine, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen have recently been covered under AOB. Political developments, particularly related to elections or the implementation of peace agreements, prompted requests for AOB briefings on the Central African Republic (CAR), Guinea-Bissau, Libya and Mali. Among the situations that had at least four AOB briefings in 2015 were Burundi, CAR, Mali, Syria and Yemen.

This format was also used to keep abreast of developments regarding situations not on the Council’s agenda, such as Burkina Faso, Guinea and Nepal. Discussing the appointment process for the next Secretary-General under AOB provided a way to informally exchange initial views on how the process might develop.

The mix of issues suggests that, while there are times this format is used as a conflict prevention tool, its regular use has been for additional discussions on issues that are already full-blown conflicts, such as Mali, Syria and Yemen.

The AOB format has also been used to get information that could impact upcoming Council decisions. For example, Council members were briefed in January under AOB on the Secretary-General’s request for the Council to authorise a troop increase for the UN Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR, as some members wanted more information on why this increase was needed. In 2015, the AOB format was used to introduce draft texts on Boko Haram, the interdiction of vessels involved in smuggling migrants in the high seas of the Mediterranean by the EU Naval Force and the Iran nuclear deal. This format has also been used to try to resolve differences that have arisen during negotiations of draft texts, as was seen recently on the appointment of the prosecutor for the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals.

One reason this format is used for some issues already on the agenda is that it is conducive to discreet discussions of more sensitive matters. There is no public record of AOB topics and fewer Secretariat officials are present. For example, Myanmar, which has been on the Council’s agenda since 2006, has been addressed exclusively under AOB since 2014, largely because China has made it clear that this is its preferred format for discussing the issue. Since February 2015 there have been four AOBs on Myanmar.

In the last two years, Council members have used the AOB format to monitor regularly situations that were deteriorating rapidly. This was the case for Burundi, CAR and Yemen last year. Getting timely information has the potential to allow the Council to deal with critical situations that could require

changes to the UN presence on the ground or new Council decisions. However, as these discussions now often involve full briefings by those who would brief in consultations, including at times by video teleconference, there is little to distinguish them from informal consultations. As a result, some members are beginning to question if the AOB format is the most appropriate for these types of briefings.

In recent months, a disturbing trend has emerged, with some requests for AOB discussions appearing to be driven by motivations other than a real desire for useful information or to enable a better Council response. Several members see Russia’s request for briefings on Turkey’s activities in relation to Syria and Iraq in this light. There is also a growing sense that this format is being used by some members to highlight other members’ positions on issues such as Palestine, Syria and Yemen—not necessarily to encourage Council action but to score political points. Back-to-back requests for briefings on Syria, in the context of Russian air-strikes, and on Yemen, in the context of air-strikes by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition supported by the UK, US and others, could be seen in this context. Some members questioned Venezuela’s reasons for requesting three briefings related to Palestine during its presidency in February.

While creative and flexible use of this format should be encouraged, a more selective and interactive approach would enable it to serve as a more useful forum for constructive informal discussions, as well as for possible early warning briefings by the Secretariat. In Hindsight: Making Effective Use of “Any Other Business”

Status Update since our March Forecast

Libya

On 2 March, the head of UNSMIL Martin Kobler briefed the Council on the Secretary-General’s latest report (S/2016/182) and recent political developments (S/PV.7640). The chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Ramlan Ibrahim (Malaysia), briefed as well. On 3 March, the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee met to discuss the final report of its Panel of Experts (S/2016/209). On 14 March, Council members issued a press statement calling for the Presidency Council to take steps to rapidly start working from the

capital, Tripoli (SC/12280). On 15 March, the Council adopted resolution 2273, renewing UNSMIL until 15 June. On 31 March, the Council adopted resolution 2278 renewing the sanctions regime for a year.

Arria-Formula Meeting on Human-Rights

On 2 March, New Zealand and Uruguay co-hosted a closed Arria-formula meeting on human rights in peace operations with the heads of human rights components of five UN peace operations: MONUSCO in

the DRC; UNAMID in Darfur; UNAMI in Iraq; MINUSMA in Mali; and MINUSCA in the CAR.

DPRK

On 2 March, the Council adopted resolution 2270 condemning in the strongest terms the nuclear test conducted by the DPRK on 6 January and its ballistic missile launch of 7 February, and demanded that it comply immediately with its international obligations. On 18 March, Council members held consultations on the DPRK and issued a press

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statement condemning the ballistic missile launches of 10 and 18 March (SC/12293). On 24 March, the Council adopted resolution 2276 extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee, and deciding that the Panel's mandate should apply with respect to measures imposed in resolution 2270. The renewal of the Panel's mandate was originally scheduled for 17 March but was delayed by China, which wanted the US's assistance on the removal of four of the ships listed in resolution 2270 as subject to the asset freeze. On 21 March, the 1718 Committee de-listed the four ships following assurances from China that the ships would no longer use crew from the DPRK (SC/12296).

Council Visiting Mission

Council members undertook a visiting mission to West Africa in early March to Mali, Guinea-Bissau and UNOWAS in Dakar (S/2016/215). On 16 March the Council held a briefing on the visiting mission (S/PV.7647).

Counter-Terrorism

On 8 March, Council members condemned the terrorist attack in Tunisia (SC/12273). On 14 March, the Department of Political Affairs briefed Council members under "any other business" on the terrorist attacks in Côte d'Ivoire and Turkey, issuing a press statement on the Côte d'Ivoire attack (SC/12279). On 22 March, Council members condemned the terrorist attacks in Brussels for which ISIL claimed responsibility (SC/12297). On 28 March, Council members condemned the terrorist attack in Lahore, Pakistan for which Tehrik-e-Taliban claimed responsibility (SC/12306).

Peacekeeping

On 10 March, the Secretary-General briefed the Security Council on his annual report (A/70/729) to the General Assembly on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (S/PV.7642). The next day, the Council adopted resolution 2272 addressing sexual exploitation and abuse in peace operations (S/PV.7643). The adoption was slightly delayed as Egypt, in a rare procedural move, requested a separate vote on its amendment (S/2016/235) to the second operational paragraph of the draft resolution. Angola, China, Egypt, Russia and Venezuela supported the amendment, Senegal abstained and the remaining nine Council

members voted against. Egypt's amendment did not receive nine positive votes and was not accepted. The Council then voted on the un-amended draft resolution that was adopted with 14 votes in favour, and 1 abstention by Egypt. On 31 March, under "any other business", the Department of Field Support briefed Council members on new allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in the CAR.

Iran

On 14 March, Council members met in consultations to discuss Iran's ballistic missile launches on 8 and 9 March.

Afghanistan

On 15 March, the Council held its quarterly debate on Afghanistan (S/PV.7645) which focused on the most recent report of the Secretary-General on UNAMA (S/2016/218). Special Representative and head of UNAMA Nicholas Haysom briefed. The Council adopted resolution 2274, renewing the mandate of UNAMA for one year.

Lebanon

Council members were briefed on 16 March by Special Coordinator for Lebanon Sigrid Kaag and DPKO on the implementation of resolution 1701 and the most recent Secretary-General's UNIFIL report (S/2016/189). The following day they issued a press statement, reaffirming deep concern over the 21-month vacancy in the presidency of Lebanon and the current political stalemate (SC/12287).

Liberia

On 17 March, the Council was briefed (S/PV.7649) by Special Representative and head of UNMIL Farid Zarif on the most recent Secretary-General's UNMIL report (S/2016/169). The head of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, also briefed along with Ambassador Olof Skoog (Sweden), Chair of the Liberia configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. The main focus of the discussion was the upcoming transfer of security responsibilities from UNMIL to the government of Liberia.

Haiti

On 17 March, Special Representative Sandra Honoré briefed the Security Council (S/PV.7651) and presented the Secretary-General's most recent MINUSTAH report (S/2016/225). Her briefing took place following the failure to elect a new president before the end of Michel Martelly's term on

7 February. The next day Council members issued a press statement that called for the completion of the electoral cycle without further delay (SC/12290).

Burundi

On 18 March, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein and Ambassador Jürg Lauber (Switzerland), chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, briefed the Council on the situation in Burundi (S/PV.7652). The Burundian Minister for External Relations and International Cooperation, Alain Nyamitwe, and Ambassador Tuvako Manongi (Tanzania) also addressed the Council.

Human Rights in Crimea

On 18 March, Ukraine organised an Arria-formula meeting on the human rights situation in Crimea with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein briefing.

Great Lakes Region

On 21 March, the Council held an open debate on conflict prevention in the Great Lakes Region. Angola circulated a concept note ahead of the debate (S/2016/223). The Secretary-General, Special Envoy Said Djinnit, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security Smail Chergui and World Bank representative Vijay Pillai briefed the Council (S/PV.7653). On 31 March, the Council adopted a presidential statement on conflict prevention in the region (S/PRST/2016/2).

Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 23 March, Special Representative Maman Sidikou briefed the Council (S/PV.7654) on the most recent MONUSCO report (S/2016/233) and the report on the Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the DRC (S/2016/232). DRC's Foreign Minister Raymond N'tungamulongo also participated. The Council adopted resolution 2277 on 30 March, renewing the mandate of MONUSCO for a year. On 1 March, the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee was briefed on MONUSCO's arms embargo-monitoring mandate and on issues of weapons management in the DRC.

Somalia

The Council adopted a resolution 2275 on 24 March extending the mandate of UNSOM. The resolution emphasises the importance of

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UNSOM's support to the political process, particularly support to the government for the completion of the state formation and constitutional review processes, as well as for preparation of the electoral process.

Food Security

On 29 March, Ambassador Ismael Gaspar Martins (Angola) and Ambassador Román Oyarzun (Spain) co-chaired an Arria-formula meeting on interlinkages between food security and peace. The briefers were: Jose Graziano da Silva, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization; Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, a former World Bank economist

and now a professor at The New School; and Sarah F. Cliffe, Director of New York University's Center on International Cooperation.

Women, Peace, and Security

On 28 March, at the initiative of Angola, the Security Council held an open debate on the role of women in conflict prevention and resolution in Africa (S/PV.7658). Angola circulated a concept note in preparation for the open debate (S/2016/219). Maria Filomena Delgado, Angola's Minister for Family and the Promotion of Women, presided. The Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, briefed along with Assistant

Secretary-General for Political Affairs Tayé-Brook Zerihoun and Ambassador Macharia Kamau of Kenya in his capacity as Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission. Paleki Ayang, Executive Director of the South Sudan Women's Empowerment Network, addressed the Council as a civil society representative.

Golan Heights

On 30 March, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations briefed Council members in consultations on the Secretary-General's latest UNDOF report (S/2016/242).

Western Sahara

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council is expected to adopt a resolution extending the mandate of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The Council will also be watching the situation on the ground closely following the evacuation of dozens of MINURSO staff at Morocco's request.

Key Recent Developments

The fate of the MINURSO mission has been called into question after a public dispute between Morocco and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon over comments made by Ban during his early-March visit to the region. The Secretary-General had been trying for several months to arrange a visit that would include meetings in Rabat, and a visit to MINURSO's headquarters in Laayoune, on the Moroccan-controlled side of the berm. In February, Morocco invited Ban to meet the King on the sidelines of the Arab League summit in Rabat scheduled for 7 April, which would have been after the drafting of the annual report of the Secretary-General on Western Sahara. The Secretary-General decided to travel to the region on 2-7 March, but the King was not available to meet him and Morocco did not agree to him visiting the Laayoune headquarters. Following a visit by his Personal Envoy Christopher Ross to

lay the groundwork for the Secretary-General's trip, Ban instead visited the Smara refugee camp, near Tindouf, Algeria, and a MINURSO team site in Bir Lahlou, in the Polisario-controlled Western Sahara, with the intention of visiting Rabat and Laayoune in July. In remarks made during the visit, Ban referred to Morocco's "occupation" of Western Sahara, triggering an angry backlash from authorities in Rabat. On 15 March Morocco requested that 84 international staffers be removed from the civilian component of MINURSO within three days.

On 17 March, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman briefed members in consultations. He said Morocco had escalated the situation without first attempting diplomatic measures. Feltman reported that the staff members involved perform a wide range of duties, including crucial logistical tasks, and that in their absence the mission could not operate.

Due to divisions in the Council, there was no agreement on issuing a statement. Instead, Council President Ismael Abraão Gaspar Martins (Angola) addressed the media with elements to the press that said that the Council had expressed serious concerns and had decided that members should engage bilaterally in order to ensure the MINURSO mission can continue its work.

On 18 March, Dmitry Titov, Assistant Secretary-General for the Rule of Law and Security Institutions in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, briefed Council members under "any other business" on the implications of a staff pullout. On 20 March it was reported that 73 staff members had left the mission.

At the 21 March noon press briefing, Deputy Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Farhan Haq echoed Feltman's point that MINURSO could no longer fully function. He said the UN complied due to logistical and security concerns but compliance does not constitute a determination that Morocco has sovereignty over the territory. Haq added that Morocco had violated its status of mission agreement, and obligations under Article 25 of the UN Charter. He stated that the Secretary-General had not made a mistake in using the term "occupation" and that the term had been used in General Assembly resolutions in 1979 and 1980.

At an informal meeting of Council permanent representatives that same day, Angola proposed a press statement, which it later circulated. The draft press statement expressed deep concern at the departure of a large contingent of MINURSO's staff in response to the 16 March note verbale by Morocco to the Secretary-General; acknowledged that such actions disrupt MINURSO's ability to effectively carry

UN DOCUMENTS ON WESTERN SAHARA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2218 (28 April 2015) extended the mandate of MINURSO until 30 April 2016. **Secretary-General's Reports** S/2015/246 (10 April 2015) was on Western Sahara. S/2014/258 (10 April 2014) was on Western Sahara. **Security Council Letters** 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. **General Assembly Resolutions** A/RES/35/19 (11 November 1980) and A/RES/34/37 (21 November 1979) referred to "the continued occupation of Western Sahara by Morocco". **Other Documents** Note from the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to the Kingdom of Morocco (22 March 2016) that conveyed the Secretariat's deep concern with respect to Morocco's decision that is "contrary to the international legal obligations of the Government".

Western Sahara (con't)

out its mission; underscored that the Council deploys peacekeepers to carry out critical functions and that peacekeeping cannot function if member states unilaterally demand the withdrawal of all civilians from missions established by the Council; urged parties to address the circumstances that led to the situation and urged Morocco to allow MINURSO's staff to return so that MINURSO's activities can continue; and reiterated its full support for the Secretary-General, his Personal Envoy Christopher Ross and Special Representative and head of MINURSO Kim Bolduc.

Such a statement was unacceptable to several Council members whose assessment of what precipitated the crisis differed fundamentally from those expressed in the Angolan statement. Egypt, supported by Senegal, suggested an amendment that added that Morocco's note verbale followed "an unfortunate misrepresentation of the UN's official position on the question of Western Sahara" and removed the language urging Morocco to allow MINURSO's staff to return to the territory. Consensus was not reached on the draft, and negotiations were briefly suspended. On 23 March, Angola circulated a revised draft incorporating some of Egypt's revisions, but also retaining original language that some members had objected to. This version was put under silence procedure, but several members apparently asked for more time. Later that evening, New Zealand circulated a shorter version of the press statement that included more neutral language and omitted direct reference to both the Secretary-General and Morocco.

Also on 23 March, Herve Ladsous, head of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, briefed Council members under "any other business". Ladsous delivered a strong message that the military component of MINURSO could not operate without the evacuated civilian staff, and that in the Secretariat's estimation this situation was unacceptable.

Council members met on 24 March under "any other business" to discuss the New Zealand draft. It seemed that the majority of Council members were amenable to this draft, with the exception of Egypt, France and Senegal who argued that the timing was not right. Council members agreed to meet again later in the day after Moroccan Foreign Minister Salaheddine Mezouar had made a statement in Rabat. In his statement Mezouar asserted that Morocco's decision was "sovereign and irreversible". He said that military contacts with MINURSO had not been disrupted, that

Morocco was committed to cooperation to ensure the continuity of the ceasefire, and that it was ready for serious talks but would not ignore the reasons for the current situation.

In their subsequent consultations, members agreed to narrow the discussion to issues directly related to MINURSO, and not the precipitating events, in an effort to find common ground. Finally members were able to agree on press elements based on the New Zealand statement. The agreed press elements stated that members of the Council: had held several meetings on Western Sahara and expressed serious concerns about developments; discussed the issue of the departure of 73 personnel from MINURSO civilian staff; had taken due note of the Secretariat's briefings on the impact which the continuation of this situation could have on the effective functioning of the mission; recalled that peacekeeping operations and other missions are deployed by the council to carry out critical tasks around the world to maintain international peace and security; and stressed the importance of addressing in a constructive, comprehensive and cooperative manner the circumstances that led to this situation so that MINURSO may resume its full capacity to carry out its mandate as contained in several resolutions. (Fuller details on the Council's deliberations can be found in our 26 March 2016 What's In Blue story "Council discussions on Western Sahara".)

The Polisario has responded to the events by condemning Morocco's decision. On 21 March Saharawi Foreign Minister Mohamed Salem Ould Salek warned that through its decision Morocco was pushing the Saharawi people to take up arms.

Key Issues

The immediate concern for the Council at this time is to determine how best to manage the crisis surrounding MINURSO in a manner that allows the mission to continue to operate as mandated.

Another main issue is that in light of these heightened tensions, the resumption of armed conflict cannot be ruled out, and the Council may need to focus on how best to mitigate that threat.

The underlying issue is that the parties remain deadlocked and the political process has stalled due to the fact that the parties' proposals for the basis of a political solution as outlined in 2007 are mutually exclusive. Ascertaining what the Council can do to

break the deadlock between the parties and determining whether an alternative approach ought to be adopted by Ross are key issues.

A wider issue is the implications of allowing a member state to insist on the removal of parts of a Council-mandated mission, especially from disputed territory.

Options

Concerning the current crisis, one option would be for the Council to issue a statement urging Morocco to reverse its decision in order to allow MINURSO to continue its work unhindered. Another option would be to agree to a demarche by the Council president. However, given the deep divisions among Council members on how to interpret the situation, this option seems unlikely. A more likely scenario is that Council members will continue to engage bilaterally.

On the mandate renewal, one option is for the Council to merely renew the mandate of MINURSO for a period of 12 months, maintaining language similar to that of the current mandate. Alternatively it could renew the mandate for a shorter period, and set up a process to review MINURSO, which has been a longstanding stagnant mission, in order to determine if the mission should continue in this form given the lack of forward movement in the peace process.

Looking at the situation as a whole, and perhaps with a renewed sense of urgency to resolve the political stalemate, a further option would be for the Council to engage in a comprehensive review of the framework that it provided for the negotiating process in 2007, as recommended by the Secretary-General in his 2014 report.

Council and Wider Dynamics

The Council is deeply divided on both the nature of the wider conflict and on the current impasse between Morocco and the Secretary-General. Such divisions have long rendered the Council impotent on the matter and have in recent years impeded efforts by members interested in making changes to the mandate of MINURSO.

Council members who support the Moroccan position include Egypt, France, Senegal and Spain, and it appears that their views cannot be reconciled with those of some other members, particularly those which recognise the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Three Council members have recognised SADR: Angola, Uruguay and Venezuela. Angola and

Western Sahara (con't)

Uruguay also maintain diplomatic relations with Morocco, while Venezuela does not.

These different positions came out clearly in the discussions over a possible statement. Members supportive of Morocco felt strongly the matter was between Morocco and the Secretary-General and did not want the Council to get involved. Even a private Council demarche was unacceptable to these members, who argued that any sort of outcome would hamper bilateral negotiations aimed at calming the situation. These members were also averse to the Council putting pressure on

Morocco to reverse its decision. They viewed the crisis as having been precipitated by Ban's comments and therefore resisted any expression of support for the Secretary-General.

Other members argued that the Council needed to show its support for the Secretary-General, that its credibility was on the line, and one member state could not be allowed to dismantle a Council-mandated mission. These members, who viewed Morocco's move as a unilateral expulsion of UN staff, argued that allowing such conduct could set a dangerous precedent for UN peacekeeping operations.

The US, which is the penholder on Western Sahara, has recently expressed its support for MINURSO publicly while also saying that it considers Morocco's autonomy plan serious, realistic and credible, according to a 19 March post on Twitter by the US Mission to the UN.

The current situation has created tensions between the Council and the Secretariat, which has requested that Morocco reverse its decision to expel the MINURSO staff and has unsuccessfully sought the Council's support in echoing this request as well as in expressing support for the Secretary-General.

Mali

Expected Council Action

In April, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous will brief the Council on the work of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

MINUSMA's mandate expires on 30 June 2016.

Key Recent Developments

Council members conducted a visiting mission to West Africa in early March, including Mali from 4 to 6 March, followed by Guinea-Bissau and UNOWAS in Dakar. During the Mali leg, led by Senegal and France, they urged the government of Mali and the Platform and Coordination coalitions of armed groups to accelerate the implementation of the 20 June 2015 peace agreement. While acknowledging progress, Council members emphasised in their meetings with Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta and Prime Minister Modibo Keita the need to make political and institutional advances that can provide concrete peace dividends to the population, such as national reconciliation and decentralisation. Both the president and prime minister expressed the government's commitment to the full implementation of the agreement.

In a joint meeting with Council members, the coalitions of armed groups expressed the need to advance the decentralisation process before moving ahead on the security provisions of the agreement, such as cantonment and the deployment of mixed patrols, as well

as the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of armed combatants.

On 9 and 10 March, the main follow-up mechanism for the implementation of the agreement, the Comité de Suivi de l'Accord, held its seventh meeting. In addition to assessing progress and settling long-standing issues, such as adopting a budget and agreeing on representation of certain armed groups, participants agreed on prioritising the establishment of interim administrations for the northern regions and setting up mixed patrols in the coming weeks. They also welcomed the holding of a Peace Forum in Kidal in late March to discuss the situation in the north. (The forum, which was expected to include the armed groups and the government, started on 28 March without the presence of government representatives.)

From 13 to 20 March, Assistant Secretary-General of Peacekeeping Operations El-Ghasim Wane led a strategic review of MINUSMA. The review is expected to provide guidance on such issues as prioritisation of the mission's good offices mandate, increasing the troop ceiling, and whether to change the posture of the mission and its force layout. During a meeting with Council members in Bamako, Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop elaborated on the need for MINUSMA to prepare its exit strategy. Diop proposed establishing benchmarks to assess performance and provide for an exit for the mission once commonly agreed objectives have been attained.

Terrorism in Mali continues to be a threat to the stability of the country and the region,

and to the mission: some 52 MINUSMA peacekeepers have died as a result of malicious acts against the mission since its establishment in 2013. Briefing the Council on 16 March, French Ambassador François Delattre stated that during the mission "the Council offered its support to the Malian forces that are at the front line of the fight against terrorism, particularly in central Mali, which has been destabilised by an increase in terrorist attacks since early 2015". He highlighted how all stakeholders in Mali "loudly called for MINUSMA to be strengthened so that it can meet the asymmetric challenges it is facing". On 21 March, a terrorist attack against the Bamako headquarters of the EU Training Mission in Mali was repelled.

At a 2-4 September 2015 AU meeting in Bamako focusing on security cooperation in the Sahelo-Saharan region, the AU said that establishing an intervention force brigade to combat terrorism in northern Mali should be considered. In November 2015, the Group of Five for the Sahel (or the Sahel G5: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) proposed to deploy a joint regional force with the same objective. A joint UN-AU technical assessment mission to assess the feasibility of such an AU force was conducted in late March.

On 22 March, the Department of Political Affairs held an informal briefing for Council members on UN support to regional response and coordination regarding counter-terrorism in West Africa and the Sahel. On youth radicalisation, at the first meeting of

UN DOCUMENTS ON MALI [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2227](#) (29 June 2015) renewed the mandate of MINUSMA. [Security Council Press Statement SC/12240](#) (12 February 2016) condemned a complex terrorist attack against MINUSMA in Kidal. [Secretary-General's Report S/2016/281](#) (28 March 2016) was the last report on Mali. [Security Council Letter S/2016/215](#) (3 March 2016) were the terms of reference of the Council visiting mission to West Africa. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.7647](#) (16 March 2016) was a briefing on the Council's visiting mission to West Africa. [S/PV.7600](#) (11 January 2016) was a briefing by Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous.

Mali (con't)

the 2242 Informal Experts Group on women, peace and security in late February, Council members were informed that many of the recruitment messages reaching disenfranchised youth in the north specifically used anti-gender equality and anti-women's rights language to lay the groundwork for recruitment and radicalisation.

Human Rights-Related Developments

The Human Rights Council considered the report of the independent expert on the situation of human rights in Mali (A/HRC/31/76) during its 31st session in March. The report, covering May to December 2015, found that armed and extremist groups in the north of Mali continue to be involved in human rights violations, including violations of the right to life; abductions; cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; unlawful detention; the recruitment and use of children; and looting. The report also expressed concern about the increasing number of inter- and intra-communal conflicts, the lack of progress in combating impunity and the need to reform the National Human Rights Commission. On 2 March, New Zealand and Uruguay co-hosted an Arria-formula meeting of Council members with the heads of human rights components of five UN peace operations, including MINUSMA.

Key Issues

An overarching issue is the slow implementation of the agreement and the lack of progress in such areas as confidence-building measures, reconciliation, return of basic services to the north and decentralisation. Ensuring that cantonment, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration take place within a broader context of security sector reform and accountability for human rights violations is an important issue.

Addressing the grievances and frustrations of different communities that are not seeing the impact of the peace dividends in their

daily lives, including youth at risk of being recruited by violent groups, is a related issue.

The limited mobility of MINUSMA and its insufficient capacities and resources to fulfil its mandate in the current context is a key issue.

The marked increase in terrorist attacks and their reach, the deliberate targeting of MINUSMA and the safety concerns of troop- and police-contributing countries are further key issues for the Council to address.

Options

The Council could engage in early brainstorming on the recommendations of the strategic review ahead of the June renewal of MINUSMA's mandate, including in consultations with troop contributors.

The Council could also issue a statement that:

- calls on the parties to act in good faith and with the spirit of compromise in the discussions regarding the implementation of the agreement;
- urges the Malian government to swiftly implement the provisions of the peace agreement within its purview, such as the establishment of interim administrations for the northern regions; and
- reiterates the Council's support of MINUSMA's good offices mandate to encourage and support the full implementation of the peace agreement.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members remain united in support of accelerating the implementation of the agreement, and this was the main message conveyed during their visiting mission to Mali. As a result of the mission, Council members might be amenable to recommendations of

the strategic review of MINUSMA regarding the need to match and adapt MINUSMA's mandate to the needs currently identified on the ground. It seems that these might include increasing MINUSMA's troop ceiling, adapting the force's layout to address the increasing reach of terrorist groups and widespread banditry in places like Mopti in central Mali, and clarifying the posture or prioritising the mandated tasks of the mission. It remains unclear, however, how these recommendations might be perceived given some Council members' concern at rising peacekeeping costs and in light of the government's call for the mission's exit strategy. Despite calls by Malian stakeholders for a more robust mandate for the mission, most Council members seem to be of the opinion that the mandate is already exceptionally robust. The AU and Sahel G5 proposed initiatives to combat terrorism in northern Mali have raised questions regarding the possibility of them operating effectively alongside French forces, MINUSMA and the Malian Defence and Security Forces.

Council members continue to be worried about attacks targeting MINUSMA in northern Mali. During the visiting mission, Council members were briefed on MINUSMA's shortfalls in operational capacity. For example, given the security situation and the risks of improvised explosive devices, the limited number of armoured personal carriers remains a key limiting factor for the mission. MINUSMA's exceptionally high number of fatalities and casualties has led to an increasing divide between the troop contributors willing to deploy their forces in the most dangerous territory and other, more risk-averse contributors.

France is the penholder on Mali.

Sudan (Darfur)

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council will receive a briefing, followed by consultations, on the Secretary-General's quarterly report on the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), which was published in late March. Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous is expected to brief.

The mandate of UNAMID expires on 30 June.

Key Recent Developments

Since mid-January, heavy fighting has been reported between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan Liberation Army-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW) rebel movement in

the Jebel Marra, a region that straddles North, South and Central Darfur. As of 10 March, more than 105,000 civilians had reportedly been displaced by this violence, according to OCHA. Government-imposed access restrictions have prevented the UN and its partners from attending to the needs of thousands of displaced persons in parts of the Jebel Marra

Sudan (Darfur) (con't)

in Central and South Darfur. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and AU Commission Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma issued a joint UN-AU press statement on 3 March expressing deep concern about the impact on civilians of the recent fighting between government forces and the SLA-AW.

Inter-communal clashes have continued to be reported in Darfur. On 9 January, an armed militia from the Beni-Halba ethnic group attacked Mouli village in West Darfur after finding the body of a member of their group in the vicinity. The attack caused the displacement of a significant number of the village's inhabitants, who were largely from the Massalit community. The displaced civilians made their way to the nearby capital of West Darfur, El Geneina, demonstrating at the governor's office on 10 January. Media reports indicate that the protestors set fire to government facilities and clashed with Sudanese security personnel, who fired on them with live ammunition. Several people reportedly died in this incident and in clashes with government security forces during a funeral for the initial victims on 11 January.

Fighting between the Salamat and Falata ethnic groups broke out on 14 February in South Darfur's Buram locality, resulting in some 20 people reportedly losing their lives. Violence has recurred between the two groups since a cattle-raiding incident in March 2015. Shortly after the 14 February incident, the Sudanese government arrested 32 leaders from the two groups.

The AU High-level Implementation Panel produced a roadmap agreement for peace in Sudan that was signed by the government on 21 March. The roadmap calls for a cessation of hostilities with rebel groups in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, with separate negotiations to ensue with the Darfur groups and with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) regarding South Kordofan and Blue Nile. The rebel groups—including the Justice and Equality Movement, the Sudan Liberation Army-Mini Minawi and SPLM-N—have yet to sign the roadmap. They are concerned that the government is

attempting to include them in a national dialogue process that is designed to prop up the regime rather than initiate real political reform.

On 9 March, UNAMID personnel accompanying a humanitarian convoy were attacked by unidentified assailants in North Darfur, and one UNAMID peacekeeper was killed. Council members condemned the attack in a 10 March press statement.

On 25 January, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous briefed the Council on UNAMID. Ladsous expressed concern about the impact of the renewed upsurge in fighting on civilians in the Jebel Marra region of Darfur. He described the difficulties in the political process between the government and the armed groups. He noted that visa denials by the government had resulted in a "high vacancy rate in key substantive sections" of UNAMID, including those relevant to the protection of civilians.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 5 February statement, the independent expert on the situation of human rights in Sudan, Aristide Nononsi, called for an immediate end to hostilities that have triggered new protection and humanitarian concerns in Darfur. He referred to the escalation of violence in the Jebel Marra area, noting that the government of Sudan has a duty to facilitate free, full and unhindered access to all conflict-affected areas by UNAMID, UN agencies and other humanitarian organisations. The statement indicated that ongoing hostilities between government forces and the SLA-AW have resulted in human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, including destruction of civilian property, considerable displacement of civilians and an unspecified number of civilian casualties.

Key Issues

The underlying issue for the Council is the continuing instability of the security and humanitarian environment in Darfur, without progress on the political front.

An additional important matter is the difficult relationship of host country Sudan with UNAMID. Ongoing challenges include restrictions imposed on the access and movement of UNAMID and its humanitarian partners and

delays in issuing visas to mission personnel.

Options

One option would be to adopt a resolution or presidential statement that encourages a removal of bilateral sanctions on Sudan and debt relief for the government, contingent on meaningful cooperation with UNAMID. On the government's side, this cooperation would entail:

- ending access restrictions for the mission and its humanitarian partners;
- issuing visas for UN personnel and individuals from NGOs in a more timely fashion;
- stressing that an exit strategy for the mission must be conditioned on significant progress in achieving UNAMID's benchmarks (i.e. an inclusive peace process, protection of civilians, unhindered humanitarian access and prevention and mitigation of community conflict).

The Council could give the government a time period within which to make progress on these issues, and indicate that it will consider additional measures (e.g. further sanctions) in case of a lack of cooperation.

Council Dynamics

The Council is divided with respect to Darfur. Some members tend to be critical of Sudan for human rights abuses, aerial bombardments, lack of compliance with the ICC and lack of cooperation with UNAMID. Others have a more sympathetic view of Sudan, maintaining that the government is doing what it can to promote stability in the region in the face of an ongoing insurgency. Among this second group is Russia, which has espoused debt forgiveness and an end to bilateral economic sanctions against Sudan as a means to help the country address economic challenges in Darfur, which it has argued are exacerbating the conflict.

The UK holds the pen on Darfur, and Venezuela is the chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee.

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council is expected to receive a briefing by Ambassador Elbio Rosselli (Uruguay), chair of the 1572 Côte d'Ivoire Sanctions Committee, regarding the final report of the Group of Experts, which is due on 8 April. The Council is also expected to receive a briefing on the Secretary-General's report on the strategic review of the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), due on 31 March.

The Council is likely to adopt resolutions on the drawdown of UNOCI and the termination of the sanctions regime.

Key Recent Developments

The Council last met on Côte d'Ivoire on 20 January when it adopted resolution 2260, which mandated the decrease of UNOCI's military component from 5,437 to 4,000 military personnel by 31 March. The resolution set the same deadline for the Secretary-General to provide the Council with recommendations on the further downsizing of UNOCI based on the conditions on the ground and the ability of Côte d'Ivoire's government to take over security responsibilities from the mission.

The successful conduct of the 25 October 2015 presidential elections was one of the main preconditions set by the Council and the Secretary-General before further consideration would be given to the downsizing and possible termination of UNOCI. In resolution 2260, Council members commended the government of Côte d'Ivoire for facilitating free and peaceful elections, as a result of which Alassane Ouattara was elected to a second term in office.

In January, Ouattara appointed a new cabinet, making changes from the previous cabinet to certain key positions. Although Daniel Kablan Duncan was reappointed as prime minister, Ouattara replaced his foreign and justice ministers as well as several deputy ministers including of finance and defence.

On 28 January, the joint trial of the former president of Côte d'Ivoire, Laurent Gbagbo, and former youth leader Charles Blé Goudé began at the ICC for their role in the violence following the 2011 election, during which around 3,000 people died in clashes between Gbagbo's forces and Ouattara's supporters. Gbagbo is the highest-ranking official and the first head of state to stand trial at the ICC. On the opening day of the trial, both Gbagbo and Blé Goudé said they were innocent

of the charges against them, which include crimes against humanity, including murder, rape and persecution.

Some of Gbagbo's supporters in Côte d'Ivoire have voiced their discontent with the ICC indictment and expressed concern that none of Ouattara's supporters have been prosecuted for their role in the post-election violence. Prior to the start of Gbagbo's trial, chief ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda told the media that prosecutors have intensified investigations involving Ouattara's supporters. Nonetheless, the ICC still has not brought charges against any of Ouattara's supporters.

Following the meeting with French President François Hollande on 4 February in Paris, Ouattara reiterated that he would not be sending any more Ivorians to the ICC now that the country has an operational justice system and is ready to try cases in domestic courts. This led some in the political opposition to reiterate their claims that Ouattara is actively trying to protect his supporters who may have played a role in violent clashes during the crisis in 2011.

On 18 February, the military court in Côte d'Ivoire sentenced three high ranking military officials to life imprisonment for their role in the 2002 murder of Robert Guei, former junta leader, and briefly president of Côte d'Ivoire. All three military officials were close associates of Gbagbo.

Although the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Gbagbo's wife, Simone Gbagbo, in 2012, the Ivorian government refused to transfer her to the ICC and instead decided to try her in Côte d'Ivoire. Simone Gbagbo is set to face trial in Côte d'Ivoire on 25 April for charges of crimes against humanity. In March 2015, a court in Côte d'Ivoire sentenced Simone Gbagbo to 20 years in prison for undermining state security.

Regarding regional cooperation, the presidents of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire held a second Joint Council of Chiefs and Elders Meeting. They agreed to strengthen their cooperation on issues of mutual concern, which include security and stability in cross-border areas, further political cooperation and resettlement of refugees in collaboration with the UN Refugee Agency. On 7 March, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire reopened a humanitarian corridor between the countries and officially began a family reunification program with the assistance of the ICRC.

On 13 March, three attackers opened fire in the tourist resort town of Grand-Bassam,

killing at least 16 people and injuring more than 30. Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility for the attack. All three assailants were killed by Côte d'Ivoire security forces. The following day, President Ouattara held an emergency meeting of his cabinet at Grand-Bassam, after which he gave assurances that this attack would not impair Côte d'Ivoire's ongoing economic resurgence.

Though this was the first time AQIM had struck Côte d'Ivoire, there has been an upsurge in AQIM activity in the region. The group carried out terrorist attacks in neighbouring Mali in November 2015 and in Burkina Faso in January. The Council reacted to the March attack by issuing a press statement that condemned the attack and stressed the need to strengthen regional and international efforts to combat violent extremism and terrorism.

Economic growth in Côte d'Ivoire continues to be robust for the fourth year in a row. According to the findings of an IMF evaluation mission conducted in March, the economy grew at a steady rate of 8.6 percent in 2015, with similar growth anticipated for this year.

Human Rights-Related Developments

The Human Rights Council considered the report of the independent expert on capacity-building and technical cooperation with Côte d'Ivoire in the field of human rights, Mohammed Ayat, during its 31st session in March (A/HRC/31/78). The report, which covers the period from 1 September to 31 December 2015, applauds the holding of peaceful presidential elections on 25 October 2015, and concludes that the main challenges facing the country are consolidating the national reconciliation process and maintaining peace and security. The report includes recommendations to strengthen the rule of law, reinforce the reconciliation process and improve prison conditions, and it reaffirms the importance of maintaining UNOCI until the achievements of Côte d'Ivoire in maintaining security and making progress towards greater respect for human rights are properly consolidated.

Key Issues

At the moment, the main issue for the Council is the future of UNOCI, including further drawdown of the mission and its subsequent termination.

A related issue for the Council will be assessing the usefulness of continuing the sanctions regime given the improved stability and security in the country, particularly after the successfully organised presidential elections in October 2015.

UN DOCUMENTS ON CÔTE D'IVOIRE Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2226 (25 June 2015) extended the mandate of UNOCI for an additional year. S/RES/2219 (28 April 2015) renewed sanctions measures (partial arms embargo, travel ban and asset freeze) until 30 April 2016 and the mandate of the Group of Experts until 30 May 2016. Security Council Press Statement SC/12279 (14 March 2016) was on the terrorist attack in Grand-Bassam. Secretary-General's Report S/2015/940 (8 December 2015) was on the situation in Côte d'Ivoire. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.7586 (17 December 2015) was a briefing by the chairs of Council subsidiary bodies.

Côte d'Ivoire (con't)

Following recent terrorist attacks in Grand-Bassam, a related issue is the threat of terrorism and its implications on the security situation in the country and the wider region.

Political tensions resulting from the ICC trial of Gbagbo could be a future issue for the Council.

Options

With respect to sanctions, the most likely option is for the Council to terminate the 1572 Côte d'Ivoire sanctions regime, which includes an arms embargo, asset freeze and travel ban. Alternatively, the Council could choose to renew the sanctions regime for a specified time period while making certain modifications to the regime. In addition, the Council could request a strategic review of the sanctions regime before considering its termination. Considering current Council dynamics, the most unlikely option would be to renew the regime in its current form.

Regarding UNOCI, an option would be to renew the mandate of UNOCI for a period of one year, after which the mission would be terminated. The Council could also recommend gradually downsizing the mission in the next year while setting a specific time period for ending it.

Looking ahead, over the longer term the Council could discuss the options for the future UN presence in country. To this end, the Council could consider the possibility of establishing a special political mission that would succeed UNOCI and could support the government in areas such as security sector reform; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration; human rights; and political processes including reconciliation and national dialogue.

Council Dynamics

There seems to be overwhelming support among Council members for the drawdown of UNOCI and its subsequent withdrawal.

Within the Council, France, the former colonial power and penholder, is the strongest advocate for both withdrawal of UNOCI and termination of the sanctions regime. Most Council members share the view that Côte d'Ivoire is a well-functioning country with a vibrant economy and that its security forces are capable of maintaining security in the country. This view was further reinforced by the successful organisation and execution of the presidential elections in October 2015. The Secretary-General's report with his recommendations following the strategic review of the mission, which is due on 31 March, is expected to play an important role in shaping the positions of Council members regarding the further actions on downsizing the mission.

France is the penholder on Côte d'Ivoire while Uruguay serves as the chair of the 1572 Sanctions Committee.

Syria

Expected Council Action

Council members will continue to monitor the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, how the cessation of hostilities is holding and humanitarian access to hard-to-reach and besieged areas in Syria.

Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura is expected to brief in mid-April in what is now the monthly update on the implementation of resolutions 2254 on the political process and 2268 on the cessation of hostilities. Council members will also receive their regular monthly briefings on the chemical weapons and humanitarian tracks in Syria.

Key Recent Developments

On 14 March, the UN-facilitated intra-Syrian proximity talks began, after having been abruptly suspended in early February due to the government's Aleppo offensive, backed by Russian airstrikes. Subsequently, intense diplomatic activity between Russia and the US had culminated in the agreement on a cessation of hostilities that was endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 2268.

Russia's military activity in Syria helped the government consolidate its control of territory

from Damascus north through Homs to the Latakia coastal plain ahead of peace talks. On the same day that talks in Geneva began, Russia announced a drawdown of its forces from Syria. The timing of Russia's announcement appeared to be a clear message to the regime of President Bashar al-Assad that Russian military support was not open-ended and that the only way forward was to engage in the peace talks. On the other hand, the drawdown preserves Russia's capabilities for rapid redeployment, maintains its capacity to strike armed opposition groups in Syria, and does not weaken its posture vis-à-vis NATO in the Mediterranean.

Russian air support for the government offensives against ISIS is ongoing and Palmyra was recaptured by 28 March. This effort is distinct from that of the US-led anti-ISIS coalition. ISIS has lost 40 percent of their territory in Iraq and 20 percent in Syria.

Also on 14 March, de Mistura briefed Council members via video teleconference from Geneva after the first day of talks. He reported that the cessation of hostilities had lowered overall levels of violence, and characterised the Russian drawdown as a significant development that would have a positive

impact on the negotiations. On the issue of aerial bombardment, de Mistura said that the Syrian minister of defence had assured his Russian counterpart that Syria would not arbitrarily use weapons. In November 2015, de Mistura had reported a similar commitment made by the government directly to his office. However, that commitment was in fact a letter denying the government's arbitrary use of weapons, saying it would never do so.

Regarding the participation of Syrian Kurdish groups, particularly the Democratic Union Party (PYD), in the intra-Syrian talks, it seems that de Mistura sought Council members' guidance on whether to include the PYD. The issue has gained increasing prominence in light of the 17 March decision by Kurdish groups to establish a federal system of governance in areas they control along the northern border. Even prior to this decision, the PYD's participation has been resisted by Turkey, which opposes any Kurdish separatist movements along its border. The Riyadh-based umbrella Syrian opposition group, the High Negotiations Committee, which controls much less territory, has signalled the need for de-centralised governance, but does not support a federal

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2268 (26 February 2015) was on the cessation of hostilities and the resumption of political talks. S/RES/2254 (18 December 2015) was on a political solution for the Syrian crisis. Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.7660 (30 March 2016) was on the humanitarian situation. Secretary-General's Reports S/2016/272 (22 March 2016) was on the humanitarian situation. S/2016/196 (26 February 2016) was on chemical weapons.

Syria (con't)

structure. Meanwhile, the Syrian government has rejected the concept and is frustrated by Russia's support of a federal structure for Syria.

The first round of talks ended on 24 March. As with previous rounds of talks in 2012 and 2014, the UN mediator hit an impasse over the issue of political transition and the fate of Assad. Addressing the issue of presidential elections within 18 months, as endorsed in resolution 2254, was not acceptable to the government, which continues to argue that discussion of presidential elections is premature. In an unusually strong statement, de Mistura said that what premature means for Syria means imminent as far as the UN is concerned.

Unlike in 2012 or 2014, Russia and the US have invested more political capital in the success of these talks. US Secretary of State John Kerry met with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on 24 March. There was general agreement that both Russia and the US would use their influence with the parties to support the cessation of hostilities, expand humanitarian access, stop attempts to gain additional territory, and work toward the release of detainees. On the issue of Assad, Kerry said he believed Russia would help Assad make the right decision and commit fully to the talks and a genuine transition. Lavrov was more circumspect, commenting that the process should end with Syrians agreeing on how they want to see their country. The next day, Russia's deputy foreign minister said that Russia and the US had agreed that the issue of Syria's president should not be on the agenda at this stage. De Mistura's 24 March paper that describes commonalities between the parties references elections, but there is no specific reference to presidential elections.

The issue of political transition is expected to be the focus of the second round of talks, set to resume on 9 April. Some media reports indicate there might be a delay, to 14 April, the day after the parliamentary elections which were announced by the regime on 22 February, hours after Russia and the US had

agreed on the cessation of hostilities.

On the humanitarian track, Jan Egeland, who is de Mistura's adviser to the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) humanitarian task force, has stressed the need for the government to permit access to the remaining six of 18 besieged areas. On 23 March, Egeland announced that the government had given verbal assent to access to three to four more areas, but not to Darayya and Douma near Damascus, both besieged by government forces and believed to be in very dire straits. In addition, he stressed that getting medical relief into these areas, even if other aid was permitted, remained the single most difficult access issue.

OCHA head Stephen O'Brien briefed the Council on 30 March, presenting the latest Secretary-General's report that described improving access and reiterating the goal for aid to reach 1.1 million people by the end of April. He also focused on the work of the ISSG humanitarian task force and how it coordinates with the UN.

On the chemical weapons track, Acting UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Kim Won-soo briefed Council members on 23 March.

Key Issue

The essential issue for the Council—entering the sixth year of a war that has exacted a death toll of 470,000, injured one million and displaced half of the Syrian population, including 4.8 million refugees—is to build on the momentum of resolutions 2254 and 2268, and exert effective leadership in supporting a cessation of hostilities and efforts to implement a political solution.

Options

The ISSG and resolutions 2254 and 2268 have identified roles for the Council in the event that talks in 2016 produce concrete results towards a national ceasefire and a parallel political process, including elections. How such a ceasefire and elections would be monitored would require more consideration by the Council.

In the near term, however, the options for the Council are limited as the day-to-day oversight of resolutions 2254 and 2268 has been outsourced to the ISSG broadly, and P5 members Russia and the US in particular.

Council Dynamics

When resolution 2268 was adopted a little more than an hour before the cessation of hostilities went into effect on 27 February, it was unclear to many Council members whether it was a pivotal moment in the trajectory of the Syrian conflict, or whether the momentum would falter. A month later, Council members are cautiously optimistic, observing that the cessation of hostilities has lowered overall levels of violence, allowed increasing flows of humanitarian aid, and created a more conducive environment for a political process.

Nevertheless, divisions remain. Russia's position has consistently sought for the US to (1) be less vocal about Assad's departure from power; and (2) increase cooperation on counter-terrorism efforts with Moscow, resulting in de-facto coordination with Damascus. On Assad, some Council members are of the view that the Russian and the US positions have quietly moved closer together, in that Assad would have a role in the transition but would not stand for re-election. It remains unclear whether Iran shares that position. The US has been more resistant to direct coordination of counter-terrorism efforts in Syria. This dynamic was demonstrated when Council members were unable to reach agreement on a draft press statement on the government's defeat of ISIS in Palmyra. The P3 wanted to expand the statement to include other victories against ISIS made by the US-led coalition in Iraq and Syria, but that was rejected by Egypt, Russia and Venezuela.

Most outcomes on the Syria political track are agreed between Russia and the US prior to agreement by the Council, as was the case with resolutions 2254 and 2268. Egypt, New Zealand and Spain lead on humanitarian issues.

Central African Republic

Expected Council Action

In April, Special Representative Parfait Onanga-Anyanga will brief on the forthcoming report on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). The Council will renew MINUSCA, which expires on 30 April, probably extending the mandate only through July, to allow more time to adapt the mandate to the post-transition situation.

Key Recent Developments

March marked the end of the transitional political government in the Central African Republic (CAR), which began in April 2013 and was initially due to expire after 18 months.

On 1 March, the Constitutional Court confirmed that former Prime Minister Faustin Archange Touadéra was elected president after winning a runoff election on 14 February against Anicet-Georges Dologuélé. Dologuélé, who led the first round of voting on 30 December 2015, conceded the election an hour after the results were announced.

The results of legislative elections held on 30 December 2015 were nullified by the transitional constitutional court on 27 January because of massive irregularities. A first round of new legislative elections for the National Assembly took place on 14 February, and at press time, a second round was scheduled for 27 March. The new government and National Assembly are supposed to be confirmed by the end of April.

The UN, AU, Economic Community of Central African States, and the EU welcomed the final results of the presidential election on 4 March. They further reiterated their commitment to continued efforts to support the completion of the transition period, including through the holding of the second round of legislative elections.

The proper conduct of the elections was a matter of disagreement between Council members in January during the negotiations over resolution 2262 which renewed the CAR sanctions regime. Council members were unable to agree on whether to commend the conduct of the elections or simply take note of them. A compromise was found by avoiding both options and instead focusing on the

forthcoming conduct of free and fair legislative elections and the second round of the presidential elections.

A similar disagreement occurred during negotiations of a draft press statement circulated by France on 14 December 2015 over whether to welcome or take note of the constitutional referendum. In that case, however, a compromise was not possible, and the press statement was eventually abandoned.

The new president will face many issues, including the fact that Muslim-dominated ex-Séléka and Christian anti-Balaka factions still control vast parts of the country, and some of their elements have been unwilling to engage in dialogue with transitional authorities. Disarming and reintegrating these elements while holding perpetrators of crimes accountable will be a key priority. Reviving defunct state institutions and addressing the high levels of poverty and needs for humanitarian assistance are also immediate tasks for the new government.

On the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse, the 2015 annual Secretary-General's report on this issue identified 22 allegations specific to UN peacekeepers in MINUSCA. By the end of February 2016, the UN's conduct and discipline unit registered 22 new allegations against personnel of MINUSCA, which was the only mission explicitly mentioned in resolution 2272 of 11 March 2016 on sexual exploitation and abuse. In January the Democratic Republic of the Congo contingent to MINUSCA was repatriated.

On 31 March, Under-Secretary-General for Field Support Atul Khare briefed Council members under "any other business" on further allegations of sexual misconduct by international forces in the CAR.

On 17 March, Council members discussed the MINUSCA mandate renewal under "any other business". France proposed to extend MINUSCA's current mandate until the end of July in a technical rollover. France reasoned that this would allow time for consultations between MINUSCA and the incoming government on adapting the mission's mandate to the post-transition period. It would also allow time for a strategic review of MINUSCA to inform Council members' deliberations on a new mandate.

At the request of the Secretary-General, the Council adopted resolution 2264 on 9 February to increase the number of corrections officers in MINUSCA from 40 to 108.

Sanctions-Related Developments

Resolution 2262 renewed the arms embargo, travel ban and assets freeze until 31 January 2017 and the mandate of the Panel of Experts until 28 February 2017. The Panel will be asked to submit its midterm report to the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee on 30 July 2016 and a final report to the Security Council, after discussion with the Committee, by 31 December 2016.

On 7 March, at the request of France, the UK and the US, the 2127 Committee added the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and its leader, Joseph Kony, for whom there is an outstanding ICC arrest warrant, to the CAR sanctions list. According to the 2127 Committee, the LRA under Kony's leadership has engaged in the abduction, killing and mutilation of thousands of civilians across Central Africa, including in the CAR.

The Committee held a meeting on 9 March with Onanga-Anyanga (via video teleconference from Bangui) and a representative of the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) to discuss the sanctions-monitoring mandate of MINUSCA and the role of UNMAS in the management of weapons and ammunition in the CAR.

On 18 March, the 2127 Committee met with its Panel of Experts to discuss their tentative programme of work for the next year.

Human Rights-Related Developments

The independent expert on the situation of human rights in the CAR, Marie-Thérèse Keita Bocoum, visited the country from 1 to 10 March and released a statement on 11 March commending the holding of elections and the improving security situation. She warned that the situation remains precarious, with pockets of insecurity and violence, particularly in inland regions. The statement encouraged the government to continue focusing on the immediate implementation of the disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and repatriation agreement; security sector reform; improving prison conditions; and the fight against impunity.

Key Issues

Renewing MINUSCA's mandate will be an immediate task for the Council in April.

With the end of the transition period, monitoring the security situation and political developments closely and reconfiguring MINUSCA's mandate accordingly will be an ongoing issue.

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE CAR Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2264 (9 February 2016) increased the number of corrections officers in MINUSCA from 40 to 108. **S/RES/2262** (27 January 2016) renewed the CAR sanctions regime until 31 January 2017 and the mandate of the Panel of Experts until 28 February 2017. **Sanctions Committee Documents SC/12281** (14 March 2016) was a press release on the CAR Sanctions Committee's meeting with the head of MINUSCA, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga (via video teleconference from Bangui), and a representative of UNMAS. **SC/12272** (7 March 2016) was a press release announcing the addition of the LRA and Joseph Kony to the CAR sanctions list. **S/2015/936** (21 December 2015) was the final report of the 2127 Sanctions Committee's Panel of Experts. **Security Council Press Statement SC/12116** (11 November 2015) condemned attacks on internally displaced persons and MINUSCA peacekeepers.

Central African Republic (con't)

Adapting the mandate to take into account the expected reduction or complete draw down of troops in the French parallel force assisting stabilisation efforts in Bangui is a related issue.

Options

The most likely option is for the Council to adopt a short-term renewal of MINUSCA's current mandate that will allow for the new CAR government to be up and running before full consideration of MINUSCA's mandate. Such a resolution may also ask for a strategic review of the MINUSCA mandate and a report back to the Council after consultations with the CAR authorities.

Another option is to renew MINUSCA's mandate for a year while adjusting the

mandate in order to take into account the pending formation of a new government and the end of the transition period.

Council and Wider Dynamics

It seems that several Council members take a positive view of the French proposal of a technical rollover, feeling that it will allow for a more thorough assessment as to what adjustments to MINUSCA's mandate are necessary after the elections and how its tasks and priorities for the short, middle and long term should be configured. For some Council members, an important aspect in consultations with the new government will be its attitude towards some of MINUSCA's existing tasks that were based on the request of the transitional authorities, such as its mandate to undertake "urgent

temporary measures on an exceptional basis... to arrest and detain in order to maintain basic law and order and fight impunity".

Despite a difference of views concerning the conduct of the elections, all Council members are hoping that the end of the transition period and a newly elected government will provide momentum to address some of the fundamental issues facing the country, including constructive dialogue with armed groups and their disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and, later on, security sector reform programs, accountability measures and re-establishing state authority and institutions, including incarceration facilities and judicial institutions.

Israel/Palestine

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council will hold its quarterly open debate on the Middle East, with a focus on the situation in Israel/Palestine and the absence of a path toward a political solution.

Key Recent Developments

The situation in Israel/Palestine remains tense as the recent wave of violence that began in late September continues. Since then, stabbings, car-rammings and shooting attacks by Palestinians have killed 28 Israelis and two American tourists. Israeli forces have killed 182 Palestinians, including 135 who Israel alleged were attackers.

Israel's expropriation of land also continues. On 15 March, Israel announced the appropriation of 579 acres (234 hectares) of land in the occupied West Bank near Jericho, the largest seizure of West Bank land in recent years. In response, Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat called on the international community to press Israel to stop land confiscations. The US State Department criticised the move, saying that continuing expropriations and settlement expansion were "fundamentally undermining the prospects for a two-state solution". Russia urged "all the sides to refrain from unilateral steps that undermine the prospects of the Palestinian

issue settlement on the internationally recognised basis". An EU statement said the move "calls into question Israel's commitment to a two-state solution".

On 20 March, a Palestinian delegation met with an ICC prosecution delegation in Amman, Jordan for three days of meetings discussing allegations of Israeli war crimes. The delegations discussed Israeli settlements, Israel's large scale military offensive in the Gaza Strip in 2014 and settler crimes, including the arson attacks by Israelis against Dawabsha family, in which a young child and his parents were burned to death.

On Fatah-Hamas reconciliation, negotiators for both parties met for talks beginning on 7 February in Doha. Negotiators said the sides reached agreement on a "limited practical perception" as to how to solve their dispute and implement previous reconciliation accords, but the talks were considered unsuccessful as major differences remain. In particular, Hamas refuses to accept the formation of a unity government on the basis of the political program of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which accepts a two-state solution and calls for a negotiated settlement with Israel. Hamas also rejects Fatah's offer to retain control over the finance, foreign affairs and security ministries.

Regarding Gaza, the Egyptian military in mid-March reportedly discovered tunnels large enough for trucks to pass through underneath the Sinai-Gaza border. Some of the tunnels stretch for more than three kilometres. Egypt and Israel claim that through these tunnels weapons are entering the Sinai to be used by extremist groups, and that ISIS members in the Sinai have entered Gaza to receive medical treatment. Tunnels traversing Gaza and the Sinai have long been used to facilitate the flow of building materials, medicine and humanitarian goods into the besieged Gaza strip.

On 15 March, a Hamas delegation visited Cairo, seeking to mend tense relations and requesting that Egypt allow more traffic through the Rafah border crossing with Gaza, the enclave's only transit point not controlled by Israel. According to Hamas, the crossing was open for only 21 days in 2015. On 21 March, it was reported that Hamas had removed all banners displaying the images of senior Muslim Brotherhood leaders, including Egyptian Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna and ousted Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, in an apparent gesture to improve relations with Cairo.

Since the last quarterly debate on Israel/Palestine on 26 January, Council members have met on several occasions to consider the

UN DOCUMENTS ON ISRAEL/PALESTINE Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.7657 (24 March 2016) was the most recent monthly briefing on Israel/Palestine. **Selected Security Council Letters** S/2015/809 (21 October 2015) contained a summary of historical precedents for the administration of territory by the League of Nations and the UN. S/2014/514 (21 July 2014) was from Abbas requesting that "the territory of the State of Palestine be placed under an international protection system" by the UN.

Israel/Palestine (con't)

situation. In February, three briefings were held on Israel/Palestine under “any other business”, all at the request of Venezuela, the Council president in February.

On 5 February, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Miroslav Jenča briefed Council members on illegal settlements and the demolition of Palestinian houses. Following the meeting, Venezuela circulated a draft press statement to Council members. Among other things, the initial draft expressed concern about the recent home demolitions and the expulsion of Palestinians by Israeli authorities. It also rejected Israel’s appropriation of 370 acres in the area of Jericho, in the West Bank, as “state property” as well as the policies of establishment and expansion of illegal settlements in Palestinian territories.

Several Council members expressed their support for the Venezuelan initiative. New Zealand, supported by Egypt and Malaysia, suggested that a press statement might be too weak an outcome on such major issues and suggested that a presidential statement or resolution might be more appropriate. Egypt proposed strong language reaffirming the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of land by force and reiterating that Israel’s appropriation of land in Palestinian and other Arab territories has no legal validity. Malaysia, Spain and Russia provided comments. Venezuela put a revised draft statement under silence on 9 February. Silence was broken by the US, which proposed extensive changes to the original text. Venezuela withdrew the draft, saying that consensus could not be reached on the statement. (For more details, see our 17 February story “Middle East Briefing and Press Statement” in What’s In Blue.)

On 16 February, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman briefed Council members under “any other business” on Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, and on international protection to Palestinian people there, as had been called for by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Feltman referred to the Secretary-General’s letter dated 21 October 2015, transmitting an internal review of historical precedents for regimes that have been devised to provide varying forms of protection for areas and their inhabitants. This review was undertaken in response to a 2014 letter from Abbas that requested that “the territory of the State of Palestine be placed under an international protection system”, with the aim of “ensuring

the protection of the Palestinian people”

A third briefing under “any other business” was held on 25 February, when OCHA head Stephen O’Brien briefed on the humanitarian situation and the situation of Palestinian children.

On 24 March, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov briefed the Council in the regular monthly meeting, where he warned that amid escalating violence, the international community must move beyond mere condemnations and send a clear message to both sides that a two-State solution was the best road to peace, but acknowledged that the possibility of a two-state solution was diminishing. He also reported that the Middle East Quartet, stepping up efforts to break the political impasse, have begun work on a report that would review the situation on the ground, identify dangers to a two-State solution and provide recommendations on the way forward.

Human Rights-Related Developments

The Human Rights Council considered three reports on Israel/Palestine during its 31st session in March. The first was the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the fact-finding mission’s report that investigated the implications of Israeli settlements. The implementation report addressed continued Israeli settlement activity; settler violence and lack of accountability; issues related to Palestinian detainees, including children in Israeli custody; and business and human rights in relation to the settlements (A/HRC/31/42). The report of the Secretary-General on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory included developments concerning the establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements, and updates and analysis of the effects of related house demolitions, evictions, settlement expansion, settler violence, discriminatory zoning and planning policies on the economic, social and cultural rights of Palestinians (A/HRC/31/43). The report of the Secretary-General on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory examined how the occupation and associated measures restrict freedom of movement and how those restrictions impact Palestinians’ enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights (A/HRC/31/44).

Key Issues

The immediate issue is determining how to de-escalate tensions. The overarching issue is how to urge the parties to cease actions that hinder the resumption of negotiations on a two-state solution, such as settlement building, acts of violence and other provocative acts.

Options

There are several issues related to Israel/Palestine that the Council could choose to address.

One option would be to adopt a resolution outlining parameters for a final status agreement.

Another option would be to take a piecemeal approach and pursue an outcome on areas where agreement can be found among Council members. Issues such as settlements or the idea of an international protection plan could be addressed in this manner.

Council and Wider Dynamics

The negotiations on the draft press statement in February demonstrated that, though consensus could not be reached, several Council members including Egypt, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russia, Spain and Venezuela are keenly interested in using the tools available to the Council to move the sides towards peace.

Egypt has expressed its intention to push for a Council outcome on Israel/Palestine before the end of the year. Egypt, while aware of the difficulties, is nevertheless interested in pursuing a Council product substantial enough to help the Palestinians return to the negotiating table, but which will not invite a veto by the US. While Egypt demonstrated a strong stance against settlement expansion during the February press statement negotiations, its approach to issues pertaining to Gaza remains to be seen and is likely to be complicated by its security concerns in the Sinai.

It is generally accepted that the fate of any Council outcome on Israel/Palestine lies ultimately with the US. While US reluctance to use the Council has often made Council action on the issue impossible, recent reports suggest that US President Barack Obama is exploring options for addressing the conflict before the end of his second term, and the US has indicated that it is considering changing its policy of opposition to using the Council as an avenue for resolving the conflict.

With US-led talks having fallen apart nearly two years ago, P5 member France is lobbying to hold an international peace conference before May that would outline incentives and give guarantees for Israelis and Palestinians to resume face-to-face talks before August to try to end the conflict. While Abbas welcomes the initiative, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has voiced opposition, insisting on direct talks between the parties without pre-conditions and preferring less international involvement.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In April, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, is expected to brief the Council.

Key Recent Developments

Nearly a year after the Saudi Arabia-led coalition intervened to restore the government of transition president Abdo Rabbo Mansour Hadi, there appeared to be a greater commitment by the warring parties towards ending Yemen's conflict. In early March, reports surfaced that talks were being held between the Houthis, a Zaydi-Shi'a rebel group, and Saudi Arabia, outside of the UN mediation process. These produced agreement on several confidence-building measures, including prisoner exchange, aid deliveries and a significant de-escalation in Houthi cross-border attacks and coalition bombing in Yemen's northern border region.

Further signs of a possible de-escalation occurred on 18 March when coalition-spokesman General Ahmed al-Asseri said the coalition would scale down its military operations. Saudi Arabia had similarly announced that major combat operations were ending in late April 2015.

On 23 March, the Special Envoy announced that a cessation of hostilities would start on 10 April followed by a new round of talks in Kuwait on 18 April. He said the talks would seek to reach a comprehensive agreement and would focus on five main areas: the withdrawal of militias and armed groups; the handover of heavy weapons to the state; interim security arrangements; the restoration of state institutions and political dialogue; and the creation of a committee for prisoners and detainees. Council members issued a press statement welcoming the announcement, urging all parties to reduce violence and refrain from provocative action ahead of the cessation of hostilities.

Earlier in March, Council members had begun discussing elements of a Yemen humanitarian resolution, including issues of access for humanitarian aid and protection of civilians, but the resolution has been put on hold in light of political developments.

Meanwhile, heavy fighting has continued across much of the country. Criticism of Saudi Arabia intensified as coalition airstrikes

continued to be responsible for the majority of civilian casualties. This included a 27 February airstrike on a marketplace in Sana'a that killed at least 32 civilians and a 15 March airstrike on a marketplace in Hajjah that according to media reports killed at least 106 people. The EU parliament adopted a non-binding resolution on 25 February calling for an arms embargo on Saudi Arabia. On 22 March, eight NGOs, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, issued a joint statement calling on all governments to cease the supply of arms to the parties of the conflict. At a press conference, Human Rights Watch stressed in particular that the P3 Council members, the US, UK and France, should stop sending arms to Saudi Arabia until it ends "unlawful" airstrikes and credibly investigates alleged violations.

The UN Inspection and Verification Mechanism (UNVIM)—created to facilitate commercial shipping to Yemen—was officially established with headquarters in Djibouti on 12 February, and was expected to be fully operational soon. The 2016 Yemen humanitarian response plan was launched on 18 February, with an appeal for \$1.8 billion to support 13.4 million people. OCHA head Stephen O'Brien referred to both developments during his last Council briefing on 3 March, when he stressed that "airstrikes and random shelling of civilians and civilian areas violate cardinal rules of international humanitarian law and constitute unlawful conduct of hostilities".

Sanctions-Related Developments

Ambassador Motohide Yoshikawa (Japan), the chair of the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee, briefed the Council with the Special Envoy on 17 February. Yoshikawa focused on the 22 January final report of the 2140 Committee's Panel of Experts. On 24 February, the Council adopted resolution 2266, which extended financial and travel ban measures and the targeted arms embargo on the Houthis and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh until 26 February 2017. It further extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts until 27 March 2017.

A new five-person Panel of Experts was proposed following criticism by Committee members, of whom only its coordinator, Ahmed Himmiche, was a member of last year's Panel. Four of the five experts were appointed by the Secretary-General on 29 March. At press time, the Committee was considering a new candidate to serve

as the international humanitarian law expert after Egypt rejected the individual that the Secretariat had initially proposed.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In the wake of the deadly airstrike that killed at least 106 civilians in a crowded village market in north-western Yemen, High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein released a statement on 18 March that condemned the repeated failure of the coalition forces to take effective actions to prevent the recurrence of such incidents, and the failure to publish the results of transparent and independent investigations into incidents that have already occurred. According to the statement, the UN Human Rights Office has recorded a total of just under 9,000 casualties, including 3,218 civilians killed and 5,778 injured, since the beginning of the conflict a year ago. "Looking at the figures, it would seem that the coalition is responsible for twice as many civilian casualties as all other forces put together, virtually all as a result of airstrikes", the High Commissioner said, adding "[it] would appear to be the case that the distinction between legitimate military targets and civilian ones, which are protected under international law, is at best woefully inadequate...and at worst, we are possibly looking at the commission of international crimes by members of the coalition".

Key Issues

A key issue will be whether the parties remain committed to the announced cessation of hostilities and talks in Kuwait, and how the Council can keep this process on track. A related issue is how the Houthi-Saudi Arabia track can complement UN-brokered negotiations between the Yemeni parties.

An ongoing concern is the humanitarian crisis and widespread human rights violations. Whether and when the Council should address this through a separate humanitarian resolution is a related issue.

An additional key issue is the expansion in Yemen of Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham.

Options

One option is for the Council to monitor developments and adopt an outcome supporting any new agreements.

The Council might, alternatively, be more proactive and adopt a resolution ahead of the planned negotiations calling on all parties to respect the cessation of hostilities and to engage in the upcoming talks without preconditions and in good faith.

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2266](#) (24 February 2016) renewed the sanctions measures until 26 February 2017. [Security Council Press Statement SC/12300](#) (23 March 2016) welcomed the Special Envoy's announcement of a cessation of hostilities and peace talks. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.7641](#) (3 March 2016) was a briefing by OCHA head Stephen O'Brien. [S/PV.7625](#) (17 February 2016) was a briefing by the Special Envoy and the chair of the 2140 Sanctions Committee. [S/PV.7622](#) (16 February 2016) was a briefing by OCHA head Stephen O'Brien. [Sanctions Committee Document S/2016/73](#) (22 January 2016) was the final report of the Yemen Panel of Experts.

Yemen (con't)

If current political initiatives do not materialise or fail to stem the fighting and its impact on civilians, the Council could move forward on a humanitarian resolution that:

- calls on all parties to allow immediate and unhindered humanitarian aid, ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel and end attacks on medical facilities, schools and civilian infrastructure;
- urges parties to cooperate fully with UNVIM and ensure delivery of commercial goods, including food, fuel and medical supplies;
- expresses concern over widespread violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law; and demands an end to attacks against civilians.

Additionally, the Council may reiterate that violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law are part of the designation criteria in resolution 2140 and express its readiness to apply sanctions against any parties committing such violations.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Members agree that the conflict can only be solved through political negotiations. They also share concern over the humanitarian crisis and the need for the parties to do more to uphold international humanitarian law and protect civilians. However, the close relations of many members, particularly the P3 and Egypt, with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries has restrained the Council's ability to address these issues more forcefully. In general, the Council has relied on the Special Envoy's mediation efforts, with members hoping for progress on a political process that the Council can then support.

However, frustration with the stalled political process and the deteriorating humanitarian situation led some members in mid-February to express support for a separate humanitarian resolution on Yemen. New Zealand, which first raised the idea, suggested elements that were discussed among the full membership at the

beginning of March. The UK, which is the penholder on Yemen, offered to prepare a text after most members supported the idea. However, consideration of a resolution, which Saudi Arabia has said is unnecessary, was put on hold as progress was made on the political front. The Council could return to the proposal if the new cessation of hostilities and talks are unsuccessful.

A new dynamic, providing hope that upcoming political talks could be more successful than previous ones, is the Houthi-Saudi Arabia dialogue. Doubts remain, however, about the commitment of leaders to a political solution or the opportunity for the sides to reach common ground.

In addition to several elected members' support for a humanitarian resolution, Russia has continued to play a leading role in focusing the Council on the humanitarian situation. Egypt has championed the positions of Saudi Arabia and the coalition, of which it is a member.

Sudan/South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council will hold consultations on the Secretary-General's report on the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), which is expected to be published by 15 April.

The UNISFA mandate expires on 15 May.

Key Recent Developments

Fundamental differences remain between Sudan and South Sudan with regard to Abyei. The two countries have not made any progress in addressing the final status of this disputed territory, which straddles the border of both countries. Sudan continues to maintain police around the Diffra oil facility in contravention of several Security Council resolutions. Temporary administrative and security units envisaged by the 20 June 2011 agreement between Sudan and South Sudan to provide stability in the region until its final status can be determined—including the Abyei Area Legislative Council, the Abyei Area Administration and the Abyei Police Service—have not been established.

On 26 November 2015, unidentified assailants attacked the home of the Ngok-Dinka paramount chief Pagot Deng. The incident, which Council members condemned in a 27 November press statement, resulted in the deaths of a UN peacekeeper and a child.

In February, the nomadic Misseriya began their seasonal migration through Abyei in search of grazing land for cattle. In the past, this annual migration has caused friction with members of the Ngok-Dinka community, who reside in the Abyei region and consider it their ancestral homeland. On 25 February, a peace conference was held in the Nyong area of Abyei that included the participation of more than 700 Ngok-Dinka and Misseriya. Deng said that the meeting was designed to promote peaceful relations between the two communities and to discuss safe migration routes for Misseriya pastoralists through Abyei.

Council members were last briefed on UNISFA in consultations on 24 November 2015. During the briefing, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous told members that the security

situation in Abyei had generally been calm, as difficulty in movement during the rainy season helped keep the Ngok-Dinka and Misseriya communities separated. He noted UNISFA's effort to promote reconciliation efforts between the two communities at the local level. Ladsous reiterated that the UN could not invest further in infrastructure for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, which is designed to monitor the Sudan/South Sudan border and which UNISFA has a mandate to support, until the parties demonstrate greater cooperation with its implementation.

On 15 December 2015, the Council adopted resolution 2251, which renewed the mandate of UNISFA for five months. The resolution welcomed UNISFA's efforts to strengthen community protection committees in Abyei to assist in maintaining law and order in the region.

Key Issues

One key issue is what role the Council can play in compelling Sudan and South Sudan

Sudan/South Sudan (con't)

to establish temporary administrative and legal institutions in the area, given the lack of progress in determining Abyei's final status.

Getting Sudan and South Sudan to cooperate with UNISFA in a more meaningful way is another key issue. Sudan has restricted the shipment to Abyei of construction materials that could be used to develop infrastructure such as roads that could be beneficial to the work of the mission. Meanwhile, South Sudan has restricted flight and landing permissions for aerial monitoring as a part of the operations of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mission.

Options

An option for the Council is to adopt a presidential statement that:

- urges Sudan and South Sudan to convene Abyei Joint Oversight Committee meetings on a regular basis, as these meetings could provide a forum for constructive

dialogue on unresolved issues and have occurred only infrequently in recent years;

- urges more consistent and meaningful cooperation with the mission by the governments; and
- encourages efforts by the Ngok-Dinka and the Misseriya, with the assistance of UNISFA, to promote inter-communal reconciliation.

Council Dynamics

There are no fundamental differences of view on the UNISFA mandate. However, while there is recognition that both Sudan and South Sudan face their own domestic crises, several members have been frustrated by the lack of progress made by the parties in resolving their differences with regard to Abyei.

One area where members have disagreed is with regard to earthwork excavation that Sudan has carried out near the Diffra oil facility. This excavation is a violation of the 20 June

2011 agreement between Sudan and South Sudan, as it constitutes the development of security infrastructure, according to the Secretary-General's last UNISFA report. In the negotiations on the last UNISFA resolution, the US was critical of Sudan on this issue, while Russia, supported by China and Venezuela, maintained that this criticism was unduly antagonistic to Khartoum. It seems that Russia did not believe that the excavation could be considered a threat to peace and security.

Members have differed on the appropriate length of the UNISFA mandate. Countries such as Russia and Venezuela have in the past espoused a mandate of six months duration, which the Secretary-General has recommended in recent reports. The US, however, has generally supported mandate renewals of shorter duration, perhaps in an effort to pressure the parties to enhance their negotiations on Abyei. The current mandate duration is five months.

The US is the penholder on UNISFA.

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council is expected to adopt a resolution renewing the South Sudan sanctions regime and the mandate of the related Panel of Experts. The Council will consider the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), which expires on 31 July 2016, and a report on the technical assistance provided by the Secretary-General to the AU for the implementation of Chapter V (i.e. justice and reconciliation) of the August 2015 peace agreement to end the civil war, including the establishment of a hybrid court for South Sudan.

Key Recent Developments

A security, humanitarian and human rights catastrophe continues to unfold in South Sudan, while implementation of the August 2015 peace agreement continues to falter. According to OCHA, there are now 1.69 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in South Sudan, and more than 640,000 have fled to neighbouring countries as a result of

the conflict that started in December 2013. Meanwhile, approximately 2.8 million people confront severe food insecurity in the country. In recent months, violence with both political and inter-communal overtones has continued to be reported in various parts of South Sudan.

On 17-18 February, fighting in the UNMISS protection of civilians site in Malakal led to the deaths of 25 people and injuries to more than 50. The incident was marked by clashes between the Dinka and Shilluk communities, with reports that armed individuals wearing the uniform of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)—the army of the South Sudan government—entered the camp, fired on civilians and burned IDP shelters. Several thousand members of the Dinka, Nuer and Shilluk communities fled the camp as a result of the violence. Council members issued a press statement on 19 February, in which they condemned the violence and emphasised that "attacks against civilians and United Nations premises may constitute war crimes". On 11 March, DPKO forwarded to the Council a confidential note

with the findings of a preliminary investigation on the incident. Also on 11 March, Stéphane Dujarric, the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, announced that DPKO and the DFS would convene an independent high-level board of inquiry to carry out "an in-depth investigation" of UNMISS's response to the violence.

On 19 March, fighting broke out among Nuer inhabitants at a protection of civilians site in Juba. One person was killed and scores injured. UNMISS issued a press release on 20 March stating that the mission was "working with Community Watch Group leaders to ascertain the reasons for the altercation and mediate between the parties".

On 21 January, the SPLA clashed with the South Sudan National Liberation Movement, an armed opposition group, in Western Equatoria state, south of the town of Yambio. The hostilities soon extended to Yambio itself, where according to Human Rights Watch, there is "evidence that government soldiers burned and looted civilians' homes during and after the fighting in Yambio, driving

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOUTH SUDAN [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2271](#) (2 March 2016) was a technical rollover extending the South Sudan sanctions regime for six weeks. [S/RES/2252](#) (15 December 2015) increased the force structure of UNMISS. [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2016/1](#) (17 March 2016) called on the parties to take certain measures and indicated that the Council would review progress by 31 March. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.7663](#) (31 March 2016) and [S/PV.7628](#) (19 February 2016) were briefings on South Sudan. [Sanctions Committee Document S/2016/70](#) (22 January 2016) was the final report of the 2206 Sanctions Committee Panel of Experts.

South Sudan (con't)

thousands of people to flee". Fighting in Western Equatoria began in May 2015 after SPLA soldiers were accused of supporting Dinka pastoralists moving into the area against the interests of local Equatorian farmers.

In recent months, violence has been reported in Western Bahr el-Ghazal state. In mid-December 2015, UNMISS received reports that government troops had burned and looted homes in an area 13 kilometres south of Wau town. UNMISS received reports of violence against the Fertit community in Wau county in January, while OCHA reported increased fighting in Wau town in February. Thousands have been displaced by the recent violence in Western Bahr el-Ghazal.

Clashes were reported on 7-8 March in Unity state's Koch county between the SPLA and the SPLA in Opposition forces. Both sides accused the other of initiating the fighting.

Some steps have been taken towards implementation of the August 2015 peace agreement. On 7 January, the parties agreed on ministerial positions for the envisioned transitional government of national unity, based on ratios established in the agreement: Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), 16 positions; SPLM/A in Opposition, ten positions; the former detainees, two positions; and other political parties, two positions. On 11 February, President Salva Kiir reappointed SPLA in Opposition leader Riek Machar as first vice president, in keeping with the August agreement.

However, the formation of the transitional government of national unity continues to be delayed amidst ongoing violations of the ceasefire agreement. In early March, a security detail of 1,370 was supposed to arrive in Juba in preparation for Machar's return. At press time, this had yet to happen, though in late March, 25 South Sudanese rebel generals had arrived in Juba. The government has also been unwilling to reconsider Kiir's October 2015 decree increasing the number of states in the country from ten to 28. This decision violates the August 2015 agreement, which is based on power-sharing ratios in ten states. Furthermore, it has aroused the ire of minority ethnic communities, who view the decision as an effort to confiscate some of their land and power for the benefit of the Dinka, Kiir's ethnic group.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met with President Kiir in Juba on 25 February. During the meeting, he underscored the importance of implementing the August

2015 peace agreement, including the establishment of the transitional government of national unity with Machar.

Kiir issued a decree on 23 March dismissing Foreign Minister Barnaba Benjamin. While no reason for the dismissal was cited, Benjamin had recently been criticised for stating that Luka Biong Deng, a well-known academic and Abyei native, is a Sudanese national. This was controversial because Abyei is a territory disputed by Sudan and South Sudan.

On 19 February, the Council held a briefing, followed by consultations, on the situation in South Sudan and UNMISS. Briefers included Ambassador Fodé Seck of Senegal, the Chair of the South Sudan Sanctions Committee, and three officials who appeared via video teleconference: Chairman of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (JMEC) Festus Mogae, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan Moustapha Soumaré and Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Šimonovic. Mogae emphasised that implementation of the agreement continued to lag behind schedule, while expressing concern about rising violence in Western Equatoria and Western Bahr el Ghazal states. Soumaré expressed concern about the violence in the Malakal protection of civilians site, fighting between government and anti-government forces in Western Bahr el Ghazal and intercommunal conflict in Jonglei, Lakes and Warrap states. He said that the mission was responding to the insecurity through long-duration patrols and temporary operating bases. Šimonovic said that the parties to the conflict continued to "attack, kill, abduct, rape, arbitrarily detain and forcefully displace civilians and pillage and destroy their property". He emphasised the importance of establishing the mechanisms outlined in Chapter V of the peace agreement—the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, the Hybrid Court for South Sudan and a compensation and reparation authority—in a way that is consistent with international norms and standards to combat impunity in South Sudan.

On 2 March, the Council adopted a technical rollover resolution renewing the South Sudan sanctions regime for an additional six weeks until 15 April and the mandate of the Panel of Experts for 10 weeks until 15 May.

The Council adopted a presidential statement on South Sudan on 17 March. The statement expressed deep concern that the parties have not fully adhered to their commitments to implement the August peace agreement. It

stated that the Council will review progress by 31 March on five steps: adhering to the permanent ceasefire; completing the implementation of security arrangements for Juba; filling the positions of president, first vice president and vice president in the transitional government of national unity; abiding by and taking no action inconsistent with the January 2016 communiqué of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, which urged an inclusive national boundary commission to review the proposal to increase the number of states and their boundaries; and protecting civilians and civilian facilities, while allowing for full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access.

On 31 March, the Council met to follow-up progress made by the parties since its 17 March presidential statement. The briefing took place in the context of Council members' consideration of expanding sanctions measures against South Sudan, particularly the discussions relating to whether to impose an arms embargo.

Sanctions-Related Developments

Ambassador Seck, the Chair of the South Sudan Sanctions Committee, provided the Council with an overview of the Panel of Experts' final report on 19 February. In particular, he highlighted the Panel's conclusion that, given the weight of the evidence, senior government and opposition officials maintained command-and-control responsibility "for actions and policies...that are grounds for designation" for sanctions.

In mid-March, Angola, China and Russia objected to a US proposal to impose targeted sanctions on Paul Malong Awan, chief of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), and Johnson Olonyi, an SPLA in Opposition general who had previously fought on the government side. This means that the proposal was rejected, given that the committee operates by consensus. The proposal to sanction Malong Awan and Olonyi was initiated in September 2015 but was put on hold at the request of Angola, China, Russia and Venezuela.

On 14 March, Leila Zerrougui, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, briefed during joint informal consultations of the South Sudan Sanctions Committee and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. She confirmed that the SPLA, the SPLA in Opposition and other armed groups have been recruiting child soldiers in South Sudan (SC/12298).

Human Rights-Related Developments

The Human Rights Council (HRC) considered during its 31st session in March, the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights containing the principal findings of the comprehensive assessment conducted by the Office of the High Commissioner into allegations of violations

South Sudan (con't)

and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law in South Sudan since the outbreak of violence in December 2013, as requested in HRC resolution 29/13 (A/HRC/31/49). The report, compiled by an assessment team deployed by the High Commissioner to South Sudan from October 2015 to January, focuses primarily on violations and abuses committed by state actors and non-state armed groups in 2015 in the worst affected states of Unity and Upper Nile States, as well as Western and Central Equatoria, where the conflict has spread.

The report finds that killings, sexual violence, displacement, destruction and looting continued unabated through 2015, with state actors bearing the greatest responsibility for violations during 2015, some of which may constitute war crimes and/or crimes against humanity. The report contains harrowing accounts of civilians suspected of supporting the opposition, including children and the disabled, killed by being burned alive, suffocated in containers, shot, hanged from trees or cut to pieces.

Recommendations made to the HRC include that it consider the establishment of a dedicated mechanism on South Sudan and that it share the report with the Security Council. Recommendations made to the Security Council include that it consider expanding the sanctions regime by imposing a comprehensive arms embargo and consider referring the matter to the ICC, failing the expeditious establishment of the Hybrid Court. The government of South Sudan responded to the report in a letter to the Office of the High Commissioner calling it inaccurate and denying its findings of government responsibility for violations, as well as opposing the appointment of a special rapporteur.

On 23 March, the HRC adopted a resolution, without a vote, that established a three-member Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, for a renewable period of one year, to monitor and report on the situation of human rights; make recommendations for its improvement; and present a written report at the HRC's 34th session (A/HRC/31/L.33). The draft resolution introduced by the US, UK, Paraguay and Albania initially referred to the establishment of a special rapporteur for a period of 30 months, but after last minute oral amendments, the text adopted established the Commission instead of a special rapporteur. South Sudan welcomed the resolution adopted and pledged it would cooperate with the Commission. China and Venezuela dissociated themselves from the consensus.

Key Issues

The key issue for the Council is how to exert leverage on the parties to ensure that they fulfil their obligations under the August 2015 peace deal. Since the signing of the agreement, its implementation has been slow, and questions remain regarding the parties' commitment to peace.

A related key issue for the Council is whether to make adjustments to the sanctions regime. In large part, the technical rollover resolution adopted in February was intended to give the Council more time to consider its options and present a more unified position at a critical moment in the peace process. However, divisions remain regarding the appropriate approach to sanctions.

Another significant issue is how to ensure that UNMISS is better able to protect civilians. This has been a long-standing challenge for the mission, given the high rates of displacement and the massive human rights violations since the start of the civil war in December 2013. Furthermore, the deadly 17-18 February incident at the Malakal protection of civilians site underscores the difficulties of providing security and keeping thousands of people safe at sites never intended, and therefore poorly equipped, for that purpose.

The question of justice and accountability is another important issue for the Council. Some, including Simonovic in his 19 February briefing to the Council, have argued that a lack of accountability in South Sudan has contributed to ongoing violence, with perpetrators permitted to act with impunity.

Options

One option for the Council is to dispatch a small emergency mission to South Sudan to discuss implementation of the peace agreement with UNMISS Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Løj, Intergovernmental Authority on Development-plus representatives and Mogae. This visiting mission could include meetings with Kiir and Machar to push for the agreement's implementation.

With regard to the 2206 sanctions regime, the most likely option is for the Council to

renew the regime and the mandate of its Panel of Experts. In doing so, the Council could impose an arms embargo on South Sudan and consider giving the Panel a specific directive to investigate the sources of corruption in South Sudan and corruption's impact on the stability of the country.

The Council could consider requesting a briefing from Šimonovic on the Human Rights Council's recent report.

Another option would be to hold an informal interactive dialogue with the AU to discuss next steps with regard to the establishment of the hybrid court for South Sudan and other options for justice, accountability and reconciliation in the country.

Council Dynamics

While all members of the Council are concerned about the situation in South Sudan, differences remain regarding the course of action the Council should pursue. Several members emphasise the importance of pressuring the parties to comply with the August 2015 peace agreement through the threat of appropriate measures, such as targeted sanctions. Others believe that threatening measures at this critical juncture, when there has been some, albeit limited, progress in the implementation of the agreement, could be counter-productive. There are also longstanding divisions among members on a possible arms embargo.

There have been different perspectives on how to move forward with accountability issues as well. When the Council negotiated the most recent UNMISS resolution in December 2015, there was considerable disagreement on the language related to the hybrid court for South Sudan called for in the peace agreement. In the initial draft of that resolution, the US added language on accountability in reference to the hybrid court; this was eventually deleted, apparently as a concession to Angola, Russia and Venezuela, which have argued that under the peace agreement issues pertaining to the court are the responsibility of the AU and not the UN.

The US is the penholder on South Sudan.

Notable Dates for April

REPORT DUE	REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION IN APRIL	REQUESTING DOCUMENT
24 March	SG report on UNAMID (Darfur)	S/RES/2228
28 March	OPCW report on the implementation of resolution 2118 (Syrian chemical weapons)	S/RES/2118
29 March	SG report on MINUSMA (Mali)	S/RES/2227
31 March	SG report on UNOCI (Côte d'Ivoire)	S/RES/2226
1 April	SG report on MINUSCA (Central African Republic)	S/RES/2117
8 April	SG report on MINURSO (Western Sahara)	S/RES/2218
8 April	Final report of the Group of Experts of the 1572 Côte d'Ivoire Sanctions Committee	S/RES/2219
13 April	SG report on UNMISS (South Sudan) and the technical assistance provided to the AU toward the establishment of a hybrid court for South Sudan	S/RES/2252 S/RES/2241
15 April	SG report on UNISFA (Abyei)	S/RES/2251
19 April	SG report on the humanitarian situation in Syria	S/RES/2139

MANDATES EXPIRE		RELEVANT DOCUMENT
15 April	South Sudan sanctions; the Panel of Experts of the 2206 Sanctions Committee expires in May but will likely be renewed in April	S/RES/2271
30 April	MINUSCA (Central African Republic)	S/RES/2117
30 April	MINURSO (Western Sahara)	S/RES/2218
30 April	Côte d'Ivoire sanctions	S/RES/2219

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