

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

The UK is planning to focus on conflict prevention in Africa during its presidency in March. Council members start the month with a visiting mission to the [Lake Chad Basin](#) region with stops in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. This will be followed by a briefing on the visiting mission.

There will be two high-level briefings, one on [Somalia](#) and the other on [South Sudan](#). Both will be chaired by UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson. The new Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmajo”, together with Special Representative Michael Keating, will participate in the briefing on Somalia. Secretary-General António Guterres and the AU High Representative, former Mali President Alpha Oumar Konaré, will brief on South Sudan. In March, the Council will also renew the mandate of UNSOM and receive a briefing on the 751/1907 Somalia Eritrea Sanctions Committee.

Another African issue this month is the situation in the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), with a resolution to be adopted to renew MONUSCO’s mandate and an update on the implementation of the DRC’s Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement.

The UK is also planning a ministerial-level open debate on modern slavery, forced labour

and conflict.

Regarding Middle East issues, members are expecting a briefing by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura on political developments in [Syria](#) early in the month, following the intra-Syrian talks which began in Geneva on 23 February. The regular monthly briefings on the Syria humanitarian situation and chemical weapons investigations have been scheduled.

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

- [Golan Heights](#), quarterly briefing on UNDOF;
- [Israel/Palestine](#), monthly briefing and the first report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 on Israeli settlements;
- [Lebanon](#), briefing on UNIFIL’s activities; and
- [Yemen](#), update on the political situation and 2140 sanctions regime.

Other issues on the programme of work include:

- [Afghanistan](#), renewal of UNAMA;
- [DPRK](#), renewal of the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee; and
- [Non-proliferation](#), briefing by the chair of the 1540 Committee.

Visiting Mission to the Lake Chad Basin Region

Expected Council Action

Council members will undertake a visiting mission to the Lake Chad Basin region at the beginning of March. The mission is intended to improve members’ understanding of the crisis in the vast area of operation of the terrorist group Boko Haram. Members will visit Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria.

France, Senegal and the UK are co-leading the mission. The chairperson of the AU Peace and Security Council is expected to accompany Council members.

Background and Mission

Increased military cooperation among countries of the region over the past two years has resulted

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UN DOCUMENTS ON THE LAKE CHAD BASIN REGION Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2017/2 (20 January 2017) condemned Boko Haram attacks and reiterated deep concern about the humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad Basin region. Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.7861 (12 January 2017) was a briefing on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin. S/PV.7748 (27 July 2016) was a briefing on the situation in the Lake Chad Basin.

Visiting Mission to the Lake Chad Basin (con't)

in Boko Haram's losing much of the territory it held at its peak in early 2015 and much of its conventional military strength. The group continues, though, to conduct a destructive insurgency through suicide bombers, improvised explosive devices and ambushes of towns and humanitarian and military targets in north-east Nigeria—from where Boko Haram emanated—Cameroon's far north, near Lake Chad in Chad and Niger's Diffa region.

Among recent developments, divisions within Boko Haram resulted in an announcement by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, to which Boko Haram declared loyalty in March 2015, that it recognised Abu Musab al-Barnawi as the group's leader instead of Abubakar Shekau. The fissure has been attributed to al-Barnawi's criticism of Boko Haram's indiscriminate attacks against Muslims. Despite these different pronouncements, it seems there remains a lack of clarity over the command and control structure of Boko Haram groups and fighters. In another setback for the group, Nigeria's President, Muhammadu Buhari, announced on 24 December 2016 that Boko Haram had been driven out of its stronghold in the Sambisa forest, though such announcements about the group have often proven premature.

Despite such gains, OCHA describes the humanitarian crisis as having continued to worsen, with the number of displaced people tripling over the last two years. According to OCHA's 3 February update on the crisis, 10.7 million people across the Lake Chad

Basin need humanitarian assistance, including 2.3 million displaced people and 7.1 million people who are severely food insecure. Famine-like conditions have been reported in parts of Borno State, Nigeria. Though the crisis is greatest in northeast Nigeria, internally displaced people and refugees from the conflict total 262,000 in Cameroon's far north, 127,000 in Chad and 241,000 in Niger. Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, has seen its population more than double to over two million people because of the influx of civilians fleeing violence.

While Boko Haram has committed widespread atrocities, counter-insurgency operations have also seen human rights violations. These have included executions, dire detention conditions of suspected members of Boko Haram and forced returns of displaced persons and refugees. Demonstrating the toll of such operations, a 17 January Nigerian military air strike on a displaced persons camp in Rann, Borno State, killed more than 100 civilians. The conflict has further devastated the region's economy, closing or severely restricting critical trading routes and uprooting traditional livelihoods.

The Council mission is being organised, in part, to increase the focus on this humanitarian crisis, which has received less attention than other crises. While the conflict is not an item on the Council's agenda, the Council held two briefings on the Lake Chad Basin crisis over the past year—on 27 July 2016 and 2 January 2017—which were characterised as sessions intended to raise awareness

of the situation. As part of what appears to be efforts to increase the focus on the crisis and to prevent its further deterioration, an international donor conference was held in Oslo on 24 February for Nigeria and the Lake Chad region, raising \$672 million for the next three years. OCHA has appealed for \$1.5 billion to meet emergency needs in the Lake Chad basin during 2017, more than double the \$739 million requested last year. On 17 February, two days after a donor mission to Borno State preparing for the conference had departed, Boko Haram launched attacks in the outskirts of Maiduguri, leading to the deaths of nine suicide bombers and two civilians.

Members will evaluate the security situation, including difficulties facing the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in addition to assessing the scale of the humanitarian crisis. The MNJTF, formed by countries of the region to combat Boko Haram, has faced resource and organisational challenges.

Ahead of the mission, the Council's Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security met on 27 February on the Lake Chad region, in light of violence inflicted on women and girls in the conflict. Also in February, representatives of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate travelled to Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria with the heads of the UN's West African and Central African regional offices to meet authorities on approaches to dealing with captured and detained persons affiliated with Boko Haram.

In Hindsight: Can the Security Council Prevent Conflict?

One of the most important tasks the Security Council is mandated by the UN Charter to perform—and one of the things that it does least well—is to prevent violent conflict. In recent years, wars have erupted in the Central African Republic, Mali, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen, among other cases, while political solutions to long-standing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Darfur, for example, have proved elusive, with civilians suffering the brunt of the fighting. Humanitarian crises have become more pronounced, and there are now some

65 million people displaced by conflict worldwide, the highest number since the establishment of the UN in the wake of World War II.

In our recent research report *Can the Security Council Prevent Conflict?* we analyse some of the factors that have inhibited this organ's preventive work, and offer options for how its conflict prevention and mitigation efforts can be strengthened.

Key Obstacles to Prevention

There are several reasons why conflict prevention is difficult for the Council. Among

them are diverging views on state sovereignty, often making it difficult to address emerging intra-state crises. While respect for sovereignty is a cornerstone of international law, a tension exists between those members who have an unconditional view of sovereignty and those who tend to emphasise the responsibilities a state has toward its people. Those upholding traditional views of sovereignty often point to the devastating humanitarian and human rights consequences that can result from violations of sovereignty, citing as examples the US military intervention

In Hindsight: Can the Security Council Prevent Conflict? (con't)

in Iraq in 2003 and the NATO operation in Libya in 2011. On the other hand, sovereignty concerns at times limit the tools at the Council's disposal, including those that are non-coercive in nature, preventing it from engaging at all in crises at an early stage, when opportunities for preventive engagement are usually most promising.

Beyond the issue of sovereignty, the political interests of powerful Council members can undermine efforts to prevent conflicts from breaking out or escalating. States frequently attach a political stigma to being discussed in the Council, and powerful international or regional patrons can significantly limit or at times block discussion of crises affecting their allies. As a result, even when there are warning signs of an impending crisis, preventive action—or the mere discussion of a situation—can be delayed or precluded. The starkest example of how the political interests of powerful states can negatively impact the efforts of the Council to prevent or mitigate conflict is when the veto—or the threat of the veto—is used to forestall action.

The primary problem the Council faces regarding prevention is a lack of action rather than a lack of information. However, the Council is not always well served in terms of the quality and timeliness of information it receives from the Secretariat to inform its decision-making. A lack of integrated analysis and information-sharing remains a systemic problem. The immediate decisions of new Secretary-General António Guterres to strengthen strategic analysis and decision-making within his executive office are clearly designed to address this weakness.

The penholder system is another factor that at times militates against effective preventive action, when members, permanent and non-permanent, defer to the penholder. When the penholder delays in taking action because it is preoccupied with other agenda items or when it is slow in considering an appropriate response, the Council can be paralysed unless other members fill the void.

Another problem with regard to the Council's ability to prevent conflict is the

sheer volume of its workload. At the present time, the Council is experiencing high levels of activity, mostly in a conflict management role, reflected in a near-record number of meetings and decisions adopted. Furthermore, the Council is divided on a number of issues. The ten non-consensual resolutions adopted in 2016 were the most in the post-Cold War period, and there were two vetoed draft resolutions (both on Syria). This level of divisiveness suggests that significant time and energy is being expended on trying to reach agreement, in large part on ongoing crises in a conflict-management capacity. The burdens placed on the Council's workload by peace operations and other conflict-management responsibilities could in time be alleviated through successful conflict prevention. In the meantime, it is hard for the Council to focus intensively on its preventive responsibilities because it is overwhelmed with the multiple crises it must manage.

Options for Action

Despite the difficulties the Council has had in preventing conflict in recent years, there are some encouraging signs. The new Secretary-General has promised to make prevention a priority for the UN, and pledged to “foster a more trusting relationship...with the Council”. It should be further noted that the Council already possesses a variety of tools for conflict prevention and mitigation; it just needs to use them more effectively.

The following are some options for the Council to improve its work in these areas.

- More efforts could be made to hold strategic, interactive discussions on emerging and evolving crises among senior diplomats in the Council and between these diplomats and relevant regional, sub-regional, national and local actors. In general, Council consultations and other meetings need to become more interactive, more spontaneous and more geared toward problem-solving.
- The work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa could be strengthened. Rather than

focusing on thematic issues, it could renew its consideration of country cases (as in its early years), generate ideas for how to approach these and report to the Council with options for action.

- The Council could make use of smaller visiting missions. Smaller missions would be able to deploy more quickly, given that logistical and security arrangements would be less onerous. Furthermore, they might be able to engage more easily in the type of face-to-face preventive diplomacy and mediation that can be difficult with a larger group.
- Given the positive experience of the UN's regional offices in conflict prevention and mediation, the Council could request a report from the Secretary-General regarding how it can enhance its support for such offices. The report could include analysis of the potential implications of establishing additional regional offices, including where they are most needed, what added value they might have and how the Council could best collaborate with them.
- The elected members could take greater initiative in drafting outcomes, including in the face of a developing crisis, rather than waiting for the penholder and the permanent members to act.
- There could be greater interaction between the Council and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). For example, the Council could follow through on its intention expressed in resolution 2282 to regularly request and draw upon the PBC's “specific, strategic and targeted” advice in the establishment, review and drawdown of peacekeeping operations and special political missions.
- The Council could make better use of the International Court of Justice (ICJ). For example, it could, when appropriate, recommend that states involved in a situation that threatens international peace and security resolve the legal aspects of their dispute through the ICJ.

Status Update since our February Forecast

UNRCCA (Central Asia)

On 2 February, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of UNRCCA, Petko Draganov, briefed Council members in consultations. Russia proposed a press statement but Council members failed to reach agreement, mainly due to continuing differences over whether to add new language relating to UNRCCA's cooperation with regional organisations. They were, however, able to agree on press elements read by the Council President following the consultations, welcoming Draganov's briefing, reaffirming the importance of conflict prevention tools, acknowledging the role of UNRCCA and encouraging greater cooperation between states in the region, UNRCCA and relevant regional organisations.

Ukraine

On 2 February, the Council held a meeting on the situation in Ukraine, requested by Ukraine itself following the recent spike in fighting in the Donetsk region (S/PV.7876). Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman briefed on the political situation in the country. The Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, updated the Council on OSCE-related activities and ceasefire violations arising from the recent surge in fighting. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien informed the Council of the grave humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine.

Iraq

On 2 February, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of UNAMI, Ján Kubiš, briefed the Council (S/PV.7875) on the latest UNAMI report (S/2017/75). A main focus of his briefing was the Mosul military operation and its humanitarian impact. On the political front, Kubiš informed the Council of the latest national reconciliation efforts in Iraq.

Peace and Security in Africa

On 3 February, the Secretary-General briefed Council members in consultations on his participation in the recent AU summit. According to a statement read by the Council President following the consultations, Council members welcomed the Secretary-General's

initiative to brief on his trip and expressed their full support for such an approach.

Counter-Terrorism

On 7 February, the Council was briefed by Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, on UN counter-terrorism efforts in support of member states' fight against ISIL, followed by consultations (S/PV.7877). The briefing was based on the Secretary-General's 2 February strategic-level report (S/2017/97) requested by resolution 2253 of 17 December 2015. On 13 February, the Council held an open debate on the protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks (S/PV.7882). Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin of Ukraine chaired the session. Briefings were given by the Secretary-General's Chef de Cabinet, Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti; Jürgen Stock, the Secretary-General of the International Criminal Police Organization (via video teleconference); Hamid Ali Rao, Deputy Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons; Chris Trelawny, Special Adviser on Maritime Security and Facilitation to the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization; and Olli Heinonen, Senior Advisor on Science and Non-proliferation at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and a former Deputy Director-General of the IAEA. Ahead of the debate, Ukraine circulated a concept note (S/2017/104). The Council adopted resolution 2341, directing the CTC and CTED to continue as appropriate, within their respective mandates, to examine member states' efforts to protect critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks. In a 1 February press statement, Council members condemned the attack against a UN monitoring team near the Nigeria-Cameroon border, during which one UN independent contractor, three Nigerian nationals and one Cameroonian national were killed and others injured (SC/12702).

Sudan (Darfur)

On 8 February, the Council adopted resolution 2340, which renewed the mandate of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee Panel of Experts until 12 March 2018 (S/PV.7878).

Libya

On 8 February, Council members received a briefing from the Special Representative of

the Secretary-General and head of UNSMIL, Martin Kobler, followed by consultations (S/PV.7879). The meeting focused on efforts under way to reach an inclusive and sustainable political settlement in Libya.

Côte d'Ivoire

On 8 February, the Council was briefed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of UNOCI, Aïchatou Mindaoudou, on the latest developments in the country and the Secretary-General's 31 January report (S/2017/89). Mindaoudou informed the Council about the results of the 2016 constitutional referendum which established the Third Republic. In addition to UNOCI's drawdown activities, Mindaoudou also addressed the recent mutiny of soldiers in various cities throughout the country (S/PV.7880).

Guinea-Bissau

On 14 February, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Guinea-Bissau, Modibo Touré, briefed the Council on the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2017/111) and recent developments in Guinea-Bissau (S/PV.7883). The chair of the PBC's Guinea-Bissau configuration, Ambassador Mauro Viera (Brazil), also briefed and statements were additionally made by representatives of Guinea-Bissau and Liberia on behalf of ECOWAS. Following consultations, Council members issued press elements expressing their concern over the political impasse in Guinea-Bissau and urging national stakeholders to implement the Conakry agreement and ECOWAS roadmap. On 23 February, the Council adopted resolution 2343 renewing the mandate of UNIOGBIS until 28 February 2018. The resolution, inter alia, fully endorsed the recommendations outlined in the Secretary-General's report regarding the need for UNIOGBIS to refocus its efforts towards political capacities in support of the Special Representative's good offices and political facilitation role.

Children and Armed Conflict

The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict met on 14 February to adopt its conclusions on the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict in Colombia (S/2016/837) and for the introduction of the Secretary-General's report on children and

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armed conflict in Somalia (S/2016/1098). The Colombia report was introduced on 9 January, and there were three meetings held to negotiate the conclusions.

Central African Republic

On 15 February, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous briefed the Council (S/PV.7884) on the latest Secretary-General's report on the situation in the CAR (S/2017/94). The chair of the CAR configuration of the PBC, Ambassador Omar Hilale (Morocco) also spoke. In addition, Ukrainian Ambassador Volodymyr Yelchenko addressed the Council in his capacity as Chair of the CAR 2127 Sanctions Committee. The briefings were followed by consultations. On 17 February the Sanctions Committee met to discuss the Panel of Experts' latest progress report.

Conflicts in Europe

On 21 February, the Council held an open debate chaired by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin on the maintenance of international peace and security focusing on conflicts in Europe (S/PV.7886). UN

Secretary-General António Guterres, OSCE Secretary-General Lamberto Zannier and Secretary-General of the European External Action Service Helga Schmid briefed. A concept note circulated by Ukraine ahead of the debate argued that emerging conflicts as well as a number of protracted conflicts in the region pose a serious threat to international peace and security and warrant the Council's attention (S/2017/108).

Western Sahara

On 21 February, at the request of Uruguay, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous briefed Council members under "any other business" on the functionality of MINURSO.

Briefing by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office

On 22 February, Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz briefed the Council in his capacity as Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE (S/PV.7887). Kurz outlined the main priorities during Austria's chairmanship which included defusing existing conflicts; fighting radicalisation and violent extremism;

and reestablishing trust and confidence. He also addressed the situation in Ukraine and the OSCE's role in facilitating the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Human Rights

On 24 February, Senegal, Sweden and Uruguay co-hosted a closed Arria-formula meeting with the heads of human rights components of three UN peace operations: José Maria Aranaz of MONUSCO, Eugene Nindorera of UNMISS and Kirsten Young of UNSOM.

Kosovo

On 27 February, Special Representative Zahir Tanin briefed the Council on Kosovo, presenting the latest UNMIK report (S/2017/95/Rev.1). Tanin noted that there had been heightened tension between Belgrade and Pristina over the past several months. He also noted, however, that the EU facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina had resumed. Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić and Kosovo's Ambassador to the US, Vlora Çitaku, also made statements.

Syria

Expected Council Action

In March, Council members expect to receive briefings on the humanitarian and political situation in Syria as well as on the use and production of chemical weapons.

Key Recent Developments

Efforts persisted to establish a mechanism to monitor the nation-wide ceasefire brokered by Russia and Turkey that started on 30 December 2016. Following 23-24 January talks in Astana, Turkey and Russia, joined by Iran, decided to establish a trilateral mechanism to observe and ensure full compliance with the ceasefire. At a 31 January briefing by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, Council members welcomed the talks, but some expressed concerns over the risk of having

a parallel political process if there was not adequate coordination with the UN's mediation efforts. At the request of some of these members, a press statement drafted by Russia, released after the Council meeting, included language regarding ceasefire violations and the continued need to secure safe and unimpeded humanitarian access across Syria.

A technical meeting to establish the mechanism to monitor the ceasefire took place in Astana on 6 February with the participation of Russia, Turkey and Iran. The US and Jordan also participated, and UN representatives did so in an advisory role. A second meeting on 16 February also included representatives of the Syrian government and opposition groups. After the meeting, the guarantor countries agreed to a concept note for a

joint group as part of the trilateral mechanism to observe the ceasefire, share information regarding the investigation of violations and promote confidence-building measures such as the release of detainees and abductees.

The High Negotiations Committee (HNC), a Riyadh-based opposition umbrella group, announced a 21-member unified opposition delegation comprising representatives of political and armed groups, as well as one representative each from the opposition groups based in Cairo and Moscow (which are tolerated by the Syrian government). However, these groups refused to be part of the HNC delegation and participated separately. Despite the circulation by Russia of a draft constitution for Syria at the first meeting in Astana, de Mistura has repeatedly stressed

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2336](#) (31 December 2016) welcomed efforts by Russia and Turkey to end violence in Syria and jumpstart a political process. [S/RES/2319](#) (17 November 2016) and [S/RES/2118](#) (27 September 2013) were on chemical weapons. [S/RES/2254](#) (18 December 2015) was on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. **Secretary-General's Reports** [S/2017/144](#) (16 February 2017) was on the humanitarian situation. [S/2017/86](#) (30 January 2017) was the monthly OPCW report. **Security Council Letter S/2017/45** (16 January 2017) was an update by the OPCW fact-finding mission on a 2 August 2016 incident and its 2016 activities. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.7888** (22 February 2017) was on the humanitarian situation. **Security Council Press Statement SC/12701** (31 January 2017) welcomed the International Meeting on Syria held in Astana, Kazakhstan, and took note of the joint statement adopted at the meeting by Iran, Russia and Turkey.

that the agenda for the Geneva talks is resolution 2254, which provides for the establishment of credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance, and sets a timeline and process for drafting a new constitution and holding free and fair elections within 18 months. At press time, the parties were expected to start discussing the issues of substance after a few days focusing on procedural matters.

Although the ceasefire is largely holding, several violations have taken place since it went into effect. Government airstrikes against rebel-held areas, including in the vicinity of Damascus, persisted despite a formal request by Russia to the government of Syria to “silence the skies” in the areas covered by the ceasefire during the Geneva talks. Despite the overall improvement in the security situation, OCHA head Stephen O’Brien stressed in a 22 February Council briefing how the ceasefire has not resulted in an increase in humanitarian access. According to a 16 February report by the Secretary-General, not a single inter-agency cross-line humanitarian convoy planned for January was deployed that month.

Turkey’s Operation Euphrates Shield has continued its counter-terrorism operations, with support from Russia and the US, against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), taking control over the northern town of al-Bab on 23 February. The presence of terrorist groups such as ISIL and Tahrir al-Sham (the latest iteration of the Al-Qaida-affiliated Al-Nusra Front), which are considered legitimate targets by the terms of the ceasefire, has been claimed to justify government attacks in places such as Dara’a, Idlib and Homs. The Syrian Democratic Forces (which include the Kurdish armed group YPG) have made progress against ISIL’s stronghold Raqqa, but it remains unclear whether the US will continue providing the same level of support to their operations under the new administration.

On 24 February, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Kim Won-soo, and the head of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM), Virginia Gamba, briefed Council members on efforts to re-establish the full operational capacity of the JIM, which is expected to be reached in March, four months after the renewal of its mandate.

Since mid-December 2016, led by France

and the UK, Council members have been negotiating a draft resolution seeking to impose sanctions on individuals and entities associated with the Syrian government and linked to the use of chemical weapons against its own population in three cases where responsibility was established by the JIM. In early January, Russia circulated another draft resolution noting the decrease of allegations of use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government and placing emphasis on their use by non-state actors. Following the release of a report by Human Rights Watch claiming that coordinated chemical attacks occurred in rebel-controlled parts of Aleppo in November and December 2016, France said on 14 February that it was time for the Council to act on this issue. At the consultations on 24 February, France and the UK, joined by the US as a co-penholder, announced that they were aiming at putting the draft to a vote before the end of the month. Russia, which has repeatedly opposed punitive measures against the Syrian government, reiterated its scepticism regarding the conclusions presented by the JIM, questioned the body of evidence on which they were based and announced that it would veto such a draft. On 28 February, the draft was put to a vote, receiving nine votes in favour, three abstentions and three against (including from veto-wielding Russia and China).

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 34th session in March, the HRC is set to hold a high-level panel discussion on the human rights situation in Syria as mandated by HRC resolution 33/23. It will also hold an interactive dialogue with the Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria to discuss its most recent report (A/HRC/34/64).

Key Issue

Six years since the start of a war that has exacted a death toll approaching half a million, left 640,000 living under siege and displaced half of the Syrian population, including 4.86 million refugees, the essential issue for the Council is to exert effective leadership in supporting a cessation of hostilities and efforts to reach a political solution.

Options

The Council has many tools at its

disposal—such as imposing an arms embargo or targeted sanctions, referring Syria to the International Criminal Court or authorising a no-fly zone to deter Syria from using its aerial capacity—but P5 divisions have made it impossible for the Council to fulfil its role in maintaining international peace and security in the case of Syria.

Council members could, both individually and collectively, step up efforts to ensure that the government guarantees humanitarian access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

Council members may organise an Arrria-formula meeting with the Human Rights Council’s Commission of Inquiry on Syria.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members’ engagement in the Syrian political negotiations has been limited to following the lead taken by key actors outside the Council. This was the case with the adoption of resolution 2236 on 31 December 2016, which was tabled by Russia and Turkey. In this context, Council members have made efforts to ensure that the initiative by Russia and Turkey reinforces and does not undermine the UN mediation, which is guided by resolution 2254 and the June 2012 Geneva Communiqué, endorsed in resolution 2118. Some Council members have expressed doubts about the Syrian government’s willingness to compromise in peace talks on a genuine transitional governing body, given its recent military victories.

Some Council members questioned the timing of the vote on the draft resolution imposing sanctions for the use of chemical weapons. However, the P3 stressed that efforts to ensure accountability should not undermine a political process, even when it was clear that the draft would be vetoed.

Following public expressions of support for the establishment of safe zones by the new US administration, on 3 February, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, stressed that the current situation does not allow for the planning of zones safe enough for the protection of civilians and the return of refugees; he emphasised that the investment of international efforts should be focused on reaching a political solution. Syria has also rejected this proposal. So far, no discussion in this regard has taken place in the Council.

Somalia

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), which expires on 31 March. The Council is awaiting recommendations from the Secretary-General on the UN's role in Somalia in the post-election period and may opt for a technical rollover of UNSOM's mandate until those recommendations can be duly considered. The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) is expected to submit its report on the Somali Security Forces to the Council by 30 March, as requested in resolution 2317.

The Council will also receive a briefing by the Chair of the 751/1907 Somalia Eritrea Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Kairat Umarov (Kazakhstan).

Key Recent Developments

Somalia completed its electoral process on 8 February with the election of President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, commonly known as "Farmajo", a former Somali prime minister and dual US citizen—an outcome that had not been generally predicted. In a vote plagued with widespread corruption, Farmajo beat 20 other candidates, including incumbent Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. His brief tenure as prime minister in 2010-2011 was notable for a reduction in the size of a bloated cabinet and the introduction of a reliable payment system for the army.

Following Farmajo's election, the Council on 10 February adopted a presidential statement welcoming the conclusion of the electoral process and the election of Farmajo. Looking forward, the Council underscored the importance of the timely and transparent appointment of ministers and cabinet positions, and called on Farmajo and his government to give urgent attention to the immediate risk of famine and to address the consequences of the severe drought in Somalia. The Council appealed to donors to increase their support for the Humanitarian Response Plan for Somalia and to support the appeals for aid by Somali federal and regional authorities. The Council also emphasised as an immediate priority the need to accelerate agreement between the federal and regional authorities on a Somali federal security

sector architecture that clearly defines the roles, responsibilities and structures of relevant security sector institutions under full Somali ownership. The Council stressed the importance of the FGS enhancing efforts to strengthen Somalia's security in light of the eventual handover of security responsibilities from the AU Mission in Somalia to the Somali security services and encouraged UNSOM to continue to undertake a comprehensive approach to security in close coordination with the Somali authorities, AMISOM and international partners. The Council also urged the new federal administration to lay the foundations for inclusive and transparent elections in four years time by, among other things, ensuring that public office in Somalia cannot be achieved through harassment, intimidation, corruption or manipulation.

According to OCHA, Somalia is in the grip of an intense drought as a result of two consecutive seasons of poor rainfall, and five million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Peter de Clercq, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, asserted on 2 February that it was time to act to prevent another famine. "If we do not scale up the drought response immediately, it will cost lives, further destroy livelihoods, and could undermine the pursuit of key state-building and peacebuilding initiatives," he warned, adding that even a severe drought does not automatically have to mean catastrophe "if we can respond early enough with timely support from the international community."

On 15 February, the UK's envoy for the Horn of Africa, Nicholas Kay, warned that hundreds of thousands of people in Somalia may die or be near death by May. The UK is organising a conference on Somalia in London in May aimed at encouraging progress on long-term stability and security in the country. Kay warned that if "by the time the conference in May happens we are having to sound the alarm and discuss the famine issue, that is going to be too late".

In a 16 January communiqué, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) requested the UN Security Council to authorise an AMISOM surge of 4,500 troops for a non-renewable six-month period. This request was made to enable AMISOM to undertake

mandated tasks set out in its 2016 concept of operations, especially in relation to the expansion of offensive operations and the exit strategy of the mission. It also called on the international community to continue to provide and increase its support to AMISOM and the Somali National Security Forces.

In a 12 February statement, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour urged AMISOM and the FGS to ensure that their forces comply with human rights standards in upcoming joint military operations against the terror group Al-Shabaab. Gilmour also thanked Jubbaland State President Ahmed Mohamed Islam Madobe for allowing the UN to open a human rights office in Jubbaland State. The 27 January report of the Secretary-General on Somalia said that security operations had generated 242 civilian casualties, of which 55 deaths and 120 injuries were attributed to the Somali Security Forces, and 37 deaths and 12 injuries to AMISOM. According to the report, UNSOM continued to engage with AMISOM on reported allegations of violations of human rights and humanitarian law, including the 17 July 2016 incident that left 14 civilians dead and three others injured in Wardinle, near Baidoa, which was attributed to AMISOM troops from Ethiopia. At the time of the report, AMISOM was finalising its investigation into the incident.

The Council met on 27 January for a briefing by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Michael Keating, AU Special Representative to Somalia Francisco Madeira and Asha Gelle, the Chair of Goodwill Ambassadors for the 30 percent reserved seats for women in the Somali elections. The meeting was followed by consultations, after which Council President Ambassador Olof Skoog (Sweden) read out elements to the press, which condemned in the strongest terms Al-Shabaab attacks on a Kenyan military base in Kolbiyowon that morning and on the Dayah Hotel in Mogadishu earlier that week. Council members commended the Somali people for the electoral process and paid tribute to the Somali Security Forces and AMISOM troops who secured the election. They also underscored the need for the incoming government to set its priorities

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2317 (10 November 2016) was on Somalia and Eritrea sanctions with ten votes in favour. S/RES/2316 (9 November 2016) reauthorised Somalia anti-piracy measures. S/RES/2297 (7 July 2016) extended AMISOM's authorisation until 31 May 2017 with no major changes. S/RES/2275 (24 March 2016) extended UNSOM's mandate. Security Council Presidential Statements S/PRST/2017/3 (10 February) welcomed the conclusion of the electoral process. S/PRST/2016/13 (19 August 2016) welcomed the meeting of Somalia's National Leadership Forum on the implementation of the 2016 National Electoral Process and regretted the delayed electoral timetable. Secretary-General's Report S/2017/21 (9 January 2017) was on Somalia. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.7873 (27 January 2017) was the briefing by Keating, Madeira and Gelle.

Somalia (con't)

for the continued peace- and state-building effort, emphasising the need for the development of a credible and capable Somali national security sector. They congratulated Somalia on the increased representation of women and youth in parliament, expressed deep concern at the worsening drought conditions in Somalia, and urged partners to provide funds and assistance. They also called for full and unhindered humanitarian access.

On 24 February, Senegal, Sweden and Uruguay co-hosted a closed Arria-formula meeting with the heads of human rights components of three UN peace operations. Kirsten Young of UNSOM addressed Council members on the roles of human rights components in the partnership between the UN and the AU and in preventing the recurrence of conflict, including through improved accountability and compliance, as they pertain to the Somali context.

Key Issues

A key issue is determining how the Council and UNSOM can best support Somalia in the post-election period on state-building issues, including the constitutional review and completion of federal state formation.

On security concerns, a main priority is strengthening the Somali National Security Forces and enhancing their ability to work with AMISOM in the fight against Al-Shabaab, particularly in light of AMISOM's plan to begin transitioning out of Somalia in October 2018.

An urgent issue is responding to the worsening humanitarian crisis and potential famine in Somalia, which if not addressed could have grave deleterious effects on recent political gains.

Options

A likely option is for the Council to conduct a short-term technical rollover of UNSOM's

mandate until it has had time to review the forthcoming recommendations of the Secretary-General on the UN's presence in Somalia in the post-electoral phase, at which point it would proceed with renewing the mandate with those recommendations in mind.

Another option would be to renew the mandate in March for one year without any major changes.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in supporting Somalia's electoral and state-building processes and in their support for AMISOM, as demonstrated by unified messages conveyed during the Council's visit to Somalia in May and the uncontested adoption of recent Council outcomes on Somalia—including its 10 February presidential statement.

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

Afghanistan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council will renew the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which expires on 17 March. It will also hold its quarterly debate on Afghanistan, during which it will consider the Secretary-General's 90-day report on UNAMA. Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, is expected to brief.

Key Recent Developments

The security situation remains very fragile and continues to take a heavy toll on Afghan security forces and the civilian population.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) continues to lose ground over territories it previously controlled, due to Afghan forces' activities with the support of NATO airstrikes. On 12 February, Afghan forces launched a new offensive against ISIL in Nangarhar province, where ISIL still holds a few districts. At the same time, the threat of

ISIL terrorist attacks throughout the country has intensified. At least 21 people were killed and more than 40 injured in a 7 February suicide bombing outside Afghanistan's Supreme Court in Kabul, for which ISIL claimed responsibility. Council members condemned the attack in a press statement issued the same day.

Meanwhile, clashes between the Taliban and Afghan security forces have intensified, with the Taliban continuing to push forward. The Taliban controls about 10 percent of the country's districts and contests another 33 percent of them. Since the withdrawal of the bulk of NATO forces in December 2014, Afghan forces have relied heavily on NATO airstrikes against the Taliban. However, these have come at a significant cost. According to UNAMA, NATO airstrikes in Helmand province on 9 and 10 February killed at least 18 civilians, nearly all women and children.

Another alarming trend are attacks by militants on aid workers, resulting in limited humanitarian access. On 8 February, six

employees of the International Committee of the Red Cross were killed and two others were reported to be abducted to an unknown location in northern Afghanistan, in an attack attributed to ISIL.

The Taliban, ISIL and other groups have reportedly also profited from the illegal smuggling of natural resources. On 2 February the Afghan Anti-Corruption Network, an Afghan civil society watchdog, reported that militants received at least \$46 million from the smuggling of natural resources, mainly marble and talc, from Nangarhar province to Pakistan.

On the political front, the Taliban continue to resist political dialogue. In an appearance before the US Senate Armed Services Committee on 9 February, the commander of NATO's Resolute Support mission and US forces in Afghanistan, Gen. John Nicholson, accused Russia of undermining NATO's efforts and acting to legitimise the Taliban as an anti-ISIL force. There have been reports that Russia has acknowledged it has "limited

UN DOCUMENTS ON AFGHANISTAN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2274 (15 March 2016) renewed the mandate of UNAMA until 17 March 2017. **Secretary-General's Report S/2016/1049** (13 December 2016) was on UNAMA. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.7844** (19 December 2016) was the quarterly debate on Afghanistan. **Security Council Press Statement SC/12708** (7 February 2017) condemned an ISIL-perpetrated suicide attack outside the Afghanistan Supreme Court the same day. **Sanctions-Related Documents SC/12721** (16 February 2017) was a press release on the delisting of one individual from the Afghanistan Sanction list. **SC/12705** (3 February 2016) announced the removal of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar from the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions list.

Afghanistan (con't)

political contact” with the Taliban but denies assisting the group. Nicholson also said that NATO should deploy additional troops in order to defeat the Taliban.

Russia hosted talks on countering extremist activities in Afghanistan and the region on 15 February with representatives of Afghanistan, China, India, Iran and Pakistan. Afghanistan and India took a hard line against the Taliban in the meeting, while China, Russia and Pakistan urged direct talks with them. Afghanistan requested that the US be invited to any future talks. However, at the end of the meeting, Russia extended a future invite only to Asian nations.

The tense relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan took a turn for the worst after a terrorist attack on a Sufi shrine in southern Pakistan killed more than 80 civilians and wounded some 250 on 16 February. Pakistan reacted with cross-border shelling, targeting camps supposedly used by Jammāt-ul Ahrar, a splinter faction of the Pakistani Taliban. In addition it closed the border crossings to all movement of people and goods and demanded that Afghanistan hand over 76 suspected terrorists. Afghanistan reacted with a similar demand that Pakistan hand over 80 suspected insurgents and close 32 camps it claims are being used by the Taliban and other groups.

The Council held its last quarterly debate on Afghanistan on 19 December 2016. During the debate, Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, told the Council that in 2016 opium poppy production in Afghanistan grew by 43 percent.

Sanctions-Related Developments

The then Chair of the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Gerard van Bohemen (New Zealand), briefed the Council on 19 December after visiting Afghanistan between 11 and 13 November 2016. He noted that the Taliban's income from narcotics is estimated at around \$400 million per year and that cutting off that financial stream could have a significant impact on the Taliban's capabilities.

While reconciliation efforts with the Taliban have stalled, the government concluded an agreement on 29 September with insurgent leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, head of the Hezb-i-Islami militant group. On 3 February, the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee removed Hekmatyar from its sanctions list.

On 16 February the Committee delisted one individual, who is now known to have passed away in 2001.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 6 February, UNAMA released its annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Afghanistan, covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2016. The report concluded that 2016 saw the highest number of civilian casualties—11,418 documented deaths and injuries—since reporting began in 2009, including record numbers of children killed and injured, with fighting between pro (both Afghani and international) and anti-government forces the leading cause of death. In an accompanying statement, Yamamoto warned that levels of civilian casualties are likely to remain “appallingly high” unless all parties seriously commit to examining the consequences of their operations.

On 12 February, UNAMA released a statement expressing its grave concern at the escalation of fighting in Helmand province, which left at least 25 civilians, mostly women and children, dead and many more wounded. According to UNAMA, NATO airstrikes killed at least 18 civilians, as mentioned above, while a Taliban suicide attack on 11 February killed at least seven civilians, mainly children, and wounded more. The 891 civilians killed or injured by the different parties in Helmand in 2016 was the highest figure in a province outside of Kabul.

The Human Rights Council is set to consider the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Afghanistan at its 34th session (A/HRC/34/41) in March. The report, covering the period from January to November 2016 and prepared in cooperation with UNAMA, highlighted as areas of ongoing concern the treatment of conflict-related detainees, the prevalence of violence against women and lack of respect for freedom of expression, and drew attention to institutional weaknesses and a culture of impunity as factors that continue to adversely impact the human rights situation.

Key Issues

The immediate issue for the Council is the renewal of UNAMA's mandate.

An ongoing key issue has been how to address the deteriorating security situation, its devastating impact on the country's stability and the toll the conflict is taking on the civilian population.

A related issue is whether it is possible to generate momentum for reconciliation efforts, given the continued heavy fighting between the insurgents and government forces.

The link between the insurgents and drug production and trafficking and illicit

exploitation of natural resources is another ongoing issue.

Options

The most likely option for the Council is to renew UNAMA's mandate for an additional year. In doing so, the Council may consider language that:

- deplores the high number of civilian casualties and demands that all sides avoid killing and injuring civilians, recalling that targeting civilians is a war crime;
- underscores the need for the international community—and particularly neighbouring countries—to continue to support and cooperate with Afghanistan;
- calls for accountability for alleged crimes committed;
- emphasises the linkages between extremism and drug production and illegal exploitation of natural resources (e.g. talcum, marble and gold); and
- highlights the importance of reconciliation in an effort to bring an end to insurgency in Afghanistan.

Council Dynamics

Council members' long-standing concerns about the deteriorating security environment and its impact on civilians continue, though with different points of emphasis. During the last debate, Russia said it was “perplexed” by claims that it is providing support to the Taliban. Russia then noted that the Quadri-lateral Coordination Group, which consists of Afghan, Chinese, Pakistani and US officials, has proven unsuccessful in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table. In addition, pointing to statements made by Nicholson, Russia expressed its dismay at attempts to diminish the threat of ISIL in Afghanistan.

Several Council members, including Egypt, France, Japan, Russia and now Kazakhstan—continue to raise concerns about the connection between the Taliban insurgency and drug production and trafficking. During the last debate, Japan reiterated that drug trafficking fuels corruption and the Taliban insurgency, while also jeopardising the safety of Afghans. Japan added that the same can be said of funding from illegal mining activities.

Japan is the penholder on Afghanistan, and Kazakhstan chairs the Sanctions Committee.

Lebanon

Expected Council Action

In March, Special Coordinator for Lebanon Sigrid Kaag and the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations El Ghasim Wane will brief Council members in consultations on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701, which called for a cessation of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006. The Council also expects to receive the Secretary-General's strategic review of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), requested by resolution 2305 of August 2016.

UNIFIL's mandate expires on 31 August.

Key Recent Developments

On 16 February, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov provided the Council's regular monthly briefing on the region. Concerning Lebanon, he reported that the reactivation of state institutions is ongoing, adding that the president and prime minister had expressed confidence that an electoral law would be agreed with the aim of holding timely elections. Furthermore, he reported that relative calm continued in the UNIFIL areas of operation and along the "Blue Line", with the exception of some ground and air violations.

President Michel Aoun, speaking on Egyptian television on 12 February, blamed Israel for Lebanon's need to support the Iranian-backed Shi'a militia Hezbollah in "a complementary role to the Lebanese army", adding that "as long as the Lebanese army is not strong enough to battle Israel ... we feel the need for its existence". Kaag responded on Twitter, saying that UN resolution 1701 is vital for Lebanon's stability and security and that the resolution calls for disarmament of all armed groups. No arms outside control of state.

Hezbollah fighters on 17 January claimed that they had located an Israeli drone that had crashed in Lebanese territory. The Israeli Defense Forces said that the drone had come down in Lebanese territory a day earlier near the border with Israel.

Lebanon's General Directorate of General Security announced on 25 January that Lebanon had arrested five people who allegedly "spied for Israeli embassies abroad".

Meanwhile, Lebanon is still grappling with

threats posed by terrorist elements. On 8 February, Lebanese security forces arrested two people, a Lebanese and a Palestinian, who they said were members of a terrorist group suspected of planning a suicide attack in Beirut. The arrests followed a foiled suicide attack at a cafe in a popular Beirut shopping district.

The Council has issued two statements in recent months on political developments in Lebanon. A presidential statement on 1 November 2016 welcomed the election of Aoun as president of Lebanon, a long-awaited and critical step to overcoming the country's political and institutional crisis. The statement urged Aoun and Lebanese leaders to build on their efforts by continuing to work constructively to promote the country's stability and by swiftly forming a government. The statement encouraged all parties in Lebanon to demonstrate renewed unity and determination to that end. It also affirmed that the preservation of Lebanon's stability is essential to regional stability and security, and underscored the Council's previous calls on all Lebanese parties to recommit to Lebanon's policy of dissociation and to cease any involvement in the Syrian crisis, consistent with their commitment in the 2012 Baabda Declaration. The statement also expressed appreciation for the International Support Group for Lebanon (ISG) and called on the international community to ensure continued support for Lebanon in addressing its economic, security and humanitarian challenges. The Council reiterated its support for Special Coordinator Kaag and encouraged her to pursue her good offices role in this crucial period for Lebanon, in close coordination with the ISG.

In a 19 December 2016 press statement, members welcomed the formation of a national unity government in Lebanon and congratulated Prime Minister Saad Hariri and his cabinet. The statement encouraged all of Lebanon's political leaders to build on this momentum of national unity and to ensure Lebanon's ability to address the pressing security, economic, social and humanitarian challenges facing the country. It reiterated the importance of holding parliamentary elections by May 2017 in accordance with the Constitution, in order to sustain Lebanon's democratic tradition.

On 6 February, Saudi Arabia announced that it would appoint a new ambassador to Lebanon, encourage Saudi tourists to travel to Lebanon and increase flights by Saudi airlines to the country, according to the Lebanese president's office. The announcement was seen as a sign of improved bilateral ties following Aoun's meeting with Saudi Gulf Affairs Minister Thamer al-Sabhan. Saudi Arabia has not had an ambassador to Lebanon since last summer.

Key Issues

The main issue is that while the situation is relatively calm, there has been little progress toward the key objectives of resolution 1701 nearly 11 years after its adoption, including a permanent ceasefire.

A central issue is that Hezbollah and other non-state actors continue to maintain weaponry that directly hinders the government's exercise of full authority over its territory, poses a threat to Lebanon's sovereignty and stability and contravenes its obligations under resolutions 1559 and 1701. In that context, the ongoing crisis in Syria, with Hezbollah's involvement on the side of the regime, and the flow of arms from Syria to Hezbollah remain of great concern.

Options

Given that the Council has relatively recently adopted a comprehensive presidential statement outlining various concerns regarding Lebanon, a further Council outcome at this time seems unlikely.

Council Dynamics

The Council has been united in its position that UNIFIL contributes to stability between Israel and Lebanon, especially considering the current Syrian crisis. Council consensus includes support for Lebanon's territorial integrity and security, condemnation of acts of terrorism on Lebanese territory and recognition of the crucial role the Lebanese Armed Forces play in responding to security challenges. The Council has also repeatedly expressed its united concern that Lebanon complete parliamentary elections by May.

France is the penholder on Lebanon.

UN DOCUMENTS ON LEBANON Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2305 (30 August 2016) extended the mandate of UNIFIL for one year. S/RES/1701 (11 August 2006) increased the force strength of UNIFIL to a maximum of 15,000 troops and expanded its mandate. Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.7885 (16 February 2017) was the regular monthly briefing on the Middle East. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2016/15 (1 November 2016) welcomed the election of Lebanese President Michel Aoun. Secretary-General's Report S/2016/931 (4 November 2016) was the most recent report on the implementation of resolution 1701. Security Council Press Statements S/12645 (19 December 2016) welcomed the formation of national unity government in Lebanon.

Israel/Palestine

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council expects to receive the first report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 on Israeli settlements, adopted on 23 December 2016. The resolution requested the Secretary-General to report on its implementation every three months.

Key Recent Developments

On 23 December, the Council adopted resolution 2334, which condemned Israeli settlement building, with 14 votes in favour and an abstention by the outgoing administration of US President Barack Obama. The resolution reaffirmed that the establishment of settlements in Palestinian territory that Israel has occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law. The resolution said the settlements were a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-state solution and underlined that the Council will not recognise any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations. It also called upon all states to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. Both parties, the resolution said, should act on the basis of international law, observe calm and restraint, and refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric.

The resolution prompted strong pushback by the Israeli government. On 26 December 2016, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Israel would move ahead with building thousands of new homes in East Jerusalem and warned nations against further action. On 22 January, the Jerusalem City Council approved 566 new housing units in East Jerusalem that had been deferred because of US objections. Just two days later, the Israeli government announced that 2,500 new housing units would be built in the West Bank. Officials said most would be built in “settlement blocs” that Israel hopes to keep in a final deal. In reaction to these developments, Council member Bolivia requested that Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov brief Council members under “any other business” on 25 January.

Council members met again under “any other business” on 2 February to be briefed by the Council President, Volodymyr Yelchenko of Ukraine, following his meeting on settlements with Palestinian Ambassador Riyad Mansour and Iraqi Ambassador Mohamed Ali Alhakim, the current chair of the Arab Group, a day earlier. He told Council members that, among other things, Palestine and the Arab Group believe that Israel’s announced settlement approvals undermine a two-state solution and escalate and destabilise the situation, and they called for all provisions of resolution 2334 to be upheld. Yelchenko relayed their request to convert the regular Middle East briefing for February into an open debate format. Only Bolivia spoke during the meeting, expressing support for the request. However, there was no wide support for the initiative among members.

During the 16 February Middle East briefing, Mladenov reported on the Israeli Parliament’s adoption of the so-called Regularisation Law, which enables the use of privately owned Palestinian land for Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank without the owners’ consent. The law could potentially retroactively “regularise”, under Israeli law, thousands of existing settlement units built on land owned by Palestinian individuals living under occupation, as well as dozens of illegal outposts. Mladenov stressed that the law’s passage marks a significant shift in Israel’s position concerning the legal status of the West Bank, contravenes international law and, according to the Israeli Attorney General, is unconstitutional. Mladenov warned that if the law stays in place, it would have far-reaching consequences for Israel, while seriously undermining prospects for the two-state solution and for Arab-Israeli peace.

Following the briefing and subsequent consultations, US Ambassador Nikki Haley spoke to the press. Her remarks largely underscored the “ironclad support of the United States for Israel.” She emphasised that the US is “determined to stand up to the UN’s anti-Israel bias” and would “never repeat the terrible mistake of Resolution 2334 and allow one-sided Security Council resolutions to condemn Israel.”

On 9 February, the US circulated a draft press statement condemning in the strongest

terms a terrorist attack earlier that day in Petah Tikva, in which at least eight Israelis were injured, as well as rocket fire on Eilat a day earlier. Some Council members, including Bolivia, France and Senegal, felt that the statement should reference operative paragraph six of resolution 2334, which calls for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, as well as all acts of provocation and destruction and calls for accountability in this regard. The US would not include the reference to 2334, arguing that the text should not diverge from the standard language of counter-terrorism press statements. No text could be agreed to. On 8 January, Council members had issued a press statement condemning in the strongest terms the terrorist attack in Jerusalem that day in which four Israelis were killed and 15 injured, with no mention of resolution 2334.

On 19 February, reports emerged that Netanyahu had taken part in a secret summit in February 2016 with Jordan’s King Abdullah II and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, organised by then US Secretary of State John Kerry in Aqaba, Jordan. According to former officials in Obama’s administration, Kerry proposed regional recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, which is a key demand of Netanyahu’s, and a renewal of peace talks with the support of the Arab countries. Netanyahu reportedly rejected the offer, saying he could not garner support from his coalition government for the deal, which would have required a significant withdrawal from occupied land.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 24 February, a spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said in a statement that they were “deeply disturbed” by the “excessively lenient” sentence of only 18 months given to Israeli Sergeant Elor Azaria, who was convicted of manslaughter in January for shooting dead Palestinian Abdelfattah al-Sharif in Hebron in March 2016. While welcoming Azaria’s prosecution and conviction because of how rare it is, the spokesperson said that it was “difficult to reconcile with the intentional killing of an unarmed and prone individual,” particularly given the harsher sentences handed down to Palestinian children for throwing stones.

The Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council (HRC) on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Michael Lynk, said in a 3 February statement that

UN DOCUMENTS ON ISRAEL/PALESTINE Security Council Resolution S/RES/2334 (23 December 2016) condemned Israeli settlements. **Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.7885** (16 February 2017) was a briefing by Mladenov. **S/PV.7863** (17 January 2017) was the most recent open debate. **S/PV.7853** (23 December 2016) was the meeting during which resolution 2334 was adopted condemning Israeli settlements. **Security Council Press Statement SC/12670** (8 January 2017) condemned a terrorist attack that day in Jerusalem.

Israel/Palestine (con't)

the Israeli government's approval of more than 6,000 new settlement homes in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem represents a "defiant and troubling repudiation of resolution 2334" and that continued settlement activity "poses a grave threat to Palestinians' right to self-determination". Lynk said that the international community must not "assume that resolutions, critical statements and international conferences alone will change state behaviour", and called upon the Security Council and the General Assembly to explore ways to ensure Israeli compliance with resolution 2334.

During its 34th session in March, the HRC is set to hold an interactive dialogue with Lynk, to discuss his most recent report (A/HRC/34/70). It is also set to consider the Secretary-General's reports on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), including East Jerusalem (A/HRC/34/38) and on Israeli settlements in the OPT, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan (A/HRC/34/39).

Key Issues

The immediate issue is ensuring compliance

with resolution 2334 in order to salvage prospects for a two-state solution. The overarching issue is determining how the Council can encourage the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties to achieve this goal.

Options

Given the difficult Council dynamics on this issue and the objection of the new US administration to resolution 2334, the most likely option will be to merely receive the report on its implementation and take no further action.

Council and Wider Dynamics

While the new US administration's approach to resolving the conflict is as yet unclear, it has made clear that it plans to staunchly defend Israel at the UN and that it fiercely opposes resolution 2334. Therefore, it will likely prevent any Council action regarding the resolution's implementation.

Several other Council members are

attempting to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. France held the second meeting of its international conference on the conflict on 15 January, which brought together more than 70 foreign ministers and culminated in the adoption of a statement proclaiming support for a two-state solution. Also, Russia last year announced its intention to host direct talks between the parties. Among elected members, Egypt has voiced its willingness to act as a broker between the parties and is likely to play a leading role in any implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative. Incoming member Sweden appointed an envoy in February to address the conflict.

Israel remains staunchly opposed to international initiatives on the issue, including involvement by the Council, preferring direct negotiations with the Palestinians, while the Palestinian Authority favours international participation.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), which expires on 31 March. Prior to this, it will be briefed by Maman Sambo Sidikou, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and MONUSCO's head. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to the Great Lakes Region, Said Djinnit, will also brief on the latest report on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement.

Key Recent Developments

The government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and opposition groups reached an agreement on the electoral process on 31 December 2016. This was part of a last-minute effort to address the political

crisis precipitated by President Joseph Kabila's resolve to remain in office beyond the conclusion of his second and—according to the constitution—final term on 19 December 2016.

Under the agreement, Kabila would stay in office until elections are held by the end of 2017. During this period, a "National Council for Overseeing the Electoral Agreement and Process (CNSAP)" would be set up, and a new prime minister named from opposition ranks. On 4 January, the Council adopted a presidential statement welcoming the signing of the agreement and calling for its swift implementation.

The CNSAP was to be headed by opposition leader Étienne Tshisekedi, but he died on 1 February. Furthermore, several aspects regarding the implementation of the agreement were left vague, and indeed, there has been little progress on issues including the

composition of the CNSAP and the selection of the interim prime minister. Tshisekedi's death has compounded disagreement over implementation, as he was to play a leading role in the process. On 16 February, budget minister Pierre Kangudia said that the DRC lacks the \$1.8 billion needed to carry out the elections, raising new fears that Kabila is stalling the electoral process. On the same day, the UN, AU, EU and the International Organisation de la Francophonie issued a joint statement calling on all stakeholders, including both the presidential majority and the opposition, to enhance their efforts in implementing the agreement.

Foreign armed groups remained active in eastern DRC. The Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) continues to pose a threat to the security of North Kivu, though the group has been weakened by continuing military operations and an

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DRC Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2293 (23 June 2016) renewed the DRC sanctions regime and the mandate of the Group of Experts. S/RES/2277 (30 March 2016) renewed the mandate of MONUSCO for a year. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2017/1 (4 January 2017) welcomed the signing on 31 December 2016 of a comprehensive and inclusive political agreement on the electoral calendar in the DRC. Security Council Letter S/2017/85 (27 January 2017) was from the DRC to the Council on the appearance of M23 members in its territory. Security Council Press Statement SC/12734 (24 February 2017) condemned violence in the Kasai region and expressed grave concern at the reports of violations of international humanitarian law committed by local militia in that region. Sanctions Committee Document SC/12707 (7 February 2017) was a press release on the DRC Sanctions Committee's meeting with regional countries. S/2016/1102 (23 December 2016) was the midterm report by the Group of Experts assisting the Sanctions Committee.

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS Special Representative of the Secretary-General Maman Sambo Sidikou (Niger) MONUSCO Force Commander Lieutenant General Derick Mbuyiselo Mgwebi (South Africa) MONUSCO Size, Composition and Cost of Mission Strength as of 31 January 2017: 16,885 troops, 475 military observers, 1,332 police, 816 international civilian personnel, 2,654 local civilian staff and 338 UN volunteers. Approved budget (1 July 2016-30 June 2017): \$1.23 billion Mission duration: July 2010 to present

Democratic Republic of the Congo (con't)

internal split. The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) continues to operate and attack civilians in Beni territory and to recruit in the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda. The toll of rebel groups' activities on civilians continues to be heavy. The UN Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) documented 31 killings of civilians in January 2017 by armed groups (including the FDLR, ADF, the Forces de résistance patriotique de l'Ituri and Mayi-Mayi Nyatura groups) and 13 killings of civilians by government forces. Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) are also believed to be responsible for a February massacre of civilians in Kasai. Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations El Ghassim Wane updated the Council on recent political and security developments under "any other business" on 23 February.

On a related matter, the DRC sent a letter to the Council President on 27 January claiming that several March 23 Movement (M23) members who had been detained in Uganda awaiting repatriation and reintegration after the defeat of their rebellion in November 2013 have resurfaced in eastern DRC. The letter requested the Council to condemn the M23's actions and to call on Rwanda and Uganda to facilitate the repatriation of former M23 members. Uganda has acknowledged that M23 members have fled the camp, and it has since arrested some of those who escaped. However, it blames the exodus of M23 members on the DRC for stalling on its reintegration program.

Uruguay, Senegal and Sweden held an Arria-formula meeting on 24 February with heads of the human rights components of three peace operations, including MONUSCO, on human rights and the implementation of the overall mandates of peace operations.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 30 January, the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee met with its Group of Experts to discuss their latest midterm report of 23 December 2016. The Committee also met with the representatives of the DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda to hear their views on the report. The Committee met with the Group's coordinator, Michael Sharp, on 15 February to receive an update on the group's work. Sharp discussed the

activities of rebel groups and loopholes in the DRC banking system that hamper the implementation of the assets freeze.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In January, the UNJHRO released its analysis of the human rights situation in the DRC in 2016, noting that violations increased from the previous year, in part because of the postponement of national elections and restrictions on democratic participation. The report concluded that state agents were responsible for the majority of human rights violations, with a "very worrying" increase in the number and proportion of violations they committed.

In a 14 February statement, a spokesperson for the High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern at reports that FARDC soldiers killed more than 100 people during clashes with the Kamuina Nsapu militia in Kasai Central Province between 9 and 13 February. According to the reports, FARDC soldiers "opened fire indiscriminately" on militia fighters, and at least 39 women were caught in the gunfire and killed. If confirmed, the spokesperson said, that would "suggest excessive and disproportionate use of force by the soldiers." The statement also condemned the recruitment of child soldiers by the militias as well as their targeting of state symbols and institutions.

Following the subsequent emergence of a video showing FARDC soldiers carrying out summary executions of unarmed victims, the High Commissioner, in a 20 February statement, called on the DRC government to take immediate steps to halt widespread human rights violations, citing "multiple, credible allegations of massive human rights violations in Kasai, Kasai Central, Kasai Oriental and Lomami provinces." The High Commissioner warned that blunt military responses do not address the root causes of conflict between the government and militias and stressed the need for a comprehensive peace plan based on dialogue. Council members issued a press statement on 24 February, expressing grave concern over the incidents and calling on the DRC to investigate the events and hold the perpetrators accountable.

During its 34th session in March, the Human Rights Council is set to hold an interactive dialogue on the DRC.

Key Issues

The immediate issue for the Council is renewing MONUSCO's mandate.

A key issue for the Council, in the aftermath of Tshisekedi's death, is ensuring that the 31 December 2016 agreement is implemented and the elections take place in 2017.

The continued violence by rebel groups

in the east and emerging violence in Kasai remain a serious threat to peace and security. The violence in the east may worsen if the political crisis does not abate.

Options

While renewing MONUSCO's mandate, the Council could also:

- revise the role of MONUSCO's Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in size or tasks in order to better address the situation on the ground;
- call on stakeholders to swiftly implement the 31 December 2016 agreement and resolve all outstanding issues in order to hold free and fair elections;
- call on the government to investigate the recent incidents in Kasai and hold accountable those responsible for crimes committed;
- call on all countries in the region to cooperate in addressing the issue of rebel groups, including the M23; and
- request the Secretariat to conduct a strategic review of MONUSCO.

Council Dynamics

Council members are concerned over the ongoing political crisis in the DRC and the potentially explosive ramifications if the 31 December 2016 agreement fails to bring about fair and timely elections and a peaceful transfer of power. Some Council members emphasise the need for the government to uphold the agreement and hold elections by the end of the year; other members are less concerned with the timeframe and look to all stakeholders as jointly responsible for its implementation, including finding ways to overcome logistical difficulties.

Council members share the view that MONUSCO needs to be more effective. Some Council members note in particular the possibility of rethinking the role of MONUSCO's FIB. At the same time, most members are of the view that because of the present political realities, MONUSCO's mandate should not be altered until after the end of the electoral cycle, at which point a strategic review of the mission would be warranted.

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

DPRK (North Korea)

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

On 11 February, the DPRK conducted its first ballistic missile launch since October 2016. DPRK leader Kim Jong-un had declared in his New Year's speech that preparations for the first test-firing of an intercontinental ballistic missile were in the final stages, and Pyongyang since then has repeatedly warned about its readiness to test such a missile at any time and any place. The latest launch, however, involved an intermediate-range rocket. It nevertheless demonstrated that the DPRK is continuing to make progress in developing its prohibited missile programme. According to the DPRK's own news reports, the missile was an upgraded, extended-range version of the submarine-launched missile it tested last August and was propelled by a solid fuel engine. Solid fuel engines can be launched more quickly than those using liquid fuel and are more mobile, making them harder to detect.

In response to the missile launch, Council members held consultations on 13 February at the request of Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the US, with a briefing by Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Miroslav Jenča. In a subsequent press statement, members condemned the 11 February and October missile launches as grave violations of the DPRK's international obligations and relevant Council resolutions. It reiterated the language of previous statements, including a call on states to redouble their efforts to implement the sanctions imposed by the Council, in particular the comprehensive measures of resolutions 2270 and 2321 adopted last year in response to the DPRK's nuclear tests. In a 15 February letter to the Secretary-General asserting that the missile launch was a "self-defensive measure", the DPRK "categorically" rejected the press statement.

In other developments, US Secretary of Defense James Mattis on 2 and 3 February travelled to Japan and the ROK for his first trip abroad since taking office. Mattis confirmed

the US commitment to defend the ROK and maintain their strong alliance, while highlighting the deployment of the US anti-ballistic missile system THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System) as a necessary defensive response to the increasing threat posed by the DPRK. Without referring explicitly to China, which has repeatedly objected to the deployment, Mattis said that "no other nation" should be concerned about THAAD.

On 7 February, OCHA listed the DPRK as one of 12 "forgotten crises to remember". According to OCHA, 15 million people, or about 60 percent of the population, are considered food insecure, 25 percent do not have access to essential health services and 1.7 million children are at risk of deadly childhood diseases.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 2 February, the chair of the Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Sebastiano Cardi (Italy), held a briefing open to all UN member states, with the Panel of Experts' coordinator, Hugh Griffiths. Cardi explained the new sanctions measures in resolution 2321 and reminded member states of their upcoming reporting obligations, while Griffiths spoke about the work of the Panel. (Cardi's presentation is posted on the Committee's website.)

The Committee met on 16 February to discuss the Panel's final report under resolution 2276. According to the report, sanctions implementation remains insufficient and inconsistent, with the DPRK retaining access to the international banking system, and designated entities on the sanctions list continuing to operate. Despite the new sectoral sanctions imposed by the Council last year, the report found that the DPRK has continued to export banned minerals and that coal exports increased from 2015 to 2016. The Panel concluded that support for strengthening the sanctions had not been matched by political will and resources to ensure effective implementation. Among other things, it recommended the designation of additional individuals and entities and the creation of a separate list of designated vessels, to be updated on a regular basis. The Panel also recommended that the Committee issue an Implementation Assistance Notice to clarify which minerals are covered by the import ban.

On 18 February, China announced that it would suspend all import of coal from the DPRK. According to information posted on the Sanctions Committee's website on 20 February, China imported nearly 1,442,000 tons of coal during the month of January, representing 19 percent of the annual total volume permitted under resolution 2321. During the month of December 2016, both the volume and the value of the coal imported by

China exceeded by far the limits set by the resolution. According to China's foreign ministry, this was due to a time lag between the adoption and implementation of the resolution.

At press time, Cardi was scheduled to brief Council members on the work of the Committee on 27 February.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 34th session in March, the Human Rights Council plans to hold an interactive dialogue with its Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, Tomás Ojea Quintana, to discuss his most recent report. The report noted that while the DPRK's international isolation deepened in 2016 due to its repeated nuclear and missile tests, it "took a few important steps to fulfil some of its international human rights obligations including the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 6 December 2016 and the submission of treaty reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women." The report also noted, however, that growing tensions had hindered attempts at engaging in a human rights dialogue with the DPRK and that UN human rights mechanisms were not granted access to the country. The Special Rapporteur continued to advocate a two-track strategy encouraging engagement, while also seeking to address human rights violations and hold perpetrators accountable.

Key Issues

A key issue for the Council is the serious escalation in the threat posed by the DPRK as Pyongyang continues to make progress in its prohibited programmes, in direct defiance of the Council's demands. A further issue is whether the tightening of sanctions will eventually induce the DPRK to change its behaviour or whether a different approach would be more effective.

An immediate issue is the renewal of the Panel of Experts' mandate and whether any revisions are required to reflect recent changes in the sanctions regime.

In the Sanctions Committee, ensuring implementation of the new sanctions provisions and responding to the findings of the Panel's latest report are the key issues. A further issue is the potential humanitarian impact of the sanctions.

Options

The main option for the Council is to renew

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DPRK Security Council Resolution S/RES/2321 (30 November 2016) strengthened sanctions on the DPRK in response to its 9 September nuclear test. S/RES/2276 (24 March 2016) extended the Panel of Experts' mandate for 13 months. S/RES/2270 (2 March 2016) strengthened sanctions on the DPRK in response to its 6 January nuclear test. **Other A/HRC/34/66** (22 February 2017) was the most recent report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK. **S/2017/139** (15 February 2017) was the DPRK letter rejecting the press statement. **SC/12716** (13 February 2017) condemned the DPRK's 11 February missile launch. **S/2017/128** (12 February 2017) was an ROK letter on the missile launch.

DPRK (North Korea) (con't)

the mandate of the Panel of Experts for another 13 months.

In the Committee, the main option is to implement the Panel's recommendations.

Council Dynamics

While Council members appear united in their concern about the threat posed by the DPRK and in calling for strict sanctions implementation, frustration about the limited impact that the current approach has had so far seems

to be mounting. There are also continuing questions about the position of the new US administration and what might come out of its announced policy review on the DPRK, amid emerging calls from within the US for a resumption of talks with Pyongyang. For now, however, the Council is likely to remain focused on sanctions implementation and the Panel of Experts' report, as discussions about any major policy shift will take place elsewhere.

Council members had an initial exchange

of views on the Panel's report at the 16 February Sanctions Committee meeting. It seems that several members did not yet have instructions and said they needed more time to study the report, but those who spoke generally praised the high quality of the Panel's work. A more detailed discussion of the report's recommendations is expected at the next Committee meeting, most likely to be held in March.

The US is the penholder on the DPRK.

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council will meet to consider the Secretary-General's 90-day report on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and his 30-day assessment focusing on the deployment and future requirements of the Regional Protection Force (RPF), obstacles to setting up the force and impediments to UNMISS in carrying out its mandate. Secretary-General António Guterres and AU High Representative for South Sudan Alpha Oumar Konaré are expected to brief the Council in a meeting chaired by UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Boris Johnson.

The UNMISS mandate expires on 15 December 2017.

Key Recent Developments

Amidst an unravelling political process and ongoing fighting in various parts of the country, the security and humanitarian environment in South Sudan has reached near-catastrophic levels. More than 1.5 million refugees have fled to neighbouring countries, including Uganda (698,000), Ethiopia (342,000), Sudan (305,000), Kenya (89,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (68,000) and the Central African Republic (4,900). Hunger is prevalent in the country as a result of insecurity, poor harvests and high food prices. On 20 February, a famine was formally declared in parts of South Sudan, with the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation, the UN Children's Fund and the UN World Food Program jointly stating

that "100,000 people [are] facing starvation" and that "a further 1 million people are classified as being on the brink of famine." On 21 February, President Salva Kiir responded by saying that the government would ensure "unimpeded access to the needy population across the country" for aid agencies.

On 7 February, Kiir spoke at a public gathering in Yei town to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the town's Episcopal church. He said that the "national dialogue", which he announced in December 2016 with the goal of ending conflict in South Sudan, would commence in March. Opposition leader Riek Machar, currently in exile in South Africa, has said that a national dialogue cannot be held until there is peace in South Sudan.

In mid-February, heavy fighting in the Wau Shilluk area of Upper Nile state led to large-scale displacement west of the Nile River. On 16 February, UNMISS issued a press statement noting that conflict was ongoing in the area and that it did not have information about some 20,000 people displaced by the fighting. An UNMISS patrol to Wau Shilluk was blocked by government troops on 16 February.

Several high-ranking South Sudanese military officials have recently resigned while directing strong criticism at the government. On 11 February, Lieutenant General Thomas Cirillo Swaka, Deputy Chief of General Staff for Logistics, submitted a resignation letter in which he accused the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) of being a "partisan and tribal army" that had committed rape

and murder. Less than a week later, Brigadier General Henry Oyay Nyago and Colonel Khalid Ono Loki tendered their resignations. Nyago accused government forces of carrying out "genocidal acts and ethnic cleansing", while Loki claimed that justice for serious crimes is not meted out against soldiers from Kiir's ethnic group, the Dinka.

Secretary-General Guterres briefed Council members in consultations on 3 February on his meetings at the AU Summit, held in late January in Addis Ababa, and spoke at length about South Sudan. He reiterated the points made in the joint UN, AU and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) press statement of 29 January that states that the three organisations would work together on the political process, with AU High Representative Konaré encouraged to conduct shuttle diplomacy in support of the mediation. Guterres also met with Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta during his visit. Guterres reportedly indicated that Kenya has now decided to contribute to the RPF after rescinding its commitment to participate following the dismissal of the UNMISS force commander, a Kenyan national.

On 10 February, in a press statement, Council members condemned the ongoing fighting in South Sudan and stressed the importance of the political process. They further expressed their disappointment that the transitional government of national unity had continued to "act inconsistently with... its obligations under the Status of Forces

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOUTH SUDAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2327 (16 December 2016) extended the mandate of UNMISS for one year and reauthorised the Regional Protection Force. S/RES/2304 (12 August 2016) authorised the Regional Protection Force. **Secretary-General's Report S/2016/951** (10 November 2016) was an UNMISS report. **Security Council Press Statement SC/12713** (10 February 2017) was a press statement condemning violence in South Sudan. **Other S/2016/1085** (23 December 2016) was the draft resolution on an arms embargo and targeted sanctions that failed to receive the necessary support to be adopted. **S/2016/924** (1 November 2016) was the executive summary of the report of the special independent investigation into the July 2016 violence in Juba.

South Sudan (con't)

Agreement with the United Nations.”

Council members were briefed in consultations by Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations El Ghassim Wane and Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour on 23 February. In elements to the press read out following the meeting, Council members expressed alarm at the declaration of a famine in parts of South Sudan and widespread food insecurity, calling it a direct result of the conflict and the obstruction of humanitarian access. Council members agreed that the humanitarian crisis would not be resolved without resolution of the political crisis on the basis of the 2015 peace agreement. They also expressed concern at delays to the deployment of the RPF and reiterated their call for the government to work with the UN on this issue.

On 24 February, Uruguay, Senegal and Sweden co-hosted an Arria-formula meeting with the heads of the human rights components of UNMISS, the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC and the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia. Eugene Nindorera, representing UNMISS, said that denial of access to areas where human rights violations are reportedly being committed and to internally displaced persons remains a big challenge. Nindorera also noted that justice and accountability issues need to be addressed before peace can be achieved.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 17 February, Gilmour released a statement following his four-day visit to South Sudan describing the “brutal reality” of the situation in the country as a war being “waged against the men, women and children of South Sudan”. Gilmour called for the perpetrators of human rights violations, including rape, gang rape and arbitrary detention, to be held accountable. He expressed concern at the severe access restrictions faced by UNMISS and said that elements of the SPLA

had engaged in what could amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

During its 34th session in March, the Human Rights Council is set to hold an interactive dialogue with the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan to discuss its most recent report (A/HRC/34/63).

Key Issues

The immediate key issue for the Council is what role it can play in providing support to the mediation process. To address this, the Council will have to calibrate how it can add value to the efforts of Guterres, Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan Nicholas Haysom and Special Representative for South Sudan David Shearer, as well as the regional and sub-regional mediators. The Council further needs to determine how to help ensure that Kiir’s “national dialogue” is inclusive and conducted in an environment free of fear and intimidation.

Along with the search for a political process, another key issue is how to mitigate the impact of the conflict on civilians, given the continued fighting and the acute humanitarian crisis.

Related to this issue are questions about when the RPF will be deployed and whether it will be able to achieve its goal of, among other things, protecting UN staff, humanitarian actors and civilians in Juba.

Options

One option is for the Council to adopt a resolution or presidential statement that:

- demands an immediate cessation of hostilities;
- condemns atrocity crimes committed in South Sudan and calls for full accountability for these acts;
- condemns restrictions on the freedom of movement of UNMISS personnel and obstacles to humanitarian access imposed by the government;

- encourages member states to support OCHA’s 2017 humanitarian appeal for South Sudan; and
- welcomes the joint UN, AU and IGAD statement of 29 January and encourages the three organisations to pursue a coordinated and coherent mediation strategy.

Another option for the Council is to hold an open debate on South Sudan to highlight the severity of the crisis and provide the Council and the wider membership an opportunity to discuss ways of addressing the crisis.

The Council could also consider holding an Arria-formula meeting on how to combat sexual violence in South Sudan, inviting the participation of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence and relevant NGOs. The meeting could be open to the wider membership and webcast in order to continue to raise awareness of this endemic problem in South Sudan.

Council Dynamics

Council members remain very concerned about the ongoing violence, the worsening humanitarian crisis and the faltering political process in South Sudan. However, there is a sense of encouragement about the active engagement of the new Secretary-General on this issue and a hope that the partnership among the UN, the AU and IGAD will reap results in the mediation strategy.

Some members, at least in private, are again discussing the possibility of pursuing an arms embargo on South Sudan. However, this continues to be a divisive matter within the Council, and it is unclear how much support such a draft would receive now. In December 2016, a draft resolution that would have authorised an arms embargo and additional targeted sanctions failed to be adopted, garnering only seven affirmative votes.

The US is the penholder on South Sudan.

1540 Committee

Expected Council Action

In March, the chair of the 1540 Committee, Ambassador Sacha Sergio Llorentty Soliz (Bolivia), who succeeded Ambassador

Román Oyarzun (Spain) on 1 January, is scheduled to brief the Council on the work of the Committee, which deals with the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Key Recent Developments

On 15 December 2016, the Council held a high-level debate titled “Preventing Catastrophe: A Global Agenda for Stopping the

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE 1540 COMMITTEE Security Council Resolution S/RES/2325 (15 December 2016) was the resolution on the comprehensive review. S/RES/1977 (20 April 2011) endorsed the first comprehensive review and renewed the mandate of the 1540 committee for ten years. Other S/2017/126 (10 February 2017) was the Committee’s latest programme of work. S/PV.7837 (15 December 2016) was the open debate on the comprehensive review. S/2016/1038 (9 December 2016) was the report on the comprehensive review.

1540 Committee (con't)

Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction by Non-State Actors”, to mark the conclusion of the second comprehensive review of the status of implementation of resolution 1540. The Council adopted resolution 2325, endorsing the review and noting the findings and recommendations of its final report.

Resolution 2325 calls on states to implement fully and effectively resolution 1540 and to submit national implementation reports, while encouraging the submission of voluntary national implementation action plans and the designation of national points of contact. It reiterates many of the main points of resolution 1977, which endorsed the first comprehensive review, but also contains some new elements, including provisions on the importance of taking into account the particular circumstances of states and prioritising efforts and resources where they

are most needed, and the need to consider the evolving nature of proliferation risks and rapid advances in science and technology. On the issue of assistance, the resolution calls for more of a regional approach, including the holding of regional assistance conferences. It also calls for enhanced cooperation between the Committee and relevant international, regional and sub-regional organisations, including regular meetings to share information and experiences.

In a clarification of the reporting cycle for the 1540 Committee, the resolution decides that the Committee shall brief the Council in the first quarter of each year, in addition to a joint briefing once a year with the 1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee and the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee. The resolution also

requests the Committee to consider “the efficiency and effectiveness” of its administrative support structures on the basis of the comprehensive review report, and encourages it to report to the Council on its findings “within 2017 as appropriate”.

Since the December debate, the Committee has held one meeting, on 31 January, to discuss its programme of work for the period of 1 February 2017–31 January 2018, which was subsequently submitted to the Council on 10 February. As before, the programme is organised around the four main themes of monitoring and national implementation; assistance; cooperation with international organisations and other relevant UN bodies; and transparency and media outreach, while reflecting the Committee’s role in the implementation of resolution 2325.

Golan Heights (UNDOF)

Expected Council Action

In March, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations will brief Council members in consultations on the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). The Secretary-General’s report is due on 19 March. No outcome is expected.

UNDOF was established in 1974 to monitor the ceasefire between Israel and Syria. Its mandate expires on 30 June.

Key Recent Developments

As a result of the spillover of the Syrian civil war into UNDOF’s area of operation, most of the mission’s peacekeepers were relocated from the Bravo (Syrian) side to the Alpha (Israeli) side of the ceasefire line in September 2014. The majority of UNDOF’s 830 uniformed personnel continue to be stationed on the Israeli side, which hinders the capacity of the mission to achieve full mobility and operational capacity.

The December 2016 UNDOF report noted that the limited redeployment of UN personnel to Camp Faouar on the Bravo side represented a major achievement for the mission. The latest UNDOF mandate renewal resolution 2330 welcomed the

phased redeployment conditioned on favourable security and operational conditions. The security situation on the Bravo side remained unstable though there was no direct threat to Camp Faouar.

The security environment in UNDOF’s area of operation varies in different sectors. The situation in the northern sector has been improving, which has led to the redeployment of UN troops to Camp Faouar. However, the December 2016 report noted that in the central sector on the Bravo side the fighting between Syrian government forces and various armed groups continued, and on several occasions resulted in shelling close to the UN positions. In the southern sector, there were persistent clashes between different armed opposition groups, including Al Nusra Front and Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade. During the past two months, it seems that the number of incidents and spillovers from Syria decreased relative to the period covered by the December report.

On 8 February, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) hit a target in the Syrian-controlled Golan Heights as retaliation for tank fire that hit Israeli positions in the Golan Heights. Israel characterised the incident as a spillover

from the Syrian civil war. Syrian government forces have been engaged in fighting rebels near the area. The IDF has maintained the position that it would not tolerate any attempt to jeopardise Israel’s security and that the Syrian government remains responsible for anything happening on its territory.

On the diplomatic front, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with US President Donald Trump on 15 February. In media remarks following the meeting, Netanyahu said that he had asked the president to recognise Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights. The Golan Heights were captured in the 1967 Six-Day War and were illegally annexed by Israel; under international law, it is considered an occupied territory. Council members had voiced their concern about this issue on 26 April 2016, following Netanyahu’s remarks that the Golan Heights would remain forever under Israeli sovereignty. In elements to the press, Council president Ambassador Liu Jieyi (China) stressed that the status of the Golan Heights remains unchanged.

During the Middle East briefing to the Council on 16 February, the Secretary-General’s Special Coordinator for the Middle East

Golan Heights (UNDOF) (con't)

Peace Process, Nikolay Mladenov, briefly addressed the situation in UNDOF's area of operations. He noted that the ceasefire between Israel and Syria is holding despite the volatile security situation on the Bravo side but that spillover from Syria continues to pose a risk of further escalation. He said that both sides expressed their commitment to the disengagement of forces agreement and the full return of UNDOF to the area of separation when the conditions permit.

Key Issues

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

A re-emerging issue will be the safety and security of UN personnel in light of the redeployment to Camp Faouar.

An ongoing issue for the Council is the violation of the ceasefire on numerous

occasions, including the presence of Syrian heavy weapons in the area of separation monitored by UNDOF, and Syrian and Israeli airstrikes. No military forces other than those of UNDOF are allowed in the area of separation.

Options

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

Council Dynamics

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

mission's liaison function continues to be considered important for avoiding further negative developments in the region.

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

Council members have expressed concern regarding the fighting in the area of operations as well as the tension between Israel and Syria along the ceasefire line, which has been exacerbated by the presence of Hezbollah.

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

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is expected to receive a briefing from the Special Envoy for Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed. The chair of the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Koro Bessho (Japan), may also brief.

Key Recent Developments

The war in Yemen has continued amidst a worsening humanitarian crisis and stalled efforts to resume political talks. The conflict pits the Houthis, a Zaydi Shiite rebel group, and forces loyal to former President Ali Abdullah Saleh against the Yemeni government and the Saudi Arabia-led coalition.

Towards the end of January, the Coalition and the Yemeni government announced the capture of the Red Sea coastal city of al-Mokha. Officials have said that the offensive will next advance on Hodeidah, Yemen's main port, which has been the primary entry point for humanitarian aid and food and fuel supplies going to Houthi-controlled areas.

On 29 January, the US conducted a raid

on a compound of Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in the village of Yakla in al-Bayda province—the first military operation authorised under the new administration of President Donald Trump. One US commando was killed and a US military aircraft was destroyed. According to Yemeni officials, 15 women and children were killed in addition to several AQAP militants. Yemeni officials initially condemned the raid and later stressed that any counter-terrorism operations should continue to be carried out in consultation with authorities.

On 1 February, the US issued a strongly worded statement on Iran, which included a warning to the country over its alleged support of the Houthis. The statement followed an attack by the Houthis on a Saudi ship using "suicide boats". The US subsequently deployed to Yemeni waters the USS Cole, which in October 2000 had been attacked by Al-Qaida in Aden port, killing 17 sailors. Referring to the Houthi attack on the Saudi vessel and its alleged support from Iran, the

Yemeni government requested in a 17 February letter that the Council designate the Houthis as a terrorist organisation.

Efforts to resume peace talks continued to flounder. The Special Envoy briefed the Council for the first time in nearly three months on 26 January, highlighting his frustration that the Houthis and Saleh's party, the General People's Congress, had not developed proposals for security arrangements—a reference to the withdrawal of their forces from Hodeidah, Sana'a and Taiz—despite their announced willingness to resume talks on the basis of the roadmap he proposed in October. The Special Envoy described Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi's continued criticism of the UN proposals as undermining confidence in the peace process.

In a 10 February letter, the Houthis requested Secretary-General António Guterres to replace the Special Envoy, claiming his handling of the political process was not balanced. During a 12 February press conference in Riyadh, Guterres said the

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN Security Council Resolutions [S/RES/2342](#) (23 February 2017) renewed the Yemen sanctions regime. [S/RES/2216](#) (14 April 2015) established an arms embargo on the Houthis and forces loyal to Saleh. **Other** [S/2017/81](#) (11 January 2017) was the Panel of Experts' final report. [S/PV.7871](#) (26 January 2017) was a briefing on Yemen.

Yemen (con't)

Special Envoy had his “full support”. On 16 February, foreign ministers of the Quad—comprising Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the UK and the US—met with Oman’s foreign minister and the Special Envoy in Bonn. No readout from the meeting was made available.

Yemen’s humanitarian crisis continues to worsen. Thirty thousand people were reported as fleeing al-Mokha during the fight for the city, adding to the 2 million people already displaced. During the Council’s 26 January briefing, OCHA head Stephen O’Brien warned of the possibility of famine in 2017. He highlighted the failure of all parties to protect civilians and noted that more than two-thirds of the damage to infrastructure has been from airstrikes. O’Brien flagged the Coalition’s refusal to allow the World Food Programme to deliver recently procured cranes to Hodeidah to improve the port’s capacity, which has been greatly reduced since its cranes were destroyed by airstrikes in 2015.

Sanctions-Related Developments

The 2140 Sanctions Committee met on 27 January to discuss the final report of the Yemen Panel of Experts. Members expressed broad support for the Panel’s work. Egypt reiterated its position from last year that the Panel did not have the mandate to report on possible violations committed by member states but only “individuals and entities” according to resolution 2140; a view not shared by other members. On 23 February, the Council adopted resolution 2342 renewing the Yemen sanctions for an additional year. Members refrained from proposing new elements to the resolution, which helped to avoid negotiations.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 10 February, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights released a statement expressing concern about reports that civilians had been trapped and targeted in fighting during the preceding two weeks in al-Mokha. The reports indicated that civilians were caught

between warring parties who gave them opposite instructions on whether to leave their homes and evacuate, that families attempting to flee their houses were shot at by Houthi-affiliated snipers and that civilians were also killed by airstrikes, with one incident on 22 January killing 11 people and wounding four. The High Commissioner warned that there “are real fears that the situation will repeat itself” in Hodeidah. He noted that airstrikes on the port city “are already intensifying”.

Key Issues

The key issue is how the Council can support efforts to achieve a cessation of hostilities and resume peace talks.

An ongoing concern is the humanitarian crisis, including issues of humanitarian access and violations of international humanitarian law.

Another issue is the growing threat of AQAP and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant as a result of the vacuum created by the war.

Options

The Council could consider a new resolution on Yemen, as the UK had said it would propose in autumn 2016, which:

- demands an immediate cessation of hostilities, including all land, sea and air military activities; and
- calls for the sides to resume negotiations on the basis of the Special Envoy’s proposals.

A resolution could additionally:

- demand that the parties allow unhindered access for aid and comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, including avoiding targeting civilian infrastructure and harming civilians;
- demand that the ban on commercial flights to and from Sana’a be lifted;
- affirm that the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) should provide clearance to and oversee inspections

of commercial shipments to Yemen in accordance with resolution 2216, call on member states to cooperate fully with UNVIM and request the Secretary-General to review UNVIM’s performance and provide a report to the Committee;

- demand that the parties cooperate with efforts to rehabilitate Hodeidah port, including allowing the delivery of cranes to facilitate essential imports of food, fuel and medicine; and
- stress the importance of accountability for alleged breaches of international humanitarian law.

Another option is holding fortnightly meetings at Council expert-level with OCHA to keep members informed about the deepening humanitarian crisis and about protection of civilians.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Yemen is a difficult conflict for the Council to deal with politically because of members’ relationships, in particular with Saudi Arabia. The UK, the US and Egypt, which are allies of Saudi Arabia, and Council members in general have been unwilling or reluctant to take positions against Saudi preferences. These have included Saudi Arabia’s opposition to any new Council resolutions on the conflict. Russia has played a role in making Council products more even-handed between the parties, highlighting Houthi perspectives, but has often raised the conflict in the face of criticism regarding its role in Syria.

During the second half of 2016, the US was driving the Quad’s activities to break the political impasse and to back the roadmap. With the change in the US administration, it would seem that the US is likely to reduce this pressure, in large part because of a more sympathetic view regarding the Saudi narrative about Iran’s role in the conflict.

The UK is the penholder on Yemen.

Notable Dates for March

REPORT DUE	REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION IN MARCH	REQUESTING DOCUMENT
29 January	SG report on Burundi	S/RES/2303
27 February	OPCW report on the implementation of resolution 2118 (Syrian chemical weapons)	S/RES/2118
3 March	SG report on UNAMA (Afghanistan)	S/RES/2274
8 March	SG report on implementation of resolution 1701 (Lebanon)	S/RES/2305
8 March	SG report on strategic review of UNIFIL (Lebanon)	S/RES/2305
9 March	SG report on MONUSCO (DRC)	S/RES/2277
9 March	SG report on the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC	S/RES/2277
15 March	Final report of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee	S/RES/2276
15 March	SG report on UNMISS (South Sudan)	S/RES/2327
17 March	SG report on UNDOF (Golan Heights)	S/RES/2330
22 March	SG report on the humanitarian situation in Syria	S/RES/2139

MANDATES EXPIRE	RELEVANT DOCUMENT
17 March	UNAMA (Afghanistan) S/RES/2274
30 March	UNSOM (Somalia) S/RES/2275
31 March	MONUSCO (DRC) S/RES/2277
24 April	Panel of Experts of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee (expires in April but will likely be renewed in March) S/RES/2276

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