

Monthly Forecast

- 1 Overview
- 2 In Hindsight: Ukraine and the Tools of the UN
- 3 Status Update since our February Forecast
- 5 Afghanistan
- 7 South Sudan
- 8 Women, Peace and Security
- 10 Syria
- 12 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)
- 13 Libya
- 14 Yemen
- 15 Lebanon
- 17 Cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States
- 18 DPRK (North Korea)
- 20 Sudan
- 21 Democratic Republic of the Congo
- 23 Somalia

Overview

In March, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will hold the presidency of the Security Council.

The UAE is expected to organise two signature events. The first is an open debate on [Women, Peace and Security](#) with a focus on enabling public-private partnerships to contribute to women's economic empowerment in conflict-affected and fragile settings. UAE Minister of Climate Change and Environment Mariam bint Mohammed Saeed Hareb Almheiri is expected to chair the meeting. UN Women Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Kristalina Georgieva, and a civil society representative are the anticipated briefers.

The second signature event is a briefing on cooperation between the [UN and the League of Arab States \(LAS\)](#). Khalifa Shaheen Almarar, Minister of State at UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, will chair the meeting. UN Secretary-General António Guterres and LAS Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit are the anticipated briefers. The UAE intends to propose a presidential statement as a possible outcome of the meeting.

In March, the Security Council is scheduled to receive the annual briefing on the activities of the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe \(OSCE\)](#) from Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs Zbigniew Rau, in his capacity as the new OSCE Chairman-in-Office (CiO).

Middle East issues on the programme include:

- [Syria](#), meetings on political, humanitarian and chemical weapons tracks;
- [Golan Heights](#), consultations on the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF);
- [Yemen](#), monthly meeting on developments;
- [Lebanon](#), consultations on the implementation of resolution 1701; and

- [The Middle East, including the Palestinian question](#), the monthly meeting.

African issues on the programme of work in March are:

- [Libya](#), meeting on the latest developments in the country and the activities of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL);
- [Somalia](#), the reauthorisations of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and anti-piracy measures off the coast of Somalia;
- [South Sudan](#), meeting on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the renewal of the UNMISS mandate;
- [Sudan](#), briefing by the Chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, as well as a meeting on the situation in Sudan and the activities of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS); and
- [Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\)](#), meeting on recent developments and the work of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC.

Asian issues this month include the adoption of a resolution on the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in [Afghanistan](#) and the renewal of the 1718 [DPRK](#) sanctions regime.

In terms of thematic issues, the chair of the [1540 Committee](#)—which addresses the concern that non-state actors might use weapons of mass destruction for terrorist purposes—is scheduled to brief the Council.

An informal briefing on [peacekeeping](#) performance based on resolution 2436 of 21 September 2018 is also expected to take place in March.

A number of additional issues could be raised in March depending on developments, including [Ukraine](#) and [Ethiopia](#), among others.

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In Hindsight: Ukraine and the Tools of the UN

As Russia moved from massing troops on the border of eastern Ukraine to attacking Kyiv and other cities by land, sea and air over the course of 29 days, the Security Council remained highly focused on the situation in Ukraine. It convened for seven public meetings, including on the humanitarian situation. It voted on an Albanian-US draft condemning Russia's military operation on 25 February but failed to adopt it due to a Russian veto. And on 27 February, it adopted a resolution referring the situation to the General Assembly, acknowledging that the lack of unanimity among the Council's permanent members over the situation in Ukraine had prevented the Security Council from exercising its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. (For more information on the meetings, see our [31 January](#), [16 February](#), [22 February](#), [25 February](#) and [27 February](#) *What's in Blue* stories.)

The UN Charter has taken centre stage in the Council's recent deliberations on Ukraine. Council members have couched their interventions in the language of the Charter, particularly Article 2, which states that international disputes should be settled in a peaceful way and that all members shall refrain "in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations". Before Russia invaded Ukraine, members focused their statements in the Chamber on the need to de-escalate and pursue dialogue and diplomacy, staying largely within Chapter VI tools for the pacific settlement of disputes.

Some members suggested that the buildup of troops on Ukraine's border could be seen as a threat to international peace and security within the context of Article 39 of the Charter, which allows the Security Council to determine the existence of any threat to the peace. Although Article 39 falls under Chapter VII (the coercive instruments in the Council's toolkit), these members couched their remarks in the context of prevention consistent with Article 33 of the Charter, which calls on parties to a dispute to seek a solution through negotiations and other peaceful means. However, no specific suggestions were made for direct Council involvement in resolving the situation through peaceful means.

As it became clear that Russia was about to deploy troops to the two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine, members began to characterise Russia's actions as a clear violation of the fundamental principles of the UN Charter. At the Council's 21 February meeting, held immediately after Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree recognising the independence of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, the US said that an attack on Ukraine is "an attack on the UN, an attack on every sovereign member state and on the UN Charter". Other members such as Kenya referred to the growing trend of powerful states violating international law with little regard, stating that "multilateralism lies on its deathbed tonight".

In a 22 February statement, the Secretary-General declared that "the decision of the Russian Federation to recognize the so-called 'independence' of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions is a violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine". He went on to stress that the principles of the UN Charter were not an "a la carte menu" that could be applied selectively. As the Council met on 23 February and the Secretary-General appealed to Putin to stop his troops from attacking Ukraine, Russia announced its

"special military operation" and began its attack on Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities.

As members became aware that an attack had been launched, the tone of their interventions changed. The UK described the attack as "unprovoked" and "unjustified", while Ireland said that "the path for diplomacy" was now closed. In notifying the Council of Russia's latest actions, the Russian ambassador cited Article 51 of the UN Charter, which provides for "the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations". Russia has cited defence of the two breakaway republics and self-defence in the light of threats against itself as grounds for applying Article 51. However, legal experts have doubts about the legal justifications for Russia's attack on Ukraine based on Article 51.

In response to the Russian attack, Albania and the US produced a draft resolution with an explicit Chapter VII reference as well as language associated with Chapter VII. This draft, which was put in blue, condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its decision to recognise the independence of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. It seems that in response to China's preference for a Chapter VI resolution, the draft resolution was revised in an apparent effort to convince China to abstain, rather than cast a veto with Russia. The determination that the situation in Ukraine constituted a clear breach of international peace and security and that Russia had committed acts of aggression, as well as the reference to the Council acting under Chapter VII, was removed.

In addition, while retaining language from the UN Charter, the revised draft softened the Council's response. It "deplored" rather than "condemned" Russia's "aggression against Ukraine in violation of Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter" and its recognition "of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine as a violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and inconsistent with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations." It seems that these changes succeeded in convincing China to abstain rather than veto the resolution. It may also have persuaded at least one other member to abstain, ultimately leaving Russia as the only member voting against the resolution. While the original Albanian-US draft did not contain any enforcement measures, a Chapter VII resolution is often the gateway towards adopting measures such as sanctions or the use of force. Eleven members voted for the text, while China, India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) abstained.

During the explanation of vote, Norway said that in the "spirit of the Charter, Russia should abstain from voting". This was an oblique reference to Article 27(3), which states that on decisions under Chapter VI, and under paragraph 3 of Article 52, "a party to the dispute shall abstain from voting". Over the years, there have been at least 10 cases of "voluntary abstention" where a country has chosen to abstain or not to participate in a vote because of its involvement in a dispute. But this provision of the Charter, which in practice appears to be voluntary rather than obligatory, has not been used in 62 years. The last case of a country recusing itself from a vote, in keeping with Article 27 (3), was in 1960. With what appeared to be a Chapter VI resolution on the table, it seems members could have raised the issue of Russia's participation in the vote, invoking this Charter article. But there appears to be little appetite, particularly

In Hindsight: Ukraine and the Tools of the UN

among the permanent members, to go down this route, possibly for both political and procedural reasons. This current matter is not dissimilar to the Russian veto on a 15 March 2014 draft resolution that declared the referendum in Crimea invalid and urged a “peaceful resolution of this dispute”. Article 27(3) was not raised in the Council; however, in a General Assembly meeting on 27 March 2014, the representative of Liechtenstein argued that Russia should have abstained on that vote under Article 27 (3), saying that “It is important that the question finds the attention of the wider membership” (A/68/PV.80).

While all of the recent meetings on Ukraine have been open, Russia had originally suggested that the 21 February meeting be a private meeting. The meetings have been held under three different agenda items: “Threats to Peace and Security” (31 January); “Letter dated 28 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2014/136)” (21, 23, 25 27 and 28 February) and “Letter dated 13 April 2014 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2014/264) (17 February). All three are existing agenda items. The latter two agenda items have been regularly used since 2014, when meetings were called for by Ukraine and Russia following Russia’s annexation of Crimea. In recent years, the agenda item “Threats to international peace and security” has been used largely in the context of counter-terrorism.

Russia had been opposed to the 31 January meeting, apparently on the grounds that it had not threatened to invade Ukraine and to the use of “megaphone diplomacy”, and requested a procedural vote on the proposal to hold the meeting. The agenda was adopted with ten votes in favour, two against (China and Russia) and three abstentions (Gabon, India and Kenya), allowing the meeting to go ahead. (Votes on an agenda of the Council are considered procedural

matters; based on Article 27 (2) of the UN Charter, such a motion requires at least nine affirmative votes to pass, and the veto does not apply.)

Rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure featured prominently over the course of these meetings. Rule 37 provides for the participation of member states when the Security Council considers that their interests are especially affected. The 31 January meeting under Norway’s presidency saw participation from Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine. During the meetings under Russia’s presidency (that is, in February), only Germany and Ukraine participated under Rule 37, although it seems Latvia and Poland wrote to Russia, as the Council president, asking to be allowed to participate. It appears that in these instances, Council members chose not to challenge the President’s decision not to allow the participation of these members.

Ukraine raised rule 20 of the provisional rules of procedure in two of the meetings. This refers to a situation where, if the President of the Council is directly connected to a question that is being addressed, he should not preside and that the presidential chair should move to the member in the next alphabetical order. Ukraine also raised Article 6 of the UN Charter, which states that a member of the UN which has “persistently violated the principles contained in the present Charter may be expelled from the Organization by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council”.

Council members of varying political views can be expected to continue to cite the UN Charter as the basis for their actions as they grapple with the rapidly changing crisis in Ukraine. The UN Charter remains the cornerstone for Council members at a time when their primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security is especially crucial.

Status Update since our February Forecast

Debate on “General issues relating to sanctions”

On 7 February, the Russian Federation convened a debate on “General issues relating to sanctions: preventing their humanitarian and unintended consequences” as one of the signature events of its Council presidency (S/PV.8962). The meeting was held under the topic “General issues relating to sanctions”, which allows the Council to consider a range of UN sanctions-related matters. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths briefed. Non-Council members Iraq, Mali, South Sudan, and Venezuela (which spoke on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defense of the UN Charter) participated under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure.

Burkina Faso

On 8 February, Security Council members held closed consultations on Burkina Faso, following the 24 January coup d’état. The meeting

was held under the agenda item “Peace consolidation in West Africa”. Special Representative and head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) Mahamat Saleh Annadif briefed on the latest developments. On 9 February, Council members issued a press statement (SC/14790), initiated by the A3 (Gabon, Ghana and Kenya), that expressed serious concern about the unconstitutional change of government, took note of the decision of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the AU to suspend Burkina Faso from their respective institutions and activities until constitutional order is restored, and expressed support for regional mediation efforts.

Counter-terrorism

On 9 February, the Council held a briefing (S/PV.8963) on the Secretary-General’s 14th biannual strategic-level report on the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh). Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism and head of the

Status Update since our February Forecast

UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) Vladimir Voronkov and Acting Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) Weixiong Chen briefed.

Collective Security Treaty Organization

On 16 February, the Council held a debate on cooperation between the UN and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) (S/PV.8967). UN Secretary-General António Guterres and CSTO Secretary-General Stanislav Zas briefed. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov chaired the meeting. Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Ukraine

Several Ukraine-related activities took place in the Council in February. On 17 February, the Security Council held a briefing on the situation in Ukraine (S/PV.8968). Russia organised the meeting to mark the seventh anniversary of the “Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements”, also known as the Minsk II agreement, adopted on 12 February 2015, and to discuss its implementation. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo, Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) Mikko Kinnunen, OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) Chief Monitor Halit Çevik, and Ukrainian civil society activist Tetiana Montian briefed. Germany and Ukraine participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

On 21 February, the Council convened for an open meeting to discuss the recent escalation of tensions in and around Ukraine, including Moscow's 21 February decision to recognise the independence of the breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine (S/PV.8970). The meeting was requested by Ukraine, with support from several Council members, including Albania, France, Ireland, Norway, the UK, and the US. The meeting was held under the agenda item “Letter dated 28 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of the Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2014/136)”. DiCarlo briefed.

On 23 February, the Security Council held another open meeting, at Ukraine's request, to discuss the deteriorating security situation in the Donbas and the request made by the separatist leaders of the breakaway regions in Donetsk and Lugansk for military assistance from Russia (S/PV.8974). Secretary-General António Guterres and DiCarlo briefed the Council. Guterres delivered a direct appeal to President Putin to stop his troops from attacking Ukraine. While the Council met, Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered televised remarks announcing that a military operation had commenced in Ukraine, and several Ukrainian cities were shelled.

On 25 February, the Council voted on a draft resolution on Ukraine (S/2022/155). Russia vetoed the draft, which received 11 votes in favour, one against (Russia) and three abstentions (China, India and the UAE).

On 27 February, the Council adopted a resolution calling for an “emergency special session” (ESS) of the General Assembly

to consider and recommend collective action on the situation in Ukraine. This was followed by a Council meeting on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine on 28 February.

Haiti

On 18 January, the Security Council convened for a briefing, followed by consultations, to discuss the situation in Haiti (S/PV.8969). Special Representative and head of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) Helen La Lime briefed the Council, stressing the need for structural reforms to tackle gang violence, address impunity and corruption, strengthen the justice system, and transform the economy. At the end of the meeting, Council members issued press elements, urging all stakeholders to engage constructively to address the root causes of Haiti's instability and expressing concern about the humanitarian situation in the country.

Central African Republic

On 22 February, the Security Council met for a briefing, followed by consultations, on the Central African Republic (CAR) (S/PV.8971). Special Representative for CAR and head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) Mankeur Ndiaye, whose term ends on 28 February, briefed the Council on the Secretary-General's latest report on MINUSCA (S/2022/119). Other briefers included the Executive Secretary of the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), João Samuel Caholo, and Special Representative of the AU Commission and Head of the AU Office in the Central African Republic Matias Bertino Matondo. The CAR's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sylvie Baïpo-Temon, participated in the meeting and reiterated her government's request to lift UN sanctions on the CAR, which have been in place since 2013.

Iraq/Kuwait

On 22 February, the Security Council convened for a briefing on the UN Compensation Commission (UNCC) (S/PV.8972). Ambassador Michael Gaffey (Ireland), the president of the UNCC Governing Council and Ireland's Permanent Representative to the UN and other International Organisations in Geneva, briefed on the Governing Council's final report on the UNCC and the conclusion of its work. Iraq and Kuwait participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Security Council's provisional rules of procedure. Prior to the briefing, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2621 which, among other things, terminated the mandate of the UNCC and directed it to conclude the outstanding matters necessary for its closure by the end of 2022.

On 24 February, the Council convened for a briefing (S/PV.8975) on the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Special Representative and head of UNAMI Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert briefed on recent developments in Iraq and on the Secretary-General's latest reports on UNAMI (S/2022/103) and the issue of missing Kuwaiti property and missing third party and Kuwaiti nationals (S/2022/100). The briefing was followed by closed consultations.

Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 23 February, the Security Council held an open briefing,

Status Update since our February Forecast

followed by closed consultations, on: “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” (S/PV.8973). Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland briefed the Council on recent violent incidents in the West Bank. He also provided an update on settlement activity and demolitions across the

West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as on the reconstruction of Gaza. In their statements, several Council members addressed the recent tensions in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. Israel and the Observer State of Palestine participated in the open briefing.

Afghanistan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is expected to adopt a resolution on the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). UNAMA’s current mandate expires on 17 March.

The Council will also receive a briefing on the situation in Afghanistan and the work of UNAMA from Deborah Lyons, the Special Representative and head of UNAMA, as well as a briefing from a representative of Afghan civil society. The briefing will be followed by closed consultations.

Key Recent Developments

Between 23 and 25 January, members of the Taliban met in Oslo with officials from the EU, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, the UK, and the US, as well as individuals from different sectors of Afghan civil society. According to media reports, diplomats who attended these meetings told the Taliban that future humanitarian aid to Afghanistan would be linked to improvements in the human rights situation in the country. In a 27 January statement, special representatives and special envoys from Europe and the US who attended the meetings said they had urged the Taliban to do more to stop human rights violations and reaffirmed their expectation that the Taliban will uphold their commitments on counter-terrorism and drug trafficking. The statement also expressed concern regarding limitations on access to secondary schools for girls and underscored the importance of higher education and job opportunities for women.

From 7 to 11 February, members of the Taliban attended meetings with Swiss officials, humanitarian organisations, and the Director-General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, in Geneva. The Taliban attendees subsequently signed a statement in which they pledged to facilitate humanitarian action; protect humanitarian staff, including female workers; cooperate with mine-clearing activities; and protect all Afghans, among other matters.

Representatives of the EU and the US also met with Taliban officials on 15 and 16 February in Doha. According to media reports, the Taliban issued a statement after these meetings which noted that “all participants pledged to make all possible efforts for the overall wellbeing of the Afghan people”.

The humanitarian and economic crises in Afghanistan have worsened. A survey conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP) in December 2021 found that 98 percent of Afghans are not eating enough food, a 17 percent increase since the Taliban seized power. Essential services in the country are on the brink of collapse, with the

health system under particular strain from a new wave of COVID-19. According to a 15 February World Bank report, prices for basic household goods have continued to rise, and increasing numbers of Afghans are unable to withdraw funds from their bank accounts.

Both the UN and the US are attempting to address these crises. The UN is reportedly exploring the establishment of a swap facility that would allow the UN and humanitarian organisations to bypass the Taliban; through this process, they would access Afghan currency from private companies, whose foreign creditors would be paid in dollars abroad. According to media reports, UN agencies will also be involved in a World Bank plan to disburse approximately \$1 billion from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). Under the reported terms of the plan, these agencies would be responsible for distributing the funds disbursed by the ARTF directly to Afghans without involving the Taliban. The ARTF is administered by the World Bank. On 2 February, the US published guidance on its sanctions exemptions that specifically authorises cash shipments into Afghanistan and the processing of transactions related to humanitarian activities in the country by financial institutions.

On 11 February, US President Joe Biden signed an executive order blocking \$7 billion in assets held by the Afghan central bank in the US. These assets were initially frozen by the US Federal Reserve immediately following the Taliban’s takeover in August 2021. On the same day, the Biden administration announced that it “will seek to facilitate access to \$3.5 billion of those assets for the benefit of the Afghan people and for Afghanistan’s future” and said that the remaining \$3.5 billion would remain in the US and “be subject to ongoing litigation by US victims of terrorism”. The Taliban, who have been seeking access to the assets, warned that they will reconsider their policy towards the US if the administration’s decision is not reversed, while former Afghan president Hamid Karzai reportedly described the announcement as “unjust and unfair and an atrocity against Afghan people”.

The human rights situation in Afghanistan has also worsened, particularly for women and girls. The Secretary-General’s 28 January report on UNAMA’s mandate, which focused on the period from September 2021 to January 2022, notes that UNAMA received more than 100 credible allegations of extrajudicial killings of members of the former government, its security forces and those who worked with international military forces. The report also indicates that the education of girls “continues to be severely curtailed”, while four women’s rights activists and their families went missing after attending protests calling for the Taliban to respect women’s rights.

Afghanistan

Although the Taliban repeatedly denied having knowledge of their whereabouts, on 13 February, UNAMA announced that the activists had been released by the de facto authorities.

Human Rights Related Developments

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet will present her latest report on the human rights situation in Afghanistan during the Human Rights Council's 49th session, which will run from 28 February to 1 April. Among other matters, the report will focus on the accountability of perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses. The Human Rights Council will also consider Bachelet's report on technical assistance achievements in the field of human rights during this session.

Women, Peace and Security

On 7 December 2021, UN Women issued a "gender alert" analysing the impact of the evolving situation in Afghanistan on gender equality and women's rights. The alert found that there has been "a concerning and rapid shift to normalising discriminatory gender norms and a general curtailment of Afghan women and girls' fundamental rights and freedoms" since the Taliban's takeover. According to the alert, women in Afghanistan have reported "increased levels of restrictive gender norms and practices" affecting their right to education, freedom of expression and movement, and access to life-saving services. Furthermore, the operation of women's civil society organisations has been considerably curtailed, and many women have reported losing their jobs due to newly introduced restrictions. UN Women noted that the Taliban have agreed to allow female humanitarian workers to continue to operate; however, it also said that these agreements have mainly been verbal, leading to inconsistent implementation across the Afghan provinces, and that they are often conditioned on restrictive requirements, such as being escorted by a male relative. The alert recommends strengthening UNAMA's human rights mandate "with a particular focus on monitoring of human rights, especially women's rights".

Key Issues and Options

The main issue for the Council is determining the role that UNAMA will play in the country following the Taliban's takeover. The Secretary-General's report on strategic and operational recommendations for UNAMA's mandate outlined several strategic objectives for the mission, including working to promote responsible and inclusive Afghan governance and society; strengthening respect for and protection of fundamental rights and freedoms of all Afghans; and contributing to creating economic and social conditions that can lead to self-reliance and stability.

The report also recommended several priorities for UNAMA, such as providing outreach and political good offices, continuing to coordinate essential humanitarian assistance, facilitating structured policy dialogue with the de facto authorities, monitoring and reporting of human rights violations, coordinating international donors and organisations in relation to basic human needs, and advocating for the provision of essential public services, due process, and justice.

The report further recommended that a human rights service under the office of the SRSG be included in UNAMA's structure. Among other matters, it would monitor, report and advocate on the situation for civilians, including children, and advocate for the fundamental rights and freedoms of all Afghans, the protection of women's and girls' rights, and the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence. It would also monitor and report on civil,

political, social, economic, and cultural rights, with a view to assisting efforts to reduce poverty and support social cohesion, victims' rights, and civic engagement.

The primary question for the Council to consider is whether and how to incorporate the recommendations made in the report into UNAMA's mandate. In dealing with this issue, the Council could draw on the text in UNAMA's current mandate and reframe it to reflect the Secretary-General's recommendations and the situation on the ground. The Council could also choose to retain priorities in the current mandate that are not explicitly referred to in the recommendations, such as supporting the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all levels of decision-making. The Council may further wish to consider outlining priorities that are not referred to in either the current mandate or the Secretary-General's report. The Council could, for example, choose to include a reporting requirement that relates to counter-terrorism.

Council Dynamics

Council members seem to hold differing views on UNAMA's mandate and the Secretary-General's recommendations concerning its strategic objectives and priorities.

While some members are strongly in favour of a robust role for UNAMA in relation to human rights, others appear less supportive and may oppose including certain aspects of the Secretary-General's recommendations regarding this issue in the mandate, including the human rights monitoring and reporting requirement.

The political aspects of UNAMA's mandate are also likely to be contentious. Some Council members are particularly concerned about implicitly conferring legitimacy on the Taliban, either through the language that is used to describe their administration or the nature of the interaction between UNAMA and Taliban officials. Several of these members also seem to prefer a strong UN presence in Afghanistan that acts as a focal point for engagement between the international community and the Taliban. Other members appear less concerned about tacit recognition of the de facto authorities and may favour bilateral engagement with the Taliban over a leading role for the UN.

UNAMA's proposed role in coordinating international donors and organisations in relation to basic human needs is another potential area of disagreement. Council members appear to have different ideas about how this should work in practice, and some members are especially concerned about the oversight of aid and its potential diversion to the Taliban.

Certain Council members take the view that UNAMA's mandate should be particularly strong in relation to the situation of women and girls. These members are likely to push for some of the text regarding women, girls and gender equality that is in the existing mandate to be retained. Similarly, some members may argue that language on counter-narcotics and the security situation, two issues that are included in the current mandate but not directly mentioned in the Secretary-General's recommendations, should also be incorporated in the new mandate.

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

February marked the two-year anniversary of the establishment of the Transitional Government of National Unity and the start of a 36-month transitional period ahead of elections, in accordance with the terms of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) signed on 12 September 2018. While some progress has been made, including the formation of national and state executive and legislative bodies, overall implementation of the R-ARCSS remains slow, particularly in relation to transitional security arrangements, the enactment of key legislation by the Transitional National Legislative Assembly, and the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms.

While screening of the Necessary Unified Forces began in December 2021, timelins for their graduation and deployment and agreement on command structures remain outstanding. Another security challenge relates to internal disputes within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) between rival military factions. One encouraging sign is that the transitional government signed an agreement with the SPLM/A-IO Kit-Gwang faction in Khartoum on 16 January to end the conflict in Upper Nile State. On 18 February, media reports said major clashes had taken place despite the signing of the ceasefire agreement. Both sides reportedly accused each other of starting the violence in Malakal, the capital of Upper Nile State.

The Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the R-ARCSS, listed several recommendations in its most recent quarterly report (1 October to 31 December 2021). These include that the government implement the agreed upon constitution-making roadmap and make financial resources available for the completion of transitional security arrangements. Among other things, the report also recommended that the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) convene a "high level leadership retreat with a view to increasing the pace of implementation".

In February, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni invited South Sudan President Salva Kiir and First Vice President Riek Machar for talks in Kampala, including on the issue of security arrangements. At the time of writing, the meeting was expected to take place on 3-4 March.

The permanent ceasefire agreed to in June 2018 is holding, but intercommunal conflict continues in several parts of the country, including a recent escalation of conflict in greater Jonglei. In a statement on 10 February at an RJMEC meeting, Deputy Special Representative and deputy head of UNMISS Guang Cong said the mission is adapting its strategy "to prevent and respond to hotspots in an integrated manner, including through the flexible deployment of Temporary Operating Bases". He added that compared to 2020, 2021 had seen "a marked decrease of about 42 percent in the number of recorded civilian victims of violence". The mission also continues

to support strengthening the administration of justice, including through the deployment of mobile courts, he said.

The human rights, humanitarian, food security, and economic conditions in the country remain dire, with an enormously detrimental effect on civilians. According to OCHA's January Humanitarian Snapshot, an estimated 835,000 people have been affected by unprecedented levels of flooding since May 2021. There are 8.3 million people in need of assistance, 4.3 million people are displaced (two million internally displaced and 2.3 million refugees), and 34,000 internally displaced people live in the protection of civilians sites, according to OCHA. Humanitarian needs are projected to continue to grow in 2022. In his 10 February statement, Cong noted that the effects of flooding "demonstrates South Sudan's increasing vulnerability to climate change", adding that "with the rainy season soon approaching, additional flooding would be catastrophic".

The government has said elections will take place in 2023, but agreement has not been reached on an electoral timetable. On 27 October 2021, the Council adopted a presidential statement requesting the Secretary-General to establish an integrated electoral assistance team led by UNMISS. In his Council briefing on 15 December 2021, Special Representative and head of UNMISS Nicholas Haysom said that 2022 "presents a dramatic challenge...[that] will require both technical and political preparations, including an agreement on the constitution, as well as on the rules governing the election". He added that "we expect the domestic political temperature to rise as elections draw closer" and expressed concern over restrictions on civic space. Haysom also highlighted "South Sudan's high vulnerability to climate change" and said that an UNMISS-UN country team working group on climate change and security had been established.

On 25 January, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) adopted a communiqué requesting the AU Commission to liaise with the UN and IGAD "to coordinate a trilateral evaluation of the electoral and constitution-making needs of South Sudan" and to submit a report within two months. On the second anniversary of the formation of the transitional government, the PSC also undertook a three-day visit to South Sudan from 22 to 25 February.

The Council last renewed the mandate of UNMISS for one year on 12 March 2021 with the unanimous adoption of resolution 2567. The resolution maintained the overall ceilings of 17,000 troops and 2,101 police personnel. It retained the four core elements of the mandate: (i) protection of civilians; (ii) creating the conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance; (iii) supporting the implementation of the R-ARCSS and the peace process; and (iv) monitoring, investigating, and reporting on violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights.

The resolution contained a new paragraph deciding that UNMISS will advance a three-year strategic vision to prevent a return to civil war, build durable peace, and support elections. It also called on the government of South Sudan and all relevant actors to fulfil a series of priority measures before the end of UNMISS's mandate in March. These included providing security to re-designated protection of civilian sites, the graduation and deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces, and signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the AU to establish the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, as agreed under

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOUTH SUDAN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2567 (12 March 2021) renewed the mandate of UNMISS until 15 March 2022. **Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2021/20** (27 October 2021) requested the Secretary-General to establish an integrated electoral assistance team led by UNMISS. **Secretary-General's Report S/2021/1015** (7 December 2021) was the 90-day report on South Sudan. **Security Council Letter S/2022/42** (20 January 2022) **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8931** (15 December 2021) was a briefing on South Sudan.

South Sudan

Chapter 5 of the R-ARCSS. (For more, see our What's In Blue story of 11 March 2021.)

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 49th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) is expected to hold an interactive dialogue with the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan on 18 March and consider its report (A/HRC/49/78). On 29 March, the HRC will hold an interactive dialogue on the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on technical assistance and capacity-building for South Sudan (A/HRC/49/91).

The commission undertook its ninth visit to South Sudan from 7 to 12 February. Members of the commission met with representatives of the government, civil society, religious leaders, entities monitoring the R-ARCSS, UN agencies, and UNMISS. They discussed necessary steps and support to implementing transitional justice mechanisms.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 20 January, the Secretary-General sent a letter to the Council on the appointment of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee in accordance with resolution 2577, which was adopted on 28 May 2021 and extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts until 1 July. The appointment of the panel was delayed by several months, apparently because of holds placed by Russia. As a result, the panel was not able to submit an interim report by 1 December 2021, as requested in resolution 2577. A final report is due by 1 May. At the briefing on 15 December 2021, Mexico, the US and the UK expressed regret that candidates for the panel had been placed on hold.

Key Issues and Options

An immediate issue for the Council to consider is what changes are necessary to the mandate of UNMISS. The most likely option is for the Council to renew the mandate for one year, maintaining the four pillars of the mission's mandate while making some adjustments. In doing so, Council members will be informed by the findings and recommendations of the upcoming 90-day Secretary-General's report and might consider some of the following:

- increasing the mission's provision of technical and logistical support to advance the graduation and deployment of the Necessary Unified Forces;
- increasing the mission's support for legislative and constitution-making processes, including capacity-building support for the National Constitutional Amendment Committee;
- providing a clear mandate for the mission to support preparations

for free and fair elections, at the request of the government;

- emphasising the implementation of a mission-wide early-warning and response strategy;
- emphasising the need to maintain an agile and flexible posture to respond to a wide range of security scenarios;
- increasing the promotion of accountability for sexual and gender-based violence and human rights violations and abuses;
- increasing protection of human rights defenders and civil society leaders;
- emphasising the need for continued and enhanced engagement by the mission with the AU Commission and the AU High Level Committee on South Sudan, also known as the C5, as well as IGAD; and
- including stronger language about addressing the effects of climate change and mandating the mission to undertake risk assessments and risk management strategies on the implications of climate change.

Council Dynamics

Members are supportive of the UNMISS mandate and its four pillars. Last year, the penholder included a new paragraph specifying that the UNMISS mandate is designed to advance a three-year strategic vision focused on preventing a return to civil war in South Sudan; building a durable peace, both locally and nationally; and supporting inclusive, accountable governance and free, fair, and peaceful elections in keeping with the R-ARCSS.

Differences of view on issues such as how to depict the situation on the ground in South Sudan, the utility of sanctions, and the effects of climate change continue to colour Council dynamics, as they have in previous years. In this regard, during last year's negotiations, an area of disagreement among Council members was the extent to which positive language on the situation should be included. In addition, references to the South Sudan sanctions regime, and the arms embargo in particular, were contentious, with opposition from members such as China and Russia. One of the most difficult issues during negotiations last year was language on climate change, despite the support of most Council members, including the penholder. Silence was broken by Russia on the inclusion of language relating to climate change.

The US is the penholder on South Sudan. Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang (Gabon) chairs the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee.

Women, Peace and Security

Expected Council Action

On 8 March, the Security Council will hold a ministerial-level open debate on enabling public-private partnerships to contribute to women's economic empowerment in conflict-affected and fragile settings. One of the signature events of the presidency of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the meeting will be chaired by the UAE Minister of Climate Change and Environment, Mariam bint

Mohammed Saeed Hareb Almheiri. UNWomen Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Kristalina Georgieva, and a civil society representative are the anticipated briefers.

No outcome is expected.

Background and Key Recent Developments

It appears that the UAE intends to use the open debate to promote

UN DOCUMENTS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY Security Council Resolution S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000) was the first Security Council resolution on women, peace and security. Reaffirming women's key role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, it called for the adoption of a gender perspective in peace agreements and for the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence.

Women, Peace and Security

a discussion of how women's economic inclusion in crisis and conflict-affected contexts can entail their full, equal and meaningful participation and strengthen their decision-making and leadership. As announced by Ambassador Lana Zaki Nusseibeh (UAE) during the January open debate on protecting women's participation, a key focus of the March open debate will be on how partnerships with the private sector "can support women's participation and inclusion in peace and security, which is an area of the [women, peace and security (WPS)] agenda that remains underdeveloped". While touching upon different aspects of WPS, it seems that the open debate is intended to strengthen the Council's engagement with the "relief and recovery" pillar of the agenda and to mobilise tangible support for its implementation. (Adopted in 2000, resolution 1325—which established the WPS agenda—envisaged four pillars: "participation", "protection", "prevention", and "relief and recovery".)

The UAE's signature event is consistent with the 1 December 2021 statement of shared commitments on WPS, which the UAE has undertaken with Albania, Norway and former Council member Niger. In the statement, the four countries pledged to make WPS a "top priority" during their respective presidencies. Among other issues, the statement includes a commitment to making issues related to WPS "an explicit focus of at least one mandated geographic meeting of the Council or specifically host a WPS signature event in each Presidency". (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 2021.)

The 2021 Secretary-General's annual report on WPS recognised that "[g]ender equality is a question of power" and that persistent gaps remain in women's access to economic resources, as well as participation in peace and security, political leadership, and access to decision-making. The World Bank's 2021 Women, Business and the Law report noted that "discriminatory laws across the world continue to threaten not only women's fundamental human rights, but also their economic security". According to the report, women have on average only three-quarters of the rights guaranteed to men worldwide.

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected women through such factors as income loss and increased family care work. The 2021 Secretary-General's annual report noted that the global response to the pandemic has often overlooked women's economic security—against a backdrop in which military spending outpaced pandemic-related health spending in most of the world in 2020. According to the report, amongst the gender-sensitive policy measures deployed to respond to the pandemic, far less than two-thirds were "aimed at strengthening women's economic security or supporting unpaid care work". The report also noted that "women have been the hardest hit by the economic fallout of the pandemic" in conflict-affected countries. In September 2021, UN Women published a report entitled *Beyond COVID-19: A feminist plan for sustainability and social justice*. Among other issues, the report called for prioritising women's access to decent jobs, social protection and food security, public investment in the care economy and tackling climate change.

Through resolution 1889, adopted in 2009, the Security Council expressed concern "that women's capacity to engage in public

decision making and economic recovery often does not receive adequate recognition or financing in post-conflict situations" and called for measures to improve women's participation in peace processes, "including by enhancing their engagement in political and economic decision-making at early stages of recovery processes".

Adopted in 2013, resolution 2122 requested the Secretary-General's Special Envoys and Special Representatives to consult regularly with women's organisations and women leaders, "including socially and/or economically excluded groups of women". It also welcomed a 2013 Peacebuilding Commission declaration which recognised that women's economic empowerment "greatly contributes to the effectiveness of post-conflict economic activities and economic growth" and affirmed the need for UN-supported post-conflict initiatives "to promote the economic empowerment of women and their equal engagement alongside men in post-conflict economic recovery".

At the same time, business-related abuses and their effects on women, including in conflict and post-conflict situations, remain a source of concern. Celia Umenza Velasco, legal coordinator for the Indigenous Reservation of Tacueyó and a member of the Association of Indigenous Cabildos of the North of Cauca (Colombia), highlighted the harmful interconnections among negative business practices, environmental damage and gender and rights abuses during the Council's October 2021 WPS annual open debate. She said, "Indigenous communities oppose logging, mining, agribusiness and other large-scale extractive and infrastructure projects because they threaten the environment and deplete our natural resources." She added that indigenous people have been killed "for protecting our waterways, forests, flowers and fauna, when their courage and dedication should be held up as a model in the non-violent struggle for territorial rights".

The 8 March open debate's objective to promote discussion of how public-private partnerships can mobilise economic support for the WPS agenda is expected to draw on initiatives like the multi-stakeholder Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (WPS-HA). With its secretariat in UN Women, the WPS-HA Compact was launched on 2 July 2021 at the Generation Equality Forum in Paris. It brings together UN member states, UN entities, regional organisations, civil society groups and the private sector to achieve substantive change on WPS and humanitarian processes by mobilising action under five thematic areas within which the Compact signatories are requested to self-select actions for implementation over a five-year period. The five areas are:

- financing the WPS agenda and gender equality in humanitarian programming;
- women's meaningful participation in peace processes;
- women's economic security, access to resources, and other essential services;
- women's leadership and agency across peace, security and humanitarian sectors; and
- protection of women in conflict and crisis contexts, including women human rights defenders.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In June 2011, the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) unanimously endorsed the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and established the

Women, Peace and Security

Working Group on Business and Human Rights. The Guiding Principles are a set of guidelines defining the key duties and responsibilities of states and business enterprises. In its 2020 report on business-related human rights abuses in conflict and post-conflict contexts, the working group said that “more decisive action” is needed “to integrate business and human rights into peace and security frameworks” and called on businesses to strengthen their human rights due diligence through a gender-responsive approach. (Human rights due diligence is the ongoing process through which companies identify and address their human rights impact.)

Noting that most states and businesses do not pay sufficient attention to gender equality and women's experiences in their implementation of the Guiding Principles, the working group's 2019 report to the HRC provided gender guidance on the Guiding Principles and called on states and businesses to “work together with women's organizations and all other relevant actors to ensure systematic changes to discriminatory power structures, social norms and hostile environments that are barriers to women's equal enjoyment of human rights in all spheres”.

Key Issues and Options

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

The UAE, as the Council president for March, could prepare a chair's summary of the meeting to capture salient themes of the discussion. (When the Security Council held a meeting in 2004 on “the role of business in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and postconflict peace-building”, Germany, as the Council president, issued a chair's summary highlighting the key themes of the discussion.) Another

option would be to convene a follow-up meeting in one year's time.

Council Dynamics

While China and Russia have often sought to highlight the importance of development and economic empowerment for the WPS agenda, other members, including European countries, have expressed concern that a preponderant focus on economic issues could overshadow the human rights aspects of the agenda. These divisions were particularly evident in 2020 during the negotiations on a draft resolution commemorating the 20th anniversary of resolution 1325. Proposed by Russia, the draft failed to garner nine affirmative votes (there were abstentions by Belgium, Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Niger, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the UK, and the US). One reason some Council members abstained was the perception that the proposed text was not adequately balanced between the socioeconomic and rights-based aspects of the agenda. China's explanation of vote stressed the attainment of sustainable development and women's economic empowerment as key factors towards conflict prevention and peace, and the strengthening of both protection and participation. For its part, the UK said that the draft resolution failed “to reflect core components of the framework, such as the essential rights-based approach and the structural barriers to gender equality”.

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.

Syria

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is expected to meet on the political, humanitarian, and chemical weapons tracks in Syria.

Key Recent Developments

Syria continues to face the devastating effects of nearly 11 years of civil war. There are no signs of diplomatic progress that could end the ongoing conflict, and the UN estimates that 14.6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in the country. In his December 2021 report on the humanitarian situation in Syria, Secretary-General António Guterres concluded that the “socioeconomic situation continues to decline, basic social services are strained and food insecurity is on the rise”. He further expressed concern about “[c]ontinued impunity for serious violations and abuses of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law”.

Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefed the Council on the political situation in Syria on 26 January. He noted that he had been consulting various key stakeholders in Geneva since December 2021—the Syrian government, the Syrian Negotiations Commission (that is, the opposition), the EU, France, Germany, Italy, the League of Arab States, Qatar, Russia, Turkey, the UK, and the US—on “a range of steps that could begin to impact the conflict dynamics, [and] build some trust and confidence between and among Syrians

and international stakeholders...within the framework of resolution 2254”. (Adopted in December 2015, resolution 2254 called for a political solution to the Syria crisis.) He said that these consultations are part of a “step by step, step for step” process, whereby he is asking interlocutors what concessions they might make in exchange for reciprocal actions from others on matters such as:

- abductees, detainees, and missing persons;
- humanitarian assistance and early recovery;
- conditions for dignified, safe and voluntary refugee returns;
- the restoration of socioeconomic conditions; and
- diplomatic issues.

On 16 February, following a meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mikdad, Pedersen shared details of the meeting with the press. He noted that he had shared with Mikdad his idea for the “step by step, step for step” process that included conversations with various parties with a stake in the situation in Syria. He also expressed hope that a seventh round of the Syria Constitutional Committee's drafting body could meet in March.

Terrorism remains a significant challenge in Syria. On 20 January, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militants raided the Ghwayran/Al-Sina'a prison in Al-Hasekeh in northeast Syria in an effort to free fellow ISIL fighters. Fighting ensued in and around

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) focused on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. **Secretary-General's Report S/2021/1029** (15 December 2021) was a report on the humanitarian situation in Syria. **Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8978** (25 February 2022) was a meeting on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria. **S/PV.8955** (26 January 2022) was a briefing on the political situation in Syria.

Syria

the prison between ISIL extremists and the Syrian Defence Forces (SDF), the Kurdish-led group that operates the prison. While the SDF retook control of the prison after several days, the violence in the area led to the displacement of nearly 45,000 people, mainly children and women, according to a 27 January UNICEF statement. On 25 January, Fionnuala Ni Aoláin, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, expressed “serious concerns for the welfare of 700 children” held at the prison and “called on States to urgently repatriate all their children detained in the country”. According to the SDF, the fighting ultimately resulted in the deaths of over 500 people, mainly ISIL fighters. An unknown number of prisoners also escaped.

On 2 February, US special forces led a raid in northwest Syria that resulted in the death of ISIL leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi. During the attack, al-Qurayshi detonated a bomb, killing himself and members of his family. During a counter-terrorism briefing in the Security Council on 9 February, Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism and head of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) Vladimir Voronkov said that while al-Qurayshi’s demise was encouraging, “Da’esh [ISIL] is known for its ability to regroup despite similar losses in the past, maintaining and intensifying its activities in conflict-afflicted regions across the world”. He added that in Iraq and Syria the group “continues to operate as an entrenched rural insurgency, exploiting the porous borders between the countries, where it retains between 6,000 and 10,000 fighters”.

On 25 February, the Security Council was briefed on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria. Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefed via videoconference on the political situation, while Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya briefed on the humanitarian track.

At the time of writing, the Council was scheduled to hold a meeting on 28 February on the Syria chemical weapons track.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In resolution 46/22, the Human Rights Council (HRC) extended the mandate of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Syria for a period of one year and requested the COI to present an updated written report (A/HRC/49/77) to the Council during an interactive dialogue at its 49th session, which will take place from 28 February to 1 April.

On 10 February, UN Human Rights experts issued a statement calling on Canada to urgently repatriate a Canadian citizen, Kimberly Polman, who is currently being held at Roj camp in Syria’s northeast in conditions that meet the “threshold of torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment”. Polman has been detained at various camps throughout Syria since March 2019 without any legal charges or legal process. A recent examination by Doctors Without Borders stated that her condition is “life threatening”.

Women, Peace and Security Developments

Thuraya Hejazi – a political activist who heads the Release Me project in Syria, an organisation that strives to empower female survivors of violence and develop local peace initiatives – briefed the Council on 26 January. Hijazi called on the Council to work towards a political solution to the conflict that includes the active participation of women and links such a solution to “accountability in a way that guarantees women’s rights”.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is how it can support the Special Envoy’s efforts to promote the “step by step, step for step” formula to build positive momentum on the political track in Syria.

The continuing humanitarian crisis in the country remains an ongoing concern for Council members. The country continues to contend with an ever-worsening economic situation, rising food and fuel prices, increased unemployment, and a growing COVID-19 caseload.

Another important issue for the Council is the continued activity of Islamic State militants in Syria, as reflected by the violence in Al-Hasekeh in late January.

One option for the Council is to hold a private meeting that includes the participation of non-Council member states with a stake in the Syrian conflict to discuss ways to support Pedersen’s “step by step, step for step” strategy. The Council could also consider adopting a statement that supports the Special Envoy’s efforts to reinvigorate the political track and expresses concern about the continuing threat of ISIS in Syria.

Council Dynamics

There are stark differences of view in the Council on Syria. China and Russia tend to be sympathetic to the Syrian government, while the P3 (France, the UK and the US) and others are highly critical of the government for violating international human rights law and international humanitarian law and for its reluctance to make concessions to achieve a political solution to the conflict. Many members among this latter group also underscore the need to hold accountable perpetrators of violence against civilians in Syria.

One rare area of convergence among members is concern over the influence of ISIL in the conflict. In this respect, several members have expressed alarm at the prison break in Al-Hasekeh.

For the past several years, Council members have held monthly meetings on the political, humanitarian and chemical weapons tracks in Syria. At the time of writing, members were discussing proposals for changing the periodicity of these meetings; a final agreement has yet to be reached.

Ireland and Norway are the humanitarian penholders on Syria.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

Expected Council Action

In March, Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zbigniew Rau, in his capacity as the new Chairman-in-Office (CiO) for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), is expected to brief the Security Council on the organisation's activities.

Background and Key Recent Developments

The chair of the OSCE rotates yearly, and on 1 January, Poland succeeded Sweden in this function. March's briefing will give Rau an opportunity to inform the Council about Poland's main priorities as chair and discuss possible avenues for UN-OSCE cooperation.

Poland has indicated that, during its term as CiO, it will be guided by a human-centred approach and will focus on supporting OSCE's conflict-resolution processes and promoting comprehensive assistance to conflict-affected populations. Poland outlined its priorities as OSCE chair at a 13 January session of the OSCE Permanent Council. At that meeting, Rau said that the risk of war in the OSCE area was at its highest point in the past 30 years. The crisis in and around Ukraine, he added, poses a challenge to Europe's stability and security. He emphasised that the Polish term would ensure that the OSCE plays a key role in addressing the current security situation in eastern Europe.

While the situation in Ukraine is not the only focus of March's briefing, developments on the issue are likely to dominate the discussions. The conflict in eastern Ukraine has consistently featured in the work of each CiO since hostilities began in 2014. The OSCE is the most prominent regional organisation operating in Ukraine and is directly responsible for monitoring the 2015 Minsk II agreement, which outlined steps for ending the conflict in Ukraine through a political settlement. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) gathers daily information related to ceasefire violations and the withdrawal of heavy weapons in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Additionally, the OSCE participates in the work of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG)—consisting of the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine—which serves as a forum for addressing implementation aspects of the Minsk agreements. Members may be interested in hearing about the impact of the current crisis in Ukraine on the work of the SMM and the future of the Minsk II agreement.

Given the OSCE's presence and access to information on the ground, Rau's briefing may provide Council members with an opportunity to learn more about recent developments on the ground following Russia's military offensive in Ukraine. On 23 February, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a "special military operation" in the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine. Shortly after the announcement, explosions were heard across several cities in central and eastern Ukraine, including the capital, Kyiv, and Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city.

Since 24 February, Russia has been attacking Ukraine on multiple fronts—including western cities such as Lviv and the southern city of Kherson—from land, air and sea. The Russian military has been carrying out rocket attacks targeting airports and military installations and ground forces are reportedly using missiles and

long-range artillery as they advance into mainland Ukraine. As at 27 February, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) documented at least 94 civilian deaths and 282 injuries, while noting that these figures may be an underestimate. Moreover, at least 368,000 people have fled Ukraine since the attacks began on 24 February, according to UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.

The aggression against Ukraine follows several months of heightened tensions resulting from Russia's build-up of military forces near Ukraine's borders. The Security Council held six meetings on the situation in Ukraine between 31 January and 28 February. Tabled by the US and Albania, co-penholders on Ukraine, a draft resolution deploring Russia's aggression against Ukraine was put to a vote on 25 February. The draft text also welcomed and urged the continued efforts of the OSCE to support de-escalation of the current situation. However, the resolution failed to be adopted owing to a Russian veto. On 27 February, the Council adopted a draft resolution calling for an "emergency special session" (ESS) of the General Assembly to consider and recommend collective action on the situation in Ukraine. This was followed by a meeting on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine on 28 February. (For more information, see our [31 January](#), [16 February](#), [22 February](#), [25 February](#), and [27 February](#) *What's in Blue* stories.)

In addition to the situation in Ukraine, Rau may address other conflict situations in the OSCE's area of operations during the briefing. The OSCE plays a role in international efforts regarding frozen conflicts in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transdniestria. Given that these conflicts are not regularly discussed by the Council, some members might want to use the briefing to hear about the OSCE's mediation efforts in these situations.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Most Council members strongly support the work of the OSCE. However, reaching agreement on Council products on UN-OSCE cooperation is difficult because of members' sharply diverging positions on issues within the OSCE's purview, most notably Ukraine, and on the broader European security architecture. At the 28th meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council on 2 December 2021, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov said that the OSCE is "in a depressing state today" and that it had become "hostage to the bloc-based discipline within the European Union and NATO".

Putin has long argued that the enlargement of NATO poses an existential threat to Russia. In an opinion piece published on 5 January, Rau indicated a readiness to hold a dialogue on a revised European security paradigm to address Russia's concerns. On 8 February, Rau launched the OSCE's Renewed European Security Dialogue initiative, stating that "it is imperative that through diplomacy and dialogue we shall find a way to de-escalate, and to begin rebuilding trust, transparency and cooperation". The subsequent Russian invasion of Ukraine in late February, which most Council members have deplored, poses a major challenge to the European security order.

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE OSCE [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2623](#) (27 February 2022) invoked an Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly to consider the conflict and recommend collective action on the situation in Ukraine. [S/RES/2202](#) (17 February 2015) endorsed the "Package of measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements" signed on 12 February 2015. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8968](#) (17 February 2022) was a briefing on the situation in Ukraine, organised by Russia to mark the seventh anniversary of the Minsk II agreement and to discuss its implementation. [S/PV.8960](#) (31 January 2022) was an open meeting on Ukraine, under the agenda item "Threats to international peace and security". [Other S/2022/155](#) (25 February 2022) was the vetoed draft resolution deploring Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Libya

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council will hold a briefing, followed by consultations, on the situation in Libya. As the Secretary-General is yet to appoint a Special Envoy, a representative of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs may brief the Council. The chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti (India), is also scheduled to brief on the committee's activities.

Key Recent Developments

Since the Council last discussed Libya on 24 January, the situation in the country has continued to be marked by political turmoil following the postponement of elections that were scheduled to take place on 24 December 2021. On 10 February, the House of Representatives appointed former interior minister Fathi Bashagha as interim prime minister; however, Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah, the incumbent prime minister elected on 5 February 2021 by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF), remains in office and has challenged the legitimacy of Bashagha's appointment. The House of Representatives' announcement came shortly after an apparent assassination attempt on Dbeiba by unknown assailants in Tripoli.

The House of Representatives justified Bashagha's appointment by citing the failure to hold elections under Dbeibah's leadership. It appointed a committee to chart a new roadmap for elections within 14 months. That new political roadmap was put to a vote before the House of Representatives on 16 February and adopted as an amendment to Libya's transitional constitution. It envisages the creation of a new electoral commission and a 24-member committee consisting of representatives from Libya's three regions to draft a new constitution.

Dbeibah has reportedly said that he would only step down after the completion of national elections. On 21 February, he announced a new electoral roadmap with a view to holding elections by June. This roadmap reportedly suggests a plan to organise parliamentary elections by 24 June and hold a constitutional referendum on the same day. The newly elected parliament would then be inaugurated and would endorse a final constitutional text, after which presidential elections would take place. Dbeibah's opponents have argued that his term ended with the failure to hold the poll on 24 December. Notwithstanding Dbeibah's announcement, the House of Representatives and Bashagha continue working towards the formation of a new cabinet and the implementation of the House of Representatives' roadmap.

Reacting to Bashagha's appointment in an 11 February statement, UN Secretary-General António Guterres took note of the vote of the House of Representatives to designate a new prime minister and called on all parties and institutions to continue to ensure that such decisions are taken in a transparent and consensual manner. He also appealed to them to preserve the stability of Libya as a top priority.

Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Libya Stephanie Williams has continued her outreach efforts with Libyan stakeholders. On 13 February, she met separately with Bashagha and Dbeibah, and stressed the need to maintain calm and stability in the country. She also stressed the importance of a sustained and continued focus on holding free, fair and inclusive national elections within the

shortest timeframe possible. On the same day, Bashagha announced that he was starting consultations to form his cabinet. At time of writing, his proposed cabinet nominations were scheduled for a vote of confidence in the House of Representatives on 28 February.

On 17 February, Libya marked the 11th anniversary of its revolution amid fears that the rivalry between Bashagha and Dbeibah could plunge the country into another cycle of instability and violence.

In a 22 February tweet, Williams said that she had met with representatives of the High Council of State, who reportedly briefed her on progress in developing the electoral roadmap. A few days earlier, a Government of National Unity spokesperson had accused Williams of bias—an accusation later refuted by the Deputy Head of the Presidential Council, Abdullah Al-Lafi, who stressed that the advisor was unbiased and “keen on building bridges with all Libyan parties”, according to media reports.

The High Council of State met on 24 February to discuss its position on the rival prime ministers and rejected the House of Representatives' initiative to appoint Bashagha as prime minister.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In resolution 48/25 of 4 October 2021, the Human Rights Council (HRC) extended the mandate of the fact-finding mission on Libya for nine months. The HRC also requested that the mission present a follow-up report to the Council at its 49th session, which will take place between 28 February and 1 April.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is how to resolve the current political impasse following the decision of the House of Representatives to designate a new prime minister. The Council has been focused on promoting the unification of Libyan state institutions after years of two de facto parallel governments—one based in Tripoli and the other in Tobruk—a situation that developed during the process of forming Libya's democratic state after the toppling of the Qaddafi regime in 2011. Council members may call on all parties to avoid a reversal of the gains made toward re-unifying Libya's state institutions.

The other priority issue is related to the organisation of national elections and how to support Libyan parties in agreeing on an electoral roadmap with the broad support of all segments of Libyan society. In this regard, Council members may appeal to all parties and institutions to sort out their differences and work together towards holding national elections in the shortest timeframe possible.

Recent political developments may also place renewed focus on the question of the leadership of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). Resolution 2519 of 31 January recalled that the mission should be led by a Special Envoy. At the time of writing, the Secretary-General's appointment of the Special Envoy remained pending.

An option for the Council is to issue a statement calling on Libyan political actors and state institutions to preserve the country's unity and stability, address their political differences through dialogue, and remain focused on organising elections to meet the aspirations of the Libyan people.

Council Dynamics

How the Council react to the recent political developments remains

UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2619 (31 January 2022) extended UNSMIL's mandate until 30 April 2022. 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; it was adopted with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (China and Russia). 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. Secretary-General's Report S/2022/31 (17 January 2022) covered developments in Libya between 25 August 2021 and 17 January 2022. Security Council Letter S/2021/716 (6 August 2021) was from the Secretary-General, transmitting the strategic review of UNSMIL.

Libya

to be seen. On 14 February, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova expressed the hope that “Libya’s new government led by Bashagha will be able to unify the Libyan society which will help to successfully cope with difficult tasks of the transitional period, including preparations to hold nationwide elections”.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is expected to hold its monthly briefing and consultations on Yemen with UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg and a representative of OCHA.

Key Recent Developments

The escalation of the war in Yemen and the risk of further regional spillover following the Houthi rebel group’s missile and drone attacks against the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and retaliatory airstrikes in January, remained major concerns over the past month.

Briefing the Security Council on 15 February, Grundberg said that he echoed the UN Secretary-General’s condemnation of the Houthi attacks on the UAE in January, which demonstrated how “this conflict risks spiralling out of control”. He also described as “alarming” the increase in airstrikes in Yemen, including on residential areas and civilian infrastructure. Grundberg updated the Council on progress towards developing a framework for a multi-track political process. He announced that, starting the following week, he would hold bilateral consultations with Yemeni stakeholders—including the warring parties, political parties, civil society representatives, and experts in the political, security and economic areas—to inform and refine this framework. He said that he intended to present the framework “later this spring”. At the same time, the UN Envoy stressed that he was exploring every opportunity for an immediate de-escalation, although these efforts continue to be frustrated as the parties’ “positions are mutually exclusive with demands on sequencing and guarantees unable to be met by the other side”. On 24 February, in closed consultations that Russia and the UAE requested amid their different positions in negotiations on the Yemen sanctions renewal, Grundberg informed members that the consultations process on his framework for a political process would now start on 7 March.

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths also briefed at the 15 February Council briefing. Griffiths reported that there were over 650 civilian casualties in the Yemen conflict during January, the highest monthly figure in three years. In this regard, he highlighted the 21 January airstrike on a prison in Saada, resulting in more than 300 deaths or injuries, carried out by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, which supports the Yemeni government against the Houthis.

Griffiths also emphasised that the financial shortage facing the aid operation in Yemen, which beginning in March could force the further scaling-back or termination of food rations for eight million

Council members may differ in their calls for the appointment of a Special Envoy. Some may urge the Secretary-General to make this appointment expeditiously, while others, especially the US, may place more emphasis on expressing support for Williams’ mediation efforts.

people and the cancellation of most UN humanitarian flights. According to Griffiths, “the scale of the current [funding] gaps are unprecedented in Yemen”. In closed consultations on 15 February, Major General Michael Beary delivered his first briefing to Council members since he assumed his duties as the head of the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) on 19 January.

On the ground, the Houthis have continued their offensive to take oil and gas-rich Marib governorate despite their territorial losses since January. During February, the newly formed “Happy Yemen Brigades”—which are reportedly composed of northern tribal and Salafi fighters—launched operations against the Houthis in the northern Hajjah and Saada governorates. A Houthi drone attack targeting Saudi Arabia’s Abha airport injured 12 civilians on 10 February. Another bomb-laden drone injured 16 civilians on 21 February in an attack on King Abdullah Airport in the Saudi city of Jizan, near the border with Yemen.

The UN announced progress towards finding a solution to the decrepit FSO Safer oil tanker that is moored in the Red Sea off the Houthi-held Ras Isa oil terminal and is at risk of an oil spill. UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen David Gressly has been coordinating a proposal to offload the estimated 1.15 million barrels of oil from the FSO Safer to a new vessel that would allow the FSO Safer to be towed away. In a 5 February statement, Gressly said that Yemeni government officials have confirmed their support for the plan and that he had held constructive talks with senior Houthi officials.

Sanction-Related Developments

On 28 February, the Security Council adopted resolution 2624, renewing the Yemen financial and travel ban sanctions until 28 February 2023 and the mandate of the Yemen Panel of Experts until 28 March 2023. Brazil, Ireland, Mexico and Norway abstained on the vote. (For more, see our [What’s In Blue story of 28 February 2022](#).)

Key Issues and Options

Key issues include the war’s escalation and the risk of further regional spillover. Grundberg’s effort to restart an inclusive political process, based on the framework he is developing that addresses political, security and economic issues, remains critical. Members may encourage Grundberg to continue to develop and complete his framework for an inclusive political process, which the Council could then endorse.

Key issues related to Yemen’s humanitarian crisis include protecting civilians, preventing famine, improving humanitarian access,

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2624 (28 February 2022) renewed the Yemen sanctions regime for one year. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8966** (15 February 2022) was a briefing on Yemen. **Security Council Press Statement SC/14771** (21 January 2022) condemned the “heinous terrorist attacks” in Abu Dhabi on 17 January that were committed and claimed by the Houthis.

Yemen

supporting the economy, and raising funds for relief efforts. The annual pledging event for Yemen's humanitarian response, being hosted by Sweden and Switzerland, is scheduled for 16 March. 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 also urge UN member states to support the economic framework that the UN has developed to stabilise the Yemeni rial, lower commodity prices, and pay civil servants' salaries.

Council Dynamics

Council members have been largely united in supporting the UN envoy's effort to restart a political process and in their calls for a ceasefire or de-escalation. There has also been widespread concern about the humanitarian situation and the threat posed by the FSO Safer. Differences in the Council have tended to involve Russia's preference for reducing references singling out the Houthis in Council products, as opposed to some other members that favour being more critical of Houthi actions.

The presence of the UAE, which is a key member in the Saudi-led coalition and joined the Council in January, has affected Council dynamics. Since the January attacks on Abu Dhabi, the UAE has pushed to label the Houthis as a terrorist group and strengthen sanctions against the movement. It has been lobbying the US, which along with the UK, supports the coalition, to reinstate its unilateral designation of the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organisation. In a separate action, on 23 February, the US announced that it was

designating for sanctions, in coordination with Gulf partners, an international network funding Houthi military forces that operates under the leadership of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force and Houthi financier Sa'id al-Jamal.

At the Security Council, the UAE initiated a press statement to characterise the Houthi targeting of Abu Dhabi as a terrorist attack. At the time of this writing, it was calling for the Council to acknowledge the Houthis as a terrorist group, and to add the Houthis as an entity to the Yemen sanctions list in the negotiations on the Council's annual Yemen sanctions resolution. In addition, the UAE statement at the 15 February briefing was notable for its implicit criticism of Grundberg, describing "the continued paralysis of the political process under the leadership of the United Nations to deal realistically and firmly with" the Houthis.

Some members have expressed concern about these moves. Members failed to agree to press elements following the 15 February briefing. On the sanctions resolution, several members also raised concerns about, among other things, the terrorism label and the impact that designating the Houthis would have on the humanitarian situation, worried for instance, about the private sector pulling back from Yemen to avoid potentially violating the sanctions, and the repercussions for the political process. To address some of these concerns, the designation was expected to not include subjecting the Houthis to the financial sanctions established by resolution 2140 and only subject them to the arms embargo provisions of resolution 2216.

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

Lebanon

Expected Council Action

In March, Council members expect to receive a briefing in consultations on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701, adopted in 2006, which called for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah. The report is due by 10 March. Special Coordinator for Lebanon Joanna Wronecka and Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix are the expected briefers.

Key Recent Developments

On 24 January, the Lebanese cabinet met for the first time in more than three months to discuss the draft budget for 2022. The cabinet had last met on 12 October 2021, before ministers affiliated with Shi'a groups Hezbollah and Amal refused to participate in further cabinet meetings in protest against Tarek Bitar, the judge leading the investigation into the 4 August 2020 Beirut port explosion. (For context, see our brief on Lebanon in the November 2021 Forecast.) According to media reports, while stressing that they would "continue to work to correct the judicial process", the two groups said that their decision to end the cabinet boycott was motivated by a desire to discuss the country's economic recovery and approve the budget. On 10 February, the cabinet approved the budget and referred it to

the parliament, where it is currently awaiting approval.

Key international interlocutors have seen the resumption of regular cabinet meetings, the approval of the budget, and agreement on a comprehensive programme of reforms as necessary steps for Lebanon to unlock international financial support to help the country overcome its ongoing dire socioeconomic crisis, as detailed in the Security Council's 4 February press statement on Lebanon. Discussions between the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Lebanese government are ongoing. Concluding an IMF virtual mission to Lebanon from 24 January to 11 February, an IMF official said that while progress had been achieved on agreeing with the Lebanese authorities on necessary areas of reform, "more work is needed to translate them into concrete policies".

On 29 December 2021, Lebanese President Michel Aoun signed a decree scheduling parliamentary elections for 15 May. In two recent press statements—released on 4 February and 27 September 2021, respectively—Council members stressed the importance of holding free, fair, transparent and inclusive elections "ensuring the full, equal and meaningful participation of women as candidates and voters". A similar message was put forward by the International Support Group (ISG) for Lebanon on 11 February. (The ISG is composed of the UN, China, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, the

Lebanon

UK, and the US, as well as the EU and the Arab League.) While candidate registration for the elections is still open, an important development was the announcement on 24 January by a Sunni leader and former prime minister Saad Hariri that he was retiring from political life and would not run in the elections.

The Lebanese population continues to face the effects of a severe socioeconomic crisis. A World Bank report issued in January estimates a 58.1 percent contraction of the Lebanese gross domestic product (GDP) between 2019 and 2021, while the inflation rate for 2021 is expected to average around 145 percent. On 26 January, Lebanon signed a deal to import energy from Jordan through Syria, but the implementation of this agreement has yet to commence. During a 10 February visit to southern Lebanon, Wroncka noted the severe impact that the crisis was having in that part of the country, where she was briefed by UNHCR officials on the situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, many of whom face extreme poverty and food insecurity.

Following separate talks with Israel and Lebanon, US Senior Advisor for Global Energy Security Amos Hochstein said he could see “narrowing gaps” toward an agreement on the demarcation of the maritime border between the two countries. Resolving the dispute could allow for the exploration of potentially lucrative natural resources in the area.

During his visit to Lebanon from 19 to 22 December 2021, Secretary-General António Guterres paid tribute to the victims of the Beirut port explosion and said that only an “impartial, thorough and transparent investigation” could deliver the justice that the families of the victims deserve. However, the inquiry into the explosion has been suspended several times following the filing of lawsuits against Bitar by officials he had summoned for questioning. During his visit, Guterres also met with key Lebanese officials to discuss the need for reforms and visited the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in southern Lebanon.

Several violent incidents targeting UNIFIL patrols have recently taken place in various locations in the mission’s area of operation. In their 4 February press statement, Council members deplored these incidents—which occurred between 22 December 2021 and 25 January—and called on the Lebanese authorities to investigate the attacks and bring the perpetrators to justice. According to media reports, the incidents have involved groups of residents who have stopped UNIFIL patrols, vandalising the mission’s vehicles and stealing peacekeepers’ personal and operational items. On 25 January, a peacekeeper required hospitalisation after sustaining injuries in an attack.

Adopted in August 2021, resolution 2591 requested UNIFIL to support the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) through temporary and special measures consisting of “non-lethal material (fuel, food and medicine) and logistical support” for a period of six months. This provision was driven by concerns about the impact of the socioeconomic crisis in Lebanon on the LAF’s capacity to carry out its functions adequately in UNIFIL’s area of operations. UNIFIL has since provided supplementary support to the LAF through several rounds of donations and, on 10 December, signed a memorandum of understanding with the LAF formalising the provision of this assistance. The LAF has also received bilateral support from some

Council members, in particular from the US, which has recently announced its intention to redirect some of its military assistance to the LAF towards “livelihood support”.

On 4 February, the Secretary-General announced that Major General Aroldo Lázaro Sáenz will take over from Major General Stefano Del Col as UNIFIL head of mission and force commander. At the time of writing, the transfer of authority ceremony was expected to take place on 28 February.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 14 February, during the 81st session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Lebanese NGOs called for targeted measures for women to address structural barriers that reinforce discriminatory and gendered norms, practices and policies; legislation to address violence against women, including against women in politics; and a comprehensive law on personal status codes in Lebanon, among other issues.

Women, Peace and Security

On 31 January, UNIFIL became the first UN field mission to receive funding via the Elsie Initiative Fund for Women in Peace Operations (EIF), which is aimed at creating an enabling environment for women peacekeepers. The EIF is a UN trust fund established in 2019 by the UN and Canada, with its secretariat within UN Women. The \$357,000 funding will be used to put in place gender-sensitive accommodations and working conditions for women peacekeepers deployed in UNIFIL’s Ghanaian battalion.

Key issues and Options

One of the Council’s main concerns is the lack of implementation of resolution 1701, including a permanent ceasefire. The most recent Secretary-General’s report on resolution 1701 said that no progress had been achieved towards the disarmament of armed groups and that Hezbollah “continued to acknowledge publicly that it maintains military capabilities”. According to media reports, Hezbollah’s leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said on 16 February that the group has been producing drones in Lebanon and that it has become capable of converting standard rockets into precision missiles. On 17 February, Israeli authorities said that they had shot down a drone belonging to Hezbollah and media reports indicate that Israeli fighter jets overflew Beirut and its suburbs the following day and southern Lebanon on 22 February.

Regarding UNIFIL, the increase in attacks against the mission’s patrols is an issue of concern for the Council. A potential issue that Council members may also consider is the expiration at the end of February of the six-month temporary and special measures in support of the LAF and whether an extension of these measures is needed. (The mandate of UNIFIL expires on 31 August.) Another potential issue is the fact that the Indonesian ship that currently serves as one of the five vessels of UNIFIL’s Maritime Task Force may end its service in March.

A key issue for the Council is the timely holding of the elections in May. How best to support women’s participation in the elections is an important related issue for some Council members. As noted during the 25 May Lebanon meeting of the Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security, women constitute only 4.6 percent of the parliament and have in the past faced numerous challenges in winning seats, such as financing and violence. Council members may

Lebanon

consider a closed Arria-formula meeting with women from Lebanese civil society and key political figures to discuss the challenges facing women participating in politics.

The ongoing socioeconomic instability is a further issue. Council members may consider inviting the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter, for a briefing. (De Schutter spent two weeks in Lebanon in early November 2021 to assess the country's multifaceted crisis.)

Council members could also consider a visit to Lebanon to gather first-hand information on all of these issues.

Council Dynamics

Although the Council has not met on Lebanon since Albania, Brazil, Ghana, Gabon, and the United Arab Emirates joined in January, it seems that the arrival of these five members has not changed the Council's broad support for Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence, and security. Differences over Hezbollah remain among Council members, with Russia on one end of the spectrum seeing the Shi'a group as a legitimate sociopolitical force, and Council members including the US and the UK at the other end listing Hezbollah as a terror group, in both cases without distinguishing between the group's political and military wings.

France is the penholder on Lebanon.

Cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council will hold a briefing on cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States (LAS) at the initiative of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which serves as president of the Council for the month. Khalifa Shaheen Almarar, Minister of State at UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, will chair the meeting. UN Secretary-General António Guterres and LAS Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit are the expected briefers. A presidential statement is a possible outcome.

Background and Key Recent Developments

Strengthening partnerships and cooperation with regional and sub-regional organisations—as envisioned in Chapter VIII of the UN Charter—has become an increasingly prominent theme for the Security Council. The Council has held annual consultative meetings with the AU Peace and Security Council since 2007 and has received regular briefings from the EU since 2010. It has also held debates and briefings on cooperation with several other bodies, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

In the past decade, representatives of the LAS have addressed the Council on several occasions as a result of the proliferation of regional conflicts. During Germany's presidency in September 2012, the Council held a high-level meeting on peace and security in the Middle East, focusing on the relationship between the Council and the LAS and featuring briefings by the then-Secretaries-General of the UN and the Arab League, Ban Ki-moon and Nabil Elaraby. The meeting adopted a presidential statement in support of the League's contribution to collective efforts towards the peaceful settlement of conflicts in the Middle East. The statement also expressed the Council's determination to take steps to enhance its cooperation with the LAS.

In May 2016, the Council held its first consultative meeting with members of the LAS in Cairo during the Council's visiting mission to Somalia, Kenya and Egypt. Then-Council president Egypt and Bahrain, then-chair of the LAS, co-chaired the meeting. Several diplomats urged that such joint meetings be convened regularly, and

some called for the establishment of a fixed consultative mechanism between the two organisations.

The relationship was further developed during Kuwait's June 2019 Council presidency through a high-level briefing on cooperation between the Council and the LAS. Secretary-General António Guterres and Aboul Gheit were the briefers. The meeting coincided with the opening of the UN Liaison Office to the LAS in Cairo, which had been planned since 2016. The office is mandated to increase collaboration related to conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Despite its modest staffing levels, the office plays an important role in coordinating joint efforts to expand economic opportunity, advance respect for human rights and build political inclusion in the region.

At the June 2019 briefing, Aboul Gheit presented several observations that he hoped would guide future LAS-UN cooperation. He stressed that any "fruitful cooperation" must allow for a permanent way to exchange information between the organisations and called for increased cooperation between the LAS and UN special representatives and envoys to Arab conflicts and areas of crises "in a manner that truly results in a unified and common understanding of [root] causes". He also emphasised that collaboration should go beyond addressing current conflicts; it should include efforts to promote joint early-warning mechanisms and preventive diplomacy.

In a presidential statement adopted at the meeting, the Council encouraged the holding of an annual briefing by the LAS Secretary-General and expressed the Council's intention to consider further steps to promote closer UN-LAS cooperation on matters related to peace and security. The statement also encouraged an annual informal meeting between Security Council members and the LAS Council—the League's main decision-making body—and underscored the importance of trilateral cooperation among the UN, the AU and the LAS on cross-regional peace and security issues.

On 18 January 2021, the Council held another meeting on UN-LAS cooperation at the initiative of Tunisia. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo and Aboul Gheit briefed the Council on areas of cooperation between the two organisations. A presidential statement adopted during the

UN DOCUMENTS ON COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UN AND THE LAS Security Council Presidential Statements [S/PRST/2021/2](#) (29 January 2021) encouraged an informal meeting between Security Council members, the LAS Secretary-General, and representatives of the Arab Summit Troika. [S/PRST/2019/5](#) (13 June 2019) encouraged holding an annual briefing by the LAS Secretary-General and an annual informal meeting between members of the Security Council and the LAS Council. [S/PRST/2012/20](#) (26 September 2012) welcomed intensifying LAS-UN cooperation. [Secretary-General's Report S/2020/898](#) (11 September 2020) was the biennial report on cooperation between the UN and regional and other organisations.

Cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States

briefing reiterated the Council's intention to consider further steps to promote closer cooperation in the fields of early warning and conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, sustaining peace, and counter-terrorism. It again encouraged the holding of an annual informal meeting between the Security Council and members of the LAS Council and, whenever possible, informal meetings of the Security Council, the LAS Secretary-General and representatives of the Arab Summit Troika—a group of three rotating countries that monitor the implementation of resolutions and commitments adopted by the LAS Council.

In line with that recommendation, Security Council members held an informal interactive dialogue (IID) on 22 September 2021 on UN-LAS cooperation, with participation from Aboul Gheit, UN Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Khaled Khiari, and representatives from Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia—the then-Arab Summit Troika.

Pursuant to Security Council resolution 1809, adopted on 16 April 2008, the Secretary-General produces a biennial report on cooperation between the UN and regional organisations. The most recent report, published on 11 September 2020, highlighted several areas of UN cooperation with the LAS. For example, it noted that the Office of Counter-Terrorism had been working closely with the LAS member states' Interior Ministers Council in developing a regional counter-terrorism strategy that was aligned with the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. It also highlighted joint efforts undertaken by UN Women and the LAS to support LAS member states in developing and implementing national action plans on women, peace and security.

On 30 and 31 January, LAS member states, with support from UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States, held a preparatory meeting to develop an approved regional position and identify key regional priorities ahead of the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women scheduled for 14 to 25 March. At the late January meeting, LAS members endorsed the Arab Declaration through which the LAS committed to enhancing women's economic empowerment and resilience in the context of climate change.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is how to strengthen cooperation between

the UN and the LAS on peace and security issues facing the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Next month's briefing will provide Council members with an opportunity to share assessments of and develop effective collaborative solutions to conflicts and crises facing the MENA region, including those in Lebanon, Libya, South Sudan, and Yemen.

A related key issue is the need to enhance trilateral coordination among the UN, the AU and the LAS on cross-regional peace and security issues. At the ninth General Cooperation Meeting between the AU Commission and the LAS, held on 1 February 2021, participants discussed the need to strengthen the Africa-Arab partnership in the context of negotiations on Libya, Sudan, Somalia, and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

The Council may consider adopting a presidential statement encouraging annual consultations between members of the Security Council and the LAS Council, as well as regular trilateral coordination meetings with the AU. The statement could also request the Secretary-General to report on further ways to strengthen relations and cooperation between the UN Security Council and the LAS Council.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Several factors have, to date, limited cooperation between the Council and the LAS. Difficult Council dynamics on issues in the region, demonstrated by the frequent vetoes cast by the US and Russia on Israel-Palestine and Syria, respectively, have complicated the ability of the two bodies to work together.

Differences among Arab League countries have also been evident in recent years. For example, in late 2020, several LAS members—including Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan and the UAE—signed the US-brokered Abraham Accords, which normalised diplomatic relations with Israel. LAS members' establishment of formal ties with Israel has long been hindered by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and some viewed the signing of the Abraham Accords as being at odds with the Palestinian national movement: at the time, Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki announced that the Palestinian Authority had decided to cede its turn to serve as the rotating chair of the LAS' Council in 2021, arguing that “there is no honour in seeing Arabs rush towards normalisation during its presidency”.

DPRK (North Korea)

Expected Council Action

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

The panel's mandate expires on 30 April.

Key Recent Developments

The Panel of Experts provided its final report to the Committee on 4 February. The Committee discussed the report when it met on 23 February. Under the terms of resolution 2569, the Panel of

Experts was due to submit the report to the Council no later than 25 February.

According to media outlets claiming to have seen the report, it notes that the DPRK has continued to evade maritime sanctions and maintain and develop its nuclear and ballistic missile infrastructure, “including through cyber means and joint scientific research”. Media reports also say that the report indicates that cyber-attacks are an important source of revenue for the DPRK and that the DPRK stole more than \$50 million from at least three cryptocurrency exchanges in North America, Europe and Asia between 2020 and mid-2021.

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DPRK Security Council Resolution S/RES/2569 (26 March 2021) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee until 30 April 2022. S/RES/2397 (22 December 2017) tightened sanctions on the DPRK. Sanctions Committee Document S/2021/777 (8 September 2021) was the midterm report of the Panel of Experts.

DPRK (North Korea)

At a 19 January meeting of the Politburo of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), DPRK officials were reportedly instructed "to promptly examine the issue of restarting all temporarily-suspended activities". Several analysts have suggested that this instruction appears to be a reference to the possible resumption of long-range and nuclear weapons tests by the DPRK, which have been the subject of a self-imposed moratorium since 2017.

On 30 January, the Republic of Korea (ROK) announced that the DPRK had tested an intermediate-range ballistic missile. According to ROK officials, the missile travelled approximately 800 kilometres before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. The following day, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the DPRK's official state news agency, said that the test was conducted to verify the accuracy of the Hwasong-12 missile, which it last tested in 2017. Council resolutions prohibit the DPRK from testing ballistic missiles.

On 4 February, Council members convened for closed consultations to discuss the 30 January test. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed. It appears that DiCarlo emphasised the importance of Council unity in responding to the DPRK's recent missile tests and said that such unity will help the Council find a solution to the problem. A majority of Council members condemned the missile launch and expressed concern regarding the DPRK's behaviour, and it seems that several members urged the Council to respond formally. China and Russia, however, did not condemn the test and apparently blamed the US for not engaging in dialogue with the DPRK. It appears that China and Russia also focused on the humanitarian impact of sanctions and the need to provide sanctions relief to the DPRK, while some African members noted that sanctions were negatively affecting the humanitarian situation in the country and said that this should be addressed.

The US circulated a draft press statement prior to the consultations. Among other matters, the statement apparently condemned the 30 January test, noted that the test violated Council resolutions, called on member states to implement sanctions, and urged the DPRK to engage in meaningful negotiations. It appears that the press statement was blocked by China.

Before the meeting, Ambassador Zhang Jun (China) told the media that the US should show "more sincerity and flexibility" and that it should "come up with more attractive and more practical, more flexible approaches, policies and actions". Albania, Brazil, France, Ireland, Japan, Norway, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the UK, and the US issued a joint statement after the meeting that condemned the 30 January launch and called on the Council to speak with one voice in responding to it. The statement also urged "all member states, and particularly our fellow Council members" to play a constructive role in implementing UN sanctions and called for the DPRK to return to dialogue.

On 12 February, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa and the ROK's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chung Eui-yong, in Hawaii. In a press conference following the meeting, all three officials condemned the DPRK's recent spate of missile tests and said that their governments were open to dialogue.

On 24 February, Council members convened for closed consultations to discuss the 90-day report on the work of the 1718 Sanctions Committee. Ambassador Mona Juul (Norway) briefed.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During the 49th session of the Human Rights Council, which is scheduled to run from 28 February to 1 April, High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet will provide an oral update on possible strategies for any future accountability process in the DPRK.

In an 11 February statement, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) noted that the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK, Tomás Ojea Quintana, would conduct an official visit to the ROK from 15 to 23 February. Ojea Quintana will meet with ROK government officials, members of the National Assembly and DPRK escapees, among others. Despite repeated requests, the DPRK has not granted him access to the country. Ojea Quintana will report his findings and recommendations to the Human Rights Council in March.

Key Issues and Options

The DPRK's recent missile tests have dramatically escalated tensions on the Korean peninsula and created a major issue for the Council. It appears that the DPRK tested nine ballistic missiles in January, the most in any one-month period in the history of its weapons programmes.

Sanctions evasion is another important issue. In its 8 September 2021 midterm report, the Panel of Experts noted that maritime vessels and "the management and ownership structures supporting them" have demonstrated increasing sophistication in their efforts to evade sanctions. The overall effectiveness of the sanctions regime is also a concern for the Council, particularly given that the DPRK is believed to have increased its nuclear arsenal since the sanctions regime was introduced. Other issues for the Council are the DPRK's ongoing refusal to engage in denuclearisation dialogue and the humanitarian impact of UN sanctions.

In light of these issues, the Council could consider adopting a formal outcome that condemns the recent missile tests, urges member states to comply with sanctions and calls for the resumption of diplomatic talks.

In extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts, Council members could include stronger language on the need for member states to adhere to existing sanctions. It could also request a report on sanctions enforcement that considers whether stricter enforcement is possible or add language that emphasises the importance of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee's role in considering humanitarian exemption requests.

Another option is to convene an informal interactive dialogue with key regional stakeholders to discuss new ways of addressing the security threat posed by the DPRK.

Council Dynamics

Council members remain divided regarding the DPRK. The P3 (France, the UK and the US) and other like-minded states regularly condemn its ballistic missile tests, arguing that they violate Council resolutions and destabilise the Korean Peninsula. These members also emphasise the importance of dialogue, maintaining the sanctions regime, and addressing sanctions evasion. China and Russia, on the other hand, often argue that more information is needed to

DPRK (North Korea)

determine whether particular missile tests violate Council resolutions and also contend that UN sanctions should be eased because of their humanitarian impact. China and Russia have also suggested that easing sanctions may entice the DPRK to engage in denuclearisation dialogue.

It is possible that members' divergent views will lead to contentious negotiations on the resolution extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts. The overall dynamic may change, however, if the DPRK's behaviour should escalate and it were to test an intercontinental ballistic missile or a nuclear weapon.

In October 2021, China circulated a draft resolution on easing sanctions on the DPRK, citing their humanitarian consequences. Although Russia is in favour of this resolution, it appears to have little support among other Council members. A previous attempt by China and Russia to promote a draft resolution providing partial sanctions relief for the DPRK in December 2019 was unsuccessful because of insufficient support from other Council members.

The US is the penholder on the DPRK. Ambassador Mona Juul (Norway) chairs the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee.

Sudan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council will receive a briefing on the Secretary-General's 90-day report on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS). Consultations are expected to follow the briefing. The mandate of UNITAMS expires on 3 June 2022.

The chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Harold Adlai Agyeman (Ghana), is expected to provide the quarterly briefing on the committee's work.

Key Recent Developments

Sudan continues to face an ongoing political crisis following the military coup d'état of 25 October 2021. A power-sharing agreement between the civilian and military entities was announced on 21 November 2021, which included the reinstatement of Abdalla Hamdok as prime minister. Hamdok resigned on 2 January, however, after mediation efforts between civilian and military leaders failed. As at 14 February, at least 80 people have been killed by state security forces in protests against the October 2021 coup, according to the non-governmental organisation the Central Committee of Sudan Doctors.

On 8 January, Special Representative for Sudan and head of UNITAMS Volker Perthes announced the launch of a "UN-facilitated intra-Sudanese political process which is aimed at supporting Sudanese stakeholders in agreeing on a way out of the current political crisis". On 13 February, UNITAMS announced the conclusion of the first phase of these consultations, which constituted a month "of almost daily sessions with a diverse range of groups including civil society, women's rights organizations, resistance committees, political parties, young women activists, academics, journalists, youth, persons with disabilities, veterans, diaspora, Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) signatories, and national experts". According to the statement, UNITAMS will "produce a summary document which will highlight major areas of consensus among various Sudanese stakeholders on contentious matters pertaining to the transition". At the time of writing, this document was not yet available. While the UN initiative has been welcomed internationally, there has been opposition from civil society groups in the country, including the Sudanese Professionals Association, which take the view that the military should hand over

power to a civilian government in accordance with the August 2019 constitutional declaration that paved the way for a three-year transition period. On 26 January, several thousand people demonstrated outside the UNITAMS headquarters in Khartoum, demanding that the mission be expelled and that Perthes leave the country.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the AU have sent delegations to Sudan to discuss the political situation. IGAD conducted a fact-finding mission to Sudan from 29 January to 1 February. A report issued following the mission found that "the current political impasse in Sudan is more complicated than widely appreciated" and has "far-reaching implications" for Sudan and the region. It also found "mistrust on both sides of externally-led interventions".

On 10 December 2021, the Council received a briefing from Perthes on the Secretary-General's 90-day report. Council members were last briefed by Perthes on 12 January under "any other business". (For more, see our What's In Blue story of 11 January.)

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 9 February, Sudan's human rights record was examined by the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group for the third time. The expert on human rights in Sudan, Adama Dieng, visited Sudan from 20 to 24 February. He met with senior Sudanese government officials, representatives of civil society organisations, human rights defenders, heads of UN entities, and diplomats. The visit had been postponed in January at the request of Sudanese authorities. (The High Commissioner for Human Rights appointed Dieng in November 2021, in line with Human Rights Council resolution S-32/1.)

During its 49th session, the Human Rights Council is expected to hold an enhanced interactive dialogue on 4 March on the oral update of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Sudan.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 10 December 2021, then-Chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Sven Jürgenson (Estonia), provided the quarterly briefing on the committee's work. (For more, see our What's In Blue story of 9 December 2021.) Jürgenson noted that the security situation in Darfur remained fragile and referred to the fact that the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid faction (SLA/AW) continued to refuse to sign the Juba Peace Agreement.

On 23 December 2021, the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee submitted its final report, as requested in resolution 2562. The report said that "the general situation in Darfur remained extremely fragile" during the reporting period and that many areas "witnessed large-scale intercommunal violence and deterioration in the security situation,

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2620](#) (15 February 2022) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts for one year. [Secretary-General's Report S/2021/1008](#) (3 December 2021) was the 90-day report on UNITAMS. [Security Council Meetings S/PV.8964](#) (15 February 2022) was the adoption of resolution 2620, renewing the mandate of the Panel of Experts. [S/PV.8925](#) (10 December 2021) was a briefing on the Secretary-General's 90-day report on UNITAMS. [S/PV.8924](#) (10 December 2021) was the quarterly briefing on the work of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee.

Sudan

described by many interlocutors as the worst in recent years". The violence included incidents of sexual assault and rape of women and girls.

The report noted that implementation of the JPA has been slow and that the unstable political situation along with economic issues have negatively affected the implementation of the Darfur-related provisions. The Panel of Experts found that violations of the arms embargo continued, with arms being transferred into Darfur without any requests for exemptions being submitted. In addition, implementation of the travel ban and asset freeze remained challenging because of a lack of cooperation by the government and regional countries.

On 15 February, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2620, extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee until 12 March 2023. The resolution expressed the Council's intention to consider by 31 August establishing clear, well-identified and realistic key benchmarks, with readiness to consider adjusting measures to respond to the situation in Darfur, given the evolving situation on the ground. It requested the Panel of Experts to submit an interim report on its activities by 12 August and a final report by 13 January 2023, along with updates every three months on its work. (For more, see our [What's In Blue](#) story of 14 February.)

Key Issues and Options

A key issue is monitoring the political situation in Sudan. In this regard, Council members will closely follow mediation efforts, including the role played by UNITAMS, and it could seek one or more updates from the mission's leadership on political developments, in addition to the expected briefing on UNITAMS.

Another key issue is the crackdown on protesters since 25 October 2021. Some Council members may seek to emphasise the need to conduct timely investigations into casualties during the demonstrations and the importance of accountability for this violence.

A further issue is the situation in Darfur, especially after looting and attacks against UN facilities, equipment and supplies that took place during December 2021 by unknown armed groups, as well as the levels of intercommunal violence and insecurity described in the final report of the Panel of Experts.

Council Dynamics

Negotiations on resolution 2620 extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts were difficult. It seems that one of the most challenging aspects of the negotiations pertained to the issue of benchmarks by which to review the sanctions regime, particularly the timeline for their consideration and which benchmarks to endorse. Members such as China, India, Russia, the A3 (Gabon, Ghana and Kenya), and the United Arab Emirates would have liked to see the Council endorse benchmarks as soon as possible. Other members expressed the position that it was not the right time to consider endorsing any benchmarks, given the ongoing political crisis. In an apparent compromise, resolution 2620 set a 31 August deadline for the Council to consider establishing benchmarks. During the negotiations, there were also clear divergences relating to the preambular language, including on how to characterise the situation in Sudan and Darfur, and on what language was deemed appropriate to be included in a resolution renewing a sanctions regime. (For more, see our [What's In Blue](#) story of 14 February.)

Following the adoption, the US said that Sudan must resolve the current political crisis and that "a restored transitional government" should advance the implementation of the JPA. The statement also highlighted the levels of intercommunal violence in Darfur, adding that "violence worsened in 2021 as the Sudan's political crisis became protracted". In its statement, China noted that "the security situation in Darfur is generally stable" but fragile, and it condemned a recent attack against UN staff, calling for it to be investigated. China and Russia both emphasised the need to establish benchmarks by which to review the sanctions regime by 31 August, adding that these should be clear, realistic and achievable.

The UK is the penholder on Sudan, and the US is the penholder on Sudan sanctions. Ambassador Harold Adlai Agyeman (Ghana) chairs the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, as of January. The vice-chair for 2022 is Ireland.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council will hold a briefing on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Bintou Keita, the Special Representative and head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), is the anticipated briefer. Consultations are expected to follow the briefing.

Key Recent Developments

On 20 December 2021, the Security Council adopted resolution 2612, extending MONUSCO's mandate for another year. It also welcomed the mission's transition plan, which was developed on the basis of the progressive and phased drawdown of MONUSCO endorsed by resolution 2556 of 18 December 2020. In the resolution, the Council further requested the mission to withdraw from Tanganyika province by mid-2022 and consolidate its presence in

Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu provinces, where security challenges persist.

It has been nine months since the government declared a state of siege to address insecurity in the eastern provinces. However, the security situation continues to deteriorate, and serious concerns remain about the protection of civilians and respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. On 1 February, militias belonging to the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* (CODECO) attacked the Savo camp for internally displaced persons in Ituri province, which left at least 58 civilians dead and more than 40 injured. According to OCHA, "Ituri province is experiencing a cycle of armed violence amid inter-communal tensions", making it the province "with the highest number of people in need at 2.9 million people".

On 4 February, Security Council members issued a press

Democratic Republic of the Congo

statement condemning the attack by CODECO militias and expressing concerns over increased armed group activities in eastern DRC. MONUSCO's Force Intervention Brigade has stepped up its operations to deter the activities of armed groups and provide security for the communities affected by the recent attacks. In November 2021, the DRC and Uganda also launched a joint military operation in eastern DRC targeting the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an armed group affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) and responsible for several deadly attacks in eastern DRC and Uganda.

The tenth Summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism of the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement, signed by the DRC and countries of the Great Lakes region to promote regional peace, security and stability, took place in Kinshasa on 24 February. President Félix Tshisekedi, as current chair of the mechanism, highlighted the fight against armed groups in eastern DRC in his remarks at the summit. In January, Tshisekedi also took up the leadership of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), which will likely help him to advance his regional security and development agenda. At the AU summit in Addis Ababa in early February, Tshisekedi handed over the rotating AU chairmanship to President Macky Sall of Senegal.

Meanwhile, the political situation in the DRC remains tense. On 29 January, the Union for Democracy and Social Justice (UDPS), President Tshisekedi's party, decided to remove its interim leader Jean-Marc Kabund from his position, allegedly for his involvement in negotiations with the leaders of former President Joseph Kabila's party in 2019. He is said to be an influential political figure and the architect of the Union Sacrée, the governing coalition that replaced the alliance between President Tshisekedi and former President Joseph Kabila. Kabund had resigned as vice president of the national assembly on 14 January, after the Republican Guard reportedly raided his house.

In early February, the Congolese authorities arrested François Beya Kasonga, the president's special security advisor, allegedly for national security reasons. Kasonga is said to have once headed the country's National Intelligence Agency. While the Congolese authorities have not given details about Kasonga's arrest, there was talk of a foiled coup on social media, and the president's spokesperson was quoted as saying that "the government has 'serious evidence' of a national security threat" and that "no attempt to destabilize democratic institutions will be tolerated". While this could be seen as an effort by President Tshisekedi to consolidate power ahead of the country's election in 2023, some analysts view it as an indication of a possible fracture within the ruling coalition, creating fears of political uncertainty.

Five years after the murder of two members of the DRC Sanctions Committee's panel of experts, Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp, in Kasai province in March 2017, a DRC military court sentenced 51 people to death, many of whom were tried in absentia. In reacting to this decision, the UN reaffirmed its support for the Congolese authorities in pursuing justice for the murders of the two UN experts and those Congolese nationals killed with them. However, it opposed the use of the death penalty and urged the country to maintain its moratorium on capital punishment.

Human Rights-related Developments

In resolution 48/20, the Human Rights Council renewed the mandate of the team of international experts on the situation in Kasai and extended it to encompass the entire national territory of the DRC. The HRC requested an oral update from the team during its 49th session, scheduled to take place from 28 February to 1 April. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, will also present an oral update on the situation of human rights in the DRC at the same session.

On 8 February, the spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Liz Throssell, issued a statement expressing deep concern at ongoing incidents of "deadly ethnically-motivated attacks" on internally displaced people's (IDP) camps by armed groups in eastern DRC. Throssell noted that OHCHR had documented ten attacks on IDP sites in 2021 in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu, and that at least 106 people were killed, 16 were injured and at least seven women were subjected to acts of sexual violence in these attacks. She observed that the regional military authorities had launched a preliminary investigation into a recent attack on 1 February on the Plaine Savo IDP camp, and called on the government to investigate the attacks on other IDP camps and ensure that the investigations are "independent, effective and transparent". She emphasised the need for those responsible to face justice and underscored that OHCHR colleagues in MONUSCO are ready to provide technical and logistical support to the authorities.

Key Issues and Options

The key issue for Council members to consider is how to tackle insecurity in eastern DRC. They may want to hear from Keita what MONUSCO, particularly its Force Intervention Brigade, is doing to prevent, deter and stop armed groups by carrying out unilateral and joint operations with the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) in line with resolution 2612. Of particular concern would be how to enhance the protection of civilians, including those sheltering in camps for internally displaced persons. These camps have recently become more frequent targets of attacks by armed groups.

A related issue is what can be done to promote an integrated regional approach in addressing the threats posed by armed groups. Council members might be keen to know about the level of cooperation between MONUSCO and the joint military operation by Ugandan and Congolese armed forces against the ADF. They might also be interested to learn more about the outcome of the tenth Summit of the Regional Oversight Mechanism.

Another key issue is related to the emerging political fault lines in Kinshasa, which could undermine political stability as the country gears up to hold elections next year. Council members could reiterate their call on Tshisekedi to remain committed to delivering the governance, security and economic reforms in his government's programme of action for 2021–2023.

A possible option is for Council members to issue a press statement reaffirming support to MONUSCO in its efforts to respond to armed groups operating in eastern DRC, encouraging a regional approach to promote durable peace and stability in DRC and the Great Lakes region, and urging DRC political stakeholders to remain focused on creating conditions favourable for holding peaceful and credible elections in 2023.

Council Dynamics

There is general support among Council members for MONUSCO's work and the mission's gradual drawdown. This was reflected by resolution 2556, in which the Council endorsed the mission's

Democratic Republic of the Congo

transition plan, developed with the government and with the involvement of civil society representatives. During this month's briefing, Council members might be interested to learn about the implementation of the transition plan and the progress made towards achieving its benchmarks and indicators.

In the face of a deteriorating security situation in the eastern provinces and its impact on the civilian population, the protection of civilians will continue to be a major focus for Council members. The

search for non-military solutions to the security problem in eastern DRC is another important issue that Council members continue to highlight in their interventions, and they may continue to reiterate their support for a regional approach through the cooperation of countries of the Great Lakes region.

France is the penholder on the DRC. Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang (Gabon) chairs the 1533 Sanctions Committee.

Somalia

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is expected to consider a resolution reauthorising the AU mission in Somalia. At the time of writing, the Council was considering how to proceed regarding the Somali anti-piracy measures set to expire on 31 March.

Key Recent Developments

On 21 December 2021, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2614, a three-month technical rollover authorising the current AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). This timeframe was intended to allow for further discussions between the AU and the Somali federal government to resolve disagreements concerning the future of the AU mission. The dispute between Somalia and the AU delayed the finalisation of three key documents on future security arrangements in Somalia requested by resolution 2568 of 12 March 2021. Somalia envisaged a reconfigured version of AMISOM as the best option to promote the efficient and gradual transition of security responsibilities to its security forces, while the AU preferred an AU-UN multi-dimensional mission financed by UN assessed contributions.

Through this resolution, the Council reauthorised AMISOM's presence until 31 December 2021 and requested an update of the mission's concept of operations (CONOPS), to be developed jointly by Somalia and the AU by August 2021. It further requested from the Secretary-General proposals for the strategic objectives, size and composition of a reconfigured AU mission, which was due by September 2021, and for continued UN logistical support for the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia and the Somali security forces alongside a reconfigured AU mission, which was due by the end of October 2021. All of these requests were delayed because of the different perspectives of the UN and the AU on the future of the AU peace operation in Somalia.

As the 31 December 2021 expiration of resolution 2568 approached, talks between the Somali government and the AU were still ongoing. That led the UK, the penholder on Somalia, to propose the three-month technical rollover until 31 March. In their explanations of vote following the adoption, France called for a swift conclusion to the talks, the UK requested all stakeholders to engage in good-faith discussions and the US urged the parties to reach an agreement before February.

Since then, significant progress has been made in shaping a new

security set-up for Somalia. Following a preliminary agreement in December 2021 between Somalia and the AU on a reconfigured AMISOM, representatives of Somalia, the AU Commission, and AMISOM held technical-level meetings between 17 and 21 January in Addis Ababa, which resulted in an outcome document outlining the parameters and strategic objectives for a new AU mission in Somalia.

The new mission is referenced in the document as "the AU Transitional Mission to Somalia (ATMIS)", and the document foresees the gradual handover of security responsibilities to Somali security forces by the end of 2023 in accordance with the Somali Transition Plan. The document also includes the option of increasing the number of troop-contributing countries. Subsequent consultations between 28 January and 9 February in the "Quartet" format (Somalia, the AU, the EU, and the UN) led to the drafts of the requested updated CONOPS; the proposal for the strategic objectives, size and composition of a reconfigured AU mission; and the associated logistical support package. Once finalised, these drafts are expected to be submitted to both the African Union Peace and Security Council and the UN Security Council for their approval.

Since the adoption of resolution 2608 on 3 December 2021, which renewed the anti-piracy measures for three months instead of the usual one year, the US, the penholder on the Somalia anti-piracy measures, and the EU Council members reportedly engaged with Somalia to avert discontinuation of the measures. In December 2021, Somalia, which must consent to the measures for the resolution to be adopted, advocated their discontinuation, citing an improvement in the security situation within its maritime borders. Somalia reiterated its position during the 15 February Council meeting on the situation in the country, noting that the measures had effectively curbed piracy and armed robbery at sea since their inception some 15 years ago. During the same meeting, the head of the EU Delegation to the UN, Olof Skoog, who briefed Council members, expressed hope that Somalia would agree to an extension of the measures for at least another nine months to allow for the EU naval mission EUNAVFOR Med Atalanta to continue operating off the coast of Somalia. Acting under the authorisations granted by the anti-piracy measures, the mission is authorised to protect vessels delivering aid for the World Food Programme; deters and suppresses piracy and armed robbery at sea; and monitors illicit fishing activities, weapons and drugs trafficking, and the illicit charcoal trade.

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2614 (21 December 2021) reauthorised the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) without substantive mandate changes until 31 March 2022. S/RES/2608 (3 December 2021) renewed the anti-piracy measures off the coast of Somalia for three months. **Secretary-General's Reports** S/2022/101 (8 February 2022) was on the situation in Somalia, covering developments from 6 November 2021 to 31 January 2022. S/2021/920 (3 November 2021) was the annual report on the situation regarding piracy and armed robbery off the coast of Somalia. **Security Council Letters** S/2021/859 (4 October 2021) was from the Security Council in response to the Secretary-General's request for an extension of the deadlines to submit proposals on a reconfigured AMISOM.

Somalia

Sanctions-related developments

On 24 February, Ambassador Jim Kelly (Ireland) delivered the periodic briefing by the Chair of the 751 Somalia Sanctions Committee, covering the committee's activities during the last 120 days. These included a meeting with the panel of experts on Somalia, which presented its programme of work to the committee, following the panel's appointment on 16 December 2021. During its mandate, the panel intends to focus its work on Al-Shabaab finances; on the group's structure; its activities regarding child recruitment and gender-based violence; on smuggling and trafficking of weapons; Somalia's weapons and ammunitions management; and the implementation of the ban on charcoal trade. During that meeting, the committee reportedly welcomed the continued improvement of the panel's relationship with the Government of Somalia. Kelly also referenced the 18 February listing by the committee of Ali Mohamed Rage, the spokesperson of Al-Shabaab, for "engaging in or providing support for acts that threaten the peace, security or stability of Somalia, including acts that threaten the peace and reconciliation process in Somalia, or threaten the Federal Government of Somalia or AMISOM by force."

Key Issues and Options

Despite the agreements reached thus far among the Quartet regarding the future of an AU presence in Somalia, several key issues appear to require continued attention. Predictable and sustainable financing will continue to be a major issue. The EU, which has provided the bulk of funding for AMISOM over the years, has yet to make a determination on whether, and at what level, it would support a new AU mission in Somalia. It is unlikely that any such decision would be made before the new mission's concept of operations, strategic objectives, and UN logistical support package are finalised.

Another important issue is the need to enhance the capacity of Somali security forces, as the new mission is expected to fully transfer security responsibilities to Somalia by 2023. The new successor mission hinges on the effective implementation of The Somali Transition Plan, the document outlining the gradual handover of security responsibilities from the AU to the Somali National Army.

Consultations on the planning documents for a new AU mission are expected to be finalised in March. Should the drafts not be finalised in time for negotiations to commence ahead of the 31 March deadline, however, the penholder may consider another short technical rollover of AMISOM's authorisation to maintain pressure on all parties to reach a final agreement while allowing additional time for consultations to conclude.

The national elections in Somalia are another key issue for the Council. The polls for the ongoing lower house (House of the Peoples) elections were scheduled to be finalised by 25 February. On that day, some hundred seats remained unfilled. On 24 February, Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble convened a national

consultative meeting to discuss the delay. The forum decided to extend the deadline for completion until 15 May. The finalisation of lower house elections is expected to pave the way for the presidential election, now likely to take place in June.

Depending on the progress of the electoral process, a Council product may either urge (or welcome) the completion of Somalia's long-delayed lower house elections. Such a product could also outline elections-related security requirements for a new AU mission.

Another issue is the future of anti-piracy operations, including whether to readjust or discontinue these measures. The Council may consider engaging Somalia and the EU in an informal interactive dialogue to discuss mutually acceptable options regarding the future of the measures.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members continue to express different views on the funding of the AU mission. During the 15 February Council meeting on Somalia, the A3 (Gabon, Ghana and Kenya) reiterated the AU's position, which calls for the utilisation of UN assessed contributions to fund the mission. Representing the largest donor to AMISOM, Skoog noted the continued willingness of the EU to support a reconfigured AU mission in Somalia but added that "there is no support for more of the same" and that Somalia needed a "fresh, holistic approach" to address its security challenges.

The new mission structure, with the potentially larger number of troop contributors and the revised command arrangement envisaged for ATMIS, may also change the dynamics among troop-contributing countries. A national representing the largest contingent of ATMIS is expected to serve as the mission's force commander. Additional countries that may contribute to ATMIS forces alongside the current member states represented in AMISOM (Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda) have yet to be confirmed at the time of writing.

Several Council members are likely to advocate, to various degrees, for the continuation of the anti-piracy measures. During the 15 February Council meeting, the US, which is the penholder on Somalia piracy, expressed its hope that the measures would be renewed unanimously. France, as an EU member with an interest in the EU's anti-piracy operation "Atalanta", said that it had worked very closely with Somalia to be able to produce a draft resolution that would be agreeable to Mogadishu. The UK acknowledged that Somalia prefers to replace the measures with a bilateral maritime cooperation framework but recommended a continuation of the measures until such a framework is in place.

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