

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

In June, Estonia will have the presidency. The Council may hold meetings in the Security Council chamber this month, although high-level meetings will most likely continue to be held by video-conference (VTC).

Estonia has chosen to hold three open debates: children and armed conflict, cybersecurity and working methods. The [children and armed conflict](#) open debate on the Secretary-General's annual report will be at ministerial level and will be chaired by the President of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid. Briefings are expected from a senior Secretariat official, UNICEF and a civil society representative.

The [cybersecurity](#) open debate will also be at ministerial level, with the Prime Minister of Estonia, Kaja Kallas, expected to chair the meeting. A briefing is anticipated from High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu. This will be the Council's first formal meeting on cybersecurity.

The annual open debate on [working methods](#) will feature briefings from the chair of the Informal Working Group on documentation and other procedural questions, Ambassador I. Rhonda King, and Loraine Sievers, co-author of "The Procedure of the UN Security Council (4th edition)".

The quarterly debate on [Afghanistan](#) will be held at ministerial level with Estonia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Eva-Maria Liimets, expected to chair the meeting. Deborah Lyons, the Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), is the anticipated briefer. An official from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and a civil society representative may also brief.

There will also be the annual briefing on cooperation between the [UN and the EU](#) with a briefing by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell.

Regarding African issues, the regular briefing on the UN mission in [Mali](#) (MINUSMA) is expected together with an adoption to renew the mission's mandate. Council members will be paying close attention to the situation following the recent coup and may hold further meetings as necessary.

On [Sudan](#), the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Integrated Transition

Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) and to receive briefings by the ICC Prosecutor and the chair of 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee.

An adoption is also anticipated to renew 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.

There are a number of other meetings on Africa scheduled this month:

- [CAR](#), on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA);
- [Central Africa region](#), on the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the implementation of the UN regional strategy to combat the Lord's Resistance Army;
- [DRC](#), on the renewal of the 1533 sanctions regime and its Group of Experts,
- [Somalia](#), briefing by the chair of the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee; and
- [South Sudan](#), on UNMISS.

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

Other Middle East issues this month include:

- [Golan Heights](#), quarterly briefing and renewal of UNDOF's mandate;
- [Iraq](#), on the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability Against Da'esh/ISIL Crimes (UNITAD);
- [Iran](#), on non-proliferation; and
- [Israel/Palestine](#), monthly briefing on recent developments.

A meeting is also expected on [Haiti](#).

In June, the Council will hold its semi-annual debate on the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal [Tribunals](#) (IRMCT).

The General Assembly is expected in June to [elect](#) five Security Council members for the 2022-2023 term.

The Council will also be closely watching developments in Myanmar and Tigray and may meet on the selection of the next Secretary-General.

29 May 2021
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Security Council Elections 2021

The 75th session of the UN General Assembly is scheduled to hold elections for the Security Council on 11 June for five non-permanent members of the Security Council for the term 2022-2023.

Background

The five seats available for election in 2021, according to the regular distribution among regions, will be as follows:

- two seats for the African Group (currently held by Niger and Tunisia);
- one seat for the Group of Asia and the Pacific Small Island Developing States (Asia-Pacific Group) (currently held by Viet Nam);¹
- one seat for the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRU-LAC, currently held by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines); and
- one seat for the Eastern European Group (currently held by Estonia).

The Western European and Others Group (WEOG) is not contesting any seats this year, as its two seats, held by Ireland and Norway through 2022, come up for election every other year. The five new members elected this year will take up their seats on 1 January 2022 and will serve until 31 December 2023.

Six member states—Albania, Brazil, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Gabon, Ghana, and the United Arab Emirates—are currently running for the five available seats. The DRC, Gabon and Ghana are contesting the two African Group seats, while the other three candidates are running unopposed. Since 2010, 78% of races for Council seats have been uncontested.

Five out of the six candidates have served on the Council previously: Brazil has served ten times; Gabon and Ghana both three times; the DRC twice; and the United Arab Emirates once. Albania has never served on the Council.

The table below shows the number of seats available by region in the 2021 election, the declared candidates, and their prior terms on the Council.

REGION	SEATS AVAILABLE IN 2021	MEMBER STATES RUNNING AND PREVIOUS TERMS ON THE COUNCIL
Africa	2	The DRC (1982-1983, 1990-1991); Gabon (1978-1979, 1998-1999, 2010-2011) and Ghana (1962-1963, 1986-1987, 2006-2007)
Asia-Pacific	1	United Arab Emirates (1986-1987)
Latin America and Caribbean	1	Brazil (1946-1947, 1951-1952, 1954-1955, 1963-1964, 1967-1968, 1988-1989, 1993-1994, 1998-1999, 2004-2005, 2010-2011)
Eastern Europe	1	Albania (never served)

Voting Procedures

Even if a country is running on a “clean slate”—that is, unopposed—it must obtain the votes of two-thirds of the member states present and voting at the General Assembly session in order to secure a seat on the Council. This means that a minimum of 129 positive votes are required

to win a seat if all 193 UN member states are present and voting.

Election to the Council, as with other principal organs of the UN, requires formal balloting even if candidates have been endorsed by their regional group and are running unopposed. In theory, a member state running unopposed might not garner the requisite votes in the General Assembly in the first round, and be challenged in subsequent rounds by a new candidate. This is possible, but unlikely.

There have been several instances in which extended rounds of voting were required to fill a contested seat, however. Such situations have usually been resolved when one of the contenders withdraws, or a compromise candidate is elected. Exceptionally, countries competing for a seat have decided to split the term between them, but the only time this has happened since 1966 was in 2016, when Italy and the Netherlands agreed to split the 2017-2018 term.

Potential Council Dynamics in 2022

The ongoing tensions among the P-5 can be expected to persist and colour Council dynamics in 2022, making it difficult for the Council to gain traction on Israel/Palestine, Myanmar, Syria, and Ukraine, among other issues.

At the same time, widespread agreement is likely to continue on the fundamental value of UN peace operations. While there are disagreements about particular mandate elements and donor concerns about the cost of peace operations, most mandate resolutions continue to be adopted unanimously. This seems unlikely to change dramatically.

As troop contributing countries, the African candidates—the DRC, Gabon and Ghana—can be expected to take keen interest in the ongoing discussions about the Council’s role in designing and overseeing peacekeeping mandates, including efforts to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. The need for more predictable, flexible and sustainable funding for AU peace operations is a longstanding concern—highlighted by Gabon during its campaign—that could be raised by African members again in 2022. In this regard, following the adoption of resolution 2568 reauthorising the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in March 2021, the African Council members and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (the A3 plus one) issued a joint explanation of vote in which they expressed their disappointment that UN assessed contributions were not included in the resolution as one of the possible options for more secure funding for AMISOM.

Tensions over the Council’s scope of discussion—and action—can be expected to persist in 2022. Some members regard issues such as food security and climate change, for example, as part and parcel of the maintenance of international peace and security. Most of the current Council line-up, and aspiring members such as Albania, Gabon, Ghana, and the UAE, espouse a role for the Council on climate change and security matters. On the other hand, China, Russia, India, and aspiring member Brazil have long had reservations about the Council’s work on this issue.

Efforts to fight terrorism and violent extremism feature in the campaign platforms of several candidate countries. Ghana is keen to forestall the expansion of terrorism from the Sahel region, while Gabon has also indicated an interest in this issue, possibly spurred by the threat in its own sub-region. In their campaigns, Albania and the UAE have also noted the importance of countering violent extremism.

1. Arab countries are a sub-group within the Asia-Pacific Group. The UAE is running unopposed for the single Asia-Pacific Group seat this year. It will also fill the “Arab Swing Seat”, which alternates every odd calendar year between the Asia-Pacific Group and the African Group. The Arab Swing Seat is being vacated by Tunisia on 31 December 2021.

Security Council Elections 2021

Earnest efforts to implement the women, peace and security agenda are likely to continue, with several of the candidate countries having presented this as a priority of their Council tenures. In 2022, elected members Ireland and Mexico are expected to continue as the chairs of the Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security, which has been very active to date in 2021. Among the permanent members, the UK, France and the US can be expected to remain strong proponents of this issue. Other member states, such as China and Russia, will probably continue to maintain that this agenda item should not be expanded to post-conflict situations and to emphasise that the issue of gender equality should not be under the Council's purview.

Depending on the trajectory of international efforts to emerge from the pandemic, the Council may continue to address the

impacts of COVID-19 with implications for international peace and security. During the past year, several Council members have held signature events during their presidencies focusing on the pandemic, and the Council has adopted two resolutions (S/RES/2532 and S/RES/2565) and one presidential statement (S/PRST/2021/10) seeking to address its effects. Many members have lamented the absence of face-to-face meetings and in-person diplomacy occasioned by New York City's COVID regulations. As the city recovers, members are increasingly able to meet in person to negotiate texts and discuss thorny issues. Into 2022, Council members can be expected to consider whether or not to retain any of the COVID-necessitated working methods adopted since March 2020.

Status Update since our May Forecast

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Security Council held its semi-annual open debate on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) via videoconference (VTC) on 4 May (S/2021/436). During his briefing, High Representative for BiH Valentin Inzko observed that BiH essentially remains a frozen conflict, while political leaders push nationalistic agendas. Inzko resigned from his position as High Representative on 27 May.

Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Security Council members held VTC consultations on "The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question" on 10 and 12 May. An open VTC debate and a discussion under "any other business" were held on this issue on 16 May and 18 May, respectively. In a press statement agreed and issued on 22 May, the Security Council called for "full adherence to the ceasefire" of 20 May that ended the 11-day round of hostilities between Israel and Hamas (SC/14527). On 27 May, an in-person meeting was also held on this issue in the Council chamber, featuring remote briefings by Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland; Philippe Lazzarini, the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); and Rashid Khalidi of Columbia University (S/PV.8782).

Ukraine

On 5 May, Russia hosted an Arria-formula meeting via VTC on the situation in Ukraine entitled "Odessa seven years after: Ne nazism and violent nationalism as drivers of conflict in Ukraine". The briefers were: Dmitry Fuchedzhi, former deputy Chief of Odessa's Regional Interior Ministry; Alexey Albu, a former member of the Odessa Regional Council; Anna Tuv, a resident of Gorlovka township in the Donbas region; Sergey Kirichuk, a participant in the 2 May 2014 events in the Odessa Trade Union building; and Rostislav Ishchenko, a political expert and analyst. Ambassador Vassily Nebenizia (Russia) provided opening and closing remarks at the meeting. After the meeting, Council members Estonia, Ireland, France, Norway, the UK and the US, as well as non-Council members Belgium and Germany, issued a joint statement in which they said that Russia had used the meeting to promote a false narrative about the

situation in Ukraine. While expressing condemnation for the loss of lives in Odessa on 2 May 2014, they urged Russia to stop politicising human tragedies.

Upholding Multilateralism and the UN-Centred International System

On 7 May, the Security Council held a high-level VTC briefing on "Upholding multilateralism and the UN-centred international system" (S/2021/456). Council president China circulated a concept note in advance of the meeting (S/2021/416). Wang Yi, China's State Councillor and Minister for Foreign Affairs, chaired the meeting. Volkan Bozkir, the president of the General Assembly, briefed.

Iraq

On 10 May, the Council held an open VTC briefing and closed consultations on the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) (S/2021/460). Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, Special Adviser and head of UNITAD, said in his briefing that "a landmark moment has been reached in our work". He emphasised that UNITAD has established clear evidence that ISIL committed genocide against the Yazidi as a religious group. On 12 May, there was an in-person Arria-formula meeting entitled "Delivering accountability through innovation and partnership: Harnessing technology to deliver justice for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide", which was organised by Iraq, the Netherlands, the UAE, the UK, and the US. The meeting highlighted UNITAD's approach as a model for international accountability efforts. In addition to Khan, briefers included: Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Murad; Amal Clooney, Counsel for Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) victims; Daryn Reicherter, the Director of the Human Rights in Trauma Mental Health Laboratory at Stanford University; and Justin Spelhaug, Vice-President for the Tech for Social Impact Group at Microsoft Corporation.

On 27 May, the Security Council adopted resolution 2576 renewing the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) for one year.

Status Update since our May Forecast

Colombia

On 11 May, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2574, which expanded the mandate of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia to include monitoring compliance with the sentences handed down by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP).

Impact of Emerging Technologies on International Peace and Security

On 17 May, there was a virtual Arria-formula meeting entitled “The impact of emerging technologies on international peace and security”. China organised the meeting with Council members Kenya and Mexico, and in cooperation with non-Council members Egypt, South Africa, and the UAE. Briefings were provided by: Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs; Maria-Francesca Spadolisano, the Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and Officer-in-Charge of the Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Technology; and Vincent Boulanin, Senior Researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). The organisers of the meeting sought to increase awareness of the impact of emerging technologies on international peace and security and examine efforts to prevent and mitigate potential risks caused by their use.

Lebanon

On 11 May, Security Council members held closed VTC consultations on the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004), which called for the disarming of all militias and the extension of government control over all Lebanese territory. Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed on the latest Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of resolution 1559 (S/2021/396).

G5 Sahel

On 18 May, Security Council members held a VTC briefing, followed by VTC consultations, on the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) (S/2021/484). Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix presented the Secretary-General’s latest report on the force (S/2021/442). Council members also heard a briefing from Chadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Chérif Mahamat Zene, on behalf of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel); the Force Commander of the FC-G5S, General Oumarou Namata Gazama of Niger; and Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Chair Ambassador Mohamed Fathi Ahmed Edrees (Egypt). During the consultations, Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare briefed on the potential activities of the proposed UN office to support the FC-G5S.

Peace and Security in Africa (Post-Pandemic Recovery)

On 19 May, Security Council members held a high-level VTC open debate on “Addressing the root causes of conflict while promoting post-pandemic recovery in Africa”. UN Secretary-General António Guterres; Moussa Faki Mahamat, the Chairperson of the AU Commission; and Achim Steiner, the Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), briefed at the meeting, which was one of China’s signature events during its Council presidency. The Security Council adopted a presidential statement stressing the need for greater support to African countries, especially those affected by conflict, to recover from the pandemic (S/PRST/2021/10). The statement expressed concern that African countries had only received two percent of vaccine doses administered globally.

Safety and Security of Peacekeepers

On 24 May, the Security Council held an open videoconference (VTC) debate on “United Nations peacekeeping operations: Improving safety and security of peacekeepers”. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare, and Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security Gilles Michaud briefed the Council. The meeting focused on how to better implement resolution 2518 of 30 March 2020, which addresses capacity-building and the safety and security of peacekeepers. The Council adopted a presidential statement including language on the threat posed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to peacekeepers, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on peacekeeping operations, and the vaccination rollout to peacekeepers.

Protection of Civilians

On 15 May, Security Council members held the annual open debate on the Protection of Civilians (POC) via VTC. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock presented the Secretary-General’s annual report on POC, which focused on the implementation of resolution 2286 on the protection of health workers and health infrastructure in conflict. ICRC President Peter Maurer appealed to the international community to improve adherence to international humanitarian law and to resolution 2286. Orzala Nemat, the Director of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, spoke on civil society participation in the Afghan peace process. Council members reflected on the status of POC and condemned attacks against health-care, humanitarian personnel, and on civilian infrastructure. Some also highlighted specific country situations, including Afghanistan, Colombia, Ethiopia (Tigray), Myanmar, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 10 May, Security Council members issued a press statement condemning the attack on the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) that occurred on 10 May near Beni in North Kivu, resulting in the death of one Malawian peacekeeper.

Belarus

On 26 May, Estonia, France and Ireland supported by Norway, the UK, and the US requested a meeting on Belarus under “any other business”. The catalyst for the meeting was the 23 May diversion to Minsk of a Ryanair passenger plane by the Belorussian authorities and the subsequent detention of Belorussian dissident journalist Roman Protasevich along with Sofia Sapega. After the meeting, Council members Estonia, France, Ireland, Norway, the UK, and the US and non-Council members Germany and Belgium issued a joint statement in which they condemned the forced landing of the Ryanair flight and called for immediate release of Protasevich and Sapega. They also called on the International Civil Aviation Organization to investigate this incident.

Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK)

On 27 May, the chair of the 1718 Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Mona Juul (Norway), briefed Council members in consultations on the 90-day report on the committee’s work.

Mali

Expected Council Action

In June, the Council is due to renew the mandate of the UN Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) before its 30 June expiry. It is also expected to hold a briefing and consultations on the situation in Mali with Special Representative and head of MINUSMA El-Ghassim Wane.

Key Recent Developments

The situation in Mali remains fluid, as the country's fragile political transition, set up following the August 2020 coup d'état, was interrupted by a second coup d'état on 24 May.

Ahead of this new crisis, Mali's transitional authorities on 15 April unveiled the upcoming electoral calendar for restoring an elected government within the 18-month transition period ending in March 2022 that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) brokered last year. The constitutional referendum will take place on 31 October, followed by elections for regional and local positions on 26 December and for the presidency and legislative seats on 27 February 2022, with possible second rounds on 13 and 20 March.

From 9 to 12 May, the ECOWAS mediator for Mali, Goodluck Jonathan, undertook an evaluation mission. While the mission communiqué noted "remarkable progress", it expressed concern about the prioritisation of reforms, the urgency of consensus on the choice of the election management body, the timelines of the territorial divisions, and respect for human rights and the rule of law. It also noted concern about inclusivity in the conduct of the transition.

On 14 May, transitional Prime Minister Moctar Ouane submitted his resignation and that of his government. President Bah N'Daw reappointed Ouane that same day, instructing him to form a new "broad-based" government. The reshuffle followed recent demands for the government's dissolution by the June 5 Movement, which organised months of protests last year against President Ibrahim Bouba Karé Keita before he was ousted in last year's coup. Reflecting renewed social unrest, the prominent National Union of Malian workers began a nationwide strike on 17 May.

On 24 May, Ouane announced the formation of the new government. The military, which has maintained a strong role in the transition, retained the key ministries of defence, security, territorial administration, and national reconciliation, though two officers formerly leading these portfolios were replaced. Soon after the government's announcement, the military arrested N'Daw, Ouane, and the newly appointed minister of defence, detaining them at a military base in Kati just outside Bamako.

The next day, transitional vice-president Colonel Assimi Goïta, leader of the August 2020 coup, announced that he had taken power. In a statement, Goïta maintained that he had not been consulted in the government reshuffle and blamed N'Daw and Ouane for nationwide strikes and protests. He said elections would go ahead as scheduled. On 26 May, N'Daw and Ouane resigned. They were released later that night.

The coup triggered international condemnation. A 24 May joint statement by the local transition monitoring committee based in Mali, comprised of the AU, ECOWAS, MINUSMA, and other representatives of the international community including France, Germany, the UK, the US, and the EU, demanded the "immediate and

unconditional release" of the transitional leaders. The committee further called for the transition to "resume its course and be concluded on schedule" and stressed that the "reckless action" risks "weakening the mobilization of the international community in favor of Mali". The EU threatened sanctions. An ECOWAS delegation, led by Jonathan, deployed to Mali on 25 May to resolve the crisis.

Council members held consultations with Wane, who briefed from Bamako, on 26 May. In a press statement, they strongly condemned the arrest of the president, prime minister and other officials, calling for their immediate release. The statement further affirmed members' support to the civilian-led transition and called for its immediate resumption, maintaining its 18-month timeline. It added, "imposing a change of transitional leadership by force, including through forced resignations, is unacceptable".

In other developments, unidentified individuals assassinated the leader of the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), Sidi Brahim Ould Sidati, on 13 April in Bamako. His killing triggered concerns about the impact of his death on the implementation of the 2015 Mali Peace and Reconciliation Agreement between the government and signatory armed groups in the north.

Insecurity continues to prevail in the north and centre. On 2 April, the Al-Qaida affiliate Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin launched an attack on the MINUSMA base in Aguelhok, Kidal region. Four MINUSMA peacekeepers were killed and 26 wounded while defending the base; over 40 assailants were reportedly killed.

Amid the deteriorating security situation across the Sahel, Security Council members recently restarted discussions about establishing a UN office to support the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S). The Secretary-General first recommended creating a support office in 2017 as a way to provide the force with more predictable and sustainable funding. Formed to combat terrorist and criminal groups and comprising units from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, the FC-G5S currently receives MINUSMA operational assistance, such as rations and fuel, and logistical support to units operating in Mali. The EU reimburses MINUSMA for this assistance.

At a 6 April Council briefing on Mali, Niger announced on behalf of the "A3 plus one" (Kenya, Niger, Tunisia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) that they would propose a draft resolution in June to establish the support office. The Secretary-General's 10 May report on the FC-G5S included an assessment of MINUSMA support, which noted that different partners consulted for the evaluation considered MINUSMA's support critical for sustaining the FC-G5S' activities but that the existing challenges warrant a new approach. During consultations on the FC-G5S on 18 May, Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare briefed members about the potential activities of a UN support office.

Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council is to renew the mandate of MINUSMA and to consider how to update it in light of the past year's developments, in particular the political transition and the security situation. Last year, in an October 2020 presidential statement, the Council requested that MINUSMA support the transition within "its mandate and existing resources".

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 transitional arrangements in Mali. Secretary-General's Report S/2021/442 (10 May 2021) was a report on the FC-G5S. Security Council Press Statement SC/14532 (26 May 2021) strongly condemned the arrest of Mali's transitional president and prime minister.

Mali

Resolving the current crisis and restoring a civilian-led transition is a key issue. Ahead of the new coup d'état, there was already concern about the fragile state of the transition and whether the authorities could undertake key reforms, including electoral decisions, to hold elections within the transition calendar.

Terrorist activity in north and central Mali is another key issue. There is also intercommunal violence and violence by ethnic militias, largely fuelled by the presence of terrorist groups and insecurity. A dire humanitarian situation and the fight against impunity for violations of human rights, including by Malian and international security forces during counter-terrorism operations, are related issues. Additionally, there is concern about terrorist activity spreading to southern Mali.

MINUSMA's ability to help stabilise central Mali and to protect civilians is another related issue. When the Council mandated that MINUSMA focus on the situation in the centre as its "second strategic priority" in 2019, it did not authorise an increase in the troop ceiling. The UN subsequently developed an adaptation plan to make MINUSMA more mobile and provide it with more specialised capacities and units. But the mission has faced challenges, including difficulty generating critical air assets.

Another key issue is MINUSMA's support to the FC-G5S. Council consideration of this role could be affected by parallel negotiations on creating the support office if the "A3 plus one" push forward with their initiative since the office, if established, would take over such activities from MINUSMA.

For MINUSMA's re-authorisation the Council may retain the two strategic priorities: to support implementation of the 2015 peace agreement—which is its "primary" strategic priority—and to support efforts to stabilise central Mali and protect civilians, the mission's "second" strategic priority. The Council may subsume within its primary strategic priority MINUSMA support for Mali's political transition. Another option is to instead make support for the transition a new, separate priority. Separately, the Council could consider imposing sanctions on perpetrators of the coup if they impede the restoration of civilian leadership of the transition.

Building on the creation of benchmarks since 2019 for implementing the peace agreement and stabilising the situation in the centre, the

Council could also add to the mandate benchmarks for the political transition. It may do so by drawing from the benchmarks and objectives suggested in the Secretary-General's roadmap, presented last March, on conditions to be met for a possible MINUSMA exit strategy.

Regarding central Mali's continued instability, the Council may request an assessment from the Secretary-General on the situation and the MINUSMA adaptation plan with recommendations on how to improve MINUSMA's support in the centre and its ability to protect civilians. Until the Council agrees on a support office for the FC-G5S, it is likely to maintain the current support model involving MINUSMA.

Council Dynamics

Following last year's coup d'état, the Council sought to support ECOWAS' mediation efforts. Once a political transition was agreed, the Council welcomed the new arrangements in its October 2020 presidential statement, setting out its expectations that the authorities should 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. Members repeated their expectation that the transition be completed within 18 months, and their support for regional mediation in their 26 May press statement.

Mandate negotiations on MINUSMA in recent years have been marked by a US push for a consolidation of the mission. This was in large part driven by the previous US administration's desire to cut back spending on UN peacekeeping, so this dynamic is likely to be less pronounced this year. Overall, members often raise concerns about the slow progress in implementing the peace agreement and political transition.

The question over how to improve international support for the FC-G5S divides the Council. The "A3 plus one" and France, which is a strong proponent of the force, have made clear that they will pursue a resolution authorising a support office. The US and the UK continue to oppose the proposal, as they did in 2017 when the Council debated the recommendation, because they object to the use of UN assessed contributions to fund non-UN missions and prefer bilateral support of the FC-G5S.

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

Libya

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council is expected to renew the authorisation of member states, acting nationally or through regional organisations, to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya, bound to or from Libya, that they have reasonable grounds to believe are violating the arms embargo. The current authorisation expires on 5 June.

The authorisation given by resolution 2546 (to inspect vessels suspected of migrant smuggling or human trafficking) expires on 2 October.

Measures related to the illicit export of petroleum from Libya adopted in resolution 2571 expire on 30 July 2022, and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, also adopted in resolution 2571, expires on 15 July 2022. The mandate of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) expires on 15 September.

UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2526](#) (5 June 2020) renewed for 12 months the vessel inspection authorisation on the high seas off the coast of Libya. [S/RES/2292](#) (14 June 2016) established an 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/1970](#) (26 February 2011) imposed an arms embargo on Libya and established a sanctions committee. [Secretary-General's Report S/2021/434](#) (5 May 2021) was on the implementation of resolution 2526. [Security Council Letters S/2021/292](#) (26 March 2021) contained the meeting record of the Council meeting on UNSMIL and Libya sanctions, held on 24 March. [S/2021/229](#) (8 March 2021) contained the Panel of Experts' latest report on Libya. [S/2020/1178](#) (7 December 2020) was a letter from Germany, transmitting a response from the EU delegation over IRINI's inspection dispute with Turkey. [S/2020/1156](#) (1 December 2020) was a letter from Turkey objecting to an inspection conducted by IRINI.

Libya

Key Recent Developments

The inspection authorisation, first put into effect in resolution 2292 in 2016, was last renewed for another 12 months, without changes, in resolution 2526 of 5 June 2020. The authorisation also allows for member states to seize and dispose of arms and ammunition found during the inspection of these vessels. The aim is to support the implementation of the Council's arms embargo on Libya, which was established in resolution 1970 in 2011.

On 23 October 2020, the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (also known as the Libyan National Army) and the Government of National Accord signed a ceasefire agreement. Following the adoption of a “political roadmap” in November 2020 by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum—which calls for parliamentary and presidential elections to be held on 24 December 2021. A new Government of National Unity (GNU) was sworn in on 15 March to serve as an interim governing authority in the lead-up to the elections. In his 5 May report on the implementation of resolution 2526, the Secretary-General noted that six months after the signing of the ceasefire agreement, violations of the arms embargo persisted.

The EU military operation in the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED operation IRINI) was the only regional arrangement acting under the above-mentioned authorisations during the period covered by the Secretary-General's report. Operation IRINI was launched on 31 March 2020 to implement the arms embargo through the use of aerial, satellite and maritime assets, as mandated in resolution 1970.

IRINI is the successor of EUNAVFOR MED operation SOPHIA, whose primary goal was to disrupt human smuggling and trafficking networks pursuant to resolution 2240 of 9 October 2015. IRINI's primary role is inspecting vessels that violate the arms embargo as mandated in resolution 2292. Furthermore, it monitors Libya's illicit oil exports as outlined in resolution 2441, and, like SOPHIA, IRINI is tasked with disrupting networks of human smuggling in the central Mediterranean region in line with resolution 2240. IRINI also provides capacity-building and training for the Libyan coast guard and navy.

As at 18 May, IRINI had conducted 3,244 hailings in the Central Mediterranean, including 122 friendly approaches and 13 vessel inspections that resulted in one cargo seizure. Three inspections were denied by flag states.

In his 21 May briefing to the Council, Special Envoy to Libya and head of UNSMIL Ján Kubiš stressed the need to respect and support the ceasefire and called for full compliance with the arms embargo. He further acknowledged the important role of IRINI in that regard.

On 22 November 2020, IRINI inspected a Turkish-flagged container ship, Merchant Vessel (MV) ROSELINE A, which was bound for Misrata in Libya. According to IRINI's official account, it had attempted to seek the consent of the flag state, but having received no answer from Turkey, its inspectors boarded the vessel. IRINI noted in a 23 November statement that “when the flag state made it clear that it denied the permission to inspect the vessel, Operation IRINI suspended the activities during which no evidence of illicit material was found on board”. In a 1 December 2020 letter to the Security Council, Turkey submitted a complaint over IRINI's inspection of MV ROSELINE A. In the letter, Turkey referred to the inspection as “arbitrary”, demanded that IRINI

change its method of communication, and rejected IRINI's “self-proclaimed” deadlines. The EU delegation to the UN responded in an 7 December 2020 letter to the Security Council that IRINI undertakes “good-faith efforts” when obtaining the consent of the vessel's flag state by contacting its diplomats prior to any inspections. The EU delegation further requested Turkey to designate new or additional contact points if they wish.

On 26 March, IRINI was renewed by the European Council until 31 March 2023. The renewal enhanced the practical arrangements for the disposal of items seized by IRINI. The head of IRINI commended the instrumental role that IRINI played in creating the latest positive momentum in Libya. The Secretary-General underscored in his report that the renewal of resolution 2526 can help facilitate a conducive environment to further augment political progress, mitigate violence against civilians in Libya and prevent the proliferation of arms in Libya as well as in the region.

Key Issues and Options

The immediate issue for the Council is the reauthorisation for member states to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya that they have reasonable grounds to believe are violating the arms embargo.

The persistent non-compliance with the arms embargo—which was noted by the final report of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, covering the period from 25 October 2019 to 24 January—is an ongoing issue for the Council. The Council is also addressing the security threats in the Sahel region and the arms flow from Libya to its neighbouring countries.

Council members individually could use their influence on parties to uphold the ceasefire agreement, foster confidence-building measures and respect the arms embargo.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Last year's reauthorisation, resolution 2526, was adopted unanimously. It seems that during the negotiations, Russia was the only member that expressed scepticism around whether IRINI's mandate is within the scope of the Council's authorisation. During the 24 March Libya briefing, Russia stressed that there were “discrepancies” in the legitimacy of IRINI's actions.

On several occasions in 2020, Libya's permanent representative to the UN expressed his delegation's opposition to operation IRINI. This year a shift may be seen in Libya's position on IRINI in light of the positive developments related to the formation of the GNU. Libya's Ambassador to Rome conveyed the GNU's interest in strengthening cooperation with the EU during his latest visit to IRINI's headquarters in Rome. IRINI is also expected to resume its capacity-building training for the Libyan coast guard.

Reports by the Panel of Experts assisting the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee indicate that a number of member states, including Council members, are involved in breaches of UN sanctions, including the arms embargo.

The UK is the penholder on Libya, and France and Estonia will draft this year's authorisation renewal. Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti (India) chairs the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee.

Sudan

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council is due to renew the mandate of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) before its expiration on 3 June in accordance with resolution 2524. The Council will receive the semi-annual briefing of the ICC Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, related to the Court's work on Darfur. The chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia), is expected to provide the quarterly briefing on the committee's work.

Key Recent Developments

There has been limited progress in advancing key elements of the political transition and the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement (JPA), according to the Secretary-General's most recent 90-day report. Following several postponements, state governors have yet to be appointed (with the exception of the governor of Darfur, appointed on 29 April) and the Transitional Legislative Council has not yet been formed. Further critical outstanding tasks under the JPA include those involving security arrangements and the establishment of ceasefire and security committees. Delays in establishing a joint protection force and the absence of integrated, united security forces continue to affect stability and the protection of civilians. Efforts to engage with the non-signatories of the JPA are ongoing. On 28 March, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the commander of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction (SPLM-N Al-Hilu) signed a declaration of principles affirming their engagement in negotiations in Juba, due to commence at the end of May.

Regarding the security situation, intercommunal clashes remain a major source of insecurity in Sudan, especially in Darfur, where 170 people were killed and over 230 injured during the reporting period, as noted in the Secretary-General's report. Following the outbreak of violence in El Geneina in early April, concerns were raised over the transitional government's inaction to restore order and immediately deploy protection forces in Darfur as stipulated in the National Plan for Civilian Protection, transmitted to the Council in May 2020. The Secretary-General's report calls on the transitional government "to do more to effectively protect its civilians". The situation of more than 2.5 million internally displaced persons and the economic and humanitarian situations remain significant challenges.

UNITAMS has reached its initial operational capacity, with 12 national staff and 62 international staff as of 1 May. According to the Secretary-General's report, the mission plans to support the Sudanese Police Force, in line with the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy. In accordance with the mission's electoral assistance mandate and following the national authorities' request for support, an electoral needs assessment mission visited Sudan from 5 to 23 April and is expected to submit its recommendations to Sudanese partners. The Secretary-General's report contains 20 benchmarks with 107 corresponding indicators designed to measure progress in the delivery of nine strategic priorities across UNITAMS' mandate. (The request for benchmarks was made in resolution 2524.) According to the report, UNITAMS will work with the UN country team and the transitional government to establish a baseline and targets for the benchmarks in the second quarter of 2021 to begin tracking progress, with potential adjustments to some indicators. The mission

will also seek to establish a robust monitoring and data collection mechanism on progress against the benchmarks.

The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) conducted a three-day mission to Sudan from 29 March to 1 April. In a 13 April communiqué, the PSC took note, among other things, of the request by the transitional government for support in the organisation of a constitutional conference and elections. It also "expresse[d] concern over the security challenges exacerbated by the withdrawal of UNAMID troops in Darfur and urge[d] the transitional government of Sudan to prioritize protection of civilians".

Regarding the regional situation, tensions have escalated over the eastern border in the Fashaqah area between Sudan and Ethiopia, resulting in sporadic clashes. Tensions also continue over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

On 20 May, the Council received a briefing on UNITAMS from Special Representative for Sudan and head of UNITAMS Volker Perthes. He expressed concern over delays in the political transition, intercommunal conflict and violence against women. He told the Council that UNITAMS is ready to assist the transitional government on security sector reforms and that the mission's support for the National Plan for Civilian Protection focuses on prevention, protection and creating an enabling protective environment, including strengthening the judiciary. UNITAMS has deployed three teams to Darfur to support the Sudanese police in community policing, investigation and addressing gender-based violence, he said.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue is assessing the role of UNITAMS across the four strategic objectives of the mission as contained in resolution 2524, namely assisting Sudan's political transition; supporting peace processes and implementing future peace agreements; assisting peacebuilding, civilian protection and rule of law in Darfur and the Two Areas (that is, South Kordofan and Blue Nile); and supporting the mobilisation of economic and development assistance and coordination of humanitarian assistance. A related issue for the Council is to consider what changes to the mandate, if any, are necessary ahead of its expiration on 3 June. In doing so, Council members will be informed by the 90-day report of the Secretary-General.

A likely option is for the Council to renew the mandate of UNITAMS for one year, maintaining the four strategic objectives of the mission while making some adjustments. In doing so, Council members might consider language to further prioritise the mandated tasks within each of the four areas. In particular, this language could include highlighting support for the implementation of the JPA and the transitional government's National Plan for Civilian Protection as well as advisory and capacity-building support for security authorities. Another option is to incorporate the benchmarks and indicators contained in the Secretary-General's report.

Another key issue that Council members will follow closely is the situation in Darfur, particularly in light of the drawdown and exit of UNAMID currently underway, as set out in resolution 2559.

Council Dynamics

Despite the unanimous adoption of resolution 2524 in June 2020 establishing UNITAMS, there were clear disagreements during

Sudan

negotiations, including over the provision of technical assistance in the areas of rule of law and security sector reform and reporting on the human rights situation. There were also strong differences about the mission's potential tasks relating to the protection of civilians. While several members believed that the mission should have a mandate to protect civilians, others (Russia, China and the three African members among them) opposed the inclusion of such tasks in the mandate, as did the transitional government. (For more, see our *What's In Blue* story of 3 June 2020.)

At the 20 May briefing, several Council members referred to the upcoming mandate renewal of UNITAMS. Russia called on Sudan

to provide comments on desired goals for the mission, and China expressed the hope that the mission will give due priority to the needs and wishes of the host country. The US emphasised its support for prioritising key tasks in the mission's mandate, and Norway highlighted clarifying the role ahead for the mission. Members such as Estonia, Ireland and Mexico welcomed the benchmarks presented in the Secretary-General's report as useful in assessing the progress of the mission.

The UK is the penholder on Sudan, and the US is the penholder on Sudan sanctions. Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia) chairs the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee.

Syria

Expected Council Action

In June, 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

Presidential elections in Syria, which were announced on 18 April and held on 26 May, have dominated the country's political situation. President Bashar al-Assad, who has led Syria since July 2000, ran against Abdallah Salloum Abdallah, a former Syrian minister from 2016 to 2020, and Mahmoud Marei, who represents the Democratic National Opposition Front, an entity that includes political opposition figures allowed to operate by the Syrian government. On 3 May, Syria's Constitutional Court announced that it had approved the candidacies of Abdallah and Marei, as well as Assad, though it rejected 48 other candidacies for "failing to meet constitutional and legal requirements". Potential candidates were required to fulfil numerous criteria, many of which have automatically disqualified prominent opposition figures from running. Syrians abroad began voting on 20 May; election day voting did not take place in areas outside government control. At the time of writing, results for the elections were unavailable, though it was widely understood that Assad would be re-elected.

Briefing the Council on 26 May, Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen said that the elections were "not part of the political process called for in resolution 2254" and, as such, he reminded the Council that he did not have a mandate to become involved in the presidential election. Resolution 2254, which was adopted unanimously in 2015, calls for "free and fair elections, pursuant to [a] new constitution, to be...administered under supervision of the UN". He further stated that "it is a source of regret that, despite our best efforts, there has been little progress" in advancing a political solution to the conflict. During the meeting, some Council members—including Estonia, France, Ireland, Norway, the UK and the US—criticised the elections, noting that they failed to conform with resolution 2254. France, in particular, said that the elections were "not credible", while the US called them "illegitimate". These views largely echo

a 5 May Group of Seven (G7) ministerial statement, which called for the Syrian government to engage in steps in line with resolution 2254, including organising elections under UN supervision, and noting that "only when a credible political process is firmly under way would [the G7] consider assisting with the reconstruction of Syria". During the 26 May Council meeting, however, Russia positively highlighted the organisation of presidential elections, maintaining that they are "fully in line with Syria's constitution and do not run counter to the provisions of resolution 2254".

In anticipation of the 26 May presidential elections, international media reported on 11 May that over 400 people, mostly those detained for engaging in online criticism of the Syrian government, had been released from prison. On 2 May, President Assad granted pardons to people who had been found guilty of crimes such as smuggling, drug abuse and foreign currency trading. At the time of writing, the number of those pardoned was unclear. According to a 27 November 2018 report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, arbitrary detention throughout Syria has been perpetrated by all parties on the ground, but "nowhere has the phenomenon been more pervasive than in areas under government control". Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo, briefing the Council on 7 August 2019, said that "reports suggest that more than 100,000 people have so far been detained, abducted, disappeared or gone missing, largely, but not only, at the hands of the Syrian Government", while noting that the UN is unable to verify these reports independently.

Syria's economic difficulties continue to worsen. According to the World Food Programme's monthly assessment for April, Syria's ongoing fuel shortage has worsened, and is having severe knock-on effects for the price of goods and energy production and consumption. These challenges have been compounded by fluctuations in the value of the Syrian pound and a sharp rise in COVID-19 cases. On 15 April, Syria's national bank devalued by half the official exchange rate of the pound against the US dollar (the unofficial rate has also seen a devaluation of the currency against the US dollar), leading to further increases in the price of goods.

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/2021/390](#) (22 April 2021) was the regular 60-day report on the implementation of humanitarian resolutions by all parties to the conflict in Syria. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8593](#) (7 August 2019) was a briefing on the situation of detainees, abductees and missing persons in Syria.

Syria

Syria's humanitarian conditions also continue to deteriorate. The World Food Programme reports that 43 percent of surveyed households suffer from poor food consumption, which is double the figure reported one year ago. According to OCHA, there are now 3.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria's north-west, a 20 percent increase from 2020 and a number that includes 3.1 million people in "extreme and catastrophic need". Meanwhile, OCHA reports that 63,000 cases of COVID-19 have been reported country-wide through 19 May, representing an increase of over 5,000 cases since April. Severely lagging testing capacity and an apparent shortage of oxygen supplies in several parts of the country present further challenges in responding to the pandemic.

Finally, there has been no progress on the chemical weapons track in Syria. Briefing the Council on 6 May on the findings of the monthly report of the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu told the Council that "identified gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies... remain unresolved" on outstanding issues and thus "the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic still cannot be considered accurate and complete". Nakamitsu's briefing followed two high-profile steps taken by the OPCW in April. On 12 April, the second report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT) concluded that there were "reasonable grounds" to believe that the Syrian air force dropped at least one cylinder of chlorine on Saraqib, Syria, on 4 February 2018. In addition, on 21 April, the OPCW Conference of State Parties (CSP) voted to suspend Syria's rights and privileges within the organisation's policy-making organs.

Key Issues and Options

Addressing Syria's deteriorating humanitarian situation will be a major focus of the Council in June, especially given that members are likely to begin negotiations on the renewal of resolution 2533, which authorises cross-border humanitarian deliveries and is due to expire on 11 July. As the COVID-19 vaccination rollout will be partially contingent on continued humanitarian access, Council members may wish to issue a press statement encouraging the equitable distribution of the vaccine in both government- and non-government-held areas of Syria.

As evidenced by the Council's 26 May meeting on Syria, it remains deeply divided on the validity of the presidential elections held that day. In addition, there are strong disagreements on the progress achieved by, and the future of, the Constitutional Committee. Despite this, Council members may wish to issue a press statement calling on both the government and opposition to engage constructively with the Special Envoy and in the work of the Constitutional Committee.

Council Dynamics

The Council's deep divisions on Syria have shown no discernible improvement in recent months. The organisation of presidential elections not in compliance with 2254 again exposed fractures amongst Council members on the file, while discussions about the renewal of cross-border humanitarian access, which will begin in the coming weeks because of the 11 July expiration of resolution 2533, are likely to be tense and difficult.

UNOCA

Expected Council Action

In June, François Louncény Fall, Special Representative and head of the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), is expected to brief the Security Council on the Secretary-General's semi-annual report on UNOCA and the implementation of the UN's regional strategy to combat the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

The mandate of UNOCA expires on 31 August 2021.

Key Recent Developments

Assessing the overall situation in the Central African region, the Secretary-General wrote in his 1 December 2020 report that "armed violence in Central Africa continue[s] unabated, with serious implications for the subregion's stability and the humanitarian situation, which has worsened dramatically". Underlying political tensions in the region have also been brought to the fore as a result of a full elections calendar in 2021, including in the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, the Republic of Congo, and São Tomé and Príncipe.

On 11 April, Chad held presidential elections in which the incumbent, President Idriss Déby, appeared to have won a sixth term. That same day, a rebel group, the Front for Change and

Concord in Chad (FACT), attacked Chad from Libya, advancing toward N'Djamena, Chad's capital. On 19 April, President Déby was apparently killed while at the scene of the fighting between Chadian government forces and the FACT. On 20 April, the army said a transitional military council led by Déby's 37-year-old son, General Mahamat Idriss Déby, would take power for 18 months until elections could be held. Opposition parties denounced the creation of the council as a "coup d'état", as it did not follow constitutional rules for succession, under which the Speaker of the National Assembly becomes interim president. On 26 April, the military appointed a civilian politician, Albert Pahimi Padacké, as transitional prime minister. That same day, Special Representative Fall attended Déby's funeral in N'Djamena, where he also met with General Déby to offer the UN's support to "find consensual and inclusive solutions" to promote Chad's peace, stability and sustainable development. On 14 May, the AU Peace and Security Council issued a communique, which, amongst other things, emphasised both the "imperative of a civilian-led, inclusive and consensual transitional process in Chad" and that "the transition to democratic rule should be completed within [an] 18-month period".

UN DOCUMENTS ON UNOCA Secretary-General's Report S/2020/1154 (1 December 2020) was the semi-annual report on UNOCA. Security Council Presidential Statements S/PRST/2020/12 (4 December 2020) requested the Secretary-General to cover Burundi in the context of regular reporting on Central Africa and the Great Lakes Region. S/PRST/2019/10 (12 September 2019) expressed the Council's full support for UNOCA.

Parts of Cameroon continue to experience violent unrest. In the country's anglophone north-western and south-western regions, sporadic fighting between separatists and the Cameroonian government persists, while jihadist attacks in Cameroon's Far North continue. The violence has taken a heavy toll, particularly on civilians. Reports of the heightened use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and extrajudicial killings have further increased tensions. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), an organisation that collects conflict- and crisis-related data, there have been 1,321 reported fatalities in Cameroon related to the violence in the past year. Some estimates suggest that over 4,000 people have been killed in the anglophone regions since violence began there in 2016. According to OCHA, over 1,427 people were forced to flee their homes in March because of the violence, and over one million people are estimated to be severely food insecure in the anglophone regions.

In the Republic of Congo, presidential elections were held on 21 March, with Denis Sassou Nguesso, the incumbent president who has ruled Congo for much of the last 42 years, announced as the winner with 88 percent of the vote. Though the polling took place in a largely peaceful atmosphere, Congo's political opposition boycotted the vote. Fall attended Sassou Nguesso's swearing-in ceremony in Brazzaville on 16 April. He had previously visited the country on 18 February, when he met with the Congolese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Claude Gakosso, to discuss Congo's presidency of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS).

With regard to Burundi, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement on 4 December 2020 that called on the government of Burundi to cooperate with the UN to address a number of challenges that the country faces while also requesting the Secretary-General to cease providing periodic reporting on the situation in Burundi and instead cover the country in the context of his regular reporting on Central Africa and the Great Lakes region. The presidential statement followed an improved security situation in Burundi, a largely peaceful presidential election in May 2020, and a smooth transition of power after the death of President Pierre Nkurunziza the following month. Since December's presidential statement, the political and security situation in the country has remained relatively stable.

Key Issues and Options

The security situation in the region remains a key concern for the Council, especially with regard to the ongoing situations in Chad, Cameroon and the CAR, where a high level of elections-related violence led to instability in December 2020 and January. On Chad, the Council may wish to adopt a press statement, reiterating the AU's call for a timely transition to democratic rule.

The threat of climate change to peace and security in the region is of concern to a number of Council members, as is the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Another key issue for the Council to consider will be how to ensure that there is a clear delineation between the roles of UNOCA and the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes region with regard to the Secretary-General's regular reporting on Burundi.

Council members are likely to want to use the June meeting on UNOCA to take stock of the situation in the region with a view to renewing the office's mandate later this summer.

Council Dynamics

There appears to be consensus in the Council regarding UNOCA's role in Central Africa, with a 12 September 2019 presidential statement illustrating Council unity in its support for UNOCA's mandate.

There are some differences, however, about the role UNOCA should play in addressing specific situations. Some Council members, such as the UK and the US, have expressed concern about the situation in Cameroon, arguing that UNOCA should focus on the security and humanitarian conditions in that country. Other members, such as China and Russia, maintain that the situation is an internal matter, and that the Council should intervene only upon Cameroon's request. Burundi has often been a deeply divisive issue for the Council. However, this may be less so since the adoption of December's presidential statement. Finally, Council members remain divided on how to address the issue of climate and security.

The UK is the penholder on UNOCA. Ambassador Abdou Abarry (Niger) chairs the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee.

International Criminal Tribunals

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council is scheduled to hold its semi-annual debate on the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT), which was established in 2010 to carry out the remaining essential functions of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) after their respective closures. The IRMCT's president, Judge Carmel Agius, and its prosecutor, Serge Brammertz, are expected to brief during the debate and to meet with the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals prior to this.

Key Recent Developments

The IRMCT—with branches in The Hague, the Netherlands; and Arusha, Tanzania—focuses on the completion of trials and appeals from the ICTY, which closed in December 2017, and the ICTR, which closed in December 2015. Its tasks include locating and arresting the remaining fugitives indicted by the ICTR—of the 93 persons indicted by the ICTR, six remain at large—and assisting national jurisdictions in handling requests related to prosecuting international crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

The Council most recently extended the IRMCT's operating period and Brammertz's term until 30 June 2022 with the adoption

International Criminal Tribunals

of resolution 2529 on 25 June 2020. The resolution requested the IRMCT to continue to take steps to enhance efficient, effective and transparent management, including clear and focused projections of completion timelines. The resolution also stressed the need for continued efforts to ensure geographic diversity and gender balance of staff, and further reduction of costs by using flexible staff engagement.

A 23 April statement on operations of the IRMCT during the COVID-19 pandemic said the IRMCT has “remained operational and remains committed to minimizing interruptions to its activities to the greatest extent possible”. The IRMCT’s courtrooms in The Hague and Arusha “have been adapted to allow for the safe conduct of the hearings, allowing for in-person or remote participation of judges, counsel or the accused”. In March, the trial in the contempt case of Prosecutor v. Maximilien Turinabo et al. resumed before the Arusha branch of the IRMCT. In April, the Trial Chamber at The Hague branch of the IRMCT concluded the hearing of closing arguments in the case of Prosecutor v. Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović.

On 11 May, Agius sent a letter to the Council reporting that Serbia continues to fail to comply with its international obligations to arrest Petar Jojić and Vjerica Radeta and surrender them to the IRMCT. The accused, who reside in Serbia, are charged with contempt of the ICTY. According to the letter, this is the third time that Serbia’s non-compliance in this case has been referred to the Security Council. It called on the Council “to take the necessary measures to ensure that Serbia fulfils its obligations”.

The last semi-annual debate on the IRMCT was held on 14 December 2020. Agius told the Council that the IRMCT is expected to conclude a significant proportion of its pending judicial caseload by the end of May. He added that because of the COVID-19

pandemic, the IRMCT was not able to conclude its existing proceedings in 2020, as anticipated in December 2019.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue is for members to continue monitoring the work of the IRMCT and the implementation of its mandate, including the areas specified in resolution 2529. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on projected timelines for completion of the IRMCT’s caseload is a related issue. Another issue is to consider responding to the non-compliance of Serbia, as outlined in the 11 May letter from Agius.

Council Dynamics

Council members generally assess the IRMCT and the progress it has made positively with the exception of Russia, which is consistently critical of the ICTY. Russia has also been critical of the appointment of Brammertz, who was the prosecutor of the ICTY from 2008 until its closure in 2017, and it had abstained on previous resolutions appointing him in 2016 and 2018. Negotiations on resolution 2529, which extended Brammertz’s term until 30 June 2022, were similarly lengthy and difficult. It was adopted with 14 votes in favour and one abstention (Russia). (See our What’s In Blue story on 25 June 2020.) At the most recent semi-annual debate, Russia expressed its concern over the health of Ratko Mladić. At the time of writing, the Appeals Chamber of the IRMCT had scheduled the pronouncement of the Appeal Judgment in the case of Prosecutor v. Mladić for 8 June.

Viet Nam is the chair of the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals.

EU-UN Briefing

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council will hold its annual meeting on strengthening the partnership with the EU under its agenda item on cooperation between the UN and regional and subregional organisations in maintaining international peace and security. Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, is expected to brief.

Background

The relationship between the UN and the EU has evolved over the years and has continued to grow in importance. Recognising this, the Council has maintained the practice of holding regular—usually annual—briefings on cooperation between the two organisations since 2010. (These briefings were not held in 2012 and 2018.) The Council formally endorsed this relationship in 2014 when it adopted a presidential statement on EU-UN cooperation. Among other things, the statement welcomed the EU’s cooperation with the UN and its role in the maintenance of international peace and security and in the implementation of Council-mandated tasks. Since 2013,

Council members have also held annual informal meetings with members of the EU Political and Security Committee.

The briefings on EU-UN cooperation generally follow a set pattern and address areas of cooperation between the two organisations. Borrell is likely to present the EU’s main foreign policy priorities and objectives and address current crises that overlap on the EU and Security Council agendas.

The EU has been heavily involved in efforts to preserve the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—the agreement that limits Iran’s nuclear programme and provides sanctions relief. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy serves as the coordinator of the Joint Commission, which is composed of the parties to the agreement, at present China, France, Germany, Russia, the UK and Iran. The agreement, which was endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 2231 (2015), has faced a precarious future since the US withdrew from it in May 2018, prompting Iran to begin violating terms of the agreement a year later.

Negotiations began in Vienna in April regarding the US return

UN DOCUMENTS ON EU-UN COOPERATION Security Council Resolution S/RES/2231 (20 July 2015) endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran. **Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2014/4** (14 February 2014) was on cooperation between the UN and the EU, highlighting the EU’s comprehensive approach to the maintenance of international peace and security. **Security Council Meeting Record S/2020/489** (28 May 2020) was a briefing by Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

EU-UN Briefing

to the agreement with the fourth round of talks beginning on 7 May. Senior diplomats urged caution but expressed hope in a statement that there was some “tangible progress with the contours of a final deal emerging”. The negotiators emphasised a “soft deadline” of 21 May, when an agreement between Tehran and the IAEA, the UN nuclear watchdog, on continued monitoring of some Iranian nuclear activities was set to expire. The E3 diplomats (France, Germany and the UK) underscored that it was “critical” for Iran to let the IAEA continue its monitoring and verification work. “IAEA access will be essential to our efforts to restore the JCPOA, as a deal cannot be implemented without it”, they said in a statement. On 24 May, the IAEA and Iran extended the monitoring agreement by a month, which avoided a collapse that could have sent wider talks on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal into a crisis.

Cooperation between the EU and the UN is especially evident in Africa, which Borrell described during his last briefing as Europe’s “sister continent” and a strategic priority for the EU. The EU provides training for security forces and assists in security sector reform in the Central African Republic, Mali and Somalia. The EU also contributes to salaries for the UN-authorized AU Mission in

Somalia. Lastly, the 27 member states of the EU are the largest collective contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget, providing over 30 percent of total contributions.

During his briefing, Borrell will most likely address the Middle East peace process, particularly the Israel-Palestinian ceasefire, which went into effect on 20 May after 11 days of fighting. In a statement issued after the ceasefire, Borrell noted that the situation in the Gaza Strip has long been “unsustainable” and “restoring a political horizon towards a two-state solution” is essential.

The EU members of the Council have made an effort to coordinate their positions and present a unified front on some issues on the Council’s agenda, including Kosovo, Syria, Ukraine, and Venezuela. Another practice that has emerged over the last several years has been for the EU members of the Council (including incoming and recent former members) to make joint statements at the Council media stakeouts.

At present, four Council members—Estonia, Ireland, Norway, and France—are also European members. The UK, which is no longer a member of this group since its 31 January 2020 formal departure from the EU, has occasionally joined the four EU members in making joint statements.

Somalia

Expected Council Action

In June, the Chair of the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason (Ireland) will deliver her 120-day periodic briefing to the Council on the activities of the committee.

Council members last renewed the Somalia sanctions measures for one year on 12 November 2020, through the adoption of resolution 2551. The same resolution also extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts on Somalia until 15 December. Committee members received the panel’s interim report in May and will convene to discuss the report’s findings and recommendations on 4 June. This mid-term update is confidential, whereas the panel’s final reports are published. The upcoming final report will be published after its submission to the Council by 15 October.

Key Recent Developments

The Council last heard the periodic briefing by the committee chair on 25 February. In this first briefing after the adoption of resolution 2551 and for the first time in her capacity as chair, Byrne Nason informed the Council about the activities of the committee between 29 October 2020 and 25 February. During the reporting period, the committee received two thematic reports from the panel and two letters from member states: one about arms embargo exemption issues and another pertaining to the panel’s report submitted under a previous mandate. Byrne Nason also reported on the number of arms embargo exemption requests, notifications and post-delivery notifications the committee had received. She noted that the Somali federal government had submitted its biannual report to the Council

on the structure, composition, strength and disposition of its security forces and the status of regional and militia forces. She also recalled that the committee had last met on 29 January to discuss the panel’s programme of work for the coming year. During that meeting, the panel informed committee members of improvements in building a positive relationship with the Somali federal government and its ongoing engagement in projects in Mogadishu and across Somalia’s federal member states. Commending the work of the panel, several committee members expressed support for the panel’s work with regard to disrupting financing sources for Al-Shabaab.

Accordingly, the most recent final report of the panel published on 28 September 2020 emphasised investigations into Al-Shabaab’s taxation models and revenue sources. It attested to the strong financial position of Al-Shabaab, a finding likely to be repeated in the mid-term report. The panel, together with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, is supporting the federal government in developing a plan aimed at disrupting current financing models of Al-Shabaab. The report also noted that the security threat posed by Al-Shabaab went beyond conventional military tactics and included extortion measures, child recruitment and effective use of propaganda. On the security side, military operations appeared to have resulted in territorial losses for the group, although Al-Shabaab reportedly has maintained its ability to produce improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and conduct attacks.

Council members last considered the situation in Somalia during open and closed consultations on 25 May. From 22 to 27 May, the Somali federal government and its member states held a consultative meeting to resolve outstanding disagreements over the conduct of

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2568](#) (12 March 2021) reauthorised the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) for ten months until 31 December 2021. [S/RES/2554](#) (4 December 2020) renewed the authorisation granted to states and regional organisations cooperating with Somali authorities in the fight against piracy and armed robbery at sea off the coast of Somalia. [Secretary-General’s Report S/2021/485](#) (19 May 2021) was on the situation in Somalia covering developments from 10 February to 7 May 2021. [Security Council Letter S/2020/1079](#) (30 October 2020) was a copy of the 28 October 2020 briefing provided by Ambassador Philippe Kridelka (Belgium) in his capacity as Chair of the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee.

Somalia

legislative and presidential elections. Agreement was reached on all outstanding issues, and the participants committed to hold elections within 60 days. At the time of writing, Security Council members were negotiating a draft press statement to welcome the agreement and encourage all political stakeholders to maintain the positive momentum.

Key Issues and Options

Key issues for the Council include how to disrupt Al-Shabaab's financing and how to continue to sustain efforts to counter the illicit charcoal trade, following the finding of the Panel of Experts that, although the exports have stopped, networks involved in the trade are still intact.

Council members are likely to include the contents of the chair's briefing and of the panel's reporting in their deliberations on the effectiveness of the sanctions regime. The recommendations in the mid-term report will be addressed at the committee level, including apprising the Council of any recommendations that may require its attention.

Council Dynamics

Divisions on the Council regarding the Somalia sanctions regime became apparent during its latest renewal. Resolution 2551 received

13 votes in favour with two abstentions (China and Russia). During its explanation of vote, China noted, as a reason for abstaining, the lack of benchmarks for an eventual lifting of sanctions, which it deems necessary to facilitate the enhancement of the Somali government's security structures. China also disapproved the inclusion of language on the bilateral relations between Djibouti and Eritrea, noting that improving their relations was not a concern of the Security Council. Russia echoed China's views on Djibouti and Eritrea, adding that the relations between the two member states was not an issue for international peace and security. Human rights language included in the resolution also drew criticism from Russia, which expressed dismay over the practice of using Council resolutions to promote the human rights agenda in the Somalia dossier for which it deems the Human Rights Council the appropriate forum. The UK, the penholder on Somalia, expressed the view that following the lifting of sanctions on Eritrea in 2018, the reference to Djibouti and Eritrea ensured that the Council remained seized of any progress in relations between the two countries, as the latest Secretary-General's report on the matter noted no substantial improvements.

UNDOF (Golan Heights)

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council is expected to adopt a resolution renewing the mandate of the UN Disengagement Observer Force in the Golan Heights (UNDOF). Prior to the adoption, Council members will receive a briefing from the Department of Peace Operations on the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission, also due in June, and on the most recent developments.

UNDOF's mandate expires on 30 June.

Background and Key Recent Developments

UNDOF was established following the conclusion of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement (the 1974 Agreement) between Israel and Syria, which ended the Yom Kippur War. Its mandate is to maintain the ceasefire between the parties and supervise the disengagement of Israeli and Syrian forces as well as the so-called areas of separation (a demilitarised buffer zone) and limitation (where Israeli and Syrian troops and equipment are restricted) in the Golan Heights.

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

As at 31 March, UNDOF consisted of 1,088 uniformed

personnel. The budget allocated to the mission for the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021 is \$67,574,300. The UN Truce Supervision Organization in Observer Group Golan continues to provide UNDOF with military observers who focus on situational awareness and static observation.

The Secretary-General's 22 March report, covering the period 20 November 2020 to 20 February 2021, said that the ceasefire between Israel and Syria was generally being maintained. However, the Secretary-General expressed concern about the ongoing violations of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement during the reporting period, including firing by Israeli forces over the ceasefire line, the presence of Syrian forces in the area of separation, and the existence of unauthorised weapons in the limitation area. The Secretary-General added, "I continue to encourage members of the Security Council to support efforts to sensitize both parties to the risk of escalation and the need to preserve the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic".

Tensions continued in and near the Golan Heights in May. On 6 May, an Israeli helicopter reportedly fired on Hezbollah militants at a Syrian military position near the Syrian Golan Heights. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that three people were wounded.

On 14 May, three rockets were fired from Syrian territory towards Israel. One fell in Syrian territory, and two landed in the Golan Heights. There do not appear to have been casualties. While responsibility for the rocket fire was unclear, it occurred in the midst of an 11-day military confrontation between Israel and militants in the Gaza strip that ended with a ceasefire on 21 May.

Council members last met on UNDOF on 25 March, when they received a briefing in consultations from Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix.

UNDOF (Golan Heights)

Key Issues and Options

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

Given ongoing violations of the 1974 Agreement, the Council could consider pursuing a statement urging parties to adhere to the commitments under the agreement.

Council Dynamics

There is general agreement within the Council that UNDOF's mandate contributes to stability in the region, given the absence of a peace agreement between Israel and Syria. Both countries still value

UNDOF's presence and want to see the mission's full return to the Bravo side. Council members also support its eventual complete return, mindful of the fact that this would require a continuously favourable security environment, which is also crucial for maintaining the confidence of troop-contributing countries.

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

Council members India and Ireland have a special interest in UNDOF, as both contribute a significant number of uniformed personnel to the mission. As at 31 March, the mission included 198 Indian uniformed personnel and 129 Irish uniformed personnel.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council will hold its monthly briefing on Yemen, followed by consultations. Also during the month, the Secretariat is expected to submit to the Council a review of the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) as requested in resolution 2534. The mandate of UNMHA expires on 15 July.

Key Recent Developments

Despite intensified diplomatic efforts since February to broker a ceasefire, fighting in Yemen continues, particularly in oil- and gas-rich Marib governorate, where the Houthi rebel group continues its offensive to take the government's last stronghold in the north. It was also announced during May that UN Special Envoy to Yemen Martin Griffiths would be leaving his position to become Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

Griffiths, together with the US Special Envoy for Yemen Timothy Lenderking, travelled to Riyadh and Muscat at the end of April to make a new push for an agreement on Griffiths' long-standing proposal for a nationwide ceasefire, the opening of Sana'a airport and the Hodeidah ports, and the resumption of a political process. In Muscat, however, the Houthis, whose chief negotiator Mohammed Abdul Salam is based in Oman, refused to meet the UN envoy.

Briefing the Council on 12 May, Griffiths said, "I am unfortunately not here today to report that the parties are closing in on a deal." Griffiths said he could not "re-emphasize enough... what is at stake in Marib", saying that the offensive indicates a belief that the war can be won militarily and warning about the implications for Yemen's stability and cohesion of continuing the Marib campaign. Griffiths criticised the Houthis' repeated failures to meet with him during negotiations over the past year, asserting that "to turn attendance of meetings into transactions is simply unacceptable". Still, he noted some reasons for hope, including the growing international and regional support for a ceasefire, underscoring his cooperation with the US, Saudi Arabia and Oman, and praising the Yemeni government's engagement in negotiations.

At the meeting, which was held via videoconference, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock emphasised

that the war is driving Yemen's risk of famine, the spread of disease and its economic collapse, all of which are causes for his concern about the lack of political progress. Lowcock highlighted Saudi Arabia's recent announcement that it would provide \$422 million worth of oil derivatives to Yemen, which would help strengthen the Yemeni rial; the first shipment arrived in Aden on 8 May. He also appeared to push back on the Yemeni government's proposal that other ports of entry and land routes be used for fuel imports as the government continues to restrict fuel shipments through the Houthi-controlled Hodeidah ports. He underscored that these alternatives are much farther away from population centres in the north, which would create complications and drive up costs.

The head of UNMHA, General Abhijit Guha, briefed Council members during closed consultations, apparently noting some of the internal divisions between government-aligned forces in Hodeidah that can be destabilising.

After the meeting, the UN announced that the Secretary-General was appointing Griffiths as the UN humanitarian relief coordinator to replace Lowcock, whose departure had been anticipated. According to the announcement, Griffiths will continue to serve as Special Envoy to Yemen until a transition can be announced.

Returning to Muscat on 27 May following a three-day visit to Riyadh, Griffiths this time met with the Houthis' Mohammed Abdul Salam on his ceasefire proposal.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 6 April, the Secretary-General re-appointed four members of the Yemen Panel of Experts that supports the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee. On 5 May, he appointed Debi Prasad Dash of India as the panel's new finance expert. On 19 May, the 2140 Committee met with the panel, which presented its work plan for 2021.

Key Issues and Options

Reaching agreement between the Houthis and the Yemeni government on proposals for a nationwide ceasefire, confidence-building measures to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, and the resumption of peace talks remains a key issue. A related, critical issue is the battle

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2534 (14 July 2020) extended UNMHA's mandate until 15 July 2021. **Security Council Press Statement SC/14497** (16 April 2021) called on the Houthis to end their escalation in Marib and condemned the cross-border attacks against Saudi Arabia.

Yemen

in Marib governorate, where heavy fighting since February has been concentrated just outside the heavily populated Marib City, the capital of the governorate. If Marib falls to the Houthis, the government's position would be significantly weakened in any future peace process, and there is the possibility that fighting could spread to parts of Yemen that have so far remained largely peaceful during the war.

If a ceasefire deal is brokered, the Council may adopt a resolution endorsing any such agreement. Alternatively, members could prepare to hold an emergency meeting on developments around Marib City if the situation appears to worsen, reiterating calls for a de-escalation and threatening sanctions on Houthi officials, military leaders and economic agents if they push forward with the attack.

The Marib fighting also threatens to worsen the humanitarian crisis, especially if it triggers mass displacement of civilians—more than one million internally displaced persons live in Marib governorate, having already fled other parts of Yemen. Generating more humanitarian funding, alleviating the fuel crisis and stabilising the Yemeni rial are important to mitigate the crisis and combat famine. Another significant issue remains the threat posed by the moored FSO Safer oil tanker in the Red Sea, as the Houthis continue to delay approval for the deployment of a UN technical team to assess the ship's condition and conduct emergency repairs. An oil spill or fire on the ship would create an environmental, humanitarian and economic disaster for Yemen and its neighbours.

In addition to using the public briefing to repeat calls for a ceasefire and negotiations, Council members are likely to use their statements to appeal to donors to provide more humanitarian funding, call on the Houthis to cooperate with the UN to avert a looming crisis with the Safer oil tanker, and maintain pressure on the

government to allow fuel deliveries. Council members may also issue a press statement, as they often do following meetings on Yemen, to collectively direct such appeals to the parties.

Among other important issues for resolving the Yemen conflict is sustaining the Saudi Arabia-brokered Riyadh Agreement, which is a power-sharing accord between the Yemeni government and the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC). 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

Yemen is a file on which Council members have been generally united. Members have been supportive of the Special Envoy and his mediation efforts. They further share concerns about the humanitarian situation and the threat posed by the decrepit Safer oil tanker. European Council members and the US tend to be more critical in calling out Houthi obstructionism, while Russia is more cautious in singling out the Houthis, suggesting this could give the appearance of Council bias—a dynamic that has often played out this year during negotiations on Council products.

The new US administration has placed a focus on ending Yemen's war, with US Special Envoy Lenderking closely coordinating his efforts with Griffiths. Indicating its frustration, Lenderking announced on 20 May that the US was imposing sanctions on two Houthi military commanders leading the Marib offensive: Muhammad Abd al-Karim al-Ghamari and Yousuf al-Madani.

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

Security Council Working Methods

Expected Council Action

In June, Estonia is organising a virtual open debate on the Council's working methods. Like last year, Estonia is collaborating with Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Chair of the Informal Working Group on Working Methods (IWG), to convene this debate. The IWG Chair is expected to circulate a concept note to members to guide the debate. If the special measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic are still in effect at the time of the debate, statements by non-Council members can be expected to be submitted in writing.

The anticipated briefers are Ambassador I. Rhonda King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) as the chair of the IWG, and Loraine Sievers, co-author of "The Procedure of the UN Security Council (4th edition)". The debate will be held under the agenda item "Implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2017/507)", referring to the most recent version of the comprehensive compendium of Council working methods.

Background and Key Recent Developments

The Council held its most recent open debate on working methods on 15 May 2020 during Estonia's last Council presidency. It was the Council's 12th annual working methods debate, and it was organised under the theme "Ensuring transparency, efficiency and effectiveness". The meeting emphasised the concept of "agility" as a critical element for the effective functioning of the Council, particularly in the context of the extraordinary challenges posed by COVID-19.

For the second time, the ten elected Council members presented a joint statement, delivered by Ambassador Dang Dinh Quy (Viet Nam). In addition to Council members, 41 member state representatives delivered statements, some of them speaking on behalf of groups of states such as the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group (ACT), the Like-Minded States on Targeted Sanctions, or the group of 24 former elected members from all regional groups. This pattern is likely to be maintained during

UN DOCUMENTS ON WORKING METHODS Notes by the President of the Security Council S/2017/507 (30 August 2017) was the most recent comprehensive compendium of Security Council working methods. **Security Council Meeting Record S/2020/418** (15 May 2020) was the most recent open debate (VTC) on working methods. **Security Council Letters S/2020/372** (7 May 2020), **S/2020/490** (3 June 2020), **S/2020/639** (2 July 2020), **S/2020/778** (4 August 2020), **S/2020/877** (3 September 2020), **S/2020/966** (2 October 2020), **S/2020/1077** (2 November 2020), **S/2020/1163** (3 December 2020), **S/2021/18** (6 January 2021), **S/2021/106** (3 February 2021), **S/2021/245** (10 March 2021), **S/2021/326** (5 April 2021) and **S/2021/428** (5 May 2021) were letters from successive presidents of the Security Council to permanent representatives of Council members on the continuation of temporary measures to be applied during the COVID-19 period.

Security Council Working Methods

the upcoming debate in June.

Since the start of its Chairpersonship in January 2020, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has been convening meetings of the IWG every six to eight weeks. It has been keen to “improve existing practices and procedures, while identifying and exploring new areas for development”, according to the Chair’s statement delivered at last year’s open debate. Accordingly, it has developed eight draft notes on various topics, ranging from co-penholdership to ensuring multilingualism in all Security Council meetings with a view to moving ongoing discussions forward and building on the work done by the previous IWG Chair, Kuwait. It is not ruling out the possibility of tabling these notes for adoption before the end of its mandate on 31 December 2021.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the Council had to adapt its working methods to the extraordinary circumstances created by the pandemic. Accordingly, it displayed considerable creativity and flexibility by developing new temporary working methods, including the holding of its meetings through videoconference and the adoption of resolutions through written procedures. At this stage, it appears that the Council may move more consistently from virtual to in-person meetings since almost all COVID-related capacity restrictions were lifted in New York as of 19 May. Some Council meetings were held in-person in late May.

Key Issues and Options

One issue is how input and ideas from the debate can help to inform the IWG’s work during the remainder of the year, particularly in light of the fact that it may possibly introduce several additional notes on a range of issues to improve existing procedures and practices.

Another issue for the Council is how it can plan beyond the working methods developed under the temporary special measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, members may want

to consider whether some of the pandemic-inspired procedures and practices can be retained to allow the Council to continue to be more agile and responsive.

As an option, Estonia could consider producing a chair’s summary to capture the main themes from the open debate.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members continue to grapple with the need to strike a balance between transparency and efficiency in the work of the Council. This was a clear theme of the working methods debate last year that may be reflected again in this year’s discussion.

As new Council members are elected in June, the issue of burden-sharing and a more equal distribution of work among all members of the Council will also continue to be emphasised. In this regard, several members advocate for co-penholderships as a way of empowering a wider number of members. At present, France, the UK and the US continue to be the penholders on most issues. In addition, the implementation of the agreed note on the selection of the chairs of subsidiary bodies continues to be a source of tension between permanent members and elected members in relation to burden-sharing.

Some members emphasise the need for ensuring implementation of eight notes by the president on several aspects of working methods adopted at the end of 2019. This has been a focus of discussion in the IWG this year under the leadership of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines as chair. The critical role of the monthly presidencies in the implementation of the note, including in creating and testing new practices or establishing alternatives to existing practices, has been noted in this regard.

In addition, some members favour an increase in the frequency of public meetings to enhance the transparency of the Council’s work, while others underscore the need for more private forms of discussion, which are conducive for holding interactive discussions and building consensus.

Haiti

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing from the Special Representative and head of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), Helen La Lime, on recent developments and the Secretary-General’s latest report on BINUH, due on 12 June. A civil society representative may also brief. The meeting may be followed by closed consultations.

BINUH’s mandate expires on 15 October 2021.

Key Recent Developments

Since the Council last met to discuss Haiti in February, three core issues have continued to determine the political landscape: the holding of legislative and presidential elections; a constitutional referendum; and controversy surrounding the term of President

Jovenel Moïse, who has ruled the country by decree since Parliament ceased to function in January 2020, when the terms of all delegates of the lower chamber and of most senators expired because of a delay in legislative elections.

On 27 June, Haitians are scheduled to vote on a new constitution, intended to replace the current text, which dates to 1987. Amongst other changes, the proposed constitution would allow a president to run for two consecutive five-year terms without the five-year pause stipulated currently. It would also replace the bicameral parliament with a unicameral structure, effectively abolishing the senate, and establish the post of vice president with a direct reporting line to the president, replacing the current position of prime minister.

The Provisional Electoral Council (PEC) is responsible for organising the referendum, and its activities will roll over into

UN DOCUMENTS ON HAITI [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2547](#) (15 October 2020) renewed BINUH’s mandate for one year. [S/RES/2476](#) (25 June 2019) established BINUH. [Security Council Presidential Statements S/PRST/2021/7](#) (24 March 2021) expressed deep concern regarding political instability. [S/PRST/2017/20](#) (17 October 2017) recognised the contribution MINUSTAH has made. [S/PRST/2011/7](#) (6 April 2011) adopted at the open debate chaired by Colombia’s president. [Secretary-General’s Reports S/2021/133](#) (11 February 2021) is the Secretary-General’s latest 120-day report on the special political mission. [S/2020/944](#) (25 September 2020) examines BINUH’s activities one year following the mission’s inception. [S/2020/537](#) (15 June 2020) covers the activities of BINUH from 13 February to 15 June 2020. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8768](#) (15 October 2020) covers the meeting during which the Council adopted resolution 2547 (2020), renewing BINUH for one year. Two members, China and Russia, abstained.

Haiti

electoral preparations. The first round of the presidential and legislative elections has been scheduled for 19 September, with a run-off foreseen for 21 November.

The constitutional referendum and the elections are facing increasing levels of scrutiny from opposition groups and the international community. Although there appears to be a common understanding that the constitution needs revision, some critics of the referendum argue that changing the constitution via popular vote is unconstitutional, referring to a passage in the current version that says, “General elections to amend the Constitution by referendum are strictly forbidden”. Moïse, on the other hand, maintains that the referendum is legitimate since Haitians will vote on a new constitution altogether, not on an amendment to the existing text.

In a 26 April statement, the “Core Group”—composed of Haiti-based representatives of Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, the US, the UN, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the EU—expressed concern over the lack of inclusivity and transparency of the constitutional review, noting that prior consultations should have taken place with a wide array of Haitian political and societal actors. It further cautioned that the political divisions in the country would hinder the implementation of the electoral calendar and called on Haitian leaders to put differences aside to address the current political crisis and to tackle the prevailing state of insecurity.

Expressing concern about both the referendum and elections, the EU has separately announced that it will not send electoral observers nor provide financial assistance to the referendum. The US has also said it does not support the referendum but continues to call for the swift holding of elections to reinstate the lower house and promote the peaceful transfer of presidential powers. In a 26 April letter to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, a group of members of the US House of Representatives called on the US government not to support the upcoming election because of concerns over the “inclusiveness of elections [...], lack of preparedness of electoral institutions [...], as well as over the unconstitutional composition of the PEC”.

To create an environment for safe, inclusive, free and fair elections to take place and to overcome the current political impasse, the OAS has decided to deploy a mission to Haiti with the aim of fostering dialogue between Moïse, members of the opposition and civil society. At the time of writing, the modalities and times of deployment of the mission were still under consideration.

Since commencing his rule by decree, Moïse has used his executive powers to establish a new national intelligence agency, issued a decree with a broad definition of terrorism, and replaced three Supreme Court justices. Prime Minister Joseph Joutel resigned effective 13 April, and his successor, Claude Joseph, who

is also the country’s foreign minister, became the sixth prime minister to serve within the past five years. Disputes over Moïse’s legitimacy continue, as the opposition argues that his term should have ended on 7 February, while Moïse maintains that his mandate lasts until February 2022.

These political developments are taking place amid concerns over Haiti’s security situation. During the last Council meeting on Haiti on 22 February, La Lime commended the increasingly professional Haitian National Police (HNP), which has close to 15,000 men and women deployed across the country, but she also noted that the referendum and elections will represent a crucial test. The HNP is already operating in an environment of insecurity, facing gang violence and a rising number of kidnappings.

Additionally, Haiti is challenged by an estimated 4.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, acute levels of food insecurity and development deficits.

Key Issues and Options

The Council referred to a number of key concerns with regard to Haiti in its 26 March presidential statement. In that statement, the Council expressed “deep concern regarding the protracted political, constitutional, humanitarian, and security crises in Haiti”, while also stressing the importance of an independent judiciary and the need to strengthen the rule of law and to protect civic space amidst reported human rights violations. The statement was the first on Haiti since 2017.

The Council may use the upcoming meeting to take stock of progress made by the UN entities on the ground and by the Haitian government in the areas of concern mentioned. Council members may also explore how to guide Haiti towards free, fair, transparent, and credible elections in a safe environment, ending Moïse’s period of ruling by decree and providing space to overcome the prevailing political impasse. Although the presidential statement did not refer to the referendum, Council members may share their views on its circumstances and conduct.

Council Dynamics

While united in the understanding that elections have to take place, Council members may express nuanced views on how the politically polarised climate will affect the upcoming ballot. With EU Council members expected to echo the EU’s views regarding elections and the referendum, they may further inquire about the role of BINUH in electoral preparations. The future of BINUH in general may be raised by China in particular, especially with respect to cost efficiency and prospects for timely drawdown. However, the US, the penholder on Haiti, rejected any language referencing a reduction of the UN presence during the negotiations of the presidential statement.

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council will be briefed on the Secretary-General's 90-day report on South Sudan, which members expect to receive by 11 June.

The mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) expires on 15 March 2022.

Key Recent Developments

Slow and selective implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) continues to contribute to uncertainty around the peace process. After numerous postponements, President Salva Kiir issued a decree on 9 May, reconstituting the country's Transitional National Legislative Assembly, as required under the R-ARCSS. The training and deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces remains a key outstanding task, and the government has neither signed the memorandum of understanding with the AU to establish the Hybrid Court for South Sudan nor set up the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing. The Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (RJMEC), which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the R-ARCSS, said in its most recent quarterly report covering 1 January to 31 March that "the pace of implementation of the R-ARCSS slowed markedly", particularly in relation to security arrangements. It called on the government to accelerate implementation, given that less than two years remain until the end of the 36-month transitional period. On 25 May, RJMEC convened a three-day workshop in Juba with signatories of the R-ARCSS on the Permanent Constitution-making process.

The human rights, humanitarian, food security, and economic conditions in the country remain dire, with an enormously detrimental effect on civilians. According to OCHA, the humanitarian situation in South Sudan deteriorated further in early 2021 because of compounding shocks, including flooding, ongoing violence and displacement. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) projected that an estimated 7.2 million people representing 60 percent of the population will face crisis levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 3) or worse from April to July. Attacks continue against humanitarian workers. On 12 May, a humanitarian worker was killed in Budi in Eastern Equatoria when gunmen ambushed a humanitarian vehicle. On 21 May, an aid worker was killed in Panyijiar County, Unity State, and a humanitarian convoy, including an ambulance, was attacked in a separate incident nearby on the same day.

Localised ethnic and intercommunal violence also continues unabated. In May, renewed conflict between community-based militias in the Greater Pibor Administrative Area led to thousands being displaced and an increased need for humanitarian assistance. In a statement on 17 May, Special Representative and head of UNMISS Nicholas Haysom said that "the rising violence in Greater Pibor and likelihood of revenge attacks is alarming". He expressed deep concern "about the impact of this conflict which is creating further displacement and threatening the distribution of food aid".

On 28 May, the Council adopted resolution 2577 which renewed the South Sudan sanctions regime for one year—including targeted sanctions and the arms embargo—and the mandate of the South Sudan Sanctions Committee's Panel of Experts. The resolution contained five benchmarks for the review of the arms embargo, namely completion of the Strategic Defense and Security Review process contained in the R-ARCSS; formation of the Necessary Unified Forces; progress on the establishment and implementation of the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process; progress on properly managing existing arms and ammunition stockpiles and implementation of the Joint Action Plan for the Armed Forces on addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

Council members were last briefed on South Sudan on 3 March by David Shearer, then-Special Representative and head of UNMISS, on the Secretary-General's 90-day report dated 23 February. Shearer raised concerns about a power vacuum at the local level, which has presented opportunities for spoilers and national actors to exploit local tensions and fuel violence. Jackline Nasiwa, founder and national director of the Centre for Inclusive Governance, Peace and Justice, briefed as a member of civil society based in South Sudan.

Key Issues and Options

Several significant political and security challenges persist in South Sudan related to the delays in implementing the R-ARCSS. Given this situation, the Council could consider holding an informal interactive dialogue (IID) with key RJMEC officials to exchange ideas about how to support the parties in meeting their obligations under the agreement. The IID is a closed format that, unlike consultations, allows for the participation of non-UN officials and briefers.

Another key issue Council members will want to follow closely is the humanitarian and food security situation. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock last briefed the Council on these issues at the 17 December 2020 meeting on South Sudan. An option would be to continue to seek regular briefings from OCHA on the situation.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members welcome the recent but long-delayed reconstitution of the Transitional National Legislative Assembly. However, many members remain concerned about the delays in implementing other key elements of the peace agreement, such as the transitional security arrangements, and about ongoing intercommunal violence and the economic and humanitarian crises.

There remain stark divisions on the Council regarding the utility of UN sanctions on South Sudan. At the time of writing, it appeared that several abstentions were possible on the adoption of resolution 2577 renewing the sanctions regime for one year. (For more details, see our What's in Blue story of 28 May.)

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

Afghanistan

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council is scheduled to hold its quarterly debate on Afghanistan. Estonia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Eva-Maria Liimets, is expected to chair the meeting, which will be held at ministerial level. Deborah Lyons, the Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), is expected to brief on the latest Secretary-General's report on the mission, due on 15 June. An official from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and a civil society representative may also brief.

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

Key Recent Developments

The situation in Afghanistan remains difficult. A diplomatic push initiated in March to reinvigorate the intra-Afghan peace process appears to have slowed down, while civilians continue bearing the brunt of persistent violence. On 14 April, US President Joe Biden announced that the US would begin withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan on 1 May, with the aim of completing the withdrawal by 11 September; recent media reports indicate that the withdrawal will be accelerated, with US and NATO troops expecting to leave Afghanistan in the first half of July.

The US decision delayed the 1 May deadline for foreign troop withdrawal stipulated in the February 2020 US-Taliban agreement. While Biden described the decision as "keeping with the agreement", the Taliban has announced that the group views it as a violation of that agreement. In addition, Taliban officials have stated that the group will refuse to participate in any conference aimed at determining Afghanistan's future until foreign troops have departed.

On 21 April, a high-level meeting on Afghanistan, planned to take place in Istanbul from 24 April to 4 May with the participation of representatives of the Afghan government, the Taliban, and the international community, was postponed. A joint statement by Turkey, Qatar and the UN (the co-organisers of the postponed meeting) noted that the aim of the meeting was to enhance the momentum of the Doha talks, which started in September 2020, but that they had agreed to postpone it to a "later date when conditions for making meaningful progress would be more favourable". At the time of writing, no new date for the Istanbul conference had been set, and it was unclear if it would take place.

The Doha peace process reportedly continues, as the delegations of the Taliban and the Afghan government continue talks in Qatar. The negotiations appear to be making little progress in light of demands by the Taliban for the release of an additional 7,000 Taliban prisoners and the removal of its members from UN sanctions designations.

On 17 March, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of Jean Arnault as his Personal Envoy on Afghanistan and Regional Issues. Arnault is expected to liaise with regional countries with the aim of supporting the negotiations between the Afghan parties. The Secretary-General's spokesperson conveyed

in a 20 April press briefing that Arnault had been unable to start his duties due to personal health reasons. The Personal Envoy appears to have travelled to New York to meet with Council members during the week of 24 May.

Meanwhile, daily attacks, often targeting civilians, continue in the country. On 30 April, a car bomb attack on a guesthouse in Pul-e-Alam in the eastern province of Logar killed at least 27 people and injured more than 100. High school students were reportedly among the casualties. On 8 May, a car bomb attack on a high school in Kabul killed at least 90 people and injured more than 150, many of whom were teenage girls. The attack took place in a western district of the capital that is home to many residents from the predominantly Shiite Hazara ethnic minority. To date, no organisation has claimed responsibility for the two attacks, but the Afghan government has blamed the Taliban. Security Council members strongly condemned the attacks in press statements issued on 3 May and 10 May, respectively. The 10 May statement expressed concern about the prevalence of violence against education facilities in Afghanistan in recent months, which severely affects students' right to education.

The latest report by the 1988 Committee's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, covering the period between May 2020 and April, argued that the Taliban's rhetoric indicates its unwillingness to reduce violence to facilitate peace negotiations. It added that the group's intent is to strengthen its military position because it believes that it can achieve its objectives either through negotiations or, if necessary, by force. The report notes that the monitoring team's interlocutors have assessed that the Taliban is responsible for 85 percent of the targeted assassinations of recent months and that many of the victims were outspoken critics of the group or had previously been threatened by it. The monitoring team added that although the Taliban has taken some steps to restrict Al-Qaeda activities in Afghanistan, the two groups "remain closely aligned and show no indications of breaking ties".

Key Issues and Options

A key priority for the Security Council is supporting the intra-Afghan talks to facilitate a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan. News of the accelerated withdrawal of US troops has added uncertainty to the process, and some analysts have expressed concern that the Taliban might abandon its engagement in the peace talks and pursue a military victory. There is also debate on whether the international community has non-military leverage to compel the Taliban to participate in peace negotiations.

Some have suggested that the removal of Taliban members from the 1988 UN sanctions list can be used as a tool to promote the group's engagement in the peace process. Several Council members, however, feel that sanctions relief should not be used as a bargaining chip and emphasise that de-listing should be approached on a case-by-case basis in line with resolution 2513, which calls for considering the de-listing of Taliban members based on their action, or lack thereof, to reduce violence or advance intra-Afghan negotiations. At the time of writing, there has been no new de-listing request submitted to the 1988 Committee in this regard.

UN DOCUMENTS ON AFGHANISTAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/ 2543 (15 September 2020) renewed the mandate of UNAMA until 17 September 2021. S/RES/2513 (10 March 2020) was on the US-Taliban agreement and the joint declaration issued by the US and the Afghan government. Secretary-General's Report S/2021/252 (12 March 2021) was the latest report on UNAMA. Security Council Letter S/2021/291 (26 March 2021) contained a record of the statements made at the latest quarterly meeting on Afghanistan, held on 23 March 2021. Security Council Press Statements SC/14515 (10 May 2021) condemned the 8 May attack on a high school in Kabul. SC/14510 (3 May 2021) condemned the 30 April attack on a guesthouse in Pul-e-Alam.

Afghanistan

Looking ahead to UNAMA's mandate renewal before its September expiry, members could consider whether any adjustments are needed to the mission's mandate. Such amendments could reflect UNAMA's expected cooperation with the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy and any possible changes because of the expected withdrawal of foreign troops.

The prevalent violence in Afghanistan, including its effect on children and youth and their right to education, is also a matter of concern for the Council. In this regard, Council members could raise awareness of the importance of incorporating child protection considerations in the intra-Afghan talks. They could also urge the parties to agree on child protection measures as early confidence-building steps in the negotiations. Such measures could include an agreement to cease attacks on schools and hospitals and to release and reintegrate child recruits and detainees.

Adequate resourcing for UNAMA's child protection capacities is an important related issue. In a 7 May Arria-formula meeting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children in situations of armed conflict, UNAMA's Human Rights Chief, Fiona Frazer, noted that the pandemic has laid bare the requirement for additional human resources to address the growing child-protection needs in an increasingly difficult environment. Resolution 2543 of 15 September 2020, which most recently renewed UNAMA's mandate, included language strengthening the mission's child protection capabilities, but the mission has not received additional human resources to date. During the upcoming negotiations in the General Assembly's fifth committee on special political missions in October and November, Council members may seek to emphasise the need to receive necessary financing for the implementation of provisions stipulated in resolution 2543.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the peace process in Afghanistan and for UNAMA's work. Possible changes to Council dynamics on Afghanistan relating to the change in the US administration and the advent of the five elected members in 2020 are likely to become more pronounced during the upcoming negotiations on UNAMA's mandate renewal.

Thus far, Ireland and Mexico—the co-chairs of the Informal Experts Group on women, peace and security—as well as Norway have indicated their strong emphasis on issues relating to the meaningful participation of women in the Afghan peace process and the safeguarding of their rights. Ireland has also signalled its focus on accountability, while India has emphasised issues relating to counter-terrorism.

India also appears to highlight the views of regional states on the Afghanistan file. In this regard, an initiative by Russia in early April to promote a presidential statement welcoming the 18 March meeting hosted by Russia in Moscow of the extended "Troika"—a group comprised of China, Pakistan, Russia and the US—did not succeed. It seems that India broke silence on the proposed text several times since it did not include its suggested language on the 30 March ministerial conference of the Heart of Asia Istanbul Process (a process aimed at increasing regional cooperation on Afghanistan comprising 15 countries, including Afghanistan, China, India and Russia).

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

Central African Republic

Expected Council Action

In June, the Council will discuss the latest Secretary-General's report on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). The Council will be briefed by Mankeur Ndiaye, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for the Central African Republic (CAR) and head of MINUSCA. Representatives of the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) may also brief the Council.

The mandate of MINUSCA expires on 15 November 2021. The CAR sanctions regime expires on 31 July 2021, and the mandate of the Panel of Experts supporting the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee expires on 31 August 2021.

Key Recent Developments

The security and political situations in the CAR have remained precarious since the 12 March adoption of resolution 2566, which increased MINUSCA's existing military and police components. Resolution 2566's adoption came in response to heightened instability in the CAR

as a rash of violence—perpetrated by a new coalition of armed groups, the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC), and aimed at disrupting the country's electoral process—engulfed parts of the country in December 2020 and January.

On 14 March, the CAR held the second round of legislative elections and the first round of partial legislative elections in areas where the 27 December 2020 first round of legislative elections could not be held because of violence. In a 24 March statement, MINUSCA announced that the day's voting "unfold[ed] without major incidents" and that the mission had provided security, logistical and administrative support to the CAR government and the National Elections Authority.

The political environment remains tense. Nonetheless, two important steps towards increased stability were taken shortly after the 14 March elections. First, on 18 March, preliminary consultations under the auspices of the national dialogue occurred, although this was opposed by demonstrators who argued that the government should not engage with the CPC. UN Deputy Special Representative

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE CAR Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2566 (12 March 2021) raised the MINUSCA troop ceiling. S/RES/2552 (12 November 2020) extended the mandate of MINUSCA and the authorisation to use all means to provide operational support to MINUSCA until 15 November 2021. S/RES/2536 (28 July 2020) renewed the CAR sanctions regime until 31 July 2021 and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the CAR Sanctions Committee until 31 August 2021. **Secretary-General's Report** S/2021/146 (16 February 2021) was the most recent report on MINUSCA.

Central African Republic

for MINUSCA Denise Brown participated in a meeting of the executive committee established to implement CAR's 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (Political Agreement). Second, on 30 March, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, the incumbent president who was re-elected on 27 December 2020, was sworn in. Speaking at his inauguration, Touadéra promised the beginning of dialogue with the aim of easing tensions. He also said that "at the end of this mandate, there will be no active armed groups on the national territory".

On 20 April, the leaders of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) issued a statement calling on the international community to "join regional efforts aimed at providing support to the efforts initiated by the CAR with a view to revitalizing the Political Agreement".

Despite an overall decrease in violence, sporadic fighting continues to create insecurity and displacement. UNHCR reported on 20 April that fighting between the government and armed opposition groups in northern regions of the CAR forced over 2,000 civilians to flee into Chad. On 10 May, MINUSCA announced that it had deployed 300 troops to protect civilians in the town of Bakouma in eastern CAR after armed groups destroyed local infrastructure, preventing access to the town. Bakouma, the mission noted, is one of the localities where the security situation had prevented the 27 December 2020 and 14 March elections from being held.

Finally, the CAR's humanitarian situation remains fragile: according to OCHA, nearly 2.8 million people—some 57 percent of the CAR's population—are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. The World Food Programme and Food and Agriculture Organization said on 19 May that 47 percent of the CAR's population suffers from food insecurity and that 2.29 million people living mostly in rural areas now require urgent support.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 31 March, several working groups and special rapporteurs of the UN Human Rights Council released a joint statement expressing alarm at the increased recruitment and use of private military and foreign security contractors by the CAR government. The statement also referred to coordinated meetings between MINUSCA and "Russian advisors", the advisors' presence at MINUSCA bases and medical evacuations of wounded "Russian trainers" to MINUSCA bases. It further noted continued reports of grave human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law, attributable to the private military personnel operating jointly with CAR's armed forces (FACA), and in some instances, UN peacekeepers.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is the security situation in the CAR. Given continued reports of security challenges, the Council will be closely following MINUSCA's operations to address the threat of armed groups and to fulfil its protection of civilians mandate.

A related issue for the Council is how the mission is working to provide assistance to the CAR authorities to advance the national dialogue. To this end, Council members may wish to issue a press statement expressing explicit support for the political process and strongly encouraging the government to take a proactive role on the dialogue.

As the June briefing will be the Council's first meeting on the CAR since the adoption of resolution 2566, Council members will be keen to learn about the status of the deployment of additional forces that were approved in March.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Overall, there is strong support amongst Council members for the work of MINUSCA. In several Council meetings held on the CAR during the recent crisis, members expressed unity in providing the mission with the resources needed to quell violence and help it to fulfil its protection of civilians mandate. Resolution 2566, however, did not receive unanimous support, with the Russian Federation abstaining on the vote, apparently because the text did not include a reference to the "UN guiding principles of humanitarian emergency assistance", which are included in UN General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 and call for the "sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States" to be fully respected in accordance with the UN Charter.

The prospect of lifting the arms embargo, which was imposed on the country by resolution 2127 in 2013, remains a contentious issue. China and Russia argue that the Council should ease the arms embargo with the aim of lifting it completely, while some other Council members believe that there is little room for further adjustments given the limited progress that has been made on achieving the benchmarks for progressively lifting or suspending the embargo. This may be a focus of discussions among members in June, in advance of the sanctions regime renewal anticipated in July.

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

Children and Armed Conflict

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council is expected to hold an open debate on children and armed conflict. Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid is expected to chair the meeting, which will be held at ministerial level. A senior Secretariat official is expected to present the

Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict, which is due in June. Other speakers are likely to include the Executive Director of UNICEF, Henrietta Fore, and a civil society briefer.

UN DOCUMENTS ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/8 (10 September 2020) was on attacks against schools. Secretary-General's Report S/2020/1243 (17 December 2020) was the sixth Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict in Myanmar. S/2020/525 (9 June 2020) was the annual report on children and armed conflict. Security Council Letter S/2020/594 (6 July 2020) contained the statements made at the annual open debate on children and armed conflict, which was held via videoconference on 23 June 2020. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8756 (10 September 2020) was an open debate on attacks against schools.

Children and Armed Conflict

Key Recent Developments

In the past year, Council members continued to follow closely the potential effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children and the UN's ability to address them. According to a 3 May report by the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict titled "Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict", the pandemic severely affected the UN's ability to monitor and verify grave violations against children and curtailed its efforts to engage with conflict parties to end and prevent such violations.

The monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM) was particularly affected during the second and third quarter of 2020 because of movement restrictions, which have limited the UN's ability to undertake fieldwork. While the UN country task forces on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children (CTFMR) continued their work in that period, the restrictions resulted in a backlog of cases requiring verification. The 3 May report further emphasised that the MRM was able to maintain its high standards of monitoring and verification, notwithstanding the difficulties posed by the pandemic.

The report notes that because of the backlog in verifying reported violations, it might take some time for the full scale of violations against children during 2020 to become evident. Although available data does not allow for definitive conclusions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children, the 3 May report suggests that the pandemic and measures implemented by states to mitigate its effects have likely increased children's vulnerability to recruitment and use, notably because of school closures and loss of family income. In addition, girls are likely to have become more vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence because of reduced mobility and increased isolation.

As in previous years, the Secretary-General's upcoming annual report is expected to contain annexes listing parties that have committed grave violations against children (their recruitment and use, killing and maiming, abductions, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and attacks on schools and hospitals).

The Secretary-General's latest annual report, issued on 9 June 2020, generated criticism from some members of the Security Council and civil society organisations because of the de-listing of the Saudi Arabia-led Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen for the violation of killing and maiming, despite the fact that the annual report showed that it had committed 222 such violations in 2019. Criticism was also aimed at the decision to de-list the Myanmar Armed Forces, known as the Tatmadaw, for the violation of recruitment and use, although they were responsible for eight cases of new recruitment and 197 cases of use in 2019, according to the findings of the annual report. The report emphasised that failure by both parties to further reduce violations will result in an automatic re-listing for the relevant violation in the next annual report.

In a 12 May open letter, 18 civil society organisations called on the Secretary-General to include in the annexes of the upcoming annual report a complete list of perpetrators of grave violations against children that accurately reflects the data collected by the MRM. The letter further notes that the Saudi Arabia-led coalition and the Tatmadaw continued to commit violations in 2020. According to the Secretary-General's sixth report on children and armed conflict in Myanmar, issued on 17 December 2020, the

UN verified that the Tatmadaw recruited and used 302 children during the first half of 2020 alone—more than the total violations it committed in 2019.

In recent months, UN officials and Council members have expressed alarm over developments in several country situations that are not on the Council's agenda and are not included in the Secretary-General's annual report. In the Tigray region of Ethiopia, many children are among the approximately one million people who have been displaced by the fighting since November 2020. In a 20 April statement, a UNICEF spokesperson described a "disturbing picture of severe and ongoing child rights violations" in Tigray, noting that UNICEF has received an average of three reports of gender-based violence per day between 1 January and 16 April.

In Mozambique, attacks in the Palma district of Cabo Delgado in late March have displaced at least 46,000 people by 11 May, approximately 40 percent of whom are children. In a 31 March statement, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba and other high-level UN officials expressed concern regarding "the unprecedented levels of violence especially the killings, beheading and kidnapping of civilians, including women and very young children". They urged Mozambique's government to "exercise its duty of due diligence to protect girls and boys, women and civilians from atrocities and acts of violence" and to hold perpetrators to account.

Developments in the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

Norway took over from Belgium as the chair of the working group in January. By the end of May, the group had held five formal meetings in 2021.

On 12 March, the working group adopted conclusions on the Secretary-General's report on South Sudan. At the time of writing, it was negotiating its conclusions on the Secretary-General's report on Myanmar and was about to begin negotiations on the Secretary-General's report on Syria (published on 19 May). It appears that some Council members want the conclusions on Myanmar also to reflect the situation of children since the 1 February takeover of the government by the Tatmadaw, although they are beyond the scope of the 30 June 2020 cut-off date of the Secretary-General's Myanmar report. As at 6 May, the UN had reported the killing of at least 53 children by security forces and the arbitrary detention of around 1,000 children and young people in Myanmar.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is having the Secretary-General's annual reports serve as an effective tool in supporting the implementation of the children and armed conflict agenda.

Concerns have been raised that if parties that do not appear to have stopped committing violations against children are nonetheless taken off the annexes, the credibility of the Secretary-General's report may be called into question. Council members could call for the consistent and transparent application of the criteria for listing and de-listing parties, which were set out in the Secretary-General's 2010 annual report. That report said that a party would be de-listed if the UN had verified that it "has ceased commission of all the said grave violations" for which it was listed.

Another important issue is facilitating adequate funding for child protection capacities in UN missions. In a 7 May virtual Arria-formula meeting on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children in situations of armed conflict, Council members heard from representatives of various UN peace operations,

Children and Armed Conflict

who argued that the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the insufficient financing for child protection in UN missions. Council members could seek to integrate relevant language on resourcing for child protection personnel more systematically into mandates of UN peace operations. The working group's practice of conducting meetings with relevant CTFMRs ahead of mandate renewals can assist in obtaining information on these issues. After relevant language is included in mandate renewal resolutions, members may wish to follow budget discussions in the General Assembly's Fifth Committee to facilitate the necessary resourcing of these provisions.

Another concern for Council members is how to address the potential effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on violations against children, including on the right to education and the vulnerability faced by girls. Members could request the UN to continue to improve the systematic collection of gender-disaggregated data on grave violations to better tailor gender-sensitive responses. During a September 2020 open debate focusing on attacks on education, the need for more gender-disaggregated information on attacks against schools was highlighted, as women and girls are often deliberately targeted in attacks on education.

Council members may also consider ways to address instances of grave violations against children in country situations that are not on the Council's agenda or included in the Secretary-General's annual report. They could ask Gamba to brief the working group on such emerging

issues and call on the Secretary-General to include in the narrative of his annual report information that may help to prevent such violations. Council members could also address child protection considerations in their statements during Council meetings on issues such as Tigray, as such situations that are not on the Council's agenda are sometimes discussed in closed consultations or under "any other business".

Council Dynamics

There is strong support overall for the children and armed conflict agenda among Council members. However, political sensitivities in the Council over issues such as Myanmar and Syria have filtered down to the subsidiary body level, resulting in protracted negotiations before consensus can be reached on some conclusions.

Disagreements have also arisen during negotiations on conclusions regarding references to the "UN guiding principles" of humanitarian assistance. Russia has increasingly pushed this formulation in Council products, which is viewed as giving greater weight to state sovereignty and the consent of the country concerned. Other Council members prefer references to the delivery of humanitarian assistance in accordance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Ambassador Mona Juul (Norway) chairs the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

Cybersecurity

Expected Council Action

In June, Estonia is organising a high-level open debate on cybersecurity as a signature event of its presidency. High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu is expected to brief. Kaja Kallas, the Prime Minister of Estonia, will chair the meeting.

Background

In recent years, the Council has become progressively more involved in addressing emerging threats to international peace and security. This includes its engagement on issues such as climate and security, pandemics, and food insecurity, among others. The Council has considered these emerging threats at the thematic level while also integrating them into its country and region-specific work.

The debate on cybersecurity will mark the first time the Council will address this specific issue in a formal setting. To date, formal discussions on cybersecurity and other issues related to information and communication technologies (ICT) have taken place in the UN General Assembly. Initial discussions on information security took place in the First Committee of the General Assembly in 1998. The following year, the General Assembly adopted resolution 53/70 on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security. The resolution called on member states to "promote at multilateral levels the consideration of existing and potential threats in the field of information security".

Discussions on cyber threats have been taking place in two General Assembly-mandated processes, the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Advancing responsible State behaviour in cyberspace in the context of international security, and the Open-Ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of ICTs in the context of international Security (OEWG).

According to its founding resolution, adopted in December 2018, the OEWG strives to "further develop the rules, norms, and principles of responsible behaviour of states...and the ways for their implementation" regarding information and telecommunications in the context of international security. Unlike the OEWG, which is open to all member states, the GGE, with a similar mandate, is composed of 25 member states. A series of GGE meetings began in 2004, intended to help promote cooperation among states in addressing security threats from information and communications technology.

In recent years, Council members have started paying closer attention to a broader set of issues related to cybersecurity and its linkages to international peace and security. This is evident from the growing number of Arria-formula meetings devoted to these issues.

On 23 November 2016, Spain and Senegal organised the first Arria-formula meeting dedicated exclusively to issues related to cybersecurity. The meeting's stated objective was to broaden discussion on the potential role of ICTs in fueling political or military tensions, as well as the importance of the protection of ICT-dependent critical infrastructures.

UN DOCUMENTS ON CYBERSECURITY General Assembly Documents A/75/816 (18 March 2021) was the report of the Open-ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security. A/RES/53/70 (4 January 1999) was a resolution on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security.

Cybersecurity

During its 2016–17 Council tenure, Ukraine organised two Arria-formula meetings that addressed certain issues related to cybersecurity. The 21 November 2016 meeting explored the potential consequences of terrorist attacks—whether physical or cyber in nature—on critical infrastructure. On 31 March 2017, Ukraine organised a meeting on hybrid wars as a threat to international peace and security, which focused on the changing nature of warfare resulting from the growing use of new technologies and strategies. The meeting drew attention to the use of a combination of military, quasi-military and non-military instruments in a synchronised manner tailored to the specific vulnerabilities of the target. Among others, these included the use of cyberattacks, interference with political processes and the systematic dissemination of propaganda domestically and internationally.

In 2020, there were two Arria-formula meetings on topics related to the issue of cybersecurity in the context of international peace and security. On 22 May, Estonia organised a meeting on “Cyber Stability, Conflict Prevention and Capacity Building”. The meeting centred on issues related to the application of international law in cyberspace; existing frameworks for responsible state behaviour in cyberspace; and capacity and confidence-building measures in cyberspace. On 26 August, Indonesia organised a meeting on “Cyber-Attacks Against Critical Infrastructure”. The main objective of the meeting was to raise awareness of the vulnerability of critical infrastructure against cyber-attacks and to advance discussions on

the need to protect critical infrastructure against this threat. It also explored how norms of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace protect critical infrastructure and contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security.

In all instances but one, elected members took on the initiative for organising Arria-formula meetings on broader issues related to the nexus between ITCs and international peace and security. China was the first permanent member to use the Arria-formula format to initiate discussion on these issues. On 17 May, it organised a meeting on the impact of emerging technologies on international peace and security. The core objective of the meeting was to expand the understanding of emerging technologies and call on the international community to bolster discussion on their development and application. China also suggested that the Council should dedicate more attention to the impact of emerging technologies in the issues on its agenda.

During its campaign for the 2020–2021 Security Council term, Estonia identified cybersecurity as one of its most important priorities, including in the context of threats of cyber-attacks. The debate is part of greater efforts by Estonia to raise awareness of cyber challenges to international peace and security and explore questions regarding the Council’s role. It is also intended to foster discussion on enhancing the implementation of existing norms of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council will vote on the renewal of the 1533 Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) sanctions regime and on the mandate renewal of its Group of Experts. The sanctions measures, last renewed by resolution 2528 on 25 June 2020, will expire on 1 July. The mandate of the Group of Experts, due to expire on 1 August, was also last extended by resolution 2528. Both are traditionally renewed at the same time. The final report of the Group of Experts is expected to be shared with members of the Security Council by 15 June. France is the penholder on the DRC; Niger chairs the 1533 Sanctions Committee.

Key Recent Developments

The latest meeting concerning the DRC sanctions regime took place on 20 May, when the 1533 Committee met in a closed videoconference (VTC) meeting to discuss the final report of the Group of Experts and the report’s recommendations. The Group of Experts is mandated to report to the Council twice within its mandate cycle and had submitted its interim report to Council members on 23 December 2020.

The interim report covers the Experts’ findings regarding the activities of armed groups, including attacks against civilians, the use of children and the improved capacity by some groups to build improvised explosive devices. The report also covers illicit activities

implicating the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC); cocoa farming and its links to armed group and FARDC activity; and the involvement of criminal networks in smuggling tin, tantalum and tungsten from mining sites under armed-group occupation. In Southern Irumu territory, the number of attacks against civilians by armed groups coming from North Kivu reportedly increased with FARDC operations, leading to large population displacements. In South Kivu, the armed group Mai-Mai Yakutum-ba continued to use illegal exploitation of gold and illicit logging as income streams. The Group of Experts also reported on cross-border issues, noting operations by elements of the Rwandan Defence Force in North Kivu from late 2019 to early October 2020 and incursions into South Kivu by the Burundi National Defence Force and the Imbonerakure youth. Two weapons seizures in Kinshasa indicated the continued existence of internal trafficking networks.

Although the Experts’ final report is already under consideration by the 1533 Committee, it is still confidential until its submission to the Security Council. It is likely to contain updates on cases under investigation by the group. The group’s recommendations for improved compliance with the sanctions regime will likely be addressed to either member states—including the DRC and its neighbouring countries—the Council or the committee and may centre around improving cooperation in the area of cross-border protection;

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DRC Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2556 (18 December 2020) extended the mandate of MONUSCO until 20 December 2021. **S/RES/2528** (25 June 2020) renewed the DRC sanctions regime until 1 July 2021 and the mandate for the Group of Experts until 1 August 2021. **Secretary-General’s Reports S/2021/274** (18 March 2021) covered the formation of a new government coalition and progress regarding the gradual handover of security responsibilities to the DRC government in Kasai and Tanganyika. **S/2020/919** (21 September 2020) detailed developments in the DRC from 17 June to 18 September 2020 and provided information on adjustments to MONUSCO’s footprint ahead of a potential, and responsible, drawdown. **Security Council Letter S/2020/1265** (26 February 2021) contained the voting record for resolution 2556.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

strengthening the capacity of the DRC government to counter illegal exploitation and trade of its natural resources while also improving traceability of traded goods; furthering disarmament, demobilization and reintegration measures; addressing armed-group activity and non-compliance of the FARDC; and curtailing weapons trafficking.

Political, security and key regional developments in the DRC and the wider region will also play a role when Council members convene to consider the sanctions regime in June. In the first months of the year, President Félix Tshisekedi reshuffled his cabinet and formed a new governing majority. The new government is now geared towards implementing his governance reform agenda, ranging from areas of governance to justice and security sector reform.

The latter will be of particular interest given that the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) will close its locations in Kasai and Kasai Central by June and in Tanganyika by June 2022, with the DRC government taking over security responsibilities in those areas. The Secretary-General's 18 March report on MONUSCO noted the deteriorating security situation in Ituri Province, in most areas of North Kivu, and across Kasai and Kasai Central. Between December 2020 and January, MONUSCO documented 1,111 human rights violations, attributing 51 percent of violations to armed groups and 49 percent to state agents. On 10 May, one peacekeeper was killed in an attack on MONUSCO by suspected elements of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in the Beni region.

On 4 December 2020, the Secretary-General presented his Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region. The strategy is intended to guide UN engagement in the region for the upcoming ten years, including on cross-border security matters and the sustainable management of natural resources.

Key Issues and Options

Security Council members will be guided by the findings contained in the Group of Experts' report when considering the renewal of the sanctions measures. The last renewal on 25 June 2020 reaffirmed

the existing sanctions measures and extended the mandate of the Group of Experts by another 14 months. As MONUSCO undergoes transition and the government focuses on key political reforms, the Council may consider maintaining the sanctions measures to further monitor the situation for another year. Given the role the illegal exploitation of and trade in natural resources as well as arms trafficking play in the financing of armed groups, the Council may consider language aimed at improving the capacity of the government to counter illicit exploitation and improve traceability of goods.

As cross-border cooperation is a key topic for the DRC and the Great Lakes Region, efforts undertaken since the last renewal by the countries concerned and the UN system may be reflected in the new draft.

Resolution 2528 also calls on the government to "swiftly and fully investigate the killing of the two members of the Group of Experts and the four Congolese nationals accompanying them and bring those responsible to justice". A new resolution may reflect the status of investigations since the March 2017 killings and may also reference the killing of the Italian ambassador to the DRC and three Italian embassy and World Food Programme (WFP) staff members in an attack on their convoy north of Goma on 22 February.

Council Dynamics

Resolution 2528 was adopted unanimously, reaffirming the Council's intent to hold accountable individuals and entities designated by the committee that meet the sanctions criteria, including "engaging in or providing support for acts that undermine the peace, stability or security of the DRC and planning, directing, sponsoring or participating in attacks against MONUSCO peacekeepers or UN personnel, including members of the Group of Experts" and violators of international law in respect of "the targeting of children or women in situations of armed conflict". Although the composition of the Council has changed, the common understanding of the continued applicability of the sanctions measures in their current form appears to persist.

Iran

Expected Council Action

In June, the Security Council is scheduled to receive the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 2231, which in 2015 endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme. The Council also expects reports from the Joint Commission, established by the parties to the JCPOA to oversee its implementation, and from the Council's 2231 facilitator, Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason (Ireland). Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo and a representative of the EU in its capacity as coordinator of the Joint Commission are also expected to brief the Council by video-conference (VTC).

Key Recent Developments

Starting in early April and continuing through May, the remaining parties to the JCPOA (China, France, Germany, Russia, the UK, and Iran) convened a series of meetings in Vienna under the chairmanship of the EU to discuss the prospect of a possible US return to the JCPOA. The US delegation was also present in Vienna but did not participate directly in these meetings. The remaining parties to the JCPOA served as intermediaries between Iran and the US, given that Iran refused to engage in direct talks with the US.

Then-US President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the JCPOA in May 2018 and subsequently imposed a series of unilateral sanctions on Iran as part of a broader strategy of maximum pressure. In response, Iran, which has formally remained in the agreement,

Iran

resumed uranium enrichment beyond JCPOA-mandated limits. Iran has conditioned its return to full compliance with the JCPOA on sanctions relief from the agreement's remaining parties.

The current US president, Joe Biden, has indicated his intention to re-enter the agreement under the condition that Iran first returns to full compliance. Biden has said that this would be a starting point for further negotiations to address other issues, including Iran's destabilising activities in the region and its ballistic missile program. Iran has emphasised that it would return to full compliance only after the US does the same. It has ruled out any negotiations over the terms of the JCPOA.

During the initial rounds of talks in Vienna, an agreement was reached to create two working groups, one focused on the lifting of specific US sanctions and the other on steps Iran should take to return to compliance with its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA. A third working group was later created to examine the potential sequencing of corresponding measures.

The talks in Vienna continued even after the 11 April explosion at the Iranian nuclear facility in Natanz. The explosion disrupted the power supply to some of the centrifuges used in the uranium-enrichment process. Iran described the incident as sabotage and blamed Israel, which neither confirmed nor denied its involvement. The US denied involvement and refused to speculate on the causes of the incident. In the following days, Iran released more details indicating that explosives were used to target the centrifuges' power supply. It named Reza Karimi as the main suspect in the attack and said that he left the country shortly before it occurred.

On 13 April, Iran announced that it would start enriching some of its uranium stock at a 60 percent level, well above the JCPOA-set limit of 3.67 percent. Three parties to the agreement (France, Germany and the UK) issued a joint statement expressing concern over Iran's plan to increase its uranium enrichment activities, which they called an important step towards the production of a nuclear weapon. They said that Iran's announcement runs contrary to ongoing diplomatic efforts to revive the JCPOA.

In December 2020, Iran's parliament passed a law significantly limiting the access of IAEA inspectors to Iran's nuclear sites starting in February 2021. However, the IAEA and Iran reached a temporary agreement in February allowing the agency to undertake verification and monitoring activities at Iran's nuclear sites until 21 May that were less limiting than the measures outlined in the December 2020 law. On 24 May, Iran and the IAEA extended this agreement until 24 June.

Key Issues and Options

The main concern for the Council is to promote full implementation of resolution 2231 by the remaining parties to the JCPOA and the wider UN membership.

The long-term survival of the JCPOA remains in question, given the US withdrawal from the agreement in May 2018, its ongoing bilateral sanctions on Iran, and Iran's continued breaches of its commitments under the agreement. Council members will continue to follow closely the diplomatic efforts in Vienna to revive the JCPOA. Should those efforts result in the stated objective of restoring the agreement, the Council could consider

issuing a statement welcoming this development.

Although still formally in the JCPOA, Iran has continued to breach its nuclear-related commitments under the agreement. Should the remaining parties to the agreement fail to resolve Iran's noncompliance issues, an option would be to formally notify the Council, which would initiate the so-called "snapback mechanism" that would effectively reinstate the sanctions that were in place before the adoption of resolution 2231. At the moment, this option seems less likely, given its possible implications for the ongoing diplomatic talks in Vienna.

The October 2020 expiry of arms-related restrictions on Iran poses a related issue for the Council, given the deep divisions among permanent members over how to address this. Some Council members, including JCPOA participant states, have concerns about Iran's destabilising behaviour in the region and its support for proxy groups. However, the Council would face a difficult challenge in trying to address Iran's activities in the region without affecting the JCPOA.

Council Dynamics

For several years, Council dynamics on Iran were characterised by deep divisions between the US and a majority of other members. This was a direct consequence of the Trump administration's policy towards Iran and, in particular, its attempts to undermine the JCPOA. Last year, the US found itself isolated during several attempts to pursue this policy objective through the Council. Facing the October 2020 expiry of arms-related restrictions on Iran under resolution 2231, the US tabled a draft resolution that would have extended the arms embargo on Iran indefinitely. The draft was not adopted, receiving two votes in favour (Dominican Republic and the US), two against (China and Russia), and 11 abstentions. Soon after, the US notified the Council that it found Iran in noncompliance with the JCPOA and claimed that it had triggered the snapback mechanism under resolution 2231, which would effectively restore all UN sanctions on Iran that were in force before the adoption of resolution 2231. All Council members, excluding the US and the Dominican Republic, expressed their opposition to the US move. They argued that the US did not have the right to invoke the snapback provision under resolution 2231 because of its withdrawal from the JCPOA.

As a result of the change of policy by the Biden administration, Council members are likely to find more common ground on issues related to Iran, primarily the JCPOA. The US interest in restoring the JCPOA means that it no longer finds itself isolated in the Council on this issue.

JCPOA participants France and the UK have emphasised the importance of preserving the JCPOA, especially its nuclear-related provisions. These members, as well as the US, have expressed concerns over the expiry of arms-related restrictions in October 2020 and Iran's destabilising behaviour in the region. One of the stated objectives of the Biden administration is to address these issues in a follow-up agreement after first restoring the JCPOA. Iran has signalled that any changes to resolution 2231, including the extension of arms-related restrictions, would force it to withdraw from the agreement. Russia and China are adamant about implementing all aspects of resolution 2231, including its sunset clauses.

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