

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

In October, Kenya will hold the presidency of the Security Council.

Kenya will hold several signature events during its presidency. It will convene a high-level open debate on the theme “[Diversity and State-building](#)” under the agenda item “Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace”. President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya plans to chair the session.

The Council is also expected to hold a high-level open debate via videoconference (VTC) on cooperation between the [UN and regional and sub-regional organisations](#), focusing on the AU. President Kenyatta is also expected to chair this meeting. Briefings are anticipated from Secretary-General Guterres, AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, and High Representative for the African Union Peace Fund Donald Kaberuka. A presidential statement is a possible outcome.

The annual open debate on [women, peace and security](#) is planned for October and will be held at ministerial level. It seems that the open debate will focus on the contribution of local women to peacekeeping, peacebuilding and transitional settings during and following UN peace operations. Similar to Ireland in September and Mexico next month, Kenya plans to make women, peace and security one of the key themes of its presidency.

A briefing to consider the Secretary-General’s seventh biennial report on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) will be convened. UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu, Executive Secretary of the Regional Centre on Small Arms in the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa and Bordering States (RECSA) Lieutenant General Badrelin Elamin Abdelgadir, and Senior Researcher at Small Arms Survey David Lochhead are the anticipated briefers.

The Council will receive a briefing from the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the [Great Lakes](#), Huang Xia, on the Secretary-General’s biennial report on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Region. The format of the meeting is expected to

be a ministerial-level debate chaired by Kenyan Foreign Minister Raychelle Omamo. A presidential statement is the anticipated outcome of this meeting.

The Council is also expected to conduct a visiting mission to the Sahel during the month, travelling to Mali and Niger. France and Niger are co-leading the mission.

Other African issues on the programme of work in October are:

- [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), a briefing on the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO);
- [Western Sahara](#), a briefing in consultations on the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and a renewal of the mission’s mandate;
- [Central African Republic](#), a briefing on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA);
- [Somalia](#), a briefing on the work of the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee;
- [Sudan/South Sudan](#), a briefing on the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA); and
- [Mali](#), a briefing on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

The Council will hold its monthly meetings on the political and humanitarian situations and on the use of chemical weapons in [Syria](#). Other Middle East issues on the programme of work this month include:

- [Yemen](#), the monthly meeting on developments;
- [Golan Heights](#), a briefing in consultations on the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF);
- “[The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question](#)”, the quarterly open debate; and
- [Lebanon](#), a briefing in consultations on the implementation of resolution 1559.

Overview

Two issues in the Americas will be discussed in October:

- [Haiti](#), a briefing on the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) and a renewal of BINUH's mandate; and
- [Colombia](#), a briefing on the UN Verification Mission in Colombia

and a renewal of the mission's mandate.

A briefing on the work of the UN Interim Administration Mission in [Kosovo](#) (UNMIK) is anticipated.

In Hindsight: The GERD and Water Security

On 15 September, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement on the dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The presidential statement, the Council's first outcome on this matter, calls for a resumption of the African Union (AU)-led negotiations to reach a "binding agreement on the filling and operation of the GERD" (S/PRST/2021/18). It was adopted after more than 14 months of sporadic AU-led negotiations and Security Council engagement on this issue.

Council practice in recent years has shown a growing concern about water security issues. At one level, the Council's discussion of the GERD could be viewed as an evolution of this practice. But while other Council discussions on water security have been at the thematic level or broad in focus, this case pitted the direct interests of influential member states against one another in a strategically important region. The roles of the AU and the League of Arab States (LAS) also shaped the way the Council addressed this issue, as did concerns that the Council could be drawn into other transboundary water disputes across the globe.

The ongoing dispute dates back to 2011, when Ethiopia started building the GERD on the Blue Nile. While Ethiopia argues that the hydropower dam, with an expected capacity of 6,000 megawatts, is vital for its development, downstream countries Egypt and Sudan have said that the GERD will threaten their own water supply and called on Ethiopia not to fill the dam without reaching a prior binding agreement. They have also accused Ethiopia of intransigence in the AU-led negotiations (which started on 26 June 2020), expressed concerns about the dispute's implications for regional peace and security, and sought the Security Council's intervention. Ethiopia has maintained that the AU-led tripartite negotiation process is the appropriate forum for resolving the dispute and accused the two downstream countries of a lack of good faith in the negotiations. Ethiopia has further argued that Egypt and Sudan are pushing for recognition of their water rights based on an unfair colonial-era treaty, a view that those countries contest.

On 23 March 2015, the three countries signed a Declaration of Principles on the GERD in Khartoum. This declaration was built around ten principles, which included prioritising cooperation, agreeing not to cause significant harm, peaceful settlement of disputes, and equitable and reasonable utilisation, among other things. While that was seen as a positive step—and many issues have been agreed upon in the negotiation process since then, including technical matters related to the dam's operation—several areas of significant disagreement remain unresolved. These include whether to establish a dispute resolution mechanism, how to manage water flow in case of drought, and even whether to call the negotiated document "an agreement" or merely "guidelines and rules".

The Council and Water Security

Although the Council has not previously engaged in a bitter transboundary water dispute like the one taking place over the GERD, it has discussed transboundary water issues for several years. Since late 2008, Council members have met twice a year to consider the work of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), a political mission established in 2008 by then-Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to help Central Asian governments address international terrorism, drug trafficking, organised crime, and environmental degradation (S/2007/279). One of UNRCCA's tasks is to foster dialogue among states in the region on transboundary water management issues, a point highlighted in several press statements issued by Council members. Most recently (January 2018), Council members encouraged Central Asian states to "play a full and active role" in managing transboundary waters and "to engage constructively in consultations to reach agreement on how to meet energy and water resource challenges across the region" (SC/13179).

In November 2016, under the Senegalese presidency, the Council held its first open debate on water, peace and security to highlight the growing threat of water insecurity, including in relation to transboundary waterways. Senegal had tested this idea among members in April 2016 through an Arria-formula meeting on water, peace and security that was chaired by the country's president, Macky Sall. Only months later, as a signature event of its June 2017 Council presidency, Bolivia organised a high-level briefing, chaired by its then-president, Evo Morales, on "preventive diplomacy and transboundary waters".

A number of themes emerged in these meetings. Several members maintained that management of transboundary waters should not be viewed primarily as a source of tension, but as an opportunity for inter-state cooperation. Some member states further recognised that addressing water disputes at an early stage could be viewed in the context of the Council's conflict prevention work, as the title of the June 2017 meeting suggests. Tensions were also evident, however, over whether the Council is the appropriate forum for addressing water security issues. Among member states not in favour of such Council engagement, Russia said in the November 2016 meeting that water-related matters are primarily sustainable development issues that the Council does not have the expertise to address, and in the June 2017 meeting that transboundary water issues should be dealt with in "specialized organizations", including at the regional level, rather than through the Security Council.

The GERD and the Council

The Council held its first public meeting on the GERD on 29 June 2020, following an escalation in tensions during the previous weeks over Ethiopia announcing its intention to prepare for the first filling

In Hindsight: The GERD and Water Security

of the dam. The Council had discussed the GERD behind closed doors under “any other business” one week earlier, and it convened the public meeting under the broad rubric “Peace and security in Africa”. Both approaches avoided placing the GERD issue formally on the Council’s agenda. Between 1 May and 29 June 2020, each of the parties directly involved (Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan) sent two letters to the Council setting out their national positions. During the 29 June meeting, several Council members recognised the AU’s mediation efforts, with some members emphasising that the dispute should be resolved at the regional level. China and Indonesia underscored their view that the Council’s discussion of the matter should not set a precedent for Council engagement in other, similar types of dispute.

One year later, Addis Ababa’s intention to move forward with the second filling of the dam prompted Egypt and Sudan to request a meeting of the LAS. On 15 June 2021, following that meeting, the LAS adopted a resolution which called on the UN Security Council to discuss the dispute and on Ethiopia to refrain from the second filling of the dam without first having reached an agreement with the countries affected. In a statement the same day, the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected the LAS resolution “in its entirety”. In line with the LAS resolution, Tunisia—a member of the UN Security Council, the LAS and the AU—requested the Security Council to meet on the GERD, which it did on 8 July. Tunisia has not contested the fact that the GERD negotiations should take place within the AU-led process, but pursued a Security Council product calling on Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan to resume those negotiations with the goal of a binding agreement on the filling and operation of the GERD.

In bringing this matter to the Council and seeking an outcome, Tunisia’s perspective differed from that of its partners in the “A3 plus one” grouping—Kenya, Niger and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines—and other members, who would have preferred that this dispute not be elevated to the Security Council. It seems that Egypt was actively engaged in bilateral diplomacy with Council members to promote the organ’s engagement on this issue.

During the 8 July 2021 Council meeting, many members emphasised that these types of disagreements are better solved regionally and through dialogue among the parties involved (S/PV.8816). Kenya called on the parties “to recommit to negotiating in good faith within the AU-led process” and expressed its “total confidence that our Egyptian, Ethiopian and Sudanese brothers and sisters will make the principle of African solutions for African challenges a reality”, while Niger called on “all parties to prioritize reaching a regional and African solution to the GERD issue”. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines said that “the African Union is best-suited to facilitate the pacific settlement of disputes on the motherland”; along with Mexico, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines referred to Chapter VIII of the UN Charter (which encourages the peaceful resolution of local disputes by regional arrangements or agencies as long as their efforts are consistent with the principles and purposes of the UN). Viet Nam was especially direct, saying “it is high time that the AU accelerate its efforts in assisting the three countries to resolve the outstanding issues”.

Negotiations on the presidential statement were prolonged and

arduous. Tunisia had initially proposed a resolution in July, but following Council members’ inability to agree on this product, it pursued a presidential statement, an outcome with less political clout than a resolution but one requiring consensus to be adopted. In the final product, the Council declared that its statement “does not set out any principles or precedent in any other transboundary water disputes”. This caveat was fueled by fear of overreach if the Council were to engage in transboundary water disputes across the globe, as there are some 260 transboundary lake and river basins and 300 transboundary aquifers, many without cooperative management frameworks.¹ These concerns were particularly evident in India’s statement after the adoption of the presidential statement. As explained by its Deputy Permanent Representative Ravindra Ragutahalli, India—as “an upper, middle and lower riparian State, with several rivers entering and exiting [its] land”—has taken the view that “as a general rule, transboundary water issues do not belong to the domain of the Security Council”.

Early iterations of the Council text apparently requested the Secretary-General to report on the dispute to the Council within six months. This reference was removed in the final version of the text, as some Council members were concerned that it would lead to further Council involvement on the GERD.

It remains to be seen whether the Council maintains its pledge that the GERD presidential statement does not establish a precedent. While members may be reluctant to discuss transboundary water disputes, such issues are likely to persist and, given the effects of climate change, may grow more contentious.

1. UN Water, Transboundary Waters <<https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/transboundary-waters/>> last accessed 27 September 2021.

Status Update since our September Forecast

The Elders

On 7 September, the Security Council held a briefing on the maintenance of international peace and security with The Elders, a non-governmental organisation of independent global leaders founded in 2007 by Nelson Mandela that strives to promote peace and human rights (S/PV.8850). The briefers were Mary Robinson—Chair of The Elders, former President of Ireland, and a past UN High Commissioner for Human Rights—and Lakhdar Brahimi, an Elder Emeritus and former Foreign Minister of Algeria.

UN Peace Operations Transitions

On 8 September, the Security Council held a ministerial-level open debate on UN transitions under the agenda item “UN peacekeeping operations”. Secretary-General António Guterres, former President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Secretary General of the Community Development Association in Sudan Safaa El-Agib Adam briefed the Council (S/PV.8851). On 9 September, the Council adopted resolution 2594, which “requests the Secretary-General to provide a report on the status of transitions across relevant UN peace operations, including those that have transitioned within the previous 24 months, before 30 June 2022”.

Afghanistan

On 9 September, the Security Council held its quarterly meeting on Afghanistan (S/PV.8853). Deborah Lyons, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), briefed on recent developments and the Secretary-General’s latest report on UNAMA (S/2021/759). During the meeting, the Council was also briefed by Wazhma Frogh, the founder of the Women and Peace Studies Organisation, and Malala Yousafzai, the co-founder and chair of the Malala Fund. On 17 September, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2596, which extended UNAMA’s mandate until 17 March 2022 and requested the Secretary-General to submit a written report by 31 January 2022 on strategic and operational recommendations for the mission’s mandate in light of recent political, security and social developments. The resolution also asked the Secretary-General to brief the Council on the situation in Afghanistan and UNAMA’s work every other month until 17 March 2022.

Libya

On 10 September, the Council received a briefing by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Libya and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Ján Kubiš on the situation in Libya. The chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti (India), presented the periodic report on the committee’s activities. Representing civil society, Asma Khalifa, co-founder of Tamazight Women’s Movement and of the Khalifa Ihler Institute, briefed on the need to strengthen public space and to protect civil society actors. On 15 September, the Council was scheduled to renew the mandate of UNSMIL for another year. However, on the day of the adoption, Russia voiced the need for further discussion on the draft resolution in blue. The Council then adopted resolution 2595, extending until 30 September UNSMIL’s mandate as set out in resolution 2542 of 14 September 2020 and paragraph 16 of resolution 2570 of 16 April. It appears that the UK, the penholder on Libya, then engaged in bilateral consultations with Russia and placed several drafts in blue which could not find the needed

consensus in time for the 29 September vote, causing the adoption to be postponed to 30 September. During the evening hours of 29 September, Russia put its own draft in blue. Early on 30 September, the vote was postponed to the afternoon, and the five permanent members engaged in negotiations resulting in a new draft in blue of a technical rollover of UNMIL’s mandate until 31 January. This draft was adopted unanimously as resolution 2599.

On 29 September, the Council also unanimously adopted resolution 2598, renewing the authorisation for member states to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya that they have reasonable grounds to suspect are being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking.

Iraq

On 17 September, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2597, which renewed the mandate of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL (UNITAD) until 17 September 2022.

Climate Change and Security

On 23 September, the Security Council held a high-level open debate on the “Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Climate and Security” (S/PV.8864). Ireland’s Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Micheál Martin chaired the meeting. The briefers were UN Secretary-General António Guterres and Ilwad Elman, Chief Operating Officer of the Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre, which is based in Mogadishu, Somalia.

Non-Proliferation

On 27 September, the Council held a high-level briefing under the agenda item “Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction”, marking the 25th anniversary of the opening for signature of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) (S/PV.8865). The meeting was chaired by Thomas Byrne, Ireland’s Minister of State for European Affairs. The briefers were UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu, Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO) Robert Floyd, and CTBTO Youth Group Member Magdalene Wanyaga. Representatives of Italy and South Africa, co-chairs of this year’s Article XIV Conference, participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure

Mali and Sahel Visiting Mission

Expected Council Action

During October, the Security Council will hold its quarterly briefing and consultations on Mali. Special Representative and head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) El-Ghassim Wane is expected to brief.

The Council is also expected to conduct a visiting mission to the Sahel during the month, travelling to Mali and Niger. France and Niger are co-leading the mission.

Key Recent Developments

Mali's political transition to restore constitutional order following coups d'état in August 2020 and May appears increasingly unlikely to follow the 18-month timeframe established in October 2020 by military authorities after negotiations with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The military's influence over the transition has deepened as Colonel Assimi Goïta, who led the August 2020 coup, ascended to the transitional presidency in June. Little progress has been made since then in preparing presidential and legislative elections scheduled for 27 February 2022. Meanwhile, terrorist groups continue to launch deadly attacks against security forces and civilians in Mali and across the Sahel region.

At a virtual summit of ECOWAS on 8 September, West African leaders expressed "great concern" about the lack of electoral preparations. They urged the transitional government to "rapidly" develop plans for the "consensual definition of the legal framework for the elections, the preparation of the voters list, and the choice of the body to conduct the elections".

At a second summit in Accra, Ghana, on 16 September, ECOWAS heads of state and government reiterated their demands for conducting elections "within the non-negotiable deadline of February 2022". They insisted that the transitional authorities implement only the necessary reforms for conducting elections, reflecting concerns that the transitional government's action plan is too ambitious and could provide excuses to extend the transition. ECOWAS further said it would impose targeted sanctions against persons or groups of persons whose actions have a negative impact on the transition timetable and instructed the president of the ECOWAS Commission to compile and submit a list of such individuals or groups.

The implementation of Mali's 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement between the government and northern signatory movements also remains slow amid the focus on completing the political transition. The 23 August report by the Carter Center, which the Security Council has mandated as the agreement's independent observer, says that from January to July, the parties have "engaged in positive dialogue and taken steps in the right direction" but have "produced few tangible achievements".

Meanwhile, violence continues in northern and central Mali. According to media reports in September, the transitional authorities were close to reaching a deal to allow the Wagner Group, a Russian private military contractor, to deploy to Mali. France and Germany warned Mali against following through with an agreement. ECOWAS also condemned the decision "to hire private security companies" in its 16 September communiqué.

The security situation in the broader Sahel remains dire. Over

160 civilians were killed in an overnight attack on 4 and 5 June in Solhan village in Yagha province, Burkina Faso. The majority of the assailants were reportedly child soldiers. Among more recent attacks, militants ambushed a military convoy on 18 August in Burkina Faso's Soum province, killing 80 people, including 65 civilians. An estimated 275,000 newly displaced people have been recorded in Burkina since April, raising the number of displaced persons in the country to more than 1.4 million. In Niger, a Human Rights Watch report issued on 11 August said that Islamist armed groups have killed over 420 civilians and displaced tens of thousands in western Niger since January. On 16 August, gunmen on motorbikes attacked the village of Darey-Daye, Niger, opening fire on civilians while they were working their fields, killing 37 people, including 14 children.

Following Mali's coup d'état in May, France announced it would draw down its 5,100-member regional counter-terrorism force, Operation Barkhane. At a summit on 9 July hosted by France with the leaders of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger—which make up the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel)—French President Emmanuel Macron said that France would leave 2,500 to 3,000 troops in the region and that France hoped to expand the role of the Takuba Task Force. The Task Force, which is comprised of European special forces based in Mali, became operational last year.

On 21 August, Chad announced that it was recalling 600 of its soldiers from the 1,200-member G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) Chadian contingent that deployed earlier this year to the tri-border area of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. The move comes as Chad's authorities have also committed to an 18-month transition following a military takeover after President Idriss Déby died in April while fighting rebels who had invaded from Libya.

In June, the Council adopted resolution 2584 renewing MINUSMA's mandate. The resolution requested the Secretary-General to produce a report with recommendations on the mission's troop ceiling in light of the growing insecurity and physical violence against civilians in central Mali. In the ensuing report, released in July, the Secretary-General proposed an increase in MINUSMA's authorised force ceiling by 2,069 uniformed personnel—1,730 military personnel, 300 former police unit personnel and 39 individual police officers. While recommending the troop increase, the Secretary-General suggested that the additional peacekeepers would be unable to make a sustained difference absent a political strategy on the part of Malian authorities for reinforcing the presence of the state and protecting civilians.

In September, Council members began discussing a draft resolution to increase MINUSMA's troop ceiling. The proposal was put on hold, however, as Malian authorities raised objections to the additional troops, apparently believing that they will not make a difference unless given a more robust mandate.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 6 August statement, the independent expert on the human rights situation in Mali, Alioune Tine, expressed concern over the continuing deterioration of the security situation following an 11-day official visit to the country. During his visit, he heard accounts of an increase in extrajudicial executions, other killings, kidnappings of civilians, and gang rapes of women, according to the statement. MINUSMA documented at least 43 extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions committed by the Malian Defense and Security

Mali and Sahel Visiting Mission

Forces between 1 April and 30 June. There has also been an increase in human rights abuses by militias and armed community groups this year, and abductions have increased as well. In the first six months of the year, MINUSMA documented 435 abductions, five times more than in all of 2019. Tine is expected to submit a full report to the Human Rights Council in March 2022.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue is the timely holding of Mali's presidential and legislative elections to restore constitutional order. Only five months remain to comply with the ECOWAS-brokered transition timeline.

Another key issue is the terrorism threat to Mali and the Sahel. Despite regional and international efforts, terrorist groups continue to expand their presence and operations in the region. The growing insecurity has also fuelled inter-communal violence and a worsening humanitarian situation.

A related issue is support for the FC-G5S, which was established in 2017 by the G5 Sahel to combat terrorist groups and organised crime. By the end of September or early October, the Secretary-General was expected to submit a letter to the Council that, according to resolution 2584, should include "detailed and operational options" for supporting the FC-G5S, "including through bilateral and multilateral mechanisms and organisations, other than MINUSMA". This is likely to include further details on the controversial proposal for a UN office to provide a logistical support package to the FC-G5S, which the Secretary-General has previously recommended to facilitate more predictable funding for its operations.

Often underlying Council discussions on Mali and the Sahel is the need to complement security initiatives with stronger approaches to address structural causes of instability, such as underdevelopment, poor governance, climate change and respect for human rights.

The Council visiting mission to Mali and Niger—its first mission since the COVID-19 pandemic—will be an opportunity to address these issues. The Mali leg is expected to focus on the political transition and preparations for the elections, the security situation, and the peace agreement's implementation. With negotiations on hold

to raise the MINUSMA troop ceiling due to Mali's apparent objections, the proposed troop increase is another likely issue for discussion with authorities.

In Niger, the mission is expected to exchange views with the authorities on the security and humanitarian situation in the Sahel. Discussions will also focus on responses to the region's insecurity and the options that the Secretary-General will outline in his anticipated letter to support the FC-G5S and implementation of the joint force's human rights due diligence policy.

Council Dynamics

The Council has supported ECOWAS' calls for an 18-month political transition in Mali. Resolution 2584 reaffirmed the need to respect the transition timetable and the 27 February 2022 electoral date. It also affirmed that MINUSMA should support the political transition as part of its "primary strategic priority".

France initially proposed the increase in the MINUSMA troop ceiling in June during negotiations to renew the mission's mandate. At present, China, Russia and the "A3 plus 1" (Kenya, Niger, Tunisia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), among other members, are unwilling to support the increase because of the Malian authorities' objections to the proposal.

The Council is divided over how to support the FC-G5S. Niger and France are strong advocates for establishing a UN support office, citing it as the best way to provide the FC-G5S with more predictable and sustainable funding. The UK and US oppose the proposal. They object to using UN assessed contributions for non-UN missions and are not convinced that a support office can be more effective than bilateral military support. They have also raised concerns about having a UN operation support a counter-terrorism force that compromises UN peacekeeping principles and would put the UN in the position of providing support to the FC-G5S despite its reported human rights violations.

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

Women, Peace and Security

Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council is scheduled to hold its annual open debate on women, peace and security. It seems that the open debate will be held at ministerial level and may focus on investing in the contribution of local women to peacekeeping, peacebuilding and transitional settings following UN peace operations.

At the time of writing, an outcome is not expected.

Key Recent Developments

In her remarks at the 16 September Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network high-level event on the margins of the 76th UN General Assembly, the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, said that currently "half a billion

of women and girls in 31 countries and territories live in protracted crises but with limited opportunities to influence the decisions being made that directly impact their lives". The Secretary-General's annual report on women, peace and security—expected ahead of the open debate—will provide an update on the implementation of the agenda in the past year.

In recent months, Council members have discussed the situation of women and girls in several crisis contexts, including during meetings on Afghanistan and Tigray. On 30 August, the Council adopted resolution 2593 addressing recent developments in Afghanistan following the Taliban's seizure of power and the 26 August attack on Kabul airport; in the resolution, the Council encouraged the parties "to seek an inclusive, negotiated political settlement, with the full,

UN DOCUMENTS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2493 (29 October 2019) requested further information on the progress and setbacks in the women, peace and security agenda. S/RES/2467 (23 April 2019) was on sexual violence in conflict. S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000) was the first Security Council resolution on women, peace and security. **Security Council Letters** S/2021/770 (2 September 2021) was the summary of the IEG's 19 August meeting on Afghanistan.

Women, Peace and Security

equal and meaningful participation of women”. In the one Council product on Tigray, a press statement issued on 22 April, members expressed their “deep concern about allegations of human rights violations and abuses, including reports of sexual violence against women and girls in the Tigray region and called for investigations to find those responsible and bring them to justice”.

The Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security (IEG) has also met regularly on situations of interest. On 19 August, the IEG held a meeting on the situation of Afghanistan. Mette Knudsen, Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan, and Alison Davidian, UN Women Deputy Representative in Afghanistan, briefed Council members and called on the participants to “advocate for the participation of women in public life and for female humanitarian workers to be able to carry out their work”. At a press stakeout following the meeting, IEG co-chairs Ireland and Mexico announced that they had written to the President of the Security Council urging the Council “to place the utmost priority on protecting and vindicating the rights of Afghan women and girls in all decisions and action on Afghanistan’s future”. In recent months, the IEG has also met on Somalia (30 June), Lebanon (25 May), Mali (29 April), and Libya (1 April). At the time of writing, a meeting of the IEG on Haiti is planned for 29 September. The meetings on Somalia, Lebanon and Haiti mark the first time these countries have been discussed by the IEG, expanding the range of situations receiving the group’s attention.

On 31 August, Ireland—the Council president for September—circulated a statement of commitments on women, peace and security jointly undertaken with upcoming Council presidents Kenya (October) and Mexico (November). The following day, during the September programme of work press briefing, Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason (Ireland) explained that women, peace and security would run like “a golden thread” through the Irish presidency and the upcoming Kenyan and Mexican presidencies.

The statement of commitments affirms that the shared goal of the presidency trio is to ensure that women, peace and security concerns are “integrated fully into country-specific and other discussions on the Council’s agenda”. Some of the actions the trio has committed to include: attaining gender balance among briefers and strong representation of women civil society speakers in Council meetings; holding women, peace and security press stakeouts; highlighting the impact of the IEG; and requesting that gender analysis be included in briefings by the UN to the Council. While other Council members have already made some of these commitments, this appears to be the first time that commitments on women, peace and security across a trio of presidencies have been so explicitly stated and undertaken. The 28 September Security Council briefing on Somalia was also held in fulfilment of the trio’s commitment to focus at least one geographic meeting on women, peace and security. (See our 28 September What’s in Blue story on “Somalia: Briefing by the Deputy Secretary-General on Women’s Participation”.)

Key Issues and Options

The main issue for the Security Council remains the full implementation of its resolutions on women, peace and security, including

through better integrating women, peace and security considerations in its country-specific decisions. Members may be interested in drawing on information from IEG meetings during country-specific meetings and negotiations.

Because of the current Council dynamics, thematic outcomes advancing women, peace and security continue to appear challenging to negotiate. In this context, members may be interested in pursuing alternatives to formal outcomes. For instance, members scheduled to hold the Council presidency after Mexico may want to consider joining, and therefore extending, the trio’s initiative, undertaking similar or expanded commitments.

September has seen a very high number of women civil society briefers participating in Council meetings. Members could develop ways to better follow up on the issues put forward by civil society briefers and on the recommendations made by UN Women during IEG meetings.

Arria-formula meetings are another option that supportive members may be interested in pursuing to further the Council’s thinking on the agenda. A recent example was the 28 July Arria-formula meeting on gender and counter-terrorism organised by Mexico, which centred on a discussion of gender stereotypes and masculinities.

Council Dynamics

The presidency trio initiative may be seen as an attempt to start moving away from the difficult political climate that has surrounded the Council’s initiatives on women, peace and security in recent years. Following the October 2020 open debate, a draft resolution commemorating the 20th anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1325 (the first women, peace and security resolution) put to a vote by Russia failed to garner the nine affirmative votes needed to pass. Abstaining members questioned the added value of a resolution consisting mainly of previously agreed language and perceived the text as being unbalanced between socioeconomic and rights-based aspects. This followed the embattled negotiations of two women, peace and security texts in 2019: resolution 2493, reiterating the need for the “full implementation” of the agenda, and resolution 2467, on conflict-related sexual violence, which was the first resolution of the agenda not to be adopted unanimously.

The Council’s dynamics on this file have not been tested directly since last year’s failed adoption. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield (US) said during the April 2021 annual open debate on conflict-related sexual violence that the US is committed “to providing sexual and reproductive health care and services for women around the world”, marking a shift in the US position on the issue since the Trump administration. During the October 2020 open debate, China and Russia—both of which had previously attended IEG meetings only rarely—committed to attending future meetings and have been present at all subsequent IEG meetings. Nonetheless, language advancing the women, peace and security agenda in country-specific resolutions often remains difficult to agree. The division seems to lie in what Council members are prepared to understand as pertaining to “peace and security”.

The UK is the penholder on women, peace and security, and the US is the penholder on conflict-related sexual violence.

Haiti

Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council will 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 by 10 October. A civil society representative may also brief. The meeting may be followed by closed consultations. The Council will also negotiate the renewal of BINUH's mandate, which expires on 15 October.

Key Recent Developments

Following the last periodic meeting on Haiti on 17 June, Council members on 1 July adopted a press statement stressing the urgent need to hold inclusive, free and fair legislative as well as presidential elections in 2021. They reiterated their concern regarding reported human rights violations and abuses and called on the government to hold those responsible to account. The statement further stressed the need for increased support and attention to Haiti's humanitarian situation and development needs and condemned the increasing gang violence. At the time of the June meeting, President Jovenel Moïse was seeking to hold a controversial referendum on a new draft constitution. He had 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.

With these issues still unresolved, Haiti soon encountered additional challenges. In the pre-dawn hours of 7 July, Moïse was assassinated in his home, and his wife sustained severe injuries. The UN system swiftly condemned the murder: on the same day, the Council issued a press statement condemning the attack and held a private meeting on 8 July to receive a briefing on the assassination from La Lime.

Following several days of uncertainty over who would lead the country, Ariel Henry, appointed by Moïse as prime minister but not sworn in at the time of the attack, officially took office and pledged to hold elections as soon as possible. Later, however, he postponed both the ballot and the constitutional referendum initially scheduled for September. The referendum and the first round of parliamentary as well as presidential elections are now expected to be held on 7 November, while a second round for the presidential office and parliament is scheduled to take place on 23 January 2022.

With Henry beginning to form a unity government based on a power-sharing deal with political opposition figures, Port-au-Prince prosecutor Bed-Ford Claude, who was in charge of investigating Moïse's assassination, then sought an investigation into whether Henry had been involved in the killing. Henry had reportedly had phone contact with a prime suspect in the case shortly after the assassination, triggering the interest of the prosecutor. Henry subsequently dismissed Claude and, several days later, Justice Minister Rockefeller Vincent. In a 16 September statement, the Office of the Prime Minister said that Henry had received several calls after the assassination from numerous individuals who were concerned for his personal safety.

Notwithstanding the judicial turmoil, Henry, on 11 September,

signed a political agreement on "peaceful and efficient governance", paving the way for the formation of the unity government. In a 15 September 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—encouraged efforts to reach a political agreement that would lead to an inclusive government while encouraging continued constructive dialogue among all stakeholders. It also called for a comprehensive investigation into Moïse's assassination. The ongoing judicial process is mired in difficulties, however: more than 40 suspects have been arrested, including 18 Colombian ex-soldiers who have reportedly claimed that they were tortured while in custody. Several judicial staff involved in the investigation have reportedly received death threats that have forced some into hiding.

Several incidents in recent weeks also aggravated Haiti's humanitarian situation. On 14 August, Haiti was struck by a 7.2 magnitude earthquake, followed by Tropical Storm Grace on 16 and 17 August. On 23 September, OCHA reported at least 2,248 deaths, with over 12,000 persons injured as a result of the quake. Over 650,000 were in need of emergency humanitarian assistance as the earthquake and storm exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities, such as rising food insecurity, deteriorating infrastructure, disrupted local markets due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and increased gang violence. On 23 August, the Council convened to discuss the humanitarian situation in Haiti under "any other business" and to gain an overview of the response efforts. In a press conference on 16 September, Deputy Special Representative for BINUH Bruno Lemarquis reported that a flash appeal is seeking some \$187.3 million to support the most vulnerable. He also reported that the tense security situation, with gangs controlling access routes to the most affected areas in the country's south, was hampering humanitarian access.

While Haiti is grappling with a domestic humanitarian crisis, its focus has also turned to the plight of some 12,000 Haitians who travelled via South and Central American countries to Del Rio, Texas, a town on the Mexican border. The Biden administration announced that it would repatriate the Haitians crossing the border but could release some on a case-by-case basis. It is applying Title 42 of the US Code of Federal Regulations, which prohibits "the introduction" of individuals into the US when the Director of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) finds a serious danger of communicable disease. Title 42 effectively provides for expulsion and, as invoked by the Trump administration beginning of March 2020, made no exception for asylum-seekers or unaccompanied minors. The first repatriation flights left the US for Port-au-Prince on 19 September. The State Department issued a press release on a 20 September phone call between Henry and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. In the call, both reportedly shared "a mutual concern for the safety of Haitian citizens and discussed the dangers of irregular migration, which puts individuals at great risk and often requires migrants and their families to incur crippling debt".

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 30 June, a joint report by BINUH and OHCHR highlighted human rights

UN DOCUMENTS ON HAITI [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2547](#) (15 October 2020) renewed BINUH's mandate for one year. [Secretary-General's Report S/2021/559](#) (11 June 2021) was the Secretary-General's latest 120-day report on Haiti and the special political mission. [Security Council Press Statements SC/14574](#) (7 July 2021) condemned the assassination of the President of Haiti, Jovenel Moïse. [SC/14571](#) (1 July 2021) reiterated the deep concern of Council members regarding the deteriorating political, security and humanitarian conditions in Haiti and stressed the primary responsibility of the government of Haiti to address the situation. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8768](#) (15 October 2020) was the meeting during which the Council adopted resolution 2547.

Haiti

concerns related to conditions of detention in Haiti and the treatment of persons deprived of liberty. According to the report, which is based on visits to 12 places of detention between January and March, prisoners in Haiti often spend years in inhumane conditions subjected to ill-treatment and torture. The report noted that the excessive use of pre-trial detention, coupled with the judicial system's limited capacity to try criminal cases promptly, has contributed to the overcrowding of detention facilities. Currently, 82 percent of people deprived of their liberty in Haiti have not been convicted, the report said.

Key Issues and Options

Recent crises have amplified the challenges facing Haiti. A key priority will remain the holding of elections. The political agreement was a promising step towards providing a stable political framework for organising the elections, merely one month before the first round of voting. One option for the Council would be to invite a civil society briefer to provide insight on the implementation of the political agreement and on progress towards holding the elections.

The humanitarian situation in the country has worsened in recent weeks and will be compounded by thousands of Haitians arriving on repatriation flights from the US. A press statement could rally international financial support for Haiti in general and for the humanitarian flash appeal to meet the most pressing challenges.

With the mandate renewal imminent, Council members may explore how BINUH can best support the electoral process and formation of a new government. While resolution 2547 of 15 October

2020 extended BINUH's mandate without changes for 12 months, the Council may consider expanding BINUH's political advisory and good offices role to strengthen the mandate in support of a newly formed government.

Council Dynamics

BINUH's mandate has been contentious since the mission's inception in October 2019. Discussions about BINUH and its role in mediating the political crisis have been divisive. China has frequently argued that there can be no external solution to the problems in the country. Other Council members consider BINUH well-positioned to assist Haiti. This debate appears to have influenced negotiations on recent Council products. In 2019, China argued for a six-month mandate renewal instead of the current 12 months and for a strategic assessment to be conducted in that timeframe, with the aim of elaborating recommendations for an exit strategy that would lead to the eventual drawdown of BINUH and the transfer of its tasks to the Haitian government. In light of the anticipated change in government, the debate around BINUH's set-up and possible breadth of provision of support may recur during the upcoming negotiation on the mission's mandate renewal.

The US has been the penholder on Haiti. Since Mexico became a Council member this year, it has emerged as an active actor cooperating with the US on several Council products. Mexico and the US will be the co-penholders for the draft resolution.

Syria

Expected Council Action

In October, 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

On 30 August, the World Food Programme (WFP) organised the delivery of humanitarian assistance from government-controlled territory in Aleppo into opposition-held territory in northwest Syria. This delivery was the first cross-line shipment into northwest Syria since 2017. According to OCHA, 14 trucks brought food rations to assist approximately 50,000 people. At the time of writing, the food aid had only been shipped to a warehouse in the northwest and had not been distributed to those in need. During his 15 September Council briefing, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths, who visited Syria, Lebanon and Turkey from 28 August to 3 September, commended the cross-line shipment. The delivery, he said, "show[ed] the resolve of the UN and our partners to assist people in need through all possible modalities, sparing no effort". He acknowledged, however, that the food rations were "sufficient to cover only a fraction of the enormous food needs in northwest Syria".

Cross-line humanitarian assistance remains one of the most

contentious issues for the Council. At the 15 September meeting, all Council members welcomed the cross-line delivery as important progress in getting humanitarian assistance into northwest Syria, but Russia intimated that it did not see this as adequate progress, warning Council members "not to be satisfied with this modest and one-time result". It also called on the UN and Council members to "work on ensuring smooth cross-line deliveries" if the Council wished to "avoid difficulties this winter in renewing the mandate of the cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism".

Overall, Syria's humanitarian situation remains dire. Over 13.4 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance, which represents a 21 percent increase compared to this time last year. Although a recent WFP assessment found that food prices had remained stable this past July, they have risen by 93 percent since July 2020. The country's economic decline, ongoing water shortages, security challenges, and civilian displacement have all further contributed to Syria's humanitarian crisis. In addition, COVID-19 cases are surging in Syria, hitting the northwest particularly hard. International media reported on 22 September that COVID-19 cases in the northwest had doubled over the past month to approximately 63,000, putting severe strain on the region's inadequate healthcare facilities.

A ceasefire was announced in Daraa on 1 September, allowing most residents of Daraa al-Balad—a neighbourhood in Daraa city,

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2585 (9 July 2021) renewed the authorisation for cross-border humanitarian aid into Syria through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing. **Security Council Meeting Records** S/PV.8849 (2 September 2021) was a meeting on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. S/PV.8861 (15 September 2021) was a meeting on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Syria

which is home to some 55,000 people, including many former members of the armed opposition—to return to their homes. The area, which is in Syria’s south-west, had witnessed intense shelling and fighting since late June. In July, Syrian government forces, apparently supported by Iranian-backed militias, began a siege of the area, cutting off access and critical services and supplies to Daraa al-Balad and resulting in large-scale displacement and destruction of critical infrastructure. Russian mediators worked with the Syrian government and local opposition figures to facilitate the ceasefire agreement, which is meant to be monitored by Russian troops. During his 15 September Council briefing, Griffiths told the Council that humanitarian assistance had begun arriving in Daraa al-Balad.

Despite the recent cessation of hostilities in Daraa, the security situation in the country remains fragile. In Syria’s northwest, there has been an uptick in violence in recent weeks. According to OCHA’s most recent situation report, dated 13 September, some areas in northwest Syria have seen the largest escalation of hostilities since the Russian-Turkish ceasefire of March 2020, resulting in 86 civilian deaths since June. Syrian government shelling caused 20 deaths in August alone. Daily shelling persists in areas south of Idlib, and at least 29 airstrikes in August hit areas that are part of the de-escalation zone established by the March 2020 ceasefire.

The violence also comes amidst international media reports of Turkey deploying “thousands” of additional troops into northwest Syria. Some analysts believe that a large-scale military confrontation between Turkey on one side and Syrian and Russian forces on the other is imminent, which could lead many of the displaced already living in the northwest to seek refuge in Turkey. During a meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on 14 September, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that “the main problem [in Syria] lies in the presence in some parts of the country of foreign armed forces without any mandate from the UN or [Syria’s] permission”. On 29 September, Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met in Sochi, Russia. The situation in Syria, including the status of the ceasefire, was a key topic of the meeting. Speaking to the press, Erdoğan stated that “the steps [Russia and Turkey] take together regarding Syria are of great import. Peace there is dependent on Turkey-Russia relations”.

On 28 September, the Council held a briefing on the political situation in Syria. Special Envoy Geir O. Pedersen raised concern about a recent increase in violence, and in reference to the Putin-Erdoğan meeting, urged those “who have influence to promote calm”. He also noted that while it had been two years since the establishment of the Constitutional Committee, there was a lack of steady progress. However, he told the Council that, following his

recent diplomatic efforts, an agreement was reached between the co-chairs of the Constitutional Committee on a methodology for the committee’s future work. As such, Pedersen informed the Council that he was convening a sixth round of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva, starting the week of 18 October.

During the Council’s 2 September meeting on the use of chemical weapons in Syria, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu reiterated the long-held assessment by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) that unresolved “gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies” in Syria’s chemical weapons declaration to the OPCW meant that it could not be considered “accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention”. Notwithstanding the lack of overall progress on the file, Nakamitsu highlighted steps that had been taken to set up a meeting between OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias and Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal al-Mekdad. This prospective meeting, she hoped, would provide an opportunity to “strengthen dialogue and cooperation between...Syria...and the OPCW Technical Secretariat”.

Key Issues and Options

One key issue for the Council is the volatile security situation in Syria, including the violence in Syria’s northwest, concern for the status of the March 2020 ceasefire in the area, and the status of the 1 September ceasefire in Daraa. Another important issue is the surging rate of COVID-19 cases in Syria.

Members may wish to adopt a presidential statement that:

- calls for all parties in Syria to agree to a nationwide ceasefire and reminds them to uphold international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians;
- calls for widespread and equitable distribution of vaccines across Syria; and
- urges member states to increase their contributions of vaccines to Syria as well as to the COVAX plan led by UNICEF and the World Health Organization.

Council Dynamics

Building on the unanimous adoption of resolution 2585, most Council members have stated in the Council their preference for shifting the dynamics on Syria towards a more constructive engagement. Despite these views and Council members’ ability to bridge differences and find compromise language in resolution 2585, several issues continue to divide the Council on the humanitarian situation. Primary amongst these are the efficacy of cross-line deliveries and the length of the cross-border mechanism mandate.

Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region

Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council will convene to discuss the situation

in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Special Representative and head of the UN Stabilization Mission in the

UN DOCUMENTS ON DRC AND THE GREAT LAKES Security Council Resolution S/RES/2556 (18 December 2020) extended the mandate of MONUSCO until 20 December 2021. Secretary-General’s Reports S/2021/306 (30 March 2021) was the Secretary-General’s biannual report on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. S/2021/587 (21 June 2021) covered developments in the DRC from 19 March to 18 June, including progress towards the implementation of MONUSCO’s mandate and political developments, such as the formation of a new government and the adoption of its work programme. Sanctions Committee Document SC/14634 (14 September 2021) was a press release by the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee regarding its meeting on natural resources.

Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region

Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Bintou Keita, is expected to brief on the Secretary-General's latest report on the situation in the DRC and progress made by MONUSCO towards implementing its mandate. The report covers the period from 19 June to 17 September. She is also expected to present the transition plan for MONUSCO pursuant to resolution 2556 of 18 December 2020, which is annexed to the Secretary-General's report. The mandate of MONUSCO expires on 18 December.

During the month, the Council will also receive a briefing from the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes, Huang Xia, on the Secretary-General's biannual report on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Region. Kenya plans to make this one of the signature events of its presidency, and the format of the meeting is expected to be a ministerial-level debate chaired by Kenyan Foreign Minister Raychelle Omamo. A presidential statement is the anticipated outcome of this meeting.

Key Recent Developments

On 3 July, DRC President Félix Tshisekedi promulgated a law reforming the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), after which the National Assembly issued a timeline for the designation of the CENI members. This process has been delayed because of lack of consensus within the Plateforme des confessions religieuses, which is supposed to propose a candidate for CENI president to the National Assembly. The Secretary-General's recent report on the DRC maintains that the "holding of timely, inclusive and peaceful elections is a key element to sustainable peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo". The elections are currently planned for 2023.

On 4 August, with the ruling Union sacrée de la nation (USN) coalition having completed its first 100 days in office, Prime Minister Jean-Michel Sama Lukonde expressed his satisfaction with the implementation of the "state of siege" policy in improving security in the eastern provinces of Ituri and North Kivu. However, the National Assembly and the Senate have both urged an assessment of the effectiveness of this policy. In spite of the state of siege, the security situation in both provinces has remained dire, with reports of heightened attacks on civilians by armed groups. In his recent report, the Secretary-General has underscored the need for authorities to carry out the "state of siege" policy in "compliance with the international human rights and humanitarian law obligations of the Democratic Republic of the Congo" and emphasised the population's "right to a fair, transparent, effective, non-discriminatory and accountable justice system".

On 5 July, a joint working group on MONUSCO's transition was formed, consisting of representatives of the DRC government and MONUSCO. The group consulted with civil society and other partners and developed "18 benchmarks, risks and mitigation measures and strategic partnerships that form the basis of the transition plan". The Secretary-General submitted the plan in accordance with resolution 2556 as an annex to his report, which will inform the Council's discussion ahead of the mission's mandate renewal in December. In line with the joint strategy for the drawdown of MONUSCO, the mission ceased its activities in the Kasai region on 30 June and is expected to withdraw from Tanganyika by mid-2022.

The last time the Council received a briefing on the Secretary-General's biannual report on the Great Lakes region was on 12 April.

The latest report is expected before the end of September. In his last briefing to the Council, Xia discussed the positive engagements by President Tshisekedi with leaders in the region in an effort to find a lasting solution to the issue of armed groups that continue to cause instability and chaos in the eastern part of the DRC. In this regard, he noted the role of Angolan President João Lourenço, who with his Congolese counterpart has sought to bring Rwanda and Uganda closer together in the framework of a quadripartite process. Xia also noted positive developments in efforts to improve relations between Burundi and Rwanda and expressed his commitment to continue supporting rapprochement and political dialogue in the region.

While noting these encouraging developments, Xia underscored the need for the continued support of the international community to the region. At the ministerial debate, he may highlight the UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region developed by his office. The strategy outlines the UN's priorities for the next ten years in supporting countries in the region in their efforts to achieve peace, security and development. Representatives of the AU, ICGLR, signatory countries of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework, diplomatic missions in the region, bilateral and multilateral partners and civil society organisations participated at a workshop in Kinshasa on 9 and 10 June to develop an action plan for the implementation of the regional strategy.

In accordance with the decision of the eighth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), held on 20 November 2020, a Contact and Coordination Group (CCG) was established to find non-military solutions to the security challenges facing the region. The group, launched at a workshop in Goma from 3 to 6 May, started its work by adopting an action plan at a meeting in Bujumbura on 5 and 6 July.

Xia noted that the issue of armed groups can only be resolved if the root causes of instability in the region, in particular the illegal exploitation of natural resources, are addressed. His office, in collaboration with ICGLR and the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ), held a workshop on natural resources in the Great Lakes region in Khartoum from 31 August to 2 September. The workshop, which was attended by members of the ICGLR, the UN, regional and international development organisations, and financial institutions, discussed coordinated actions to curb the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the region.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 30 July, the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee held informal consultations on the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the DRC. The discussion focused on efforts to fight persistent illicit trade in the DRC's gold, tin, tantalum and tungsten (3T) sectors. The committee was briefed by the Group of Experts, the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes, the Executive Secretary of the ICGLR and a representative from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 48th session, the Human Rights Council is expected to hold an enhanced interactive dialogue on 5 October on the report of the High Commissioner on the human rights situation in the DRC and the activities of the UN Joint Human Rights Office (A/HRC/48/47). The report, covering 1 June 2020 to 31 May, concludes that the human rights situation "was severely compromised by the persistence of attacks by armed groups targeting the civilian population", resulting in many human rights violations and abuses, including sexual violence.

Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region

Key Issues and Options

Some of the key issues related to the situation in DRC and the Great Lakes region that may be raised during the briefing session include how to:

- provide continued support to the government's programme of action;
- appeal to Congolese political stakeholders to resolve their differences through dialogue to create favourable conditions for the organisation of peaceful, credible and inclusive elections in 2023;
- welcome the development of MONUSCO's transition plan for the phased and gradual drawdown of the mission;
- draw appropriate lessons from the drawdown and exit of the mission from Kasai province;
- implement agreed on benchmarks and timelines in a flexible manner in accordance with the evolving security situation and the gradual takeover of security responsibilities by the Congolese armed forces (FARDC);
- encourage regional efforts in addressing the security challenges in the eastern part of Congo in relation to the activities of negative forces; and
- support regional efforts in the fight against illegal exploitation of natural resources.

Kenya intends to propose a presidential statement as an outcome of the ministerial-level debate on the Great Lakes region. It appears discussions are underway between Kenya and France, the penholder, on the focus of the draft text. In terms of the substance of the text, options for the Council include:

- welcoming MONUSCO's transition plan;
- commending the rapprochement and political dialogue between and among countries of the Great Lakes region;
- welcoming the commencement of the CCG's work;
- supporting the implementation of the UN regional strategy; and encouraging regional efforts in the fight against illegal exploitation of natural resources.

Council Dynamics

There appears to be general support among Council members for MONUSCO's work as well as for gradual mission drawdown. However, differing views regarding timelines and benchmarks may emerge once the Council begins deliberations on how to further advance the drawdown process. The illegal exploitation of natural resources, intercommunal violence, and human rights violations in the DRC are among the issues that concern Council members.

France is the penholder on the DRC; Niger chairs the 1533 Sanctions Committee

UNDOF (Golan Heights)

Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing on the activities of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights from the Department of Peace Operations (DPO). The briefing will be on the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on UNDOF, which is due in October, and on the most recent developments.

UNDOF's mandate expires on 31 December.

Background

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 observed violations of the 1974 Agreement and calls upon both sides to exercise restraint. Violations regularly include unauthorised personnel and equipment in the areas of separation and limitation, the firing of weapons across the ceasefire line, and drones and aircraft crossing the ceasefire line. The mission's observation role has been limited since its September 2014 relocation from the

Bravo (Syrian) to the Alpha (Israeli-occupied) side because of the armed conflict in Syria.

Key Recent Developments

In his most recent report to the Security Council, dated 3 June, the Secretary-General concluded that while the ceasefire between Israel and Syria was generally being maintained, ongoing violations of the 1974 Agreement persist—including firing by Israeli forces over the ceasefire line, the presence of Syrian forces in the area of separation, and the presence of unauthorised weapons in the limitation area. These violations, the Secretary-General noted, come at a “volatile time for the region”.

In addition to the violations highlighted in the report, there have been ongoing tensions in and around the Golan Heights in recent weeks. For example, international media have reported several instances of Hezbollah rockets being launched near the area, including a 6 August incident during which Hezbollah launched 19 rockets toward northern Israel from Lebanon. Tensions between Israel and Syria have also affected the Golan Heights. On 17 August, Israel launched a missile attack into southern Syria, purportedly striking Iranian-backed militias operating near the town of Quneitra, which lies within the Golan Heights.

On 10 June, the Security Council held a meeting with UNDOF's troop- and police-contributing countries. The Council then held its regular consultations on UNDOF on 14 June. The 10 June session was a private meeting and thus closed to the public. (A private

UNDOF (Golan Heights)

meeting differs from Council consultations, which are also closed, in being a formal meeting of the Security Council. In addition, in line with rules 37 and 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, member states whose interests are directly affected and Secretariat officials may be invited to participate in a private meeting. The rules of procedure also require that a communiqué be issued following a private meeting, unlike consultations, for which no written record is created.) According to the communiqué, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed Council members and the troop- and police-contributing countries on the current situation. No other information was provided about the meeting's contents.

On 29 June, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2581, which renewed UNDOF's mandate for six months.

Key Issues and Options

The renewal of UNDOF's mandate is expected in December and will be a key issue for the Council as it holds consultations on DPO's briefing.

The numerous violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement of 1974 is 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 is an important component of regional stability, given the absence of a peace agreement between Israel and Syria. Both countries 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 deep divisions overall on the Council regarding the Syria file, particularly between Russia and the US, the two countries continue to consider UNDOF a separate issue on which they agree.

Council members India and Ireland have a particular interest in UNDOF, as both contribute a significant number of uniformed personnel to the mission. On 30 June, UNDOF included 175 Indian and 125 Irish uniformed personnel.

Small Arms and Light Weapons

Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council will hold a briefing to consider the Secretary-General's seventh biennial report on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), to be submitted in accordance with the presidential statement adopted on 29 June 2007. UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu, Executive Secretary of the Regional Centre for Small Arms based in Nairobi Lieutenant General Elamin Abdelgadir, and Senior Researcher at Small Arms Survey David Lochhead are expected to brief.

Background and Recent Developments

The last time the Security Council discussed SALW was on 5 February 2020. Nakamitsu briefed the Council on the Secretary-General's sixth biennial report on SALW. She noted that “[w]ith an estimated one billion small arms in circulation worldwide, the use of these weapons in lethal violence, whether in conflict or non-conflict settings, is prevalent across regions and subregions from the Americas to Africa to Southern Europe”. Nakamitsu also pointed out that “small arms continue to facilitate a vast spectrum of actions constituting violations of human rights, including the killing and maiming of children, rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence”.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UNPoA). This is considered the universal framework for countering the illicit

flow of SALW and was agreed upon by all participants at the UN Small Arms Conference held in 2001. The seventh biennial meeting of states on the UNPoA, held in New York from 26 to 30 July, considered key challenges and opportunities related to the full and effective implementation of the UNPoA. The meeting concluded with the adoption of a substantive outcome document, which, among other things, underscores the need to integrate the UNPoA into all relevant sustainable development goals (SDGs) and targets at the national, regional and global levels. In particular, it calls for enhanced efforts to make progress as part of the SDGs Decade of Action, particularly under the SDG indicator 16.4.2. on the “proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments”.

The seventh conference of states parties to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which regulates international trade in conventional arms, took place in Geneva from 30 August to 3 September. The conference held a thematic discussion on SALW that explored how the issue can be considered within the ATT framework.

On 16 September, Mexico convened a virtual Arria-formula meeting on the threat to international peace and security posed by the illicit trade in SALW to build momentum on the SALW discussion following the holding of the UNPoA and ATT conferences.

The briefing in October is expected to focus on addressing the threat caused by the illicit flow of SALW in the context of

UN DOCUMENTS ON SMALL ARMS [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2220](#) (22 May 2015) contained provisions aimed at strengthening UN coordination and action on SALW. [S/RES/2117](#) (26 September 2013) was the first thematic resolution on SALW adopted by the Council, focusing on their illicit transfer, destabilising accumulation and misuse. [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/5](#) (11 March 2020) recognised the impact and challenges posed by illicit trade in and diversion of SALW in Africa. [Secretary-General's Report S/2019/1011](#) (30 December 2019) was the Secretary-General's sixth biennial report on SALW. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8713](#) (5 February 2020) was a briefing by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu on the spread of SALW and their ammunition.

Small Arms and Light Weapons

peacekeeping. The Secretary-General's sixth biennial report highlighted the challenges faced by peacekeepers because of "a growing number of armed actors and a prevalence of weapons, ammunition and other explosives". In this regard, it stressed the importance of providing specialised pre-deployment training in weapons and ammunition management to support peacekeepers operating under such difficult circumstances.

Issues and Options

Some of the key issues related to SALW that may be raised during the briefing session include how to:

- address the challenges and threats posed by the illicit trade in and diversion of SALW and reduce the humanitarian impact of their excessive accumulation, misuse, and illicit trade;
- enhance the full and effective implementation of the UNPoA at national, regional and global levels as part of the SDG Decade of Action, particularly under SDG indicator 16.4.2;
- integrate the consideration of SALW into the women, peace and security agenda and promote gender perspectives in small arms control policies, programmes and actions;
- support and encourage regional efforts to control the spread of SALW, including the AU flagship initiative on "Silencing the Guns in Africa" and others;
- mainstream the consideration of SALW across the Council's country- and region-specific and thematic agenda items and effectively utilise the tools at the Council's disposal, including sanctions and arms embargoes, in combatting the illicit flow of SALW;
- promote the effective implementation of activities related to the management of weapons and associated ammunition in formulating mandates for UN peacekeeping operations; and
- provide peacekeepers with all the necessary support to enable them to better protect their equipment and weapons from deliberate attacks by terrorists and other armed groups and enhance stockpile management in peacekeeping.

An option for the Council would be to adopt a resolution commemorating the 20th anniversary of the UNPoA and renewing its commitment to the objective of countering the illicit flow of SALW. The resolution could encourage follow through on recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's most recent biennial

report, such as mainstreaming the consideration of SALW throughout the Council agenda and including language on the effective implementation of activities related to SALW in the formulation of mandates for peacekeeping operations. It has been six years since the adoption of resolution 2220 of 22 May 2015 on SALW.

Council Dynamics

Kenya, which holds the Council presidency in October, attaches great importance to addressing the scourge of SALW. The country hosts the Regional Centre on Small Arms, which coordinates the implementation of the Nairobi Protocol on the Prevention, Control and Reduction of SALW in 15 countries in the Great Lakes region, the Horn of Africa and bordering states. The Permanent Representative of Kenya to the UN, Martin Kimani, chaired the seventh biennial meeting of state parties to UNPoA. Kenya considers the October briefing on SALW one of the signature events of its presidency, and intends to circulate a concept note to help guide the discussion. In this regard, it may wish to highlight the challenges and threats posed by SALWs in Africa, including in the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes and the Sahel.

Council dynamics in relation to SALW tend to be complicated. Russia is of the view that the General Assembly is the most appropriate place for discussion of SALW issues, except for arms embargoes imposed by the Council. Past negotiations on SALW were also controversial. For instance, six council members abstained on the adoption of resolution 2220 because the text did not include language critical of the transfer of SALW to non-state actors. But some like-minded members in the Council may try again to advance a resolution on SALW, building on the momentum generated by recent international attention to the issue.

The other contentious issue is in relation to the ATT. Some Council members that are not parties to the treaty have tended to express opposition to it. Kenya, Tunisia, Russia, Viet Nam, and the US are not parties to the treaty. Kenya, however, participated in the recent conference of states parties as an observer. In 2020, China became the latest country to join the treaty. The US is a signatory to the treaty but has not ratified it. Last year, it said that "the lawful ownership of small arms and the illegal use of small arms in non-conflict settings" must be distinguished from "the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons which fuels conflict and instability".

Western Sahara

Expected Council Action

In October, Security Council members expect to receive a briefing in consultations on the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), likely from Alexander Ivanko, the new Special Representative for Western Sahara and head of MINURSO, and from a UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

briefing. Council members are also expected to vote on a draft resolution to renew MINURSO's mandate, which expires on 31 October. The Secretary-General's report on the situation concerning Western Sahara is expected to be published ahead of the meeting. A meeting of troop-contributing countries with Council members is also scheduled ahead of MINURSO's mandate renewal.

UN DOCUMENTS ON WESTERN SAHARA [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2548](#) (30 October 2020) renewed MINURSO's mandate until 31 October 2021. [Security Council Letters S/2021/787](#) (14 September 2021) informed the Council of the outcome of elections in Morocco, including Western Sahara territories. [S/2021/494](#) (24 May 2021) Morocco condemned political support provided by South Africa to the Polisario [S/2021/475](#) (16 May 2021) transmitted a letter from the Polisario Front calling on the Security Council to protect Sahrawi civilians and ensure their safety. [S/2020/1075](#) (30 October 2020) contained the explanations of vote on resolution 2548. [Secretary-General's Report S/2020/938](#) (23 September 2020) was the latest Secretary-General's report concerning the situation in Western Sahara.

Western Sahara

Key Recent Developments

Since the Council last discussed Western Sahara and the work of MINURSO on 21 April, the question of MINURSO's leadership has remained an issue. On 24 August, the Secretary-General informed Security Council members of the appointment of Ivanko, a Russian national who had served as MINURSO's Chief of Staff since 2009. He succeeds Colin Stewart, who completed his assignment on 26 August.

Meanwhile, the position of Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara has remained vacant since former German President Horst Köhler left the office for health reasons in May 2019. At the time of writing, however, the process of appointing a replacement appeared to have gained momentum. In a 14 September statement, the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the UN, Omar Hilale, announced Morocco's approval of Italian-Swedish diplomat and former Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura as the next Personal Envoy. The following day, the Polisario Front—the entity representing the inhabitants of the Western Sahara region known as Sahrawis—said that it had already expressed its approval of de Mistura's candidature on 29 April. Morocco's eventual acceptance was reportedly the result of increased diplomatic efforts by the US and months of engagement by Secretary-General António Guterres with both Morocco and the Polisario Front. In his attempt to find an envoy acceptable to both parties, Guterres apparently proposed several candidates, including former Romanian Prime Minister Petre Roman and former Portuguese Foreign Minister Luís Amado.

Once appointed, the Personal Envoy will have to reinvigorate a stagnant peace process, building on diplomatic efforts underway since the signing of the ceasefire agreement 30 years ago on 6 September 1991. The situation in Western Sahara has remained precarious since November 2020, when Polisario protesters blocked traffic between the Moroccan-controlled side of Western Sahara and Mauritania at the border town of Guerguerat, following which Morocco deployed armed forces into the buffer zone. The Polisario Front subsequently announced it would no longer respect the ceasefire agreement, signed by both parties in 1991. The heightened tensions are reflected in the exchange of letters to the Security Council. In its correspondence dated 19 February, 16 May and 2 August, the Polisario Front called for “the attention of the members of the Security Council to the catastrophic situation in the territories of Western Sahara under the illegal Moroccan occupation, especially in the aftermath of the act of aggression carried out by the occupying State of Morocco against the Liberated Territories of Western Sahara on 13 November 2020”, the date on which Moroccan forces entered the buffer zone to expel Polisario protesters blocking the traffic between the Moroccan-controlled side of Western Sahara and Mauritania at the border town of Guerguerat. It also mentioned a “new wave of brutal violence and terror carried out by the Moroccan occupying state against our people in the occupied Western Sahara”. South Africa—which has been a supporter of the Polisario Front, including during its Security Council tenure in 2018–2019—shared the letters as an annex to official UN correspondence since the Polisario Front holds no official status with the UN. Morocco, addressing South Africa in a letter dated 24 May, said it “condemns the endorsement by South Africa of misleading terminology concerning the nature of the regional dispute concerning Moroccan Sahara, as well as the false allegations about the human rights situation in the Saharan provinces of the Kingdom of Morocco”.

The conflict has continued to affect regional dynamics. In another letter addressed to the Council dated 19 July, Morocco reacted to a statement by Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra during the Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, held on 13 July, in which he compared the situation in Western Sahara to a military conflict. Morocco's letter said that Algeria denied the right of self-determination to the Kabyle people, an ethnic minority group in Algeria striving for independence and currently accused by Algerian authorities of causing wildfires. Algeria—supportive of the Polisario Front—was angered by the letter and cut diplomatic ties with Morocco on 24 August. Another diplomatic dispute erupted in May when Spain admitted the leader of the Polisario Front, Brahim Ghali, into the country for medical treatment on humanitarian grounds because of a COVID-19 infection. Morocco summoned the Spanish ambassador to Rabat and is reported to have temporarily reduced its border controls at Ceuta, a Spanish enclave in Morocco, allowing several thousand migrants to cross into Spain's territory.

In its latest letter to the Council dated 14 September, Morocco said it had held general legislative, commune-level and regional elections on 8 September, including in the disputed territories. Reporting a participation rate of 66.94 percent in the Laayoune and 58.30 percent in the Dakhla areas of Western Sahara, it attributed the high voter turnout to an “unwavering commitment of citizens of the southern provinces to their Moroccan identity and to the exercise of their inalienable right to the democratic management of their local affairs, within the framework of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Morocco”. In response, a 20 September press release by the Polisario Front called the ballot a “mock election” amounting to “colonial practices”.

Key Issues and Options

Reviving the peace process and recommitting parties on the ground to the ceasefire remain key issues. With the appointment of a new Personal Envoy apparently imminent, Council members will have the opportunity to map out their expectations for the new envoy through the upcoming mandate renewal. They may call for resumption of the roundtable talks, initiated by Köhler; the current MINURSO mandate noted Köhler's intent to invite Morocco, the Polisario Front, Algeria and Mauritania to meet again in the roundtable format, which was said to have been a promising initiative.

Council Dynamics

Council members differ in their national positions on Western Sahara. On 10 December 2020, former US President Donald Trump announced that the US recognised Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, securing in return Morocco's normalisation of relations with Israel. Council members Kenya, Mexico and Viet Nam maintain diplomatic ties with the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). India has withdrawn, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has frozen, their SADR recognitions. France has traditionally supported the Moroccan autonomy plan for the region. The plan was submitted by Morocco to the UN in 2007 and foresees the integration of the territory with Morocco, with the Sahrawi people managing their internal affairs while being represented externally by Morocco. African Council members may also take into consideration developments at the AU level. On 9 March, the AU Peace and Security Council adopted a communiqué in which the AU announced its intention to increase diplomatic efforts to bring about a lasting

Western Sahara

political solution to the situation in Western Sahara and to re-open the AU Office in the Moroccan-administered city of Laayoune.

Differences have also arisen during discussions of MINURSO's

mandate. Adoptions have not been unanimous since 2017, with Russia citing the lack of reference to the right of self-determination in recent mandates.

Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace

Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council is expected to hold a high-level open debate on the theme “Diversity and State-building” under the agenda item “Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace”. President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya is expected to chair the session.

Background and Open Debate

Kenya is organising the open debate because most situations on the Council's agenda stem from internal conflicts, in which identity issues—whether ethnic, racial, religious, or even socioeconomic—are often a cause of, or are exploited, to fuel conflict. For effective conflict prevention and peacebuilding, states need to be able to manage strife among diverse populations. Moreover, states perceived as favouring one or some groups over others or failing to provide adequate basic services to all of their citizens can become susceptible to identity conflict.

Examples of such situations facing the Council are plentiful. The fighting in Ethiopia's Tigray region stems in large part from competition for political power among ethnic groups and grievances over being marginalised by central authorities. Mali's instability over the past decade was triggered by a rebellion by ethnic Tuaregs, who sought their own independent state in the country's long-neglected north. Terrorist groups that have proliferated across the Sahel have sought to exploit issues around identity, recruiting among the traditionally nomadic ethnic Fulani who have felt discriminated against by authorities. In turn, the Fulani have been victims of attacks by communities that associate them with extremist groups, driving a cycle of inter-communal violence. The Syrian civil war also has roots in identity conflict, with the perception that the state served those in the main cities while neglecting its mostly rural poorer areas. The sides have then manipulated sectarian identities during the war.

The growth of fake news and the misuse of social media have exacerbated these challenges to states, while the COVID-19 pandemic has also deepened divisions around identity amid the political

tensions and socioeconomic fallout generated by the global health crisis. Reflecting on these two trends, Secretary-General António Guterres noted during a 2 July 2020 Council briefing on the COVID-19 pandemic that “stigma and hate speech are on the rise, and an epidemic of misinformation online has run rampant”.

UN peacebuilding reforms in recent years have recognised dynamics related to diversity and state-building for preventing conflict and sustaining peace. The Advisory Group of Experts (AGE), which prepared an initial report for the ten-year review of the UN peacebuilding architecture in 2015, stressed the importance of “inclusive” national ownership for successful peacebuilding. The AGE warned that national ownership cannot simply entail national elites imposing peace “on fractious populations that lack even minimal trust in their leaders”, but that “[t]he national responsibility to drive efforts to sustain peace must therefore be broadly shared across all key social strata and divides”.

In resolution 2282 of 27 April 2016 on the ten-year review, the Security Council echoed this point, emphasising that “inclusivity is key to advancing national peacebuilding processes and objectives in order to ensure that the needs of all segments of society are taken into account”. Likewise, Sustainable Development Goal 16 indicates the important role that state institutions can play in peacefully managing diversity. The goal aspires to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development; provide access to justice for all; and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

While no formal Council product is anticipated in connection with the high-level debate, Kenya's presidency seeks to promote more understanding of the role of identity in conflicts and the importance of building states' capacities and legitimacy to manage challenges in diverse societies. As the organiser of this debate, Kenya may prepare a summary of the main ideas raised or lessons identified in the meeting to be circulated in a Council letter. This could provide a basis for further Council discussion of this issue.

Colombia

Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing from Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu on recent developments and

the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission, which was issued on 24 September.

The Council is also expected to renew the verification mission's mandate ahead of its 31 October expiry.

UN DOCUMENTS ON PEACEBUILDING AND SUSTAINING PEACE Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2558 (21 December 2020) was on the 15-year review of UN peacebuilding, welcoming progress and encouraging continued actions to implement the 2016 resolutions on the ten-year review of UN peacebuilding. S/RES/2282 (27 April 2016) was on the ten-year review of the UN peacebuilding architecture. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2018/20 (18 December 2018) was on the Peacebuilding Commission's advisory role to the Council. Security Council Letter S/2015/490 (29 June 2015) was the report of the Advisory Group of Experts on the UN Peacebuilding Architecture.

Colombia

Key Recent Developments

During the reporting period of the Secretary-General's report, which covers 26 June to 24 September, some progress was made on the implementation of the November 2016 Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace between the government of Colombia and the former rebel group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP), including in the transitional justice process stipulated by the agreement.

The Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repentance—which is comprised of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), the Truth Commission, and the Unit for the Search for Persons Deemed as Missing—continued to advance its work in the past several months. On 16 August, Álvaro Uribe, who served as Colombia's president from 2002 to 2010, held an informal meeting with the Truth Commission's president, Francisco de Roux. (In February, the SJP issued a report that implicated the Colombian military in the killing of 6,400 civilians as part of the “false positives” phenomenon during Uribe's presidency.) At that meeting, Uribe denied responsibility for the extrajudicial killing of civilians and questioned the legitimacy of institutions formed as part of the peace agreement, such as the Truth Commission. On 31 August, Andrés Pastrana, who served as president from 1998 to 2002, testified voluntarily before the Truth Commission. He noted that although he was unsuccessful in forging a peace agreement with the FARC-EP during his term, his government laid the groundwork for the agreement that was reached in 2016. With these meetings, the Truth Commission has received input on the conflict from all five living former Colombian presidents.

Under the terms of the 2016 peace agreement, the Truth Commission's mandate is set to expire by 28 November. In July, several victims' organisations filed a petition to Colombia's constitutional court requesting an extension of the mandate, arguing that the commission's work was hindered during the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted its ability to meet with conflict-affected communities. At the time of writing, the constitutional court has yet to rule on the issue.

Persistent violence against communities (including indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities), former FARC-EP members, human rights defenders, and social leaders continued to complicate the implementation of the 2016 agreement. The verification mission verified the killing of 13 ex-combatants during the reporting period of the Secretary-General's report, bringing to 291 the number of former FARC-EP members killed since the signing of the 2016 peace agreement. In addition, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) received information about the killings of 43 human rights defenders, three of which were verified during the reporting period.

While the period between late April and mid-June was marked by widespread protests, the reporting period of the Secretary-General's latest report has not experienced similarly high levels of demonstrations. Protests and a national strike, which started on 28 April in response to a tax reform proposed by the government—that would have, among other things, increased taxes on the middle

class—lasted for over 40 days across the country. Some of the protests turned violent, resulting in allegations of at least 56 related deaths.

In mid-June, the national strike committee—which represents some 40 labour unions, farmer organisations and student organisations—suspended talks with the government aimed at resolving the crisis and expressed its intention to pursue its demands through other means, including by proposing bills to congress. Since then, the strike committee has proposed ten draft bills to congress on various social and economic policies, but they have received little support from lawmakers, according to media reports. The committee has also called for protests to take place on the 28th of each month. On 7 September, Colombia's congress passed an amended tax reform plan that replaced the previously proposed reform plan, which was retracted during the protests, and is set to raise \$4 billion annually. The reform's stated aim is to stabilise public finances and address social issues such as combatting poverty, the provision of higher education and the creation of additional jobs for women and youth.

Colombian President Iván Duque's 21 September speech at the UN General Assembly high-level segment garnered criticism from members of the Comunes party (which is composed of former FARC-EP combatants) for its portrayal of the peace agreement. Among other things, Duque called it “[t]he weak peace agreement signed in 2016 with the FARC terrorist group”. He added that his country is making progress in “building peace with legality”. (The government's “peace with legality” strategy has been criticised by former FARC-EP members as a narrow interpretation of the 2016 peace agreement.) Duque's presidential term ends in August 2022, and congressional and presidential elections are set to take place in March and May of that year, respectively.

The Council last met to discuss the situation in Colombia on 13 July, when it received a briefing from Ruiz Massieu and from Melissa Herrera, founder and director of the Latin American Foundation Viva la Vida. Herrera described the efforts of young peacebuilders in the country and emphasised the dangers faced by young women. She proposed several possible actions for the Council in this regard, such as including indicators of progress on Council resolutions relating to youth, peace and security in the verification mission's reporting to the Council. She also suggested that the Council conduct a visiting mission to Colombia and hold consultations with a diverse group of youth representatives.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members in October will be the renewal of the verification mission's mandate. The current mandate of the mission, as set out in the 2016 agreement, focuses on verifying aspects of the agreement related to the political, economic and social reincorporation of former FARC-EP combatants and personal and collective security guarantees, including comprehensive security programmes and protection measures for communities and organisations in conflict-affected areas. In resolution 2574 of 11 May, the Council expanded the verification mission's mandate to include monitoring compliance with the sentences handed down by the SJP. (The SJP is expected to begin handing down its sentences by early 2022.)

UN DOCUMENTS ON COLOMBIA [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2574](#) (11 May 2021) expanded the verification mission's mandate to include monitoring compliance with the sentences handed down by the SJP and extended it until 31 October 2021. [Secretary-General's Report S/2021/824](#) (24 September 2021) was the most recent 90-day report. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8818](#) (13 July 2021) was the Security Council's latest quarterly meeting on Colombia. [Security Council Press Statement SC/14583](#) (16 July 2021) reaffirmed the Council's support for the peace process.

Colombia

The Council will be following the preparatory work conducted by the verification mission ahead of undertaking this new task. Council members may wish to interact with representatives of the SJP and of victims' organisations to hear their views on the mission's new role and on ways in which the Council could further support transitional justice processes in the country. Members could either invite these representatives to brief during the Council's quarterly meeting on Colombia or hold such a discussion in an informal interactive dialogue, a closed meeting format that could allow for a frank exchange of ideas.

In July, several Council members initiated opportunities for diplomats to interact directly with former FARC representatives. (The Council last engaged with former FARC members during its visiting mission to Colombia in July 2019.) Norway organised a virtual meeting for Council experts on transitional justice processes with members of the Comunes party, while the Irish embassy in Bogotá convened an in-person meeting, in which several in-country ambassadors of non-permanent members of the Security Council were in attendance, to hear the views of members of the Comunes party on the latest Secretary-General's report. Council members may wish to continue holding such informal meetings to hear a broad array of voices regarding various aspects of the implementation of the agreement.

October's quarterly meeting will take place ahead of several important milestones, including the fifth anniversary of the November 2016 peace agreement. How best to support the implementation of the agreement in full, and not only selected aspects, continues to be an important issue for Council members.

Developments surrounding the electoral campaign for the 2022 elections, including the potential for an increase in political polarisation and violence against candidates, are a possible concern for the Council. As has been the case in the past, Security Council members are likely to issue a press statement following October's quarterly meeting; in the statement, they may wish to call on political actors to avoid polarising rhetoric and to prioritise dialogue.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the peace process in Colombia. While they have generally been deferential towards the government, some differences in tone have emerged since 2019. Russia, for example, has criticised the government for insufficient implementation of the peace agreement and its refusal to conduct dialogue with the armed group Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN).

The Council is united in its support for the verification mission, and Council members are generally supportive of the mission's undertaking the additional task of monitoring compliance with the SJP's sentences. However, the negotiations on resolution 2574 took longer than initially expected, in part because of China's concerns regarding the possible budgetary implications of the mandate expansion. Eventually, language proposed by China in this regard was not included in the text, as other Council members felt that these issues should be addressed through the General Assembly's Fifth Committee.

The UK is the penholder on Colombia.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council will hold its monthly briefing and consultations on Yemen. Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths are likely to brief.

Key Recent Developments

The Houthis rebel group has continued its offensive on Marib governorate while its forces made advances in the southern governorate of Shabwa. The new UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Hans Grundberg, officially started on 5 September, following months of stalled ceasefire negotiations.

On 10 September, Grundberg, who had been the EU Ambassador to Yemen since 2019, delivered his first briefing to the Security Council. "The United Nations approach to ending the conflict must be inclusive", he told the Council. "To define the best way forward, I intend to assess past efforts, identify what has worked and what has not, and listen to as many Yemeni men and women as possible." He added, "The beginning of my tenure should therefore be used as a moment to reassess our respective responsibilities." Grundberg said that a peace process

would take time, and announced his plans to meet soon with Yemeni government officials, the Houthis and other Yemeni political actors. He also plans to tour the region to meet leaders in Riyadh, Muscat, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Tehran, and Cairo. In press elements, Security Council members welcomed Grundberg's appointment and reiterated their expectation that the parties would meet with him and each other under UN auspices, in good faith and without preconditions.

During September, fighting intensified in Shabwa governorate as the Houthis made advances in the southern governorate that borders Marib. Shabwa and Marib governorates are Yemen's main sources of oil and natural gas. The operation appeared to be an attempt to bypass or cut off Marib City, where the Houthi offensive has been stalled for months. The group also escalated drone and missile attacks. These included a suspected Houthi missile attack on the al-Anad military base in Yemen's southern Lahj governorate on 29 August that killed at least 30 soldiers and wounded at least 50 others, and a drone attack on 31 August against Abha International Airport in Saudi Arabia that injured eight people and damaged a commercial aircraft.

On 18 September, the Houthis executed nine people by firing squad, including one reported minor, for allegedly participating in

Yemen

the killing of senior Houthi official Saleh al-Samad in an airstrike by the Saudi-led coalition in April 2018. In a statement, UN Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the executions, which he noted “are a result of judicial proceedings that do not appear to have fulfilled the requirements of fair trial and due process under international law”. Guterres also expressed concern about a Saudi-led coalition airstrike that same day in Shabwa that allegedly killed six civilians from the same family.

Yemen’s humanitarian crisis continues to be the world’s largest, with 20.7 million people requiring some form of aid or protection. Briefing at the 10 September Council meeting, OCHA Deputy Director of Operations Ghada Eltahir Mudawi highlighted the conflict’s impact on vulnerable populations, including women and girls, internally displaced persons (Yemen has the fourth-largest internally displaced population in the world) and children, among others. Mudawi also noted that since 2018, landmines, improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance have killed or injured more than 1,400 civilians in Yemen.

Pledges totalling about \$600 million were announced at a humanitarian event on Yemen during the General Assembly’s high-level debate on 22 September.

During September, Aden and other southern areas saw days of sustained protests, starting on 14 September. The protests erupted amid the declining value of the Yemeni rial, which in areas outside Houthi territory has been trading at record lows in relation to the US dollar, making the cost of food and other goods prohibitively expensive. Two protesters were reportedly killed in Aden, which is under the control of the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC), and two were reportedly killed in government-controlled Hadhramaut governorate.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 48th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held an interactive dialogue on 14 September with the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts and considered its latest report (A/HRC/48/20). Kamel Jendoubi, the group’s chair, expressed concern that impunity continued largely unabated for those who perpetrated serious violations in Yemen and that the group had seen little progress in terms of investigations conducted by the parties. On 21 September, the spokesperson for the High Commissioner for Human Rights referred to the execution of the nine individuals on 18 September, saying “the defendants were sentenced to death in a judicial process that violated their constitutional rights and did not comply with fair trial standards under international law”. He added: “[T]hey were reportedly tortured, and forced to sign confessions. In addition, they were denied their right to assistance from a lawyer at several stages of the proceedings.”

Women, Peace and Security

During the 10 September open briefing on Yemen, Entesar Al-Qadhi, executive director of the Marib Girls Foundation for Development, briefed the Security Council to provide a civil society perspective. Al-Qadhi focused on the humanitarian situation in Marib governorate, drawing the Council’s attention to the conditions of internally displaced people, including women and girls. In her remarks, Al-Qadhi pointed out that, despite the critical contribution that women in Yemen have made towards building peace, they continue to be excluded from decision-making processes. She urged Special Envoy Grundberg to consult regularly with “all Yemenis, especially women and young people” during his mandate. Al-Qadhi called on the Security Council to demand “the cessation of Houthi attacks against Marib”, including by adopting a resolution for a ceasefire; to support an inclusive peace process, and to urge the conflict parties to grant unimpeded humanitarian access. She further urged the Council to call on member states to fund the UN humanitarian response plan for Yemen and women’s civil society organisations.

Key Issues and Options

Reassessing the UN and Council approach for resuming a peace process is a key issue at the start of the new Special Envoy’s tenure. The Yemeni government and the Houthis have not discussed a comprehensive solution for ending the war since the 2016 Kuwait peace talks. How to make the political process more inclusive is an important related issue and a goal that the new envoy supports. This will entail bringing into the process more of the anti-Houthi opposition such as Yemen’s different political parties, armed groups and other local actors. Council members could encourage the envoy to consult with Yemeni parties and relevant regional countries as he develops his strategy to revive a political process, which the Council could then endorse.

Key issues related to Yemen’s humanitarian crisis include the prevention of famine, the protection of civilians, challenges to humanitarian access, and support for the economy. The UN has repeatedly warned about the potential for the Houthis’ Marib offensive to worsen the humanitarian situation if it triggers a new wave of mass displacement.

A recurring key issue is the threat posed by the FSO Safer oil tanker, holding an estimated 1.15 million barrels of oil and moored in the Red Sea off the Houthi-held Ras Isa oil terminal. The Houthis have still not allowed a UN technical team to conduct an assessment mission to the decrepit ship, which risks causing an environmental catastrophe in the event of an oil spill or fire.

In their public interventions, Council members could reiterate calls for:

- a ceasefire;
- measures to address the humanitarian crisis, such as lifting Yemeni government restrictions on fuel imports through Hodeidah’s ports;
- continued implementation of the Riyadh Agreement, the Saudi Arabia-brokered power-sharing agreement between the Yemeni government and the STC; and
- Houthi cooperation with the UN to avert a crisis with the Safer oil tanker.

Council Dynamics

Council members support UN-led mediation efforts for a ceasefire and share concerns about the humanitarian situation and the environmental threat posed by the Safer oil tanker. The US Special Envoy for Yemen, Timothy Lenderking, has liaised closely with the UN on efforts to restart a political process. Despite this general unity among members, differences exist. For example, European members and the US tend to be more critical of perceived Houthi obstructionism, while Russia is more cautious in singling out the Houthis—a dynamic that sometimes plays out during negotiations on Council products.

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

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

On 3 and 4 April, the Kosovo parliament convened two sessions for its presidential elections. The high office had been vacant since 5 November 2020, when former President Hashim Thaçi resigned following his indictment by the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (KSC) and Specialist Prosecutor's Office (SPO) on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Vjosa Osmani, former Speaker of parliament, assumed the duties of acting president of Kosovo from 5 November to 22 March, when parliamentary elections were held. On 4 April, Osmani was elected president in the third round of voting after receiving 71 votes—ten votes more than the simple majority needed. The ethnic Serb minority party and two other opposition parties boycotted the election. While Osmani supports efforts to normalise relations with Serbia, she first demands that Belgrade apologise and prosecute those responsible for war crimes committed during the Kosovo conflict.

Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia resumed after a nine-month hiatus. On 15 June, EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Miroslav Lajčák and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell met with Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić for the first of two meetings. The second meeting, which took place on 19 July, discussed several proposals, including a six-article joint peace declaration. According to Kurti, the Serbian delegation rejected the proposal because it would not accept a reference in the preamble to dealing with the past. Following the meeting, Lajčák admitted that, while the parties agreed that their chief negotiators would meet every month to discuss issues of concern, very little progress had been achieved.

Since the Council's last briefing on the situation in Kosovo on 13 April, relations between Serbia and Kosovo have remained generally stable. In September, however, tensions on the Kosovo-Serbia border escalated as Pristina officials began enforcing a policy prohibiting the entry of vehicles with Serbian license plates. Since 2011, Kosovo and Serbia have had an arrangement under which Kosovo admits vehicles displaying KS (Kosovo) license plates, which are acceptable to Serbia, or RKS (Republic of Kosovo) plates, which are not. The new policy requires all vehicles crossing the border to display the RKS license plate. On 20 September, Kosovo riot police were deployed to the border in northern Kosovo as hundreds of Kosovo Serbs gathered to protest the new policy. Kurti claimed that the policy was “not aimed to infringe the right of Serb citizens for free movement or provoke any destabilisation” but rather a reciprocal measure against Belgrade for not permitting vehicles with RKS plates to cross into Serbia. In response, Vučić called on the EU to verify whether the 2013 Brussels Agreement on the normalisation of relations between the two sides remained in effect.

Key Issues and Options

The Council's main priority is to maintain stability in Kosovo. It will continue to monitor diplomatic efforts to advance the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, as well as obstacles and potential roadblocks to that end.

The delay in implementing existing agreements within the framework of the EU-facilitated dialogue, including the establishment of an association of Serb-majority municipalities in northern Kosovo, remains an important issue for the Council.

Another key issue is the cooperation of Kosovo authorities with the KSC and SPO. Kurti has openly criticised the work of the KSC as lacking transparency and suggested that domestic courts develop the capacity to manage criminal indictments and prosecutions. While the KSC and SPO, located in The Hague, are constituted by Kosovo legislation, they are staffed with international judges, prosecutors, and officers.

Some Council members (notably France, the UK and the US) continue to question the UNMIK reporting cycle and have called for the mission's downsizing on several occasions, citing the relative overall stability on the ground. The Council agreed in February 2018 to a less frequent reporting cycle, but it could now request the Secretary-General to conduct a strategic review of UNMIK to assess the mission's performance.

Another option that the Council could consider is to pursue a statement:

- expressing its full support for UNMIK;
- noting with regret the lack of progress achieved on the EU-facilitated dialogue and urging both parties to do their utmost to create the conditions for the normalisation of their relations;
- calling for the implementation of existing agreements and encouraging UNMIK to assist with efforts in that regard; and
- reaffirming the importance of respecting KSC's mandated authority and jurisdiction over crimes against humanity, war crimes and other crimes under Kosovo law.

Council Dynamics

Kosovo remains a low-intensity issue for the Council and is closely followed mainly by members with a specific interest in the region. Nevertheless, deep divisions among permanent members have continued to characterise the Council's approach to the issue. France, the UK and the US recognise Kosovo's independence and tend to be supportive of its government; China and Russia do not recognise its independence and strongly support Serbia's position. Four elected members (Estonia, Ireland, Niger, and Norway) recognise Kosovo's independence, while six do not (India, Kenya, Mexico, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, and Viet Nam).

Divisions among the Council's permanent members became acutely apparent during its 13 April briefing on the situation in Kosovo held via videoconference. Arguing that “the majority of [Council members] do not recognize Kosovo as an independent State”, Russia tried to prevent Kosovo's minister of foreign affairs, Donika Gërvalla-Schwarz, from displaying the Kosovo flag during her speech. Because of Russia's request that the flag not be shown,

Kosovo

the virtual meeting was delayed for 45 minutes as the Council discussed the issue privately. Ultimately, Gërvalla-Schwarz spoke in a private capacity, and the briefing took place in an informal and provisional format so as to avoid setting a precedent.

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

mandate, arguing that conditions on the ground have completely changed since UNMIK was established 22 years ago.

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

Central African Republic

Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council will discuss the Secretary-General's latest report on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), which is due by 11 October. Mankeur Ndiaye, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for the Central African Republic (CAR) and head of MINUSCA, an EU representative, and the AU Special Representative and head of the AU Office in the CAR are expected to brief.

The mandate of MINUSCA expires on 15 November. The CAR sanctions regime expires on 31 July 2022, and the mandate of the Panel of Experts supporting the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee expires on 31 August 2022.

Key Recent Developments

The situation in the CAR has remained volatile since Ndiaye last briefed the Council on 23 June. During that meeting, Ndiaye echoed the Secretary-General's 16 June report, which raised serious concerns about ongoing military counter-offensives carried out by the "national security forces [FACA] and bilaterally deployed and other security personnel". He noted that the counter-offensives against the Coalition des patriotes pour le changement (CPC), an alliance of armed opposition groups responsible for significant violence in the CAR, had contributed to a high level of human rights violations in the country. (Some Council members allege that the "bilaterally deployed forces" are Russian military instructors and mercenaries. Russia maintains that the CAR government has invited its instructors to work with the CAR armed forces and denies that they have been involved in any violations.)

On 27 July, a series of attacks by the Union for Peace in the CAR (UPC), an armed opposition group, against both FACA and MINUSCA installations, caused injury to one peacekeeper. According to MINUSCA, on the same day, FACA members and "bilaterally deployed forces" clashed with an unidentified armed group near CAR's north-west border, resulting in widescale displacement. According to a 15 September OCHA report, thousands of civilians were forced to flee the fighting. Four days later, fighting between the 3R (Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation) armed group and the FACA erupted after an attack on a FACA base in the north-west

village of Mann. Carrying out its protection of civilians mandate, MINUSCA deployed both a rapid intervention force and an aerial reconnaissance mission. Seven people were killed in the fighting.

The ongoing insecurity has also had a major impact on the country's humanitarian situation. According to OCHA's reporting, there were approximately 713,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in the country as at 31 August. While there had been a drop in IDP numbers since early spring, 37,510 newly displaced people were recorded throughout August, due primarily to fighting in the north-west. Overall, the number of Central Africans in need of humanitarian assistance has risen in the past year. At this time last year, 2.36 million people in the CAR were considered food insecure; that number has now grown to over 2.6 million people—some 57 percent of the country's population.

On 15 September, MINUSCA announced the UN Secretariat's decision to repatriate immediately all Gabonese military units from MINUSCA. The decision, which was based on credible reports of sexual exploitation and abuse by the Gabonese contingent, will affect 450 Gabonese troops. In making the announcement, MINUSCA highlighted the organisation's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and said that MINUSCA's partners had provided assistance to the victims. Speaking to the media on 17 September, the Secretary-General's spokesperson announced that the decision and "swift action" had come as the result not only of recent allegations of sexual abuse but also "on top of much older allegations which have not been resolved". The Gabonese defence ministry has also opened an investigation.

MINUSCA has been the subject of previous allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, notably during 2015 and 2016. In December 2015, an independent panel appointed by the Secretary-General to review how the UN had handled reports of sexual exploitation and abuse by international peacekeeping forces in the CAR released a report that highlighted systemic failures in UN reporting chains and inadequate responses by several UN officials, including by then-head of MINUSCA, Babacar Gaye, who subsequently resigned at the request of the Secretary-General.

Increasingly strong language on sexual exploitation and abuse has been inserted into subsequent MINUSCA mandate renewals.

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE CAR Security Council Resolutions [S/RES/2536](#) (28 July 2021) renewed the CAR sanctions regime until 31 July 2022 and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the CAR Sanctions Committee until 31 August 2022. [S/RES/2566](#) (12 March 2021) raised the MINUSCA troop ceiling. [S/RES/2552](#) (12 November 2020) extended the mandate of MINUSCA for one year until 15 November 2021. [S/RES/2272](#) (11 March 2016) addressed sexual exploitation and abuse in peace operations.

Central African Republic

Resolution 2552, which renewed MINUSCA's mandate until 12 November, emphasised the need to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and to improve the way these allegations are addressed. Resolution 2552 also urges troop- and police-contributing countries to "take appropriate steps to ensure full accountability in cases of such conduct involving their personnel".

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 4 August, a joint report by the UN Human Rights Office and MINUSCA provided details of the dire and worsening human rights situation over the past year in the CAR. The report, which covers July 2020 to June, documents 526 incidents of abuses and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law across the country, affecting at least 1,221 victims. Among the documented abuses and violations are extrajudicial and summary killings; torture and ill-treatment; arbitrary arrests and detentions; unnecessary and disproportionate use of force; conflict-related sexual violence; and serious violations against children, including their recruitment by parties to the conflict.

During its 48th session, the Human Rights Council is expected to hold an interactive dialogue on 7 October with the independent expert on the situation of human rights in the CAR, Yao Agbetse, and consider his report (A/HRC/48/81).

Key Issues and Options

The most pressing issue for the Council will be the renewal of MINUSCA's mandate, which expires on 15 November. As such, Council members will be following closely Ndiaye's briefing to assess if there are areas in the mandate that need further strengthening. One possible such area is in connection with sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers. In addition to taking this into consideration during upcoming mandate renewal negotiations, Council members may wish to adopt a presidential statement in October, echoing

relevant language on sexual exploitation and abuse from previous MINUSCA mandates as well as resolution 2272, which was adopted on 11 March 2016 and addressed sexual exploitation and abuse in peace operations.

The ongoing violence and slow progress on the implementation of the CAR's 2019 political agreement is another key issue for Council members. To help support national reconciliation and reinvent the CAR's stagnant dialogue process, Council members may wish to express their support for the 16 September call for a ceasefire in the CAR by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

Council and Wider Dynamics

There has been strong overall support amongst Council members for the work of MINUSCA. However, there are growing differences among some Council members on the situation in the country. Key amongst these issues is the role of the Russian instructors and reports of Russian mercenaries in the CAR. Given allegations of Russian actors' participation in recent fighting and human rights violations, Council sessions have grown increasingly tense, with some members, including the UK and the US, strongly questioning Russia's involvement in the country.

There appears to be wide support for the need to address sexual exploitation and abuse in all peace operations, including through the repatriation of peacekeepers when there is credible evidence of patterns of sexual exploitation and abuse. Resolution 2272 was adopted with 14 votes in favour, and one abstention (by then-elected member Egypt). Gabon is set to join the Council as an elected member on 1 January 2022.

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

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council will hold its quarterly open debate on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland is expected to brief.

Key Recent Developments

More than four months after the 20 May ceasefire agreement that concluded 11 days of hostilities between Israel and Hamas, the security situation in the Gaza Strip remains precarious. Nevertheless, while intermittent bouts of violence have marked the period since the Council's last open debate on this issue in July, the ceasefire has, thus far, largely held. A measured easing of some of the restrictions imposed by Israel on Gaza and several notable meetings among key international interlocutors on the Middle East have also recently taken place.

For the first time since the 20 May ceasefire, a rocket was fired at

Israel from Gaza on 16 August. It was intercepted by Israel's anti-missile system. Earlier on the same day, Israeli security forces had killed four Palestinians in connection with a raid on the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank.

Recently, there have been repeated demonstrations near the fence delimiting the border between Israel and Gaza. One of the most serious incidents was on 21 August, when a march to mark the 52nd anniversary of the arson attack at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and to protest against the restrictions on Gaza turned violent. The clashes resulted in the death of two men (a Palestinian and an Israeli) and a 12-year-old Palestinian boy. In response to the 21 August incident, Israel launched airstrikes later that day against Hamas military sites in Gaza. Israel also carried out airstrikes against Hamas targets on 23 August, 29 August and 7 September following repeated launches of incendiary balloons from Gaza.

Several rockets were also fired from Gaza towards Israel on 10, 11 and 12 September, apparently in connection with the capture,

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION Security Council Resolution S/RES/2334 (23 December 2016) condemned Israeli settlements; it was adopted with 14 votes in favour and a US abstention. **Security Council Press Statement SC/14527** (22 May 2021) welcomed the 20 May ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas after an 11-day round of hostilities.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

between 10 and 11 September, of four of the six Palestinian inmates who had tunneled out of a high-security prison in northern Israel on 6 September. The rockets triggered response fire from Israel on 11, 12 and 13 September.

Despite these confrontations, this period has also seen a number of important official meetings. On 29 August, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz met in Ramallah. This was the first high-level meeting between Abbas and Israeli officials in more than a decade. Following the talks, Israel announced a series of measures to support the Palestinian Authority economically, including a \$155 million loan. The meeting came after Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's visit to the US, where he met with President Joe Biden on 27 August. Biden stressed the importance of taking "steps to improve the lives of Palestinians and support greater economic opportunities for them".

In an interview reported in *The Jerusalem Post* on 15 September, Bennett said that instead of focusing on Palestinian statehood, it would be preferable to "create more business, strengthen the economy and improve living conditions for everyone in Judea and Samaria".

On 2 September, Abbas, King Abdullah II of Jordan and Egyptian President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi met in Cairo, reportedly to discuss the strengthening of the 20 May ceasefire and the revitalisation of the Middle East peace process. On 13 September, Bennett and al-Sisi met in Sharm el-Sheikh, marking the first formal Israeli visit to Egypt in a decade. It seems that the meeting included a discussion of the situation in Gaza, among other regional issues. Regarding the restrictions on Gaza, Wennesland said in his 30 August Council briefing: "The current gradual approach is a holding operation and not a strategic way forward and a solution for the people of Gaza. Gaza requires political solutions that will see a full lifting of Israeli closures." After a ban lasting more than three months, some construction materials for the private sector started entering Gaza on 30 August. On 1 September, other restrictions were eased, including those on the fishing zone in the southern part of the Gaza coast. A 13 September Al Jazeera news report with interviews from Gaza, however, indicated that reconstruction was yet to start.

On 19 August, the UN and Qatar signed a memorandum of understanding for the UN to provide cash assistance to vulnerable families and improve the socioeconomic situation in Gaza. (During the May hostilities, Israel halted the transfer of Qatari cash-based aid because of concerns that the funds would end up supporting Hamas.) The distribution of cash aid by the UN to impoverished families in Gaza began on 13 September and is expected to reach almost 100,000 beneficiaries.

Regarding the situation in the West Bank, OCHA reported that 1,841 Palestinians were injured by Israeli forces between 27 July and 20 September; most of these injuries occurred during protests against settlement activities near the village of Beita in the Nablus area. OCHA reported that Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced owners to demolish 119 Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank during this period. Two further structures were demolished by their owners in East Jerusalem between 7-20 September to avoid paying fines. 58 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank between 1 January and 20 September. In his 29 September monthly briefing to the Council, Wennesland briefed on recent developments and the implementation of resolution 2334, which was adopted in 2016 and demanded that all settlement activities cease

with immediate effect.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 48th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) is expected to consider the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on allocation of water resources in Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (A/HRC/48/43), on 1 October. The HRC will also receive an oral update from the High Commissioner on the implementation of S-30/1, followed by a general debate. In resolution S-30/1, adopted at the HRC's 30th special session, the HRC decided to urgently establish an ongoing independent, international commission of inquiry to investigate all alleged violations of international humanitarian law and all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law leading up to and since 13 April in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel.

Key Issues and Options

Key immediate issues for the Council include the consolidation of the 20 May ceasefire towards a longer-term arrangement, the improvement of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the acceleration of its reconstruction. Demolitions of Palestinian civilian structures and the possibility of further evictions are also an issue of concern to the Council. The resumption of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians remains a key issue.

Building on the recent diplomatic momentum, Council members could consider ways to support the reconstruction of Gaza and confidence-building measures between Israel and the Palestinians. A Council statement stressing the importance of maintaining the ceasefire and providing humanitarian and reconstruction aid to Gaza may also be an option.

Council Dynamics

Council members have repeatedly underscored that settlement-building is a violation of international law and have called for an end to settlement activities and demolitions of Palestinian civilian structures. Members also regularly stress the importance of Israel and the Palestinians returning to the peace table and the need for a two-state solution.

At present, the US, Israel's strongest ally in the Council, appears to be prioritising measures to improve Palestinian living conditions, rather than putting its weight behind a resumption of the peace process. It has criticised actions by the parties as being provocative—including settlement activity, demolitions, hate speech, and compensation to individuals imprisoned for terrorism. At the same time, it has also maintained that "there are other issues in the region that are threats to international peace and security and deserve more of the Council's attention", as Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield (US) stated during the 25 March Council meeting on the Middle East. This year the US resumed its financial support for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), which had been cut during the Trump administration.

Though some Council members may support a strategy that prioritises economic and livelihood improvements over political negotiations, other members may stress that economic relief and improvements in day-to-day living conditions do not negate the need to resume working on a political process. During the 28 July Middle East meeting in the Council, Russia noted that "we should not lose sight of, or postpone until a more favourable moment, the task of reviving the political peace process, including relaunching direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations on all final status issues".

Somalia

Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council will engage on the issue of Somalia sanctions on several occasions. 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. The Council will also receive the report of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, on the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Somalia and any impediments to aid delivery.

The Somalia sanctions regime will expire on 15 November, and the mandate of all members of the Somalia Sanctions Committee's Panel of Experts will expire on 15 December.

Key Recent Developments

Byrne Nason's most recent periodic Council briefing was on 14 June, when she informed members about the committee's activities since 26 February. Her briefing included the listing of three members of the militant group Al-Shabaab pursuant to paragraph 8 (a) of resolution 1844 of 20 November 2008 for "engaging in or providing support for acts that threaten the peace, security or stability of Somalia, including acts that threaten the Djibouti Agreement of 18 August 2008 or the political process, or threaten the Transitional Federal Institutions or the AU Mission in Somalia by force." These were the first listings since the committee added two names in March 2018, when the Somalia sanctions regime was still grouped with a regime imposed on Eritrea. Shortly before the 14 June meeting, the committee had considered the panel's mid-term report, which covered five key issues: the continued threat posed by Al-Shabaab, including the use of improvised explosive devices; violations of international humanitarian law; ongoing investigations into the group's finances; the management of weapons and ammunition by the federal government; and the ban on the export of charcoal from the country. The mid-term reports of the Somalia sanctions regime are traditionally not made public; the final reports will be made available on the committee's website.

Recent months also saw changes in the composition of the panel. On 27 April, the coordinator, Natascha Hryckow, who was also the maritime and regional expert, resigned. Since then, arms expert Richard Zobot has been serving as interim coordinator. A new candidate to replace Hryckow was suggested to the committee but placed on hold by China and Russia. In recent months, both Council members have placed holds on several candidates for expert panels and expert groups across other UN sanctions regimes.

The request for the briefing and the report on humanitarian assistance was last renewed in resolution 2551 of 12 November 2020. The recent report highlighted challenges humanitarian workers are facing in the country, including abduction, arrest, harassment, forcible seizure of assets, and restrictions on road movement by the parties to the conflict. It described the threat to humanitarian delivery posed by Al-Shabaab, which "continues to implement hostile policies against most humanitarian organizations, directing local populations to not accept assistance from some humanitarian organizations,

further punishing communities that do not oblige and directly targeting the organizations' personnel or assets, or directing local populations to do so". The report further recommended the renewal for another year of the humanitarian exemption in the 751 sanctions regime, which provides that its measures "shall not apply to the payment of funds, other financial assets, or economic resources necessary to ensure the timely delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance in Somalia".

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 48th session, the Human Rights Council is expected to hold an interactive dialogue on 6 October with the independent expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia, Isha Dyfan, and consider her report (A/HRC/48/80). The report, covering 1 July 2020 to 30 June, concludes that there has been a recent regression in the protection of women and children's rights and that inaction on human rights on the part of the government has resulted in increased violations and abuses against civilians, emboldened perpetrators and left victims without redress. The report makes several recommendations, including reviewing cases and releasing journalists, media workers and human rights defenders arbitrarily arrested and unlawfully detained; completing the enactment of long-standing bills and conducting transparent appointments to human rights institutions to protect women and children's rights; and finalising the constitutional review process.

Women, Peace and Security

On 5 August, the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, and the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, issued a joint press release on the increasing levels of conflict-related sexual violence in Somalia. They reported that some 400 civilians – primarily girls – were subjected to conflict-related sexual violence in Somalia during 2020, marking an increase of almost 80 percent compared to 2019. An equally disturbing number of cases (over 100) were recorded during the first trimester of 2021.

Cases were attributed to clan militia, government security forces and Al-Shabaab, "which continues to use sexual violence and forced marriage as tactics of domination in areas under their de facto control, forcing many families to flee their land". Patten and Gamba urged the Somali government to "take concrete measures to end and prevent the recurrence of sexual violence against women and children", including strengthening the legal framework and adopting and implementing action plans on child soldiers and conflict-related sexual violence.

The "planning, directing or committing [of] acts involving sexual and gender-based violence" is one of the listing criteria under the Somalia sanctions regime. To date, no listing has been made pursuant to this criterion.

Key Issues and Options

A continuous key issue for the Council in the past years has been the question of how to disrupt Al-Shabaab's financing and counter the group's influence. A recent political dispute between President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo" and Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble over the disappearance of a cybersecurity expert working for Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency caused concern that Al-Shabaab might exploit or benefit from the political rift. The Council's 18 September press release on the dispute cautioned that "any political differences [should] not divert from united action against AlShabaab and other militant groups".

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2551](#) (12 November 2020) renewed the partial lifting of the arms embargo on Somali security forces and also renewed the mandate of the Somalia Panel of Experts until 15 December 2021. [Secretary-General's Report S/2021/723](#) (10 August 2021) was on the situation in Somalia, covering developments from 8 May to 31 July. [Security Council Letter S/2020/1079](#) (30 October 2020) was the 28 October 2020 briefing by Ambassador Philippe Kridelka (Belgium). [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8775](#) (12 November 2020) covered the adoption of resolution 2551. [Security Council Press Statement SC/14641](#) (18 September 2021) expressed deep concern about the ongoing disagreement within the Somali government and the negative impact on the electoral timetable and process. [Sanctions Committee Documents S/2020/1004](#) (15 October 2020) was the report by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. [S/2020/949](#) (28 September 2020) was the final report of the Panel of Experts on Somalia.

Somalia

When deliberating the regime's renewal in November, including its humanitarian carveouts, Council members may consider the current humanitarian situation, which OCHA described in its August report as being "aggravated this year by a double climate disaster of drought in some parts of the country and flooding in others, as well as political tensions, the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating desert locust infestation", leaving some 5.9 million people in need of assistance.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Somalia participated during Byrne Nason's last briefing and directed

criticism towards Kenya, accusing the Council member of using cluster munitions in air strikes in 2019 and conducting air raids that killed civilians. Kenya rejected the claims as false. Somalia also requested the establishment of "practical and achievable benchmarks" for lifting the sanctions measures. Somalia also advocated for the lifting of sanctions during a 22 July visit to Mogadishu by Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence Simon Coveney. China shares this position and had argued for the inclusion of benchmarks during the negotiations on the renewal of the sanctions regime in November 2020. China and Russia abstained on the adoption.

Lebanon

Expected Council Action

In October, Security Council members are expected to receive their semi-annual briefing in closed consultations on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1559. Adopted in 2004, the resolution called for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon, the disarmament of all militias, and the extension of government control over the whole Lebanese territory. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo is expected to brief. The Secretary-General's report is due on 13 October.

Key Recent Developments

On 10 September, Prime Minister-designate Najib Mikati announced the formation of a new government. This came after more than a year of political deadlock following the resignation of then-Prime Minister Hassan Diab in the aftermath of the 4 August 2020 Beirut port explosion. The new government won the confidence of Lebanon's parliament on 20 September. Najla Riachi, the Minister of Administrative Development, is the only woman in the cabinet. According to UNWomen, this represents a drop to "a disappointing four percent" compared with the 2019 Lebanese government, in which women made up 30 percent of the cabinet.

In welcoming the formation of the new government, Secretary-General António Guterres urged the new executive to "implement a tangible reform agenda that addresses the needs and aspirations of the Lebanese people, which includes holding elections on time". A similar message, welcoming the new executive while underscoring the necessity of reforms and timely elections, was also put forward by the International Support Group for Lebanon on 22 September. (The group is composed of the UN, China, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the UK, and the US, as well as the EU and the Arab League.)

On 27 September, Security Council members issued a press statement welcoming the announcement of the formation of a new government in Lebanon and urging it to implement necessary reforms. Council members also stressed the importance of holding "free, fair and inclusive" elections in 2022 that ensure "the full, equal

and meaningful participation of women as candidates and voters". The statement further calls for "a swift, independent, impartial, thorough, and transparent investigation" into the 4 August 2020 Beirut port explosion. This is the first Council press statement on Lebanon since February 2019.

Lebanon continues to face a serious socioeconomic crisis characterised by shortages of fuel, medicine and water. In early September, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia reported that poverty in Lebanon affects almost 74 percent of the population, while Amnesty International warned of the risk to the right to health associated with the failure of the Lebanese authorities to provide fuel to hospitals.

During the crisis, the Shi'a group Hezbollah has arranged for Iranian fuel to be delivered to Lebanon, with the first of several truck convoys reaching Lebanon via Syria on 16 September. It seems that the shipment was not approved by the Lebanese government and was delivered despite US sanctions on Iran. In a 17 September interview with CNN, Mikati said that he was saddened by the delivery, but that he believed that the country would not be subjected to US sanctions as the shipment had not been authorised by the government.

At the same time, several international initiatives have emerged to support the government and the population of Lebanon. The French and UN-led "Conference in Support of the Population of Lebanon" took place via videoconference on 4 August, raising \$370 million, with the US pledging nearly \$100 million in humanitarian assistance to Lebanon. In early September, plans for Lebanon to receive Egyptian natural gas supplied via Jordan and Syria were announced after a ministerial-level meeting among Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria in Amman. It seems that the plan enjoys US support and might receive an exemption from US sanctions on Syria. On 17 September, a shipment of fuel from Iraq reached Lebanon, and on 23 September, Deputy Special Coordinator and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Najat Rochdi announced the start of fuel delivery to "critical healthcare and water institutions across Lebanon". On 13 September, the Lebanese government announced

UN DOCUMENTS ON LEBANON Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2591 (30 August 2021) renewed the mandate of UNIFIL until 31 August 2022. S/RES/1559 (2 September 2004) urged the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon, the disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias and the extension of the Lebanese government's control over the whole territory of Lebanon. S/RES/1701 (11 August 2006) called for cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon, increased the number of UNIFIL troops to 15,000 troops and expanded its mandate. **Secretary-General's Report S/2021/650** (13 July 2021) was the most recent Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701.

Lebanon

that the central bank of Lebanon would receive \$1.135 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Demands for accountability for the Beirut port explosion have continued in recent months, as no significant progress was achieved through the domestic investigation. On 15 September, a joint letter signed by 145 non-governmental organisations, survivors, and families of the victims of the blast appealed to the UN Human Rights Council to adopt a resolution establishing an international investigative body to look into human rights violations related to the explosion.

Regarding the security situation in southern Lebanon, tensions flared in early August along the Blue Line, a border demarcation between Israel and Lebanon. On 4 August, three rockets were fired from north of the Blue Line towards Israel, prompting artillery fire from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in response. On 5 August, following further rocket fire towards Israel from sites in Lebanon, the IDF carried out airstrikes on Lebanese territory for the first time since 2014. On 6 August, rockets were fired from Lebanon towards open ground near Israeli positions, for which Hezbollah claimed responsibility. The IDF later responded with artillery fire. No casualties ensued from this bout of tension, and both Israel and Hezbollah said they had no intention of escalating violence further.

On 30 August, the Security Council extended the mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for one year, until 31 August 2022, through resolution 2591. The main new element introduced by the resolution was a request for UNIFIL to support and assist the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) by providing additional non-lethal material and logistical support for a temporary period of six months. This originated from concerns about the effects of Lebanon's multifaceted crises on the capacity of the LAF to maintain security in southern Lebanon. (See our 29 August "What's in Blue" story on UNIFIL's mandate renewal).

Key Issues and Options

A key issue that the Council is likely to consider in October is the significant amount of weaponry held by Hezbollah and other non-state actors in Lebanon. The most recent Secretary-General's report on resolution 1701 said: "No progress was achieved with respect to the disarmament of armed groups. Hizbullah continued to acknowledge publicly that it maintains military capabilities. The maintenance

of arms outside the control of the State by Hizbullah and other groups in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) continues to restrict the State's ability to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory."

Other issues for the Council include the socioeconomic instability in Lebanon and the timely holding of elections in 2022. An important connected issue is also how best to support women's participation in the elections. Council members could consider holding a closed Arria-formula meeting with women from Lebanese civil society and influential political figures in the country to discuss strategies for enhancing women's participation in the political process.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence, and security. They further emphasise the need for government reforms to address the difficult security, socioeconomic and humanitarian situations facing the country.

The negotiations on UNIFIL's mandate renewal suggest a less confrontational US approach when compared to the previous administration. Unlike last year, there was seemingly no attempt by the US to alter UNIFIL's mandate and configuration to allow the mission to play a more active role in confronting the proliferation of weapons in southern Lebanon and actors such as Hezbollah.

Nevertheless, this does not seem to have been underpinned by a fundamental change in the US position on Hezbollah. Extending the national emergency declared on 1 August 2007 by the US with respect to Lebanon (Executive Order 13441), President Biden issued the following notice on 20 July: "Certain ongoing activities, such as Iran's continuing arms transfers to Hizbullah—which include increasingly sophisticated weapons systems—serve to undermine Lebanese sovereignty, contribute to political and economic instability in the region, and continue to constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States."

Russia has typically taken the view that Hezbollah should be seen as a legitimate partner for dialogue, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with a delegation of senior Hezbollah members in Moscow on 15 March.

France is the penholder on Lebanon.

Sudan/South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In October, the Council will receive a briefing on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), due by 15 October as requested in resolution 2575. Consultations are expected to follow the briefing.

The mandate of UNISFA and the mission's support to the Joint

Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM), which monitors the demilitarised zone along the border between Sudan and South Sudan, both expire on 15 November.

Key Recent Developments

Improved relations between Sudan and South Sudan since 2019 have created an enabling environment for progress in resolving the

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN/SOUTH SUDAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2575 (11 May 2021) renewed the mandate of UNISFA until 15 November 2021. S/RES/2550 (12 November 2020) renewed the mandate of UNISFA until 15 May 2021. Secretary-General's Report S/2021/383 (20 April 2021) was the Secretary-General's report on UNISFA. Security Council Letters S/2021/805 (17 September 2021) was a letter from the Secretary-General transmitting the strategic review of UNISFA. S/2021/322 (1 April 2021) was a letter from the Secretary-General on options for the responsible drawdown and exit of UNISFA. Security Council Meeting Record S/2021/408 (28 April 2021) transmitted the meeting record of the briefing on Sudan/South Sudan on 26 April.

Sudan/South Sudan

final status of Abyei, the disputed area along the Sudan-South Sudan border. However, little concrete progress has been made, including implementation of the June 2011 Agreement on Temporary Arrangements for the Administration and Security of Abyei Area. In recent months, tensions in the region have affected the mission, of which Ethiopia is the sole troop-contributing country. These include the ongoing armed confrontation in Ethiopia; escalating tensions over the eastern border in the Al-Fashaga area between Sudan and Ethiopia, which have resulted in sporadic clashes; and the dispute between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). In this context, Sudan has publicly called for the replacement of the Ethiopian troops in UNISFA, which South Sudan has rejected. Ethiopia has come to recognise that conditions are no longer favourable for their troops to remain in Abyei, given Sudan's position.

On 8 and 9 September, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Parfait Onanga-Anyanga visited Abyei as part of a visit by Lacroix to the region. At a press briefing in New York on 17 September, Lacroix noted that UNISFA plays an instrumental role in reducing tensions between communities while acknowledging that the continued presence of Ethiopian troops in Abyei is a source of contention. He added that if UNISFA is to continue, the current composition must be changed and that other contributing countries would replace the Ethiopian contingent in the next seven months.

On 11 May, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2575, renewing the mandate of UNISFA and the mission's support for the JBVMM until 15 November. The resolution maintained the authorised troop and police ceilings at 3,550 and 640 personnel, respectively. It requested the Secretary-General to provide the Council with a strategic review of UNISFA by 30 September, assessing recent political developments between and within Sudan and South Sudan and providing detailed recommendations for further reconfiguration of the mission and establishing a viable exit strategy. Resolution 2550, adopted on 12 November 2020, requested the Secretary-General to develop options for the responsible drawdown and exit of the mission and to submit a report on these by 31 March. In a letter to the Council on 1 April, the Secretary-General reported that consultations conducted with the governments of Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia as well as other relevant stakeholders were "inconclusive" and, given the different positions on the future of the mission, "no options that would be minimally acceptable to the parties could be formulated".

Council members received the strategic review on 17 September. It recommended two options for the reconfiguration of UNISFA: reconfiguration with a slightly reduced troop ceiling and similar deployment, or reconfiguration of capabilities and footprint with a more significantly reduced ceiling. In light of the regional dynamics, both options include the replacement of the current contingents with a UN multinational force with enhanced enabling units and a revised concept of operations. The report said that the replacement of personnel could commence in October and estimated that it would take between 100 days and six months. Both options retain the JBVMM at the same level. The review team was not able to propose a clear exit strategy at this stage, the report said.

The Council was last briefed on Abyei on 26 April by Lacroix and Onanga-Anyanga.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council to consider is the reconfiguration of the mission and what modifications to make to the mandate and force structure ahead of the mandate renewal in November. Council members are expected to consider the findings and recommendations of the strategic review as well as the Secretary-General's report on progress in implementing UNISFA's mandate, due by 15 October.

Another key issue is what steps to take in relation to the need "to develop a viable exit strategy", as mentioned in resolutions 2550 and 2575. A related issue is how to bridge the differences expressed by Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia, as outlined in the Secretary-General's 1 April letter, so that the Secretary-General can offer options that would be acceptable to all parties. One option would be to consider holding an informal interactive dialogue with all the parties (Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, the UN, the AU, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development) to find common ground. A related option may be for the Council to suggest that the Secretariat consult further with the AU and the AU High-Level Implementation Panel on a way forward.

Council Dynamics

The US, as penholder on the issue, suggested language about developing an exit strategy for UNISFA during negotiations in November 2020, which was included in resolution 2550 and again in resolution 2575 (for more on resolution 2550, see our *What's In Blue* story of 11 November 2020). The US has repeatedly asserted that UNISFA has continued longer than intended for an interim force and has pressed for a viable exit strategy.

The US position may have shifted slightly since then, including as a result of the change in its Administration as well as regional developments. At the 26 April meeting, the US expressed concern about the recent deterioration of the security situation within and among regional countries and the impact this may have on Abyei. In its explanation of vote on the adoption of resolution 2575 on 11 May, the US said that "with shifting dynamics in the region, it is essential that we continue to assess how UNISFA contributes to the regional political and security architecture" and that the mission's "configuration and its exit strategy must take into account the current circumstances". The statement also urged the AU "to develop longer-term solutions that can be sustained after the departure of United Nations peacekeepers".

In the past, the three African members, supported by China and to a lesser extent by some other members, have called for a renewal of the mandate without any changes, given the evolving internal political situations in Sudan and South Sudan. At the 26 April meeting, the three African members and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines made a joint statement emphasising that the mission constituted "an anchor of stability" and that any future decision on drawdown options for UNISFA should be informed by the views of the parties and be conditions-based, including the determination of the final status of Abyei.

The US is the penholder on Abyei.

UN-AU Cooperation

Expected Council Action

In October, the Council is expected to hold a high-level open debate via videoconference (VTC) on cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations, focusing on the AU. The president of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, is expected to chair the debate. Briefings are expected from UN Secretary-General António Guterres, AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, and High Representative for the African Union Peace Fund Donald Kaberuka. A presidential statement is a possible outcome.

Background and Key Recent Developments

In the past two decades, the Security Council has increasingly sought to strengthen its cooperation with regional and sub-regional organisations in accordance with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, which encourages the peaceful settlement of disputes by regional arrangements or agencies. In this regard, it has been holding an annual joint consultative meeting with the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) since 2007.

The last consultative meeting was held virtually on 30 September 2020, during which members of the two Councils discussed the situation in Mali, the broader Sahel sub-region and Somalia. They also discussed the progress made under the AU Master Roadmap to Silence the Guns in Africa and the implementation of Security Council resolution 2457 of 27 February 2019, which emphasised the importance of tackling illicit arms to achieve a conflict-free Africa and the need for effective implementation of relevant arms control instruments and regimes, in particular those related to small arms and light weapons. The annual consultative meeting was preceded by the fifth joint informal seminar, held on 29 September 2020, during which members of the two Councils exchanged views on enhancing the cooperation between the UN and the AU with regard to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the AU's own framework for sustainable development, Agenda 2063.

Since 2016, the Security Council has also been holding an annual briefing or debate to discuss the Secretary-General's annual report on strengthening the partnership between the UN and the AU on issues of peace and security in Africa. Traditionally, the annual report is considered during the monthly presidency of an African member of the Council. Strengthening ties between the UN, the AU, and African RECs and RMs has been a key focus of the Secretary-General's reports.

The latest report, which was published on 30 August, highlights several joint initiatives undertaken since the issuance of the previous report in August 2020. According to the report, the UN has been actively engaging with:

- the AU in Libya, Sudan, and Somalia;
- the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) in the Central African Republic;
- the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in South Sudan;
- the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in

Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Mali; and

- the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Lesotho and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

October's annual high-level debate will be the first since the re-elections of the UN Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the AU Commission. Therefore, it could provide an opportunity for the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the AU Commission to reaffirm their commitments to the Joint UN-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, signed in 2017.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members will be how to address some of the pressing peace and security challenges in Africa—such as in Ethiopia, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Mozambique, and Somalia, among other places—through enhanced cooperation and partnership between the UN and the AU across the whole peace continuum, ranging from conflict prevention and peacekeeping to peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

Another key issue is how to address the longstanding request of the AU for sustainable financing of AU-led peace support operations. Resolution 2378, adopted in 2017, expressed the Security Council's intention to consider co-funding AU-led peace support operations through UN-assessed contributions “on a case-by-case basis”. However, attempts to negotiate a Security Council resolution on the subject earlier this year were unsuccessful. The Secretary-General has since underscored the importance of reinvigorating discussions between the two Councils on this issue. The AU is developing a common African position; the AU is expected to revive such financing discussions with the Security Council once the AU policy organs consider and adopt this position.

Kenya intends to propose a presidential statement as a possible outcome of the meeting. An option for the Council is to use the statement to build on the recommendations of the Secretary-General, as contained in his latest report. The statement could:

- recall that cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations can improve collective security when carried out on the basis of complementarity and consistent with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter;
- acknowledge that African regional and sub-regional organisations have assumed greater responsibility with regard to addressing threats to peace and security on the continent;
- encourage greater collaboration and coordinated action among the UN Secretariat, the AU Commission, and RECs and RMs in conflict prevention efforts, including by building capacity for accountability for serious violations and strengthening justice systems throughout the continent;
- welcome efforts to clarify the division of labour between the AU and RECs; and
- encourage further consideration of co-financing mechanisms for AU-led peace support operations, such as through UN-assessed contributions.

UN DOCUMENTS ON COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UN AND THE AU Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2584 (29 June 2021) renewed the mandate of MINUSMA. **S/RES/2568** (12 March 2021) was a resolution reauthorising AMISOM for ten months, until 31 December 2021. **S/RES/2378** (20 September 2017) was a resolution on UN peacekeeping reform. **Secretary-General's Report S/2021/763** (30 August 2021) was the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the partnership between the UN and the AU. **Security Council Letter S/2020/1179** (8 December 2020) transmitted the transcript of the VTC debate on “Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations: African Union”.

UN-AU Cooperation

Council Dynamics

Council members are generally supportive of the cooperation and partnership between the UN and the AU in the area of peace and security. However, discussions on specific aspects of the relationship, such as co-financing matters, have been marked by disagreement. For example, Council members were divided during negotiations on resolution 2568 of 12 March, which renewed the mandate of the AU Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). The A3 plus one (consisting of the three African Council members Kenya, Niger and Tunisia, and the like-minded Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) expressed disappointment that their proposal on UN assessed contributions was not incorporated into the resolution. The UK seemed to prefer a broader discussion on financing, rather than dealing with the issue in mission-specific contexts.

The UK and the US have expressed several reservations on the issue of co-financing of AU-led peace support operations. During the October 2019 briefing on the Secretary-General's report on strengthening the partnership between the UN and the AU on issues of peace and security in Africa, the UK noted that establishing "robust financial reporting arrangements, clear joint planning and coordination structures and strong compliance frameworks for human rights, international humanitarian law and conduct and discipline" would be a key consideration of any future Council decision on the matter. The US also noted that proposals for a co-financing mechanism would require "appropriate safeguards" and "adequate burden-sharing".

The A3 plus one and France have also been trying to advance the discussion in the context of the support office for the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5s). During the June negotiations on resolution 2584, which renewed the mandate of the UN Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), France proposed adding to the list of MINUSMA's priority tasks the support that the mission provides to the FC-G5S. After objections from the UK and the US, MINUSMA's support to the FC-G5S was removed from the list of the mission's priority tasks, although the resolution retained a request for the Secretary-General to provide a report on both bilateral and multilateral options for support to the FC-G5S.

During October's high-level debate, the A3 plus one may raise the issue of financing, but substantive discussion on this matter could be deferred pending the adoption of the common African position. The Biden administration is expected to be more amenable than its predecessor to a discussion of this issue.

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