

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

Indonesia has the presidency of the Security Council in August. While the Security Council is expected to continue to work largely remotely, due to COVID-19 restrictions, it may hold some meetings on UN premises. Unless there are further refinements made to the temporary provisional measures agreed to over the last few months, remote meetings will continue to be deemed as unofficial and held as videoconferences (VTC), either open (briefings, debates or open debates) or closed (consultations). A 24-hour written procedure will continue to be used for adoptions unless members agree to hold an in-person meeting.

There will be a strong focus on counter-terrorism issues. Indonesia has chosen to hold a ministerial-level open debate on the linkages between [terrorism and transnational organised crime](#). The possible briefers are UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Under-Secretary-General of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism Vladimir Voronkov, and Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Ghada Waly. There will also be a briefing on the Secretary-General's biannual strategic-level report on [the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant \(ISIL or Da'esh\)](#). The expected briefers are Voronkov and Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate Michèle Coninx.

Indonesia's other open debate is [pandemics and the challenges to peacebuilding and sustaining peace](#). This follows the Informal Interactive Dialogue on the same topic in July. It will be chaired by Indonesia's foreign minister, Retno L.P. Marsudi. The likely briefers include Guterres, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Sarah Cliffe, Director of New York University's Center on International Cooperation.

Several regular Middle East meetings are on the programme of work. There will be the three monthly [Syria](#) meetings: open and closed VTCs on the political and humanitarian situation and a closed VTC on the use of chemical weapons. The monthly meetings on developments in [Yemen](#) and on the situation in the [Middle East, including the Palestinian Question](#) are also planned in both open and closed format. In addition, the Council will meet for a briefing on recent developments in [Iraq](#) and on the two latest Secretary-General's reports, on the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq and on the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives.

Meetings in open and closed format are also planned ahead of adoptions to renew the UN missions in [Lebanon \(UNIFIL\)](#) and [Somalia \(UNSOM\)](#). An adoption is also expected to renew the [Mali](#) sanctions regime, as well as the mandate of its Panel of Experts.

The Council will be briefed on the latest Secretary-General's report on the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in [Guinea-Bissau \(UNIOGBIS\)](#), as well as developments in the country following the post-electoral crisis earlier in the year.

The quarterly briefing by the chair of the 1718 [DPRK Sanctions Committee](#) in a closed session is also anticipated in August.

Council members may also participate in a "virtual visiting mission" to meet with key stakeholders in [Somalia](#) ahead of the adoption.

The Council will be watching developments in [Burundi](#), [Iran](#), [Libya](#), [Myanmar](#) and [Sudan](#), as well as those related to the [Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam](#), and additional meetings may be added as necessary.

31 July 2020

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In Hindsight: Six Days, Five Resolutions, One Border Crossing

During the second week of July, the Security Council struggled to re-authorise the Syria cross-border humanitarian aid delivery mechanism, which was set to expire at midnight on Friday, 10 July. [Only after four draft resolutions failed to be adopted did the Council finally reach agreement.](#) The process that eventually led to the adoption of resolution 2533 was acrimonious and not only resulted in the Council's re-authorising just a single border crossing—thus reducing the UN's capacity to deliver humanitarian assistance to Syria's north-west—but again laid bare the Council's deep divisions over Syria. Russia and China vetoed two resolutions in the course of the week, and two Russian-sponsored texts failed to reach enough votes to pass. The challenge of the week's negotiations and multiple failed votes was exacerbated by the way the Council has had to work during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a written voting procedure and lack of in-person meetings.

Background on the Cross-Border Mechanism

The UN cross-border aid delivery mechanism was established by resolution 2165, which was unanimously adopted on 14 July 2014. It authorised UN agencies and humanitarian partners, with notification to the Syrian authorities, to use the border crossings at Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa (both on the Syrian-Turkish border), AlYarubiyah (on the Syrian-Iraqi border) and Al-Ramtha (on the Syrian-Jordanian border) “to ensure that assistance, including medical and surgical supplies, reached people in need throughout Syria through the most direct routes”. The mechanism was subsequently renewed annually by unanimous vote in December 2014 (resolution 2191), December 2015 (resolution 2258) and December 2016 (resolution 2332). Beginning with resolution 2393 in December 2017, consensus on the Council began to unravel, with China and Russia (joined by Bolivia) abstaining on the mechanism's renewal. They abstained again on resolution 2449 in December 2018, which extended the mechanism for another year.

The stark cleavages that characterised last month's negotiations had been building over the previous years but became fully evident this past December and January. The Council failed to re-authorise the mechanism on 20

December 2019, as two competing draft resolutions—tabled by co-penholders Belgium, Germany and Kuwait and by Russia—were vetoed and received an insufficient number of affirmative votes, respectively. When resolution 2504 was adopted on 10 January, the mandate was renewed for only six months rather than 12, and while Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa were re-authorised, the al-Ramtha and the AlYarubiyah crossings were removed. Resolution 2504 was adopted by a vote of 11 in favour, none against, and four abstentions, including China and Russia; the UK abstained arguing that 2504 “reduce[d] aid provision for vulnerable populations” and the US, also abstaining, said that the resolution was “wholly inadequate to the needs of the Syrian people”. In short, though there had already been strong hints of Russia's and China's wish to move from cross-border to cross-line delivery of humanitarian assistance in previous years, the period from December 2019 to January 2020 brought this to the fore.

A Circuitous Path to Adoption

It was no surprise, then, that the process that led to the adoption of resolution 2533 on 11 July proved difficult. Negotiations began on 16 June, with the Syria humanitarian co-penholders (Belgium and Germany) circulating an initial draft that contained both the renewal of the Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa crossings for 12 months and the re-authorisation of the AlYarubiyah crossing for an initial period of six months in light of the impact of COVID-19, with a review to assess if another six months would be needed. It seemed that most Council members—including all ten elected members—supported keeping Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa open. A number of members also argued that the Council should authorise the re-opening of AlYarubiyah given the potentially devastating impact that COVID-19 could have on Syria's north-east. No Council members officially commented on the text. Shortly before the second round of negotiations on the text, however, Russia informed Council members that its starting negotiating position was to close Bab al-Salam and renew only Bab al-Hawa for six months.

Recognising that including AlYarubiyah was a clear red line for Russia and could also reduce the support of the Council's elected members, on Saturday, 4 July, the co-penholders put under silence a draft text that

would re-authorise the Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa crossings for 12 months. Russia, China and the US broke silence on the text for different reasons, all of which would continue to bedevil the negotiations. Russia argued that the text did not take into account its positions on the initial draft circulated on 16 June, while China advocated for language supporting Secretary-General António Guterres' call in March to waive sanctions, in general, to allow countries access to food, essential health supplies, and COVID-19 medical support, and requesting the Secretary-General to report on the impact of sanctions on Syria. The US wanted the text to also include the re-authorisation of the AlYarubiyah crossing for six months.

With an impending expiration of the cross-border mandate, the co-penholders put in blue a draft resolution on Monday, 6 July. The Council had agreed in March to a 24-hour written adoption procedure in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant that unlike normal circumstances, the Council would not be able to vote relatively swiftly on another draft resolution if this draft was not adopted. As had been widely anticipated, the draft resolution was vetoed by Russia and China.

On Wednesday, 8 July, a draft resolution circulated by Russia and calling for re-authorisation of one border crossing, at Bab al-Hawa, for six months, was not adopted, having received only four votes in favour (Russia, China, Viet Nam and South Africa), with seven against (Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, the UK and the US) and four abstentions (Indonesia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Tunisia). On Friday morning, 10 July, a new co-penholders' draft, calling for the re-authorisation of the Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa border crossings for six months instead of 12, was again vetoed by Russia and China, with all other Council members supporting the text. Later that evening, a second Russian draft resolution that would have re-authorised Bab al-Hawa for 12 months was voted down. China and Russia were again joined by South Africa and Viet Nam in supporting the text. Seven members voted against (Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, the UK and the US), and four abstained (Indonesia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Tunisia).

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Matters were coming down to the wire, with the expiry of the existing cross-border authorisation only hours away. The penholders floated the idea of a new draft resolution that would include the re-authorisation of the Bab al-Hawa crossing for 12 months and the Bab al-Salam crossing for three months. When it became clear that Russia would not accept the three-month re-authorisation for Bab al-Salam, the penholders put in blue on Friday evening a draft that did not include it. As Russia had already proposed a text that included only Bab al-Hawa for 12 months, it seemed plausible that it would not veto the co-penholders' new draft. Finally, on Saturday, 11 July, the Council adopted resolution 2533, renewing the Bab al-Hawa border crossing until 10 July 2021. Twelve members voted in favour of the resolution, while three members (China, the Dominican Republic and Russia) abstained. The abstention by the Dominican Republic, which supports the cross-border mechanism, came as a surprise to many. In its explanation of vote, it noted that it had abstained because of the Council's "failure to re-open the border crossing of Al Yarubiyah and [the] decision to close the Bab al-Salam crossing, [which would] have terrible consequences to the lives of hundreds of thousands of children".

Key Points of Contention

During the negotiations, two main points of contention emerged: as in past renewals, the mechanism itself (its duration and the number of border crossings to be authorised) and the impact of sanctions. Russia has regularly argued against the ongoing need for the cross-border aid delivery mechanism, and in its explanation of vote on 9 July noted that the "mechanism was established in 2014 as an urgent and temporary exceptional measure..." and that its "position on the mechanism has always been clear—the gradual closure of the crossing points and phasing-out of the whole mechanism based on the assessment of the situation in the country". China, on the other hand, has often argued, as it did following the vote on 10 January, that it "has always had reservations regarding the establishment of a Syrian cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism" and that "cross-border humanitarian assistance is a special relief method adopted under specific circumstances". It

reiterated its long-held view that the "sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country concerned, and the will of its Government must be respected".

The second contentious issue was the impact of unilateral sanctions on Syria. Russia and China, in particular, argued throughout the negotiations that sanctions have had a severely negative impact on Syria's humanitarian situation, while the US and European members of the Council maintain that critical humanitarian goods and medical supplies are exempt from sanctions. The two failed Russian drafts included language requesting the Secretary-General to provide a report by the end of August on the "direct and indirect impact of unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria on its socio-economic situation and humanitarian deliveries from outside Syria"; and to "continue to include in his reports the humanitarian impact of unilateral coercive measures".

Just before the final vote on 11 July, both China and Russia put forward amendments, that were put to a vote the same day: China proposed that the draft text include language from resolution 2532 on COVID-19 of 1 July "recognizing efforts and measures proposed by the Secretary-General concerning the response to the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to conflict-affected countries", apparently an indirect reference to the Secretary-General's March call to waive sanctions because of the impact of COVID-19. Russia requested that the draft text include language reflecting "improvements of cross-line deliveries of UN humanitarian assistance" as well as a second amendment requesting that the Secretary-General report on "the humanitarian impact of unilateral coercive measures" (that is, unilateral sanctions). Though none of these amendments were adopted, they garnered stronger support than anticipated, with the Russian amendment referencing cross-line deliveries and the Chinese amendments each receiving eight votes in favour, one short of being added to the resolution. This suggests that, while several Council members found the addition of language on sanctions inappropriate in a resolution on humanitarian assistance, a significant number did. The issue of sanctions on Syria is likely to continue to dominate

Syria discussions in the coming months.

The Dominican Republic's abstention on the final draft resolution notwithstanding, the elected members remained largely unified over the course of the week, a signal to the permanent members that they placed a high priority on the preservation of the cross-border mechanism. But the elected members did not form a monolith: South Africa and Viet Nam were the only two elected members that voted in favour of the two Russian drafts, suggesting that they were prepared to vote for any text that would have kept the cross-border mechanism, in whatever form, functioning. There were also differences within the group on the issue of sanctions and the role of cross-line deliveries: six elected members voted in favour of the Russian and Chinese amendments noted above.

Finally, the Council is operating in uncharted territory vis-à-vis working methods. The new cumbersome working methods do not allow a quick turnaround of drafts and votes and may have made compromise more difficult. The Council often works under tight deadlines that can heighten stark political differences, as is the case with Syria. With the looming expiration of resolution 2504, virtual negotiations and a 24-hour voting procedure for both resolutions and amendments placed even greater stress on the Council's capacities. Council members showed creativity and flexibility in agreeing to alterations to its procedures when they had reviewed the drafts and determined their positions. On the penholders' second draft resolution, for example, Germany used its prerogative as Council president to reduce the time allotted to vote on amendments to 12 hours, and on the second Russian text was able to compress the voting timeline to two hours. This helped expedite the circulation and consideration of the next draft resolution. The presidency also expedited the vote on the Russian and Chinese amendments to the final draft resolution. Adjusting its rules of procedure in the midst of a global pandemic, the Council finally had an agreed text, announced by the president at 1730 hours on Saturday, 11 July. In the end, while resolution 2533 may not be what the majority of members wanted, it prevented a nearly complete dismantling of a mechanism that has been responsible for providing humanitarian aid to the Syrian people for six years.

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UNRCCA (Central Asia)

On 6 July, Special Representative and head of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) Natalia Gherman briefed Council members in a closed VTC meeting on the activities of UNRCCA. She updated them on the activities of the centre since her last briefing in January, including on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the region and on the work of UNRCCA. Her briefing apparently touched upon UNRCCA's work to promote regional cooperation projects, empower women and youth in the region, and support the implementation of the UN anti-terrorism strategy on a local level.

Peace and Security and Human Rights

On 7 July, the Council held via VTC an open debate under the agenda item UN peace operations on the topic "peacekeeping operations and human rights" (S/2020/674). Ahead of the debate, Germany circulated a concept note (S/2020/604). Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, German Federal Minister of Defence, delivered Germany's national-capacity statement. The briefers were Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, David Shearer, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan and head of UNMISS, and Dismas Kitenge Senga of the Kisangani (DRC)-based civil society organisation, Lotus. Twenty-nine member states not on the Council and the EU submitted their statements in writing. On 28 July, members of the Council held an informal virtual meeting with the President of the Human Rights Council, Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger.

Libya

On 8 July, the Council held a high-level open VTC on Libya (S/2020/686). Secretary-General António Guterres briefed. On 28 July, the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee held an "informal informal" meeting via closed VTC with Libya, regional member states, and regional organisations to discuss the implementation of UN sanctions.

West Africa and the Sahel

On 9 July, Council members held an open VTC meeting (S/2020/706), followed by a closed VTC session, on West Africa and the Sahel. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, head of UNOWAS, presented the Secretary-General's

latest report on the region (S/2020/585). Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, the coordinator of the Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad, spoke about the link between climate change and security, in particular in the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel. On 28 July, the Council adopted a presidential statement, proposed by Belgium and Niger, following up on the 9 July meeting (S/PRST/2020/7). The statement, among other things, expressed concern about the potential of the COVID-19 pandemic to exacerbate existing fragilities in West Africa and the Sahel, undermine development, worsen the humanitarian situation and disproportionately affect women and girls, children, refugees, internally displaced persons, older persons and persons with disabilities.

South Sudan

On 13 July, the Security Council issued a press statement welcoming developments in South Sudan's peace process, including the agreement between the parties to the Revitalised Agreement on the allocation of states' leadership positions and announcement of governors (SC/14248). It also called on the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity to end delays in the implementation of the Revitalised Agreement and urged the parties to finalise security arrangements, establish transitional government institutions and to make progress on transitional reforms. It expressed concern about increased violence between armed groups in South Sudan in recent months and called on the parties to work toward preventing such violence. The press statement briefly addressed issues such as South Sudan's efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, the dire humanitarian situation and cooperation between South Sudanese authorities and humanitarian agencies, and the role of IGAD, while calling on the South Sudanese government to ensure UNMISS' freedom of movement.

Annual Report

On 14 July, during its first physical meeting since 12 March, the Council considered and adopted without a vote the draft report of the Security Council to the General Assembly covering 1 January to 31 December 2019 (S/PV.8746). The Russian Federation's Permanent Representative, Ambassador Vasily

Nebenzia, whose delegation was responsible for drafting the introduction to this year's annual report, presented it to the Council.

Youth, Peace and Security

On 14 July, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2535 on youth, peace and security, which was co-authored by the Dominican Republic and France (S/PV.8748). The adoption followed the 27 April open debate on this issue, convened during the presidency of the Dominican Republic. This is the third resolution adopted by the Council on youth, peace and security, following resolution 2250 of 9 December 2015 and resolution 2419 of 6 June 2018. It requests the Secretary-General to submit a biennial report to the Security Council on the implementation of resolutions 2250, 2419 and 2535. The resolution thus established a regular reporting requirement on youth, peace and security for the first time. The resolution also calls for more systematic reporting on the youth, peace and security agenda by the Secretary-General in regular thematic and geographic reports and includes provisions aimed at the mainstreaming of the youth, peace and security agenda into the work of the UN secretariat.

Colombia

On 14 July, the Security Council convened for an open briefing followed by closed consultations on Colombia (S/PV.8749). The meeting took place in the Economic and Social Council chamber, part of the morning of the first in-person meetings since 12 March for Council members. Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu briefed on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission (S/2020/603). The Council was also briefed by Clemencia Carabalí Rodallega, a representative of the Municipal Association of Women in the north of Cauca department. Both briefings were conducted via VTC. On 16 July, Council members issued a press statement which expressed concern over the targeting and killing of former combatants, social leaders, and indigenous, Afro-Colombian and other community leaders, which have continued unabated despite the COVID-19 pandemic (SC/14255). Council members recalled resolution 2532, which endorsed the appeal of the Secretary-General

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for a global ceasefire in response to COVID-19, and called on the parties in Colombia to halt violence and facilitate pandemic response. Council members further took note of the request made by the parties and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP) for a role for the Verification Mission in monitoring the implementation of sanctions imposed by the SJP, as envisioned by the 2016 Final Peace Agreement.

Central African Republic

On 14 July, the Security Council issued a press statement condemning an attack against a convoy of MINUSCA (SC/14253). The attack, which occurred on 13 July and was carried out by armed elements of the Return, Reclamation and Rehabilitation (3R) in the north-west of the CAR, resulted in the death of a Rwandan peacekeeper. On 28 July, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2536, which extended the CAR sanctions regime until 31 July 2021, including an arms embargo with some exemptions. Resolution 2536 also renewed the mandate of the CAR Panel of Experts, who assist the Sanctions Committee to oversee the sanction measures, until 31 August 2021 (S/PV.8750).

Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 15 July, Belgium, South Africa, and the US co-hosted an Arria-formula meeting entitled: “the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the Great Lakes Region—How to translate the ongoing positive regional momentum into new options for conflict prevention, management and reform”. Along with Council members, participants included the DRC; Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region; Mauricio Villafuerte, Mission Chief for the DRC from the International Monetary Fund; and member states from the region as well as others such as Canada, Switzerland, and Ireland. Council members spoke about the importance of having a comprehensive approach with regional cooperation to tackle natural resource exploitation. Some also suggested an increased role for the Peacebuilding Commission. Russia said that any measures must respect the sovereignty of the DRC.

Women, Peace and Security

On 17 July, the Council held, via VTC, its annual open debate on conflict-related sexual

violence (S/2020/727). The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, and Angelina Jolie in her position as UNHCR Special Envoy, briefed. Two civil society representatives also briefed: Khin Ohmar, founder and chair of Progressive Voice from Myanmar and Nadia Carine Therese Fornel-Poutou, Executive President of the Association des Femmes Juristes de Centrafrique. In addition to Council members, 43 member states and observers submitted statements, including Canada on behalf of 62 states and the EU.

Cyprus

On 20 July, Council members were briefed in consultations by Elizabeth Spehar, Special Representative and head of UNFICYP, on recent developments and the latest Secretary-General’s report. On 28 July, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2537 which extended the mandate of UNFICYP for another six months (S/PV.8751).

The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 21 July, Council members held the quarterly open debate on “The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question” in open VTC format (S/2020/736). The briefers were Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nikolay Mladenov; Daniel Levy, President of the US/Middle East Project; and Khalil Shikaki, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah.

Climate and Security

On 24 July, Security Council members held a ministerial-level open debate on “climate and security” in open VTC format. A concept note was circulated ahead of the meeting (S/2020/725), which was chaired by German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas. Briefers included Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas Miroslav Jenča; Colonel Mahamadou Magagi of Niger, Director of the Centre National d’Études Stratégiques et de Sécurité; and Coral Pasisi of Niue, Director of the Sustainable Pacific Consultancy. In addition to the 15 Council members, several member states spoke at the meeting on behalf of regional or

other groups: Belize (Alliance of Small Island States); Denmark (the Nordic Group); Fiji (Pacific Small Island Developing States); and Nauru (Group of Friends on Climate and Security). A representative of the EU also spoke, as did Kenya and Ireland, which will serve on the Council in 2021–2022. In addition to these statements, 29 other non-Security Council member states submitted their interventions in writing.

Arria-Formula Meeting on Participation of Women in the Afghan Peace Process

On 27 July, an Arria-formula meeting on “Women and the Afghan Peace Process: Ensuring Women’s Participation and Promoting their Rights” was held via VTC. It was co-organised by Afghanistan, Germany, Indonesia and the UK. The First Lady of Afghanistan was the keynote speaker, while concluding remarks were provided by Baroness Fiona Hodgson of Abinger, a member of the UK House of Lords and honorary member of the Group of Friends of Women in Afghanistan. The panelists were Hasina Safi, Afghanistan’s Minister of Women’s Affairs; Dr Habiba Sarabi, member of the Afghan government negotiating team; Ghezal Haris, head of the Afghanistan Ombudsperson’s Office; Deborah Lyons, Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA; and Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani, Permanent Representative of Qatar to the UN. In addition to Council members, interventions were also made by representatives of Norway and Uzbekistan, which are expected—in addition to Germany, Indonesia and Qatar—to host future rounds of the intra-Afghan negotiations. All the speakers expressed their strong support for the meaningful participation of women in the upcoming intra-Afghan negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Participants in the meeting also emphasised the need to hear input from women across all of Afghan society, including women residing in rural areas, before and during the negotiations process. They further stressed that any eventual peace agreement must safeguard women’s rights and preserve the gains made in the past 20 years towards the empowerment of women and girls in Afghanistan.

Counter-Terrorism

Expected Council Action

In August, the Security Council is expected to hold two meetings on counter-terrorism issues. Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov, the head of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), and Assistant Secretary-General Michèle Coninsx, the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), are expected to brief the Council on the Secretary-General's 11th strategic-level report on the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh). Then, during a high-level open debate, Voronkov and the Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Under-Secretary-General Ghada Waly, are expected to brief the Council on a joint report by the UNOCT and UNODC on the linkages between terrorism and organised crime. If the measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are still in place, the meetings are likely to be held as open videoconferences.

Key Recent Developments

The number of attacks perpetrated by ISIL in its former strongholds in Iraq and Syria have increased significantly in the first half of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019, according to the 26th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team (the Monitoring Team). No attempts to travel by individuals listed under the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions regime were reported and no exemptions to the travel ban were requested by member states. A continuing problem states encounter are false positive hits while screening individuals for travel, showing the need to improve the sanctions list. The Monitoring Team therefore urged states to provide

updated information about listed individuals as soon as it is available. Regarding the financing of ISIL's operations in Iraq and Syria, the Monitoring Team reports that the group uses donations, kidnap for ransom, extortion of businesses and individuals and commercial activity. States consider ISIL to have financial reserves of about \$100 million in total. In Iraq, the group has managed to exploit political instability as well as security gaps as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to relaunch an intensive rural insurgency and was able to conduct sporadic attacks in large cities, including Baghdad. Libya remains an essential link for ISIL operations across Africa, which continue to threaten Libya's own security and stability as well as that of surrounding states.

In June, CTED published a paper titled "The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism, countering terrorism and countering violent extremism". The paper noted that terrorist groups are exploiting the pandemic to further their propaganda and narratives. One example is the repurposing of anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, racist and anti-immigrant tropes to increase hatred towards specific groups. Such narratives are often paired with existing or new conspiracy theories about the pandemic, mostly by extreme right-wing groups. Failures by states, real or perceived, to address the pandemic are being used to promote anti-state violence. On the other hand, the paper pointed out that measures to combat the pandemic have led to a decrease in operational opportunities for terrorist groups because of travel restrictions, increased vigilance on state borders, and less crowded spaces. As states prioritise resources for the fight against COVID-19, counter-terrorism operations and measures directed at the prevention of violent extremism have begun to be

adversely affected. Armed forces, for example, are being redeployed to support public health efforts. Already limited, efforts by states to repatriate children from the Al-Hol camp in Syria, which holds about 65,000 people displaced from territories previously held by ISIL, of which 94 percent are women and children, seem to have stalled, despite the high risk of a spread of COVID-19 in the camp. Reintegration programmes have also been put on hold, increasing the risks for incarcerated individuals to be exposed to the virus as infection rates in prisons are disproportionately higher. The 26th report of the Monitoring Team concludes that there are no indications that ISIL is trying to systematically weaponise the virus but still found evidence that it is a potential threat and should be followed.

On 11 March, the Council held a debate titled "Countering terrorism and extremism in Africa" under the agenda item "Peace and security in Africa", a signature event of China's Council presidency. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo; Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the UN Development Programme Bureau for Policy and Programme Support Abdoulaye Mar Dieye; and Ambassador Fatima Kyari Mohammed, the AU Permanent Observer, briefed. The EU, Japan and 15 African member states made statements as well. A presidential statement was adopted during the meeting.

On 9 July 2019, the Council held an open debate on the linkages between international terrorism and organised crime. Briefers were Under-Secretary-General Yuri Fedotov, then-Executive Director of UNODC; Coninsx; and Tamara Makarenko, an international consultant for the UN Interregional Crime and Research Institute. Resolution 2428 on the issue was adopted on 19 July and required the

UN DOCUMENTS ON COUNTER-TERRORISM Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2532 (1 July 2020) supported the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. S/RES/2482 (19 July 2019) was on the linkages between international terrorism and organised crime. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/5 (11 March 2020) was on countering terrorism and extremism in Africa. Secretary-General's Reports S/2020/754 (28 July 2020) was a joint report by UNOCT and UNODC on the linkages between terrorism and organized crime as requested by resolution 2482. Sanctions Committee Document S/2020/717 (16 July 2020) was a letter from the chair of the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, transmitting the 26th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. Security Council Letters S/2020/493 (3 June 2020) was from the chairs of the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee and the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, transmitting a joint report by CTED and the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team "on actions taken by Member States to disrupt terrorist financing", as requested by resolution 2462 on combatting the financing of terrorism. S/2020/243 (27 March 2020) was from the chair of the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee, containing its programme of work for 2020. S/2020/220 (20 March 2020) was from the chairs of 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee and the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, announcing that a "joint special meeting" on combatting the financing of terrorism as mandated per resolution 2462 would be postponed "on an exceptional basis in the light of the ongoing challenges posed by COVID-19 ... in order to reduce unnecessary exposure to health risks". Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8743 (11 March 2020) was a debate titled "Countering terrorism and extremism in Africa" under the agenda item "Peace and security in Africa" and the adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2020/5. Security Council Press Statements SC/14262 (27 July 2020) was on the 22 July killing of five humanitarian aid workers in Nigeria. SC/14239 (1 July 2020) was on a 29 June terrorist attack in Karachi, Pakistan, resulting in several deaths. SC/14216 (16 June 2020) was on terrorist attacks in north-east Nigeria, resulting in at least 120 people killed and others injured. The attacks took place in Felo on 9 and 10 June, in Nganzai on 13 June, and on a UN humanitarian facility on 13 June in Monguno. SC/14185 (13 May 2020) was on two terrorist attacks that took place in Afghanistan on 12 May: one on a Médecins Sans Frontières clinic in Kabul and one on a funeral in Nangarhar Province, the latter claimed by the Islamic State Khorasan Province, an affiliate of ISIL. SC/14155 (1 April 2020) was on two terrorist attacks in Chad and Nigeria on 23 March: in Boma (Chad), at least 98 people were killed and 47 people were wounded, and in an attack on military vehicles near Goneri in Yobe State (Nigeria), at least 47 people were killed. SC/14147 (26 March 2020) was on a terrorist attack claimed by the Islamic State Khorasan Province, an affiliate of ISIL. The 25 March attack was conducted in Kabul, Afghanistan, on the Dharamshala Sikh Temple, resulting in at least 25 dead and many wounded.

Counter-Terrorism

Secretary-General to submit within 12 months a joint report by the UNOCT and UNODC on linkages between terrorism and organised crime, whether transnational or domestic. This report—along with a concept note by Indonesia, the Council president in August, expected to be circulated ahead of the open debate—will constitute the basis for the open debate.

Women, Peace and Security

Resolution 2396, addressing foreign terrorist fighters, emphasised that women “associated with foreign terrorist fighters returning or relocating to and from conflict may have served in many different roles, including as supporters, facilitators, or perpetrators of terrorist acts”. According to a July CTED analytical brief on “The prosecution of ISIL-associated women”, not all states implement that understanding and many do not investigate female returnees, considering them only as victims. Resolution 2396 argues that gender-sensitive prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies are required. Evidence collection against women faces even more hurdles as the online documentation of the involvement of women in violent acts is less pronounced, due to ISIL’s ideas about gender roles. “Membership in a terrorist organisation” is the criminal offence

most often used to prosecute female returnees. In some convictions, there is no consideration of whether or not the woman’s “association” was by choice or coercion. The CTED brief also looks at sentencing of women in contrast to that of men, concluding that there is a two-way gender bias: in some cases women were not taken seriously as perpetrators and received lesser sentences, in other cases they received much harsher sentences as their role in terrorism was perceived as a transgression of gender roles.

Council Dynamics

In general, counter-terrorism enjoys the support of all Council members. Some differences exist regarding the four pillars of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The pillars are, first, addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; secondly, measures to prevent and combat terrorism; thirdly, measures to build states’ capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the UN system in that regard; and fourthly, measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight

against terrorism. During the negotiations in March on the presidential statement on countering terrorism and extremism in Africa, some members felt that the initial draft lacked adequate representation of the fourth pillar. While negotiating resolution 2532 on COVID-19, penholders France and Tunisia had to address concerns by Russia and the US that a Council endorsement of the Secretary-General’s global ceasefire call should include an exemption for counter-terrorism operations. The resolution consequently specified that a ceasefire and humanitarian pause do not apply to military operations against ISIL, Al-Qaida and Al-Nusra Front, and other terrorist groups that have been designated by the Council.

The US is the penholder on counter-terrorism. Ambassador Kais Kabtani (Tunisia) chairs the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee. Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani (Indonesia) chairs both the 1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee and the 1540 Non-Proliferation Committee.

Iraq

Expected Council Action

In August, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing by the Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, on the most recent developments in Iraq and on the two latest Secretary-General’s reports, on UNAMI and on the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives. Both reports are due in August. If the measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are still in place, the briefing and the subsequent consultations are likely to be held as open and closed videoconferences, respectively.

The mandate of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL (UNITAD) expires on 21 September, and UNAMI’s mandate expires on 31 May 2021.

Key Recent Developments

Following the start of a “Strategic Dialogue” on 11 June, Iraq and the US issued a joint statement, saying that “the U.S. would continue reducing forces from Iraq”. No timeline was provided. The US currently has about 5,000 troops stationed in the country. The US-led Global Coalition against Da’esh (the Coalition) has about 2,500 troops in Iraq. Attacks continue to be directed against the US military and diplomatic presence and the Coalition. According to media reports, about 36 such assaults have taken place since the end of October 2019. In the joint statement, Iraq “committed to protecting the military personnel” of the Coalition as well as “the Iraqi facilities hosting them”. No group has claimed responsibility for the attacks. The US, however, blames Iran-backed militias operating in Iraq and has attacked their bases in retaliation, showing that Iraq continues to be

the military battleground for competing Iran-US interests.

On 3 January, Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards’ Quds Force, was killed by a US strike near the Baghdad airport, as was Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the Deputy of the Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF). On 5 January, the Iraqi parliament adopted a resolution calling on the government to work towards ending the presence of foreign troops in Iraq (the resolution has not been implemented). In a 6 January letter to the Council president, Iraq condemned the attack as violating “the sovereignty of Iraq and the principles of international law”. In a 9 January letter to the Council president, the US argued that it had acted in self-defence. On 8 January, Iran retaliated by striking a base in Iraq, injuring approximately 100 US troops, according to media reports. In her 29 June annual report

UN DOCUMENTS ON IRAQ Security Council Resolutions [S/RES/2522](#) (29 May 2020) extended the mandate of UNAMI until 31 May 2021. [S/RES/2490](#) (20 September 2019) extended the mandate of UNITAD until 21 September 2020. Security Council Letters [S/2020/547](#) (17 June 2020) was from the president of the Security Council containing the briefing given by Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, the Special Adviser and head of UNITAD, on 15 June. [S/2020/467](#) (29 May 2020) was from the president of the Security Council containing the draft UNAMI renewal resolution in blue, the votes submitted by all Council members, and an explanation of vote by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. [S/2020/460](#) (29 May 2020) was from the president of the Security Council containing the results of the vote on resolution 2522.

to the Human Rights Council, the UN's Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnès Callamard, concluded that "the targeting of General Soleimani, and the deaths of those accompanying him, constitute an arbitrary killing". Referring to international human rights law, Callamard said that "the US is responsible" for this internationally wrongful act. She also dismissed the US' claim of self-defence as no evidence was provided by the US of "an ongoing or imminent attack". During his first official visit abroad, Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi met with the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who reiterated that Iran continued to be determined to fully retaliate against the US for the killing of Soleimani.

One of the Iran-backed militias that the US has accused of perpetrating attacks against its personnel in Iraq is Kata'ib Hezbollah, which the US has designated a terrorist organisation. Kata'ib Hezbollah is part of the PMF, established in 2014 from different, mostly Iran-backed Shia Muslim fighters to combat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh). Last July, then-Prime Minister Adil Abd Al-Mahdi issued an executive order bringing the PMF under the exclusive control of the Iraqi state and ordering it to cut all links with political entities. He warned that armed groups operating outside the control of the Iraqi state were illegal and subject to prosecution. This order has yet to be implemented, and current Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi announced his intention to take actions in that regard. The Iraqi government carried out a raid on 25 June on a Kata'ib Hezbollah base, and 14 members of the group were arrested. Following pressure by the PMF, all but one were released.

Iraq's political situation continues to depend on support from both Iran and the US. On 31 October 2019, Iraqi president Barham Salih announced that Prime Minister Al-Mahdi intended to resign, following

widespread popular protests demanding basic services and systemic change. According to UNAMI statistics, 490 people have died and 7,783 have been injured since the demonstrations started in October 2019. On 9 April, Salih named Al-Kadhimi, then chief of intelligence, as prime minister-designate. He seems to be acceptable to Iran and the US. Al-Kadhimi will hold the position only until elections are held, presumably sometime next year. So far, no prime minister-designate has received support from the protesters. Al-Kadhimi has declared that he will maintain the muhasasa (apportionment system), a political system based on quotas for ethno-sectarian groups. The abolition of that system has been one of the protesters' core demands. The Iraqi parliament approved the new government led by Al-Kadhimi on 6 May, with seven out of 22 cabinet positions still outstanding. On 6 June, the parliament approved all outstanding positions.

Turkey continues to conduct military operations against positions of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Kurdistan, northern Iraq. Turkey, the EU and the US, among others, classify the PKK as a terrorist organisation. On 4 July, the Turkish Defence Ministry claimed to have killed three PKK members in an operation. In an 8 July letter to the Council, the Turkish ambassador to the UN said that Turkey was "obliged to take appropriate measures" in self-defence "in the absence of Iraq's ability to deal with the presence of terrorists in its own territory".

On 15 June, the Council received a briefing in an open and closed videoconference from Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, the Special Adviser and head of UNITAD.

COVID-19 case numbers in Iraq continue to rise sharply. As of 31 July, Iraq had 121,263 confirmed cases of COVID-19.

At the time of writing, the UN's 2020 humanitarian response plan for Iraq of \$748.1 million was funded at 31.9 percent, with \$450.7 million outstanding.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 10 July press briefing note, the spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Liz Throssell, expressed deep concern at the murder of the prominent security analyst Hisham al-Hushami on 6 July. Al Hushami had been outspoken against both ISIL and Shia militias in Iraq. Throssell emphasised that OHCHR welcomes the pledge of the prime minister to "hold Al Hushami's murderers to account". Referring to a series of popular protests that started in October 2019 and have continued with varying intensity, the press briefing note said that UNAMI and the UN Human Rights Office "verified the targeted killings of 23 people linked to the demonstrations... These victims included political and human rights activists, people who were vocal on social media in support of the demonstrators, and local community organisers". Throssell underscored that OHCHR calls on the newly formed Iraqi government to "ensure accountability – through thorough, independent and transparent investigations and prosecution".

Key Issues and Options

Council members are closely following the political and security situation in Iraq. After closed consultations, Council members could issue a press statement addressing issues of concern to them.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members are generally unanimous in their support for UNAMI and positive developments in Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations.

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

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

Syria

Expected Council Action

In August, 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

On 30 June, the EU organised a donor meeting—the Brussels IV Conference—for Syria. Speaking at the conference, UN Secretary-General António Guterres reminded donor countries that “nine out of 10 people [in Syria] are now living in poverty” and that “the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a doubling of food prices”. He urged countries to “step up [their] financial, humanitarian and political commitments to the Syrian people”. The conference—which was held as a videoconference (VTC) due to special measures put in place in response to the pandemic—resulted in pledges of \$7.7 billion for Syria, consisting of \$5.5 billion to support humanitarian and development activities for the remainder of 2020 and \$2.2 billion in 2021.

Syria’s economic, security and humanitarian situations all appear to have suffered setbacks in recent weeks. Syria’s already-precarious economic situation continues to deteriorate, and the security situation in the country’s north-west worsened in July, while the closure of the Bab al-Salam border crossing to UN cross-border humanitarian assistance and the announcement of the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the north-west have made the humanitarian situation in and around Idlib more tenuous.

Over the last several months, the Syrian pound has suffered a major collapse, and the cost of essential goods continues to increase. According to OCHA, the Syrian pound has lost nearly half of its value since the start of May. This has led to a steep rise in the price of food, medicine and other goods. According to data from the World Food Programme, some 9.3 million Syrians are considered food insecure. While the Syrian economy has been severely weakened by nine years of conflict, its recent decline is due in large part to the combined effects of several factors. These include concern over EU sanctions and new unilateral US sanctions that took effect

on 17 June under the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, infighting between the Syrian government and Rami Makhlouf (President Bashar al-Assad’s cousin and the head of Syriatel, a major telecommunications firm that provides a vital source of revenue to the government), and the spill-over effects of the economic crisis in neighbouring Lebanon.

Though north-western Syria continues to remain largely calm since a ceasefire was announced on 5 March, recent developments have contributed to a worsened security situation. On 14 July, a roadside explosive device was detonated on a joint Russian-Turkish patrol in the southern Idlib de-escalation area, reportedly injuring several Russian soldiers. This followed at least two other attacks on joint patrols along the M4 highway security corridor in June and early July. On 19 July, a car bomb was detonated near the north-west border crossing of Bab al-Salameh on the Turkish border, killing seven civilians and wounding over 60 people, while another explosion in the town of Afrin reportedly injured 13 people.

Syria’s humanitarian situation remains very fragile, particularly in the north-west. On 9 July, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in the region. The infected person is reportedly a doctor based in Gaziantep, Turkey, who travels regularly to Syria and works at the Bab al-Hawa Hospital. An additional 28 cases have subsequently been identified. According to OCHA, all four patients are health professionals, and steps to mitigate the spread of the virus have resulted in restrictions of movements as well as suspension of routine clinical work in area hospitals. These first COVID-19 cases in the north-west come in the context of the Security Council’s adoption of resolution 2533 on 11 July on the delivery of cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria, following six days of negotiations and four failed resolutions. Resolution 2533 re-authorised the Bab al-Hawa crossing for 12 months but did not re-authorise the crossing at Bab al-Salam, thus further limiting the UN’s delivery capacity.

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock—who said on 19 May that “meeting the enormous humanitarian

needs in the north-west requires a renewal of the cross-border authorisation for the Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa border crossings for an additional 12 months”—was expected to brief the Council on 29 July and was likely to offer an assessment of what impact the closure of Bab al-Salam is having on OCHA’s work. (For more on this issue, please see “In Hindsight” in this month’s Forecast.)

On 14 July, the Security Council met in its regular, monthly closed format to discuss the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The meeting was scheduled to discuss the regular report by the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on progress in the elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. Apparently, however, the closed session focused on the 9 July decision by the OPCW’s Executive Council condemning the use of chemical weapons as reported by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), which concluded that “there are reasonable grounds to believe that Syria used chemical weapons in Ltamenah, Syria in March 2017”. The Executive Council decision also requested that Syria declare to the OPCW where the chemical weapons used in the attacks were “developed, produced, stockpiled, and operationally stored for delivery” and declare “all of the chemical weapons it currently possesses”. The Executive Council will take further steps to decide “appropriate actions” under the Chemical Weapons Convention if Syria fails to meet these obligations within a 90-day period.

Finally, Special Envoy Geir O. Pedersen briefed the Council on 23 July, updating the Council on the situation of the Constitutional Committee, which is scheduled to meet in person in Geneva in late August. He also addressed the security situation in the country’s north-east and north-west as well as the situation of detainees in the country. The Council was also briefed by Wafa Mustafa, a representative of Families for Freedom, a Syrian civil society organisation comprised of families and relatives of those who have suffered enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention during the Syrian conflict, who also focussed on the situation of detainees in Syria.

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2533 (11 July 2020) renewed the authorisation for cross-border humanitarian aid into Syria through one border crossing (Bab al-Hawa) for 12 months. S/RES/2504 (10 January 2020) renewed the authorisation for cross-border humanitarian aid into Syria through two border crossings (Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa) for six months. **Secretary-General’s Report S/2020/401** (14 May 2020) was on the review of the UN’s cross-line and cross-border operations. **Security Council Letters S/2020/702** (11 July 2020) was from the president of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the permanent representatives of Council member states on the outcome of voting on resolution 2533. S/2020/551 (16 June 2020) was from the president of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the permanent representatives of Council member states containing the record of the 16 June open VTC meeting on Syria’s political situation.

Syria

Human Rights-Related Developments

During a virtual press conference on 7 July, the chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, presented the report on the special inquiry in the Idlib region. The report, which the Human Rights Council (HRC) requested in resolution 43/28, covered the period from November 2019 to June 2020 and reported 52 “emblematic attacks by all parties which led to civilian casualties or damage to civilian infrastructure”. Among these attacks were 17 that affected hospitals and medical facilities, 14 attacks on schools, nine attacks on markets, and 12 attacks affecting homes. Calling the report a “chronicle of deaths foretold”, Pinheiro underscored that the Commission consistently called Idlib a “ticking time bomb”. Hanny Megally, one of the three members of the Commission, emphasised that since “pandemics know no borders, neither should life-saving aid”, with civilians needing “sustained and unfettered access to humanitarian assistance which must neither be politicised by Member States nor instrumentalized by parties to the conflict”. The report (A/HRC/44/61) was presented to the HRC during the last week of its 44th session.

Women, Peace and Security

In a 2 July op-ed essay titled “Put women at the centre of Syria crisis response”, published on the Egyptian news website Al-Ahram, UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and Executive Director of the UN Population Fund Natalia Kanem argued that the funding for programmes addressing gender-based violence, economic empowerment and women’s leadership as well as sexual and reproductive health services has to match the increase in needs on the ground. They said that Syrian women are more likely than men to be affected by poverty, be victims of gender-based violence and be responsible for the care of children and their other family members. This likelihood increases with the spread of COVID-19. Despite these challenges and risks, Mlambo-Ngcuka and Kanem

emphasised that women’s organisations in Syria and Syrian women continue to be at the core in all aspects of crisis response, including health care, peacemaking, education and humanitarian efforts. Consequently, they called upon donors meeting at the Brussels IV Conference on Syria to put the rights and needs of women and girls at the centre of its discussions.

Key Issues and Options

With the adoption of resolution 2533 on 11 July, the contentious debate over cross-border delivery of humanitarian assistance has been set aside for the time being. As the impact of the decision on the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Syria’s north-west becomes clearer and the COVID-19 situation evolves, Council members may wish to consider other options. These could include consideration of re-authorising Bab al-Salam or, in the event of an outbreak of COVID-19 in Syria’s north-east or a lack of further improvements in cross-line delivery, reinstating the Al Yarubiyah border crossing between Syria and Iraq. Given the very difficult negotiations that surrounded the adoption of resolution 2533, these options may, however, be implausible.

Another key issue for the Council is progress on the political file. With the Special Envoy’s 16 June announcement that the Constitutional Committee is to meet in person in Geneva in August, the Council may seek ways to offer support to this body.

Finally, the OPCW Executive Council’s 9 July decision condemning the use of chemical weapons as reported by the OPCW IIT may again bring the work of the IIT to the fore at the Council. The Council may wish to invite the OPCW Executive Director to the Council

to discuss the decision further and explore what actions the OPCW Executive Council can take if Syria fails to comply with the 9 July decision.

Council Dynamics

The Council remains divided on Syria, and the re-authorisation of cross-border aid mechanisms starkly illustrated differences on the humanitarian file. Resolution 2533 was adopted with 12 votes in favour and three abstentions (China, the Dominican Republic and Russia). The Dominican Republic, in its explanation of vote, noted that it had abstained owing to the Council’s “failure to re-open the border crossing of Al-Yarubiyah and [the] decision to close the Bab al Salam crossing, [which would] have terrible consequences to the lives of hundreds of thousands of children”. The negotiations leading up to the adoption exposed deep rifts within the Council not only on the importance of the cross-border delivery mechanism but also on such issues as the impact of sanctions and the weight and confidence that the Council places on cross-line assistance. China and Russia maintained throughout the negotiations that coordination with Syria on this mechanism could be strengthened and argued that the humanitarian situation has been adversely impacted by unilateral sanctions. The US and European members of the Council have reiterated their position that US and EU sanctions exempt humanitarian goods and expressed distrust of the Syrian government’s intentions in handling cross-line humanitarian assistance.

Belgium and Germany are the penholders on humanitarian issues in Syria.

Guinea-Bissau

Expected Council Action

In August, the Council will hold a briefing followed by consultations on the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau

(UNIOGBIS). Special Representative and head of UNIOGBIS Rosine Sori-Coulbaly is expected to brief. A representative from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

may also brief. Because special measures necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic are still likely to be in effect, the meetings are expected to be held under the open and

UN DOCUMENTS ON GUINEA-BISSAU Security Council Resolution S/RES/2512 (28 February 2020) renewed the mandate of UNIOGBIS until 31 December 2020. **Security Council Presidential Statements S/PRST/2020/2** (11 February 2020) addressed West Africa broadly and urged all national stakeholders in Guinea-Bissau “to ensure a peaceful implementation of the election results”. **S/PRST/2019/13** (4 November 2019) expressed support for the communiqués of ECOWAS and the AU following the dismissal of the government of Prime Minister Aristides Gomes on 28 October. Secretary-General’s Report S/2020/755 (28 July 2020) was the most recent report of the Secretary-General on developments in Guinea-Bissau and the activities of UNIOGBIS. **Security Council Letter S/2020/144** (24 February 2020) was from the Chair of the PBC Guinea-Bissau configuration. **Security Council Press Statements SC/14240** (1 July 2020) expressed concern, among other things, at recent incidents, calling on Guinea-Bissau’s defence and security forces not to interfere in the political process in Guinea-Bissau. **SC/14138** (5 March 2020) called on the parties in Guinea-Bissau “to respect the legal and constitutional frameworks and the democratic process to resolve the post-electoral crisis”. **SC/13989** (16 October 2019) reiterated the imperative need for the presidential election to be held on 24 November 2019.

USEFUL ADDITIONAL RESOURCE Mark Shaw and A. Gomes, *Breaking the Vicious Cycle: Cocaine politics in Guinea-Bissau*, *Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime*, Geneva, May 2020.

Guinea-Bissau

closed videoconference (VTC) format.

The mandate of UNIOGBIS expires on 31 December.

Key Recent Developments

The most recent Security Council decision on Guinea-Bissau, resolution 2512 of 28 February, reconfirmed an earlier plan, expressed in resolution 2458, to terminate UNIOGBIS at the end of 2020.

Guinea-Bissau has experienced frequent political instability—including four coups d'état and more than a dozen attempted coups, with the military playing a particularly strong role in the country's political life—since it gained independence from Portugal in 1974. In the period since the 2012 coup, Guinea-Bissau has gone through multiple political crises, but without interventions by the military. In 2019, political tensions flared again. Guinea-Bissau was supposed to hold a presidential election before the five-year term of President José Mário Vaz ended on 23 June 2019. This would have led to Guinea-Bissau's first peaceful transfer of power from one democratically elected president to another. When Vaz repeatedly delayed setting the date for the presidential election, serious concerns were raised by international actors, especially those most engaged with Guinea-Bissau and referred to as the Group of Five, composed of the UN, AU, EU, the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with the latter playing a particularly active role.

The election was held on 24 November, contested by 12 candidates. The leader of PAIGC, Domingos Simões Pereira, won 40.13 percent of the vote. Placing second with 27.65 percent was Umaro Sissoco Embaló of the Movement for Democratic Change (MADEM-G15), a party formed by PAIGC dissidents in 2018. Vaz ran as an independent and received only 12 percent of the vote. As no candidate won a majority, a run-off election between Simões Pereira and Sissoco Embaló was set for 29 December 2019. On 4 December 2019, third-place finisher Nuno Gomes Nabiam, leader of the United People's Assembly-Democratic Party of Guinea-Bissau, signed a political pact with Sissoco Embaló to support the latter's candidacy.

In the 29 December 2019 election, Sissoco Embaló received 53.55 percent of the

vote, with Simões Pereira garnering 46.45 percent. While observers deemed the elections peaceful, PAIGC challenged the results on 3 January in the Supreme Court of Justice (SCJ) over the tabulation methods used by the National Election Commission (CNE). The SCJ ordered a re-count, and following a stand-off of several weeks, the CNE repeated the tabulation and re-confirmed Sissoco Embaló as the winner on 25 February. PAIGC filed a new challenge with the SCJ on 26 February.

Not waiting for the court's decision, Sissoco Embaló held a swearing-in ceremony in a hotel in Bissau on 27 February and declared himself President of the Republic. Former president Vaz and Nabiam presided over the ceremony, which most foreign diplomats and representatives of international bodies did not attend. Among the public figures who did attend the ceremony was Antonio Indjai, a retired general who is listed by the 2048 Guinea-Bissau Sanctions Committee for having led the 2012 coup.

In a 28 February decree, Sissoco Embaló dismissed the government of Prime Minister Gomes, and unilaterally appointed Nabiam as the new prime minister. In support of Sissoco Embaló, the military promptly took over all state institutions, the SCJ and the national broadcast media. At the beginning of March, Guinea-Bissau had two competing governments: the government led by Prime Minister Gomes endorsed by the National Assembly, and another led by the de facto authorities, supported by the military, with Sissoco Embaló at the helm and with Nabiam as his prime minister.

In the days that followed, the de facto authorities replaced key government officials as well as engaging in harassment and intimidation of several public figures. Prime Minister Gomes went into hiding, and several ministers as well as PAIGC presidential candidate Simões Pereira left the country because of concerns for their personal safety. Several SCJ judges received threats.

The Security Council discussed Guinea-Bissau in consultations under “any other business” on 5 March and received a briefing from Sori-Coulibaly. In a press statement that same day, Council members called on the parties “to respect the legal and constitutional frameworks and the democratic process to resolve the post-electoral crisis”. They

further “called on ECOWAS to urgently send a high-level political mission to Guinea-Bissau” to help resolve the crisis.

Meanwhile, ECOWAS had been planning a joint mission to Guinea-Bissau with the AU and the UN that was scheduled to arrive on 18 March. Neither that mission nor the high-level mission called for by the Council took place because Guinea-Bissau's borders were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In a 22 April communiqué, ECOWAS announced that following its in-depth analysis of the situation in Guinea-Bissau, its Heads of State and Government had decided to recognise Sissoco Embaló as the winner of the 2019 presidential election and asked him to appoint a prime minister in conformity with constitutional norms and form a government by 22 May. The four other members of the Group of Five, the AU, EU, CPLP and the UN, issued a statement that same day, taking note of the ECOWAS decision.

In the next several weeks, Sissoco Embaló held consultations in Bissau with representatives of the Group of Five as well as with leaders of different political parties. His efforts to form a government by 22 May were unsuccessful. Under the country's Constitution, the party with the highest number of votes in parliament nominates the prime minister, and the country's president then endorses the appointment. Following the 2019 legislative elections, PAIGC, which won 47 seats, and together with its allies held a majority in the 102-member National Assembly, would not recognise Nabiam, who had been appointed by Sissoco Embaló's 28 February decree.

According to UN sources, several members of the National Assembly were subjected to intimidation, and one was kidnapped in May (and later released). Sissoco Embaló also threatened to dissolve the parliament. Eventually, some alliances shifted within the different parliamentary groups, and on 29 June the assembly approved the Nabiam-led government programme. In a 1 July press statement, members of the Security Council expressed concern at recent incidents and called on Guinea-Bissau's defence and security forces not to interfere in the political process in Guinea-Bissau. They also “reminded all stakeholders that they may consider taking appropriate measures in response to further developments in the situation in Guinea-Bissau”.

Guinea-Bissau

Against the backdrop of the political upheavals, there were also new developments concerning drug trafficking, a perennial problem in Guinea-Bissau that emerged following the country's 1998-1999 civil war (political instability and frequent coups combined with its coastal geography made the country a useful transit point between Latin America and Europe for the cocaine trade). In September 2019, the country's law enforcement made its largest cocaine seizure, and in April, 12 suspects were sentenced in connection with the case. But Braima Seidi Bá, a politically connected businessman also accused in this case, was tried in absentia because of the COVID-19 lockdown and did not report to prison after his 16-year sentence was handed down. There have also been concerns that drug cartels may be poised to exploit the current political instability and increase their activities. Since early March, there have been reports of arrivals of suspected drug traffickers in the country. The new government has replaced key law enforcement officials responsible for fighting drug trafficking during the recent period when several major drug seizures occurred.

Sanctions-Related Developments

The 2048 Guinea-Bissau Sanctions Committee expects to meet in August to discuss the Secretary-General's sixth report on "The progress made regarding the stabilization of Guinea-Bissau and the restoration of constitutional order", which will provide recommendations on the Guinea-Bissau sanctions regime. Resolution 2512, in which the Council requested the report, said that the recommendations should address—though not be limited to—issues such as continuation, adjustment or suspension of the sanctions and prospective delistings.

Developments in the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)

The PBC's country configuration held a VTC meeting on 23 June, with its chair Ambassador Ronaldo Costa Filho (Brazil) providing an update.

Sori-Coulibaly briefed the configuration's members on developments and concerns related to UNIOGBIS' expected termination at the end of the year in the context of political developments in the country and the COVID-19 pandemic. Ambassador Abdou Abarry (Niger) spoke on behalf of ECOWAS, which Niger is chairing in 2020.

Key Issues and Options

Assessing whether conditions on the ground and transition planning for a follow-on UN presence are suited to closing the mission by the end of 2020 is the key issue. When the Council adopted resolution 2512 deciding to close UNIOGBIS on 31 December, the situation in the country was in flux. Since transition planning requires close consultation with national authorities and both the post-electoral crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic significantly delayed the start of the new government's functioning, some consideration may be given to a possible extension of the transitional period. An option for the Council could be to request the Secretary-General to provide an update later this year on progress in handing over UNIOGBIS' tasks to the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the UN country team, and other entities. The update could also identify capacity or financial gaps that may exist following UNIOGBIS' closure.

Transnational criminal activities, particularly drug trafficking, remain a key issue, and there are concerns that terrorist groups in the region could also potentially exploit Guinea-Bissau's political instability. An option for the Council is to request information on how the role of UNODC in Guinea-Bissau could be enhanced in light of UNIOGBIS' upcoming closure.

When the Council imposed sanctions on Guinea-Bissau in the wake of the 2012 coup, a key demand was for the military to take "immediate steps to restore and respect constitutional order, including a democratic electoral process, by ensuring that all soldiers

return to the barracks". Until earlier this year, the military had stayed out of political life since the 2012 coup. In light of the late February/early March military intervention and seizure of state institutions, including the SCJ, an option for the Council is to reconsider its earlier plans related to the sanctions regime.

Council and Wider Dynamics

The Council has tended to follow ECOWAS' lead on Guinea-Bissau, seeking to support its decisions, often prompted by the West African Council member. This pattern has largely held in 2020, with the additional factor of having Niger both as the Security Council penholder on Guinea-Bissau and its president, Mahamadou Issoufou, serving as ECOWAS chairman this year.

Members appear to agree on the goal of ending UNIOGBIS, though some have raised serious concerns about increased political instability and cases of violence and intimidation against those actors perceived to be a threat to the current authorities. During the last mandate negotiations, some members stressed the importance of assessing the situation on the ground before UNIOGBIS exits.

Some current and incoming Council members—including Germany, Ireland, Kenya, Niger (on behalf of ECOWAS) and the UK—spoke during the June meeting of the PBC's Guinea-Bissau configuration. While acknowledging certain positive developments, some raised serious concerns about the renewed involvement of the military in the country's political life, with interference by the defence and security forces in political processes and intimidation of the opposition, judges and journalists. Some were also concerned about the reports of increased activity on the drug scene.

Niger is the penholder on Guinea-Bissau. Ambassador Kais Kabtani (Tunisia) is the chair of the 2048 Guinea-Bissau Sanctions Committee.

Lebanon

Expected Council Action

In August, the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) before its 31 August expiry. Prior to this, Council members will convene for a closed videoconference (VTC) meeting to hear a briefing on the latest Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701, issued on 14 July. The expected briefers are Ján Kubiš, Special Coordinator for Lebanon, and Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix.

Key Recent Developments

The situation in Lebanon remains unstable as the country continues to suffer from a debilitating economic crisis that is fuelling popular unrest and giving rise to concerns of widespread food insecurity. The financial crisis—the worst in Lebanon's recent history—is characterised by a deep recession, a sharp rise in unemployment, and escalating inflation.

On 30 April, the government of Prime Minister Hassan Diab approved a five-year financial recovery plan aimed at alleviating the country's economic condition. It maps out losses in the country's financial system and calls for restructuring the country's debt load through negotiations with Lebanon's creditors, curbing expenditures, and implementing structural and sectoral reforms. The plan had faced criticism from opposition parliamentarians, the governor of the Central Bank, and the Association of Banks in Lebanon, who claim that it overestimates the extent of the losses in the financial system.

Disagreements among Lebanese political elites about the financial recovery plan complicated the government's negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) aimed at securing a \$10 billion loan, as the plan served as a platform for the government's engagement in the talks. After several rounds of negotiations beginning in early May, the Lebanese Finance Minister announced on 3 July the suspension of talks with the IMF pending internal agreement on the scale of losses in the financial system. IMF officials have since stressed the need for the Lebanese authorities to unite around the government plan while expressing concern that an attempt to present lower losses and

postpone necessary reforms will only delay the country's economic recovery.

In the meantime, Lebanese citizens continued to bear the brunt of the country's dire financial straits, which have been exacerbated by the halt in economic activity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Between October 2019 and July, the Lebanese pound lost more than 80 percent of its value against the US dollar. The prices of many basic staples have doubled since the beginning of the year, and sharp devaluation of citizens' wages left many unable to buy food. The UN World Food Programme (WFP) warned that a million Lebanese will be unable to afford food in 2020. For the first time since 2006, the WFP is planning to begin distributing food assistance to Lebanese citizens, with the organisation expecting to reach approximately 50,000 families in need.

On 17 July, the UN launched an updated COVID-19 Lebanon Emergency Appeal, which seeks \$482 million to assist those affected by the combined impact of the pandemic and the socioeconomic crisis.

Popular protests by citizens calling for better living conditions and government reform, which led to the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri's government in October 2019, subsided between mid-March and late April because of the lockdown measures imposed to stem the COVID-19 pandemic. Large-scale anti-government protests, some of which turned violent, resumed across the country in late April as citizens sought to express their growing discontent over the lack of basic goods and services. During a 6 June protest, violence erupted between supporters and opponents of Hezbollah as several groups called for the disarmament of all militias in line with resolution 1559; 25 soldiers and 48 civilians were injured.

The Secretary-General's 14 July report on the implementation of resolution 1701 said that despite several incidents between Israel and Lebanon that had increased tensions, the situation in UNIFIL's area of operation remained mostly calm during the reporting period. The report noted an increase in instances in which the sides pointed weapons at each other across the Blue Line, a border demarcation between Israel and Lebanon, requiring UNIFIL's involvement

to de-escalate the situation. The report said that in some instances "Israel Defense Forces (IDF) weapons were also pointed at UNIFIL and Observer Group Lebanon" and that this issue had been brought up during a 14 May meeting of the tripartite mechanism consisting of UNIFIL and the two countries.

On 27 July, tensions rose along the Israeli Lebanese border, as the IDF announced that it had foiled an infiltration attempt by Hezbollah in the Shab'a Farms/Mount Dov area. According to the IDF, it had opened fire at a group of up to five Hezbollah operatives who crossed the Blue Line into Israeli territory in a bid to carry out an attack. No casualties were reported on either side of the border, and Hezbollah had denied that its members attempted to infiltrate Israel. Media sources suggest that the reported attempted attack was a retaliation for the killing of a Hezbollah fighter on 20 July during an alleged Israeli airstrike in Syria. The occurrence prompted accusatory rhetoric from leaders in Israel and Lebanon. UNIFIL urged the parties to exercise maximum restraint and launched an investigation to determine the facts of the incident.

On 1 June, the Secretary-General issued a report containing an assessment of the continued relevance of UNIFIL's resources, taking into consideration the troop ceiling and the civilian component of the force, in accordance with resolution 2485 of 29 August 2019. The assessment determined that UNIFIL plays a key role in maintaining calm along the Blue Line, including through its liaison and coordination mechanisms, which help prevent misunderstandings between the sides. It noted that UNIFIL's configuration is based on a saturation model, as the force currently has the highest concentration of troops and equipment among all UN peacekeeping missions. According to the assessment, the high density of troops in a relatively small area of operations and the high frequency of daily operational activities conducted by UNIFIL serve as a deterrent to a resumption of hostilities. The assessment appears to conclude that no changes in the troop ceiling are necessary as it observes that "UNIFIL, with its robust posture, remains necessary to prevent a security vacuum until conditions on the ground change" towards a permanent ceasefire.

UN DOCUMENTS ON LEBANON Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2485 (29 August 2019) renewed UNIFIL's mandate until 31 August 2020. S/RES/1701 (11 August 2006) called for a cessation of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel. **Secretary-General's Reports** S/2020/710 (14 July 2020) was on the implementation of resolution 1701. S/2020/473 (1 June 2020) was an assessment of the continued relevance of UNIFIL's resources.

Lebanon

The assessment also outlines challenges to the implementation of UNIFIL's mandate, including the limited ability of the Lebanese Armed Forces to fully deploy in the south of Lebanon or maintain a maritime presence, the continued violations of Lebanese airspace by Israel, and restrictions on the movement of UNIFIL personnel that have barred the force from investigating sites of violations of resolution 1701. The report makes several concrete recommendations to address these challenges, including the deployment of smaller combat vehicles to allow UNIFIL to access sites without disturbing the local population and the consolidation of several UN positions concurrent with the use of advanced technologies, such as unmanned aerial vehicles to enhance monitoring along the Blue Line.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 10 July statement, Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, registered serious concerns about Lebanon's economic crisis. "The situation is fast spiralling out of control, with many already destitute and facing starvation as a direct result of the crisis," she said, calling on Lebanon's political parties and leaders to enact needed reforms and prioritise the provision of essential needs such as food, electricity, health care, and education. According to the statement, 1.7 million refugees and 250,000 migrant workers are among the most vulnerable.

Key Issues and Options

The main issue for Council members in August will be the renewal of UNIFIL's

mandate. A key priority for the Council is to protect the integrity of UNIFIL's mandate and to provide the force with the means necessary to carry out its tasks. Council members may choose to endorse the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's assessment and request the secretariat to initiate deliberations with the parties and troop-contributing countries on the matter.

An ongoing concern for the Council is the economic and political turmoil engulfing Lebanon, which has the potential to undermine the already fragile security situation in the country. The Council also remains concerned about the lack of progress in implementing the main objectives of resolution 1701, including a permanent ceasefire and disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon. As the Council has not issued a press statement on Lebanon since February 2019, it may consider a statement calling on the government of Lebanon to implement the reforms necessary to avert a humanitarian crisis in the country. Such a product may recall resolution 2532 of 1 July, which called on parties to conflicts around the world to adopt a ceasefire to help combat the spread of COVID-19 and urge Israel and Lebanon to fulfil their obligations under resolutions 1701 and 1559.

Council Dynamics

There is a strong consensus among Council members in their support for Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity and security.

However, there is a divergence of views on the security dynamic in the region and the role of UNIFIL. Over the past several years, these differences have been especially evident during negotiations on UNIFIL's mandate renewals.

The US has argued that the mission's role should be reconsidered, given that UNIFIL is unable to fulfil the entirety of its mandate because it lacks access to parts of its area of operations. The US most recently reiterated this position in the Council's 4 May closed VTC meeting on the implementation of resolution 1701, saying that steps should be taken to either empower UNIFIL or to realign its "staffing and resources with tasks it can actually accomplish".

The US entered the latest mandate renewal negotiations advocating a significant reduction of the troop ceiling and a comprehensive strategic review of the mission. The request for an assessment of the continued relevance of UNIFIL's resources served as a compromise, as most Council members opposed these proposals. On 17 June, Council members held an informal closed VTC discussion on the assessment with Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix. It appears that most Council members appreciated the report's recommendations, but the US may have felt the assessment fell short in addressing the challenges to the implementation of UNIFIL's mandate. France is the penholder on Lebanon.

Pandemics, Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace

Expected Council Action

In August, the Council is expected to hold an high-level open debate on "Peacebuilding and sustaining peace: challenges caused by pandemics". Possible briefers are Secretary-General António Guterres, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, representing The Elders, the NGO of public figures founded by Nelson Mandela, and Sarah Cliffe,

Director of New York University's Center on International Cooperation.

Key Recent Developments

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on 11 March. Tensions between China and the US led to protracted negotiations over the course of three months on a resolution to

support the Secretary-General's 23 March global ceasefire appeal to combat COVID-19 in conflict-affected countries. A key sticking point was US opposition to mentioning the WHO, which the administration of President Donald Trump has criticised, in addition to its criticism of China, during the crisis. China, conversely, wanted a reference to the UN specialised agency, which has been mentioned in

UN DOCUMENTS ON COVID-19 AND HEALTH CRISES Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2532 (1 July 2020) demanded a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on the Council's agenda and called upon all parties to armed conflicts to engage immediately in a 90-day humanitarian pause. S/RES/2439 (30 October 2018) expressed serious concern that the security situation was severely hampering response efforts to the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and facilitating the spread of the virus and called for the immediate cessation of hostilities by all armed groups. S/RES/2177 (18 September 2014) determined that the unprecedented extent of the Ebola outbreak in Africa constituted a threat to international peace and security. Security Council Letter S/2020/571 (22 June 2020) was the concept note for the 2 July open debate on pandemics and security. General Assembly Document A/RES/74/270 (2 April 2020) reaffirmed the General Assembly's "commitment to international cooperation and multilateralism and its strong support for the central role of the UN system in the global response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic".

Pandemics, Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace

previous Council resolutions on health crises. In late June, a compromise was finally reached by adding language saying that the Council had “considered” the General Assembly’s 2 April resolution on “Global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)”; that resolution acknowledged the crucial role played by the WHO and called for the application of the agency’s relevant guidelines.

On 1 July, the Council was thus able to adopt resolution 2532, demanding a cessation of hostilities in all situations on its agenda and calling for all conflict parties to engage in a humanitarian pause for at least 90 days. An exemption is included for the continuation of military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da’esh), Al-Qaida, Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups designated by the Security Council. The resolution said that the “unprecedented extent of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security”. On peacebuilding, it recognised that peacebuilding and development gains made by countries in transition and post-conflict countries could be reversed as a result of the pandemic.

The next day, Council members held a high-level open debate on the peace and security implications of pandemics and international health crises, hearing briefings from Guterres, ICRC President Peter Maurer, and AU Commissioner for Social Affairs Amira Elfadil Mohammed. Guterres recalled the diverse threats posed by COVID-19 to international peace and security that he had outlined in the Council’s previous meeting on the pandemic in April. These included rising tensions from the severe socio-economic fallout of the pandemic and around upcoming elections, erosion of trust in public institutions, and the aggravation of pre-existing grievances, to all of which conflict-affected and post-conflict countries are most vulnerable. Other threats include obstacles for maintaining peace processes, exploitation of the crisis by terrorist groups, heightened risks of bio-terrorism, and new challenges for peace operations.

As a follow-up to resolution 2532, Council members held an informal interactive dialogue in a closed videoconference (VTC) format on 22 July with representatives of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) to consider the multidimensional challenges posed by COVID-19 in conflict-affected countries,

an issue that the PBC has discussed regularly since April. Louise Blais, chargé d’affaires of Canada, which chairs the PBC, and Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, briefed.

Developments in the Peacebuilding Commission

The PBC first discussed the COVID-19 pandemic in an 8 April meeting on the disease’s multi-faceted impacts in conflict-affected countries. In a press release about the meeting, PBC members noted that the pandemic may undermine social cohesion, strain the capacity of governance institutions, increase risks of instability, and have potential consequences for food security. The statement further expressed concern that the crisis may adversely affect employment, livelihoods, and incomes and potentially exacerbate underlying tensions, as well as compounding already dire humanitarian situations in affected countries.

The PBC has since held meetings on the pandemic’s effects on West Africa and the Sahel, on Central Africa and on the immediate socio-economic responses to COVID-19. The crisis has also featured prominently in the PBC’s country-specific meetings and other thematic discussions.

Key Issues and Options

As resolution 2532 recognised, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to endanger international peace and security. Immediate impacts have been felt through the disruptions caused to UN peacekeeping operations and by the threat it poses to already vulnerable refugee and displaced populations and existing humanitarian crises. But, as the Secretary-General observed, the pandemic threatens to stress typical root causes and underlying fragilities that can lead to conflict, which are the focus of peacebuilding interventions.

Thus, key issues for the open debate will be to consider these immediate and longer-term challenges created by COVID-19 and its impact on conflict-affected and post-conflict countries, similar to the discussion during the 22 July informal interactive dialogue. The debate will look to explore ideas for more effective support for these countries in light of the pandemic. These include the role of peace operations, capacity-building, regional organisations and south-south cooperation as well as how to enhance cooperation between the Council and the PBC. Other issues include the impact on financing for peacebuilding as a result of the global economic slowdown due to the pandemic, and the impact of COVID-19 on women in conflict-affected countries. The

open debate is further meant to contribute to the ongoing 2020 review of UN peacebuilding, mandated by the April 2016 Council and General Assembly resolutions on the previous review of the UN’s peacebuilding architecture—the PBC, the Peacebuilding Fund and the Peacebuilding Support Office.

Council Dynamics

Health crises are a non-traditional security threat, but after initial concerns raised by China and South Africa in March about the link between the pandemic and peace and security, members have not questioned the Council’s discussing the pandemic. During the 2 July open debate, a number of members highlighted concerns about how the pandemic could exacerbate frequent conflict drivers such as economic conditions and social tensions. At the same time, some members, such as Russia and South Africa, underlined that Council discussions about the pandemic should focus on situations on its agenda, and expressed concerns about the Council’s involving itself in, for example, economic aspects, which are the responsibility of other UN organs and entities.

The drawn-out negotiations on resolution 2532 stemmed from US-China tensions, fuelled by US criticism of and rhetoric about China regarding the pandemic amid the major US outbreak. France and Tunisia served as co-penholders on the resolution and were heavily invested in overcoming this impasse so the Council could back the Secretary-General’s ceasefire appeal.

Elected members in general have actively sought to have the Council address the pandemic. Most recently, Germany organised the high-level debate in July, and as the coordinator of PBC-Council relations, it also organised the informal interactive dialogue, supported by Indonesia, Niger, and the UK. Indonesia, which will serve as the Council’s August president and has proposed the open debate, was also part of the initial group of countries behind the first General Assembly resolution on the pandemic, adopted on 2 April. In addition, Indonesia has a track record of a strong interest in peacebuilding. It has served four terms in the PBC, most recently from 2017-2018, when it was a PBC focal point on financing for peacebuilding in 2017, and in 2017, it organised the first high-level PBC meeting on south-south cooperation.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In August, 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). The mandate of UNMHA, renewed on 14 July, expires on 15 July 2021. The 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee is expected to consider the mid-term update of its Panel of Experts in August. The mandate of the Panel of Experts expires on 28 March 2021.

Key Recent Developments

Fighting continues between the Houthis rebel group and the Yemeni government, backed by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, as Griffiths works to broker a ceasefire agreement. Meanwhile, Yemen's humanitarian situation has continued to deteriorate, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and worsening economic conditions.

Drone and missile attacks by the Houthis against Saudi Arabia, and coalition airstrikes, continued during July after escalating since the expiration of a unilateral coalition ceasefire in late May. On 12 July, the coalition announced that it had intercepted and destroyed two ballistic missiles and six bomb-laden unmanned aerial vehicles launched by the Houthis, who claimed responsibility for attacks against an oil facility and military bases in Jizan, Najran and Assir in southern Saudi Arabia. That same day, an airstrike in Hajjah governorate killed seven children and two women, according to the UN humanitarian office in Yemen. On 15 July, at least 11 civilians, including six children and two women, were killed by airstrikes in al-Jawf governorate. "We deplore yesterday's air strikes in al-Jawf (...) A thorough & transparent investigation is required," Griffiths tweeted.

Griffiths continues to lead negotiations between the government and the Houthis on a joint declaration of a nationwide ceasefire, on a series of economic and humanitarian measures, and on the resumption of peace talks. On 28 July—at a rare physical meeting of the Council since the COVID-19 pandemic struck New York City—Griffiths expressed

concern that after four months "[t]here is a real risk that these negotiations will slip away, and that Yemen will enter a new phase of prolonged escalation."

Saudi Arabia has overseen negotiations between the government and the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) following the STC's seizure in June of Socotra governorate and a 22 June ceasefire announcement between the sides. On 29 July, an agreement was reached in these talks. The STC abandoned its 25 April declaration of self-rule and recommitted to implementing the November 2019 Riyadh Agreement that had ended an earlier round of fighting in the south. In accordance with the Riyadh Agreement, the sides should form a government within 30 days, with an equal number of ministers from northern and southern Yemen, including representatives of the STC. The plan also calls for the withdrawal of rival forces from Aden and the contested governorate of Abyan, and the appointment of a new governor and security director for Aden during the 30-day period.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in Yemen is deteriorating further. "We have never before seen in Yemen a situation where a severe domestic economic crisis overlaps with a sharp drop in remittances and major cuts to donor support for humanitarian aid—all amidst a devastating pandemic", according to Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock's statement during a 24 June closed VTC with Council members. A 30 June OCHA report described the aid operation as being "on the brink of collapse", having received only \$558 million in 2020 so far, compared to \$2.6 billion at the same time last year. During July, OCHA increased its warnings about the renewed risk of famine.

There are increasing worries, too, about the environmental, humanitarian and economic consequences that could result from a leak or accident on the FSO Safer oil tanker moored in the Red Sea off Hodeidah governorate, which has not had maintenance during the five-year-long war. The situation gained new urgency when the ship's engine room flooded in late May; emergency repairs by Yemeni divers from the SAFER corporation prevented the tanker from sinking.

The Council held a special session via VTC on the FSO Safer on 15 July. Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme Inger Andersen said a spill of the tanker's 1.1 million barrels of oil would be four times greater than the Exxon Valdez spill in Alaska in 1989, which released 275,000 barrels, and that destruction to ecosystems would last decades and affect the livelihoods of up to 28 million people in the region. Lowcock updated members on negotiations with the Houthis to allow for a UN-led technical mission to carry out an assessment of the ship and make initial repairs. The week before, the Houthis informed the UN in writing that they would grant access to the UN-led team, though they have made similar commitments before. Andersen and Lowcock described other threats: an explosion and fire on the ship would expose millions of people to harmful levels of pollutants, contaminate water wells and subject millions of Yemeni farmers to crop loss. Furthermore, the critical port of Hodeidah could be closed for up to six months, doubling food prices in Yemen, and international shipping through the Red Sea would potentially be crippled, among other potential consequences.

At the Council's 28 July briefing on Yemen, Lowcock reported no progress in resolving the situation with the tanker. During the session, members heard briefings from two Yemeni civil society representatives based in Sana'a. Wafa'a Alsaïdy, General Coordinator for Yemen of Médecins du Monde, focused on Yemen's decimated health system, under further strain by the COVID-19 pandemic. Alsaïdy called on Council members to reconsider and end weapons sale that fuel the war, pressure countries involved in the war to stabilize the economy, ensure safe and unimpeded humanitarian access, and maintain aid funding. Raja Abdullah Ahmed Almasabi of the Arab Human Rights Foundation talked about the war's impact on persons with disabilities, urging UN agencies, international NGOs and governments to give greater attention to disabled persons' needs and rights. Guha briefed in consultations. Council press elements after the meeting called on the parties to agree rapidly to Griffiths' proposals and for the Houthis to issue entry

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2534](#) (14 July 2020) extended the mandate of UNMHA until 15 July 2021. [Security Council Letter S/2020/648](#) (3 July 2020) was from the Yemeni government, requesting a Council special session on the FSO Safer. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8753](#) (28 July 2020) was a briefing on Yemen. [Security Council Press Statement SC/14233](#) (29 June 2020) expressed deep concern at the slow pace of negotiations, calling on the parties to agree rapidly to mediated proposals.

Yemen

permits to the UN technical team to assess the Safer tanker.

Key Issues and Options

Achieving a nationwide ceasefire and restarting a political process remains a critical issue, though frustration is building at the lack of results in the current negotiation process. Since fighting intensified between the government and Houthis in January, Council members have called for a cessation of hostilities in multiple press statements, and Griffiths' efforts gained greater urgency in March in light of COVID-19 and the Secretary-General's global ceasefire appeal to combat the pandemic. More recently, the Council adopted resolution 2532 on 1 July demanding a cessation of hostilities in all situations on its agenda, in support of the Secretary-General's global ceasefire appeal.

Regarding the humanitarian situation, Yemen's deteriorating economic conditions—the near-depletion of Central Bank reserves,

a decline in remittances, and a new fuel shortage—threaten to worsen the humanitarian crisis, already acute because of the pandemic, the intensified fighting of recent months, and the funding shortage for relief efforts. Resolving the situation of the FSO Safer remains a critical and urgent issue.

If agreement is reached on the joint declaration for a ceasefire, the Council may adopt a resolution to welcome or endorse the deal. Another option, as put forward by the International Crisis Group in light of the impasse in negotiations, is a new Council resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire in Yemen and calling for more inclusive peace talks to involve other Yemeni parties that are necessary to implement any future agreements. Likely to be key to Council members pursuing a new resolution is a signal from Griffiths that his efforts could benefit from such a resolution. He has yet to provide such an indication since determining shortly after his appointment in 2018

that he could pursue a mediated solution within the parameters of resolution 2216, which was adopted in April 2015 at the outset of the Saudi-led coalition's intervention.

Council Dynamics

Council members appear aligned in their support of the Special Envoy, desiring a ceasefire and resumption of a political process. They further share concerns about the humanitarian crisis, the COVID-19 outbreak in Yemen, and the FSO Safer. Tunisia is the Arab member on the Council that traditionally champions positions of the Saudi-led coalition. The US, which is seeking to maintain restrictions on Iranian arms transfers that are set to expire later this year, often points to what it perceives as Iran's destabilising role in Yemen.

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

Somalia

Expected Council Action

In August, the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), which expires on 31 August. Earlier in the month, the Council is due to receive a briefing from Special Representative and head of UNSOM James Swan and hold consultations on Somalia.

The authorisation for the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) expires on 28 February 2021.

Key Recent Developments

The Council is set to renew UNSOM's mandate after two technical rollovers on 30 March and 22 June. While initial negotiations began among the permanent members in March, it became clear by mid-month that the Council's ability to conduct further negotiations would be limited by measures taken in response to the COVID-19

pandemic. Member states agreed that the best way forward, under the circumstances, would be a technical rollover of UNSOM's mandate, which in Council practice entails 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.

On 22 June, with the COVID-19 special measures still in place, Council members once again renewed the mandate of UNSOM through a technical rollover, until 31 August. Resolution 2527 passed unanimously through the written procedure agreed in March. It seems the Council wished to consider UNSOM's mandate after knowing more about the Federal Government of Somalia's plans for upcoming elections. The expectation was that the Council would

determine how UNSOM can best provide strategic support and advice to facilitate the electoral process and adjust the mission's mandate as appropriate, at a time when the Somalia government was further along in its planning for the elections.

After several weeks of delays, the chair of the National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC), Halima Ismail, announced in a meeting with the Federal Parliament on 27 June that upcoming elections should be postponed because of logistical, financial, and COVID-19 challenges. At the heart of the issue is the oft-repeated promise by Somali high-level officials that elections would be one person, one vote. Previously, Somalia had used a clan-based system of indirect voting. In this model, lawmakers are voted in by clan elders, and then those lawmakers elect a president from a group of selected contenders. It was thought that elections in 2020 or

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2527 (22 June 2020) was a technical rollover of UNSOM's mandate until 31 August 2020. S/RES/2520 (29 May 2020) renewed the authorisation of AMISOM until 28 February 2021. 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/2020/573 (23 June 2020) contained the record of the adoption of resolution 2527. S/2020/529 (11 June 2020) was a copy of the 9 June briefing provided by Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) in his capacity as Chair of the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee. S/2020/466 (29 May 2020) contained both the draft resolution and letters received in reply from Council members indicating their national positions on the adoption of resolution 2520. S/2020/266 (31 March 2020) from the president of the Security Council, containing both the draft resolution and letters received in reply from Council members indicating their national positions on the draft resolution that became resolution 2516.

Somalia

2021 could instead be based on universal suffrage and mark a significant step forward for Somalis. In her statement on 27 June, Ismail said that one person-one vote elections would take at least until March 2021 to organise and possibly longer if using biometric registration. (Before the announcement, parliamentary elections were tentatively scheduled for 27 November, and the president's term ends on 8 February 2021).

The suggestion that elections could be delayed has set off a political dispute inside Somalia. Some members of parliament and the NIEC continue to support universal suffrage and therefore have supported the NIEC's recommendation to delay elections. However, Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire said on 9 July that there could be no delay in holding elections. This signalled a possible rift with his former close ally President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo", who has repeatedly called for universal suffrage. Just a few weeks later, on 25 July, Khaire was removed from his position through a no-confidence vote in Somalia's parliament. According to the speaker of parliament, Khaire was removed due to the government's inability to "fulfill its national promises, including holding one man-one vote elections, and establishing a national security force capable of tightening the security". Khaire's removal was criticised by both the EU and the United States. It is now up to Farmajo to appoint a new prime minister or establish a unity government until elections are held.

Additionally, the recommendation to postpone elections was rejected by the presidents of Somalia's federal states (Said Abdullahi Deni of Puntland, Ahmed Mohamed Madoobe of Jubaland, Ahmed Abdi Karie Qoorqoor of Galmudug, Abdiaziz Laftagareen of South West and Mohamed Abdi Ware of Hirshabelle). They released a joint statement on 12 July calling for modified indirect elections that could be held sooner than the sought-after universal suffrage elections. With this statement, the leaders made it clear that they oppose any delay in elections and are willing to sacrifice universal suffrage, at least in the

short term. On 16 July, the speaker of the Lower House of Parliament announced his opposition to the clan-based model, further throwing into question the road ahead for Somalia's elections.

A series of meetings between federal states' presidents and the Federal Government of Somalia to discuss elections and other agenda items took place during the week of 20 July. This marks the first meeting between Farmajo and the presidents of the federal member states in over a year. On 22 July it was announced that the stakeholders had agreed to nominate a technical working group that would design a plan to hold "timely" elections. Somalia's leaders are expected to reconvene on 15 August.

Somalia continues to face a number of long-standing threats and challenges, along with newer ones. These include COVID-19, with over 3,100 cases in Somalia as of 28 July; the worst locust outbreak in over 25 years; heavy floods that have displaced around 500,000 people; and Al-Shabaab, the Somali terrorist group aligned with al-Qaeda, which continues to orchestrate attacks. On 13 July Al-Shabaab attempted to assassinate General Odowaa Yusuf Rageh, the head of the Somalia National Army, in a suicide car bomb attack in Mogadishu. Rageh survived, but one civilian was killed and several others wounded.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 9 June, Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium), chair of the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee, briefed Council members in an open videoconference on the committee's activities from 28 February to 9 June. He highlighted Al-Shabaab's increased use of improvised explosive devices in Somalia and their devastating effect.

Human Rights Developments

During the 43rd session, the President of the Human Rights Council (HRC) appointed Isha Dyfan as the Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Somalia. The HRC renewed the mandate of the independent expert for a year in resolution 42/33.

Key Issues and Options

Conversations about Somalia, and by extension the future of the UN's role in Somalia, are dominated by the possibility of Somalia's first one person-one vote elections. Council members want to consider how UNSOM can best continue to provide strategic support and advice to the Federal Government of Somalia and AMISOM during this critical and potentially unstable period.

In his latest report, the Secretary-General expressed concern that the relationship between the Federal Government of Somalia and some of its states remains poor. Council members may echo this concern in their statements and could include calls for better cooperation in future resolutions, presidential or press statements.

Council Dynamics

Council members are generally united in their belief that the upcoming elections are important for Somalia. Many Council member states have repeatedly stressed the need for one person-one vote elections. This puts them at odds with some of the current statements coming out of Somalia. In the August meeting, these divisions are likely to become stark: Council dynamics could be shaped by this tension between the desire to push for stronger development of democratic practices and respect for traditions and practicality, with Somali political stakeholders themselves remaining divided on these issues.

Council members often emphasise that they view Somalia as being at a historical turning point, both politically and in its reform and strengthening of the security sector. Members consistently stress the need for better relationships between the Federal Government of Somalia and Somali federal states, something that remains challenging and has periodic flare-ups. Member states are likely to voice the need for reconciliation in their statements.

The UK is the penholder on Somalia. Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve (Belgium) is Chair of the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee.

DPRK (North Korea)

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Over the past several months, the security situation on the Korean peninsula has been marked by persistent instability and a deepening rift between the DPRK and the Republic of Korea (ROK). The tensions between the two escalated in early June when the DPRK denounced the ROK for allowing defectors from the north to disseminate propaganda leaflets across the border. In retaliation, the DPRK announced that it would cut all communication channels with the ROK and abandon commitments made during the 2018 inter-Korean summits.

DPRK leader Kim Jong-un and ROK President Moon Jae-in held three summits in 2018, during which they agreed on a series of measures to improve relations between the two nations and promote reunification of Korea through diplomatic means. One of the outcomes of the rapprochement was the establishment of the inter-Korean liaison office in the city of Kaesong on the DPRK side of the border. In an escalatory move on 16 June, the DPRK used explosives to completely demolish the liaison office while the military announced plans to move troops into the demilitarised zone between the two countries. After meeting with the Workers' Party's Central Military Commission on 23 June, Kim called off the military plans against the ROK but provided no details about the decision.

On the diplomatic front, the efforts to denuclearise the Korean peninsula have remained at an impasse ever since the collapse of the February 2019 US-DPRK summit in Hanoi. The US Special Representative for North Korea, Stephen Biegun, visited Seoul from 7 through 9 July and held talks with senior ROK officials. He expressed support

for the cooperation between the two Koreas and said that the US was ready to engage with the DPRK on denuclearisation issues. In various remarks to the media, US President Donald Trump has indicated that he would be open to meeting Kim in another summit. The DPRK, however, has shown little interest in meeting with the US. The last time the US and the DPRK negotiating teams met in a working-level session was in October 2019 in Sweden. That session ended without an outcome, and since then, there has been no direct engagement between the two sides.

The DPRK has taken strict measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 from neighbouring countries. Starting in January, the DPRK closed its borders, banned international tourism, and imposed mandatory quarantines on those suspected of having been in contact with anyone who could be infected with the virus that causes the disease. The DPRK officials have reported no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country, a claim that is disputed by many international observers. On 26 July, the DPRK reported its first suspected case of COVID-19 in the city of Kaesong by an individual who illegally crossed the border from the ROK. No further details were provided. The DPRK has started easing some restrictive measures over the past several weeks. Commercial activity between the DPRK and its main trading partner, China, has declined substantially as a result of the restrictions, causing a sharp rise in the price of food and other consumer goods in the DPRK. International aid agencies have warned that this development is likely to contribute to greater food insecurity and to have negative consequences for the humanitarian situation.

On 28 July, the Council met under "any other business" to discuss the situation in the DPRK. The meeting focused on issues related to cap oil exports to the DPRK and a technical issue of ton/barrel conversion rate. The meeting was initiated by Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, and the UK.

Human Rights-Related Developments

At its 43rd session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted without a vote resolution 43/25 which renewed the mandate of the Special

Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in DPRK for a year. The resolution commended the Special Rapporteur for his work, particularly given "his continued efforts in the conduct of his mandate despite the lack of access to the country". Resolution 43/25 also urges the government of DPRK to "promote, respect and protect the human rights of workers", including those workers who had been repatriated to DPRK in accordance with Security Council resolution 2397 which stipulated that DPRK workers had to be repatriated no later than 22 December 2019.

Key Issues and Options

This year, and particularly in recent months, there has been a steady increase in tensions on the Korean peninsula, as evidenced by the DPRK's heightened rhetoric. The DPRK has resumed testing ballistic missiles and shown no interest in continuing the inter-Korean dialogue and diplomatic talks with the US on denuclearisation. Given the volatile security environment, the Council is primarily concerned with maintaining stability on the Korean peninsula. An option for the Council would be to consider issuing a formal outcome addressing the need for stability and the resumption of diplomatic talks.

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

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

Council Dynamics

Members continue to be divided over the role of sanctions in addressing the nuclear threat posed by the DPRK. The US has been a

UN DOCUMENTS ON DPRK Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2515 (30 March 2020) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee until 30 April 2021. **S/RES/2397** (22 December 2017) tightened sanctions on the DPRK. **Security Council Letters** S/2020/266 (6 April 2020) contained the written procedure voting record on resolution 2515 that extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee. **S/2020/246** (30 March 2020) was from the president of the Security Council containing the results of the vote on resolution 2515. **Security Council Meeting Record** S/PV.8682 (11 December 2019) was an open briefing on non-proliferation focused on the DPRK. **Sanctions Committee Documents** S/2020/151 (2 March 2020) was the final report of the Panel of Experts. **S/2019/971** (20 December 2019) was the annual report of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee.

DPRK (North Korea)

strong proponent of maintaining the policy of maximum pressure until the DPRK takes concrete steps toward denuclearisation. The EU members of the Council are generally supportive of this approach. On the other hand, China and Russia have shown interest in considering some form of sanctions relief and in December 2019 circulated a draft resolution providing partial sanctions relief for the DPRK. The

proposal remains stalled because of insufficient support from other Council members.

Council members have been generally united in their concern about potential consequences of spread COVID-19 for the DPRK. On this front, there has been broad support among 1718 Committee members for accelerating the process for considering humanitarian exceptions.

The US has been reluctant to address the DPRK's ballistic missile tests in the Council in light of its diplomatic efforts. Several other Council members, particularly European members, have pushed for discussions following the recent tests.

The US is the penholder on the DPRK, and Ambassador Christoph Heusgen (Germany) chairs the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee.

Mali

Expected Council Action

In August, the Council is due to renew the Mali sanctions regime, which expires on 31 August, as well as the mandate of the Panel of Experts, which expires on 30 September. Ahead of the sanctions renewal, the Council is expected to receive the Mali Panel of Experts' final report.

The mandate of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) expires on 30 June 2021.

Key Recent Developments

Since June, Mali has seen a fresh sociopolitical crisis, with tens of thousands of people protesting in Bamako against the government. A coalition of opposition and civil society groups known as the June 5 Movement-Rally of Patriotic Forces (M5-RFP) and led by Imam Mahmoud Dicko organised mass protests on 5 and 19 June, calling for the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita because of continued insecurity, the struggling economy, corruption, and the Constitutional Court's decision to annul 5.2-percent of the votes cast in the long-delayed legislative elections held this spring. The court's ruling on 30 April, a key trigger for the demonstrations, overturned provisional results for 31 seats (out of 147), which increased the parliamentary representation of Keita's party by ten seats.

From 18 to 20 June, a high-level delegation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)—including the Nigérien and Nigerian foreign ministers, Kalla Ankourao and Geoffrey Onyeama,

respectively, and the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Jean-Claude Kassi Brou—were in Mali to mediate the dispute. The ministerial mission called for the formation of a unity government and rerunning the elections for the disputed legislative seats.

On 11 and 12 July, at least 11 protesters were killed and 150 people were injured in Bamako. Security forces fired live ammunition at protesters who looted the parliament, besieged the national broadcaster's office, and attacked the offices of the ruling party. In a 12 July joint statement, MINUSMA, the AU, ECOWAS and the EU condemned “any form of violence as a means of crisis resolution” and also condemned the authorities’ “use of lethal force” to maintain order. The joint statement encouraged the government to release protest leaders who had been arrested and expressed support for ECOWAS’ proposals to end the crisis. That same day, Keita announced that he had dissolved the constitutional court and said that he was willing to consider re-doing the contested legislative elections. Amid the unrest, Mali continues to face terrorist attacks in its centre and north as well as inter-communal violence.

A second ECOWAS mission was in Mali from 15 to 19 July, led by former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan. The M5-RFP rejected the ECOWAS reform proposals because they did not call for Keita to resign. Conversely, the ECOWAS communiqué on the mission made clear that Keita's resignation was a red line for the regional bloc, stating that it would “not tolerate” any

unconstitutional ascension to power.

Several days later, on 23 July, the presidents of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, and Senegal went to Bamako to meet with President Keita and Dicko. On 27 July, ECOWAS held an extraordinary summit on the crisis, conducted virtually, where the heads of state reported on their mission. In its recommendations following the summit, ECOWAS proposed that the 31 MPs whose electoral results were contested resign and that new elections be held. It again recommended the formation of a unity government that includes the opposition. ECOWAS said its plan should be implemented within ten days and recommended sanctions against those who impede it. That same day, Council members held a closed videoconference, requested by Russia, on the situation. In press elements, members expressed strong support for ECOWAS' mediation and took note of the summit recommendations.

In July, French and Estonian troops deployed to Mali as the first units of the newly launched Task Force Takuba. The French-led special-forces operation, which will include contingents from other European countries, will support Malian forces fighting the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) in the Liptako-Gourma border region with Burkina Faso and Niger.

On 29 June, the Council renewed the mandate of MINUSMA for one year. The new mandate updated last year's benchmarks—referred to as priority measures in the text—for implementing the 2015 Mali Peace and Reconciliation Agreement between the

UN DOCUMENTS ON MALI [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2531](#) (29 June 2020) renewed the mandate of MINUSMA until 30 June 2021. [S/RES/2484](#) (29 August 2019) renewed the Mali sanctions measures until 31 August 2020 and the mandate of the Panel of Experts until 30 September 2020. [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/7](#) (28 July 2020) was on the situation in West Africa and the Sahel, urging Malian stakeholders to prioritise the use of dialogue to resolve political tensions, based on ECOWAS recommendations. [Security Council Press Statement SC/14213](#) (14 June 2020) condemned an attack on a MINUSMA convoy in which two Egyptian peacekeepers were killed. [Sanctions Committee Documents 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. [S/2020/158](#) (28 February 2020) was the mid-term report of the Mali Panel of Experts.

Mali

government and armed groups in the north on security sector reform, constitutional and other institutional reforms, the development of the north, and the participation of women. It also established benchmarks for the Malian government to meet in central Mali over the next year for re-establishing state presence and state authority and for fighting impunity.

In a 28 July presidential statement on West Africa and the Sahel, the Council urged Malian stakeholders to prioritise the use of dialogue to resolve the situation, without delay, based on ECOWAS' recommendations from 19 July; to refrain from any action likely to fuel further tensions; and to work inclusively and constructively to preserve the rule of law.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 17 July press briefing note, the spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Liz Throssell, said that there was particular concern about the events in Bamako from 10 to 12 July when special forces (the Force spéciale anti-terroriste, or Forsat) were reported to have fired lethal ammunition during clashes with demonstrators. The Human Rights and Protection Division of MINUSMA confirmed that at least 14 protesters – including one woman and two boys – were killed and 154 others injured. Throssell said that it was essential that “all alleged human rights violations and acts of violence committed during the demonstrations are the subject of prompt, thorough, transparent and independent investigations and that those responsible are held accountable”.

The note also mentioned that the MINUSMA Human Rights and Protection Division, in line with its mandate, had launched a fact-finding mission to “examine allegations of serious human rights violations perpetrated in connection with the protests”. Throssell reported that the Malian National Human Rights Commission said on 13 July that it had been denied access to the demonstrators in custody. OHCHR had reminded the authorities “of their obligations to support, and not impede, the work of the national human rights institution and civil society organisations which play an important role regarding the promotion and protection of the human rights of everyone in Mali”, she said.

On 22 June, the Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted without a vote resolution 43/38 on “technical assistance and capacity-building for Mali in the field of human rights”. The resolution underscored that Security Council resolution 2374 of 2017 “establishes a regime of targeted sanctions against, in particular...those who plan, direct or conduct human rights violations or abuses or violations of international humanitarian law”. The HRC resolution also noted the subsequent imposition of Council sanctions on eight individuals in December 2018 and July 2019.

Key Issues and Options

The recent political crisis and protests pose a new issue of concern, with potential

repercussions for implementing the peace agreement and addressing the ongoing major security threats in Mali's north and centre.

A key issue for August will be assessing the impact of the Mali sanctions—an assets freeze and travel ban—established in 2017 for individuals or entities threatening the peace, security and stability of Mali. Sanctions remain an important Council tool to pressure the signatory parties of the 2015 peace agreement to advance the accord's implementation, for which there have been signs of greater progress this year. A criticism of the sanctions' application is that current sanctioned individuals are all from the north, including the one parliamentarian who is listed by the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee. One issue is how to be more balanced in also targeting the government for hindering the agreement's implementation. Members could further consider how the sanctions regime may be used to support efforts to stabilise the situation in central Mali. The 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee is expected to discuss the Panel of Experts' final report in early August ahead of the expected renewal of the sanctions regime later in the month.

Council Dynamics

On sanctions, the P3, among other Council members, support their use against those obstructing the peace agreement. Russia is the most sceptical about sanctions, at times raising concerns about whether new designations may further alienate spoilers, as opposed to the intended effect of changing their behaviour.

On the current political crisis, the A3 have championed ECOWAS' positions and efforts, which members appear to support. Overall, Council members remain concerned about the security situation and consider implementation of the peace agreement as crucial for achieving broader stability in the Sahel. Niger has been profoundly affected by Mali's insecurity, with spillover from terrorist groups. The US has questioned the effectiveness of MINUSMA, at times pitting its positions on Mali against other Council members that consider the mission's role to be crucial. The June mandate renewal for MINUSMA, however, proceeded more smoothly than members thought might be the case in light of the US' views on the mission, its cost, and frustration over the peace accord's faulty implementation.

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

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