

Monthly Forecast

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In Memoriam: Edward C. Luck (1948-2021)

With the entire UN community, Security Council Report (SCR) was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Professor Edward C. Luck on 16 February. Ed was instrumental to SCR's establishment, helping to develop the vision for the organisation and to recruit our first group of research analysts. He subsequently served for many years as an advisor to the organisation as a member of our board of directors and collaborated with us on numerous projects. His exceptional intellect and work ethic cast a bright light on

our understanding of many of the most pressing challenges facing the UN during the past several decades. In addition to being a first-rate scholar and practitioner, Ed was a gifted and dedicated teacher who mentored countless members of our community—who now serve in the UN system, in diplomatic missions, in think tanks and in academia. As we honour Ed's life and legacy, SCR wishes to extend our heartfelt condolences to Ed's family and friends, and to all those who had the privilege to work with him.

Overview

In March, the US will have the presidency of the Security Council. At press time, it appeared that all meetings would be held virtually.

The US has chosen to hold a high-level open debate on [conflict and food security](#) as its signature event with the Secretary-General as a possible briefer.

Several meetings are planned on [Sudan](#) and [South Sudan](#). On Sudan, the Council is expecting a briefing on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) and the drawdown and withdrawal of the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). In addition, the chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee is expected to brief on the work of the Committee. On South Sudan, the Council is expected to be briefed on the latest report on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and to renew its mandate by the middle of the month.

The Council is also expected to consider a resolution reauthorising the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in March.

Other meetings on African issues include:

- [DRC](#), on the Secretary-General's most recent report on MONUSCO; and
- [Libya](#), on the Secretary-General's report on UNSMIL and an update from the chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee.

Regarding the Middle East, there will be the regular briefings on the political, humanitarian and chemical weapons tracks in [Syria](#), as well as

the monthly meeting on developments in [Yemen](#). Other Middle East issues that will be considered include:

- [Golan Heights](#), on the UNDOF report and most recent developments;
- [Lebanon](#), an update on the implementation of resolution 1701, which called for a cessation of hostilities between the Shi'a militant group Hezbollah and Israel in 2006; and
- [The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question](#), the monthly meeting, including the quarterly report on the implementation of resolution 2334, which condemned settlements and called for steps to prevent acts of violence against civilians.

Regarding Asia, there will also be the quarterly debate on [Afghanistan](#). The Council is also expected to adopt a resolution renewing the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 [DPRK Sanctions Committee](#).

A briefing of the [1540 Committee](#) on non-state actors and weapons of mass destruction is also anticipated during the month.

Finally, the Council expects to receive the annual briefing by the Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe ([OSCE](#)).

Council members will most likely closely follow developments in Ethiopia, Haiti and Myanmar.

In Hindsight: The Appointment of the Secretary-General

Secretary-General António Guterres' five-year term concludes on 31 December 2021. The process of selecting and appointing the next Secretary-General officially commenced when the British Ambassador to the UN, Barbara Woodward, acting in her capacity as president of the Security Council, and General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir, issued a joint letter on 5 February to all member states, soliciting candidates for the position. This was in line with resolution 69/321, which was adopted on 11 September 2015 and called on the two presidents to start the Secretary-General appointment process through a joint letter setting out the process.

The UN Charter provides little guidance on the appointment process. Article 97 of the UN Charter simply says that: "The Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council." Rule 48 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure states that the Council's recommendation to the General Assembly shall "be discussed and decided at a private meeting".

For most of the UN's history, the selection of the Secretary-General was opaque and tightly controlled by the permanent members. However, in 2016, active involvement of civil society and members of the General Assembly in insisting on greater transparency and a more clearly defined selection process led to substantial changes that allowed both the General Assembly and elected members of the Security Council to play significant roles in the process. (For more information on the history and changes to the selection and appointment process, please refer to SCR's October 2015 research report, *Appointing the UN Secretary-General*, and its April 2017 report, *The UN Secretary-General Selection and Appointment Process: Emerging from the Shadows*.)

Recently the 1 for 7 Billion coalition, made up of civil society organisations, and the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT) of 25 member states, have expressed concern that the reforms made to the process in 2016 might be lost, especially in a situation where there were no other candidates than the incumbent. Both groups had pushed for reforms during the last appointment process. However, there are early signs that the selection process will be guided by the new practices created in 2015-2016. On 8 January, Bozkir wrote to Guterres

expressing his intention to start the selection process for the next Secretary-General and asking for an early indication of his interest in seeking a second term. Bozkir stressed member states' interest in seeing the 2015-2016 reforms consolidated, and that the process would again be guided by principles of transparency and inclusivity.

On 11 January, Guterres responded in writing to the presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly, indicating that he is available for a second term. (The position is once-renewable.) Guterres' decision to stand again triggered activity on a joint letter outlining the process. In mid-January, Council members began negotiating on the draft letter that had been prepared by the Office of the President of the General Assembly, returning the revised draft in early February.

The most significant innovation in 2016 was the participation of all the candidates in informal dialogue sessions, generally referred to as hearings. UN webcasts allowed a global audience to observe the candidates presenting their approach to the challenges facing the UN, while the larger UN membership and civil society had the opportunity to pose questions. In addition, in 2016, for the first time, all Council members met with all 13 candidates in an informal setting, allowing for further interaction. This was in stark contrast to past practice, which had been shrouded in mystery, with no public record of who was being considered for the position.

The joint letter makes clear that this year's candidates will have the opportunity for meetings with Council members and that there will be informal dialogues in the General Assembly before the Council's selection process begins. It seems that Guterres has conveyed to the two presidents that he is ready to provide a vision statement and participate in an informal dialogue. The current understanding is that the informal dialogues are likely to take place in April and May in the General Assembly, with the Council beginning its discussions in May or June. According to the joint letter, the informal dialogues can continue throughout the selection process, which would accommodate candidates nominated after April or May. While these sessions were widely praised for increasing the transparency of the selection process last time, there may be scope for further refining them. In a letter

to the two presidents containing recommendations based on lessons learnt from 2016, ACT has suggested that the format of the informal dialogues should be changed to avoid repetitive questions and allow for greater participation of civil society.

There is no clear timeline proposed for the nomination of candidates. This was a difficult issue in the negotiations of both resolution 69/321 and the joint letter of 2016. In the previous race, some members preferred not to establish definitive deadlines, to allow for late entrants to the race if no consensus candidate had emerged. This time if it does not look like there will be more than one candidate and there appears to be consensus on Guterres' reappointment, some members may push for an early decision. It would, therefore, benefit prospective candidates to have a clear deadline for the latest point at which they could be nominated. Female candidates were particularly encouraged to run in 2016, and we may see greater pressure for female candidates to come forward from some members and civil society in the coming months.

Other areas of the nomination process could yet benefit from greater clarification. The 2021 joint letter notes that the 2015 letter states that: "Member States presenting candidates should do so in a letter to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council." The general understanding in 2016 was that candidates needed to be nominated by a member state. However, it is unclear whether this would apply to an incumbent running for a second term. In addition, at least one individual, apparently not nominated by a member state, has written to the Office of the President of the General Assembly announcing their candidacy. Other questions that may arise are whether a candidate can only be nominated by their country of citizenship, and if a member state can nominate more than one candidate. In September 2016, the Bulgarian government shifted its support for then UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova, the candidate it had nominated in February 2016, in favour of Kristalina Georgieva, then Vice-President of the European Commission.

When the Council begins to focus on the selection process, how quickly it makes a decision may depend on whether there are candidates apart from Guterres. Although Council members met all the candidates informally in 2016, if Guterres is the sole

In Hindsight: The Appointment of the Secretary-General

candidate, 2021 could see a similarly swift trajectory to the previous reappointment process. Following then-Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's announcement on 6 June 2011 that he would seek a second term, the Council met in consultations on 10 June, and having established that there was consensus on re-appointing Ban, adopted a resolution in a private meeting on 16 June with this recommendation to the General Assembly. Similarly, if the Council were to adopt a similar resolution recommending Guterres, the General Assembly would proceed to vote on its own resolution re-appointing Guterres to a second term.

Should there be multiple candidates, the

Council may wish to hold meetings with them, as it did in 2016. The question of using straw polls may also come into play. Since 1991, the Security Council has used some form of straw poll to determine the viability of candidates ahead of a formal vote. In a situation with multiple candidates, there can be a number of rounds of straw polling, including colour-coded ballots that distinguish permanent and elected members. These polls have been criticised in the past for lack of transparency, notwithstanding the tendency for outcomes to leak quickly, and there may be a push for more open communication from Council members following any straw polls this year. (For more information on the

history of straw polls and the Security Council, please refer to Security Council Report's June 2016 research report, *Appointing the UN Secretary-General: The Challenge for the Security Council*.)

No matter the number of candidates, this selection and appointment process is an opportunity to cement the gains made in transparency and accountability in 2016. Going beyond consolidation of those gains, both the Council and the General Assembly could also provide further guidance on areas such as the nomination criteria and the format created for interactions with candidates.

Status Update since our February Forecast

Myanmar

On 2 February, Security Council members were briefed on Myanmar by Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener in a closed videoconference (VTC). The briefing took place the day after the Myanmar military detained civilian leaders and declared a year-long state of emergency. Schraner updated members on the developments that led to the military takeover. She also condemned the actions of the military and appealed to members to send a strong signal in support of democracy in Myanmar. Council members issued a press statement SC/14430 on 4 February expressing deep concern at the declaration of the state of emergency and the arbitrary detention of members of the government. They also called for the immediate release of all those detained and called for safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all people in need, including through the reestablishment of UN relief flights. Reiterating members' strong support to ASEAN, the press statement also welcomed the 1 February statement of the ASEAN chair on developments in Myanmar.

Ethiopia (Tigray)

On 3 February, Security Council members discussed the humanitarian situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia under "any other business", a standing item in closed consultations. The meeting was initiated at the request of Estonia, France, Ireland, Norway,

the UK, and the US. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock briefed. During the meeting, Lowcock emphasised the importance of protecting civilians and allowing unhindered humanitarian access in Tigray.

UNOWAS

On 3 February, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement on West Africa and the Sahel (S/PRST/2021/3), proposed by penholders Ireland and Niger following Council members' 11 January bi-annual briefing on the region. The statement welcomed presidential and legislative elections held in 2020 in West Africa and the Sahel. It called on "all political stakeholders to further advance national political dialogue and to take concrete steps to allow sustainable reconciliation". It further called for continued support and enhanced cooperation to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, including "for equal and affordable access to the vaccine as well as essential health services".

Children and Armed Conflict

On 5 February, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict met in a closed VTC meeting for the introduction of the Secretary-General's report on Children and Armed Conflict in Myanmar by the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict. A representative from the permanent mission of Myanmar participated.

In the same meeting, the Working Group discussed the conclusions adopted on the Secretary-General's report on Mali with the permanent representative of Mali.

Counter-Terrorism

On 10 February, the Security Council held a VTC briefing on the Secretary-General's 12th biannual strategic-level report on the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh) under the agenda item "Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts". Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov, the head of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, and Assistant Secretary-General Michèle Coninx, the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), briefed. On 18 February, the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee held a closed VTC to receive the monthly update on the activities of CTED. On 19 February, the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee met in a closed VTC on the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team's report on its mission to Turkey.

Ukraine

On 11 February, the Security Council held a briefing via VTC on the situation in Ukraine. Russia requested the meeting to mark the anniversary of the "Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk

Status Update since our February Forecast

Agreements”, also known as the Minsk II agreement, adopted on 12 February 2015, and to discuss its implementation. During the meeting, the Council received briefings from Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo; Heidi Grau, Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Chairperson-in-Office; and OSCE Special Monitoring Mission Chief Monitor Halit Çevik.

Iraq

On 16 February, the Security Council held an open VTC briefing, followed by closed VTC consultations, on the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Special Representative and head of UNAMI Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert briefed.

COVID-19

(Implementation of S/RES/2532)

On 17 February, the Security Council held a high-level VTC open debate on “ensuring the equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines in contexts affected by conflict and insecurity” (S/2021/138; S/2021/157). UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab chaired the meeting, announcing the UK’s intention to propose a resolution calling for vaccination ceasefires. The briefers were: UN Secretary-General António Guterres; Henrietta Fore, the Executive Director of UNICEF; Seth Berkley, the CEO of GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance; and Jagan Chapagain, the Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The Council unanimously adopted resolution 2565 which demanded a humanitarian pause to facilitate the delivery of COVID-19 vaccines in areas of armed conflict.

Haiti

On 22 February, the Security Council held an open VTC meeting, followed by a closed

VTC session, on Haiti. Special Representative and head of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) Helen La Lime briefed the Council on recent developments and the Secretary-General’s latest 120-day report on the special political mission (S/2021/133). The Council was also briefed by Vivianne Roc, President of “PLURIELLES”, an eco-feminist youth-led organisation that addresses peace and security issues in Haiti. Haitian President Jovenel Moïse participated under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure. La Lime said that the polarisation that has defined most of Moïse’s term in office has become more acute. She expressed concern over signs of shrinking civic space in the country and noted a worrying increase in food insecurity. At the time of writing, the US, the penholder on Haiti, was working on a possible presidential statement on Haiti.

Somalia

On 22 February, the Security Council discussed the situation in Somalia in an open VTC. The Council was briefed by Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) James Swan, AU Special Representative Francisco Madeira, and EU Managing Director for Africa Rita Laranjinha. Swan presented the Secretary-General’s latest report (S/2021/154) amidst a state of political upheaval in Somalia, which has seen legislative and presidential elections delayed. On 26 February, the Council adopted resolution 2563, reauthorising the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) for two weeks until 14 March.

Climate and Security

On Tuesday (23 February), there was a high-level VTC open debate on climate and security. Prior to the meeting, naturalist David Attenborough delivered a brief pre-recorded video message. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson chaired the meeting. Secretary-General António Guterres and Nisreen Elsaïm,

the Chair of the UN Youth Advisory Group, provided briefings. Eight Council members (Estonia, France, Kenya, Niger, Norway, Tunisia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and the UK) participated at the level of heads of state and of government. Attenborough said that climate change is “the biggest threat to security that modern humans have ever faced”, while Guterres called it the “defining issue of our time”. Elsaïm underscored the importance of “collecting data about conflict and climate change, consulting local communities, and trusting in science” as means to address the threats posed by climate change.

Central African Republic

On 24 February, the Security Council met to discuss the situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) in an open VTC. The Council was briefed by Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix; AU Peace and Security Commissioner Smaïl Chergui; the EU’s European External Action Service Managing Director for Africa, Rita Laranjinha; and Kessy Martine Ekomo-Soignet, the Director of URU, a CAR-based, youth-led peacebuilding civil society organisation. Lacroix briefed on recent developments and the Secretary-General’s latest report on the mission (S/2021/146). While the meeting was a regularly scheduled quarterly meeting on the CAR, it came during a period of heightened instability in the country.

The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

At the time of writing, Council members were expected to hold the monthly meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question” on 26 February. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland and two youth civil society representatives (one Israeli and one Palestinian) were expected to brief.

Syria

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Speaking to the press after briefing the Council in closed consultations on 9 February, Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen expressed dissatisfaction with the work of the Constitutional Committee, which held its fifth round of in-person meetings in Geneva during the week of 25 January. The talks, which failed to produce any tangible results and concluded without an agreement to meet for a sixth round, had been, according to Pedersen, “a missed opportunity and a disappointment”, owing to both procedural and substantive disagreements between the Syrian government side and participants from the political opposition. Pedersen had apparently expanded on these sentiments in the closed Council session, echoing the sombre appraisal that he gave immediately after the conclusion of the fifth round on 29 January when he said that the body “[could] not continue to meet” unless there was a change in the sides’ approach to the meetings.

Pedersen also noted on 9 February, however, that the lack of progress on the political track had been due to a lack of “constructive international diplomacy” on Syria. Without international diplomacy that “bridges existing divides and focuses on mutual and reciprocal steps for steps,” he argued, it is “unlikely that any track—the constitutional track or any other—will really move forward”. Council members were unable to agree on a press statement at the conclusion of the 9 February meeting due to the sharp divisions within the Council on Syria. On 15-16 February, Pedersen travelled to Sochi, Russia, to attend a meeting with members of the configuration referred to as the Astana guarantors, which consists of Russia, Turkey and Iran. On 18 February, Pedersen travelled to Moscow for meetings with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and subsequently visited Damascus from 22 to 23 February.

The lack of progress on the political track comes ahead of controversial presidential elections scheduled to take place sometime

between 16 April and 16 May (according to Syrian law, the elections must take place at least 90 days before current President Bashar al-Assad’s seven-year term expires). While the Syrian government has indicated that the elections will be held within this timeframe, a number of Council members—including France, the UK and the US—have stressed that they will not recognise the results if the elections fail to conform with resolution 2254, which was unanimously adopted in 2015 and calls for “free and fair elections, pursuant to [a] new constitution, to be...administered under supervision of the UN”. Speaking to the Council on 20 December 2020, France, the UK and the US were joined by Belgium and Tunisia in reiterating the need for Syria’s elections to be held under resolution 2254, with Belgium warning that “any election not held under resolution 2254 would be a major step backwards and would undermine any prospects for peace”.

This month will mark the one-year anniversary of the ceasefire agreed on 5 March 2020 between Russia and Turkey in Syria’s north-west, in and around Idlib. Although the ceasefire has largely held, there continue to be reports of clashes between Syrian military and armed opposition forces in the area and of shelling and sporadic aerial bombardment. Russian and Turkish military forces recently conducted a series of joint military drills in Saraqib, just south of the M4 highway security corridor agreed by Russia and Turkey. These joint activities reportedly come in anticipation that the two sides will re-establish regular joint patrols of the M4 in accordance with the ceasefire agreement. The patrols, which were conducted until 25 August, were halted after several incidents in which patrols were blocked by local activists and reportedly came under attack by members of the armed opposition.

The security situation outside the area covered by last year’s ceasefire also remains fragile. According to media reports, at least two dozen people were killed as a result of two car bombs that were detonated in towns near the Syrian-Turkish border. In one incident, in the town of Azaz, a car-bomb attack took place outside an administrative building on 31 January. On the same day, a car

bomb was detonated at a checkpoint outside the town of Beza’a. In another development, Israel launched missile strikes against targets near Damascus on 15 February. While neither Israeli nor Syrian media sources reported on the nature of the targets nor the number of casualties, other press reports suggest that the targets were linked to the presence of the Iranian military in Syria and that the attacks resulted in nine fatalities.

Syria’s humanitarian situation continues to be dire. Briefing the Council on 25 February, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock underscored the growing number of Syrians who are food insecure. According to a 17 February World Food Programme statement, “in just over one year, an additional 4.5 million Syrians have become food insecure”, making a total of 12.4 million Syrians—nearly 60 percent of the country’s population—who suffer from food insecurity. “The increase maybe shocking,” Lowcock noted, “but it cannot be said to be surprising”. In Syria’s north-west, winter floods have affected over 67,000 internally displaced people. According to OCHA, nearly 3,800 tents have been destroyed and another 7,800 damaged, while roads leading to camps have been cut off or damaged as the result of the floods. The situation for children has been particularly difficult in recent weeks: nearly 120 schools have been damaged by the flooding, affecting 21,000 children, and at least 13 children have been killed and another 14 injured in incidents involving explosive weapons and unexploded ordnance across Syria so far this year. Finally, according to the Secretary-General’s 18 February report on the humanitarian situation in Syria, of the 62,000 people who remain at Al Hol camp—a refugee and internally displaced persons camp in Syria’s north-east housing both victims and relatives of armed members of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant—94 percent are women and children and 53 percent are children under the age of 12. These children face deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the camp as recent violence in the camp has made delivery of humanitarian assistance and provision of other services difficult.

Speaking to the Security Council on 3 February, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

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/2021/160 (18 February 2021) was the regular 60-day report on the implementation of humanitarian resolutions by all parties to the conflict in Syria.

Syria

Izumi Nakamitsu reiterated her concern about Syria's failure to fully cooperate on the file. "I say this every month because it bears consistent repeating," she said. "There is an urgent need to not only identify but hold accountable all those who have used chemical weapons in violation of international law." The meeting, which was held via open videoconference, again illustrated the stark divisions on this issue: the Russian Federation repeated its views that Syria is in compliance with its Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) obligations and criticised the work of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team, which concluded in April 2020 that "there are reasonable grounds to believe that Syria used chemical weapons in Ltamenah, Syria in March 2017". The US, and other European members of the Council, argued that the Syrian government has obstructed the OPCW's work to avoid accountability.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 46th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) is expected to hold an interactive dialogue on 11 March with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria and consider its report, covering March 2011 to 24 December 2020 (A/HRC/46/54). The report concludes that "[o]ver the past 10 years, parties to the conflict have perpetrated the most heinous violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of international human rights law...[including] acts that are

likely to constitute crimes against humanity, war crimes and other international crimes, including genocide". It observed that the "massive crimes, violations and abuses have gone unpunished". Along with other recommendations, the report makes "one overarching recommendation: immediately institute a permanent ceasefire, endorsed by the Security Council and enforced by the key Member States supporting the Government and armed groups". The HRC will also consider the commission's report on arbitrary imprisonment and detention in Syria, requested in HRC resolution 44/21 (A/HRC/46/55).

Key Issues and Options

The failure of the Constitutional Committee's fifth round to achieve any progress will be a key focus for the Council in March. Given the negative tone of Pedersen's recent public statements on the committee's fifth round of meetings and the apparently down-beat assessment he offered Council members on 9 February, Council members will be following closely his engagement with Damascus. Council members may ask the Special Envoy to outline concretely the next steps that need to be taken—by the Special Envoy himself, by the parties, and by external actors—if the stalled process is to be reinvigorated.

Though the Council was unable to agree on a press statement after Pedersen's last briefing, the Council may try to find consensus on a document that lays out a clear set of substantive achievements they expect the committee to aim for if upcoming rounds

of meetings are planned. Council members may also use this opportunity to address their concerns over the Syrian government's plan to hold presidential elections outside the provisions of resolution 2254.

The Council may also wish to consider issuing a presidential statement on the ten-year anniversary of the start of the conflict, which could address the need for a political solution to the conflict and highlight the dire humanitarian situation.

Council Dynamics

There has been little discernible progress in recent months in bridging the differences between Council members on Syria's political, humanitarian and chemical weapons files. Some members, including the US, the UK and France, have become openly concerned about the failure of the Constitutional Committee to achieve anything after more than a year of meetings, but others such as China and Russia have argued that there should be no externally imposed timelines on the process and have cautioned that more patience is needed. February's meeting on chemical weapons again illustrated the Council's wide rift on the issue, and the 20 January Council meeting on humanitarian issues showed little change in the stark cleavages that exist between Council members on that file.

Conflict and Hunger

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is expected to hold a high-level open debate via videoconference (VTC) on conflict and food security, which will be the signature event of the US Council presidency. Secretary-General António Guterres may brief.

Background and Key Recent Developments

Recent years have seen the Council increase its consideration of the link between conflict and hunger. In May 2018, it adopted resolution 2417, which "recalls the link between

armed conflict and violence and conflict-induced food insecurity and the threat of famine". Resolution 2417 called on all parties to armed conflict to comply fully with international humanitarian law and strongly condemned unlawful denial of humanitarian access and the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare. It urged all conflict parties to protect civilian infrastructure critical for delivering aid and for the proper functioning of food systems.

Resolution 2417 also requested the Secretary-General to report swiftly to the Council when there is a risk of conflict-induced

famine and widespread food insecurity in the context of armed conflict, and to update the Council on the resolution's implementation every 12 months during his annual briefing on the protection of civilians. Since the resolution's adoption, OCHA has alerted the Council to risks of famine in conflict situations in several white papers: Sudan in August 2018, Yemen in October 2018, and on conflict-induced food insecurity and the risk of famine in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), northeast Nigeria, South Sudan, and Yemen in September 2020.

Starting in 2019, Council members have

UN DOCUMENTS ON CONFLICT-INDUCED HUNGER Security Council Resolution S/RES/2417 (24 May 2018) requested the Secretary-General to report to the Council when there is a risk that armed conflict is leading to famine or widespread food insecurity. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/6 (29 April 2020) encouraged member states to support early-warning systems to identify and respond to emerging food insecurity. S/PRST/2017/14 (9 August 2017) was on the threat of famine in Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and north-east Nigeria.

Conflict and Hunger

also held informal meetings at the deputy ambassador level to discuss the bi-annual report of the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), titled *Monitoring food security in countries with conflict situations—a joint FAO/WFP update for the members of the United Nations Security Council*. The Dominican Republic and Germany initiated the practice, and Ireland and Niger have taken over this role for 2021. On 29 April 2020, the Council adopted a presidential statement encouraging member states “to support relevant early warning systems to provide governments and humanitarian actors with timely, reliable, accurate and verifiable information regarding food security and allowing for anticipation and early action to prevent and mitigate the effects of a food crisis in the context of armed conflict”.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated hunger in conflict-affected and fragile countries. In 2019, 135 million people were facing acute food insecurity. Significant drivers of acute food insecurity were: conflict (affecting 77 million people in 22 countries), weather extremes (affecting some 34 million people in 25 countries), and economic shocks (affecting 24 million people in eight countries), according to *The Global Report on Food Crises for 2020*, which is produced by the international alliance, the Global Network against Food Crises. With the onset of the pandemic, the total was projected to double to 270 million. Speaking at a high-level Council VTC on conflict-induced hunger on 21 April 2020, WFP Executive Director David Beasley described the situation as a “hunger pandemic”.

The Council also held a VTC on 17 September 2020, prompted by OCHA’s most recent white paper. During the meeting, Beasley said: “The global hunger crisis caused by conflict, and now compounded by COVID, is moving into a new and dangerous phase—especially in nations already scarred by violence. The threat of famine is looming again; so we have to step up, and not step back ... 2021 will be a make-or-break year”.

In December 2020, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), used by the FAO, WFP and other partner organisations to monitor food insecurity, reported that 16.2 million people in Yemen, more than half the population of 30 million, will face Phase 3 “crisis” levels of food insecurity or worse by

mid-2021. The analysis said that pockets of famine-like conditions (IPC Phase 5) already exist and warned that the number of people experiencing catastrophic food insecurity could nearly triple from 16,500 currently to 47,000 people by June 2021. Since then, UN officials have repeatedly said that 50,000 people are experiencing famine-like conditions.

The FAO, UNICEF and WFP highlighted the deteriorating situation in South Sudan in an 18 December 2020 joint statement. According to an IPC analysis conducted in October and November 2020, 6.5 million people in South Sudan were facing severe food insecurity due to fighting, the COVID-19 pandemic and severe flooding. The number could grow to 7.24 million by July. Two independent reports published by the IPC Global Support Unit the week before found that six counties were likely already experiencing famine.

The September 2020 OCHA white paper reported that in the DRC nearly 22 million people were acutely food insecure, the highest number in the world—a result of COVID-19 compounding the impact of decades of conflict. On 22 February, two WFP vehicles came under fire in the eastern DRC, resulting in the death of the Italian ambassador to the DRC, a Carabinieri police officer from the Italian embassy, and a WFP staff member.

During the 17 September 2020 VTC, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock said violence in the Sahel has forcibly displaced more than 1 million people, most of whom are dependent on agriculture. Some 14 million people were experiencing crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity, the highest figure in a decade. In Burkina Faso alone, 3.3 million people were acutely food insecure, with 11,000 people reported as experiencing famine conditions. Violence related to the terrorist group Boko Haram in north-east Nigeria continues to contribute to widespread food insecurity. The UN projects that up to 5.1 million people in north-east Nigeria could become critically food insecure during the next lean season period from June to August—a level similar to the situation in 2016–2017 when there were reports about possible famine, according to a UN press release.

Of looming concern is Ethiopia’s Tigray region, where fighting since November 2020 continues between government and allied

Eritrean forces and those of the regional government. The Famine Early Warning Systems Network, which is funded by the US, reported at the end of January that the conflict, access constraints for humanitarian actors and a deteriorating economy were driving emergency levels of hunger in central and eastern Tigray.

Key Issues and Options

Key issues include bringing the Council up to date on current conflict-driven food crises since its 17 September 2020 VTC, identifying potential food security crises, and considering where the Security Council should act or hold accountable individuals or entities responsible for food insecurity. Related to this is the Council’s responsibility to maintain humanitarian access, protect aid workers and respond to other forms of interference. As recalled in resolution 2417, the Council may impose sanctions on those who obstruct the delivery of, access to, or distribution of humanitarian assistance.

Other issues include whether to establish a UN focal point to support the implementation of resolution 2417, the importance of funding relief efforts as set out in the UN’s 2021 Global Humanitarian Overview, and mitigating the economic impact of armed conflict that contributes to food insecurity. Also important are the other factors worsening food insecurity in conflict situations, such as climate change and the pandemic, issues that themselves can be drivers of instability or conflict.

Council members may apply ideas raised at the debate to their consideration of country-specific situations. Members could call for invoking resolution 2417 to respond to warnings about the growing hunger crisis and challenges to humanitarian access in Ethiopia’s Tigray region. Discussion may also feed into the upcoming Food Systems Summit to be hosted by Secretary-General António Guterres during the General Assembly’s high-level week in September.

Council Dynamics

Elected members have been important in advancing Council discussion on conflict-induced hunger since the Council first increased its focus on this issue in 2017. As noted, Niger and Ireland are replacing the Dominican Republic and Germany in

Conflict and Hunger

chairing members' informal briefings on food security in countries in conflict. The P3 have also supported such initiatives. In addition to the upcoming US-sponsored open debate, the UK appointed a Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs

in September 2020. During the UK's February Council presidency, it also organised an informal meeting of like-minded Council members on resolution 2417. Russia does not agree with the Council's consideration of conflict and hunger as a thematic subject

as it feels that multiple factors contribute to hunger crises in conflict-affected countries and that the Council is not the appropriate mechanism to deal with the problem.

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is due to renew the mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) before its 15 March expiration. Prior to this, the Council expects a briefing, followed by consultations, on the Secretary-General's 90-day report.

Key Recent Developments

South Sudan will mark ten years of independence in July. The permanent ceasefire continues to hold in most parts of the country, and overall levels of political violence remain lower since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) on 12 September 2018. However, slow and selective implementation of the R-ARCSS has contributed to uncertainty around the peace process. Localised ethnic and intercommunal violence continues. The human rights, humanitarian, food security, and economic conditions in the country remain dire, with an enormously detrimental effect on civilians.

One year ago, on 22 February 2020, the Transitional Government of National Unity was established, marking the start of a 36-month transitional period ahead of the holding of elections, as agreed in the R-ARCSS. However, critical aspects of the R-ARCSS have not been implemented in accordance with its timelines. The Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (RJMEC), which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the R-ARCSS, said in its most recent quarterly report covering 1 October to 31 December 2020 that the "pace of implementation...slowed markedly during the last quarter", with very little progress made on the two outstanding

pre-transitional tasks, namely the reconstitution of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly (TNLA) and the training and redeployment of the Necessary Unified Forces (NUF). The report concluded that the slow pace of implementation of the R-ARCSS poses significant challenges and risks, including growing defections among the parties to the peace agreement and intercommunal violence, which could destabilise the permanent ceasefire; insufficient resources devoted to the training and redeployment of the NUF, with the potential to derail unification; and a prolonged delay in establishing the TNLA and the Council of States, which could result in the inability to pass legislation critical to the success of the R-ARCSS.

On 15 December 2020, the Council received the independent strategic review of UNMISS, requested in resolution 2514, which renewed the UNMISS mandate for one year in March 2020. The review concluded that the four pillars of the mission's mandate remain valid overall, namely protecting civilians, creating the conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, supporting the peace process, and monitoring and investigating human rights violations and abuses. It made recommendations for specific adjustments to the mission's activities in five key areas: supporting the implementation of the R-ARCSS, the peace process and relevant governance processes; protection of civilians; human rights; humanitarian assistance; and gender and women, peace and security. The review emphasised that "the primacy of politics is central to achieving protection goals and building durable peace in South Sudan" and stressed the need for increasing political leverage to help to move the peace process

forward. In this regard, it noted that it is critical for the UN, and in particular UNMISS, to enhance their role in supporting the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). To achieve this, the report recommends establishing a strong compact with the region and the AU and making more effective use of existing UN resources in the region.

In December 2020, the Secretary-General released his report on children and armed conflict in South Sudan, covering 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2020. According to the report, grave violations against children have declined overall since the signing of the R-ARCSS, but such violations continue to be committed by all parties, including government security forces.

Council members were last briefed on South Sudan on 15 December 2020 in an open videoconference (VTC), followed by a closed VTC. The briefers were Special Representative and head of UNMISS David Shearer and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock. In January, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of Nicholas Haysom (South Africa) as his new Special Representative for South Sudan and head of UNMISS to succeed Shearer.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 2 February, a spokesperson for the High Commissioner for Human Rights welcomed the decision by the government to move forward with the establishment of transitional justice institutions, including the Hybrid Court and the Commission on Truth, Reconciliation and Healing, as agreed under Chapter V of the R-ARCSS. "Over many years, victims of extremely grave human rights violations have awaited the implementation of these key mechanisms," the spokesperson said while calling on South Sudan to swiftly sign the

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOUTH SUDAN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2514 (12 March 2020) renewed the mandate of UNMISS until 15 March 2021. **Secretary-General's Reports S/2020/1205** (14 December 2020) was on children and armed conflict in South Sudan. **S/2020/1180** (9 December 2020) was the 90-day report on South Sudan. **Security Council Letters S/2021/49** (6 January 2021) was on the appointment of Nicholas Haysom (South Africa) as Special Representative for South Sudan and head of UNMISS. **S/2020/1237** (17 December 2020) was a compilation of the briefings and statements from Council members' 15 December 2020 videoconference on South Sudan. **S/2020/1224** (15 December 2020) transmitted the independent strategic review of UNMISS.

South Sudan

Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of the Hybrid Court, already negotiated with the AU. On 10 March, the Human Rights Council is expected to hold an interactive dialogue during its 46th session with the Commission on South Sudan and consider its report (A/HRC/46/53).

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 7 February, the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee held a meeting open to all member states during which the coordinator of the Panel of Experts briefed participants on the Panel's interim report of 25 November 2020 (S/2020/1141). The briefing was attended by Committee members, representatives of South Sudan and the regional states and other interested member states. The Committee held a closed VTC with the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten on 26 February.

Women, Peace and Security

In an 11 February press release, Patten welcomed the announcement of the establishment of the Hybrid Court, which is expected to investigate and prosecute sexual violence, among other crimes. Patten expressed her hope that this will signal that perpetrators will be held accountable and that communities and survivors will be heard. She also emphasised the importance of the 35 percent quota for the representation of women in institutions such as the Hybrid Court, as agreed in the R-ARCSS. Patten called upon the government to expedite the establishment of the Hybrid Court and to adopt a survivor-centred approach.

Key Issues and Options

An immediate issue for the Council to consider is what changes are necessary to the mandate of UNMISS. The most likely option is

for the Council to renew the mandate for one year, maintaining the four pillars of the mission's mandate while making some adjustments. In doing so, Council members will be informed by the findings and recommendations of the independent strategic review and might consider some of the following:

- reducing the mandated number of troops from 17,000 to 15,000 (14,621 troops are currently deployed in the country);
- increasing advice, technical support and good offices engagement in relation to implementation of the R-ARCSS, including the process of drafting a constitution and preparations for elections;
- increasing assistance for security sector reform;
- enhancing support to judicial and law enforcement institutions to address widespread impunity and promote the rule of law;
- increasing protection of human rights defenders and civil society leaders; and
- increasing expertise on gender and conflict-related sexual violence.

Council Dynamics

The mandate of UNMISS was last renewed on 12 March 2020 with the unanimous adoption of resolution 2514. As was the case during negotiations on resolution 2459, which renewed the mission's mandate in 2019, Council members again expressed some divergent positions in relation to the

preambular paragraphs during last year's negotiations. (Russia abstained on resolution 2459.) Reference to the South Sudan sanctions regime, and the arms embargo in particular, was contentious in 2019 and 2020, with strong opposition from Russia. Language on sexual and gender-based violence and human rights proved difficult during negotiations in 2020, as in prior years. (See our *What's In Blue* story from 11 March 2020.)

Many Council members are increasingly worried about the delays in implementing key elements of the R-ARCSS and the impact this may have on the political and security situations. It is likely that these members will be in favour of language seeking to encourage UNMISS to enhance advice and technical support for the peace process and to increase its engagement with the AU and IGAD in this regard. Intercommunal violence; human rights violations; sexual and gender-based violence; and the economic and humanitarian crises are also likely to be raised as areas of concern during this month's negotiations.

Several of the members that joined the Council this year may be particularly engaged on South Sudan. India is the second-highest troop-contributing country to UNMISS, as of December 2020. Kenya is a member of IGAD. Norway is a member of the Troika on South Sudan, along with the US and the UK.

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

Sudan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS). The briefing will cover the Secretary-General's 90-day report on UNITAMS, which includes information about the drawdown and withdrawal of the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) as an annex, requested in resolutions 2524 and 2559. The chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions

Committee, Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia), is expected to provide the quarterly briefing on the committee's work.

The mandate of UNITAMS expires on 3 June in accordance with resolution 2524.

Key Recent Developments

Sudan continues to make progress in its democratic transition since the peace agreement was signed on 3 October 2020 by the transitional government of Sudan, the

Sudan Revolutionary Front, and the Sudan Liberation Movement-Minni Minawi. On 8 February, Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok announced the formation of the new government, including the Sovereign Council and Cabinet. Hamdok named 20 new ministers, including the appointments of Darfuri rebel leader Gibril Ibrahim as finance minister and Mariam Sadiq al-Mahdi, a leader of the Umma Party, as foreign minister. At the time of writing, the Transitional

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2562 (11 February 2021) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts for one year. 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. **Secretary-General's Report S/2020/1155** (1 December 2020) was the 90-day report on UNITAMS. **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/2020/1183 (18 December 2020) was a record of the briefing on 8 December on UNITAMS and UNAMID. 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. **Sanctions Committee Document S/2021/40** (13 January 2021) was the final report of the Panel of Experts.

Sudan

Legislative Council was expected to be constituted by 25 February.

In spite of the gains of recent months, political and security challenges persist. In a 21 February statement, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North led by Abdel Aziz al-Hilu reiterated its rejection of the peace agreement, which has also been rejected by the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid. Following Hamdok's announcement of the formation of a new government, protests took place in several cities, including in Darfur, over the dire economic conditions in the country.

The security situation in parts of Darfur remains precarious, with inter-communal violence, human rights violations and abuses, violations of international humanitarian law and large-scale displacement. Notwithstanding these challenges, UNAMID continues with its drawdown and exit in accordance with resolution 2559, which requested the Secretary-General to complete the withdrawal of all uniformed and civilian UNAMID personnel by 30 June. On 21 January, UNAMID handed over its team site in Saraf Omra, North Darfur, to the government of Sudan, and on 3 February, its team site in Kutum Locality, North Darfur, was handed over to the North Darfur state government. On 15 February, UNAMID handed over its team site in Khor Abeche Locality, South Darfur. More UNAMID team sites are scheduled for closure and handover to the government of Sudan in the coming months. In February, following its handover in January, the Saraf Omrah site was looted. The Secretary-General condemned the looting and called on the Sudanese authorities "to investigate the incident and ensure sufficient security presences for subsequent handovers so that facilities are preserved for civilian use".

Volker Perthes (Germany), appointed Special Representative for Sudan and head of UNITAMS on 7 January, arrived in Khartoum on 2 February. Perthes met with Hamdok on 14 February to discuss the role of UNITAMS. On 18 February, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of Khardiata Lo N'Diaye (Senegal) as his new Deputy Special Representative for Sudan and the UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in the country.

On 11 February, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2562 extending the

mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee until 12 March 2022. The resolution requests the Secretariat to produce a report by the end of July with recommendations for clear and well-identified key benchmarks that could guide the Council in reviewing the sanctions measures on Darfur. It expresses the Council's intention to establish those benchmarks by 15 September.

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.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 11 January, the Sudan Sanctions Committee considered the final report of the Panel of Experts. The report noted that the humanitarian situation in Darfur has not improved, the situation of internally displaced persons remains unchanged, and sexual and gender-based violence is endemic. The panel found that the government continued to transfer arms and other military materiel into Darfur in violation of the arms embargo, without submitting any exemption requests or notifications. Implementation of the travel ban and asset freeze remained a challenge because of the government's and the region's lack of cooperation, the report said. (There are four individuals listed under the sanctions regime, all designated in 2006.) The report also said that most of the Darfuri rebel groups have strengthened their presence in Libya, where they participated heavily in major military operations of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces militia (also known as the Libyan National Army). In a 25 February press release, the Committee urged signatories of the peace agreement to stop recruiting fighters; Darfuri non-signatory groups to engage in peace talks with the government as soon as possible; and the withdrawal of "forces from foreign countries". The Committee said it would consider listing those individuals or entities if they fail to do so (SC/14449).

Women, Peace and Security

Sexual and gender-based violence continued to be endemic and unaddressed in Darfur, according to the final report of the Panel of Experts. The panel detailed such incidents, which were perpetrated daily, especially against women and girls. The majority of cases of conflict-related sexual violence occurred in Central Darfur. According to the report, the Sudanese government acknowledged that addressing existing protection concerns in Darfur was a challenge. Survivors identified the perpetrators

as members of the Sudanese security forces, armed male members of nomadic communities, and fighters of the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid. In some cases, extreme violence was used against victims, leading to their death. The panel reported that there were instances in which members of warring Sudanese factions "punished" communities if they were perceived as being on the side of the opposite faction by raping female members of those communities, including spouses of rival commanders.

The panel said that the absence of justice for sexual and gender-based violence exacerbated such crimes, "as the majority of cases were not adequately investigated, if at all". The Sudanese police said that they often lacked the resources and the capacity to follow up on cases that were reported to them. According to information from the director of the Unit for Combating Violence Against Women and Children under the Ministry of Labour and Social Development, some progress was made. Standard operating procedures for the response to and prevention of gender-based violence were endorsed, and the government signed a framework for cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict in March 2020. The director also outlined plans for training security personnel and proposed amendments to laws that would enable access to justice for survivors and victims of sexual and gender-based violence. The panel welcomed the introduction of these measures for protection, prevention and response. It also said that the new Sudanese government showed "growing awareness and acknowledgement" of the problem, which the panel considered progress.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue is assessing the role of UNITAMS across the four strategic objectives for the mission contained in resolution 2524, namely: assisting Sudan's political transition; supporting peace processes and implementation of future peace agreements; assisting peacebuilding, civilian protection and rule of law in Darfur and the Two Areas (that is, South Kordofan and Blue Nile); and supporting the mobilisation of economic and development assistance and coordination of humanitarian assistance. Council members could consider holding an informal interactive dialogue with Sudanese officials to discuss how the Council and UNITAMS could best support implementation of the peace agreement and the government's National Plan for Civilian Protection.

Another key issue that Council members will want to follow closely is the security situation in Darfur, particularly in light of the drawdown and exit of UNAMID currently

Sudan

underway, as set out in resolution 2559. The transition from UNAMID to UNITAMS is a priority for the Council. Council members may be particularly interested in receiving updates on when UNITAMS can be expected to reach full operational capacity.

Council Dynamics

Council members welcome recent political progress in Sudan, including the formation of the new cabinet. However, members remain concerned over the groups that have yet to join the peace process. The dire economic and humanitarian situations are also particularly worrisome to many members. Divisions

persist in assessing the situation in Darfur. Several members remain concerned that the security situation in some regions of Darfur is still precarious and underscore the need to avoid a relapse into conflict. While a number of these members believed that UNITAMS should have a mandate to protect civilians, others (Russia, China and the three African members among them) opposed the inclusion of such tasks in the mandate.

An overarching divergence of views in the Council exists regarding the utility of the Sudan sanctions regime, as was seen during negotiations on resolution 2562 in February. Those members eager to see the

Council ease the sanctions measures tend to emphasise positive developments in the country over the past year. Other Council members appear more cautious about the removal of sanctions, citing the precarious situation in Darfur and the findings in the final report of the Panel of Experts. (See our *What's In Blue* story of 10 February 2021.)

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.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Expected Council Action

In March, Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ann Linde, the new Chairperson-in-Office (CiO) for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), is expected to brief the Security Council on the organisation's activities.

Background

The chairpersonship of the OSCE rotates yearly, and on 1 January, Sweden succeeded Albania in this function. March's briefing, which will be conducted via videoconference, will give Linde an opportunity to inform the Council about Sweden's main priorities as chair and discuss possible avenues for cooperation.

Sweden has indicated that its chairpersonship will draw from the "very fundamentals" of the OSCE: the European security order, the comprehensive concept of security, and continued conflict resolution efforts in the region. In her 14 January statement to the OSCE's Permanent Council, Foreign Minister Linde referred to the ongoing conflicts and crises in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Belarus. She also underscored the "link between security and respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law" in her statement. The situation in Ukraine has consistently featured in the work of each chairpersonship

since hostilities began in 2014. The OSCE is the most prominent regional organisation operating in Ukraine and is directly tasked with monitoring the 2015 Minsk agreements, which the Security Council endorsed in resolution 2202. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission gathers daily information related to ceasefire violations and the withdrawal of heavy weapons in eastern Ukraine. Additionally, the OSCE participates in the work of the Trilateral Group—consisting of the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine—which serves as a forum for addressing implementation aspects of the Minsk agreements.

Given the OSCE's presence and access to information on the ground, Linde's briefing may provide Council members with an opportunity to learn more about recent developments, particularly following a briefing on 11 February, which was called by Russia to mark the anniversary of the Minsk II agreement. At the briefing, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo emphasised that talks cannot be a substitute for real progress and that the situation on the ground remains fragile despite incremental progress on some elements of the agreement. DiCarlo noted the worsening humanitarian conditions, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with 3.4 million people projected to need humanitarian assistance in

2021, according to OCHA. Linde's briefing may provide further updates regarding the dire humanitarian situation in Ukraine.

On 20 January, Linde concluded a two-day official visit to Ukraine, her first visit as CiO. In a press release on 21 January, she noted the "high importance" the Swedish chairpersonship places on supporting a peaceful resolution, including "full respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders". While meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, and Deputy Prime Minister for Reintegration of the Temporary Occupied Territories of Ukraine Oleksii Reznikov, Linde welcomed their actions toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict. She underscored her commitment as CiO to defend the European security order and encourage efforts to achieve a sustainable political solution in Ukraine, which would align with the OSCE's principles and commitments. Linde also met with civil society representatives, observing in a press release that "their voices are important to help us implement our joint commitments—in Ukraine and the region". She emphasised that full inclusion and empowerment of women is central to the prevention and mitigation of conflicts and consolidation of peace.

During its chairpersonship, Sweden will

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE OSCE Security Council Resolution S/RES/2202 (17 February 2015) endorsed the "Package of measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements" signed on 12 February 2015. **Security Council Meeting Records S/2021/159** (11 February 2021) was on the situation in Ukraine called by Russia on the anniversary of the Minsk II agreement. **S/PV.8714** (6 February 2020) was a briefing by the Albanian Prime Minister and Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Edi Rama, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for 2020. **S/PV.4964** (7 May 2004) was the first public briefing by the Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

also focus on the prioritisation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The programme of the Swedish OSCE chairpersonship underscores Sweden's emphasis on strengthening the OSCE in producing data, analysis and actions that will take account of gender. Furthermore, the programme notes that when visiting field operations, the CiO will "pay special attention to their important work

in this regard, as well as to women's rights organisations on the ground".

In addition to the situation in Ukraine, in her briefing to the Council, Linde is likely to address last year's outbreak of armed conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. In her address to the Permanent Council, Linde observed that the OSCE has a "vital role" to play in conflict settlement, including on the

ground. In addition to Ukraine and Nagorno-Karabakh, the OSCE also plays a role in international efforts regarding frozen conflicts in Georgia and Transdniestria. Given that these conflicts are not regularly discussed by the Council, some members may want to use the briefing to hear about the OSCE's mediation efforts in these situations.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is expected to hold its monthly briefing on Yemen with Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock, and General Abhijit Guha, who heads the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement.

Key Recent Developments

Recent weeks have seen intensified diplomatic engagement to stop Yemen's war, triggered by the new US administration's policy shift on Yemen. At the same time, the Houthi rebel group has escalated its offensive in Marib governorate, prompting new concerns about Yemen's already dire humanitarian crisis and the prospects for resuming a peace process.

On 4 February, US President Joe Biden announced the appointment of a US special envoy for Yemen, Timothy Lenderking, "to push for a diplomatic resolution" to the conflict. Biden also announced that the US was ending support for offensive operations of the Saudi Arabia-led campaign fighting against the Houthis, including sales of relevant arms. From 10 to 11 February, Griffiths met in Riyadh with Lenderking, Saudi Deputy Minister of Defense Prince Khalid bin Salman and Yemeni Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmed Awad Bin Mubarak, among other officials. These meetings followed Griffiths' first visit to Iran from 7 to 8 February, during which he met with Foreign Minister Javad Zarif.

The US also announced that effective 16 February, it was revoking the decision in January by the outgoing Trump administration to designate the Houthis as a "Foreign Terrorist Organization" and Houthi leader Abdulmalik

al-Houthi and military commanders Abd al-Khaliq Badr al-Din al-Houthi and Abdullah Yahya as "Specially Designated Global Terrorists". (The three individuals—who remain under other US sanctions—are under Security Council travel ban and asset freeze sanctions for undermining the peace, security and stability of Yemen.) US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the decision was made based on warnings by UN officials and others that the designations would have a devastating impact on Yemenis' access to basic commodities such as food and fuel and would exacerbate the humanitarian crisis.

On 7 February, the Houthis intensified their offensive to take Marib City. They also escalated drone attacks on Saudi Arabia. Rich in oil and gas fields, Marib governorate has become the Yemeni government's last stronghold in northern Yemen. The fighting could also have severe humanitarian consequences, especially if it spreads to Marib City, which has seen its population increase since 2015 from 40,000 to 1.8 million inhabitants, mostly due to internally displaced persons from Houthi-controlled areas, according to the Yemen Panel of Experts' recent final report to the 2140 Sanctions Committee.

At the Council's 18 February videoconference (VTC) briefing, Griffiths called for the Houthis to stop the offensive, warning that "[t]he quest for territorial gain by force threatens all of the prospects of the peace process". Welcoming the opportunity offered by the new US focus on Yemen, Griffiths said the parties should immediately agree on a nationwide ceasefire and humanitarian and economic measures to allow, at a minimum, the unhindered flow of fuel and other commodities through Hodeidah's ports—using the revenues

to pay civil servant salaries—and the opening up of Sana'a airport to commercial flights.

Lowcock also expressed alarm during the Council meeting about Marib, saying the front lines were moving closer to civilian areas, missile attacks had hit Marib City and nearby displaced persons camps, and thousands of civilians had already started to flee. He highlighted the Yemen pledging conference scheduled for 1 March as critical to prevent famine. Referring to recent diplomatic engagement, Lowcock said "the world will have wasted the current opportunity for peace if a massive famine is allowed to take hold".

Earlier in the month, the UN released a statement on 2 February expressing frustration over apparent Houthi backtracking on a commitment to give a UN-led technical team access to the FSO Safer oil tanker. The vessel is moored in the Red Sea off Hodeidah governorate, threatening to cause a major environmental catastrophe if its nearly 1.1 million barrels of oil leak. By the 18 February Council VTC, the Houthis had dropped plans to "review" their approval of the mission, according to Lowcock; however, the UN could still not predict when the team would be allowed to inspect the tanker.

The fifth meeting of the Supervisory Committee on the Implementation of the Prisoners and Detainees Exchange Agreement between the parties, co-chaired by the Office of the Special Envoy and ICRC, was held from 24 January to 21 February in Amman without agreement to release further prisoners.

On 25 February, the Council adopted resolution 2564, renewing the Yemen sanctions measures and the mandate of the Yemen Panel of Experts for an additional

Yemen

year. The resolution condemns the ongoing escalation in Marib and the Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia, calling for “an immediate cessation of attacks without preconditions”. It also stresses Houthi responsibility for the situation of the FSO Safer and for not responding to the major environmental and humanitarian risk that it poses

In an annex attached to the resolution, the Council imposed the asset freeze and travel ban sanctions on Houthi official Sultan Saleh Aida Aida Zabin. According to the Panel of Experts report, Sultan Zabin is the director of the Criminal Investigation Department in Sanaa, and has played a prominent role in a policy of intimidation and the use of systematic arrest, detention, torture, sexual violence and rape of politically active women. The designation of Zabin was the first addition to the Yemen sanctions list since April 2015, when the Council adopted resolution 2216. Resolution 2564 was adopted with 14 members voting in favor, while Russia abstained.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 19 February, a spokesperson for the High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern over the “potentially disastrous humanitarian consequences” of civilians in Marib governorate in northern Yemen, including at least 800,000 internally displaced people, amid an escalation in hostilities between the Houthis and the Yemeni government. The spokesperson also said OHCHR were in the process of verifying information about recent civilian casualties in Marib, following an offensive by Houthi forces. During its 46th

session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held an interactive dialogue on 25 February on the oral update of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen.

Key Issues and Options

The fighting in Marib is a key issue as it threatens political efforts and could worsen Yemen’s humanitarian crisis. The Special Envoy is focusing on reaching an agreement for a ceasefire, increasing access through Hodeidah’s ports and reopening Sana’a airport. Linked to any ceasefire agreement is the importance of resuming peace talks as any halt in the fighting will be unsustainable without progress on the political track. Sustaining the Saudi Arabia brokered Riyadh Agreement, the power-sharing accord between the Yemeni government and the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC), is also important for resolving the Yemen conflict. If agreement is reached to establish a ceasefire, the Council may adopt a resolution to endorse the deal. Council members are likely to monitor the Marib offensive closely and may reiterate calls for de-escalation if fighting persists.

The humanitarian crisis, particularly the threat of famine, remains a critical issue. Preventing famine will be more difficult if relief efforts must be diverted to respond to a mass displacement crisis caused by a battle for Hodeidah city. The upcoming pledging conference, to be held virtually, will be critical to raising the approximately \$4 billion for this year’s Yemen Humanitarian

Response Plan. Stabilising the Yemeni rial and other measures to support Yemen’s economy are also important to make sure Yemenis can afford to purchase food. Council members may highlight the situation in Yemen at the US Council presidency’s signature event in March, a high-level open debate on conflict and food security.

Council Dynamics

Council members remain aligned in their support of the Special Envoy, continuing to back his mediation efforts. The new US focus on Yemen has added momentum in support of his work. Members further share concerns about the humanitarian situation and the threat posed by the decrepit FSO Safer oil tanker. In the past year, members have issued multiple press statements and press elements in which they have called for a cessation of hostilities, highlighted the need for stakeholders and the international community to take measures to avert famine, and called on the Houthis to facilitate the UN technical mission’s access to the oil tanker.

Russia’s abstention on resolution 2564, reflected concerns that it often raises about singling out the Houthis, and its view that the resolution was unbalanced.

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

Non-Proliferation (1540 Committee)

Expected Council Action

In March, the chair of the 1540 Committee, Ambassador Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico), is scheduled to brief the Council on the work of the committee, which deals with the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The mandate of the committee expires on 25 April.

Background

Adopted in 2004, resolution 1540 aims to address the concern that non-state actors

might use weapons of mass destruction for terrorist purposes (individuals and sub-state groups are not covered under existing treaties dealing with nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons). It requires all states to prevent non-state actors from obtaining access to nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons and their delivery systems. Furthermore, it requires states to establish domestic controls to prevent the proliferation of such weapons.

In 2011, the Council adopted resolution 1977 which extended the mandate of the 1540 Committee for ten years. It called for

the committee to conduct two comprehensive reviews on the implementation of resolution 1540, one after five years and the other prior to the renewal of the committee’s mandate. In 2020, the committee was supposed to focus on activities related to this comprehensive review. The open consultations that were initially planned for June 2020 were among the most significant of these activities. This event was meant to gather representatives of UN member states, international and regional organisations, and civil society to discuss the 1540 review process. Due to

UN DOCUMENTS ON NON-PROLIFERATION Security Council Resolutions S/RES/1977 (20 April 2011) extended the mandate of the 1540 Committee until 25 April 2021. S/RES/1540 (28 April 2004) established the 1540 Committee. Security Council Letter S/2020/847 (27 August 2020) informed the Council of the committee’s decision to postpone all activities related to the comprehensive review, including the open consultations, until 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Other S/2020/1308 (28 December 2020) was the annual report of the 1540 Committee.

Non-Proliferation (1540 Committee)

delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee decided in August 2020 that all activities related to the comprehensive review, including the open consultations, would be postponed until 2021.

Following the completion of an earlier review of resolution 1540's implementation in December 2016, the Council adopted resolution 2325, which called for further efforts to strengthen implementation. In addition, resolution 2325 clarified the reporting cycle by deciding that the 1540 Committee would brief the Council in the first quarter of each year in addition to providing the annual joint briefing with the 1267/1989/2253 ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee and the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee.

In 2020, the March briefing was postponed as Council meetings were affected by the Council having to adapt suddenly to remote working. Then-committee chair Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani (Indonesia) briefed the Council on the work of the committee on 23 November. He emphasised the importance of resolution 1540 in efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons; weapons of mass destruction; and their means of delivery to and by non-state actors.

Furthermore, he stressed the need for all states to prevent such proliferation. Notwithstanding the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Djani noted that the committee would continue to promote the full and effective implementation of the resolution and to assist states, upon request, in strengthening their national capacity.

On 28 December 2020, the committee published its annual report on the implementation of resolution 1540 that detailed the committee's activities during 2020. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee has had to take precautionary measures in conducting its business. While some activities, particularly those related to the comprehensive review, have been postponed until 2021, the committee has been able to meet virtually, and the report noted that it had completed some preparatory activities. These include the finalisation of committee matrices and their publication on the committee's website, approval of the outline of the final report, and delivery of letters to international and regional organisations inviting them to submit written inputs on their work in support of resolution 1540 since the 2016 comprehensive review. The committee continued to strive to achieve universal

reporting by member states on the implementation of resolution 1540. By the end of 2020, 184 out of the 193 member states had submitted their first reports on the implementation of resolution 1540.

At press time, the committee had yet to adopt its programme of work for this year. Usually, the programme of work is organised around four main themes: monitoring and national implementation, assistance, cooperation with international organisations and other relevant UN bodies, and transparency and media outreach.

Given the delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is highly likely that the committee will not be able to complete the comprehensive review on resolution 1540's implementation before the expiry of the committee's mandate on 25 April, as required by resolution 1977. When adopted, the committee's programme of work should provide more clarity on the timeline for completion of this process. One option, if it looks like more time is needed, is for the Council to consider a short-term extension of the committee's mandate to allow for the completion of the comprehensive review.

Lebanon

Expected Council Action

In March, Security Council members expect to receive a briefing in consultations on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701, due on 9 March. Adopted in 2006, resolution 1701 called for a cessation of hostilities between the Shi'a militant group Hezbollah and Israel. Briefings are expected from Deputy Special Coordinator for Lebanon Najat Rochdi and Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix.

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

Key Recent Developments

Lebanon remains without a government, more than six months after the government of Hassan Diab resigned following widespread

anti-government protests in the aftermath of the 4 August 2020 Beirut blast. Diab's government serves in a caretaker position while Saad Hariri—whom Lebanese President Michel Aoun designated as the new prime minister on 22 October 2020—negotiates the formation of a new cabinet.

Hariri and Aoun have publicly disagreed over the formation of the new government. Hariri has insisted on appointing an 18-member cabinet of technocrats who will be able to carry out necessary reforms, such as those contained in the roadmap presented by French President Emmanuel Macron. Aoun, however, calls for increasing the number of ministers to 20 and for the two additional positions to be filled by Christian ministers. Hariri strongly opposes Aoun's demands, which would grant veto powers

to the president's political bloc. (According to the Lebanese constitution, government decisions need the consent of two-thirds of the cabinet to pass; therefore, whoever controls more than a third of the cabinet will have blocking powers.)

The continual delays in government formation hinder progress in addressing Lebanon's multifaceted economic problems. The Beirut blast and the lockdowns instituted to stem the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the deep financial crisis that Lebanon has been experiencing since late 2019. The unemployment rate in Lebanon stands at more than 30 percent and the cost of living has risen more than 140 percent, making it difficult for many citizens to buy basic staples. In addition, close to 90 percent of the approximately 1.5 million

Lebanon

Syrian refugees in Lebanon are in need of humanitarian and cash assistance, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. International interlocutors emphasise that instituting reforms in Lebanon is a prerequisite to unlocking approximately \$11 billion in financial assistance. International partners have, however, continued to provide humanitarian aid to Lebanon, with the World Bank announcing on 11 January the approval of a \$246 million loan to assist impoverished families.

Against this backdrop, Lebanon has also been experiencing an increase in social unrest and heightened tensions between Syrian refugees and Lebanese citizens. In two incidents in November and December 2020, Lebanese citizens attacked Syrian refugees and burned their dwellings in the northern towns of Bsharri and Bhanine, leading to the displacement of 270 and 370 refugees, respectively. In addition, protests that erupted on 24 January in Tripoli and lasted for four days turned violent, leaving two dead and more than 400 injured. The protests were apparently sparked by the dire economic impact of the strict lockdown measures instituted in January to fight the increase in COVID-19 cases in Lebanon.

On 4 February, Lokman Slim, a Lebanese activist and an outspoken critic of Hezbollah, was found dead in the village of Addoussieh in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah has denied responsibility, and Slim's assailants remain unknown at the time of writing. Slim's assassination was strongly condemned by many in the international community, including US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who urged Lebanese officials to hold the perpetrators of the attack to account.

Recent months have not witnessed any major incidents between Israel and Lebanon in UNIFIL's area of operations, in contrast to the four-month reporting period of the Secretary-General's latest report on resolution 1701, issued on 12 November 2020, which noted two breaches of the cessation of hostilities on 27 July and 26 August 2020.

The negotiations between Israel and Lebanon on the delineation of the maritime border between the two countries—which commenced in October 2020 with the mediation of US officials from the Trump administration—appeared to have stalled by December 2020 after the sides had met four times. At the time of writing, a date has not

been set for additional meetings, and it is unclear to what extent the new administration of US President Joe Biden intends to support the maritime border negotiations.

On 18 January, the Secretary-General appointed Ján Kubiš, who had served as the Special Coordinator for Lebanon since 2019, as his Special Envoy on Libya and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). At the time of writing, a new Special Coordinator for Lebanon had yet to be named.

On 10 February, the Secretary-General sent a letter to the Security Council, requesting a two-year extension of the mandate of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL)—a UN-backed tribunal established in 2009 to hold trials of those accused of involvement in the February 2005 attack that killed former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and 21 others—ahead of its 28 February expiry. The Secretary-General warned of a funding gap for the STL and expressed his intention to request a \$25 million subvention from the General Assembly to fund the tribunal's work in 2021. On 11 December 2020, the STL sentenced Salim Jamil Ayyash to five concurrent sentences of life imprisonment, following its 18 August 2020 verdict convicting Ayyash of participating in a conspiracy to carry out the attack.

Key Issues and Options

A major issue for the Council is the economic and political instability engulfing Lebanon, which has the potential to undermine the already fragile security situation in the country. The growing tensions related to Lebanon's economic distress is a matter of concern. A 2 February International Crisis Group report suggests that the Lebanese security forces may increasingly struggle to prevent violence if the trend persists. Council Members may consider calling for international partners to increase humanitarian support to Lebanon and to consider deepening cooperation with different security agencies, which are also among suggestions contained in the report.

A key priority for the Council is to protect the integrity of UNIFIL's mandate and to provide the force with the means to carry out its tasks. In this regard, Council members may be interested to hear from the briefers on progress in the implementation plan for the recommendations contained in the

Secretary-General's 1 June 2020 assessment report on the continued relevance of UNIFIL's resources. In a 28 October 2020 letter, the Secretary-General presented the first elements of the implementation plan and described steps that UNIFIL is already taking, including initiating discussion with the parties on the use of new technologies such as cameras, as well as other steps that will be carried out in the 2021/22 budget period. While the Council has not officially endorsed the 1 June assessment report, it appears that many Council members have expressed support for its recommendations.

Council members may consider convening a meeting of the 1636 Sanctions Committee to hear a briefing about developments in the STL's work. The committee has the mandate to register individuals designated by the government of Lebanon or the STL as suspected of involvement in the 2005 attack.

Council Dynamics

There is a consensus among Council members in support of Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security. The change in the US administration and the five new elected members may affect the Council's view on such issues as security dynamics in the region and UNIFIL's role and configuration.

The previous US administration expressed the view that UNIFIL should play a more active role in confronting the threats posed by Iran, Hezbollah and the proliferation of weapons in southern Lebanon. Its advocacy for a reduction in UNIFIL's troop ceiling resulted in the decision, by resolution 2539 of 28 August 2020, for the force's troop ceiling to be reduced to 13,000 from the 15,000 set out by resolution 1701.

While the Biden administration's position on Lebanon has yet to be publicly announced, it is possible that its attempts to re-start negotiations with Iran on the nuclear deal may have a bearing on its actions related to the Lebanon portfolio. It appears that thus far, the incoming administration has diverged from the previous administration's practice and refrained from criticising Iran in Council meetings on issues such as Syria; it may do the same in meetings on Lebanon. However, the Biden administration may maintain a similar position regarding UNIFIL's configuration, in line with a desire to promote the efficient use of

Lebanon

resources in peacekeeping operations.

Incoming members India and Ireland are major troop-contributing countries to UNIFIL. They are likely to closely follow developments related to the implementation of

the 1 June 2020 assessment report and may emphasise the need for close consultations with troop-contributing countries throughout the process. India, which has outlined as a priority the use of technology to increase the

effectiveness of peacekeeping operations, is likely to be supportive of such initiatives with regard to UNIFIL.

France is the penholder on Lebanon.

Afghanistan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is scheduled to hold its quarterly meeting on Afghanistan. Deborah Lyons, the Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), is expected to brief on the latest Secretary-General's report on the mission, due on 15 March.

The mandate of UNAMA expires on 17 September, and the mandate of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee expires on 17 December.

Key Recent Developments

Afghanistan remains mired in insecurity as the intra-Afghan talks in Doha stall, and widespread violence continues to adversely affect civilians. On 2 December 2020, the negotiating teams of the Afghan government and the Taliban concluded protracted deliberations on the rules of procedure for the peace talks and agreed to adjourn the negotiations until 5 January, when they were expected to discuss the agenda for the peace talks, leading to substantive deliberations. The negotiation teams did not reconvene until 22 February. While the peace talks were delayed, Taliban representatives, including the head of the Taliban negotiations team, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, travelled to meet with international interlocutors in Pakistan, Iran and Turkmenistan between mid-December and mid-February.

It appears that a major factor hindering the talks is uncertainty around the Afghanistan policy of the new administration of US President Joe Biden. In a 22 January conversation with Afghan National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan conveyed the US's intention to review the February 2020 US-Taliban agreement, including to "assess

whether the Taliban was living up to its commitments to cut ties with terrorist groups, to reduce violence in Afghanistan, and to engage in meaningful negotiations with the Afghan government and other stakeholders". Separately, a US State Department spokesman said on 26 January that the Biden administration will review the sanctions imposed by the former administration of President Donald Trump on ICC officials involved in investigating US troops and intelligence officials for possible war crimes in Afghanistan.

A crucial aspect of the review of the US-Taliban agreement is whether the US will adhere to its obligation under the agreement to withdraw all foreign troops by 1 May. The decision on the troop withdrawal is time-sensitive and has far-reaching repercussions for US allies, Afghanistan's security, and the continuance of the peace talks. Taliban representatives have stated on several occasions that if the US does not abide by its commitment, the Taliban will withdraw from the intra-Afghan talks and resume armed struggle.

On 3 February, a report by the Afghanistan Study Group—a bipartisan panel established by the US Congress to examine the US-Taliban agreement—concluded that a withdrawal adhering to strict timelines without considering the Taliban's compliance with the agreement would increase the US's vulnerability to terrorist threats and the potential for civil war in Afghanistan. The group recommended a diplomatic effort by the US and Afghanistan's neighbours to convince the Taliban to agree to an extension of the timeline for the withdrawal of international troops and to abide by its commitments under the agreement. A member of the panel noted in an interview that possible leverage in respect of the Taliban includes its desire for international recognition as a legitimate political

movement and for sanctions relief.

Following a meeting of NATO defence ministers on 17 and 18 February, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said at a news conference that violence in Afghanistan must decrease and more progress needs to be made in the peace negotiations. At the time of writing, the US had not made an official statement regarding the troop withdrawal.

Meanwhile, as peace talks between the sides remain delayed, violence continues to surge across Afghanistan. UNAMA's annual report on the protection of civilians, issued on 23 February, noted that 3,035 civilians were killed and 5,785 injured in 2020, with women and children constituting 43 percent of casualties in the past year. The report said that the peace talks have failed to reduce the number of civilian casualties, and trends include targeted killings of government officials, military personnel, civil society members, and journalists. In a recent attack, two female judges were killed in Kabul on 17 January. According to a 15 February UNAMA report, 11 human rights defenders and media professionals have been killed since the start of the intra-Afghan negotiations—a sharp increase from previous months. UNAMA warned that this has led to the contraction of media space and pushed many professionals to self-censor or flee the country.

In recent months, the Taliban has carried out an intense offensive, capturing military bases and police outposts near capital cities in provinces such as Helmand and Uruzgan in the south and Kunduz and Baghlan in the north. According to media reports, the Taliban has been levying taxes and installing its own administrative services in areas it has captured, thus challenging the authority of the state. Analysts surmise that the Taliban's actions seek to

UN DOCUMENTS ON AFGHANISTAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2557 (18 December 2020) renewed the mandate of the Monitoring Team supporting the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee until 17 December 2021. **S/RES/2543** (15 September 2020) renewed the mandate of UNAMA until 17 September 2021. **S/RES/2513** (10 March 2020) was on the US-Taliban agreement and the joint declaration issued by the US and the Afghan government. **Secretary-General's Report S/2020/1182** (9 December 2020) was the latest report on UNAMA. **Security Council Letter S/2020/1274** (22 December 2020) contained the record of the latest quarterly meeting on Afghanistan, held on 17 December 2020.

Afghanistan

pressure the Afghan government into making concessions in the peace negotiations. It appears that the Taliban has made new demands for the peace talks, including the release of an additional 7,000 prisoners and the formation of an interim government—both of which the government has rejected.

Against this backdrop, Afghanistan continues to suffer from the increasing spread of COVID-19 and a deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation. According to the World Bank, the poverty rate in Afghanistan rose to 72 percent in 2020—a 22 percent increase from 2019. The UN warned that 18.4 million people—nearly half the population—will need humanitarian assistance in 2021. Almost 17 million people are in crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity, with nearly half of all children in Afghanistan facing acute malnutrition in 2021. The Afghanistan humanitarian response plan requires \$1.3 billion to reach 15.7 million people in need.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 3 February, UNAMA and OHCHR published the sixth periodic report on the treatment of persons deprived of liberty for security and terrorism-related offences in Afghanistan, covering 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2020. The report, based on 656 interviews, found that while the percentage of detainees claiming to have been tortured has decreased slightly compared to 2017-2018, 30.3 percent of those interviewed said they had been subjected to such treatment. It also found that the failure to implement procedural safeguards resulted in detainees held incommunicado and in solitary confinement in the National Directorate of Security.

During its 46th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) is expected to receive a briefing on 22 March on the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and on the achievements of technical assistance in the field of human rights, covering 1 January to 30 November 2020 (A/HRC/46/69). The report concluded that “[d]

espite a reduction of 21 percent in civilian casualties, Afghanistan remained one of the deadliest places to live in 2020”. Among other findings, it said that women and girls continue to face challenges in accessing justice for crimes of violence and that civil society actors continue to be increasingly targeted. The report made a series of recommendations, including that the parties to the conflict urgently agree to a comprehensive cessation of hostilities.

Key Issues and Options

A key priority for the Security Council is supporting the intra-Afghan talks to facilitate a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan. An issue in this regard is how to advance the engagement of the sides in the peace process. Council members may consider delisting certain Taliban members from the 1988 UN sanctions list. Some Council members may emphasise that delisting should be approached on a case-by-case basis in line with resolution 2513, which calls for considering the delisting of Taliban members based on their action, or lack thereof, to reduce violence or advance the intra-Afghan negotiations.

As the March meeting will take place during the US presidency of the Council, it might serve as an opportunity for Zalmay Khalilzad, the US Special Representative to Afghanistan, to brief members on recent developments. This could yield ideas on how the Council can best support negotiating efforts.

Looking ahead, Council members might wish to consider how to encourage the sides to incorporate into the negotiations such issues as the protection of children and considerations relating to disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and security sector reform. They may also wish to discuss ways to include the voices of women, youth, children, and minorities from all segments of Afghan society in the talks as they progress.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the peace process in Afghanistan and for UNAMA’s work. The change in the US administration and the five new elected members may affect Council dynamics on Afghanistan. While the Biden administration’s Afghanistan policy has yet to be publicly announced, its engagement with the Afghan government so far has demonstrated more attention to the concerns of Kabul in the peace process. Notably, at the time of writing, incoming US officials have not engaged directly with the Taliban, unlike officials in the previous administration.

Incoming member India replaced Indonesia as the chair of the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee. With Norway taking over from Indonesia as the chair of the 1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, the two committees are chaired by different Council members for the first time since 2011.

Council member India has long had close ties to Afghanistan and has since 2001 cooperated with the Afghan government on development, reconstruction and capacity-building in the country, most recently sending Afghanistan its first supply of the COVID-19 vaccine. Issues relating to counter-terrorism are likely to be a focus for New Delhi as Indian officials have often said that Afghanistan should not serve as a sanctuary for terrorists or as a staging ground for activities against India.

Estonia and Norway are the co-penholders on Afghanistan, and Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti (India) chairs the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee. The US is the penholder on the sanctions file.

Libya

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is expected to receive briefings by the Special Envoy to Libya and head of the UN Support Mission for Libya (UNSMIL), Ján Kubiš, and the chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, Ambassador T. S. Tirumurti, the Permanent Representative of India. The Council may also receive a report by the Secretary-General on the work of the advance team that will be deployed to Libya in support of the envisioned establishment of a ceasefire monitoring mechanism under the umbrella of UNSMIL.

Sanctions related to the illicit export of petroleum from Libya expire on 30 April, and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee expires on 15 May. The authorisation given through resolution 2526 (to inspect vessels believed to be in violation of the arms embargo) expires on 5 June and the authorisation given through resolution 2546 (to inspect vessels suspected of being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking) expires on 3 October. UNSMIL's mandate expires on 15 September.

Key Recent Developments

A 14-month-long assault by the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF, also known as the Libyan National Army) under General Khalifa Haftar against Libya's capital, Tripoli, and the internationally recognised Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) based there was halted by armed groups supporting the GNA in June 2020. Both the LAAF and the GNA receive foreign military backing in violation of UN sanctions. Turkey's support for the GNA eventually turned the conflict in its favour. In her 28 January briefing to the Council, then-Acting Special Representative and head of UNSMIL Stephanie Williams said that "blatant foreign interference continues" in Libya.

The final report by the Panel of

Experts—expected to be published in March—was leaked to the press in mid-February. The panel reportedly describes the involvement of Erik Prince, the founder of the private military company Blackwater Worldwide, on the side of the LAAF. Prince has denied the reports.

A leaked confidential report by the Panel of Experts in May 2020 said that the Russian private military company Wagner Group had deployed around 1,200 mercenaries to fight for the LAAF, according to media reports. The Kremlin denies ties to the Wagner Group despite accusations to the contrary by various sources.

The 13 January final report of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee addresses the involvement of Darfuri rebel groups in the Libyan conflict on the side of the LAAF. It further lays out the engagement of the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—reportedly among the military supporters of the LAAF—with those groups.

On 23 October 2020, the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (5+5 JMC)—consisting of five representatives each from the LAAF and the GNA—signed a permanent ceasefire agreement, including a request for the Council to adopt a resolution supporting compliance of all national and international stakeholders with the ceasefire agreement. The 5+5 JMC also expressed its intention to set up a monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the agreement. On 27 October 2020, Council members issued a press statement welcoming the ceasefire agreement.

The agreement further stipulates that within three months from the day it was signed, "all military units and armed groups shall clear all confrontation lines and return to their camps". In addition, it calls for the departure of foreign fighters and mercenaries from all sovereign Libyan spaces (land, sea and air) within the three-month period. That deadline passed on 23 January without the implementation of those provisions.

The Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF)—consisting of 75 participants representing the main Libyan geographical, social and political constituencies—decided on a "political roadmap" on 15 November 2020. It states that parliamentary and presidential elections will be held on 24 December 2021. The members of the LPDF agreed on a "reformed executive authority", which will lead a "government of national unity" until the elections are held. The reformed executive authority will consist of a three-member Presidency Council, a prime minister, and two deputy prime ministers. In a 21 January letter to the Council, Fayez al-Serraj, the head of the GNA, requested UN support for the electoral process, including election observers. Voting by the LPDF on the candidates for the reformed executive authority took place in Geneva in early February, electing Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah as prime minister-designate and Mohammad Younes Menfi as president of the Presidency Council. The Council welcomed this step in a 16 February presidential statement. The House of Representatives has yet to pass a vote of confidence on this interim government.

On 2 March 2020, Ghassan Salamé, then-Special Representative and head of UNSMIL, announced his resignation, citing stress-related health reasons. Resolution 2542, adopted on 15 September 2020, split the role of Special Representative into a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and an UNSMIL Coordinator, following pressure by the US. On 16 December, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of Raisedon Zenenga as UNSMIL Coordinator. Following a difficult selection process, Council members agreed on the appointment of Ján Kubiš as Special Envoy to Libya and head of UNSMIL on 18 January. Kubiš took up his position on 8 February.

Key Issues and Options

The conflict in Libya and related

UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2546](#) (2 October 2020) renewed for 12 months the authorisation for member states, acting nationally or through regional organisations, to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya that they have reasonable grounds to suspect are being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking. [S/RES/2542](#) (15 September 2020) extended UNSMIL's mandate until 15 September 2021; it was adopted with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (China and Russia). [S/RES/2526](#) (5 June 2020) renewed for 12 months the authorisation for member states, acting nationally or through regional organisations, to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya bound to or from the country that they have reasonable grounds to believe are violating the arms embargo. [S/RES/2509](#) (11 February 2020) renewed the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee until 15 May 2021 as well as the measures related to the illicit export from Libya of petroleum until 30 April 2021; it was adopted with 14 votes in favour and one abstention (Russia). [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2021/4](#) (9 February 2021) welcomed the election of the interim executive authority. [Sanctions Committee Document S/2021/40](#) (13 January 2021) was the final report of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee. [Security Council Letters S/2021/110](#) (4 February 2021) was from the president of the Security Council to the Secretary-General, conveying a request for the establishment and deployment of an advance team to be deployed to Libya in support of the envisioned establishment of a ceasefire monitoring mechanism under the umbrella of UNSMIL, and to report back on the team's work 45 days from the date of the letter at the latest. [S/2021/70](#) (21 January 2021) was from the Permanent Representative of Libya, containing a letter from the head of the GNA, Fayez Serraj, requesting UN support for the electoral process. [S/2021/59](#) (15 January 2021) was from the president of the Security Council to the Secretary-General, taking note of the Secretary-General's intention to appoint Ján Kubiš as Special Envoy to Libya and head of UNSMIL. [S/2021/58](#) (13 January 2021) was from the Secretary-General, informing the president of the Security Council of his intention to appoint Ján Kubiš as Special Envoy to Libya and head of UNSMIL.

Libya

non-compliance with the arms embargo by multiple international actors have been ongoing issues for the Council. One option for the Council is to follow up on the request contained in the ceasefire agreement to adopt a resolution supporting compliance of all national and international stakeholders with the 23 October 2020 ceasefire agreement between the Libyan conflict parties. Another option is for the Council to consider the GNA's request for electoral support through election observers.

Council and Wider Dynamics

The Council's 16 February presidential statement reiterates its call for states to comply with the arms embargo and to withdraw mercenaries and foreign forces from Libya, but some countries, including members of the Council, fail to respect this. All foreign sponsors but Turkey deny their role in Libya.

Divisions remain between Council members on Libya. The chair of the Libya Sanctions Committee was last able to brief the Council in September. Since then, the committee has not been able to agree on the chair's statement. (Sanctions committee

decisions and statements require consensus.) Ahead of November's bimonthly briefing on UNSMIL, Russia raised an objection to an assessment by the Panel of Experts that a merchant vessel had potentially violated the arms embargo by carrying jet fuel from the UAE to Benghazi in September 2020; it raised the same objection again ahead of January's bimonthly briefing on UNSMIL.

The UK is the penholder on Libya. T. S. Tirumurti, India's Permanent Representative, chairs the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee.

DPRK (North Korea)

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is expected to extend the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Sanctions Committee.

The panel's mandate expires on 30 April.

Key Recent Developments

In line with the provisions of resolution 2515, the Panel of Experts provided the Committee with the final report on its work in early February. During its meeting on 24 February, the committee discussed the report's key findings. If approved by all committee members, the panel's final report is expected to be circulated to the Council by 5 March.

According to some media outlets claiming to have seen the report, the DPRK has continued its unabated violation of the sanctions regime, most notably through illicit ship-to-ship transfers of oil and coal, the proliferation of weapons and cyber-attacks. The DPRK has reportedly engaged in a wide range of cyber operations, targeting financial institutions and virtual currency exchanges and resulting in the theft of \$316.4 million. Other media reports have pointed to the DPRK's continued development of nuclear and ballistic missile programs and evidence of cooperation between the DPRK and Iran on projects involving the development of long-range missiles. These findings seem to be similar to the conclusions of the panel's reports during

the past several years. The panel has drawn attention in the past to the increased sophistication of the DPRK's use of cyber-attacks. In its August 2019 report, the panel estimated that the DPRK's cyber actors had, by then, generated around \$2 billion in revenue.

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 night-time military parade in Pyongyang. At a similar military parade in October 2020, the DPRK displayed what it claimed was its largest ICBM to date.

At his confirmation hearing before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee in January, Secretary of State nominee Antony Blinken indicated that the new US administration would conduct a full review of the US approach toward the DPRK. The new US president, Joe Biden, has been a vocal critic of former President Donald Trump's approach, especially his summit-level meetings with Kim. During a 12 February press briefing, State Department spokesperson Ned Price emphasised that lack of engagement with the DPRK should not be interpreted as an indication that the relationship with the DPRK is not a priority for the US administration. He stressed that the US would remain committed to the denuclearisation of the DPRK.

In 2017, the Council adopted resolution 2397, which imposed an annual cap of

500,000 barrels on the DPRK's imports of refined petroleum. A persistent issue at the committee level has been its members' inability to agree on a ton/barrel conversion rate, which would help the committee determine with more precision the permitted amount of imported petroleum products. China and Russia notify the committee of their shipments of refined petroleum to the DPRK in tons while other members use barrels. After numerous attempts to resolve this issue, committee members reached an agreement on the conversion rate in January.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 9 March, during its 46th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) is expected to hold an interactive dialogue with the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, Tomás Ojea Quintana, and consider his report (A/HRC/46/51). On 11 March, the HRC is expected to consider the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on promoting accountability in the DPRK (A/HRC/46/52). The report concludes that "[a]nalysis of available information continues to confirm that there are reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity have been committed and may be ongoing". The High Commissioner said in a statement on 2 February that, seven years since the report of the Commission of Inquiry on human rights in the DPRK (A/HRC/25/63), "not only does impunity prevail, but human rights violations that may amount to crimes against humanity continue to be committed". She called for a reinvigorated effort to bring justice to victims of gross human rights violations in the DPRK.

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE 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/2020/270 (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 Document S/2020/840 (28 August 2020) was the midterm report of the Panel of Experts.

DPRK (North Korea)

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 abandon the diplomatic track and engaged in heightened rhetoric aimed at 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 new ways of addressing 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 the DPRK's persistent violations of the sanctions regime, the effectiveness of the regime remains an issue for the Council. These violations have been well documented in the Panel of Experts' reports. In renewing the mandate of the Panel of Experts, the Council could include stronger language on the need for member states to adhere to the existing sanctions measures. It could also request the DPRK sanctions committee to provide a report on ways to more strictly enforce the sanctions.

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 maximum pressure policy 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 sanctions 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 the Council's composition as of 1 January and the new US administration. During 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. It focused mostly on sanctions pressure and diplomatic efforts, while the Council's European members took the lead in the Council's 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 Ambassador Mona Juul (Norway) chairs the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee.

UNDOF (Golan Heights)

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing on the activities of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) by the Department of Peace Operations on the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on UNDOF, also due in March, and on the most recent developments.

UNDOF's mandate expires on 30 June.

Key Recent Developments

UNDOF was established following the conclusion of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement (the 1974 Agreement) between Israel and Syria, which ended the Yom Kippur War. Its mandate is to maintain the ceasefire between the parties and supervise the disengagement of Israeli and Syrian forces as well

as the so-called areas of separation (a demilitarised buffer zone) and limitation (where Israeli and Syrian troops and equipment are restricted) in the Golan Heights. Carrying out the mandate entails observing violations of the 1974 Agreement, reporting them and liaising with both sides. UNDOF protests violations it observes of the 1974 Agreement and calls upon both sides to exercise restraint. Such violations regularly include unauthorised personnel and equipment in the areas of separation and limitation, the firing of weapons across the ceasefire line, and drones and aircraft crossing the ceasefire line. The mission's observation role has been limited since its September 2014 relocation from the Bravo (Syrian) to the Alpha (Israeli-occupied) side because of the armed conflict in Syria.

As of December 2020, UNDOF comprises 1,224 personnel. The budget allocated to the mission for the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June is \$67,574,300. The UN Truce Supervision Organization in Observer Group Golan continues to provide UNDOF with military observers who focus on situational awareness and static observation.

The Secretary-General's 2 December 2020 report, covering the period from 21 August to 19 November 2020, said that the ceasefire between Israel and Syria was generally being maintained. However, there were several violations of the 1974 Agreement, including jet aircraft crossing from the Bravo to the Alpha side, air strikes in the area of separation, unauthorised equipment in the area of limitation, the crossing of the

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE GOLAN HEIGHTS [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2555](#) (18 December 2020) renewed the mandate of UNDOF until 30 June 2021. [Secretary-General's Report S/2020/1159](#) (2 December 2020) was the latest report on UNDOF. [Security Council Letter S/2020/1263](#) (18 December 2020) was from the president of the Security Council containing the draft UNDOF renewal resolution in blue and the votes submitted by all Council members.

UNDOF (Golan Heights)

ceasefire line by armed forces, and their presence in the area of separation. UNDOF has protested all violations of the 1974 Agreement and called upon both sides to exercise restraint, in line with its mandate.

UNDOF personnel continued to observe crossings of the ceasefire line by unidentified individuals (farmers and shepherds tending livestock) from the Bravo side on a daily basis. UNDOF maintained its support for the International Committee of the Red Cross in facilitating the return of individuals who had crossed the ceasefire line. It also observed the movement of armed individuals between Lebanon and Syria. According to 17 February media reports, an Israeli woman crossed the ceasefire line and was detained by the Syrian authorities. A prisoner exchange between Israel and Syria, reportedly supported by Russia, led to the woman being able to return to Israel. Financial support by Israel for the supply of the first Russian COVID-19 vaccine to Syrians was also reported to be part of the deal.

The Secretary-General's report discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on the implementation of UNDOF's mandate, including slowing down the gradual return of UNDOF to the Bravo side. UNDOF's ability to patrol was affected by the two-week quarantine requirement for rotating contingents. Despite some restrictions, UNDOF was able to reconstruct

another position on the Bravo side and reoccupied it on 12 November. The enhancement of UNDOF's operational reach and capability on the Bravo side continued with the opening of new patrol routes. UNDOF regularly engages with the Israel Defense Forces on their restrictions on UNDOF's movements.

The Secretary-General stressed that there continued to be "a significant threat" to UNDOF personnel in its area of operations, originating from explosive remnants of war and "a probable threat" from "the possible presence of sleeper cells of armed groups".

According to media reports, Israel has increased its attacks on military bases in Syria used by Iran-backed militias. The latest such attack reportedly took place on 14 February.

On 25 March 2019, then-US President Donald Trump signed a presidential proclamation recognising Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. UN spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said on the same day that Secretary-General António Guterres's view was that "the status of Golan has not changed". During an 8 February interview with CNN, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was asked whether the new US administration would continue to recognise the Golan Heights as part of Israel. Blinken responded that "the control of the Golan [...] remains of real importance to Israel's security" and that "legal questions are something else". He added that "if the situation were to change in

Syria, that's something we'd look at".

The Council renewed UNDOF's mandate for six months until 30 June in a unanimous vote on 18 December 2020 in resolution 2555.

Key Issues and Options

The numerous violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement of 1974 are an ongoing issue for the Council. UNDOF's ability to implement its mandate, including its full return to the Bravo side, has been a key issue since 2014.

Council Dynamics

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

Russia and the US are the co-penholders on UNDOF. Despite their deep divisions regarding the Syria file, both countries are expected to continue to consider UNDOF a separate issue on which they agree.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council will hold a briefing on the Secretary-General's most recent report on the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

The MONUSCO mandate expires on 20 December. The 1533 Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) sanctions regime expires on 1 July.

Key Recent Developments

The DRC's political situation has been in a state of upheaval since early December 2020,

when President Félix Tshisekedi announced the end of his ruling coalition with the Front Commun pour le Congo (FCC), which is affiliated with former DRC president Joseph Kabila. The FCC had controlled two-thirds of the parliamentary seats, and Tshisekedi threatened to dissolve the National Assembly if he was unable to get a majority. On 27 January, a majority of the FCC members of parliament left the FCC to join two opposition parties supporting a newly formed parliamentary majority known as the "Sacred Union" set up by Tshisekedi. National Assembly Speaker Jeanine Mabunda subsequently resigned, as

did DRC Prime Minister Sylvestre Ilunga Ilukamba, along with several other ministers. On 5 February, Alexis Thambwe Mwamba, president of the Senate, also resigned. On 15 February, Tshisekedi announced that he had appointed Sama Lukonde Kyenge, a Tshisekedi supporter and former director general of the DRC's state mining company, as prime minister. At the time of writing, Kyenge had yet to form a government.

Violence in eastern DRC has persisted into the new year, with several reports in early January and February of attacks on numerous villages by the Allied Democratic Forces

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DRC Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2556 (18 December 2020) renewed MONUSCO's mandate until 20 December 2021. S/RES/2528 (25 June 2020) renewed the DRC sanctions regime until 1 July 2021 and the mandate for the Group of Experts until 1 August 2021. **Secretary-General's Report** S/2020/919 (21 September 2020) covered the activities of MONUSCO and the situation in the DRC from 17 June to 18 September 2020. **Security Council Letter** S/2020/1265 (19 December 2020) was from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General on the voting details of resolution 2556.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

(ADF), an Islamist armed group originating in Uganda. On 1 January, officials from the DRC's Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) reported that the FARDC, supported by troops from MONUSCO, had regained control from the ADF of the village of Loselose in the Beni territory of North Kivu. Fourteen suspected ADF militants and two FARDC soldiers were killed in the operation. On 14 January, 46 civilians were killed when the ADF launched another attack on a village in the Irumu district. In February, at least two more ADF attacks killed civilians: on 2 February, 12 people died when the ADF raided Mabule village, and on 9 February, ten civilians were reported to have been killed in an attack on a village near the Ugandan border. Since 30 October 2019, the FARDC has increased its military operations against the ADF in an effort to dislodge the group from eastern DRC. On 22 February, Italy's ambassador to the DRC and two others travelling with him died in an attack on a World Food Programme (WFP) convoy near the eastern city of Goma. They were travelling to the town of Rutshuru to visit a WFP school feeding programme. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

On 6 February, Tshisekedi became chair of the AU for 2021, taking over the rotating position from South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. In his inaugural address to the other AU heads of state, Tshisekedi outlined his priorities, which included addressing the challenges of COVID-19, promoting peace and security on the continent, improving regional integration, and tackling climate change.

DRC authorities announced on 4 February that a resident of the town of Butembo in the country's North Kivu province had contracted the Ebola virus. Since then, another three cases of Ebola have been identified in Butembo, making this the 12th Ebola outbreak in the DRC. Three months ago, the country declared an end to a previous outbreak, the second worst in its history. On 15 February, the World Health Organization announced that it had launched a vaccination campaign in Butembo and that health care workers were the first to be vaccinated.

Lastly, in January, the Secretary-General announced the appointments of both Bintou Keita (Guinea) as Special Representative

and head of MONUSCO to succeed Leila Zerrougui and Khassim Diagne (Senegal) as Deputy Special Representative for Protection and Operations to succeed David Gressly.

Human Rights-Related Developments

The UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC published a report on 2 February, documenting a significant increase in the number of attacks against the civilian population by the ADF in Irumu and Mambasa territory in Ituri province and in Beni territory in North Kivu province. According to the report, at least 849 civilians were killed in these areas in 2020. The report also documented human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law committed by security and defence forces in the context of their operations against ADF combatants. The Human Rights Council is expected to hold an enhanced interactive dialogue, on 19 March during its 46th session, on oral updates on the DRC from the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the team of international experts on the situation in Kasai, as requested in resolution 45/34.

Key Issues and Options

The March briefing will be Keita's first as Special Representative and MONUSCO head. An issue for the Council is oversight of the mission's transition, and members will be interested to hear how Keita envisions this transition in light of the updates to the mission's mandate as outlined in resolution 2556, which was adopted in December 2020. In renewing MONUSCO's mandate, the resolution called for the mission's "planned withdrawals from the Kasai in 2021 and progressively from Tanganyika in 2022, as well as the gradual consolidation of MONUSCO's footprint in the three provinces where active conflict persists". Members may also be interested in how the recent political changes might affect the work of the mission.

Council members will also be following closely both the ongoing and persistent violence in the country's east and any political instability precipitated by the current changes in government in Kinshasa. Council members may use March's meeting to reiterate the need for compromise by the DRC's political leaders, including the issuance of a presidential or press statement to encourage Congolese stakeholders to work through their political differences in a peaceful manner.

Council Dynamics

While there is general consensus amongst Council members in support of the work

of MONUSCO, the adoption of resolution 2556 highlighted some divisions on the best way to move forward with MONUSCO's transition. Many of these issues—such as the duration and speed of the drawdown of MONUSCO and the role and work of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB)—are longstanding, and Council members were able to find compromise language during December's adoption. However, they may continue to affect how Council members view the mission's transition. In the last two years, South Africa, a significant troop-contributing country to the FIB, was a strong proponent of the FIB. The US, on the other hand, has argued that it would ultimately like to see the FIB dissolved. In addition, a 2020 independent assessment report called for the "expeditious deployment of combat units functioning as quick reaction forces" in accordance with UN pre-deployment training and verification standards. Troops from Kenya and Nepal would be among the forces to be deployed. With South Africa no longer on the Council and Kenya having joined in 2021, the change in Council membership may influence how other members view the need for the FIB.

Another contentious issue that arose during the MONUSCO mandate negotiations—language on humanitarian assistance—resulted in resolution 2556 being adopted without unanimity. As with several other recent mandate renewals, Russia insisted that the draft resolution include language recalling the "UN guiding principles of humanitarian emergency assistance" in several parts of the text. However, the text put in blue did not include all of Russia's textual changes. Russia subsequently abstained on resolution 2556.

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

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