

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

Tunisia has the presidency in January. It has chosen to hold an open debate on the [challenges faced by countries in fragile contexts](#), in particular on the African continent. Possible briefers include UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Chair of the AU Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat and former President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Tunisia is also organising a debate on [threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts](#), focusing on international cooperation in combating terrorism, to commemorate 20 years since the adoption of resolution 1373 in 2001. The anticipated briefers are Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism Vladimir Voronkov and CTED Executive Director Michèle Coninsx.

Tunisia's two other signature events are expected to be briefings on the implementation of resolution 2532, which demanded a cessation of hostilities in all situations on the Council's agenda to combat the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), with the Under-Secretaries-General for political, peace-keeping and humanitarian affairs as expected briefers; as well as on [cooperation between the Council and the League of Arab States \(LAS\)](#) with the UN and LAS Secretaries-General as likely briefers.

Regarding the Middle East, there will be the regularly scheduled meetings on [Syria](#), the monthly

meeting on developments in [Yemen](#), and the quarterly debate on [the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question](#). On Syria, there will be a meeting covering the political and humanitarian situations as well as on the use of chemical weapons.

On African issues, there will be updates on the activities of [UNSMIL \(Libya\)](#) and [MINUSMA \(Mali\)](#). The Council may also adopt a resolution supporting the compliance of all national and international stakeholders with the 23 October 2020 ceasefire agreement between the parties to the Libyan conflict.

Meetings on situations in South America and Europe are also expected in January. The Council will be briefed on the Secretary-General's 90-day report on the [UN Verification Mission in Colombia](#). On [Cyprus](#), Council members will be briefed on the latest report on UNFICYP, and the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the mission by the end of the month.

The Council is expected to receive updates on the activities of two UN regional offices: [UNOWAS \(West Africa\)](#) and [UNRCCA \(Central Asia\)](#).

Council members will most likely closely follow developments in the [Central African Republic](#), [Ethiopia](#) and [South Sudan](#), although no meetings on these issues were scheduled at press time.

In Hindsight: Looking Back to Look Ahead

Every January, five new members take their seats for a two-year term on the Security Council. In 2021, India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway are the incoming five (I-5) replacing departing members Belgium, Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa.

While we don't have a crystal ball, the events of 2020 may provide an indication of what these members can expect in 2021.

The new members enter the Council following an extraordinary year. Forced to confront the

unusual situation of being unable to meet at the UN because of restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City, the Council had to find ways of continuing its essential work, particularly the adoption of resolutions extending mission mandates and sanctions regimes. Within two months, the Council recreated most of its meeting formats and developed a written procedure for voting, which, although more cumbersome, allowed for the adoption of resolutions and presidential statements. It also

30 December 2020
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found a way of agreeing on other decisions without in-person meetings.

The statistics for 2020 confirm that the Council maintained its essential work. Overall, the Council continued to hold regular meetings on issues on its agenda and renewed mission and sanctions regime mandates. Fifty-eight resolutions were adopted in 2020, exceeding the 52 adopted in 2019. The number of presidential statements, which had already been on a downward trend, dropped from 15 to 13. Given the deep divisions on an increasing number of issues, members may have chosen not to pursue outcomes in this format given the need for consensus. Less clear is whether COVID restrictions exacerbated pre-existing Council divisions to a point where some outcomes were unattainable.

The amount of time spent in meetings dropped drastically, down by more than 200 hours compared to the 660 hours in 2019. This reduction can be partially explained by the fact that open debates, which have been held as videoconferences (VTCs) since May, have restricted speaking roles to Council members and briefers. Other participants have had to submit their contributions in writing. The almost two-week period in March 2020 of no Council activity, followed by more limited activities for a short period, additionally accounts for the drop in meeting hours. Furthermore, it became harder to meet on more controversial topics in 2020: in the past, such meetings have been informally negotiated face-to-face or decided through a procedural vote during a formal meeting. Given that the Council's VTCs are not considered official meetings, however, procedural votes could not be held unless members were willing to meet in person. It is not clear whether some issues that were discussed in closed VTCs under "any other business" such as Hong Kong, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, or Belarus might have been held as public meetings under normal circumstances.

In 2020, Council members held 22 Arria-formula meetings, the same number as in 2019, matching its peak use since it began in 1992. It seems that some members chose to hold Arria-formula meetings rather than Council VTCs so that the wider membership could take the floor. Estonia organised a high-level Arria-formula meeting, a first for this format, which has prompted greater interest

in exploring the advantages virtual convening offers for high-level participation and engaging briefers outside of New York. China and Russia have in the past expressed reservations about this format, but in 2020 both chose to use it, in Russia's case organising five Arria-formula meetings. With the prospect of the Council's continuing to work remotely at least in the early part of 2021, there may need to be further discussion of whether virtual meetings should be considered official and of how to enable the larger membership to speak during open debates.

Before the pandemic, relations among the permanent members were already fraught. A global pandemic might have been expected to unify Council members to address its consequences for peace and security, as happened following the terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September 2001. Instead, rather than narrowing the differences, it led to greater cleavages in 2020. Not being able to meet in person did not help. Divisive issues require face-to-face bilateral or small group negotiations in order to find compromises or creative language.

Not surprisingly, in 2020 the Council continued to struggle with obtaining unanimous agreement on Council outcomes. Twelve resolutions were not unanimous. They covered sanctions renewals (Central African Republic, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen), mission mandate renewals (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Western Sahara, Haiti, and Libya), criminal tribunals and the Syrian humanitarian situation. Significantly, on a number of resolutions, the disagreements were over language on human rights, gender, or climate and security rather than core elements of the mission's mandate or the sanctions regime.

Several draft resolutions were not adopted due to a veto or the lack of sufficient number of votes in favour. In 2020 there were three vetoes, two of which related to the re-authorisation of the Syria cross-border aid mechanism. The Council's working methods due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a written voting procedure and lack of in-person meetings, may have made these negotiations more difficult. Russia and China vetoed two resolutions, and two Russian-sponsored texts failed to garner enough votes to pass, before the Council was able to re-authorise just one border crossing. One of the last bastions of

Council unity, counter-terrorism, fell when the US vetoed a draft resolution on the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs).

Iran was another divisive issue. In August 2020, the US introduced a draft resolution that would have extended indefinitely the existing arms-related restrictions under resolution 2231. The resolution failed to be adopted due to insufficient votes. With the change in the US administration in January, this is expected to become more of a consensus issue in the Council.

In a tough year, there have been signs of progress on some issues such as Libya, where a fragile ceasefire is holding at the time of writing, and Mali, where following a coup last August, the country is moving towards a political transition. Colombia continues to be an issue that has overall Council support. In 2020, the Council oversaw the establishment of a new mission, the Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), and in South Sudan, long-term political rivals came together in a new Transitional Government of National Unity. While these are positive developments, progress is fragile, and all these situations will require the Council's watchful attention in 2021.

Two presidential statements on children and armed conflict were adopted in 2020, showing strong support for this agenda. Other thematic issues fared less well. The women, peace and security agenda continued to see pushback from several permanent members. The issue of climate and security also met with strong resistance from three permanent members, making an outcome impossible in 2020. However, members found other ways to keep a focus on this issue. Germany, Niger and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines chose signature events with a climate and security theme during their presidency. At the end of 2020, 11 like-minded Council members came together to form an informal expert group that, among other things, will work at systematically integrating this issue into the Council's work. With four of the five new members expressing an interest in climate in the context of peace and security and the US position likely to be more positive, 2021 may provide opportunities for Council action on this agenda.

There may also be scope for consideration of non-traditional aspects of international

In Hindsight: Looking Back to Look Ahead

security, including cyber threats and pandemics, in the new year. In May 2020, Council members attended a high-level Arrria-formula meeting on cyber and security organised by Estonia during its presidency, and this issue may be raised again this year. The Council's protracted inability to adopt a product on COVID-19 was in stark contrast to the Secretary-General's activism; in addition to the ceasefire call, his office issued regular COVID-19 policy briefs. However, the pandemic

was not absent from the Council's agenda. The Council was able to discuss the issue in open VTCs and in meetings on country-specific situations, with mission mandates being updated to address the coronavirus situation. In 2021, the impact of the pandemic on issues on its agenda is likely to continue to be a key focus of the Council's work.

As the five new members take their seats in the Council, there is hope that, although the effects of the global pandemic are likely

to affect how the Council works for part of 2021, more normal working methods will return during the year. While some of the existing difficult dynamics are not going to disappear, the new members appear ready to carve out opportunities for progress on some of the most contentious issues and most difficult conflicts of the last few years.

Status Update since our December Forecast

Ukraine

On 2 December, Russia organised an Arrria-formula meeting on implementation of the 2015 Minsk Package of Measures, an agreement on the settlement of conflict in Ukraine. According to the concept note circulated ahead of the meeting, the aim was to provide an opportunity for the sides to the settlement process and Council members to exchange views on the implementation of resolution 2202 which endorsed the agreement. Briefings were provided by Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia (Russia); Natalia Nikoronova, Representative of Donetsk in the Minsk Contact Group; and Vladislav Deinego, Representative of Lugansk in the Minsk Contact Group. The US, the UK and the EU members of the Council did not take part at the meeting due to objections over the briefers.

Children and Armed Conflict

On 2 and 4 December, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict met in closed VTC meetings to receive a briefing from the UN country task force on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children (CTFMR) in Colombia and the CTFMR in Somalia, respectively. On 11 December, the Working Group met with the permanent representatives of Nigeria and the Philippines to the UN to discuss the conclusions adopted on the Secretary-General's report on Nigeria and the Philippines. On 17 December, the Working Group convened for the presentation by the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict of the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict in South Sudan. On 18

December, it heard a briefing from UNICEF on its Global Horizontal Note and met with the chargé d'affaires of the DRC to discuss the conclusions adopted on the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict in the DRC. In December, the Working Group adopted conclusions on the Secretary-General's reports on Nigeria, the Philippines, the DRC and Mali, bringing the number of conclusions adopted on the Secretary-General's country-specific reports on children and armed conflict to 13 during Belgium's 2019-2020 tenure as chair of the Working Group.

Security Sector Reform

On 3 December, the Security Council held a ministerial-level debate on "Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace: Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/R)" via VTC (S/2020/1176). South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Naledi Pandor, presided over the meeting. The briefers were Bintou Keita, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa; Alexandre Zouev, Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions; and Smail Chergui, AU Commissioner for Peace and Security. Following the meeting, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2553, the Council's second thematic resolution on security sector reform.

UN-AU Cooperation

On 4 December, the Security Council held a high-level VTC debate on cooperation between the UN and regional and subregional organisations, focusing on the AU (S/2020/1179). South Africa

circulated a concept note ahead of the debate (S/2020/1146). President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa chaired the open debate. Secretary-General António Guterres briefed on his annual report on the cooperation between the UN and the AU (S/2020/860). AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat also briefed. A presidential statement was adopted as an outcome (S/PRST/2020/11).

Somalia

On 4 December, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2554, which renewed the counter-piracy measures off the coast of Somalia for one year (S/2020/1173). Resolution 2554 authorises states and regional organisations cooperating with Somalia to use all necessary means to fight against piracy and armed robbery at sea off Somalia's coast.

Burundi

On 4 December, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement, requesting the Secretary-General to cease providing periodic reporting on the situation in Burundi and instead cover the country in the context of his regular reporting on Central Africa and the Great Lakes region (S/PRST/2020/12). The presidential statement also called on the government of Burundi to cooperate with the UN to address a number of challenges that the country faces, including human rights, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 7 December, the Security Council held a briefing on the Secretary-General's most

recent report on MONUSCO (S/PV.8778). Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of MONUSCO Leila Zerrougui told the Council that the so-called joint strategy, which was shared with the Council by the Secretary-General on 26 October, offers a vision for MONUSCO's eventual drawdown and exit. On 18 December, the Council adopted resolution 2556, extending MONUSCO's mandate until 20 December 2021. Fourteen members voted in favour of the resolution, with Russia abstaining.

Sudan

On 8 December, the Council was briefed (S/2020/1183) on UNITAMS and UNAMID. The briefing covered the Secretary-General's 90-day report on both missions (S/2020/1155) as well as the joint AU/UN special report on UNAMID (S/2020/1115). Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare briefed. On 10 December, the Council received the semi-annual briefing of the ICC Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, related to the Court's work on Darfur (S/2020/1192). On 11 December, the chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia), provided the quarterly briefing on the committee's work (S/2020/1235). On 22 December, the Council adopted resolution 2559 on the expiration of the mandate of UNAMID on 31 December 2020.

Central Africa (UNOCA)

On 9 December, François Louncény Fall, Special Representative and head of UNOCA, briefed the Council on the Secretary-General's semi-annual report on UNOCA and the implementation of the UN's regional strategy to combat the Lord's Resistance Army (S/2020/1154). In his briefing, Fall highlighted a number of security threats in the region and called for greater regional cooperation and coordination to address the root causes of instability.

Youth, Peace and Security

On 9 December, an Arria-formula meeting was held via VTC on "Youth, Peace and Security: Capitalising on intergenerational dialogue to build and sustain peace

and enhance social cohesion at community levels". It was organised by South Africa in cooperation with the Dominican Republic, France, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Tunisia as well as the incoming members Ireland, Kenya and Norway. The briefers were Jayathma Wickramanayake, the Secretary-General's youth envoy; Aya Chebbi, the AU Special Envoy on Youth; Ahmed Yasin, peace activist and youth mobiliser at Palestinian Vision; and Karabo Mokgonyana, Southern Africa Youth Ambassador for Peace. The meeting marked the fifth anniversary of the adoption on 9 December 2015 of resolution 2250, which was the first thematic resolution on youth, peace and security.

Iraq (UNITAD)

On 10 December, Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, Special Adviser and head of UNITAD, briefed the Council on the latest Secretary-General's report (S/2020/1107). He called on the Council to maintain its support for UNITAD in its pursuit of justice for the victims. He briefed the Council on the innovative approaches the team has adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic and commended the government of Iraq for cooperation (S/2020/1193).

Golan Heights (UNDOF)

On 11 December, Council members held a closed VTC on UNDOF. On 18 December, the Council adopted resolution 2555, renewing UNDOF's mandate until 30 June 2021.

DPRK (North Korea)

On 11 December, the Security Council held a meeting under "any other business" on the human rights situation in the DPRK. Germany, France, Belgium, Estonia, the UK, Dominican Republic and the US requested the meeting. Initially these members proposed holding an open meeting with a briefing by Michelle Bachelet, High Commissioner for Human Rights. China and Russia objected to holding an open meeting, however.

Tribunals

On 14 December, the Security Council held its semi-annual debate on the IRMCT via VTC (S/2020/1236). The IRMCT's president, Judge Carmel Agius, and its prosecutor, Serge Brammertz, briefed. Agius told the

Council that the IRMCT may conclude most of its cases by May 2021.

Ethiopia (Tigray)

On 14 December, Security Council members discussed the humanitarian situation in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia under "any other business", a standing item in consultations. The meeting was initiated at the request of Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, the US, and the UK. Wafaa Saeed, OCHA's Deputy Director for Eastern & Southern Africa, briefed, calling on the parties to respect international humanitarian law.

Libya

On 15 December, the Security Council convened for VTC consultations on Libya. Acting Special Representative and head of UNSMIL Stephanie Williams briefed on progress in the Secretariat's articulating proposals for effective monitoring of the October 2020 ceasefire agreement in Libya under UN auspices. On 16 December, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of Raisedon Zenenga of Zimbabwe as Mission Coordinator of UNSMIL.

South Sudan

On 15 December, the Security Council was briefed (S/2020/1237) on UNMISS and the Secretary-General's 90-day report on South Sudan (S/2020/1180). Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of UNMISS David Shearer and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock briefed. Ambassador Dang Dinh Quy (Viet Nam), chair of the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee, briefed on South Sudan sanctions.

Afghanistan

On 17 December, Council members held an open VTC meeting on the situation in Afghanistan (S/2020/1274). Deborah Lyons, Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, briefed on recent developments and the Secretary-General's 9 December report on UNAMA (S/2020/1182). The Council was also briefed by Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani (Indonesia), the chair of the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee, and Shkula Zadran, Afghanistan's Youth Representative to the UN. On 18 December,

the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2557, renewing the mandate of the Monitoring Team supporting the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee for another year, until 17 December 2021.

International Court of Justice

On 18 December, the Security Council held a virtual open debate on the promotion and strengthening of the rule of law, focusing on strengthening the cooperation between the Security Council and the ICJ. The president of the ICJ, Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf, briefed. South Africa circulated a concept note ahead of the open debate (S/2020/1194).

Peacebuilding

On 21 December, the Security Council adopted resolution 2558 on the review of the UN peacebuilding architecture. The resolution was substantively identical to General Assembly resolution 75/201, adopted that same day. The joint resolutions welcome “the progress made in the implementation” of the 27 April 2016

resolutions on the last review of UN peacebuilding, including through the relevant UN intergovernmental bodies, and by the entire UN system, including through reforms, in particular, at the field level. The resolutions set out plans for a high-level General Assembly meeting during its seventy-sixth session on the financing of peacebuilding that should pursue “action-oriented outcomes”. A further comprehensive review of UN peacebuilding will take place in 2025, according to the resolutions, which request the Secretary-General to present an interim report in 2022, as well as a second, detailed report in 2024 in advance of the review, and to continue to present a report every two years following that review.

Western Sahara

On 21 December, Council members held VTC consultations on Western Sahara. Germany requested the meeting to consider recent developments in the region: the increased tensions since mid-November between Morocco and the Polisario Front and

the US recognition of Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara on 10 December. Bintou Keita, the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, and Colin Stewart, the Special Representative and head of MINURSO, briefed.

Iran (Non-Proliferation)

On 22 December, the Security Council held an open VTC session on the implementation of resolution 2231, which endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran’s nuclear programme. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo presented the Secretary-General’s latest report on the implementation of resolution 2231. The Council’s facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231, Ambassador Philippe Kridelka (Belgium), reported on the work of the Council related to resolution 2231. The Head of the EU delegation, Ambassador Olof Skoog, briefed on the work of the JCPOA’s Joint Commission.

Mali

Expected Council Action

In January, the Council is expected to hold a briefing, followed by consultations, on the Secretary-General’s quarterly report on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the Secretary-General’s bi-annual letter on the security situation, MINUSMA’s performance, and transition planning. The report and the letter are due in late December 2020. The mandate of MINUSMA expires on 30 June 2021.

Key Recent Developments

Following the 18 August 2020 coup d’état that ousted Mali’s President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) led negotiations with the new military authorities to establish a civilian-led political transition. This resulted in the National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP)—created by officers

involved in the coup—appointing former Colonel and Defence Minister Bah N’daw as transitional president on 21 September 2020. Colonel Assimi Goïta, the head of the CNSP, was named transitional vice-president. On 28 September, Moctar Ouane, a former foreign minister and diplomat, was appointed as transitional prime minister.

On 1 October 2020, the CNSP published the transitional charter, setting out an 18-month period to organise new elections and implement reforms. The final version of the charter dropped a reference, at ECOWAS’ insistence, to the possibility that the vice-president could replace the president and limited the vice-president’s responsibilities to security and defence. A new 25-member government was announced on 5 October. On 3 December 2020, Transitional President N’daw appointed by decree the 121 members of the National Transitional Council to serve as an

interim parliament, which will be responsible for voting on reforms and legislative changes.

ECOWAS, following the charter’s publication and appointment of the transition’s leadership, lifted on 6 October 2020 the sanctions it had imposed on Mali after the coup. In lifting sanctions, ECOWAS reiterated its demands that the new authorities dissolve the CNSP and release all military and civilian personnel who had been detained during the coup. (On 8 October, the government announced the release of the remaining 12 individuals arrested during the coup d’état.)

While the transitional institutions have been put in place, the military has sought to keep a strong hold on power. This is despite the push by ECOWAS and the June 5 Movement—Rally of Patriotic Forces (M5-RFP)—a coalition of civil society and political parties that held mass protests calling for Keïta’s resignation before the coup d’état—for the transition to

UN DOCUMENTS ON MALI Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2541 (31 August 2020) renewed the Mali sanctions regime for one year. S/RES/2531 (29 June 2020) renewed the mandate of MINUSMA until 30 June 2021. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/10 (15 October 2020) welcomed the new transitional arrangement in Mali following the 18 August coup d’état and outlined expectations of the way forward. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8765 (8 October 2020) was a briefing on Mali with Special Representative and head of MINUSMA Mahamat Saleh Annadif. Security Council Press Statement SC/14330 (16 October 2020) condemned the 15 October attack against MINUSMA in the Kidal region, in which one peacekeeper was killed. SC/14279 (19 August 2020) strongly condemned the mutiny on 18 August and the subsequent arrest of Mali’s president and other government officials.

Mali

be civilian-led. Army colonels were appointed to lead four government ministries: the important portfolios of defence, security, territorial administration, and national reconciliation. The military was allocated 22 seats on the National Transitional Council, the largest block of any group, and on 5 December 2020, the transitional legislature elected as its president Colonel Malick Diaw, one of the organisers of the coup. Of 17 newly appointed governors, 11 are from the military, bringing the total number of regions governed by military or police officers to 13 out of 20. The military has also yet to disband the CNSP.

The developments in Bamako overshadowed efforts to implement the 2015 Mali Peace and Reconciliation Agreement between the government and signatory armed groups in the north. In a positive sign, however, representatives of the signatory movements were appointed to the new government for the first time since the agreement. During an 8 October 2020 Council briefing, Special Representative and head of MINUSMA Mahamat Saleh Annadif described the development as “highly symbolic and significant.”

Terrorist attacks continue in Mali’s centre and north while intercommunal violence, often fuelled by terrorist groups, plagues central Mali. On 8 October 2020, Malian authorities announced the release of four hostages being detained by the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (JNIM), including Malian politician Soumaïla Cissé, who was kidnapped in March 2020, and French aid worker Sophie Petronin, who had been held for nearly four years. In exchange, the government reportedly released 200 prisoners. (Cissé, a likely top presidential candidate for the 2022 election, died on 25 December 2020 from coronavirus, according to his family.) On 13 November 2020, France announced that senior JNIM

leader Bah ag Moussa had been killed three days earlier in Mali’s Menaka region during an operation by the French regional counter-terrorism force Operation Barkhane. Ag Moussa was a former Malian colonel who had been sanctioned by the Security Council under the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions regime.

Following the 8 October 2020 briefing on Mali, on 15 October the Security Council adopted a presidential statement that welcomed the new transitional arrangements. The statement underlined that the transition should lead to constitutional order and elections in Mali within 18 months, called for the dissolution of the CNSP, and recognised the importance of political, institutional, electoral, administrative, and security sector reforms as set out in the Transition Charter and the Transition Roadmap. It further reiterated the importance of the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement; called on the authorities to expedite action to protect civilians, reduce intercommunal violence and restore peaceful relations between communities in central Mali; and reaffirmed the importance of fighting terrorism.

Key Issues and Options

Mali’s political transition is a key issue. This includes military-civil relations and the extent to which the military is ceding power to civilian leadership, stakeholders’ upholding the transition charter and progress in advancing envisioned reforms, especially those concerning the electoral process.

Recurring issues related to the Council’s consideration of Mali remain important: progress in implementing the 2015 peace agreement, the stabilisation of central Mali and protection of civilians, and the overall security situation. When renewing

MINUSMA’s mandate last June, the Council updated benchmarks for assessing progress on the implementation of the peace agreement (security sector reform, constitutional and decentralisation reforms, the development of the north, and the participation of women). The mandate renewal also created two benchmarks for the situation in Mali’s centre: on restoring the Malian state presence and on fighting impunity.

Sanctions, which were established in 2017 to pressure the peace agreement’s signatory parties to speed up its implementation, remain a Council tool. Members could consider how the sanctions regime might be used in support of the political transition.

Council Dynamics

Since the coup d’état, the Council has sought to support ECOWAS’s mediation efforts and back whatever agreement it concluded (even before the coup, amid the major protests against President Keita, Council members deferred to ECOWAS’s mediation efforts to resolve that crisis). Following the ECOWAS-brokered transition, the Council acted to support the agreement by welcoming the new arrangements and further setting out its expectations that the new authorities should complete the transition in 18 months while continuing to implement the 2015 peace agreement and carrying out efforts to stabilise central Mali and to combat terrorism.

France is the penholder on Mali. At the time of writing, it had not been announced who would assume the chairmanship of the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee from Ambassador José Singer Weisinger of the Dominican Republic, which is concluding its Council term.

Colombia

Expected Council Action

In January, the Council is expected to receive a briefing from Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia

Carlos Ruiz Massieu on recent developments in Colombia and the Secretary-General’s latest 90-day report on the mission.

The mandate of the Verification Mission

expires on 25 September 2021.

Key Recent Developments

The final quarter of 2020 witnessed increased

UN DOCUMENTS ON COLOMBIA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2545 (25 September 2020) renewed the mandate of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia until 25 September 2021. **Secretary-General’s Report S/2020/943** (25 September 2020) was the most recent 90-day report. **Security Council Letter S/2020/1023** (16 October 2020) contained a meeting record of the Security Council’s quarterly meeting on Colombia, held on 14 October 2020. **Security Council Press Statement SC/14332** (19 October 2020) reiterated the support of Council members for the peace process in Colombia.

Colombia

public discourse around the implementation of the November 2016 Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace between the government of Colombia and the former rebel group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). The persistent violence against communities, including indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, and the killing of former FARC-EP members, human rights defenders and social leaders continues to complicate the implementation of the 2016 agreement and was highlighted on several occasions in recent months.

In late October 2020, hundreds of former FARC-EP members embarked on a march to the capital Bogotá to protest the continued violence against former combatants who have laid down their arms as part of the peace agreement. Participants in the peaceful protest, called the “pilgrimage for life and peace”, started marching from various regions in Colombia and arrived in Bogotá on 1 November. The protest was sparked by the 16 October killing, in the southern town of Mesetas in the department of Meta, of demobilised combatant Juan de Jesús Monroy, who led reintegration activities for former combatants in his region. Protesters demanded a meeting with President Iván Duque and called on the government to protect former combatants.

By 15 December 2020, the Verification Mission had documented the killing of 244 former FARC combatants since the peace agreement was signed. In his 25 September report on Colombia, the Secretary-General said that “the unrelenting violence against former combatants continues to take a toll on the reintegration process and the consolidation of peace more broadly”.

Following the protests, Duque and Emilio Archila, the Presidential Counsellor for Stabilisation and Consolidation, met with representatives from the FARC party on 6 November 2020. This marked the second time Duque met with former FARC members during his presidency, and the first such meeting held in the presidential palace. After the meeting, Archila announced that the sides had agreed to study additional measures to protect former combatants and that the government intended to deploy officials to territories where ex-combatants live to tailor better regional security arrangements. He

also said that the government will speed up efforts to buy land in former territorial areas for training and reintegration (TATRs) to be allocated to former combatants, as well as build or improve housing in those areas. The Secretary-General has often emphasised that the issue of land allocation for former combatants is one of the most pressing matters for the reintegration process. In his 25 September report, he expressed hope that the government will fulfil its objective of purchasing plots of land for nine former TATRs by the end of 2020.

Duque tweeted that at the 6 November 2020 meeting, the government reiterated its will to build “peace with legality”—a term his government uses to describe its strategy with regard to the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement. FARC members have continuously criticised this strategy as a narrow interpretation of the peace agreement. During the meeting, Duque also committed to personally visiting, during his term, all 20 former TATRs that he had not yet visited. On 17 December 2020, Duque visited a TATR in the municipality of Dabeiba, department of Antioquia. While there, he announced the purchase of 17 hectares of land for housing plans and productive projects to benefit former combatants and their families.

On 25 November 2020, Archila and several other government officials testified in a public hearing held by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), the judicial component of the transitional justice system established by the 2016 Peace Agreement. The SJP summoned the officials to update the court about the government’s compliance with its 30 July 2020 order calling on government officials to increase implementation of the peace agreement’s mechanisms for the protection of ex-combatants. Among other things, the SJP called for the National Commission on Security Guarantees, the body charged under the peace agreement with developing a public policy for dismantling criminal organisations and their support networks, to increase the frequency of its meetings and to present guidelines and an action plan for the policy within 60 days (that is, by 30 September). Duque convened the Commission on 12 August after a long hiatus, last having done so on 9 January. At the time of writing, the National Commission had yet to present guidelines and an action plan for the policy.

At the public hearing, Archila expressed the government’s commitment to the security of former FARC members while asserting that those perpetrating most of the attacks against former combatants are members of armed criminal organisations, FARC dissidents and groups such as the guerrilla group Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN). He also detailed protection measures carried out by the government, including the deployment of members of the public security forces in and around former TATRs.

The Security Council last discussed Colombia on 14 October 2020 when it received a briefing from Ruiz Massieu. Ruiz Massieu called on actors in Colombia to use the tools contained in the 2016 agreement to address the challenges associated with recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. He noted that peacebuilding and pandemic recovery efforts should be complementary and focus on increasing state presence in rural areas. Several Council members expressed support for the components of the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non-Repetition: the SJP, the Truth Commission, and the Unit for the Search for Persons Deemed as Missing. They welcomed recent high-level confessions by former FARC members regarding past crimes as a sign of progress towards achieving justice and reconciliation. In its statement, Russia requested more information from the Verification Mission on similar confessions by state participants in the conflict.

On 28 and 29 October 2020, Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed conducted a virtual visit to Colombia, along with Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka and Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo. The aim of the visit was to highlight the importance of resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The delegation met virtually with Duque, women human rights defenders and women leaders to discuss advances and challenges in implementing the 2016 Agreement.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 15 December 2020 statement, Michelle Bachilet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, condemned violence carried out by non-state armed groups, various criminal groups and other

armed elements in Colombia targeting peasants and indigenous and Afro-Colombian people. According to the statement, up to that point in 2020, the UN Human Rights Office in Colombia had documented 66 massacres in which a total of 255 people were killed across 18 departments and had received information about the killing of 120 human rights defenders. Bachelet noted that violence has been normalised in Colombia after decades of armed conflict and called on the Colombian authorities “to take stronger and much more effective action to protect the population from this appalling and pervasive violence”.

Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council remains to support the implementation of the peace agreement in Colombia. The need to implement the agreement fully—as opposed to focusing only on selected aspects—continues to be a key factor for Council members.

The persistent violence in the country is a long-standing concern for the Council. This issue was addressed in numerous Council press statements calling for the National Commission on Security Guarantees to make progress in devising a plan to dismantle criminal organisations in the country. Some Council members may therefore wish to inquire about advances in this regard.

A future issue for the Council will be the possible expansion of the mandate of the Verification Mission to include monitoring compliance with the sentences handed down by the SJP. In resolution 2545, which most recently renewed the mandate of the Verification Mission, the Council expressed its readiness to consider adding this task to the

mandate of the Verification Mission, based on the conclusion of an inter-institutional consultation process coordinated by the Colombian government. The resolution referenced the need to consider the issue in “a timely manner”, to reflect the view of Council members that the consultations led by the Colombian authorities should conclude within a certain timeframe to allow the mission sufficient time to prepare for undertaking a new role before the SJP begins handing down sentences. The SJP is expected to begin handing down sentences in the latter part of 2021.

On 29 November 2020, Duque announced that he had instructed Archila, Minister of Justice and Law Wilson Ruiz and the Colombian Foreign Ministry to make an official request for the expansion of the Verification Mission’s mandate to include monitoring of the SJP’s sentences. After receiving the official request from the Colombian government, the Council will need to adopt a resolution authorising the expanded mandate. Ahead of that decision, Council members may request information from the Secretariat on relevant operational issues, such as which sentences will be verified or whether the mission will require specific expertise. Members can request such information in the form of a Secretary-General’s letter, or they could convene a meeting to receive a briefing from a Secretariat official. Some Council members may suggest that the modalities of the Verification Mission’s role in monitoring compliance with SJP sentences should be articulated by taking into consideration the

views of all relevant stakeholders, including the FARC party.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the peace process in Colombia. While they have generally been deferential towards the government, some differences in tone have emerged since 2019. Some Council members have been more critical of such issues as the continued insecurity in rural areas and the government’s uneven approach to implementing various aspects of the agreement. Russia’s statement during the 14 October 2020 meeting criticised the government’s response to protests that took place in September following the death of a citizen in police custody, while alleging a “noticeable build-up of a repressive component in the actions of the authorities”.

Incoming Council member Norway has historically played a role in the peace process in Colombia, as it was invited by the FARC and the Colombian government to serve as a guarantor of the 2016 peace agreement along with Cuba. Norway and Cuba, together with the Colombian government and the FARC, participate in the Commission for the Follow-up, Promotion and Verification of the Implementation of the Final Agreement (CSIVD)—the main forum for dialogue between the parties regarding the implementation of the peace agreement.

The UK is the penholder on Colombia.

Syria

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Though the 5 March 2020 ceasefire agreed by Russia and Turkey in Syria’s north-west is generally holding, numerous incidents

of shelling and aerial attacks persist. Syrian government military forces continue to attack various armed groups, including jihadist factions, around Idlib and across Syria’s north-west. This comes in the wake of media reports in early December that Turkey had withdrawn from three additional observation points and military outposts in the region, following their departure from several such posts in November.

The deteriorating security situation in the north-west has also caused civilian harm: speaking to the Council on 25 November 2020, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Ramesh Rajasingham noted that at least eight civilians were killed due to shelling and airstrikes in the region during the previous month. Since the March ceasefire agreement, “240,000 displaced people have returned to towns and villages in southern Idlib and

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA Security Council Resolution 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. **Secretary-General’s Report S/2020/1195** (11 December 2020) was the regular 60-day report on the implementation of humanitarian resolutions by all parties to the conflict in Syria. **Security Council Meeting Record S/2020/1147** (25 November 2020) was a letter from the president of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the permanent representatives of Council member states containing the record of the 25 November open VTC meeting on Syria’s humanitarian and political situation.

western Aleppo,” he said. “These places are now, again, coming under attack”.

The security situation also remains tenuous in Syria’s south-west. In the Deraa governorate, local media have reported that there have been nearly 800 attacks since June 2020 on government officials, former opposition members, and Syrian and Russian military personnel involving targeted assassinations, landmines, improvised explosive devices, and other means, with over 500 civilians also reportedly killed.

Briefing the Council on 16 December 2020, Special Envoy Geir O. Pedersen described the fourth session of the Constitutional Committee, which was convened in person in Geneva from 30 November to 4 December. At the insistence of the Syrian government, the agenda of the meeting centred on “national foundations and principles”, such as countering terrorism and sanctions relief, while the opposition had argued that the agenda should move on to constitutional principles, rights and freedoms, or the structure of the constitution. Before the session started, members of the Constitutional Committee reached an agreement, saying that though the agenda would revolve around “national foundations and principles”, the fifth round will transition to a discussion of constitutional issues.

Pedersen told the Council on 16 December 2020 that “given the deep divides in Syria, in the region, and internationally, forging a consensus on exactly how to bring about...a truly constructive diplomacy is proving very difficult”. Nonetheless, Pedersen argued that the parties of the Constitutional Committee did share common ground and that plans for the next round of meetings, currently scheduled to be conducted in person in Geneva during the week of 25 January, would therefore go forward. The agreed agenda for that meeting—discussion of constitutional principles—may result in the beginning of a drafting phase, which Pedersen recently expressed hope could be “possible to start...with the next few rounds of discussions”.

While progress on the political track remains halting, Syria’s humanitarian situation continues to worsen. Speaking to the Council on 16 December 2020, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock noted that “even as active conflict in some areas [in Syria] has subsided, economic decay and the compounding impact

of COVID-19 are driving deterioration in people’s lives”. According to OCHA, getting an accurate number of Syria’s COVID-19 cases is difficult because of low testing capacity and significant community spread of the disease, among other reasons. Meanwhile, there appears to be a particularly high level of coronavirus infections in Syria’s north-east and north-west. The growing number of cases continues to further degrade Syria’s damaged health care system: by 9 December, 1,618 of all COVID-19 recorded cases in Syria’s north-west were healthcare workers, up significantly from the 693 reported on 9 November.

Continuing economic decline and rising food insecurity have also had far-reaching effects on the country. After stabilising for a short period this autumn, the Syrian pound has declined again recently, with a devaluation of some 15 percent over the last several weeks. This has led to further increases in the price of basic goods for families whose economic situation was already perilous. The World Food Programme regularly assesses the number of Syrians considered food insecure, which it now estimates at over 9.3 million.

Finally, the Council’s deep disagreements around the use of chemical weapons in Syria have again been on display in recent weeks. On 11 December 2020, Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Director-General Fernando Arias updated the Council on the status of Syria’s compliance with the OPCW as part of the Council’s regular monthly briefing on the implementation of resolution 2118, which requires the verification and destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons stockpiles. Arias concluded that “to date, considering the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved, the declaration submitted by Syria still cannot be considered accurate and complete”. This position was also echoed by High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu, who briefed the Council alongside Arias.

Arias also updated the Council on the Syrian government’s failure to respond to a 20 July 2020 letter he sent to Syria’s deputy foreign minister, following the 9 July decision by the OPCW’s Executive Council to condemn Syria’s use of chemical weapons in Ltamenah, Syria, in March 2017. The decision and subsequent letter requested that Syria declare to the OPCW not only where

the chemical weapons used in the attacks were “developed, produced, stockpiled, and operationally stored for delivery” but also “all of the chemical weapons it currently possesses”. Arias told the Council he notified the OPCW Executive Council and States Parties on 14 October 2020 that Syria had not fulfilled any of the requirements called for in the 9 July decision.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 20 November 2020 press briefing note, Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, expressed deep concern about reports of the ongoing detention of civilians, including humanitarian workers in Idlib, in north-western Syria. She emphasised the “deeply troubling reports of executions following the detentions and so-called trials by the de facto authorities” in areas under the control of Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and other armed groups. Shamdasani underscored that the armed groups continue to impose rules and codes of conduct that “fundamentally violate a range of human rights protected by international law” and noted that any non-state actors exercising government-like functions in a territory are obliged to respect human rights norms.

Women, Peace and Security

On the occasion of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence (GBV) – which is observed each year from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10 December (International Human Rights Day) – Muhanad Hadi, the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, and Luay Shabaneh, the UN Population Fund Regional Director, issued a joint statement condemning all violence against women and girls affected by the Syrian conflict, including the violence committed against women human rights defenders and women humanitarian workers on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis. They called upon all those engaged in the response to COVID-19 in Syria to commit to ending gender-based violence and to addressing its root causes.

Key Issues and Options

With the completion of the Constitutional Committee’s fourth round and the announcement of a fifth-round session that ostensibly will focus on constitutional issues, Council members may wish to follow the committee’s work very closely in late January. Council members may want to refrain from putting pressure on the parties in anticipation of the January meeting but could re-evaluate the committee’s progress after the session. This

Syria

would allow the Council to determine whether enough progress has been achieved to warrant the Council's offering support for future rounds of meetings, or other steps should be taken to reinvigorate the talks. Given ongoing security challenges in north-western Syria, rising COVID-19 cases, and the onset of winter, some members may request more in-depth information from OCHA on what steps the Council could potentially pursue to ameliorate the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the region.

Council Dynamics

The Council remains deeply divided on Syria's political, humanitarian and chemical weapons files. Despite OPCW Director-General Arias' 11 December 2020 briefing to the Council, discord amongst Council's members persists on the chemical weapons file. There are also stark cleavages between Council members over the way forward on the humanitarian file. Positive, albeit modest, developments on the Constitutional Committee may help improve Council dynamics

on the political track. While there is broad agreement among Council members that the work of the committee is a generally positive development, some members have become openly concerned about the committee's lack of progress. Council members will be keen to see if the fifth-round meetings planned for January will finally usher in fruitful discussions on a new constitution and perhaps initiate a drafting process.

Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Challenges of Maintaining Peace and Security in Fragile Contexts

Expected Council Action

As president of the Security Council in January, Tunisia is organising an open debate on the challenges of maintaining international peace and security in fragile contexts.

Background

The open debate intends to focus on the various challenges faced by countries in fragile contexts, in particular on the African continent. The discussion is likely to examine the drivers that contribute to creating fragile contexts, their effects, and the role of the Security Council in addressing them.

In Africa, multiple factors contribute to creating fragile contexts, including insecurity, intercommunal violence, organised crime, terrorism, violent extremism, socio-economic inequality, weak governance, youth marginalisation, the illegal exploitation of natural resources, competition for scarce resources, and climate change. These drivers also have the potential to contribute to armed conflict and exacerbate threats to international peace and security.

The Council mandates several UN missions in African countries facing these complex challenges, including the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic

Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA); the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, declared a global health crisis on 11 March 2020 by the World Health Organization, is also relevant in this context. Resolution 2532, adopted on 1 July 2020 following an arduous negotiation, demanded an immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on the Council's agenda in support of the Secretary-General's global ceasefire appeal to combat the pandemic. The resolution also recognised the risks to fragile states that have been affected by conflict, cautioning that peacebuilding and development gains made by countries in transition and in post-conflict situations could be reversed as a result of the pandemic. On 9 September 2020, Security Council members held an open videoconference (VTC) on the implementation of resolution 2532. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock said the weakest, most fragile and conflict-affected countries would be those worst affected by COVID-19 in the medium and long term. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo said the erosion of

trust in public institutions "increases fragility and has the potential to drive instability".

The Council has engaged on several of the factors that contribute to fragile contexts in both thematic and country-specific items on its agenda. As a recent example, Security Council members held a virtual, high-level open debate on 3 November 2020 on "contemporary drivers of conflict and insecurity", under the Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace agenda at the initiative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, which looked at the security implications of climate change and COVID-19, among other factors.

Council Dynamics

Some Council members hold conservative views of what constitutes a threat to peace and security. These members are likely to be more reluctant for the Council to engage on certain issues, including in relation to climate change and some socio-economic factors. Russia and China have expressed concern that Council involvement on such issues encroaches on the prerogatives of other UN entities, which they maintain are better equipped to deal with them. Russia has been the most notably vocal and often cautions about the value of maintaining the division of labour between the UN's principal organs and its peace and security, development and human rights pillars.

UN DOCUMENTS ON MAINTAINING PEACE AND SECURITY IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2556 (18 December 2020) renewed the mandate of MONUSCO until 20 December 2021. S/RES/2552 (12 November 2020) renewed the mandate of MINUSCA until 15 November 2021. S/RES/2540 (28 August 2020) renewed the mandate of UNSOM until 31 August 2021. S/RES/2532 (1 July 2020) supported the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. S/RES/2531 (29 June 2020) renewed the mandate of MINUSMA until 30 June 2021. S/RES/2514 (12 March 2020) renewed the mandate of UNMISS until 15 March 2021. Security Council Letters S/2020/1090 (3 November 2020) contained the record of the open debate on "contemporary drivers of conflict and insecurity". S/2020/897 (11 September 2020) contained the record of the briefings and statements from the 9 September 2020 VTC on the implementation of resolution 2532.

Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Challenges of Maintaining Peace and Security in Fragile Contexts

The security implications of climate change is a particularly controversial issue in the Council. Most Council members currently champion the organ's engagement on this issue. They have emphasised that factors such as drought, water scarcity, food insecurity, and desertification that are caused or

exacerbated by climate change increase the risk of violent conflict. Russia, China and the US, however, have strong reservations about the Council's engagement on this issue. The US has resisted efforts to incorporate climate-security language in Council outcomes on Iraq, Haiti and other matters.

After initial concerns raised by China and South Africa about the COVID-19 pandemic's link with the maintenance of peace and security, members appear to recognise and agree on its potential peace and security implications.

West Africa and the Sahel

Expected Council Action

In January, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative and head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), will brief the Council to present the Secretary-General's semi-annual report on West Africa and the Sahel.

Key Recent Developments

Terrorist groups continue to destabilise the Sahel and fuel intercommunal violence. Boko Haram and a splinter group, the Islamic State in West Africa Province, remain a threat to north-eastern Nigeria and to other countries in the Lake Chad Basin. In recent months, presidential elections triggered political violence in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, where incumbents ran for controversial third terms.

Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau claimed responsibility for the killing of 78 rice farmers on 28 November 2020 in Zabarmari village, about an hour from Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. (Some reports estimate that 110 people were killed.) A Security Council press statement on 30 November condemned the attacks "in the strongest terms". In a 4 September 2020 white paper to Security Council members, the UN raised new warnings about food insecurity and the risk of famine in north-eastern Nigeria, Yemen, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Council members discussed the food security crises at a 17 September briefing on conflict-induced hunger.

Nigeria faces other security challenges. Worsening banditry violence in the north killed over 1,100 people in the first half of 2020, according to Amnesty International. On 11 December 2020, more than 300 boys were kidnapped from their secondary school

in north-western Katsina State. A statement by Secretary-General António Guterres condemning the incident attributed the abduction to "suspected bandits". Boko Haram has claimed responsibility, which, if true, would reflect an expansion in its area of operations; on 17 December, it was reported that many of the boys had been released. Earlier, nationwide protests against police brutality turned violent on 20 October 2020 when soldiers fired at demonstrators in Lagos, killing at least a dozen people; this triggered looting and the burning of police stations and government buildings across Nigeria.

In the Sahel, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) brokered the establishment of a transitional government in Mali for an 18-month period following the 18 August 2020 coup d'état, which ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. (For more, see Security Council Report's January Forecast on Mali). Violent extremist groups continue an insurgency in Burkina Faso marked by human rights violations by terrorist groups as well as by security forces and self-defence militias that has resulted in the internal displacement of over one million people. UN officials have also raised alarms about crisis levels of food insecurity, which now affects 3.3 million, with pockets of famine in the country's north; the situation was discussed at the 17 September Council briefing on conflict-induced hunger. Niger continues to be destabilised by spill-over violence from Mali and Burkina Faso, and by Boko Haram in its Diffa region. On 12 December 2020, gunmen killed at least 27 people and burned 800 to 1,000 homes in Toumour village in Diffa.

In Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, Presidents

Alpha Condé and Alassane Ouattara, respectively, ran for controversial third terms. (Condé pushed through a constitutional change in March to the two-term limit, while Ouattara argued that Côte d'Ivoire's revised 2016 constitution reset his terms.)

Guinea's election was held on 18 October 2020, with Condé winning 59.5 percent of the vote. Post-electoral violence caused 12 deaths, according to Human Rights Watch, amid a crackdown on opposition protests.

In Côte d'Ivoire, Ouattara decided to run for a third term after the death in July 2020 of his designated successor, Amadou Gon Coulibaly. The opposition boycotted the 31 October poll, which Ouattara won with over 94 percent of the vote. On 2 November, opposition candidates announced that they were creating a transitional government to prepare new elections. Political violence with ethnic undertones escalated, and at least 12 opposition members were arrested. To de-escalate the situation, Ouattara met for talks on 11 November with Henri Konan Bédié, the 86-year-old former president and candidate in the race who had been named head of the opposition's transitional government. According to government figures released that day, 85 people had been killed in election-related violence since 10 August: 34 deaths occurred before the election, 20 on election day, and 31 afterwards. Almost 22,000 people had fled to neighbouring countries amid the political tensions, according to the UN Refugee Agency, of which more than 20,000 went to Liberia. By 2 December, three opposition members remained in detention, including former prime minister Pascal Affi N'Guessan, and nine others had been released on conditional bail, according to Human Rights Watch.

UN DOCUMENTS ON WEST AFRICA AND THE SAHEL [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/7](#) (28 July 2020) expressed concern about the potential of the COVID-19 pandemic to exacerbate existing fragilities in West Africa and the Sahel. [Security Council Press Statement SC/14367](#) (30 November 2020) condemned the killing of civilians during the 28 November terrorist attack in north-east Nigeria.

West Africa and the Sahel

Burkina Faso held its presidential election on 22 November 2020 although some areas were unable to conduct polls because of the insecurity. President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was re-elected with 57.87 percent of the vote. Niger is scheduled to hold legislative and president elections on 27 December.

The UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) is due to conclude by the end of December 2020 after 21 years in the country. On 11 December, Chambas and Assistant Secretary-General for Africa Bintou Keita attended a closing ceremony at UNIOGBIS headquarters in anticipation of its conclusion. The mission's departure—decided in February 2019 by the Council—follows interference by the military in February 2020 when it occupied government buildings to help install Umaro Sissoco Embaló as president while the Supreme Court was still considering challenges by his opponent to the results of the December 2019 election.

At a 10 August 2020 Council meeting, Special Representative and head of UNIOGBIS Rosine Sori-Coulibaly said that there had been “arbitrary arrests, intimidation and detention” of opponents of the new administration, creating a “hostile environment” and leaving Guinea-Bissau in a “fragile situation”. Sori-Coulibaly warned that UNIOGBIS was unlikely to fulfil its mandate, with urgent reforms, such as the constitutional review, still incomplete. UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Executive Director Ghada Fathi Waly expressed concern about the “resurgence of drug trafficking and the re-emerging influence of criminal operations in the country”. Reporting earlier in 2020 by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, which supports the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, had flagged Guinea-Bissau as a destination for Central Asian nationals who had travelled from Syria to several African countries,

where the monitoring team assessed that they “intend to lie low”.

On 7 September 2020, the Supreme Court confirmed Sissoco Embaló's victory, concluding the legal challenges to the December 2019 election. The ECOWAS Mission in Guinea-Bissau, deployed to the country in 2012, withdrew in September.

Key Issues and Options

The threat of terrorism remains a key issue, as are Chambas' good offices activities around electoral and political tensions. UNOWAS support to post-conflict countries where peace operations have withdrawn is also important. UNIOGBIS in Guinea-Bissau will be the most recent operation to depart from the region and where UNOWAS is expected to increase its good offices role. Drug trafficking, intercommunal violence and piracy are other regional threats that are linked at times with terrorist groups.

In addition to security initiatives, addressing structural causes of instability, such as underdevelopment, poor governance and climate change, remain a priority, including through the UN's Sahel Strategy, the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) Priority Investment Programme, and the Lake Chad Basin regional stabilisation strategy. UNOWAS is responsible for supporting, through political advocacy and convening, the UN's Sahel Strategy, enhancing UN system collaboration and promoting coherent international responses to address such challenges in the region. The UN has been seeking to further enhance the mission's collaboration with regional organisations and has proposed establishing a UNOWAS liaison office in Abuja where ECOWAS is headquartered. Implementation of Mali's 2015 peace agreement is also frequently cited as key for the Sahel's stabilisation.

The Council may adopt a presidential statement, a common practice following UNOWAS briefings. Such a statement could

address the closure of UNIOGBIS, recalling the importance of maintaining international support for Guinea-Bissau, including through the Peacebuilding Commission, and reiterating calls for UNODC to increase its presence. It could further note the Council's intention to review the Guinea-Bissau sanctions regime. Separately, members may consider the Secretary-General's long-standing proposal to establish a Guinea-Bissau Panel of Experts—even for an initial period of just some months—to provide objective information to the Council, including assisting it in delisting decisions or ending the sanctions regime.

Council Dynamics

Members value the good offices activities of Chambas and of UNOWAS's conflict prevention role. They share concerns about the worsening security situation in the region, but it is not clear what concrete measures the Council is prepared to take. UN peacekeeping is not seen as appropriate for conducting counter-terrorism activities, so members seek to support regional forces, including bilaterally, such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) and the Multinational Joint Task Force, while encouraging the UN system and other actors to tackle structural problems that contribute to instability. Members have had diverging views on how the UN and Council should support the FC-G5S. However, substantive discussion of support, such as providing UN funding or the role of the UN Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, tends to occur during Council meetings on Mali and the FC-G5S.

The West African member traditionally serves as penholder on UNOWAS. Since 2018, there have been co-penholders, with Belgium and Niger as co-penholders during 2020. It is unclear which incoming member may replace Belgium in this role.

Counter-Terrorism

Expected Council Action

As president of the Security Council in January 2021, Tunisia is organising a debate on threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts, focusing on international cooperation in combating terrorism. The debate is intended to commemorate 20 years since the adoption of resolution 1373 in 2001, that, among other things, placed barriers on the movement, organisation and fund-raising activities of terrorist groups and their supporters and established the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC). A presidential statement is a possible outcome.

Background

On 28 September 2001, following the terrorist attacks that took place in New York, Washington, D.C. and Pennsylvania on 11 September 2001, the Security Council adopted resolution 1373, acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The resolution set out various measures to be implemented by member states to address the threat of terrorism in a global, coordinated and comprehensive manner. These included criminalising the financing of terrorism; freezing without delay any funds related to persons involved in acts of terrorism; denying all forms of financial support for terrorist groups; suppressing the provision of safe haven, sustenance or support for terrorists; sharing information with other governments on any groups practising or planning terrorist acts; cooperating with other governments in the investigation, detection, arrest, extradition and prosecution of those involved in such acts; criminalising active and passive assistance for terrorism in domestic law and bringing violators to justice; and implementing effective border-control measures. The resolution also established the CTC, a subsidiary body composed of all 15 Council members and initially chaired by the UK, to monitor implementation of the resolution by member states.

Since then, the Council has adopted over 20 resolutions that pertain to the issue, with

the majority of these being adopted in the past five years. Some earlier relevant resolutions include resolution 1535, adopted in March 2004, establishing the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) as a special political mission to assist the CTC in its work. Resolution 1624, adopted in September 2005, prohibited incitement to commit terrorist acts while resolution 2178, adopted in September 2014, dealt with countering foreign terrorist fighters and countering violent extremism.

The CTC and CTED use various tools to monitor and facilitate the implementation of the relevant resolutions. For example, CTED conducts country visits on the committee's behalf to assess member states' counter-terrorism efforts. These visits can include experts from relevant international, regional and subregional organisations, such as the AU, the EU, the Financial Action Task Force, an intergovernmental organisation on combating money laundering), the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Criminal Police Organization, the International Organization for Migration, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, the World Customs Organization, and other specialised bodies and institutions. In addition to country visits, assessment tools used include the Detailed Implementation Survey and the Overview of Implementation Assessment. CTED's mandate was most recently renewed until 31 December 2021 by resolution 2395 of 2017.

The CTC also holds regular closed and open briefings. Last year, for example, the CTC held an open videoconference (VTC) briefing on 9 October 2020 on "Emerging trends in violent extremism conducive to terrorism and addressing violent extremism through a human rights-based approach", and on 15 October 2020, it held a closed VTC meeting on maritime security. On 23 November 2020, the Council received its annual briefing from the chairs of its counter-terrorism-related committees, including a briefing

by Ambassador Tarek Ladeb (Tunisia), chair of the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee.

Key Issues

While progress has been made in the last two decades, terrorism continues to pose a threat to international peace and security, requiring collective action on national, regional and international levels. The January 2021 debate presents the opportunity to assess progress made since the adoption of resolution 1373 and to highlight possible gaps and challenges. The debate could also serve to highlight future priority areas.

Some key issues that may be addressed at the debate include compliance by member states with the relevant resolutions, including resolution 1373, and how the Council can support the work of the CTC. Another issue is how to further facilitate cooperation among the CTC and CTED, other subsidiary bodies of the Council and relevant specialised bodies and institutions.

A further issue relates to the impact the COVID-19 pandemic may have on efforts to combat terrorism. 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. (In June 2020, 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.)

The US is the penholder on counter-terrorism. Ambassador Tarek Ladeb (Tunisia) chairs the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee for the period 2020-2021.

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. S/RES/2395 (21 December 2017) extended CTED's mandate until 31 December 2021. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/5 (11 March 2020) was on countering terrorism and extremism in Africa. Security Council Letters S/2020/1143 (23 November 2020) was the annual briefing from the chairs of the Council's counter-terrorism-related committees. S/2020/243 (27 March 2020) was from the chair of the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee, containing its programme of work for 2020. 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. Other Documents "The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism, countering terrorism and countering violent extremism", CTED paper, June 2020. Available at: <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CTED-Paper%E2%80%9393-The-impact-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic-on-counter-terrorism-and-countering-violent-extremism.pdf>

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In January, the Council is expected to hold its monthly briefing on Yemen with Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock, and General Abhijit Guha, who heads the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement. In addition, the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee's Panel of Experts is expected to submit its final report to the committee.

Key Recent Developments

The war in Yemen persists across multiple frontlines as the Special Envoy maintains efforts to broker a nationwide ceasefire and resume a peace process. UN officials continue to highlight the growing risk of famine and have raised concerns about the impact of the reported intention of the outgoing Trump administration to designate the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organisation.

The latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis was released on 3 December 2020. (Last year the UN was unable to conduct this annual analysis because of access restrictions in Houthi-controlled areas.) The analysis indicated that pockets of famine-like conditions (IPC Phase 5) have returned and warned that the number of people experiencing catastrophic food insecurity could nearly triple from 16,500 currently to 47,000 people between January and June 2021. It further found that the number of people experiencing Phase 4 food insecurity—emergency food insecurity conditions—is poised to increase from 3.6 million to 5 million people in the first half of 2021. Overall, 16.2 million people, more than half of Yemen's population of 30 million, will face Phase 3 "crisis" levels of food insecurity or worse by mid-2021. Intensified fighting, a deteriorating economy along with inflation, a locust plague and a drop-off in donor funding have contributed to the new hunger crisis in Yemen.

On 3 December 2020, David Beasley, Executive Director of the World Food Programme, met with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to request that the US not designate the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organisation as part of its maximum pressure campaign on Iran. One of the worries is that the designation could deter donors, shippers, insurers, and bankers from working in Yemen,

fearing criminal liability or sanctions for violating US law if their activities benefit the Houthis, who control territory where 70 per cent of the population lives. On 8 December, the US Treasury Department announced that it was sanctioning Iran's recently appointed ambassador in Sana'a, Hasan Irlu, for acting for or on behalf of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force and whose "appointment as an envoy to the Houthi rebels in Yemen demonstrates the Iranian regime's indifference to resolving the conflict, which has led to the widespread suffering of millions of Yemenis". On 10 December, the Treasury Department announced sanctions on five Houthi officials from various security and intelligence services for committing serious human rights abuses.

Council members held their monthly meeting on Yemen during a closed videoconference (VTC) on 14 December 2020 with Griffiths, Lowcock and Guha. Griffiths apparently reported that he expected an announcement would soon be made by the government and the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) on the formation of a new government. A key aspect of the Saudi Arabia-brokered November 2019 Riyadh Agreement, a new government would enable the STC to participate in the government delegation at future peace talks. According to diplomats, Griffiths hoped to capitalise on the expected announcement to push for in-person talks between the government and the Houthis that he is seeking to organise in a bid to conclude the protracted negotiations on a joint declaration for a ceasefire, economic and humanitarian measures, and the resumption of the peace process. Lowcock reportedly indicated that famine was likely, but its severity would depend on humanitarian access, donor funding and a reduction in violence.

Ahead of the meeting, Council members issued a press statement that condemned the military escalation in Yemen and the 23 November 2020 Houthi attacks on oil facilities in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Members "called for the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, and for Yemen's parties to meet urgently under Martin Griffiths' auspices to bridge differences on the Joint Declaration". The press statement expressed alarm at the new IPC assessment and "called on all donors in the international community, including in the region, to step up

urgently and save lives by disbursing outstanding pledges...and making early and generous contributions in 2021". Among other points, members reiterated that all the parties must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, including those related to humanitarian access and the protection of civilians and civilian objects.

On 18 December 2020, President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi appointed the new power-sharing government. The 25-person cabinet will continue to be headed by Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed and include members of the STC and ministers of other major political parties. On 30 December, explosions at Aden's airport killed at least 22 people and wounded over 50 others, shortly after a plane carrying the new cabinet arrived from Saudi Arabia. No one on the government plane was reportedly hurt, according to a government spokesperson.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a closed Arria-formula meeting on 3 December 2020, the UN Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen (GEE) briefed the Security Council members on its third report, *A Pandemic of Impunity in a Tortured Land*, which details serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law (A/HRC/45/6). According to a subsequent press release from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the GEE denounced the "endemic impunity" for violations, which, they observed, has the "effect of fueling more abuses". In his remarks to Council members, Kamel Jendoubi, chair of the group, emphasised that the violations underline the "complete lack of respect for international law". The GEE observed that the human rights crisis in Yemen directly touches upon matters on the Security Council's agenda, including threats to international peace and security; protection of civilians in armed conflict; women, peace and security; sexual violence in conflict; and impediments to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, among others. The GEE called on the Security Council to refer the situation in Yemen to the International Criminal Court as well as more fully integrate human rights into the Security Council's regular agenda. They noted, according to the press release, that this action would "send a powerful message...that there will be no impunity for serious violations of human rights".

Women, Peace and Security

For the second year in a row, Yemen tops the UN Population Fund's list of countries where the needs of women and girls in humanitarian emergencies are greatest. In its Humanitarian Action

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN [Security Council Press Statement SC/14384](#) (13 December 2020) called for the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement and for Yemen's parties to meet urgently to bridge differences on the joint declaration. [Human Rights Council Document A/HRC/45/6](#) (28 September 2020) was the third annual report of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen.

Yemen

Overview report for 2021, the UN's sexual and reproductive health agency made an appeal for \$100 million for Yemen. According to the report, published in December 2020, over 80 percent of the Yemeni population – including more than a million pregnant women, many acutely malnourished – require some form of assistance. Only half of Yemen's health facilities remain functional, and reports of gender-based violence are rising in the country, where humanitarian conditions continue to deteriorate, given the long-lasting political crisis complicated by internal displacement, food insecurity, outbreaks of cholera, and now COVID-19.

Key Issues and Options

The joint declaration for a nationwide ceasefire and restarting peace talks remains the main political initiative. The Houthi offensive in Marib governorate since the start of 2020 remains a significant threat to political talks, especially if fighting spreads to Marib city, which has become a political and economic stronghold for the government and where hundreds of thousands of displaced persons have relocated during the war. Sustaining and implementing the Saudi Arabia-overseen Riyadh Agreement between the government and the STC is another important issue. If

agreement is reached on Griffiths' proposed joint declaration, the Council may adopt a resolution to endorse the deal.

The risk of famine and the overall humanitarian situation remain critical. Not only are humanitarian access and more donor funding required for relief operations, but measures such as hard currency injections are needed to strengthen the Yemen rial. The potential US designation of the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organisation may exacerbate the situation and complicate political efforts, as Griffiths apparently indicated during his last briefing, noting that the peace process will require that the Houthis are able to travel.

The moored FSO Safer oil tanker, which poses the risk of a major oil spill off the coast of Hodeidah, is an equally vital issue. This includes the Houthis' fulfilling their most recent commitments to give a UN-led technical mission access to the tanker to assess its condition and make urgent repairs. Lowcock reported at the 14 December 2020 meeting that it is hoped that the mission can deploy in early February 2021.

Council Dynamics

Council members appear aligned in their support of the Special Envoy, continuing to back his efforts to reach an agreement on the joint declaration. Members further share concerns about the humanitarian situation and the FSO Safer. In the past year, members issued multiple press statements and press elements urging the parties to reach agreement on the declaration, calling on the Houthis to facilitate the UN technical mission's access to the oil tanker, and more recently highlighting the need for stakeholders and the international community to take measures to avert famine. At the 14 December 2020 closed VTC, the UK told members that it was willing to host the in-person talks that Griffiths hopes to organise. The UK co-hosted with Sweden an event on 10 December 2020 on "Averting Famine in Yemen" (via VTC) to consider the IPC analysis.

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

Cyprus

Expected Council Action

In January, the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) ahead of its 31 January expiry. Special Representative and head of mission Elizabeth Spehar is likely to brief on the latest UNFICYP report and recent developments in a closed videoconference. A representative from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs may also brief.

Key Recent Developments

Initially scheduled for April 2020, the presidential elections in northern Cyprus were postponed until October 2020 because of restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. After two rounds of voting, Ersin Tatar defeated incumbent Mustafa Akinçi to become the new Turkish Cypriot leader. The candidates' positions on the political solution to the Cyprus issue played a central role during

the campaign. Considered a moderate, Akinçi has been in favour of seeking reconciliation with the Greek Cypriots and has openly supported a federal solution to the Cyprus issue. By contrast, Tatar campaigned on a platform of exploring the possibility of a two-state solution and favouring closer relations with Turkey.

On 3 November 2020, Spehar hosted an informal meeting between Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades and Tatar. This was the first meeting between the two as the respective leaders of the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot communities. The meeting aimed to provide an opportunity for the Cypriot leaders to get acquainted and engage in an informal exchange of views on the political process. According to a press release issued by UNFICYP after the meeting, both Tatar and Anastasiades indicated that they would respond positively to the Secretary-General's commitment to exploring the possibility of an informal meeting

with the guarantor powers (Greece, Turkey and the UK) and the UN at an appropriate time.

The political process in Cyprus remains at an impasse since the latest round of negotiations broke down in July 2017. In 2020, engagement between Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders has been further limited by the COVID-19 pandemic and in anticipation of the election in Northern Cyprus. On 1 December, Jane Holl Lute—who since 2018 has been serving as a special envoy of the Secretary-General on the Cyprus dispute—visited Cyprus. Lute, whose core task is to consult with the Cypriot parties on finalising the terms of reference expected to serve as a basis for future negotiations, held separate meetings with Anastasiades and Tatar. In line with established practice, she has not made any public statements or comments on the substance of her discussions. According to media reports, both leaders reaffirmed their willingness to participate in an informal

UN DOCUMENTS ON CYPRUS [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2537](#) (28 July 2020) renewed the mandate of UNFICYP until 31 January 2021. [Secretary-General's Reports S/2020/685](#) (13 July 2020) was on UN good offices in Cyprus. [S/2020/682](#) (10 July 2020) was on UNFICYP. [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/9](#) (9 October 2020) reaffirmed the status of Varosha as set out in previous Council resolutions. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8766](#) (9 October 2020) was the adoption of S/PRST/2020/9.

Cyprus

meeting with the guarantor powers hosted by the Secretary-General.

On 9 October 2020, the Council held in-person consultations on Cyprus. The catalyst for the meeting, requested by the Republic of Cyprus, was the decision by the Turkish Cypriot authorities to open the beach and coastline of Varosha city to the public. Varosha is located on the Turkish Cypriot side of the buffer zone, a demilitarised area separating Turkish Cypriots in the north and Greek Cypriots in the south. The residents, who were predominantly Greek Cypriots, fled the city in 1974 after Turkish military forces intervened on the island following a coup d'état in Cyprus by Greek officers who were members of the Cyprus National Guard. Since then, Varosha has remained unpopulated and closed to the public. The city is under the control of the Turkish military, and UNFICYP supervises the ceasefire and maintains the buffer zone. The status of Varosha, which has remained disputed since 1974, is an important part of the greater unification talks.

The Council has pronounced itself on Varosha on several occasions, saying that it considers inadmissible any efforts to populate Varosha with people other than its original inhabitants and calling for the area to be transferred to UN administration. During the 9 October meeting, the Council adopted a presidential statement in which it reaffirmed the status of Varosha as set out in previous Council resolutions and called on the sides in Cyprus and the guarantor powers to engage in dialogue.

On 16 November 2020, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Northern Cyprus, including the city of Varosha. In his remarks to the media, Erdoğan reiterated Turkey's support for a two-state solution to the Cyprus issue. Erdoğan's visit and comments drew criticism from EU foreign policy

chief Josep Borrell, who reiterated that there was no alternative to a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem based on relevant Security Council resolutions.

Key Issues and Options

Since the collapse of the most recent round of unification talks in 2017, the Council has primarily been concerned with the lack of any meaningful progress on the political front and the diminishing prospects for advancing a political settlement of the Cyprus problem anytime soon. Although the Council has taken the view that the primary responsibility for finding a solution lies with the Cypriot sides, it could consider taking a more proactive approach to stimulate the process. An option would be to explore changing the mandate of UNFICYP, including seeking options for downsizing and for a possible exit strategy.

The newly elected Turkish Cypriot leader openly favours a two-state solution. This runs contrary to the parameters set in previous Council resolutions, which reaffirmed support for a settlement based on a bicomunal, bizonal federation with political equality.

Developments related to the broader political process have traditionally played a crucial role in guiding negotiations on the mandate renewal. While Lute has been engaged in a series of consultations with the parties on the way forward, Council members have received few, if any, substantial details about that engagement. Ahead of the mandate renewal in January, the Council could consider holding a private meeting with Lute about the prospects for progress on the political track.

Tensions over hydrocarbon resources off the coast of Cyprus are a growing concern for the Council. As was the case in the past, these tensions could affect the political process

negatively and carry potential risks for the security situation in the region.

Council Dynamics

Cyprus remains a low-intensity issue on the Council's agenda. Among the members with a special interest in Cyprus that follow the issue closely are France, Russia and the UK. The UK is also one of the guarantor powers under the 1960 treaty guaranteeing the independence, territorial integrity, and security of Cyprus.

While the Council is united in its support for the political process, members diverge somewhat on the conditions and timeframe for the unification talks. Some seem to share the view that this process cannot be open-ended and that the Council could apply pressure on the parties to revive the negotiations. However, Russia has strongly opposed any attempt to exert pressure on both sides and affect negotiations in any way, maintaining that the process must be Cypriot-led and Cypriot-owned in order to achieve lasting results.

The US has emphasised that peacekeeping missions must support political processes and that the Council should reconsider the mandates of missions where progress on the political track is absent. During past mandate renewal negotiations, the US has supported a comprehensive strategic review of the mission and timed benchmarks for an exit strategy tied to the political process. It remains uncertain whether the new US administration will dramatically shift position on Cyprus in general and UNFICYP in particular.

Most Council members seem wary of initiating drastic changes to the mission's mandate and size. In the absence of progress in the unification talks, the US position might gain more support from other members that have been cautious on this issue. Russia is likely to oppose any changes to the status quo.

Cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States

Expected Council Action

In January, the Security Council will hold a briefing on cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States (LAS) as an

initiative of Tunisia, which serves as president of the Council for the month. Secretary-General António Guterres and LAS Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit may brief.

Background and Key Recent Developments

Improving partnerships and cooperation with regional organisations has become an

UN DOCUMENTS ON COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UN AND THE LAS Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/11 (4 December 2020) further underscored the importance of developing effective partnerships between the UN and regional organisations, in particular the African Union. S/PRST/2019/5 (13 June 2019) supported the holding of an annual briefing by the Secretary-General of the LAS and of an annual informal meeting of members of the Security Council and the Council of the LAS. **Secretary-General's Report S/2020/898** (11 September 2020) was the latest biannual report on cooperation between the UN and regional and other organisations. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8548** (13 June 2019) was a briefing on cooperation between the Council and the League of Arab States.

Cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States

increasingly prominent theme for the Council and other parts of the UN system. Chapter VIII of the UN Charter envisioned cooperation and partnership between the Council and regional and sub-regional organisations. The Council has held an annual consultative meeting with the AU Peace and Security Council since 2007 and has received regular briefings from the EU. It has held debates and briefings on cooperation with several other bodies, including its first such briefing with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in January 2020.

There has been increasing consultation with the LAS, which was the first regional organisation to be granted observer status in the General Assembly. Representatives of the LAS have addressed the Council on several occasions as a result of the proliferation of regional conflicts. During Germany's presidency in September 2012, the Council held a high-level meeting on peace and security in the Middle East focusing on the relationship between the Council and the LAS. Its outcome was a presidential statement in support of the League's contribution to collective efforts for the peaceful settlement of conflicts in the Middle East and that also expressed the Council's determination to take steps to enhance cooperation. In May 2016, the Council held its first consultative meeting with members of the LAS in Cairo during the Council's visiting mission to Somalia, Kenya and Egypt.

The relationship was further developed during Kuwait's June 2019 Council presidency through a high-level briefing on cooperation between the Council and the LAS. Secretary-General Guterres and LAS Secretary-General Aboul Gheit briefed. The briefing also noted the opening, that month, of the UN liaison office to the LAS in Cairo, which had been in the works since 2016. The office is meant to increase collaboration related to conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. The office is small, but it plays an important role in maintaining the relationship between the two bodies and has been welcome by the LAS, which has indicated that it would like to see the office further strengthened.

In his 13 June 2019 briefing, Aboul Gheit presented several observations that he hoped would guide future LAS and UN cooperation. He stressed that any "fruitful cooperation" must allow for a permanent way to exchange information between the organisations. He called for increased cooperation, particularly with UN special representatives and envoys to Arab conflicts and areas but also beyond addressing current conflicts, to incorporating early-warning mechanisms and preventive diplomacy.

In a presidential statement adopted at the meeting, the Council encouraged the holding of an annual briefing by the LAS Secretary-General and expressed the Council's intention to consider further steps to promote closer cooperation between the UN and the LAS in many peace and security areas. The statement also encouraged an annual informal meeting between Security Council members and the LAS Council. Furthermore, it emphasised the importance of trilateral cooperation and coordination between the UN, the AU and the LAS on cross-regional peace and security issues.

Biannually, the Secretary-General releases a report on cooperation between the UN and regional organisations. The latest report, published on 11 September 2020, highlights several areas of cooperation with the LAS. For example, it notes that the Office of Counter-Terrorism has been working closely with the LAS member states' Interior Ministers Council in developing a regional counter-terrorism strategy that is aligned with the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, including two high-level meetings held in September 2019 and February 2020.

Cooperation between regional groups was further discussed on 23 November 2020 during a meeting between the Secretary-General and the heads of regional organisations, where a particular focus was how regional organisations can mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19. The most recent meeting on the cooperation between the Council and a regional organisation was held on 4 December with a focus on the AU. Secretary-General António Guterres and Mousa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AU

Commission, briefed the Council on ongoing collaboration. They also highlighted the role of Africa's several sub-regional bodies. Presidents Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger, and Kais Saied of Tunisia also participated. A presidential statement was adopted at that meeting.

Key Issues and Options

The upcoming meeting is being organised to further enhance the cooperation between the UN and the LAS in resolving conflicts, as many of the situations on the Council's agenda are wars in Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa. The meeting is also seen as a way to implement calls in the Council's September 2012 and June 2019 presidential statements regarding increased cooperation.

Both the Secretaries-General of the LAS and of the UN have called for ceasefires during the COVID-19 pandemic. Meeting participants may discuss how both calls for ceasefires complement each other and efforts to implement the ceasefires.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Several factors have, to date, limited cooperation between the Council and the LAS. The Arab-Israeli conflict and geopolitical competition in the region, demonstrated by the frequent vetoes cast by the US and Russia on Israel-Palestine and Syria, respectively, have complicated the ability of the two bodies to work together. During the last meeting in June 2019, Aboul Gheit warned against "the dangers of maintaining the status quo of the Palestinian situation" and condemned Israel's "continued oppressive practices". In contrast, the US reiterated its belief that Iran was "the most significant threat to regional peace and security".

Differences among Arab League countries have also hindered the organisation from playing a greater role and have been an obstacle to coherent policy positions. The LAS has a fairly small budget of \$60 million and does not benefit from the subregional organisations that represent a strength for the AU.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Expected Council Action

In January, the Council is expected to hold a briefing on the implementation of resolution 2532, which demanded a cessation of hostilities in all situations on the Council's agenda to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock are the anticipated briefers.

Background and Recent Developments

On 23 March 2020, Secretary-General António Guterres called for a global ceasefire to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in conflict-affected countries. On 1 July, the Security Council supported the Secretary-General's call when it adopted 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. The resolution exempted military operations against terrorist groups designated by the Security Council. It also requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the UN system, including country teams, accelerate their response to the pandemic.

US-China tensions caused the resolution to take more than three months to negotiate. A key sticking point was the US opposition to mentioning the World Health Organization (WHO), which the administration of US President Donald Trump has criticised during the crisis, along with China. (On 6 July 2020, the US notified Secretary-General António Guterres of its withdrawal from the WHO, effective 6 July 2021.) China, conversely, wanted a reference to the UN agency, which is mentioned in previous Council resolutions on health crises. A compromise was finally reached by adding language that said the Council had "considered" the General Assembly's 2 April 2020 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.

During a 9 September 2020 videoconference (VTC), Council members received briefings by DiCarlo, Lacroix and Lowcock on the implementation of resolution 2532. DiCarlo noted that after some encouraging initial responses to the Secretary-General's ceasefire appeal, many temporary truces had expired without extensions. She recalled the heightened risks to international peace and security posed by the pandemic—including the erosion of trust in public institutions, the aggravation of human rights violations and abuses, and the impact on political and peace processes—which "highlight the magnitude of the challenge of conflict prevention that lies before us". Both DiCarlo and Lacroix described how UN peace operations were adapting.

Lowcock similarly flagged the "indirect consequences of the pandemic" in fragile countries that "are dwarfing the impact of the virus itself", noting that these are "chiefly economic". He highlighted the importance of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and similar institutions in cushioning people from the worst effects of the global economic contraction to reduce the risks of instability and fragility. "To speak plainly, woefully inadequate economic and political action will lead to greater instability and conflicts in the coming years," he said. "More crises will be on this Council's agenda".

Throughout the crisis, the Council has held a number of meetings related to the pandemic. The Secretary-General first briefed members in a closed VTC on his ceasefire appeal and the impact of COVID-19 on peace operations and humanitarian crises on 9 April 2020. High-level debates were organised by Germany on 2 July 2020 to consider the pandemic's peace and security implications, on 12 August by Indonesia on the challenges to peacebuilding, and 24 September by Niger to consider global governance reforms post-COVID-19.

Several vaccines developed by late 2020 and the subsequent rollout of initial vaccinations in several countries has brought new hope for an end to the pandemic. During the 12 August 2020 Council debate, Sarah Cliffe of New York University's Center on

International Cooperation, identifying secondary impacts of the pandemic on peace and security, flagged the potential for unequal access to vaccines to become a conflict driver.

Key Issues and Options

The January briefing is being organised in connection with the request in resolution 2532 that the Secretary-General provide updates to the Council on UN efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic in countries in situations of armed conflict or affected by humanitarian crises and on the impact of COVID-19 on the ability of peacekeeping operations and special political missions to carry out their mandated priority tasks. Council meetings on the pandemic, including the 9 September 2020 VTC, have considered potential threats that the pandemic poses to international peace and security. Resolution 2532 recognised that the "unprecedented extent of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security".

No Council product is expected. The Council may, however, continue to hold periodic meetings to stay aware of and consider possible destabilising impacts of the pandemic. Such meetings could help prepare the Council to act quickly on looming peace and security threats as a result of the pandemic while, perhaps more significantly, also bringing attention to its socio-economic impacts that threaten international peace and security and prompting other relevant actors to address such problems.

Council Dynamics

Tunisia is organising this briefing as part of its January Council presidency. It served with France as co-penholders on resolution 2532. France and Tunisia had requested the Council's first briefing on 9 September 2020 to be updated on the implementation of resolution 2532.

In addition to the difficult resolution negotiations, Council meetings on the pandemic over the last nine months were punctuated by US interventions highly critical of China and the WHO. The quite inflammatory statements echoed those of the Trump administration

UN DOCUMENTS ON COVID-19 Security Council Resolution 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. Security Council Letters S/2020/1172 (4 December 2020) was from China containing the co-chairs' summary of the 25 November 2020 Arria-formula meeting on unilateral coercive measures. S/2020/663 (8 July 2020) contained the record of the briefings and statements from the 2 July open debate on the peace and security implications of pandemics and international health crises. 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".

COVID-19 Pandemic

amid the major COVID-19 outbreak in the US. President-elect Joe Biden has said he intends to reverse the US withdrawal from the WHO, and the new US administration is likely to seek to reduce divisiveness during Council discussions of the global health crisis.

Another area of difference that has

surfaced in Council consideration of the pandemic has been over sanctions. Russia and China often recall their view that sanctions, especially those imposed unilaterally, should be waived as they can undermine countries' capacity to respond to the pandemic, an action the Secretary-General has previously

suggested. These were points recalled at a 25 November Arrria-formula meeting on unilateral coercive measures, co-sponsored by China, Niger, Russia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and South Africa.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Expected Council Action

The Security Council expects to hold its quarterly open debate on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question” in January. A high-level UN official will brief.

Key Recent Developments

On 15 November 2020, the Israeli government announced that it was commencing bidding for the construction of more than 1,200 new housing units in the Givat Hama-tos settlement in eastern Jerusalem. Nickolay Mladenov, then Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, issued a statement the following day in which he called for the decision to be reversed, adding that it “would significantly damage prospects for a future contiguous Palestinian State and for achieving a negotiated two-State solution based on the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states”. He also reiterated the UN’s view of the illegality of settlements under international law.

On 10 December, Morocco agreed to resume diplomatic relations with Israel, becoming the fourth member state of the League of Arab States to initiate a rapprochement with Israel in 2020, along with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan. Following the announcement of Morocco’s decision, Moroccan King Mohammed VI called Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to assure him of Morocco’s continued commitment to the two-state solution. Among the Arab countries, Israel also has diplomatic relations with Egypt and Jordan, established in 1979 and 1994, respectively. Also on 10 December, the US agreed to recognise Morocco’s sovereignty over Western

Sahara, the disputed territory also claimed by the Polisario Front. (The Security Council established the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara [MINURSO] in 1991 in an effort to resolve this dispute.)

According to OCHA, by 14 December 2020 Israeli authorities had demolished 815 Palestinian structures—defined as “residential, livelihood-related, service-related or part of infrastructure”—in 2020 in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This represents the second-highest annual figure since OCHA began keeping such statistics in 2009, topped only by the number of such demolitions in 2016.

The two main Palestinian factions, Hamas and Fatah, held reconciliation talks in Istanbul, Turkey, from 22 to 24 September 2020 and in Cairo, Egypt, from 16 to 18 November. Fatah announced that the two parties had agreed to hold Palestinian legislative and presidential elections following the Istanbul discussion, but the parties reportedly could not agree on a timetable for the elections during the Cairo meetings. Hamas has run the Gaza Strip since it took control of the territory during armed conflict with Fatah in June 2007; Fatah runs the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

On 17 November 2020, the Palestinian Authority announced that it would resume cooperation with Israel on security and civilian matters. This cooperation had been severed in May 2020 in light of the Israeli government’s threat to annex parts of the West Bank, a move that Israel agreed not to carry out as part of its normalisation agreement with the UAE. The resumption of cooperation with Israel will once again allow the Palestinian Authority to receive tax revenue that Israel collects on its behalf. On 13 December,

Ismail Haniya, the chair of the Hamas Political Bureau, criticised the Palestinian Authority’s decision to resume cooperation with Israel and said that it would be detrimental to intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

In a virtual address to the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2020, Palestinian President Abbas called for an international conference in early 2021—to be undertaken by the UN Secretary-General “in cooperation with the [Middle East] Quartet [the EU, Russia, the UN, and the US] and the Security Council”—to resolve “all final status issues”.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the UN General Assembly, virtually as well, on 29 September. He said that Israeli’s normalisation of relations with Arab states—the UAE and Bahrain at that point—would increase the chances of peace between Israel and the Palestinians, maintaining that “Palestinian leaders will increasingly realize that they no longer have a veto over peace and progress in our region”.

The Council held its monthly meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question” on 21 December 2020. Mladenov briefed on the implementation of resolution 2334 of 2016—which condemned Israel’s settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and acts of violence against civilians—and other recent developments.

On 21 December 2020, Tor Wennesland was appointed Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. He succeeds Nickolay Mladenov, whose term as Special Coordinator was expected to end on 31 December 2020. Wennesland most recently served as Norway’s special envoy for the Middle East Peace Process.

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION Security Council Resolution S/RES/2334 (23 December 2016) condemned Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and acts of violence against civilians. Secretary-General’s Report S/2020/1234 (16 December 2020) was on the implementation of resolution 2334.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 19 November 2020, two UN experts on human rights (Michael Lynk, the Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory, and Balakrishnan Rajagopal, the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing) condemned the Israeli government's demolition of the homes and property belonging to a Palestinian Bedouin community in the northern Jordan Valley of the West Bank. The experts noted that Palestinian homes and structures in the West Bank built without a permit are regularly demolished but observed that "the Israeli planning regime in the occupied territory is discriminatory and restrictive, and rarely grants Palestinian applications for building permits". The experts expressed particular concern that secure housing is one of the "ultimate protections" against the COVID-19 pandemic and "deliberately creating a homeless population" during an international health catastrophe is a "serious human rights blemish on any State authority responsible for such acts".

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is what role it can play in resurrecting the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, given the widespread rejection of the Trump administration's peace proposal in 2020, including by

the Palestinians. The new US administration is unlikely to support Trump's peace proposal, possibly creating space in the Council (and in other relevant fora) to discuss other options. One avenue that has been proposed by a number of Council members—and could be further explored—has been to revitalise the Middle East Quartet. A related option would be to expand the Quartet as a forum for negotiations by allowing other states in the region to participate in a mediating capacity. Council members could also further explore the proposal made by President Abbas for an international peace conference in early 2021.

Another key issue is how the Council can support intra-Palestinian reconciliation. A statement encouraging Hamas and Fatah to continue their dialogue and engage with each other in good faith could be considered. If this is politically untenable, then different regional or other sub-groups within the Council could consider issuing joint statements in support of reconciliation.

Council Dynamics

The widespread position in the Security Council—and among the UN membership

more broadly—is that settlement construction is a violation of international law, that the occupation of Palestinian territories should end, and that the resolution to the conflict should be centred on a two-state solution, based on the pre-June 1967 borders, with land swaps agreed mutually by the parties.

US President-elect Joe Biden takes office on 20 January 2021. While the US will continue to be Israel's strongest advocate in the Council under the new administration, it is likely to be less accommodating than the Trump administration to the positions of the current Israeli government. In this regard, the Biden administration is likely to be critical of settlement expansion and express support for the two-state solution.

Incoming member Norway has historically played an important role in the Middle East peace process. It chairs the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC), which coordinates the delivery of international aid to the Palestinian Authority; the AHLC was established in 1993 after the signing of the Oslo I Accord.

UNRCCA (Central Asia)

Expected Council Action

In January, the Special Representative and head of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), Natalia Gherman, is expected to brief the Security Council in closed consultations on the UNRCCA's activities.

Key Recent Developments

Gherman last briefed Council members in videoconference (VTC) consultations on 6 July 2020. She updated members on the UNRCCA's activities pertaining to counter-terrorism, transboundary water management, border demarcation, and regional cooperation initiatives with Afghanistan. In addition, she described the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the region and briefed on the UNRCCA's initiatives aimed at empowering women and youth in the region.

Since Gherman's last Council briefing, the UNRCCA has continued to offer mediation support in resolving regional issues. The situation in Kyrgyzstan constituted a focus of the centre's work in recent months. On 5 October 2020, protests erupted in Kyrgyzstan following allegations that the parliamentary election held the previous day was fraudulent. After protests turned violent, with at least one person killed and more than 1,000 injured during clashes between protestors and the police, President Sooronbay Jeenbekov declared a state of emergency and deployed troops to the streets of Bishkek. As a result of the political unrest, the Kyrgyz Central Election Commission annulled the election results on 6 October and Jeenbekov resigned on 15 October. Kyrgyzstan's lawmakers appointed Sadyr Japarov, a former parliament member, as prime minister and subsequently as

acting president. Japarov had been serving an 11-and-half-year prison sentence for kidnapping a regional governor until he was released by his supporters during the turbulent October protests. Japarov has called the charges against him politically motivated.

On 22 October 2020, the parliament adopted a bill postponing new parliamentary elections to the spring of 2021, overturning a previous decision by the Central Election Commission which called for holding elections on 20 December 2020. On 24 October, the Central Election Commission announced that presidential elections would take place on 10 January.

Between 16 and 26 October 2020, Gherman conducted a series of meetings with Kyrgyz officials in Bishkek, including Japarov, the minister of foreign affairs and the vice-speaker of the parliament. In the meetings,

UN DOCUMENTS ON UNRCCA [Security Council Letter S/2007/279](#) (7 May 2007) was from the Secretary-General on the establishment of a United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. [Security Council Press Statement SC/13179](#) (25 January 2018) welcomed further cooperation between UNRCCA, the Central Asian States, and relevant regional organisations.

UNRCCA (Central Asia)

Gherman expressed the UN's readiness to support the electoral process while emphasising that the next elections must be free and fair, ensure the meaningful participation of women and youth, and include strong oversight of the electoral process. A set of priorities was discussed for UN assistance to Kyrgyzstan to overcome the current crisis: rule of law, socio-economic stabilisation, health, education, social protection, electoral support, and human rights. In her meetings, Gherman emphasised the importance of an inclusive and transparent decision-making process in the country as a basis for UN support.

On 13 November 2020, the UNRCCA announced a Joint Statement of Intent between the government of Kyrgyzstan and the UN. The statement expressed the resolve of the Kyrgyz government and the UN to cooperate on addressing current challenges to peace, stability and development, including the deteriorating socio-economic situation and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Kyrgyz government expressed its commitment to fulfilling its international obligations and intention to uphold the separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the state. It pledged, among other things, to maintain the principles of the rule of law; good governance; and protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of speech. The Joint Statement of Intent appears to be the first of its kind involving the UN and a Central Asian state.

On 14 November 2020, Japarov suspended his duties as acting president and prime minister to become eligible to run in the upcoming presidential election. Parliamentary chairman Talant Mamytov became acting president and Artyom Novikov was named acting prime minister. After his designation as acting prime minister in October, Japarov called for making changes to Kyrgyzstan's constitution, and a new draft constitution was made public on 17 November. It provides for a single executive (the president) along with a smaller parliament. Currently, the duties of the executive branch in Kyrgyzstan are divided between a president and a prime minister who are chosen by parliament. Human rights organisations expressed concern that the proposed amendments would weaken Kyrgyzstan's parliament and concentrate power in the presidency, with Human Rights Watch

warning that the envisioned constitutional reforms "significantly erode checks and balances on the executive". On 10 December, the Kyrgyz parliament approved Japarov's initiative to hold a national referendum on the constitutional reforms simultaneously with the presidential election on 10 January.

Because of COVID-19-related restrictions on travel, the UNRCCA has adapted much of its preventive diplomacy activities to an online platform since March 2020, carrying out several meetings, including sessions aimed at increasing cooperation to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. On 21 September, UNRCCA organised an online seminar, "Women Parliamentarians' Partnership for Peace and Stability in Central Asia and Afghanistan", for women parliamentarians to share good practices in addressing threats to peace and security through parliamentary tools.

On 10 December 2020, the UNRCCA hosted the tenth annual meeting of deputy ministers of foreign affairs of the Central Asian states and Afghanistan via VTC. Participants exchanged views on developments affecting peace and security in Central Asia and discussed areas of cooperation, such as countering terrorism in the region. As part of the meeting, the UNRCCA hosted the second Government-Youth Dialogue for Central Asia and Afghanistan. Youth representatives from the Central Asian states and Afghanistan met virtually with high-level officials from the region and discussed issues relating to regional youth interaction.

Key Issues and Options

One of the main issues for the Council is how to make better use of the UNRCCA's experience in conflict prevention and what more the Council could do to support the UNRCCA's role in preventive diplomacy and regional cooperation.

Council members will be following the region's electoral processes, including Kyrgyzstan's 10 January presidential election and constitutional referendum, and the legislative election planned on the same day in Kazakhstan. Members will be interested in the possible effects that the conduct of these processes and their outcomes might have on stability in the region. Council members may seek to issue a press statement welcoming the UNRCCA's efforts in the context of the October 2020 electoral crisis in Kyrgyzstan.

Such a product could mention the issuance of the Joint Statement of Intent between the government of Kyrgyzstan and the UN as an important step in this regard.

Another issue for the Council is how to mitigate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region that could affect international peace and security, including secondary impacts on the socio-economic situation, on counter-terrorism efforts, and on the human rights situation. Some members might emphasise the importance of respecting the rule of law and human rights, as well as of making sure that efforts to curb the spread of the virus do not curtail such civil rights as the right of assembly.

Council Dynamics

Council members are generally supportive of the work of the UNRCCA and view it as an important tool in promoting cooperation in Central Asia. However, Council members have been unable to agree on a press statement on UNRCCA since January 2018, owing to disagreements between the penholder, Russia, and the P3 (France, the UK and the US) about whether to include references to cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. In January 2018, the Council was able to agree to a press statement due to the efforts of then-Council member Kazakhstan, who obtained consensus by referring to "relevant regional organisations" without naming them.

In addition, it appears that in past consultations on the UNRCCA, several Council members raised issues relating to human rights, with Germany and the US referring to the situation of Uighur minorities. Other members, including China and Russia, opposed the statements made about this matter, saying that it was unrelated to the UNRCCA's mandate. In the latest 9 July 2020 consultations, it seems that several members referred to the need to uphold human rights, without explicitly referencing Uighur minorities. It is not yet known how the change in the US administration might affect its positions in this regard. The addition of India—a country with an important role in the region—to the Council as an elected member may also affect Council dynamics on the UNRCCA.

Libya

Expected Council Action

In January, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing on the activities of the UN Support Mission for Libya (UNSMIL). A high-level Secretariat official is likely to brief, as is the incoming chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee. The Council may adopt a resolution supporting the compliance of all national and international stakeholders with the 23 October 2020 ceasefire agreement between the parties to the Libyan conflict.

UNSMIL's mandate expires on 15 September 2021, and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee expires on 15 May 2021.

Key Recent Developments

Following the Berlin conference in January 2020, negotiations have been taking place between the Libyan parties—the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF, also known as the Libyan National Army) under General Khalifa Haftar and the internationally recognised Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA). These have centred on three tracks (economic, political and security), with varying levels of progress. The 5+5 Joint Military Commission—which is leading the negotiations on the security track and consists of five representatives each from the GNA and the LAAF—conducted its fourth round of talks in Geneva in October 2020, culminating in the signing of a ceasefire agreement on 23 October.

The agreement stipulates the departure of foreign fighters and mercenaries from all sovereign Libyan spaces within three months of the signing of the agreement. It calls for the withdrawal of all military units and armed groups from the frontlines, an immediate suspension of foreign military training and the departure of training personnel. The signatories further requested that the Council adopt a resolution supporting the compliance of all national and international stakeholders with the ceasefire agreement.

Tenuous progress has been made on the three tracks since the ceasefire agreement was signed. Regarding the military track, Acting Special Representative and head of UNSMIL Stephanie Williams noted in her 19 November 2020 open videoconference

(VTC) briefing to the Council that the 5+5 Joint Military Commission had met twice in early November to discuss the terms of the Libyan-led, UN-supported ceasefire monitoring mechanism. The mechanism is initially expected to cover an area running from Sawknah to Abu Grein and Bin Jawad, in central Libya. She added that the commission identifies as a priority the “reopening of the coastal road between Misrata and Sirte, supported by the deployment of a joint security force as well as the withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries from the area”. Sirte has strategic significance because of its proximity to Libya's oil crescent, where most of the country's oil export terminals are located.

Williams emphasised in her 19 November 2020 briefing that the situation remained volatile and added that the two sides have yet to withdraw their forces from the frontlines. Additionally, Williams noted in a 2 December 2020 statement that there are 20,000 foreign forces or mercenaries in Libya, emphasising that this constitutes a violation of the UN arms embargo on Libya and of Libyan sovereignty.

In resolution 2510 of 12 February 2020, the Council endorsed the conclusions of the Berlin Conference and requested the Secretary-General to report on several aspects of the conclusions, including on “proposals for effective ceasefire monitoring under the auspices of the UN”. Resolution 2542 of 15 September, which renewed UNSMIL's mandate until 15 September 2021, asked the Secretary-General to submit that information “no later than 60 days after the adoption of this resolution” (that is, by 15 November). The Secretary-General requested an extension of the deadline until 30 December 2020 in a 13 November letter to the Security Council. He noted that the extension will allow for the outcome of ongoing talks by the 5+5 Joint Military Commission on the modalities of the ceasefire monitoring mechanism to inform the Secretariat's proposals.

The Security Council, in its 18 November 2020 letter approving the deadline extension, requested an interim briefing on progress by the Secretariat in articulating proposals for the ceasefire monitoring mechanism. Following the Council's request, Williams briefed the Council on 15 December 2020

in closed VTC consultations. It appears that Williams spoke about the ongoing dialogue between the parties in the three tracks while noting that the parties would prefer a light UN footprint in the monitoring of the ceasefire agreement. In press elements issued after the meeting, members of the Security Council underlined the importance of a “credible and effective Libyan-led ceasefire monitoring mechanism” while calling for the withdrawal of all foreign fighters and mercenaries from Libya in line with the ceasefire agreement.

On the political track, the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) held its first in-person session in Tunis between 7 and 15 November 2020. Formed in line with the conclusions of the Berlin conference, the LPDF consists of 75 participants representing the main Libyan geographical, social and political constituencies; 26 of its representatives were elected by the House of Representatives (HoR) and the High Council of State (HCS) and 49 (including 16 women) were selected by UNSMIL.

On 13 November 2020, the LPDF reached agreement, by consensus, to hold presidential and parliamentary elections on 24 December 2021. To that end, the LPDF adopted a national roadmap that articulates objectives and deadlines for forming institutions capable of organising elections and implementing political, economic and military reforms. The objectives include the formation of a new executive authority, with a new presidency council and a government of national unity, to be led by a prime minister and two deputies whose main mandate will be to lead during the transitional period towards elections, reunify state institutions, and provide security and basic services to the population until elections are held.

The LPDF held a second round of consultations between 23 November and 5 December 2020 to discuss criteria for the selection of the unified executive authority that would oversee the preparatory phase preceding the elections. At the time of writing, representatives of the LPDF have yet to agree on a selection mechanism for appointees to senior positions in the new executive authority.

Regarding the economic track, UNSMIL convened a meeting of representatives of Libyan economic institutions in Geneva on

Libya

14 and 15 December 2020 to discuss possible economic reforms. Participants outlined steps to consolidate the national budget and developed recommendations to unify the currency exchange rate—at present, there are different exchange rates in areas controlled by the GNA and LAAF—to ensure greater stability of the Libyan currency. On 16 December, the Board of Directors of the Central Bank of Libya conducted its first meeting in five years, in which it announced its decision to unify the exchange rate.

UNSMIL has remained without an appointed head since 2 March 2020 when Ghassan Salamé announced his resignation as Special Representative and head of UNSMIL, citing stress-related health reasons. Resolution 2542 split the role of Special Representative into a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and Mission Coordinator of UNSMIL, following pressure by the US. On 16 December, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of Raisedon Zenenga of Zimbabwe as Mission Coordinator of UNSMIL. On 15 December, the Security Council sent a letter to the Secretary-General endorsing the appointment of Nickolay Mladenov, the current Special Envoy of the Secretary-General to the Middle East Peace Process, as the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Libya and head of UNSMIL. However, on 21 December, Mladenov informed the Secretary-General that he will resign from the UN on 31 December because of personal and family reasons and will not be able to take up the position of Special Envoy for Libya.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 11 November 2020, Libya's human rights record was examined for the third time by the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group. According to the Working Group's draft report (A/HRC/WG.6/36/L.13), the Libyan delegation noted that political divisions compromised reforms relating to human rights, treaty ratification and legislative action. Mohamed Lamtom, Libya's justice minister, said Libya attached "great importance to the review process". During the interactive dialogue, Libya received 285 additional recommendations, particularly calls for cooperation with the UN Fact-Finding Mission, established by the Human Rights Council in July 2020.

Key Issues and Options

The ongoing conflict in Libya and related non-compliance with the arms embargo by multiple

international actors have been persistent issues for the Council, together with the implementation of the Berlin Conference's conclusions.

One option for the Council is to adopt a resolution supporting the implementation of the ceasefire agreement, as the agreement's signatories have requested. At the time of writing, negotiations on such a resolution have yet to begin. It seems that Council members would like the resolution to be informed by, among other things, the Secretariat's proposals for ceasefire monitoring and the progress by the Libyan parties on the political track. Although resolution 2542 mandated UNSMIL to "provide appropriate support" to the implementation of the ceasefire once it was agreed, Council members might seek to endorse specific measures contained in the Secretariat's proposals for ceasefire monitoring under UN auspices.

Council Dynamics

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

Mercenaries from several countries are reportedly fighting on both sides, as acknowledged in the ceasefire agreement. All foreign sponsors except Turkey deny their role in Libya.

A confidential report by the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee that was leaked to the press in early May 2020 said that the Russian private military company Wagner Group had deployed around 1,200 mercenaries to fight for Haftar, according to media reports. The Kremlin denied having ties to the Wagner Group despite accusations to the contrary by various sources. Several Council members, including Germany and the US, have publicly criticised Russia in this regard. For its part, Russia joined other Council members in calling for the withdrawal of mercenaries from Libya in the press elements following the 15 December 2020 consultations.

The UK is the penholder on Libya. At the time of writing, the chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee to succeed Germany, which is leaving the Council on 31 December, had yet to be named.

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