

Monthly Forecast

- 1 Overview
- 1 In Hindsight: Subsidiary Bodies Chairs and Penholders for 2021
- 3 Status Update since our January Forecast
- 4 Central African Republic
- 6 COVID-19
- 7 Syria
- 9 Myanmar
- 10 Sudan
- 12 Counter-Terrorism
- 13 Yemen
- 14 Iraq
- 16 Somalia
- 17 Haiti
- 19 Climate Change and Security
- 20 DPRK (North Korea)

Overview

In February, the UK will have the presidency of the Security Council. Its signature events will focus on [climate change](#) and [COVID-19](#). The high-level meeting on security risks in climate-vulnerable contexts is expected to be chaired by UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The COVID-19 meeting will focus on equitable access to vaccines, especially in conflict-affected areas; UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab is expected to chair.

There will also be a briefing on the threat posed by the [Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant](#) and the Secretary-General's twelfth strategic-level report on this issue.

Several meetings are planned on [Somalia](#). The Council will receive a briefing on developments in Somalia and the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSAM). A meeting is also planned on the 751 Somalia sanctions committee. At the end of the month the Council is expected to renew the authorisation of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

Other African issues include:

- [CAR](#), update on developments and the most recent MINUSCA report; and
- [Sudan](#), renewal of the mandate of the

Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee.

Regarding the Middle East, there will be the monthly meeting on developments in [Yemen](#), as well as a briefing by the chair of the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee. The renewal of Yemen financial and travel ban sanctions and the mandate of the Yemen Panel of Experts is also anticipated.

Other Middle East issues that will be considered include:

- [Iraq](#), update on UNAMI and on the missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives;
- [The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question](#), the monthly briefing; and
- [Syria](#), the regular briefings on the political and humanitarian situations and on the use of chemical weapons.

Two meetings on Asia are anticipated: on [Myanmar](#) and the 1718 [Democratic People's Republic of Korea](#) Sanctions Committee.

Finally, there will also be a meeting on the UN Integrated Office in [Haiti](#) (BINUH).

In Hindsight: Subsidiary Bodies' Chairs and Penholders for 2021

The presidential note on the election of the chairs and vice-chairs of subsidiary bodies for 2021, issued on 7 January, was the culmination of almost six months of negotiations among the Security Council's incoming and permanent members (P5). Despite new working methods put in place in 2016 to facilitate a more efficient and transparent process, getting agreement this time was protracted and challenging. The difficulties had as much to do with the negotiations between the permanent and elected members as it did with competition among elected members to head particular subsidiary bodies, coupled with reluctance to take on others.

Guidance and Practice in the Selection of Subsidiary Body Chairs

In 2016, the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions (IWG) issued a presidential note on transitional arrangements for elected members (S/2016/619) calling on Council members "to make every effort to agree provisionally on the appointment of the chairs of the subsidiary organs for the following year no later than 1 October". Since then, members have made concerted effort to reach agreement by this date, although it has never quite been met. Even if the list is agreed before the end of the year, the presidential note setting out the new

29 January 2021

This report is available online at [securitycouncilreport.org](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org).

For daily insights by SCR on evolving Security Council actions please subscribe to our "What's In Blue" series at [securitycouncilreport.org](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org) or follow [@SCRTweets](https://twitter.com/SCRTweets) on Twitter.

In Hindsight: Subsidiary Bodies Chairs and Penholders for 2021

chairs of subsidiary bodies is traditionally issued at the beginning of January.

The transitional arrangements conveyed in the 2016 Note were incorporated in the 2017 “Note 507” on working methods. These arrangements included that consultations on the appointment should begin as soon as possible after the elections and be conducted in a “balanced, transparent, efficient and inclusive way” by two members of the Council “working in full cooperation”. The understanding from the start has been that the two members in question would be the IWG chair and one permanent member. This year, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, as chair of the IWG, coordinated the process among the incoming members and worked on the list of chairs with the “P5 coordinator”, a position that rotates quarterly. Last year, France was the P5 coordinator from August to October 2020, and China from November to January 2021.

This Year’s Process

This year’s elected members made a promising start. The first meeting to discuss subsidiary body chairs took place in late June, shortly after the five incoming members were elected on 17 June 2020. By early July, an initial list of members’ preferences had been drawn up. There were ten subsidiary bodies available: six sanctions committees and four subsidiary organs. Agreement was reached on all the vacant slots except for one sanctions committee, which was viewed as politically sensitive. One thematic working group had two elected members vying for the chair: it was proposed to split the chair, with each member getting a year. This initial list was conveyed to the P5 in mid-August. The P5 responded with a counter-proposal in late September, which was not acceptable to several incoming members. Following further discussions, the incoming members agreed to resubmit the original list, this time with no vacant slot or shared positions. The P5 accepted most of the allocations, but further negotiations were needed with at least one incoming member that remained dissatisfied with its mix of subsidiary bodies. The list of chairs was ultimately agreed on 5 January.

There are two unusual aspects to the 2021 presidential note on chairs of the subsidiary bodies. For the first time, the 1267 and 1988 sanctions committees will be chaired by different members. These two committees were created in 2011 when the committee established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999)

concerning Al-Qaida and the Taliban was split into one committee for more general terrorist listings, and another for the Taliban.

Second, the 2021 presidential note contains two footnotes. The first states that “India will be the Chair of the counter-terrorism committee until the end of 2022, after Tunisia leaves the chair”. The second footnote states that Mexico will be the Vice-Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict until the end of 2022, after Niger concludes its term as Vice-Chair. In effect, these negotiations have selectively brought 2022 chairing arrangements into the mix, giving some members dibs on future year arrangements and taking these slots off the table for the 2022 incoming members. While similar verbal agreements have been made in the past, these footnotes formalise such commitments.

Reflections and Takeaways

This year’s negotiations may have been especially complicated due to the mix of subsidiary bodies available as well as the composition of the five incoming members. With three of the five members having similar priorities regarding protection issues, files such as children and armed conflict, women, peace and security and climate and security were hotly contested. At the other end of the spectrum were “undesirable” sanctions committees, perceived as singularly politically sensitive or resource-intensive. It was hard for the incoming five to present a list without gaps or overlap, despite the general perception that giving the P5 an incomplete list is more likely to result in a reshuffling of positions.

This year informal bodies, such as the Informal Experts Group on women, peace and security and the choice of the elected members for the Peacebuilding Commission were treated as part of the mix of subsidiary bodies and included in the list given to the P5. In previous years, positions for informal bodies were de-linked from the appointment process for formal subsidiary bodies and they do not appear in the presidential note on the appointment of subsidiary body chairs. These positions have not traditionally required P5 sign-off; arguably, however, their inclusion can ease the overall negotiation process by putting more options on the table.

Committee chairs serve in their personal capacity and the general practice has been for the permanent representative to take on this role. However, departing from this practice

in 2019, Germany appointed its deputy permanent representative as chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee. Now, Norway has appointed its deputy permanent representative as chair of the DPRK Sanctions Committee. Late in the negotiations, questions arose over the role of vice-chairs and how they are chosen. The guidelines of many subsidiary bodies state that, when the chair is unable to chair a meeting, they will nominate one of the vice-chairs or a representative of their mission. While chairs often use the latter option, it appears that an actively engaged vice-chair, working closely with the chair, is more strongly positioned to play a substantive role. Further discussion may be needed on how vice-chairs can best be utilised.

Representational level also featured in the negotiating process. The initial discussions among the incoming members were held at permanent representative level, with final discussions among the political coordinators. The P5 were apparently represented at political coordinator level throughout the discussions, creating a perception of imbalance. It is possible that having more engagement among the P5 permanent representatives might allow for easier agreement.

There is also a continuity argument for designating one P5 coordinator to serve throughout the negotiations, rather than the mid-way change entailed by the position’s usual three-month rotation cycle, although this does not seem to have been an impediment in the recent process.

Penholderships and Burden-sharing

While today the subsidiary body chair positions are all filled by elected members, the position of penholder on most country files is largely in the hands of the P3, with few such penholder positions available to elected members—currently only Afghanistan, Guinea-Bissau, the Syria humanitarian file and West Africa and the Sahel. (The penholder role refers to the member of the Council that leads the negotiation and drafting of resolutions on a particular Council agenda item. Somewhat contentiously, there has been no structured link between the chair of a given subsidiary body and the penholder on the same agenda item.) Elected members have also called for better burden-sharing and more equal distribution of work among the members of the Security Council. A December 2019 presidential note stressed that the selection of chairs should “take into account the need for

In Hindsight: Subsidiary Bodies Chairs and Penholders for 2021

a shared responsibility and a fair distribution of work for the selection of the Chairs among all members of the Council, bearing in mind the capacities and resources of members”.

Co-penholderships between permanent and elected members, another regular topic of discussion, became a reality for the first time when Germany joined the UK as co-penholder on Libya sanctions and Sudan in 2019. However, the 2020 incoming members did not seek such partnerships. It appears that while some of the 2021 incoming members were interested in co-penholding with a permanent member, they chose not to pursue this following signs that it would not be a viable proposition in 2021. As before, there are several co-penholder positions involving two elected members.

Conclusions

Elected members often come to the Council table with a clear idea of their priorities. Their subsidiary body preferences are often linked to these priorities as well as to the resources they can bring, including the country’s—or the permanent representative’s—experiences. To avoid gaps in the initial list for the P5, however, members may need to be flexible and willing to consider some positions not on their “wish list” or to give up those that are. As members prepare for a seat on the Council, an earlier understanding of the workings of the different subsidiary bodies might demystify some of the more opaque committees and spur interest in areas that had not been an initial priority.

While the incoming members may have had to plunge into tough negotiations, among themselves and with the P5, even before taking their Council seats, their ability to remain united in the face of proposed changes from the P5 was essential to having an outcome with which most members appear satisfied. Incorporating reflections from the 2021 appointment process may allow for an easier and earlier decision for the 2022 positions.

For more information on the penholders and chairs of subsidiary bodies, please refer to our 2021 table on Security Council penholders and chairs of subsidiary bodies as of January 2021.

Status Update since our January Forecast

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

On 6 January, the Council held a high-level open videoconference (VTC) debate on the challenges faced by countries in fragile contexts, in particular on the African continent (S/2021/24). Tunisian President Kaïs Saïed chaired the meeting. UN Secretary-General António Guterres, Chair of the AU Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat, and former President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf briefed. Tunisia circulated a concept note ahead of the debate (S/2020/1296).

West Africa and the Sahel

On 11 January, Security Council members held a VTC briefing with the Special Representative and head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) Mohamed Ibn Chambas, who presented the Secretary-General’s 24 December 2020 report on West Africa and the Sahel. At the time of writing, Council members were still negotiating a draft presidential statement on the region proposed by Ireland and Niger.

Mali

On 13 January, Security Council members held a VTC briefing on Mali, with Special Representative and head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission

in Mali (MINUSMA) Mahamat Saleh Annadif. Annadif presented the Secretary-General’s latest report on Mali dated 28 December 2020 (S/2020/1281). In addition to the report, members considered the Secretary-General’s bi-annual letter on MINUSMA operations, including security challenges, implementation of the mission’s adaptation plan, mission performance, and transition planning (S/2020/1282). Closed VTC consultations followed the public session. On 14 January, Security Council members issued a press statement that condemned in the strongest terms the attack perpetrated on 13 January 2021 against MINUSMA north of the town of Bambara-Maoudé, in the Timbuktu region, which resulted in four peacekeepers from Côte d’Ivoire killed and five others injured (SC/14411). In an 18 January press statement, Council members also condemned in the strongest terms the 15 January attack near Tessalit in Kidal region, which resulted in the death of one peacekeeper from Egypt, and seriously injured another (SC/14414).

Cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States

On 18 January, the Council held a meeting on cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States (LAS) at the initiative of Tunisia, Council president in January. Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo

and Secretary-General of the LAS Ahmed Aboul Gheit briefed the Council on areas of cooperation between the two organisations.

Cyprus

On 19 January, the Council held VTC consultations on the situation in Cyprus. Special Representative and head of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) Elizabeth Spehar briefed the Council on the recent developments and key findings from two Secretary-General’s reports on UNFICYP: one was the semi-annual report on the mission (S/2021/4) and the second focused specifically on UNFICYP’s good offices (S/2021/5). On 29 January, Council president Tunisia read the results of the written voting procedure for resolution 2561, which was adopted unanimously and extended the mandate of UNFICYP for another six months.

Colombia

On 21 January, the Security Council convened for an open VTC meeting, followed by a closed VTC session, on Colombia. Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Masieu briefed on recent developments and the Secretary-General’s latest 90-day report on the mission (S/2020/1301). On 28 January, Council members issued a press statement, which expressed grave concern over the targeting and killing of former combatants,

Status Update since our January Forecast

social leaders, and indigenous, Afro-Colombian and other communities. They also welcomed the Colombian government's recent request for the expansion of the Verification Mission's mandate to verify implementation of the sentences of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and undertook to give this request prompt consideration.

Belarus

On 22 January, there was an Arria-formula meeting, held via videoconference, on media freedom in Belarus. The meeting was organised by Council members Estonia, France, Ireland, Norway, the UK, and the US, and co-sponsored by non-Council members Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Urmas Reinsalu, chaired the meeting. The keynote speech was delivered by Irene Khan, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of freedom of opinion and expression. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the Belarusian opposition presidential candidate, delivered introductory remarks. Briefers included Pavel Latushko, a member of the opposition's Coordination Council Presidium and the Head of the National Anti-Crisis Management; Stanislav Ivashkevich, an investigative journalist and producer at Belsat TV; and Gareth Browne, a journalist for *The Times* (UK).

The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 26 January, the quarterly open debate on "The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question" was held in VTC format. Tor Wennesland, who replaced Nickolay Mladenov as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in December 2020, gave his first briefing to the Council in his new role. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, also briefed.

UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA)

On 27 January, Special Representative and head of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) Natalia Gherman briefed Council members in a closed VTC meeting on the UNRCCA's activities. She updated Council members on the activities of the centre since her last briefing in July. In this regard, she apparently discussed the centre's efforts to empower women and youth in the region, UNRCCA's support for transboundary water management projects, and its support for the implementation of the UN's anti-terrorism strategy.

Libya

On 28 January, the Council received a briefing by the Acting Special Representative and head of the UN Support Mission for Libya

(UNSMIL), Stephanie Williams, in an open VTC briefing followed by closed VTC consultations. Due to lack of consensus in the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee on his statement, the new chair of the committee, Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti (India), was unable to brief the Council on Libya sanctions.

Arria-Formula Meeting on Repatriation of Children from Conflict Zones

On 29 January, Security Council members held an Arria-formula meeting on "Children and Armed Conflict, Repatriation of Children from Conflict Zones: From Camps to Homes. Call for Action". The meeting was co-organised by the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The briefers were Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism; Anna Kuznetsova, Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Russian Federation; and Magzhan Ilyassov, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the UN.

Central African Republic

Expected Council Action

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

The mandate of MINUSCA expires on 15 November 2021. The CAR sanctions regime expires on 31 July 2021, and the mandate of the Panel of Experts supporting

the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee expires on 31 August 2021.

Key Recent Developments

Since the Council's 12 November 2020 adoption of resolution 2552, which extended MINUSCA's mandate by one year, the security and political situation in the CAR has deteriorated considerably. The country has suffered a series of attacks by an alliance of armed groups, known as the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC), against Central African armed forces (FACA) and MINUSCA in towns across the CAR in the

run-up to, and following, the 27 December 2020 presidential elections.

One week before the presidential elections, armed groups attacked several towns outside Bangui, CAR's capital. MINUSCA forces were deployed on 20 December 2020 to two municipalities to the north-west of Bangui that had been attacked by the armed groups. On 21 December, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed Council members on the escalating situation under "any other business". On 23 December, MINUSCA reported that it had retaken control of the town of Bambari,

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE CAR Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2552 (12 November 2020) extended the mandate of MINUSCA and the authorisation to use all means to provide operational support to MINUSCA until 15 November 2021. **S/RES/2536** (28 July 2020) renewed the CAR sanctions regime until 31 July 2021 and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the CAR Sanctions Committee until 31 August 2021. **Secretary-General's Report** S/2020/994 (12 October 2020) was the most recent report on MINUSCA. **Security Council Meeting Record** S/PV.8771 (19 October 2020) was a briefing on the Secretary-General's report.

Central African Republic

235 miles north-east of Bangui, which had briefly fallen to armed groups. On the same day, the Council approved Secretary-General António Guterres' proposal to temporarily redeploy two infantry companies and two military utility helicopters from the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to assist MINUSCA for a two-month period. On 25 December, three MINUSCA peacekeepers from Burundi died following an attack by armed opposition groups in Dékoa, approximately 160 miles north of Bangui.

Presidential elections were held on 27 December 2020. International media sources reported numerous low-level violent incidents on election day, and there were reports that voting did not take place in 29 of CAR's 71 sub-prefectures. On 30 December, the Democratic Opposition Coalition (COD-2020), which consists of a number of opposition presidential candidates, called for the results to be annulled, claiming that there had been widespread fraud. Despite this, the head of CAR's National Elections Authority declared on 4 January that incumbent president Faustin-Archange Touadéra had won reelection, gaining an absolute majority of 53.9 percent of the vote in the first round, obviating the need for a second round in February. On 18 January, CAR's Constitutional Court certified Touadéra as the winner.

Numerous attacks have taken place since the elections, including a 2 January assault by armed forces allied with former CAR president François Bozizé on the town of Damara, which lies 50 miles north of Bangui, and a 3 January assault on the town of Bangassou, some 450 miles east of Bangui along CAR's border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). On 9 January, several armed groups attacked the towns of Bouar, some 270 miles north-west of Bangui, and Grimari, approximately 185 miles north-east of Bangui. In both instances, MINUSCA assisted the FACA to repulse the attacks; in Bouar, MINUSCA deployed air assets in support of their operations.

On 13 January, Security Council members again discussed the situation in the CAR under "any other business" at the request of France. Lacroix briefed on the situation, focusing on MINUSCA's operation in the context of the rising violence. Two days later, following the arrival of reinforcements, MINUSCA troops regained control of Bangassou, offering protection to Bangassou's civilian population and stopping the looting

that had followed the retreat of armed groups.

On 18 January, two more MINUSCA peacekeepers—from Gabon and Morocco—were killed on the outskirts of Bangassou when their convoy was ambushed by armed groups. In a press statement on 18 January, Council members expressed their condolences to the families of the killed peacekeepers. The press statement also warned that "attacks against peacekeepers may constitute war crimes" and reminded "all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law".

According to the mission, seven MINUSCA peacekeepers have been killed since the recent unrest began and 60,000 refugees have fled across CAR's border into neighbouring Cameroon, Chad, DRC, and the Republic of the Congo. Another 58,000 persons are displaced within CAR. The CAR authorities have blamed the outbreak of violence on groups affiliated with Bozizé, who announced on 25 July that he would run in the elections, but whose candidacy was rejected by CAR's Supreme Court on 3 December. (Bozizé was listed under Security Council sanctions in 2014 for "engaging in or providing support for acts that undermine the peace, stability or security of CAR".) MINUSCA, in a press release dated 18 January, also attributed the violence to "allies" of the former president.

On 21 January, at the request of the CAR government, the Council met again. Ndiaye told the Council via videoconference that the deployment of reinforcements from UNMISS had "lifted morale among MINUSCA personnel" but that the CPC appeared to be "increasingly aggressive". He subsequently requested an increase in both troops and police officers within the framework of inter-mission cooperation. CAR Foreign Minister Sylvie Baïpo-Temon, also participating in the meeting, requested the Council to fully lift the arms embargo that has been imposed on the CAR since the adoption of resolution 2127 in 2013. Council members issued a press statement on 22 January. That same day, the CAR authorities announced a 15-day state of emergency. On 24 January, the CPC reportedly surrounded Bangui, cutting off the capital's main supply route with Cameroon. According to international media, over 1,600 trucks—including those carrying food, medicine and humanitarian assistance—were stranded. On 25 January, the CAR government announced that FACA troops, working with "allied forces",

reportedly a reference to Russian and Rwandan troops, pushed back the CPC forces.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 15 January statement, the independent expert on human rights in the CAR, Yao Agetse, said that "thousands of Central Africans were unable to exercise their right to vote" and that "many were victims of torture or ill-treatment and death threats for exercising their right to vote" during elections in December 2020. The CPC had obstructed elections, including by preventing the dissemination of election materials and burning polling stations, the statement added. Agetse urged MINUSCA, the Special Criminal Court, and the ICC promptly to investigate serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by the CPC and other armed groups and called on the Security Council, including the CAR Sanctions Committee, to impose consequences on those individuals involved.

Key Issues and Options

There are two immediate issues for the Council to consider in the context of the recent resurgence of violence: the first pertains to providing the mission with the resources needed to address the fresh violence and allow it to fulfil its protection of civilians mandate, provide assistance to the CAR authorities to stabilise the situation, and demonstrate the Council's unified support for MINUSCA. The Council may wish to adopt a resolution that offers further concrete support to the mission and the CAR authorities.

The second issue relates to the arms embargo. Over the past year, China and Russia have taken the view that the Council should go further in easing the arms embargo with the aim of lifting it completely. A number of other Council members have argued that there is little room for further adjustments in light of the political and security situations and the limited progress that has been made on achieving the benchmarks for progressively lifting or suspending the arms embargo. However, in light of the CAR foreign minister's request to lift the embargo, the Council may wish to revisit this issue well in advance of the sanctions regime renewal anticipated in July.

Council and Wider Dynamics

There is consensus among Council members for providing the mission with the resources needed to quell the recent violence in the country and ensure that the mission can fulfil its protection of civilians mandate. In addition, Council members agree on the need for accountability for the perpetrators

Central African Republic

of the recent violence and a recommitment by all of the signatories of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation to its full implementation. However, lifting of the arms

embargo has become a contentious issue for the Council over the past year. These differences were again demonstrated during the 21 January Council session.

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

COVID-19

Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council is expected to hold a high-level briefing on COVID-19, with a focus on equitable access to vaccines, especially in conflict-affected areas. UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab is expected to chair the briefing.

Background and Key Recent Developments

Last year, the Security Council organised several meetings on the COVID-19 pandemic centred around resolution 2532, which demanded a cessation of hostilities in all situations on its agenda to support the Secretary-General's 23 March 2020 global ceasefire appeal to fight COVID-19 in conflict-affected countries. By late 2020, several COVID-19 vaccines had been developed, and the subsequent rollout of initial vaccinations in a range of countries brought new hope for an end to the pandemic.

A key mechanism for the development of COVID-19 vaccines and for promoting their distribution is COVAX, run by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Gavi vaccine alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations. COVAX is one of the four pillars—diagnostics, therapeutics, vaccines, and health systems—of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator that was launched in April 2020 by the WHO, the European Commission and France in response to the pandemic. The COVAX vaccine pillar includes a funding instrument, backed with official development assistance and contributions from the private sector and philanthropy, to assist 92 middle- and lower-income countries that cannot fully afford to pay for COVID-19 vaccines. Other activities of the COVAX facility are supporting the development of vaccine candidates and negotiating prices.

Concerns about unequal access to the vaccine by wealthy and low-income countries have already materialised in the initial rollout, however. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, addressing the Executive Board of the WHO on 18 January, warned that “the promise of equitable access is at serious risk”. He noted that 39 million doses of vaccine had already been administered in at least 49 higher-income countries, while one low-income country had received just 25 doses. According to Tedros, “some countries and companies continue to prioritize bilateral deals, going around COVAX, driving up prices and attempting to jump to the front of the queue”, and the situation is compounded by manufacturers prioritising regulatory approval in rich countries where profits are highest as opposed to submitting vaccine candidates to the WHO for review.

Secretary-General António Guterres repeated calls in January for COVID-19 vaccines to be a global public good, saying this requires full funding for the ACT Accelerator and its COVAX facility, while raising concerns about what he called “vaccinationism”. At a Council videoconference (VTC) on 25 January on the implementation of resolution 2532, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo asserted that inequalities in the global recovery and the failure to vaccinate in developing countries, including countries affected by conflict and instability, would be “a severe blow to peace and security”.

A study commissioned by the International Chamber of Commerce, released on 25 January, revealed the potential economic impact of failure to distribute vaccines equitably. It concluded that if wealthy nations fully vaccinate by the middle of the year and low-income countries are largely excluded, the global economy would suffer losses totalling

as much as \$9.2 trillion in 2021. Nearly half of these costs, \$4.5 trillion, would be borne by wealthy countries because of continued disruptions to global trade and supply chains. Another more likely scenario, according to the study, found that if developing countries vaccinate half their populations by the end of the year, the world economy would still experience losses between \$1.8 trillion to \$4.4 trillion, with more than half the losses occurring in wealthy economies. These economic costs, noted the study's authors, far outweigh the current donor financing needed to procure vaccines for everyone and fully fund the ACT Accelerator, which has a funding gap of \$27.2 billion as of 19 January. Referring to this analysis at the Council's 25 January VTC, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock said, “[t]his is not about generosity but a matter of the self-interest of wealthier countries”.

The global response to the pandemic in 2020 was hampered by tensions between the US and China and US criticism of the WHO. In the Security Council, these tensions led to drawn-out negotiations on resolution 2532, which was adopted more than three months after the Secretary-General's initial ceasefire appeal. The new US administration of President Joe Biden, however, has already acted to restore US participation in multilateral efforts to address the pandemic. On 20 January, the first day of the new administration, President Biden signed a letter to the Secretary-General retracting the US decision last year to withdraw from the WHO, which would have taken effect on 6 July 2021. The US has also expressed its intention to join COVAX, in which the administration of Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump, declined to participate.

At the Council's 25 January VTC, Council members also heard briefings by Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations

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. **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

Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare. Lacroix said that across all UN field missions, 2,486 cumulative COVID-19 cases among UN personnel and dependents had been reported, with 24 deaths. Khare described plans to vaccinate UN personnel and dependents worldwide. He said the plans called for cooperating with host countries to include UN personnel in their national vaccine programmes and, where that was not possible, that the UN would seek alternative arrangements. He also noted the convening of a Group of Friends of troop- and police-contributing countries to agree on “pragmatic, coherent and common efforts” to vaccinate troops and police in peacekeeping operations and guard units in special political missions.

Key Issues and Options

Resolution 2532 recognised that the pandemic is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security. In this context, the focus of the meeting will be on

COVID-19 vaccines, in particular how to ensure equitable access to vaccines, especially in conflict-affected and fragile countries. Barriers to access, such as vaccine supplies and funding, logistical challenges to delivering and administering vaccines, and humanitarian access in conflict situations are key issues.

Council members may use their national interventions to promote international cooperation and coordination through the main multilateral tool, COVAX, and may appeal for donor funding to support vaccine access for low-income countries. Members may further reiterate the Council’s demand for states and parties to armed conflicts to conclude cessation of hostilities agreements or even encourage the idea of “vaccine pauses”.

Council Dynamics

The new US administration has already shown that Council dynamics around the pandemic will be different in 2021. Last year, Council meetings on the pandemic were punctuated by US interventions that were highly critical of China and the WHO.

In addition, the negotiations on resolution 2532 were made difficult by US opposition to any reference in the text to the WHO. But at the initial 25 January Council briefing, the US administration took a much more conciliatory tone, stressing the central role of the WHO in the global pandemic response and the US commitment to supporting multilateral instruments to facilitate a rapid global vaccine rollout. Until the US announced that it would join the COVAX facility, the US and Russia were among only a handful of countries that had not committed to participate in COVAX.

Another area of difference that has surfaced in Council consideration of the pandemic has been over sanctions. Russia and China often recall, as have other members, their view that unilaterally-imposed sanctions should be waived as they can undermine countries’ capacity to respond to the pandemic.

France and Tunisia served as co-penholders on resolution 2532.

Syria

Expected Council Action

In February, 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

Briefing the Security Council on 20 January, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock offered a sobering account of Syria’s ongoing humanitarian needs. He noted that in 2020 the UN-coordinated humanitarian operation assisted, on average, 7.6 million people a month across Syria. That represented an increase of 20 percent compared to 2019. In Syria’s north-west, OCHA dispatched a monthly average of 1,000 trucks of aid, reaching 2.4 million people each month. He said that the situation was likely to deteriorate further in 2021, estimating that approximately 13 million people will remain in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria with an additional ten

million people, including 5.5 million Syrian refugees, in need in the region.

The dire humanitarian situation has been exacerbated by Syria’s deteriorating economic conditions as well as continuing food insecurity. According to a 19 January 2021 World Food Programme (WFP) report, the price of basic food items continued to increase in December. Syria’s standard food basket was 236 percent higher compared to December 2019, a month-to-month increase of 13 percent that brought the basket to its highest recorded price since WFP started monitoring prices in 2013. In addition, the Food and Agriculture Organization recently reported that the Syrian government has doubled the price of subsidised bread.

Fuel shortages have also contributed to the worsening economic situation. On 10 January, Syria’s petroleum ministry announced that it would cut its fuel distribution by 24 percent because of delays in the arrival of needed supplies, causing further hardship

for many Syrians. Finally, Syria has seen the number of COVID-19 cases continue to rise rapidly, putting increased strain on Syria’s health care and educational systems, as well as driving up unemployment.

During a briefing to the Council on 20 January, Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen noted that the “Syrian people have seen less all-out violence” than during previous periods of the conflict. Nonetheless, the fragile security situation continues to threaten civilians, with reports of civilians being killed in crossfire between warring parties or by improvised explosive devices. On 2 January, two car bombs were detonated in northern Syria—one in a market in Ras al-Ain, killing two children, and another outside a bakery in Jinderis, near Aleppo, killing one person. Shelling and airstrikes continued to harm civilians in and around Idlib despite a 10-month-old ceasefire in the area.

Other reports suggest a recent uptick in violence in several of Syria’s regions: on

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.

Syria

12 January, Israeli airstrikes in and around Deir al-Zour in the eastern part of the country reportedly targeted Syrian military sites, killing 57 Syrian government soldiers and, according to international media, members of Iranian-backed militias. On 30 December 2020, Islamic State militants attacked a bus on a road outside Deir al-Zour, leading to increasing concerns about the resurgence of the group in some parts of Syria. On 11 December, a car bomb killed 16 people at a checkpoint in the Syrian town of Ras al-Ain near the Turkish-Syrian border. Turkish gendarmes were among those killed in the attack.

From 25 to 29 January, the Small Body of Syria's Constitutional Committee convened for a fifth round of meetings, discussing constitutional principles for the first time. Speaking to the press on 29 January, Pedersen gave a downbeat assessment of the meetings, stating that the "week had been a disappointment" and that the committee "cannot continue to meet if [they] do not change their approach". As such, he noted that there had been no agreement on the timeframe for another meeting.

The issue of the use of chemical weapons remains a deeply divisive one amongst Council members. During his 11 December 2020 briefing to the Council, Fernando Arias, the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), concluded that "the declaration submitted by Syria still cannot be considered accurate and complete", a sentiment that was echoed by High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu during her briefing to the Council on 5 January. Though most Council members welcomed the work of the OPCW and Arias, Russia, in its 5 January statement to the Council, expressed dissatisfaction with Arias' briefing, claiming that

the Council had "heard nothing new from [Arias] either at the open or the closed segment of [the] meeting in December".

On 21 January, Secretary-General António Guterres announced the establishment of a three-person independent senior advisory panel to strengthen the "deconfliction mechanism" in Syria. According to OCHA, this mechanism provides for "the exchange of information by humanitarian actors with military actors in order to... avoid potential hazards for humanitarian personnel". On 6 April 2020, the Secretary-General released a summary of his Board of Inquiry (BOI) report into attacks on sites in north-west Syria—including hospitals, schools and camps for internally displaced persons—that had been on a "deconfliction" list. At the time, the Secretary-General informed the Council that he was planning to appoint a senior independent adviser to help prevent similar incidents and improve the mechanism. The panel is expected to submit its final report by 10 May.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 29 December 2020 statement, the special rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Alena Douhan, called on the US to remove unilateral sanctions imposed in June 2020 under the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019. According to the statement, these broad sanctions "violate the human rights of the Syrian people" and may inhibit rebuilding of Syria's civilian infrastructure destroyed during the conflict. They could target any foreigner helping in reconstruction as well as employees of foreign companies and humanitarian operators helping to rebuild Syria.

Key Issues and Options

The completion of the Constitutional Committee's fifth round will be a key focus for

the Council in February. Most Council members agree that the political track has yielded few results, and some members have become openly concerned about this after more than a year of Constitutional Committee meetings. European members on the Council have tended to emphasise that reconstruction aid to Syria will not be forthcoming without tangible progress on the political front. With the completion of the fifth round, members may wish to take stock of what the Committee has been able to accomplish to review how they will approach its future work. The Council could adopt a presidential statement welcoming the limited progress to date, while also laying out a clear set of substantive achievements they expect the Committee to aim for in upcoming rounds of meetings.

Council Dynamics

The Council remains deeply divided on Syria's political, humanitarian and chemical weapons files. OPCW Director-General Arias' unequivocal assessment for the Council in December that Syria is still not in compliance with its obligations did little to bridge the gap that exists amongst Council's members on the chemical weapons file. While there are two new penholders—Ireland and Norway—on the Syria humanitarian file, the 20 January Council meeting showed little change in the stark cleavages that exist between Council members on that issue. On the political front, there is broad agreement among Council members that the work of the Constitutional Committee is a generally positive development, but some members have become openly concerned about the Committee's lack of progress.

Myanmar

Expected Council Action

The Council may receive a briefing in February on the situation in Myanmar from Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener. Briefers from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees and UNDP are also possible.

Key Recent Developments

On 21 January, Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Masud bin Momen, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Luo Zhaohui and Myanmar International Cooperation Deputy Minister Hau Do Suan held a virtual tripartite meeting on the repatriation of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh. The last such meeting was held in January 2020. Media reports indicate that during the meeting Myanmar agreed to begin repatriation in the second quarter of this year. Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a bilateral agreement on repatriation in November 2017, but tangible progress on returns has been elusive. Repatriation attempts in November 2018 and August 2019 were abandoned after the refugees refused to return to their homeland, citing security concerns.

On 28 December 2020, about 1,800 Rohingya refugees were transferred from Cox's Bazar refugee camp to Bhasan Char island, located 34 miles from mainland Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal. Ahead of the impending movements, the UN issued a statement on 2 December stating that it had not been involved in the relocation exercise and reiterating its position that Rohingya refugees needed to make a "free and informed decision" about relocating to Bhasan Char and that the movements to the island should be voluntary.

The National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won a resounding victory in a general election on 8 November 2020, taking more than 80 percent of the democratically contested seats and increased its parliamentary majority. (A quarter of the seats are reserved for the military.) The new government is expected to be formed in March. The Myanmar military (known as the Tatmadaw) has called for an investigation of voting lists, alleging fraud.

Voting in 56 townships, largely in Rakhine State, was cancelled on security grounds, leaving 1.2 million out of 1.6 million registered voters in the state unable to cast ballots. In order to hold supplementary elections, originally anticipated for the end of January, the Arakan Army, an armed group composed largely of Rakhine Buddhists, and the Tatmadaw agreed to an informal ceasefire brokered by the Japanese special envoy to Myanmar, Yohei Sasakawa.

On 18 November 2020, the Third Committee of the General Assembly—which deals with social, humanitarian and human rights issues—approved a draft resolution on the "Situation of Human Rights of Rohingya Muslims and other Minorities in Myanmar" by a vote of 131 in favour to 9 against, with 31 abstentions. The resolution expressed grave concern at recent reports of serious human rights violations and abuses in Myanmar, in particular in Rakhine State and in Kachin and northern Shan States, and called for "full and unhindered access" for the delivery of humanitarian access and the "voluntary and sustainable return" of all internally displaced persons and refugees. It also called on the government to ensure accountability by undertaking "full, transparent and independent investigations" of reports of human rights violations.

On 11 September 2020, the Council discussed Myanmar during a closed videoconference (VTC). Special Envoy for Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener, High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, and UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific Kanni Wignaraja briefed on a range of issues, including the need to de-escalate the conflict; humanitarian access; the peace process; accountability; the Rakhine Advisory Commission recommendations; the tripartite memorandum of understanding between the Myanmar government, UNDP and UNHCR; and the November 2020 elections.

Children and Armed Conflict-Related Developments

The Secretary-General's 2020 annual report on children and armed conflict delisted the Tatmadaw for the violation of recruitment and use of children, conditioned on the "immediate ending and preventing of the ad hoc use of children in non-combat roles". It warned that failure to comply would result in relisting in the 2021 report. In a 14 October 2020 press release, the co-chairs of the UN Country Taskforce on Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Violations against Children in Myanmar expressed grave concern over the circumstances of the killing of two children in fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army in Buthidaung Township, Rakhine State. They called for an investigation and reiterated that the use of children for non-combat purposes should not be seen as a lesser violation than recruitment. The Secretary-General's sixth report on children and armed conflict in Myanmar, which covers the period 1 September 2018 to 30 June 2020, was published on 18 December 2020. The Secretary-General acknowledged the progress made in developing a legal framework and implementing the action plan to stop recruitment and use of children. He expressed concern over the killing and maiming of children and urged the government to sign a joint action plan with the UN on killing and maiming and sexual violence against children. He also expressed concern over the recruitment and use of children by armed groups. The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict is expected to consider this report in February.

Key Issues and Options

For much of 2020 the government's attention was focused on addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and preparing for the November elections. Council members refrained from putting pressure on Myanmar ahead of the elections. The February meeting could allow the Council to convey its views on recent developments and to revisit issues such as the challenges to repatriation of Rohingya refugees, the security situation in northwest Rakhine State and the impact of COVID-19 in Myanmar. One option would be for Council members to issue a press statement reacting to the elections, encouraging the government to hold supplementary elections in Rakhine State, and formalising the ceasefire. A stronger outcome, such as a resolution or presidential statement, would likely prove

UN DOCUMENTS ON MYANMAR [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2017/22](#) (6 November 2017) addressed the situation in Rakhine. [Secretary-General's Report S/2020/1243](#) (17 December 2020) was on children and armed conflict in Myanmar. [S/2020/525](#) (9 June 2020) was the Secretary-General's 2020 annual report on children and armed conflict. [Security Council Letter S/2020/67](#) (24 January 2020) conveyed the notice of the International Court of Justice order indicating provisional measures in the case concerning application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar). [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8477](#) (28 February 2019) was a briefing by Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener. [General Assembly Document A/C.3/75/L.34](#) (30 October 2020) was the resolution on the situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar. [Human Rights Council Document A/HRC/39/64](#) (12 September 2018) was the report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar.

Myanmar

difficult given the divisions in the Council on Myanmar. In addition, Council members could reiterate the need for the return of refugees to be safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable, and show support for greater coordination between the Myanmar government and the UN on this issue.

The Council may want more information about the relocation of refugees to Bhasan Char. The UN has maintained the need for comprehensive technical assessments that would review the safety and feasibility of Bhasan Char as a place to live. Council members could encourage the Bangladesh government to invite the UN to conduct technical assessments of the suitability of the island to house the refugees and to verify that those being relocated are doing so voluntarily.

It is unclear if the meeting on Myanmar will be held in an open or closed format. Several Council members are likely to oppose having an open VTC. In the past, opposition to the format of a meeting could be settled through a procedural vote. (A procedural vote takes place in a formal meeting, requires nine affirmative votes, and cannot be vetoed by a permanent member.) VTC meetings are not currently considered official meetings of the Council, however, so reaching agreement

through a procedural vote will be difficult unless the Council is able to meet in person. A possible compromise could be to hold an open VTC briefing so that Council members can hear from the Special Envoy and the Myanmar and Bangladesh government representatives but not express their views publicly. They could then make national statements in a closed VTC that could include other briefers, including the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, and representatives from UNHCR and UNDP.

Council Dynamics

At the meeting on Myanmar in September 2020, Council members were united over the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for conflict de-escalation. However, the familiar cleavages over accountability, international humanitarian law, and humanitarian access were also evident. The UK, as penholder, floated the idea of a press statement as a possible outcome, but this was not acceptable to at least one permanent member. As a result, the European members at the time (Estonia, France, Germany, and the UK), the Dominican Republic, Tunisia and the US decided to issue a

joint statement following the meeting, if it is not possible for the Council to agree on an outcome after the February meeting, “like-minded” Council members may again choose to issue their own press statement which could highlight the recent developments while reiterating their views on the need for returns to be safe and voluntary.

Several members in the Council have strong historical and regional ties to Myanmar. China is likely to emphasise its role in encouraging the repatriation of Rohingya and dialogue between Bangladesh and Myanmar. India may be reluctant to discuss Myanmar in light of recent positive developments such as the November elections, the informal ceasefire, and the tripartite meeting. As a member of ASEAN, Vietnam has taken a cautious approach in line with ASEAN’s general principle of non-interference in the affairs of its member states and has not been a strong advocate of greater Council involvement. These members, together with Russia, may also be concerned that active Council engagement may jeopardise current regional and tripartite activities.

Sudan

Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee by 12 February, in advance of its expiration on 12 March, as set out in resolution 2508.

The mandate of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) expires on 3 June in accordance with resolution 2524.

Key Recent Developments

On 16 and 17 January, 160 people were reportedly killed and 215 injured in clashes

between the Masalit and Arab communities around a camp for internally displaced people in West Darfur. The clashes also led to the mass displacement of over 50,000 persons from the camp and nearby villages. Sudanese authorities responded by declaring a state of emergency and imposing a curfew in the region. The government also deployed military units to West Darfur. In South Darfur, 72 people were reportedly killed and 73 injured on 18 January in clashes between the Falata and Reizigat tribes.

In an 17 January statement, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called on the Sudanese authorities to end the fighting

and ensure the protection of civilians, in accordance with the government’s National Plan for Civilian Protection. (The plan was transmitted to the Council in May 2020.) On 21 January, the UK, along with Estonia, France, Ireland, Norway, and the US, raised the violence in Darfur under “any other business”, discussing the government’s response and possibilities for UNITAMS to support the government.

The violence in Darfur comes less than a month after the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2559, on 22 December 2020, on the exit of the UN/AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2559 (22 December 2020) was on the end of the mandate of UNAMID. S/RES/2524 (3 June 2020) established UNITAMS for an initial period of 12 months. S/RES/2508 (11 February 2020) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts for one year. **Secretary-General’s Report** S/2020/1155 (1 December 2020) was the 90-day report of the Secretary-General. **Security Council Letters** S/2021/11 (30 December 2020) announced the appointment of Volker Perthes (Germany) as Special Representative for the Sudan and head of UNITAMS. S/2020/1319 (30 December 2020) was a summary of the meeting on Sudan of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security on 14 December 2020. S/2020/1209 (15 December 2020) was the annual report of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee. S/2020/1235 (17 December 2020) was a record of the quarterly briefing on 11 December by the Chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee. S/2020/1183 (18 December 2020) was a record of the briefing on 8 December on UNITAMS and UNAMID.

Sudan

The resolution terminated the mandate of UNAMID as of 31 December 2020 and requested the Secretary-General to complete the withdrawal of all uniformed and civilian UNAMID personnel by 30 June, other than those required for the mission's liquidation. (For more see our What's In Blue story of 21 December 2020.)

On 8 December 2020, the Council received a briefing on UNITAMS and UNAMID from 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. On 11 December 2020, Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia) provided the most recent quarterly briefing in his capacity as chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, during which he highlighted several aspects of the panel's reporting. He also reiterated that the sanctions regime "is not to punish the Sudan, but to support the attainment of sustainable peace". Sudan made a statement expressing its position that sanctions should be lifted.

In a 30 December 2020 letter, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of Volker Perthes (Germany) as Special Representative for the Sudan and head of UNITAMS.

Human Rights-Related Developments

Following the violence in Darfur in January, the spokesperson for the High Commissioner for Human Rights said in a statement on 22 January that "the lack of security and chronic impunity in the region leaves it vulnerable to further serious violence". The spokesperson added that there "are severe gaps in protection by state authorities, as well as a lack of accountability for violations" and that "local health facilities have reported being unable to cope with the high number of casualties".

Women, Peace and Security

On 14 December 2020, the Informal Experts Group (IEG) on women, peace and security met on Sudan, attended by all Council members. Among the key topics discussed were points related to the peace agreement signed by the transitional government of Sudan, the Sudan

Revolutionary Front and the Sudan Liberation Movement-Minni Minawi in Juba in October 2020, including the fact that only 10 percent of negotiators involved were women and all mediators were male. Speakers stressed that lockdown measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic had made documenting cases of conflict-related sexual violence harder. (UNAMID reported 191 cases of such violence in 2020.) They also noted the transitional government's adoption of Sudan's first National Action Plan on women, peace and security. During the meeting, UN entities provided Council members with recommendations. They asked the Council to ensure that civilians were adequately protected in Darfur; this included protecting women from sexual and gender-based violence. They also requested that the Council retain and support women protection advisors and gender advisors in UNITAMS.

Key Issues and Options

An immediate issue for the Council is renewing the mandate of the Panel of Experts. Another issue is to consider reviewing the sanctions measures on Darfur, as signalled in the past three resolutions that renewed the mandate of the Panel of Experts. A further issue is to consider establishing clear, well-identified and measurable key benchmarks to guide the Council in reviewing the sanctions measures on the government of Sudan, an intention expressed by the Council in resolutions 2455 and 2508.

An option for the Council is to consider, in the resolution renewing the mandate of the Panel of Experts, including a request that the Secretariat provide a report assessing the role of the sanctions regime and specifying options for the elaboration of benchmarks, as was done in relation to South Sudan with the adoption of resolution 2521 on 29 May 2020. A less likely option is to consider expanding the regime's designation criteria to include acts of rape or sexual violence. In assessing the options, Council members are likely to be informed by the final report of the Panel of Experts, which at the time of writing was yet to be released publicly.

A key issue that Council members will want to follow closely is the security

situation in Darfur, particularly in light of the violence in January and the drawdown and exit of UNAMID currently underway, as set out in resolution 2559. Another key issue is what role UNITAMS can play, within its mandate contained in resolution 2524, in supporting the government to fulfil its obligation to protect civilians, including implementation of its National Plan for Civilian Protection. Council members could consider holding an Informal Interactive Dialogue with Sudanese officials to discuss how the Council and UNITAMS could best support implementation of this plan.

Council Dynamics

It appears that members continue to hold divergent views on the utility of the sanctions regime. Those members that would like the Council to review and ease the sanctions measures, including developing benchmarks in this regard, may encourage that this be done now by emphasising positive developments in the country over the past year, such as the signing of the peace agreement in Juba in October 2020. Following the adoption of resolution 2508 in February 2020, China said that regular review of the sanctions regime was necessary and urged Council members to consider developing a road map towards lifting such measures. Russia, too, said it was time to formulate a road map towards the lifting of sanctions. However, other Council members may take a more cautious approach in reviewing the sanctions measures, including as a result of the violence in Darfur in January and the findings contained in the final report of the Panel of Experts. At the time of writing, Council members had been unable to agree on a statement condemning the violence in Darfur in January.

The UK is the penholder on Sudan, and the US is the penholder on Sudan sanctions. Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia) chairs the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee. The vice-chairs are Ireland and Viet Nam.

Counter-Terrorism

Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council is expected to receive briefings by Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov, the head of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), and Assistant Secretary-General Michèle Coninsx, the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) on the Secretary-General's 12th strategic-level report on the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh).

Key Recent Developments

On 12 January, the Council held a ministerial-level open debate via videoconference (VTC) on the upcoming 20th anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1373 on 28 September 2001 and the establishment of the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC). Voronkov, Coninsx and Fatima Akilu, the Executive Director of the Neem Foundation, briefed. The Council also adopted a presidential statement on the issue. In his briefing, Voronkov stressed that ISIL remains a threat in Iraq, Syria and the wider region.

In December 2020, CTED published an update to its June 2020 paper "The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism, countering terrorism and countering violent extremism". The paper focuses on the challenges that the pandemic poses to addressing the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism, an increase in recruitment opportunities for such groups, and the situation of ISIL-associated foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and their families. It further discusses the adaptation of violent extremists' narratives to the pandemic, the challenges posed to prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration (PRR) measures, and repatriation.

A reprioritisation of state spending to fight the pandemic and a strained global economy has led some states to cut back on funding for counter-terrorism operations and for development, humanitarian and peacebuilding initiatives meant to counter violent extremism.

Violent extremists and terrorists continue to exploit trends connected to the pandemic, including an increase in the use of social media and the internet more broadly. Those

groups spread misinformation and propaganda for radicalisation purposes with the goal of recruitment. According to CTED, there is some evidence that more children and young people have accessed such content online. In Western Europe, extreme right-wing groups exploit woes related to the pandemic. The paper argues that this trend is of concern, especially in connection with states' campaigns to vaccinate their populations. CTED also reports that misogynistic content has increased online, risking the intensification of violence against girls and women.

The risk of forcible recruitment by armed groups has increased in West Africa and the Sahel as the pandemic and ongoing violence have resulted in children and youths being out of school.

Violent extremist and terrorist groups in the Eurasian region have exploited economic grievances exacerbated by the pandemic and have offered financial support in an effort to recruit or indoctrinate people.

Regarding the situation of FTFs associated with ISIL and their families in prisons and detention camps, attention by states to their condition and related humanitarian and security challenges has further decreased. The situation in overcrowded camps in Iraq and Syria—the vast majority of the population being young children and women—requires even more urgent attention now, with cases of COVID-19 reported, according to CTED.

The paper notes that implementation of PRR measures has decreased. The repatriation of people associated with FTFs has almost stopped, often in the name of measures to combat the pandemic. During the 12 January open debate, Voronkov called the repatriation of foreign nationals associated with ISIL, the majority being children and women, an urgent challenge.

The CTED paper concludes with a call to address the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism, such as inequality and state fragility. The paper cautions against "fueling conditions conducive to terrorism and violent extremism", including "the increased securitization of pandemic responses". By way of example, the paper argues that emergency measures implemented to fight COVID-19

that limit the exercise of human rights may increase existing grievances, leading to further radicalisation. CTED therefore emphasises the need for a balanced, comprehensive, gender-sensitive, and human rights-compliant approach to countering violent extremism and terrorism. Voronkov, in his 12 January briefing to the Council, called for "an inclusive approach and a strategic investment in building resilience" in that regard.

On 27 January, the CTC held an open VTC briefing on the protection of "soft" targets against terrorist attacks. On 20 January, the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee met in a closed VTC on the 27th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team.

On 29 January, Russia, Kazakhstan and the Office of the Special Representative on Children in Armed Conflict co-hosted an Arria-formula meeting on the repatriation of children from conflict zones. Virginia Gamba, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Voronkov, Anna Kuznetsova, Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights of Russia, and the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan, Magzhan Ilyassov, who is also the co-chair of the Global Coalition for the reintegration of child soldiers, briefed.

Council Dynamics

In general, counter-terrorism enjoys the support of all Council members. A recent notable exception was a draft resolution on the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of FTFs. Initiated by Indonesia in August 2020, it failed to be adopted because of a US veto; the other 14 Council members voted in favour of the text. The US argued that the draft resolution did not reference the repatriation of FTFs and their families. It seems that the US' decision to veto may have also been connected to wider Council dynamics on the Iran nuclear issue under the Indonesian presidency that month.

Some differences also exist regarding the four pillars of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The pillars are, first, addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism; second, measures to

UN DOCUMENTS ON COUNTER-TERRORISM Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2021/1 (12 January 2021) was on the 20th anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1373 and the establishment of the CTC. Sanctions Committee Document S/2021/68 (21 January 2021) was a letter from the chair of the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, transmitting the 27th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team. Security Council Press Statements SC/14421 (22 January 2021) was on the two suicide attacks in central Baghdad on 21 January, resulting in 32 dead and at least 110 injured. SC/14414 (18 January 2021) was on the 15 January attack against the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), in which one peacekeeper was killed and another injured. SC/14411 (14 January 2021) was on the 13 January attack against MINUSMA, resulting in four peacekeepers dead and five injured.

Counter-Terrorism

prevent and combat terrorism; third, measures to build states' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and to strengthen the role of the United Nations system in that regard; and fourth, measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism. The fourth pillar does not enjoy

equal support among all Council members. New Council members India and Kenya are expected to take an active interest in counter-terrorism issues.

The US is the penholder on counter-terrorism. Ambassador Tarek Ladeb (Tunisia) chairs the CTC. Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative Trine Heimerback

(Norway) chairs the 1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee. The 1540 Non-Proliferation Committee is chaired by Ambassador Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico).

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council is expected to adopt a resolution renewing Yemen financial and travel ban sanctions, which expire on 26 February, and the mandate of the Yemen Panel of Experts, which expires on 28 March. (The targeted arms embargo established by resolution 2216 in April 2015 against the Houthi rebel group is open-ended.) The Council will also hold its monthly briefing on Yemen with Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock, and General Abhijit Guha, the head of the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA). The chair of the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee, Ambassador I. Rhonda King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), is also expected to brief.

Key Recent Developments

The war in Yemen persists across multiple frontlines as the Special Envoy maintains efforts to broker a ceasefire and resume a peace process involving the Yemeni government and the Houthis. UN officials continue to highlight the risk of famine, raising concerns that the US designation of the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organisation could prove severely counterproductive to efforts to ward off catastrophe.

On 30 December 2020, at least 25 people were killed and over 100 injured by multiple explosions at Aden airport shortly after a plane carrying the new Yemeni cabinet arrived from Saudi Arabia. No one on the government plane was hurt. A second attack, by drone, reportedly targeted Mashiq Palace in Aden after the government was transferred there; no casualties were reported in this

incident. The new cabinet, announced on 18 December 2020, includes representatives of the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC), and its formation marked a key step in fulfilling the November 2019 Saudi-brokered Riyadh Agreement between the STC and the Yemeni government. The circumstances of the Aden attacks remain unclear, but the reported use of missiles in the airport attack suggest the Houthis may have been responsible as they are the only other party to the conflict known to have such weapons.

Griffiths condemned the attack on Aden airport, which according to the government included targeting the arrival hall and the VIP lounge. He toured the damage on 7 January when he travelled to Aden to meet with Prime Minister Maen Abdulmalik Saeed and other members of the cabinet and local officials.

When the US designated the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organisation on 10 January, it also labelled Houthi leaders Abdul Malik al-Houthi, Abd al-Khaliq Badr al-Din al-Houthi, and Abdullah Yahya al Hakim as "specially designated global terrorists". (The three individuals are under Security Council travel ban and asset freeze sanctions for undermining the peace, security and stability of Yemen.) Since November 2020, media sources had reported that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo of the outgoing Trump administration was planning to designate the group as part of its maximum-pressure campaign on Iran, which is believed to provide military support to the Houthis. UN officials and others lobbied against the move, worried about its implications on the humanitarian situation and the political process in Yemen.

At the Council's 14 January meeting on Yemen, Griffiths, Lowcock and World

Food Programme Executive Director David Beasley reiterated UN concerns. Griffiths observed that the designation could have a "chilling effect" on his mediation efforts and said the decision "should be revoked based on humanitarian grounds at the earliest opportunity". Lowcock and Beasley also advocated for the US reversing the designation, which Lowcock warned could cause a "large-scale famine that we have not seen for nearly forty years". Lowcock and Beasley stressed its anticipated impact on commercial food imports, which make up about 90 percent of Yemen's food supplies. According to Lowcock, many suppliers, banks, shippers and insurers are likely to cease doing business in Yemen due to legal liabilities. "They fear being accidentally or otherwise caught up in US regulatory action which would put them out of business or into jail", he noted, adding that those who may continue doing business say that food costs will increase by at least 400 percent. Lowcock and Beasley also highlighted the expected disruption on aid operations without exemptions for humanitarian actors, who inevitably interact with the Houthis and risk violating US law.

When the designation officially entered into force on 19 January, the US issued licenses exempting aid groups, the UN, the Red Cross, and exports of agricultural commodities, medicine and medical devices. Asked about the announced licenses, Spokesperson of the Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric said that the UN's position had not changed, and that "we call on the government to reverse that decision".

On 24 January, a new round of prisoner exchange talks between the government and Houthis and co-chaired by the Office of the

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2511 (25 February 2020) renewed the Yemen sanctions regime for one year. 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.

Yemen

Special Envoy and the ICRC commenced in Amman, Jordan. The last talks held in September 2020 in Geneva resulted in the exchange of 1,056 prisoners.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 22 January, the Yemen 2140 Sanctions Committee met to consider the final report of its Panel of Experts, which included details of arms transfers to the Houthis in violation of the targeted arms embargo and of the origins of commercial components used by the Houthis in assembling weapons. At the time of writing, the Panel of Experts planned to travel to Aden at the invitation of the Yemeni government to investigate the 30 December 2020 attack.

Key Issues and Options

Restarting the political process remains a key issue. After ten months of negotiations on Griffiths' proposed joint declaration for a nation-wide ceasefire, confidence-building measures, and the resumption of peace talks, the Special Envoy is continuing to engage the parties to reach an agreement. Fighting—including the Houthi offensive in Marib governorate, the political and economic stronghold of the government—risks undermining peace talks. Sustaining and implementing the Riyadh Agreement is another important related issue. If agreement is reached on the joint declaration, the Council may adopt a resolution to endorse the deal.

Concerns about famine in Yemen were already on the rise before the US designation. According to Lowcock and Beasley, 50,000

people were already experiencing famine-like conditions, and the 3 December 2020 Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) analysis forecasts that the number of people facing Phase 4 emergency food insecurity conditions—just one step above famine—would increase from 3.6 million to five million during the first half of 2021. Funding for the aid operation remains a major challenge. Moreover, stabilising the Yemeni rial is critical to make sure Yemenis can afford to purchase food. Members may continue to advocate in their national statements that donors, particularly Gulf States—which cut back their contributions significantly over the past year—support the humanitarian appeal, and inject hard currency into Yemen's Central Bank to bolster the Yemeni rial.

In the resolution to renew the sanctions regime, the Council could incorporate recommendations from the Panel of Experts to draw attention to the panel's findings about the diversion of assets and delays in paying civil servant salaries, especially those of the military, undermining Yemen's peace, security and stability.

Council Dynamics

Council members appear aligned in their support of the Special Envoy, continuing to back his mediation efforts. Members further share concerns about the humanitarian situation and the risk that the decrepit FSO Safer oil tanker moored in the Red Sea off Hodeidah might cause a major

environmental disaster. In the past year, members issued multiple press statements and press elements in which they urged the parties to reach agreement on the joint declaration, called on the Houthis to facilitate the UN technical mission's access to the oil tanker and, more recently, highlighted the need for stakeholders and the international community to take measures to avert famine.

During January, members were split over whether to attribute responsibility for the 30 December 2020 Aden attacks to the Houthis in a press statement to be issued following their January meeting on Yemen. The US and the UK, in particular, believed that the statement should identify the Houthis as responsible, while Russia argued that members should be careful not to assign blame before an objective investigation is conducted, noting that the Houthis had not claimed responsibility, as they had in many other attacks.

The new US administration has indicated that the foreign terrorism organisation designation might be reversed and that ending the Yemen war will be a foreign policy priority. The US has been criticised for complicity in the war's widespread violations of international humanitarian law through its military support for the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, as have the UK and France.

The UK is the penholder on Yemen.

Iraq

Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing by the Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, on the most recent developments in Iraq and on the two latest Secretary-General's reports on UNAMI and on the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives. Both reports are due in February.

UNAMI's mandate expires on 31 May 2021 and the mandate of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) expires on 18 September 2021.

Key Recent Developments

A double suicide attack hit central Baghdad on 21 January, killing 32 people and injuring at least 110. The same day, Secretary-General António Guterres strongly condemned the

bombings. The attack, the largest of its kind in three years, was claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh) a day later. On 22 January, Council members adopted a press statement condemning the attack "in the strongest terms".

Attacks also continue to be directed against the US military and diplomatic presence and the US-led Global Coalition against Da'esh (the Coalition) in Iraq. The latest such attack took place on 20 December 2020 when 21

UN DOCUMENTS ON IRAQ Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2544 (18 September 2020) extended the mandate of UNITAD until 18 September 2021. S/RES/2522 (29 May 2020) extended the mandate of UNAMI until 31 May 2021. Security Council Letters S/2020/1216 (15 December 2020) was to the president of the Security Council from Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia), chair of the 1518 Iraq Sanctions Committee 2020-2021, transmitting the annual report of the committee. S/2020/1193 (18 December 2020) contained the briefing provided by Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, Special Adviser and head of UNITAD, and the statements by all Council members and Iraq during an open videoconference (VTC) meeting on UNITAD on 10 December 2020. S/2020/1144 (27 November 2020) contained the briefing provided by Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert during the 24 November 2020 open VTC meeting on UNAMI. S/2020/1130 (20 November 2020) contained an 18 November 2020 letter from the Iraqi foreign minister requesting the Council to strengthen UNAMI's role with regard to the upcoming elections. Security Council Press Statements SC/14421 (22 January 2021) was on the two suicide attacks in central Baghdad on 21 January, resulting in 32 dead and at least 110 injured. SC/14365 (24 November 2020) was on Iraq-Kuwait relations.

rockets were fired at the US Embassy in Baghdad. One Iraqi was killed in the attack and buildings were damaged. These attacks are usually not claimed by any group. In a 23 December 2020 statement, a US Central Command spokesperson said that the attack “was almost certainly conducted by an Iranian-backed Rogue Militia Group”. The US in the past has attacked bases of Iran-backed militias operating in Iraq in retaliation.

One of the Iran-backed militias that the US has accused of perpetrating attacks against its personnel in Iraq is Kata’ib Hezbollah, which the US has designated a terrorist organisation. Kata’ib Hezbollah is part of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), established in 2014 from different, mostly Iran-backed, Shi’a Muslim fighters to combat ISIL. In July 2019, then-Prime Minister Adil Abd Al-Mahdi issued an executive order bringing the PMF under the exclusive control of the Iraqi state and ordering it to cut all links with political entities. The current Iraqi prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, is trying to implement a zero-tolerance policy towards armed groups operating outside state control. On 11 October 2020, a spokesperson for Kata’ib Hezbollah, claiming to speak on behalf of groups of “resistance” against the US presence in Iraq, said that the group had temporarily suspended attacks on US forces.

On 3 January 2020, a US strike near the Baghdad airport killed Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards’ Quds Force, as well as Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of the PMF. On the anniversary of the strike, thousands of Iraqis protested and demanded that US troops leave Iraq.

On 15 January, the US Department of Defense announced that it had completed the planned drawdown of its force in Iraq to a level of 2,500 troops. The new US president, Joe Biden, appears intent on continuing the policy of withdrawing military personnel from Iraq while maintaining a counter-terrorism presence.

A major wave of widespread popular protests demanding basic services and systemic change started in October 2019 and ultimately led to the resignation of the Iraqi government that same year. Protests continue mostly in the city of Nasiriyah.

Iraqi President Barham Salih named al-Kadhimi as prime minister-designate on 9

April 2020. He will hold the position until early elections are held. Initially announced for 6 June 2021, the elections are now scheduled for 10 October 2021 as the Iraqi parliament voted to postpone them after Iraq’s Independent High Election Commission had requested more time to prepare. In an 18 November 2020 letter to the Council, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein requested the Council to strengthen UNAMI’s role with regard to the elections.

On 9 December 2020, ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda announced that her office would not open an investigation into possible war crimes committed by UK nationals in Iraq. Following the conclusion of her preliminary investigation, Bensouda found that “there is a reasonable basis to believe that members of the British armed forces committed the war crimes of wilful killing, torture, inhuman/cruel treatment, outrages upon personal dignity, and rape and/or other forms of sexual violence”. However, her office did not consider the situation admissible. The ICC is a court of last resort and cases are only admissible when “the State is unwilling or unable genuinely to carry out the investigation or prosecution”, according to Article 17(1)(b) of the Rome Statute of the ICC. In the case of the UK, she concluded that these conditions had not been met.

On 16 September 2007, security guards of the private military company Blackwater International shot dead 17 civilians and injured 24 in Nisour Square in Baghdad. Four Blackwater security guards were convicted by a US federal court in 2014 of manslaughter, murder and weapons charges. On 22 December 2020, then-US president Donald Trump pardoned the men. In a 30 December 2020 statement, the independent experts of the Human Rights Council’s Working Group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination condemned the pardons as a violation of international law by the US. The Working Group argued that states are obliged to “hold war criminals accountable” under the Geneva Conventions, including when they act as private military contractors.

On 10 December 2020, the Council received a briefing from Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, the Special Adviser and head of UNITAD.

On 24 November 2020, Council members adopted a press statement on the issue

of missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 27 November 2020, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances (CED) issued its findings on Iraq, calling on it to incorporate the offence of enforced disappearances into domestic criminal legislation, and to ensure no person is held in secret detention. The report found that a pattern of enforced disappearance persists in much of the country. It expressed concern over the lack of reliable data on cases of enforced disappearance and the large quantity of unidentified bodies and mass graves. It recommended that Iraq establish a consolidated nationwide database of all cases of disappearance that have occurred in the country since 1968. The Committee received allegations in relation to 420 possible secret detention sites and urged Iraq to investigate them, close any such facilities or convert them into regular registered and supervised detention centres, as well as to take all necessary measures to ensure that no one is detained secretly in the future.

Key Issues and Options

Council members are closely following the political, security and humanitarian situations in Iraq. After the briefing by Hennis-Plasschaert, Council members could issue a press statement addressing issues of concern to them.

Regarding the request from the Iraqi government for a strengthened role of the UN in the electoral process, Council members could discuss possible options.

Council and Wider Dynamics

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

Regional dynamics continue to affect Iraq. The government routinely states that Iraq has no intention of taking sides and becoming caught in the middle of Iran-US tensions. Turkey continues to conduct military operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) positions in Kurdistan, northern Iraq, despite Iraq’s objections.

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

Somalia

Expected Council Action

In February, the Council is expected to renew its authorisation of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), due to expire on 28 February. The Council is scheduled to be briefed on the Secretary-General's report on the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), which is due 13 February. James Swan, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and head of UNSOM, will brief the Council. Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason (Ireland), chair of the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee, will also brief the Council on the activities of the committee.

The mandate for UNSOM expires on 31 August 2021.

Key Recent Developments

Because of an ongoing political dispute between the Somali Federal Government, led by President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo", and leaders from two of the country's federal member states, Puntland and Jubaland, parliamentary elections scheduled for December 2020 have been postponed. In September, the five leaders of the federal member states and Farmajo reached an agreement, subsequently endorsed by Parliament, for parliamentary elections to be held from 1 to 27 December and presidential elections on 8 February. At the time of writing, a date for the parliamentary elections had yet to be set, and the presidential elections seem likely to be postponed.

According to international media reports, there are several reasons for the disagreements between the federal government and the Jubaland and Puntland governments. These include claims that, based on longstanding precedent, Farmajo should not be allowed to run for another term and that he has attempted to bypass Somalia's electoral laws by installing loyalists on polling committees charged with coordinating the parliamentary elections. Given the logistical and security challenges of holding direct elections (Somalia has not held direct elections since 1969), a modified indirect electoral process was agreed last year. This system allows clans' delegates to choose members of the lower house of parliament, who will in turn choose the president.

During an Informal Interactive Dialogue (IID) with Council members on 20 January, Somali Foreign Minister Mohamed Abdirizak Mohamud explained that the federal government aimed to organise the elections in a timely manner and would like to start this process regardless of Jubaland and Puntland's position on the matter. This position was initially mooted by Somali Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble on 9 January when he announced that the government was planning to move forward with the elections without Jubaland and Puntland, organizing the elections in three of Somalia's five federal states—Galmudug, Hirshabelle and South West State—and Mogadishu Municipality. To date, no further steps have been taken to begin this process.

During a 25 January visit to Garowe, the capital of Puntland, Swan met with Puntland President Said Abdullahi Deni. Speaking to the media after the meeting, Swan said that there was a "need for constructive compromise between the Federal Government and Federal Member States to reach agreement over implementation of the electoral process" given that it is "in the national interest". Speaking to the Council on 23 November 2020, Swan called for the country's political consensus to be "preserved and indeed deepened".

In addition to the political instability caused by the uncertain electoral process, regional relations and the security situation in the country have also been challenging in recent months. On 30 November 2020, Somalia expelled Kenya's ambassador, with Somalia's information minister, Osman Dube, claiming that Kenya "continues meddling in [Somalia's] internal political affairs and...has ignored [Somalia's] previous calls to stop violating [the country's] sovereignty". The expulsion came after a meeting between Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and Musa Bihi Abdi, the leader of Somaliland, whose 1991 declaration of independence from Somalia has not been recognised by any UN member state. At the meeting, Kenya announced that it would open a consulate in Hargeisa, Somaliland's capital, and begin direct flights between Nairobi and Somaliland. Somalia also accused Kenya of putting

pressure on Puntland's federal authorities to boycott the parliamentary elections.

On 25 January, fighting between Somali federal troops and Jubaland state forces resulted in the death of 11 civilians in Bula Hawa, a town near the border with Kenya. Dube claimed that the attack was undertaken by "Kenya and its guerrilla rebels", which the Kenyan authorities denied. In a 25 January letter to the AU, the Kenyan government warned of large-scale displacement of civilians and further destabilisation in the region if the fighting in the area continued. On 26 January, the AU called on the parties to de-escalate tensions through dialogue.

Key Issues and Options

Council members will continue to follow closely progress towards parliamentary and presidential elections, including how the dialogue evolves between the Somali federal government and the governments of the federal member states, especially Jubaland and Puntland. Council members may wish to consider adopting a press statement noting the need for the elections to be organised through a consensual approach and in a timely manner.

On 8 January, the Council received the Secretary-General's independent assessment on the configuration of AMISOM. Required under resolution 2520 renewing AMISOM's mandate last year, the report offers a series of conclusions and recommendations on the future work of AMISOM and its relations with the Somali federal government and security forces. The assessment is likely to guide the Council's work as it considers how to adjust AMISOM's and UNSOM's priorities in 2021.

Council Dynamics

There is broad consensus among Council members regarding the challenges facing Somalia. However, members remain divided on the way ahead, and differences have emerged on the Council's approach to the country. On 12 November 2020, for example, China and Russia abstained on resolution 2551, which, among other issues, renewed the partial lifting of the arms embargo on Somali security forces. Both Russia and China argued for the inclusion of benchmarks

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2554 (4 December 2020) renewed the counter-piracy measures off the coast of Somalia for 12 months. S/RES/2551 (12 November 2020) extended various elements of the Somalia sanctions regime until 15 November 2021. S/RES/2540 (28 August 2020) extended UNSOM's mandate for 12 months until 31 August 2021. **Secretary-General's Report S/2020/1072** (2 November 2020) covered the reporting period from 1 November 2019 to 31 October 2020, detailing the international military and capacity support for efforts to combat piracy. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8775** (12 November 2020) was the adoption of resolution 2551 on the Somalia sanctions regime.

Somalia

that could begin the path towards lifting the arms embargo while objecting to the inclusion of human rights language.

There are likely to be further differences of opinion over the current political impasse. A number of members might be reluctant to address Somalia's internal electoral processes, claiming that such a move could interfere in the country's internal matters.

The Secretary-General's independent assessment may also illuminate further divisions: some members see AMISOM as a crucial bulwark against the armed group Al-Shabaab and believe that removing its authorisation could create a destabilising security vacuum. EU members on the Council, and the UK, as major financial sponsors of AMISOM, are eager to see tangible

improvement on the ground. Kenya, which joined the Council on 1 January, remains one of the top contributors to AMISOM and as a close neighbour is likely to be actively engaged in discussions on Somalia.

The UK is the penholder on Somalia.

Haiti

Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), Helen La Lime, on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest report on the special political mission, due on 12 February. A civil society representative may also brief.

BINUH's mandate expires on 15 October 2021.

Key Recent Developments

Haiti continues to contend with the interlocking crises of political instability and a deteriorating socioeconomic situation, as electoral milestones in 2021 present opportunities and challenges for progress in the country. On 7 January, Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (PEC) announced that a constitutional referendum will take place in April, while the presidential election is set for September. In addition, the parliamentary and municipal elections—which were initially scheduled for October 2019 but have been delayed by political stalemate—are expected to take place in September and November, respectively. The UN is expected to provide electoral support to events related to the electoral calendar, responding to an official request of the Haitian government contained in a letter dated 11 November 2020.

Electoral uncertainty remains a challenge because of a lack of consensus between the parties in Haiti around issues such as the composition of the PEC, the holding of the constitutional referendum and the end-date of President Jovenel Moïse's term in

office. On 23 July 2020, Moïse requested that the sectors represented in the PEC either confirm their existing representative or appoint a new one within 48 hours. The Haitian constitution stipulates that several key sectors (including religious sectors and academia) must nominate councillors for the PEC. The members of the PEC refused Moïse's request and collectively resigned the following day, citing in their resignation letter concerns about the intention of the presidency to move forward with changes to the constitution and start the electoral process without having achieved consensus between all relevant stakeholders, including the opposition and civil society.

The process for the selection of the new PEC appears to have been controversial. Several civil society sectors refused to nominate a counsellor for the PEC, as mandated by the constitution, in protest of the presidency's actions. On 18 September 2020, Moïse appointed a new PEC by presidential decree, without having secured the approval of the Supreme Court for the nominations. Haitian opposition parties, legal scholars and human rights organisations criticised this move as illegitimate and unconstitutional.

While there is consensus among the different political parties on the need for constitutional reform, the process leading to the reform remains the main point of disagreement between the president and the opposition. The announcement of the expected constitutional referendum garnered criticism from the opposition, which maintains that the referendum is illegal because the current Haitian constitution prohibits any modification of it by referendum. In a 23

October 2020 address, Moïse claimed that he does not intend to run in the next presidential election, in an apparent attempt to dispel claims that he is seeking constitutional reform so he can run again.

On 30 October 2020, President Moïse installed an Independent Advisory Committee for the development of a new constitution. Details of the draft constitution—which is set to be finalised by 26 February—have not been released to date, although a member of the Independent Advisory Committee said in an early January interview that proposals include creating a single legislative chamber to replace the current Senate and Chamber of Deputies, extending parliamentary terms, and giving Haitians who live abroad increased representation. Moïse has declared that if the draft constitution is approved by referendum, the next elections will be organised along the timeline of the new constitution. As such, the result of the referendum could alter the electoral calendar announced in early January.

Opposition groups have also claimed that the electoral calendar constitutes an attempt by Moïse to extend his term in office. The end-date of Moïse's term is disputed because his inauguration on 7 February 2017 was preceded by a one-year term of a provisional president. (As there was no elected successor when President Michel Martelly's term ended in February 2016, the Senate chose Jocelerme Privert as provisional president on 14 February 2016). Opposition groups claim that Moïse's five-year term will legally end on 7 February 2021 while Moïse's position—which is supported by most UN members states—is that the legal end-date is in February 2022.

UN DOCUMENTS ON HAITI Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2547 (15 October 2020) renewed BINUH's mandate for one year. S/RES/2476 (25 June 2019) established BINUH. Secretary-General's Report S/2020/944 (25 September 2020) was the latest report on BINUH. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8768 (15 October 2020) was the adoption of resolution 2547. Two members, China and Russia, abstained.

Haiti

The opposition has called for demonstrations to demand that Moïse step down in February. According to media reports, hundreds of people participated in demonstrations that took place on 15 January in Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haitien, Jacmel, Saint-Marc, and Gonaïves. Although several clashes were reported between police and protesters in the capital, the demonstrations were characterised as largely peaceful. It appears that the opposition's calls have not garnered much traction so far as participation has been lower compared to other protests held in Haiti in recent years.

In the meantime, civilians continue to bear the brunt of a deteriorating security and humanitarian situation. In her latest briefing to the Security Council, on 5 October 2020, La Lime underlined the increased unrest in the country, threats posed to state authority by gang violence and the widespread perception of impunity. Between 1 June and 31 August 2020, BINUH attributed 172 alleged human rights abuses by gang members and unidentified armed men, including 27 killings, 28 injuries and eight rapes. According to OCHA, the humanitarian situation in Haiti continues to be affected by political and security instability, which affect access to essential services and have impacts on the most vulnerable people. OCHA estimates that approximately 4.4 million Haitians will need humanitarian assistance in 2021. The 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan in Haiti will require \$235.6 million to assist 1.5 million people in need.

On 15 October 2020, the Security Council adopted resolution 2547, renewing BINUH's mandate for another year. No changes were made to the core mandate of the special political mission as set out in resolution 2476 of 25 June 2019, which established BINUH.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 19 January, the Human Rights Service of BINUH and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights released a joint report on human rights violations related to the protests that took place between 6 July 2018 and 10

December 2019. The report shows a pattern of human rights violations and abuses followed by a near lack of accountability and documents a 333 percent increase in the number of human rights violations and abuses against the rights to life and security of the person during the reporting period. In introducing the report, the spokesperson of the High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern that "persistent insecurity, poverty and structural inequalities in Haiti coupled with increasing political tensions may lead to a pattern of public discontent followed by violent police repression and other human rights violations". The spokesperson added that recent presidential decrees creating a national intelligence agency and strengthening public security are worrying, as it appears that they are not consistent with international human rights norms and standards and risk leading to a further crackdown on the rights of freedom of peaceful assembly, association and freedom of expression.

Key Issues and Options

The envisioned electoral process in Haiti is a key issue that Council members are likely to follow closely. The potential for increased insecurity due to public unrest and the rise in gang-related activities are also matters of concern for the Council. Council members appear to be united in agreement on the need for the Haitian National Police (HNP) to be adequately supported and resourced by the Haitian government. The Secretary-General warned in his latest report that the limited resources afforded the HNP is beginning to erode operational capacity and public trust in the country's sole functioning nationwide public safety institution.

Council members may want to hear more from La Lime about the envisioned UN support for the electoral calendar and about the ongoing constitutional reform process in Haiti and what it could mean for future elections. A civil society briefer could provide the Council with a personal perspective and fine-grained analysis of the challenges and opportunities related to the election planning. The Council may also choose to adopt a presidential or press statement calling on Haitian stakeholders to ensure the holding of free, fair and transparent elections.

Council Dynamics

Council members generally supported the establishment of BINUH instead of a peacekeeping mission. Former Council member, the Dominican Republic (Haiti's neighbour on the island of Hispaniola), was the sole voice advocating a return to a peacekeeping operation. Several other Council members believe that the problems Haiti is facing are political in nature and could be better handled by a political mission and Haitians themselves. Such positions came into view during the negotiations on resolution 2547, as China seemingly advocated for a strategic assessment of BINUH with the aim of elaborating recommendations for an exit strategy leading to the eventual drawdown of the Integrated Office and the transfer of its tasks to the Haitian government. While Russia supported China's suggestion, other members felt that such steps were premature.

China and Russia abstained on resolution 2547, noting in their explanations of vote that the US draft resolution failed to consider their suggested language about the increase in gang-related violence and the difficult human rights situation in Haiti. While several members agreed that it is important to address those issues, they disagreed about their inclusion in a draft resolution on the renewal of BINUH's mandate. Some suggested that these issues could be better addressed in a presidential statement so that the Council could share its concern in unison.

Incoming Council member Mexico, which replaced the Dominican Republic in the Latin American and Caribbean Group seat, is likely to follow developments in Haiti closely. As combating the spread of illicit small arms and light weapons is a foreign policy priority for Mexico, it may join St. Vincent and the Grenadines in voicing concern about the influx of illicit small arms and light weapons into Haiti and their role in fuelling gang-related violence.

The US is the penholder on Haiti.

Climate Change and Security

Expected Council Action

In February, the UK plans to host a high-level open debate, “Addressing climate-related security risks to international peace and security through mitigation and resilience building”. The meeting is expected to consider conflict risks, peacebuilding approaches and ways to support adaptation and resilience in climate-vulnerable contexts. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to chair the meeting. Secretary-General António Guterres is an anticipated briefer. There may be other briefers as well.

Key Recent Developments

In recent years, the Security Council has begun to focus increasingly on the negative security effects of climate change on various country- and region-specific files on its agenda. In 2020 alone, language on climate change was integrated into Council outcomes on the Central African Republic, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Somalia, and West Africa. Frequently, this language has emphasised the need for adequate risk assessments and risk management strategies to cope with the adverse security effects of climate change and other environmental factors in particular situations.

The awareness of the connection between climate change and security was also reflected in the signature events pursued by various Council presidents in the second half of 2020. The UK is continuing this trend with its February open debate. The relevant signature events in 2020 were: the 24 July 2020 open videoconference (VTC) during the German presidency on the “Maintenance of international peace and security: Climate and security”; the 17 September 2020 open VTC during the Nigerian presidency on the “Maintenance of international peace and security: Humanitarian effects of environmental degradation and peace and security”; and the 3 November 2020 open VTC during the presidency of St. Vincent and the Grenadines on “Peacebuilding and sustaining peace: Contemporary Drivers of Conflict and Insecurity”.

On 24 July 2020—the same day as the open VTC on climate and security spearheaded by Germany—ten members of the Security Council (Belgium, the Dominican

Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Niger, Tunisia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the UK, and Vietnam) and three of the incoming members (Ireland, Kenya and Norway) issued a joint statement affirming that an Informal Expert Group would be convened “to assist the Council to achieve a more comprehensive and systematic approach on climate-security risks in situations on the ground”.

The first meeting of the Informal Expert Group—which, like other expert groups on the protection of civilians and women, peace and security, is not considered a formal subsidiary body of the Council—was held virtually on 20 November 2020. All 15 Security Council members attended the meeting, although China and Russia participated only as observers. Four incoming members (Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, and Norway) also took part in the meeting. The meeting focused on the security implications of climate change in Somalia and featured briefings by Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSAM) James Swan and Dan Smith, Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Key Issues and Options

Council members and other member states might explore several key issues during the open debate. These include:

- the importance of developing the analytical capacities of the UN system to assess climate change-related security threats in fragile states and regions, provide the Security Council with useful information about these threats, and support states and regional organisations in developing and implementing actionable strategies to address them;
- the importance of developing synergies among states, regional and sub-regional organisations, and the UN system in managing and mitigating climate change-related security risks; and
- the need to determine how the Security Council, the peace operations it mandates, UN Country Teams, and the UN Secretariat can best collaborate to address such risks.

In addition to hearing from a UN official,

the Council could request a briefing from a climate-security expert from a think tank, university, or non-governmental organisation who can describe linkages between climate change and security and present options for the role the Council could play in tackling these issues. A briefing from a local civil society actor—who can describe the impacts of climate change in his or her country or region—could provide the Council with a first-hand, informative account of the challenges facing specific situations on the Council’s agenda.

During the debate, some members may wish to explore options for the work of the recently formed Informal Expert Group. Since the Council has repeatedly underscored the importance of risk assessments and risk management strategies for climate-security threats, one option would be for the group to engage with UN officials, host governments and regional organisations on the way forward in undertaking accurate risk assessments and in developing and implementing effective strategies to manage these risks.

Another possible option would be for the UK to produce a chair’s summary of the debate, capturing the main themes of the discussion.

Although the political environment might not be ripe in the Council for such action at present, in the future the Council could consider authorising the deployment of climate advisors in peace operations and regional offices where environmental or ecological conditions are having an impact on the security environment.

Later this year, also depending on the dynamics in the Council, members might consider reviving the draft resolution on climate and security initially proposed by Germany (and others) in advance of the 24 July open VTC on climate and security. The draft was supported by most members, but it was strongly opposed by the US and faced resistance from China and Russia.

Council Dynamics

Council members are divided over the Council’s role in addressing climate and security issues. Those supportive of the issue emphasise that factors such as drought, water scarcity, food insecurity, and desertification that are caused or exacerbated by climate change

UN DOCUMENTS ON CLIMATE AND SECURITY Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2011/15 (20 July 2011) is the Council’s one thematic outcome on climate and security. Security Council Letters S/2020/1090 (5 November 2020) contained the briefings and statements by member states from the open VTC on contemporary drivers of conflict and insecurity. S/2020/929 (21 September 2020) contained the briefings and statements by member states from the open VTC on the humanitarian effects of environmental degradation and peace and security. S/2020/751 (28 July 2020) contained the briefings and statements by member states from the open VTC on climate and security on 24 July 2020.

Climate Change and Security

increase the risk of violent conflict. They have encouraged a more systematic integration of climate-related security risks into the Council's work. China and Russia are less supportive of Council engagement on this issue. They believe that climate change is fundamentally a sustainable-development issue that is more appropriately addressed by other parts of the UN system, including the General Assembly and ECOSOC.

The dynamics on climate-security issues are likely to shift perceptibly in the Council in 2021. The most consequential change is that the views of the new US administration on climate change are diametrically opposed to those of the previous administration. During the Trump administration, the US was

one of the staunchest opponents of Council engagement on this matter, joining China and Russia in contesting the integration and expansion of climate language in some country-specific outcomes, and as noted above, in disapproving of a thematic resolution on climate and security in July 2020. In contrast, it is likely that the new US administration will be a strong proponent of Security Council engagement on climate change, as was the Obama administration (2008-2016) in which President Joe Biden served as vice president. In addition, four of the five new members—Ireland, Mexico, Norway, and Kenya—are supportive of Council engagement on this issue. India is the one new member that has traditionally been opposed

to Council involvement on climate-security matters. Overall, in 2021 up to 12 Council members are expected to be keen to see consistent Council engagement on this issue.

The UK, which is spearheading the meeting, has long been a proponent of Security Council engagement on climate and security matters. It hosted the Council's first debate on the potential impact of climate change on security in April 2007. From 1 to 12 November, it will also be hosting the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, in partnership with Italy.

Niger and Ireland are the co-chairs of the Informal Expert Group in 2021.

DPRK (North Korea)

Expected Council Action

In February, the chair of the 1718 Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Mona Juul (Norway), is due to provide her first briefing in this capacity. The committee is expected to discuss the final report of the Panel of Experts in February, but the report is not expected to be formally presented to the Council until March. Because of the temporary measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the briefing is expected to be held as a closed videoconference (VTC).

Key Recent Developments

Leading up to the US presidential election on 3 November 2020 and in its aftermath, the DPRK remained relatively restrained and did not conduct any ballistic missile or nuclear tests. However, on 15 January, DPRK leader Kim Jong-un showcased the country's latest weapons systems, including a new submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) during a nighttime military parade in Pyongyang. During a similar military parade in October 2020, the DPRK displayed what it claimed was its largest ICBM to date.

The 15 January parade marked the conclusion of the eight-day congress of the

DPRK's ruling Workers' Party, which started on 6 January. During the congress, Kim was promoted to the position of General Secretary, the highest rank in the Workers' Party. Addressing party delegates, Kim emphasised that the US remains the DPRK's main enemy regardless of who is leading its government. Kim outlined a set of plans to further develop the DPRK's nuclear and conventional weapons systems. While not ruling out diplomacy, Kim said that the DPRK's bolstered nuclear capabilities are intended to give the country better leverage in dealing with the US.

Speaking on the economic situation in the country, Kim admitted that the party had made serious mistakes in handling the economy. He said that the five-year plan for economic development had failed to reach targets in nearly every sector. Also, he added, the DPRK has faced serious economic challenges stemming from developments outside its control. (These include international sanctions, devastating natural disasters in 2020 and strict restrictions on movement in and out of the country to stop the spread of COVID-19.)

The diplomatic effort to denuclearise the Korean peninsula has remained at an impasse since the collapse of the February 2019 US-DPRK summit in Hanoi. The new

US president, Joe Biden, has been a vocal critic of former President Donald Trump's approach towards the DPRK, especially his summit-level meetings with Kim. Biden has emphasised that he would be willing to meet Kim only upon the condition that the DPRK take concrete steps towards denuclearisation. During a 17 January press conference, the president of the Republic of Korea, Moon Jae-in, encouraged the incoming Biden administration to build upon successes and draw lessons from the failures of Trump's diplomacy with Kim. Moon played an instrumental role in facilitating negotiations between the US and the DPRK during the Trump presidency.

On 11 December 2020, Council members met virtually under "any other business" on the human rights situation in the DPRK. Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, the UK, and the US requested an open videoconference (VTC) meeting and a briefing by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet. China and Russia objected to holding the meeting, however. Given that the Council's VTCs are not considered official meetings, procedural votes cannot be held unless members are willing to meet in person. From 2014 to 2017, the Council held an annual meeting on the human

UN DOCUMENTS ON DPRK Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2515 (30 March 2020) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee until 30 April 2021. **S/RES/2397** (22 December 2017) tightened sanctions on the DPRK. **Security Council Letters S/2020/266** (31 March 2020) contained the written-procedure voting record on resolution 2515, which extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee. **S/2020/246** (30 March 2020) was from the president of the Security Council containing the results of the vote on resolution 2515. **Sanctions Committee Documents S/2020/840** (28 August 2020) was the midterm report of the Panel of Experts.

DPRK (North Korea)

rights situation in the DPRK in December, but in 2018 and 2019, the proponents of this meeting could not convince nine members to support the meeting. (While every resolution requires nine votes, the veto does not apply to Council decisions of a procedural nature.)

On 17 November 2020, the Council met under “any other business” to discuss issues related to the implementation of paragraph 5 of resolution 2397. The chair of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee at that time, Ambassador Christoph Heusgen (Germany), initiated the meeting to address the issue of the conversion rate between tons and barrels related to importing refined petroleum products to the DPRK; under UN sanctions the DPRK’s import of petroleum products is capped at 500,000 barrels annually. A persistent issue at the committee level has been the inability of its members to agree on a ton/barrel conversion rate, which would help the committee determine with more precision the permitted amount of imported petroleum products. After the meeting, Heusgen held a media stakeout during which he noted that China and Russia have politicised the process of finding a solution to this issue and have continuously stalled attempts to resolve it. He emphasised that the inability to resolve this issue undermines the credibility of the Council and the committee.

Key Issues and Options

The security situation on the Korean peninsula, which remains volatile despite the absence of ballistic missile or nuclear tests over the past several months, is an ongoing issue for the Council. As evident from the January military parade, the DPRK has continued to develop new weapons systems, including ICBMs, in violation of Security Council resolutions. Initial diplomatic efforts and a period of US-DPRK rapprochement in 2018-19 resulted in the easing of tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

In 2020, the DPRK appeared to have abandoned the diplomatic track and engaged in heightened rhetoric towards the Republic of Korea and the US. There is also some uncertainty over how the DPRK will react to the change in the US administration given that Biden criticised the US engagement with Kim during Trump’s presidency.

An option for the Council would be to convene an informal interactive dialogue with key regional stakeholders to discuss next steps in confronting the security threat posed by the DPRK. The Council could also consider adopting a formal outcome addressing the need for stability on the Korean peninsula and calling for the resumption of diplomatic talks.

In light of persistent violations of the sanctions regime by the DPRK, the effectiveness of the regime remains an issue for the Council. These violations have been well documented in the Panel of Experts reports, most recently in the final report of September 2020. In response, the Council could consider ways of more strictly enforcing the sanctions and issue a statement calling on member states to adhere to existing sanctions measures.

An ongoing issue in the sanctions committee has been the inability of members to reach agreement on the appropriate ton/barrel conversion. Given that the Council imposed limits on imports of refined petroleum products to the DPRK, reaching an agreement on this issue would contribute to better implementation of sanctions. Lacking agreement in the committee, an option would be for the new chair of the committee (Norway) to continue discussions on this issue and, with other members, possibly elevate the discussion to the Council level if it continues to falter in the committee.

Council Dynamics

Members continue to be divided over the role of sanctions in addressing the nuclear

threat posed by the DPRK. The US has been a strong proponent of maintaining the policy of maximum pressure until the DPRK takes concrete steps towards denuclearisation. The EU members of the Council are generally supportive of this approach. On the other hand, China and Russia have shown interest in considering some form of sanctions relief. In December 2019, they circulated a draft resolution providing partial sanctions relief for the DPRK, but the proposal was not put to a vote and remains stalled because of insufficient support from other Council members.

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

It seems unlikely that there will be a significant shift in Council dynamics because of changes in Council composition as of 1 January and the new US administration. During the past several years of the Trump administration, the US was reluctant to draw too much attention to the DPRK’s ballistic missile testing, possibly fearing negative consequences for its diplomatic efforts. Instead, the US focused mostly on sanctions pressure and diplomatic efforts. During this time, the Council’s European members have taken the lead in orchestrating the Council response to the DPRK’s ballistic missile activities. The Biden administration has signalled that it would increase pressure on the DPRK to force it to come to the negotiating table and abandon nuclear weapons.

The US is the penholder on the DPRK, and as of 1 January, Ambassador Mona Juul (Norway) chairs the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee.

Security Council Report Staff

Karin Landgren
Executive Director

Shamala Kandiah Thompson
Chief Operating Officer

Paul Romita
Managing Editor

Vladimir Sesar
Development and Outreach Manager

Audrey Waysse
Operations Manager

Alina Entelis
Policy Analyst

Lindiwe Knutson
Policy Analyst

Robert Schupp
Policy Analyst

Vanessa Tiede
Policy Analyst

Benjamin Villanti
Policy Analyst

Anna Haven
Research Assistant

N'Dango Athie
Intern

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

Design Point Five, NY

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

Telephone +1 212 759 6394

Fax +1 212 759 4038

Web securitycouncilreport.org

Follow [@SCRtweets](https://twitter.com/SCRtweets) on Twitter