Overview

Peru will have the presidency in April. It has chosen to hold a high-level briefing on peacebuilding and sustaining peace which is planned to coincide with the 24-25 April General Assembly high-level event on this issue. Secretary-General António Guterres and the Chair of the PBC, Ambassador Ion Jinga (Romania), are expected to brief.

There will be three open debates this month. The open debate on women, peace and security will be on the Secretary-General’s annual report on conflict-related sexual violence, focusing in particular on preventing sexual violence in conflict through empowerment, gender equality and justice. Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten will brief. The second open debate will be on youth, peace and security and focuses on a recently completed progress study on the topic. The quarterly debate on the Middle East is expected to focus as usual on Israel/Palestine.

The mandates of the UN missions in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) and in Western Sahara (MINUSURSO) will be renewed in April. Ahead of the renewal of MINUJUSTH, the Council is expected to hold a debate. There will be a TCC meeting and consultations ahead of the renewal of MINUSURSO at the end of the month.

Regarding the Middle East, the Council will continue to follow developments in Syria closely and are expecting to receive the monthly briefings on political and humanitarian developments and on the use of chemical weapons, with additional meetings possible depending on developments. There will be several Sudan/South Sudan meetings. The Council will discuss developments in relation to UNMISS in South Sudan, UNISFA in Abyei and Sudan/South Sudan relations. The Council is also expected to decide whether to extend UNISFA’s support to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism and may receive the Secretary-General’s report on the independent review of UNISFA. Other African issues the Council will consider include:

- Great Lakes Region, a briefing on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the DRC and the region;
- Liberia, a briefing on the final report of the mission and from the chair of the country configuration on Liberia of the PBC; and
- Mali, the activities of MINUSMA.

Other issues on the programme of work include:

- Colombia, an update on the UN Verification Mission in Colombia; and
- Non-proliferation, a briefing by the chair of the 1540 Committee.

Arria-formula meetings are anticipated on counter-terrorism and organised crime, on the rule of law and peacekeeping, and on the role of religious leaders in promoting peace and security. Additionally, Council members will attend a retreat with the Secretary-General in Sweden.

In Hindsight: What’s wrong with the Security Council?

Parting Reflections of Executive Director Ian Martin

In three years of watching the Security Council from this unique vantage point, I have gained a far broader understanding of its role and functioning than I had from briefing it and seeking to implement its mandates as a Special Representative of the Secretary-General. It does not lead me to a happy conclusion. The world’s premiere body for maintaining international peace and security is crippled by multiple handicaps—at a time when the threats of not only intra-state but inter-state conflicts are higher than at any other time since the worst of the Cold War. Some of these handicaps are intractable, but others could and should be mitigated, if not overcome.
In Hindsight: What’s wrong with the Security Council?

The first is a crisis of legitimacy stemming from the obviously anachronistic composition of the Council—its failure to reflect the geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century. The Council displays in its practice little awareness of how seriously this undermines its credibility in under-represented regions. With no current expectation that sufficient consensus to amend the Charter can be reached, the Council ought at least to show maximum openness to the wider membership, but this cannot be said to characterise the attitude of its permanent members.

Meanwhile, the optimism which followed the end of the Cold War, that the political divisions which had inhibited Council action were a thing of the past, has evaporated as new differences—not so unlike the old ones—have emerged and deepened. Nowhere is this more evident than over the Syrian conflict, which at the time of writing has seen 11 resolutions vetoed in an increasingly bitterly divided Council. The ineffectiveness of the Council on Syria in the face of the Russian veto is mirrored by its ineffectiveness on Israel/Palestine in the face of the US veto. And while Syria, Israel/Palestine and Ukraine are situations in which major national interests of permanent members are at stake, the divisions have spilled over to bedevil situations on the Council’s agenda where there are no such interests and Council consensus ought to be more readily achievable.

The depth of the divisions among the permanent members makes the role of the ten elected members more critical than ever. Their responsibility to those who elected them requires them to be a bridge between the Council and the wider membership. And despite their own ideological diversity, they can help to find greater consensus when permanent members are confronting each other. However, they face several impediments to their being able to play their part as strongly as is needed.

First, the manner of elections is far from guaranteeing that the ten elected members will be among those from their regions who can make the most effective contribution to the work of the Council. Uncontested candidatures endorsed by regional groups on a basis of rotation almost always go unchallenged in the General Assembly. Contests have tended to begin earlier and to involve increasing levels of expenditure, invitations to capitals, entertaining and gifts, as well as political lobbying by roving ambassadors and targeting of development assistance. In neither contested or uncontested elections is it clear that what weighs most with member states is the criterion set out in the Charter: that due regard shall be “specially paid” to the contribution of members of the United Nations to the maintenance of international peace and security and to the other purposes of the organization, as well as to equitable geographical distribution.

Second, the most obvious handicap to the effectiveness of elected members is the brevity of the two-year term contrasted with the continuity of the permanent members, with their institutional memories and large diplomatic staffs. The ability of elected members to mitigate this handicap with preparation before commencing their two-year term has been somewhat enhanced by the decision of the General Assembly to bring forward the date of their election from October to June, and by the Council then bringing forward to 1 October the date from which it invites the newly elected members to observe all meetings and informal consultations of the Council and its subsidiary bodies.

These changes allow for better preparation by newly-elected members, including the handover of responsibilities for sanctions committees and other subsidiary bodies from their predecessors. And they allow more time for efforts to pass on experience from one group of elected members to the next. SCR itself has increasingly provided capacity development for incoming delegations and those who will support them in capitals. But the limitations of a two-year term and the disparity between the elected and permanent members are immense. In this context, the decision of Italy and the Netherlands, with the endorsement of the Western European and Others Group, to split the 2017-2018 term after five rounds of close voting in June 2016 is not a good precedent, notwithstanding the collaborative arrangements they established.

Third, the Council struggles with the weight of its agenda. In 1990, the Council held 69 meetings and 80 consultations. In 2017, there were 296 meetings—a fourfold increase—and 137 consultations. The Council adopted 37 resolutions in 1990, 61 in 2017. In 2017, 1135 Council documents were issued. It spent an average of 56 hours each month in formal meetings and consultations, to which can be added time spent in Arria-formula meetings, informal interactive dialogues, and sanctions committees and other subsidiary bodies, as well as in negotiations.

There can be no doubting the greatly increased weight of necessary Council business, but the Council adds to the burden on itself by poor time management. Reporting cycles do not necessarily correspond to the need for another round of consideration of an agenda item, and often result in discussions which add little to the one before. Despite repeated injunctions to itself, the Council spends much of its time in informal consultations in the delivery of repetitive prepared speeches, and only limited time in interaction with each other and with briefers focused on strategic issues.

The time devoted to open debates and thematic issues also merits scrutiny. From 90 hours in 2013, the cumulative duration of open debates went up gradually to more than 170 hours in 2017. But their contribution to Council decision-making, especially as regards core situations on the Council’s agenda, is questionable. The Council’s thematic debates have made important contributions to normative developments, such as those regarding women and peace and security, children and armed conflict, and the protection of civilians. But they too can become repetitive with little impact on country situations. Most elected members feel they should mark their presidencies with thematic debates, perhaps to fulfill campaign commitments or to provide platforms for their ministers. The Council, however, needs to refocus on how its permanent representatives can devote sufficient time to strategic discussion of its core responsibilities, notably intractable country and regional situations and ensuring effective mandates and political support for peace operations.

Fourth, the greatest obstacles to the effectiveness of elected members are found in the working methods which permanent members have imposed on the Council. The domination of the permanent members was always considerable, but as SCR’s first Executive Director wrote of his experience on the Council, “it was not unusual in the early 1990s for elected members to take initiatives on major substantive items and to strongly contest the policy options on other items where a member of the P5 had the lead”. Countries which have recently come back onto the Council after a substantial interval remark on the closing down of space for the initiative and effective contribution of elected members.
Central to this is the operation of the penholder system. It is a relatively recent practice, which has become entrenched in the past decade. Since 2014, Notes by the President—the form in which Council working methods are articulated—have institutionalised penholdership as a recognised, if informal, arrangement. In doing so, they state that any member of the Council may be a penholder. Yet there is no process by which the Council agrees to designate a penholder or reviews the allocation of penholderships. In practice, three permanent members—France, the UK, and the US—are today sole penholders on the overwhelming majority of country situations on the Council’s agenda.

A joint statement of six elected members from six regions—Angola, Chile, Jordan, Malaysia, New Zealand and Spain—in an October 2015 open debate on Council working methods noted that the penholder system “has diminished the opportunity for wider Council engagement, especially by the elected members”, and “cuts across the principle of collective responsibility that underpins the Charter”.

Closely linked to the penholder system is the manner of negotiations, the quality and outcomes of which are of supreme importance to the effectiveness of the Council. But these are vitiated by penholder domination. As one permanent representative noted in a July 2016 open debate: “…the Council was intended to be a collective security body. Too often, it is a forum for polarizing initiatives and last-minute take-it-or-leave-it drafts tabled by so-called penholders.”

Notwithstanding these handicaps, the trend towards diminished space for the contribution of elected members has been increasingly resisted in the past few years and has begun to be somewhat reversed. SCR has analyzed such dynamics in successive In Hindsight articles. Amid the Council’s greatest failure, to bring an end to the conflict in Syria, elected members became penholders on the humanitarian situation from 2013; made efforts—ultimately unsuccessful—to find consensus after an April 2017 chemical weapons attack and to save the Joint Investigative Mechanism of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the UN; and this February negotiated a call for a month-long ceasefire. In 2016, five elected members took the initiative in drafting and negotiating a resolution on the protection of health care in armed conflict, at a time when four of the five permanent members of the Council were associated with coalitions responsible for attacks on health-care structures, in Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria. In December 2016, elected members were instrumental when the Council issued a rare rebuke of Israel, with the adoption of a resolution condemning Israeli settlements as having no legal validity and constituting a major obstacle to a two-state solution. Dismayed by the inaction of the Council in the face of persistent violations of international humanitarian law and the greatest of the world’s extreme humanitarian crises in Yemen, elected members have pressed for greater Council action and threatened to move forward if the UK as penholder continued to stall.

The political differences among elected members are as wide as those among the permanent members, but SCR has set out in its most recent research report the ways in which they have pursued their common interest in promoting more transparent and open working methods, with greater space for elected members and non-members to influence Council decisions.

As I leave SCR, the internal politics of the permanent members and the relations among them seem to offer no prospect of improvement in the effectiveness of the Council, confronted as it is by threats of great danger and complexity. Reform of the composition of the Council is essential as a matter of justice and legitimacy, yet seems still beyond the ability of governments to agree upon; it would not in itself be a guarantee of effectiveness, and indeed an enlarged Council would all the more need to improve its working methods. In the immediate future, it is the quality and determination of ten elected members on which some incremental improvement in performance most depends.

Security Council Report (SCR) is delighted to announce, following a world-wide search, that Karin Landgren will be the organisation’s next Executive Director, effective 1 May 2018. Ms. Landgren will succeed Ian Martin, who is returning to England.

Ms. Landgren has wide-ranging experience in a variety of areas germane to the work of SCR and in locations throughout the world. She is the first woman to have headed three United Nations peace operations mandated by the Security Council. She was until 2015 an UN under-secretary-general and head of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), a peacekeeping operation, and led UNMIL’s response to Ebola through the height of the epidemic. Prior to this, she led two political missions, the UN Office in Burundi (BNUB) and the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN). She was head of child protection at UNICEF, where she developed a widely-used approach to child protection, the Protective Environment Framework; and she worked on refugee protection and statelessness for many years for UNHCR, including in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Eritrea, Singapore and India. She is a founding member of the Nordic Women Mediators’ Network and has taught at Columbia University and the Central European University.

SCR Board Chairman Joshua Mintz commented: “Karin brings a wealth of experience and wisdom to the post and an important perspective to the work of SCR. We are fortunate to have Karin take over the leadership role of SCR and her experience will be invaluable to SCR. The Board and staff of Security Council Report are excited about this important step and look forward to her leadership. We are grateful to Mr. Martin who has provided exemplary service to SCR over his tenure.” Ms. Landgren noted: “SCR plays a vital role in analyzing and explaining the work of the Security Council to observers and practitioners alike, and after years of drawing on its excellent work I’m delighted to take up the role of Executive Director.”
Status Update since our March Forecast

Lake Chad Basin
On 2 March, Council members issued a press statement condemning the 19 February Boko Haram kidnapping of 110 school girls in Dapchi, Nigeria, and a 1 March attack in Rann, Nigeria that led to the deaths of at least three humanitarian workers, four Nigerian soldiers, and four Nigerian police (SC/13233). On 22 March, the Council met to discuss the Lake Chad Basin and the implementation of resolution 2349, with a focus on the root causes of the Boko Haram crisis. Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohamed briefed, as did Mohamed Bila of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and Chitra Nagarajan, a Senior Conflict Advisor with the think tank and public policy consultancy Adelphi (S/PV.8212).

Terrorism
On 2 March, Council members issued a press statement condemning the terrorist attacks which took place that day in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, against the army headquarters and the French Embassy (SC/13234). On 9 March, the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee, the 1373 Counterterrorism Committee (CTC) and the Afghanistan Sanctions Committee held joint informal consultations. At press time, on 29 March, the CTC was expected to hold its monthly formal meeting, and a representative of the Global Counterterrorism Forum briefed the committee.

1267/1989/2253 Sanctions Committee
On 6 March, the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee added two individuals and one entity to the sanctions list (SC/13237). On 9 March, the 1267/1989/2253, the Counterterrorism Committee and the Afghanistan Sanctions Committee held joint informal consultations. At press time, on 29 March, the 1267/1989/2253 and Afghanistan sanctions committees, were expected to be briefed by Lars Tummers, special envoy for counterterrorism at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ismail Chikkori, Director of Global Affairs at the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, in their capacity as co-chairs of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum.

Central African Republic
On 6 March, Council members issued a press statement condemning an attack against education workers near Markounda in the north-western part of the CAR on 25 February 2018 by unknown assailants, which resulted in the killing of one UNICEF education consultant, two officials of the Ministry of Education of the CAR, and three members of a UNICEF national partner organisation, Bangui Sans Frontières (SC/13236). On 16 March, the Panel of Experts assisting the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee presented their programme of work to the committee.

Democratic Republic of the Congo
On 7 March, Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative and head of MONUSCO, briefed the Council (S/PV.8198) on the latest MONUSCO report (S/2018/174) and the report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement (S/2018/128). Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix also participated in the consultations that followed. On 19 March, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock; Jeanine Bandu Bahati, Coordinator of “Encadrement des Femmes Indigènes et des Ménages Vulnérables”; and Abbé Donatien Nshole, Secretary-General and spokesperson of the Congolese National Episcopal Conference, briefed the Council on the humanitarian situation in the DRC (S/PV.8207). Council members issued a press statement on 22 March, expressing their concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation (SC/13260). On 27 March, the Council adopted resolution 2409 renewing the mandate of MONUSCO until 31 March 2019. On 23 March, Zerrougui and a representative of the Joint Mission Analysis Centre of MONUSCO (responsible for monitoring the arms embargo) briefed the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee on the security situation via video teleconference. A representative of the UN Mine Action Service also briefed the committee.

Afghanistan
On 8 March, the Council held a debate on the situation in Afghanistan with a briefing by Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto, Deputy Chairperson of the High Peace Council Habibi Sarabi, and Executive Director of the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies Mariam Safi (S/PV.8199). Yamamoto briefed on the latest UNAMA report (S/2018/165), the security situation, the preparation for the elections, and the conference of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation, which endorsed the call for direct talks between the Government and the Taliban. Sarabi and Safi centered their briefings on women’s rights and the role of women in the Afghan peace process. Ahead of the debate, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2405 which extended the mandate of UNAMA for another year, while also welcoming the strategic review of the mission and calling for implementation of its recommendations. On 15 March, Council members issued a press statement welcoming the convening of the Kabul Process conference and calling on the Taliban to accept the offer of direct talks with the government (SC/13251). On 21 March, Council members condemned the terrorist attack in Kabul, claimed by ISIL, which resulted in at least 33 people killed and 65 injured (SC/13258).

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
On 8 March, Italian Foreign Minister and current OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Angelino Alfano briefed the Council on main priorities of the Italian chairmanship of the organisation (S/PV.8200). These include fighting transnational threats to peace and security, combating racism and xenophobia, and promoting the rights of women. In his briefing, Alfano devoted significant attention to the situation in Ukraine, where the OSCE plays an important role in monitoring the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Children and Armed Conflict
The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict met on 12 March for the introduction of the Secretary-General’s report on children and armed conflict in Mali. It also discussed the Global Horizontal Note for the period of July to September 2017, and heard a briefing from Germany’s Deputy Permanent Representative Ambassador Jürgen Schulz on the
Crimea Arria-Formula meeting
On 15 March, Council members held an Arria-formula meeting (open to media and wider UN membership) on the Crimea, which was organised by the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, the UK and the US, in partnership with the Ukraine. The meeting, which came at the fourth anniversary of the Russia annexation of Crimea, focused on the role and limits of the Council and good offices of the Secretary-General in addressing violations of the UN Charter and international law. Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Olena Zerkal and a representative of the Crimean Tatars, Ayla Bakka, provided briefings. In addition to the briefers and members of the Council, Germany and the EU delivered statements as parties with an interest in the issue. Ambassador Olof Skoog (Sweden) provided opening remarks, and Ambassador Joanna Wronecka (Poland) gave closing remarks.

Tribunals
On 19 March, the Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2018/6) on the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (S/PV.8208). The statement requested the Mechanism to present its latest progress report by 15 April, and it requested detailed schedules for the proceedings currently under consideration and factors relevant to projected completion dates for cases and other matters over which the Mechanism had jurisdiction. The statement also requested the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals to carry out a thorough examination of the Mechanism’s report, as well as the report on the evaluation of its working methods by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, due to be submitted by 31 March 2018. This review must be completed by 15 May and its outcome shall be reflected by the Security Council in an appropriate form.

Lebanon
On 20 March, Acting UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Pernille Dahler Kardel briefed Council members in consultations on the latest Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (S/2018/210).

DPRK (North Korea)
On 21 March, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2407, extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee until 24 April 2019 (S/PV.8210).

Somalia and Eritrea
On 13 March, the chair of the 751/1907 Somalia and Eritrea Sanctions Committee, Kairat Umarov (Kazakhstan), delivered his regular 120-day briefing to Council members in consultations. On 27 March, the Council adopted resolution 2408, renewing the mandate of UNSOM for an additional year.

Sudan (Darfur)
On 14 March, the Council was briefed on UNAMID by Joint Special Representative for Darfur and head of UNAMID Jeremi ah Mamabolo (via video teleconference) on the Secretary-General’s latest 60-day report on this issue (S/2018/154). Ambassador Joanna Wronecka (Poland), the chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, provided the quarterly briefing to Council members on the Committee’s work (S/PV.8202). The briefings were followed by consultations. Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba briefed members in the consultations.

Use of Nerve Agent
On 14 March, a meeting was convened regarding the use of a nerve agent in Salisbury in the UK (S/PV.8203). The UK requested the meeting to update members on its investigations into the 4 March attack, which resulted in the poisoning of three individuals: Sergei Skripal, a former Russian intelligence officer who spied for the UK, and his daughter, both of whom are reportedly in a critical condition, as well as a police officer, who became ill while investigating the incident. During the meeting, at which all Council members spoke, UK Chargé d’Affaires Ambassador Jonathan Allen stated that: “Either this was a direct attack by Russia on my country, or Russia has lost control of a military-grade nerve agent that it had developed”. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia (Russia) said that the accusations were “unfounded” and “totally unacceptable.”

Berlin Workshop on Children and Armed Conflict held from 12-13 February. It had another meeting on 26 March to negotiate conclusions on the report on children and armed conflict in Mali.

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Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace

Expected Council
In April, the Council is expected to hold a high-level briefing to consider the Secretary-General’s implementation report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace. This is planned to coincide with the 24–25 April General Assembly high-level event on the issue. Secretary-General António Guterres and the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), Ambassador Ion Jinga (Romania), are expected to brief.

Key Recent Developments
In January, the Secretary-General submitted his report on the implementation of the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on the review of the UN peacebuilding architecture. These substantively identical resolutions defined the notion of sustaining peace when they were adopted in April 2016, broadening the concept of peacebuilding as occurring not only in post-conflict situations but also to prevent conflict in the first place and across the conflict cycle. The resolutions emphasised that sustaining peace was a responsibility of all three pillars of the UN’s work: security, human rights and development. For follow-up, the General Assembly resolution included a decision, which the Council version took note of, to invite the Secretary-General to provide a report at least 60 days before a high-level event on “Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace” during its 72nd session.

The Secretary-General’s implementation report provides an overview of the relevant aspects of his ongoing peace and security, development system, and management reforms. This includes, as stressed in the two resolutions, efforts for greater coherence across the UN system and between other international actors such as regional organisations and international financial institutions, enhancing the capacities of the UN resident coordinators, and revitalising the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), which is to join a new Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) to serve as a “hinge” between the UN’s three pillars.

The report also sets out options to increase, restructure and better prioritise financing for peacebuilding, which the review of the peacebuilding architecture said was significantly underfunded. Guterres proposed a “quantum leap” in the capacity of the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to enable investments totalling $500 million annually. In recent years, the UN has aspired to annual PBF investments of $100 million, though in 2017 the PBF approved an all-time high of $157.1 million for 31 countries.

To increase the PBF’s capacity, the Secretary-General proposed, inter alia, that member states commit unspent peacekeeping budget funds to the PBF. He also proposed that they be assessed the equivalent of 15 percent of the cost savings of a peacekeeping operation’s budget when it is reduced from the previous year. Guterres reiterated a previous proposal from the review for $100 million or one percent of the value of total UN budgets for peace operations be provided annually to the PBF from assessed contributions. Other options to increase overall financing of peacebuilding include principal contributors of UN peacekeeping budgets voluntarily committing the equivalent of 15 percent of the final full-year budget of a closing peacekeeping mission towards peacbuilding activities in a country, or placing this money into a pooled fund managed by the resident coordinator’s office for a two-year period. The report noted possibilities for innovative financing, including through, inter alia, individuals, foundations and corporate partnerships. It highlighted an upcoming joint UN-World Bank Group study (released in March) which found that increased spending on prevention could save between $5 billion and $70 billion per year, depending on different forecast scenarios, for the affected country and the international community combined.

On 5 March, Guterres informally briefed member states on his report. He said that he hoped they would give his proposals serious consideration at the high-level meeting in April and urged members to focus not only on the event but also on meaningful ways to follow up on decisions that are taken. A majority of delegations expressed support for the proposals and for having a concise resolution of the General Assembly that would acknowledge the report and set up future reporting.

General Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák subsequently appointed Ambassadors Audra Plepytė (Lithuania) and Masud Bin Momen (Bangladesh) as co-facilitators to lead intergovernmental consultations on a draft resolution to be adopted by the General Assembly during the 24–25 April high-level meeting. The envisioned resolution is meant to be similar to the resolution that the General Assembly adopted on 20 December 2017 on the Secretary-General’s proposed peace and security reforms. That resolution took note of the Secretary-General’s report on reforming the peace and security pillar and supported his vision. It further requested that the Secretary-General submit, as soon as possible, a comprehensive report elaborating on the establishment of the DPPA and Department of Peace Operations. On 1 March, the Secretary-General submitted this report, which included a proposal to increase PBSO regular budget positions by 50 percent.

In the Security Council, a presidential statement was adopted on 21 December 2017 that laid out elements related to peacebuilding and sustaining peace to be considered when reviewing the mandates and configuration of peacekeeping missions.

Developments in the Peacebuilding Commission
The Secretary-General’s report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace highlighted progress in the PBC to diversify its working methods and the country and regional situations it considers. The PBC has continued its engagement on The Gambia, holding a 4 December 2017 meeting on ongoing institutional reforms and plans for a roundtable conference of development partners that was held in Dakar from 20 to 22 February. On the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, for which in 2017 the Council requested PBC support in implementing, PBC Chair Ambassador

That same month, the PBC continued initiatives in support of MINUJUSTH, which was requested in resolution 2350. The report contained 11 benchmarks to align political and programmatic interventions. That same month, the PBC continued initiatives to widen the country situations before it, holding sessions on Colombia and Sri Lanka on 13 and 20 November, respectively. Also during 2017, the PBSO began regularly informing PBC members on the activities of the PBF as part of efforts to carry forward the call in the peacebuilding/sustaining peace resolutions to increase synergies between the two entities.

Within the work of the PBC’s country configurations, Ambassador Jürg Lauber (Switzerland), chair of its Burundi configuration, visited Burundi from 27 to 30 March. The Liberian configuration has remained focused on supporting that country’s transition after the departure of the UN Mission in Liberia, committing itself to filling resource and capacity gaps of around $130 million over the next two years in implementing a peacebuilding plan that the Security Council requested. The Sierra Leone configuration met on 23 March to discuss developments, amidst several violent incidents, ahead of the country’s presidential run-off election. The chairs of the PBC’s Guinea-Bissau configuration, Ambassador Mauro Vieira (Brazil), and the Central African Republic configuration, Ambassador Omar Hilale (Morocco), participated in Security Council briefings on 14 and 22 February respectively.

Key Issues and Options
The Council session is expected to be held on 25 April, to complement the General Assembly’s high-level event. The Council’s discussion is expected to focus on those aspects of the Secretary-General’s report most closely related to the Council’s responsibility to maintain international peace and security. This includes, for example, the PBC’s advisory role to the Council, adopting longer-term strategic approaches to prevent or resolve conflict, and improving transitions during the withdrawal of peace operations.

One option for the Council, having previously adopted concurrent resolutions with the General Assembly in establishing and conducting reviews of the UN peacebuilding architecture, is to adopt a resolution or presidential statement mirroring the resolution being negotiated in the General Assembly. Another option is having such a product additionally outline elements that should be considered when preparing for transitions from peace operations to a UN country team setting.

Council and Wider Dynamics
Peru’s interest in organising this session stems from its own history in successfully emerging from conflict in the 1980s and 1990s, which reflected many of the processes envisioned by a sustaining peace approach.

Despite what seems like fairly broad support for the Secretary-General’s proposals in his report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace, major UN financial contributors are likely to resist new assessed contributions. Also, some countries continue to be concerned about the implications of the concept of sustaining peace. Russia and some countries of the Non-Aligned Movement have expressed reservations, believing it could lead to interference in issues pertaining to state sovereignty. Russia also frequently affirms that there should remain a clear division in the responsibilities of the UN’s different pillars, while some countries have worried about a diversion from development funding.

Mexico heads an approximately 40-member Group of Friends for Sustaining Peace, which includes Council members France, the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK and the US. Kazakhstan has also promoted ways to address peace and security challenges that combine development, regional dimensions and greater integration of the UN system.

Sweden is the current coordinator of the Council-PBC stock-taking sessions, organised periodically to review relations between the two bodies.

Haiti

Expected Council Action
In April, the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH), which expires on 15 April. Ahead of the renewal of the mandate, there will be a debate on MINUJUSTH.

Key Recent Developments
On 20 March, the Secretary-General transmitted his strategic assessment of MINUJUSTH, which was requested in resolution 2350. The report contained 11 benchmarks for an exit strategy toward a non-peacekeeping UN presence, developed over the past three months. The exit strategy was developed by MINUJUSTH in collaboration with a number of Haitian interlocutors, including the government, the Parliament, judicial institutions, the Haitian National Police (HNP), and civil society organisations. Any future planning for a staggered withdrawal of the formed police units will be linked to progress in related benchmarks. The benchmarks describe the desired end state for the situation in Haiti in the last quarter of 2019, which would facilitate a smooth transition to the UN country team. They are:
- The executive and legislative branches would have promulgated legislation that improves access to justice, enhances the HNP’s development, and addresses prolonged pre-trial detention, which is currently resulting in prison overcrowding, and all branches would have initiated implementation of the new legislation, including through sustainable budget allocations.
- The Haitian authorities would make timely, gender-balanced and merit-based appointments in the justice sector, including in the High Council of the Judiciary, High Court of Appeals, and the High Court of Audits and Administrative Disputes.
- The Corrections Directorate would perform key management functions, providing...
basic services to all detainees and ensuring respect for their rights.

The HNP would respond to public disorder and manage security threats throughout Haiti without requiring international support and demonstrating elevated levels of professionalism, human rights awareness and gender-sensitivity, as a result of the implementation of the relevant priorities of the HNP Strategic Development Plan for 2017-2021.

There would be strengthened internal oversight and accountability mechanisms in the justice, corrections and police sectors, addressing misconduct and ensuring increased effectiveness and compliance with human rights.

Haitian women and men, and in particular those from the most vulnerable and marginalised communities, would demonstrate increased trust in the capability and willingness of the justice system to address crime and of the HNP to provide security.

The national Office for the Protection of Citizens would function independently and protect citizens whose rights have been violated.

Civil society organisations, including those representing women, would advocate with the Haitian authorities to promote and protect human rights and be empowered to bring allegations of human rights violations to the competent judicial or administrative authorities.

National authorities would comply with international human rights obligations, including holding individuals responsible for current and past human rights violations and fulfilling their reporting obligations to human rights treaty bodiess.

Rule of law and anti-corruption institutions would demonstrate increased capacity to fight corruption.

The Permanent Electoral Council would be established through a credible and transparent process and would exercise its electoral responsibilities in an independent and transparent manner, without requiring international support.

According to the report, MINUJUSTH and the UN country team will assess their preparedness for the upcoming transition, including through a capacity assessment of the country team against the programmatic aspects of MINUJUSTH’s mandate, which will be informed by gender and women, peace and security perspectives.

The Secretary-General also recommended that the Security Council extend the mandate of MINUJUSTH to reflect the timeline defined by the benchmarked exit strategy. He will continue to keep the structure of the mission under review and will report to the Council with his recommendations for a staggered withdrawal based on results achieved against the benchmarks and the situation on the ground.

On 28 February, Secretary-General António Guterres and Special Envoy for Haiti Josette Sheeran hosted an overnight retreat on eradicating cholera in Haiti at Greentree on Long Island. Several Haitian government ministers were scheduled to attend, along with President Moïse. However, the delegation cancelled its attendance after a dispute erupted a day earlier following the issuing of a statement by head of MINUJUSTH Susan D. Page that welcomed a judicial corruption inquiry into how $2 billion in oil loans from Venezuela was spent by former Haitian government officials and called on authorities to look into alleged human rights violations by the HNP. Haitian Foreign Minister Antonio Rodrigue said Page’s statement went beyond the UN’s role to support the country in the enforcement of rule of law and justice.

**Human Rights-Related Developments**

In his opening statement at the 37th session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) on 7 March, High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein expressed his regret at the “lack of action regarding development of a national Plan of Action to implement recommendations of human rights mechanisms”. On 22 March, the High Commissioner gave an oral briefing to the HRC on the human rights situation in Haiti.

**Key Issues and Options**

The key issue is whether or not the ambitious benchmarks laid out for the transition to a non-peacekeeping UN presence in Haiti are achievable in the projected timeframe and, if not, how long the mission should be given to continue its work towards these goals. Related ongoing issues for the Council include the need for MINUJUSTH to develop further the capacity of the HNP and continue to encourage progress across all rule of law sectors and concerning human rights-related reforms, in particular with regard to criminal justice, before its projected closure in the last quarter of 2019. The Council may need to closely monitor developments in regards to the benchmarks, which could be reflected in the April resolution renewing the mandate, and continue to tailor the mandate accordingly.

Another issue is the lack of funding for the Secretary-General’s new approach to cholera. In response to his July 2017 invitation to member states to voluntarily waive the return of the 2015-2016 unencumbered balances and credits from MINUJUSTH’s predecessor, MINUSTAH, to support the UN New Approach to Cholera, 31 member states positively responded; however this only amounted to $3.3 million out of $40.5 million. A total of $7.7 million has been pledged in support of cholera efforts. The Secretary-General had estimated that the new approach would cost $400 million.

**Council Dynamics**

Council members seem content with the progress Haiti has achieved in the last year. The presidential, legislative and municipal elections were all held peacefully without major threats to overall security, and President Jovenel Moïse’s inauguration marked the restoration of constitutional order. This was the backdrop for the Council’s adoption of resolution 2350, which authorised the gradual drawdown and closure of MINUSTAH by 15 October followed by the establishment of a much smaller successor mission, MINUJUSTH.

While the Council voted unanimously in favour of resolution 2350, some members expressed concern regarding certain aspects of the resolution. Most notably, in explaining their votes, Russia and China objected to the inclusion of a human rights mandate for the successor mission and to its being established under Chapter VII, which authorises enforcement action in order to restore international peace and security. Bolivia also expressed reservations about invoking Chapter VII in the resolution, noting that this does not reflect the reality on the ground. Furthermore, Russia has also
argued that some of the aspects of the MINUJUSTH mandate are not clear and would be difficult to implement in practice. These concerns may be raised again during the April mandate renewal.

Council practice is that draft resolutions on Haiti are negotiated and agreed among the Group of Friends of Haiti, which comprises Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, France, Guatemala, Peru, the US and Uruguay, before being circulated to all 15 Council members by the US as the penholder.

**Syria**

**Expected Council Action**
In April, the Council expects to receive the monthly briefings on political and humanitarian developments in Syria and on the use of chemical weapons.

**Key Recent Developments**
Despite the unanimous adoption of resolution 2401 demanding a cessation of hostilities in Syria, the conflict entered its eighth year amidst a marked intensification of violence. Soon after the resolution was adopted on 24 February, the unwillingness of the government to implement the resolution became clear as it continued to justify its military actions as counter-terrorism operations. On 28 February, the Council received an early assessment of the implementation of resolution 2401 by the Under-Secretaries-General for Humanitarian and Political Affairs, Mark Lowcock and Jeffrey Feltman, respectively. Lowcock said that there had been no improvement in the humanitarian situation in Eastern Ghouta since the passage of the resolution. In a 4 March statement, the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, Panos Moumtzis, said: “Instead of a much needed reprieve, we continue to see more fighting, more death, and more disturbing reports of hunger and hospitals being bombed. This collective punishment of civilians is simply unacceptable.”

On 7 March, Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and OCHA Director Lisa Doughten briefed Council members in consultations at the request of France and the UK. Doughten told the members that, despite the readiness of the UN and its partners to deploy humanitarian convoys to Eastern Ghouta, the lack of security on 5 March had prevented the complete offloading of the first convoy that had made it into Eastern Ghouta since November 2017. Some of the critical humanitarian supplies that could not be delivered then were unloaded in Eastern Ghouta on 9 March, despite renewed shelling that was in breach of “assurances of safety from parties including the Russian Federation”, according to the Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria, Ali al-Za’hari.

On 12 March, Secretary-General António Guterres briefed the Council on the implementation of resolution 2401. He said that there had been no cessation of hostilities and that violence had continued not only in Eastern Ghouta but also in Afrin, Idlib, and Damascus and its suburbs. The delivery of humanitarian aid had not been safe, unimpeded or sustained, and no sieges had been lifted. He also underscored that efforts to combat terrorist groups did not supersede those humanitarian obligations.

Throughout March, the government’s military offensive in Eastern Ghouta persisted. It first succeeded in dividing rebel-held territory into three areas and has resulted in the displacement of thousands of civilians. The separation of armed groups from terrorist organisations has been a key issue in the discussions on Eastern Ghouta. Resolution 2401 distinguished between the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Al Qaida, Al-Nusra Front, and other terrorist groups designated by the Council—which would not be protected by the cessation of hostilities—and other armed groups that would be. After resolution 2401 was adopted, three armed groups in Eastern Ghouta (i.e. Jaish al-Islam, Faylaq al-Rahman and Ahrar al-Sham) expressed their commitment to abide by the terms of the resolution and to expel Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, Al-Nusra Front’s latest iteration. The evacuation of civilians was a direct result of Russia’s engagement with these armed groups.

On 16 March, de Mistura briefed the Council on “developments of substantial gravity on the ground” in Eastern Ghouta. He also briefed the Council on his ongoing political efforts to bring about a constitution-al committee. He reiterated that the government continued to refuse to engage on the committee’s formation, and in consultations he raised the possibility of establishing interim arrangements and timelines to begin its work. He also told Council members about the limited progress made by Iran, Russia and Turkey on the issue of detainees, abductees and missing persons despite concrete proposals made by the UN ahead of a 15 March foreign minister-level meeting in Astana.

On 19 March, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, was scheduled to brief the Council on the human rights situation in Syria. The meeting was requested by France with the support of the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Sweden, the UK and the US. However, a procedural motion called for by Russia on whether to convene the meeting failed to receive the nine votes necessary for approval. Bolivia, China, Kazakhstan and Russia voted against the motion, while Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and Ethiopia abstained. In lieu of a formal meeting, that afternoon Al Hussein was asked to brief members in an Arria-formula format organised by the countries that had requested the meeting.

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At the initiative of the Netherlands, Council members held an informal interactive dialogue on chemical weapons in Syria on 20 March with the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, and the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Ahmet Üzümcü. Nakamitsu and Üzümcü discussed with Council members the elements contained in a 23 February report of the OPCW, conveyed to the Council on 1 March. The report raised concerns regarding the limited cooperation of the Syrian government in addressing the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies identified by the OPCW in Syria’s initial declaration. They also briefed Council members on the arrangements currently being negotiated by the OPCW and the UN Office for Project Services with the Syrian government for the planned destruction of two stationary, aboveground chemical weapons production facilities and how this process would unfold.

Despite the demand for cessation of hostilities, the Turkish military offensive in the town of Afrin continued in March. In late March, Turkey took full control of the region. On 25 March, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that the offensive would continue towards YPG-held Tal Rifaat in northern Aleppo. Throughout the offensive in Afrin, the UN expressed alarm at its impact on civilians, threatened by airstrikes and ground-based attacks and prevented from escaping by Kurdish forces.

On 27 March, Lowcock briefed the Council on the lack of implementation of resolution 2401. At the meeting, many Council members expressed concerns at the situation in Eastern Ghouta. Kuwait and Sweden emphasised that evacuations must be voluntary, that the dialogues on evacuations include the participation of civilians, and that the conditions of the shelters receiving civilians need to be improved.

**Human Rights-Related Developments**

On 2 March, the Human Rights Council (HRC) voted 25 to four (with eight abstentions) to hold an urgent debate on the situation in Eastern Ghouta, at which the High Commissioner for Human Rights made a statement. On 5 March, the HRC adopted by 29 votes to four (with 14 abstentions) resolution 37/1 on the deteriorating situation of human rights in Eastern Ghouta. (Security Council and HRC member Ethiopia abstained while China voted against the resolution.) The resolution welcomed Security Council resolution 2401 and condemned the sustained denial of humanitarian access, the indiscriminate use of heavy weapons and aerial bombardments against civilians, and the alleged use of chemical weapons in Eastern Ghouta. It also requested the Commission of Inquiry on Syria to urgently conduct a comprehensive and independent inquiry into the events in Eastern Ghouta and to provide an update followed by an interactive dialogue on the situation to the HRC at its 38th session in June.

On 13 March, the HRC held an interactive dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry to discuss its latest report (A/HRC/37/72), covering 8 July 2017 to 15 January 2018. The report concluded that civilians had been deliberately targeted through unlawful means and methods of warfare, including arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, and sexual and gender-based violence. There had been repeated attacks on medical facilities, schools and markets, and humanitarian aid has been used as a weapon of war. The report also highlighted the high cost to civilians of offensives to defeat ISIL, saying that the international coalition failed to take all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilian objects.

On 15 March, the Commission released a report on sexual and gender-based violence in Syria, covering March 2011 to December 2017 and based on 454 interviews (A/HRC/37/CRP.3). According to the report, sexual and gender-based violence against women, girls, men and boys has been used by parties to the conflict as a tool to instil fear, humiliate and punish or, in the case of terrorist groups, as part of their enforced social order. It recommended that the Security Council include regular briefings by the Commission as part of its formal agenda, including on the use of sexual violence.

On 23 March, the HRC voted 27 to four (with 16 abstentions) to extend the mandate of the Commission for one year (A/HRC/RES/37/29).

**Key Issues and Options**

During the seven years of the war, P5 divisions have limited the options at the disposal of the Council. Council members could hold an informal, unscripted and forward-looking meeting at the ambassador-level to discuss how to increase pressure on the parties to the conflict and seek a compromise that is both realistic and agreeable to all.

The stewardship of the humanitarian penholders in negotiating resolution 2401 illustrates the potential role of elected members in the Council. However, the lack of implementation also shows that no progress will be made without the buy-in of the parties and their supporters. Given the politicisation of the discussions on the humanitarian situation, the Council faces the challenge of maintaining unity as it addresses the failure of the parties to cease hostilities.

The Council has struggled to find a mutually acceptable formula for replacing the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). If reaching an agreement proves impossible, Council members could request options from the Secretary-General to devise such a mechanism, taking into account the positions expressed by Council members in the failed negotiations to renew the JIM.

**Council and Wider Dynamics**

Council dynamics on Syria are characterised by increased polarisation. This is now apparent in the discussions on the humanitarian situation, as well as on the political process and responsibility for the use of chemical weapons. Beyond the different perspectives among Council members regarding the meaning and implementation of resolution 2401, Council meetings have reflected differing views about the credibility of key humanitarian actors. At the 12 March Council briefing, Russia questioned the figures and sources cited in the Secretary-General’s report.

At the 12 March briefing, US Ambassador Nikki Haley warned “any nation that is determined to impose its will through chemical attacks and inflicting inhuman suffering” that the US “remains prepared to act if we must”. It circulated a draft resolution imposing a cessation of hostilities on Eastern Ghouta and Damascus that appeared to be unacceptable to Russia. Members of the Syrian Negotiation Commission, which represents opposition groups, made several calls for unilateral action at an Arria-formula meeting that same day. The meeting, titled “Implementing Syria’s Cessation of Hostilities: Syria’s Opposition Speaks”, was sponsored by France, the Netherlands, Poland and the UK. Several Council members expressed reservations about pursuing any action that would undermine the framework established by resolution 2401, whether from inside or outside the Council. In an attempt to increase pressure on Russia and Syria, the US along with France, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Sweden and the UK sent a letter on 16 March to the Council president. The letter said that if there is no implementation
women, peace and security

expected council action

in april, the council expects to hold an open debate on the secretary-general’s annual report on conflict-related sexual violence, focusing particularly on preventing sexual violence in conflict through empowerment, gender equality and justice. special representative on sexual violence in conflict pramila patten will brief. peru plans to circulate a concept note ahead of the debate. no outcome is expected.

key recent developments

at press time the secretary-general was about to submit his most recent report on conflict-related sexual violence, covering january to december 2017, which will provide the basis for the april open debate.

the report is expected to focus on 19 countries for which credible information is available and provide country-specific strategic recommendations as well as overarching policy recommendations. these are the same 19 countries that appeared in the previous two reports by the secretary-general. also, as in recent years, the report is expected to contain an annex of a list of parties credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict on the agenda of the security council, the majority being non-state actors. côte d’ivoire is expected to be removed from the annex.

the report is also expected to cover country visits by patten, who took up the position in june 2017, to myanmar, iraq and sudan. her first official visit was to myanmar from 14 to 17 december 2017, where she met with state counsellor daw aung san suu kyi, several government ministers, and other officials. prior to this visit, patten briefed the council on 12 december 2017 to share her impressions of the camps in cox’s bazaar, bangladesh, which she visited from 5 to 13 november 2017, saying that accounts she heard indicate a pattern of grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law committed against rohingya women and girls in the context of military operations. patten visited sudan from 18 to 25 february, travelling to both khartoum and darfur, where she met with senior government officials, parliamentarians and civil society representatives. in a 27 february press release, patten said a key observation from her visit to sudan is the existence of a deep-seated culture of denial which enhances and feeds the culture of silence about sexual violence. it marked the first time that any special representative for sexual violence in conflict had visited the country since the office was established in 2009. patten also visited iraq from 26 february to 5 march, where she met with government officials and survivors of sexual violence at the hands of isil/daesh. in a 5 march press release, patten stressed the need to ensure that survivors of conflict-related sexual violence are fully protected and that perpetrators are brought to justice.

another issue that is expected to be in the report is sexual exploitation and abuse. last year’s report recognised that the un has individuals among its ranks who engage in egregious acts of sexual exploitation and abuse. on 15 february, the secretary-general’s second report on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse was released. it provides information on measures to strengthen the un’s system-wide response to sexual exploitation and abuse, including progress in the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy and the secretary-general’s “new approach” strategy, which was outlined in last year’s report on the issue.

the report also highlights the activities of the informal experts group (ieg) on women, peace and security, established following the adoption of resolution 2242. in 2017, the ieg held meetings on the lake chad basin (27 february), yemen (23 march), mal (4 may), iraq (14 june), the central african republic (2 november), yemen (22 november), and afghanistan (5 december). so far this year, it has met on the lake chad basin (30 january) and the democratic republic of congo (28 february) with a meeting on iraq scheduled for the end of march and meetings on libya and mal expected later in the year.

key issues

a key issue is the role of the council in preventing sexual violence in conflict through empowerment, gender equality and justice, and in reinforcing current efforts to prevent sexual violence in conflict, including through the work of relevant sanctions committees. another issue is what the council can do to ensure full implementation of the relevant resolutions dealing with sexual violence in conflict as well as compliance by state and non-state parties.
Women Peace and Security

The Council may also consider how to go beyond briefings and the submission of names of perpetrators of sexual violence by the Special Representative to the relevant sanctions committees. That could mean considering the possibility of adopting targeted measures against these individuals. A related issue is expanding designation criteria in all relevant sanctions regimes where sexual violence is persistently perpetrated. In this regard, the Council could ensure that dedicated gender and conflict-related sexual violence expertise informs the work of sanctions committees and invite the Special Representative to share information with sanctions committees, as appropriate.

Keeping in mind the Secretary-General’s focus on prevention, a further issue is how to give due consideration to the identified risk factors of sexual violence as an early-warning indicator that could enable the Council to better fulfil its conflict prevention role.

No outcome is anticipated. However, the Council can continue to monitor the implementation of key resolutions on this issue by following it closely and integrating it into relevant country-specific and cross-cutting thematic resolutions.

Council Dynamics

Discussion of the Secretary-General’s report on conflict-related sexual violence has been a regular feature on the Council’s agenda since 2009, but Council members continue to have divergent views on aspects of this thematic agenda, including how to incorporate it into the Council’s sanctions regimes and how to advance and deepen efforts to integrate the women, peace and security agenda across all areas of the Council’s work. China and Russia have typically resisted many elements that they interpreted as an expansion of the women, peace and security agenda or perceived as infringing on state sovereignty or the competencies of other parts of the UN system.

Some members have highlighted the importance of working closely with relevant sanctions committees to list perpetrators and may raise this issue in the open debate. Others have shown interest in focusing on how conflict-related sexual violence occurs in situations where there is also systemic gender-based discrimination, such as the exclusion of women from political life, economic marginalization, and discriminatory systems of both formal and informal law.

Great Lakes Region

Expected Council Action

In April, Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region Said Djinnit will brief on the latest report on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the region (PSC Framework).

Key Recent Developments

The deplorable security situation in eastern DRC has taken another turn for the worse. In response to an upsurge in violent activities by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an Islamist rebel group, in North Kivu—including a deadly attack on Tanzanian peacekeepers on 7 December 2017 that resulted in 15 peacekeepers killed, 53 wounded and one who remains missing—Uganda and the DRC have launched an extensive military campaign against rebel groups in the region. One effect of the offensive has been an increase in the movement and activity of rebel groups, resulting in more violence and massive displacement of civilians.

Leila Zerrougui, the Special Representative and head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), briefed the Council on 7 March. She characterised the humanitarian situation in the DRC as “shocking”. Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix also participated in the consultations that followed.

The dire humanitarian situation was the focus of a briefing initiated by the Netherlands on 19 March, during which Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock, Secretary-General of the Episcopal National Conference of Congo and the chair of the Peacebuilding Commission Burundi Configuration, Ambassador Jürg Lauber (Switzerland), the commission’s revised electoral calendar now calls for combined presidential, legislative and provincial elections to take place on 23 December 2018. The opposition has denounced the revised calendar.

On the initiative of the US, Council members held an Arria-formula meeting on 12 February focused on the DRC elections. Several Council members observed that fulfilling the agreement, releasing political prisoners, ending politically-motivated prosecutions, and respecting freedom of assembly and expression are essential to creating the political space necessary for credible elections. In the 7 March briefing, Zerrougui said that security forces have used excessive means to quash several peaceful anti-Kabila protests since December 2017.

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On 27 March, the Council adopted resolution 2409, renewing MONUSCO’s mandate with its current troop levels until 31 March 2019. The resolution calls on all stakeholders in the DRC—including President Joseph Kabila—to swiftly implement the 31 December 2016 agreement in order to proceed without further delay to the preparation of elections on 23 December. It also calls on the DRC to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially that of peaceful assembly, lift the blanket ban on demonstrations, and exercise maximum restraint in responding to protests.

On Burundi, where President Pierre Nkurunziza’s decision to run for a controversial third term triggered a political crisis, the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy, Michel Kafando, and the chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Burundi Configuration, Ambassador Jürg Lauber (Switzerland), briefed the Council on 26 February. Kafando said that despite a calm security situation, many human rights violations were still being reported. He emphasised that the government’s decision to revise the constitution via a referendum in May had hampered economic gains and would not contribute to the conduct of credible elections, planned for 2020. At press time, Council members were negotiating a draft presidential statement on the political situation in Burundi, circulated by France on 1 March.

On 8 December 2017, the Council adopted resolution 2389 on the initiative of then-Council member Egypt, reaffirming that the PSC Framework remains an essential mechanism to achieve durable peace and stability. It invited the Secretary-General “to assess the progress, challenges and shortcomings in the implementation of the Framework, and to present his vision, supported by concrete recommendations, to the Council in his next report”, due by 31 March.

**Human Rights-Related Developments**

In February, the UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC (UNJHRO) – composed of the Human Rights Division of MONUSCO and OHCHR – released a report on the human rights situation in the month of January. The report documented 744 human rights violations throughout the DRC, which was above the monthly average for 2017 (541 violations). Violations of the right to property constituted the highest number of total violations documented (29 percent), followed by violations of the right to liberty and security of the person (211 violations and 857 victims, including 155 women and 31 children). According to the report, state agents were responsible for 60 percent of all violations.

On 19 March, UNJHRO said in another report that the right to freedom of peaceful assembly was severely restricted and often violently suppressed in the DRC in 2017 and that the trend continues. Between 1 January 2017 and 31 January 2018, at least 47 people were killed by security services and defence forces. Because most demonstrators were peaceful, the report concludes that the use of excessive force—including lethal force—by the authorities was unlawful, unjustified and disproportionate.

During an enhanced interactive dialogue on 20 March, the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Andrew Gilmour, provided an oral update on the human rights situation in the DRC. The High Commissioner will submit a comprehensive report on the DRC to the Human Rights Council at its 38th session in June.

**Key Issues and Options**

In the DRC, with MONUSCO’s mandate renewed, the primary political focus for the Council in the upcoming period will be monitoring the electoral process closely and ensuring that elections take place as scheduled. Timely elections should be free and fair and should take place in an inclusive environment conducive to participation in the political process. Council members may threaten or move to sanction actors who undermine the electoral process. Reviewing the role of Djinnit and whether he can play a bigger political role during the elections period is something the Council could consider.

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

The ongoing violence in different parts of the country and the dire humanitarian situation are of continuing concern, and the protection of civilians remains a top priority for MONUSCO. The Council may want to continue to closely review the performance of contingents and MONUSCO’s deployment and protection strategy.

**Council and Wider Dynamics**

All Council members remain concerned about the ongoing political crisis in the DRC and the security and humanitarian situations. They also maintain that the Council should closely follow and engage on the DRC in 2018. The MONUSCO mandate negotiations reflected a consensus about the imperative of holding the elections on 23 December without further delays, in alignment with the position of regional actors.

In principle, they also agree that elections should be free, fair and inclusive, but as elections near, differences may emerge regarding how far the Council can and should go in urging the government and other stakeholders to take certain actions to this effect. This mainly reflects disagreements over how to define the political crisis—as a constitutional issue or one with wider national and regional implications— and the appropriate response.

On the Great Lakes, one issue that was discussed during the negotiations on resolution 2389 was the role of Djinnit, particularly in light of the Secretary-General’s recommendation in a letter to the Council on 4 October 2016 that the role of the Special Envoy be expanded beyond issues relating to the PSC Framework. Though some Council members thought this warranted consideration, the Council in its response only said that it looked forward to further discussion of the recommendation, as several Council members felt that further elaboration of the financial and organisational ramifications of the recommendation was required. Ultimately, the Council did not follow up on the recommendation to expand the Special Envoy’s role, as some members did not see any advantage in expanding his office or justification for greater expenditures. These members made it clear during the negotiations that they would not now accept a text that potentially expands the Special-Envoy’s role, despite the fact that other Council members feel that this idea warrants consideration.

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

Expected Council Action
In April, the Council expects to receive a briefing on Mali from the Special Representative and head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), Mahamat Saleh Annadif, followed by consultations.

MINUSMA’s mandate ends on 30 June.

Key Recent Developments
Two and a half years since the signing of the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, key provisions remain unimplemented. Briefing the Council on 23 January, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix reiterated the urgency of ensuring progress in the implementation of the agreement. The adoption by the parties (the government and coalitions of armed groups) of a timeline on 15-16 January to take on urgent tasks within the framework of the agreement by March was characterised as an important step that could bring much-needed progress on institutional measures, security arrangements and eventually development for northern regions. In a press statement adopted the next day, Council members welcomed the revised timetable and the renewed commitment of the parties to the implementation of all of their remaining obligations under the agreement. They also expressed a shared sense of impatience regarding the persistent delays in the full implementation of the agreement.

Since the adoption of the revised timetable, the Comité de Suivi de l’Accord, the main follow-up mechanism to the agreement, was not able to meet because of disagreements among the parties. However, in late March, the parties agreed to a roadmap elaborating and adapting the January revised timeline. On 23 March, Prime Minister Soumeylo Boubèye Maïga visited Kidal for the first such visit in four years.

The holding of local and regional elections, which had already been postponed from November 2017 to April, was postponed again. Presidential elections will be held in the summer. Even though the constitution needed to be revised to, among other things, establish an upper legislative chamber and lay out a framework for key reforms stipulated in the agreement, this has not happened.

The security situation in the north and centre of Mali continues to be critical. On 26 January, a terrorist attack on a bus transporting civilians, near Boni in the centre of Mali, resulted in the deaths of 26 people from Mali and Burkina Faso, including children. Terrorist groups continue to carry out attacks against MINUSMA and French and Malian forces. Since the mission was established in 2013, at least 99 UN peacekeepers have been killed as a result of hostile acts. Two attacks with improvised explosive devices on 27 and 28 February in Mopti killed six Malian soldiers and four Bangladeshi peacekeepers, respectively. Inter-communal violence among ethnic groups has persisted.

After the first operation in late October 2017, the G5 Sahel joint force conducted its second operation, “Pagnali”, in the border area between Mali and Burkina Faso in January. A 23 February conference hosted in Brussels by the EU, the UN, the AU and the G5 Sahel increased pledges to a total of 414 million euros. A technical agreement between the EU, MINUSMA and the G5 Sahel to provide support to the latter through the UN, as per resolution 2391, was also reached.

In January, Secretary-General António Guterres announced the establishment of the International Commission of Inquiry, which will investigate serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law committed in Mali since January 2012. The commission, which was envisioned in the 2015 agreement but took two and a half years to be appointed, is expected to submit a report to the Secretary-General within one year.

At the initiative of the Secretariat to systematically review long-standing missions, a strategic review of MINUSMA is being carried out in March/April. The review—led by Ellen Margrethe Løj, a former Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Liberia and later, South Sudan—is expected to provide guidance on the future direction of MINUSMA prior to the renewal of its mandate in June. The review is also expected to contribute to defining a mission-wide plan, requested by the Council in resolution 2364, which sets out a strategic approach for a phased implementation of MINUSMA’s mandate and for the eventual transition and exit of the mission.

The mission continues to be missing key equipment and capacities, including utility and armed helicopters and additional escort-dedicated capacities and medical capacities. On 19 March, Canada announced its commitment to a one-year deployment of an aviation task force expected to replace German helicopters scheduled to depart Mali this summer.

Sanctions-Related Developments
After several months of negotiations, the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee adopted its guidelines on 29 January. On 28 February, the coordinator of the Panel of Experts briefed the committee, providing its first interim update. The committee chair, Ambassador Olof Skoog (Sweden), conducted a visiting mission to Mali in late March to explain the terms of the sanctions regime to Malian stakeholders.

Human Rights-Related Developments
On 1 February, MINUSMA and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published a report on the human rights situation in Mali. On 21 March, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held an interactive dialogue with the independent expert on human rights in Mali, Suliman Baldo, to discuss his latest report (A/HRC/37/78). The report, covering 1 April to 30 November 2017, concluded that the growing influence of extremist groups has contributed significantly to the rapid deterioration of the security situation in the country and that a multidimensional and coordinated response is needed to successfully prevent violent extremism and de-radicalise young people.

On 23 March, the HRC extended the mandate of the independent expert for one year (A/HRC/37/39).

Key Issues and Options
Council members could consider ways to increase pressure to ensure progress in the implementation of the agreement and support Mali in a critical electoral cycle. They could hold a frank and unscripted discussion, inviting the Secretariat, the mission leadership and Algeria to participate, as a way to garner
Mali

support around a common political strategy.

Once the strategic review is conducted, Council members could request the review’s final report in its entirety—rather than an abridged version or a summary of it—and engage directly with Loj on the recommendations in an informal interactive dialogue. The Council could continue to monitor the gap between MINUSMA’s current mandate and the mission’s insufficient capacities and resources in light of the upcoming mandate renewal in June.

In view of the unchartered territory opened by MINUSMA’s role in support of the G5 Sahel joint force, Council members could be briefed on the modalities of this support and how it works in practice. They could also be briefed on the legal and humanitarian implications of the operations conducted by the joint force with MINUSMA’s support.

To tackle the terrorist threat, the Council could add terrorist groups operating in Mali, such as Jama’at Nusrat Islam wal-Muslimin, to the list of the 1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh) & Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee.

Council and Wider Dynamics

All Council members have expressed concerns about the slow pace of implementing the peace agreement. The Council established a targeted sanctions regime on Mali through resolution 2374, which was adopted unanimously on 5 September 2017. It was created with the idea of pressuring the parties without necessarily listing individuals or entities; if listings are proposed this might result in divisions among Council members.

France is the penholder on Mali. The chair of the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee is Sweden.

Non-Proliferation (1540 Committee)

Expected Council Action

In April, the chair of the 1540 Committee, Ambassador Sacha Sergio Llorentty Soliz (Bolivia) 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 18 January, the Council held a high-level briefing on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction with a focus on confidence-building measures. During the meeting, organised by Kazakhstan, which held the presidency in January, Council members discussed various issues regarding non-proliferation, including confidence-building measures that would strengthen the implementation of resolution 1540. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres briefed the Council and noted that the UN could play an important role in supporting member states in further developing and expanding confidence-building measures, while also providing a venue for dialogue between the parties in developing new norms for resolving disagreements.

On 3 January, the committee published a report on the review of the implementation of resolution 1540 that detailed the committee’s activities during 2017. It held two formal meetings in 2017—in January to discuss the adoption of its programme of work and in July to discuss the programme’s implementation and progress made. By the end of 2017, 179 out of 193 member states had submitted reports on the implementation of resolution 1540.

Under Bolivia’s presidency in June 2017, the Council held an open debate on “the global effort to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by non-state actors” with an emphasis on the implementation of resolution 1540 and the work of the committee. Over 40 member states participated and most of them underlined the continuing significance of resolution 1540 in the effort to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by non-state actors. Some members raised concerns over the alleged use of chemical weapons in Iraq and Syria. The US urged member states to apply pressure on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to stop using chemical weapons. In its statement, Russia said that resolution 1540 was inadequate given the current global threats. It also emphasised the growing threat of terrorist groups like the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

Following the completion of the second review of the status of implementation of resolution 1540 in December 2016, the Council adopted resolution 2325, which called for further efforts to strengthen implementation of resolution 1540. In addition, resolution 2325 clarified the reporting cycle by deciding that the 1540 Committee would brief the Council in the first quarter of each year in addition to providing the annual joint briefings with the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da’esh) and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee and the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee.

On 11 May 2017, the committee chair briefed the Council together with the chairs of the other counter-terrorism-related committees as mandated by resolution 2325. In his briefing, Soliz noted that there are many areas of complementarity between the committees despite their differing mandates, and he also stressed the importance of promoting further cooperation between the committees. Ambassador Amr Abdellatif Aboulatta (Egypt), chair of the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee, delivered a joint statement on behalf of the chair of the three committees. Among other things, the statement emphasised the threat posed by terrorists in committing acts that could possibly involve the use of weapons of mass destruction. Furthermore, it underlined the significance of cooperation between the committees and their expert groups in addressing the risk that terrorists and other non-state actors might acquire...
Yemen

Expected Council Action
In April, the Council expects a briefing on Yemen by Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, which will be his first briefing since replacing the former envoy, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, at the end of February. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock is likely to brief on the humanitarian situation.

Key Recent Developments
The war in Yemen has escalated in recent months, further exacerbating the world’s greatest humanitarian crisis. The Saudi Arabia-led coalition and forces affiliated with the Yemeni government appeared to have intensified operations since the break-up of the alliance between the Houthi rebels and supporters of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. Fighting in late January in Aden between Yemeni government forces and southern separatist militias, which are backed by the United Arab Emirates, also showed fissures among Houthi opponents and the fragility of their coalition. On 16 February, 18 months after the last round of peace talks, the UN announced the appointment of Griffiths as the new Special Envoy as of 1 March.

On 26 February, Russia vetoed a draft resolution to renew the Yemen sanctions regime. It objected to references to the Yemen Panel of Experts’ findings that Iran was in non-compliance with the arms embargo. Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said these were “unconfirmed conclusions and evidence” and therefore such a resolution “could have seriously destabilizing consequences, not just for the situation in Yemen but for the entire region”. Eleven members voted in favour of the resolution, while Bolivia joined Russia in voting against it. China and Kazakhstan abstained. Council members then unanimously approved a draft resolution which Russia had presented that was based on last year’s resolution 2342, with technical amendments to extend sanctions measures until 26 February 2019 and the mandate of the Yemen Panel of Experts until 28 March 2019. Speaking after this second vote, US representative Kelley Eckels-Currie said that Bolivia, China, Kazakhstan and Russia’s votes “invited Iran to continue promoting chaos in the Middle East”.

The next day, 27 February, Ould Cheikh Ahmed briefed the Council for the last time as Special Envoy. He blamed the Houthis for the failure of peace talks, saying that they had come close to achieving a peace agreement during three months of talks in Kuwait in 2016 but “the Houthis were not prepared to make concessions on the proposed security arrangements or even to go into details about a comprehensive security plan”.

Director of Operations for OCHA John Ging also briefed. According to Ging, 22.2 million people require humanitarian assistance, including 8.4 million people who are severely food insecure. An additional two million people are displaced, including 100,000 people who have been displaced since November. Ging said that humanitarian access within Houthi-controlled areas had deteriorated. He also reiterated concern about the ongoing problems of delivering essential supplies to Yemen, which has long imported most of its food and fuel, and the continued closure of Sana’a airport. According to Ging, a major challenge was the coalition’s diversion of commercial shipping to Aden. Moreover, fewer commercial ships are seeking to go to Yemen because of costly delays and unpredictable access.

On 12 March, Lise Grande was appointed UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, replacing Jamie McGoldrick, who was named Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in February.

On 15 March, the Council adopted a presidential statement on Yemen’s humanitarian crisis, calling for the full and sustained opening of all of Yemen’s ports, including the Houthi-controlled Hodeidah and Saleef ports, and for increased access to Sana’a airport. The Council reaffirmed that access restrictions can constitute violations of international humanitarian law and stressed the need to prevent the adverse effects of the arms embargo on commercial and humanitarian imports. The statement, inter alia, encouraged donors to support the upcoming Geneva donors’ conference for Yemen’s 2018 UN Humanitarian Response Plan (scheduled for 3 April), while “taking note with appreciation” the coalition’s announcement of a new humanitarian relief programme of work is organised around four main themes: monitoring and national implementation; assistance; cooperation with international organisations and other relevant UN bodies; and transparency and media outreach.
Yemen

plan known as the Yemen Comprehensive Humanitarian Operations.

Touching on efforts to end the conflict, the presidential statement welcomed the appointment of the new Special Envoy and called upon all parties to the conflict to abandon pre-conditions and engage in good faith with the UN-led process, with the meaningful participation of women and other underrepresented groups at all levels. On 19 March, Griffiths issued a press release on his assumption of the role of Special Envoy, stating that “a credible political process will require all sides to be flexible, make difficult compromises, and prioritize the national interest for the sake of the Yemeni people”.

On 28 March, Council members issued a press statement condemning the Houthi missile attacks targeting several cities in Saudi Arabia on 25 March, and expressing grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Yemen.

Sanctions-Related Developments
Following the renewal of the Yemen sanctions measures and the mandate of the Panel of Experts, committee members have been in discussions during March on appointing the members of the Panel of Experts, which at press time was expected to be finalised by 28 March when the mandate of the current panel expires.

Key Issues and Options
The upcoming Council meeting will be Griffiths’s first briefing, during which he may present his initial plans for resuming a peace process. Issues related to this include establishing a cessation of hostilities and the possible broadening of peace talks, for example, to include other groups that are seen as critical to implementing any future agreement, such as the separatist Southern Transitional Council. Relevant to this discussion is consideration of a new Council resolution. Resolution 2216 is the Council’s last substantive political resolution regarding the conflict. Adopted three years ago at the onset of the coalition intervention, it has so far proven ineffective in ending the war and has often been seen as creating a restrictive framework for mediation efforts.

Human Rights-Related Developments
In a 12 February statement, High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein expressed alarm at continuing civilian casualties in Yemen as hostilities increased, noting that “civilians are under fire on all sides, as Houthi and affiliated forces carry out sniper attacks and indiscriminate shelling, and the Saudi-led Coalition continues to conduct airstrikes”. According to the statement, OHCHR verified that 27 people were killed and 76 injured between 1 and 8 February – more than double the number of civilian casualties confirmed during the previous week. Most of the casualties were attributed to the warring parties – 48 to the coalition and 51 to the Houthi forces.

On 23 February, OHCHR sent Council members a confidential white note that flagged its Sana’a office’s almost daily reports of civilian casualties as a result of intensified coalition air strikes over the last two months, and on a smaller scale from Houthi shelling and sniper firing, US drone strikes, and attacks by Al Qaeda and Islamic State-affiliated groups. It further stated its serious concern at the lack of accountability on all sides.

On 22 March, the Human Rights Council held an oral briefing on humanitarian issues in Yemen.

Council and Wider Dynamics
The P3, along with most Council members, have strategic relations with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. This has made it difficult for the Council to be more actively engaged on Yemen, and Saudi Arabia has been able to exert its influence on Council products.

The negotiations on the Council’s last presidential statement, however, indicated shifting dynamics. The Netherlands and Sweden represented a group of five at first and then later six members, including Bolivia, France, Peru and Poland, who coordinated their positions to push for what they regarded as a more balanced and comprehensive text. This pitted them against Kuwait and, at times, the UK during the negotiations. At the same time, the existence of this group seemed to help those who were trying to convince Saudi Arabia to accept the presidential statement—among them the US, which came in towards the end of the seven weeks of negotiations. Such coordination among Council members first emerged in November and December when a similar grouping formed to raise concerns about Council products on Yemen that they felt were too one-sided.

On the sanctions, Russia and China in particular felt strongly that the Panel of Experts had not met evidentiary standards expected of UN sanctions experts in order to draw its conclusions, such as the lack of any information on the chain of custody regarding Iranian-made weaponry possessed by the Houthis. Conversely, the US was very keen to use the sanctions renewal as an opportunity for the Council to send a strong message about Iranian meddling, not just in Yemen but across the region.

The UK is the penholder on Yemen. Peru chairs the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee.
Western Sahara

Expected Council Action
In April, the Council is expected to adopt a resolution extending the mandate of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The Council will receive the Secretary-General’s report on the situation in Western Sahara and will be briefed by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Colin Stewart and the Department of Political Affairs on the situation ahead of MINURSO’s renewal. MINURSO’s mandate expires on 30 April.

Key Recent Developments
On 21 March, Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara Horst Köhler and Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed Council members in consultations. The briefing was a follow-up to resolution 2351, adopted on 28 April 2017. In renewing the mandate of MINURSO for an additional year, the resolution requested the Secretary-General to update the Security Council within six months of the appointment of the new personal envoy. The resolution called for information about the ways in which the envoy, working with the parties, was progressing towards a mutually acceptable political solution that would provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara; how MINURSO’s performance measures were being developed and implemented; and how structures and staffing could be reorganised to achieve mission goals efficiently.

Köhler reported on his recent consultations, which included bilateral meetings with the parties, as well as meetings with neighbouring countries Algeria and Mauritania, and the AU and EU. Köhler also reported meeting with permanent Council members France, the UK and US, with plans to meet the other two permanent members China and Russia, as well as other relevant governments. While he did not divulge details, Köhler conveyed his intention to hold direct negotiations between the parties before the end of the year, stressing that the parties ought to engage in good faith and without preconditions. Council members overwhelmingly expressed their support for Köhler and his efforts.

Lacroix briefed Council members in response to operative paragraph three of resolution 2351, in which the Council recognised that the recent crisis in the buffer strip in Guerguerat raised fundamental questions regarding the ceasefire and related agreements and encouraged the Secretary-General to explore ways that such questions can be resolved. He conveyed to members that DPKO had sent a note verbale to the parties on its intention to send a technical mission to Guerguerat and requesting information from the parties on their questions pertaining to the ceasefire. He reported that Morocco’s response was that such a mission was “untimely and inappropriate”; and while the Polisario Front welcomed the mission, they did not give any of the additional requested information.

Following the briefing, the president of the Council delivered agreed elements to the press on behalf of Council members. In it, they expressed their full support for the efforts of the personal envoy and welcomed his recent bilateral meetings with the parties and neighbouring countries to relaunch the negotiating process with a new dynamic and a new spirit, leading to the resumption of a political process under the auspices of the Secretary-General. Council members underscored the importance of maintaining constructive engagement in an effort to advance the political process. They also expressed concern about the situation in Guerguerat, and recalled the importance of maintaining the status quo as mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General and the need for full implementation of resolution 2351.

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

Another issue is that the parties have significantly divergent interpretations of the mandate of MINURSO. In Morocco’s view, the mission’s role is limited to monitoring the ceasefire, supporting demining, and assisting the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with confidence-building measures in the event that such activities resume after their interruption in July 2014; it does not encompass contact with civil society or other civilian actors. By contrast, the Polisario maintains that organising a referendum on self-determination remains the central element of the mission’s mandate, with ceasefire monitoring and other activities being subordinate to that aim. The Council could attempt to clarify the objectives and mandate of the mission in the resolution renewing the MINURSO’s mandate, but that is unlikely as Council members themselves have divergent views on this question.

Council Dynamics
There is division among Council members on how they view the conflict. However, it appears that the current Council composition may be less polarised than it has been in recent years, when divisions rendered the Council largely unable to agree to outcomes on Western Sahara, even during successive crises. Members also appear to be united in their support for Personal Envoy Köhler and his work.

Permanent member France staunchly supports the Moroccan position and is likely to continue to work to protect Morocco’s interests during this year’s renewal.

The African members of the Council do not have a common position. Ethiopia is the only African member that recognises an independent Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), as proclaimed by the Polisario in 1976. Neither of the new African members, Côte d’Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea, recognises SADR.

Bolivia also recognises SADR, and the parliament of another member, Sweden, voted to recognise an independent Western Sahara in 2012. The Swedish government has not implemented this.

An indication that the US administration is likely to seek to cut funding for MINURSO is contained in its budget proposal for 2019, which proposes cutting the US contribution to MINURSO by more than half and suggests reductions in both civilian staffing and in the force.

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

Expected Council Action
In April, the Council expects to receive a briefing on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), followed by consultations. Council members also expect to receive the monthly report from the Secretary-General on violations of the Status of Forces Agreement or obstructions to UNMISS, as requested in resolution 2406.

The mandate of UNMISS expires on 15 March 2019.

Key Recent Developments
The situation in South Sudan remains a cause for grave concern. More than four million people are still displaced, half of whom are refugees in neighbouring countries, and more than 200,000 internally displaced persons continue to be protected on UNMISS protection of civilians sites with the assistance of humanitarian partners. Human rights violations and abuses, including incidents of sexual violence, continue at alarming levels with impunity, and the country is on the brink of facing its worst famine yet. More than seven million people in South Sudan (almost two-thirds of the population) could become severely food insecure in the coming months without sustained humanitarian assistance and access, according to a 26 February joint report by the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation, UNICEF, and the World Food Programme.

The third phase of the South Sudan High-Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF), convened by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, is scheduled for 26 to 30 April. It is expected to involve the continuation of discussions around governance and security arrangements that were begun at the second phase of the forum, which took place from 5 to 16 February. The objectives for the process set out by IGAD are threefold, namely to restore the permanent ceasefire, to resume the full and inclusive implementation of the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan, and to develop revised and realistic timelines for a democratic election at the end of the transitional period.

The first phase of the forum took place from 18 to 22 December 2017 and resulted in the signing of the 21 December 2017 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA). However, fighting has continued in South Sudan since the signing of the CoHA, although at lower levels than at this time during the dry season in previous years.

On 15 March, UNMISS’s mandate was unanimously extended for one year. The Council decided to maintain the overall force levels of a maximum of 17,000 troops, which includes a Regional Protection Force (RPF) at levels to be set by the Secretary-General but not exceeding 4,000, and no more than 2,101 police personnel. The resolution contains a number of new references to the role of UNMISS in supporting the peace process, following the Secretary-General’s special report on UNMISS’s independent review. In this regard, UNMISS is mandated to use good offices to support the peace process, in particular the HLRF, and to facilitate and support the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM), the body mandated to monitor violations of the CoHA. The resolution further “stresses that the peace process only remains viable with the full commitment by all parties” and notes the Council’s “intention to keep the tasks and composition of UNMISS under active review, based on the possible outcomes of the [HLRF]”. The resolution also expresses the Council’s intention to “consider all measures, including an arms embargo, as appropriate, to deprive the parties of the means to continue fighting and to prevent violations” of the CoHA. (For more details, see our What’s In Blue story of 14 March.)

The Council was last briefed on South Sudan on 27 February by Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Bintou Keita and IGAD Special Envoy for South Sudan Ismail Wais.

Human Rights-Related Developments
On 23 March, the HRC extended the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in South Sudan for one year without a vote. The resolution requests the Commission to present an oral update at the HRC’s 39th session in September and a written report at its 40th session in March 2019. It requests the Commission to share its report with the AU and all relevant organs of the UN, including UNMISS.

Key Issues and Options
An immediate issue for the Council is how to support IGAD’s efforts to revitalise the political process and what consequences it should impose on those who undermine the process. In an effort to reduce the level of violence and exert leverage on the parties, Council members could seek to impose an arms embargo and further targeted sanctions.

Another issue is whether to receive strengthened and more regular updates on the human rights situation in South Sudan. An option in this context would be to invite the High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide an update on the human rights situation. Another option would be to hold an Arria-formula meeting with the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in light of its 23 February report, which documents human rights violations against civilians, including massacres; sexual violence; and the destruction of homes, hospitals and schools.

Council Dynamics
During negotiations in March on extending UNMISS’s mandate, Council members generally supported the recommendations in the Secretary-General’s special report on UNMISS’s independent review, in particular to increase the mission’s role in supporting the peace process in a sufficiently flexible manner, given that the process is still underway. However, differences arose in some other areas. On the RPF, which is responsible for “providing a secure environment in and around Juba and in other parts of South Sudan as necessary” according to resolution 2406, Council members including the US, the Netherlands and Sweden were in favour of removing specific references to the number of RPF troops in the mandate to allow for more flexibility regarding the number to be deployed, given that the threat of military conflict in Juba has considerably diminished. However, other members, including Russia and China, sought a clear reference to the RPF’s troop ceiling of 4,000, which was subsequently included in the version adopted. (To date the RPF only comprises approximately a quarter of this number.)

Ethiopia, supported by Côte d’Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea, initially expressed reluctance about the inclusion of language threatening a potential arms embargo, as proposed in the initial draft resolution circulated by the US. However, Council members managed
to agree on retaining the language with a minor amendment by Russia, in so far as it serves as a reminder of existing options at the Council’s disposal and did not go so far as to actually commit to imposing such measures. There has been a long-standing divide in the Council over whether to impose an arms embargo and further targeted sanctions. Further Council consideration on this will likely be influenced by assessments of the extent of violations of the CoHA, as well as the level of commitment and progress made by the parties at the third round of the HLRF in April. Assessments as to whether the threat of an arms embargo is sufficient in the present context will also be taken into consideration.

Another area of disagreement during negotiations was related to human rights reporting. Russia, China, Ethiopia and Bolivia rejected the inclusion of language, proposed in the initial draft circulated by the US, which requested the Secretary-General to provide regular thematic reporting on human rights issues in South Sudan and brief updates on the human rights situation in South Sudan every 60 days. Although several members were unhappy with the eventual removal of this language from the adopted text, a compromise was reached by requesting “strengthened reporting on human rights issues” to be included in the Secretary-General’s 90-day report.

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

South Sudan

Expected Council Action
In April, the Council will receive a briefing from Special Representative Jean Arnault on the Secretary-General’s 90-day report on the UN Verification Mission in Colombia. Consultations will follow the briefing.

The mandate of the verification mission expires on 26 September 2018.

Key Recent Developments
The UN Verification Mission has continued to implement its mandate to verify the political, economic and social reintegration of the members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), as well as security guarantees. This process has been marked by the beginning of the electoral cycle, which includes holding legislative and presidential elections this year and which has affected the implementation of the peace-related legislative agenda.

Legislative elections were held on 11 March. Although no party won a majority of votes, the three most successful parties have each declared their scepticism regarding the 2016 agreement between the Government and FARC-EP. The first round of the presidential elections is expected to be held in May. However, a law endorsed by the Constitutional Court established the peace agreement as a frame of reference for the formulation of public policies and provided the obligation for civil servants to comply with the agreement for the next 12 years, irrespective of the outcome of elections.

The political party Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (FARC), which was founded after the end of the laying-down of weapons, received only 0.22 percent of the votes for the House of Representatives and 0.34 for the Senate but was allocated five seats in each of the chambers as per the agreement. On 9 February, the FARC suspended the electoral campaign as a result of threats and attacks against its candidates and supporters. Two former FARC-EP members were killed when they were carrying out campaign activities on 16 January in Antioquia.

Fragile security conditions for former FARC-EP members outside some of the 26 territorial areas for training and reintegration continue to pose a challenge to their reincorporation into civilian life. Attacks against former members and their family members have persisted. Despite the detention of some of their senior commanders, FARC-EP dissident groups have continued attacks, including trans-border operations into Ecuador. Other armed groups that are filling the vacuum left in the large areas formerly under the influence of FARC-EP continue to be a threat to communities. On 18 February, the Colombia Offices of the High Commissioners for Human Rights and for Refugees issued a statement expressing concerns at human rights violations, including killings and forced displacements in rural communities in Bajo Cauca (Antioquia region). Human rights defenders have been continuously targeted, and 121 of them were killed in 2017.

The socioeconomic reintegration of the 14,000 former combatants through the establishment of productive projects and other forms of income generation continues to be a challenge. Briefing the Council on 10 January, Arnault warned of the accumulated frustration among former combatants with their reintegation process; he called for diligence in support of their reintegration and the development of communities in which they are placed.

The Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), which is tasked with adjudicating crimes committed during the conflict, started its work on 15 March. The Constitutional Court is still reviewing an amendment to the statutory law regarding the eligibility requirements for magistrates of the SJP.

On 5 October 2017, the Council adopted resolution 2381, expanding the mandate of the UN Verification Mission to include participation in the monitoring and verification of a bilateral and temporary ceasefire between the government and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) armed group, at the request of the parties. This mechanism was composed of representatives of the Colombian military, the ELN and the Catholic Church.

The failure of the parties to extend the ceasefire in early January led to increased attacks by the ELN, which included the killing of seven policemen on 28 January and several attacks against critical infrastructure.
Colombia

ELN attacks continued in February and March, although the ELN announced a unilateral ceasefire from 9 to 13 March during the holding of legislative elections. On 12 March, President Juan Manuel Santos announced the resumption of talks with the ELN in Quito, Ecuador. If the parties are able to agree to a new bilateral ceasefire, it is likely that verification tasks will fall again to the Catholic Church and the UN Verification Mission. This would most likely require additional capacities for the mission, since the 70 observers deployed with the UN mission to verify the ELN ceasefire until January have already been repatriated.

Human Rights-Related Developments
On 21 March, the Human Rights Council considered the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on Colombia (A/HRC/37/3/Add.3). The report, covering 1 January to 31 December 2017, presents OHCHR’s assessment of the first year of implementation of the human rights aspects of the peace agreement. It also documents increased killings of human rights defenders, including social and community leaders. Fatalities included 84 human rights defenders with leadership roles, 23 members of social and political movements, and 14 people killed during social protests in 2017.

Key Issues and Options
An important issue is ensuring that the peace agreement is implemented in its entirety, despite the outcome of legislative and presidential elections. When Council members visited Colombia in May 2017, they met with representatives of the main political parties and expressed unanimous support for the agreement and stressed the need to ensure its irreversibility, irrespective of changes in administrations.

The government’s ability to develop a well-resourced strategy for reintegrating FARC-EP members into society, and to provide safety and security in areas formally occupied by the FARC-EP, will be critical issues in ensuring successful implementation. Once the electoral cycle is over, Council members could consider holding an Arria-formula meeting with government representatives and former FARC-EP members, who could brief by VTC on their assessment of how the commitments made in the agreement are being carried out.

Given the role that the UN Verification Mission may again be asked to play, Council members are expected to continue following the negotiations in Quito between the government and the ELN. Council members could issue a statement encouraging progress and reiterating their readiness to deploy additional observers should the parties agree to a new ceasefire.

Council Dynamics
Members are unified in their support of the peace process in Colombia. Several members have viewed engagement in Colombia as a rare bright spot for the Council, while it struggles to play an effective role on several other agenda items. However, there are concerns about the scepticism expressed about the agreement by some political parties, and Council members recognise the need for them to stay engaged in supporting the process. The roles of the Council in sustaining key provisions of the agreement with an imminent change in government and in verifying a potential future ceasefire by the ELN constitute an opportunity for the Council to have an important impact in preserving a peace process to which it only contributed marginally in its final stage.

The UK is the penholder on Colombia.

Liberia

Expected Council Action
In April, the Council will discuss the Secretary-General’s final report on the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). There may be a civil society briefer. Ambassador Olof Skoog (Sweden) will also brief as the chair of the country configuration on Liberia of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC).

Key Recent Developments
The Liberian Supreme Court ruled on 7 December 2017 that evidence of violations during the 10 October presidential and legislative elections was insufficient to have affected results. This cleared the way for holding the presidential run-off election, which was held on 26 December. George Weah of the Coalition for Democratic Change defeated Vice-President Joseph Boakai of the Unity Party by a margin of 61.5 percent to 38.5 percent. Weah is a former international football star who had previously run unsuccessfully for president and had been a senator since 2014. Having campaigned on ending corruption, he did well among young people and the poor.

On 22 January, Weah was sworn in as president, succeeding Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, whom he thanked for bringing peace to Liberia after her election in 2005 following Liberia’s civil war. The handover represented the first time in over 70 years—since 1944—that power was transferred peacefully between democratically-elected leaders in Liberia.

The last uniformed contingent of UNMIL—a Nigerian formed police unit—withdrawn from Liberia on 16 March ahead of the mission’s closure on 30 March. From 22 to 23 March, international partners of Liberia gathered in Monrovia to take part in a series of events to mark the conclusion of UNMIL’s mandate after more than a 15-year presence. Speaking at the “Liberia Moment” conference on 23 March, Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohamed highlighted that despite its progress, Liberia still faced very serious challenges of, inter alia, poverty, inequality and discrimination that had to be met through inclusive sustainable development.

Developments in the Peacebuilding Commission
Skoog chaired a meeting of the PBC’s Liberia configuration on 13 March, during which it received...
brieﬁngs from, among others, Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohamed and Special Representative Farid Zarif via video teleconference. Mohamed stressed the importance of a strengthened resident coordinator’s ofﬁce for maintaining the UN’s good ofﬁces role following the handover of peacebuilding responsibilities to the UN Country Team. She highlighted the importance of the Liberia Multi-Partner Trust Fund, established as a pooled funding mechanism to reduce fragmentation and duplication of assistance to achieve the sustainable development goals.

Liberian Minister of Finance and Development Samuel Tweah also addressed the PBC, describing cost-saving measures that are underway, including the elimination of “ghost” salary payments and reducing civil servant salaries. The measures are intended to increase resources for President Weah’s priorities—improving roads, agriculture, education and youth development.

Tweah and Liberian Permanent Representative Lewis Brown noted that some Liberians had apprehensions about UNMIL’s departure, such as the anticipated economic ramifications of the mission’s withdrawal. The session also included representatives of the Economic Community of West African States, the UN Country Team, and the diplomatic community in Liberia. In his remarks, Skoog emphasised that the PBC’s Liberia conﬁguration would continue to bring together all relevant stakeholders to follow developments, work to mobilise resources, identify gaps in funding, and contribute to coherence in the activities of donors.

Skoog also attended the “Liberia Moment” conference.

Human Rights-Related Developments
The special rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, visited Liberia from 5 to 9 March, where he met with government authorities including Liberia’s president George Weah and civil society organisations, journalists, academics, students and lawyers. In a 9 March statement, Kaye said that Liberia needs to “lock in and expand the gains made in the years since the civil war” and noted “the deep economic problems the country faces and the legitimate demands of the Liberian people for an improvement in the economy and basic institutions of governance”. The special rapporteur will present a report on his visit, including recommendations, to the Human Rights Council at its 41st session in June 2019.

Key Issues and Options
Members are expected to praise Liberia and the UN for the successful conclusion of UNMIL, which has been present since 2003, as well as commend Liberia’s successful elections and transfer of power. Despite these positive developments, challenges facing Liberia include poverty, with more than half the population still living on less than $1 a day, promoting economic development; and the new government’s ability to meet citizens’ expectations following the campaign. Underlying causes of the civil war and repercussions of the conﬂict also remain, including the need to continue decentralisation reforms, address land rights issues and reconciliation, and review the constitution.

Liberia is seen as a key test case for the UN’s new “sustaining peace” approach for more effective peacebuilding and greater focus on conﬂict prevention. This includes avoiding a signiﬁcant drop-off in ﬁnancial support and political attention after a peace operation withdraws, while improving coherence at the operational level among the UN Country Team and other international partners. Liberia is further viewed as a test for the PBC to become a reliable intergovernmental body to support such transitions and complement the Security Council. Given the UN Country Team’s ﬁnancial and capacity constraints, the PBC has committed itself to mobilise the resources needed to carry out over the next two years a peacebuilding plan that the Council requested and endorsed.

As has been done when other peacekeeping operations have ended, the Council may adopt a presidential statement congratulating Liberia and the UN for the successful conclusion of UNMIL. Such a statement may further:

• call on the government to address remaining challenges, such as decentralisation, good governance, land rights, reconciliation and the constitutional reviews;
• welcome the engagement of the PBC in seeking to address capacity gaps for implementing the Liberia peacebuilding plan;
• encourage donors to contribute to the peacebuilding plan and to the Liberia Multi-Partner Trust Fund;
• express support for the continued engagement of the UN Country Team and the strengthened capacities of the Ofﬁce of the UN Resident Coordinator in support of Liberia’s efforts to consolidate its gains and to promote sustainable development;
• encourage coordination between the UN Country Team and other international partners; and
• reiterate that the UN Ofﬁce for West Africa and the Sahel should make available its good ofﬁces to the government and UN resident coordinator.

Council Dynamics
After almost 15 years, the closure of UNMIL will be welcomed by Council members. As noted above, many members now view Liberia as an important test case for the Secretary-General’s focus on prevention and sustaining peace, and for carrying out better transitions from peace operations to UN country team settings to reduce the dependency on crisis management and more costly peacekeeping missions. The Council demonstrated this greater emphasis when it requested for the ﬁrst time a peacebuilding plan for Liberia in its ﬁnal renewal of UNMIL’s mandate in resolution 2333 in December 2016. Members have been positive about Sweden’s efforts in its role as the PBC’s country conﬁguration chair in seeking to raise awareness of outstanding needs and support for Liberia’s transition. As a current member of the Council, it has also been able to provide substantial inputs into Council decisions on Liberia.

The US is the penholder on Liberia.
Expected Council Action
In April, the Security Council is expected to hold an open debate on youth, peace and security. Graeme Simpson—the lead author of the recently completed progress study on youth, peace and security—is expected to brief the Council.

A resolution is a possible outcome.

Key Recent Developments
On 9 December 2015, the Council adopted resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security. The resolution focused on the role of youth, defined as people between ages 18 and 29, in conflict prevention and resolution. It encouraged member states to engage with local communities and NGOs to develop strategies that counteract a narrative of violent extremism. It urged member states to provide youth with an enabling environment for the implementation of violence-prevention activities and peacebuilding efforts. The resolution invited relevant UN bodies to improve their coordination and interaction with regard to the needs of youth during armed conflicts and in post-conflict situations.

It further requested the Secretary-General to conduct a progress study on the positive contribution of youth to peace processes and conflict resolution. However, it did not indicate a timeframe for the completion of this progress study, which was only recently finalised, and circulated in early March. A more detailed version is expected to be completed later in the year.

The research for the progress study on youth, peace and security drew on consultations with thousands of youth, country-focused studies, and a global survey of youth peacebuilding organisations, among other methods. A diverse advisory group of 21 experts supported the lead author. Referring to youth as the “missing peace,” the study called for a conceptualisation of youth as “partners for peace” rather than “as a problem to be solved”. It noted that the stereotype of young women as victims of violence needs to be adjusted so that their ability to contribute to peace and security is also recognised and nurtured. It emphasised that youth need to be included in political and economic processes that promote their well-being and sense of belonging and that “[j]ustice and human rights are...essential vehicles for prevention and lay the foundation for sustainable peace”.

The adoption of resolution 2250, which was an initiative of Jordan, built on the open debate on the “role of youth in countering violent extremism and promoting peace” held during Jordan’s presidency in April 2015 and on the Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security held in Amman in August 2015. Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II of Jordan chaired the debate, which included the participation of 69 member states, the AU, the EU, the Permanent Representative of the Observer State of the Holy See, and the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations.

The meeting featured briefings by then-Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Peter Neumann, the Director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at King’s College in London; and Scott Atran, the Director of Research in Anthropology at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. Ban described how “violent extremists deliberately target youth”. He said that youth needed to be given opportunities to participate in peace talks, as they “pay a price for the fighting, and...deserve to help structure the healing”. Neumann briefed on radicalised European youth who became foreign terrorist fighters in Iraq and Syria. He said that what they shared was a sense that they did not belong to the cultures in which they were living and maintained that, in addition to creating de-radicalisation programmes and challenging extremism on the Internet, longer-term efforts are needed “to work on creating more inclusive societies and more inclusive identities”. Atran maintained that governments “should continue their important work on problems of development, and on immigration and integration, with a goal of transforming the much-lamented youth bulge into a youth boom by unleashing youth’s inherent energy and idealism”.

Key Issues and Options
A key issue is how to ensure that the Council’s focus on youth and violent extremism does not overshadow the positive contribution of youth in situations of armed conflict. Simpson’s briefing will most likely emphasise the potential of youth to play a critical role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, given the focus of the progress study. It might also be useful to have a civil society youth leader brief the Council on the role he or she has played in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

A further important issue is ensuring that the recommendations of the progress study are considered by the Council. In this regard, the Council could discuss pursuing a resolution that takes on board key recommendations from the study. Among such measures, the resolution could encourage member states and regional and sub-regional organisations:

• to promote youth participation in peace negotiations and constitution-making processes;
• to collaborate with youth in developing and implementing disengagement and reintegration programs; and
• to support research and data collection on youth, peace and security issues.

The Council could also designate a penholder to take the lead on youth, peace and security—including with regard to the implementation of resolution 2250—and call on the Secretary-General to report on its implementation on an annual basis. This member could advocate the inclusion and concrete implementation of activities related to youth, peace and security in Council mandates.

Council and Wider Dynamics
Council members have emphasised various ways to counter violent extremism among youth. Among the ideas that have been expressed and promoted by members are countering extremist ideologies through narratives and programmes that uphold inclusivity and tolerance, preventing the travel of foreign terrorist fighters, and targeting terrorist financing.

At the same time, while concerns continue to be expressed about the linkages between youth and extremist ideologies, members also emphasise that young people...
make positive contributions to peace and security and that their capacities for preventing and resolving conflicts and building peaceful societies need to be developed.

The Peacebuilding Commission, an advisory body of the Council, established focal points on thematic issues in 2017, including one on youth, peace and security. Belgium has been the focal point on youth, peace and security since 2017.

**Sudan/South Sudan**

**Expected Council Action**

In April, the Council is expected to hold consultations on the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and on Sudan/South Sudan issues. The Council is also expected to decide by 15 April whether to extend the mission’s support to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM), established in 2011 to conduct monitoring and verification activities along the Sudan-South Sudan border, as set out in resolution 2386. Council members may receive the Secretary-General’s report on the independent review of UNISFA.

The mandate of UNISFA expires on 15 May.

**Key Recent Developments**

The security situation in Abyei, the disputed territory along the Sudan/South Sudan border, remains relatively stable in the absence of progress on the implementation of the 20 June 2011 agreement, which established temporary arrangements for the administration and security of Abyei pending resolution of its status. Against the backdrop of political paralysis, intercommunal violence, criminality, and the presence of armed groups, UNISFA continues to maintain a measure of stability in Abyei.

On 15 November 2017, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2386, extending UNISFA’s mandate until 15 May. It decided to maintain the authorised troop ceiling of 4,791 until 15 April, after which the ceiling decreases to 4,235 unless the Council decides to extend the mission’s support for the JBVMM. The resolution said that this would be the final extension of support to the JBVMM unless both parties adhere to specific measures by no later than 15 March. Among these measures are facilitating the full freedom of movement for UNISFA air and ground patrols, including landing within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone (SDBZ); opening of Phase I of the border crossing corridors; holding at least one meeting to resume border demarcation discussions; reactivating the ad hoc committee of the “14 Mile Area” (a disputed border territory); facilitating the establishment of the four JBVMM team sites; and convening at least two meetings of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism (JPSM).

While the JBVMM remains at initial operating capability, some recent meetings have taken place in line with the specific measures required above. The inaugural meeting of the ad hoc committee of the 14 Mile Area took place on 27 February, during which terms of reference were agreed. The JPSM held meetings on 4 February and 5 March in Addis Ababa that were convened by the AU High-Level Implementation Panel. At the meeting on 5 March, standing clearance was granted for all ground patrols and helicopter landings within the SDBZ. It was also agreed that both parties would intensify their unilateral and joint efforts concerning the establishment of the SDBZ, and that outstanding issues related to the establishment of team sites would be resolved and the sites set up within two weeks. The next meeting of the JPSM is scheduled to take place in April. The Abyei Joint Oversight Committee (AJOC) last met from 14 to 15 November 2017 alongside a meeting of traditional leaders of the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities. The AJOC meeting discussed the Abyei Area interim institutions, but it was not able to reach agreement on their establishment.

Council members were last briefed on the issue on 26 October 2017 by Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions Alexander Zuev and Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan Nicholas Haysom. In a break with previous practice, the briefing took place in the open Council chamber instead of in consultations. Both briefers stressed UNISFA’s stabilising role.

**Key Issues and Options**

The key issue for the Council is whether to retain UNISFA’s support of the JBVMM. An option is to continue the mission’s support based on some of the recent efforts made by the parties. Another option is to retain the mission’s support for a shorter period of time as a means of putting pressure on the parties to intensify efforts to fully implement the JBVMM and address the current lack of progress towards a political solution. This could take the form of a technical rollover of support for the JBVMM for one month until UNISFA’s mandate renewal in May. A further option is for the Council to take no action to extend the mission’s support for the JBVMM, which would result in UNISFA’s troop levels decreasing after 15 April, as set out in resolution 2386.

Another issue is whether the Council should take steps to advance the stalled political process to avoid having to extend the mission indefinitely. In considering these issues, Council members will need to reflect on how the Council can best support the AU and Haysom in advancing the dialogue between Sudan and South Sudan on the status of Abyei.

An option is for the Council to continue the practice of holding briefings on UNISFA and Sudan/South Sudan issues in the Council’s open chamber, as was done on 26 October 2017, instead of in consultations. That would be a way to increase international attention to the status of Abyei and add pressure on Sudan and South Sudan to advance the political process. In addition to Haysom, the Council could also invite Thabo Mbeki,
Sudan/South Sudan

followed similar divides between the US and Ethiopia (UNISFA’s primary troop-contributing country) on the current mandate and troop ceiling for the mission as during negotiations of the renewal in May 2017. The initial draft resolution circulated by the US in November 2017 proposed an immediate suspension of the mission’s role in supporting the JBVMM and a reduction in the troop ceiling. This reflected the general concern by the US that UNISFA is persisting longer than intended for an interim force, and that Sudan and South Sudan are taking advantage of the relative stability that UNISFA provides to delay attempts to resolve the status of Abyei.

However, Ethiopia, supported by a number of other Council members, was of the view that suspending the mission’s support of the JBVMM and reducing the troop ceiling would undermine the effectiveness of the mission, and that the parties had taken sufficient steps towards establishing the JBVMM to merit retaining support. This difference in perspective is likely to be reflected again in discussions around whether to retain the mission’s support of the JBVMM in April and ahead of UNISFA’s mandate renewal in May.

The US is the penholder on Abyei.

Israel/Palestine

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council is expected to hold its quarterly open debate under the agenda item “the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”, which will focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Key Recent Developments

Negative trends on the ground and political tensions continue to characterise developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to Israeli officials, a Palestinian shot an Israeli security guard to death in Jerusalem’s Old City on 18 March before being shot dead by a police officer. Two days earlier, a car-ramming by a Palestinian near Jenin in the northern West Bank killed two Israeli soldiers and wounded two others. The Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas had called for a day of rage that day to mark the 100th day since US President Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital on 6 December 2017.

On 26 March, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov presented the fifth report on the implementation of resolution 2334, covering the period from 18 December last year to 25 March, to the Council. During the reporting period, Israel advanced 22 plans for some 1,500 housing units in Area C settlements and around a dozen units were approved for construction. The reporting period was also characterised by continuing demonstrations and clashes following the US announcement on 6 December recognising Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, and to growing tensions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and along the Gaza fence. He stressed that developments on the ground cannot be divorced from the broader context of continued military occupation of Palestinian territory, uncertainties about the future of the peace process and the two-state solution, unilateral actions that undermine peace efforts, and continued turmoil in the wider region. He also expressed his continued concern over the UN Relief and Works Agency’s (UNRWA) $446 million funding gap.

On 18 March, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) said they had destroyed a tunnel in the Gaza Strip dug by Hamas militants to mount cross-border attacks. An IDF spokesman claimed that the tunnel had been cut off during the 2014 Gaza war and that Hamas had tried to put it back into operation. A Hamas spokesman said that the Israeli claims about destroying tunnels referred to old structures used by the Palestinian resistance during the Israeli offensive against civilians in the Gaza Strip in 2014.

On 13 March, a roadside bomb struck a convoy carrying Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, in what has been deemed a failed assassination attempt. Hamdallah was unharmed. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas’s office issued a statement accusing Hamas of perpetrating the “cowardly attack”. No group claimed responsibility for the bombing.

Meanwhile, there has been no progress on the stalled Fatah-Hamas reconciliation process following the signing of a reconciliation agreement between the two parties in October 2017. Reports indicate that Hamas is refusing the Palestinian Authority’s demand that it subordinate its military units and weapons to the Authority’s command.

In a 20 February Council briefing, Mladenov repeated his warning that the current situation in Gaza is unsustainable. He reported that continuing power cuts of up to 20 hours per day severely undermined the provision of basic services and that the situation could deteriorate with dramatic consequences.

On 14 March, the White House hosted a conference with representatives from 20 countries, including Israel and many Arab states, to discuss potential solutions for the worsening humanitarian and economic conditions in Gaza. There was no Palestinian delegation present, and reports indicate that the Palestinian Authority chose not to attend amid deteriorating relations with the US following the decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. According to a White House readout, the conference built upon a meeting held in Cairo a week earlier and will carry ideas forward to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting in Brussels at the end of March. The readout noted that the US administration believes that
deteriorating humanitarian conditions in Gaza require immediate attention and must be solved for humanitarian reasons and for ensuring the security of Egypt and Israel. The statement stressed that addressing the humanitarian situation is also a necessary step toward reaching a comprehensive peace agreement.

The US administration announced on 23 February that it would accelerate its timeline for opening an embassy in Jerusalem, originally envisioned for 2019, to take place on 14 May in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the state of Israel. This day is known to Palestinians as Yom al-Nakba, or day of the catastrophe, marking the mass displacement that preceded and followed Israel’s establishment.

Abbas addressed the Council during its 20 February meeting on the issue, saying that he would redouble efforts to seek full UN membership for Palestine, and calling for an international peace conference by mid-2018 that would include the participation of both parties, the permanent members of the Security Council and the Middle East Quartet—comprised of the EU, UN, US and Russia. In the consultations after the meeting, US Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt and Jared Kushner, a senior advisor to US President Donald Trump, interacted with Council members. They reportedly emphasised the US administration’s commitment to resolve the Israel/Palestine conflict and said they were working on a peace plan that would be presented in due course. Since then, White House senior officials have said that the plan is almost ready, but no release date has been given.

On 22 February, Bolivia, France, Kuwait and Sweden hosted an Arria-formula meeting titled “Prospects for the two-State solution for peace”. A statement was delivered on behalf of former US President Jimmy Carter, followed by briefings by former UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry, former Commissioner-General of UNRWA Karen AbuZayd, and Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council Jan Egeland.

**Human Rights-Related Developments**

During its 37th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held an interactive dialogue on 19 March with the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Michael Lynk, to discuss his latest report (A/HRC/37/75). The report, which focused on the right to health, concluded that Israel has been in “profound breach” of that right in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). It highlighted that Israel’s “avaricious occupation... has had a highly disruptive impact upon health care and the broader social determinants for health for the Palestinians”.

The HRC also considered several other reports on the issue during its 37th session. The High Commissioner’s report on the human rights situation in the OPT, including East Jerusalem (covering 1 November 2016 to 31 October 2017), emphasised the high risk of arbitrary detention and concluded that a persistent lack of accountability and shrinking space for media and human rights defenders was of particular concern (A/HRC/37/42). Covering the same period, the High Commissioner’s report on Israeli settlements in the OPT, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan concluded that a significant increase in settlement activity had taken place (A/HRC/37/43). It also emphasised that settlements are prohibited under international humanitarian law and amount to a war crime, and called on Israeli authorities to immediately halt and reverse all settlement development in compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. The HRC also considered the High Commissioner’s reports on the implementation of HRC resolutions S-9/1 and S-12/1 (A/HRC/37/39) on the humanitarian situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories; and the implications of Israeli settlements on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Palestinian people (A/HRC/37/39); and on accountability and justice for all violations of international law in the OPT (A/HRC/37/41).

**Key Issues and Options**

The overarching issue is determining how the Council can encourage the resumption of peace talks between the parties to achieve a two-state solution, including promoting a reversal of further negative trends on the ground—continuing settlement expansion, the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza, and continued incitement to violence and terrorist attacks. Given the confrontational Council dynamics on this issue and the objection of the US administration to the Council’s engagement on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Council options for involvement appear increasingly limited.

**Council and Wider Dynamics**

Tensions within the Council on this conflict reached a peak in recent months following Trump’s 6 December 2017 proclamation concerning Jerusalem. All other Council members voted in favour of a proposed resolution reaffirming that any decisions and actions that purport to have altered the status of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void, and must be rescinded. After vetoing the draft, US Permanent Representative Nikki Haley called the matter “an insult” that would not be forgotten. It is likely that tensions over this issue will persist and that the US will continue to prevent any outcome in the Security Council and elsewhere in the UN system that it feels challenges Israel.

The Palestinian Authority has in turn rejected the US as a mediator and is seeking international initiatives to bring the parties together. The US and Israel, however, remain staunchly opposed to international initiatives on the issue, including any meaningful involvement of the Council.