

Monthly Forecast

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29 May 2020
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Overview

France has the presidency of the Security Council in June. In light of the UN Headquarters' anticipated partial closure extending to the end of June, the Council is expected to continue using the provisional measures agreed on at the end of March, as adapted in April and May.

There will be an open debate via videoconference (VTC) on [children and armed conflict](#) where the briefers are expected to be the Special Representative for children and armed conflict, Virginia Gamba; the Executive Director of UNICEF, Henrietta Fore; and a civil society representative. Unless new special measures are adopted in June, statements by non-Council members are expected to be submitted in writing.

A briefing by the [UN High Commissioner for Refugees](#), Filippo Grandi, is planned as an open VTC. He is expected to highlight the situation of refugees in several country-specific cases on the Council's agenda as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugee populations.

The seven adoptions due this month are expected to follow the written voting procedure established at the end of March. Among them will be an adoption to renew the mandate of the [UN mission in Mali](#), ahead of which the Council will hold a high-level open VTC with the participation of the foreign minister of France, Jean-Yves Le Drian. The public session will be followed by a closed VTC.

Several meetings on Sudan are anticipated. Following a rollover of [UNAMID's](#) mandate on 28 May until 3 June, an adoption will be needed to renew the mission's mandate. There will also be an open VTC by the [ICC Prosecutor](#) and a closed VTC briefing by the chair of [1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee](#).

There are a number of other meetings on African issues scheduled this month:

- [Burundi](#), closed VTC on recent developments;
- [CAR](#), open and closed VTCs on the Secretary-General's report on MINUSCA;
- Central Africa region, an open and closed VTC on [UNOCA](#) and the implementation of the UN regional strategy to combat the Lord's Resistance Army;
- [DRC](#), renewal of the 1533 sanctions regime and its Group of Experts and open and closed

VTCs on the Secretary-General's report on MONUSCO;

- [Sahel](#), open VTC on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel;
- [Somalia](#), renewal of UNSOM and a closed VTC briefing by the chair of the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee; and
- [South Sudan](#), open and closed VTCs on UNMISS.

Regarding Middle East issues, an adoption is anticipated to renew 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.

An adoption is also expected to renew [UNDOF's](#) mandate. The regular quarterly briefing on the Golan Heights will also take place in June in a closed VTC.

Regarding [Syria](#) there will be regular monthly meetings held as open and closed VTCs on the political and humanitarian situation and a closed VTC on the use of chemical weapons.

Other anticipated meetings include:

- [Iraq](#), closed VTC on UNITAD;
- [Israel/Palestine](#), open and closed VTCs on developments; and
- [Yemen](#), closed VTC on developments.

In June, the Council will hold its semi-annual debate on the [International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals \(IRMCT\)](#). A resolution extending the term of the prosecutor and the operating period of the IRMCT, both of which expire on 30 June 2020, is expected.

Meetings are also expected on [Afghanistan](#) and [Haiti](#). The Council will also hold open and closed VTCs on the Iran nuclear issue.

The annual meeting of UN Force Commanders is also anticipated in June. Force commanders from MINUSMA and UNMISS as well as the Deputy Force Commander from UNDOF are expected to brief.

The General Assembly is expected in June to [elect five Security Council members](#) for the 2021-2022 term.

In Hindsight: The Evolving Security Council-PBC Relationship

Recent years have seen the emergence of a much more active Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), an intergovernmental advisory body to the UN's main organs created in 2005 to maintain attention to post-conflict countries. This includes increased engagement with the Security Council, after years of what could be described as indifference to the PBC on the Council's part, and relative passivity by the PBC. The changes reflect a proactive approach by PBC members, the efforts of some elected members of the Security Council advocating within the Council for the PBC, and greater openness among the permanent members, traditionally wary of other bodies' involvement in tasks related to the maintenance of international peace and security.

The so-called UN peacebuilding architecture has undergone several reviews, with the third such review underway since November 2019 and results expected by the end of this year. The 2015-2016 review contributed to a broader understanding of peacebuilding, embodied by the concept of "sustaining peace" as a responsibility of the entire UN system. In resolution 2282 adopted at the review's conclusion, the Council expressed its commitment to seeking the specific, strategic and targeted advice of the PBC, particularly during the creation, renewal and drawdown of missions.

Among the early signs of improved cooperation was the Council's first-ever request that the Secretary-General prepare a peacebuilding plan ahead of the drawdown of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) when renewing the mission's mandate for the last time in December 2016. The resolution emphasised the important convening role of the PBC in developing this plan (S/RES/2333). Similarly, a month later in a presidential statement on West Africa and the Sahel, the Security Council underlined the importance of PBC support to the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in implementing the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (S/PRST/2017/2). The last time the Council sought PBC engagement with a new situation had been in 2010, over Liberia. The PBC's consideration of the Sahel came as some member states and the Secretariat sought to expand the PBC's discussions beyond the six country-specific configurations (CSCs) on its agenda. The PBC has as well been moving away from organising its work around CSCs and towards conducting more of its activities through its 31-member state Organizational Committee, while addressing the needs of a

broader range of fragile states besides those emerging from conflict.

In December 2018, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement on the PBC's advisory role taking stock of recent changes. The statement acknowledged "progress that the Peacebuilding Commission has achieved"; recognised its "unique" convening platform to bring together member states, host governments, the UN system, international financial institutions, regional organisations, and civil society, and identified best practices (S/PRST/2018/20).

Useful practices, according to the Council, included the PBC's informal interactive dialogues with the Council, its role during transitions related to the withdrawal of UN peace operations, and its collaboration with regional and subregional organisations, including the AU. The presidential statement flagged as good practice the October 2018 "observations"—a letter to the president of the Security Council from the PBC's Central African Republic (CAR) country configuration—ahead of the mandate renewal for the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR. Until then, the PBC had conveyed its advice only during Council briefings or informal interactions. The presidential statement encouraged the PBC to continue to align its work with the Council's calendar and engage with stakeholders well in advance of relevant Council meetings. Addressing a persistent criticism of the PBC, the statement encouraged it to provide advice "complementing and not duplicating the reports of the Secretary-General to the Council".

The practise of sending letters of advice to the Council ahead of mandate renewals, which began with the CAR observations, may be the most visible sign of increasing PBC-Council engagement since the Council statement. The CAR configuration continued the practice in October 2019, as did the Guinea-Bissau configuration in February. In December 2019, the PBC for the first time submitted a similar letter ahead of a renewal that has no country configuration, namely of UNOWAS; it did so again in April on the thematic topic of youth, peace and security. PBC representatives have also more systematically sent the Council reports on their missions, most recently to Burundi, the CAR and Guinea-Bissau.

Another apparent trend has been the Council's interest in seeing the PBC engage in fragile situations. The PBC has held three meetings since May 2019 on Burkina Faso, which

the Council discusses during meetings on the G5 Sahel Joint Force and UNOWAS. Council members encouraged and welcomed this involvement in press statements last year on the Joint Force and requested that the Secretary-General keep the PBC informed of efforts to scale up the UN country team to address Burkina Faso's humanitarian crisis and help stem the deteriorating security situation.

The increased interaction between the Council and the PBC has also included more, and perhaps more strategic, use of informal interactive dialogues (IID). In March 2019, Germany organised an IID between the PBC and Council members to consider peacebuilding needs and challenges in the Sahel ahead of a Council visiting mission to Mali and Burkina Faso. Côte d'Ivoire and Belgium, as co-penholders on UNOWAS, similarly organised an IID in November 2019 on a strategic review of the special political mission, inviting the PBC chair to participate. As the Council's current informal coordinator with the PBC, Germany is responsible for organising "stocktaking" sessions between Council members that are members of the PBC, and the PBC and CSC chairs, a practice started in 2013. It has sought to make these meetings more forward-looking to identify opportunities where the PBC may offer useful advice to the Council. This recently resulted in coordination around the issue of youth, peace and security ahead of a Council videoconference on the issue.

Transitions continue to be identified as an important area for PBC-Council cooperation, and its continued convening role in respect of Liberia is cited as a positive example. The PBC has not yet become engaged with ongoing transitions in Darfur and Haiti, however. And despite the transition process set in place by the Council since February 2019 for the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) to conclude by the end of 2020, the PBC has yet to undertake the same sort of exercises to consider UN country team capacities and gaps that it held on Liberia before UNMIL's departure. Guinea-Bissau's latest political impasse, however, has made it difficult for the UN and the PBC to engage with national authorities on their priorities and conduct post-mission planning.

Aligning its calendar with the Security Council's programme of work, which the PBC committed itself to doing following the 2016 working methods review, is a practical way of enhancing its advisory role, although

In Hindsight: The Evolving Security Council-PBC Relationship

its practice remains inconsistent. The written advice of the PBC's Guinea-Bissau configuration was sent to the Council on 24 February, only four days before UNIOGBIS' mandate expiry. At times, a CSC chair may still largely duplicate the information shared by the heads of mission during a Council briefing.

Ultimately, the test of the relationship lies in the PBC's substantive advice adding value to the Council, and its capacity for complementing the Council's work. Providing useful advice turns on such factors as the capacities of respective PBC chairs, the level of Secretariat support, cooperation with national authorities and their interest in peacebuilding, and the extent of member state divisions.

A recurring criticism is that since PBC documents are adopted by consensus, this enables the P5, who are all PBC members—and other member states—to reject recommendations before they reach the Council.

The PBC can play an important complementary role to that of the Council. PBC meetings that focus on structural challenges related to governance or development that are important to stabilise fragile states, for example, can contribute to a greater understanding of these issues and to more efficient donor assistance. Furthermore, the PBC has made progress towards playing the envisioned “bridging” role between the UN's peace and security, development, and human rights

pillars. Most recently, an 8 April meeting of the PBC on the COVID-19 pandemic provided a forum for considering the multi-faceted impacts that risk destabilising countries affected by conflicts such as food insecurity, employment and livelihoods and underlying tensions. A PBC press release on the session welcomed the Secretary-General's global ceasefire appeal and, notably, recognised the efforts of the World Health Organisation (WHO), whereas arguments about referring to the WHO have hitherto blocked agreement on a Security Council resolution on the pandemic. The COVID-19 meeting again showed the emergence of a more active PBC and opportunities for it to play an active role.

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Lebanon (1701)

On 4 May, the Security Council heard a briefing on the latest Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (S/2020/19) in a closed VTC meeting. The Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Ján Kubiš, and Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed the Council. 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. Following the meeting, Council members issued press elements that commended the work of UNIFIL, emphasised the importance of the force being able to fulfil its mandate, and condemned any attacks on UNIFIL peacekeepers. On 13 May, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed the Council on the latest Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1559 (S/2020/329) in a closed VTC meeting. Following the meeting, Council members issued press elements that stressed the need to fully implement resolution 1559, which requires the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon and stated that violations of the Lebanese sovereignty by air and land should immediately stop. Council members further emphasised the urgent need for the Lebanese government to carry out economic reform in the country and expressed their support to Lebanon in addressing the economic, security, and humanitarian challenges, as well as the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, that are facing the country.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

On 6 May, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Valentin Inzko, briefed in an open VTC (S/2020/379) on his latest semi-annual report (S/2020/345). A civil society briefer, Irena Hasić, Executive Director of Youth Initiative for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, also briefed the Council. Inzko applauded the tripartite presidency for launching the process on 28 April to implement 14 key priorities for achieving EU membership. However, he expressed concern that some political parties “will soon return to the pre-pandemic status quo” where decision-making at the State level was blocked by parties belong to Republika Srpska's governing coalition. Hasić explained that filling the gaps in the current educational system is “crucial to offering Bosnia and Herzegovina youth the tools they need to become active and responsible citizens and promoters and drivers of change.”

High-level Arria-formula Meeting to Mark the 75th Anniversary of the End of World War II on European Soil

On 8 May, Estonia hosted a high-level Arria-formula meeting entitled: “Seventy-five years from the end of the Second World War on European soil—lessons learned for preventing future atrocities, responsibility of the Security Council”. Urmas Reinsalu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia chaired the meeting and briefings were provided by Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative of the EU; Rosemary DiCarlo,

Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; and Timothy Snyder, Professor of History at Yale University. In addition to Security Council members, 61 member states made statements in the meeting. Of the participating states, 45 were represented at ministerial-level. Estonia circulated a concept note (S/2020/352) ahead of the meeting.

Sudan/South Sudan

On 14 May, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2519 extending the mandate of UNISFA, as well as its support to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, until 15 November (S/2020/408). The resolution maintained the mission's troop and police ceilings. It was adopted through a written procedure under temporary, extraordinary and provisional measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Myanmar

Council members were briefed on 14 May by Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener in a closed VTC. She covered recent developments in Myanmar, including the democratic transition, the conflict in Rakhine state and Rohingya crisis and highlighted the impact of COVID19 on these issues. She also addressed humanitarian access issues and regional cooperation. Following the meeting the past and present EU Council members (Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany and Poland) held a virtual stakeout during which

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they expressed their concern about the military escalation in Rakhine and Chin States and called for an immediate, comprehensive and nationwide ceasefire.

Working Methods

On 15 May, Estonia, which is the vice-chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions (IWG) organised the annual open debate on the working methods of the Security Council (S/2020/418). Estonia, jointly with Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, whose Permanent Representative, Ambassador I. Rhonda King chairs the IWG, prepared a concept note for the debate (S/2020/374). Because of the temporary measures adopted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the debate was held under the format of an open VTC. The briefers were King, in her capacity as chair of IWG; Karin Landgren, Executive Director of Security Council Report; and Edward Luck of Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. The ten elected members made a joint statement, delivered Ambassador Dang Dinh Quy (Viet Nam) whereas the permanent members each made a statement. The statements of the briefers and Council members were webcast live and archived on UN Web TV. Member states not on the Council had been invited to submit written statements. There were 41 written submissions from non-Council members. Some statements were made on behalf of groups, such as Accountability, Coherence and Transparency, or ACT, submitted by Switzerland; the Nordic States, submitted by Norway; the Group of Like-Minded States on Targeted Sanctions, submitted by Chile; and a diverse group of 25 recent former members of the Council, submitted by New Zealand. The text of all the briefings and statements will be published in a compilation document. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, in its capacity as IWG chair plans to produce an analytical summary of the statements.

Middle East

On 20 May, Security Council members held an open VTC, followed by a closed VTC, on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" (S/2020/430). Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov briefed. He told Council members that: "The continuing threat

of annexation by Israel of parts of the West Bank would constitute a most serious violation of international law, deal a devastating blow to the two-State solution, close the door to a renewal of negotiations, and threaten efforts to advance regional peace and our broader efforts to maintain international peace and security".

Venezuela

On 20 May, the Security Council held an open VTC meeting on Venezuela at the request of Russia (S/2020/435). Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed the Council. The meeting was prompted by a letter that Venezuela sent to the Security Council on 13 May (S/2020/399) in which it alleges that there was an attempt by groups of mercenaries to infiltrate Venezuela between 3 and 4 May, with the aim of perpetrating criminal acts and assassinating high-level officials in the country. The letter claims involvement by Colombia and the US in the alleged attempted infiltration—an allegation which both countries have denied. At the 20 May meeting, Di-Carlo echoed the Secretary-General's position, which opposes any escalation of the situation in Venezuela, and called for the resumption of political dialogue between the main political parties in the country and for the holding of credible and inclusive elections. She further expressed concern about the politicisation of humanitarian aid and about reports of detentions of political leaders and journalists reporting on COVID-19 in Venezuela.

Crimea

On 21 May, Russia hosted an Arria-formula meeting via VTC on the situation in Crimea. The meeting was framed as a follow-up to the 6 March Arria-formula meeting on the human rights situation in Crimea, organised by Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, the UK, and the US in partnership with Ukraine. Members were briefed by Asadullah Bairov, Deputy Mufti of Crimea; Anastasia Gridchina, head of the Ukrainian community of Crimea; Ervin Musaev, Deputy Director-General of the Crimean Tatar TV channel "Millet/People"; and Alexander Makar, presenter of the TV channel "Krym/Crimea". In their statements, the briefers defended the legitimacy of the 2014 Crimean referendum and the region's subsequent accession to Russia. They also argued that the Crimean population and ethnic minorities in the area

enjoy a wide range of freedoms, speak their language and practice their religion freely, and in general, do not face persecution at the hands of the Russian authorities. Most members who spoke at the meeting, condemned the annexation of Crimea by Russia and accused it of violating the basic principles of the international law including multiple General Assembly resolutions that uphold the territorial integrity of Ukraine, including Crimea and Sevastopol.

Cyber Stability

On 22 May, there was an Arria-formula meeting on: "Cyber Stability, Conflict Prevention and Capacity Building", organised by Estonia in cooperation with Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Indonesia and Kenya. Estonian Prime Minister Jüri Ratas delivered opening remarks and Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia) chaired the meeting. Briefers included High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu; James Lewis, Senior Vice President and Director of the Technology and Public Policy Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington DC think tank; and David Koh, Chief Executive of the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore. The meeting was organised in order to raise awareness of cyber challenges to international peace and security, how these challenges can be mitigated, and how responsible state behaviour in this sphere can be enhanced.

Protection of Civilians

On 27 May, Council members were joined by Secretary-General António Guterres, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross Peter Maurer, and Nobel Peace Laureate and member of The Elders Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in a high-level open VTC to discuss the Secretary-General's annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The Secretary-General reiterated his global ceasefire call and detailed the potentially devastating impact of COVID-19. He also stressed the disproportionate consequences of conflict on women, girls, and people with disabilities. Maurer underlined how Council divisions, particularly around humanitarian access, increase suffering and must be ended. Sirleaf bemoaned the amount of protracted conflicts that still exist and called on the Council to find political will to

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end the conflicts that are hurting civilians. At a later date, the Council will release a document where all statements, including those from the wider membership that were submitted in writing, will be compiled.

EU-UN Briefing

On 28 May, the Council held its annual meeting on strengthening the partnership with the EU under its agenda item on cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations in maintaining international peace and security. Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy briefed the Council in an open VTC.

DPRK

On 29 May, the chair of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Christoph Heusgen (Germany), briefed Council

members in a closed VTC on the 90-day report of the committee's work. The briefing was primarily focused on developments related to the work of the committee and the implementation of the sanctions.

COVID-19

During May, Council members continued negotiations on a draft resolution to support the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Co-penholders, France and Tunisia placed a text under a silence procedure on 7 May. But the US, which has objected to a resolution mentioning the World Health Organization, broke silence the next day, unable to accept a less direct reference to the "United Nations system, including specialized health agencies". During May, Council members held closed VTCs at ambassadorial level on the draft resolution under "any other business"

on: 6 May, 12 May and 21 May. The 12 May session was requested by Estonia to discuss the possibility of a shorter draft resolution, focused exclusively on those elements related to the Secretary-General's ceasefire appeal, an initiative floated by Estonia together with Germany. Despite informal circulation of a text, the proposal did not gain traction. By the end of May, France and Tunisia were still engaging Council members to try to reach an agreement on a resolution.

Hong Kong

On 29 May, at the request of the UK and the US, Council members discussed the 27 May decision by China's National People's Congress Party regarding national security legislation for Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China) under "any other business".

Burundi

Expected Council Action

In June, a Secretariat representative is expected to brief the Council on the situation in Burundi in a videoconference meeting.

Key Recent Developments

In May, the Council was expected to meet on Burundi, in keeping with the quarterly briefings on the issue requested by resolution 2303. That meeting was not scheduled, however, and it appears that the decision was taken to postpone it until after Burundi's 20 May elections. Council members had held an informal interactive dialogue (IID) on the situation in Burundi on 26 February. This was originally 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. The last formal Council meeting on Burundi took place on 30 October 2019. (Resolution 2303 adopted on 29 July 2016 requires the Secretary-General to report on the situation in Burundi every three months.)

On 20 May, Burundi held Presidential

elections. The elections will determine a successor to President Pierre Nkurunziza, who won a controversial third term in 2015, precipitating mass demonstrations and an increase in violence and repression against his opponents. Seven candidates competed in the elections. Evariste Ndayishimiye, Secretary-General of the National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD)—Burundi's ruling party—and Agathon Rwasasa of the National Congress for Liberty (CNL), the leading opposition party, were considered the top two candidates. According to media reports, polling took place in a largely incident-free environment. Speaking to the media on 22 May, Rwasasa said, however, that more than 200 CNL supporters were arrested on election day and that he retained the option of challenging the results over suspected fraud. On 25 May, provisional results were announced with Ndayishimiye winning 68 percent of the vote and Rwasasa with 24 percent.

The pre-election campaign was conducted in a tense environment: there were reports of

campaign violence and of the arrest of at least 140 members of the political opposition during the campaign. On 11 May, the Burundian government informed the East African Community (EAC) that EAC election observers would be required to quarantine for 14 days because of COVID-19; consequently, the EAC was unable to undertake its observation activities. The threat of COVID-19 did not prevent the candidates from organising large campaign rallies. On 12 May, the World Health Organization's country representative and three other staff members were expelled from Burundi. According to the UN's Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, which released a statement on the situation on 14 May, the electoral campaign was "marred by a spiral of violence and political intolerance". In a 17 May joint statement, the AU Commission and UN Secretariat called on "all entities involved in organizing the 20 May elections, the defense and security forces and state-owned media to fully contribute to preserving a stable and peaceful environment, pre-requisite for free, inclusive, fair, transparent and credible elections in Burundi".

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 for Burundi Michel Kafando.

Burundi

Key Issues and Options

The conduct of the presidential elections and the post-election transition, as well as reports of increased suppression of civil liberties during the pre-election period, are areas of concern for several Council members. The impact that the elections will have on the stalled inter-Burundian dialogue is also something that the Council will monitor closely.

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

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 past, South Africa appealed

to the Council "to support the Government of Burundi and the EAC mediation process as it lays the foundation for an environment that is conducive to the holding of democratic elections".

The Council has had difficulty finding new channels through which to re-engage Burundi. The conduct of the elections and post-election transition 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.

Syria

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Notwithstanding the relative calm in Syria's north-west as a result of the 5 March ceasefire agreed by Russia and Turkey, tensions remain because of continued reports of instability in the country's south-west, concerns about COVID-19 and the dire humanitarian situation. In this context, Council members held an informal interactive dialogue (IID) on chemical weapons in Syria on 12 May with Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Director-General Fernando Arias, Coordinator of the OPCW's Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) Santiago Oñate, and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu. That meeting, conducted through videoconferencing (VTC), focused on the first report of the OPCW IIT, which, according to Oñate's public remarks at the report's 8 April public release, "concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the perpetrators of the use of sarin as a chemical weapon in Ltamenah on 24 and 30 March 2017, and the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon on 25 March 2017 were individuals

belonging to the Syrian Arab Air Force".

The closed, informal format of the IID apparently offered members the opportunity to speak frankly with Arias and ask Oñate about the IIT's findings. However, neither Russia nor China attended the meeting, and Syria, which was invited, also did not attend. During the meeting, several members apparently reiterated positions expressed during April's VTC on chemical weapons; a number of Council members published their statements on their respective missions' websites after the April meeting. The UK and Estonia underscored the need for accountability for those deemed responsible for the attacks, and Germany said that "accountability is essential and impunity for these heinous crimes is not an option". South Africa "took note" of the report and expressed its wish to work with the Executive Council of the OPCW and the Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) to further examine the report. Following the IID, Russia's Permanent Representative, Vassily Nebenzia, held a press briefing at which he called into question the IIT's legitimacy, questioned its methodology, and said its investigation was a "flagrant violation of the CWC". In a letter dated 12 May and sent to the Secretary-General and Security Council on 13 May, the Russian Federation

announced that it "object[ed] to the practice of interaction with the OPCW Director General behind the backs of the vast majority of the OPCW membership", and would not take part in the "'informal informal' interactive dialogue". The letter also relayed a series of questions it had intended to ask Arias in an "open setting".

The Council met again on 18 and 19 May for separate VTC meetings on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria, respectively. Briefing on the political situation, Special Envoy Geir O. Pedersen noted that aerial bombardments had stopped and that the ceasefire appeared to be holding in Syria's north-west despite reports of artillery shelling and crossline skirmishes. He urged all parties to take advantage of the "calm" to seek a nationwide ceasefire and to allow the country to address COVID-19.

Despite the calm in the north-west, the security situation in other parts of Syria remains tense. On 8 May, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said in a statement that while the ceasefire in Idlib province was "mostly holding", the situation in other parts of the country was "a ticking time-bomb that must not be ignored". Since early March, Bachelet noted, the UN had documented 52 targeted killings in Syrian government-controlled Daraa Governorate.

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA [Security Council Resolutions 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 Reports S/2020/401](#) (14 May 2020) was on the review of the UN's cross-line and cross-border operations. [S/2020/310](#) (15 April 2020) was the first report of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons' Investigation and Identification Team. [Security Council Letters S/2020/390](#) (13 May 2020) was a letter from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation on the 12 May Informal Interactive Dialogue on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. [S/2020/354](#) (1 May 2020) was a letter from the president of the Security Council containing the briefing provided by Mark Lowcock during the 29 April open VTC meetings on Syria. [S/2020/353](#) (1 May 2020) was a letter from the president of the Security Council containing the briefing provided by Geir O. Pedersen during the 29 April open VTC meetings on Syria.

Syria

Pedersen echoed these findings and raised concern about a resurgence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Syria's eastern desert. Pedersen also announced that an agreement had been reached to organise a third session of the Constitutional Committee as soon as an in-person meeting could be convened.

Despite official reports of only 64 confirmed cases of COVID-19, the disease continues to affect the country. According to Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock's 19 May briefing, low testing capacity and a shortage of medical supplies and personal protective equipment persist, and the economic impact of COVID-19 is taking a toll. Rising prices for food staples and a devaluation of the Syrian pound in some parts of the country are driving food insecurity to levels not previously seen.

On 13 May, the Secretary-General submitted his review of the UN's humanitarian cross-line and cross-border operations, which was requested in resolution 2504. The resolution renewed the authorisation for cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria through two border crossings (Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa) for six months but did not reauthorise the AlYarubiyah border crossing between Syria and Iraq or the Al Ramtha border crossing between Syria and Jordan. The report noted that 11 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance throughout Syria. Of the 6.2 million people living in areas not under Syrian government control, 4.2 million concentrated in Syria's north-east and north-west have acute humanitarian needs.

In his 19 May Council briefing, Lowcock was unequivocal on cross-border assistance in the north-west, saying:

"[M]eeting the enormous humanitarian needs in the north-west requires a renewal of the cross-border authorisation for the Bab al Salaam and Bab Al Hawa border crossings for an additional 12 months... This decision cannot be left to the last minute. Too many lives are at stake."

In the north-east, cross-line air shipments of health supplies have been ongoing, and the World Health Organization delivered 30 tonnes of medical supplies to the area on 10 May. According to Lowcock, however, "supplies reached only 31 percent of the medical facilities that had previously been supported by cross-border deliveries from AlYarubiyah". This, he argued, meant that a "combination of more cross-border and cross-line access is required to sustain, and preferably increase, humanitarian assistance" and that alternatives to AlYarubiyah have comparatively more limitations.

Key Issues and Options

The cross-border delivery of humanitarian assistance remains a contentious issue. Several Council members are seeking ways to authorise the reopening of the AlYarubiyah border crossing, given their views about the inadequacy of current cross-line deliveries and especially in light of the risk posed by COVID-19. Some Council members, however, have expressed scepticism about the need for such an authorisation: speaking during the 29 April Council briefing, Russia's

Permanent Representative urged Council members "not to waste their time on looking for a way to advocate, explicitly or implicitly for getting AlYarubiyah back...". Resolution 2504 expires on 10 July, and members are anticipating difficult negotiations.

During the April and May briefings, some Council members cited the Secretary-General's call for the global waiver of sanctions that could undermine the capacity of countries to ensure access to food, health supplies and medical support to respond to COVID-19 as a reason for lifting unilateral sanctions on Syria. Other members, including the P3 (France, the UK and the US), have argued that goods and medical supplies used for humanitarian purposes are not subject to sanctions and that exemptions exist for humanitarian activities.

Despite the Council's discussion of the OPCW IIT report in April and May, this issue could also feature on the agenda in June, with some members considering a possible Council product to highlight the IIT's findings and push for accountability.

Council Dynamics

Member states continue to hold starkly different views on Council engagement on Syria. The P3 and others tend to condemn attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure by the Syrian government and its allies and raise concerns about accountability while China, Russia, and some elected members often emphasise the importance of eliminating the threat of terrorism in Syria.

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

Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force

Expected Council Action

In June, the Council is expected to hold an open videoconference (VTC), followed by a closed VTC, on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (FC-G5S), which Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger (G5 Sahel) established in 2017 to combat terrorist and criminal groups in the region.

Key Recent Developments

The Sahel region continues to be destabilised by terrorist groups and intercommunal violence often exacerbated by these groups. In Niger, attacks claimed by the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) left 72 soldiers dead on 10 December 2019 and 89 soldiers on 9 January—the two deadliest incidents experienced by Niger's security forces. Violence in Burkina Faso continues to create an

unprecedented humanitarian crisis in that country, displacing more than 839,000 people by 26 May, compared with 87,000 people in January 2019.

In light of the deteriorating situation, the heads of state of the G5 Sahel countries and France met in Pau, France, on 13 January, announcing the establishment of a new Coalition for the Sahel. The coalition, open to additional partners, encompasses

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. [Secretary-General's Report S/2020/373](#) (8 May 2020) was on the FC-G5S. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8670](#) (20 November 2019) was a briefing on the FC-G5S.

Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force

initiatives to fight terrorism, re-establish state presence, and coordinate development activities. Immediate military efforts will concentrate on 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.

Other security initiatives include the launching of Task Force Takuba under the command of Operation Barkhane. Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Sweden (the latter pending parliamentary approval) committed special forces to the task force at a ministerial meeting held remotely on 27 March. The task force is 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-Gourma region. Moreover, the AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the G5 Sahel have continued discussions about the deployment of 3,000 additional troops to the Sahel. In a 21 April communiqué, the AU Peace and Security Council said it looked forward to being briefed by 15 June on a revised draft strategic concept note developed by the AU Commission for deploying these troops.

Despite the deteriorating security situation, the Secretary-General's 8 May report on the FC-G5S said that "the Joint Force's operational tempo increased throughout the reporting period". The report continued: "For the first time since its establishment, it was able to simultaneously carry out and plan operations. In addition, operations increased in scale and duration", taking place alongside recently launched regional and international security initiatives. The report flagged issues that continued to limit the ability of the FC-G5S to effectively benefit from the operational and engineering support of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). It also observed several recent delays in FC-G5S activities, deployments and operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and says that

terrorist groups have sought to exploit the pandemic to intensify attacks and for propaganda purposes.

The Secretary-General's report highlighted the importance of counter-terrorism operations respecting human rights. Recent months have seen growing numbers of reported human rights violations by security forces and self-defence militias. From 27 March to 2 April, Nigerien forces allegedly arrested and then executed 102 ethnic Tuareg and Fulani men in Inates and Ayorou in the western Tillaberi region. Niger's minister of defence said that this would be investigated. A report by the MINUSMA human rights division also reported that Nigerien armed forces were responsible for 34 extrajudicial executions in several Malian localities between 23 February and 5 March, and that there were more than 100 extrajudicial killings by Malian security forces in the first quarter of 2020. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees condemned violence in Burkina Faso against Malian refugees by security forces who forcibly entered the Mentao refugee camp on 2 May, injuring at least 32 people, some seriously.

Key Issues and Options

Taking stock of progress and challenges in operationalising the FC-G5S, including its ability to use the support it receives from MINUSMA, is a key issue for the session in June.

Promoting and ensuring that the FC-G5S complies with international humanitarian law and the UN's human rights due diligence policy, which is necessary for MINUSMA support and critical for effective counter-terrorism, is a related issue. Recent incidents of extra-judicial executions and other abuses by defence and security forces have caused increased concerns about military tactics. While FC-G5S units may not have been involved in some incidents, it may be challenging to distinguish actions of the FC-G5S from those of national forces outside the command of the joint force. 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 another important issue.

The findings of a Secretariat assessment of the support provided by MINUSMA to the

FC-G5S will be included in the Secretary-General's upcoming report on Mali ahead of the mission's mandate renewal at the end of June. Last year's resolution 2480 renewing MINUSMA's mandate expanded its provision of life-support consumables to all joint force contingents, and not just those operating on Malian territory, provided the FC-G5S or other partners deliver the assistance. But as indicated in the Secretary-General's 8 May report, MINUSMA's mandate needs to be changed to allow commercial entities to transfer this assistance from the mission to the FC-G5S. The Council may address this impediment and other findings of the assessment in the mandate renewal of MINUSMA.

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 it views as part of a long-term exit strategy for Operation Barkhane. Niger is a member of the G5 Sahel, which has continued to call for the Council to authorise a Chapter VII mandate for the FC-G5S. In their view, that could ensure sustainable financial support to the FC-G5S. More recently, Niger objected to holding last month's planned Council meeting on the FC-G5S because of its sensitivities to the Council's discussing alleged human rights abuses committed by security forces. Several Council members contribute to other security initiatives in the region, including MINUSMA and EU training and capacity-building missions, and to 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. The US prefers to assist the FC-G5S bilaterally, and it has been wary of authorising MINUSMA to support the FC-G5S.

France is the penholder on the G5 Sahel joint force.

International Criminal Tribunals

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council is scheduled to hold its semi-annual debate on the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT), which was established in 2010 to carry out the remaining essential functions of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) after their respective closures. The IRMCT's president, Judge Carmel Agius, and prosecutor, Serge Brammertz, are expected to brief during the debate and to meet remotely with the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals prior to this. A resolution extending the term of the prosecutor and the operating period of the IRMCT, both of which expire on 30 June 2020, is expected. (The terms of judges are dealt with by an exchange of letters.)

The debate, due to temporary measures adopted for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, is expected to be held as a videoconference.

Key Recent Developments

The IRMCT, with branches in The Hague, Netherlands, and Arusha, Tanzania, focuses on the completion of trials and appeals from the ICTY, which closed in December 2017, and the ICTR, which closed in December 2015. Its tasks include locating and arresting the remaining fugitives indicted by the ICTR—now seven, following an arrest in May—and assisting national jurisdictions in handling requests related to prosecuting international crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The IRMCT was established by resolution 1966 in 2010, which says that “the Mechanism shall continue the jurisdiction, rights and obligations and essential functions of the ICTY and the ICTR”, and that it “should be a small, temporary and efficient structure, whose functions and size will diminish over time”.

Under resolution 1966, the IRMCT was mandated to operate for an initial period of four years and for subsequent periods of two years thereafter unless the Security Council decided otherwise. The Council most recently extended the IRMCT's operating period in resolution 2422, adopted on 27 June 2018

with 14 votes in favour and Russia abstaining. The resolution, which also extended Brammertz's term until 30 June 2020, requested the IRMCT to continue to take steps to enhance efficiency and effective and transparent management, including “more focused projections of completion timelines and disciplined adherence thereto”; “enhancement of the geographic diversity and gender balance of staff, while ensuring continued professional expertise”; and “further reduction of costs, including through, but not limited to, flexible staff engagement”. It requested that the IRMCT update the Council in its semi-annual reports on progress in implementing the resolution.

On 28 February, the Council adopted a presidential statement which, among other things, requested the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals to review a progress report from the IRMCT as well as a report by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of the methods and work of the IRMCT by 15 May. The statement said the outcome of the review would be “reflected by the Security Council in an appropriate form”.

The OIOS report, which assessed the implementation of the recommendations contained in its previous evaluation report from 2018, found that the IRMCT was effective in reducing costs and flexibly deploying staff based on the workload. While it exceeded the gender balance targets in favour of women overall, it continued to strive to achieve geographical diversity, the report said. It also determined that further effort was needed to coordinate and share information across the three organs of the IRMCT (Chambers, Office of the Prosecutor and Registry) and to present clear and focused projections of completion timelines. The report made two recommendations, namely, to ensure systematic thinking and planning about the future and a shared vision of institution-building, and to provide clear and focused projections of completion timelines at the earliest stage possible in annual and progress reports.

On 16 May, Félicien Kabuga (previously one of eight remaining fugitives indicted by the ICTR, of whom there are now seven) was arrested in Paris by French authorities

as the result of a joint investigation with the IRMCT Office of the Prosecutor. The arrest was welcomed by the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Kabuga was indicted by the ICTR in 1997 on seven counts of genocide, complicity in genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, attempt to commit genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, persecution and extermination, all in relation to crimes committed during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Kabuga is expected to be transferred to the custody of the IRMCT, where he will stand trial.

The last semi-annual debate on the IRMCT was held on 11 December 2019.

Key Issues and Options

An immediate issue for Council members is to adopt a resolution appointing a prosecutor of the IRMCT as the term of the current prosecutor expires on 30 June, according to resolution 2422.

A key issue for members is to continue monitoring the work of the IRMCT and the implementation of its mandate. An option is for these considerations to be informed by the most recent OIOS report and the IRMCT progress report, requested in the presidential statement adopted on 28 February. A related issue is for the Council to reflect the outcome of the review by the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals of these two reports “in an appropriate form”, also requested in the presidential statement adopted on 28 February. An option is for the Council to reflect the findings of this process in the resolution appointing a prosecutor by 30 June.

Council Dynamics

Council members generally assess positively the IRMCT and the progress it has made, with the exception of Russia, which had also been consistently critical of the ICTY. In explaining its abstention on resolution 2422, which extended Brammertz's term until 30 June 2020, Russia expressed its opposition to the reappointment of the same officials from the ICTY (Brammertz had previously served as the ICTY's prosecutor) and reiterated its view of the IRMCT's “problems

UN DOCUMENTS ON INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL TRIBUNALS Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2422 (27 June 2018) extended the term of the IRMCT's prosecutor until 30 June 2020. S/RES/1966 (22 December 2010) established the IRMCT. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/4 (28 February 2020) updated the timelines specified in S/PRST/2018/6. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8681 (11 December 2019) was the most recent semi-annual debate. Security Council Letter S/2019/888 (18 November 2019) transmitted the assessment reports of the president and of the prosecutor of the IRMCT. Other S/2020/236 (26 March 2020) was the OIOS report on the IRMCT.

International Criminal Tribunals

with its approaches to justice and its internal administration and staffing policies”. Russia also abstained on the adoption of resolution 2269 on 29 February 2016, which previously extended Brammertz’s term until 30 June 2018. In its statement at the most recent semi-annual briefing on 11 December 2019,

Russia reiterated its view that the IRMCT “has inherited a flawed legacy” from the ICTY. It expressed the “hope that 2020 will bring it significantly closer to its end” and that Russia is “ready to do whatever we can to enable that to happen”.

Council members are likely to welcome

the arrest of Kabuga and call for similar progress in relation to the remaining seven fugitives indicted by the ICTR, as the issue of locating them has been a longstanding one.

Viet Nam is the chair of the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals.

Libya

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council is expected to renew 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. The current authorisation expires on 10 June.

The mandate of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) expires on 15 September. The authorisation given by resolution 2491 (to inspect vessels suspected of migrant smuggling or human trafficking) expires on 3 October. 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

The inspection authorisation, first put into effect in resolution 2292 in 2016, was last renewed for another 12 months, without changes, in resolution 2473 of 10 June 2019. The authorisation also allows for member states to seize and dispose of arms and ammunition found during the inspection of these vessels. The aim is to support the implementation of the Council’s arms embargo on Libya.

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, the capital,

against the internationally recognised and UN-backed Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) based there. In his 15 May report on the implementation of resolution 2473, the Secretary-General expressed his deep concern about the increase in breaches of the arms embargo since the assault started. In that regard, he referred to commitments made by the participants of the Berlin Conference on Libya in January, the conclusions of which the Council endorsed in resolution 2510 of 12 February. The conference participants committed themselves “to unequivocally and fully respect and implement the arms embargo” and called “on all international actors to do the same”. During her 19 May briefing to the Council, the Acting Special Representative and head of UNSMIL, Stephanie Williams, referred to continued “blatant violations of the arms embargo” and to the nature of the Libyan conflict as a “pure proxy war”. The Secretary-General, in his report, also noted that the illicit outflow of weapons has supported terrorist groups in their expansion of influence in the region. For the reasons given, he stressed that the implementation of the arms embargo and the inspection regime are critical.

The EU military operation in the Southern Central Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED Operation SOPHIA) functioned as the only regional arrangement under the Council’s authorisation until the end of its mandate on 31 March. Between the initial authorisation in 2016 and 5 March of this

year, it reported 2,642 queries and hailings, six inspections of vessels leading to arms seizures on two occasions, seven flag enquiries, and 161 friendly approaches. No member state reported any vessel inspections under the authorisation. In his report, the Secretary-General called upon member states to complement the work that the EU military operation does in implementing the Council’s authorisation.

Some difficulties arose in 2019 regarding the re-authorisation of EUNAVFOR MED SOPHIA by the EU Council, whose decisions require unanimity. In March 2019, the EU extended the mandate of Operation Sophia but temporarily suspended the deployment of its naval assets. It seemed that an extension of the existing mandate was not agreeable to all EU members. Last year’s report by the Secretary-General noted with concern that the suspension “de facto means that it has not been possible to inspect and seize vessels in international waters off the coast of Libya, on suspicion of smuggling [...] arms”. In this year’s report, he said that the suspension “precluded the possibility of conducting further friendly approaches, boardings and inspections at sea”. EUNAVFOR MED SOPHIA was still able to report aerial activities such as satellite surveillance with a broad geographical scope.

The EU launched the military operation in the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED IRINI) on 1 April as the follow-on mission to EUNAVFOR MED SOPHIA. Operation

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 vessel inspection authorisation for the high seas off the coast of Libya created in resolution 2292 in support of the implementation of the Security Council’s arms embargo. S/RES/2292 (14 June 2016) established an 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/2020/393** (15 May 2020) was the latest report on the implementation of resolution 2473. **Security Council Letter S/2020/421** (19 May 2020) was an open VTC on UNSMIL and Libya sanctions.

Libya

IRINI will have naval, aerial and satellite assets to implement its mandate. EUNAVFOR MED IRINI's primary task is the implementation of the arms embargo, a secondary task being to disrupt "the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks". Patrols by operation IRINI started on 4 May. So far, France has deployed a vessel and Luxembourg and Poland have contributed aircraft. The operation has faced difficulties regarding aspects of its activities, spending decisions and receiving assets from EU member states. It seems that at different Council meetings, Russia has raised the question of whether EUNAVFOR MED IRINI's mandate is still within the scope of the Council's authorisation. The EU and its member states argue that it is, and so does the Secretary-General in his report. The Council held a closed videoconference (VTC) on operation IRINI on 8 April at Russia's request.

The Secretary-General welcomed EUNAVFOR MED IRINI in his report while at the same time emphasising "the importance of close consultation" with the

GNA. In his statement to the Council on 19 May, Libyan Ambassador Taher M. El-Sonni repeated the GNA's rejection of operation IRINI. He had previously sent letters to the president of the Council conveying the GNA's opinion. He argued that the GNA had not been consulted as required by resolution 2292 and that the authorisation is insufficient to implement the arms embargo and should cover land routes as well. The authorisation given by the Council only covers the inspection of vessels.

Key Issues and Options

The immediate issue for the Council is the renewal of 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.

The ongoing military conflict in Libya and non-compliance with the arms embargo have been continuing issues for the Council. The Council also follows closely the

implementation of the Berlin conference's conclusions. Council members individually could use their influence to put pressure on the conflict parties and proxy powers to adhere to the arms embargo.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Last year's authorisation renewal resolution was adopted unanimously. It seems that Russia is the only Council member showing fundamental scepticism around this year's renewal. Libya has also expressed its rejection of the only operation implementing the authorisation, the EU's EUNAVFOR MED IRINI.

Reports by the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee indicate that a number of countries, including Council members, are involved in breaches of UN sanctions, including the arms embargo.

The UK is the penholder on Libya, sharing the pen with Germany on the sanctions file; Germany will draft the June authorisation renewal. Jürgen Schulz, Germany's Deputy Permanent Representative, chairs the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee.

Sudan (Darfur)

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council will receive the semi-annual briefing, most likely in an open videoconference (VTC), of the ICC Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, related to the Court's work on Darfur. The chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia), is expected to provide the quarterly briefing on the committee's work via VTC.

The mandate of the UN/AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) expires on 31 October 2020.

Key Recent Developments

The situation in Darfur has remained largely unchanged. Intercommunal clashes and civil unrest continue, while the harvest season has seen an increase in attacks against farmers by pastoralists. There are still some two million internally displaced persons in Darfur and

serious human rights violations continue to be reported. In response to the spread of COVID-19, the Sudanese authorities closed all airports, seaports and land crossings in March and declared a public health emergency. Regarding the political situation, it was announced on 17 May that the Sudanese transitional government and the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF), a coalition of rebel groups in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, will initial a peace agreement on 20 June. Talks between the parties are expected to take place from 18 May to 19 June.

On 30 March, the Council adopted resolution 2517, which called for UNAMID's troop and police ceilings and its team sites to be maintained until 31 May. It also expressed the Council's intention to decide by 31 May "courses of action regarding the responsible drawdown and exit of UNAMID" and "to adopt a new resolution at the same time,

establishing a follow-on presence to UNAMID". (See our What's In Blue story of 27 March.) At the time of writing, the Council was expected to adopt such a resolution.

Sudan is not a state party to the Rome Statute of the ICC. The Security Council referred the situation in Darfur to the ICC in resolution 1593, adopted on 31 March 2005, with abstentions from Algeria, Brazil, China, and the US. The ICC investigations regarding Darfur focus on allegations of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Darfur, Sudan, since 1 July 2002. All five ICC arrest warrants in the Darfur situation remain in force. Former President Omar al-Bashir remains in detention in Khartoum, where he was convicted of money-laundering and corruption in December 2019 and sentenced to two years in prison. On 11 February, the Sudanese transitional government announced that al-Bashir would appear

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. 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, requested in resolution 2495. Security Council Letters S/2020/336 (28 April 2020) contained the records of the briefings and statements made during the open part of the 24 April 2020 Council VTC meeting on UNAMID. S/PV.8691 (18 December 2019) was the semi-annual briefing by the ICC Prosecutor.

Sudan (Darfur)

before the ICC. To date, however, details of how and when he might be handed over are unclear. Two other suspects in the Darfur situation, Abdel Raheem Hussein and Ahmad Harun, are also reportedly being detained in Khartoum. The whereabouts of the remaining two Darfur suspects, Ali Kushayb and Abdallah Banda, are unknown.

In her last semi-annual briefing on 18 December 2019, Bensouda noted the principle of complementarity in the Rome Statute, namely that the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute crimes rests with national criminal jurisdictions. However, she said that “[u]nless and until the Sudan can demonstrate to the ICC judges that it is willing and able to genuinely investigate and prosecute the Darfur suspects for the crimes alleged in their respective arrest warrants, those cases will remain admissible before the ICC”. She also noted that Sudan’s “publicly stated commitments to international law and international human rights and justice have created a renewed expectation for accountability in the Darfur situation” and reiterated her Office’s “willingness to engage in dialogue and cooperation with the Sudan so that justice can finally be served for the victims of

atrocities in Darfur, either in a Sudanese court or before the ICC”.

On 24 April, the Council was briefed during an open VTC on the special report of the Chairperson of the AU Commission and the Secretary-General on UNAMID, requested in resolution 2495. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed.

Key Issues and Options

The Council will need to continue to closely assess several key issues—including the overall situation in Darfur and the impact of the broader political situation—in relation to the drawdown of UNAMID and the deployment of a follow-on presence. The impact that COVID-19 is having, and may continue to have, on Sudan and for the future mission will also be important issues for the Council to consider.

Another key issue is for the Council to continue to follow the steps taken in relation to the five ICC arrest warrants, which remain in force. An option is to seek more clarity on the statement made in February by the Sudanese transitional government that al-Bashir

would appear before the ICC. Another option is to further encourage the government to engage in dialogue and cooperation with the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC.

Council Dynamics

The scope and pace of UNAMID’s drawdown and exit have been contentious among Council members for several years. Despite consensus on the need for a follow-on mission to include political and peacebuilding support covering all of Sudan, as requested by the Sudanese authorities, Council members hold divergent positions about the situation in Darfur and the impact of UNAMID’s drawdown and exit on issues such as the protection of civilians.

At the last semi-annual briefing by Bensouda on 18 December 2019, several Council members expressed support for the work of the ICC and encouraged the Sudanese authorities to engage and cooperate with the Court. These included Belgium, the Dominican Republic, France, Germany and the UK.

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

Somalia

Expected Council Action

In June, the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), which expires on 30 June. Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buystwerve (Belgium), chair of the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee, will also brief the Council on activities of the committee in a closed videoconference meeting on 9 June.

At the time of writing, the authorisation for the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was expected to be renewed on 29 May for another year.

Key Recent Developments

The Council was initially set to renew UNSOM’s mandate on 25 March and, in

keeping with its practice, the expected duration of the mandate was to be one year. It became clear in mid-March, however, that the Council’s ability to conduct negotiations would be limited by measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Member states agreed that the best way forward, under the circumstances, would be a technical rollover of UNSOM’s mandate, which in Council practice is the adoption of a largely unchanged mandate for a short period. Through a written procedure agreed to by Council members on 27 March, UNSOM’s mandate was renewed on 30 March until 30 June by the adoption of resolution 2516.

Al-Shabaab, the Somali terrorist group aligned with al-Qaeda, continues to be a

threat to civilians, and has, by some estimates, killed more than 3,000 people in the past five years. AMISOM troops successfully stopped a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attack launched by al-Shabaab on 24 April. The latest Secretary-General’s report on UNSOM, published 13 May, notes that during the reporting period al-Shabaab had increased its mortar attacks in Mogadishu, the capital, with “the Aden Adde International Airport zone, in which the United Nations compound is located...[recording]... the highest number of indirect fire attacks on the zone”.

Somalia is also trying to address the challenges of COVID-19. According to the latest reports, Somalia has over 1,700 cases, the

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2516](#) (30 March 2020) was a technical rollover of UNSOM’s mandate until 30 June 2020. [Secretary-General’s Report S/2020/398](#) (13 May 2020) was the latest report on the activities of UNSOM. [Security Council Letters S/2020/266](#) (31 March 2020) was a communication from the president of the Security Council that contained both the UNSOM draft resolution and letters received in reply from Council members indicating their national positions on the draft resolution. [S/2020/247](#) (30 March 2020) was the letter announcing the conclusion of the written voting procedure on resolution 2516. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8731](#) (24 February 2020) was the discussion of the Secretary-General’s report on UNSOM covering 5 November 2019 to 4 February 2020.

Somalia

second-highest number in eastern Africa. Schools and universities have been closed for weeks, all commercial flights in and out of the country have been cancelled, and there is a night-time curfew in Mogadishu. Humanitarian cargo flights have continued but must receive permission a day in advance. Aid and humanitarian actors say the real number of COVID-19 cases could be much higher, and worry that Somalia's weak healthcare infrastructure has left the country unable to address the disease effectively. As of 15 May, Somalia had only one quarantine centre, and it received its first test kits in April, weeks after its first case was recorded.

Tensions between Somalia and Kenya increased in the first months of 2020 over territory that has access to the Indian Ocean (in June, the International Court of Justice is scheduled to hear arguments about the border between Somalia and Kenya over the disputed territory, with implications for the control of natural resources; at the time of writing, it was unclear if the case could be delayed for COVID-19-related reasons). 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 in an effort to calm tensions. The two presidents made a commitment to improving border security and ties between the nations, but the general shutdown of both countries in response to COVID-19 has made further action difficult. On 4 May, a private Kenyan cargo plane crashed in Bardale, Somalia, with some reports suggesting that the plane had

been shot down. Somalia and Kenya agreed to investigate the crash jointly, possibly a sign of improved relations. The plane was reportedly carrying supplies to assist in Somalia's COVID-19 response.

Council members discussed the situation in Somalia in an open videoconference (VTC) meeting on 21 May. At the meeting, Special Representative James Swan, the AU's Special Representative Francisco Madeira, and Agnes Marcaillou of the UN Mine Action Service briefed. Those participating in the meeting discussed the impact of COVID-19, preparations for elections, and the security situation.

Sanctions-Related Developments

[On 27 May the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee held an "informal informal" meeting to discuss the Panel of Experts' midterm report.](#)

Key Issues and Options

One of the main reasons Council members agreed to a technical rollover of UNSOM's mandate in March was their desire to hold substantive discussions once the Council's interim working methods were more established, which has now happened. There are a number of elements to review in UNSOM's mandate, such as how UNSOM can best continue to provide strategic support and advice to the Federal Government of Somalia and AMISOM, especially ahead of proposed elections. Given that AMISOM's authorisation will now also be renewed before UNSOM's, the Council may be able to better tailor UNSOM's activities to support AMISOM and overall preparations for elections.

In his latest report, the Secretary-General expressed concern that the relationship between the Somali federal government and some of its states remains poor. Council members may echo his concern and could, in future Council products, include calls for

better cooperation.

Council Dynamics

In the past, Council members have diverged over several Somalia-related issues, such as the pace of AMISOM troop reductions, whether or not Somalia is ready to take over more security responsibilities, predictable and sustainable funding for AMISOM, and whether to include references to the impact of climate change on Somalia in resolutions and presidential statements.

However, member states remain united in their belief that upcoming elections are an important turning point for Somalia, if they can take place given COVID-19's impact. All members states repeat how they view that Somalia is at a critical juncture, both politically and in its reform and strengthening of the security sector. During the briefing on Somalia on 24 February, at which the representative of Tunisia spoke on behalf of a coalition of like-minded states (Niger, South Africa and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), all members emphasised the need for political agreement among Somalia's stakeholders. In the 21 May meeting, South Africa spoke on behalf of this same coalition. Their statement clearly shared their priority to consolidate security gains and resist making changes to UN operations too soon. Some members called for the acceleration of a plan for Somali security forces to take over more responsibilities. France, in particular, spoke about the EU's participation in Somalia, saying that the EU is in favour of a more collaborative approach that would see greater accountability, participation of the EU in strategic planning, and wider financial partners.

The UK is the penholder on Somalia. Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) is Chair of the Sanctions Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Somalia.

UNOCA (Central Africa)

Expected Council Action

In June, François Louncény Fall, Special Representative and head of the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), is expected to brief the Security Council on the Secretary-General's semi-annual report on UNOCA and the implementation of the UN's regional strategy to combat the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

The mandate of UNOCA expires on 31 August 2021.

Key Recent Developments

The region covered by UNOCA includes several situations that are on the Council's agenda, including Burundi, the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Following last year's strategic review of the UNOCA mandate, the Council adopted a presidential statement welcoming the office's role in promoting inclusive political dialogue in non-mission settings, including in Cameroon, Chad, Gabon, the Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and São Tomé and Príncipe. During his most recent briefing to the Council on 9 December 2019, Fall said that the overall political and security situation in Central Africa "remains worrisome".

In Burundi, presidential elections were held on 20 May. The elections will determine a successor to President Pierre Nkurunziza, who won a controversial third term in 2015, precipitating mass demonstrations and an increase in violence and repression against his opponents. Seven candidates competed in the elections. Evariste Ndayishimiye, Secretary-General of the National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD)—Burundi's ruling party—and Agathon Rwaswa of the National Congress for Liberty (CNL), the leading opposition party, were considered the top two candidates. According to media reports, polling took place in a largely incident-free environment. There were, however, reports of campaign violence and of the arrest of at least 140 members of the political opposition during the campaign. According to the UN's Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, the electoral campaign was "marred by a spiral of violence and political intolerance". On 11 May, the Burundian government informed

the East African Community (EAC) that EAC election observers would be required to quarantine for 14 days because of COVID-19; consequently, the EAC was unable to undertake its observation activities. In addition, the World Health Organization's country representative and another three WHO staff were expelled from Burundi on 12 May. On 25 May, provisional results were announced with Ndayishimiye winning 68 percent of the vote and Rwaswa with 24 percent.

In Cameroon, there continues to be unrest in the anglophone north-western and south-western regions, grounded in claims of political and economic discrimination by the francophone authorities against the anglophone minority. These tensions have been exacerbated recently; on 9 February, Cameroon held parliamentary and local elections, with reports of electoral violence and disruptions in anglophone regions of the country, while 22 people were killed in an attack in the north-western anglophone village of Ngarbuh on 14 February. On 21 April, a commission of inquiry established by the government determined that the country's army had been responsible for the killing of at least 13 of the victims during an operation in Ngarbuh. On 13 May, Fall visited Cameroon, where he met with President Paul Biya to discuss peace and security in Central Africa, regional integration, and regional challenges presented by COVID-19.

In the CAR, there has been an overall decrease in violence since the Political Peace Agreement was signed on 6 February 2019 in Bangui. However, violent incidents and human rights violations continue, and full implementation of the peace agreement has not materialised. Violent clashes between rival armed groups in late April and early May in Ndélé in CAR's north-east left at least 27 civilians dead. Presidential, legislative and local elections are scheduled for December 2020 and early 2021. In that regard, the return of former presidents François Bozizé and Michel Djotodia to the CAR from exile on 15 December 2019 and 10 January, respectively, has been a source of tension. In addition, deputies from the CAR National Assembly proposed a bill in early April that would have allowed President Faustin-Archange Touadéra to remain in power if elections

were to be delayed because of COVID-19. Civil society organisations and the political opposition denounced the assembly bill, which was later withdrawn.

In the DRC, President Félix Tshisekedi has been active in promoting cooperation between the DRC and its neighbours. This regional outreach comes in the context of efforts to stabilise the eastern DRC, which remains volatile. While maintaining the dual strategic priorities of protecting civilians and supporting the stabilisation and strengthening of state institutions, the renewal of the mandate of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) for one year in resolution 2502 on 19 December 2019 also included a request that the Secretary-General work with the government to create an exit strategy for the mission. That strategy is due by 20 October. In general, Council members have maintained a positive view of the DRC's political situation, with concern focusing mainly on violence in the DRC's east.

Key Issues and Options

The security situation in the region remains a key concern for the Council, especially with regard to the situations in the CAR and eastern DRC.

Recent elections in Cameroon and Burundi and upcoming elections in the CAR are also a concern. As the 12 September 2019 president statement noted, one of UNOCA's priorities is to assist countries "facing institutional crises related to electoral processes" while working with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

The COVID-19 global pandemic and its impact on Central Africa is also of concern to UNOCA and the Council.

Council Dynamics

There appears to be consensus on the Council regarding UNOCA's potentially stabilising role in Central Africa, with the 12 September presidential statement illustrating the Council's unity regarding its ongoing support for UNOCA's mandate.

There are some differences, however, about the role UNOCA should play in addressing different situations. Some Council members, such as the UK and the US,

UN DOCUMENTS ON UNOCA Secretary-General's Report S/2019/913 (29 November 2019) was the Secretary-General's semi-annual report on UNOCA. Security Council Presidential Statements S/PRST/2019/10 (12 September 2019) expressed the Council's full support for UNOCA. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8679 (6 December 2019) was a briefing by François Louncény Fall, Special Representative and head of UNOCA, on the situation in Central Africa and the latest report on the activities of UNOCA.

UNOCA (Central Africa)

have expressed concern about the situation in Cameroon, arguing that UNOCA should focus on the security and humanitarian situation in that country. Other members, such as China and Russia, maintain that the situation

in Cameroon is an internal matter and that the Council should intervene only upon Cameroon's request.

The UK is the penholder on UNOCA. Ambassador Abdou Abarry (Niger) chairs

both the 2127 Central African Republic (CAR) Sanctions Committee and the 1533 Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Sanctions Committee.

Iraq

Expected Council Action

In June, the Council is scheduled to receive a briefing from Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, the Special Adviser and head of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD).

UNITAD's mandate expires on 21 September 2020.

Key Recent Developments

UNITAD was set up through resolution 2379 of 21 September 2017 for an initial period of two years and was renewed for another year in resolution 2490 of 20 September 2019. The Council had asked the Secretary-General to establish an investigative team 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, the investigative team is responsible for promoting accountability globally for atrocity crimes committed by ISIL in order to counter ISIL narratives that have led people to join the terrorist group. On 31 May 2018, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of Karim Asad Ahmad Khan as Special Adviser and head of UNITAD. The investigative team formally began its work on 20 August 2018. To date, the Special Adviser has published four reports.

According to resolution 2379, UNITAD is to be "impartial, independent, and credible",

operating within its terms of reference, the UN Charter, UN best practices and relevant international law, including international human rights law. The investigative team has an assessed budget of around \$21 million for 2020, covering core infrastructure and staffing needs. Additionally, it relies on voluntary contributions made to the trust fund established by resolution 2379, and on in-kind contributions, including the provision of expert personnel. Current contributors to the trust fund are Cyprus, Denmark, the EU, Germany, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Qatar, Slovakia, the UK, the United Arab Emirates, and the US. Commitments to contribute to the trust fund currently amount to about \$5 million.

UNITAD's overall staff stands at 148, representing all of the UN's regional groups. Women make up 49 percent of substantive and support positions and Iraqi nationals constitute more than one-third of professional staff. Expert personnel from Australia, Finland, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Sweden are currently provided by their respective governments. According to the Special Adviser's report, more states have expressed an intention to second personnel.

As required by resolution 2379, UNITAD is implementing its mandate according to "UN best practices", meaning that no evidence may be shared for criminal proceedings where capital punishment may be imposed. The death penalty, however, is incorporated into the Iraqi legal system. The

international crimes the investigative team is mandated to investigate are not yet incorporated into Iraq's domestic legal system, moreover, and are prosecuted as terrorist crimes. Iraq is currently working on legislation that would establish a tribunal for the prosecution of ISIL for international crimes, with UNITAD supporting that process.

The investigative team's implementation strategy entails three areas for investigation: the mass killing of unarmed Iraqi air force cadets from Tikrit Air Academy (also known as "Camp Speicher") in June 2014, attacks committed by ISIL against the Yazidi community in the Sinjar district in August 2014, and crimes committed by ISIL in Mosul between 2014 and 2016. 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. According to the Special Adviser's fourth report, progress has been made regarding these areas, with some parts of the investigations "now in a phase of evidentiary consolidation and legal analysis".

The report describes further progress made by UNITAD during the 180-day reporting period. The investigative team was able to expand its evidentiary sources, which is described as a "significant success". UNITAD's evidentiary data lake now contains 23.9 terabytes of data. Digital forensics has "the potential to represent a paradigm shift in the prosecution of ISIL members", according to the report. The Special Adviser stresses the

UN DOCUMENTS ON IRAQ [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2522](#) (29 May 2020) renewed the mandate of UNAMI until 21 May 2021. [S/RES/2490](#) (20 September 2019) extended the mandate of UNITAD until 21 September 2020. [S/RES/2379](#) (21 September 2017) established an investigative team to collect, store and preserve evidence of international crimes committed by ISIL in Iraq. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8675](#) (26 November 2019) was the third briefing by the Special Adviser and head of UNITAD. [S/PV.8624](#) (20 September 2019) was the adoption of resolution 2490, extending the mandate of UNITAD until 21 September 2020. [S/PV.8573](#) (15 July 2019) was the second briefing by the Special Adviser and head of UNITAD. [S/PV.8412](#) (4 December 2018) was the first briefing by the Special Adviser and head of UNITAD. [S/PV.8052](#) (21 September 2017) was the adoption of resolution 2379. [Security Council Letters S/2020/397](#) (12 May 2020) was a briefing on Iraq. [S/2020/386](#) (11 May 2020) was from the Special Adviser and head of UNITAD, transmitting the fourth report on the activities of UNITAD. [S/2019/878](#) (13 November 2019) was from the Special Adviser and head of UNITAD, transmitting the third report on the activities of UNITAD. [S/2019/760](#) (19 September 2019) transmitted a letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq, requesting the extension of UNITAD's mandate until 21 September 2020. [S/2019/407](#) (17 May 2019) was from the Special Adviser and head of UNITAD, transmitting the second report on the activities of UNITAD. [S/2018/1031](#) (15 November 2018) was from the Special Adviser and head of UNITAD, transmitting the first report on the activities of UNITAD. [S/2018/773](#) (15 August 2018) was from the Secretary-General, notifying the Council of his appointment of Karim Asad Ahmad Khan as Special Adviser and head of the investigative team earlier that year and that the investigative team was to begin its work on 20 August 2018. [S/2018/118](#) (14 February 2018) was a letter from the Secretary-General, conveying the terms of reference for the investigative team.

Iraq

urgency of obtaining and preserving physical evidence and digital imagery from crucial crime scenes as reconstruction efforts in the country are accelerating. The investigative team was also able to open two more investigative units in the field, bringing the number of field units to five. The new units will be able to investigate crimes against the Christian, Kaka'i, Shabak, Shi'a, Sunni, and Turkmen communities. Regarding the investigative team's Baghdad facilities, a new section has been built for interviewing detainees. Legal counsel for the detainees is accessible. UNITAD has also established a website.

The protection of survivors, victims and witnesses, including child witnesses and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, remains one of the central aspects of UNITAD's work: UNITAD's Witness Protection and Support Unit provides psychosocial support to trauma victims, for example.

The Special Adviser continues to engage academia, community leaders, Iraqi authorities, the Kurdistan Regional Government, non-governmental organisations, religious actors and leaders, and survivor groups.

Resolution 2379 says that Iraqi authorities are "the primary intended recipient" of evidence collected by UNITAD. So far, no evidence has been shared with Iraqi authorities, but discussions around evidence transmission are ongoing. The resolution also refers to the possibility that evidence collected by the

investigative team could complement "investigations carried out by authorities in third countries at their request". The investigative team is currently supporting cases in five countries. UNITAD has received a further five formal requests from states as well as indications by other states that they intend to request support.

On 6 March, Iraqi religious leaders representing the Christian, Kaka'i, Shi'a, Sunni and Yazidi communities adopted the Inter-faith Statement on the Victims of ISIL. The statement, the first of its kind, calls for concerted action to hold ISIL perpetrators criminally responsible and rejects ISIL's ideology.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the work of UNITAD. Work on two exhumations in Mosul had to be temporarily suspended. In Kocho, which lies in the Sinjar district, the return of remains of identified victims from mass graves to their families has also been temporarily halted.

On 12 May, the Council held an open videoconference (VTC) and closed VTC on the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI). The Special Representative and head of UNAMI, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, briefed. Support for UNITAD is part of UNAMI's mandate. At the time of writing, the Council was expected to renew UNAMI's mandate ahead of its expiry on 31 May. On 29 May, Council president Estonia announced the unanimous adoption of resolution 2522, renewing the mandate of UNAMI until 31 May 2021.

Key Issues and Options

The Council will keep monitoring UNITAD's activities. In case the Council decides to hold the June briefing as a closed VTC only, Council members may aim to issue press elements in keeping with the latest agreement by Council members on working methods, which indicates that the Council president will work towards issuing press elements after every closed VTC meeting.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members are generally supportive of UNITAD, as is the Iraqi government. Members whose national jurisdictions do not have the death penalty continue to be concerned about the possibility that evidence shared by the investigative team with the Iraqi authorities might be used in criminal proceedings in which the death penalty could be imposed. Other members are of the opinion that the use of the death penalty is Iraq's sovereign right, a point routinely emphasised by Iraq as well. Another issue frequently raised by some members is the prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters currently on Iraqi soil. Some of the governments concerned have been reluctant to take back their nationals in order to prosecute them, leading to criticism that they are outsourcing their legal obligations.

The UK is the penholder on UNITAD.

UNDOF (Golan Heights)

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council is expected to extend for six months the mandate of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), which expires on 30 June. Ahead of the mandate renewal, the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) is expected to brief Council members in a closed videoconference (VTC) on the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on UNDOF, due in June, and the most recent developments.

Key Recent Developments

UNDOF was established following the conclusion of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces

Agreement between Israel and Syria (the 1974 Agreement), which ended the Yom Kippur War. UNDOF is mandated to maintain the ceasefire between the parties and supervise the disengagement of Israeli and Syrian forces as well as the so-called areas of separation (a demilitarised buffer zone) and limitation (where Israeli and Syrian troops and equipment are restricted) in the Golan Heights. The implementation of the mandate entails observing any violations of the 1974 Agreement, reporting them, and liaising with both sides. The mission's observation role has been limited since its September 2014 relocation from the Bravo (Syrian) to the Alpha (Israeli-occupied) side because

of the armed conflict in Syria. As of March, UNDOF comprises 1,007 personnel and has a budget of \$2,762,400 from July 2019 through June 2020. The UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in Observer Group Golan continues to provide UNDOF with military observers.

The Secretary-General in his 20 March report, covering the period from 23 November 2019 to 5 March, said that the ceasefire between Israel and Syria was generally being maintained. Violations of the 1974 Agreement had increased, however, and the Secretary-General expressed his worry about this development.

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE GOLAN HEIGHTS Security Council Resolution S/RES/2503 (19 December 2019) renewed the mandate of UNDOF until 30 June 2020. Secretary-General's Report S/2020/219 (20 March 2020) was a report on UNDOF.

UNDOF (Golan Heights)

UNDOF's operating environment experienced changes because Syria regained control over areas formerly held by different opposition armed actors. UNDOF made further progress towards a limited return to operations on the Bravo side, which remains a priority for the mission. Its patrol routes were able to cover about 50 percent of the area of limitation and about 95 percent of the area of separation. The Secretary-General stressed, however, that there continues to be "a significant threat" to UNDOF personnel in its area of operations, originating from explosive remnants of war and "the possible presence of sleeper cells of armed groups, including listed terrorist groups". The Secretary-General emphasised the need for Israel and Syria to support the clearance of explosive remnants, unexploded ordnance of war, and mines.

UNDOF personnel continued to observe crossings of the ceasefire line by unidentified individuals (farmers and shepherds tending livestock) from the Bravo side on a daily basis. To deter such crossings, UNDOF started putting up warning signs.

The presence of Israel's Iron Dome (missile) defence systems on the Alpha side is considered "unauthorized military equipment in the area of limitation" by UNDOF, in violation of the 1974 Agreement, as regularly stated in the Secretary-General's reports.

UNDOF was able to use the Qunaytirah crossing point regularly to move personnel and equipment. Conversations with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on increased facilitation of its use by UNDOF continue. The Secretary-General underlined that UNDOF

has to be able to use the crossing point fully, and necessarily with the support of both parties, in order to implement its mandate. The IDF continues to impose restrictions on movement and access to UNDOF positions in the area of separation. Further complicating progress on the issue was the 2 March closure of the Alpha gate due to measures taken to combat the spread of COVID-19.

The Secretary-General also expressed his concern over the continued presence of Syrian armed forces at a number of checkpoints in the area of separation, where only UNDOF military forces are permitted, including on the main road that connects Qunaytirah to Damascus.

According to the Secretary-General's report, UNDOF has protested all violations of the 1974 Agreement and called upon both sides to exercise restraint, in line with its mandate.

The Council was initially scheduled to hold the three-month consultations on UNDOF on 25 March. The meeting was cancelled following measures announced by the Secretary-General to address COVID-19, which included a partial closure of UN headquarters that began on 16 March.

For the first time since 2011, UNDOF conducted a major rotation of troops through Damascus International Airport on 4 April, with the prospect of continuing to do so in the future.

Key Issues and Options

An ongoing issue for the Council is the numerous violations of the 1974 Agreement.

UNDOF's ability to implement its mandate, including its eventual full return to the Bravo side, has been a key issue since 2014. Regarding the mandate renewal, the Council's options are restricted, as how UNDOF operates is subject solely to the 1974 Agreement. Any changes in the mandate would require agreement by Israel and Syria, which remains unlikely. Bearing that in mind, the Council could renew UNDOF's mandate for a period longer than six months. In the same vein, the Council might consider changing the Secretary-General's reporting cycle back to six months instead of 90 days, which had been the practice until December 2012.

Council and Wider Dynamics

There is general agreement within the Council that UNDOF's mandate contributes to stability in the region, given the absence of a peace agreement between Israel and Syria. Both countries still value UNDOF's presence and want to see the mission's full return to the Bravo side. Council members also support its eventual complete return, mindful of the fact that this would require a continuously favourable security environment, which is also crucial for maintaining the confidence of troop-contributing countries.

Russia and the US are the co-penholders on UNDOF. Despite the deep divisions between the co-penholders regarding the Syria file, both countries are expected to continue to consider UNDOF as a separate issue, given the positions of Israel and Syria.

Mali

Expected Council Action

In June, the Council is due to renew the mandate of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) before its 30 June expiry. Prior to this, a high-level videoconference (VTC) on Mali will be held with France's Foreign Minister participating. There will also be a meeting with MINUSMA troop-contributing countries.

The sanctions regime expires on 31 August, followed by the expiry of the mandate of the Panel of Experts on 30 September.

Key Recent Developments

Mali continues to experience violence in its north and centre in the form of terrorist assaults and inter-communal conflict, alongside a deteriorating security situation across

the Sahel region. Despite this, there have been some signs of improved implementation of the 23 June 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement.

On 19 April, the second round of legislative elections was held, marked not only by an insecure environment but also concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic, both of which contributed to low voter turnout. The

UN DOCUMENTS ON MALI [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2480](#) (28 June 2019) renewed the mandate of MINUSMA until 30 June 2020. [Security Council Letters S/2020/286](#) (9 April 2020) contained the records of the briefings and statements made during the open part of the 7 April 2020 Council VTC on Mali. [Security Council Press Statement SC/14181](#) (11 May 2020) condemned the 10 May attack against a MINUSMA convoy in Aguelhoc, in which three peacekeepers from Chad were killed and four others injured. [Sanctions Committee Document SC/14156](#) (3 April 2020) was a 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee press release on its meeting with Mali and regional states on the sanctions regime.

Mali

ruling party Rally for Mali (Rassemblement pour le Mali) finished first, winning 51 of 147 seats in parliament. Ahead of the first round of elections on 29 March, leading opposition politician Soumaïla Cissé was kidnapped in the Timbuktu region and at press time remained in captivity.

Recent months saw an upsurge in fighting between terrorist groups Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara as the latter sought to extend its area of influence, increasing competition for recruits and territory. Three MINUSMA peacekeepers from Chad were killed and four others injured on 10 May in an attack against a UN convoy in Aguelhoc using an improvised explosive device.

MINUSMA's human rights division released a report on 30 April on trends in violations and abuses of international humanitarian and human rights laws in Mali during the first quarter of 2020. It included observations on the increased involvement of the Malian Defense and Security Forces (MDSF) in human rights violations. MDSF personnel were responsible, among other abuses, for 101 extrajudicial executions from 1 January to 31 March.

At the last Council meeting on Mali, by VTC on 6 April, Special Representative and head of MINUSMA Mahamat Saleh Annadif noted "some positive steps" in the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement. Particularly significant was the deployment since February of the first reconstituted units of the Malian defence and security forces—composed of national troops and integrated forces from northern armed groups—to Gao, Timbuktu, Kidal, and Ménaka. Annadif also addressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the Secretary-General's decision to suspend the rotation of uniformed contingents in peace operations until 30 June. Exceptions to the policy would be made on a case-by-case basis.

In press elements following the meeting, 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. MINUSMA has had over 50 COVID-19 cases among mission personnel, two-thirds of whom at the time of this writing have already recovered.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 2 March, the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee held informal consultations to hear statements by Mali and regional states. According to a committee press release, Mali recalled that it requested the regime's establishment as an additional instrument to accelerate the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement. Algeria, the chief mediator of the accord, suggested that the sanctions regime be firmly attached to the primary objective of promoting the implementation of the agreement.

Key Issues and Options

Assessing progress in implementing the 2015 peace agreement, MINUSMA's primary strategic priority, is a key issue. This includes progress in the five priority areas or benchmarks set out in resolution 2480, which renewed MINUSMA's mandate last year: constitutional reform, decentralisation, security sector reform, development of the north, and participation of women in the agreement's implementation.

Another key issue is MINUSMA's support to the government to stabilise the country's centre and to protect civilians, which resolution 2480 established as the mission's second strategic priority. This includes generating the resources and forces required for the Secretary-General's December 2019 adaptation plan to provide MINUSMA with more specialised capacities, including air assets, to facilitate MINUSMA's presence in two major areas, northern Mali and central Mali. During May, the General Assembly's Fifth Committee began considering the plan's financial implications. While it does not increase MINUSMA's troop ceiling, the plan increases the mission's budget by 5 percent from its 2019/2020 level, according to the Secretary-General's 23 March report on Mali.

MINUSMA's support for the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (FC-G5S), formed by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger to combat terrorist groups and organised crime in the Sahel, is another key issue. MINUSMA is mandated to support the FC-G5S with life consumables, such as rations and fuel, and also to provide medical evacuation capacities and engineering support for FC-G5S units operating in Mali, for which MINUSMA is reimbursed through an agreement with the EU. Findings and recommendations of an assessment of MINUSMA's support for the FC-G5S,

requested in resolution 2480, will be included in the upcoming Secretary-General's report on Mali.

Security trends in Mali and the wider region, human rights violations and combating impunity, and transition-planning for the eventual reconfiguration of MINUSMA and transfer of tasks to the UN country team, Malian authorities and other stakeholders are among other issues. Also important is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, both on MINUSMA and on the implementation of the peace agreement.

For MINUSMA's mandate renewal, the Council may consider setting out new benchmarks for the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement. It may also establish benchmarks to assess progress in addressing the situation in central Mali, which could include elements on accountability and restoring the Malian state's presence. The Council may further express support for the adaptation plan and encourage member states to contribute the required capacities. On MINUSMA's support for the G5 Sahel, the resolution could address limitations that have impeded the arrangement's effectiveness, based on the findings of the Secretariat's assessment. (For more on the FC-G5S, see the brief on the G5 Sahel Joint Force in this month's Forecast.)

Council Dynamics

Members frequently highlight the importance of the 2015 peace agreement to the long-term stability of the Sahel, and they agreed on benchmarks last year in resolution 2480 to place greater pressure on the Malian parties to implement the accord. There are different views, however, on the effectiveness of MINUSMA. France, among other members, considers the mission's role as very important to supporting the peace agreement's implementation. The US is the most vocal in expressing frustration about delays in the peace process. It suggested at a January briefing that the Council deprioritise MINUSMA's support in implementing the agreement and focus more on protecting civilians if there has not been more progress by the June renewal. During the April VTC, it said that the Council must assess what the mission can realistically accomplish. The US proposed a reduction in the troop ceiling in last year's negotiations and has apparently

objected to changes that would increase the mission's budget. Niger, which is part of the G5 Sahel, has been profoundly affected by

spillover from Mali's instability.

France is the penholder on Mali. Ambassador José Singer Weisinger (Dominican

Republic) chairs the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee.

Security Council Elections

On 17 June, the General Assembly is scheduled to elect five states to two-year terms on the Security Council, beginning on 1 January 2021. For more detailed information, please see our Research Report: Security Council Elections 2020.

Background

The five seats available for election in 2020 according to the regular distribution among regions are as follows:

- one seat for the African Group (currently held by South Africa);
- one seat for the Asia-Pacific Group (currently held by Indonesia);
- one seat for the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC, currently held by the Dominican Republic); and
- two seats for the Western European and Others Group (WEOG, currently held by Belgium and Germany).

Seven member states—Canada, Djibouti, India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, and Norway—are currently running for the five available seats. Djibouti and Kenya are contesting the single African Group seat. Canada, Ireland and Norway are contesting the two WEOG seats. The other two candidates, India and Mexico, will run unopposed for the Asia-Pacific and GRULAC seats, respectively. All seven candidates have served on the Council previously:

- India has served seven times (1950-1951, 1967-1968, 1972-1973, 1977-1978, 1984-1985, 1991-1992 and 2011-2012);
- Canada has served six times (1948-1949, 1958-1959, 1967-1968, 1977-1978, 1989-1990 and 1999-2000);
- Mexico has served four times (1946, 1980-1981, 2002-2003 and 2009-2010);
- Norway has served four times (1949-1950, 1963-1964, 1979-1980 and 2001-2002);
- Ireland has served three times (1962, 1981-1982 and 2001-2002);

- Kenya has served twice (1973-1974 and 1997-1998); and
- Djibouti has served once (1993-1994).

The Eastern European Group is not contesting any seat this year as its seat, held by Estonia through 2021, comes up for election every other year.

Voting Procedures

Regardless of whether an election is contested, a country must obtain the votes of two-thirds of the member states present and voting at the General Assembly session to secure a seat on the Council. This means that a minimum of 129 positive votes are required to win a seat if all 193 UN member states are present and voting.

Election to the Council, as with other principal organs of the UN, requires formal balloting even if candidates have been endorsed by their regional group and are running unopposed. In theory it is possible, although unlikely, that a member state running unopposed might not garner the requisite votes in the General Assembly in the first round. Such a country could then be challenged in subsequent rounds by a new candidate and ultimately not obtain a seat.

There have been several instances in which extended rounds of voting were required to fill a contested seat. Such situations have usually been solved by the withdrawal of one of the contenders or the election of a compromise candidate, rather than by agreeing on a split term. The sole exception to this practice since 1966 was the 2016 agreement between Italy and the Netherlands to split the 2017-2018 term.

On 22 May, the President of the General Assembly submitted under silence procedure (until 29 May) a draft decision on the process of holding elections by secret ballot during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the

draft, the President of the General Assembly will give at least ten days' notice to UN member states of the date of the elections and a designated venue for casting ballots. Given the pandemic-related limitations on large gatherings, the draft envisages that member states would cast ballots during designated time slots and at a specified venue. The same method would be used for additional rounds of balloting, if required.

Potential Security Council Dynamics in 2021

Geopolitical tensions and divisions among Council members, notably among the permanent members (P5), seem likely to persist following the departure of five non-permanent members at the end of 2020 and the arrival of five newly elected members in January. The divisions among permanent members were made very apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the inability of the Council to react promptly to this global crisis with implications that go well beyond matters of health. For the last several years, Russia and the US have been on opposing sides in conflicts in the Middle East and Europe. China, which has become increasingly assertive globally and in the Council, has often sided with Russia. At the same time, the US has retreated from active engagement in multilateral institutions and increasingly pursues its foreign policy interests unilaterally. France, the UK, and the US (P3), which were a united bloc for over a decade, have in some cases been divided on issues such as the Sahel; Iran; women, peace and security; and climate change and security.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as an issue with potentially wide-ranging consequences for international peace and security and which may affect various situations on the Council's agenda. In the coming months, the Council will have to contend

Security Council Elections

with the implications of the pandemic on UN peacekeeping and its humanitarian impact in countries on the Council's agenda. Although it is difficult to assess how the Council's dynamics might evolve next year, the priorities candidates have cited in their campaigns, as well as their long-standing interests, indicate some general patterns that might emerge.

Among the current candidates, Djibouti, India, Ireland, and Kenya are significant troop contributors to peace operations and are expected to play a role in advancing the Council's discussions on this topic. India has historically been among the largest troop and police contributors to UN peacekeeping operations. Canada is among the top ten contributors to the UN peacekeeping budget and has a long-standing interest in this issue. In the context of peacekeeping, Kenya has emphasised the need for more predictable funding to support the work of AU peace operations. These candidates are likely to be interested in ongoing discussions about the role of the Council in designing

and overseeing the mandates of peacekeeping operations and efforts to improve their effectiveness and efficiency.

Post-conflict peacebuilding is an area of interest to several candidates and appears likely to remain a focus of the Council's work in the coming years. This is especially so given the recent transition to a political mission in Haiti and transitions to a post-peacekeeping environment that are underway in Darfur and possibly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Over the past several years, a growing number of the Council's elected members have emphasised the linkages between development and international peace and security. This trend is likely to continue in 2021, given that several candidates have highlighted this issue. The P3 have been receptive to Council discussions of the links between specific aspects of development and peace and security. However, China and Russia have been more cautious in this regard and have advocated keeping the Council's agenda more

narrowly focused on issues that primarily involve situations of armed conflict.

Despite resistance by some members, the Council has become progressively readier to acknowledge the relationship between climate change and threats to security and stability in several situations on its agenda. During their campaigns, most of this year's candidates have stressed the importance of addressing climate change as a security risk. Canada, Kenya, Mexico, and Norway have all placed climate change high on their list of priorities.

Most candidates have committed themselves to promoting greater transparency and inclusiveness in the Council's work. This has been a prominent theme in candidates' agendas during recent election cycles and an issue on which elected members traditionally play the leading role. Several candidates have expressed interest in improving the working methods of the Security Council and if elected are likely to advance this issue during their term.

Briefing by the High Commissioner for Refugees

Expected Council Action

In June, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi will brief the Council via videoconference (VTC). He is expected to describe the situation of refugees in several country-specific cases on the Council's agenda. In light of recent developments, he is also expected to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugee populations and discuss the work his agency is doing in this context. The briefing will take place under the agenda item "Briefing by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees", which allows for a general briefing by the High Commissioner without tying it to a specific situation on the Council agenda.

Background and Key Recent Developments

Since the 1990s, the Security Council has increasingly considered the links between the situation of refugees and threats to international peace and security. Over the years, the

Council was briefed several times by the High Commissioner for Refugees about specific country situations on the Council's agenda, such as briefings by then-High Commissioner António Guterres on the Sahel in 2012 under the agenda item "Peace and Security in Africa" and on Syria in December 2015.

The Council received its first briefing under the agenda item "Briefing by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees" on 10 November 2000 from then-High Commissioner Sadako Ogata, who provided updates on the refugee crises in several countries on the Council's agenda and made recommendations on how peace operations and peacebuilding initiatives can further support the work of aid agencies in addressing issues relating to refugees. Since then, the Council has received four briefings under this agenda item, with the most recent one taking place under the April 2019 German presidency. At that meeting, Grandi described worrying trends in the global refugee crisis—which

has reached unprecedented dimensions in the last few years—such as the stigmatisation of refugees, and outlined three areas in which the Council plays a critical role: solving peace and security crises, supporting countries hosting refugees, and working to remove obstacles to solutions to forced displacement, including through the safe and voluntary return of refugees to their home countries.

On 24 June 2019, Council members held an Arria-formula meeting on refugees, displaced persons and returnees. Joining Grandi in this briefing were Permanent Representative of the AU to the UN Fatima K. Mohamed; Special Adviser of the Secretary-General for African Affairs Bience Gawanas; and ICRC Vice-President Gilles Carbonnier. The meeting was organised by the three African members of the Security Council at the time (Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea and South Africa) to mark the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Organisation of African Unity Convention Governing Specific Aspects

UN DOCUMENTS ON BRIEFINGS BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8504 (9 April 2019) was a briefing by High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. S/PV.8083 (2 November 2017) was a briefing by High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. S/PV. 6062 (8 January 2009) was a briefing by High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres. S/PV.4219 (10 November 2000) was a briefing by High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata.

Briefing by the High Commissioner for Refugees

of Refugee Problems in Africa and the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance for Internally Displaced Persons in Africa.

The June briefing can serve as a platform for Grandi to describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugee populations around the world with a view to highlight ways in which the Council can help alleviate the complex problems arising from the global spread of the virus and perhaps support the work of the UN refugee agency, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). At the time of writing, 134 refugee-hosting countries had reported local transmissions of COVID-19. There are currently 71 million refugees and forcibly displaced people around the world, the majority of whom are fleeing conflict situations.

According to UNHCR, there had been no major COVID-19 outbreaks among refugees and internally displaced people as of 26 May. However, UNHCR continues to warn about the heightened vulnerabilities these groups face and the potentially disastrous consequences if the virus spreads within the usually densely populated refugee camps. Since 80 percent of refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries, they face an added risk during an outbreak of COVID-19 because of an often-limited access to water, sanitation systems and health facilities. In addition, they are more vulnerable to secondary consequences of the pandemic, particularly the socio-economic impacts of steps taken to mitigate the disease. In many country situations, refugees rely on fragile sources of income, usually in the unofficial economy, which has been severely curtailed because of the restrictions imposed in many countries. They are therefore at jeopardy of losing their livelihood and of facing severe hunger, along with their susceptibility to increased protection risks, including sexual and gender-based violence, especially against women and girls.

Since March, Security Council briefings on country-specific situations have included updates on the impact of the pandemic on refugee populations. In a 14 May closed

VTC meeting on the situation in Myanmar, Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener also addressed the situation of Rohingya refugees. It appears that concerns were raised at the meeting about the situation of Rohingya refugees who have been stranded at sea because of the reluctance of Bangladesh and neighbouring Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries to take them in during the pandemic. During a 20 May open VTC meeting on Venezuela, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo also described in her briefing the impact of COVID-19 on the more than five million Venezuelan refugees who have mostly taken refuge in neighbouring countries. Many Venezuelan refugees, having lost their livelihoods in their host countries, have decided to return to their home country. According to UNHCR data, approximately 600 people are estimated to be coming back into Venezuela through the Colombia-Venezuela border each day, creating additional needs for humanitarian agencies to provide shelter and medical supplies to returnees.

UNHCR has launched a funding appeal aimed at mitigating the effects of the pandemic, seeking \$745 million to help countries hosting large refugee populations. At the time of writing, 32 percent of the appeal (\$235 million) had been funded.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is how to adopt a broad-reaching approach to address the possible humanitarian and security impacts on refugees that could emerge from the pandemic. One possible theme for the High Commissioner's briefing might be the importance of Council action at an early stage to address emerging problems and prevent such crises. Grandi might also emphasise that durable solutions to refugee crises ultimately lie in the political rather than humanitarian domain, highlighting the importance of an early Council role.

Council members may seek information from Grandi on how UNHCR's work in supporting refugees is affected by COVID-related

restrictions on movement, and on additional support that UNHCR and host countries may need to meet the new demands.

At the time of writing, the Council was negotiating a draft resolution on the COVID-19 pandemic that includes an expression of support for the Secretary-General's 23 March appeal for a global ceasefire. The aim of the appeal is to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and focus resources on fighting the global pandemic. If such a product is adopted, it may include language about the impact of the pandemic on refugees.

Council Dynamics

The Council is generally united in its support for UNHCR and the work of the High Commissioner. It appears that Council members agree on the need to hear updates about refugees in country-specific situations and to include language on issues relating to refugees in Council products. Draft language on refugees does not appear to have been a sticking-point in the ongoing negotiations over a resolution calling for a global ceasefire in light of the spread of COVID-19.

However, it appears that political sensitivities in the Council over issues such as Syria and Myanmar have also affected Council deliberations on the issue of refugee returns to these countries. While all Council members agree on the need to ensure a safe and voluntary return of refugees, there is a divergence of views on whether such conditions have already been met in these countries. During the April 2019 briefing by the High Commissioner, Russia suggested that some refugees from Syria are prevented from returning to their homes and that international assistance, which is focused on support for refugee camps outside of Syria, is "maintaining the status quo". Other Council members, notably the P3, have voiced concerns about possible reprisals against returnees, while expressing the view that conditions have not been met in Syria for the safe return of refugees.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In June, the Council is expected to hold its monthly briefing, via videoconference (VTC), with Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths, a representative from OCHA, and General Abhijit Guha, who heads the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA). During June, the Secretariat is further expected to submit a review of UNMHA to the Council as requested in resolution 2505. The mandate of UNMHA expires on 15 July.

Key Recent Developments

The Special Envoy has continued his efforts to broker a ceasefire and resume a political process to end Yemen's war, which have gained greater urgency amidst concerns over the risks of COVID-19 in Yemen.

When Griffiths briefed Council members via VTC on 14 May, he recalled that he had shared draft agreements at the end of March with the Yemeni government and the Houthi rebel group on a nation-wide ceasefire, humanitarian and economic measures, and resuming a political process. Griffiths said he remained in intensive negotiations with the parties on the proposals, and that there had been "significant progress", particularly related to his ceasefire proposal, while the greatest differences were over the humanitarian and economic measures. In his April briefing, the Special Envoy said these measures include the release of prisoners and detainees, opening Sana'a International Airport, paying civil servants' salaries, and ensuring the entry of ships carrying essential commodities into the ports in and near Hodeidah. Griffiths has also proposed creating a joint operations cell between the parties to combat COVID-19.

Griffiths spoke, as well, about the deteriorating situation in southern Yemen. On 25 April, the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) declared self-rule and took control of government ministries and offices in Aden. Since then there had been military tensions between government and STC-affiliated forces in Abyan and Socotra governorates. Griffiths described developments as "a perfect storm" and "deeply troubling" and called on the government and the STC to intensify efforts to implement the Riyadh

Agreement, the November 2019 power-sharing arrangement brokered by Saudi Arabia.

Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Ramesh Rajasingham said at the 14 May meeting that the humanitarian agencies believed that community transmission of COVID-19 was taking place across Yemen. At a time when the pandemic threatens to worsen Yemen's humanitarian crisis, he highlighted that funding shortages could force 31 (out of 41) major UN programmes to start closing down in the next few weeks. According to Rajasingham, an estimated \$2 billion would be required to cover essential activities from June through December. Saudi Arabia and the UN will host a virtual pledging conference on 2 June.

During a closed VTC, Guha apparently said that the pandemic and the government's suspension of its participation in the Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC), which oversees implementation of the December 2018 Hodeidah agreement, are the mission's largest challenges. While Guha remains in Hodeidah with a core team, the majority of UNMHA personnel were working remotely from their home countries to reduce their risk of exposure to COVID-19.

In press elements issued after the briefing, Council members reiterated support for the Secretary-General's 25 March call for a ceasefire in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and urged the Houthis to reciprocate the ceasefire announcement made by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition. While expressing steadfast support for the Special Envoy, members conveyed their concern at the slow pace of negotiations on the Special Envoy's proposals. They called on the STC to reverse any actions challenging the legitimacy, sovereignty, unity or territorial integrity of Yemen, including diversion of revenues. The press elements further reiterated that full access must be maintained for humanitarian efforts amid the COVID-19 threat.

Since the briefing, STC and pro-government forces have engaged in heavy fighting in Abyan governorate as the government launched an offensive to take the provincial capital of Zinjibar. Meanwhile, OCHA said that confirmed COVID-19 cases grew, in the week ending 16 May, by almost 325 percent

from the previous week, and that infections had been found in 10 Yemeni governorates. According to media reports, officials in Aden said that hundreds of people had died in the city recently with COVID-19-like symptoms, and other reports claim that the Houthis have been hiding the extent of the outbreak in the north. On 19 May, the Food and Agricultural Organisation warned that Yemen could suffer a "catastrophic" food security situation due to the pandemic. As of 28 May, there were 260 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Yemen with 54 deaths.

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. A related concern is the implications for the political process and the humanitarian situation if the Houthi 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.

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 from COVID-19. Other critical issues are the deteriorating situation in southern Yemen and salvaging the Riyadh Agreement.

Since January, the Council has called for a cessation of hostilities or expressed support for the Secretary-General's ceasefire call in press statements on 30 January, 10 April and 29 April and in press elements on 17 April and 14 May. 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 assent to the Special Envoy's proposals, Griffiths has said 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.

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2505 (13 January 2020) extended the mandate of UNMHA until 15 July 2020. Security Council Letter S/2020/322 (21 April 2020) was from the US regarding two interdicted shipments of arms and related materiel from Iran. Security Council Meeting Record S/2020/411 (xx May 2020) contained the records of the briefings and statements made during the open part of the 14 May 2020 Council VTC meeting on Yemen. Security Council Press Statement SC/14176 (29 April 2020) was on instability in southern Yemen.

Yemen

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members appear 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 exit the war, which has lasted more than five years. The US at times seeks to highlight what it perceives as Iran's destabilising role. In April, it sent a letter to the Council, the Secretary-General, the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee, and the facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231 on the Iran nuclear deal about two recent seizures of Iranian arms, which it said were likely bound for the

Houthis. The notification also appears tied to the US push to maintain restrictions on Iranian arms transfers that are set to expire later this year.

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

Haiti

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council is expected to hold an open videoconference (VTC) on the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH). Special Representative Helen La Lime is expected to brief, and a civil society briefer may also participate.

BINUH's mandate expires on 16 October 2020.

Key Recent Developments

Haitian President Jovenel Moïse has been governing Haiti through executive decree since 13 January. The existing parliament's mandate expired on that day with no new parliament in place because legislative and local elections had not been held in October 2019, as constitutionally mandated. In 2019, Parliament failed to pass an electoral law and approve an election budget that would have been the first steps for organising these elections; nor was there political agreement on the new composition of the Provisional Electoral Council. Moïse continues to lack popular support and has been the subject of months of protests, some violent and deadly. Opposition groups continue to call for Moïse's resignation.

The political crisis has been overshadowed by the appearance of COVID-19 in Haiti, a country with a weak and overburdened health care system. Government officials responded quickly to the threat of COVID-19. Since late March, all gatherings of more than ten people have been banned, there has been a curfew, and schools, airports and some factories have been closed. At the time of writing, the

number of cases appeared relatively low, with 663 reported cases and 67 deaths as of 22 May, but several factors raise concerns that numbers could rise. At least 27,000 Haitians have returned home from jobs in the neighbouring Dominican Republic since 17 March, and the US has deported over 100 Haitians during the shutdown. The Dominican Republic has reported over 13,000 cases, and the US has more than 1.5 million reported cases. Local reports indicate that markets and transportation remain as busy as they were before the pandemic. Amongst the population there is also widespread fear and distrust of health officials, especially those from outside Haiti, which makes reporting and testing difficult (access to testing is limited in any case, with two laboratories in the country able to perform the test). Congested neighbourhoods, poor sanitation, overcrowded prisons and the weak healthcare system could also exacerbate disease spread.

Estimates of how widely the epidemic could spread range from 35 to 85 percent of the population, illustrating how much remains unknown. The impact of a wider spread of COVID-19 throughout Haiti could be devastating, however. According to the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti, six million of Haiti's 11 million people live below the poverty line, 300,000 children are going without meals because schools are closed, and at least one million Haitians suffered from severe hunger before the pandemic.

Moïse said he would urge Prime Minister Joseph Jouthe to set up an economic unit

to address the impact of COVID-19 and has also begun discussions for a plan regarding the food supply with the ministry of agriculture. With remittances making up approximately 36 percent of Haiti's gross domestic product, the shutdown of many countries' economies may leave many Haitians abroad without money to send home. Moïse has also created a presidential commission to coordinate the fight against COVID-19. The commission is led by Dr. Jean William Pape, a widely respected doctor who runs a large AIDS and tuberculosis clinic in Port-au-Prince. To assist, the International Monetary Fund has announced a pledge of \$111 million, and the US State Department and the US Agency for International Development have committed a total of \$13.2 million. The World Bank and the EU have also made significant pledges.

BINUH's mandate, established through resolution 2476, includes advising the government on issues related to promoting and strengthening political stability and good governance, the rule of law, an inclusive inter-Haitian national dialogue, and protecting and promoting human rights. According to diplomatic sources, BINUH is fully established and is working with the UN's agencies, funds, and programmes on the ground.

The first Council meeting on BINUH was held on 13 February. Special Representative La Lime and Marie Yolène Gilles, executive director of the civil society group Fondasyon Je Klere, briefed.

UN DOCUMENTS ON HAITI [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2476](#) (25 June 2019) established BINUH. [Secretary-General's Report S/2020/123](#) (13 February 2020) was the first Secretary-General's report covering the activities of BINUH. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8729](#) (20 February 2020) was the first briefing held on BINUH. [S/PV.8559](#) (25 June 2019) was the adoption of resolution 2476 establishing BINUH.

Haiti

Key Issues and Options

The closure of the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH) in October 2019 followed by the launch of BINUH marked the first time since 2004 with no UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti. Members will likely want further updates on the transition from a long-standing peacekeeping presence to a smaller special political mission. Members may also seek more information about BINUH's support for the Haitian government's efforts to stabilise and develop Haiti. Given postponed elections in 2019, members may in addition want to hear about the ongoing constitutional reform process in Haiti and what it could mean for future elections.

Haiti's preparedness for COVID-19 seems likely to be the main topic of discussion. Members are well aware of the deficiencies in Haiti's health care infrastructure and may want to know how BINUH and the wider UN are preparing for an increase in cases.

Council Dynamics

During its term on the Council, the

Dominican Republic has repeatedly and strenuously expressed its view that MINUJUSTH, the peacekeeping mission that BINUH replaced, was withdrawn from Haiti too soon. In his statement during the last public meeting on Haiti in February, Ambassador José Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) tied the chaos in Haiti to the early withdrawal of MINUJUSTH, indicating that Haiti was not ready for this transition during an election period. While some other members seem sympathetic to that view, especially given the current political impasse, Council members in general support the establishment and strengthening of BINUH and did not oppose its formation as a replacement for MINUJUSTH. Those members believe that the problems Haiti is experiencing now are not of the type to be addressed by peacekeeping; instead they are political and better handled by a political mission and Haitians themselves.

Council members focused much of their attention in the last meeting on the political impasse and the need for all stakeholders to

work together. France said that it was ultimately up to the parties to move forward, and this rhetoric will likely be repeated in June. Some members may focus more on the root causes of Haiti's instability, pointing to a lack of economic development, among other things. All members remain concerned about the continued overcrowding of Haiti's prisons as well as the ability of the Haitian National Police to handle security responsibilities effectively and to remain neutral.

A potential point of divergence amongst Council members may be the timing of elections. Some members do not want to rush into elections while others believe constitutional reform, a process that many believe should take place swiftly in Haiti, should not be used as a reason to delay elections. Moise has pledged to begin constitutional reform, but the process has been slow. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, it may not be possible to hold elections in the near future.

The US is the penholder on Haiti.

Central African Republic

Expected Council Action

In June, the Council will hold a videoconference to discuss the latest Secretary-General's report on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), which is due by 15 June. The Council will be briefed by Mankeur Ndiaye, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for the Central African Republic (CAR) and head of MINUSCA, and Matias Bertino Matondo, AU Special Representative and head of the AU Office in the Central African Republic.

The mandate of MINUSCA expires on 15 November. The CAR sanctions regime expires on 31 July and the mandate of the panel of experts supporting the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee expires on 31 August.

Key Recent Developments

Though there has been an overall decrease in violence since the Political Peace Agreement was signed on 6 February 2019 in Bangui, violent incidents and human rights violations continue, according to the Secretary-General's 14 February report. Full implementation of the peace agreement, the report notes, has been delayed because of a lack of good faith by armed groups, 14 of which signed the agreement with the CAR government. Briefing the Council on 20 February, Ndiaye highlighted "significant advances in the implementation of the peace agreement" but warned that persistent violations of the agreement by some armed groups raised concerns about "pockets of instability" throughout CAR.

On 15 March, a MINUSCA peacekeeper was killed when elements of the anti-Balaka, one of the signatories to the peace agreement,

launched an attack on the central CAR town of Grimari. In a separate incident on 15 March, another peacekeeper was injured when his patrol on the Ndélé-Birao axis came under attack by elements of two armed groups. A civilian CAR staff member of MINUSCA was killed in Ndélé on 7 March. The Security Council issued a press statement on 16 March condemning the attacks.

According to media reports, seven of the 14 armed groups that signed the 2019 peace agreement announced on 25 April that they were suspending participation in both the government and peace agreement implementation mechanisms, citing the government's "fail[ure] to seize the opportunity offered by the agreement to get the country out of the crisis". Since this announcement, the situation in and around Ndélé has deteriorated: violent clashes between rival armed groups began on

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE CAR Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2507 (31 January 2020) renewed the CAR sanctions regime until 31 July 2020 and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the CAR Sanctions Committee until 31 August 2020. **S/RES/2499** (15 November 2019) extended the mandate of MINUSCA and the authorisation to use all means to provide operational support to MINUSCA until 15 November 2020. **Security Council Letter S/2019/930** (6 December 2019) contained the Secretary-General's assessment of progress achieved on the key benchmarks the Council established on arms embargo measures in the CAR. **Secretary-General's Reports S/2020/124** (14 February 2020) was on MINUSCA. **Security Council Press Statement SC/14145** (16 March 2020) was a press statement on attacks against MINUSCA. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8728** (20 February 2020) was a briefing on the latest Secretary-General's report on MINUSCA.

Central African Republic

29 April and continued through 9 May, leaving at least 27 civilians dead, 56 people injured and over 2,000 displaced. And, in early May, ten attacks against humanitarian organisations took place in Ndélé, which resulted in the temporary suspension of all humanitarian aid to the town. Approximately 12,000 internally displaced persons remain in need of assistance in Ndélé. According to OCHA, throughout CAR approximately 2.6 million people require humanitarian assistance, with 669,000 civilians internally displaced and another 593,000 people seeking refuge outside CAR. MINUSCA announced on 17 May that it was launching Operation “Igana siriri” (“Bringing Peace” in the local Sango language) in Ndélé to help stabilise the situation. According to MINUSCA, the operation, which is being carried out jointly with Central African armed forces, aims to “restore a safe and secure environment in and around the city [of Ndélé], to ensure the protection of civilians”.

Despite security concerns and an uptick in violence, presidential, legislative and local elections are scheduled for December 2020 and early 2021. At his Council briefing in October, Ndiaye warned that “a serious delay in holding the next elections could create a vacuum at the highest echelon of the State and lead to another political transition that... would be harmful to the consolidation of democracy, stability and peace”. During his last Council briefing in February, Ndiaye asked the international community to help CAR fulfil its technical, logistical and financial needs so that the elections could be held “within the constitutional time frame”. On 16 May, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) announced that registration forms, critical to the authorities for establishing a voters’ list, had arrived at Bangui airport.

Tensions have risen in the context of elections, in particular, with the return to CAR from exile of former presidents François

Bozizé and Michel Djotodia on 15 December 2019 and 10 January, respectively. In early April, deputies from the CAR National Assembly put forward a bill that would have allowed President Touadéra to remain in power if elections were to be delayed because of COVID-19. (Though CAR is currently still reporting low levels of COVID-19 cases, there is fear that an outbreak would devastate the country.) Civil society organisations and the political opposition—including Bozizé, who has not ruled out running for president—denounced the assembly bill, which was later withdrawn and remains suspended.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 9 March, the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee held informal consultations during which the Coordinator of the Panel of Experts provided an overview of the panel’s 7 February 2020 progress update. The panel was to present its work plan to the committee during a meeting scheduled a week later, but the meeting did not take place because of measures taken by the Security Council to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The work plan has since been presented to the committee in written form. The committee announced on 20 April the addition of Martin Koumtamadji to its sanctions list. Koumtamadji, who is the leader of the Democratic Front of the Central African People, was listed for “engaging in or providing support for acts that undermine the peace, stability or security of the Central African Republic”. The sanctions imposed include an asset freeze and travel ban.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 7 April, the independent expert on human rights in the CAR, Yao Agbetse, said in a statement that “since 28 March 2020, the political climate has deteriorated and has led to tensions detrimental to the still fragile security situation in the capital Bangui”. He called on armed groups to “put an immediate, complete and irrevocable end to all hostilities and forms of violence”, as required under the peace agreement. The statement also referred to the “potentially catastrophic consequences” of the COVID-19 pandemic and said that “the electoral system for the next presidential

elections is far from being in place”. He urged the Security Council “to take urgent measures and send a strong message...because the risks of an eruption of violence are real”.

Key Issues and Options

Monitoring the implementation of the CAR peace agreement and ensuring that credible and transparent elections are held remain vital priorities for the Council. Monitoring the process leading up to the elections will also be a priority. In light of the recent escalation of violence in Ndélé, members may consider adopting a statement urging the parties to cease their violent actions and fully implement the peace agreement. Such a product might also seek to demonstrate the Council’s unified support for MINUSCA and its work to facilitate the electoral process.

Council and Wider Dynamics

There is consensus on the Council in support of the Political Peace Agreement. However, differences regarding CAR sanctions persist. Several Council members are of the view that the sanctions regime continues to promote security in the CAR and can also serve to pressure the parties to implement the peace agreement, while other members have argued that more progress should be made towards the complete lifting of the arms embargo. The difficult negotiations and subsequent vote on resolution 2507 renewing the CAR sanctions regime ahead of its 31 January expiry demonstrated that divergence of opinion; unlike previous unanimous renewals of the sanctions regime, China and Russia abstained on the resolution, arguing that the Council should do more to lift sanctions on the government.

France is the penholder on the CAR, and Ambassador Abdou Abarry (Niger) chairs the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee.

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In June, Security Council members expect to hold an open videoconference (VTC)

meeting, followed by a closed VTC session, on the Secretary-General’s 90-day report on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

and developments in South Sudan. Special Representative and head of UNMISS David Shearer is the likely briefer.

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOUTH SUDAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2521 (28 May 2020) extended the sanctions on South Sudan until 31 May 2021 and the mandate of the Panel of Experts until 1 July 2021. S/RES/2514 (12 March 2020) renewed the mandate of UNMISS until 15 March 2021. Sanctions Committee Document S/2020/342 (28 April 2020) was the final report of the South Sudan Sanctions Committee’s Panel of Experts.

South Sudan

The mandate of UNMISS expires on 15 March 2021.

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 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. At press time, the parties continued to disagree on the allocation of the ten state governorships. On 7 May, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir declared that the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Government (SPLM-IG) would be accorded six governorships while three would be chosen by the SPLM in Opposition (Machar's party) and one by the South Sudan Opposition Alliance, a coalition of opposition parties. In a letter later that day to Augustino Njoroge, interim chair of the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, which is responsible for overseeing and monitoring implementation of the peace agreement, Machar rejected Kiir's decision, writing that it was "not taken by consensus" and arguing that the R-ARCSS "gives the parties the competence to allocate the States and Counties and not the Presidency". He further requested Njoroge's intervention in the matter, noting that the "deadlock in the allocation of States still stands".

Heavy inter-communal fighting between the Murle and Lou Nuer groups was reported in Pieri and the surrounding areas in Jonglei state on 16–17 May. Although the precise number of casualties is unclear, some media sources have estimated that over 200 people died and 300 were wounded in the fighting, which included cattle-raiding, the abduction of women and villages being burned. Doctors Without Borders has reported that more than 50 of the wounded were transferred for medical care to its hospital in Lankien, located some 50 kilometres from Pieri. On 20 May, Special Representative Shearer, quoted on the UNMISS website, said that the violence was "fueled by economic deprivation caused by devastating floods which wiped away many homes and killed thousands of cattle which families rely on for their survival". The attack

is the latest in a series of inter-communal clashes in Jonglei in recent months.

On 22 May, High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet released a statement condemning reports that hundreds of civilians were killed in inter-communal violence across 28 villages in Jonglei State between 16 and 17 May, with many more injured and thousands displaced. According to the statement, despite a decline in politically motivated fighting, inter-communal violence has increased this year to become the main source of violence in the country. During the first quarter of 2020, it resulted in 658 people killed, 452 injured, 592 abducted and 65 subjected to sexual violence, the statement said.

The number of reported cases of COVID-19 in South Sudan continues to rise steadily; as of 29 May, 994 cases had been reported in the country. Among those infected are First Vice President Riek Machar and his wife, Defence Minister Angelina Teny. If not contained, the virus could 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.

On 7 May, Special Representative Shearer held a virtual press briefing on the COVID-19 crisis. He said that because of the movement restrictions put in place to combat the virus, the UN had to reduce some operations, such as rotating staff in health centres and patrolling. Nonetheless, he described the measures UNMISS and UN agencies have been able to take, including pre-positioning nutritional supplies for vulnerable populations, distributing soap and buckets, and developing an education campaign to combat the virus, among other examples.

The final report of the South Sudan Sanctions Committee's Panel of Experts was published on 28 April. The report maintained that "[t]he selective and incomplete implementation of the security compromises made under the revitalized peace agreement threatens the peace, security and stability of South Sudan". In particular, the report noted that the deadlines for completing transitional security arrangements, including the cantonment of forces and the "formation, training and redeployment of the necessary unified forces" had not been met. It further outlined violations of

the arms embargo imposed by the UN Security Council, including weapons shipments to the National Security Service from Sudan's General Intelligence Service and the presence of Uganda People's Defence Forces in South Sudan's Central Equatoria State. The panel recommended that the arms embargo be maintained.

On 29 May, the Council adopted resolution 2521, renewing the South Sudan sanctions regime—including targeted sanctions and the arms embargo—until 31 May 2021 and the mandate of the Panel of Experts until 1 July 2021. While 12 members voted in favour of the resolution, three members (China, Russia, and South Africa) cast abstentions.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is how to encourage further progress in implementing the peace agreement, including by breaking the impasse over the allocation of state governorships and addressing security arrangements. Members could request a briefing from the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission to get its assessment of the implementation of the peace agreement. The Council could consider adopting a presidential statement acknowledging the progress that has been made—for example, through the formation of the transitional government and the reduction of political violence—while urging the parties to resolve outstanding issues.

Another important issue is how to address the ongoing inter-communal violence, including between the Murle and Lou Nuer groups in Jonglei states. Members may be keen to learn in June's meeting the measures that UNMISS is taking to help mitigate such violence.

Given the spread of the coronavirus in South Sudan, another key issue is what further measures the Council can take to help reduce the impact of COVID-19 on the security and humanitarian situation in the country. In their interventions during the open VTC—or in a product, if the Council were to pursue one—Council members could encourage enhanced funding and in-kind support (for example, medical supplies and equipment) from member states for the humanitarian needs facing South Sudan.

South Sudan

Council Dynamics

Council members agree that the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity on 22 February was an important step, but many of them share concerns over the need to fully implement the R-ARCSS and create a durable peace. In this regard, when UNMISS was renewed in March, the Council listed support for the peace process as a priority ahead of monitoring and investigating human rights

in the order of mandated responsibilities, a departure from previous years. During this month's briefing, some members may also emphasise the need for an agreement on the allocation of state governors and progress on implementing transitional security arrangements as important factors in consolidating peace in South Sudan.

As demonstrated by the vote on resolution 2521, there are deep divisions on the Council

regarding the utility of sanctions on South Sudan. While some members believe that they help to foster stability in the country, others 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.

Children and Armed Conflict

Expected Council Action

In June, the Council is expected to hold an open videoconference (VTC) debate on the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict, due in June. Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba will present the Secretary-General's report. Other speakers are likely to include the Executive Director of UNICEF, Henrietta Fore, and a civil society briefer.

Key Recent Developments

On 12 February, the Council held a high-level briefing on "Integrating child protection into peace processes to resolve conflict and sustain peace". Belgian Foreign Minister Philippe Goffin presided, and Belgian King Philippe and Queen Mathilde were in attendance. King Philippe made a statement, and Secretary-General António Guterres; AU Peace and Security Commissioner Smaïl Chergui; and Jo Becker, chair of the advisory board of the NGO Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, briefed the Council.

The high-level briefing was convened ahead of the launch that day of the "Practical guidance for mediators to protect children in situations of armed conflict", a document developed by the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict with the aim of providing tools for mediators and other parties involved in peace processes to prioritise the protection of children and prevention of violations against them.

At the briefing, Guterres noted the

worrying rise in the number of children who are killed or maimed in conflict. In 2018, 12,000 children were killed or maimed—the highest annual number since 1996, when the General Assembly created the post of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Guterres said that the guidance for mediators is the next step in the strategy to put children at the heart of protection, peacebuilding and prevention efforts, emphasising that in addition to implementing the guidance, member states needed to take concrete steps to prioritise the protection of children in conflict situations. Becker said that child protection provisions are rarely included in peace agreements, despite the progress that has been made in raising awareness of the issue. Since the Council began engaging with the issue of children and armed conflict in 1999, fewer than 18 percent of the 444 documents in the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs' peace agreements database, including peace and ceasefire agreements as well as declarations and other communiqués, have included child-protection provisions. She further stressed that meaningful references to the needs of children should be included in peace agreements, such as articulation of long-term frameworks that address the needs of children in post-conflict situations in a sustainable way.

The Council adopted a presidential statement during the high-level briefing that welcomed the development of the UN's guidance on child protection in peace processes and encouraged the Secretary-General to

disseminate it and promote its use in UN peace and mediation processes. It further called on member states to integrate child protection into "all relevant activities in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations", while stressing the need to ensure accountability for all violations against children.

On 23 March, Guterres appealed for a worldwide ceasefire to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and focus resources on fighting the global COVID-19 pandemic. Following his call, several countries committed themselves to stopping hostilities, including Cameroon, Sudan and the Philippines. Special Representative Gamba issued a statement calling on parties to include considerations relating to the rights and well-being of children in peace dialogues and to demonstrate their commitment to a ceasefire by putting an end to the recruitment of children and securing the release of children associated with parties to conflict.

A UN policy brief, issued on 15 April, covered the possible impact of the spread of COVID-19 on children in armed conflict situations. It said that while children are generally spared from the primary effect of the virus and are less affected by symptoms of the disease, they are more likely to be affected by secondary consequences, particularly the socio-economic impacts of steps taken to mitigate the disease. In armed conflict situations, where health care systems are already burdened, children have limited access to medical services. In addition, the brief warned that the pandemic, or pandemic response, may

UN DOCUMENTS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/3](#) (12 February 2020) called on parties to integrate child protection provisions into peace agreements. [Secretary-General's Report S/2019/509](#) (20 June 2019) was the annual report on children and armed conflict. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8721](#) (12 February 2020) was a high-level briefing on "Integrating child protection into peace processes to resolve conflict and sustain peace".

Children and Armed Conflict

increase the recruitment of children. For example, school closures might give children an incentive to join armed groups.

Developments in the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

Between January and March, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict held three formal meetings and one informal consultation. Because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Working Group has held three closed VTC meetings since March for briefings, the introduction of country-specific reports on children and armed conflict and a discussion of conclusions adopted by written procedure.

The Working Group adopted conclusions on the Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic and Yemen. At the time of writing, negotiations continue on conclusions on the reports on Colombia and Iraq.

On 22 May, Gamba and Manuel Fontaine, Director of the Office of Emergency Programmes at UNICEF, briefed the Working Group on the impact of COVID-19 on children and provided an initial assessment of the effects of the pandemic on the UN system's ability to perform tasks related to the children and armed conflict agenda. Gamba stated that while the monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict remains operational, lockdown measures that are in effect globally have restricted the UN's ability to undertake fieldwork. She further discussed mitigating measures that are being carried out to ensure the continuity of monitoring and reporting, such as cooperation with local civil society partners.

Key Issues and Options

An overarching priority for the Council is the prevention of violations against children, given the continuous worsening of hostilities and their impact on them. In that regard, a key issue for the Council is having the Secretary-General's annual reports serve as an effective

tool in supporting the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda. The annual reports contain annexes listing parties that have committed grave violations against children (their recruitment and use, killing and maiming, abductions, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and attacks on schools and hospitals). Since 2017, the list has been divided into two sections (A and B) for parties that have not enacted measures to improve the protection of children during the reporting period and those that have enacted some such measures, respectively.

In the last few years, controversies have arisen around the accuracy and impartiality of the listing and delisting of certain perpetrators in the annexes of the annual report. Concerns have been raised that if parties that do not appear to have stopped committing violations against children are taken off the annexes, the credibility of the monitoring and reporting mechanism itself will be called into question. Greater transparency about the listing and delisting criteria and the criteria for moving listed parties between sections A and B may help address these concerns. Another option is to consider the establishment of a due diligence process to inquire into possible discrepancies.

The meeting will also mark 15 years since the adoption of resolution 1612, which established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. As such, it can serve as an opportunity for member states to reflect on the achievements since the establishment of the Working Group, and to look ahead for new ways to promote the fulfilment of the children and armed conflict agenda.

A new issue for the Council is how to address the impact of COVID-19 on children

in situations of conflict. A related concern is the ability of the UN system, including the Special Representative's office and peacekeeping missions, to protect children on the ground because of restrictions on movement. During Council briefings on relevant country-specific situations, members may wish to raise the issue of how the monitoring, reporting and response to violations of children's rights are being affected. At the time of writing, the Council was negotiating a draft resolution on the COVID-19 pandemic that includes a call for a global ceasefire. The Council may consider adding language about the impact of the pandemic on children in any such product.

Council Dynamics

There is strong support overall for the children and armed conflict agenda among Council members. For example, the adoption of the February presidential statement was relatively smooth. However, political sensitivities in the Council over issues such as Syria and Myanmar have filtered down to the subsidiary body level, making it hard to achieve consensus on some conclusions.

The advent of remote working has meant that the Working Group has not been able to hold face-to-face negotiations. Over the years, members of the Working Group have developed strong ties because of their regular contact. These relationships have often been useful in reaching agreement on outcomes. It is hard to predict how meeting and negotiating remotely will affect this.

Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium) chairs the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

Afghanistan

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council will hold its quarterly meeting on Afghanistan. Deborah Lyons, Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), is expected to

brief the Council via videoconference (VTC) on the latest Secretary-General's report on UNAMA, due on 17 June. A civil society representative may also brief the Council.

The mandate of UNAMA expires on 17 September, and the mandate of the

Monitoring Team assisting the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee expires on 16 December.

Key Recent Developments

On 10 March, the Security Council adopted

UN DOCUMENTS ON AFGHANISTAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2513 (10 March 2020) was on the US-Taliban agreement and the joint declaration issued by the US and the Afghan government. **S/RES/2489** (17 September 2019) renewed the mandate of UNAMA until 17 September 2020. **Secretary-General's Report S/2020/210** (17 March 2020) was the latest Secretary-General's report on UNAMA. **Security Council Meeting Record S/2020/274** (31 March 2020) was the latest quarterly meeting on the situation in Afghanistan. **Sanctions Committee Documents S/2020/415** (19 May 2020) was the 11th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 1988.

Afghanistan

resolution 2513, which welcomed the progress towards a political settlement of the war in Afghanistan facilitated by the 29 February Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan signed by the US and the Taliban and the Joint Declaration for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan issued by the US and the Afghan government. The resolution further called on the parties to carry out confidence-building measures to support future intra-Afghan negotiations, including reductions in violence and the release of prisoners.

On 17 May, there was tenuous progress towards the advancement of intra-Afghan negotiations when Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and former Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah signed a power-sharing deal aimed at resolving their dispute over the results of the 28 September 2019 presidential elections. Under the deal, Abdullah relinquished an executive role in the government in exchange for half of the cabinet positions for his coalition (50 seats in total) and an appointment as chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR), which will oversee the peace talks with the Taliban.

Since the resolution of the political stalemate between the Afghan political elites was seen by many as one of the pre-conditions for progress towards intra-Afghan negotiations, these developments raised hopes among international stakeholders for further headway. However, the Taliban reiterated on 18 May that they would not agree to participate in the peace talks until the Afghan government released 5,000 prisoners who are members of the militant group. At the time of that statement, a limited exchange of prisoners had taken place, with the Afghan government having released about 1,000 prisoners while the Taliban released at least 260 Afghan hostages.

Another sticking-point that continues to cloud prospects for intra-Afghan negotiations is the persistent level of violence in the country. While the Taliban seem to be adhering to their commitment under the US-Taliban agreement to halt attacks against international forces, the group's attacks against the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces have continued unabated. Tensions mounted following two attacks on 12 May—on a Kabul hospital in which assailants attacked a maternity ward, resulting in at least 24 deaths, mostly of women and

newborn babies, and on a funeral in Nangarhar, in which at least 25 civilians were killed and 68 injured. The latter attack was claimed by the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP), while the former was not claimed by any group. The attacks were strongly condemned in statements issued by the Security Council and by Secretary-General António Guterres.

Although the Taliban denied responsibility for the 12 May attacks, President Ghani blamed them and ordered Afghan forces to move from the “active defence” posture they had been in since the signing of the US-Taliban agreement to conducting offensive attacks against Taliban militants. In response, the Taliban warned that they will increase their attacks on Afghan security forces. In a recent example of hostilities, seven people were killed and 40 injured in a Taliban assault on an Afghan intelligence agency post in the eastern province of Ghazni on 18 May.

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of attacks by all sides of the conflict, with UNAMA reporting an increase in civilian casualties in April relative to the previous month. According to the mission, the Taliban were responsible for 208 civilian casualties in April (the same level as March), while Afghan security forces were responsible for 172 civilian casualties (a 37 percent increase from March).

On 23 May, the Taliban announced a three-day ceasefire for the duration of the Eid al-Fitr holiday. President Ghani instructed the Afghan security forces to also observe a ceasefire and announced the release of an additional 900 Taliban prisoners as a show of good faith, bringing the total of released Taliban prisoners to about 2,000. The announcement of the ceasefire was welcomed by Guterres, who urged the parties to seize this opportunity to advance towards an Afghan-led peace process. This marked the second time a formal ceasefire was observed between the Taliban and the Afghan government in nearly two decades of war, with the first brief cessation of hostilities taking place in 2018, also during the Eid al-Fitr holiday.

The latest report of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee, issued on 19 May, warned that the Taliban could continue to employ delaying tactics, such as insisting on a full prisoner swap or objecting to the composition of the Afghan government's negotiating team,

in a bid to stall the intra-Afghan negotiations while international forces continue to leave the country in line with the US-Taliban agreement. On 15 May, a US Pentagon spokesman indicated that the US is on track to fulfil its obligation under the agreement to reduce its forces in Afghanistan to roughly 8,600 troops by mid-July.

There have been several international initiatives since March to bring the Afghan parties to the negotiating table. On 16 April, a meeting of the “six plus two” format—a group consisting of six countries bordering Afghanistan (China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) as well as Russia and the US—took place under the auspices of the UN. This was the first meeting in many years of this group, which was last operational between 1997 and 2001. Participants discussed the importance of regional initiatives in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan and repeated the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire aimed at facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, Zalmay Khalilzad, the US Special Representative to Afghanistan, travelled to Doha and later to Kabul on 17 May with the aim of pressing the sides to take the necessary steps to commence intra-Afghan negotiations. At press time, there was still no concrete date for the start of these negotiations. It remains likely that the sides will find it difficult to start direct negotiations before the lifting of travel restrictions imposed to slow the spread of COVID-19.

As of 29 May, Afghanistan reported 13,659 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 246 fatalities from the virus. OCHA has warned that the pandemic poses an increased threat to Afghanistan because of the strain it might put on an already fragile medical system, along with the possibly dire economic repercussions on the impoverished and malnourished population. According to OCHA, protests erupted in the first weeks of May across the country, including in Nangarhar, Laghman, Ghazni, Parwan, Balkh and Ghor provinces, with citizens expressing their dissatisfaction with lockdown measures and the government response to the pandemic, including the perceived lack of transparency in the distribution of food to those in need.

Afghanistan

Key Issues and Options

The key priority for the Council is supporting political and security stability in the country to facilitate the continuation of negotiations geared towards achieving peace in Afghanistan.

Council members will be interested in hearing from the briefer an update on the status of international efforts to start the intra-Afghan negotiations. In light of the recent spike in hostilities and civilian casualties, many members are likely to emphasise in their statements the responsibilities of all sides to protect civilians.

A new concern for the Council is the impact of COVID-19 on the fragile health

institutions in the country and the economic effects on vulnerable populations. Council members may therefore consider asking for a briefing by OCHA on how the international community can further assist in tackling the threat of the virus in Afghanistan.

Council Dynamics

Council members are generally united in their support for UNAMA and are committed to advancing the peace process in Afghanistan. All Council members seem to share the hope that the US-Taliban agreement will facilitate progress towards intra-Afghan negotiations. It appears, however, that several members are cautious about a provision in the agreement

that calls for the removal of Taliban-affiliated individuals from the 1988 sanctions regime. Some members emphasise that the sanctions regime is an important tool in compelling the Taliban to participate in the peace process and are apprehensive about lifting the regime completely in the near future. They advocate for a more phased approach in which the delisting of individuals will be considered based on their participation in the intra-Afghan negotiations.

Germany and Indonesia are the co-penholders on Afghanistan, and Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani (Indonesia) chairs the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee. The US is the penholder on the sanctions file.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council will hold a briefing and consultations on the Secretary-General's most recent report on the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Special Representative and head of MONUSCO Leila Zerrougui is likely to brief Council members. The briefing and consultations will be held by videoconference (VTC). Additionally, Council members will need to renew the measures under the 1533 Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) sanctions regime, which expire on 1 July. The mandate of the Group of Experts assisting the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee expires on 1 August and is traditionally renewed with the sanctions measures themselves.

The MONUSCO mandate expires on 20 December.

Key Recent Developments

On 24 March, Security Council members held an informal closed VTC meeting on MONUSCO and the situation in the DRC. This meeting was the first Council session since 12 March. Discussions about how to hold this consultation, and conduct other forthcoming Council business, focused on how to categorise the meeting. Many Council members were comfortable using the

terminology “consultations of the whole”—typical for closed meetings of members of the Council—but one Council member objected, saying that any meeting held via VTC could not be considered a formal Council meeting. To proceed with Council business, therefore, it was decided to hold the MONUSCO discussion as a “closed VTC”, and that method has continued while special temporary measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic are in place at UN headquarters.

During the meeting, in which Special Representative Zerrougui and Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix participated, both briefers discussed the relatively stable political situation in the DRC, Zerrougui's meetings with DRC stakeholders to develop a transition strategy, and ongoing operations in eastern DRC against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebel group.

Ahead of the 2023 DRC elections, Zerrougui has been using her good offices to seek to mend the relationship between the DRC's main political parties and work with civil society to consolidate the political gains made so far after DRC's first peaceful transfer of power. While noting the remaining significant challenges, Zerrougui said that there have been enough improvements and work toward stabilisation of the DRC that she believes the conditions could be present for

the phased withdrawal of MONUSCO.

Lacroix detailed the implementation of an action plan in response to recommendations from an independent assessment report, prepared by Lieutenant General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, on the protection of civilians and neutralisation of armed groups in Beni and Mambasa territories. Cruz travelled to eastern DRC in December 2019, after MONUSCO came under criticism for the implementation of its protection of civilians mandate. Cruz's report was released on 16 January, and he briefed Council members under “any other business” on 20 January. In the 24 March briefing, Lacroix described several steps his office had taken in response. The first was to begin preparations to strengthen the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), so it could conduct targeted offensive operations jointly with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition, Lacroix told Council members that the FIB would be reconfigured with the introduction of three Quick Reaction units to replace one of the battalions currently deployed and the addition of more staff officers between June and September. He said any changes in MONUSCO as requested by resolution 2502 would be carried out so as not to create a security vacuum. Resolution 2502, the most recent MONUSCO mandate renewal,

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DRC Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2502 (19 December 2019) renewed the mandate of MONUSCO until 20 December 2020. **S/RES/2478** (26 June 2019) renewed the 1533 sanctions regime until 1 July 2020. **Secretary-General's Reports S/2020/214** (18 March 2020) covered the activities of MONUSCO and the situation in the DRC from 27 November 2019 to 16 March 2020.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

set out several tasks that could prepare for MONUSCO's eventual withdrawal.

After the closed VTC, Council members decided to adopt press elements to be shared with the public, apparently to maintain some record of this more informal meeting. In the press elements, Council members encouraged work towards a sustainable exit for MONUSCO and welcomed the role of regional states. They also welcomed the progress made against Ebola while recognising the challenges that lay ahead with COVID-19.

COVID-19 has affected the DRC, including MONUSCO operations. As the disease spread, the Congolese government acted quickly to shut its borders. Reported cases in the DRC reached 2,300 as of 26 May, with approximately 66 deaths. While the DRC has a response system set up for mass disease events because of Ebola and other contagious diseases, there are still concerns about the country's capacity to respond. Most of the reported COVID-19 cases have been in the capital, Kinshasa, whereas Ebola's epicentre was in the east. There have been criticisms of the continued existence of overcrowded prisons and mixed messaging from the government on the best way forward. With MONUSCO officials cognisant of the risk of any mission personnel becoming a vector for the disease, peacekeeping troop rotation has been halted, leaving many troops in the DRC well beyond their planned departure dates.

Along with COVID-19, several other diseases affect life in the DRC. Ebola remains an underlying threat. On 3 March, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) reported that the "last patient with a confirmed case of Ebola" was discharged from one of its facilities, but on 10 April a new instance was reported in Beni, followed by at least six more cases. MSF reported that the last patient in Beni was discharged on 14 May, but the Ebola epidemic has not yet been officially declared as having ended. An ongoing measles epidemic has led to nearly 320,000 cases and more than 6,000 deaths, mostly of children, since January 2019. Malaria and cholera are also threats to the population.

Human Rights-Related Developments

At a 17 April press briefing, the spokesperson for the High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed alarm about the worsening security situation in Djugu and Mahagi territories,

Ituri province, where more than 150 people had been killed in the preceding 40 days in a series of attacks by Djugu-based perpetrators. "The brutality of the attacks, with perpetrators using machetes to kill women and children, raping, looting property, destroying houses and killing livestock, suggests the aim is to inflict lasting trauma on the affected populations, forcing them to flee, and so gain control over the territory, which is rich in natural resources", he said. The spokesperson called on the authorities to strengthen the presence of security forces and state officials in the region, to investigate all alleged abuses and human rights violations, and to hold those responsible accountable.

Sanctions-Related Developments

Since 1 January, Ambassador Abdou A Barry (Niger) has chaired the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee. The first meeting under his leadership was held on 21 February. On 22 May, committee members held an "informal informal" VTC meeting to discuss the Group of Experts' final report.

Key Issues and Options

With MONUSCO's mandate not up for renewal until December, the Council will continue to monitor the situation on the ground, especially given the complications caused by COVID-19. After Lacroix's detailed briefing in March on changes in response to the Cruz recommendations, Council members are likely to want to follow up on those actions and better understand if they have had an impact.

Council members are also expected to seek information on COVID-19's impact on MONUSCO, from troop rotations to operations in the east to community engagement efforts.

As for the sanctions regime, due to be renewed in June, Council members will be looking closely at the Group of Experts report to determine if any changes are needed. On 6 February, Seka Baluku, leader of the ADF, was added to the sanctions list, and members may want to know if this has had any impact. Given Zerrougui's statements in March about the ongoing improvements in the DRC, members are likely to support the continuation of measures that emphasise cooperation. Some members may be interested in what more could be done to protect the country's natural resources from illicit and conflict-fuelling exploitation.

It has been three years since Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp, two members of the Group of Experts assisting the 1533 Committee, were killed while conducting

investigations in the DRC. While a trial began in 2017 in Kananga in front of a military tribunal and 50 defendants were named, there has been little progress in uncovering the details of what happened. In a Human Rights Watch (HRW) press release, entitled "Still No Justice for Murders of UN Experts in Congo", HRW detail what they consider the slow reactions by the Congolese government, and cite many elements of concern, from a lack of defence representation to accusations of torture by those in pretrial detention and allegations of interference in the investigation by Congolese security forces. Several of the defendants are from military or intelligence backgrounds, making this case extremely sensitive. UN member states continue to follow up on the case and the UN has sent a team to assist in technical matters. Member states may mention the lack of accountability for these killings in their interventions.

Council Dynamics

Despite differences about the future of MONUSCO, Council members were able to come together when renewing the operation's mandate and adopted resolution 2502 unanimously. In general, Council members have maintained an optimistic view of the DRC's political situation, with most of their concern focused on violence in the east and the health crises.

COVID-19 has become a significant topic for all issues on the Council's agenda, including the DRC. Its impact on peacekeeping missions may be brought up during discussions in June. Indonesia and South Africa, both large troop contributors to MONUSCO, will be interested in hearing more about troop rotation constraints. The two countries remain concerned about the effect on their troops' capacities and the need for rotation as soon as possible. Additionally, several Council members may raise issues about improvements in the performance of peacekeepers. The US, in particular, remains highly critical of the FIB.

On the upcoming sanctions regime's renewal, member states are mostly aligned, and it seems likely that an extension will occur.

The penholder on the DRC is France. Ambassador Abdou A Barry (Niger) chairs the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee.

Expected Council Action

In June, the Council is scheduled to receive the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 2231, which in 2015 endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme. The Council also expects reports from the Joint Commission, established by the parties to the JCPOA to oversee its implementation, and from the Council's 2231 facilitator, Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium). Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo, Pecsteen, and a representative of the EU in its capacity as coordinator of the Joint Commission, are also expected to brief the Council in a videoconference.

Key Recent Developments

The tensions between the US and Iran have shown no signs of abating and there is renewed uncertainty over the fate of the JCPOA. The US announced its withdrawal from the agreement in May 2018 and has since continued to impose unilateral sanctions on Iran as a part of its broader strategy of maximum pressure. Although still formally in the agreement, Iran has reduced its nuclear-related commitments and has gradually resumed uranium enrichment activities beyond JCPOA-mandated limits. Iran has emphasised that its actions are reversible and that its return to full compliance with the JCPOA is conditioned on sanctions relief from the agreement's remaining parties.

Under the JCPOA, the first set of restrictions, including a travel ban and arms-related transfers, is set to expire in October. The US has publicly stated its intention to prevent the expiry of the arms embargo. In late April and early May, several sources indicated that the US had shared with Germany, France and the UK a draft resolution that would extend indefinitely the restrictions on arms transfers. In a 29 April press conference at the State Department, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the US would not allow Iran to acquire conventional weapons after the expiry of the ban in October and emphasised that the US would work with other Council members to extend this prohibition. If the Council is unable to take action on

this, Pompeo said the US would explore other possibilities to assure that the arms embargo stays in place after October.

In May, both Pompeo and US Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook said publicly that the US could possibly renew the arms embargo on Iran by triggering a snapback mechanism envisaged in resolution 2231. The resolution stipulates that any concerned party to the JCPOA can notify the Council about an issue that it considers a significant violation of the agreement. The sanctions in place before the adoption of resolution 2231 would then resume 30 days after the notification, unless the Council adopts a resolution that continues the lifting of the sanctions. Such a resolution could be vetoed by any permanent member that believes there has been significant Iranian non-compliance. Although the US announced its withdrawal from the agreement in 2018, resolution 2231 listed it as one of the parties to the JCPOA. Pompeo and Hook have thus argued that the US would have a legal right to trigger a snapback mechanism.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) announced on 22 April that it had successfully launched military satellite Noor into the Earth's orbit. According to the IRGC, the satellite will be used primarily for reconnaissance and communication purposes. On 13 May, the US initiated a meeting under the "2231 format" to discuss this issue. In a statement issued following the meeting, the US emphasised that the launch represents another instance of Iran violating resolution 2231. It also condemned Iran for violating the arms embargo under resolution 2231 and accused it of supplying weapons to terrorist organizations and proxy forces in the region.

Key Issues and Options

The primary concern for the Council is to ensure full implementation of resolution 2231 by the remaining parties to the JCPOA and the wider UN membership.

Iran has committed several breaches of its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA. Should the remaining parties to the agreement fail to resolve Iran's non-compliance issues, an option would be to notify the Council formally, which would initiate the

snapback mechanism that would effectively reinstate the sanctions that were in place before the adoption of resolution 2231.

The expiry of arms-related restrictions on Iran in October presents another significant issue for the Council, given the deep divisions among permanent members on how to address the embargo. An option is for Council members to organise a private meeting to further discuss this specific issue, given that most of the deliberations are taking place outside the Council's purview and through diplomatic channels limited to specific stakeholders. Such a meeting could provide an opportunity for Council members and the EU to present their views and exchange ideas on how to best address this issue.

A set of challenges for the Council could emerge should the US decide to initiate the snapback mechanism under the JCPOA. A central issue, in this case, would be whether the US has the legal authority to do so in that it withdrew from the agreement in 2018. Another issue for the Council would be whether to seek a legal opinion on this question from either the Secretariat or the International Court of Justice and what political consequences such an opinion could have for the Council.

The standoff between the US and Iran over the JCPOA has also affected the regional security situation and heightened military tensions in the Persian Gulf. In light of the overall military build-up in the region and the potential for open confrontation, the Council will follow this situation closely. Should tensions escalate further, the Council could consider making a more formal pronouncement urging restraint on all sides.

Council Dynamics

The US withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 has left the Council deeply divided on this issue. Although Iran has committed several breaches of its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA, it has remained formally in the agreement. The US has claimed that Iran's destabilising behaviour in the region runs contrary to the spirit of the agreement and has maintained a maximum pressure campaign on the country, imposing a series of unilateral sanctions. Most other Council

UN DOCUMENTS ON IRAN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2231](#) (20 July 2015) endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran. [Secretary-General's Report S/2019/934](#) (10 December 2019) was on implementation of resolution 2231. [Security Council Letter S/2019/925](#) (4 December 2019) was the report of the Joint Commission on the status of the Procurement Working Group's decisions and on any implementation issues. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8695](#) (19 December 2019) was the semi-annual briefing on the implementation of resolution 2231. [Security Council Press Statement SC/13762](#) (2 April 2019) reaffirmed the commitment to advancing the goals of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. [Other S/2020/307](#) (15 April 2019) was the IAEA report on verification and monitoring in Iran in light of resolution 2231.

Iran

members—among them China, France, Germany, the UK, and Russia, which are parties to the agreement—maintain their position that the JCPOA remains valid, reiterate the importance of preserving it, and say that they will continue to adhere to its provisions. Some have suggested that by withdrawing from JCPOA, the US voided its ability to trigger the snapback mechanism.

These members have, however, expressed concern over Iran's latest violations of the agreement and have called on the country to return to full compliance. Given its continued breaches of the JCPOA, Iran is at risk of losing the support of the other parties to the agreement and the wider Council membership.

The ongoing campaign by the US to extend the arms-related restrictions on Iran has further deepened the divisions among permanent members. China and Russia have been vocal in their opposition to the renewal of the arms embargo on Iran and have accused the US of not meeting its obligations under the JCPOA. These two members would most likely veto any attempt by

the US to pass a resolution that would extend the arms embargo. France, Germany and the UK, which are all allies of the US, have not made definite pronouncements on this specific issue. While these members share similar concerns with the US over Iran's destabilising role in the region, they have emphasised the importance of addressing Iran's nuclear issue by preserving the JCPOA.

The attempt by the US to initiate a snapback mechanism under the JCPOA would likely result in deepening already existing divisions among Council members. It seems certain that some members would question the legal validity of this move by the US.

In addition to non-proliferation issues, the Council has also been drawn into consideration of the regional security situation stemming from the attacks in the Persian Gulf on Saudi oil facilities and oil tankers in 2019 and the 3 January killing of Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force, by a US strike near the Baghdad airport. The Council has been united in calling for de-escalation and restraint by all parties.

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Security Council Report is a non-profit organisation supported by the Governments of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and United Arab Emirates, and Carnegie Corporation.

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