

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

Due to protective measures in place in New York City in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, under which non-essential workers are required to stay at home, the Monthly Forecast for May is distributed solely in electronic format, as it was last month.

In May, Estonia has the presidency of the Security Council. In light of the Secretariat's anticipated closure extending into May, the Council is expected to continue using the provisional measures agreed on at the end of March and beginning of April.

There will be two virtual open debates this month. The first is a meeting on [working methods](#), with briefers still to be announced, and the second is on [protection of civilians](#), where Secretary-General António Guterres and ICRC President Peter Maurer are the anticipated briefers. Because the special measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic will still be in effect at the time of the debates, statements by non-Council members are likely to be submitted in writing.

Several regular Middle East meetings are scheduled. On [Syria](#), open and closed video teleconferences (VTCs) on the political and humanitarian situation and a closed VTC on the use of chemical weapons are anticipated. A closed VTC briefing is expected on developments in [Yemen](#).

Two closed VTC meetings are anticipated on [Lebanon](#). The first is on the implementation of resolution 1701, which called for a cessation of hostilities between the Shi'a militant group Hezbollah and Israel in 2006 and which was originally scheduled in March but postponed because of COVID-19 pandemic-related measures. The second meeting is on the implementation of resolution 1559, which called for the disarmament of all militias and the extension of government control over all Lebanese territory.

Regarding African issues, there will be several meetings on [Libya](#). The ICC prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, will provide her semi-annual briefing in a closed VTC. There will be open and closed VTCs on UNSMIL and Libya sanctions.

An open VTC briefing on the [Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel \(FC-G5S\)](#), focused on the Secretary-General's bi-annual report on the FC-G5S, is anticipated. In addition, there will be an open and closed VTC on the [UNSO \(Somalia\)](#).

Regarding [European](#) issues, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, who assumed the position on 1 December, will brief Council members in an open VTC. The High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Valentin Inzko, will brief in an open VTC on his latest report.

The chair of the [1718 Democratic People's Republic of Korea Sanctions Committee](#), Ambassador Christoph Heusgen (Germany), is expected to brief Council members in a closed VTC.

In addition, the Council will need to adopt resolutions to renew the mandates of [UNAMI \(Iraq\)](#), [UNISFA \(Abyei\)](#) and [AMISOM \(Somalia\)](#). A resolution will also be needed to renew the South Sudan sanctions regime—including targeted sanctions and the arms embargo—which expires on 31 May. The Council may adopt a resolution renewing the mandate of the [South Sudan Sanctions Committee Panel of Experts](#). The Council may also adopt a resolution establishing a follow-on presence to [UNAMID](#). As agreed at the end of March 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 VTC. Finally, a resolution related to [COVID-19](#) may be adopted in early May.

The Council is expected to follow developments on [Burundi](#), [Myanmar](#) and [Iran](#) nonproliferation and may hold VTC briefings if needed.

30 April 2020

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In Hindsight: Security Council Working Methods in the Time of COVID-19

For nearly two weeks following its last pre-COVID-19 formal meeting on 12 March, the Security Council became invisible and—in the eyes of the general public and fellow UN members—appeared to be idle. A new programme of work was posted on the Council's website on 16 March, with that week's meetings cancelled but retaining those for the weeks of 23 and 30 March. The subsequent versions of the programme of work listed fewer and fewer meetings, and the last one, posted on 27 March, showed no meetings between 12 and 31 March.

Yet March 2020 became an extremely busy month for Council members. When it became probable that the measures being contemplated to curb the spread of COVID-19 would leave the Council unable to meet physically, its members, with Secretariat support, began preparing for the use of video teleconferencing (VTC) instead. During the week of 16 March, there were some ten rounds of testing these virtual meetings, initially mainly at the political coordinators' level and gradually also involving the permanent representatives and their deputies.

While numerous technical difficulties were gradually resolved, some fundamental procedural challenges arose. Key among them was whether VTC meetings would be considered official meetings of the Council, reflected on the programme of work and listed in the UN Journal. If the virtual meetings would not be considered formal meetings of the Council, how would the Council perform certain essential tasks, such as adopting resolutions to renew mandates that would otherwise expire?

These and other working methods and procedural matters were under intense discussion among members, with the March presidency, China, playing the leading role and as a priority, seeking agreement on a procedure that would allow members to adopt decisions. During the second half of March, members reached agreement on a written voting procedure to adopt resolutions that “would have the same legal status as those voted in the Chamber” and would also allow members to explain their vote in writing in a document that would be posted on the Council website. Members also agreed to a process for holding meetings by VTC.

On 24 March, members held their first fully virtual meeting: a briefing on the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic

Republic of the Congo, followed by virtual meetings on Libya on 26 March, Syria on 30 March, and Afghanistan on 31 March. Using the new written voting procedure, the Council adopted four resolutions in late March—three renewing mandates and one on the safety and security of peacekeepers. To the outside world, however, the Council was still invisible because there was no agreement among members about announcing, webcasting and keeping records of the meetings.

Writing to the president of the Security Council on 30 March, the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group of 25 member states raised concerns about the Council's ability to discharge its mandate. It also warned that unless the Council was able to continue to adapt its working methods to the unprecedented circumstances, “the present way of operating also risks undermining progress made over the years in strengthening the transparency, inclusion and accountability of the Council towards the wider UN membership” (S/2020/252).

Facing the prospect of holding its entire April presidency under the COVID-19 measures, the Dominican Republic began working in late March on a set of temporary measures aimed at enabling the Council to conduct as much of its business as possible with greater transparency, a stronger record of developments, and means for the Council to communicate with the broader UN membership and the outside world.

Building on the newly emerging practices and using the terminology developed under the Chinese presidency, the Dominican Republic proposal foresaw two types of VTCs, open and closed, with open VTCs being equivalent to briefings or debates and closed VTCs being reserved for meetings that would have taken place in consultations. The briefings in open VTCs were to be broadcast live and then stored in the UN video archives. Starting on 21 April, the exchanges between Council members after open VTC briefings have also been broadcast and archived. The set of measures negotiated during the last days of March and adopted on 1 April at the closed VTC meeting of the Permanent Representatives on the programme of work also included formulations that would allow written records to be kept of the open VTCs. It was agreed that the president of the Council would circulate the text of the briefings and

a compilation of members' statements as letters addressed to the Secretary-General and the other Council members' permanent representatives, issued as official Security Council documents. Furthermore, there would be an effort to negotiate and issue elements to the press following closed VTCs that the president would convey through a short VTC.

During the negotiations, the programme of work itself posed a particular challenge. All the meetings of the Council held virtually would be considered unofficial, leading some members to claim that the programme could not be formally adopted. There was also no agreement on announcing the VTC meetings in the UN Journal. For the sake of transparency, a compromise was reached whereby on the first day of the presidency members would agree on an “Informal Plan of VTC of the Security Council”, which would then be posted on the Council's website.

Members also agreed in late March on measures that would allow non-Council members to participate in some Council discussions. China worked out an agreement among members allowing for participation of “specially affected” non-Council members in certain VTCs, and the Dominican Republic expanded the possibility of issuing such invitations to other member states, members of the Secretariat or individuals. A 14 April note verbale from the Dominican Republic sent to all UN members and observer missions outlined modalities for submission of written statements for VTCs that had originally been planned as open debates. Both measures added a degree of transparency to the new working methods.

Both the Chinese and the Dominican Republic presidents of the Security Council resorted to an unusual format to communicate the agreed upon provisional working methods to Council members and the public. They each issued a letter “from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council” (S/2020/253 of 27 March 2020 and S/2020/273 of 2 April 2020, respectively). Presidents of the Security Council do not habitually communicate with the other 14 members by such letters. Almost all letters from Security Council presidents over the last decade-and-a-half are addressed to the Secretary-General and convey the Council's consent to a personnel

In Hindsight: Security Council Working Methods in the Time of COVID-19

appointment, a plan to conduct a visiting mission or to acknowledge receipt of a proposal. It appears that the format of a letter from the president to all Council members to convey the agreed temporary procedures was chosen to emphasise the extraordinary and temporary nature of the measures developed by the respective presidencies. (With the above measures applying initially through April and in light of the UN Secretariat's anticipated closure extending into May, that month's Council presidency, Estonia, was at the time of writing preparing a letter that would allow the Council to continue to work remotely.)

At the same time as Council members were developing their new temporary working methods, the Security Council's website introduced new, user-friendly features, allowing those not on the Council to follow

along more readily. The home page now has a button labelled "VTC meetings and outcomes March-April 2020" and links to the key documents about the provisional measures, while the monthly informal plan of VTCs is located under the "Monthly" button, and the "Daily" button contains information on the Council's work plan for the day. The videos of meetings have been archived by the UN website under the usual button of "Meetings/Security Council".

In its first few weeks of operating under the UN's COVID-19 measures, the Council has gone from initial procedural rigidity to displaying considerable creativity and flexibility. The ability to adapt its working methods has been a feature that the Council has displayed throughout its history. The Security Council started grappling with its working methods

at its very first meeting on 17 January 1946, when it needed to adopt rules of procedure before it could proceed. These were presented in draft form by the UN Preparatory Commission, and the Council adopted them on an interim basis. But the draft rules immediately prompted many questions and concerns, and the Council set up its first subsidiary body that day, a sub-committee for the consideration and possible revising of the rules, charged with reporting back to the Council "as soon as possible" (S/PV.1). The sub-committee tried for several months to agree on the rules. But on 24 June 1946, the Council gave up efforts to reach an agreement and adopted the rules as provisional. Through many new practices, documentation and communication methods in the intervening decades, the rules have nonetheless remained provisional ever since.

Status Update since our April Forecast

Lake Chad Basin

On 1 April, Council members issued a press statement condemning the 23 March terrorist attack in Boma, Chad, in which at least 98 persons were killed and 47 wounded, and the attack on military vehicles near Goneri in Yobe State, Nigeria, the same day, in which at least 47 persons were killed (SC/14155).

Mali

On 7 April, Council members convened an informal open video teleconference (VTC) meeting, followed by a closed VTC meeting, on the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2020/223) on Mali and MINUSMA. Special Representative and head of MINUSMA Mahamat Saleh Annadif briefed, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali, Tiébilé Dramé, also addressed members during the open session (S/2020/286). In press elements, members called on the government and the UN to continue working together to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and for MINUSMA to continue delivering on its mandate despite the pandemic, while ensuring the safety and security of its staff and peacekeepers. Members welcomed progress implementing the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, underlined that more progress

was needed, and reiterated their call on member states to provide necessary capabilities for the MINUSMA adaptation and the need for relevant General Assembly bodies to examine the plan's financial implications.

MH17

On 8 April, Council members held a meeting under "any other business", on developments related to the legal proceedings on the downing of flight MH17. Russia requested the meeting as a follow up to the 6 March letter (S/2020/181) by the Netherlands, on behalf of Australia, Belgium, Malaysia and Ukraine, sent to the Council president. The letter informed the Council that the criminal trial of four individuals (three Russians and one Ukrainian) who are charged for their role in downing flight MH17 would start on 9 March in The Hague under Dutch law. After the meeting, the Russian mission issued a statement to the press in which it questioned the independence and transparency of the criminal proceedings in The Hague. At a virtual press stakeout after the meeting, Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany and Poland welcomed the legal process in The Hague and called out Russia for not cooperating with the investigation.

COVID-19

On 9 April, Security Council members held a VTC meeting with Secretary-General António Guterres on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on situations on the Council agenda. At the outset of his statement, Guterres said that "[T]he world faces its gravest test since the founding of this Organization". The ensuing discussion included the pandemic's impact on peacekeeping operations, special political missions and humanitarian responses, and the Secretary-General's global ceasefire appeal. In press elements, members "expressed their support for all efforts of the Secretary-General concerning the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to conflict-affected countries and recalled the need for unity and solidarity with all those affected". Discussions also continued on a Security Council resolution on the pandemic. On 23 April, under "any other business" during a closed VTC meeting, France and Tunisia presented as co-penholders a draft resolution, which had merged the two separate texts that had been negotiated among the P5 and E10, respectively,

Western Sahara

On 9 April, Council members held a closed VTC meeting on Western Sahara and MINURSO. Special Representative Colin Stewart

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and Assistant Secretary-General for Africa Bintou Keita briefed. Member states were apparently told that the Secretary-General is working hard to find a new Personal Envoy (the post has been vacant for 11 months). After the meeting South Africa appeared to suggest adopting press elements, however one permanent member was unable to agree, and no press elements were issued.

Colombia

On 14 April, Security Council members convened an informal open VTC meeting (S/2020/305), followed by a closed VTC meeting, on the situation in Colombia. Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu briefed the Council on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission (S/2020/239). Council members were also briefed by David Santiago Cano Salazar, a civil society youth leader from Colombia who shared his personal experience in leading and participating in projects to support the reintegration of ex-combatants from the former rebel group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). On 17 April, Council members adopted a press statement in which they reiterated their unanimous support for the peace process in Colombia (SC/14163). They expressed grave concern over the attacks against human rights defenders, community and social leaders, including those from indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, and former FARC-EP members. They further urged the regular convening of the National Commission on Security Guarantees and called for progress in developing a public policy to dismantle illegal armed groups.

Great Lakes Region

On 22 April, the Council held open and closed VTC meetings on the Great Lakes Region. Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region Huang Xia briefed (S/2020/325). According to Xia, COVID-19 has killed 131 people in the region and there have been over 4,700 cases. He expressed his worry about the lasting economic impact the virus could have on the already-weakened countries. He said his office continues to watch the upcoming elections in Burundi and the Central African Republic, while welcoming progress made to normalise relations between Rwanda

and Uganda. After the closed meeting, Council members released press elements. They welcomed positive steps taken in the region to deescalate tensions and increase regional cooperation. Council members also urged closer cooperation among the region in order to defeat COVID-19. They expressed their full support to Xia and his office.

Climate Change and Security

On 22 April, an Arrria-formula meeting was held via VTC on "Climate and security risks: the latest data" and broadcast live on the Facebook page of the Permanent Mission of France to the UN. It was co-organised by Belgium, France, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, Germany, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the UK and Viet Nam. The briefers were Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; Robert Malley, President and CEO of International Crisis Group; and Dan Smith, Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Venezuela

On 22 April, Council members convened a meeting on Venezuela under "any other business" at the request of Russia. The meeting was requested following Venezuela's 3 April letter to the Council (S/2020/277) referring to the US announcement that it would deploy warships to the western Caribbean Sea "close to the Venezuelan coast". Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and Americas Miroslav Jenča briefed the Council, while describing the political divisiveness in the country and recalling the Secretary-General's offer to provide "good offices" if requested by the government and the opposition. On 28 April, Council members held an informal closed VTC meeting to discuss the humanitarian situation in Venezuela, at the request of the Council's EU member countries (Belgium, Estonia, France and Germany). Reena Ghelani, OCHA's Director for Operations briefed the Council on the humanitarian situation and the impact of the spread of COVID-19 in the country, while calling for increased access to humanitarian assistance and more funding for humanitarian response. Following the meeting, the Council's EU member countries together with Poland held a press stake-out where they expressed concern about the spread of the pandemic in Venezuela, which

was already struggling with a grave economic, social and humanitarian situation, while stressing the need for the de-politicisation of humanitarian aid and the need to uphold the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, humanity, impartiality and independence.

Middle East (Israel/Palestine)

On 23 April, Council members held an open VTC on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov briefed. He expressed concern about threats of annexation of part of the West Bank by Israel and maintained that such a course of action would have a devastating impact on the possibility of a two-state solution (S/2020/341).

Kosovo

On 24 April, the Security Council held an open VTC briefing on the situation in Kosovo (S/2020/339). Zahir Tanin, Special Representative and head of UNMIK, briefed on the latest Secretary-General's report (S/2020/255) and the most recent developments. Serbia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dačić and Kosovo's Minister of Foreign Affairs Glauk Konjufca also participated in the meeting. The focus of the meeting was the political situation in Kosovo, after the collapse of government and response to COVID-19 pandemic.

Youth, Peace and Security

On 27 April, Council members held an open VTC meeting entitled: "Towards the fifth anniversary of the youth and peace and security agenda: accelerating implementation of resolutions 2250 and 2419" (S/2020/346). The Council was briefed by Secretary-General António Guterres and Jayathma Wickramanayake, the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth. The Council also heard briefings from two civil society members: Olla Al-Sakkaf of Yemen, a project coordinator in the "Youth Without Border Organization for Development" and Gatwal Augustine Gatkuoth Yul of South Sudan, founder of the "Young-adult Empowerment Initiative" in Uganda. The Dominican Republic circulated a concept note ahead of the debate (S/2020/302). In addition to Security Council members, 44 member states and regional organisations participated in the debate by sending their written statements.

Sudan (Darfur)

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council is expected to make a decision regarding the drawdown and exit of the UN/AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). In accordance with resolution 2495 and following the 30 March adoption of resolution 2517, which maintained UNAMID's current troop and police ceilings until 31 May, the Council is likely to adopt a resolution establishing a follow-on presence to UNAMID. The adoption is expected to take place at the end of May under procedures put in place in March in light of COVID-19 and the Council's updated working methods.

Key Recent Developments

On 31 October 2019, the Security Council adopted resolution 2495, extending the mandate of UNAMID until 31 October. Notwithstanding that mandate expiry, the resolution set 31 March as the date by which the Council should decide on the mission's troop and police ceiling and take the necessary steps to establish a follow-on presence to UNAMID.

Resolution 2495 also requested the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the AU Commission to provide the Council with a special report. The report, which was initially due no later than 31 January, was to provide an assessment of the situation on the ground, an update on the peace process, recommendations on the appropriate course of action regarding the drawdown of UNAMID, and options for a follow-on UN presence.

In a letter to the Council on 31 December 2019, the Secretary-General asked for a one-month extension from 31 January to 28 February for the submission of the report to allow for further high-level consultations with AU and Sudanese officials. The report was circulated on 12 March.

The report provides updates on political developments in Sudan as well as the peace process. The overall security situation in most parts of Darfur remains unchanged, while "intercommunal tensions... can escalate to a significant level of violence, far beyond the capacity of the Sudanese rule of law institutions to respond". Security incidents in Khartoum and West Darfur, according to the

report, "underscored the fragility of the transition period". Human rights abuses, including some by uniformed personnel, are still widespread while nearly two million persons remain displaced. The report takes account of the 27 January letter from Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok to the Secretary-General, calling for the establishment of a Chapter VI peace support operation in the form of a special political mission, and assesses a second letter from Hamdok, dated 27 February, as "aligned with the strategic objectives outlined" in the special report.

As for options for a follow-on presence, the report sets out four core objectives for UNAMID's successor: support for the achievement of political benchmarks in the Constitutional Declaration, including the Constitution and elections; implementation of peace agreements in the conflict-affected areas; strengthening human rights and rule of law institutions and scaling-up support for recovery and development to build resilience and mitigate protection risks; and facilitating international support for economic reform with a path to sustainable development. The recommended option for the follow-on presence, the reports notes, is "the establishment of a political and peacebuilding integrated support presence, headquartered in Khartoum, with responsibility for all of the Sudan, taking into account the request expressed by the Sudanese authorities."

Coupled with COVID-19's impact on the work of the Council, delays in the Council's receiving the special report contributed to the postponement of a Council meeting on UNAMID that had initially been scheduled for 18 March. This, in turn, led to the penholders' determination that a two-month extension of the deadline for deciding on the drawdown and exit of UNAMID and the establishment of a follow-on presence was necessary. Council members supported this approach. On 30 March, the Council adopted resolution 2517, which called for the mission's troop and police ceilings and its team sites to be maintained and extended until 31 May to allow the Council to decide on "courses of action regarding the responsible drawdown and exit of UNAMID...[and]...

adopt a new resolution... to establishing a follow-on presence to UNAMID". (See our What's In Blue story of 27 March.)

The delayed meeting was eventually held on 24 April as an open video teleconference (VTC) followed by a closed VTC. It focussed on the operations and drawdown of UNAMID and a discussion about the follow-on mission. The impact of COVID-19 on both the mission's current operations and the timeline for UNAMID's transition was also raised, with Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix noting that UNAMID's drawdown would likely be delayed by several months. While all Council members agreed on the need for a drawdown of UNAMID and a successor presence with a Sudan-wide mandate, the meeting also highlighted differences on contentious issues, such as whether military and/or police components should remain in Darfur and what role a successor mission might play on protection of civilians, human rights, security sector reform, and other issues. (See our What's In Blue story of 27 April.)

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 30 March, the chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan transmitted his report covering the period of 12 December 2019 to 25 March 2020 to the president of the Security Council. As the chair was unable to deliver the quarterly briefing to the Council as planned owing to the changes in the Council's working methods due to COVID-19, he asked that his written report be circulated to the Council. The report notes that the Panel of Experts conducted a visit to Sudan in February in order to gather "important information pertaining to the peace process and the military and financial capabilities of the Darfuran armed groups in Darfur and the region, as well as the regional dynamics and security issues". The panel reported good cooperation from the Sudanese government and noted that it was able to gain access to previously unauthorised areas. The report also noted that the sanctions committee chair's planned trip to Sudan in April had been postponed due to COVID-19 precautions.

Key Issues and Options

The Council will need to assess several key issues—including the overall situation in Darfur and the impact of the broader political

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN (DARFUR) [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2517](#) (30 March 2020) maintained UNAMID's current troop and police ceilings until 31 May. [S/RES/2495](#) (31 October 2019) renewed UNAMID's mandate until 31 October 2020. [Secretary-General's Report S/2020/202](#) (12 March 2020) was the special report of the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the AU Commission that was requested in resolution 2495. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8718](#) (11 February 2020) was a meeting to adopt resolution 2508, extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts for one year. [S/PV.8654](#) (31 October 2019) was the meeting to adopt resolution 2495. [Sanctions Committee Documents S/2020/250](#) (30 March 2020) was a letter from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan addressed to the president of the Security Council containing his report to the Council.

Sudan (Darfur)

situation in the country as well as future tasks and mandate—to establish a successor presence to UNAMID. One option would be for the Council’s determinations to be based on the findings and recommendations of the 12 March report. Council members are expected also to take into account the views presented by Prime Minister Hamdok in his two letters to the Council, including an initial request for a special political mission. The role of the AU will also need to be assessed, given UNAMID’s hybrid nature.

The impact that COVID-19 is having, and may continue to have, on Sudan will also be an important issue for the Council to consider in the context of Sudan’s current situation as well as the effect it will have on the future mission. Given that the Secretary-General has suspended troop rotations until 30 June and that Port Sudan and Sudan’s airports remain closed, the timelines for establishing any follow-on mission are likely to be delayed by several months.

Council Dynamics

The scope and pace of UNAMID’s drawdown, reconfiguration, and eventual exit have been contentious among Council members in the past. More recent negotiations, including on resolution 2495 in October 2019, were relatively smooth, notably because of the 22 October 2019 letter from Hamdok requesting the mission’s extension.

Despite consensus on the need for a follow-on mission to UNAMID, Council members continue to hold divergent positions about the situation in Darfur. Some members, such as co-penholder Germany, have cautioned that any transition has to be informed by the conditions on the ground while others, such as China, assert that the situation in Darfur remains largely stable. Russia has argued that the situation in Darfur is “steadily normalizing” and, as such, the Council “should respect the leadership of Sudan on the question of Darfur [and]... strengthen communication and coordination with the government of the Sudan”. The US has noted that it “supports a follow-on UN mission

with a countrywide mandate to continue assistance to the new Sudanese government”.

Council members have also disagreed on the impact of UNAMID’s drawdown in Darfur and some of the core elements of the follow-on mission’s work. Some members, such as the UK, have raised concerns about the potential effect police reductions will have on the security and human rights situations in Darfur while others, such as South Africa, have questioned the efficacy of having a small contingent of formed police units in a successor mission. Other issues, such as what role the follow-on mission will have in human rights and security sector reform, are also contentious areas. While there appears to be agreement that a follow-on mission need not be of a hybrid nature, several Council members will be keen to find ways to ensure that the UN and AU work together after UNAMID’s transition.

The UK and Germany are co-penholders on Sudan. Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia) chairs the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee.

Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force

Expected Council Action

During May, the Council usually meets on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (FC-G5S), which Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger (G5 Sahel) decided to establish in February 2017 to combat terrorist and criminal groups in the region. Prior to this, members will receive the Secretary-General’s bi-annual report on the FC-G5S.

Key Recent Developments

The Sahel region continues to be destabilised by terrorist groups and inter-communal violence often exacerbated by these groups. The deteriorating situation has prompted a series of new security initiatives since January.

At a summit of heads of state in Pau, France, on 13 January, G5 Sahel countries and France reaffirmed their commitment

to combating terrorism and created a new Coalition for the Sahel that is open to other partners. The coalition will address security measures, strengthen state capacities, and coordinate development initiatives. Its immediate military efforts will be concentrated in the Liptako-Gourma tri-border region of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger under the joint command of France’s regional counter-terrorism force, Operation Barkhane and the FC-G5S. A joint command mechanism has since been established, consisting of a joint command post to plan operations and an intelligence-sharing cell in Niamey, Niger, as well as the deployment of G5 Sahel officers to Barkhane’s headquarters in N’Djamena, Chad.

France also announced in early February that it was deploying 600 additional troops to reinforce Operation Barkhane, increasing

it to 5,100 troops. On 27 March, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, the Netherlands and Portugal, as well as Sweden (pending parliamentary approval) committed special forces to the French-led Task Force Takuba at a ministerial meeting held remotely of 11 European countries, Mali and Niger for the launch of the new force. The task force is under the command of Operation Barkhane and expected to become operational later this year to advise, assist and accompany Malian armed forces, in coordination with G5 Sahel partners, in fighting terrorist groups in the Liptako region.

Moreover, at the AU’s annual summit in February, African leaders requested the AU Commission to develop a framework for a possible six-month deployment of a force composed of the Multinational Joint Task Force (mandated by the AU Peace and

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE G5 SAHEL JOINT FORCE [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2480](#) (28 June 2019) expanded MINUSMA’s provision of life-support consumables to all G5 Sahel joint force contingents. [S/RES/2391](#) (8 December 2017) outlined ways in which MINUSMA should support the G5 Sahel joint force. [Secretary-General’s Report S/2020/223](#) (20 March 2020) was the latest report on MINUSMA. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8670](#) (20 November 2019) was a briefing on the G5 Sahel joint force. [Security Council Press Statements SC/14155](#) (1 April 2020) condemned the 23 March terrorist attack in Boma, Chad, in which at least 98 were killed and 47 wounded, and the attack on military vehicles near Goneri in Yobe State, Nigeria, the same day, in which at least 47 were killed. [SC/14029](#) (21 November 2019) was on the G5 Sahel joint force.

Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force

Security Council to fight Boko Haram, the terrorist group based in the Lake Chad basin) and 3,000 troops to deter terrorist groups in the Sahel.

Despite these efforts, the security situation remains dire. Terrorist groups continue to be a threat in northern Mali despite recent progress in the peace process. In Mali's centre, the situation has continued to deteriorate as a result of these groups' expansion and inter-communal attacks, which Council members discussed during a 7 April meeting on Mali. On 9 January, Niger's military suffered the deadliest attack in its history when suspected Islamic State militants attacked a base in Chinegodar, Tillabery region, near the Malian border, killing at least 89 soldiers. This followed a 10 December 2019 attack also in western Niger in which 71 soldiers were killed.

In Burkina Faso, terrorist and intercommunal violence had displaced 839,000 people by 25 March, compared with 87,000 people in January 2019. Security and community self-defence groups also continue to be implicated in abuses. According to Human Rights Watch, security forces detained and executed 31 men from the ethnic Fulani group on 9 April during a government counter-terrorism operation in the northern town of Djibo. This followed a series of other killings of Fulani, who are often accused of supporting terrorist groups, including the reported killing of 32 civilians in Mansila, Yagha province, by security forces on 6 March and the 8 March killing of 43 Fulani in Dinguila and Barga villages, Yatenga province, by Koglweogo self-defence militias. The COVID-19 pandemic has added a new layer of challenges for Burkina Faso after the country recorded its first two cases on 9 March. The Second Vice President of the National Assembly, Rose Marie Compaoré, died of COVID-19 on 18 March, and on 22 March it was reported that the ministers of foreign affairs, mines, education, and the interior had all tested positive for COVID-19.

Chad's military suffered its worst losses in a single attack by Boko Haram when at

least 98 soldiers were killed on 23 March in Boma, Chad. On 29 March, Chad launched a counter-insurgency operation. At the conclusion of the 10-day operation, which deployed troops to Niger and north-eastern Nigeria, the government claimed that over 1,000 Boko Haram militants had been killed, with a loss of 52 soldiers.

Key Issues and Options

Taking stock of progress and challenges in operationalising the FC-G5S and the support it receives from the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) is a key issue for the session in May. The upcoming Secretary-General's report may acknowledge some progress, including an increase in operations.

Promoting and ensuring that the FC-G5S complies with international humanitarian law, which is necessary for UN support and critical for effective counter-terrorism, is a related issue. Complementing security measures by addressing structural problems that contribute to instability in the Sahel, such as governance and underdevelopment, through the UN's Sahel Strategy and the G5 Sahel Priority Investment Programme is a further issue frequently underscored during Council discussion on the FC-G5S.

In May, the Secretariat is expected to conduct an assessment of MINUSMA's support for the FC-G5S. Resolution 2391 from December 2017 set out that MINUSMA provide medical and casualty evacuation capabilities, access to life-support consumables such as rations and fuel, and engineering support for FC-G5S units operating in Mali, for which the mission is reimbursed through an agreement with the EU. This support was expanded in last year's resolution 2480 renewing MINUSMA's mandate to allow all joint force contingents to receive life-support consumables, provided the FC-G5S or a third party delivered the assistance and units benefitting from it complied with the UN human rights due diligence policy.

The assessment is likely to flag what is working well and what is not, ways to remedy shortcomings and problems, and possibly other areas where MINUSMA could provide support. Council members are likely to consider and may incorporate findings from the assessment when renewing MINUSMA's mandate in June.

Council Dynamics

While Council members have all expressed support for the FC-G5S, they often raise concerns that the force has struggled to become fully operational. France is a strong advocate of the force, which is important as part of a long-term exit strategy for Operation Barkhane. In addition, Niger, new to the Council this year, as a G5 Sahel member is likely to be a strong proponent of the joint force. However, at the time of writing Niger has raised objections to the anticipated May briefing, apparently sensitive about the Council discussing alleged human rights abuses committed by security forces. Estonia, also new to the Council, contributes troops to Operation Barkhane. Several Council members contribute to other security initiatives in the region, including MINUSMA and EU training and capacity building missions, as well as regional development initiatives that, members frequently stress, require equal attention in order to stabilise the Sahel.

The Council has been divided over whether the UN should provide financial support to the FC-G5S. Over the last year-and-a-half, it has put on hold discussion of the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a UN support package for the force to allow more time for the FC-G5S to demonstrate its effectiveness and how it uses funding already committed to it. In addition to the US preference to assist the FC-G5S bilaterally, it has been wary of authorising MINUSMA to support the FC-G5S.

France is the penholder on the G5 Sahel joint force.

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council expects to vote on a resolution to renew the South Sudan sanctions regime—including targeted sanctions and the arms embargo—which expires on 31 May. The mandate of the South Sudan Sanctions Committee Panel of Experts expires on 30 June, and the Council is also expected “to take appropriate action regarding [its] future extension” by 31 May, as stipulated in resolution 2471.

Key Recent Developments

On 22 February, the Transitional Government of National Unity was established in South Sudan, marking the start of a 36-month transitional period ahead of the holding of elections, in accordance with the terms of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) signed on 12 September 2018. Riek Machar was sworn in as First Vice President, followed by four other vice-presidents. Machar has pledged to work with President Salva Kiir during the transitional period to implement the R-ARCSS. At the time of writing, the parties continued to disagree on their allocation of the ten state governorships, with the government maintaining that its supporters should have six of these posts.

On 12 March, the Council adopted resolution 2514, extending the mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) until 15 March 2021. The resolution maintained the overall force levels with 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 violations and abuses—with broad agreement from Council members on each of these components. One departure from previous years is that support for the peace process now precedes monitoring and investigating human rights in the order of mandated responsibilities. (See our What’s In Blue story from 11 March.)

The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) adopted a communiqué on 9 April in

which it congratulated the government and people of South Sudan on the establishment of the transitional government and welcomed the “significant improvement in the general security and humanitarian situation” in the country. The communiqué called on South Sudanese stakeholders to work together against COVID-19. It also urged member states that had imposed sanctions on South Sudan to remove them “in order to facilitate the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement and create conducive conditions for socio-economic recovery and development in the country”.

The government of South Sudan has taken a number of measures to prevent an outbreak of COVID-19, including forming a high-level task force to address the epidemic, instituting a national curfew, and suspending air travel between states within the country, among other measures. As of 20 April, there have been four reported cases in South Sudan. If not contained, there is the potential for the virus to have a devastating impact on the country, given the tens of thousands of people living in overcrowded camps for internally displaced persons and South Sudan’s fragile and under-resourced health care system.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 20 March statement, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, expressed “serious concerns about the escalation in intercommunal violence in central and eastern South Sudan in the past month”, urging State authorities “to curb the bloodshed and bring those responsible to justice”. Hundreds have been killed, women and children have been subjected to sexual violence, and many homes have been set afire, forcing thousands to take refuge in makeshift camps since the rise in attacks began in mid-February, the statement said. In an 8 April statement, the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan urged the recently formed Transitional Government of National Unity to increase efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19, including halting all armed hostilities. The nearly 1.5 million internally displaced persons in the country “are at a heightened risk of exposure to COVID-19 due to their limited access to basic services such as healthcare, water, hygiene and sanitation, food, and adequate housing. Many have often had to travel for hours or days to reach healthcare facilities, leading to high levels of preventable deaths among displaced populations,” the statement said.

Sanctions-Related Developments

At the time of writing, the members of the South Sudan Sanctions Committee were considering the final report of the Panel of Experts. The panel’s interim report, dated 22 November 2019, said, “The region has not consistently enforced the arms embargo or the asset freeze and travel ban on sanctioned individuals.” The report also noted challenges related to transparency and oversight in the country’s management of its natural resources.

Key Issues and Options

An immediate key issue for the Council is to make a decision on renewing the sanctions regime and the Panel of Experts. In doing so, the Council could signal its concerns about misuse of public resources by government officials in ways that undermine stability in the country. It might also encourage South Sudan’s cooperation and dialogue with the Panel of Experts. Another option is to consider incorporating benchmarks into a resolution outlining conditions that would need to be met for targeted sanctions and the arms embargo to be lifted.

Another key issue for the Council is the implementation of the arms embargo and targeted sanctions imposed by resolution 2471. The findings and recommendations of the panel’s final report, not yet available at this writing, are likely to inform the Council’s further consideration regarding implementation of the sanctions regime.

Council Dynamics

Sanctions on South Sudan remain a divisive issue in the Council. When the Council last renewed the sanctions regime in May 2019 through resolution 2471, there were only ten affirmative votes, along with five abstentions. While most members of the Council believe that sanctions are a useful tool to foster stability in the country, other members (for example, China, Russia and South Africa) are concerned that they could undermine the political progress that has been made.

The US is the penholder on South Sudan. Ambassador Dang Dinh Quy (Viet Nam) chairs the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee.

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOUTH SUDAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2514 (12 March 2020) renewed the mandate of UNMISS until 15 March 2021. S/RES/2471 (30 May 2019) extended the sanctions regime and mandate of the Panel of Experts until 31 May 2020. Sanctions Committee Document S/2019/897 (22 November 2019) was the interim report of the Panel of Experts.

Lebanon

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council is expected to hold two meetings on Lebanon in closed video teleconference (VTC) format. The first meeting will be a briefing on the latest Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701, which called for a cessation of hostilities between the Shi'a militant group Hezbollah and Israel in 2006. This meeting was originally scheduled to take place in March but was postponed because of the impact of COVID-19 on the Council's working methods. The Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Ján Kubiš, and Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix are expected to brief the Council.

In the second meeting, the Council is expected to receive the semi-annual briefing on the Secretary-General's latest report on the implementation of resolution 1559. Adopted in 2004, resolution 1559 called for the disarmament of all militias and the extension of government control over all Lebanese territory. Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo is expected to brief the Council.

The mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) expires on 31 August.

Key Recent Developments

Lebanon continues to experience uncertainty amid a persistent economic crisis and growing popular unrest, which were compounded in the past two months by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Protests that erupted in October 2019 led to the resignation of the government of former Prime Minister Saad Hariri on 29 October 2019. Hassan Diab, whom Lebanese President Michel Aoun designated as the new prime minister, formed a new government on 21 January, vowing to implement sweeping reforms to address the countries' economic and political straits.

Lebanon is currently in the midst of its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war, which is characterised by a deep recession, a sharp rise in unemployment, and escalating inflation. Large fiscal deficits accumulated since the end of the civil war have resulted in Lebanon having the world's third highest ratio of debt to gross domestic product (GDP). In addition, Lebanon failed to

make a \$1.2 billion Eurobond payment that was due on 9 March, harming its creditworthiness. It was the first time the country has defaulted on sovereign bonds in its history. The dire economic spiral was exacerbated by the halting of economic activity caused by the nationwide lockdown instituted in Lebanon since 15 March in a bid to stop the spread of COVID-19.

On 15 April, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicted that Lebanon will experience a 12 percent contraction of its economy in 2020. On 16 April, Diab announced that the Lebanese government had reached out to the IMF to seek its advice on an economic rescue plan. At the time of writing, the proposed plan was still under discussion by the Lebanese cabinet.

The rise in unemployment rates—which had been precariously high before the COVID-19 pandemic—has sparked concerns among aid agencies that large swaths of society in Lebanon will face food insecurity. Lebanese government officials have estimated that approximately 75 percent of the population is in need of assistance because of the spread of the virus. On 27 April, popular discontent about the steep surge in food prices and the sharp depreciation of the Lebanese national currency led citizens in several cities across the country, including Beirut and Tripoli, to ignore the lockdown measures by gathering in public to protest their grievances towards the government. According to media reports, some of the protests turned violent, with protestors vandalising banks and clashing with government security forces, leading to the injury of 81 security personnel and the death of one protestor.

As of 27 April, Lebanon had 710 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 24 fatalities from the virus. Concerns have been raised about the possibly devastating effects the virus could have in the densely populated refugee communities in Lebanon, which is host to approximately 1.5 million Syrian and Palestinian refugees. At the time of writing, only one case of COVID-19 had been reported among the refugee population. During a 6 April meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon (ISG)—comprising the UN; the governments of China, France,

Germany, Italy, Russia, the UK and the US; and the EU and the Arab League—Special Coordinator Kubiš expressed the UN's support for the steps taken so far by the Lebanese government to address the spread of COVID-19 while stressing the need to ensure that it will “offer the same level of services to all patients, regardless of their legal status and nationality”.

During late March and early April, there were numerous security-related incidents along the Israel-Lebanon border. However, no major escalation of violence threatened the relative calm in UNIFIL's area of operations. In a 3 April letter, the Permanent Representative of Lebanon said that three Israeli warplanes entered Lebanese airspace on 31 March and fired missiles at Syrian territory. In a 16 April letter, Lebanon alleged that on 15 April Israel again violated Lebanese airspace to carry out an attack on Syrian territory, this time targeting a vehicle at the Judaydat Yabus crossing on the Lebanon-Syria border. According to media reports, a senior Hezbollah official was in the vehicle but escaped injury. A 19 April letter from the Permanent Representative of Israel said that Hezbollah violated resolution 1701 in two incidents—on 26 March, when Hezbollah reportedly launched a Tactical Remotely Piloted Aerial Vehicle from southern Lebanon into Israeli airspace, and on 17 April, when the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) detected three locations where Hezbollah had allegedly breached the security fence along the Blue Line, a border demarcation between Israel and Lebanon.

The Secretary-General's 10 March report on resolution 1701 noted that while UNIFIL's freedom of movement was generally respected during the reporting period, several incidents of restricted movement occurred. The most serious incident took place on 10 February in Bar'ashit when a UNIFIL patrol was blocked by 15 individuals, who then attacked four peacekeepers, one of whom sustained minor injuries. The Secretary-General further expressed concern that UNIFIL has not been able to access areas north of the Blue Line in connection with its investigations into the events of 1 September 2019, in which Hezbollah launched several missiles targeting the IDF south of the Blue Line, and

UN DOCUMENTS ON LEBANON Security Council Resolutions [S/RES/2485](#) (29 August 2019) renewed UNIFIL's mandate until 31 August. [S/RES/1701](#) (11 August 2006) called for a cessation of hostilities between the militant group Hezbollah and Israel. [S/RES/1559](#) (2 September 2004) called for the disarmament of all militias and the extension of government control over all Lebanese territory. [Secretary-General's Reports S/2020/329](#) (24 April 2020) was on the implementation of resolution 1559. [S/2020/195](#) (10 March 2020) was on the implementation of resolution 1701. [S/2019/819](#) (15 October 2019) was on the implementation of resolution 1559.

Lebanon

into tunnels crossing the Blue Line in contravention of resolution 1701.

Women, Peace and Security

In his latest report on the implementation of resolution 1701, the Secretary-General emphasised the leading role played by women during the protests “in de-escalating tensions and maintaining non-violence”. Following clashes between sectarian groups on 26 November 2019 in different parts of Lebanon, Christian and Muslim women on 27 November 2019 marched peacefully to show their rejection of sectarian strife. The cabinet of Prime Minister Diab has six female members – including the Minister for Defence (a first for both Lebanon and the Arab region), who is also the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Minister for Justice – constituting 30 percent of the government.

The “Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018-2028” lays out the Secretary-General’s plan on how “to double the numbers of women in military and police contingents of UN peacekeeping operations”, according to resolution 2242 of 13 October 2015 on women, peace and security. As at 26 March, UNIFIL had six percent female uniformed personnel. In the UN Truce Supervision Organization, which serves with the Observer Group Lebanon under the operational control of UNIFIL, 11 percent of uniformed personnel were female. In his observations, the Secretary-General encourages troop-contributing countries “to increase the number of women among military personnel in UNIFIL”.

The Secretary-General’s report further says that UNIFIL and the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon had received no allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Key Issues and Options

A key priority for the Council continues to be ensuring the stability of Lebanon in light of the economic and political turmoil engulfing the country. The main concern for the Council is how to address the political instability and prevent a deterioration of the security situation.

A main issue remains the persistent maintenance of arms by Hezbollah and other non-state actors in contravention of resolutions 1559

and 1701, which restricts the government’s ability to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory. Such a situation contributes to tensions along the Israel-Lebanon border, raising concerns regarding a possible uptick in hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah. While the situation in UNIFIL’s area of operations remains relatively calm, ongoing violations of resolutions 1701 and 1559 by both sides demonstrate the precariousness of the situation on the ground. The main priority for the Council therefore remains to work towards ensuring the full disarmament of armed groups in Lebanon and achieving a permanent ceasefire between the sides.

A new area of concern is the impact that COVID-19 on the fragile health and financial institutions in the country and on vulnerable groups such as refugees. Council members may therefore be interested in hearing from the briefers about the potential impact that COVID-19 might have on the stability of the country and on any challenges it might pose to the ability of UNIFIL to perform its duties. They may also ask for a briefing by OCHA on how the international community can further assist refugee communities in Lebanon in light of the conditions created by the spread of the virus.

Members could consider issuing a statement calling on the government to ensure an adequate response to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on all segments of the population while taking into account the needs of vulnerable groups such as refugees and low-income individuals. They may also want to echo the Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire to combat the spread of COVID-19 while urging Israel and Lebanon to fulfil their obligations under resolutions 1701 and 1559.

Council Dynamics

There is a strong consensus among Council members in their support for Lebanon’s

sovereignty, territorial integrity and security. The Council has also been united in repeatedly calling on all Lebanese parties to recommit to Lebanon’s policy of dissociation from the Syrian crisis and to desist from any involvement there. In this regard, some members might welcome the fact that the ministerial statement adopted by Diab’s government on 11 February vowed to uphold Lebanon’s dissociation from regional crises.

Council members have however expressed differing views regarding UNIFIL’s role in the region. The US has taken the view that the mission should play a more active role in confronting the threats the US considers most serious—those posed by Iran, Hezbollah, and the proliferation of weapons in southern Lebanon.

During the negotiations on resolution 2485, which most recently renewed the mandate of UNIFIL, the US argued that the mission’s role should be reconsidered, given that UNIFIL is unable to fulfil part of its mandate because it lacks access to parts of its area of operations. The resolution thus included strengthened language about the need for freedom of movement for the mission, as well as a call for the Secretariat to conduct an assessment of the mission by 1 June, taking into consideration the troop ceiling and civilian component of UNIFIL. Some Council members may choose to pose questions to the briefers about the expected assessment in the upcoming consultations.

Other members—including France and Russia—have emphasised that no changes should be made to the mission’s mandate. These members are cautious about changing the mandate because of the potential impact on the fragile calm that has been maintained in southern Lebanon for over a decade.

France is the penholder on Lebanon.

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council is expected to receive briefings by the Acting Special Representative and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Stephanie Williams, and the chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, Jürgen Schulz, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany. A Secretary-General's report on UNSMIL is also due in May. Additionally, ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda will deliver her semi-annual briefing on recent developments concerning cases in Libya.

UNSMIL's mandate expires on 15 September 2020. The authorisations given by resolutions 2473 (to inspect vessels believed to violate the arms embargo) and 2491 (to inspect vessels suspected of migrant smuggling or human trafficking) expire on 10 June 2020 and 3 October 2020, respectively. Measures related to the illicit export of petroleum from Libya expire on 30 April 2021, and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee expires on 15 May 2021.

Key Recent Developments

Over a year ago, General Khalifa Haftar, head of the eastern-based militia known as the Libyan National Army (LNA), launched an offensive towards Tripoli against the internationally recognised and UN-backed Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) based there. Libya does not have professional security forces, and the GNA currently relies on armed groups for its security. Both the LNA and the GNA receive foreign military support in breach of UN sanctions. International efforts to facilitate a permanent ceasefire between the parties have been unsuccessful so far. In recent weeks, fighters aligned with the GNA have made significant gains against the LNA. On 27 April, Haftar dismissed the 2015 UN-brokered "Libyan Political Agreement" and announced his intention to rule the country.

As a result of the Berlin Conference on Libya in January, negotiations between

Libyan parties along three tracks (economic, political and security) are underway but with different levels of progress. Participants in the economic track have met twice; because of the COVID-19 pandemic the third meeting was postponed. Members of the different working groups under this track are still unable to meet remotely. The political track has come to a halt after its inaugural meeting on 26 February. Following the second round of talks on the security track that concluded on 23 February, the conflict parties agreed on a draft ceasefire agreement and were expected to present it to their leadership. The participants of the Berlin Conference further agreed to establish an International Follow-Up Committee (IFC) to coordinate efforts to implement the Berlin Conference conclusions. The latest meeting of the IFC took place virtually on 2 April. The Council endorsed the conclusions of the Berlin Conference in resolution 2510 of 12 February (adopted with Russia abstaining). In a 4 April press release, UNSMIL said that "despite commitments made by all of the participants at the Berlin Conference, some of these countries have nevertheless continued to brazenly resupply one or the other side of the conflict, in a flagrant disregard of the arms embargo".

The Special Representative and head of UNSMIL, Ghassan Salamé, announced that he was resigning from his post on 2 March, citing stress-related health reasons. Secretary-General António Guterres appointed Deputy Special Representative Stephanie Williams as Acting Special Representative and head of UNSMIL on 11 March. The Secretary-General has yet to appoint a successor.

UNSMIL released a call for a humanitarian ceasefire addressed to the conflict parties and an end to military interference in Libya to allow for a rapid response to COVID-19, on 17 March. The GNA responded positively to the call on 18 March, as did the LNA on 21 March, which was welcomed in a statement by the Secretary-General's spokesman on that day.

The Secretary-General called for "an immediate global ceasefire" on 23 March.

On the same day, fighting had resumed in Libya, according to media reports, and Libya's health minister confirmed the country's first case of COVID-19. The institutional fragmentation of Libya resulted in parallel authorities in the west and the east announcing measures to contain the spread of COVID-19. In a 24 March UNSMIL press release, Williams strongly condemned "grave violations of the humanitarian pause". On 25 March, media reports quoted residents of Tripoli as saying they had experienced the worst fighting in weeks.

The Secretary-General launched the UN's \$2.01 billion "Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19" (GHRP) on 25 March, with Libya as a priority country. The plan outlines Libya's vulnerabilities to the outbreak as "insecurity, political fragmentation, a weak health system and high numbers of vulnerable people, including migrants, refugees" and internally displaced persons. As of 30 April, Libya had 61 confirmed cases of COVID-19. At the time of writing, the GHRP has been funded at 43.8 percent, with \$1.13 billion outstanding.

At the time of writing, the UN's 2020 humanitarian response plan for Libya of \$114.9 million has been funded at 11.4 percent, with \$101.8 million outstanding. According to UNSMIL, about 149,000 people are internally displaced as a result of Haftar's offensive on Tripoli, 356 people have died, and 329 people were injured as of 31 March. UNSMIL said that "the humanitarian situation has deteriorated to levels never previously witnessed" in the country.

The Secretary-General published an update on his call for a global ceasefire on 2 April, acknowledging that "respect for the humanitarian pause was short-lived" in Libya, "with clashes between GNA and LNA forces escalating drastically on all frontlines in the next days". The escalation includes attacks on health care providers. The Secretary-General's spokesman strongly condemned "the heavy shelling, for the second consecutive day, of Al Khadra General Hospital in Tripoli" in

UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2510](#) (12 February 2020) endorsed the conclusions of the Berlin Conference on Libya; it was adopted with 14 votes in favour and one abstention (Russia). [S/RES/2509](#) (11 February 2020) renewed the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee until 15 May 2021 as well as the measures related to the illicit export from Libya of petroleum until 30 April 2021; it was adopted with 14 votes in favour and one abstention (Russia). [S/RES/2491](#) (3 October 2019) renewed for 12 months the authorisation for member states, acting nationally or through regional organisations, to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya that they have reasonable grounds to suspect are being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking. [S/RES/2486](#) (12 September 2019) extended UNSMIL's mandate until 15 September 2020. [S/RES/2473](#) (10 June 2019) renewed for 12 months the authorisation for member states, acting nationally or through regional organisations, to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya bound to or from the country that they have reasonable grounds to believe are violating the arms embargo. [Secretary-General's Report S/2020/275](#) (6 April 2020) was the latest report on the implementation of resolution 2491. [Security Council Letter S/2020/203](#) (10 March 2020) was a letter from the Secretary-General, containing the list of members of the Panel of Experts supporting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, appointed according to resolution 2509.

Libya

a statement on 8 April. The statement furthermore condemned “the continued attacks on medical personnel, hospitals and medical facilities”, assets that are particularly critical in times of COVID-19. The Royal Hospital in Tripoli was also hit in fighting on 17 April.

The Council held a closed video teleconference on the new EU military operation in the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED IRIINI) on 8 April. EUNAVFOR MED IRIINI operates under the Council’s authorisation in resolution 2473 to implement the Council’s arms embargo.

According to a statement by the Humanitarian Coordinator for Libya, Yacoub El Hillo, on 10 April, Tripoli’s water supply was cut off by an armed group, an “abhorrent” measure that originated “in the Shwerif area as a pressure tactic to secure the release of family members” a few days earlier. Later that day, mediation efforts led to an apparent agreement, and access to water began to be re-established on 13 April.

Indiscriminate shelling of civilian neighbourhoods continues to be part of the ongoing military conflict in Libya. In a 15 April press statement, UNSMIL condemned the LNA’s “indiscriminate bombardment of Tripoli with rockets, many of which have landed on civilian neighbourhoods”.

ICC-Related Developments

Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, the son of Muammar Gaddafi, whose extradition has been sought by the ICC for the alleged commission of crimes against humanity, has been at large since he was set free by the Abu-Bakr al-Siddiq Brigade, a Zintan-based militia, in June 2017. Gaddafi submitted a motion on 6 June 2018 to the ICC that his case was inadmissible. On 4 April 2019, Pre-Trial Chamber I rejected Gaddafi’s inadmissibility challenge

by majority; he appealed the ruling on 11 April 2019. On 9 March, the Appeals Chamber confirmed the admissibility of his case unanimously.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 17 April, the spokesperson for the High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed grave concern over continued fighting in Libya, including its impact on civilians, hospitals, and other medical facilities in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. “Despite numerous calls for a global ceasefire during these difficult times, including from the UN Secretary-General, we have received reports that attacks have in fact escalated in Libya”, the spokesperson said. He also noted that from the start of the year until the end of March, UNSMIL documented at least 131 civilian casualties (64 deaths and 67 injuries), an overall increase in civilian casualties of 45 percent compared to the previous three months.

Women, Peace and Security

The latest Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of resolution 2491 authorising vessel inspections on the high seas off the coast of Libya, described the risk of drowning while crossing the Mediterranean as higher for children and women and said women constituted 11 percent of those embarking from Libya. Detention of migrants and refugees in the country continues to carry “a high risk of sexual and gender-based violence”. Those crimes are perpetrated with impunity. Guards of the Directorate for Combating Illegal Migration and armed groups employ sexual violence “as a form of torture”, control and humiliation. The report also described conditions for women and girls in detention facilities, including a lack of female guards, strip-searches in front of or by male guards, a lack of privacy in sanitation facilities, and no access to sexual and reproductive health services, including menstrual hygiene products and necessities for nursing and pregnant women. Outside detention centres, migrants and refugees also risk sexual and gender-based violence. In the observations of his

report, the Secretary-General said these crimes were “unacceptable” and called for them to be addressed “as a matter of urgency”.

Key Issues and Options

Libya faces the COVID-19 pandemic in the midst of the ongoing military conflict, which is characterised by an increase in military activity overall, including indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure. The recent increase in the targeting of health care providers has exacerbated an already dire humanitarian situation. Council members could issue a statement condemning these attacks and reiterating the calls for a humanitarian ceasefire. Progress made on the implementation of the conclusions of the Berlin Conference on Libya, specifically the three tracks, will be closely followed by Council members.

Council Dynamics

The Council continues to be divided over Libya. Council outcomes routinely call upon UN member states to cease support for parallel institutions in Libya, but some countries, including members of the Council, fail to respect these calls.

The semi-annual briefings by Bensouda on cases in Libya have had limited impact, given divisions among Council members on whether to take action to support the implementation of ICC decisions.

The UK is the penholder on Libya, sharing the pen with Germany on the sanctions file. Jürgen Schulz, Germany’s Deputy Permanent Representative, chairs the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee.

Syria

Expected Council Action

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

measures adopted because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the three meetings will be held through video teleconference (VTC).

Key Recent Developments

In the wake of the 5 March ceasefire agreed between the Russian Federation and Turkey and amid concerns about the impact of COVID-19 in Syria, the Security Council

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. Secretary-General’s Report S/2020/139 (28 February 2020) reviewed alternative modalities for the border crossing of Ya’rubiyah. Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8734 (27 February 2020) was a meeting on the political and humanitarian situation in Syria. Security Council Letters S/2020/254 (31 March 2020) was a letter from the president of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the permanent representatives of Council member states containing the record of the 30 March 2020 open VTC meeting on Syria.

Syria

convened an informal VTC meeting on 30 March on the political and humanitarian situations in the country. Special Envoy Geir O. Pedersen addressed progress on the political process, while Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock described the ongoing humanitarian situation in north-western and north-eastern Syria and OCHA's efforts to implement resolution 2504, which renewed the authorisation of cross-border humanitarian aid into Syria through two border crossings (Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa) for six months. The situation of COVID-19 in Syria, including how restrictions put in place by the Syrian government could impede delivery of humanitarian assistance, was front and centre. Lowcock emphasised Syria's overall unpreparedness for an outbreak, asserting that, after nine years of conflict, the country's health infrastructure is severely depleted. Displaced populations are especially vulnerable to COVID-19, with camps for displaced persons remaining overwhelmed; an outbreak could severely strain an already stretched humanitarian response. (At press time, Syrian authorities had reported 38 confirmed cases of COVID-19, none of which were in the north-west.)

On 6 April, the Secretary-General released a summary of the Board of Inquiry (BOI) report into attacks on sites in north-west Syria that had been included on a "deconfliction" list, which, according to OCHA, is "the exchange of information by humanitarian actors with military actors in order to... avoid potential hazards for humanitarian personnel". The BOI analysed seven attacks on hospitals, schools and camps for internally displaced persons, offering conclusions on six sites. Of these, it found that it was "highly probable" that attacks were "carried out by the Government of Syria and/or its allies" in four of the incidents, by the "Government of Syria" in one incident, and by an "armed opposition group" in another. The BOI determined that it did not have a mandate to review and investigate one of the sites: it was "unable to establish that the [As-Suqaylabiyah] Hospital received support from the UN" despite the World Health Organization's "provid[ing] material support to the Hospital around the time of the incident". The report offers recommendations on steps to prevent similar incidents and asserts that OCHA

should undertake to improve the "deconfliction mechanism".

On 8 April, Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Director-General Fernando Arias submitted the first report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT). The IIT, which was established to identify perpetrators of chemical weapons attacks in Syria following a June 2018 decision of the Conference of State Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention, was formed after the Council failed to renew the UN-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism, which it established through resolution 2235 of 7 August 2015 "to identify those responsible" for the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The IIT report highlights three chemical weapons attacks in March 2017 in Ltamenah, concluding that there were "reasonable grounds" to believe that the Syrian Air Force conducted all of the attacks. Moreover, the reports said that military operations "of such a strategic nature as these three attacks" could only have occurred "pursuant to orders from the highest levels" of the Syrian Armed Forces. However, the IIT was unable to reach a definitive conclusion on the chain of command. Nor did it obtain any information that the Syrian authorities had investigated or brought about prosecutions with regard to these incidents.

On 15 April, the Council held a closed VTC meeting with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. While this was the regular meeting on the implementation of resolution 2118, which prohibits Syria from using, developing, stockpiling or retaining chemical weapons, the session apparently focused primarily on the IIT report, which had been publicly released the week before. Despite the meeting being closed, statements subsequently published on respective Council members' mission websites suggest that the meeting further illustrated differences on the Council regarding the use of chemical weapons in Syria and the work of the IIT. The Russian Federation maintained that it "had no doubts that [the IIT's] main purpose would be to whitewash the illegal acts of aggression against Syria" and that the IIT "echo[ed] baseless accusations". Other Council members, including Germany, the UK and Estonia, expressed

concern about the need for accountability for those deemed responsible for the attacks.

The 5 March ceasefire agreement appears to have reduced violence in Syria's north-west. While there have been reports of sporadic ceasefire violations, there have been no reports of aerial bombardment. The Turkish Defence Ministry announced on 21 April that five joint Russian-Turkish patrols along the M4 security corridor had now taken place. Improvements in the security situation in the area have been overshadowed by concerns about a possible COVID-19 outbreak. Fearing an outbreak of COVID-19, over 100,000 people have left overcrowded camps to return to damaged homes around Idlib, according to media reports.

At press time, the Council was scheduled to meet on 29 April to discuss political issues and the humanitarian situation. The humanitarian briefing was expected to include an update on the response to COVID-19 in Syria and OCHA's operations as well as progress regarding resolution 2504. The status of an "independent written review" of the cross-line and cross-border operations and recommendations, required by resolution 2504, was also expected to be discussed. The Special Envoy was expected to update on his nationwide ceasefire call and the status of a third constitutional committee meeting.

Key Issues and Options

A key immediate issue is how the Council might address the issue of COVID-19 in Syria. While there was broad agreement that steps need to be taken on this when the issue of Syrian government restrictions was raised on 30 March, Russia was critical of OCHA, saying that it was "untimely and inappropriate to criticize Damascus and impose new conditions regarding humanitarian access". In May, Council members could ask OCHA to brief on how a potential outbreak would affect its operations in both the north-west and the north-east, especially given the closure in January of the Ya'rubiyah border crossing on the Syrian-Iraqi border.

The Council may wish to revisit the issue of the 5 March ceasefire agreement. One option would be for the Council to ask to be updated on the ceasefire and to explore how the Special Envoy could use it as part of achieving a nationwide ceasefire.

With the submission of the summary of

Syria

the Board of Inquiry's report to the Council, 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 report's recommendations vis-à-vis OCHA with Lowcock.

Though the OPCW IIT report was discussed on 15 April as part of the regular chemical weapons briefing, it had not been officially transmitted to the Council at press

time. The Council could discuss the report with the OPCW in a private-meeting format. Council members often meet on chemical weapons issues in Syria in closed consultations, in which non-UN officials and non-Council members are not permitted to participate. That is not the case with private meetings, the format used when the Council discussed the use of chemical weapons in Syria with Fernando Arias 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.

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

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council will hold its semi-annual debate on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The High Representative for BiH, Valentin Inzko, is expected to brief on the latest report of the Office of the High Representative (OHR). Because of the temporary measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the debate is expected to be held as a video teleconference (VTC).

The current authorisation for the EU-led multinational stabilisation force (EUFOR ALTHEA) expires on 5 November.

Key Recent Developments

After the general elections took place on 7 October 2018, it took Bosnia's main Bosniak, Croat and Serb parties approximately 14 months to form a new national government—called the Council of Ministers—which was endorsed by the state parliament on 23 December 2019.

However, the predominantly Bosniak and Croat regional entity, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH)—one of two entities that make up BiH along with the predominantly Serb Republika Srpska (RS)—is still without a government, as are several of the Federation's ten cantons. The deadlock reflects continued divisions and tensions among Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. Furthermore, the likelihood of a deal on the formation of those governments diminishes the closer Bosnia gets to local elections, set for October 2020, when parties will contend for control of municipalities in key cities, notably

the capital, Sarajevo, and Banja Luka.

Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik, the RS leader for nearly a decade, continued speaking out against the country's statehood and threatening that the RS would secede. This destabilising rhetoric is regularly documented by the High Representative in his six-month reports. In February, Dodik emphasised his desire to organise a referendum on RS independence, reiterating that Bosnian Serbs should be the ones to decide their future. Inzko said that he was convinced that a referendum would not take place or, if it did, would not have any legal validity. "Secession would mean crossing a red line", he said in an interview with N1, a regional 24-hour news channel, "and under the Dayton Agreement, entities have no right to secede".

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic spreading in the region, on 7 April, all EU ambassadors accredited to BiH, the EUFOR commander, and the head of the EU Delegation to BiH/EU Special Representative in BiH published an essay on the official website of the delegation of the EU to BiH, calling for solidarity in order to defeat the virus. They also emphasised that BiH has been invited to join the Joint Procurement Agreement for necessary medical equipment alongside the other EU member states. On 9 April, Bosnian Foreign Minister Bisera Turkovic signed the agreement, which allows the country to participate in the EU procurement mechanism. The mechanism "secures more equitable access to specific medical countermeasures and improved

security of supply". Another "solidarity mechanism" is the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, which is intended to provide BiH with in-kind assistance through member state resources. According to the essay, the EU is mobilising over 410 million euros in aid for the Western Balkans for COVID-19 response, with 80.5 million euros for BiH to "help it tackle the effects of the virus both in terms of immediate medical needs and socio-economic recovery". As of 22 April, BiH had over 1,300 confirmed COVID-19 cases.

The Council held its previous semi-annual debate on 5 November 2019, during which Inzko emphasised that BiH's failure to prioritise anti-corruption efforts is directly contributing to a "brain drain", which according to the World Bank's Fall 2019 update has led to 55 percent of the adult population with higher education "permanently emigrating". Inzko also rejected a trend towards "revisionism or outright denial" of the 1995 Srebrenica genocide and other crimes committed during the Balkan wars in the 1990s. The Council was also briefed via VTC by a civil society speaker, Selma Korjenic, who is head of Programme-Bosnia and Herzegovina for TRIAL International, which fights impunity for international crimes and supports victims. She underscored her concerns that nationalist rhetoric denies the committing of serious crimes and glorifies criminals and that very little is being done concerning peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, which are "fundamentally blocked at all political levels".

UN DOCUMENTS ON BIH Security Council Letter S/2019/843 (25 October 2019) was the High Representative's report, covering the period from 16 April to 15 October 2019. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8658 (5 November 2019) was the Council's semi-annual debate on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Women, Peace and Security

During his briefing to the Council on 5 November 2019, Inzko emphasised the political elite's lack of attention towards "issues of real importance to the citizens". He specifically pointed out gender inequality. Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina on average earn half of what men earn. The gender gap also reaches into the political system. An existing legal obligation for women to occupy 40 percent of positions is not being implemented. Inzko called the complete lack of women in government positions "a great injustice". He called for gender issues to be prioritised by politicians in the country.

Key Issues and Options

Ethnic divisions among Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs and growing disregard of judicial decisions continue to create political gridlock and a dysfunctional state, hampering socio-economic reforms and BiH's EU integration. Linked to this is the stalled process for fulfilling the criteria and objectives for closing OHR. One of the main areas of disagreement

reportedly remains whether the country's NATO Membership Action Plan, which BiH was invited to join in 2010—a key step for BiH's accession to NATO—should be activated because of the opposition of Bosnian Serb leaders. (The Membership Action Plan is a NATO programme of advice, assistance and practical support tailored to the individual needs of countries wishing to join the Alliance. While it does not guarantee future membership, it essentially puts countries on track to joining the Alliance.) On 7 February, Dodik said that as long as he is part of Bosnia's tripartite presidency, he would endeavour to "take apart everything that has been achieved so far in the field of [NATO] integration."

Council Dynamics

In general, Council members share concerns about BiH's divisive ethnic politics. Most members are also critical of the RS leaders'

rhetoric, which they view as challenging BiH's sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the November 2019 debate, several member states expressed shock at the briefers' accounts of rising ethnic tensions, historical revisionism, and overall regression. Some insisted that BiH leaders take action to combat these trends while others called on the Council itself to stop BiH's regression.

The representative of the Russian Federation, which tends to be more supportive of the positions of the RS leadership and is often critical of the High Representative, questioned the accuracy of the High Representative's information. Divisions over BiH's Euro-Atlantic integration, particularly involving NATO, between the US and European Council members on one side and Russia on the other have also been a factor in Council dynamics in the past six years.

Iraq

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), which expires on 31 May. The Council is also scheduled to receive a briefing by the Special Representative 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. Both reports are due in May. The fourth report of the Special Adviser and head of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) is also due in May.

UNITAD's mandate expires on 21 September 2020.

Key Recent Developments

Iraq's political situation has remained

unstable and dependent upon support by both Iran and the US. On 31 October 2019, Iraqi president Barham Salih announced Prime Minister Adil Abd Al-Mahdi's intention to resign, following widespread popular protests demanding basic services and systemic change. On 1 February, Salih designated Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi, a politician with cabinet experience, as the new prime minister. On 1 March, Allawi withdrew after parliament twice failed to approve his proposed cabinet. On 17 March, Adnan al-Zurfi, a former governor of the Najaf governorate, was designated the new prime minister by Salih. On 9 April, he also withdrew. The same day, Salih named Mustafa al-Kadhimi, the current chief of intelligence, as prime minister-designate. He seems to be acceptable to Iran and the US. Meanwhile, Al-Mahdi remains as the caretaker prime minister, and a new prime minister would only hold that position until elections are held, presumably sometime next year. The demonstrations

have been halted by the COVID-19 pandemic. So far, no prime minister-designate has received support from the protesters.

Iraq also continues to be the military battleground for competing Iran-US interests. March was marked by a string of attacks and counter-attacks on Iraqi soil. The attacks were directed against the US military or diplomatic presence or the US-led Global Coalition against Da'esh. According to media reports, a 16 March attack on the former "Green Zone" in Baghdad marked the 26th such assault since the end of October 2019. No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks, but the US blames Iran-backed militias and attacks their bases in retaliation. One example was a 12 March attack on Camp Taji, housing US and Coalition troops, and counter-attacks by the US on 13 March on facilities used by Kata'ib Hezbollah (designated by the US as a terrorist organisation) in Iraq. Kata'ib Hezbollah is part of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), established

UN DOCUMENTS ON IRAQ [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2490](#) (20 September 2019) extended the mandate of UNITAD until 21 September 2020. [S/RES/2470](#) (21 May 2019) extended the mandate of UNAMI until 31 May 2020. [Security Council Letter S/2020/213](#) (16 March 2020) was a letter from the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the president of the Security Council. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8739](#) (3 March 2020) was a briefing by the Special Representative and head of UNAMI, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, on the most recent developments in the situation in Iraq, the two latest Secretary-General's reports on UNAMI, and the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives.

Iraq

in 2014 from different, mostly Iran-backed Shia Muslim fighters to combat ISIL. Last July, then-Prime Minister Al-Mahdi issued an executive order bringing the PMF under the exclusive control of the Iraqi state, ordering them to cut all links with political entities, and warned that armed groups operating outside the control of the Iraqi state were illegal and subject to prosecution. This order has yet to be implemented.

UNAMI condemned the attack on Camp Taji in a 12 March statement and said in a 13 March statement that “attacks and retaliatory attacks, including repeated strikes on the Global Coalition forces—present in Iraq at the invitation of its government to fight Da’esh (ISIL)—do not serve the common interest of Iraq”. In a 14 March statement, the Secretary-General expressed “his serious concern about repeated attacks in Iraq”. In a 16 March letter to the president of the Security Council, the Permanent Representative of Iraq condemned the assault on Camp Taji as an act of aggression. He further called the US’ retaliatory strikes “a flagrant violation of the sovereignty of Iraq”, “an act of aggression”, and “a flagrant violation of the conditions under which American forces are present in Iraq”. The US continues to pull troops out of Iraq.

In her latest Council briefing, on 3 March, Hennis-Plasschaert said that “the state-to-state violence we saw play out across Iraq earlier this year was received as a clear and substantial threat to the country”. She further recalled remarks by the Secretary-General that “the large number of armed groups operating outside State control is preventing the country from functioning as a normal State”. She stressed the need for the Iraqi government to “dismantle or formally integrate those armed entities under full State control without delay”.

On 25 March, the Secretary-General launched the UN’s \$2.01 billion “Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19” (GHRP), with Iraq being a priority country. The plan emphasised that “the Iraqi health system is severely under-resourced and not well suited to addressing a wide scale medical emergency”. Neighbouring country Iran has the highest number of cases in the region. As of 30 April, Iraq had 2,003 confirmed cases of COVID-19. At time of writing, the GHRP was 43.8 percent funded, with \$1.13 billion

outstanding. On 15 March, Iraqi authorities enacted a curfew, closed airports and schools, and ordered the population to mostly stay at home. The restrictions were loosened on 21 April for the month of Ramadan.

Iraqi authorities announced on 3 April that they would fine the Reuters news agency and revoke its license for three months after it reported that the actual number of infected and dead was much higher than the official number and that officials were urged not to disclose the real numbers. The same day, UNAMI released a statement saying that the World Health Organization “dismisses the prospect that the government is deliberately hiding or falsifying the results”. At the same time, the statement emphasised that the Iraqi government “must also continue to defend independent reporting, as media freedom is one of the pillars of a democratic society”. On 19 April, Reuters’ license was reinstated.

The Secretary-General’s Middle East Envoys (for Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and the Middle East Peace Process) issued a joint appeal on 11 April in support of the 23 March Secretary-General’s appeal for an “immediate global ceasefire”. They called for “negotiating immediate halts to ongoing hostilities” and for action “to facilitate humanitarian access and assistance”, among other things.

At time of writing, the UN’s 2020 humanitarian response plan for Iraq of \$519.8 million was funded at 17.1 percent, with \$431 million outstanding.

UNITAD was established on 21 September 2017 by resolution 2379 to support Iraqi domestic efforts to hold the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) accountable for crimes it committed in the country “by collecting, preserving, and storing evidence in Iraq of acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide”. Additionally, UNITAD is tasked to promote accountability globally for atrocity crimes committed by ISIL, to counter ISIL narratives that have led people to join the terrorist group. UNITAD’s investigations are focusing on those ISIL members who bear the greatest responsibility among the leadership as well as regional and mid-level commanders.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 12 March, during its 43rd session, the Human Rights Council adopted the outcome of the

Universal Periodic Review of Iraq (A/HRC/43/14). Out of the 298 recommendations received, 245 enjoyed the support of Iraq and 48 had been noted. At the adoption, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Iraq said a National Plan of Action on Human Rights would be developed in order to implement the accepted recommendations before the next cycle. In the discussion, speakers welcomed Iraq’s decision to implement national strategies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, foster women’s empowerment and ensure the protection of children, despite security challenges. Other speakers urged the Iraqi government to publicly condemn the killing of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual individuals.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members in May will be the renewal of UNAMI’s mandate and its potential adjustments. Council members are also closely following the political situation in Iraq. Like most countries, Iraq is facing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering the involvement of the US on the ground, a statement by the Council on the security situation is unlikely.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members are generally unanimous in their support for UNAMI and the positive developments in Iraq-Kuwait relations.

Regional dynamics continue to affect Iraq, as evidenced by the continued attacks on US and Coalition bases and US counterattacks on Iraqi soil. The government routinely says that Iraq has no intention of taking sides and becoming a theatre for Iran-US tensions.

Council members are also generally supportive of UNITAD, as is the Iraqi government. Some divisions exist with regard to evidence-sharing, the death penalty and foreign terrorist fighters. Some members continue to be concerned about the possibility that evidence shared by UNITAD might be used in Iraqi criminal proceedings in which capital punishment could be imposed. Other members stress that this matter falls under Iraq’s sovereignty, a viewpoint shared by Iraq. Another issue frequently raised by some members is how and where to prosecute foreign terrorist fighters currently in Iraq.

The US is the penholder on Iraq issues in general, and the UK is the penholder on Iraq-Kuwait issues and UNITAD. Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia) is the chair of the 1518 Iraq Sanctions Committee.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

The Special Envoy has continued his efforts to broker a ceasefire agreement and resume a political process to end Yemen's war, which has gained new urgency over concerns about a potential COVID-19 outbreak in Yemen.

On 25 March, the Secretary-General called for an immediate cessation of hostilities in Yemen, following his 23 March appeal for a global ceasefire to help create conditions to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The call was initially welcomed by the Houthis rebel group, the Yemeni government and its allies, the Saudi Arabia-led coalition. However, on 28 March, the coalition announced that it had intercepted two ballistic missiles aimed at Riyadh and southern Saudi Arabia that the Houthis claimed to have fired. Heavy coalition air strikes on Sana'a followed. Despite the military escalation, Saudi Arabia announced on 8 April a two-week unilateral ceasefire for coalition operations, beginning the next day, because of the threat of COVID-19.

In a 10 April press statement, Council members endorsed the Secretary-General's call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and welcomed Saudi Arabia's unilateral ceasefire announcement. The statement also welcomed the Yemeni government's "positive response to the ceasefire call" while calling on the Houthis "to make similar commitments without delay". It stressed that further military escalation "would hinder the access of humanitarian and health care workers, and the availability of health-care facilities necessary to tackle a COVID-19 outbreak". That same day, Yemen confirmed its first case of COVID-19, an older worker at the al-Shahr port in the eastern governorate of Hadramawt.

Fighting, including coalition airstrikes, was continuing (mainly in Marib, Al Jawf, Al Bayda, and Taiz governorates), despite the

unilateral ceasefire announcement, when Griffiths briefed Council members on 16 April during a video teleconference (VTC) meeting on Yemen. The Special Envoy said that he had presented to the parties a set of proposals for a nationwide ceasefire, economic and humanitarian measures, and the resumption of a political process. Elaborating on the economic and humanitarian proposals, he said they might include measures to release prisoners and detainees; open Sana'a International Airport; pay civil servants' salaries; open access to roads; and ensure the entry of ships carrying essential commodities into Hodeidah ports, "all of which will help directly and indirectly in the fight against COVID-19". Negotiations were ongoing with the parties and were not being impeded by the need to conduct them virtually, according to the Special Envoy, who said that agreements could be expected "in the immediate future". He added: "I can report that we are making very good progress. We are moving towards a consensus over the proposals, particularly on the principle of a nation-wide ceasefire".

Speaking about the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic during the meeting, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock underscored that Yemen's war has degraded the country's health system, exhausted people's immune systems, and increased acute vulnerabilities. "As a result, epidemiologists warn that COVID-19 in Yemen could spread faster, more widely and with deadlier consequences than in many other countries," Lowcock said. He emphasised that maintaining the current humanitarian operation is essential to help Yemenis stay healthy and defend themselves from COVID-19. He warned, however, about the funding shortage facing the aid operation, which has received only \$800 million compared to \$2.6 billion at the same time last year. Without additional funds, 31 of the UN's 41 major programmes would start closing down in the next few weeks. Among other points, Lowcock observed that the pandemic's impact on the global economy could also affect Yemen's humanitarian crisis. The fall in oil prices makes it harder to finance imports and pay civil servants' salaries, and the economic

slowdown was causing a decrease in private remittances from the diaspora, which are Yemen's largest source of hard currency.

In press elements on 17 April, Council members called on the Houthis and Yemeni government "to engage constructively with Special Envoy Martin Griffiths' proposals for a nationwide ceasefire, confidence building measures, and the restart of the political process, with a view to reaching agreement on these as soon as possible".

On 25 April, the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) declared self-rule and a state of emergency across southern Yemen. The announcement undermined the November 2019 Riyadh Agreement brokered by Saudi Arabia for the government and the STC to share power after heavy fighting between the sides during August and September. The coalition urged "an immediate end to any steps contrary to the Riyadh Agreement". The move was also rejected in statements by the southern governorates of Al-Mahra, Hadramawt, Socotra and Shabwa. A Security Council press statement on 29 April expressed strong concern at the STC declaration and called for expediting the Riyadh Agreement's implementation.

Also on 26 April, General Guha announced that UNMHA was temporarily reducing personnel in Hodeidah due to the COVID-19 pandemic, though Guha and a core team of staff and monitors would remain.

Key Issues and Options

How the Council can support efforts to establish a ceasefire in Yemen and restart a political process remains a key issue, made all the more critical given the risk posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Houthis have so far appeared bent on pressing their current military advantage ahead of any new peace talks, while the government has apparently been reticent to engage on some of Griffiths' proposals around economic and humanitarian measures. A related concern is the implications for the political process and the humanitarian situation if the Houthis press their offensive against the government stronghold of Marib governorate, which could uproot more than 1 million people, including over 800,000 displaced persons already in Marib.

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2505](#) (13 January 2020) extended the mandate of the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement until 15 July 2020. [Security Council Meeting Record S/2020/313](#) (21 April 2020) contained the records of the briefings and statements made during the open part of the 16 April 2020 Council VTC meeting on Yemen. [Security Council Press Statement SC/14159](#) (10 April 2020) welcomed the Saudi Arabia-led coalition's announcement of a unilateral ceasefire and called on the Houthis to make similar commitments without delay.

Yemen

Yemen's humanitarian crisis—the largest in the world, with 24 million people, or 80 percent of the population, requiring humanitarian assistance—is poised to worsen if the COVID-19 pandemic takes hold. A ceasefire is considered critical to help control the spread of the disease and deliver humanitarian assistance. As of 28 April, Yemen still had only one laboratory-confirmed case of COVID-19, though a statement by UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen Lise Grande that same day expressed concern of the “very real probability that the virus has been circulating undetected and unmitigated”. On 29 April, the government reported that five cases had been confirmed in Aden.

Other issues include the deteriorating situation in southern Yemen and salvaging the Riyadh Agreement, and the suspension in March of the Redeployment and Coordination Committee (RCC), which oversees the December 2018 ceasefire agreement on

Hodeidah. The government withdrew from the RCC after a government liaison officer to the agreement was shot by a Houthi sniper; the official died in April.

Since fighting intensified in January, the Council has issued press statements on 30 January and 10 April and press elements on 17 April that called for an immediate cessation of hostilities. Council members with influence on the parties as well as regional countries may continue to press the sides to reach a ceasefire agreement. If the parties agree to the Special Envoy's proposals, he plans to convene a virtual meeting of the government and the Houthis to confirm their commitment to the agreements. Council members could welcome plans for such a meeting or endorse any new agreements that are reached.

Council Dynamics

Council members appear to be aligned in

their support of the Special Envoy, desiring a ceasefire and resumption of a political process while being very concerned about the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak in Yemen. Tunisia is the Arab member on the Council that traditionally champions positions of the Saudi Arabia-led coalition supporting the Yemeni government, and Saudi Arabia has appeared increasingly intent on finding a way to end the war, which has lasted more than five years. At the end of March, the US reduced its humanitarian funding because of the Houthis' interference with aid operations. Russia expresses concerns at times about the Council's 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.

Sudan/South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council expects to renew the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). The Council is also expected to extend 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.

The mandate of UNISFA and the mission's support for the JBVMM expire on 15 May.

Key Recent Developments

Sudan and South Sudan are both undergoing significant political transitions and, according to the Secretary-General's most recent report on UNISFA, “have paid limited attention to their responsibilities regarding Abyei”, the disputed territory along the Sudan/South Sudan border. Meanwhile, the security situation in Abyei remains fragile, with elevated intercommunal tensions, an increase in criminality, and the presence of armed elements in UNISFA's area of responsibility, as described

in the report, which covers 16 October 2019 to 15 April. As of 31 March, UNISFA included 3,486 troops (out of 3,550 authorised) and a police component of 37 officers (out of 640 authorised) with the low rate of deployment of the latter attributed to the non-issuance of visas by Sudan. According to the Secretary-General's report, UNISFA continues to discuss the need to facilitate the deployment of the remaining police personnel with Sudan.

Discussions are also still ongoing on the appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission which was first requested in resolution 2469, adopted on 14 May 2019. The request was consistent with the views of the Secretary-General, who stated in a 20 August 2018 letter (S/2018/778) that the mission “has lacked the civilian tools to keep the parties engaged in the advancement of their dialogue politically” to resolve the final status of Abyei, and recommended the appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission to function as the main focal point on political matters. (The current head of mission is also the force commander, Major General Mehari Gebremariam.)

The Secretary-General's most recent report also details steps being taken by the mission in response to COVID-19, including appointing a designated coordinator and task force. (Although Sudan and South Sudan have confirmed cases, at the time of writing, the mission itself has not recorded any cases among its personnel.)

The mandate of UNISFA was last renewed for six months by resolution 2497, adopted on 14 November 2019. The resolution maintained the authorised troop ceiling at 3,550 and the police ceiling at 640. It also extended the mission's support for the JBVMM until 15 May. The resolution 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. (See our What's In Blue story of 13 November 2019.)

The Council was last briefed on the issue

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN/SOUTH SUDAN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2497](#) (14 November 2019) extended UNISFA's mandate and its support to the JBVMM until 15 May 2020. [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. [Secretary General's Report S/2020/308](#) (16 April 2020) was the most recent report on the situation in Abyei.

Sudan/South Sudan

on 28 April via VTC by Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix. He said that “a volatile security situation, rising intercommunal tensions and an increase in the presence of armed groups are part of a challenging landscape, made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic” and called for a six-month extension of the mission’s mandate. Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga also briefed.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council to consider leading up to UNISFA’s 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 observations and recommendations contained in the Secretary-General’s report on UNISFA, which include extending the mandate of UNISFA for another six months; emphasising the need for progress towards resolving the status of Abyei, “as an open-ended mandate for UNISFA is not acceptable or affordable”; and encouraging the AU to increase its involvement on the issue “as the main political mediator”.

The difficulty of obtaining visas for

members of UNISFA’s police component, attributed to Sudan’s refusal to issue them, has been a longstanding issue. 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. It is likely that the visa problems and the protracted difficulties with appointing a civilian deputy head of mission will be discussed further during negotiations ahead of UNISFA’s mandate renewal.

Council Dynamics

As in previous years, the Council’s attention to 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 focus on 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. Language on gender was slightly amended in resolution 2497 after Russia broke silence, with the reference to “adequate expertise on gender and protection” changed to “adequate expertise on women and child protection”. (See our What’s In Blue story of 13 November 2019.)

During negotiations ahead of the mission’s mandate renewal in May 2019, the three African members, supported by China and to a lesser extent by some other members, called for a renewal of the mandate without any changes, given the evolving internal political situations in Sudan and South Sudan. However, the US and other members were opposed to having the mandate continue unchanged. (See our What’s In Blue story of 13 May 2019.)

The US is the penholder on Sudan/South Sudan.

Open Debate on Security Council Working Methods

Expected Council Action

During its presidency in May, Estonia has decided to organise a virtual open debate on the Council’s working methods. Estonia, the vice-chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions (IWG), will prepare a concept note for the debate jointly with the chair, Saint

Vincent and the Grenadines. Because the special measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic will still be in effect at the time of the debate, statements by non-Council members are likely to be submitted in writing.

The debate will be held under the agenda item “Implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2017/507)”,

referring to the most recent version of the comprehensive compendium of Council working methods.

Background and Key Recent Developments

The Council held its most recent open debate on working methods on 6 June 2019 during

UN DOCUMENTS ON WORKING METHODS Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2015/19 (30 October 2015) was the first presidential statement adopted by the Council on its working methods. **Notes by the President of the Security Council** S/2019/990 (27 December 2019) addressed the issue of the Council’s visiting missions. S/2019/991 (27 December 2019) addressed the issue of the selection of chairs of Council subsidiary bodies. S/2019/992 (27 December 2019) addressed the issue of an unofficial addendum to the programme of work to be prepared at the discretion of the president of the Security Council. S/2019/993 (27 December 2019) addressed the issue of additional modalities for incoming elected members. S/2019/994 (27 December 2019) addressed the issue of wrap-up sessions at the end of presidencies of the Council. S/2019/995 (27 December 2019) addressed the issue of Council meetings with troop- and police-contributing countries. S/2019/996 (27 December 2019) addressed the issue of the gender pronoun used in the Provisional Rules of Procedure. S/2019/997 (27 December 2019) addressed the issue of timeline for the preparation of the Council annual report to the General Assembly. S/2017/507 (30 August 2017) contained the most recent comprehensive compendium of Security Council working methods. S/2010/507 (26 July 2010) contained an updated version of the 2006 compendium. S/2006/507 (19 July 2006) contained the outcome of six months of work by the Informal Working Group in 2006 under the leadership of Japan, a compendium of Council working methods with a particular focus on enhancing Council transparency, as well as interaction and dialogue with non-Council members. **Security Council Meeting Records** S/PV.8539 (6 June 2019) was the most recent open debate on working methods. S/PV.3483 (16 December 1994) was the first open debate on working methods. **Other** S/2020/273 (2 April 2020) was a letter from the president of the Security Council to permanent representatives of Council members containing a paper on the working methods of the Security Council for the month of April 2020. S/2020/253 (27 March 2020) was a letter from the president of the Security Council to permanent representatives of Council members describing temporary measures to be applied during the COVID-19 period, in particular the written voting procedure. S/2020/172 (3 March 2020) was a letter from the permanent representatives of Kuwait and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines containing their report from the IWG January 2020 planning retreat.

Open Debate on Security Council Working Methods

the presidency of Kuwait, which chaired the IWG in 2018–2019. For the first time in an open debate, the ten elected Council members presented a joint statement, delivered by Ambassador Jerry Matthews Matjila (South Africa). In addition to Council members, 28 representatives of member states delivered statements, some of them speaking on behalf of groups of states such as the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, known as ACT; the Like-Minded States on Targeted Sanctions; or a group of 22 former elected members from all regional groups.

During its remaining time as chair of the IWG, Kuwait focused on several of the topics raised and specific proposals put forward by participants. The IWG developed several notes by the president of the Security Council (the document format frequently used for capturing working methods-related understandings) on subjects including the addendum to the Council's provisional programme of work, wrap-up sessions, the selection of chairs of subsidiary bodies, Security Council visiting missions, the timeline for the adoption of the annual report to the General Assembly, the gender pronoun used in the Provisional Rules of Procedure, additional modalities for incoming elected Council members, Council meetings with troop- and police-contributing countries, and co-penholdership by chairs of the corresponding subsidiary bodies.

The negotiations of most drafts took months and were often difficult. No agreement was reached on the draft concerning co-penholderships, but on 27 December 2019, eight notes by the president were issued on the other topics.

In January, the new chair of the IWG, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, jointly with Kuwait, the IWG chair during the preceding two years, organised a planning retreat on working methods. The two countries' permanent representatives, I. Rhonda King and Mansour Al-Otaibi, respectively, chaired the 17-19 January meetings. All Council

members, most at the political coordinator level, were represented at the retreat held in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' capital, Kingstown. Among the topics discussed in the context of planning the work of the IWG was striking the balance between working methods codification and allowing for flexibility. In her summary and personal reflection on the discussions, the IWG Chair I. Rhonda King, highlighted the critical role of the successive Council presidents, "including in creating and testing new practices or establishing alternatives to existing practices" and signalled the intention to foster greater partnership between the monthly presidencies and the IWG.

Key Issues and Options

The new leadership of the IWG sees the debate as an opportunity to receive from the broader membership input and ideas that would inform the group's work in 2020-2021. A likely topic of particular interest is how the Council can best strike a balance between transparency, efficiency and effectiveness.

Member states not on the Council may want to highlight, both in terms of substance and format, the types of information coming out of the Council they consider as most important and relevant to their work. In this context, some may bring up the wrap-up sessions that are held by most presidencies. Also likely to be raised will be the timing of the submission of the Council's annual report to the General Assembly.

With the adoption of eight notes by the president on several aspects of working methods at the end of 2019, some members will want to comment on the new measures' likely impact and implementation.

Some participants in the open debate may also want to discuss the ways in which the Council has been adapting its working methods under the temporary special measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic (for more information on this topic, see "In

Hindsight" in this issue of the Forecast).

Council and Wider Dynamics

The debate in May will be the Council's 12th open debate on working methods. Initially very rare—the first such debate was held in 1994 and the second not until 2008—open debates on working methods have become an annual practice during the past decade. Previously, there had been some reluctance, in particular from permanent members, about discussing Security Council working methods publicly and receiving critiques and suggestions from member states not on the Council.

Elected members have historically been the driving force in most working methods initiatives. Only one open debate on working methods—the first—was an initiative of a permanent member, France. In the early to mid-1990s, when the Council's activity increased dramatically, as did the interest of members not on the Council in its work, several members began seeing the need to describe new practices in written documents and to work on making the Council's documents better organised and easier to trace. Elected members felt this need much more acutely, and several took on codifying specific areas of Council practice as a priority for their two-year term. This shared concern resulted in the formation of the IWG in 1993. Initially chaired by the rotating monthly presidency of the Security Council, the IWG has been chaired by elected members for periods of one or two years since 2006.

Over the decades, members and observers have noted that the lack of formally binding procedures creates uncertainty, especially for elected members, who are thereby at a disadvantage. Some, however, have cited pragmatic reasons for keeping the rules in their provisional form: not making them formal gives the Council more flexibility and allows it to adapt working methods quickly, sometimes literally on the spot.

Somalia

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council is expected to renew its authorisation of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), due to expire on 31 May. Before that, the Council is scheduled to be briefed on the Secretary-General's report on the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSO). The mandate for UNSO expires on 30 June.

Key Recent Developments

The Council was initially set to renew UNSO's mandate on 25 March. Because of the impossibility of holding physical meetings given measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19, members agreed on a technical rollover of the mandate. Through a written procedure elaborated and agreed to by Council members in late March, on 30 March the Council adopted resolution 2516, renewing the mandate until 30 June. Council members wanted to postpone more substantive discussions on UNSO until the Council's interim working methods were more established as a number of detailed discussions are necessary on how UNSO can best continue to provide strategic support and advice to the Federal Government of Somalia and AMISOM, especially ahead of proposed elections.

In Somalia, a situation that remains volatile has been complicated by humanitarian problems. Since late 2019, Somalia, along with much of East Africa, has endured the worst locust outbreak in 70 years. Many organisations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), have warned that the impact on food crops could be devastating and long-lasting. A second, larger wave is expected in June. The FAO says that a swarm of locusts the size of one square kilometre can eat the same amount of food in one day as 35,000 people.

Additionally, Somalia is trying to address the challenges of COVID-19, having recorded its first case in mid-March. At the time of writing, the number of reported cases stands at approximately 440, with 23 deaths. At least four healthcare workers have been infected. On 4 April, the UN confirmed that an international employee of a private company

operating under a UN contract was diagnosed, as well. Schools and universities are closed, all flights in and out of the country have been cancelled, and there is a night-time curfew in Mogadishu, the capital. Humanitarian cargo flights may continue, but must receive permission a day before. Protests took place in April over the closure of several mosques. Many are concerned about Somalia's refugee camps, where basic necessities like soap and water are scarce. In response, the World Health Organization (WHO) began establishing 1,250 active surveillance sites staffed by more than 1,500 health workers and community volunteers for finding those infected, contact tracing and testing. The Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of UNSO, James Swan, released a press statement on 31 March stressing the UN's support for Somalia during the pandemic, and reiterated the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire.

In March, tensions increased between Somalia and Kenya over territory with access to the Indian Ocean. A build-up of Somali security forces in the Gedo region of Jubaland, Somalia led to clashes between Somali federal forces and militias loyal to the controversially-re-elected president of Jubaland, Ahmed Mohamed Islam, who seems to be supported by Kenya. On 2 March the skirmishes that spilled over the border into Kenya caused some civilians to flee. On 5 March, Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo" and Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta spoke via telephone to try to calm tensions while also committing to improving border security and ties between the nations. UNSO and international partners released a press statement calling on all actors to exercise restraint. They also reiterated the importance of cooperation between Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya. Since then, the situation has been calm but unpredictable. The International Court of Justice is scheduled to hear arguments about the border between Somalia and Kenya in June in a case that centres on access to the Indian Ocean, with implications for control of natural resources.

Sanctions-Related Developments

During this period, one informal meeting of the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee was held. On 29 April a representative from the UN Mine Action Service briefed the Committee on improvised explosive devices in Somalia. There may be a meeting in May to discuss the midterm report of the Panel of Experts.

Key Issues and Options

A crucial question the Council has to answer is how AMISOM retains the capability and means to strengthen and assist the Somali forces so that these forces can progressively take the lead in providing security while avoiding a premature handover of security responsibilities. Last year's negotiations focused on the desire of some to reduce AMISOM's troop ceiling. Ultimately, resolution 2472 decided to reduce the level of uniformed AMISOM personnel by 1,000 to a maximum level of 19,626 by 28 February 2020. This was done with the caveat that the Council could change its mind if the situation in Somalia so warranted. As of April, the troop numbers had been reduced, though the process was behind schedule.

As with UNSO in March, a technical rollover may be a possibility this month because of the complexity of discussions in changing AMISOM's mandate. This is not the first time AMISOM's renewal has been delayed because of forces beyond its control. In October 2012, following a three-day UN shutdown due to Hurricane Sandy, the Council in resolution 2072 rolled over the mandate of the AMISOM until 11 November 2012, "recognizing in those exceptional circumstances the need for a short extension of the mandate".

Council Dynamics

In the past, including during last year's negotiations on resolution 2431, positions taken on the pace of troop reductions reflected the underlying divisions among Council members.

In 2019 the P3 (France, the UK and the US) were supportive of the troop reduction suggested in a 2019 joint assessment

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2516 (30 March 2020) was a technical rollover of UNSO's mandate until 30 June 2020. **S/RES/2472** (31 May 2019) renewed the authorisation of AMISOM until 31 May 2020 and authorised reductions to achieve a maximum level of 19,626 uniformed AMISOM personnel by 28 February 2020. **S/RES/2072** (31 October 2012) was a seven-day technical rollover of AMISOM. **Security Council Letters S/2020/266** (6 April 2020) was a letter from the president of the Security Council that contained both the draft resolution and letters received in reply from Council members indicating their national positions on the draft resolution. **S/2020/273** (2 April 2020) was a letter from the Permanent Representative of the Dominican Republic on Security Council working methods for April 2020. **S/2020/247** (30 March 2020) was the letter announcing the conclusion of the written voting procedure on resolution 2516. **S/2020/253** (27 March 2020) was a letter from the Permanent Representative of China on the written voting procedure and other provisional procedural measures.

Somalia

by a combined AU-UN team. In line with the AU position, the A3 at that time (Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and South Africa) opposed any drawdown on the basis that Somalia was not ready to take over more security responsibilities at that juncture. Many who now oppose a drawdown say that it must be guided by the situation on the ground, which they regard as not currently conducive. Other Council members, such as China and Russia, have expressed support for A3/AU position, as they felt the views of the region should be respected. Several Council

members did not hold strong views and were ready to support a unified Council position. Positions do not seem to have changed in the year that has passed.

The AU continues to press the Council to do more to ensure predictable and sustainable funding for AMISOM. In addition to the logistical support given through the UN Support Office in Somalia and the voluntary contributions provided through the UN trust fund for AMISOM, several Council members have been willing to consider providing direct funding to AMISOM through

UN assessed contributions. The US, however, remains opposed to the idea.

Another point of contention for any draft resolution is language on climate change. Several member states believe it is important to retain or even strengthen language about climate security for Somalia, which in their opinion is experiencing the impact of climate change acutely. The US remains an obstacle to any inclusion of climate change language.

The UK is the penholder on Somalia.

Protection of Civilians

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council is scheduled to receive the Secretary-General's report on protection of civilians and hold an open video teleconference to discuss it in lieu of the annual open debate, which will not be held because of the precautions to slow the spread of COVID-19. Non-Council members are invited to participate by sending their written statements to the Council. All statements, including those from the briefers, will then be published in a compendium prepared by the president of the Security Council that will be posted on the Council's website and included in the UN electronic document system. Secretary-General António Guterres and ICRC President Peter Maurer are expected to brief. Estonia, as president of the Council, is also planning to invite a civil society participant.

Key Recent Developments

In the 20 years since the Security Council first took up the protection of civilians as a thematic issue, several broad themes have emerged. In its 2019 occasional policy paper, marking 20 years of the Security Council's engagement on the protection of civilians, OCHA listed these themes as: enhancing respect for international law in the conduct

of hostilities, facilitating access to humanitarian assistance and medical care, preventing and responding to forced displacement, according special protection to children affected by armed conflict, protecting women, and combatting conflict-related sexual violence. According to the UN Department of Peace Operations, more than 95 percent of peacekeeping operations now have mandates that include protection of civilians. For example, the AU-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur offered physical protection to civilians through 4,720 military patrols, including 1,062 visits to villages and 589 visits to camps for internally displaced persons.

The Security Council's most recent open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict was held on 23 May 2019. The Secretary-General briefed, as is often the case during this annual debate. Other briefers were Maurer and Federico Borello, executive director of the Center for Civilians in Conflict, a US-based NGO known as CIVIC.

In his speech, Guterres observed that "the normative framework has been strengthened, [but] compliance has deteriorated". Maurer criticised the lack of Council action and said that in some cases it has led to the perception of a "free ride" for parties to a conflict

to commit atrocities. Borello spoke about the importance of engaging communities in their own protection. He said that "efforts to protect civilians and resolve conflict will more likely succeed if undertaken in full consultation and partnership with civilians and communities". Following the briefings, more than 80 delegations participated in the meeting, with the foreign minister of Indonesia presiding as Council president.

Since the May 2019 open debate, Council members have held a number of formal and informal meetings on topics involving protection of civilians. On 11 June 2019, the Council held a briefing on missing persons in armed conflict at the initiative of Kuwait as president for the month. Resolution 2474 on this subject was adopted unanimously during the meeting. The briefing and resolution marked the first time the Council addressed the issue of missing persons in armed conflict as a stand-alone subject. One of Kuwait's main goals was to shift the focus on missing persons from being a post-conflict issue to one that is addressed from the beginning of conflict in order to prevent critical information on the fate or location of the missing from being lost. The resolution also requested that the Secretary-General's annual report on

UN DOCUMENTS ON PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2475](#) (20 June 2019) was on protection of persons with disabilities in conflict, co-authored by Poland and the UK and adopted unanimously. [S/RES/2474](#) (11 June 2019) was on persons reported missing during armed conflict. [S/RES/2417](#) (24 May 2018) was on the link between armed conflict and food insecurity, strongly condemning the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access. [S/RES/2286](#) (3 May 2016) condemned attacks on health care workers and facilities in armed conflict. [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/6](#) (29 April 2020) on conflict-induced hunger followed up on measures laid out in resolution 2417, with an additional element on early warning systems. [S/PRST/2019/8](#) (20 August 2019) reaffirmed the fundamental importance of the four 1949 Geneva Conventions for the protection of those affected by armed conflict. [Secretary-General's Report S/2019/373](#) (7 May 2019) was the annual report on protection of civilians, which, for the first time, included a section on missing persons. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8596](#) (13 August 2019) was a briefing on "the 70th Anniversary of the Geneva Conventions – upholding humanity in modern conflict". [S/PV.8556](#) (20 June 2019) was the adoption of resolution 2475. [S/PV.8543](#) (11 June 2019) was the adoption of resolution 2474. **USEFUL ADDITIONAL RESOURCES** [Building a Culture of Protection: 20 Years of Security Council Engagement on the Protection of Civilians](#) (May 2019) was a publication from OCHA summarising the protection of civilians file since 1999.

Protection of Civilians

the protection of civilians include a section on missing persons.

On 20 June, after five months of difficult negotiations, the Council adopted resolution 2475 on the situation of persons with disabilities in armed conflict. This resolution was an initiative of Poland and the UK and had 68 cosponsors. Similarly to resolution 2474, this was the first stand-alone resolution to address a specific aspect of protection of civilians in conflict, in this case the protection of persons with disabilities. It requested the Secretary-General to expand the information currently included in his annual report to have recommendations on issues of relevance to persons with disabilities. It also expressed the Council's commitment to inviting briefers with disabilities. On 24 June, Equatorial Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa organised an Arria-formula meeting on "Responding effectively to the needs of refugees, displaced persons and returnees: the role of the United Nations Security Council and its members".

During its August 2019 Council presidency Poland organised several events concerning protection of civilians. On 13 August, the Council had a briefing on "the promotion and strengthening of the rule of law in the maintenance of international peace and security: international humanitarian law". On 20 August, the Council adopted a presidential statement, drafted by Poland, focusing on international humanitarian law to mark the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the universally ratified four Geneva Conventions. Poland also organised an open Arria-formula meeting on 22 August on the subject of "advancing the safety and security of persons belonging to religious minorities in armed conflict".

Most recently, on 21 April, the Council held a briefing on the protection of civilians from hunger during armed conflict at the initiative of the Dominican Republic. Briefers were Qu Dongyu, Director-General of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization; David Beasley, Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme; and Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council. The Dominican Republic's Foreign Minister Miguel Vargas presided virtually over the meeting, which was the first VTC meeting under the COVID-19 measures where Council members' interventions were webcast live and recorded for future viewing.

It has been a practice since the establishment of the informal expert group for protection of civilians in 2009 to hold meetings ahead of every peacekeeping mission and SPM renewal. In these meetings, Council members discuss key protection recommendations from the latest Secretary-General's reports and receive briefings from experts in the field. While not all Council members attend these informal meetings, those that do find them useful in planning how to move forward in mandate negotiations.

Key Issues and Options

As president of the Council, Estonia hopes to use the meeting as an opportunity to focus on more consistent implementation of this agenda on the ground. They consider this a high-level event and it seems likely the president of Estonia will attend. To this end, Council members and other member states could touch upon the recently adopted resolutions and review implementation of their terms. Members may also speak about the

issue in relation to compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, the gendered aspect of protection of civilians, the protection of medical personnel and facilities, and humanitarian access, among other pertinent matters. It also seems likely that members will discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected protection of civilians.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members and the wider membership are likely to use the broad nature of this open debate to highlight a variety of issues, depending on their priorities. By leaving this year's debate broad, Estonia hopes to have wider engagement on the issue. Member states' divergences can be seen in what they choose not to bring up, whether it is human rights or the impact of climate change on civilians. In the past year, the negotiations on resolutions 2474 and 2475 have also illuminated differing positions. China and Russia in particular have been cautious on this issue. For example, during last May's open debate, the Russian ambassador said, "We should not be distracted by the endless identification of new categories of persons who need special protection under international law". This is a similar position to some other Council members, who worry that having resolutions on different aspects of protection of civilians will lead to a fragmentation of the overall agenda and make it weaker. Some propose that now is the time for implementation of resolutions already adopted, instead of new ones.

The UK is the penholder on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

EU-UN Briefing

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council will hold its annual meeting on strengthening the partnership with the EU under its agenda item on cooperation between the UN and regional and subregional organisations in maintaining

international peace and security. Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, is expected to brief the Council.

Background

The relationship between the UN and the EU has evolved over the years and has continued to grow in importance. Recognising this, starting in 2010, the Council has maintained the practice of holding regular—usually

UN DOCUMENTS ON EU-UN COOPERATION Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2491 (3 October 2019) renewed the authorisation for member states, acting nationally or through regional organisations, to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya that they have reasonable grounds to suspect are being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking. S/RES/2231 (20 July 2015) endorsed the JCPOA. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2014/4 (14 February 2014) was on cooperation between the UN and the EU, highlighting the EU's comprehensive approach to maintenance of international peace and security. Security Council Meetings S/PV.8482 (12 March 2019) was a briefing on cooperation between the UN and the EU. S/PV.7935 (9 May 2017) was a briefing on cooperation between the UN and the EU.

EU-UN Briefing

annual-briefings on cooperation between the two organisations. (These briefings were not held in 2012 and 2018.) The Council formally endorsed this relationship in 2014 when it adopted a presidential statement on EU-UN cooperation. Among other things, the statement welcomed the EU's cooperation with the UN and its role in the maintenance of international peace and security and in the implementation of Council-mandated tasks. Since 2013, Council members have also held annual informal meetings with members of the EU Political and Security Committee.

This will be the first opportunity for Borrell to brief the Council on EU-UN cooperation. He assumed the position of EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on 1 December 2019, succeeding Federica Mogherini, who had been in office since 2014. The meeting was initially scheduled for February during Belgium's presidency of the Council but was postponed.

The briefings on EU-UN cooperation generally follow a consistent pattern and cover areas of cooperation between the two organisations. Borrell is also expected to present the EU's main foreign policy priorities and objectives and address current crises that overlap on the EU and the Council agendas.

Given the global reach of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely that this issue will feature prominently during this year's meeting. On 8 April, the EU launched a "Team Europe" support package worth more than 20 billion euros to support partner countries worldwide in their fight against COVID-19 and its consequences. The EU has pledged to promote a coordinated multilateral response to the pandemic in cooperation with the UN and other international institutions. The "Team Europe" package will focus on supporting COVID-19 response efforts by the World Health Organization and the UN, among others.

The EU has been engaged heavily in efforts to preserve the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the agreement that places limits on Iran's nuclear programme and provides sanctions relief. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy serves as the coordinator of the Joint Commission, which is composed of the parties to the agreement. The agreement, which the Council endorsed in 2015 in resolution 2231, has faced a precarious future since the US withdrew from it in May 2018. Iran has since gradually started to abandon its commitments under the agreement. On 5 January, it announced that it will no longer be bound by the uranium enrichment limits set out in the JCPOA while emphasising that it would return to compliance if other parties fulfil their obligations under the agreement.

On 14 January, France, Germany and the UK formally referred Iran's non-compliance to the Joint Commission's Dispute Resolution Mechanism, setting in motion a process that could eventually result in initiating the so-called "snapback mechanism" which could lead to reinstating the UN sanctions on Iran that were in place before the adoption of resolution 2231. While the agreement sets specific time limits for the resolution of disputes, that period could be extended almost indefinitely if all parties agree. Eventually, if the dispute is not settled by the Joint Commission, if one of the parties formally notifies the Council on Iran's non-compliance, the Council would have 30 days to vote on a resolution that would either continue the lifting of sanctions, or would cause the sanctions that were in place prior to the adoption of resolution 2231 to "snap back".

On 31 March, special purpose vehicle INSTEX—a mechanism established in early 2019 by France, Germany and the UK to mitigate the effects of US sanctions on Iran

and facilitate legitimate trade between the EU and Iran—completed its first transaction between Europe and Iran. The transaction included the export of medical equipment to Iran, which is one of the countries most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the context of peacekeeping, cooperation between the EU and the UN is most prominent in Africa, where the two organisations work alongside one another in several countries. The EU provides training for security forces and assists in security sector reform in the Central African Republic, Mali and Somalia. The EU also provides salaries for the UN-authorized AU Mission in Somalia. Member states of the EU are the largest collective contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget, providing over 30 percent of total contributions.

Borrell is also likely to discuss the Middle East peace process, the situation in Libya, the humanitarian situation in Iraq, cooperation with other regional organisations, transnational crime, climate change, and sustainable development, among other issues.

The EU members of the Council have made a concerted effort to coordinate their positions and present a unified front on some issues on the Council's agenda, such as Kosovo, Syria, Ukraine and Venezuela. Another practice that has emerged over the past several years has been for the EU members of the Council (including incoming and recent former members) to make joint statements at the Council media stakeout, presenting the EU position on specific Security Council issues.

Currently, four Council members—Belgium, Estonia, Germany and France—are also EU members. The UK, which stopped being a member of this group on 31 January when it formally left the EU, has occasionally joined the four EU members in such statements.

DPRK (North Korea)

Expected Council Action

In May, the chair of the 1718 Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Christoph Heusgen (Germany), is expected to brief Council members in a closed video teleconference (VTC) on the 90-day report of the committee's work. Because of the temporary measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the briefing is expected to be held as a closed VTC.

Key Recent Developments

On 30 March, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2515, which extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the work of the 1718 Sanctions Committee until 30 April 2021. Because of the partial closure of UN headquarters starting on 16 March, Council members were unable to meet in person to vote on the draft resolution or reach an agreement on VTC modalities for voting. After negotiations, the Council agreed to adopt decisions through a written procedure. Resolution 2515 was the first resolution adopted using the written adoption process. The resolution sets the deadlines for the panel to submit its midterm and final reports as of September 2020 and March 2021 respectively.

DPRK leader Kim Jong-un started the year with an announcement that the DPRK will no longer be constrained by its self-imposed moratorium on testing inter-continental ballistic missiles, saying that he would unveil a new "strategic weapon". The DPRK's escalatory rhetoric has placed an additional strain on already stalled diplomatic efforts to denuclearise the Korean peninsula. Despite the rhetoric, the DPRK did not test any weapons in January and February. On 1 March, the DPRK conducted its first ballistic missile test this year, which was followed by a series of other ballistic missile tests on 8, 20 and 28 March. It also fired several short-range missiles on 14 April.

Council members met under "any other business" on 5 March to raise concerns about the DPRK's initial ballistic missile test. Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, and the UK

made a joint statement at the media stakeout following the meeting. They condemned the missile test and emphasised that these activities constitute a violation of Security Council resolutions. Council members met again under "any other business" on 31 March to discuss the DPRK's subsequent ballistic missile launches. Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, the UK, and non-Council member Poland issued a statement following the meeting, condemning the DPRK's continued efforts to develop its ballistic missile programs and operate its nuclear weapons programme.

After earlier discussions in the sanctions committee, the final report of the Panel of Experts was to be made public by 6 March. The report was published in mid-April, the delay apparently being due to its translation into all six official UN languages. According to the report, the DPRK has continued unabated violation of the sanctions regime, most notably through illicit ship-to-ship transfers of oil and coal, the proliferation of weapons, and cyber-attacks. These findings appear similar to the conclusions of the panel's midterm report published in September 2019. The panel has drawn attention to the increased sophistication of the DPRK's use of cyber-attacks. In its midterm report published in August 2019, the panel estimated that DPRK cyber actors have generated around \$2 billion of revenue through illegal activities.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in China, the DPRK has taken strict measures to stop the spread of the virus. It has closed borders with neighbouring countries, banned international tourism, and imposed mandatory quarantines on those suspected of having been in contact with anyone who could be infected with the disease. To date, the DPRK has reported no cases of COVID-19, a claim that is disputed by many international experts. China and South Korea, both of which border the DPRK, are among the first countries to have been heavily affected by the pandemic.

On 24 March, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet issued a statement calling for sanctions to be reassessed, especially in countries affected by

the COVID-19 pandemic. She mentioned the DPRK as one of the countries where sanctions might significantly impair medical efforts to address the pandemic.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 43rd session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held an interactive dialogue on 9 March with the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, Tomás Ojea Quintana, and considered his report (A/HRC/43/58), which found no sign of improvement in the human rights situation nor progress in advancing accountability and justice for human rights violations. In his statement, Ojea Quintana highlighted the plight of women, the lack of access to water, and the dire situation in prisons. He also said that the COVID-19 pandemic had brought into focus the impact of sanctions on the people of the DPRK and called on the HRC to look at this issue.

Key Issues and Options

Tensions on the Korean peninsula have been on the rise during the past several months as evidenced by the DPRK's escalatory rhetoric and its resumption of ballistic missile testing. Also, there has been no significant progress on the diplomatic front in US-DPRK talks or the inter-Korean dialogue. Given the volatile security environment, the Council is primarily concerned with maintaining stability on the Korean peninsula. An option for the Council would be to consider issuing a formal outcome addressing the need for stability and the resumption of diplomatic talks.

As is clear from the final report of the Panel of Experts, the effectiveness of the sanctions regime in light of continued violations by the DPRK remains an ongoing issue for the Council. In addressing this, the Council could consider other ways to ensure stricter enforcement or consider issuing a statement calling on members to adhere to existing sanctions measures.

A related issue for the Council, and some members in particular, is the impact of sanctions on the humanitarian situation in the country. The global COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these concerns. While the DPRK has said that it has no confirmed cases, the potential impact of this pandemic on the DPRK could be severe. Should the

UN DOCUMENTS ON DPRK Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2515 (30 March 2020) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee until 30 April 2021. **S/RES/2397** (22 December 2017) tightened sanctions on the DPRK. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8682** (11 December 2019) was an open briefing on non-proliferation focused on the DPRK. **Security Council Letter S/2020/270** (6 April 2020) contained the written procedure voting record on resolution 2515 that extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee. **S/2020/246** (30 March 2020) was a letter by the president of the Security Council containing the results of the vote on resolution 2515. **Sanctions Committee Documents S/2020/151** (2 March 2019) was a final report of the Panel of Experts. **S/2019/971** (20 December 2019) was the annual report of the 1718 Sanctions Committee.

DPRK (North Korea)

COVID-19 pandemic affect the DPRK, the Council could consider options for temporary and targeted sanctions relief to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

Council Dynamics

Members continue to be divided over the role of sanctions in addressing the nuclear threat posed by the DPRK. The US has been a strong proponent of maintaining the policy of maximum pressure until the DPRK takes concrete steps toward denuclearisation. The EU members of the Council are generally supportive of this approach. On the

other hand, China and Russia have shown interest in considering some form of sanctions relief and even circulated a draft resolution on partial sanctions relief for the DPRK in December 2019. The proposal remains stalled because of insufficient support from other Council members.

With respect to a potential spread of COVID-19 in the DPRK Council members appear to be united in their assessment that it could have severe consequences for the country. There has been a broad consensus among 1718 Committee members about the need to accelerate the process for considering

humanitarian exemptions.

The US has been reluctant to address the DPRK's ballistic missile tests in the Council, in light of its diplomatic efforts. Several other Council members, particularly European members, have pushed for discussions following the recent tests. It remains to be seen whether the US position will change if it becomes clear that the diplomatic track appears closed and the DPRK conducts further tests.

The US is the penholder on the DPRK, and Germany chairs the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee.

Burundi

Expected Council Action

In May, a Secretariat representative is expected to brief the Council on the situation in Burundi, in keeping with quarterly briefings on the issue requested by resolution 2303.

Key Recent Developments

Presidential elections in Burundi are scheduled for 20 May. President Pierre Nkurunziza—whose election to a controversial third term in 2015 precipitated mass demonstrations and an increase in violence and repression against his opponents—has said that he does not plan to run. The National Council for the Defense of Democracy—Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD)—Nkurunziza's (and Burundi's ruling) party—has announced that its secretary general, Evariste Ndayishimiye, will be its candidate. The candidate of the National Congress for Liberty, the leading opposition party, is Agathon Rwasa.

Since Nkurunziza announced in April 2015 that he would run for a third term and his subsequent re-election, hundreds of civilians have been killed in clashes with security forces, and nearly half a million people have fled their homes. The government maintains that the security situation is stable throughout the country. According to UNHCR, as of 31 March, there were 334,261 Burundian

refugees, mostly in Tanzania, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, with an additional 102,722 internally displaced persons as of 3 April.

In its 4 September 2019 report, the Human Rights Council's (HRC) Commission of Inquiry on Burundi found that suppression of civil liberties is intensifying ahead of the election. It also notes that violations of the right to life, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, sexual violence, and violations of economic and social rights—some of which may constitute crimes against humanity—are conducted in a climate of impunity. The commission further identified the CNDD-FDD's youth league, the Imbonerakure, and government security forces as the main perpetrators. In addition, the Imbonerakure is forcibly collecting funding from the population for the presidential election. On 16 January, the European Parliament adopted a resolution strongly condemning "the current restrictions on freedom of expression in Burundi... in particular in the run-up to the 2020 elections".

The East African Community (EAC)—which was expected to lead a mediation process involving the Burundian government and opposition as well as civil society organisations, but which has not materialised in four years—announced on 8 February that it would send an elections observation mission

to the country for the upcoming elections. Recent media reports suggest that former Tanzanian Prime Minister Mizengo Pinda was expected to lead the EAC elections observation mission. However, at the time of writing, the EAC has not clarified the size or timeline of the mission's deployment. There is also some question as to whether or not the mission would be permitted to enter Burundi, given concerns around COVID-19.

The chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ambassador Jürg Lauber (Switzerland), along with Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, Bintou Keita, visited Burundi from 2 to 6 February 2020. In his 24 March letter addressed to the president of the Security Council, Lauber submitted a report from the trip in which he observed that, during his visit, all of his Burundian, regional and international interlocutors were "united in their wish for a credible, inclusive, transparent and peaceful electoral process". However, Lauber recommended that the "electoral period must not deflect attention from acute and chronic needs of the population" and encouraged the Burundian authorities "at all levels to facilitate cooperation to meet those needs".

On 26 February, Council members held an informal interactive dialogue (IID) on the situation in Burundi. This was originally

UN DOCUMENTS ON BURUNDI Security Council Resolution S/RES/2303 (29 July 2016) requested the Secretary-General to report to the Council on the situation in Burundi every three months. **Secretary-General's Report S/2019/837** (24 October 2019) was on the situation in Burundi. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8652** (30 October 2019) was a briefing by Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi Michel Kafando. **Security Council Letter S/2020/232** (24 March 2020) was a letter from the chair of the PBC's Burundi configuration Ambassador Jürg Lauber addressed to the president of the Security Council transmitting the report of his 2 to 6 February 2020 visit to Burundi.

Burundi

envisaged as a formal public briefing followed by consultations, but the president of the Council—Belgium—decided instead to hold an IID, which allows for non-Council members to participate in a private discussion. Though Burundi was invited, it did not participate; however, several regional countries did. Some Council members used the IID to emphasise the need for the upcoming elections to be held in an inclusive, peaceful and transparent manner.

On 10 April, the Commission of Inquiry released a statement expressing concern about the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its potential impact on the Burundian population, saying that measures taken by the government remained insufficient to address the pandemic. The statement highlighted Burundi's fragile health system. It also noted that more than 70 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and the increased risk that the coronavirus would spread in Burundi's overpopulated prisons. It also expressed regret that "some humanitarian organisations were refused access to sites where persons were quarantined in deplorable conditions". The president of the commission, Doudou Diène, noted that combatting the pandemic "is more challenging in a pre-electoral context such as in Burundi, as it requires even more vigilance... [and] should not be used for political or economic purposes".

The last formal Council meeting on Burundi took place on 30 October 2019. Then-Special Envoy to Burundi Michel Kafando highlighted tensions due to "an increase in the level of political intolerance and a growing threat to civil and political freedoms". He also announced his intention to resign.

The Council's last resolution on Burundi was resolution 2303, adopted in July 2016. Several elements of that resolution, such as

the creation of a UN police component in Burundi for an initial period of one year, have never been implemented.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 43rd session, the HRC held an interactive dialogue on Burundi on 9 March with an oral briefing by the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, which noted that the eight risk factors identified in the commission's September 2019 report (A/HRC/42/49) – that is, an environment of instability; a history of serious human rights violations; the weakness of State structures; the existence of reasons, aims or drivers that justify the use of violence against particular groups; the capacity of potential perpetrators to commit atrocity crimes; the absence of internal and external elements that can contribute to preventing an escalation of violence, ending it or lessening its impact; enabling circumstances or preparatory actions, whether sudden or gradual, that provide an environment conducive to the commission of atrocity crimes; and triggering factors – are still present, and some are even more marked than before. A deterioration of the situation in regard to political, economic and security stability was highlighted as was the widespread climate of impunity and an increase in hate speech with political or ethnic dimensions or both.

Key Issues and Options

Increased suppression of civil liberties ahead of the presidential elections, the threat of elections-related violence and the stalled inter-Burundian dialogue remain concerns that the Council will wish to monitor closely. One option would be to adopt a presidential statement ahead of the election, calling on Burundi to take steps towards an inclusive, transparent and peaceful electoral process, including respect for civil liberties, and urging the EAC to invigorate efforts to revive its mediation efforts.

Another major issue is the continued lack of accountability for human rights violations over the last several years, amplified by the closure in February 2019 of the country's

UN Human Rights Office at the insistence of the government after a 23-year presence. The Council may encourage Burundi to cooperate fully with all UN bodies.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council divisions over Burundi persist. Some members maintain that, given the political tensions and human rights violations in the country, Burundi should remain on the Council's agenda, while others, notably Russia and China, argue that the country should come off the agenda, as it does not represent a threat to international peace and security. In the Council's last formal meeting on Burundi on 30 October 2019, South Africa appealed to the Council "to support the Government of Burundi and the East African Community mediation process as it lays the foundation for an environment that is conducive to the holding of democratic elections". While Council members agree that the continued viability of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreements—which ended the Burundian civil war in 2000—is important as a basis for stability in the country, Burundi is adamant in its opposition to what it considers interference by the international community in its internal affairs.

Some Council members are concerned about the upcoming elections and have emphasised that elections should be held in a credible and transparent manner. The Council has had difficulty finding new channels with which to re-engage Burundi. The conduct of the upcoming elections could provide the Council an opportunity to revisit the nature of its engagement with Burundi and the frequency and timing of Council briefings.

France is the penholder on Burundi.

Security Council Report Staff

Karin Landgren
Executive Director

Joanna Weschler
Deputy Executive Director

Shamala Kandiah Thompson
Deputy Executive Director

Paul Romita
Senior Policy Analyst

Alina Entelis
Policy Analyst

Teale Harold
Policy Analyst

Lindiwe Knutson
Policy Analyst

Robert Schupp
Policy Analyst

Vladimir Sesar
Policy Analyst

Vanessa Tiede
Policy Analyst

Benjamin Villanti
Policy Analyst

Robbin VanNewkirk
Website Manager

Audrey Waysse
Operations Manager

Maritza Lopez
Administrative Assistant

Anna Haven
Research Assistant

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Design Point Five, NY

Security Council Report
711 Third Avenue, Suite 1501
New York NY 10017

Telephone +1 212 759 6394

Fax +1 212 759 4038

Web securitycouncilreport.org
whatsinblue.org

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