

Monthly Forecast

- 1 Overview
- 2 In Hindsight: The Security Council in 2021
- 3 Status Update since our December Forecast
- 5 Syria
- 7 Protection of Civilians: The Humanitarian Impact of Urban Warfare
- 8 Mali
- 10 West Africa and the Sahel
- 11 Yemen
- 13 Sudan (Darfur)
- 14 Women, Peace and Security: Open Debate on Protecting Women's Participation
- 16 The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question
- 18 Colombia
- 20 Libya
- 21 Afghanistan
- 23 Cyprus
- 24 UNRCCA (Central Asia)

Overview

In January, Norway will hold the presidency of the Security Council.

Norway is expected to organise three signature events. The first is a ministerial-level open debate on [Women, Peace and Security \(WPS\)](#) under the theme “Protecting Participation: Addressing Violence Targeting Women in Peace and Security Processes”. The meeting will be chaired by the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Anniken Huitfeldt. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet and a civil society representative are expected to brief.

The second event is a high-level open debate on [protection of civilians](#) under the theme “Wars in cities: protection of civilians in urban settings”. Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre will chair the meeting. Secretary-General António Guterres, ICRC President Peter Maurer, and a civil society representative are expected to brief.

Aside from these two signature events, Norway plans to organise a retreat at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund estate in Pocantico, New York. It will be akin to a mini-Oslo Forum, gathering mediators for an extended and substantial sofa talk under the theme “Preventive diplomacy and mediation”. It starts with a lunch discussion with the Secretary-General on the future of preventive diplomacy as he begins his second term in January. In addition, there will be three sessions dealing with specific conflict situations—Colombia, Afghanistan and the situation in the Sahel. Mediators, negotiators and other actors from the field are expected to take part in these discussions.

The Security Council is scheduled to hold its quarterly debate on the [Middle East and the Palestinian question](#). Norway intends to elevate the debate to ministerial level status. Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Anniken Huitfeldt is expected to chair the meeting.

Other Middle East issues on the programme include:

- [Syria](#), the monthly meetings on the political, humanitarian and chemical weapons tracks; and
- [Yemen](#), the monthly briefing and consultations on developments.

The Security Council is also scheduled to hold a meeting on [Afghanistan](#). Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre is expected to chair the meeting. Norway intends to open the meeting for rule 37 participation by Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries.

There will also be consultations on the [UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia \(UNRCCA\)](#) this month.

African issues on the programme of work in January are:

- [Libya](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and renewal of the UNSMIL mandate;
- [Mali](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA);
- [Sudan](#), the semi-annual briefing of the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC); and
- [West Africa and the Sahel](#), briefing and consultations on the activities of the UN Regional Office for West Africa (UNOWAS).

The Council may also adopt a resolution initiated by Ghana and Norway on piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea during the month.

The Council is expected to adopt a resolution renewing the mandate of the UN Peacekeeping Force in [Cyprus \(UNFICYP\)](#), the one European issue on the programme.

In terms of issues in the Americas, there will be a briefing and consultations on [Colombia](#).

A number of issues could be raised in January depending on developments, including [DPRK](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Iran](#), [Myanmar](#), [Sudan](#), and [Ukraine](#). Discussions have been ongoing on a possible open meeting on Myanmar marking the one-year anniversary of the coup.

Norway is interested in building upon last year’s WPS focus (initiated by Ireland, Kenya and Mexico) during its presidency, and hopes to make this a shared commitment among the elected members of the Council. Aside from the high-level open debate, the monthly Yemen briefing and consultation is also expected to have a WPS focus.

30 December 2021

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

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

In Hindsight: The Security Council in 2021

The Security Council enters 2022 following a challenging year. Political upheavals in countries long on the agenda, such as Afghanistan, Haiti, Mali, Myanmar, and Sudan, required close Council attention. The Council faced a continuing crisis as a result of the conflict in Tigray, Ethiopia.

With an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Council adhered for months to the working methods protocols developed in 2020, meeting virtually and adopting outcomes through written procedure. Starting in May, it gradually resumed more normal functioning, moving back to the chamber and consultations room over the second half of the year. As travel began to normalise, the Council also went on a visiting mission in November to Mali and Niger, its first in two years. However, sharply rising COVID cases in New York at the end of 2021 may cause the Council to return to virtual meetings.

In terms of outcomes¹, the Council adopted 57 resolutions, the same number as in 2020.² Presidential statements, on the decline for a few years, saw a marked increase from 13 to 24. The increase can be partly explained by the Council using this format to encourage progress in volatile situations such as Libya, Haiti and Sudan. The Council also—unusually—agreed on a presidential statement on Myanmar following the February coup. Presidential statements were also issued following meetings on thematic topics including terrorism, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, preventive diplomacy, COVID-19, maritime security, and the UN and regional organisations.

The number of hours spent in meetings was similar to 2020. Over the last two years, Council members have spent about ten fewer hours in meetings each month than in 2019, the last full year the Council functioned normally. This can largely be attributed to the lack of open debates with the larger membership taking the floor. Such meetings resumed in October, and meeting hours are likely to increase in 2022 as a result, assuming that the Council is not compelled to revert to a virtual platform because of COVID-19.

Arria-formula meetings proliferated, with Council members convening 32 such meetings, the highest in any year and significantly exceeding the 22 Arria-formula meetings held in both 2019 and 2020. Members have expressed concern that Arria-formula meetings may lose their usefulness as an informal forum in which Council members have a private exchange of views with persons or organisations who are not able to participate in consultations. An option is to make more use of closed Arria-formula meetings, as the Council did twice in the final quarter of 2021: on hate speech and cyber activities targeting critical civilian infrastructure.

Of the 55 resolutions adopted, nine, or 16%, were not unanimous. Those resolutions were largely related to sanctions renewals, which have become a particularly thorny issue for the Council. One resolution, on Bosnia and Herzegovina, was not adopted due to insufficient votes. Amid signs that 2021 would be the first veto-free year since 2013, Russia used its veto on 13 December 2021 on a draft resolution on climate and security, which also marked the first time a modern thematic resolution was vetoed. (In 1949, the USSR vetoed three resolutions on the regulation and reduction of armaments and armed forces, which might today be regarded as thematic resolutions.)

There were no procedural votes cast this year. While this may partly be due to the Council meeting virtually for almost half a year,

it seems that members were able to resolve matters that fall under the procedural category, such as agenda items and briefers, without resorting to this type of vote. (Procedural votes need to be held in a formal meeting and the virtual meetings are not considered official meetings of the Council.) There was also an unusually high number of presidential texts—resolutions that all 15 members have co-sponsored—with six in 2021 compared to one in 2020 and none in 2019.

Looking beyond the numbers, a different picture emerges. It has been a year of routinely complicated negotiations and multiple silence breaks on draft resolutions, often close to the time of adoption. Although there was just one veto, the implicit (or explicit) threat of the veto may have influenced the content of a number of resolutions. Difficulty with mandate renewals or changes on the ground led to technical rollovers of the mandates of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) (twice), AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) (twice), and the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Geopolitical divisions and members' interests have resulted in a constant struggle between holding public and private meetings, and a failure to achieve strong outcomes on issues such as Myanmar and Tigray.

Divisions and dynamics have affected how rapidly and robustly the Council is able to respond to situations. The Council adopted a resolution on recent developments in Afghanistan two weeks after the Taliban took power in mid-August. However, rather than focus on the Taliban takeover, the resolution addressed an attack near Kabul airport and the security situation more broadly due to the objections of China and Russia, who eventually abstained on the resolution. The Council took over a month to express concern over the situation in Myanmar in a presidential statement following the 2 February 2021 military takeover. Two days after a coup in Mali, Council members issued a press statement strongly condemning the arrest of the transitional president of Mali, prime minister and other officials by elements of the military. Three days after the military takeover in Sudan, the declaration of a state of emergency and the detention of the prime minister and members of the transitional government, Council members issued a press statement expressing strong concern about the developments. It did not respond to coups in Chad and Guinea, issues that are not on the Council's agenda.

Since the outbreak of conflict in Tigray in November 2020, the Council has met regularly on this rapidly evolving situation. Originally, differing views from members, including the A3 (Kenya, Niger, Tunisia) plus one (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), about the desirability of Council involvement made it difficult to hold public meetings. As the humanitarian situation deteriorated and conflict in northern Ethiopia intensified, positions shifted. In 2021, the Council discussed this matter ten times: five times under AOB, four times in a public meeting and once in an informal interactive dialogue meeting. It issued two press statements, in April and November 2021, but struggled to agree on any stronger outcome.

In a show of unity on a perennially contentious issue, for the first time since 2016, the Council unanimously adopted a resolution re-authorising the cross-border mechanism to deliver humanitarian assistance into Syria's northwest. The negotiations were difficult, with divergent positions that appeared unwavering. Agreement was finally reached following a high-level meeting between Russia and the US. This led to a compromise text that was acceptable to all. As a result, the Council was able to avoid the series of drafts that were either vetoed or not adopted due to insufficient votes that had

1. Statistics from the UN's monthly "Highlights of the Security Council." <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/monthly-highlights>

2. Amended following final numbers at the end of 2021.

In Hindsight: The Security Council in 2021

become the norm in recent years.

New threats to peace and security featured in a number of Council meetings. Estonia, during its June 2021 presidency, organised the first formal meeting on cybersecurity. Two Arria-formula meetings considered the impact of emerging technologies on international peace and security (organised by China, Kenya and Mexico) and the consequences of malicious cyber activities targeting critical civilian infrastructure (organised by Estonia and the UK). Kenya and the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect organised a closed Arria-formula meeting on addressing and countering hate speech in relation to preventing discrimination, hostility and violence on social media.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on peace and security continued to feature in the Council's deliberations in 2021. The UK organised a meeting on vaccine distribution in conflict areas during its February 2021 presidency, following which the Council adopted a resolution on this topic. China initiated a discussion of post-pandemic recovery in Africa during its May 2021 presidency. Council members also had follow-up meetings on the implementation of the 2020 resolution on cessation of hostilities during the pandemic and this year's resolution on equitable distribution of vaccines.

Climate and security has also featured prominently on the Council's agenda in 2021. High-level open debates were held during the Irish, Nigerien and UK presidencies. An Arria-formula meeting on rising sea levels was organised by Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, and Viet Nam. Although the draft resolution on climate and security was vetoed by Russia, it had the support of 12 members and 113 co-sponsors. While members may not push for a product in 2022, the 2021 momentum is likely to persist.

Long-standing thematic issues were not neglected in 2020. The Council adopted resolutions on peacekeeping, peacebuilding and protection of civilians, which enhanced the institutional framework already in place. Other notable resolutions were on attacks against civilians and civilian objects and on the protection of education.

While there was no thematic women, peace and security (WPS) resolution in 2021, members found a novel way of signalling its importance. The "presidency trio" initiative from Ireland, Kenya and Mexico during their consecutive presidencies (September, October and November) saw these members committing to a series of actions on WPS. Building on this initiative, in December, Niger, Norway, the United Arab Emirates, and Albania issued a statement of shared commitments on WPS for their respective presidencies. This initiative could provide a useful template for other areas where strong outcomes have proved difficult.

In 2021, elected members showed initiative in taking or sharing the pen on several issues. Ireland, working closely with the A3 plus one, drafted outcomes on Tigray. Mexico shared the pen with the US on Haiti and the UK on Colombia. Elected members continued to hold the pen on two key issues: Syria humanitarian and Afghanistan. Norway and Ireland shepherded a draft resolution on the cross-border mechanism in Syria to a successful conclusion. As co-pens, Estonia and Norway rose to the challenge of guiding the negotiations on UNAMA's mandate renewal in the midst of the rapidly changing situation in Afghanistan.

Five new members—Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana, and the United Arab Emirates—take their seats on the Council on 1 January. With enough ambition and imagination, they may be able to help find a way forward on the turbulent situations and emerging issues of 2021 that are likely to continue into 2022.

Status Update since our December Forecast

Iraq

On 2 December, the Security Council received a briefing on the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD) (S/PV.8914). Christian Ritscher, the Special Adviser and Head of UNITAD, briefed on the seventh biannual report on UNITAD's activities (S/2021/974).

Arria-formula Meeting on Children without Parental Care in Conflict Settings

On 3 December, Security Council members held a virtual Arria-formula meeting on "Addressing Challenges of Children without Parental Care in Conflict Settings". The meeting was organised by Viet Nam, in cooperation with Kenya, Niger, Norway, Russia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the US and non-Council member Malta. The briefers were UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Omar Abdi; Christian Cardon de Lichtbeur, Chief Protection Officer at ICRC; and Angela Marshall, Senior Child Protection Technical Advisor at Save the Children. Ambassador Dang Dinh Quy (Viet Nam) chaired the meeting.

Somalia

On 3 December, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2608, renewing the anti-piracy measures off the coast of Somalia

for three months. On 21 December, the Council also unanimously adopted resolution 2614, reauthorising the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) for three months until 31 March 2022.

Arria-formula Meeting on Protection of Education in Conflict

On 6 December, Security Council members held an Arria-formula meeting on the protection of education in conflict. Niger and Norway, the co-penholders on resolution 2601 of 29 October on the protection of education, organised the meeting. Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs Anniken Huitfeldt chaired the meeting and Crown Prince Haakon of Norway gave remarks. The briefers at the meeting were Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba and Doris Mpoumou, the Director of the AU Liaison and Pan-Africa Office and AU Representative at Save the Children International. Representatives of UNICEF and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provided opening and closing remarks.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 6 December, the Security Council held a briefing, followed by consultations, on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (S/PV.8918). Special Representative of the

Status Update since our December Forecast

Secretary-General for the DRC and head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Bintou Keita, briefed the Council on the Secretary-General's latest report, which covered the period from 18 September to 30 November (S/2021/987). Marie-Madeleine Kalala, a women's rights activist and member of the African Women Leaders Network, briefed the Council as a Congolese civil society representative. The Council also received a briefing from Ambassador Abdou Abarry of Niger in his capacity as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Council adopted resolution 2612 on 20 December 2021, extending MONUSCO's mandate until 20 December 2022. The resolution authorised a symbolic reduction of the mission's troop ceiling, welcomed MONUSCO's transition plan, and requested the mission to withdraw from Tanganyika province by mid-2022 and consolidate its footprint in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu, the three provinces where active conflict persists.

Briefing by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

On 7 December, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi briefed the Council (S/PV.8919). The meeting took place under the agenda item "Briefing by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees", which allows for a general briefing by the High Commissioner without tying it to a specific situation on the Council's agenda. Grandi described the situation of refugees in several country-specific cases on the Council's agenda, including Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Syria and Yemen, among others. He also addressed the impact of climate change on refugees and discussed the importance of safeguarding humanitarian access, noting that UNHCR has struggled to deliver vital aid to citizens in the Tigray region of Ethiopia.

Golan Heights (UNDOF)

On 8 December, Council members held closed consultations on UNDOF (S/PV.8920). On 21 December, the Council adopted resolution 2613, renewing UNDOF's mandate until 30 June 2022.

Climate Change and Security

On 9 December, the Security Council held a high-level open debate on "Security in the context of terrorism and climate change" under the agenda item "Maintenance of international peace and security" (S/PV.8923). Nigerien President Mohamed Bazoum chaired the meeting. The briefers were UN Secretary-General António Guterres, AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat, and Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and Head of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) Mamman Nuhu.

On 13 December, the Security Council met (S/PV.8926) to vote on a draft resolution on climate change and security, which was co-authored by Ireland and Niger (S/2021/990). The draft failed to be adopted due to a Russian veto. India also voted against the draft, and China abstained. The other 12 Council members voted in favour of the draft.

International Criminal Tribunals

On 13 December, the Council held its semi-annual debate on the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT),

which was established in 2010 to carry out the remaining essential functions of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) after their respective closures (S/PV.8927). The IRMCT's president, Judge Carmel Agius, and its prosecutor, Serge Brammertz, briefed during the debate and met with the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals prior to this meeting.

Subsidiary Bodies: Briefing by the Outgoing Chairs

On 13 December, the five outgoing chairs of the Council's subsidiary bodies briefed on their respective experiences (S/PV.8928). Most referenced how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected the work of the subsidiary bodies they chaired. Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia) noted continued efforts to reduce the number of listed entities of the 1518 Iraq Sanctions Committee and highlighted the need for a visit to Sudan by the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee chair. Ambassador Abdou Abarry (Niger) gave an account of his visits to the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in his capacity as the outgoing chair of the 2127 Central African Republic and 1533 Democratic Republic of the Congo sanctions committees. Ambassador Tarek Ladeb (Tunisia) spoke about his experiences chairing the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee (reporting on COVID-19 related challenges to the committee's work) and the 2048 Guinea-Bissau Sanctions Committee (stressing the need for the next chair to visit the region). He also described his experiences as chair of the Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations, discussing its consideration of resolution 2518 of 31 March 2020 on the safety and security of peacekeepers. Ambassador Rhonda King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) described her experiences chairing the 2140 Yemen sanctions committee and expressed regret that the committee had not been able to visit Yemen due to COVID-19 related travel restrictions. She also noted that the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions had adopted five presidential notes while she served as its chair. Ambassador Hai Anh Pham (Viet Nam) spoke about the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee, reporting on the committee's visit to the country while Viet Nam served as its chair.

COVID-19 Pandemic

On 13 December, Security Council members held closed consultations on the implementation of resolution 2532 and resolution 2565, which demanded, respectively, a cessation of hostilities in all situations on the Council's agenda to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and a humanitarian pause to facilitate the delivery of COVID-19 vaccines in areas of armed conflict. Under-Secretary-General for Peacebuilding and Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Ramesh Rajasingham briefed. In press elements after the meeting, Council members reiterated the importance of implementing these resolutions and stressed the need for the relevant UN bodies, within their mandates, to remain focused on implementing the resolutions.

Iran

On 14 December, the Council convened for its biannual briefing on resolution 2231 of 20 July 2015, which endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear programme (JCPOA) (S/PV.8930).

Status Update since our December Forecast

Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed on the Secretary-General's latest report on the implementation of resolution 2231, which was issued on 8 December (S/2021/995). The Council's facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231, Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason (Ireland), reported on the Council's work in relation to resolution 2231. The head of the EU delegation to the UN, Olof Skoog, briefed on the work of the JCPOA's Joint Commission.

Sudan/South Sudan

On 15 December, the Security Council adopted resolution 2609, extending the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) until 15 May 2022.

South Sudan

On 15 December, the Security Council held a briefing on South Sudan (S/PV.8931). Special Representative and head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Nicholas Haysom briefed on the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on South Sudan, which was issued on 7 December (S/2021/1015). Wafaa Saeed, the Director of the Coordination Division of OCHA, briefed on the dire humanitarian situation in the country. Ambassador Hai Anh Pham of Viet Nam, chair of the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee, briefed on the committee's work. Consultations followed the briefing.

Central Africa (UNOCA)

On 15 December, François Louncény Fall, Special Representative and head of UNOCA, briefed the Council (S/PV.8933) on the Secretary-General's semi-annual report on UNOCA and the implementation of the UN's regional strategy to combat the Lord's Resistance Army (S/2021/975). In his briefing, Fall highlighted several challenges facing the region, including the threat of terrorism, rising food insecurity, climate change and the COVID19 pandemic.

DPRK (North Korea)

On 15 December, Council members discussed the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) under "any other business". The meeting was requested by the US, with support from Estonia, France, Ireland, Norway, and the UK.

Counter-terrorism

On 17 December, the Council adopted resolution 2610, updating and renewing the 1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) and Al-Qaida sanctions regime. The resolution

extended the mandates of the 1267/1988 Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team (Monitoring Team) and the Office of the Ombudsperson for another 30 months, until June 2024. Notable updates in the resolution relate to the effects of counter-terrorism measures on humanitarian activities, the Office of the Ombudsperson and the assets freeze measures outlined in resolution 2368.

On 30 December, the Council adopted a resolution extending the mandate of the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED).

Ethiopia

On 20 December, Council members discussed the situation in Ethiopia under "any other business". Estonia, France, Ireland, Norway, the UK, and the US requested the meeting, which focused mainly on the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths briefed.

Arria-formula Meeting on Preventing Civilian Impact of Malicious Cyber Activities

On 20 December, Council members held a closed Arria-formula meeting on "Preventing Civilian Impact of Malicious Cyber Activities". The meeting was organised by Estonia and the UK. The briefers were Izumi Nakamitsu, UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and Helen Durham, Director of International Law and Policy at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Participation was open to current and incoming Security Council members.

Arria-formula Meeting on National Minorities and the Glorification of Nazism in the Baltic and Black Sea Region

On 22 December, Council members held an Arria-formula meeting on "The Situation with National Minorities and Glorification of Nazism in Baltic and Black Sea Region" via videoconference (VTC). The meeting was organised by Russia, and Russia's permanent representative Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia provided welcoming and closing remarks. The briefers were UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues Fernand de Varennes and several civil society representatives. After the meeting, 36 member states—including Council members Estonia, France, Ireland, Norway, the UK and the US, and incoming Council member Albania—issued a joint statement accusing Russia of misusing the Arria-formula meeting to promote a false narrative and disinformation on its neighbouring countries. Noting Russia's military build-up on Ukraine's borders, the statement also called on Russia to de-escalate tensions and immediately withdraw its forces and equipment stationed in Ukraine.

Syria

Expected Council Action

In January, the Security Council expects to hold its monthly meetings on the political, humanitarian and chemical weapons tracks in Syria.

Key Recent Developments

Syria's humanitarian situation has shown no signs of improvement in recent months. According to an October 2021 World Food

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2585 (9 July 2021) renewed the authorisation for cross-border humanitarian aid into Syria through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing. S/RES/2254 (18 December 2015) was the first resolution focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. **Secretary-General's Reports** S/2021/1030 (15 December 2021) was the "substantive report, with particular focus on transparency in operations, and progress on cross-line access in meeting humanitarian needs" requested in resolution 2585. S/2021/1029 (15 December 2021) was the latest report on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Syria

Programme (WFP) assessment, Syria's food insecurity is at its worst level in over a year, with October marking the highest recorded monthly average for food prices since WFP started tracking this data in 2013. In addition, rising fuel prices and decreasing access to heating fuel have driven up the costs of transportation and reduced the availability of adequate heating.

Syria's already fragile health care system has been further strained because of the effects of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the country's increasing water crisis. Syria continues to see rising numbers of COVID-19 cases, especially in the northwest, while access to vaccines remains limited. According to OCHA, only 2.9 percent of Syria's population has been vaccinated. And, as previously reported, unprecedentedly diminished water levels in the Euphrates River have contributed to power outages, reduced access to clean drinking water, and loss of crops, while a resulting increase in water-borne diseases in Syria's northeast has challenged health care providers. The situation is likely to worsen amidst reports that the region's Alouk water station, which had been operating well below its normal capacity, stopped functioning on 26 November 2021, affecting access to water for over a half-million people.

The protection of civilians in Syria also remains dire as a result of ongoing violence. According to OHCHR, regular airstrikes and shelling in November 2021 in Syria's northwest killed 12 civilians, including four women and four children, and injured 31 civilians. In addition, the Secretary-General's 15 December report noted that 78 incidents of airstrikes and shelling resulted in 97 civilian deaths, including seven women and 27 children, and another 127 civilians were injured during the 60-day reporting period.

From 9 to 10 December 2021, the WFP organised its second delivery of humanitarian assistance from government-controlled territory in Aleppo into opposition-held territory in northwest Syria, with 17 trucks providing food and nutrition assistance for 43,500 people. (This followed an initial cross-line delivery of humanitarian assistance on 30 August.) The December delivery also contained aid from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF. Briefing the Council on 20 December, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths explained that OCHA has developed a six-month plan that would offer more "predictable" cross-line operations. He also echoed the Secretary-General's 14 December report, warning that despite progress made by cross-line deliveries, they "cannot at this point replace the massive scale of the cross-border operation".

Since the conclusion of the last round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee from 18 to 22 October 2021, little progress has been made on that track. Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen, briefing the Council on 20 December, informed members that a lack of agreement on the committee's methodology had hampered progress, but that he was ready to convene another session of the Constitutional Committee "as understandings are in place". In recent weeks, however, Pedersen travelled extensively throughout the Middle East, holding bilateral meetings with regional actors as well as meeting with Russia, US and EU representatives as part of his efforts to create a new diplomatic initiative; he told the Council on 20 December that this initiative would allow for key states to take a "step-by-step, step-for-step" approach and to identify and agree on "incremental, reciprocal, mutual, realistic, precise, and verifiable steps that could be taken in parallel" in order to help resolve Syria's conflict.

During the Council's 8 December 2021 meeting on 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". At that meeting, Russia said that the situation vis-à-vis the OPCW was "far from encouraging" and that the current difficult predicament was not grounded in the situation in Syria but in the "constant attempts to politicize the [OPCW's] work", which was leading to the destruction of "one of the most important pillars of the regime of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction".

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 1 December 2021, the President of the Human Rights Council (HRC), Nazhat Shameem Khan (Fiji), announced the appointment of Lynn Welchman (UK) to serve as a member of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Syria, which was established by the Council in August 2011 to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law committed in the country since March 2011. The COI is scheduled to present a written report to the HRC at its 49th session in March.

Key Issues and Options

The main issue for Council members in January will be extending the mandate of the cross-border mechanism for delivery of humanitarian assistance. In resolution 2585, adopted on 9 July 2021, the mechanism's mandate was extended until 10 January 2022, with another six months' extension (to 10 July 2022) subject to the issuance of the Secretary-General's substantive report focussing on "transparency in operations, and progress on cross-line access in meeting humanitarian needs". That report was issued on 15 December.

One option for the Council would be to take a low-key approach to the issue by allowing the mandate automatically to roll over for another six months based on the timely issuance of the Secretary-General's report. Another option would be to consider the findings of the report while welcoming its issuance and acknowledging that these enable a six-month extension of the cross-border mechanism. Finally, the Council could discuss the report's findings, using its conclusions to establish any steps needed for the further extension of the cross-border mechanism.

Council Dynamics

When resolution 2585 renewing the cross-border mechanism mandate was adopted in July 2021, all Council members hailed the unanimous vote and the ability of Russia and the US to overcome differences on Syria. But Council members offered divergent interpretations of the resolution's language concerning the length of the mandate. Those differing positions have remained largely unchanged. At the conclusion of the July 2021 vote, France, the UK and the US were joined by Estonia and Mexico in stating categorically that the renewal was for 12 months. Some members, including co-penholders Ireland and Norway, understand that the second six months will automatically follow the Secretary-General's report, while others believe that the report's "particular focus on transparency in operations, and progress on cross-line access in meeting humanitarian needs" is the condition by which the Council will grant the additional six months. After the July vote, Russian Permanent Representative

Syria

Vassily Nebenzia told the press that not allowing a straight 12-month renewal “was our red line, because you cannot expect that it will go without any assessment and reassessment of what’s happening on the

ground. That’s why the second six-month period will be conditional on progress which we’ll make in other areas of [the] humanitarian and political situation in Syria”.

Protection of Civilians: The Humanitarian Impact of Urban Warfare

Expected Council Action

In January, Norway plans to hold a high-level open debate on “Wars in cities: protection of civilians in urban settings” as one of the signature events of its presidency. The open debate is expected to focus on the long-term, cumulative humanitarian repercussions of urban warfare. Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre will chair the meeting. Secretary-General António Guterres, ICRC President Peter Maurer, and a civil society representative are expected to brief. Non-Council member states will be invited to participate in person, pending the COVID-19 situation, or submit a written statement to be included in the meeting’s official record.

Background and Key Recent Developments

The Security Council first took up the protection of civilians in armed conflict (POC) as a thematic issue in 1999. Since then, it has adopted several resolutions on the protection of categories of persons, including: humanitarian personnel in 2014 (resolution 2175), journalists and other media professionals in 2015 (resolution 2222), health care workers (and facilities) in 2016 (resolution 2286), missing persons (resolution 2474), and persons with disabilities in 2019 (resolution 2475). It has also adopted resolutions addressing other POC-related topics, such as hunger and conflict in 2018 (resolution 2417) and the protection of civilian infrastructure in 2021 (resolution 2573).

Recent Council discussions have also considered the humanitarian impact of urban warfare. Conflicts over the past decade in densely populated environments have led to high rates of civilian casualties and displacement. The Council first expressed its views on the urbanisation of conflict at the thematic level in April 2021. In resolution 2573 on attacks against critical civilian infrastructure, the Council voiced grave concern about “indiscriminate attacks and establishment of military positions in densely populated areas, and their devastating impacts upon civilians”.

While the Council has yet to hold a formal meeting on armed conflict in urban settings at the thematic level, the humanitarian impact of urban warfare has often been mentioned in its country-specific resolutions and in the Secretary-General’s annual POC reports. For example, in several of its resolutions on Syria, the Council has condemned indiscriminate attacks and the indiscriminate use of particular explosive weapons in populated areas. It has also demanded that parties to the conflict in Syria demilitarise civilian facilities and “avoid establishing military positions in populated areas”. In its 15 March 2018 presidential statement on Yemen, the Council expressed grave distress at indiscriminate attacks in densely populated areas and the impact of such attacks on civilians, including large numbers

of civilian casualties and damage to civilian objects. In 2016, the Council also considered the issue of urban warfare in the context of terrorism in resolution 2274 on Afghanistan, condemning the use of civilians as “human shields” and “suicide attacks, often in civilian-populated areas”.

The Secretary-General’s latest annual POC report, issued on 3 May 2021, highlighted the disproportionate impact of explosive weapons on civilian populations in urban settings. It noted that in 2020, 88 percent of those killed and injured by explosive weapons in urban areas were civilians, compared to 16 percent in other areas. The report described the devastating toll that such weaponry takes on essential civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools and water plants, disrupting access to vital resources and public services, such as water, electricity, sanitation and health care. It also emphasised the long-term impact of explosive weapons, such as lifelong disabilities and grave psychological trauma suffered by victims of urban warfare.

While the report urged parties to abide by the rules of distinction and proportionality in international humanitarian law, it acknowledged that efforts to estimate and minimise collateral damage from explosive weapons may be ineffective in urban settings because of the unanticipated ways in which narrow streets and tall buildings channel blasts. As such, the report welcomed member states’ efforts to develop a political declaration against the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas (often referred to as EWIPA).

Spearheaded by Ireland, the political declaration’s informal consultation process has been taking place in Geneva since 2019. The first two consultations were held on 18 November 2019 and 10 February 2020. Ireland released a first draft of the political declaration in March 2020, and subsequently began accepting written inputs throughout 2020. In January 2021, Ireland released a revised draft declaration and online consultations were held on 3-5 March 2021. While the completion date for this process remains unclear, Ireland intends to conduct a further round of in-person negotiations in Geneva from 2 to 4 February 2022.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is how to promote the effective protection of civilians in urban warfare. As a relatively new sub-theme of the POC agenda, Council members could request more research from the UN on the challenges of urban warfare. In this regard, they could request the Secretary-General to include the issue of urban warfare as a sub-item in annual POC reports and to offer recommendations to member states on how best to employ the disarmament toolbox of

UN DOCUMENTS ON PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS Security Council Resolution S/RES/2573 (27 April 2021) condemned attacks on civilian infrastructure in armed conflict. Secretary-General’s Report S/2021/423 (3 May 2021) was the latest report on the protection of civilians. Security Council Letter S/2021/505 (27 May 2021) contained a record of the annual briefing on the protection of civilians in armed conflict convened on 25 May 2021.

Protection of Civilians: The Humanitarian Impact of Urban Warfare

the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament to develop national policies aimed at protecting civilians in urban warfare. Council members could also encourage the Secretary-General to assess the effectiveness of adding provisions related to urban warfare in the POC mandates of relevant UN peace operations.

Another key issue is how to promote Council engagement on various sub-themes of POC, such as urban warfare, as part of coherent and integrated protection of civilians agenda. Although dedicated discussions of certain sub-themes of the POC agenda allow for a more extensive and comprehensive examination of those topics, some in the UN system have raised concerns that the focus on specific sub-themes could contribute to the fragmentation of the POC agenda.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members agree that the likelihood of civilian casualties increases as armed conflicts become more protracted and urbanised. As such, there is significant support among Council members regarding the need to address issues related to the urbanisation of conflict. However, certain Council members may be reluctant to establish further sub-categories of the POC agenda and individuals requiring special protections. At the last annual open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, held on 25 May 2021,

Russia maintained that, in practice, the approach of creating new topics or categories of persons under the POC umbrella could be counterproductive, as doing so “differentiates the legal regime and loosens protection that civilians could receive”.

Some member states are also concerned that a political declaration against the use of explosive weapons could lead to new interpretations of existing international humanitarian law or result in commitments based on novel terminology not reflected in existing laws. For example, rather than having the political declaration focused on the use of EWIPA, some member states have expressed a preference for focusing on the broader context of urban warfare. In its comment submitted to Ireland in the lead up to the March 2021 consultations on the draft declaration, the US said that it could not join an initiative that would “seek to stigmatise the use of ‘explosive weapons’, which are legitimate means of warfare under international humanitarian law”.

Furthermore, Council members remain divided over other aspects related to the POC agenda, including accountability mechanisms and emerging threats to peace and security. Russia has previously objected to including references to international tribunals and international prosecution in POC-related Council products. Several Council members have also objected to specific language on emerging threats such as climate change in POC products.

Mali

Expected Council Action

In January, the Council is expected to hold a briefing, followed by consultations, on the Secretary-General's quarterly report on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the Secretary-General's biannual letter on MINUSMA's operations, performance, and implementation of the integrated strategic framework for Mali. Special Representative and head of MINUSMA El-Ghassim Wane will brief.

The mandate of MINUSMA expires on 30 June 2022.

Key Recent Developments

There has been little progress in organising elections to complete Mali's transition process brokered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) following coups d'état in August 2020 and May 2021. Meanwhile, Mali continues to experience widespread insecurity caused by terrorist groups and intercommunal violence.

The Security Council conducted a visiting mission to Mali and Niger from 23 to 25 October 2021. In Mali, it focused on assessing the status of the transition and preparations for the first round of legislative and presidential elections that had been scheduled, prior to May's coup d'état, for 27 February 2022. Transitional President Assimi Goïta and transitional Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maïga did not commit to adhering to the electoral calendar in their meetings with Council members, instead indicating the need to improve

security and that the authorities planned to hold national consultations in December on how to proceed with elections.

In a 4 November press statement on the visiting mission, Council members reiterated their strong support for the ECOWAS and AU mediation efforts and called for the transition to be completed within the agreed timeline set out in the Transitional Charter and in accordance with the transitional authorities' own commitments. The press statement urged the authorities to present a timetable for organising elections.

ECOWAS has continued to insist that the 18-month transition period and 27 February election date should be upheld. In a communiqué following a 7 November 2021 summit in Accra, ECOWAS noted that transitional authorities had informed it “of their inability to meet the transition deadline of February 2022”. ECOWAS “deplore[d]” the lack of progress and announced sanctions, including a travel ban and asset freeze on the transitional authorities, their families, and transitional institutions, effective immediately. The next day, it published a list of around 150 individuals that it had sanctioned, including transitional Prime Minister Maïga, 27 ministers of the interim government and the 121 members of the National Transitional Council. Goïta and Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop were not included.

On 23 November 2021, Malian authorities announced that the national consultations scheduled for December were being postponed. The head of the panel overseeing the organisation of these

UN DOCUMENTS ON MALI Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2590 (30 August 2021) extended the Mali sanctions for an additional year. S/RES/2584 (29 June 2021) renewed the mandate of MINUSMA until 30 June 2022. Secretary-General's Report S/2021/657 (16 July 2021) recommended increasing MINUSMA's force ceiling by 2,069 personnel. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8893 (29 October 2021) was a briefing on Mali and the Council visiting mission to Mali and Niger.

Mali

talks, Zeïni Moulaye, said that the delay was necessary to find the “broadest possible consensus” and that a new schedule would be announced in due course. Ahead of a 12 December ECOWAS summit, Goïta informed the regional bloc in a letter that Mali would provide a detailed timetable for holding elections by 31 January 2022. At the summit, ECOWAS warned that it would impose additional sanctions if there was no concrete progress by 1 January in the preparations for the elections.

Insecurity continues to afflict Mali. On 3 December 2021, unidentified militants attacked a bus travelling from the village of Songho to a market in Bandiagara in central Mali, killing at least 31 civilians. Many others were reported wounded or missing. On 7 December, seven MINUSMA peacekeepers from Togo were killed and three seriously injured when their vehicle hit an improvised explosive device (IED) in Bandiagara. One MINUSMA contractor from Mali was also killed in the incident, and one contractor was wounded. The day before, an Egyptian peacekeeper died from wounds suffered on 22 November when the vehicle he was in struck an IED about 11 kilometres from the MINUSMA camp in Tessalit.

As part of the plan France announced in June 2021 to reduce the size of Operation Barkhane, its Sahel-wide counter-terrorism force, to some 2,500 to 3,000 personnel, France concluded the withdrawal of its troops from three bases in northern Mali. It handed over its base in Kidal to MINUSMA on 12 October; bases in Tessalit and Timbuktu were turned over to Malian forces on 15 November and 14 December, respectively.

Tensions have persisted between Mali and its traditional partner France since Malian military leaders ousted the transition’s top civilian leaders last spring and France announced the drawdown of Operation Barkhane. As reported in September 2021, transitional authorities have held discussions on contracting fighters from the Russian private security company Wagner Group. From 10 to 12 November, Foreign Minister Diop visited Moscow to discuss strengthening military cooperation between Mali and Russia with his counterpart, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. During a press conference, they denied having discussed the possible role of the Wagner Group. In a communiqué from its 12 December summit, ECOWAS reiterated its concerns “over the risk for the region of [f] the intervention of private security companies in Mali”. The US issued a stark rebuke to Mali about reaching a deal with the Wagner Group in a 15 December press statement.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a statement after her visit to Mali between 1 and 6 November 2021, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris asserted that human rights must be at the centre of the security response in Mali. During her visit, Brands Kehris engaged with a wide range of interlocutors on the deteriorating human rights situation in Mali and the broader Sahel region and on support for the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) to implement its Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Compliance Framework.

Brands Kehris said that the MINUSMA Human Rights and Protection Division has documented a steep rise in human rights violations and abuses, with 2,032 incidents in 2020, a 48.86 percent increase from 2019. The main perpetrators were violent extremist groups; however, community-based self-defence groups and militias commit abuses as well, and there are credible allegations of violations of human rights and humanitarian law by national and international forces during counter-terrorism operations.

Brands Kehris also expressed deep concern about multiple reports that descent-based slavery remains widely tolerated in Malian society, including by some influential politicians, law enforcement officials, judicial authorities,

and other secular and religious leaders. In addition, at least seven “barbaric” attacks took place in the Kayes region since January 2021 in which one person was killed, at least 77 injured, and more than 3,000 “slaves” displaced, according to a 29 October press release by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Key Issues and Options

Making progress on holding elections and restoring constitutional order are key issues. The dire security situation in Mali, particularly in the centre and north, and in the wider Sahel region, remains a matter of serious concern. Related to this is equipping MINUSMA with the requisite resources and capacities, including more air assets, to carry out its mandate to protect civilians. Human rights abuses committed by Malian security forces and other security presences during counter-terrorism operations is another related challenge.

Implementing the 2015 Mali Peace and Reconciliation Agreement between the government and northern armed groups is a recurring key issue on which progress has stalled amid the attention to carrying out Mali’s political transition.

Another significant issue usually raised at Council meetings on Mali is support for the FC-G5S, made up of forces from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Mali and Niger, to combat terrorist groups. MINUSMA provides rations, fuel and logistical support to the FC-G5S and is reimbursed by the EU. The Secretary-General has proposed the establishment of a UN support office for the FC-G5S to take over and expand such functions, to be financed through UN assessed contributions.

Council members could resume discussions on the Secretary-General’s July 2021 recommendation to increase the force ceiling of MINUSMA by 2,069 personnel. Council discussions on the proposal, which according to the Secretary-General, could help improve security in central Mali if accompanied by a comprehensive political strategy by Malian authorities to stabilise the situation, were put on hold in September 2021 after Mali objected to a troop increase. Mali believed that new peacekeepers, without a more robust mandate, would not make a difference on the ground. However, in a letter dated 15 December 2021, it informed Council members that it had agreed to the deployment of 1,000 additional Chadian soldiers to reinforce MINUSMA.

Council Dynamics

Since the August 2020 coup d’état, the Council has sought to support the ECOWAS mediation and its position on keeping to the 18-month timetable for the political transition. Resolutions 2584 and 2590, which renewed MINUSMA’s mandate and the Mali sanctions regime in June and August 2021, respectively, reaffirmed the need to respect the transition period and the 27 February electoral date.

Recent months have seen some emerging differences over strategy among Council members. While members recognise that it is unlikely elections can be held on time, some seek to apply maximum pressure, in line with the ECOWAS approach, on Malian authorities to organise the elections sooner rather than later. Russia, and to an extent China, express greater sympathy with the authorities over the challenges of holding elections because of the security situation and the risk of further political instability if elections take place prematurely. Ghana replaces Niger in 2022 as

Mali

the West African Council member. President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana is the current Chair of the ECOWAS Authority.

France is the penholder on Mali. It has continued discussions on the Secretary-General's proposed support office for the

FC-G5S with the UK and the US, which have opposed the idea. Ambassador Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) chairs the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee.

West Africa and the Sahel

Expected Council Action

In January, the Security Council will hold its biannual briefing on West Africa and the Sahel. Special Representative and head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) Mahamat Saleh Annadif, Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Ghada Fathi Waly, and a civil society representative are expected to brief. The Council may also adopt a resolution initiated by Ghana and Norway on piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea.

Key Recent Developments

On 5 September, Guinea became the third country in West Africa and the Sahel to experience a military takeover during the past 16 months, joining Mali and Chad, when special forces carried out a coup d'état against President Alpha Condé. Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, leader of the National Committee for Reconciliation and Development (CNRD), announced the dissolution of the government, suspended the constitution and accused Condé, who had the constitution changed to run for a third term in 2020, of corruption and "trampling citizens' rights". On 16 September 2021, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) called on Guinea to hold presidential and legislative elections within six months and announced travel ban and asset freeze sanctions on the members of the CNRD and their families. Since then, the CNRD has adopted a Transition Charter setting out a series of tasks, including the holding of elections, but has not specified the transition's duration. Doumbouya was sworn in as transition president on 1 October 2021, and a civilian prime minister and transitional government were appointed.

On 7 November, ECOWAS appointed Mohamed Ibn Chambas as Special Envoy to Guinea; Chambas headed UNOWAS from September 2014 until April 2021. At a 12 December summit, ECOWAS again insisted on a six-month transition in Guinea and urged the government quickly to submit a timetable to hold elections, which authorities committed to doing by the end of December 2021.

Mali's political transition to restore constitutional order following coups d'état in August 2020 and May 2021 has made little progress toward organising elections within the 18-month timeline that ECOWAS brokered in October 2020. On 7 November 2021, ECOWAS imposed asset freeze and travel ban sanctions on some 150 individuals, reiterating the need for transition authorities to respect the 27 February 2022 date for legislative and presidential elections. (For more on Mali, see the Mali brief in this month's Forecast.)

President Adama Barrow of The Gambia was re-elected on 4 December 2021. It was The Gambia's first presidential election since Barrow's 2016 defeat of long-time ruler Yahya Jammeh, whose refusal to accept that result led to an ECOWAS military intervention in January 2017. At the 12 December ECOWAS summit, ECOWAS announced that this force, the ECOWAS Mission in The Gambia (ECOMIG), whose mandate ended in December, would be converted to a police mission on 1 January 2022.

Insecurity continues to afflict the Sahel region, particularly in central and northern Mali; the Liptako-Gourma region of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger; and the Lake Chad Basin. On 14 November 2021, suspected fighters of the Al-Qaida affiliated Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM) attacked a military camp in Soum province, Burkina Faso, killing at least 49 gendarmes and four civilians. This was the deadliest attack suffered by Burkinabe forces during the past five years of the Islamist insurgency. The security situation in Burkina Faso has increased civil unrest, leading to the resignation of Prime Minister Christophe Joseph Marie Dabire and his government on 8 December 2021.

Demonstrations also broke out against the French military presence in the region. In November 2021, protesters sought to block a French military convoy travelling from Côte d'Ivoire to Mali. On 20 November, four protesters were shot during a confrontation with the convoy in Kaya, Burkina Faso; two people were killed and 18 wounded in western Niger during another attempt by protesters to stop the convoy.

On maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea, Special Representative Annadif asserted at his 8 July 2021 Council briefing that the "risks of a confluence between the threat coming from the sea and that coming from the Sahel are real". A week earlier, on 30 June 2021, the UN Peacebuilding Commission held a meeting on piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, where 84 maritime attacks and the kidnapping of 130 people occurred during 2020. UNODC Executive Director Waly presented a UNODC study showing that about six pirate groups, with 30 to 50 members each, have the capacity to operate in deep waters in the Gulf of Guinea. They mostly target international vessels to kidnap crew members for ransom, generating income of about \$4 million per year. The economic impact on West and Central Africa is estimated at about \$800 million, according to UNODC.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a statement at the conclusion of her first official visit to Burkina Faso, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet recognised the government of Burkina Faso's invitation to establish an OHCHR office and

West Africa and the Sahel

its “willingness and openness to collaborate on the promotion and protection of human rights”. She noted that Burkina Faso successfully held “peaceful legislative and presidential elections” in 2020. She said this is indicative of a “deep desire to preserve the democratic and human rights progress the country has made...and gives much cause for hope”.

Key Issues and Options

Political developments and trends in West Africa and the Sahel region, including concerns about democratic backsliding, are key issues during UNOWAS meetings. The session is likely to include the first Council update on Guinea since the September 2021 coup d'état.

The threat of terrorism remains a key challenge facing the region. Inter-communal and herder-farmer conflicts, so-called banditry violence in northwest Nigeria that has intensified, and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea are other security concerns that are linked at times with the activities of terrorist groups. Regional counter-terrorism initiatives include the Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S), which comprises troops from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) fighting the continued Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin.

In addition to security responses, a key issue is addressing the structural causes of instability, such as underdevelopment, poor governance, and climate change, through the UN's Sahel Strategy, the Group of Five for the Sahel Priority Investment Programme, and the Lake Chad Basin regional stabilisation strategy.

The Security Council may adopt a presidential statement—usually proposed by the UNOWAS penholders following these biannual meetings—that addresses recent developments in the region and reiterates calls for a comprehensive approach to tackle the security, peacebuilding and development challenges of the region. Another possibility is for Council members to resume negotiations on a draft resolution on the Sahel that Russia initiated in December 2021 regarding the threat of terrorism and the importance of a holistic approach to dealing with the underlying causes of conflict in the Sahel.

The problem of maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea is likely to be highlighted during January. Council members are expected to negotiate a draft resolution that could, among other things, encourage cooperation between states of the region and bilateral

and multilateral partners in responding to the piracy threat and call for the Secretary-General to provide a report with recommendations for combatting piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and assessing possible linkages with terrorism.

Council Dynamics

Members value UNOWAS' good offices activities and conflict prevention role. At times they differ over whether to refer to political crises or tensions in countries not on the Council agenda in Council products on UNOWAS. Members also appear aligned on the importance of a holistic approach to addressing insecurity in the region, often stressing the need for greater coherence in the activities of the UN system and other stakeholders.

The issue of support to the FC-G5S divides members. France has championed the establishment of a UN support office—as recommended by the Secretary-General—to provide logistical support to the FC-G5S through UN assessed contributions. The UK and the US oppose the idea and prefer to see support channelled bilaterally. They also express concerns that supporting a counter-terrorism force with a questionable human rights record could compromise UN peacekeeping principles. Substantive discussion on this issue takes place during Council meetings on Mali and the FC-G5S, however.

Over the past year, Russia appears to be increasing its involvement in the Sahel. Russia and Mali recently held talks on strengthening military cooperation amid reports that Mali's transitional authorities are discussing the possibility of contracting fighters from the Russian private security company Wagner Group. Russia first proposed its draft resolution on the Sahel as an alternative to an Irish-Nigerien draft resolution on climate change in December 2021. After vetoing the draft climate change resolution, Russia solicited further comments on its proposed Sahel text, but it later announced that it was pausing work on the draft.

The Security Council conducted a visiting mission to Mali and Niger from 23 to 25 October 2021. It was co-led by France, Kenya and outgoing Council member Niger.

Ghana is the new West African Council member starting in January 2022. President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana is the current Chair of the ECOWAS Authority. Ghana and Ireland are expected to serve as co-penholders on West Africa and the Sahel.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In January, the Security Council will hold its monthly briefing and consultations on Yemen with UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg and a representative of OCHA.

Key Recent Developments

Heavy fighting persists in Marib governorate as the Houthi rebel

group pursues its offensive against the government stronghold to gain control of Marib's oil and gas fields. Elsewhere, hostilities continue along nearly 50 other front lines.

Grundberg briefed the Council on 14 December 2021, reiterating his concern about the possibility of urban warfare in Marib city, which is home to an estimated 1.5 million to three million people, most of whom have fled from conflict in other parts of the country

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8929 (14 December 2021) was a briefing on Yemen. Security Council Press Statements SC/14707 (18 November 2021) condemned the Houthi seizure of the compound formerly used as the US embassy in Sana'a. SC/14671 (20 October 2021) stressed the need for de-escalation by all, including an immediate end to the Houthi escalation in Marib. Sanctions Committee Document SC/14695 (9 November 2021) announced the addition of three entries to the Yemen sanctions list.

Yemen

or moved to the city during the war. He also updated the Council on the situation in Hodeidah governorate following the withdrawal in November of the government-aligned Joint Forces from the critical port city of Hodeidah and the establishment of new front lines about 70 kilometres south of the city. With the escalation in conflict, Grundberg warned, “There is a risk that this could open a new chapter of Yemen’s war that is even more fragmented and bloody”.

The UN envoy also presented a broad overview of the framework he is developing to restart a political process. He stressed the importance of accounting for Yemen’s diverse interests, including those “involved in the fighting and those who are not”. The political process “should support near-term solutions to de-escalate violence, prevent further economic deterioration and mitigate the impact of the conflict on civilians”, he said. “It should also identify and build consensus around the elements of a political settlement that sustainably ends the war, establishes inclusive governance arrangements, and ensures Yemenis’ civil and political, as well as social, economic and cultural rights”. He indicated that the political process would involve parallel tracks and said that “military intensification should not be allowed to stop this process”.

At the session, Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Ramesh Rajasingham delivered an update on the humanitarian situation and response. He underscored that the “economy remains in freefall”, which he said is the biggest challenge facing the aid operation. In government-held areas, the historic depreciation of the Yemeni rial has continued—by mid-December 2021, it had fallen to 1,700 rials to the US dollar. On 6 December, Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi replaced the leadership of the Aden-based Central Bank.

Rajasingham also highlighted the Houthis’ continued detention since early November 2021 of two UN staff members in Sana’a. He also expressed deep concern about a UN contractor whom the government recently arrested in Marib. According to Rajasingham, the UN had not been given access to any of the individuals, nor had it received any official information regarding their arrests.

On 21 December 2021, Iran’s ambassador to the Houthis, Hassan Irloo, died of COVID-19 following his evacuation on an Iraqi military plane out of Sana’a just days earlier in a rare exemption from the Saudi-led blockade on air traffic out of the city.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 2 December 2021, more than 60 civil society organisations sent a joint statement to the UN General Assembly, urging it to establish an investigative mechanism to gather and preserve evidence of serious human rights abuses and violations of international law in Yemen. The statement said that a new mechanism was urgently needed because of the Human Rights Council’s failure during its 48th session in October to renew the mandate of the Group of Eminent International and Regional Experts on Yemen (GEE) – which was established in 2017 to monitor and report on the human rights situation in the country – following a lobbying campaign against the GEE by Saudi Arabia.

Key Issues and Options

Grundberg’s effort to restart an inclusive political process for a negotiated settlement to the conflict remains a critical issue. This challenging task is made more difficult by the pace of changing military dynamics—notably, Houthi gains since September 2021 in their multi-front offensive in Marib governorate, the fall of which would be a major blow to the government.

Council members have made multiple calls since 2020 for an end

to the Houthi escalation in Marib and for a nationwide ceasefire, most recently in a 20 October 2021 press statement. On 9 November, the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee imposed sanctions on three Houthi military leaders for their role in the Marib offensive, cross-border drone and missile attacks on Saudi Arabia, and arms smuggling. Members may encourage Grundberg to continue to develop and complete his framework or road map for a political process, which the Council could then endorse.

Key issues related to Yemen’s humanitarian crisis include preventing famine, protecting civilians, improving humanitarian access, and supporting the economy. The UN has repeatedly warned about the potential for the Houthis’ Marib offensive to worsen the humanitarian situation if it triggers new mass displacement.

Council members could encourage donors to support the 2022 humanitarian response plan (HRP), which is expected to require funding similar to last year’s \$3.85 billion HRP. They could further urge UN member states to support the economic framework that the UN has developed and anticipates launching in parallel with the 2022 HRP. This framework seeks new foreign-exchange injections through the Central Bank to help stabilise the rial along with actions, such as lifting restrictions imposed by the government and the Saudi Arabia-led coalition on commercial imports through Red Sea ports, to lower commodity prices for food and fuel and to use import revenues to pay civil servants’ salaries.

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

The 2140 Sanctions Committee is also expected to consider the Yemen Panel of Experts’ final report during January.

Council Dynamics

Council members support UN-led mediation efforts and share concerns about the humanitarian situation and the threat posed by the Safer oil tanker. In February 2021, the US appointed a special envoy to Yemen, Timothy Lenderking, who has coordinated his work with the UN to restart a political process.

Despite these general areas of agreement, differences among members exist. The new sanctions designations in November 2021 became controversial when Russia sought, unsuccessfully, to have the decision rescinded, having failed to raise its objections within the allotted time period to block the action. Russia regularly seeks to reduce references in Council products singling out the Houthis, contending that the Council should maintain greater balance. Its statement at the December briefing was notable, as it argued that it was time to recognise that the parties were not ready to relaunch talks. Russia suggested that the Council replace or update resolution 2216, adopted in April 2015 at the outset of the military intervention by the Saudi-led coalition in support of the Yemeni government, which it asserted makes a political settlement impossible and no longer reflects the realities of the conflict. The statement added that western Council members are willing to sacrifice Council unity on Yemen over sanctions.

In January 2022, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) joins the Council. The UAE has been a leading member in the coalition. It

Yemen

has significantly scaled back its military presence in Yemen since 2019 but remains an important actor, including through its support of various armed groups, such as the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the Joint Forces. In its previous reporting, the Yemen Panel of Experts has noted that the UAE, along with the other conflict parties, has committed violations of international humanitarian law and human rights and

has described the UAE's support to the STC as "acting against the spirit of resolution 2216", which called for "Member States to refrain from taking any actions that undermine the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen, and the legitimacy of the President of Yemen".

The UK is the penholder on Yemen. Ambassador Ferit Hoxha (Albania) is the new chair of the 2140 Sanctions Committee.

Sudan (Darfur)

Expected Council Action

In January, the Security Council is expected to receive the semi-annual briefing of the ICC Prosecutor on Darfur. Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, who began serving as ICC Prosecutor in mid-June 2021, will provide his first briefing to the Council on the ICC's Darfur-related activities.

Key Recent Developments

On 9 June 2021, in her final briefing to the Council as ICC prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda referred to the "constructive dialogue and a good spirit of cooperation" that her office had developed with the transitional government in Sudan. She spoke about her visit to Darfur the previous week and stated: "The clear and consistent message I received from Darfur victims in El Fasher, Nyala and Zalingei is that the four outstanding warrants must be executed and that suspects must be handed over to the ICC." (ICC arrest warrants remain outstanding against former President Omar Hassan Ahmad Al Bashir, Ahmad Muhammad Harun, Abdel Raheem Muhammad Hussein, and Abdallah Banda Abakaer Nourain.) Bensouda had stressed this same message to government officials at all levels during her visit to the country, she said, and called for Sudan "to fully cooperate with the Office's investigations, including by providing unhindered access to its territory and to the relevant records, information and materials, as well as the protection of witnesses".

The ICC's Pre-Trial Chamber II confirmed charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity against Ali Muhammad Abd-Al-Rahman (also known as Ali Kushayb) on 9 July 2021. Abd-Al-Rahman, reportedly a former Janjaweed militia leader who is alleged to have committed these crimes in Darfur in 2003 and 2004, surrendered in the Central Africa Republic in June 2020. His trial is expected to begin in April 2022.

Khan visited Sudan from 9-13 August 2021, meeting with senior members of the transitional government—including Chairperson of the Transitional Sovereign Council Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, among others—and civil society representatives. In a press conference in Khartoum on 12 August, he said that he had "stressed and requested that the Government of Sudan further deepen its cooperation with [his] office". He further underscored that: "Transfer of any suspect is an important step towards achieving justice but should be preceded and accompanied by substantive and ever deepening cooperation by

the Sudanese authorities".

Also on 12 August 2021, Sudanese Foreign Minister Mariam al-Mahdi reportedly told Sudan state media that Sudan "would hand over wanted officials to the ICC". At the time of writing, this had yet to occur.

On 14 December 2021, some seven weeks after the military takeover in Sudan, an ICC delegation met in Khartoum with Malik Agar and Tahir Hajar, two former rebels who now serve on the transitional government's Sovereign Council. Media sources indicate that the discussion focused on preparations for another visit to Sudan by Khan and the potential handover of former Sudanese officials wanted by the ICC to The Hague.

Sudan has undergone considerable political turmoil in recent months. On 25 October 2021, the Chairperson of the Transitional Sovereign Council, Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, declared a nationwide state of emergency and the suspension of key provisions of the August 2019 Constitutional Document, including the transfer of the Sovereign Council chair from the military to the civilian government, which was set to take place in November. He also announced that the military would oversee Sudan's transition until elections, to be held in July 2023. The military detained Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and his wife and placed them under house arrest. Government officials, including ministers and civilian members of the Sovereign Council, were also arrested.

On 21 November 2021, Hamdok was released from house arrest, following significant international criticism and mass demonstrations in Sudan against the military takeover, which were met with violence by security forces. Appearing together on television, he and al-Burhan announced a new 14-point power-sharing agreement, including Hamdok's reinstatement as prime minister, and the release of all political detainees. Under the terms of the agreement, the parties decided to "[a]ccelerate the completion of all transitional governance institutions including the Transitional Legislative Council and the Constitutional Court", to form "a civilian government of independent national experts (technocrats)", and to investigate injuries and deaths during the protests following the 25 October 2021 military takeover.

The power-sharing agreement has faced opposition in Sudan. Several parties have rejected the agreement, including the main opposition alliance, the Forces for Freedom and Change Coalition (FFC). Large protests against the 25 October 2021 military takeover

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN (DARFUR) Security Council Resolution S/RES/1593 (31 March 2005) referred the situation in Darfur to the ICC. Security Council Meeting S/PV.8925 (10 December 2021) was a briefing on the situation in Sudan and the work of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS). S/PV.8791 (9 June 2021) was a briefing by the ICC prosecutor on the court's work in Darfur.

Sudan (Darfur)

and the subsequent power-sharing agreement erupted in several cities in Sudan, including in the capital, Khartoum, at various times in December.

Key Issues and Options

An underlying key issue for the Council is how to promote justice and accountability for past atrocities committed in Sudan. A related issue for the Council is how to support enhanced cooperation between the ICC prosecutor and the government of Sudan.

In addition to receiving Khan's briefing, Council members supportive of the ICC's work could consider holding an informal meeting with the prosecutor to facilitate a dialogue on ways in which his office can strengthen its cooperation with the Sudanese government.

They could also hold a joint press stakeout encouraging improved

relations between the Sudanese government and the ICC.

Council and Wider Dynamics

The Council is divided on the work of the ICC. Albania, Brazil, France, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Ireland, Mexico, Norway, and the United Kingdom are states party to the Rome Statute of the ICC, while China, India, Russia, the UAE, and the US are not. These distinctions do not necessarily reflect how members view the court's work on Sudan, however. For example, although not a party to the Rome Statute, the US has long supported the ICC's efforts with regard to Sudan.

Among the wider membership of the UN, African countries have long expressed concern that the court focuses its work inordinately on Africa.

Women, Peace and Security: Open Debate on Protecting Women's Participation

In January, the Security Council will hold an open debate entitled "Protecting Participation: Addressing Violence Targeting Women in Peace and Security Processes". One of the signature events of Norway's presidency, the meeting will be convened at ministerial level and chaired by the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Anniken Huitfeldt. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet and one or more civil society representatives are expected to brief. No outcome is expected.

Background and Key Recent Developments

It appears that Norway intends to use the open debate to address how violence, intimidation and reprisals against women peacebuilders, civil society representatives and human rights defenders undermine the objective of ensuring women's participation in peace and security processes. It seems that the open debate is intended to promote a discussion of concrete ways for the Security Council to address and prevent these forms of targeted violence.

Adopted in April 2019, resolution 2467 states that "women's protection and participation are inextricably linked and mutually-reinforcing". The Executive Director of UN Women, Sima Sami Bahous, recently underscored this point during the annual open debate on women, peace and security (WPS) in October 2021. She said: "We cannot expect women to build peace if their lives are constantly under threat." The protection of women human rights defenders, peacebuilders, and civil society leaders was also the focus of the NGO Working Group on WPS' open letter to UN permanent representatives ahead of the October 2021 annual open debate. The letter argues that the protection of women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders "remains one of the starkest gaps in the Security Council's implementation of the WPS agenda" and that the Council has "failed to address the root causes of this issue or mount an effective response when

attacks against civil society occur".

The Secretary-General's 2021 annual report on WPS states that in 2020 the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified 35 cases "of killings of women human rights defenders, journalists and trade unionists in seven conflict-affected countries". In addition, the report notes that "[m]any more" women have faced threats and harassment in connection with these activities. The 2021 report also announced that the Secretary-General's annual report on WPS in 2022 will have a focus on women's rights and is expected to include "recommendations for better protection for women human rights defenders against all political violence in public life". As such, it seems that the open debate in January is intended to lay the groundwork for Council discussion on this theme ahead of the annual WPS open debate.

Security Council members discussed reprisals and intimidation against women human rights defenders and peacebuilders on 21 February 2020, when Belgium, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, Germany, and the UK co-hosted an Arrria-formula meeting entitled "Reprisals against women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders who engage with the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies". January's open debate will be the first formal Security Council meeting on the issue.

Norway's focus in the debate on the connection between women's participation and protection is consistent with the 1 December 2021 statement of shared commitments on WPS undertaken by elected Council members Albania, Niger, Norway, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The statement builds on the "presidency trio" initiative on WPS undertaken by Ireland, Kenya and Mexico during their consecutive Council presidencies in September, October and November of last year. In their statement of shared commitments, these four countries pledged to make

UN DOCUMENTS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2493 (29 October 2019) reiterated the need for the full implementation of the WPS agenda. S/RES/2467 (23 April 2019) was on sexual violence in conflict and was adopted with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (China and Russia). **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8886** (21 October 2021) was the annual open debate on WPS.

Women, Peace and Security: Open Debate

WPS a “top priority” during their respective presidencies and to ensure that the agenda “is fully and meaningfully integrated into all aspects of the Council’s work, including in country-specific discussions”.

The 1 December 2021 statement echoed many of the commitments already undertaken by Ireland, Kenya and Mexico, including striving to achieve gender parity among invited Security Council briefers and ensuring a “strong representation of diverse women civil society briefers”. Other returning elements are the commitment to make WPS issues an explicit focus of at least one mandated geographic meeting and highlighting the Council’s discussions on WPS through dedicated press stakeouts. In line with the theme of January’s open debate, one of the novel elements of the statement of shared commitments is a focus on women peacebuilders and human rights defenders. In particular, the four states have committed to “[s]upporting the safe participation of civil society briefers” in Council meetings, to take “a zero-tolerance approach” on reprisals, and to call for “accountability for such acts”.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 29 September 2021, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris presented to the Human Rights Council the latest Secretary-General’s report on reprisals against individuals cooperating with the UN (A/HRC/48/28). Brands Kehris said that more than 100 of the 240 individuals referred to in the report were not mentioned by name because of protection issues and that this signalled the “high level of risk affecting cooperation with the UN in contexts where fear can inhibit such cooperation”. The Secretary-General’s report specified that “cases not publicly reported or kept anonymous ... continue to concern predominantly women”. The report included cases of reprisals connected to engagement with the Security Council. For instance, it reviewed the case of a civil society representative who was reportedly accused by the National Security Services (NSS) of South Sudan “of being paid to raise the issue of sexual violence and accountability” during a meeting with a visiting Security Council delegation in March 2020. According to the report, the civil society representative “discontinued any direct contact with UN staff in public, as well as resigned from the civil society organization they represented, and ceased UN cooperation when NSS intimidated their co-workers”.

Key Issues and Options

The main issue for the Security Council remains the holistic and substantive implementation of its resolutions on WPS, including through better integration of WPS considerations into its country-specific decisions.

Regarding the theme of the open debate, promoting civil society’s substantive participation and addressing reprisals against civil society briefers are issues of importance for many Council members. Norway, as the Council president for January, could prepare a chair’s summary of the open debate to capture salient themes of the discussion.

Another option would be to convene a follow-up meeting in a closed format with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor. Among other issues, the meeting could focus on the interaction between long-term and short-term strategies to prevent reprisals and strengthen the participation of diverse women civil society actors. During such a meeting, Council members may consider calling for support

of the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund’s (WPHF) new funding window on protection and participation of women peacebuilders and human rights defenders in crisis and conflict contexts, scheduled to be launched in January. (The WPHF is a multi-partner trust fund whose board is composed of UN entities, including UNWomen, civil society organisations, and states).

During the presidency trio initiative, a high number of women civil society briefers participated in Council meetings. Among the novel elements in the statement of shared commitments by Albania, Niger, Norway, and the UAE is a pledge to follow up on recommendations and priority issues raised by civil society briefers. The four countries that issued the statement and other Council members may also be interested in developing ways to monitor the impact of their commitment to follow up on the concerns expressed by civil society briefers.

Council Dynamics

Language on women human rights defenders proved highly contentious during the negotiations of resolution 2493 (2019), the Council’s most recent WPS resolution. Some Council members threatened to abstain if draft language referring directly to women human rights defenders were deleted, while China and Russia strongly resisted the inclusion of said language. Negotiations eventually led to the compromise text that now appears in the sixth operative paragraph, in which the Council “encourages Member States to create safe and enabling environments for civil society, including formal and informal community women leaders, women peacebuilders, political actors, and those who protect and promote human rights, to carry out their work independently and without undue interference, including in situations of armed conflict, and to address threats, harassment, violence and hate speech against them”. In their statements after the vote, however, Russia and China distanced themselves from this language, with China reserving “its position vis-à-vis paragraph 6” and Russia pointing out that the resolution contained “a number of provisions that go beyond the Security Council’s mandate”. The two countries reiterated similar positions during the February 2020 Arria-formula meeting on reprisals against women human rights defenders.

During the annual open debate on WPS in October 2021, Estonia, Ireland, Mexico, Norway, Tunisia, the UK, and the US mentioned human rights defenders or women human rights defenders in their remarks. Both Niger and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines referred to reprisals, with Niger noting that special attention “should be paid to young women peacebuilders who face serious reprisals for their vital work”. Russia, on the other hand, presented a seemingly unchanged position on the issue, reiterating that the Security Council “should focus on situations that pose an imminent threat to international peace and security” as the “work to promote the role of women” is already carried out by other UN bodies, such as the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

The UK is the penholder on WPS, and the US is the penholder on conflict-related sexual violence. Ireland and Mexico are the co-chairs of the Informal Experts Group on WPS.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Expected Council Action

In January, the Security Council will hold its quarterly open debate on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. It appears that as part of the Norwegian presidency of the Security Council, the debate will be convened at ministerial level and will be chaired by Norway’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Anniken Huitfeldt. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland and a civil society representative are expected to brief.

Key Recent Developments

The quarterly open debate follows two recent meetings of key interlocutors on the Middle East in Oslo. On 17 November 2021, the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC)—a 15-member committee that coordinates development assistance to the Palestinian people at the policy level and is chaired by Norway and co-sponsored by the US and the EU—met in person at ministerial level. Speaking prior to the AHLC meeting, Qatar’s Minister of State of Foreign Affairs announced that Qatar and Egypt had signed an agreement to supply building material and fuel to Gaza. A meeting of the envoys of the Middle East Quartet—which consists of the EU, Russia, the UN, and the US—was held on the same day. In the joint press statement released after the meeting, the envoys expressed concern about “ongoing acts of violence in the West Bank, the advancement of new settlement units, the untenable fiscal crisis within the Palestinian Authority and threats of violence from the Gaza Strip”. The envoys called on the parties to “take additional steps to address these challenges directly through fiscal and other reforms, as well as to avoid unilateral steps”.

On 14 December 2021, officials from the US and the Palestinian Authority held a virtual meeting of the US-Palestinian Economic Dialogue (USPED). This was the first USPED meeting since May 2016, as no USPED meetings were held during the Trump administration. In mid-November 2021, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield (US) conducted an official visit to Israel, the West Bank and Jordan, during which she met with high-level Israeli and Palestinian officials, including Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

The recent period has seen the continuation of violent incidents. Several such incidents were noted in a 14 December 2021 OCHA Protection of Civilians report:

- On 17 November, a Palestinian stabbed and injured two Israeli Border Police officers in the Old City of Jerusalem and was subsequently shot and killed by Israeli police.
- On 21 November, a Palestinian shot and killed an Israeli civilian and reportedly injured an Israeli civilian and two Israeli Border Police officers. The attacker was shot and killed by Israeli forces.
- On 4 December, a Palestinian stabbed and injured an Israeli and tried to stab an Israeli Border Police officer near the Old City of Jerusalem and was shot and killed by security forces.
- On 6 December, a Palestinian was shot and killed by security forces after he drove a vehicle into a security booth at a checkpoint in Tulkarm, injuring an Israeli security guard.
- On 8 December, an Israeli was stabbed and injured by a Palestinian

in the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, in East Jerusalem.

- On 10 December, Israeli forces killed a Palestinian in the context of weekly protests against settlement activity in Beita, Nablus.
- On 13 December, a Palestinian was killed by security forces following a search-and-arrest operation in Nablus.

In addition to these incidents, an Israeli civilian was killed on 16 December in an attack carried out by Palestinians near the Homesh outpost in the West Bank.

According to a 17 December statement issued by Wennesland, “there have been several retaliatory attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians in villages near Nablus”. In the statement, Wennesland condemned all violent and terrorist acts and appealed “to all sides to deescalate the situation”.

During the reporting period, 441 Palestinians—including 97 children—were injured in clashes with Israeli security forces across the West Bank. Most of the injuries were registered during demonstrations against settlement activities near the village of Beita in the Nablus area.

At the end of October 2021, Israeli authorities announced plans for the construction of several thousand housing units in different locations in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. (For further details, see our 7 November “What’s in Blue” story). On 6 December, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee decided not to advance the plans for a settlement in Atarot, between Ramallah and East Jerusalem, citing the need first to conduct an environmental study. Commenting on the 2 December 2021 conversation between Bennett and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said that Blinken had “strongly emphasized that Israel and the Palestinian Authority should refrain from unilateral steps that exacerbate tensions and undercut efforts to advance a negotiated two-state solution, including advancing settlement activity”.

According to OCHA, between 16 November and 6 December 2021, Israeli authorities “demolished, seized, or forced owners to demolish” 62 structures owned by Palestinians, displacing 55 people, including 18 children.

Israel recently designated six Palestinian NGOs as terrorist organisations. The initial order—which applied only within Israel and was signed on 22 October 2021 by the Israeli Ministry of Defence—was extended on 7 November 2021 to the West Bank. Several key international human rights interlocutors have criticised the designation, including High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, a group of UN independent experts on human rights, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch. Council members discussed the designations during a meeting on 8 November 2021 under “any other business” called by Tunisia, and several Council members raised the issue at the 30 November 2021 monthly meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”.

On 11 December 2021, the first round of local elections was held in some areas of the West Bank; the second round is expected in March 2022. On 29 April, Abbas indefinitely postponed Palestinian parliamentary and presidential elections, originally scheduled for 22 May and 31 July.

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 Meeting Record S/PV.8913](#) (30 November 2021) was the November monthly meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

The ceasefire reached after the 11 days of hostilities in May 2021 between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip has largely held, and Israel has recently eased restrictions it previously imposed, allowing more goods to enter the Strip and issuing permits for traders and merchants to enter Israel. At the same time, Wennesland has called for a longer-term, sustainable arrangement for Gaza in his monthly briefings, stressing that the objective remains the lifting of all restrictions. On 9 December 2021, the Israeli minister of foreign affairs travelled to Egypt on a diplomatic visit to discuss, among other issues, the situation in Gaza.

On 16 November 2021, Jordan and Sweden convened an international ministerial conference on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Addressing the Advisory Commission on UNRWA on 29 November 2021, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Philippe Lazzarini, said that “UNRWA is on the brink of collapse” and that there is a \$60 million gap to cover the cost of services for the months of November and December 2021. Lazzarini noted that while 2021 saw “the welcome resumption of the immense US support to UNRWA”, other donors have decreased or not disbursed their funding.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 3 November, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory, Michael Lynk, and the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Balakrishnan Rajagopal, issued a statement condemning Israel’s announcement that it was planning to build thousands of new housing units in its West Bank and East Jerusalem settlements. The experts noted that the illegality of the Israeli settlements is one of the most widely accepted issues in modern international law. They welcomed the diplomatic criticism regarding settlement expansion, including by the US, but observed that “criticism without consequences means little” and called on the international community to support the ongoing investigation into the settlements by the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court.

On 10 November 2021, Lynk and the Working Group on the use of mercenaries expressed growing alarm at the rising rate of violence directed by Israeli settlers towards Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory. They emphasised that 2021 witnessed the “highest recorded levels of violence ... and more severe incidents”. (The statement notes that “In several cases, Israeli security forces and outsourced private security companies stand by and take no action to prevent the violence; instead, they respond to settler-related violence by ordering Palestinians to leave the area, including Palestinian-owned land, or even actively support the settlers.”)

According to OCHA, in the initial ten months of 2021, there had been 410 attacks by settlers against Palestinians (302 against property and 108 against individuals), with four Palestinians killed. In 2020, there were 358 attacks in total, and in 2019, 335 attacks. Yesh Din – an Israeli human rights organisation – noted that 91 percent of investigations into settler attacks against Palestinians between 2005 and 2019 were closed by the Israeli authorities, with no charges filed.

Women, Peace and Security

On 20 and 21 October 2021, UN Women Palestine held an annual Open Day on Women, Peace and Security in Gaza City. The event brought together Palestinian women from Gaza and the West Bank and was organised in partnership with the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) and with support from the Government of Norway. During the Open Day, UN Women Special Representative for Palestine Maryse Guimond said that women’s leadership and participation have been absent in “peace efforts between Palestine and Israel and those aiming to achieve intra-Palestinian reconciliation, rendering the success of both endeavours more elusive”. Among

the issues discussed were the importance of holding Palestinian elections and the impact of the occupation on Palestinian women and girls, with the Director of GUPW, Intissar Al Wazir, stating that women, peace and security resolution 1325 “is a very important framework to promote women’s protection from occupation violence”. Recommendations formulated by the participants at the event included the establishment of a platform for Palestinian women leaders, with diverse political views and from different generations, to convene and strategise on how to increase women’s participation in the Palestinian reconciliation process.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is what role it can play in reinvigorating the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. During the November 2021 meeting, Wennesland spoke of the need to “restore a political horizon that will help stop the endless cycle of crisis management and move back towards meaningful negotiations to end the occupation and resolve the conflict”. Preserving the viability of the two-state solution; the persistence of violent incidents and clashes, including settler attacks; and the consolidation of the 20 May 2021 ceasefire into a longer-term arrangement also remain key issues.

To revitalise the Middle East Quartet, one option would be to issue a statement welcoming the in-person Quartet meeting in November and calling for the next meeting to be held at ministerial level to underscore the gravity of the current political impasse.

Another option would be for the Council to meet with Lynk and Rajagopal in a closed meeting format to engage in a frank discussion about recent settlement activity.

Council Dynamics

Council members have repeatedly called for an end to settlement activities and expressed support for a two-state solution. At the November 2021 monthly meeting on the Middle East, Council members mentioned settlement expansion as a source of concern, with the US noting that settlement expansion “has reached a critical juncture and is now undermining the very viability of a negotiated two-State solution”.

At the same time, the US has also criticised the Council’s focus on Israel as being disproportionate. At the November 2021 monthly meeting on the Middle East, Thomas-Greenfield said that Israelis “interpret the overwhelming focus on Israel in this organ as a denial of Israel’s right to exist and an unfair focus on that one country—and they are correct”. She called instead for more regular meetings on Iran and for open meetings on Lebanon and proposed to “enforce Security Council resolutions intended to constrain Iran’s regional malign activities, nuclear threats and support for terrorism organizations like Hamas and Hizbullah”. It appears that this was the first time in which the US directly mentioned Iran during an open meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” since the start of the Biden administration.

Council members also regularly underscore the importance for the parties to return to political negotiations. At the same time, it appears that the current US policy is driven by prioritising economic measures to improve the Palestinians’ living conditions over the resumption of the peace process.

Colombia

Expected Council Action

In January 2022, 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 27 December 2021. A civil society representative is also expected to brief.

The verification mission's mandate expires on 31 October 2022.

Key Recent Developments

On 24 November 2021, Colombia marked the fifth anniversary of the signing of the 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). The occasion prompted reflection on issues relating to the implementation of the peace agreement and increased engagement by both Colombian and international actors.

Security Council members issued a press statement on 24 November 2021, welcoming progress in the past five years on such issues as the reintegration of former combatants, the transformation of the former FARC-EP from an armed group into a political party and transitional justice processes. Members highlighted the need to address remaining challenges, chiefly the persistent violence against communities (including indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities), former FARC-EP members, human rights defenders, and social leaders.

Secretary-General António Guterres conducted a two-day visit to Colombia on 23 and 24 November 2021, which was his first official field visit since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. He met with government officials; members of the Comunes party (which is comprised of former FARC-EP members); the heads of the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition, which is comprised of the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), the Truth Commission, and the Unit for the Search for Persons Deemed as Missing; civil society representatives; and victims of the conflict. During a 24 November 2021 event in Bogotá, Guterres outlined the important advances in the peace agreement's implementation, while warning about the risks undermining peace and emphasising that "the main long-term solution lies in a comprehensive expansion of the State that brings governance and development opportunities to the entire territory".

The reporting period of the Secretary-General's report, which covers 25 September to 27 December 2021, witnessed important progress in transitional justice processes in Colombia. On 28 October 2021, ICC Prosecutor Karim Asad Ahmad Khan announced that the court had decided to close its preliminary examination, which commenced in 2004, on alleged crimes committed during the civil war in the country. (During a preliminary examination—which precedes a full investigation—the ICC assesses whether the alleged crimes fall under its jurisdiction and evaluates whether domestic authorities are carrying out genuine proceedings to facilitate accountability.) The ICC said that its decision was informed by the

progress made by the various jurisdictions in Colombia in addressing conflict-related crimes, which led the court to determine that Colombian authorities are "neither inactive, unwilling nor unable to genuinely investigate and prosecute Rome Statute crimes".

The ICC and the Colombian government signed a cooperation agreement which outlines mutual responsibilities to ensure that transitional justice processes in the country remain on track—the first agreement of its kind between the court and a state party. According to an ICC press statement, the agreement reinforces the roles both entities will undertake to "ensure that the significant progress achieved by domestic prosecutorial and judicial entities, and in particular by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, is sustained and strengthened".

The Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition continued to advance its work in the past several months. On 10 December 2021, the SJP announced that 21 former Colombian soldiers and one civilian have admitted their culpability for crimes committed as part of the "false positives" phenomenon, whereby civilians killed in military operations during the conflict were presented as combatants in official reports. (A February 2021 SJP report implicated the Colombian military in the killing of at least 6,400 civilians between 2002 to 2008.) They have acknowledged their responsibility for the murder of at least 240 people, asked for forgiveness and provided new evidence on the crimes, according to the court. Among the 21 former soldiers is Brigadier General Paulino Coronado Gámez, who is the highest-ranking officer to acknowledge responsibility for such crimes.

Persistent violence against communities (including indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities), former FARC-EP members, human rights defenders, and social leaders continues to complicate the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement. The verification mission verified the killing of ten ex-combatants during the reporting period of the Secretary-General's report, bringing to 303 the number of former FARC-EP members killed since the signing of the 2016 agreement.

Preparations for congressional and presidential elections planned for March and May 2022, respectively, are also underway. On 13 December 2021, the registration for congressional candidates was concluded. Among the 2,966 registered candidates, 407 are candidates for the 16 "special transitional electoral districts for peace". The establishment of these electoral districts was stipulated in the 2016 agreement, with the aim of promoting the participation of historically excluded populations in conflict-affected areas, including members of indigenous communities and representatives of victims' and women's organisations.

On 30 November 2021, the US Department of State revoked its designation of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) as a terrorist organisation, noting in a press statement that since the signing of the 2016 peace agreement, the group "no longer exists as a unified organisation that engages in terrorism or terrorist activity". According to the press statement, this will allow the US to promote the implementation of the peace agreement, including by working with demobilised combatants.

UN DOCUMENTS ON COLOMBIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2603 (29 October 2021) extended the verification mission's mandate for another year until 31 October 2022. 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/2021/1090 (27 December 2021) was the most recent 90-day report. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8879 (14 October 2021) was the Security Council's latest quarterly meeting on Colombia. Security Council Press Statement SC/14713 (24 November 2021) congratulated Colombians on the fifth anniversary of the 2016 peace agreement.

Colombia

The US further announced the designation of the FARC-EP and Segunda Marquetalia, groups which are comprised of combatants who refuse to demobilise, as terrorist organisations.

On 29 October 2021, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2603, renewing the mandate of the verification mission for another year, without making any changes to the mission's core mandate.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 15 December 2021, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued a report documenting instances of unnecessary or disproportionate use of force by police officers during mass protests in Colombia, which began in April 2021 and continued across the country for several weeks. Between 28 April and 31 July 2021, the OHCHR office in Colombia received 63 allegations of deaths resulting from participation in protests. At the time of writing, OHCHR has verified 46 deaths, of which 44 were civilians and two were law enforcement officers. Based on the information collected and examined by OHCHR, there are "reasonable grounds" to believe that police officers were responsible for at least 28 deaths and that at least ten of the deaths involved members of the National Police's Mobile Anti-Riot Squad (ESMAD). The report asserts that Colombian authorities must reform their approach towards protest management to avoid the recurrence of loss of lives and injuries witnessed during the protests.

Key Issues and Options

Council members will closely follow developments relating to the 2022 congressional and presidential elections. A concern for the Council is the potential for an increase in violence against candidates, especially in the "special transitional electoral districts for peace". In 2021, the Electoral Observation Mission—a platform of civil society organisations in Colombia that promotes the exercise of civil and political rights—registered 146 attacks against political and social leaders in the areas where these electoral districts have been established, 44 of which resulted in death. Council members may wish to issue a press statement underscoring the need to implement the security guarantees stipulated in the 2016 agreement and consolidate state presence in conflict-affected areas.

Progress in transitional justice processes is another likely focus for the Council, as the SJP is expected to begin handing down its sentences in early 2022. In resolution 2574 of 11 May 2021, the Council expanded the verification mission's mandate to include monitoring compliance with the sentences handed down by the SJP. 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 recent months, several Council members initiated opportunities for diplomats, both in New York and in Bogotá, to interact informally with former FARC members and Colombian civil society representatives. For example, on 15 December 2021, Norway organised a virtual meeting among Council experts in New York and representatives of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities to discuss the implementation of the ethnic chapter of the 2016 peace agreement. Council members may wish to continue holding such informal meetings to hear a broad array of voices address various aspects of the implementation of the agreement.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the peace process in Colombia and for the verification mission's work.

It seems that Mexico has sought to play an active role on Colombia, which is a priority file for Mexico City. For instance, it co-authored the Council's 16 July press statement with the UK, the penholder on Colombia. It appears, however, that the UK and Mexico diverge on whether their cooperation on Council products should become established practice. This disagreement led to delays in the negotiations on resolution 2603; the zero draft of that resolution was circulated later than initially expected, leaving a short period for deliberations ahead of the verification mission's expiry. Although resolution 2603 was eventually presented jointly by the UK and Mexico, it is unclear whether these members will pursue this practice for future Council products on Colombia. The UK was apparently the sole author of the 24 November 2021 press statement.

The advent of five new elected Council members—Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—in 2022 might affect Council dynamics on Colombia. Brazil, which borders Colombia, can provide a regional perspective and might wish to play an active role on the file, similar to Mexico.

In 2021, the "A3 plus one" Council members (Kenya, Niger, Tunisia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) strongly emphasised the need to address the challenges faced by indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. For example, these members broke silence during the negotiations on resolution 2603, requesting additional language on the ethnic and gender chapters of the peace agreement. It remains to be seen whether Gabon and Ghana will join Kenya in highlighting such issues.

The US decision to revoke the FARC's terrorist designation may also affect its engagement on the file. It appears that prior to the revocation, US diplomats were unable to participate in the informal meetings between Council experts and former FARC members.

Libya

Expected Council Action

In January, the Security Council will hold a briefing and consultations on the situation in Libya. The chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti (India), is scheduled to brief on the activities of the sanctions committee.

Council members are also expected to vote on a resolution renewing UNSMIL's mandate, following two technical rollovers of the mandate in September that extended it for two weeks until 30 September 2021, and subsequently until 31 January.

The Secretary-General's report on the situation in Libya is due by 11 January.

Key Recent Developments

Preparations for the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections continued to dominate the political landscape. Days before the envisaged 24 December 2021 polls, the High National Elections Commission (HNEC) had not released the final candidate list for the presidential elections. The delay in publishing the list was caused by the ongoing review of the eligibility of several candidates to run for president. The HNEC made an initial determination in respect of the candidates, but several of its decisions were being challenged in court at the time of writing. In addition, a date for the parliamentary election—initially also foreseen to take place on 24 December 2021 but postponed to January—had yet to be announced.

Among the presidential candidates whose eligibility is being challenged are former Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF, also known as the Libyan National Army, or LNA) General Khalifa Haftar; Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, who is sought by the ICC on two counts of alleged crimes against humanity and is the son of deposed former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi; and Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah, who stepped down from his position as prime minister of the Government of National Unity (GNU) to run in the upcoming elections. A precondition to qualify for the presidential race is relinquishing political and military positions three months before the vote, according to a controversial electoral law passed by the eastern-based House of Representatives. However, Dbeibah stepped down in November—too late to meet the three-month requirement. Furthermore, upon accepting the nomination for prime minister in February 2021, he pledged not to seek elected office in the upcoming elections. His position was subsequently filled by Ramadan Abu Jnah, who, when speaking about a possible postponement of the elections during a 13 December press conference, stated that “nobody should deprive Libyans of this historic [24 December 2021] deadline and we will not let anybody do so”.

On 22 December, given the ongoing delay in the finalisation of the candidate list and controversy surrounding the electoral law, the HNEC released a statement announcing that it will not be able to hold the presidential election on 24 December 2021 and suggested that the House of Representatives postpone the date of this election until 24 January. It added that it had nearly completed the review of the over 5,300 applications for the parliamentary elections for audit and possible appeals. According to media reports, Hadi Al-Sagheer, the president of the parliamentary election committee (the body

tasked with following up on the electoral process), released a statement confirming the postponement, noting that “after reviewing the technical, judicial and security reports, we would like to inform you that it will be impossible to hold the [presidential] elections on the date set by the elections law.”

On 23 November 2021, UNSMIL's Special Envoy Ján Kubiš resigned. In an 8 December 2021 statement marking his last day in office, Kubiš noted that “professional and personal reasons” necessitated his resignation. He had said earlier that the current political situation required the focus of UN mediation efforts to shift to Tripoli and that his resignation accelerated the shift. His statement echoes the findings of the 6 August 2021 independent strategic review report, which recommended the restructuring of UNSMIL and the relocation of its leadership from Geneva to Tripoli.

It appears that the Secretary-General intended to appoint Stephanie Williams, the former Deputy Special Representative in Libya, as interim head of UNSMIL, but Russia opposed the move. The Secretary-General instead named Williams his Special Advisor for Libya. Williams previously served as acting Special Representative in Libya between Ghassan Salamé's departure as the head of mission in March 2020 and Kubiš's appointment in January 2021. Williams arrived in Libya on 12 December 2021. According to an UNSMIL statement issued that day, she will “lead the good offices and mediation efforts and engagement with Libyan, regional, and international actors to pursue the implementation of the three intra-Libyan dialogue tracks and support the holding of presidential and parliamentary elections”.

As the electoral situation unfolded, Williams engaged political stakeholders to reach agreement on a new date for parliamentary and presidential elections, and to discuss the legitimacy of the current transitional political leadership, whose mandates expire on 24 December 2021. She also urged them to maintain a calm security environment amidst reports of military forces associated with different political actors mobilised in Tripoli. In a 21 September 2021 statement, UNSMIL called for any emerging political or military matters to be resolved through dialogue.

Sanctions-Related Developments

In December 2021, the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee and subsequently the Council received the interim report of its Panel of Experts. It is not a public document, but excerpts leaked to media outlets indicate that the panel found that although violations of the arms embargo on Libya decreased compared to the previous year, the embargo remained ineffective and existing stockpiles of weapons and ammunition in the country are sufficient to fuel future conflict. The experts also concluded that the continued presence of foreign fighters remained a serious threat.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 10 December 2021 press statement, the Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Rupert Colville, expressed deep concern over the continued forced expulsions of asylum-seekers and other migrants in Libya. He underscored that expulsions of asylum-seekers and other migrants without due process and procedural guarantees directly contravened the “prohibition of collective expulsions as well as the principle of non-refoulement under international human rights and refugee law.” Colville also mentioned an OHCHR report published on 25 November, “Unsafe and

UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2599](#) (30 September 2021) extended UNSMIL's mandate until 31 January 2022. [S/RES/2542](#) (15 September 2020) renewed UNSMIL's mandate until 15 September 2021. [Security Council Presidential Statements S/PRST/2021/24](#) (24 November 2021) welcomed the Paris International Conference and the Libya Stabilisation conference. [S/PRST/2021/12](#) (15 July 2021) welcomed the second Berlin Conference on Libya, which was held on 23 June 2021. [Security Council Letter S/2021/716](#) (6 August 2021) was from the Secretary-General, transmitting the strategic review of UNSMIL.

Libya

Undignified: The forced expulsion of migrants from Libya”, which highlighted that asylum-seekers and other migrants in Libya are consistently at risk of “arbitrary or collective expulsion”. The report further noted that those expelled have already experienced a range of other “serious human rights violations and abuses in Libya at the hands of both state and non-state actors, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, trafficking, sexual violence, torture and ill treatment”. Colville called on Libya to act swiftly to meet its obligations under international human rights law and urged the international community to “ensure due diligence in the provision of operational, financial and capacity-building support to the Libyan government [...] to ensure these efforts do not undermine human rights”.

Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council will be how to assist the country in organising peaceful and credible presidential and parliamentary elections and subsequently facilitate a peaceful transfer of power.

When renewing UNSMIL’s mandate, Council members will likely take into account the status of the electoral process. If the new polling date for presidential elections comes after the January renewal date for the UNSMIL mandate and if the date of the parliamentary elections continues to be unclear, the Council may consider another short rollover of the current mandate, at least until after the presidential election, and possibly until after both parliamentary and presidential elections. If the presidential election has been completed by the time the Council considers the UNSMIL mandate in January—and if there is greater clarity around the timing of the parliamentary elections—the Council

will most likely consider how it can best support the transition of power at the head-of-state level and the preparations for the parliamentary elections.

Council Dynamics

Negotiations in September 2021 on the renewal of the UNSMIL mandate were difficult. The UK, the penholder on Libya, suggested the restructuring of the mission in accordance with the recommendations of the August independent strategic review report. Such restructuring would relocate UNSMIL’s Special Envoy from Geneva to Tripoli and convert this position to that of a Special Representative, supported by two Deputy Special Representatives. Russia said it did not support the UK’s draft resolution, expressing concern over the timing and implementation of the restructuring, the scope of UNSMIL’s mandate following the endorsement of the strategic review’s recommendations, and language on the withdrawal of foreign fighters and mercenaries.

Following intense negotiations and two postponements of the adoption, the UK tabled a draft text, rolling over the mandate until 31 January 2022, which was adopted unanimously as resolution 2599. This timeframe was supposed to allow for the elections to take place and provide additional time for Council discussion. With the date of the elections unresolved and continuing divergent views on language regarding mercenaries and foreign fighters, the scope of the mission’s tasks, and human rights, the upcoming mandate renewal negotiation may be difficult.

Afghanistan

Expected Council Action

In January, the Security Council will receive a briefing on the situation in Afghanistan and the work of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Either the Secretary-General or Deborah Lyons, the Special Representative and head of UNAMA, will brief. A female representative of civil society is also expected to brief the Council.

Key Recent Developments

The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate. According to OCHA, 24.4 million Afghans, including 12.9 million children, are currently in need of humanitarian assistance. The latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report on Afghanistan notes that 55 percent of the population will experience crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity between November 2021 and March, a 35 percent increase over the same period last year. In a 14 December statement, a spokesperson for the World Food Programme (WFP) said that recent WFP surveys found that an estimated 98 percent of Afghans have insufficient food.

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is compounded by the

country’s economic woes. Prior to the Taliban’s takeover, 75 percent of Afghanistan’s public expenditure and 40 percent of its GDP were funded by international aid. International donors have largely suspended this aid in recent months, and the US has frozen approximately \$9.5 billion in assets belonging to the Afghan central bank, leading to a widespread liquidity crisis in the country. The de facto authorities are unable to pay the salaries of most civil servants, including teachers and doctors, and many Afghans cannot access basic public services. In a 22 November 2021 report, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) noted that Afghanistan’s financial system is critical to the provision of humanitarian assistance in the country and suggested that the system may be on the brink of collapse.

On 2 December 2021, Martin Griffiths, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, announced that the UN was considering measures designed to inject liquidity into the Afghan economy. Griffiths told reporters that the UN is “trying to urgently establish with support from the World Bank as well as the UN system, a currency swap initiative which will allow liquidity to go into the economy” and that he hopes “we get it

UN DOCUMENTS ON AFGHANISTAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2615 (22 December 2021) was on the 1988 Afghanistan sanctions regime and addressed the provision of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. **S/RES/2611** (17 December 2021) renewed the mandate of the Monitoring Team supporting the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee for a period of one year. **S/RES/2596** (17 September 2021) renewed UNAMA’s mandate until 17 March 2022. **S/RES/2593** (30 August 2021) addressed recent developments in Afghanistan, including the Taliban’s seizure of power and the 26 August attack at Kabul airport.

Afghanistan

up and running before the end of the month”. The World Bank has also taken steps to ease the crisis in Afghanistan. On 10 December, it announced that the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund will give \$180 million to the WFP and \$100 million to UNICEF. The World Bank administers the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund.

Many Afghans are fleeing the country. On 10 November 2021, Jan Egeland, the Secretary-General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, warned that thousands of Afghan refugees were crossing the border into Iran every day. Egeland noted that these refugees receive very little assistance and that he expects the flow of refugees to increase throughout the winter.

In a 3 December 2021 statement, a UNHCR spokesperson noted that internally displaced Afghans lack insulated shelters, sufficient fuel for heating, adequate food, and necessary medical supplies. The spokesperson called for an additional \$374.9 million in funding to assist UNHCR “for the Afghanistan Situation in 2022 – including continued winter response”.

As these crises mount, the Taliban regime has continued to seek recognition and assistance from the international community. In a speech delivered on 27 November 2021, the Taliban’s acting prime minister, Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund, called for international support and said that “the Islamic Emirate wants good relations with all countries and economic relations with them”. On 12 December, de facto Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi told the Associated Press that the Taliban seek “mercy and compassion” and urged the international community to lift sanctions on the group and unfreeze Afghan assets. Despite these requests, the Taliban have shown little willingness in their talks with the international community to make concessions regarding women’s rights or the establishment of an inclusive government, according to media reports.

The Taliban’s hopes for formal international recognition were dealt a blow on 2 December 2021 when Ambassador Anna Karin Eneström (Sweden) announced that the General Assembly’s Credentials Committee had deferred its decision regarding the Taliban’s claim for UN recognition. On 6 December, the General Assembly adopted a resolution approving the Credentials Committee’s recommendation. Afghanistan’s ambassador to the UN, Ghulam M. Isaczai, who had been appointed in June 2021 prior to the Taliban takeover, resigned on 15 December. On the following day, Afghanistan’s permanent mission to the UN issued a press statement indicating that: “Naseer Ahmad Faiq, Minister Counselor, has assumed the leadership of the Mission in the capacity of Charge d’Affaires”.

The security situation in Afghanistan remains an ongoing concern. During her 17 November 2021 briefing, Lyons noted the Taliban’s “inability to curb the expansion of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISIL-K)” and described it as a “major negative development”. She also observed that 334 attacks had been attributed to ISIL-K in 2021, compared to 60 attacks in 2020, and that the group continues to target the Shiite community.

On 17 December 2021, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2611, which renewed the mandate of the Monitoring Team supporting the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee for a period of one year.

On 22 December 2021, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2615, which determines that “humanitarian assistance and other activities that support basic human needs in

Afghanistan” will not constitute a violation of paragraph 1 (a) of resolution 2255 of 22 December 2015, that prohibits the provision of funds, financial assets, or economic resources to individuals listed under the 1988 Afghanistan sanctions regime. It indicates the Council’s intention to “review the implementation of this provision after a period of one year”.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 14 December 2021, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada Al-Nashif delivered an oral update in Geneva on the human rights situation in Afghanistan. Al-Nashif observed that the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan “threatens the most basic of human rights” and noted that “the situation is compounded by the impact of sanctions and the freezing of state assets”. She expressed alarm over credible allegations that more than 100 members of the former Afghan national security forces had been killed, despite the general amnesty announced by the Taliban in August. She also observed that women and girls now “face great uncertainty with respect to the rights to education, to livelihoods, and to participation, in which they made important gains in the past two decades”.

Women, Peace and Security

In a 25 November 2021 press release to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, Alison Davidian, Deputy Country Representative for UN Women Afghanistan, said that “lifesaving services” for survivors of gender-based violence have closed in the country “on account of fear of being targeted”. According to the press release, nine in ten Afghan women experience at least one form of intimate partner violence during their lives. Violence against women in Afghanistan has increased because of restrictions on women’s freedoms and rights, including their freedom of movement and the right to work. According to research by Amnesty International that was published on 6 December, key services for survivors of gender-based violence have been drastically curtailed since the Taliban takeover, leaving survivors and personnel involved in the delivery of protective services, including women’s shelter staff, at risk of violence and death. Amnesty International urged the Taliban to support and reopen shelters and ensure that the providers of protective services can work without fear of reprisals. It also called on the international community to provide funding for protective services and to urge the Taliban to uphold their obligations to women and girls.

Key Issues and Options

A key priority for the Council is determining the role that UNAMA will be able to play in Afghanistan following the Taliban’s takeover. Resolution 2596, which was adopted on 17 September 2021, extended UNAMA’s mandate until 17 March and requested that the Secretary-General submit a written report by 31 January outlining strategic and operational recommendations for the mandate in light of recent political, security and social developments. With these deadlines in mind, Council members will be following the situation in Afghanistan closely, focusing particularly on the security environment and the extent to which the Taliban are willing to allow UNAMA to carry out its work and adhere to Afghanistan’s international commitments.

The humanitarian and economic crises in Afghanistan are another issue for the Council to consider. An informal, closed meeting with humanitarian organisations that play a key role in Afghanistan could enable Council members to engage in a dialogue with these organisations and learn more about the current challenges and opportunities of aid delivery to the country.

The rising incidence of terrorism in Afghanistan is also a major concern for the Council. The Council could request a briefing from a counter-terrorism expert, which would provide an opportunity for Council members to understand better how the Council can contribute to the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council dynamics are continuing to evolve in the aftermath of the Taliban's takeover. China and Russia, which have kept their embassies in Kabul open, have both made public statements demonstrating a willingness to work with the Taliban and have also urged the international community to unfreeze Afghan assets. While the US and the UK are resisting calls to release Afghan funds, there are also signs that they may be willing to engage with the Taliban to a certain extent. The US has met with the Taliban to discuss the provision of humanitarian assistance; the UK has also met Taliban officials and is reportedly considering reopening its embassy in Kabul. China and Russia have also expressed their support for regional solutions to the

problems facing Afghanistan.

For certain Council members—including Ireland, Mexico, Norway, and states that share similar views—the challenges facing women and girls in Afghanistan are a particular concern. These members are likely to prioritise keeping the situation of women and girls at the forefront of the Council's work in relation to Afghanistan.

Council members are united regarding the importance of preventing Afghanistan from becoming a haven for terrorism. Differences (particularly among China, India, Russia, and the US) have emerged, however, over whether and how to name specific terrorist organisations in Council products.

Cyprus

Expected Council Action

In January, Security Council members are expected to receive a briefing in consultations on the situation in Cyprus. Recently appointed Special Representative and head of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) Colin Stewart is expected to brief. A representative from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs may also brief. The Council is expected to renew UNFICYP's mandate ahead of its 31 January expiry.

Key Recent Developments

On 27 September 2021, Secretary-General António Guterres hosted an informal meeting with Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar in an effort to find common ground for the resumption of peace talks. Anastasiades reportedly said after the meeting that the two leaders exchanged views while maintaining their divergent positions. Anastasiades remains firmly committed to a settlement based on a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation (BBF) with political equality as stipulated in previous Security Council resolutions, while Tatar insists on a two-state solution based on sovereign equality. The leaders also discussed various ways of overcoming the current deadlock and creating prospects for resuming “a creative dialogue”. More specifically, they discussed the appointment of a UN envoy to succeed Jane Holl Lute, who resigned the week prior to the meeting after accepting a senior position at an international energy and petrochemical company.

Lute was hired as a UN consultant in August 2018, and later referred to as UN Senior Official, to conduct consultations with the parties on the Secretary-General's behalf and to finalise the terms of reference for the peace negotiations. Following news of Lute's resignation, it appears that Guterres was considering the appointment of a personal or special envoy to assume her responsibilities. (Special envoys are usually assigned to undertake special missions related to matters of which the Security Council or the General Assembly are seized, while personal envoys undertake missions at the Secretary-General's initiative.)

According to media reports, Turkish Cypriot leader Tatar objected

to the appointment of a special envoy, arguing that such an envoy's ability to find common ground would be constrained by being forced to operate strictly within the BBF framework outlined in Security Council resolutions. A personal envoy, he suggested, would have greater autonomy to explore new ideas, including his proposed two-state solution. At the time of writing, Guterres had yet to appoint a new envoy.

On 4 November 2021, Guterres appointed Colin Stewart to succeed Elizabeth Spehar as Special Representative and head of UNFICYP. Stewart arrived on the island on 6 December 2021 and has since taken a tour of the buffer zone and held separate meetings with Anastasiades and Tatar.

From 2 to 4 December 2021, Pope Francis visited Cyprus to advocate for the rights of migrants and refugees. The number of refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Cyprus began to rise significantly in 2018. The internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus (RoC) received a total of 12,724 asylum applications in 2019, followed by a drop in 2020 resulting from COVID-19-related travel restrictions. In 2021, the number of applications once again increased. Between January and September, 8,605 people applied for refugee and asylum status, with an additional 6,483 applications pending. According to government officials, the vast majority of migrants entered the country illegally through the UN buffer zones. RoC authorities maintain that the situation is overwhelming state institutions and, as a result, submitted a request to the European Commission on 10 November 2021 to suspend applications for asylum by individuals entering the country illegally.

Key Issues and Options

Since the collapse of the 2017 unification talks in Crans-Montana, the key issue for the Security Council has been the lack of meaningful progress on the political front and the diminishing prospects for reaching a political settlement of the Cyprus problem. Given the current deadlock, the Council could take several actions to revive the peace process. It could encourage the parties to approach negotiations on the basis of “engagement without recognition” and

UN DOCUMENTS ON CYPRUS Security Council Resolution S/RES/2587 (29 July 2021) renewed UNFICYP's mandate until 31 January 2022. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2021/13 (23 July 2021) reaffirmed the status of Varosha as set out in previous resolutions and condemned the announcement by Turkish and Turkish Cypriot leaders on the further reopening of a part of the fenced-off area of Varosha. Security Council Reports S/2021/634 (9 July 2021) was the Secretary-General's report on his mission of good offices in Cyprus. S/2021/635 (9 July 2021) was on UNFICYP.

Cyprus

undertake significant confidence-building measures, which could help facilitate the resumption of negotiations.

The Council could also urge the parties to create a Track II process to complement Track I diplomatic efforts that rely on official contacts between authorities. A Track II component, involving unofficial interactions, could broaden the inclusivity of the peace talks and advance reconciliation and peacebuilding objectives. In this regard, the Council could call for the appointment of a new UN Special Envoy for Cyprus to oversee Track II processes, in addition to confidence-building measures and laying the groundwork for the resumption of Track I negotiations.

Another important issue, which the Council has increasingly emphasised over recent years, is the need to establish a mechanism for direct military contacts between the opposing forces in Cyprus, facilitated by UNFICYP. In its January 2020 mandate renewal resolution, the Council called for the establishment of such a mechanism and specifically urged UNFICYP to submit proposals to this end. UNFICYP presented its proposal to the parties in May 2020, and former Special Representative Spehar engaged in talks with both sides on the way forward. Considering heightened tensions in Cyprus and the ongoing violations in the fenced-off area of Varosha, the Council could put more pressure on the parties to form a military committee to help defuse tensions and prevent the escalation of violence.

Council Dynamics

Cyprus remains a low-intensity issue on the Council's agenda. Council members with a special interest in Cyprus that follow

the issue closely include France, Russia and the UK. In addition to being a guarantor power, the UK also serves as the penholder on this issue.

While the Council is united in its support for UNFICYP and a political process based on a BBF with political equality, members differ on the conditions and timeframe for the unification talks. Some seem to share the view that this process cannot be open-ended and that the Council could apply more pressure on the parties to revive the negotiations.

The US has emphasised that peacekeeping missions must support political processes and that the Council should reconsider the mandates of missions where progress on the political track is absent. During past UNFICYP mandate renewal negotiations, the US has supported a comprehensive strategic review of the mission as well as benchmarks and timelines for an exit strategy tied to the political process. Russia, however, has strongly opposed any attempt to exert pressure on both sides and affect negotiations in any way, maintaining that the process must be Cypriot-led and Cypriot-owned to achieve lasting results. It views UNFICYP as an instrument not to exert political pressure but to maintain security and monitor compliance with the buffer zone.

Most Council members seem wary of initiating drastic changes to the mission's mandate and size. Given the absence of progress in the unification talks, however, the US position might gain more support from other members that have been cautious on this issue. Nonetheless, Russia is likely to oppose any changes to the status quo.

UNRCCA (Central Asia)

In January, the Special Representative and head of the UN Regional Centre for Central Asia (UNRCCA), Natalia Gherman, is expected to brief Security Council members in closed consultations on UNRCCA's work.

Key Recent Developments

Gherman last briefed Council members in closed consultations on 26 July 2021. She provided an update on UNRCCA's activities pertaining to counter-terrorism, transboundary water management, border demarcation, and regional cooperation with Afghanistan.

Since Gherman's last briefing, the Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan has created several challenges for Central Asian states and altered regional dynamics. In a statement during the Council's 17 November 2021 Afghanistan meeting, Ambassador Jonibek Hikmat (Tajikistan) described the implications of the Taliban's takeover for the region. He noted that "the Taliban's takeover of Kabul has worsened the internal political, socioeconomic, and security situation in the country, which will have greater implications...for countries of the region.... The exportation of extremism, terrorism and radical ideologies, an increase in drug trafficking and a greater flow

of refugees are some of the immediate challenges the countries of the region could face".

Central Asian states and regional organisations have implemented several measures in response to these challenges. On 18 October 2021, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) undertook military drills involving over 5,000 troops in Tajikistan near its border with Afghanistan. The CSTO is a treaty body that comprises Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan. According to media reports, these drills were the largest military operation conducted on the Tajik-Afghan border in many years. Smaller exercises were also held by Russia and certain Central Asian states near Afghanistan's border in August and September, while Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan conducted military drills along the Uzbek-Afghan border in late November.

Central Asian states have also participated in regional conferences on Afghanistan and pledged to provide assistance to the Afghan population. On 20 October 2021, representatives of Central Asian states attended the third meeting of the "Moscow format", which was established in 2017 to discuss Afghanistan. The Moscow format consists of China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan,

UN DOCUMENTS ON UNRCCA [Security Council Letter S/2007/279](#) (7 May 2007) was from the Secretary-General on the establishment of a United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Ashgabat. [Security Council Press Statement SC/13179](#) (25 January 2018) welcomed further cooperation and coordination between UNRCCA, the Central Asian States, and relevant regional organisations, including those organisations of which the Central Asian States are members.

UNRCCA (Central Asia)

Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. In a joint statement following the meeting, these states proposed launching a “collective initiative to convene a broad-based international donor conference under the auspices of the UN as soon as possible”. According to media reports, leaders from Central Asia also committed to providing aid to Afghanistan at the 15th Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) summit, which took place in Turkmenistan on 28 November. The ECO was established to promote sustainable economic development in Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. Its members include Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

On 27 October 2021, Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov sparked tensions in the region by proposing a land swap between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The proposal was an apparent effort to resolve a border dispute between the two countries. This dispute descended into violence in April over the use of a shared water distribution facility, when clashes between civilians and soldiers from each country led to 50 people being killed and hundreds more injured.

Kyrgyzstan held parliamentary elections on 28 November 2021. In October 2020, Gherman conducted meetings with Kyrgyz officials in which she expressed the UN’s readiness to support the electoral process. She further emphasised that the elections must be free and fair, include the meaningful participation of women and youth, and demonstrate strong oversight of electoral procedures. In a 29 November 2021 statement, a team of international election observers said: “While election day was peaceful and voting was well organized in the vast majority of polling stations observed, significant procedural problems were noted during the vote count and the initial stages of tabulation.”

On 8 December 2021, UNRCCA hosted the 11th annual meeting of deputy foreign ministers of Central Asian states. The meeting was convened to exchange information on developments affecting peace and security in the region and discuss ways in which UNRCCA and Central Asian states can use preventive diplomacy to address existing and emerging challenges. In her statement, Gherman described efforts by Central Asian countries to improve and strengthen regional interaction. The deputy foreign ministers and senior UN officials discussed how UNRCCA can assist in preventing radicalisation, countering terrorism and finding solutions to transboundary water management issues. Participants in the meeting also expressed concern about the situation in Afghanistan and stressed that the UN should play a leading role in ensuring peace and stability and providing humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan.

Gherman also continued to focus on increasing the participation of women in public life in Central Asia. On 28 October 2021, she addressed a conference on sustainable development and women’s leadership in the region, which was hosted by the Central Asia Women Leaders’ Caucus (CAWLC). Among other issues, Gherman stressed the importance of working on relevant initiatives concerning the women, peace and security agenda across all levels of government and the need for inclusive and comprehensive approaches within and across the region.

Key Issues and Options

One of the main issues for the Council is how to make the best use of UNRCCA’s experience in conflict prevention and whether there is anything else the Council could do to support UNRCCA’s role in facilitating preventive diplomacy and regional cooperation.

Council members will be following the situation in Afghanistan and its impact on the region closely. With this in mind, the Council could consider inviting a representative of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to participate in the consultations and provide information regarding developments in the country that may affect the wider region. When UNAMA’s mandate is renewed in March, Council members could also request the Secretary-General to include an integrated analysis of the political, security and economic effects of the situation in Afghanistan throughout Central Asia. This analysis could draw on contributions from UNRCCA.

Council members are also likely to be interested in recent electoral developments in Kyrgyzstan. Council members could issue a press statement that reiterates the importance of the Joint Statement of Intent between the government of Kyrgyzstan and the UN. In this statement, which was issued on 13 November 2020, the Kyrgyz government pledged to maintain the rule of law and principles of good governance, protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, uphold the separation of powers, and fulfil its international obligations.

Council Dynamics

Council members are generally supportive of the work of UNRCCA and view it as an important tool in promoting cooperation in Central Asia. However, Council members have been unable to agree on a press statement on UNRCCA since January 2018, owing to disagreements about including references to cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

In addition, it appears that several Council members have raised human rights issues during the consultations. For example, in recent years, the US and past Council member Germany have referred to the situation of Uighur minorities in the region. Other members, including China and Russia, have opposed discussion of this matter, arguing that it is not related to UNRCCA’s mandate. Disagreements regarding references to foreign terrorist fighters also arose following the consultations that took place last January.

Security Council Report Staff

Karin Landgren
Executive Director

Shamala Kandiah Thompson
Chief Operating Officer

Paul Romita
Managing Editor

Alina Entelis
Deputy Managing Editor

Dawit Yirga Woldegerima
Deputy Managing Editor

Vladimir Sesar
Development and Outreach Manager

Audrey Waysse
Operations Manager

Sara Bertotti
Policy Analyst (Consultant)

Matthew Blainey
Policy Analyst

Tiffany Jenkins
Policy Analyst

Lindiwe Knutson
Policy Analyst

Robert Schupp
Policy Analyst

Benjamin Villanti
Policy Analyst

Anna Haven
Publications Assistant

Rodrigo Saad
Research Assistant

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

Design Point Five, NY

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

Telephone +1 212 759 6394

Fax +1 212 759 4038

Web securitycouncilreport.org

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