

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

This is the first Monthly Forecast to be distributed solely in electronic format since Security Council Report began publishing in November 2005. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, New York City, the UN Secretariat and many member states have placed restrictions on non-essential workers, who have been required to stay at home. Hard copies of this Forecast would go largely to empty offices, while the distribution itself would add unnecessary risk. The COVID-19 pandemic has touched every region of the world, and has hit New York City hard. Now as since its first meeting in 1946, the Security Council remains tasked with the maintenance of international peace and security, and there is high interest in how the Council organises itself and addresses aspects of this changing global environment. In the midst of the current crisis, Security Council Report will continue to provide independent, objective information and analysis on the Council's activities and those of its subsidiary bodies.

Karin Landgren
Executive Director

The Dominican Republic has the Security Council presidency in April. With COVID-19 still likely to make physical meetings difficult, the Council is expected to continue to use the provisional measures set out in the 27 March letter from Ambassador Zhang Jun (China), the March president of the Security Council. Other new working methods may be agreed to during the month.

Resolutions will be adopted through a 24-hour written procedure and presidential statements through electronic agreement. Results will be announced by the Council president by video teleconferencing (VTC). There are no mandate renewals that require adoption in April, but if members choose to adopt a resolution or presidential statement following a meeting, the adoption will follow these new working methods.

Meetings will be held via VTC and at press time it seems that open and closed VTC meetings

are being discussed. It seems that for the open VTCs, besides the briefers, members whose interests are affected may be invited to participate (under rule 37), but it was less clear if other member states would be able to do so. Closed meetings would only involve Council members. While to some extent they follow the traditional format of public briefings in the chamber and closed consultations, members have not agreed to consider them as official meetings of the Council or to reflect them in the UN Journal.

On the first working day of the month, following a closed VTC to agree to the work of the Council in April, the president is expected to issue a Presidency Addendum on that work plan. The Presidency Addendum would replace the customary Programme of Work.

The Dominican Republic has chosen to hold an open debate on [youth, peace and security](#) late in the month. Secretary-General António Guterres may brief along with civil society representatives from youth-led organisations. A resolution is a possible outcome.

An open briefing is expected on the [protection of civilians from hunger during conflict](#). Expected briefers are the Executive Director of the World Food Programme, David Beasley, Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation, Qu Dongyu and the Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Jan Egeland. A presidential statement is a possible outcome.

The quarterly open debate on [Israel/Palestine](#) is also anticipated this month.

Other Middle East issues in April include:

- [Syria](#): Open and closed VTC briefing on the political and humanitarian situation and closed VTC on the use of chemical weapons; and
- [Yemen](#), closed VTC on developments in the country.

Regarding African issues, the Council will discuss developments in relation to [UNISFA in Abyei and Sudan/South Sudan](#) in open and closed VTC meetings.

Other African issues include:

- [Great Lakes](#), open VTC briefing on the implementation of the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the

31 March 2020
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Overview

- region, and other developments,
- [Mali](#), open and closed VTC on developments in Mali; and
- [Western Sahara](#), closed VTC briefing on MINURSO.

An open and closed VTC are expected on the Secretary-General's 90-day report on [Colombia](#).

Regarding European issues, there will be an open VTC briefing on [Kosovo](#).

The Council is expected to follow developments in the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), [South Sudan](#) and [Sudan](#) closely and may hold VTC briefings if needed.

In Hindsight: The Women, Peace and Security Agenda at 20

Ahead of this year's 20th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325, the inaugural resolution on women, peace and security of 31 October 2000, a closer look at the current state of the agenda is warranted: is the agenda regressing, progressing or being maintained? Security Council Report's upcoming research report *Women, Peace and Security: The Agenda at 20* argues that the Council should focus its attention on the implementation as well as the maintenance of the agenda. Several examples of Council decisions, highlighted in our report, illustrate the divisions among Council members and the threat that the agenda faces even when Council members' intentions are to restate parts of the existing normative framework.

Resolution 1325 recognised that armed conflict has a differential and disproportionate impact on women. It further acknowledged that equal participation by women in the maintenance of international peace and security, an expansion of women's roles in preventing and resolving conflict, and women's protection can all contribute to the Council's fulfilling its mandate of promoting and maintaining international peace and security. The Council's normative work developed accordingly along four main paths: protection, participation, prevention, and relief and recovery. This includes, for example, the protection of women from conflict-related sexual violence, and the participation of women in peace processes, political processes, the prevention of conflict, and peacebuilding. Recent efforts to develop this framework further—namely with resolutions 2467 and 2493 adopted in 2019—have shown the difficult political environment at the Council as well as the risk of rolling back the agenda.

During the negotiations on resolution 2467 on conflict-related sexual violence, initiated by Germany, three permanent members of

the Council—China, Russia and the US—expressed opposition to several aspects of the text, and at various stages of the process, all three threatened to use their veto. The initial text had ambitious goals to progressively develop the agenda, such as the establishment of a formal Security Council subsidiary body on conflict-related sexual violence. This idea, however, did not resonate with a number of Council members. One of the most striking developments during the negotiations was the challenge to previously agreed language on the sexual and reproductive health rights of victims of sexual violence, showing the difficulty of maintaining existing norms and commitments pertaining to the women, peace and security agenda. This led some observers, including civil society advocates, to question the insistence on seeking a resolution at a time when the US administration's reservations about sexual and reproductive health rights were well known. The resolution was ultimately adopted with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (China and Russia; for more details, please also see our 2 May 2019 *What's in Blue* story).

With resolution 2493, South Africa had intended to focus on the “full implementation” of the women, peace and security agenda. Women's sexual and reproductive health rights were never explicitly mentioned in any of the drafts. The US apparently argued that its national position on sexual and reproductive health meant that it could not support the implementation of the entirety of the agenda, as that would include Council resolutions that referred to these rights. While the resolution was adopted by consensus and includes the formulation “full implementation” (the US reportedly having argued for “effective implementation” instead), following the adoption the US representative said that the US could not “accept references to sexual and reproductive health”.

Our report also examines developments involving Council sanctions regimes. During the period covered by our report (1 January 2017 to 31 December 2019), five sanctions regimes established listing criteria for individuals and entities for targeted sanctions related to sexual and gender-based violence: the 2127 Central African Republic Sanctions Committee and the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee in 2017; the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee, and the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee in 2018. Resolution 2441 of 5 November 2018 on the Libya sanctions regime was adopted with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (China and Russia). The two countries did not agree that a separate criterion for sexual and gender-based violence was necessary. Following the addition of these listing criteria, one individual was listed under the Mali sanctions regime and two individuals were listed under the South Sudan sanctions regime.

The Informal Expert Group (IEG) on women, peace and security, established by resolution 2242 of 13 October 2015, has consolidated a practice of regular meetings on developments related to the women, peace and security agenda in countries on the Council's agenda. It is chaired by two Council members, currently the Dominican Republic and Germany. UN Women acts as the secretariat of the IEG, organising and preparing its meetings. The IEG provides a space for systematic discussions of country-specific situations between senior UN representatives from the field and Council members' country experts and women, peace and security experts; usually, there is a follow-up meeting a few months after a country situation is discussed. According to the IEG's guidelines (S/2016/1106), its goal is to inform the work of the Council and UN activities in the field and to “mainstream the agenda”.

In Hindsight: The Women, Peace and Security Agenda at 20

Between February 2016 and June 2019, the IEG held 27 country-specific meetings. They included four meetings each on the Central African Republic and Iraq; three meetings apiece on Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and Yemen; two meetings each on the Lake Chad Basin and Libya; and one meeting each on Mali and the Sahel, Myanmar and South Sudan. This format has not gone unchallenged, however. Attempts to strengthen the role of the co-chairs during the negotiations on resolution 2493 failed because of the resistance of some members. A paragraph in the

resolution that initially “welcomed” the work of the IEG had to be reformulated to “noting” its work. Generally, it seems that the majority of Council members, relevant parts of the UN system, and civil society agree that the IEG works well as an informal body and that there is no desire to push for anchoring it within the subsidiary body system of the Council, such as transforming it into a working group.

Resolution 2242 expressed the Council’s “intention to invite civil society, including women’s organizations, to brief the Council in country-specific considerations and relevant

thematic areas”. The number of female civil society briefers has steadily increased.

Looking ahead to the 20th anniversary of resolution 1325 in October, the research shows an environment un conducive to a progressive development of the agenda or even for the restating of previously agreed language. While this may change, until it does, the wisest way to mark the anniversary may be by actively pursuing the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda.

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Iraq

On 3 March, the Council received a briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of UNAMI, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, on the most recent developments in the situation in Iraq and on the two latest Secretary-General’s reports—on UNAMI and on the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives (S/PV.8739). The briefing was followed by consultations.

Guinea-Bissau

On 4 March, Council members discussed Guinea-Bissau in consultations under “any other business” with Special Representative and head of UNIOGBIS Rosine Sori-Coulibaly. Niger requested the session in light of the political deterioration that followed the 27 February swearing-in ceremony of Umaro Sissoco Embaló at a hotel in Bissau despite a legal challenge to the election results still being under consideration by the Supreme Court of Justice (STJ) (subsequently, the military occupied government institutions, including the STJ). On 5 March, Council members issued a press statement calling on the parties “to respect the legal and constitutional frameworks and the democratic process to resolve the post-electoral crisis”. They further “called on ECOWAS to urgently send a high-level political mission to Guinea-Bissau” to help resolve the crisis (SC/14138).

South Sudan

On 4 March, the Council was briefed by David Shearer, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of UNMISS, on the Secretary-General’s 90-day report. Shearer reported on several positive developments in the country and said that UNMISS had stepped up its protective presence to build confidence in areas of return. Betty Sunday, Coordinator of the Women’s Monthly Forum on the Peace and Political Process in South Sudan, briefed the Council as a civil society representative by video-teleconference from Juba. The briefing was followed by consultations. Also on 4 March, Council members issued a press statement that welcomed the formation of a Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (SC/14137). On 12 March, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2514 renewing the mandate of UNMISS until 15 March 2021 (S/PV.8744). The resolution maintains the overall force levels at their mandated ceilings of 17,000 troops and 2,101 police personnel. The four core elements of the mandate remain largely unchanged, namely protecting civilians, creating the conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, supporting the peace process, and monitoring and investigating human rights.

Cyber Threats

On 5 March, Council members discussed the issue of cyber threats and hybrid warfare during the “any other business” part of

consultations. In February, the Georgian permanent representative wrote to the Council regarding a large-scale cyberattack launched against the Georgian Government and media websites in October 2019 (S/2020/135). The meeting was initiated by Estonia, the UK and the US. In a joint statement to the media after the meeting, the three members attributed the responsibility for these cyberattacks to Russian military intelligence agencies and said that these actions represent a wider pattern of Russia’s activities. Russia has denied these accusations and emphasised that there is no evidence to support these claims.

DPRK

On 5 March, the Council held a meeting under “any other business” to raise concerns over the 1 March ballistic missile test conducted by the DPRK. After the meeting, Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany and the UK made a joint statement at the media stakeout. They condemned the missile test and emphasised that these activities constitute a violation of Security Council resolutions. On 30 March, the Council adopted resolution 2515, renewing the mandate of the Panel of Experts supporting the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee until 30 March 2021. On 31 March, Council members discussed the recent ballistic missile launches by the DPRK under “any other business” at the conclusion of the closed VTC meeting on UNAMA. Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, Poland, and the UK issued a statement following the meeting

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condemning the DPRK's continued efforts to develop its ballistic missile programs and operate its nuclear weapons programme.

The Informal Working Group on Documentation (IWG) and Other Procedural Questions.

On 6 March, the IWG held a formal meeting to discuss its plans for 2020–2021. During the meeting, chaired by Ambassador Inga Rhonda King (St. Vincent and the Grenadines), members discussed issues such as penholder-ship, strengthening the engagement between chairs of sanctions committees and penholders, and how the Council can balance transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Central African Republic

On 9 March, the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee held informal consultations during which the Coordinator of the Panel of Experts provided an overview of the panel's 7 February 2020 progress update. The panel was supposed to present its work plan to the committee during a meeting scheduled about a week later. However, the second meeting did not take place as Council meetings were postponed due to measures taken by the Security Council to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The work plan has since been presented to the committee in written form.

Afghanistan

On 10 March, the Security Council adopted resolution 2513, which welcomed the progress towards a political settlement of the war in Afghanistan facilitated by the 29 February "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan" (S/2020/184) signed by the US and the Taliban and the "Joint Declaration for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan" (S/2020/185) issued by the US and the Afghan government (S/PV.8742). On 26 March, Council members issued a press statement in which they condemned a terrorist attack that took place at a Sikh-Hindu temple in Kabul on 25 March 2020 (SC/14147). The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province claimed responsibility for the attack, which resulted in the death of at least 25 people. On 31 March, Security Council members held an informal video teleconference meeting on the situation in Afghanistan and the activities of UNAMA. Ingrid Hayden, Deputy Special Representative of UNAMA, briefed Council members

on the latest Secretary-General's report on UNAMA, issued on 17 March (S/2020/210). Council members agreed on press elements afterwards, in which they expressed concern at the impact of COVID-19 in Afghanistan and called on all Afghan parties to implement a comprehensive ceasefire and ensure access to humanitarian aid. They further called on the political leadership in Afghanistan to settle their differences and expressed hope that intra-Afghan negotiations will commence without delay, while bearing in mind the difficulties posed by the spread of COVID-19.

Counter-Terrorism

On 11 March, the Council held a debate titled "Countering terrorism and extremism in Africa" under the agenda item "Peace and security in Africa", a signature event of China's Council presidency (S/PV.8743). Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo, Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the UNDP Bureau for Policy and Programme Support Abdoulaye Mar Dieye and Ambassador Fatima Kyari Mohammed (AU Permanent Observer) briefed. The EU, Japan and 15 African member states made statements as well. A presidential statement was adopted during the meeting (S/PRST/2020/5). On 23 March, as mandated by resolution 2462 on combatting the financing of terrorism, a "joint special meeting" of the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee and the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee "on terrorist financing threats and trends as well as on the implementation of the provisions of this resolution" was scheduled to take place. That date was in line with the requirement of resolution 2426 that the meeting take place within 12 months after the adoption of that resolution. In a 20 March letter (S/2020/220), the chairs of the two committees announced that the meeting would be postponed "on an exceptional basis in the light of the ongoing challenges posed by COVID-19 [...] in order to reduce unnecessary exposure to health risks".

Sudan (Darfur)

On 12 March, Council members issued a press statement condemning the attack on Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok's convoy in Khartoum on 9 March (SC/14143). A briefing on the special report (S/2020/202) of the Secretary-General and the Chairperson

of the AU Commission, requested in resolution 2495, did not take place as planned, as Council meetings were postponed due to measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The quarterly briefing by the chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia), similarly did not take place in March. On 30 March the Council adopted resolution 2517 regarding the drawdown and exit of UNAMID and establishing a follow-on presence, in accordance with resolution 2495

Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 24 March, Council members held a video teleconference on MONUSCO and the situation in the DRC, including the response to COVID-19 in country. Special Representative Leila Zerrougui and Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed Council members. After the meeting, Council members agreed to press elements. They encouraged work towards a sustainable exit for MONUSCO and welcomed the role of regional states. They also welcomed the progress made against Ebola while recognising the challenges that lay ahead with COVID-19.

Somalia

The Council was initially set to renew the mandate of UNSOM on 25 March. Due to the difficulty of holding physical meetings, given measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19, members agreed on a technical rollover of the mandate. On 30 March the Council adopted resolution 2516 renewing the mandate until 30 June.

Libya

On 26 March, Council members convened an informal video teleconference meeting on UNSMIL. Acting Special Representative and head of UNSMIL Stephanie Williams briefed. Council members agreed on press elements afterwards, including expressions of concern "at the significant escalation of hostilities" and "the possible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic". They further "called on the parties to de-escalate the fighting urgently, to immediately cease hostilities and to ensure unhindered access of humanitarian aid throughout the country". Originally scheduled for 27 March as the bimonthly briefing and consultations on UNSMIL and Libya sanctions,

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the meeting was rescheduled and the format was changed in line with adjustments to the Council's working methods due to the impact of COVID-19.

Peacekeeping Operations

On 30 March, the Security Council adopted resolution 2518 on improving safety and security of peacekeepers. This resolution was initially intended to be adopted during an open debate on the issue, one of China's signature events during its presidency, (originally scheduled for 24 March). Since measures announced by the Secretary-General to address COVID-19 included a partial closure of UN headquarters that began on 16 March, and Council members were unable to meet in person, the open debate was cancelled.

MEETINGS NOT HELD IN MARCH DUE TO COVID-19-RELATED CHANGES IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL'S PROGRAMME OF WORK

1540 Committee

The chair of the 1540 Committee, Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani (Indonesia), was scheduled to brief the Council on 17 March on the work of the committee, which deals with the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The meeting was postponed.

Open Debate on Multilateralism and the Political Settlement of Disputes

An open debate titled "Upholding Multilateralism and Promoting the Political Settlement

of Disputes" which was scheduled for 19 March did not take place.

Lebanon (1701)

The Council consultations on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701, covering the period from 1 November 2019 to 18 February (S/2020/195), scheduled for 17 March, did not take place.

UNDOF

The Council's consultations on UNDOF, initially scheduled for 26 March, did not take place.

Colombia

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council expects to receive a briefing from Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu on recent developments and the Secretary-General's 90-day report on the mission, published on 26 March. As was the practice in 2018 and 2019, the Council is likely to issue a press statement following the 90-day briefing. At the time of writing, it was unclear whether the briefing would be held exactly as planned because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The mandate of the verification mission expires on 25 September.

Key Recent Developments

At the outset of 2020, Colombia experienced a period of relative calm in contrast to the last quarter of 2019, which was marked by complicated electoral dynamics and widespread popular demonstrations. Following the local and municipal elections that took place on 27 October 2019, new local authorities—including mayors, governors, and members of municipal councils—assumed office across Colombia on 1 January. The October elections were the first local and municipal

elections since the signing of the 2016 Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace between the government of Colombia and the rebel group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) and the first elections in which former FARC-EP members participated.

On 20 February, the mayor of Bogotá, in cooperation with Colombian civil society organisations, convened a summit on "Territorial Peace". At the meeting, mayors and governors from different regions of the country launched the "National Network of Local Authorities for Peace" and promised to incorporate steps to implement the 2016 peace agreement in their local development plans.

Following popular protests in November 2019, at which citizens expressed their demand for a comprehensive implementation of the peace agreement, among other things, Colombian President Iván Duque Márquez launched a "national conversation" on 26 November 2019 between government representatives and different sectors of civil society. The conversation, which spanned several meetings in late 2019, revolved around six themes: inclusive growth, transparency, education, the

government's "peace with legality" strategy, the environment, and youth. A report summarising the findings of the national conversation was supposed to be issued by 15 March, but at the time of writing its release had been postponed to an unknown date because of the outbreak of COVID-19. Several protests took place across the country during the first months of 2020, with a protest planned for 25 March being suspended due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

Violence against communities and the killing of former FARC-EP members, human rights defenders, and social leaders have continued unabated in 2020. According to a spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, at least ten human rights defenders were reportedly killed during the first 13 days of the year. As of 26 March, 16 former combatants had been killed in 2020. This toll can be viewed as a continuation of the worrying trend in 2019, which saw the killing of 77 former combatants—the highest number of victims since the signing of the peace agreement—and the killing of at least 108 human rights defenders. The violence continues to be most prevalent in rural areas with limited state presence—in particular the Cauca, Nariño, Antioquia, Caquetá

UN DOCUMENTS ON COLOMBIA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2487 (12 September 2019) renewed the mandate of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia until 25 September 2020. **Secretary-General's Reports** S/2020/239 (26 March 2020) was the 90-day report. S/2019/988 (26 December 2019) was the 90-day report. **Security Council Meeting Record** S/PV.8702 (13 January 2020) was a briefing by Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu. **Security Council Press Statement** SC/14081 (15 January 2020) reiterated the support of Council members for the peace process in Colombia.

Colombia

and Norte de Santander departments—where there is heightened activity by illegal armed groups and criminal structures.

In his 26 December 2019 report, the Secretary-General called for the reconvening of the National Commission on Security Guarantees, the body charged under the peace agreement with the development of a public policy on the dismantling of criminal organisations and their support networks. After a long hiatus, the commission was convened by Duque on 9 January. According to government officials, the purpose of the meeting was to ensure that the positions of civil society be reflected in future public policy on the matter. On 23 January, a technical session was held to consider the proposals presented by civil society and to establish a roadmap for the drafting of the policy.

On 14 February, the guerrilla group Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) announced a 48-hour long “armed strike” in several departments. During the “strike”, civilians were instructed by the group to not leave their homes or use means of transportation. Several incidents of violence took place during the strike, including attacks on security forces which resulted in the death of one soldier. Following the strike, civil society groups called for a renewed dialogue between the government and the ELN.

As of 22 March, Colombia had 277 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and had reported two fatalities from the virus. On 17 March, the Presidential Counsellor for Stabilization and Consolidation, Emilio Archila, indicated the government’s commitment to continue implementing programmes related to the implementation of the peace agreement, regardless of the difficulties posed by measures put in place to contain the spread of the virus. The governmental Agency for Reintegration and Normalization (ARN) which is in charge of carrying out plans for the reintegration of former combatants, has affirmed that the measures to counter COVID-19 will not affect the payment of monthly allowances for former combatants.

Between 22 and 23 March, riots erupted in 13 penitentiaries across Colombia, resulting in the deaths of at least 23 inmates and 83 injured. The riots were reportedly sparked by inmates’ concerns that the authorities are taking insufficient measures to protect prison facilities from the spread of COVID-19. Following the riots, the government announced

a national “state of penal emergency” and pledged to take action to forestall the spread of the virus in the country’s prisons.

On 30 March, the guerrilla group ELN announced on its official website its intention to implement a one-month unilateral ceasefire which will begin on 1 April with the aim of facilitating the response to COVID-19 in the country. It emphasised, however, that this is an “active” ceasefire, since the group reserves the right to respond to attacks from government forces or other armed groups. Secretary-General António Guterres issued a statement welcoming the announcement, while expressing hope that the measure will allow the government to fight the spread of the virus and will give respite to communities and vulnerable groups affected by violence. He further called on other armed groups to adopt similar measures.

The Security Council last discussed Colombia on 13 January, when it received a briefing from Ruiz Massieu and held consultations on the topic. On 15 January, members of the Security Council issued a press statement in which they reaffirmed their commitment to working closely with Colombia to make progress in implementation of the peace agreement. The statement expressed grave concern regarding the targeting of community and social leaders as well as former FARC combatants and called for effective government action to improve security, including through the extension of state presence to conflict-affected areas. It also welcomed the meeting of the National Commission on Security Guarantees earlier in the month and noted that Council members are looking forward to the development of a public policy to dismantle illegal armed groups in the country.

On 19 March, Colombia signed an agreement with the UN on a new Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for 2020-2023. Prior to the signing of the agreement, Duque met with Secretary-General António Guterres in New York on 9 March. In a press stake-out following the meeting, Duque announced that the agreement focuses on handling of the migrant population in Colombia, cooperation on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and “peace with legality” (a term used by Duque’s government to describe its strategy with regard to the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement). In comments to the press, Duque outlined that “peace with

legality” focuses on reintegration of ex-combatants through territorial entities, eradication of illicit crops and combating armed groups. The government’s “peace with legality” strategy has been continuously criticised by members of the FARC party as a narrow interpretation of the 2016 peace agreement.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 43rd session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) considered on 27 February the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ annual report on the activities of OHCHR in Colombia (A/HRC/43/3/Add.3). The report assessed the human rights situation in Colombia in 2019, with a focus on the situation of human rights defenders; the use of the military in situations related to public security; the fight against impunity; and inequalities in the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. The report outlined “persistently high levels of violence generating serious human rights violations”, including attacks on human rights defenders and indigenous peoples; an increase in cases of alleged arbitrary deprivation of life; and grave human rights violations committed against children. It also assessed the implementation of the human rights aspects of the peace agreement and includes recommendations for improving the human rights situation. (On 30 October 2019, the host country agreement between the government and OHCHR was renewed until 31 October 2022.)

The HRC also considered the report of the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, on his visit to Colombia (A/HRC/43/51/Add.1).

Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council remains to support the implementation of the peace agreement in Colombia. The need to implement the agreement fully—as opposed to focusing on only select aspects—continues to be an issue, acknowledged by members of the Council in a series of recent statements that stressed the interlocking nature of the different elements of the accord.

Council members might be interested to hear more about the role that can be played by local authorities in implementing the peace agreement, such as local development plans that are intended to assist with the reintegration of former FARC combatants. As has been the case with previous Council meetings on Colombia, several Council members are likely to express concern regarding the persistent levels of violence against ex-combatants, community leaders and human rights defenders while stressing the need to protect

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women and ethnic communities. Council members may want to seek further information on progress in devising a public policy for dismantling criminal organisations and of measures taken by the government to protect vulnerable communities that are affected by violence.

Council members may also be interested in hearing from the briefer about the potential impact that the outbreak of COVID-19 might have on the implementation of the peace agreement and on any challenges it might pose to the ability of the UN Verification Mission to perform its duties. Some members might raise the question of how the spread of COVID-19 in the region might affect stability, noting also that Colombia has closed its border with neighbouring Venezuela to pre-empt the spread of the virus.

The UN Verification Mission was established in accordance with the 2016 agreement, which stipulated an initial three-year duration, “renewable if necessary”. That initial period will end in September 2020. Duque, however, has already expressed his wish for the mission to continue through his term in office, which ends in 2022. The mandate of the mission, as set out in the 2016 agreement, focuses on verifying aspects of the agreement related to the political, economic and social reincorporation of the FARC-EP; personal and collective security guarantees; and comprehensive programmes of security and protection measures for communities and organisations in conflict-affected areas. Previous mandate renewal resolutions have left the mandate unchanged. However, in preparation for the next mandate expiry in September, Council

members may wish to consider possible modifications to the mission’s mandate to correspond with developments in the implementation of the agreement.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their overall support for the peace process. While they have generally been deferential towards the government, some differences in tone emerged in 2019. For example, several members have been critical of the government on such issues as the continuing security vacuum in areas from which FARC-EP withdrew under the agreement and an uneven approach to implementing different aspects of the agreement.

The UK is the penholder on Colombia.

Mali

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council is due to hold its quarterly briefing on Mali, followed by consultations. The mandate of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) expires on 30 June 2020.

Key Recent Developments

There has been some improvement in implementing the 2015 Mali Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, while at the same time the security situation remains dire in central Mali and parts of the north.

On 19 January, a ministerial-level meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee (CSA) was held. This was its first meeting since the government cancelled a planned CSA meeting in September 2019 after the President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, declared that signatory parties in the north were colluding with terrorist groups.

In a major step in the implementation of the peace agreement, the first mixed unit of the reconstituted army—composed of national troops and integrated forces from the north—arrived in Kidal city on 13 February, which marked the Malian army’s first return

to Kidal since fighting with rebel groups forced its retreat in May 2014. Reconstituted units have also deployed to Gao, Timbuktu and Menaka. From 4 to 7 March, Prime Minister Boubou Cissé visited the northern cities and towns of Kidal, Tessalit, Aguelhok and Menaka. His visit to Kidal also had symbolic significance, as it had been former Prime Minister Moussa Mara’s visit there that precipitated the May 2014 battle; it was also reportedly the first visit of a Malian prime minister to Aguelhok since independence.

The first round of legislative elections, initially scheduled for November 2018, was held on 29 March, despite security challenges and concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic. On 25 March, just days before the election, gunmen kidnapped main opposition leader Soumaila Cissé along with other members from his team while they campaigned in central Mali; Cissé has yet to be freed. A second round of the legislative elections is scheduled for 19 April.

Meanwhile, attacks by terrorist groups and intercommunal violence has continued. On 14 February, ethnic Dogon militiamen attacked the Fulani village of Ogossagou in the Mopti region. At least 35 people were

killed and 19 went missing. Ogossagou is the village where 157 civilians were killed in a March 2019 attack. In an 18 March statement on a MINUSMA and OHCHR investigation into the February attack, Special Representative and head of MINUSMA Mahamat Saleh Annadif expressed concern about the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators. On 19 March, militants killed 29 Malian soldiers in Tarkint, Gao Region. Fighting reported between terrorist groups has further complicated the situation.

Insecurity in Mali and the broader Sahel was the focus of a 13 January summit in Pau, France, with Malian President Ibrahim Bou-bacar Keita; other presidents of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel, consisting of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger); and French President Emmanuel Macron. According to a joint statement, France and G5 Sahel countries agreed to a new political, strategic and operational framework called the Coalition for the Sahel that is open to other partners. It will combine efforts to combat terrorist groups, strengthen state capacities, and encourage development assistance. This includes concentrating

UN DOCUMENTS ON MALI [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2480](#) (28 June 2019) renewed the mandate of MINUSMA until 30 June 2020. [Secretary-General’s Report S/2020/223](#) (20 March 2020) was the quarterly report on Mali. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV. 8703](#) (15 January 2020) was a briefing on Mali. [Security Council Press Statement SC/14083](#) (17 January 2020) expressed serious concern about delays implementing many of the 2015 peace agreement’s substantive provisions. [Sanctions Committee Documents SC/14144](#) (12 March 2020) was a 2374 Sanctions Committee press release on the Panel of Experts’ mid-term report. [S/2020/158](#) (28 February 2020) was the mid-term report of the Mali Panel of Experts. **ADDITIONAL USEFUL RESOURCES** Mali: Army, [UN Fail to Stop Massacre](#). Human Rights Watch. 18 March 2020.

Mali

military efforts on the Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso border region under the joint command of France's regional counter-terrorism Operation Barkhane, and the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S), targeting the Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS) as a priority. In early February, France announced that it would deploy 600 troops to reinforce the 4,500 soldiers already serving in Operation Barkhane.

On 10 February, President Keita said the government was open to dialogue with the jihadist groups Katiba Macina and Ansar Dine. This policy shift has not been extended to ISGS.

The Council last met on Mali on 14 January. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix presented the Secretary-General's adaptation plan for MINUSMA, developed in light of its new, second strategic priority mandated in resolution 2480 of June 2019 to support the government in addressing the deteriorating situation in central Mali while continuing to devote close attention to the north. Lacroix said, "It is not feasible for MINUSMA to implement its additional strategic priority in the centre without additional resources", which "has resulted in dangerous gaps in areas in northern Mali". Lacroix explained that the plan maintains authorised troop and police levels but seeks to "make MINUSMA more agile, flexible and mobile, with tailored units, enhanced capabilities and, most importantly, with additional air mobility".

A 17 January Council press statement noted some progress in the peace agreement's implementation but expressed serious concern about delays in many of its substantive provisions. It further welcomed the Secretary-General's plan to adapt MINUSMA "by increasing its protected mobility, agility and flexibility".

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 12 February, the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee met on the mid-term report of the Panel of Experts on Mali, and on 3 March, the committee met with regional states to discuss implementation of the sanctions regime. Among its findings, the Panel of Experts' mid-term report said that signatory group the Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA) has colluded with terrorist groups both in northern and central Mali. The report also mentions the involvement in the drug trade by the CMA, and the Platform, mainly the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA) and the Arab Movement of Azawad

(MAA). According to media reports, GATIA rejected the accusations, and the CMA formed a committee to analyse the report. The CMA continued its military expansionist strategy in the north, in violation of the ceasefire and at the expense of the Platform, according to the report.

Earlier, on 4 February, the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee imposed an assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo on Amadou Koufa, the leader of Katiba Macina, the main al-Qaeda affiliated group in central Mali. On 10 February, Mahri Sidi Amar Ben Daha, alias Yoro Ould Daha, who is sanctioned under the Mali sanctions regime, was killed in northern Mali.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 21 February, the independent expert on the situation of human rights in Mali, Alioune Tine, released a statement expressing concern over the increasing violence and impunity in the central region of the country, saying that the "Malian Armed Forces and MINUSMA have failed to provide adequate security for the civilians of the region". The statement also highlighted the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, reporting that the number of internally displaced persons increased from 99,000 to 207,751 from March to December 2019.

During its 43rd session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) was scheduled to hold an interactive dialogue on 17 March with Tine and to consider his report (A/HRC/43/76). Given the circumstances surrounding COVID-19, however, the HRC suspended its 43rd session on 13 March. The report, covering 1 April 2019 to 20 November 2019, concludes that Mali and the Sahel face "enormous and multifaceted challenges in terms of security, governance and development" and that "Mali and the entire subregion are facing danger such as they have never known before". The report emphasises the need for the Malian state, the FC-G5S and MINUSMA to increase the protection of civilians in areas at risk.

Key Issues and Options

Implementation of the 2015 peace agreement remains a key issue, particularly in the five priority areas set out in resolution 2480: constitutional reform, decentralisation, security sector reform, development of the north, and participation of women. The legislative elections are an important step to advance constitutional reform. The COVID-19 pandemic presents new issues, including Mali's limited medical infrastructure, concerns over the safety of peacekeepers and MINUSMA troop rotations, and its potential impact on the peace agreement's implementation. In this context, the CSA meeting set for March was cancelled due to the pandemic. Mali confirmed its first two cases of COVID-19 on 23 March.

The security situation is critical. Related to this is the MINUSMA adaptation plan. Council members requested in their 17 January press statement that the Secretary-General's next quarterly report include a detailed update on the implementation of the plan and its effects on improving coordination between MINUSMA's civil, military and police components. The UN's ability to generate the new capabilities required for the plan and the financial implications, which the General Assembly's Fifth Committee is expected to consider in May, are important issues.

The Council had been planning a visiting mission in April to the Sahel, including Mali, to contribute to its consideration of the next mandate renewal on MINUSMA. The mission has been postponed, however, because of concerns over COVID-19.

Sanctions remain a tool to pressure those obstructing the 2015 peace agreement. Current sanctioned individuals are all from the north, including the one designated parliamentarian, and one issue is how to be more balanced in also targeting the government for hindering the agreement's implementation.

Council Dynamics

Members have been frustrated by the peace agreement's slow implementation, which is why in resolution 2480 the Council specified priority areas in which it expects to see progress. The US is the most vocal critic of the parties in this regard, and suggested at the 14 January briefing that the Council consider deprioritising MINUSMA's support in implementing the agreement and instead focus the mission on protecting civilians if there has not been more progress by the time of MINUSMA's June mandate renewal. As demonstrated by their 17 January press statement, members support the MINUSMA adaptation plan, though it seems that the US might object to changes that would increase the mission's budget. On sanctions, the P3, among other Council members, support their use against those hindering the peace agreement while Russia is the most likely to question their use. Members share concerns about the security situation. Niger, a Council member since 1 January, has been profoundly affected by the spillover of violence.

France is the penholder on Mali. Ambassador José Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) chairs the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee.

Western Sahara

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council expects to receive a briefing on the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) as mandated in resolution 2494. Colin Stewart, the Special Representative for Western Sahara and head of MINURSO, is likely to brief. Western Sahara briefings have usually been held in consultations.

MINURSO's mandate expires on 31 October.

Key Recent Developments

The political situation regarding Western Sahara remains relatively unchanged. The Secretary-General has yet to appoint a new Personal Envoy since the previous envoy, former President of Germany Horst Köhler, resigned his post on 22 May 2019 because of health concerns. The personal envoy is mandated to move the political process forward, towards settlement of the Western Sahara dispute, and in the year before resigning, Köhler had successfully led several roundtable discussions. The personal envoy's mandate rests on being able to establish trust amongst the discussants, namely Morocco, the Polisario Front, Algeria and Mauritania. (Western Sahara has been the subject of territorial disputes since Spain withdrew in 1976. Initially, both Morocco and Mauritania presented claims, but Mauritania renounced its claim in 1979. The independence movement is led by the Polisario Front, which represents the nomadic inhabitants of the Western Sahara region known as the Sahrawis.) In the ten months since Köhler's departure, no initiatives towards reaching a political agreement have been evident.

Meanwhile, the situation on the ground remains tense. Special Representative Stewart last briefed Council members in closed consultations on 16 October 2019, highlighting his concerns about the humanitarian situation as well as an ongoing funding gap. Stewart described rising frustration among Sahrawi youth because of the lack of opportunities and of any final settlement of the issue. Civil society actors continue to criticise violence by Moroccan police against activists in Western Sahara. According to the

World Food Programme's 2019 nutrition survey, there was a deterioration in women and children's nutritional status, with anaemia in refugee camps prevalent among 50.1 percent of children aged 6-59 months and 52.2 percent among women of reproductive age. As of 1 March, there were no reports of COVID-19 in the Tindouf refugee camps.

Relations have remained tense between Morocco and the Polisario Front, moreover. In July 2019, King Mohammed VI of Morocco stressed in a speech that Western Sahara is part of Morocco and urged the international community to work on Morocco's autonomy plan, which was first submitted to the UN in 2007. With the support of the Moroccan government, Burundi, Central African Republic, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, The Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, and São Tomé and Príncipe have all recently opened consulates in Moroccan-controlled Laayoune and Dakhla in the disputed territory.

On 30 October 2019, the Council adopted resolution 2494 renewing the mandate of MINURSO for one year. The US, as penholder, opted not to make significant changes to the text at that time, aside from a return to the 12-month mandate cycle, for which France and others had been advocating. A 12-month mandate was the norm until 2018, when the US pushed for a six-month mandate to increase pressure on the parties to work towards a peaceful solution. The return to the yearlong mandate seemed to signal the US belief that the continued absence of a personal envoy had substantially reduced the possibility of any positive political progress.

Thirteen Council members voted in favour of resolution 2494, with Russia and South Africa abstaining (as they did during the previous vote, in April 2019). In their statements, Russia and South Africa stressed their support for MINURSO's work. Russia indicated their belief, however, that others were trying to use the renewal to "predetermine the direction of the negotiation process being conducted under the auspices of the United Nations or to change established approaches affirmed in previously adopted resolutions". South Africa did not believe the text was balanced between the parties and

worried about attempts to subvert principles of self-determination.

From 19 to 24 December 2019, the Polisario Front held its 15th Congress in Tifariti. About 2,000 attended, including Sahrawi delegates, Polisario Front administration officials, and several foreign delegations, including representatives from the newly elected government in Algeria. In a January letter to the Security Council, the Polisario Front denounced the fact that the motorsport "Africa Eco Race" crossed through its region, and also protested that the Secretary-General was not criticising Moroccan actions sharply enough. The Polisario Front also continues to advocate for the immediate appointment of a new personal envoy.

Key Issues and Options

MINURSO is one of the longest-running UN peacekeeping missions, having been established in 1991 with the key objective of facilitating a referendum for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. With no referendum held, its duties today mainly consist of monitoring the ceasefire across the Berm, a 1,700-mile-long earthen wall that divides the Moroccan-administered portion of Western Sahara from that held by the Polisario Front. Members will want to hear of any challenges on the ground to MINURSO or difficulties in implementing its mandate.

Given the continued absence of the Secretary-General's personal envoy, Council members could consider issuing a press statement urging the Secretary-General to appoint a successor to Köhler as soon as possible. In the past, there have been unsuccessful attempts at conveying this message to the Secretary-General, including during the mandate renewal negotiations in October 2019: some members wanted a stronger call for this, while others felt that a resolution was not the right place. The fact that the post has been vacant for nearly a year may have increased the Council's sense of pressure.

Council and Wider Dynamics

The Council has been quiet on the Western Sahara issue since the adoption of resolution 2494. With many member states frustrated

UN DOCUMENTS ON WESTERN SAHARA [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2494](#) (30 October 2019) renewed MINURSO's mandate for 12 months, with abstentions by two Council members. [Secretary-General's Report S/2019/787](#) (2 October 2019) covered challenges to MINURSO's operations and steps taken to address them. [Security Council Letter S/2020/45](#) (16 January 2020) was from the Polisario Front to the Secretary-General that included a complaint about alleged Moroccan violations of Military Agreement No. 1 during the Eco Race as well as some dissatisfaction with statements made by the spokesman for the Secretary-General during his daily press briefing on 13 January 2020. The letter was transmitted by Namibia with a request that it be circulated as a Security Council document. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8651](#) (30 October 2019) included the adoption of resolution 2494 renewing MINURSO's mandate until 31 October 2020.

Western Sahara

by the absence of a personal envoy and the concomitant lack of political progress, they may voice these concerns.

In January 2017, Morocco rejoined the AU after a 33-year absence. Morocco left when the AU's predecessor body admitted Western Sahara as a member in 1984. Since rejoining the organisation, Morocco has been stepping up its efforts to maintain its de facto governance over part of the Western Sahara territory and attempt to bring some AU members around to its way of thinking. This

is reflected in the opening of the nine consulates, something that was unforeseeable before.

South Africa remains the Polisario's most steadfast ally on the Council. It will likely continue to push for more negotiations to determine the status of Western Sahara as soon as possible, and for retaining a focus on human rights. The opening of consulates by nine African countries in Laayoune, in the disputed territory, may signal a changing dynamic among African states which had previously been consistent in their positions on

MINURSO and in their support for Polisario. Tunisia, as a new Council member and part of the region, may have a useful point of view to share, though it will do so delicately given its critical relationships with all stakeholders. Tunisia's neighbour Algeria has also renewed its involvement on Western Sahara after recently pulling back while it formed a government. Algeria is one of the countries that has spoken out against the recent consulate openings.

Syria

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council expects to hold its monthly meetings on political issues, the humanitarian situation, and the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Key Recent Developments

As the security and humanitarian situations in north-west Syria continued to worsen, the Council met twice at the end of February to discuss rapidly unfolding events. On 27 February, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Ursula Mueller briefed the Council on the ongoing situation in Syria's north-west, where 950,000 people had been displaced since 1 December and fighting continued. She also updated the Council on the Secretary-General's report that reviewed alternative modalities for the border crossing of Ya'rubiyah, which had been one of four Council-authorized crossings for the delivery of humanitarian aid into Syria. However, the Council was unable to reach agreement on maintaining this crossing and the Al-Ramtha crossing when it renewed the cross-border aid delivery mechanism on 10 January through resolution 2504. Henrietta Fore, executive director of UNICEF, also briefed, focusing on the estimated half-million children affected by the crisis.

With fighting continuing to escalate, the Council met again on 28 February in an emergency public session. Secretary-General António Guterres made opening remarks followed by Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary

DiCarlo's briefing on attacks in southern Idlib by Syrian government forces and the Russian Federation air force as well as attacks launched by non-state armed groups. According to OHCHR, around 1,750 civilians had been killed since April 2019, DiCarlo said.

On 2 March, an inter-agency UN mission crossed from Turkey into north-west Syria to assess first-hand the deteriorating humanitarian situation and determine the feasibility of "a sustained UN presence in Idlib". Led by Kevin Kennedy, regional humanitarian coordinator for the Syria crisis, it included representatives from the International Organization for Migration, the UN Population Fund, UNHCR, UNICEF, the World Food Programme, OCHA, and the World Health Organization. The mission noted that over 2,150 trucks carrying aid had crossed from Turkey into north-west Syria in January and February—twice the number that had delivered assistance in the same period the year before. On 3 March, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock also visited the border area near Hatay in Turkey, where he described the situation in which traumatised people—up to 2.8 million in north-western Syria—were living in open-air conditions, despite cold temperatures. Ambassador Kelly Craft (US) joined Lowcock at the border during part of his visit.

Tensions between Turkey on one side and Syria and the Russian Federation on the other escalated further after an attack on Turkish forces on 27 February and subsequent

counter-attacks by the Turkish military on Syrian government forces. In response, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met in Moscow on 5 March, agreeing to a cessation of all military actions effective 6 March. The agreement also included the establishment of a security corridor along the strategic M4 highway, with joint Russian-Turkish patrols.

The Council held closed consultations on 6 March to discuss the agreement. The Russian Federation proposed press elements for the President of the Council to read out, which included the Council's welcoming the establishment of a ceasefire and encouraging all parties to comply. Some member states objected to the lack of language on the humanitarian situation in the text while others felt that the Council would be acting prematurely in welcoming the previous day's agreement. On 15 March, both Russian and Turkish officials announced that joint patrols of the M4 security corridor had begun; media sources, however, noted that some patrolling had been cut short because Syrian opposition forces blocked the roadway.

On 13 March, the Board of Inquiry, established in August 2019 by the Secretary-General to investigate attacks on sites in north-west Syria on a "deconfliction" list that included health facilities, submitted its report to the Secretary-General. According to his spokesperson, the Secretary-General intends to share a summary of the report publicly.

Lowcock had been expected to brief the

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2504](#) (10 January 2020) renewed the authorisation of cross-border humanitarian aid into Syria through two border crossings (Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa) for six months. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8734](#) (27 February 2020) was a meeting on the political and humanitarian situation in Syria. [Secretary-General's Report S/2020/139](#) (21 February 2020) reviewed alternative modalities for the border crossing of Ya'rubiyah.

Syria

Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria on 25 March. However, this meeting was removed from the Council's Programme of Work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The briefing had been expected to cover the situation in north-western Syria, Lowcock's visit to the region, updates on progress regarding resolution 2504, and the potential impact that COVID-19 could have on vulnerable communities in Syria, particularly in the country's north-west.

Special Envoy Geir O. Pedersen briefed the Council on 30 March on the political situation, including any progress on the political process, which has remained in a stalemate for several months since the Constitutional Committee convened in Geneva in November 2019. On 24 March, Pedersen called for a "complete, immediate nationwide ceasefire throughout Syria to enable an all-out-effort to suppress COVID-19 in Syria". Syrians remain "acutely vulnerable to COVID-19" and need a "sustained period of calm throughout the country respected by all parties" so that the necessary measures are taken to address this crisis.

On 26 March, it was announced that Pedersen's 30 March briefing would be convened as an informal videoconference meeting and would be organised as a joint political and humanitarian briefing, where Lowcock also briefed. This was the third informal videoconference meeting of Council members since measures announced by the Secretary-General to address COVID-19 included a partial closure of UN headquarters that began on 16 March.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Investigation and Identification Team (IIT)—established to identify perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria following a June 2018 decision of the Conference of States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)—is scheduled to deliver its report by 27 March.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 43rd session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held an interactive dialogue on 9 and 10 March with the Commission of Inquiry on Syria and considered its report (A/HRC/43/57), which presents findings based on investigations conducted from 11 July 2019 to 10 January. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, chair of the Commission, told the HRC that since December 2019, nearly one million Syrians had been displaced, with some 80 percent of these being women and children. More than three million people remain trapped in northern Idlib with a "near absence of humanitarian aid", he said. He also referred to the terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which had carried out attacks on civilian-inhabited areas under the control of the government, killing dozens of women, men and children. Hundreds of Syrians had been killed in near-constant bombardments during the period under review, he said.

Given the circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak, the HRC suspended its 43rd session on 13 March and adopted a decision extending all mandates and mandated activities that would otherwise expire at the end of the 43rd session, including that of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria, until a yet to be determined date on which the 43rd session is resumed (A/HRC/43/L.14). At the adoption, the representative of Syria expressed its opposition to the extension of the Commission's mandate in this manner, adding that it is a "disputed" and not a consensual mandate.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue is how the Council might support the 5 March ceasefire agreement. Despite some members' view that welcoming the ceasefire would be premature, the Council may wish to revisit the issue as the ceasefire appears to be holding. One option would be for the Council to organise a briefing to be updated on the ceasefire. Several members may also call for Special Envoy Pedersen to support the ceasefire agreement. One option would be for the Council to urge the Secretary-General to play an enhanced good offices role by supplementing Pedersen's efforts and engaging in dialogue with all the relevant parties in the area to build on the opportunity

presented by the ceasefire. The Council could also urge him to explore how the parties in the Constitutional Committee could reinvigorate the stalled political process.

The Council could also make an appeal for enhanced financial contributions to support OCHA's humanitarian plan for Syria, given increased needs in the north-west and increased deliveries of assistance that the inter-agency mission noted in its visit to the region.

With the submission of the Board of Inquiry report on 13 March, the Council could ask the Secretariat for a briefing on the board's findings in a closed format to allow for a frank dialogue and exchange of views.

The Council could also discuss the IIT report with the OPCW in a private-meeting format in April. While Council members often meet on chemical weapons issues in Syria in closed consultations, non-UN officials and non-Council members are not permitted to participate in these informal meetings. That is not the case with formal private meetings, the format used when the Council discussed the use of chemical weapons in Syria with Fernando Arias, the OPCW's Director-General, on 5 November 2019.

Council Dynamics

Member states hold markedly different views on Council engagement on Syria. The P3 (France, the UK and the US) and others tend to condemn attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure by the Syrian government and its allies, while China and Russia often emphasise the importance of eliminating the threat of terrorism in Syria. The failure of the Council to agree on elements to the press at its 6 March closed consultations on the ceasefire in the north-west illustrated the tense dynamics.

Belgium and Germany are the humanitarian co-penholders on Syria.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council is expected to hold its monthly briefing with Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths and a representative from OCHA. The mandate of the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) expires on 15 July 2020.

Key Recent Developments

Heavy fighting has continued since mid-January, with the Houthis rebel group seizing new territory in the north and appearing poised to attack Marib governorate. The governorate and its provincial capital, the city of Marib, have emerged during the war as an important Yemeni government stronghold, experiencing an economic and population boom from Yemenis fleeing violence, its oil and gas reserves, and investments by Saudi Arabia. A battle there would further undermine progress made in late 2019 to resume a political process, as well as placing a new heavy toll on civilians, including the 800,000 internally displaced persons in Marib.

On 1 March, the Houthis took the city of Al Hazm, the capital of the northern Al Jawf governorate, resulting in a new “massive displacement”, according to OCHA. Its fall was seen as opening the way for the Houthis to attack Marib. Concerned by this prospect, Griffiths visited Marib on 7 March. In public remarks, Griffiths said, “Marib must be insulated from conflict, remain a haven for Yemenis and continue its path to development and prosperity”. He repeated his call for a freeze in military activities.

Briefing the Council on 12 March, Griffiths said that there was a real risk of a protracted military escalation. He added, “It is imperative that the parties agree to participate in a public, accountable, nationwide de-escalation mechanism that quiets the tempo of war and steers Yemen off this precarious path”. Griffiths also reported increased clashes in and around Hodeidah. The day before, according to news reports, a Houthi sniper shot a Yemeni government liaison officer serving in one of the joint observation posts set up last year to monitor the Hodeidah ceasefire. That led the government to suspend its participation in the Redeployment Coordination Committee that oversees implementation of

the Hodeidah agreement. During the briefing, Griffiths also noted continued restrictions on the movement of UNMHA personnel, saying that mission patrols had not been able to enter Hodeidah city since October 2019. Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Ramesh Rajasingham also briefed, echoing Griffiths’ call for a cessation of hostilities.

Echoing his appeal two days earlier for a global ceasefire in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, on 25 March, Secretary-General António Guterres called for an immediate ceasing of hostilities in Yemen, and for the parties to focus on reaching a political settlement and working together to counter a potential COVID-19 outbreak. The Houthis, government and Saudi Arabia-led coalition that supports the government all expressed support for the Secretary-General’s call. Despite these positive overtures, on 28 March, the coalition announced that it had intercepted two ballistic missiles as well as drones that the Houthis claimed to have fired at Riyadh and areas in southern Saudi Arabia. The attacks were followed by a series of coalition air raids on Sana’a.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 43rd session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) received an oral update on 27 February from the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, on the human rights situation in Yemen. Bachelet told the HRC that since March 2015, OHCHR has verified and confirmed the killing of 7,734 civilians, including 2,103 children, and injuries to 12,269 others due to indiscriminate attacks, landmines, improvised explosive devices, and the storage of weapons and explosives in residential areas, by all parties to the conflict. The actual numbers are likely to be far higher, she said. Despite the ceasefire in Hodeidah, it was the location with the highest number of civilian casualties in 2019 (102 civilians killed and 310 injured), she added. Thousands more people have died from illness and malnutrition resulting from constraints on humanitarian aid, the blockade, and the collapse of the economy and key institutions and services. Currently, out of a national population of 30.5 million people, 20.1 million face hunger and 14.4 million need immediate assistance for their sustenance or survival. Since March 2015, 3.65 million people have been displaced, including 410,000 in 2019, she said.

In a 6 March statement, OHCHR expressed concern over the 35 Yemeni parliamentarians

sentenced to death – in absentia – by the Houthi-controlled Specialized Criminal Court on 3 March on charges related to their participation in last year’s April 2019 parliamentary meeting in Sayoun that had been called for by President Abdo Raboo Mansour Hadi.

Key Issues and Options

The military escalation has significantly set back progress made during the latter part of 2019 to resume a political process through the dialogue between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-brokered Riyadh Agreement between the government and the separatist Southern Transitional Council. Critical issues include how the Security Council can support de-escalation efforts and the resumption of an inclusive political process that can lead to UN-mediated peace talks. Preserving the December 2018 Stockholm Agreement, which includes the Hodeidah agreement, as well as the stalled Riyadh Agreement, remains important.

The humanitarian crisis continues to be severe. OCHA usually briefs on five key priorities: the protection of civilians, humanitarian access, funding for the aid operation, support for the economy, and the need for a political solution. A battle for Marib, where there is already fighting, would likely have new devastating humanitarian consequences. Ongoing challenges include the operating environment for humanitarian actors, particularly in the Houthi-controlled north. During the 12 March briefing, Rajasingham said that restrictions in Yemen had prevented the UN from conducting assessments to quantify the 2020 humanitarian response plan (HRP). Therefore, he said, OCHA would continue applying its 2019 Yemen HRP, “to maintain the programmes that have helped prevent famine, roll back cholera and otherwise save millions of lives” noting that considerable funding will be required, though probably somewhat less than in 2019 (a December 2019 global humanitarian overview published by OCHA estimated that \$3.2 billion would be needed in 2020, compared to \$4.16 billion in 2019.) As of late March, a pledging conference for Yemen was scheduled for 2 April in Riyadh. There has been discussion to convene it remotely, though it is still likely to be delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2511 (25 February 2020) renewed the Yemen sanctions regime for one year. **Security Council Letters S/2020/2007** (16 March 2020) was from Yemen on the suspension of its participation in the Redeployment Coordination Committee. **S/2020/200** (11 March 2020) was from Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and Yemen on the risks posed by the SAFER oil tanker. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8745** (12 March 2020) was a briefing on Yemen. **Security Council Press Statement SC/14094** (30 January 2020) called for an immediate cessation of the hostilities that broke out in mid-January.

Yemen

Despite reporting no confirmed cases of COVID-19, the pandemic poses a new major concern for Yemen, which has struggled to deal with other health crises during the war because of the strain on its health care and sanitation systems, including the largest cholera outbreak ever recorded. Neighbouring Saudi Arabia and Oman had confirmed 1299 cases and 167 cases respectively, by 28 March. The government and the Houthis have introduced measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19, including restrictions on flights to Sana'a and Aden, prompting concerns among humanitarian actors that these could affect aid operations. On 20 March, Griffiths urged the parties to release all “conflict-related” prisoners as part of a long-delayed prisoner exchange agreement, citing the risks posed by COVID-19.

At the time of this writing, members were considering a press statement to echo the

Secretary-General’s call for a country-wide cessation of hostilities given the risks posed by COVID-19. Moreover, the P5 and the key states in the region that have influence on the parties could seek to exert pressure directly on the sides to de-escalate and cooperate with the Special Envoy to resume a political process.

Council Dynamics

Council members have appeared to remain quite united on Yemen, despite the contentious sanctions renewal in February that led to abstentions by China and Russia. At the 12 March session, members seemed unanimous in their calls for the parties to de-escalate and on the importance of restarting a political process. During the Council’s public sessions, most members have also been raising concerns about the increasing Houthi interference with humanitarian operations

that OCHA has flagged over recent months and the need for the Houthis to allow a UN assessment mission access to the moored SAFER oil tanker off the Ras Issa oil terminal, which risks causing a major environmental disaster in the Red Sea. Tunisia is the Arab member on the Council that traditionally champions positions of the Saudi Arabia-led coalition supporting the Yemeni government. The US has begun to reduce its humanitarian funding due to the Houthis’ interference with aid operations, as it has warned that it would do during recent Council briefings on Yemen. Russia at times expresses concerns about the Council criticising or singling out the Houthis more than other actors.

The UK is the penholder on Yemen. Ambassador Inga Rhonda King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) chairs the Yemen 2140 Sanctions Committee.

Protection of Civilians: Conflict and Hunger

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council plans to hold a briefing on the protection of civilians from hunger during armed conflict. Possible briefers are Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), David Beasley (who, however, announced on 19 March that he had contracted COVID-19), Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), Qu Dongyu, and Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Jan Egeblad. The Council may adopt a presidential statement.

Key Recent Developments

Recent years have seen the Council increase its consideration of the link between conflict and hunger. In 2017, the threat of famine in north-east Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, which the Secretary-General had warned member states could occur without decisive action, prompted two briefings and an Arria-formula meeting on the crises. A Council presidential statement deplored the

failure of certain parties in these conflicts to ensure unfettered and sustained access for deliveries of vital food assistance and other aid. It also called on member states to provide resources and funding to avert famine.

During the Netherlands’ presidency in March 2018, a Council briefing considered more broadly the rising trend in food insecurity and conflict, considered to be the main driver of hunger in 18 countries, according to a joint report of the EU, FAO and WFP at the time. The session also sought to raise awareness of international laws and norms to protect civilian populations from hunger and food insecurity during war.

Two months later, on 24 May 2018, the Council adopted resolution 2417, which “recalls the link between armed conflict and violence and conflict-induced food insecurity and the threat of famine”. The resolution strongly condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access and urged all parties to protect civilian

infrastructure critical to the delivery of aid and to ensure the proper functioning of food systems. Resolution 2417 further requested the Secretary-General to report swiftly to the Council when there is a risk of conflict-induced famine and widespread food insecurity in the context of armed conflict and to brief every 12 months on the resolution’s implementation in the context of his annual briefing on the protection of civilians.

Since the adoption of resolution 2417, OCHA has sought to alert the Council to risks of famine in conflict situations, including by sending a white paper on unprecedented levels of hunger and malnutrition in South Sudan in July 2018. Council members then convened consultations in August 2018 on food security in South Sudan and in press elements after the meeting demanded that all parties allow unhindered humanitarian access. Similarly, an OCHA white paper alerted the Council to the renewed risk of famine facing Yemen in October 2018 ahead of a Council briefing on that country’s humanitarian

UN DOCUMENTS ON CONFLICT AND HUNGER Security Council Resolution S/RES/2417 (24 May 2018) was on conflict-induced hunger. **Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2017/14** (9 August 2017) was on the threat of famine in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and north-east Nigeria. **Security Council Letter S/2020/62** (22 January 2020) circulated the seventh joint FAO/WFP update for Council members on food security in countries with conflict situations. **Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8379** (23 October 2018) was a briefing on Yemen’s humanitarian crisis. **S/PV.8213** (23 March 2018) was a briefing on conflict and hunger. **S/PV.8069** (12 October 2017) was a briefing by the Secretary-General on impediments to an effective response to the risk of famine in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and northeast Nigeria. **S/PV.7897** (10 March 2017) was a briefing on the humanitarian situation in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and the Lake Chad Basin.

Protection of Civilians: Conflict and Hunger

crisis. During the briefing, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock warned of “a clear and present danger of an imminent and great big famine engulfing Yemen—much bigger than anything that any professionals in this field have seen during their working lives”, and outlined five priorities that he called for the Council to support to prevent this possibility. In December 2018, the first Yemeni peace talks in over two years led to the Stockholm Agreement, which averted a battle for the port city of Hodeidah, through which Yemen imports much of its food and other critical supplies.

Starting in January 2019, the Dominican Republic and Germany have co-hosted informal briefings for members to remain updated on conflict-induced hunger trends by discussing the bi-annual reports prepared by the WFP and FAO, titled Monitoring food security in countries with conflict situations—a joint FAO/WFP update for the members of the United Nations Security Council. The most recent edition, the seventh in the series, was issued in January and circulated

to members by the Dominican Republic. It spotlights Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Haiti, the Lake Chad Basin, central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), Somalia and South Sudan. (The report notes that the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Sudan and Yemen are not covered because there was no updated acute food insecurity data.)

Key Issues and Options

Key issues include obstacles to humanitarian access and ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law. Other factors that contribute to hunger in conflict are threats to or attacks on food sources—such as infrastructure for delivering food and insecurity from fighting that hinders access to farmland—and high food prices. Underlying fragilities, such as climate change, underdevelopment and poverty, make some countries in conflict more vulnerable to hunger crises.

A presidential statement could recall messages from resolution 2417, including that the Council can and has sanctioned individuals

or entities obstructing the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including access to or distribution of such assistance.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Maintaining Council attention to conflict-induced hunger has been an important issue for the Dominican Republic. This is reflected by its role in organising the informal briefings for members on food insecurity in conflict situations, hitherto held in January and September 2019 and January 2020. Some members, in particular Russia, continue to have concerns about the Council taking up as a thematic issue food insecurity and hunger, which can have numerous causes and which the Council already addresses when it arises in country situations under discussion. Elected members have taken the lead on previous Council products on conflict and hunger, though with support from the P3. Sweden was penholder on the August 2017 presidential statement, and resolution 2417, adopted unanimously in May 2018, was put forward by Côte d’Ivoire, Kuwait, the Netherlands and Sweden.

Great Lakes Region

Expected Council Action

Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region Huang Xia is expected to provide his bi-annual briefing to the Council in April on the implementation of the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSC Framework) for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the region, and other recent developments in the region.

Key Recent Developments and Council Dynamics

The Council continues to follow several country issues in the Great Lakes region, including the DRC, Burundi and the Central African Republic (CAR).

In the DRC, President Félix Tshisekedi has been active in promoting cooperation between the DRC and its neighbours. This regional outreach comes in the context of

efforts to stabilise the eastern DRC, which remains volatile. The issue was most recently discussed at an informal interactive dialogue, held on 14 January, during which Special Envoy Xia also briefed. The Council held two meetings in consultations in November and December 2019 to discuss an increase in violence in the area.

While maintaining the dual strategic priorities of protecting civilians and supporting the stabilisation and strengthening of state institutions, the one-year renewal of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) mandate on 19 December 2019 in resolution 2502 also included a request to the Secretary-General to work with the government to create an exit strategy for the mission, due by 20 October. In general, Council members have maintained a positive view of the DRC’s political situation, with

concern focusing mainly on violence and the ongoing risk of re-emergence of Ebola in the DRC’s east. Despite differences on the best way to proceed with MONUSCO in the future, especially its Force Intervention Brigade, the Council adopted resolution 2502 unanimously.

In Burundi, the political situation remains unsettled. Presidential elections—the first since 2015, when Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza won a controversial third term—are scheduled for 20 May. Nkurunziza has said that he does not plan to run. On 26 February, Council members held an informal interactive dialogue (IID) on the situation in Burundi, during which Assistant Secretary-General for Africa Bintou Keita briefed. This was originally envisaged as a formal public briefing followed by consultations, but the president of the Council in February—Belgium—decided instead to hold an IID, which

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE GREAT LAKES REGION [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2507](#) (31 January 2020) extended the CAR sanctions regime until 31 July 2020 and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the CAR Sanctions Committee until 31 August 2020. [S/RES/2502](#) (19 December 2019) extended MONUSCO’s mandate until 20 December 2020. [Secretary-General’s Reports S/2020/124](#) (14 February 2020) was on MINUSCA. [S/2019/837](#) (24 October 2019) was on the situation in Burundi. [S/2019/783](#) (1 October 2019) was on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region. [Security Council Press Statement SC/14145](#) (16 March 2020) was on attacks against MINUSCA. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8728](#) (20 February 2020) was a briefing on the latest Secretary-General’s report on MINUSCA. [S/PV.8646](#) (25 October 2019) was a briefing on the latest Secretary-General’s MINUSCA report.

Great Lakes Region

allows for non-Council members to participate in an informal discussion. Though Burundi was invited, it did not participate in the meeting. During the meeting, some Council members emphasised the need for the upcoming elections to be held in an inclusive, peaceful and transparent manner.

At a briefing of the Human Rights Council on 9 March, its Commission of Inquiry on Burundi (COIB) warned that the situation in the country had worsened. The COIB highlighted attacks against opposition politicians and their families as well as “killings, disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detentions, acts of torture and ill-treatment and rape against actual or alleged political opposition members”. COIB members also reiterated the Commission’s concern about the humanitarian situation, including the 336,000 Burundian refugees in neighbouring countries.

Security Council members remain divided on Burundi. China and Russia have said that the country no longer belongs on the Council’s agenda, arguing that the situation is not a threat to international peace and security; the UK, amongst others, maintains that the country should remain on the agenda, given the political situation and human rights violations.

Regarding the CAR, there has been an overall decrease in violence since the Political Peace Agreement was signed on 6 February

2019 in Bangui, according to the Secretary-General’s 14 February report. However, violent incidents and human rights violations continue, and full implementation of the peace agreement has been delayed because of a lack of good faith by armed groups, some 14 of whom signed the agreement with the CAR government. One of those groups, the anti-Balaka, is reportedly responsible for the 15 March death of a UN peacekeeper who was part of the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). He was killed when elements of the anti-Balaka launched an attack on the central CAR town of Grimari. In a separate incident on 15 March, another peacekeeper was injured when his patrol on the Ndélé-Birao axis came under attack by elements of two armed groups. Finally, a CAR staff member of MINUSCA was also killed in Ndélé on 7 March. The Security Council issued a press statement on 16 March condemning the attacks.

CAR’s fragile situation was discussed in a Council briefing and consultations on 20 February. According to OCHA, approximately 2.6 million people require humanitarian assistance, with 669,000 civilians internally displaced and another 593,000 people seeking refuge outside CAR. Presidential, legislative and local elections are scheduled for

December 2020 and early 2021, and there are concerns about seeing electoral timelines met. At a Council briefing on 25 October, the Special Representative and Head of MINUSCA, Mankeur Ndiaye, warned that “a serious delay in holding the next elections could create a vacuum at the highest echelon of the State and lead to another political transition that... would be harmful to the consolidation of democracy, stability and peace in the Central African Republic”. More recently, during his 20 February briefing, he asked the international community to meet its technical, logistical and financial support so that the elections could be held “within the constitutional time frame”. While all Council members support the Political Peace agreement, there are some differences regarding CAR sanctions. Unlike previous unanimous renewals of the sanctions regime, China and Russia abstained on the Council’s January adoption of resolution 2507, arguing that the Council should do more to lift sanctions on the government.

While the Special Envoy has recently focused on mobilising resources to attract business and investment in the Great Lakes region, his office’s investment and trade conference, scheduled for 18-20 March in Kigali, was cancelled as a precaution in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Middle East (Israel/Palestine)

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council is scheduled to hold its quarterly open debate on “the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. Adjustments to Council working methods caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 may alter the format of the meeting, however. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov may brief

Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People”. Notable elements include:

- the incorporation of existing Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including the Jordan Valley, and East Jerusalem into the state of Israel;
- Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel;
- Palestinian statehood to be contingent upon the fulfilment of several conditions determined by Israel, such as the renunciation of violence and the disbanding of militant groups such as Hamas;
- the territory of the future Palestinian state to include the Gaza strip, parts of the West Bank, and some neighbourhoods on the

outskirts of Jerusalem;

- the linking of these different parts of a Palestinian state through new roads, bridges and tunnels;
- the Palestinian capital to be located “in the section of East Jerusalem...in all areas east and north of the existing security barrier”;
- a minimum four-year freeze in Israeli settlement construction, with existing settlements allowed to remain;
- \$50 billion in international investment, supplied by international donors mostly from among Arab nations, to build a new Palestinian state;
- a US embassy in the new Palestinian state; and

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST (ISRAEL/PALESTINE) Security Council Resolution S/RES/2334 (23 December 2016) was a resolution “[C]ondemning all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian Territory”. Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8730 (24 February 2020) was a regularly scheduled briefing on the Middle East. S/PV.8717 (11 February 2020) was a briefing focused on the US peace plan.

Middle East (Israel/Palestine)

- the preservation of the status quo of the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.

The Palestinian Authority, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the League of Arab States, and the AU Commission Chairman, among others, rejected the plan.

Indonesia and Tunisia circulated a draft resolution on 4 February that would have reiterated the Council's support for international parameters to resolve the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians. The initial draft, which would most likely have been vetoed by the US, strongly regretted "that the plan presented on 28 January 2020 by the United States and Israel breaches international law and the internationally-endorsed terms of reference for the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict". In addition, it reiterated the various UN resolutions and initiatives that call for a two-state solution based on pre-1967 borders. The draft was revised, following input from some members, and put under silence until 10 February. The US broke silence with a number of amendments, and the UK proposed further consultations on the draft. Subsequently, the penholders decided to postpone the vote to allow more time for consultations. At the time of writing, it remained unclear if Council negotiations on the text would resume.

The Security Council held a briefing on 11 February at the request of Tunisia and Indonesia that focused on the US peace plan. Secretary-General António Guterres made introductory remarks, and Mladenov provided the briefing. Guterres reiterated the commitment of the UN to the two-state solution, with "Israel and Palestine...living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines". Mladenov also reaffirmed this position, adding that absent "a credible path back to negotiations, we all face a heightened risk of violence...that will drag both peoples and the region into a spiral of escalation with no end in sight". During the meeting, President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority said of the US peace plan, "This deal dictates its own terms and the entrenchment of occupation, annexation by military force and the strengthening of the obsolete apartheid regime that has now returned to Palestine". Questioning Abbas' interest in peace, Israeli Ambassador Danny Danon, who spoke after

Abbas, said that the plan offered a starting point for negotiations.

The Council held its monthly meeting on "the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" on 24 February. Mladenov briefed, describing the difficult humanitarian situation in Gaza and adding that the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continued to confront significant funding obstacles. His briefing was followed by consultations.

For nearly a year, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party had been engaged in a tight bid for power with the Blue and White Alliance, led by Benny Gantz, a former Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces and a former Netanyahu ally. On 2 March, the third Israeli elections since April 2019 ended inconclusively. However, while citing the need for unity in light of the possible national crisis facing Israel with the outbreak of COVID-19, Gantz agreed on 26 March to join Netanyahu in forming a unity government that leaves Netanyahu as prime minister. At time of writing, the deal under discussion envisions Netanyahu retaining his post for 18 months, followed by an 18-month term for Gantz as prime minister.

In late February, in the lead up to the 2 March elections, the Israeli government approved the construction of thousands of homes for Israeli settlers on the West Bank. Netanyahu had said that Israel would annex all Israeli settlements located in Palestinian territories if he won the election.

On 18 March, Philippe Lazzarini was appointed the Commissioner-General of UNRWA. He most recently served as Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon in the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon.

In a video message on UNRWA's website on 20 March, Matthias Schmale, the Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, appealed to donors for materials such as hand sanitising gel, medicines, and protective equipment for health workers to help the area confront a potential COVID-19 outbreak. Almost 2 million people live in Gaza, which is densely populated and has a fragile health care system.

On 30 March, Council members convened an informal videoconference meeting on the situation the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Special Coordinator

for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov briefed. Council members issued press elements in which they welcomed ongoing Israeli-Palestinian coordination to address COVID-19. The meeting had originally been scheduled for 26 March as a briefing followed by consultations, but it was postponed and the format was changed due to the impact of COVID-19 on the Council's working methods.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 43rd session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) considered on 26 February the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights titled "Ensuring accountability and justice for all violations of international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem" (A/HRC/43/21). The report, covering 1 November 2018 to 30 October 2019, concluded that the period under review was characterised by "a persistent failure to ensure accountability for allegations of excessive use of force by the Israeli security forces in the context of the large-scale protests in Gaza and law enforcement operations in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem". The HRC also considered the report of the High Commissioner on "Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem" (A/HRC/43/67).

Key Issues and Options

The recent Israeli approval of increased settlement construction remains an important issue and will likely be addressed in this month's meeting. Other long-standing issues that may be raised in the meeting include the humanitarian situation in Gaza, the prospects for intra-Palestinian reconciliation, the demolition of Palestinian civilian structures in the West Bank, and the firing of rockets into Israel from Gaza. One new issue that may be discussed is how Israeli and Palestinian authorities are coordinating to address the spread of COVID-19 and preparations for a potential outbreak of the virus in the Gaza strip. On 18 March, a telephone conversation took place between Israeli President Reuven Rivlin and Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas on coordination regarding the response to the spread of COVID-19. Since then, Israeli authorities have taken steps to transfer testing kits and medical equipment into the Gaza strip.

The Dominican Republic, as president of the Council for April, could consider inviting a civil society representative to brief during the open debate—as was done twice in 2019, in April and November. Possibilities

Middle East (Israel/Palestine)

could include a human rights activist to discuss the likely human rights implications of the approval of additional Israeli settlement construction or a health expert to brief on needs and strategies to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

During April's meeting, members could also choose to discuss ways to revitalise the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, given the rejection of the US peace proposal by the Palestinians.

Council Dynamics

Deep divisions persist on this issue in the Council between the US and other members. Since President Donald Trump came

to office in 2017, the US has moved its embassy to Jerusalem, recognised Israeli sovereignty over the disputed Golan Heights, and declared that Israeli settlements are “not, per se, inconsistent with international law”, according to a statement by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in an 18 November 2019 press conference.

While the US has traditionally been staunchly pro-Israel, these decisions represent a shift in policy that is even closer to Israel. Other members support a position in line with that of the UN, calling for a two-state solution in line with pre-1967 borders; this view was widely reiterated during the Council meeting on 11 February. During the same

meeting, a number of members—France, Germany, Indonesia, South Africa and Vietnam—referenced resolution 2334 (2016), which declares that Israeli “settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967” have “no legal validity” and constitute “a flagrant violation under international law”. By calling for the incorporation of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, into the state of Israel, the US peace plan directly contradicts resolution 2334. Several members remain concerned that continued settlement construction undermines the potential for a two-state solution.

Kosovo

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council is expected to hold this year's first regular briefing on the situation in Kosovo. The Special Representative and head of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Zahir Tanin, will brief on recent developments and the latest report by the Secretary-General. In line with established practice, Serbia is likely to participate at a high level while Kosovo will probably be represented by its ambassador to the US.

Key Recent Developments

Following the resignation of Prime Minister Ramush Haradinaj in July 2019, Kosovo held general elections on 6 October. “Self-Determination”, a long-standing opposition party, came in first after winning 26 percent of the vote. The two major political parties, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), won 24 and 21 percent, respectively. The turnout, which stood at over 44 percent, was the highest ever recorded for a general election in Kosovo.

Almost four months after the elections, Self-Determination and the LDK reached an agreement on forming the new government. Albin Kurti, the leader of Self-Determination, became the prime minister on 3 February

after he received support from 66 lawmakers in the 120-seat parliament. The major opposition parties PDK, Alliance for the Future of Kosovo and Social Democratic Initiative did not participate in the vote. Ten members of parliament from the Serbian List (a political party representing the Serb minority in Kosovo) cast votes but abstained.

On 2 March, US National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien and US Special Envoy for Serbia and Kosovo Negotiations Richard Grenell hosted a meeting between Kosovar President Hashim Thaçi and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić at the White House. No specific agenda for the meeting was made public, but some media outlets have reported that the leaders were presented with versions of a draft final agreement on Kosovo. According to media reports, the final agreement would presumably include the potential for territorial adjustments, a possible mutual recognition, and UN membership for Kosovo.

There has been no progress in the EU-facilitated talks between Belgrade and Pristina. The dialogue has been at an impasse since November 2018 when Kosovo imposed 100 percent tariffs on Serbian imports. The EU and the US have continued to call for the tariffs to be revoked and for both parties to resume dialogue. Serbia has indicated that its

participation in the dialogue is contingent on the removal of the tariffs.

The tariffs have become a contentious issue between the coalition partners in the current government of Kosovo. Kurti has proposed a gradual easing of tariffs while Isa Mustafa, the leader of the LDK, called for their immediate and complete removal. Kurti and Mustafa also clashed on the appropriate way for Kosovo to address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. On 18 March, Kurti dismissed Interior Minister Agim Veliu for openly supporting Thaçi's suggestion that a state of emergency should be declared in light of the COVID-19 spread in Kosovo. Kurti has questioned the need for a state of emergency, citing a relatively low number of confirmed cases (20 at the time) and no deaths. Later the same day, Mustafa said he would seek a parliamentary vote of no confidence in Kurti's government, which took place on 25 March. The motion of no confidence received support from 82 members of the parliament which brought down the government. The Constitution mandates that the new elections be held within 45 days after the dissolution of the government. Given the COVID-19 pandemic it remains uncertain when Kosovo will be able to hold new next elections. On 20 March, the government of Kosovo approved

UN DOCUMENTS ON KOSOVO [Security Council Resolution S/RES/1244](#) (10 June 1999) authorised NATO to secure and enforce the withdrawal of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia forces from Kosovo and established UNMIK. [Secretary-General's Report S/2019/797](#) (4 October 2019) was on Kosovo. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8655](#) (31 October 2019) was a briefing on Kosovo. [Other S/2019/120](#) (7 February 2019) was a note by the Council president that said the Council would hold briefings on Kosovo in June and October 2019 and that as of 2020, briefings would be held twice a year (in April and October).

Kosovo

the decision to abolish the tariffs on import of raw materials from Serbia.

Key Issues and Options

The Council's primary concern is to maintain stability in Kosovo. The Council will also monitor developments in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina and efforts to reach a final agreement on Kosovo. Should there be a significant breakthrough on the diplomatic front, the Council could consider the possibility of adopting a formal outcome that would welcome this.

The EU has been the main facilitator of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, which resulted in the 2013 Brussels agreement on the normalisation of relations between the two. While there was progress in some areas, an issue for the Council remains the lack of implementation of the main aspects of the agreement (most notably the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb Municipalities in northern Kosovo) and what role, if any, UNMIK might play in facilitating its implementation.

Some members of the Council, the P3 in particular, have questioned the UNMIK reporting cycle and called for downsizing the mission in light of the relative overall stability on the ground. In February 2019, the P3 and EU members of the Council prevailed in their months-long effort to reduce the frequency of meetings on Kosovo. According to the agreement, from this year on the Council will hold two briefings on Kosovo annually, unless the Council decides otherwise. The Council could request the Secretary-General to conduct a strategic review of UNMIK to consider the effectiveness of the mission.

Council Dynamics

Kosovo remains a low-intensity issue for the Council and is closely followed mainly by members with a specific interest in the region. This is due in part to the pre-eminence in Kosovo of regional organisations, including the EU, NATO and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Nevertheless, deep divisions among permanent members have continued to

characterise the Council's consideration of Kosovo. France, the UK, and the US recognise Kosovo's independence and tend to be supportive of its government; China and Russia do not recognise Kosovo's independence and strongly support Serbia's position.

The US has been the most vocal proponent of a drawdown and eventual withdrawal of UNMIK, citing the level of stability in Kosovo. The US has also asserted that the mission is overstuffed and over-resourced for its limited responsibilities and that these resources could be put to better use in more pressing situations on the Council's agenda.

The issue of modifying UNMIK's mandate and possible drawdown is likely to become more prominent in the upcoming period given the growing number of Council members supporting this position. Alone among missions regularly discussed by the Council, UNMIK's mandate is open-ended. Any attempt to change it would require a new resolution, which Russia would strongly oppose and most likely block.

Youth, Peace and Security

Expected Council Action

As Security Council President in April, the Dominican Republic is planning to convene an open debate on the issue of youth, peace and security under the agenda item "Maintenance of International Peace and Security". Secretary-General António Guterres may brief the Council. Other briefers may include civil society representatives from youth-led organisations. At the time of writing, it was unclear whether the debate would be held as planned because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

A resolution is a possible outcome of the event. It is not expected, however, to be adopted during the debate but at a later date to allow for the discussion to inform the drafting.

Background and Key Recent Developments

The Council first addressed the issue of youth, peace and security at the initiative of Jordan

during the country's April 2015 presidency when it organised an open debate on the "role of youth in countering violent extremism and promoting peace". On 9 December 2015, the Council adopted resolution 2250, which mandated a progress study on youth, peace and security. The study in turn served as the basis for resolution 2419, the second resolution on the issue, adopted unanimously on 6 June 2018. This adoption was also preceded by an open debate, convened during the Peruvian Council presidency in April 2018. During Peru's subsequent July 2019 presidency, the Council heard a briefing on the implementation of resolutions 2250 and 2419 from Jayathma Wickramanayake, the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, and representatives from youth-led organisations in Afghanistan and Kenya. On 12 December 2019, the Council adopted a presidential statement drafted by South Africa focused on

mobilising youth around the "Silencing the Guns by 2020" initiative—a flagship project of the AU's Agenda 2063, which aims at ending all conflict in Africa by 2020.

On 2 March 2020, the Secretary-General issued his report addressing the issue of youth, peace and security. The report was mandated by resolution 2419, which recognised the role youth can play in conflict prevention and requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the implementation of resolutions 2250 and 2419 no later than May 2020. The report covered the period between December 2015 and December 2019 and addressed progress on the five pillars outlined by resolution 2250: participation of young people in peace processes, humanitarian contexts, and in national governance and political processes such as voting and running for office; protection of young people, in particular vulnerable groups such as refugees, and often-targeted

UN DOCUMENTS ON YOUTH, PEACE AND SECURITY [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2419](#) (6 June 2018) reaffirmed the important role that youth and youth-led civil society can play in peacebuilding and sustaining peace; it was adopted unanimously. [S/RES/2250](#) (9 December 2015) recognised the contribution of youth in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2019/15](#) (12 December 2019) focused on mobilising youth around the AU's "Silencing the Guns by 2020" initiative. [Secretary-General's Report S/2020/167](#) (2 March 2020) was the first Secretary-General's report on the issue of youth, peace and security.

Youth, Peace and Security

groups such as young peacebuilders and human rights defenders; prevention of violence by addressing underlying drivers of conflict through the provision of education and the economic inclusion of young people; fostering partnerships between youth-led organisations and member states, UN entities, and civil society; and inclusion of the needs of young people in planning for disengagement and reintegration in conflict and post-conflict environments.

The findings of the Secretary-General's report outlined progress in implementing the agenda in terms of the growing recognition on the part of governments, UN entities and civil society of the important role youth play in peace and security. The report stressed, however, that many challenges remain to achieving progress on the five pillars, such as structural barriers limiting the ability of youth to participate in decision-making and violations of their human rights. The Secretary-General referred to the report as a call to action while saying that "to create a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous world for all, young people need to be involved and conditions that enable them to unleash their full potential must be created".

In his overview of the implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda on the national level, the Secretary-General referenced positive examples of youth participation in peace processes in such countries as Colombia and the Philippines. He further emphasised the contribution youths have in such political processes by voicing their stand in less formal channels, such as organisation of peaceful demonstrations and online media campaigns.

The Secretary-General expressed grave concern, however, about the threats made against young peacebuilders and human rights defenders working in conflict areas,

noting the heightened dangers posed to women activists. He therefore stressed the responsibility of member states to ensure that these groups are protected and that perpetrators of violence against them are brought to justice. He said that to ensure coordinated action at a national level, governments need to incorporate youth, peace and security elements into broader policy frameworks, noting in particular the role that national parliaments can play by such means as adoption of relevant legislation and the commissioning of national road maps for youth, peace and security.

The report also noted the increasing engagement of the Security Council on the youth, peace and security agenda since the adoption of resolution 2250. The Council had interactions with young people in nearly half of its visiting missions undertaken during the period covered by the report and increasingly sought to hear briefings from youth representatives in country-specific debates, such as on Syria and Afghanistan. Furthermore, reports of the Secretary General to the Council about issues on its agenda have increasingly referenced youth-specific issues.

Key Issues and Options

The debate on youth, peace and security can serve as an opportunity for Council members and the wider UN membership to take stock of progress made in the implementation of resolutions 2250 and 2419 and share best practices and lessons learned at the national and regional level. It can also serve as a platform to discuss the Secretary-General's report on youth, peace and security and its recommendations and to devise priorities for action.

Council members may want to discuss the Secretary-General's recommendation that young people be encouraged to participate in

peace and security efforts, including within mission mandates. Currently, only approximately 24 percent of peacekeeping mission mandate renewal resolutions include provisions on youth. Members might therefore want to consider if and how they would want to modify future mandate renewal resolutions to include such provisions. Council members may also consider ways to ensure the protection of young peace builders and human rights defenders and increase accountability for perpetrators of violence against these groups.

The Council may adopt a resolution on the issue, subsequent to and informed by the open debate. Such a resolution may include a request to the Secretary-General regarding future reporting on the youth, peace and security agenda. The Dominican Republic could also choose to produce a chair's summary that would reflect the themes of the open debate.

Council Dynamics

Council members have differing views on youth, peace and security as an area of Council focus. During the negotiations on resolution 2419, it seemed that mainly China and Russia argued that the matter should be dealt with by other parts of the UN system while maintaining that it is not directly relevant to the Council's agenda. Some members might therefore not see a need for further reporting by the Secretary-General to the Council on this matter. It appears, however, that other members support having Council engagement on this issue and would have preferred even stronger language in resolution 2419 about the positive role youth can play on peace and security matters.

Sudan/South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council is expected to receive a briefing on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei

(UNISFA), due by 15 April, as requested in resolution 2497.

The mandate of UNISFA expires on 15 May.

Key Recent Developments

On 14 November 2019, the Council adopted resolution 2497, renewing the mandate of UNISFA until 15 May. The resolution maintained the authorised troop ceiling at 3,550

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN/SOUTH SUDAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2497 (14 November 2019) extended UNISFA's mandate and its support to the JBVMM until 15 May 2020. S/RES/2492 (15 October 2019) extended UNISFA's support for the JBVMM until 15 November 2019. Secretary General's Report S/2019/817 (15 October 2019) was on the situation in Abyei. Security Council Letter S/2020/112 (7 February 2020) was a note from the Secretary-General on progress made in implementing the mission's mandate, requested in resolution 2497. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8644 (24 October 2019) was a briefing on Sudan/South Sudan.

Sudan/South Sudan

and the police ceiling at 640. It also extended the mission's support for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM), established in 2011 to conduct monitoring and verification activities along the Sudan-South Sudan border, until 15 May. The resolution expressed concern that the delayed full deployment of UN police prevents UNISFA from fulfilling its mandate and may create a security vacuum in Abyei, the disputed territory along the Sudan/South Sudan border. It also expressed concern about efforts by both Sudan and South Sudan to impede UNISFA from executing its mandate fully, including by withholding visas for police and blocking the appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission. In relation to the latter, the resolution reiterated the request to the Secretary-General to appoint a civilian deputy head of mission for UNISFA, which was first requested in resolution 2469, adopted on 14 May 2019. (See our What's In Blue story of 13 November 2019.)

The overall security situation in Abyei remains fragile. Two major incidents took place on 19 and 21 January. On 19 January, three people from the Misseriya community were killed in an attack in the Kolom area of Abyei. On 21 January, an armed attack targeting the local Ngok Dinka community in the Kolom area was reportedly perpetrated by Misseriya armed elements, resulting in 35 confirmed deaths.

The Security Council adopted a press statement on 29 January, condemning these incidents of violence between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities in the Kolom area. The press statement welcomed reports that the governments of Sudan and South Sudan had committed to de-escalate tensions and jointly investigate the violence. It also "expressed disappointment that the governments of Sudan and South Sudan have obstructed full implementation of UNISFA's mandate", particularly the deployment of police and the civilian deputy head of mission, requested in resolution 2497, which had not yet been fulfilled.

As requested in resolution 2497, Council members received a note on 7 February from the Secretary-General that reported on progress made in implementing the mission's mandate, including the increase in police and the appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission, and progress in achieving the JBVMM

benchmarks. The note expressed concern that the mission "could be overstretched if no progress is made on the deployment of the proposed three formed police units to address the increase in criminal activities". It said that one formed police unit is expected to be deployed by the end of March and the second as soon as possible. Discussions with Sudan and South Sudan were still ongoing in relation to the appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission, according to the note. The JBVMM "has made some progress on the benchmarks" set out in resolution 2497, as outlined in the note.

The Council was last briefed on the issue on 24 October 2019 by Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga. Lacroix referred to the "unprecedented opportunity" to resolve the border-related issues between Sudan and South Sudan, adding that following recent positive developments in bilateral relations, the two countries need to resume direct talks immediately to resolve the final status of Abyei. Onanga-Anyanga also referred to the improved relations between the two countries, adding that the list of pending issues remains extensive, with most of the commitments agreed to in 2012 not yet implemented.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 20 March, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, released a statement expressing serious concern over the escalation in intercommunal violence in South Sudan. Since mid-February, hundreds of people have been killed, women and children subjected to sexual violence and homes destroyed, forcing thousands to take refuge in makeshift camps, the statement said. The high number of weapons used by rival clans, tensions linked to the movement of cattle and access to natural resources were identified as contributing to the increase in violence along with the failure of local and national authorities to respond.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council to consider leading up to UNISFA's mandate renewal in May is the overall appropriateness of the mission's current mandate in relation to the situation on the ground and what modifications, if any, to make to the mandate and force structure. This assessment is likely to be informed by the Secretary-General's report on UNISFA

due by 15 April, as requested in resolution 2497.

The difficulty of obtaining visas for members of UNISFA's police component has been a longstanding issue attributed to the non-issuance of visas by Sudan. Another issue is the failure to appoint a civilian deputy head of mission, as requested by the Council in May 2019, in light of ongoing discussions with Sudan and South Sudan. In this context, members will most likely be eager to hear more about the steps taken to resolve these issues.

Other issues Council members will be following closely are the significant recent political developments in Sudan and South Sudan, including the establishment on 22 February of the Transitional Government of National Unity in South Sudan, and the impact these developments may have on the situation in Abyei. An option would be to encourage Sudan and South Sudan to intensify their engagement to advance towards a political resolution of their common border issues.

Council Dynamics

As in previous years, the Council's focus on the situation in Abyei remains limited, largely overshadowed by its ongoing engagement on South Sudan and Sudan. However, the upcoming 15 May expiration of UNISFA's mandate and its support for the JBVMM present opportunities for Council members to direct attention to the issue.

Negotiations around the mission's troop and police levels have generally been contentious in the past, with the US typically seeking further troop reductions. It has asserted 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. The US has also pressed for a viable exit strategy for the mission. Unlike previous years, however, the US did not seek a troop reduction during negotiations on resolution 2497 in November 2019, making negotiations far less contentious than during previous mandate renewals.

The US is the penholder on Sudan/South Sudan.

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