

Monthly Forecast

- 1 Overview
- 1 In Hindsight: Guns for Hire – The Security Council and Mercenarism
- 3 Status Update since our March Forecast
- 5 Women, Peace and Security
- 7 Mali
- 8 Syria
- 10 Great Lakes Region
- 12 Mine Action
- 13 Kosovo
- 14 Libya
- 16 Yemen
- 17 Cooperation Between the UN and Regional Organisations
- 19 Western Sahara
- 20 Colombia
- 21 Non-Proliferation (1540 Committee)
- 22 The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question
- 23 Sudan/South Sudan
- 24 Protection of Civilians: Protecting Critical Infrastructure

31 March 2021
This report is available online at securitycouncilreport.org.

For daily insights by SCR on evolving Security Council actions please subscribe to our “What’s In Blue” series at securitycouncilreport.org or follow @SCRtweets on Twitter.

Overview

In April, Viet Nam will have the presidency of the Security Council.

Viet Nam has chosen to hold several signature events during the month. A ministerial-level open debate on [mine action](#) is anticipated with UN Secretary-General António Guterres as a likely briefer. A resolution is a possible outcome.

A high-level open debate on enhancing cooperation between the [UN and regional and sub-regional organisations](#), focusing on confidence-building measures and dialogue, is also planned. Secretary-General Guterres, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and representatives of regional organisations are anticipated briefers. A presidential statement is likely to be pursued.

Viet Nam also plans to hold a ministerial-level open debate on the [protection of civilian infrastructure](#). Secretary-General Guterres may brief. Other briefers are expected to include ICRC President Peter Maurer and a representative of the International Peace Institute. A resolution is a potential outcome.

The annual open debate on [conflict-related sexual violence](#) is expected in April. Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten is expected to brief. Representatives of civil society are also likely to participate.

The mandate of the [1540 Committee](#)—which aims to address concerns that non-state actors might use weapons of mass destruction for terrorist purposes—will be renewed in April.

The Council is also expected this month to renew the measures related to the illicit export of petroleum from [Libya](#) and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya

Sanctions Committee.

Other African issues include meetings on:

- [Mali](#), on the Secretary-General’s most recent MINUSMA report;
- [The Great Lakes region](#), on the Secretary-General’s bi-annual report on the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework;
- [Western Sahara](#), to receive a briefing on developments and MINURSO’s operations; and
- [Sudan/South Sudan](#), on the Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of the mandate of UNISFA.

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](#).

The quarterly open debate on the [Middle East, including the Palestinian Question](#), is also scheduled for April.

A briefing on [Kosovo](#), focusing on recent developments and the latest report of the Secretary-General, is the one European issue currently anticipated on the Council’s programme this month.

Regarding the Americas, there will be a meeting on [Colombia](#), focusing on recent developments and the Secretary-General’s latest 90-day report on the UN Verification Mission in Colombia. The Council may also adopt a resolution expanding the mandate of the mission to include monitoring compliance with the sentences handed down by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP).

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

In Hindsight: Guns for Hire – The Security Council and Mercenarism

Mercenaries, the proverbial soldiers of fortune, have been part of conflict for almost as long as conflict has existed. Historical records suggest that mercenaries were used by the Carthaginians against Rome during the Punic Wars some 2,400

years ago. During the Middle Ages, so-called *condottieri* (Italian for “contractors”) regularly provided fee-based military services to city-states. Following well-publicised mercenary involvements in Africa in the late 1960s and 1970s,

In Hindsight: Guns for Hire — The Security Council and Mercenarism

the post-Cold War period gave new impetus to private military forces, including high-profile cases of mercenarism in Equatorial Guinea, Papua New Guinea and Sierra Leone by the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Recently, mercenaries have been heavily involved in illicit, destabilising activities in a number of countries on the Security Council's agenda. These actions have taken multiple forms, including attempts to overthrow governments, as was the case in Equatorial Guinea in December 2017, just days before starting its two-year Council term; taking control of natural resources, as has been seen in Syria and the Central African Republic; fighting on behalf of governments, as happened in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020; and helping to protect embattled national governments, as apparently occurred this year in the Central African Republic. With Council-mandated UN peace operations in some of these same countries, the activities of mercenaries could complicate the UN's work, potentially undermining or disrupting the mission's ability to fulfil its mandate.

No country provides a better current example of the proliferation and globalisation of mercenary groups than Libya. Private entities, in support of different parties to the conflict in the country, have been involved in deploying private military capabilities and violating, or attempting to violate, the Council's arms embargo in Libya. The [final report of the Panel of Experts on Libya](#) released on 8 March noted that three United Arab Emirates-based companies, apparently involving Australian, South African, UK and US nationals, are alleged to have designed a plan, named Project Opus, to provide forces affiliated with General Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army with "armed assault rotary-wing aviation, intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft, maritime interdiction, cyber, unmanned armed vehicles, and intelligence fusion and targeting capabilities". The plan also included a component to "kidnap or terminate individuals regarded as high-value targets".

The panel also reported allegations that the Russian entity Wagner Group was deployed to Libya in 2018 to "provide technical support for the repair and maintenance of armoured vehicles" for Haftar's forces. By early 2019, the report continued, Wagner's support for Haftar evolved to "provide

operational combat support", growing to an estimated deployment of 800 to 1,200. (Wagner Group has also reportedly been operating in Syria and the Central African Republic; the government in Moscow denies any ties to the group.) Finally, the panel alleged that Turkey's SADAT International Defense Consultancy has recruited and trained Syrian fighters. Turkey is the largest military backer of the Libyan Government of National Accord.

Mercenarism is big business, often entailing multinational personnel and highly sophisticated weaponry. While mercenary groups are ostensibly private entities, they can allow sponsoring states to advance national interests by outsourcing conflict. Further complicating the picture, private entities occupy a spectrum from mercenaries to so-called 'legitimate' actors who, States argue, are not mercenaries and don't participate in hostilities.

International legal and normative foundations against mercenary activities include the [1989 International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries](#) and the [1977 Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa](#), negotiated by the Organization of African Unity (the AU's predecessor). Under the 1989 convention, which has 36 state parties and entered into force in 2001, the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries are "offences of grave concern to all States", and international cooperation among states is to be developed and enhanced "for the prevention, prosecution and punishment of such offences". The 1977 convention states that the activities of mercenaries pose a "grave threat...to the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and harmonious development of Member States of the Organization of African Unity".

With a spectrum of actors engaged in different facets of conflict situations, there have been efforts to address the conduct of private military and security companies (PMSCs). In 2008, the Swiss Government and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) finalised the [Montreux Document](#), which addresses "substantive legal concerns, such as the status of PMSC personnel under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, individual accountability for misconduct in different jurisdictions, and the authorities' duty to oversee and screen the actions

of firms for potential misconduct". It also "articulates the most pertinent international legal obligations with regard to PMSCs and debunks the prevailing misconception that private contractors operate in a legal vacuum". It is currently supported by 57 states as well as the EU, NATO and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In September 2017, the Human Rights Council (HRC) established an open-ended working group tasked with developing an international regulatory framework relating to the activities of PMSCs (resolution [36/11](#)). It first met in [May 2019](#).

Despite the persistently destabilising effect of mercenaries on international peace and stability, addressing mercenarism has rarely been at the centre of global attention, and overall, the United Nations' attention to the subject has been modest. In 1987, the UN Commission on Human Rights (the predecessor of the HRC) created a Special Rapporteur on the use of mercenaries. In 2005, the commission ended this position, creating a new [Working Group on the use of mercenaries](#) that focuses on "mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the rights of people to self-determination". Composed of five independent experts, the working group is mandated to work towards strengthening the international legal framework for the prevention and sanction of the recruitment, use, financing, and training of mercenaries, as well as studying mercenaries, mercenary-related actors and PMSCs, and identifying the sources and causes of mercenary and mercenary-related activities. In support of this work, it conducts country visits and reports on these visits to the HRC. Finally, it produces annual reports for the General Assembly on relevant thematic issues. Its [most recent report](#), published on 28 July 2020, looks at the evolving nature of mercenarism and aims to "shed light on the pervasive secrecy and opacity surrounding mercenary and mercenary-related activities," which, it notes, is "particularly stark when such actors are employed as an instrument to remotely influence armed conflicts, while their patrons, including States, deny involvement and seek to avoid legal responsibilities".

The Security Council has held two sessions on the matter. The first was an 18 March 2003 meeting on the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and

In Hindsight: Guns for Hire – The Security Council and Mercenarism

mercenary activity in West Africa, which resulted in the adoption of [resolution 1467](#), the Council's only dedicated resolution on mercenaries. The resolution expressed concern about “links between mercenary activities, illicit arms trafficking and the violation of arms embargoes that help to foster and prolong conflicts in West Africa”. In addition, it requested subregional states to “ensure that relevant measures adopted at the national, regional and international levels to combat these problems are put into effect”, including strengthening cooperation to identify those who “provide support for mercenary activities”.

The Council's second consideration of mercenarism came on 4 February 2019 with a high-level debate on “Mercenary activities as a source of insecurity and destabilization in Africa”. The meeting was organised under the presidency of Equatorial Guinea, which has been the target over the past quarter-century of five attacks involving foreign mercenaries. As a follow-on, the Council appeared set to adopt a presidential statement in December 2019 expressing concern about the impact of mercenaries and their illicit activities in Central Africa. The text failed to pass silence on 30 December, and within two days, the penholder (Equatorial Guinea) was no longer on the Council; the presidential statement was not pursued. The draft recognised that

mercenaries and mercenary activities constitute a threat to stability in Central Africa and condemned the “use, recruitment, financing, protection and training of mercenaries in order to impede the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination, destabilize or overthrow governments or otherwise undermine the constitutional order, disrupt or compromise the territorial integrity, sovereignty and the rule of law of States as well as to commit abuses of human rights”.

The December 2019 draft statement was not adopted because of an issue highlighted during the Council's meeting that February, namely distinguishing between illegal, destabilising mercenary activities and the activities of what are considered legitimate private military and security companies. The Working Group on mercenaries reiterated in July 2020 that there are legal definitions in the 1977 [Additional Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Conventions](#) and the 1989 Convention, but they are “exceedingly narrow and difficult to apply”. It added that the international legal framework on the issue “reflects the specific historical context in which it was developed: namely a period characterized by decolonization, post-colonial wars and interventions in the internal affairs of newly independent States, especially in Africa”. Speaking at the [open debate on 4 February](#), the UK said that “it is important to draw

a distinction between mercenaries—a term clearly defined in international humanitarian law—and properly regulated and responsible private security companies”, while the US highlighted the need to “draw a sharp contrast between illegal destabilizing mercenary activities and the legal legitimate role that private military and security companies can play in many places”. South Africa, where one of the first post-Cold War private military firms, Executive Outcomes, originated, argued that the international community should “address the perception around the privatization and corporatization of security services, as such a role should be the sole responsibility of sovereign governments”.

With the rise in mercenarism in countries on the Council's agenda, including in countries with UN peace operations, there may be a need for a better understanding of the issue. To reinvigorate the discussion started by Equatorial Guinea in 2019 and examine situations on its agenda more closely, the Council could hold an Arria-formula meeting with members of the working group on the use of mercenaries and other experts to explore the impact of mercenaries in specific countries and regional cases on the Council's agenda. It could also consider this issue on a more regular basis, perhaps in a semi-annual or annual meeting.

Status Update since our March Forecast

South Sudan

On 3 March, the Security Council was briefed via videoconference (VTC) by David Shearer, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of UNMISS, on the Secretary-General's 90-day report (S/2021/172). He urged the Transitional Government of National Unity to build on gains made during its first year in office and accelerate implementation of the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement or risk a return to widespread violence (S/2021/219). Jackline Nasiwa, the Founder and National Director of the Centre for Inclusive Governance, Peace and Justice, also briefed the Council. The briefing was followed by VTC consultations.

On 12 March, the Security Council

unanimously adopted resolution 2567, renewing the mandate of UNMISS until 15 March 2022. The resolution maintains the overall force levels at their mandated ceilings of 17,000 troops and 2,101 police personnel. The four core pillars of the mandate were retained, namely protecting civilians, creating the conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, supporting the peace process, and monitoring and investigating human rights.

Ethiopia (Tigray)

On 4 March, Security Council members discussed the humanitarian situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia during a closed VTC under “any other business”.

Ireland—supported by Estonia, France, Norway, the UK, and the US—requested the meeting. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock briefed. He told members that some 4.5 million people in Tigray were in need of humanitarian assistance, with food security a major concern. He further noted that access to water, sanitation, and health services were disrupted. Lowcock called for scaled-up humanitarian assistance and for an independent needs assessment.

Sudan

On 9 March, the Security Council received a VTC briefing, followed by VTC consultations, on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance

Status Update since our March Forecast

Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) (S/2021/246). Special Representative for Sudan and head of UNITAMS Volker Perthes briefed on the Secretary-General's 90-day report on UNITAMS (S/2021/199), while Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare briefed on the drawdown of the AU/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). Kholood Khair, Managing Partner of Insight Strategy Partners, also briefed.

On 25 March, the chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia), provided the quarterly briefing on the Committee's work via VTC.

OSCE

On 10 March, the Council was briefed via VTC by Ann Linde, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, and current Chairperson-in-Office for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (S/2021/256). During the briefing, Linde emphasised the crucial need for the UN and the OSCE to cooperate closely in Europe, noting that one of her main priorities is to “seek continued engagement at the highest levels towards sustainable solutions to the crises and conflicts in the [European] region, in line with international law and with full respect for the OSCE principles and commitments”.

Myanmar

On 5 March, Council members were briefed on developments in Myanmar by Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener in a closed VTC. The Special Envoy updated Council members on the recent lethal attacks by the military on protestors. She called on the Council to take urgent action and said that Council unity and robust action were crucial to stopping the violence.

On 10 March, the Council adopted a presidential statement on Myanmar (S/PRST/2021/5). The presidential statement expressed the Council's deep concern at the developments since the military's declaration of a state of emergency on 1 February and expressed strong support for the democratic process. It also strongly condemned the violence against peaceful protestors—including against women, youth and children—and called for the release of those arbitrarily detained.

On 31 March, Council members were briefed on developments in Myanmar by

Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener in a closed videoconference (VTC). At the time of writing, press elements were expected to be issued following the meeting.

Conflict and Food Security

On 11 March, Security Council members held an open debate via VTC on conflict and food security (S/2021/250). This was the signature event of the US Council presidency, and a concept note was prepared for the meeting (S/2021/217). Secretary-General António Guterres, Executive Director of the World Food Programme David Beasley, and Executive Director of Oxfam International Gabriela Bucher briefed. In connection with the event, members discussed having a presidential statement, but they were unable to gain consensus on the text. A key impediment to agreement was over establishing a reporting cycle by the Secretary-General on the issue; Russia in particular objected to such a reporting cycle.

Central African Republic

On 12 March, with a vote of 14 in favour and one abstention, the Council adopted resolution 2566, which raised the troop ceiling of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) by 2,750 and the police component by 940. The decision to provide the mission with the troop and police reinforcements comes during a period of heightened instability in the CAR, which has seen a rash of violence led by a newly-formed coalition of armed groups, the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC), which has challenged the authority of the current government.

Somalia

On 12 March, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2568, reauthorising the presence of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) for ten months until 31 December. While authorising AMISOM's core mandated tasks and troop ceiling, the resolution attached a timeline to milestones that need to be met before the end of the year in order to inform discussion on the future of the mission.

At the time of writing, Council members were expected to discuss the delays in the electoral process in Somalia under “any other

business” on 31 March. Press elements were anticipated.

Afghanistan

On 12 March, Council members issued a press statement (SC/14464) in which they strongly condemned the targeted attacks against civilians in Afghanistan.

On 23 March, the Security Council held its quarterly meeting on Afghanistan via VTC (S/2021/291). Deborah Lyons, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), briefed on the Secretary-General's 12 March UNAMA report (S/2021/252). Sha-har-zad Akbar, the chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), also briefed the Council.

Ukraine

On 12 March, there was a high-level VTC Arria-formula meeting on Crimea. The meeting was co-organised by Council members Estonia, France, Ireland, Norway, the UK, and the US. It was also co-sponsored by Australia, Belgium, Canada, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Turkey, and Ukraine. Estonia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Eva-Maria Liimets, chaired the meeting. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in New York, delivered the keynote speech. Phillip Karber, President of the Potomac Foundation, and Maria Tomak, Coordinator of the Media Initiative for Human Rights, provided briefings. Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs, participated in the meeting.

On 17 March, Russia hosted an Arria-formula meeting via VTC on the situation in Crimea. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia (Russia) provided introductory and closing remarks at the meeting. Briefings were provided by: Chingiz Yaqubov, the Chancellor of the Crimean Engineering and Pedagogic University (CEPU); CEPU students; Anastasia Gridchina, the Head of the Ukrainian Community of Crimea; Roman Chegrinets, the Head of the Crimean regional national-cultural autonomy, “Belarusians of Crimea”; Ludmila Radeva, Vice-Chair of the regional

Status Update since our March Forecast

Bulgarian national-cultural autonomy of Crimea, “Paisius of Helindar”; and Vera Pautova, the Head of the Educational Center for Children and Youth Creativity. According to the concept note prepared by Russia, the meeting’s objective was to provide comprehensive information on the situation in Crimea from current residents of the region.

Lebanon

On 18 March, Council members heard a briefing on the latest Secretary-General’s report (S/2021/240) on the implementation of resolution 1701 in a closed VTC meeting. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Deputy Special Coordinator for Lebanon Najat Rochdi briefed.

Counter-Terrorism

On 18 March, the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee met in a closed VTC to hear the monthly update from its Executive Directorate. On 30 March, Council members agreed on a press statement condemning in the strongest terms the 28 March suicide attack against Makassar Church in Makassar, Indonesia.

Freedom of Religion and Belief

On 19 March, a virtual Arria-formula meeting was held on “Religion, Belief and Conflict: the protection of members of religious and belief groups in conflict and religious actors in conflict resolution”. Lord Ahmed, UK Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, chaired the meeting. The briefers were: Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury and a member of the Secretary-General’s High-level Advisory Board on Mediation; Azza Karam, Secretary General of Religions for Peace; Ekhlas Bajoo, a member of

the Yazidi community; and Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, Special Adviser and Head of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL (UNITAD) (and Chief Prosecutor-designate of the International Criminal Court).

Haiti

On 24 March, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement on Haiti (S/PRST/2021/7). It was the first presidential statement on Haiti since October 2017. The statement called for legislative and presidential elections to be held, for increased accountability for perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses, and for the Haitian government to end impunity in this regard. The statement also emphasised the need for the government to address the deteriorating security situation and noted with concern the humanitarian situation in the country.

UN Disengagement Observer Force (Golan Heights)

On 25 March, Council members were briefed in consultations by Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix on the Secretary-General’s latest 90-day UNDOF report and the most recent developments.

The Threat of Improvised Explosive Devices against Peace Operations

On 26 March, an Arria-formula meeting was held on: “Protecting the Peacekeeper: Suppressing the Deployment of Improvised Explosive Devices against Peace Operations”. The meeting was co-hosted by Kenya, China, Estonia, France, Ireland, Mexico, Niger, Norway, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, the United

States, and Viet Nam. In addition, Belgium, Ecuador, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal co-sponsored the meeting. Ambassador Martin Kimani of Kenya chaired the meeting. The briefers were: Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix; Lieutenant General Dennis Gyllensporre, the Force Commander of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); Brigadier General Charles L Mwazighe of the International Peace Support Training Centre (IPSTC); and Ilene Cohn, the Deputy Director and Officer-in-Charge of the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS).

DPRK

On 26 March, the Council adopted resolution 2569, which extended until 30 April 2022 the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 Sanctions Committee.

On 30 March, Council members discussed recent missile tests by the DPRK under “any other business”. Estonia, Ireland, Norway, the UK, and France initiated the meeting.

1540 Committee (Non-proliferation)

On 30 March, Ambassador Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) briefed the Council on the work of the Committee, which deals with the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Children and Armed Conflict

On 31 March, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict held a closed VTC meeting to discuss the South Sudan conclusions and heard a presentation from UNICEF on the Global Horizontal Note.

Women, Peace and Security

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council is scheduled to hold its annual open debate on conflict-related sexual violence. The Special

Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, is expected to brief. Representatives of civil society are also likely to participate. No formal outcome is anticipated.

Key Recent Developments

Conflict-related sexual violence, as defined in the Secretary-General’s annual reports, “refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced

UN DOCUMENTS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2564 (25 February 2021) renewed the Yemen sanctions regime for a year; it was adopted with 14 votes in favour and one abstention (Russia). S/RES/1888 (30 September 2009) established the position of Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. S/RES/1820 (19 June 2008) addressed sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000) was the Council’s first resolution on women, peace and security. **Security Council Letters** S/2021/264 (17 March 2021) was the summary of the IEG’s 2 March meeting on Yemen. S/2021/166 (18 February 2021) was the summary of the IEG’s 2 February meeting on South Sudan. S/2020/727 (21 July 2020) was a letter from the president of the Security Council containing the briefings provided and statements given by states during the 17 July open videoconference on conflict-related sexual violence. **Other** S/2020/1054 (30 October 2020) was a draft resolution initiated by Russia, which failed to garner the needed number of votes to pass.

Women, Peace and Security

prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict". The position of Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict was established in resolution 1888 of 30 September 2009.

As in previous years, the Secretary-General's annual report is expected to focus on countries where verifiable information was obtained. Last year's annual report provided analysis and recommendations on sexual violence in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, the Central African Republic (CAR), Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Iraq, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan (Darfur), Syria, and Yemen.

The humanitarian situation in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia continues to raise concerns, in the light of reports of "rape and other horrific forms of sexual violence", according to a 22 March statement by UN entities (including the heads of the International Organization for Migration, OCHA, the UN Development Programme, UN Population Fund, UNHCR, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization) and non-governmental organisations. The statement calls for an "independent investigation into conflict-related sexual violence in Tigray", involving the OHCHR. In a 21 January statement, Paten expressed great concern about "serious allegations of sexual violence" in the region. She shared "disturbing reports" of individuals who were forced to rape their family members and women who were forced to have sex with military elements in exchange for basic commodities. She called on the parties to the hostilities to respect their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including a zero-tolerance policy for crimes of sexual violence. According to media reports, rape is being used as a weapon of war in Tigray by Ethiopian and Eritrean soldiers.

As has been the case since 2012, the annual report is also expected to contain an annex listing "parties credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict on the agenda of

the Security Council". Last year's annual report named parties in CAR (six non-state actors), the DRC (21 non-state actors and two state actors), Iraq (one non-state actor), Mali (five non-state actors), Myanmar (one state actor), Somalia (one non-state actor and three state actors), South Sudan (four non-state actors and two state actors), Sudan (two non-state actors and two state actors), and Syria (five non-state actors and two state actors) as well as Boko Haram under "other parties of concern on the agenda of the Security Council". States listed in the annex are prohibited from contributing to UN peace operations. If an actor "has made formal commitments to adopt measures to address conflict-related sexual violence", it is indicated in the annex. To be removed from the annex, an actor has to cease violations and implement its formal commitments. Only one party, the Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire, has been delisted so far.

In resolution 1820 of 19 June 2008, the Council expressed its intention to consider the use of targeted sanctions against perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence. Of the 14 Council sanctions regimes, seven include explicit designation criteria for these crimes: CAR, DRC, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen. In total, 14 individuals (under the CAR, DRC, Mali, South Sudan, and Yemen sanctions regimes) and four entities (under the CAR and DRC sanctions regimes) have been listed under these criteria so far.

On 25 February, the Council adopted resolution 2564, renewing the Yemen financial and travel ban sanctions and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee. With the resolution, the Council added Houthi official Sultan Saleh Aida Aida Zabin to the sanctions list for "[playing] a prominent role in a policy of intimidation and use of systematic arrest, detention, torture, sexual violence and rape against politically active women", as reported by the Panel of Experts. This marked the first time that the Council has listed an individual in the Middle East region for such crimes.

On 8 March, Council members convened virtually for an Arria-formula meeting titled "Call to Lead by Example: Ensuring the Full, Equal and Meaningful Participation of Women in UN-led Peace Processes". The meeting

was co-hosted by 12 Council members (Ireland, Mexico, Estonia, France, Kenya, Niger, Norway, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the UK, the US, and Viet Nam). Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo; Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen; Bronagh Hinds, an advocate for women's rights from Northern Ireland; and Rasha Jarhum, a peacebuilder from Yemen, briefed. In her statement, Jarhum said that "sexual violence is used against women and girls by all parties to the conflict" in Yemen. She emphasised, however, that it was particularly the Houthis who have "arbitrarily detained, tortured and repeatedly raped women and girls who oppose them". She therefore thanked the Council for its 25 February listing of Zabin.

Since Ireland and Mexico took over as co-chairs of the Informal Experts Group (IEG) on women, peace and security on 1 January, the IEG has met on South Sudan on 3 February and Yemen on 2 March. Both times, the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict participated.

Key Issues and Options

An ongoing issue for the Council is how to consolidate progress in the implementation of successive resolutions on conflict-related sexual violence. One option is to increase the direct interactions between Council members and the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. That could include briefings to the Council in open or closed formats and to its subsidiary bodies, including sanctions committees.

The Council could call upon state and non-state actors to make "formal commitments to adopt measures to address conflict-related sexual violence", as a first step towards delisting from the annex of the annual report, and request the Secretary-General to inform the Council on compliance with these commitments in his reporting.

Where a designation criterion for sexual violence exists, the Council could strengthen efforts to sanction perpetrators. In renewing the mandates of panels of experts assisting sanctions committees, the Council could make sure that, where relevant, the experts have gender expertise.

When negotiating mandate renewals of peace operations, Council members could

Women, Peace and Security

ensure that, where pertinent, language supporting the deployment of gender advisers and women's protection advisers is included.

Council Dynamics

Formal outcomes on women, peace and security continue to be difficult to negotiate. Following last year's annual open debate on women, peace and security, Russia put to the vote a draft resolution commemorating

the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Council's first resolution on women, peace and security, resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000. The negotiations were contentious, and the resolution failed to garner nine affirmative votes (China, Indonesia, Russia, South Africa, and Viet Nam voted in favour; Belgium, Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Niger, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the UK,

and the US abstained). The perception by the abstaining members was that the text was not balanced between different aspects of the agenda, placing more emphasis on the socioeconomic aspects than the rights-based aspects, including language on human rights.

The US is the penholder on conflict-related sexual violence. Ireland and Mexico are the co-chairs of the IEG on women, peace and security.

Mali

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council will hold its quarterly briefing on Mali, followed by consultations. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix is expected to brief. The mandate of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) expires on 30 June 2021.

Key Recent Developments

Since the August 2020 coup d'état, Mali's transitional institutions—which are to govern for 18 months before elections are held in March 2022 to restore a democratically elected government—have become fully operational. On 10 February, the interim parliament known as the National Transitional Council began its first session, and on 22 February, it approved the government action plan proposed by transitional prime minister Moctar Ouane. The action plan sets out six priority areas, including institutional reforms, moving forward with elections and openness to dialogue with extremist groups.

The Monitoring and Support Group for the Transition in Mali, co-chaired by the UN, the AU and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), held its second meeting on 8 March in Lomé, Togo. A communiqué issued following the meeting “took note with satisfaction of the progress” made since the support group's inaugural meeting in November 2020 and recalled the need for dialogue between Malian stakeholders. The military has maintained a strong role in the transition, and tensions continue

between the interim authorities and political groups and civil society.

On 11 February, the Monitoring Committee of the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement between the Malian government and signatory armed groups met in Kidal, its first meeting held outside of Bamako since the agreement was signed in 2015. Algerian Foreign Minister Sabri Boukadoum chaired the meeting, which brought together six Malian ministers, the leadership of the signatory armed groups and international mediators. In a press release, the Secretary-General welcomed this “new momentum and the growing trust among the signatory parties” and “encourage[d] the signatory parties to build upon this positive dynamic by translating the agreed commitments into actions”.

Terrorist attacks continue in central Mali. On 15 March, at least 33 Malian soldiers were killed and 14 wounded in an attack on their convoy near the town of Tessit, located in the Gao region; the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara claimed responsibility. It was the deadliest attack against Malian forces since the August 2020 coup.

Six MINUSMA peacekeepers have been killed in attacks since January. Four peacekeepers from Côte d'Ivoire were killed and five injured in a 13 January attack in the Timbuktu region. Two days later, one Egyptian peacekeeper was killed and another seriously injured near Tessalit in Kidal region. On 10 February, assailants reportedly drove an explosives-laden vehicle into a MINUSMA base near Douentza, then

opened fire with mortars and automatic weapons before peacekeepers repelled the attack. One peacekeeper from Togo was killed and 27 were injured.

On 15 March, the UN announced the appointment of El-Ghassim Wane of Mauritania as the Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of MINUSMA. Wane succeeds Mahamat Saleh Annadif, who headed the mission for the last five years. (On 26 March, the UN announced Annadif's appointment as the head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel.)

In mid-March, a Malian court ended the trial of Amadou Sanogo, leader of a 2012 coup d'état against President Amadou Toumani Touré, who was accused of involvement in killing 21 paratroopers during a failed counter-coup. It also ended proceedings against 15 other defendants. In making the decision, the court cited a 2019 reconciliation law offering amnesty or pardon for specific crimes committed during the 2012 crisis.

Regionally, a summit of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel), to which Mali belongs, was held from 15 to 16 February in N'Djamena, Chad. There has been speculation that France may start withdrawing troops from Operation Barkhane, its 5,100-strong counter-terrorism force in the Sahel. However, French President Emmanuel Macron, participating virtually, announced at the summit that France would not be downsizing, called for a “civilian surge” to complement military efforts and continued to oppose dialogue with jihadist leaders.

UN DOCUMENTS ON MALI Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2541 (31 August 2020) renewed the Mali sanctions regime for one year. S/RES/2531 (29 June 2020) renewed the mandate of MINUSMA until 30 June 2021. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/10 (15 October 2020) welcomed the new transitional arrangements in Mali following the 18 August coup d'état. Sanctions Committee Document S/2021/151 (17 February 2021) was the midterm report of the Mali Panel of Experts. Security Council Press Statements SC/14436 (12 February 2021) condemned the 10 February attack against MINUSMA near Douentza, in which one peacekeeper from Togo was killed and 27 peacekeepers injured. SC/14414 (18 January 2021) condemned the attack on 15 January against MINUSMA near Tessalit in Kidal region, in which one peacekeeper from Egypt was killed and another was seriously injured. SC/14411 (14 January 2021) condemned the attack perpetrated on 13 January 2021 against MINUSMA to the north of the town of Bambara-Maoudé, in Timbuktu region, in which four peacekeepers were killed and five others injured.

Mali

Mali's neighbours continue to face violence from terrorist groups that have also provoked inter-communal conflict. Niger experienced several lethal attacks near its border with Mali during March: assailants killed at least 58 civilians on 15 March in Banibangou in the Tillabéri region and attacked a series of villages on 21 March in the Tahou region, leaving at least 137 people dead.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 46th session, the Human Rights Council held an interactive dialogue on 22 March with the independent expert on Mali, Alioune Tine, and considered his report (A/HRC/46/68). Tine said the situation "remained concerning in the north and centre of Mali, where civilians continued to be attacked by violent extremist groups as well as armed community self-defence groups, despite the presence of international and national security forces". He recommended that MINUSMA respond proactively to threats against civilians.

On 30 March, MINUSMA's Human Rights Division released a report concluding that a 3 January airstrike by Operation Barkhane killed at least 19 civilians at a wedding party in the town of Bounti in central Mali. The French military had previously asserted that the strike had killed around 30 jihadists. According to the report, five armed individuals belonging to terrorist group Katiba Serma attended the wedding, three of whom were killed. In a statement, France's ministry of defense said that it "reaffirms strongly" that the airstrike targeted an "armed terrorist group" and indicated that it had "numerous reservations about the methodology used" in the report.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 9 February, the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee met via videoconference to consider the midterm report of the Mali Panel of Experts. A committee press release noted that the midterm report highlights the main political and

security developments concerning the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali and its signatory parties between September 2020 and January 2021 and provides an update on the implementation of the sanctions regime.

Key Issues and Options

Mali's political transition is a key issue. In this regard, having the Council emphasise the importance of stakeholders' upholding their obligations in the transition charter and making progress in envisioned reforms, especially related to the electoral process, may be useful.

Recurring issues that continue to require the Council's attention include: progress in implementing the 2015 peace agreement, the stabilisation of central Mali and protection of civilians, and the overall security situation. When it renewed MINUSMA's mandate last June through resolution 2531, the Council updated the benchmarks for assessing progress on the implementation of the peace agreement (security sector reform, constitutional and decentralisation reforms, the development of the north, and the participation of women). The mandate renewal also created two benchmarks for the situation in Mali's centre: on restoring the Malian state presence and on fighting impunity.

Next month, Council members will also be considering a Secretary-General's letter on a long-term road map that sets out the conditions for a possible exit strategy requested in resolution 2531. Received by members on 26 March, the letter focuses on the objectives to achieve by the end of the political transition, and notes that it is "premature" to envisage any drawdown or transfer of MINUSMA's security responsibilities to national forces immediately following the

elections. Another issue is MINUSMA's support for the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S), which comprises operational assistance, such as the provision of rations and fuel, and some logistical support. The Secretariat's assessment of this support is expected to be included in the Secretary-General's May report on the FC-G5S.

An option for the Council, leading up to MINUSMA's mandate renewal in June, is to conduct a "virtual" mission to Mali to engage interlocutors in the country. The Council last visited Mali in March 2019 and had to cancel plans for an April 2020 mission due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

Council Dynamics

Following last year's coup d'état, the Council has been united in supporting the mediation efforts of ECOWAS and backing any agreement it concluded to restore a civilian government. When Malian stakeholders agreed to the ECOWAS-brokered political transition in October 2020, the Council welcomed the new arrangements in a presidential statement and set out its expectations that the new authorities would complete the transition in 18 months while continuing to implement the 2015 peace agreement and carry out efforts to stabilise central Mali and combat terrorism.

France is the penholder on Mali. Ambassador Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) chairs the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee.

Syria

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

March saw the commemoration of a decade of conflict in Syria. In addition to hundreds of

thousands of deaths from the conflict, the war has forced 13 million Syrians, more than 60 per cent of the country's population, to flee their homes and left 13.4 million people in need of humanitarian aid, which is estimated to be more than three times the number of people in need at the end of 2012.

During his Council briefing on 15 March, Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen

focused on the need for a peaceful resolution of the decade-long conflict. Despite five rounds of meetings of the Constitution Committee, which is responsible for drafting a new constitution for Syria in line with resolution 2254, there has been no tangible progress in producing a political solution. Resolution 2254, adopted unanimously in 2015, expressed support for a

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

UN-facilitated, Syrian-led political process. It was hoped that the last round of meetings, held from 25 to 29 January, would see the beginning of the drafting phase of a new constitution, but the government and opposition members taking part in the talks failed to produce any concrete results.

At his 15 March Council briefing, Pedersen noted that it was essential to use the opportunity afforded by the relative calm in the conflict to put a fresh focus on the political process, noting that there was “great danger that the fragile calm could unravel” and derail any progress. He also emphasised the need for the international community to engage in “sustained and robust diplomatic dialogue”, telling the Council that it was time to establish a “new international format” that would bring together different parties, including the Council’s five permanent members, Iran, Turkey, Arab states, and the European Union, to peacefully resolve the conflict. To this end, he maintained that it was “now necessary for all these actors to seriously sit down and develop a Syrian policy based on the understanding that none of them can dictate the outcome of the Syrian conflict”.

The call for renewed international efforts came as the foreign ministers of Russia, Qatar and Turkey met in Doha on 11 March to discuss Syria. After the meeting, Turkey’s Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, announced that the three countries had “launched a new “trilateral consultation process” to discuss ways of contributing to a lasting political solution in Syria. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov noted that the group did not aim to replace the Astana group consisting of Russia, Turkey and Iran. In a joint statement, Russia, Qatar and Turkey expressed their commitment to advancing a political process in accordance with resolution 2254. On the humanitarian situation, they called on the “international community, the UN and its humanitarian agencies to enhance their efforts”. On 9 March, Josep Borrell, the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs, said the EU would continue to withhold reconstruction funds until there had been a political transition in line with resolution 2254, underscoring the EU’s long-standing view that “there will be no end to sanctions, no normalizations, no support for reconstruction until a political transition is underway”.

Meanwhile, Syria’s security situation

remains worrying despite an overall decrease in violence. On 21 March, a Syrian military artillery attack on Al Atareb Surgical Hospital in Aleppo governorate killed six patients and injured 16 civilians, including five medical staff. Several aerial attacks, some allegedly by Russian military jets, took place near the Bab al-Hawa border crossing on the Syrian-Turkish border and within a few hundred meters of where a number of humanitarian organisations have offices, striking a gas facility and subsequently setting fire to trucks deployed to deliver humanitarian assistance. The UN deputy regional humanitarian coordinator for Syria told the media that approximately one million people live in refugee camps in the area and “are highly vulnerable when airstrikes and shelling happen”. Meanwhile, on 16 March, the official Syrian news agency reported that Israel had launched a series of missile strikes on Syria. It was unclear, however, whether the missiles hit their intended targets, two ammunition depots located outside Damascus that ostensibly belong to Iranian-backed militias. Syrian state television claimed that the missiles were shot down by Syrian air defences.

Syria’s humanitarian and economic conditions also continue to worsen. According to a 19 March World Food Programme report, food security in Syria “remain[s] at critical levels”, with food prices having reached a record high in January. On 16 March, UNICEF’s Middle East regional director indicated that over six million Syrian children need assistance and that one-third of Syrian schools were now unusable due to damage, serving as shelters for displaced families, or being used for military purposes. COVID-19 continues to affect the humanitarian situation as Syria’s case-load grows, with approximately 41,000 cases reported throughout the country on 16 March. On 23 March, WHO announced that it will begin its COVID-19 vaccination campaign in Syria in April or early May and aims to inoculate approximately 20 percent of Syria’s population this year. However, the equitable delivery of the vaccine is likely to be complicated, given humanitarian access challenges into areas outside government control in Syria’s north-east and north-west.

Finally, on 4 March, the Council held its regular monthly meeting on the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu said that “at this stage, the declaration submitted by [Syria] cannot be considered accurate and complete”, noting that 19 issues related to Syria’s chemical weapons declarations made to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) remain unresolved. While calling on the Syrian government to cooperate fully with the OPCW, she also highlighted that the OPCW Declaration Assessment Team had been deployed to Syria to hold consultations with the government.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During the 46th session of the Human Rights Council, High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said on 11 March that “with Syria about to enter its 11th year of violence and conflict, the pursuit of truth, justice and reparations for victims must not only continue but be stepped up”. The recent conviction of a former Syrian intelligence officer by a German trial court for aiding and abetting crimes against humanity was an important step forward on the path to justice, the High Commissioner said. She stressed the need to address the issue of missing and disappeared people and joined the call for the creation of an independent mechanism with an international mandate to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing people, identify human remains, and provide support to their families.

Key Issues and Options

Reinvigorating the stalled political process will be a key focus in April. Council members were unable to agree on a press statement after Pedersen’s briefing on 15 March. However, the Special Envoy’s emphasis on the need for the international community to come together in a “sustained and robust” manner could serve as the catalyst for some Council members to seek another opportunity through a presidential statement or, at minimum, a press statement to call on the parties in the conflict to take a serious and meaningful approach to the political process in line with resolution 2254 and engage with the Constitutional Committee.

Addressing the deteriorating humanitarian situation will also be a major focus for the Council. It may use the announcement of the WHO vaccination rollout as the impetus for exploring ways to ensure that access issues do not present an obstacle to the equitable distribution of the vaccines in government- and

Syria

opposition-held areas.

Council Dynamics

Stark differences between Council members on Syria's political, humanitarian and chemical weapons files persist. Recent calls for Council members to work together to influence Syrian actors to peacefully resolve the conflict seem to have done little to build

consensus on how to advance the political process. The monthly meeting on chemical weapons regularly highlights the Council's deep divisions on the issue, while the cleavages that exist between Council members on the humanitarian file are likely to be exacerbated as a vaccination rollout begins this spring in Syria. Members are also

anticipating further discord as discussions about the renewal of cross-border humanitarian access gather pace in the coming weeks, due to the 11 July expiration of resolution 2533, authorising cross-border humanitarian deliveries.

Great Lakes Region

Expected Council Action

Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region Huang Xia is expected to provide his biannual briefing to the Council in April on the implementation of the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSC Framework) for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and on other recent developments in the region. Xia is also likely to brief on the implementation of the UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes region. The strategy was presented to the Council in December 2020, and the biannual report of the Secretary-General on the PSC Framework is due by 29 March.

Key Recent Developments

In his 29 September 2020 report on the implementation of the PSC framework, the Secretary-General informed the Council of ongoing efforts by his Special Envoy to develop a strategy for peace consolidation, conflict prevention and conflict resolution in the Great Lakes region. On 4 December 2020, the Secretary-General submitted the finalised strategy to the Security Council. Numerous stakeholders were consulted on the text, including PSC Framework signatory countries, regional organisations, civil society representatives, international partners, various UN entities and the African Union.

The strategy suggests a whole-of-system approach to the Great Lakes region, detailing ten priorities outlined under three pillars:

- The first pillar covers peace, security and justice. Priorities under this pillar are dialogue and inclusive political processes;

sustained cooperation on cross-border security issues; good governance, rule of law and human rights; and women/youth and peace and security.

- The second pillar focusses on sustainable development and shared prosperity, with the priority areas of equitable and inclusive socio-economic development; regional economic cooperation, trade and investment; as well as sustainable and transparent management of natural resources.
- The third pillar addresses resilience to long-standing and emerging challenges and prioritises prevention of violent extremism; durable solutions to protracted forced displacement; as well as preparedness and resilience to internal and external shocks.

In outlining the strategy, the Secretary-General indicates that it is intended to capitalise on positive developments in the region over the past years, including the peace agreements reached in the Central African Republic (CAR) in 2019, in South Sudan in 2018 and in Sudan in 2020, as well as increased regional cooperation on political or economic levels.

The guarantors of the PSC Framework (the UN, the AU, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and the Southern African Development Community) met virtually on 3 March to commemorate the framework's eighth anniversary. (It was agreed on 24 February 2013). In a statement issued after the meeting, the guarantors summarised the achievements made under the PSC Framework, echoed the progress noted in the strategy, and highlighted

remaining challenges. Among the challenges noted were the illegal exploitation of natural resources, strained relationships between certain countries in the region, a high number of refugees and displaced persons, and ongoing human rights violations.

The Technical Support Committee on the implementation of the PSC Framework met virtually on 18 March, expressing its full support for the new strategy. The committee is comprised of senior government representatives of the signatory countries to the PSC Framework agreement (Angola, the DRC, Burundi, CAR, Congo, Rwanda, South Africa, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) and its Guarantors (the UN, the AU, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and the Southern African Development Community).

A number of notable political, security and humanitarian developments have occurred in the Great Lakes region in recent months, including in cases on the Council's agenda. In the DRC, the ruling coalition close to former President Joseph Kabila, the *Cap pour le changement* (CACH)-*Front Commun pour le Congo* (FCC), collapsed in December 2020. A new government has yet to be formed.

On 27 January, several hundred members of parliament left the FCC to join two opposition parties supporting *Union sacrée de la nation* (USN), a newly formed coalition around President Félix Tshisekedi. Several ministers resigned, as did Prime Minister Sylvestre Ilunga Ilukamba, Senate President Alexis Thambwe Mwamba; and Assembly Speaker Jeanine Mabunda. These positions were subsequently filled, including the

KEY DOCUMENTS ON THE GREAT LAKES REGION Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2566 (12 March 2021) raised the MINUSCA troop ceiling. S/RES/2566 (18 December 2020) extended the mandate of MONUSCO until 20 December 2021. S/RES/2552 (12 November 2020) extended the mandate of MINUSCA for one year until 15 November 2021. S/RES/2389 (8 December 2017) was the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the region. Secretary-General's Reports S/2021/146 (16 February 2021) was the latest Secretary-General report on the situation in CAR. S/2020/951 (29 September 2020) was the latest Secretary-General report on the implementation of the PSC Framework. Security Council Presidential Statements S/PRST/2020/12 (4 December 2020) requested the Secretary-General to cease periodic reporting on Burundi and to cover the country in the context of regular reporting on Central Africa and the Great Lakes Region. Security Council Letter S/2020/1168 (3 December 2020) included the strategy for peace consolidation, conflict prevention and conflict resolution in the Great Lakes region.

Great Lakes Region

appointment of the former Director General of the DRC's state mining company, Sama Lukonde Kyenge, as the new prime minister.

The first parliamentary session with the participation of USN took place on 15 March. With allies of President Tshisekedi now appointed to several influential positions, several sources have indicated that the influence of former President Kabila has been reduced.

The security situation has remained difficult in the eastern DRC. On 22 February, the Italian ambassador to the DRC was among three killed in an attack on a World Food Programme (WFP) convoy north-east of Goma; an Italian embassy staff member and a WFP employee were also killed. Attacks on villages in the DRC by the Allied Democratic Forces, an Islamist group originating in Uganda, have also been reported in recent months.

The Security Council held a meeting on the DRC on 30 March. Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) Bintou Keita briefed on the latest report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the country and on progress by MONUSCO towards implementing its mandate. It was her first briefing to the Council in this role, following her appointment on 15 January. During the meeting, Council members voiced concern over the security situation in the country, particular in the eastern part of the DRC, and welcomed steps towards the formation of a new DRC government. Other topics raised in the meeting included: the importance of greater participation of women in the peacebuilding process; MONUSCO's drawdown and the associated need for intensified cooperation between the UN and the DRC government at all levels; the impact of Tshisekedi's AU chairpersonship on improved cooperation across the Great Lakes region; the illegal exploitation of natural resources; and the dire humanitarian situation.

On 31 March, Council members adopted a press statement on the DRC welcoming the efforts of Tshisekedi to promote political

stability; reconciliation; and the improvement of the security situation. The statement also underlined the importance of strengthened cooperation across the region.

In December 2020, CAR held presidential elections, resulting in the re-election of incumbent Faustin-Archange Touadéra, and the first round of legislative elections. The elections took place in a tense security environment, amid persistent attacks by armed groups across the country, in part as a result of mobilisation efforts by former President François Bozizé and the limited capacity of the CAR security forces to respond. A newly formed coalition of armed groups, the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC), contributed to the state of heightened instability. On 12 March, Council members reacted by adopting resolution 2566, which expressed grave concern over the deteriorating security situation and raised the troop ceiling for the military component of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) by 2,750 and that of the police component by 940. The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) also redeployed two infantry companies and two military utility helicopters to CAR in support. The second round of legislative elections took place on 14 March in what was reported to have been a much calmer security environment than the first round.

Cross-border challenges persisted across the region. At the end of February, UNHCR reported the presence of over 300,000 Burundian refugees in Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC and the need for over \$222.6 million to provide adequate assistance to them. COVID-19 continues to adversely impact the socio-economic situation across the region, while pandemic-related movement constraints continue to impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 46th session, the Human Rights Council held an enhanced interactive dialogue on 22 March on the human rights situation in the DRC. High Commissioner for Human Rights

Michelle Bachelet said the situation in the east of the country continues to worsen, with human rights violations committed by a range of armed groups in areas with little to no presence of Congolese authorities, as well as by the Congolese military and police force. In her briefing, Special Representative and head of MONUSCO Bintou Keita noted a worrying increase in attacks by armed groups against the civilian population, particularly in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu.

Key issues and options

A key issue for the Council is how it can help to promote the effective implementation of the UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes region. In this regard, members may choose to focus their interventions on ways in which countries in the region can cooperate on cross-border security, humanitarian and economic issues, including refugee flows, the COVID-19 pandemic, and trade and investment.

Another key issue for the Council is the persistent insecurity and violence in some of the countries in the Great Lakes region. While countries such as the CAR and the DRC are discrete agenda items, members could reinforce the call by the Secretary-General in his 29 September 2020 report on the implementation of the PSC Framework for "Governments of the region to expedite the establishment of critical national and regional disarmament, demobilization and reintegration frameworks".

Council Dynamics

There is wide concern on the Council for a range of security and humanitarian difficulties facing the region. Among these concerns are the negative impact of the illegal trade in natural resources, violence against civilians caused by armed groups, and ongoing human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence. There are also heightened worries about the security environment in the CAR and the current political situation in the DRC.

Mine Action

Expected Council Action

In April, Council president Viet Nam is expected to convene a ministerial-level open debate on mine action. Viet Nam's Deputy Prime Minister, Pham Binh Minh, will chair the meeting, which will be held via videoconference. Secretary-General António Guterres is a likely briefer. Possible additional briefers include Ambassador Stefano Toscano, the director of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, and Nguyen Thi Dieu Linh, manager of "Project Renew" (an all-women demining team) at the Norwegian People's Aid in Viet Nam.

A resolution is a possible outcome.

Background and Recent Developments

Mine action is defined by the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) as activities to reduce the social, economic and environmental impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW), including humanitarian demining, victim assistance, stockpile destruction, and advocacy against the use of anti-personnel mines. The Security Council regularly addresses issues related to mine action and the threat posed by ERW and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in the context of UN peace mission mandates and country-specific discussions, but it has considered mine action as a thematic issue on only a few occasions.

The General Assembly has traditionally been the main forum for discussing mine action, and in recent years it has adopted a resolution every two years on assistance in mine action. While General Assembly discussions tend to centre on the humanitarian impact of landmines, Security Council debates focus on their effect on peace and security in conflict and post-conflict situations, including ramifications for the work of UN peace missions.

The Council first considered mine action as a thematic issue at an open debate on 15 August 1996, which was followed by the adoption on 30 August of a presidential statement on demining in the context of UN peacekeeping. In this statement, the Council expressed its readiness to consider mine-action concerns in country-specific situations and noted the importance of ensuring that mine action is reflected in the mandates and personnel

planning for peacekeeping operations.

On 30 June 2017, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2365, the first thematic resolution on mine action, following a 13 June briefing convened by Bolivia, which also spearheaded the resolution. The resolution recognised the threat posed by landmines, ERW and IEDs to civilians and peacekeepers, emphasised the importance of providing relevant equipment and training to peacekeeping operations to reduce this threat, and called on parties to armed conflict to end the use of explosive devices.

Resolution 2365 also requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on its implementation within a year of its adoption. The subsequent report, which was issued on 29 June 2018, outlined possible ways to support mine action, including its mainstreaming into country-specific discussions and the planning and mandates of UN missions, as well as the inclusion of mine action in ceasefires and peace agreements. The report was discussed at a briefing on 29 June, during which the Council was briefed by Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions Alexander Zuev. He underscored that mine action is a precondition for the success of stabilisation, peacebuilding and sustainable development. Zuev said that training, awareness-raising and capacity-building are key to mitigating the threat posed by landmines, ERW and IEDs, and he called on member states to provide sustainable funding to the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action.

On 26 March, Kenya organised an Arria-formula meeting on the protection of peace operations from the threat posed by IEDs, in cooperation with China, Estonia, France, Ireland, Mexico, Niger, Norway, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the United Kingdom, and Viet Nam.

Since 2015, there has been an increase in casualties—most of whom are civilians—from landmines, ERW and IEDs. In 2020, the UN recorded approximately 7,000 civilian deaths and injuries due to landmines, ERW and IEDs in areas with a UN mine action presence; within that figure, 28 percent were children. In Afghanistan, IEDs are the leading cause of civilian harm, with 872 civilians killed and 2,170 injured in 2020. In addition,

landmines, ERW and IEDs have increasingly been the cause of death of UN peace mission personnel, as they are being used to target convoys or to breach peacekeepers' defensive positions and camps. For example, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has recorded 65 deaths among its personnel from attacks using explosives since its creation in 2013, a number constituting close to 20 percent of the mission's casualties. In the first months of 2021 alone, MINUSMA reported 15 IED incidents in which six peacekeepers were killed and 44 injured.

Key Issues and Options

According to the concept note prepared by Viet Nam ahead of the meeting, April's open debate on mine action can serve as a platform to discuss new threats and challenges posed by landmines, ERW and IEDs and to discuss concrete measures to enhance coordination and tailor international mine action support on the national, regional and international levels.

A priority for the Council is to provide UN peace operations with the tools to address the threat posed by landmines, ERW and IEDs to civilians and to UN personnel. In this regard, key issues include how to design mission mandates the better to address mine action from the mission's inception and how to facilitate ongoing mine action training for UN personnel.

Another important issue is increasing linkages between mine action and the women, peace and security agenda, as the participation of women in mine-related activities can help raise awareness among larger segments of conflict-affected societies.

An additional matter for the Council to consider is ways of receiving more information about the effects of landmines, ERW and IEDs in situations on its agenda. While resolution 2365 requests the Secretary-General to provide the Council with information on these effects when reporting on peacekeeping operations and special political missions, many country-specific reports do not include such information because of word-limit constraints.

One option that Viet Nam plans to pursue is a resolution on mine action, ERW and

UN DOCUMENTS ON MINE ACTION Security Council Resolution S/RES/ 2365 (30 June 2017) was the first thematic resolution on mine action. Security Council Presidential Statements S/PRST/2003/22 (19 November 2003) was on the importance of mine action in peacekeeping operations. S/PRST/1996/37 (30 August 1996) was on demining in the context of UN peacekeeping operations. Secretary-General's Report S/2018/623 (21 June 2018) was on the implementation of resolution 2365. Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8304 (29 June 2018) was a briefing on mine action convened by Russia. S/PV.7966 (13 June 2017) was a briefing on mine action convened by Bolivia. S/PV.3689 (15 August 1996) was the first thematic meeting on mine action.

Mine Action

IEDs. This resolution could:

- emphasise the importance of pre-deployment and in-theatre training for peacekeepers on this issue;
- strengthen language relating to women's participation in mine action; and
- call for the Secretary-General to include a section on the effects of landmines, ERW and IEDs on civilians in his annual report on the protection of civilians.

A future option on this issue would be to have UNMAS officials brief the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and

Security on the gendered effects of landmines, ERW and IEDs in different conflict and post-conflict environments.

Council Dynamics

While discussion of mine action is common in country-specific situations and in the context of peacekeeping operations, some Council members are hesitant about adding it as another stand-alone thematic agenda item and are likely to oppose requiring a regular cross-cutting report from the Secretary-General. It appears that an initiative in 2019

by then-Council members Belgium and the Netherlands to promote a second thematic resolution on mine action did not succeed because of the US's opposition to the inclusion of a regular reporting requirement. Previous attempts by Council members to introduce regular reporting requirements on issues such as security sector reform and youth, peace and security have also faced opposition, usually by permanent members of the Council; in some cases, this opposition has been overcome.

Kosovo

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council is expected to hold its first briefing this year on the situation in Kosovo. The Special Representative and head of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Zahir Tanin, will brief on recent developments and the latest report by the Secretary-General.

Key Recent Developments

The leader of the “Self-Determination” political party, Albin Kurti, was elected Kosovo's prime minister for the second time on 22 March. During the constitutive session of the Kosovo parliament, 67 members of parliament (MPs) backed the new government led by Kurti. According to the Kosovo Constitution, a new government requires support from at least 61 of the 120 MPs in the parliament. Speaking before the vote, Kurti said that some of the most pressing issues for the new government would be addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, economic development, and the rule of law. Regarding the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, he said that Kosovo would not make further compromises and would make resolving the issue of missing persons the main priority in the dialogue.

On 14 February, Kosovo held early parliamentary elections, in which “Self-Determination” won 58 seats in the parliament. More established political parties that have been in power for most of Kosovo's history—the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and the Democratic Party of Kosovo

(PDK)—retained 15 and 19 seats, respectively. The support for “Self-Determination” doubled since the last elections in October 2019, while the LDK and the PDK lost 13 and five seats.

The parliamentary elections came after a turbulent year in Kosovo's politics. In February 2020, Kurti became the prime minister after his party reached a coalition agreement with the LDK. A dispute over the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the collapse of the governing coalition in March, after which the parliament dismissed Kurti's cabinet in a vote of no confidence. In June, Avdullah Hoti of the LDK became the new prime minister with support from 61 MPs. Soon after, “Self-Determination” petitioned the Constitutional Court to review the legality of the vote to confirm Hoti's government. It argued that one of the MPs who voted for Hoti's government had been convicted of a crime that should have disqualified him from holding the elected position. On 21 December, the Court ruled that Hoti's government was illegitimate, thus triggering an early election on 14 February.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the EU-facilitated dialogue on the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. In a 9 March press release, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said that the dialogue had resulted in some important agreements between Serbia and Kosovo. He noted, however, that the EU strongly believes that the dialogue should now move into its

final stages and conclude “with one comprehensive legally-binding normalization agreement between Kosovo and Serbia dealing with all outstanding issues”.

On 2 March, the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, Miroslav Lajčák, travelled to Pristina, where he held meetings with government officials and leaders of political parties. He also briefed Kurti on the progress made to that point in the dialogue. The following day, Lajčák met Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić. Lajčák emphasised that continuing the dialogue was a key factor in advancing EU integration for both sides.

On 24 June 2020, the Specialist Prosecutor's Office filed an indictment with the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC), charging Kosovo's then-president, Hashim Thaçi, among others, with a series of crimes against humanity and war crimes. On 5 November, the KSC confirmed an indictment against Thaçi, after which he resigned as president, citing the need to protect the integrity of the office and the country. Later that day, Thaçi was transferred to the KSC detention centre. On 9 November, Thaçi appeared before the Court and pleaded not guilty to all charges. Formally established in 2016 by the Kosovo parliament, KSC is a special court based in The Hague that operates under Kosovo's law and is staffed by international judges, with the mission of investigating alleged war crimes committed by the Kosovo Liberation Army during the conflict in Kosovo in the 1990s.

UN DOCUMENTS ON KOSOVO [Security Council Resolution S/RES/1244](#) (10 June 1999) authorised NATO to secure and enforce the withdrawal of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia forces from Kosovo and established UNMIK. [Secretary-General's Report S/2020/964](#) (1 October 2020) was on Kosovo. [Security Council Meeting Record S/2020/1040](#) (23 October 2020) was the transcript of the videoconference briefing on Kosovo. [Other S/2019/120](#) (7 February 2019) was a note by the Council president that said the Council would hold briefings on Kosovo in June and October 2019 and that as of 2020, briefings would be held twice a year (in April and October).

Kosovo

Key Issues and Options

Maintaining stability in Kosovo remains the Council's primary concern. The Council will continue to monitor diplomatic efforts to advance the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina and any efforts towards reaching a final agreement on Kosovo.

Another issue for the Council is the lack of implementation of existing agreements in the context of the EU-facilitated dialogue, especially the delays in the establishment of the Association/Community of Serb Municipalities in Serb-majority northern Kosovo. In this regard, Council members will need to consider how the new government in Kosovo will approach the EU-facilitated dialogue, given that Kurti has been critical of the talks.

Also an issue for the Council will be Kosovo's cooperation with the KSC since some political actors in Kosovo have publicly criticised its work. Should Kosovo limit its cooperation with the KSC, the Council could consider issuing a statement calling on the authorities in Kosovo to adhere to its commitments to the court.

Some Council members (France, the

UK and the US, in particular) have continued to question the UNMIK reporting cycle and called for downsizing the mission in light of the relative overall stability on the ground. While the Council reached an agreement on a less-frequent reporting cycle in February 2018, it could also request the Secretary-General to conduct a strategic review of UNMIK to consider the effectiveness of the mission.

Council Dynamics

Kosovo remains a low-intensity issue for the Council and is closely followed mainly by members with a specific interest in the region. This is due in part to the strong engagement of regional organisations, including the EU, NATO and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, in matters related to Kosovo.

Nevertheless, deep divisions among permanent members have continued to characterise the Council's consideration of Kosovo. France, the UK and the US recognise Kosovo's independence and tend to be supportive of its government; China and Russia do not

recognise its independence and strongly support Serbia's position. Six elected members (India, Kenya, Mexico, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, and Viet Nam) do not recognise Kosovo's independence.

The US has been the most vocal proponent of a drawdown and eventual withdrawal of UNMIK, citing the level of stability in Kosovo. The US has also asserted that the mission is overstaffed and over-resourced for its limited responsibilities and that these resources could be put to better use in more pressing situations on the Council's agenda. The UK has also called for a review of UNMIK's mandate, arguing that the situation on the ground has changed.

The issue of modifying UNMIK's mandate and its possible drawdown is likely to become more prominent in the upcoming period, given the growing number of Council members that support this position. Alone among missions regularly discussed by the Council, UNMIK's mandate, established in 1999, is open-ended. Any attempt to change it would require a new resolution, which Russia would strongly oppose and most likely block.

Libya

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council is expected to renew the measures related to the illicit export of petroleum from Libya, which are due to expire on 30 April, and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, which 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 2491 (to inspect vessels suspected of being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking) expires on 3 October. The mandate of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) 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. The 8 March final report of the Panel of Experts calls the arms embargo "totally ineffective", and describes its violations by the foreign backers as "extensive, blatant and with complete disregard for the sanctions measures". On

the travel ban and assets freeze, the report notes that implementation of the measures also continues to be ineffective.

Regarding the illicit export of petroleum from Libya, the panel reports that authorities in the east of the country continue to smuggle fuel overland "at a small scale". The COVID-19 pandemic has brought efforts to illicitly export petroleum by sea to a temporary halt. According to the report, authorities in the east also continue to try to import aviation fuel.

On the presence of foreign fighters, the panel reports that armed groups from Chad and Sudan, fighting for the LAAF, continue to be active in the country's conflict. Between 4,000 and 13,000 fighters from Syria are supporting either the GNA or the LAAF. The

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). Sanctions Committee Document S/2021/229 (8 March 2021) was the final report of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee. Security Council Letter S/2021/70 (21 January 2021) was from the Permanent Representative of Libya, containing a letter from the head of the GNA, Fayez al-Serraj, requesting UN support for the electoral process.

Libya

panel established that on 22 January 2020 a United Arab Emirates (UAE)-based company deployed 267 Sudanese recruits to Libya, where the LAAF assigned them to protect the Ras Lanuf oil terminal. The recruits protested and were withdrawn after six days. Also identified as being in Libya were 800 to 1,200 fighters employed by the Wagner Group, a Russian private military contractor. The Kremlin denies any connection to the company.

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 agreement. The 5+5 JMC also expressed its intention to set up a monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the agreement. In its final report, the Panel of Experts called the parties' commitment to the implementation of the agreement "questionable". The agreement further stipulated 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 called 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 Council has received a Secretary-General's report on the work of the advance team that was deployed to Libya on 3 March in support of the envisioned establishment of a ceasefire monitoring mechanism under the umbrella of UNSMIL. The report describes the proposed mechanism in more detail as well as the tasks, areas of operation, security arrangements, logistical considerations, and prerequisites for the deployment of monitors provided by UNSMIL.

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. The roadmap 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 consists of a three-member Presidency Council, in addition to a prime minister and two deputy prime ministers. In a 21 January letter to the Council, Fayez al-Serraj, then 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, as a result of which Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah was elected prime minister-designate and Mohammad Younes Menfi was elected president of the Presidency Council. The Council welcomed this step in a 16 February presidential statement. On 5 March, Dbeibah submitted his proposed cabinet for a vote of confidence by the House of Representatives, which approved the cabinet on 10 March. This was welcomed by the Secretary-General the same day and by the Council in a presidential statement on 12 March. On 15 March, the new Government of National Unity (GNU) was sworn in.

The new Special Envoy to Libya and head of UNSMIL, Ján Kubiš, gave his first briefing in this capacity on 24 March.

On 25 March, Mahmoud Mustafa Busayf Al-Werfalli, for whom the ICC had issued two arrest warrants for alleged war crimes, was shot dead in Benghazi by unidentified perpetrators.

Key Issues and Options

The immediate issue for the Council is to adopt a resolution renewing the sanctions related to the illicit export of petroleum from Libya and the mandate of the Panel of Experts (the arms embargo, assets freeze and travel ban measures are open-ended and do not have to be renewed).

The conflict in Libya and related 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, based on the information conveyed to Council members in the Secretary-General's report. Another option is for the Council to consider the GNA's request for electoral support with election observers.

Council and Wider Dynamics

The Council's 12 March presidential statement reiterates its call for states to comply with the arms embargo and to support the ceasefire agreement, including the withdrawal of 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 been unable to agree on the chair's statement. (Sanctions committee decisions and statements require consensus.) Ahead of the bimonthly briefing on UNSMIL in November 2020, 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. Similar dynamics played out ahead of the 24 March briefing.

Russia abstained during the adoption of resolution 2509 of 11 February 2020—the previous resolution renewing the sanctions related to the illicit export of petroleum from Libya and the mandate of the Panel of Experts—questioning in its explanation of vote the relevance of new language that had been included in the resolution on the illicit import of petroleum.

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

Yemen

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

The Houthi rebel group continues its offensive to take Marib governorate, rich in oil and gas reserves, and the Yemeni government's last stronghold in northern Yemen. The front-line lies just outside Marib City, home to around two million people, including many of the one million internally displaced Yemenis who fled to Marib governorate during the war. The Houthis also continue an intensified drone and missile campaign against Saudi Arabia. They claimed responsibility for a 7 March attack on a Saudi Aramco oil company facility at Ras Tanura, the world's largest oil export terminal, on the Persian Gulf and an attack using armed drones on 19 March ignited a fire at an Aramco installation in Riyadh. Attacks on the six-year anniversary of the Saudi-led coalition's intervention on behalf of the government on 25 March set fire to a fuel storage tank in Jizan.

Fighting escalated on other fronts in Taiz, Hodeidah and Hajah governorates as government-aligned forces and Saudi Arabia sought to alleviate pressure on Marib. The Saudi-led coalition also intensified airstrikes during March on Sana'a and elsewhere. Briefing the Council on Yemen on 16 March, Griffiths described the war as "back in full force".

Despite significant diplomatic activity, efforts to secure a nationwide ceasefire, re-open the Sana'a airport, allow the unhindered delivery of fuel and other commodity imports through Hodeidah port, and resume peace talks remained at an impasse. US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking undertook a 17-day trip to the region in late February and March to push for a ceasefire plan with Yemeni, Saudi and Houthi officials. Speaking at a 12 March meeting on Yemen organised by the Atlantic Council, a US think tank, Lenderking conveyed a sober assessment on reaching a deal, saying, "Tragically, and somewhat confusingly for me, it appears

that the Houthis are prioritizing a military campaign" to seize Marib governorate.

On the humanitarian front, a 1 March virtual donor conference generated pledges of \$1.7 billion against the \$3.85 billion requested for this year's Yemen humanitarian response plan. The Secretary-General in a statement described the conference outcome as "disappointing". Briefing the Council at its 16 March meeting, Lowcock said the result meant that the UN would be unable to stop "the protracted process of starvation" facing millions of Yemenis. The UN also raised the alarm in March about the fuel shortage in northern Yemen that has been driving up prices of food and health care, as the government and coalition have prohibited any fuel imports through Hodeidah ports since January. Yemen also featured prominently at an 11 March open debate on conflict-induced hunger. The meeting included the participation of World Food Programme Executive Director David Beasley, who had just visited Yemen and, with other speakers, warned about the risk of widespread famine in Yemen.

At the 16 March briefing, Nirvana Shawky, the regional director for the Middle East and North Africa of CARE, an international humanitarian organisation operating in Yemen, also briefed. Shawky urged the Council to address economic recovery as an urgent priority, help fill the \$2 billion funding gap in the humanitarian response, improve humanitarian access as an "absolute necessity", and exercise its responsibility to end the war. Council members issued a press statement on 18 March that condemned the fighting in Marib and cross-border attacks against Saudi Arabia. It stressed "the need for a de-escalation by all, including an immediate end to the Houthi escalation in Marib".

On 22 March, Saudi Arabia proposed a plan for a ceasefire under UN supervision, the re-opening of Sana'a airport to several regional and international destinations, the deposit of oil revenues from ships entering Hodeidah into a joint account in the Central Bank's Hodeidah branch, and the resumption of peace talks. The Secretary-General released a statement welcoming the Saudi announcement.

March also saw a number of deadly incidents involving migrants. On 7 March, a fire at a Houthi-run detention facility in Sana'a

killed at least 45 Ethiopian migrants and injured 170 others. At the Council's March briefing, Griffiths called for an independent investigation into the incident. On 21 March, the Houthis announced the arrest of 11 security personnel and a number of senior personnel, saying guards had fired three tear gas canisters into the facility that started the fire. On 4 March, at least 20 migrants drowned when human traffickers forced dozens of passengers to jump off a crowded boat in Djibouti bound for Yemen.

A second wave of COVID-19 spread through Yemen during March. On 23 March, the government declared a health emergency in areas under its control. The transportation minister of the Houthi authorities in Sana'a, Zakaria al-Shami, died from coronavirus on 21 March, while Houthi Prime Minister Abdulaziz bin Habtour was hospitalised.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 26 March, the Yemen Panel of Experts briefed the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee on its investigation into the 30 December 2020 attack on Aden airport that targeted the new Yemeni cabinet arriving from Saudi Arabia. According to a confidential "ad hoc" report, which was shared with the Committee, the Panel apparently determined that the rockets used in the attack were fired from Houthi-controlled territory and were known to be used only by the Houthis. The Panel did not go so far as to assign responsibility to the Houthis and will report further on the incident in its mid-term update.

Towards the end of March, the Panel informed the Committee that it planned to conduct a complete review of its findings in the finance section of its January final report regarding the misuse of the Saudi deposit to the Yemeni Central Bank. It said that section IX.B and annex 28, as well as related commentary in the executive summary, and Table 1, should be disregarded. In addition, the Panel's finance expert resigned.

Women, Peace and Security

On 2 March, the Informal Experts Group (IEG) on women, peace and security held its fourth meeting on Yemen. Griffiths; David Gressly, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen; and General Guha briefed the IEG. Key recommendations were also conveyed to Council members by UN Women and further observations were presented by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

The summary shared by the co-chairs of the IEG, Ireland and Mexico, and the UK as penholder on women, peace and security, contains the main issues raised and the proposals made

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2564](#) (25 February 2021) renewed Yemen sanctions measures for one year, condemned the escalation in Marib, and stressed the Houthis' responsibility for the situation of the FSO Safer. [Security Council Letter S/2021/264](#) (17 March 2021) was the summary of the 2 March 2021 meeting of the Informal Experts Group on WPS on Yemen. [Security Council Press Statement SC/14471](#) (18 March 2021) stressed the need for a de-escalation by all, including an immediate end to the Houthi escalation in Marib.

Yemen

by UN entities. Among the key topics were the under-representation and exclusion of women in Yemen from peace negotiations, political talks and decision-making. One example given was the total lack of women in the recently formed 24-member cabinet of the government. Griffith, in October 2020, had publicly committed to include women in all upcoming talks and his office has been involved in supporting and engaging the local female Yemeni community safety actors in the context of negotiations for a ceasefire and confidence building measures.

Regarding conflict-related sexual violence, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict emphasised that all parties to the conflict have committed such crimes. The parties had not committed to preventing conflict-related sexual violence nor had they taken any remedial action. In that context, the SRSG's office welcomed the adoption of resolution 2564 on Yemen sanctions. With the resolution, the Council added Houthi official Sultan Saleh Aida Aida Zabin to the sanctions list for his role in overseeing a policy of intimidation and the use of systematic arrest, detention, torture, and sexual violence against politically active women.

UN representatives provided Council members with recommendations in response to the concerns raised. Regarding the renewal of UNMHA's mandate, the Council could call on UNMHA to systematically engage with women's organisations and to report on that engagement. The Council was also advised to call on the conflict parties to commit to the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence. Regarding the Yemen Sanctions Committee, the recommendation was for Committee members to consider further listings of individuals identified by the Panel of Experts as responsible for crimes against women. Possible Council action included continuing to invite Yemeni female civil society briefers to participate in the monthly Yemen meetings. Another recommendation was for Council members to support the deployment of women protection advisors.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue is the battle in Marib. If Marib City falls and the Houthis seize the governorate, it would affect the balance of power in any future peace process, significantly weakening the government's position. Council members are likely to monitor developments and support diplomatic initiatives for a ceasefire. They could seek an emergency meeting on developments around Marib City, reiterate calls for a de-escalation, and threaten sanctions on additional Houthi officials, military leaders and economic agents if they push forward with the attack.

The Marib fighting could also worsen the humanitarian crisis, especially if it triggers mass displacement of civilians and puts stress on national relief efforts to prevent famine. Along with generating more humanitarian funding and relieving the fuel crisis, measures to support the economy, such as stabilising the Yemeni rial, are important to ensure people can afford food. Council members may reiterate calls for donors to provide additional funding to the humanitarian response and to inject hard currency into Yemen's Central Bank to bolster the currency.

Another significant issue remains the environmental threat posed by the moored FSO Safer oil tanker in the Red Sea, which the UN remains unable to access despite previous Houthi commitments to allow it to deploy a team to assess the ship and conduct emergency repairs.

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. A related issue is how to promote an inclusive political process that would involve Yemen's multiple armed groups and other stakeholders besides the Houthis and the government.

Council Dynamics

Council members support the Special Envoy and his mediation efforts. Members further share concerns about the humanitarian situation and the threat posed by the decrepit Safer oil tanker. The new US administration has placed a focus on ending Yemen's war, and this has reinvigorated diplomatic engagement. A rare joint statement by the P3, Germany and Italy on 11 March condemned the Houthi offensive on Marib City and attacks against Saudi Arabia, asserting that "renewed diplomatic efforts to end the Yemen conflict, in support of the UN Special Envoy, with the support of Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the international community, offer the best hope for ending this war".

Russia often raises concerns about the Council's singling out the Houthis, which it believes could give the appearance of bias. This dynamic played out during negotiations on the 18 March press statement, which led to streamlining references to the Houthis and the removal of language on the Safer oil tanker in exchange for keeping one reference to the "Houthi escalation in Marib". Russia also questioned last month the Panel's mandate for being able to investigate the Aden attack.

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

Cooperation between the UN and Regional Organisations

Expected Council Action

In April, Viet Nam plans to convene a high-level open debate on enhancing cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations. The meeting is expected to focus on the importance of confidence-building measures and dialogue in the context of conflict prevention and resolution. Secretary-General António Guterres and

former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon are expected to brief. A presidential statement is likely to be pursued as an outcome.

Background and Developments

Chapter VIII of the UN Charter envisions cooperation and partnership between the Council and regional organisations in the maintenance of international peace and

security. Under Article 52 (3), the Council "shall encourage the pacific settlement of local disputes through...regional arrangements or by...regional agencies either on the initiative of the states concerned or by reference from the Security Council". Article 53 (1) indicates that the Council can use regional arrangements for enforcement actions under its authority, although this is not to be done

UN DOCUMENTS ON COOPERATION WITH REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/11 (4 December 2020) underscored the importance of developing effective partnerships between the UN and regional organisations, in particular the African Union. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8711 (30 January 2020) was a briefing on the cooperation between the UN and ASEAN, initiated by Viet Nam during its Council presidency.

Cooperation between the UN and Regional Organizations

without Council authorisation. Article 54 states that the Council shall be fully informed of actions “undertaken or in contemplation under regional arrangements or by regional agencies for the maintenance of international peace and security”.

In the last decade, there has been a growing recognition of the opportunities for a productive relationship between the Council and regional organisations. The AU has perhaps the most established relationship with the Security Council, with peacekeeping a principal area of their institutional cooperation. In Europe, regional organisations such as the EU and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) play key roles in conflict and post-conflict environments. For example, the OSCE closely monitors the situation in Ukraine, serving as an important source of information for the Council about developments there.

Briefings on the relationships with different organisations have become a regular feature of the Council’s programme of work over the years. Council members have held annual joint consultative meetings with members of the AU Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) since 2007, and the Council has met to discuss the Secretary-General’s annual report on the AU-UN relationship since 2015. It has also met annually for a briefing by the incoming chairperson-in-office of the OSCE and on UN-EU cooperation since 2001 and 2010, respectively.

In addition to these annual meetings, Council presidents have chosen to hold briefings or debates on the relationship between the Council and regional organisations. In this respect, since January 2020, the Council has met to discuss its relationships with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the International Organization of La Francophonie, and the League of Arab States.

Confidence-building measures are occasionally raised in Secretary-General’s reports and discussed in Council meetings, but

frequently without much specificity. The Special Envoy for Syria, Geir O. Pedersen, has regularly called for the large-scale release of detainees and abductees as a potential confidence-building measure in the Syria conflict, albeit without much success. Several Council members have echoed his call for such releases. One example of support by the UN and a regional organisation for a confidence-building measure on a Council agenda item is the bi-communal technical committees in Cyprus. The Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities on the island established these committees—which address education, health care, crime, and other matters of common concern—to promote enhanced understanding between their communities. The bi-communal technical committees operate under the auspices of the UN and receive financial support from the EU.

Key Issues and Options

An underlying issue is how the Council can work most effectively with regional and sub-regional organisations to promote confidence-building measures to prevent and resolve conflicts.

A presidential statement is an option that could be pursued. Such a statement could:

- highlight the importance of confidence-building measures in supporting conflict prevention and mediation efforts;
- encourage the mediation work of the UN’s envoys, including ways in which they have cooperated with regional and sub-regional organisations with regard to conflict prevention and resolution; and
- request a special report from the Secretary-General on ways in which the Council and regional entities can work together to build confidence and promote dialogue among parties to disputes and best practices in this regard. The report could examine particular situations where enhanced cooperation on confidence-building measures could be explored.

Another possible option is for a chair’s

summary of the meeting to be produced. This could serve as a useful reference to highlight ideas for cooperation between the Council and regional and sub-regional bodies in promoting confidence-building measures. In recent years, such summaries have been helpful in capturing the key issues raised in Council meetings.

In the future, Council members might consider convening an informal interactive dialogue with UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs officials and heads of various regional organisations to discuss ways to build synergies between the mediation structures in the UN system and regional organisations. For example, such a meeting would allow for an exchange of ideas with organisations such as ASEAN—which has been committed to confidence-building in security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region through its ASEAN Regional Forum—and the OSCE, which could share useful information on its experience in working with the EU and the UN on joint confidence-building measures in Georgia. As an informal, closed meeting, an informal interactive dialogue might allow for a freer exchange of ideas than is possible in an open meeting.

Council Dynamics

Most Council members emphasise the importance of conflict prevention and mediation at the thematic level. There is also clear support for enhancing the relationship between the UN and regional organisations in this regard. Interest in strengthening the interaction between the Council and regional organisations is reflected by the high number of formal meetings that are held in the Council on these relationships. The April meeting will present an opportunity to explore an issue—confidence-building measures—that is rarely discussed in depth in the Council.

Western Sahara

Expected Council Action

In April, Security Council members expect to receive a briefing in consultations on the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), likely from Collin Stewart, the Special Representative for Western Sahara and head of MINURSO.

The MINURSO mandate expires on 31 October.

Key Recent Developments

Council members convened virtually on Western Sahara on 21 December 2020, when Germany called for a Council meeting following several months of increased tensions between Morocco and the Polisario Front, the entity representing the inhabitants of the Western Sahara region known as Sahrawis. The frictions included Polisario protesters blocking traffic between the Moroccan-controlled side of Western Sahara and Mauritania at the border town of Guerguerat, following which Morocco deployed armed forces into the buffer zone. The Polisario Front subsequently announced it would no longer respect the ceasefire agreement, signed by both parties in 1991.

The conflict has since persisted at a low-intensity level, and MINURSO continues to monitor the situation. In a press statement dated 2 March, the Polisario Front reacted to remarks by the spokesperson of the Secretary-General, who had said that MINURSO continued to monitor the situation throughout the territory and within Guerguerat. Criticising the mission, the Polisario Front suggested that the spokesperson's account reflected an attempt by MINURSO to give a false impression of "overall calm".

Since Western Sahara received its independence from Spain in 1975, Morocco and the Polisario Front have contested the area, which borders Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco. A referendum that was supposed to be held with the support of MINURSO and was intended to determine the region's status has never materialised. Morocco maintains that Western Sahara should be incorporated within its territory as an autonomous region, but the Polisario Front insists that the referendum should be held, with

independence as a legitimate option.

On 10 December 2020, former US President Donald Trump announced that the US recognised Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, securing in return Morocco's normalisation of relations with Israel. In 2019 and 2020, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, the Gambia, Guinea, Liberia, São Tomé and Príncipe, and the United Arab Emirates established diplomatic presences in areas under Moroccan control. According to the latest report of the Secretary-General, the Polisario Front criticised those actions as violations of international law and a breach of the international legal status of Western Sahara as a non-self-governing territory.

The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) announced its intention to increase diplomatic efforts to "bring about a just and durable solution to the crisis". In a communiqué adopted on 9 March, it expressed concern over the resumption of military confrontation. It mandated the AU Troika—consisting of the current, incoming and outgoing AU Chairpersons—to revitalise its engagement with both parties to the conflict and requested the AU Commission to take necessary steps to reopen the AU Office in the Moroccan-administered city of Laayoune to reactivate AU support for a political solution.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is how to reinvigorate the political process, as the most recent round of talks between the parties was in March 2019. In this regard, and in light of ongoing tensions, the question of finding a successor for the former Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General has become more pressing. The post has been vacant since former German President Horst Köhler left the office for health reasons in May 2019. Köhler had initiated a series of round-table discussions, bringing together Morocco, the Polisario Front, and neighbouring countries Algeria and Mauritania. Both Morocco and the Polisario Front appear to have placed conditions on the profile of a possible successor, which is likely to have challenged the search for a suitable candidate.

Council members may call on the Secretary-General to expedite the search for and appointment of a new envoy and inquire about options to reinstate the political dialogue. They are also likely to call on both sides to return to respecting the ceasefire agreement and to take measures for immediate de-escalation.

Also an important issue, which is described in the Secretary-General's 23 September 2020 MINURSO report, is MINURSO's difficulty in accessing the Polisario-controlled area to the east of the berm that separates areas under Moroccan and Polisario control. Council members may inquire about the mission's progress in reinstating cooperation to access sites located in that area, as well as the extent to which the mission is engaging parties to de-escalate the current tensions.

The ongoing challenges posed by COVID-19 are another key issue. Council members may want to hear about the impact of COVID-19 on the population, how the virus is affecting MINURSO's activities, and how the mission is responding to this challenge.

Council Dynamics

The upcoming meeting on Western Sahara will be the first on this issue since the new US administration has taken office. President Biden's inauguration was followed by much speculation about whether the new administration would backtrack on the decision to recognise Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara. In April 2018, the US, as the penholder, opted to reduce the mandate cycle from 12 to six months. This decision was reversed with a return to a 12-month mandate in October 2019. MINURSO mandate adoptions have not been unanimous since 2017. Russia and former Council member South Africa both abstained during the vote on MINURSO's current mandate. Russia cited concerns over lack of reference to the right to self-determination in recent mandates, while South Africa expressed a preference for a six-month mandate and the need for MINURSO to have a human rights component.

Colombia

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing from Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission.

The Council may adopt a resolution expanding the mandate of the mission to include monitoring compliance with the sentences handed down by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP).

The Verification Mission's mandate expires on 25 September 2021.

Key Recent Developments

At the outset of 2021, some progress was made on the implementation of the November 2016 Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace between the government of Colombia and the former rebel group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), including some level of increase in the dialogue between the parties and progress in the transitional justice process stipulated by the agreement. However, the persistent violence against communities (including indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities), former FARC-EP members, human rights defenders, and social leaders continues to complicate the implementation of the 2016 agreement.

During January and February, the SJP, the judicial component of the transitional justice system established by the 2016 agreement, made several crucial announcements regarding its investigations, prompting widespread public discourse. The SJP has the authority to issue sentences against those who acknowledge responsibility for crimes committed during the conflict, which can include up to eight years of confinement to one municipality to carry out work and activities that count as reparations to victims. As the SJP expects to start handing down sentences in the latter part of 2021, it has been conducting preparatory work, such as identifying seven cases it deems representative of the conflict (including kidnappings by the former FARC-EP, extrajudicial killings by agents of the state, and recruitment and use of children); collecting information; and

hearing testimonies from defendants.

On 26 January, the SJP issued its first indictment, accusing eight former FARC leaders of perpetrating a kidnapping-for-ransom operation that targeted more than 20,000 people, including many civilians. The SJP noted that some of the victims were raped or killed and said that the kidnappings amount to crimes against humanity. The accused former leaders have until 30 April to respond to the SJP's indictment; in the meantime, they have indicated their intention to admit guilt. Public reactions varied, as some saw the indictment and the expected admission of guilt as a sign of progress in the transitional justice process, while others called for tougher punishment for the former combatants' actions and for banning them from participation in political activities.

On 12 February, the SJP issued a report that implicated the Colombian military in the killing of 6,400 civilians from 2002 to 2008, during Álvaro Uribe's presidency. The killings were apparently part of the so-called "false positives" phenomenon, whereby civilians killed in military operations were presented as combatants in official reports. The numbers presented by the SJP were substantially higher than previous official estimates, which had put the number of victims at 2,248. Uribe criticised the SJP's report, arguing that it was politically motivated, and questioned the legitimacy of its sources. In a 19 February statement, OHCHR welcomed the SJP's progress on the indictment and the report, calling them "important steps in the fight against impunity".

The worrying security environment in Colombia persisted in the first quarter of this year, resulting in widespread internal displacement in some areas of the country. According to OCHA, during January, activities of armed groups in the border area between Colombia and Venezuela affected both Colombians and Venezuelan refugees in the area, leading to the displacement of at least 200 people in Cúcuta and Tibú. OCHA further warned about the surge in violence in the Pacific-coastal city of Buenaventura, which is a strategic area for drug trafficking. Violence perpetrated by armed groups since late 2020 that has mainly targeted the Afro-Colombian community in the city resulted in

the killing of seven people and displaced hundreds. Overall, OCHA noted that in January and February, 13,422 people—including 5,574 children—experienced displacement or restrictions on their movement due to the activities of armed groups nationwide.

Attacks against former FARC combatants have also continued unabated. The Verification Mission verified the killing of 14 ex-combatants since the outset of 2021. On 26 February, the SJP stated that the government and other state entities failed to comply fully with its July 2020 order calling on them to implement mechanisms contained in the 2016 agreement to protect ex-combatants. Among other things, it called for the National Commission on Security Guarantees—which comprises government officials and six civil society representatives and is charged under the peace agreement with developing a public policy for dismantling criminal organisations and their support networks—to present guidelines for the policy by 30 September 2020. The SJP therefore issued a new deadline, calling on the government to present the guidelines for the plan by 24 March. According to media reports, the government had shared proposed guidelines for the plan with the entire National Commission on Security Guarantees on 24 March, but the civil society members in the commission rejected them, saying their proposals had not been taken into account.

On 10 March, Colombian President Iván Duque met with Rodrigo Londoño, president of the "Comunes" party. (The FARC party decided to change its name to "Comunes" during its national assembly, which took place in January). At the meeting, which was facilitated by Ruiz Massieu, the parties agreed to work on a roadmap for the remainder of the timeframe envisioned for the implementation of the 2016 agreement and to strengthen efforts to protect former combatants.

While the SJP continued making progress in its work, the Security Council has been considering an expansion of the Verification Mission's mandate that would include the monitoring of compliance with SJP sentences. Following a 15 January letter from Duque formally requesting the expansion of the mandate, the Council asked the Secretary-General to submit his

UN DOCUMENTS ON COLOMBIA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2545 (25 September 2020) renewed the mandate of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia until 25 September 2021. Secretary-General's Report S/2020/1301 (29 December 2020) was the most recent 90-day report. Security Council Letters S/2021/186 (24 February 2021) contained the Secretary-General's recommendations on the expansion of the mandate of the Verification Mission. S/2021/77 (25 January 2021) contained a meeting record of the Security Council's quarterly meeting on Colombia, held on 21 January 2021. S/2021/147 (15 January 2021) contained a request from Colombian President Iván Duque for the expansion of the Verification Mission's mandate. Security Council Press Statement SC/14425 (28 January 2021) reiterated Council members' support for the peace process in Colombia.

Colombia

recommendations on the matter.

In a 24 February letter, the Secretary-General said that the mission's tasks—which were formulated in consultation with the Colombian government—would be to verify that those individuals who have received restorative sentences comply with them, and that the government provides the necessary conditions (such as budgetary and security support) for the sentences to be implemented. He noted that the mission's role in verifying compliance can help build confidence in the transitional justice arrangements contained in the 2016 peace agreement. The letter outlines changes that may be needed to the mission's configuration, including a dedicated headquarters capacity in Bogotá and increased mobility to areas where restorative works will be carried out.

Council members held an expert-level meeting with the UN Secretariat on 5 March to discuss the Secretary-General's recommendation. It appears that most members reacted positively to the suggestions, with some posing questions on issues such as envisioned timelines for implementation of the mandate expansion and the mission's interaction with civilians in areas with indigenous populations, where a substantial amount of the restorative work is expected to take place. At the time of writing, negotiations on a draft resolution expanding the mandate have yet to

begin, as it appears that at least one member had further questions about the budgetary implications of the possible expansion.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 46th session, the Human Rights Council considered the report on Colombia of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/46/76) on 25 February. The report, covering 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020, focused on security and human rights; civic space; access to justice and the fight against impunity; and inequalities in the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. It also assessed the implementation of the human rights aspects of the 2016 peace agreement and put forward recommendations. Among the report's findings, it said that in 2020 OHCHR documented 76 massacres involving 292 deaths and that OCHA documented 94 mass displacements, involving 25,366 people. In 2020, OHCHR registered the killing of 133 human rights defenders.

Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council remains to support the implementation of the peace agreement in Colombia. The need to implement the agreement fully, and not only selected aspects, continues to be an important matter for Council members.

Violence in Colombia is a long-standing Council concern. The Council addressed this issue in numerous press statements calling for the National Commission on Security Guarantees to make progress in devising a plan to

dismantle criminal organisations in the country. Some Council members may therefore wish to inquire about recent progress in this regard.

Another issue is the potential for tensions in Colombia as the SJP continues to carry out sensitive transitional justice processes. Council members may wish to reiterate their support for the independence of the SJP. Another option for the Council is to undertake a virtual visiting mission with representatives from the SJP, the government and victims' organisations to hear their views on the mission's new role, assuming that its mandate is expanded. In this regard, during the Council's July 2019 visiting mission to Colombia, Council members' meeting with representatives of the SJP was an important sign of support for the court's work.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the peace process in Colombia. While they have generally been deferential towards the government, some differences in tone have emerged since 2019. Some Council members have become more critical of developments such as the continued insecurity in rural areas and the government's uneven approach to implementing various aspects of the agreement.

Non-Proliferation (1540 Committee)

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council is expected to renew the mandate of 1540 Committee ahead of its expiry 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 to have focused on activities related to this comprehensive review, with the open consultations planned for June 2020 among the most significant of these. This event planned to gather representatives of UN member states, international and regional organisations, and civil society

to discuss the 1540 review process. Due to 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

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)

(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 invitations to international and regional organisations 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, and by the end of 2020, 184 out of the 193 member states had submitted their first such reports.

On 30 March, Ambassador Juan Ramón

de la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico), briefed the Council on the work of the committee. At the time of writing, 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 be unable to complete the comprehensive review on resolution 1540's implementation, as required by resolution 1977, before the committee's mandate expires on 25 April. 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.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Expected Council Action

The Security Council expects to hold its quarterly open debate, likely via videoconference, on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question" in April. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland is expected to brief.

Key Recent Developments

On 11 March, the foreign ministers of Egypt, France, Germany, and Jordan met in Paris with Special Coordinator Wennesland and the EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, Susanna Terstal, to discuss ways to advance the Middle East peace process. The foreign ministers released a statement in which they underscored that "progressive and mutual confidence-building measures based on a step-by-step approach will help restore dialogue between the parties, paving the way for a genuine peace process that should resume as soon as possible". They also emphasised their support for the two-state solution and

concurred that the "building and expansion of settlements as well as confiscation of Palestinian structures and properties are a violation of international law and undermine the viability of the two-state solution".

A virtual meeting of the envoys to the Middle East Quartet—which consists of the EU, Russia, the UN, and the US—was held on 23 March. Following the meeting, the Quartet members issued a statement calling for a return to meaningful negotiations leading to a two-state solution. They also indicated that they had discussed the COVID-19 pandemic and emphasised "the need for the parties to refrain from unilateral actions that make a two-state solution more difficult to achieve".

The COVID-19 virus remains a significant challenge in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In February, active COVID-19 cases declined in Gaza, but they increased dramatically in the West Bank, according to OCHA. At the time of writing, over 2,500 people had died from COVID-19 in the Occupied Palestinian Territory since the start

of the pandemic. On 21 March, the Palestinians—who have been receiving vaccines from the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility and some UN member states—began their national vaccination campaign in Gaza and the West Bank.

From 1 January to 17 March, 290 Palestinian structures were demolished, displacing 443 people, according to OCHA. At the current pace, demolitions and resulting displacements will surpass last year's numbers (851 structures demolished, displacing 1,001 people).

Following a preliminary examination of almost five years, ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda announced on 3 March that the Court is launching a formal investigation into alleged war crimes committed in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, since 13 June 2014. (This was the date used by the Palestinian Authority when it referred the situation to the ICC in 2015.) The Palestinian Authority and the militant group Hamas welcomed the decision, which was

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION Security Council Resolution S/RES/2334 (23 December 2016) stated that Israeli settlements are a flagrant violation of international law and called for immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror. Security Council Letter S/2021/91 (28 January 2021) was a record of the quarterly debate on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question".

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

strongly criticised by Israel and the United States. On 21 March, Israel rescinded Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki's travel permit—which allows him to move freely across borders separating the occupied Palestinian territories, Israel and Jordan—following his meeting with ICC Prosecutor Bensouda on 18 March in the Hague to discuss the Court's investigation.

Palestinian legislative and presidential elections are scheduled for 22 May and 31 July, respectively. The Palestinian Central Elections Commission closed the voter registration process on 23 February. An estimated 93 percent of eligible Palestinian voters have registered for the polls. On 16-17 March, Fatah, Hamas and other Palestinian factions met in Cairo to discuss electoral preparations. During the meeting, the Palestinian factions resolved to hold the elections in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem in a fair and transparent manner.

The Council held its monthly meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question, on 25 March. In his briefing, Special Coordinator Wennesland expressed deep concern with the expansion of Israeli settlements and urged Israel to “cease the advancement of all settlement activity immediately”. He further indicated that the UN would “continue to support the Palestinian people, including through facilitating and supporting [electoral] preparations”.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is what role it can play in reinvigorating the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. The Trump administration had presented a peace plan that was widely rejected by Council members. With the change in US administration, there may be greater potential for considering a new approach. Several formats have been discussed in the Council as options for advancing the peace process, such as the Quartet, an expanded Quartet that includes key member states in the Middle East, and an international peace conference. The Council could consider requesting a special report from the Secretary-General outlining the viability of these different formats, how to integrate them into a coherent mediation effort and how to build trust and confidence between the parties.

Another key issue is how the Council, and the UN more broadly, can best support the preparations and holding of the Palestinian elections planned for later this year. Council members could consider an informal interactive dialogue with representatives of the Palestinian Authority to get their views on how the UN can best support the electoral process. (An informal interactive dialogue is an informal closed meeting that Council members hold with one or more non-Council member state or states, regional organisations or other invited speakers to exchange views on situations that concern them directly.)

Council Dynamics

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

The administration of US President Joe Biden, who took office on 20 January, has pledged to restore US support for humanitarian assistance and economic development programmes for the Palestinians, which had been cut by the previous US administration. The Biden administration has also expressed its commitment to the two-state solution, although it has expressed its concern with what it views as anti-Israel bias in the UN.

In recent months, several Council members have underscored the need for enhanced cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians in the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Some members have also urged Israel to provide enhanced vaccine access to the Palestinians.

There have also been calls by several Council members to revitalise the peace process. In this regard, a number of members are encouraged by recent efforts to reinvigorate the Middle East Quartet.

Sudan/South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council expects to receive a briefing on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), due by 15 April, as requested in resolution 2550.

The mandate of UNISFA and the mission's support for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM) expire on 15 May.

Key Recent Developments

Bilateral relations between Sudan and South Sudan continue to improve. Despite the continued rapprochement between the two countries, however, little progress has been made in resolving the final status of Abyei—the disputed area along the Sudan-South Sudan border—and the security situation there remains volatile. On 12 November 2020, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2550, renewing the mandate of UNISFA and the mission's support for the JBVMM until 15 May. It maintained the authorised

ceilings of 3,550 troops and 640 police. The resolution contained new language in relation to an exit strategy for UNISFA. It requested the Secretary-General to develop options for the responsible drawdown and exit of the mission and to submit a report on these no later than 31 March. The resolution noted that these options should prioritise the safety and security of civilians living in Abyei, account for the stability of the region, and include an option for a responsible drawdown and exit of UNISFA that is not limited by implementation of the Agreement on the

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN/SOUTH SUDAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2567 (12 March 2021) renewed the mandate of UNMISS for one year. S/RES/2559 (22 December 2020) was on the exit of UNAMID. S/RES/2550 (12 November 2020) renewed the mandate of UNISFA until 15 May 2021. **Secretary-General's Report S/2020/1019** (15 October 2020) was the Secretary-General's report on UNISFA. **Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8774** (12 November 2020) was the adoption of resolution 2550. **S/PV.8772** (22 October 2020) was a briefing on Sudan/South Sudan.

Sudan/South Sudan

Temporary Arrangements for the Administration and Security of the Abyei Area agreed to by the parties in June 2011. At the time of writing, the report on drawdown options was not available.

On 22 December 2020, the Council adopted resolution 2559 on the exit of the UN/AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). The resolution terminated the mandate of UNAMID on 31 December 2020 and requested the Secretary-General to complete the withdrawal of all uniformed and civilian UNAMID personnel by 30 June. On 12 March, the Council adopted resolution 2567, renewing the mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan for one year. (For more details, see our What's In Blue stories of 21 December 2020 and 11 March.)

The Council was last briefed on Abyei on 22 October 2020 by Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Parfait Onanga-Anyanga.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council to consider leading up to UNISFA's renewal in May is what modifications to make to the mandate and force structure in light of the situation on the ground. A likely option is for Council members to take into account the findings and recommendations of the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the mandate of UNISFA, due by 15 April. The report is expected to cover progress in relation to

several long-standing issues, including:

- engagement by the AU on political mediation of the Abyei dispute and Sudan and South Sudan border issues;
- recommendations on the most appropriate framework, structure or organisational mandate for the region to provide support to the parties that will enable further progress in resolving the status of Abyei and other border issues;
- efforts by the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa to support the AU and help the parties to establish temporary administrative and security arrangements for Abyei and to achieve a political solution to the status of Abyei;
- progress in increasing UNISFA's police component;
- appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission, as requested by the Council in May 2019, which at press time had not yet occurred due to ongoing discussions between Sudan and South Sudan on the subject;
- usage of Athony airport; and
- the issuance of visas to support implementation of the mandate.

Another option is to consider requesting an independent review of UNISFA in light of recent political developments between and within Sudan and South Sudan, as expressed in resolution 2550.

Also a key issue is what steps to take in relation to the drawdown and exit of the mission. These could be informed by the

Secretary-General's report on options for the drawdown of the mission, due by 31 March as requested in resolution 2550.

Council Dynamics

The US, as penholder on the issue, put forward language about considering an exit strategy for UNISFA during negotiations in November 2020, which was included in resolution 2550. In its explanation of vote following the resolution's adoption on 12 November 2020, the US said that "given the warming relations between the Sudan and South Sudan, a responsible exit strategy should be developed, and it must account for the continued security needs of the people of Abyei". The US also urged the AU to "play a key role" in this regard and to support the parties to achieve further political progress. The US has in the past pushed for troop reductions, asserted that UNISFA is persisting longer than intended for an interim force, and pressed for a viable exit strategy for the mission.

At the 22 October 2020 meeting, the three African members (Niger, South Africa and Tunisia) and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines made a joint statement emphasising the "continued relevance of the UNISFA mandate in stabilizing the Abyei area and along the border, and in bringing certainty amid these uncertain times". They also endorsed the extension of the mission's mandate.

The US is the penholder on Abyei.

Protection of Civilians: Protecting Critical Infrastructure

Expected Council Action

In April, Viet Nam plans to hold an open debate via videoconference (VTC) on "Critical Infrastructure: The Protection of Objects Indispensable to the Survival of the Civilian Population", as one of the signature events of its presidency. Viet Nam's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Pham Binh Minh, is expected to chair the meeting, and Secretary-General António Guterres may brief the Council. Other briefers will include ICRC President Peter Maurer and a representative of the International Peace Institute.

The Council may adopt a resolution.

Background

One of Viet Nam's priorities during its Security Council term (2020-2021) is the protection of civilians and essential infrastructure in conflict areas. The objective of the debate is to consider the current state of the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Article 54 of the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions (1977) states: "It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless

objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population...for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse party". The prohibition applies to food products, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies, and irrigation works. According to article 54, these objects cannot be denied "for whatever motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motive". In the context of the Security Council open debate,

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS Security Council Resolution S/RES/2341 (13 February 2017) was on the protection of civilian infrastructure against terrorist attacks. Security Council Meeting S/PV.7882 (13 February 2017) was the open debate initiated by Ukraine on the protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks. Secretary-General's Report S/2020/366 (6 May 2020) was the Secretary-General's annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Protection of Civilians: Protecting Critical Infrastructure

objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population will include those mentioned in the Geneva Conventions.

While it is rare for the Council to focus on this issue at the thematic level, the destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population has been mentioned numerous times in the Secretary-General's annual protection of civilians report, in country-specific Security Council resolutions and in connection with other thematic agenda items. In a briefing to the Security Council on 27 May 2020, Secretary-General Guterres said that his latest protection of civilians report published that month "showed little progress on the protection of civilians, and on compliance with international law in 2019". The report noted that direct or indiscriminate attacks by parties to conflict had damaged or destroyed homes, schools, hospitals, markets, places of worship, and essential civilian infrastructure, such as electrical and water systems. He added that protracted armed conflicts undermine efforts to repair and maintain infrastructure such as water facilities, which can also affect the environment and the ecosystem of water resources. In his report, the Secretary-General welcomed the increased attention paid by member states, international organisations and civil society to environmental damage caused by armed conflicts, and mentioned the open Arria-formula meeting held in December 2019 on the "Protection of the Environment during Armed Conflict" hosted by Estonia, Germany, Kuwait, and Peru.

The latest protection of civilians report also indicated that in many situations of conflict, attacks on schools included the burning of facilities and the destruction of school equipment. According to UNICEF, after ten years of war in Syria, one in three schools can no longer be used because they have been destroyed, damaged or are being used for military purposes; such attacks impede long-term development and have an impact on an entire generation's access to education.

During its presidency of the Security Council in February 2017, Ukraine held an open debate on the protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks, which was a priority issue for the country. The objective of the open debate was to

raise awareness about vulnerabilities and the impact of terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure—including international airports, nuclear plants, water supplies, and health facilities—while promoting discussion of preventive measures. At the beginning of the open debate, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2341 on the protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist threats. A key element of the resolution is enhancing international and regional cooperation to protect critical infrastructure.

Despite the Secretary-General's appeal for an immediate global ceasefire on 23 March 2020 to fight COVID-19 in conflict-affected countries, conflicts continue to rage across the world. During the April meeting, Council members are likely to reiterate the importance of protecting civilian populations and infrastructure, as well as humanitarian and health workers, medical facilities, and hospitals that continue to come under attack.

Security Council Report Staff

Karin Landgren
Executive Director

Shamala Kandiah Thompson
Chief Operating Officer

Paul Romita
Managing Editor

Vladimir Sesar
Development and Outreach Manager

Audrey Waysse
Operations Manager

Alina Entelis
Policy Analyst

Tiffany Jenkins
Policy Analyst

Lindiwe Knutson
Policy Analyst

Robert Schupp
Policy Analyst

Vanessa Tiede
Policy Analyst

Benjamin Villanti
Policy Analyst

Anna Haven
Publications Assistant

N'Dango Athie
Intern

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

Design Point Five, NY

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

Telephone +1 212 759 6394
Fax +1 212 759 4038
Web securitycouncilreport.org

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