

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

In April, the UK will hold the presidency of the Security Council.

The UK plans to organise two signature events. The first signature event is a briefing on the implementation of resolution 2565 on the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, adopted during the UK presidency in February 2021. The UK Minister of State for South Asia, North Africa, the UN and the Commonwealth, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, is expected to chair the meeting. Assistant Secretary-General Ted Chaiban, the Global Lead Coordinator for COVID-19 Vaccine Country-Readiness and Delivery; Esperanza Martinez, head of the ICRC’s COVID-19 Crisis Management Team; and a civil society representative are expected to brief.

The second signature event is the annual open debate on conflict-related sexual violence, which this year is entitled “Accountability as Prevention: Ending Cycles of Sexual Violence in Conflict”. Lord Ahmad is expected to chair the meeting. Secretary-General António Guterres, Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten, 2018 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Murad, and one or more civil society representatives are the anticipated briefers. The UK has recently joined the statement of shared commitments on Women, Peace and Security jointly undertaken by Albania, Brazil, Norway, the United Arab Emirates and former Council member Niger. In the statement, these countries committed to make Women, Peace and Security a “top priority” during their respective presidencies.

The UK also plans to organise Sofa Talks at Greentree on 8 April to facilitate informal discussion on the significance of data and technology in supporting the Council’s work in conflict prevention and resolution.

In April, the Security Council is scheduled to hold its quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Other Middle East issues on the programme include:

- Syria, meetings on political, humanitarian and chemical weapons tracks; and

- Yemen, monthly meeting on developments.

African issues on the programme of work in April are:

- Libya, renewal of the mandate of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), consultations on UNSMIL, and the semi-annual briefing by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on cases in Libya;
- Mali, briefing and consultations on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA);
- Western Sahara, briefing in consultations on the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO);
- Sudan/South Sudan, briefing and consultations on the implementation of the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA); and
- Great Lakes, the semi-annual briefing on the implementation of the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSC Framework) for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Great Lakes region.

European issues this month include a briefing on the situation in Ukraine, as well as the semi-annual briefing on the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Additional meetings on Ukraine may also be scheduled.

In terms of Latin American issues, the Council is expected to hold a briefing and consultations on the UN Verification Mission in Colombia.

Other issues could be raised in April depending on developments, including Ethiopia, DPRK, Myanmar and Iran (JCPOA), among others.

The UK intends to encourage interactive discussion and outcome-oriented action during its April presidency. It would also like to highlight conflict prevention and peacebuilding issues as thematic priorities in the consideration of the various country files. Furthermore, the UK intends to draw attention to the issue of reprisals against civil society briefers.

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In Hindsight: Trends of Council Engagement on Ukraine

Few crises in recent decades have galvanised the Security Council's attention like the current conflict in Ukraine. During the past two months, the Council has held 13 meetings on Ukraine—11 open briefings, one meeting in closed consultations, and one discussion under “any other business”—and voted on three draft resolutions, two of which were not adopted. The resolution that was adopted called for an “emergency special session” (ESS) of the General Assembly to consider and recommend collective action on the situation in Ukraine. This led to two resolutions being adopted in the General Assembly.

The Council will likely continue its intense focus on Ukraine, as the war continues to have devastating effects on civilian populations, and progress on the diplomatic front appears elusive. While the Council has discussed Ukraine since 2014—when Russia annexed Crimea and the crisis in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions erupted—the Russian invasion in February has affected the Council's work, as well as the wider multilateral system, in several notable ways.

The situation in Ukraine is permeating the Council's engagement on other issues. Ukraine is frequently referenced in meetings on other topics. In discussing the political and humanitarian situation in Syria on 24 March, Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy (Russia) said that Secretary-General António Guterres had abandoned his usual neutral language with regard to Ukraine. At the same meeting, Deputy Permanent Representative Richard Mills (US) accused Moscow of using “some of the same barbaric tactics” in Ukraine as in Syria, adding that it was troubling that Russia was recruiting Syrians to fight in Ukraine.

Similarly, at the Council's ministerial-level open debate on Women, Peace and Security on 8 March, several member states reiterated their criticism of the Russian intervention and highlighted the impact of the conflict on women in Ukraine. Russia, in turn, claimed that the West had been “indifferent to the murder of women and children in Donetsk and Luhansk by the Kyiv junta” during the previous eight years.

In the midst of such diplomatic jousting, the ripple effects of the crisis in Ukraine on other situations on the Council's agenda are frequently being raised in the organ. At the Council's 15 March meeting on Yemen, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths noted that Yemen imports about one-third of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine, and that the conflict in Ukraine “may restrict supply and push up food prices...harm[ing]...the lives of...many Yemeni families”. In the 24 March Council meeting on Syria, Griffiths warned that the increase in global food and energy prices resulting from the Ukraine crisis is also expected to have a negative humanitarian effect on Syria. In the same meeting, Deputy Permanent Representative Alicia Guadalupe Buenrostro Massieu (Mexico) alluded to the adverse effects of the war in Ukraine on Syria's grain supply. It should be noted that the humanitarian needs in both Yemen and Syria are already enormous; according to OCHA, 20.7 million Yemenis and 14.6 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance.

As a result of the war, Ukraine has decided to withdraw its military contingent and equipment from the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in order to strengthen its defences in the war effort at home. This issue

was apparently raised in closed consultations on MONUSCO on 29 March. The Ukrainian contingent of 268 peacekeepers is composed of 250 troops, six staff officers, five individual police, and seven experts, according to the UN. Ukraine also has eight helicopters deployed in eastern DRC, of which four are attack helicopters and four are transport helicopters.

Some members have appealed for the significant focus on Ukraine not to distract the Council and other international actors from other peace and security challenges in the world. Ambassador Mona Juul (Norway) stated in the 22 March meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” that “Even while Ukraine dominates the headlines and the agenda of the Security Council—and for a good reason—we cannot abandon other ongoing crises.” During the Council's 16 March meeting on Libya, Ambassador Michel Biang (Gabon) appealed to the European Union “to show the same compassion, in keeping with international humanitarian law, to Africans fleeing security and climate crises for which they are not responsible” as it has to Ukrainian refugees.

An emerging trend appears to be the development of different tracks on Ukraine. Three tracks have so far been apparent in the Council's approach to Ukraine: one on political developments, a second on the humanitarian situation, and a third on nuclear, biological and chemical risks.

Prior to the Russian invasion, there were three meetings on the escalating tensions in and around Ukraine on 31 January, 21 February and 23 February that focused on political developments, with briefings from Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo and an emphasis on diplomatic efforts to stave off conflict. In the 23 February meeting, Guterres appealed to Russia to stop what appeared to be an imminent attack on Ukraine; during the course of the meeting, the Russian offensive began. (Russia organised a meeting on 17 February to mark the 7th anniversary of the Minsk II Agreement, but this is an annual meeting that Russia, which held the Council presidency in February, had planned well in advance.)

Since the war started, the Council has convened four meetings specifically on the humanitarian situation in the country, in addition to the humanitarian draft resolutions that it has discussed. These meetings were held on 28 February, 7 March, 17 March, and 29 March.

There may also be a track emerging regarding nuclear, biological and chemical risks. The Council was briefed on 4 March about the fire at a training facility at the nuclear power plant in Zaporizhzhia, where fighting was reported, and amidst concerns about the potential for a nuclear catastrophe. Trepidation about the safety and security of the nuclear power plant at Chernobyl has also been raised in Council meetings. Russia has convened one briefing and one discussion under “any other business”, alleging military biological activities in Ukraine, although many Council members have been dubious of Russia's claims. Some Council members—including Albania, France and the US—have expressed concern that Russia is using disinformation tactics as a pretext for the possible use of biological or chemical weapons against Ukrainians. During the 11 March briefing, the US said that “we have serious concerns that Russia may be planning to use chemical or biological agents against

In Hindsight: Trends of Council Engagement on Ukraine

the Ukrainian people”. At the 18 March briefing, Russia denounced accusations that it would deploy biological and chemical weapons against Ukraine as “true cynicism”, suggesting instead that “Ukrainian nationalists” have brought chemical agents to some regions to “create a provocation and then blame Russia for it”. Should the war continue and the Council remain heavily involved, engagement on multiple tracks could crystallise over time, as it has with regard to Syria, where the Council has addressed the conflict in discrete political, humanitarian, and chemical weapons tracks.

The penholding patterns have been atypical during the current crisis. Most issues on the Council’s agenda have one or two clear penholders. It is not common for more than two countries to take the pen on the same file. But that is what has happened in this case. Albania and the US produced a draft resolution deploring Russia’s aggression, which was vetoed. They also co-drafted the resolution calling for an emergency session of the General Assembly under the “Uniting for Peace” procedure, which was adopted. France and Mexico were the penholders on a humanitarian draft resolution, which they did not table for a vote in the Council because they could not find sufficient common ground, instead taking their initiative to the General Assembly. Meanwhile, Russia subsequently pursued an alternative draft on the humanitarian situation in the Council, which only received two affirmative votes (China and Russia) and thus was not adopted. In recent years, Russia has periodically proposed alternative texts, especially on Syria.

Another atypical development is the partnership between permanent and elected members in the penholding on the Ukraine file. While the P3 members (France, the UK and the US) draft most Council outcomes, they rarely share the pen with elected members. A rare recent example of a permanent member holding the pen with an elected member was when Germany joined the UK as co-penholder on Libya sanctions and Sudan in 2019–2020.

Amid the unfolding tragedy in Ukraine, member states have framed their public statements in the Council Chamber in the language of the UN Charter. While Russia was amassing troops along Ukraine’s border but prior to its invasion of the country, members tended to employ Chapter VI language—Chapter VI focuses on the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes—in calling for de-escalation and the pursuit of dialogue and diplomacy. Some members have continued to refer to the peaceful settlement of disputes, but after the invasion, many have drawn directly from Article 2 (4) of the Charter, which states 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”. At the 25 February meeting at which Russia exercised its veto, Ambassador Juan Ramón de la Fuente (Mexico) called the Russian invasion a “flagrant violation” of article 2 (4), while Ambassador Mona Juul (Norway) declared: “A veto cast by the aggressor undermines the purpose of the Council. It is a violation of the very foundation of the UN Charter”. Even China,

India, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—while abstaining on the vetoed draft and on the subsequent resolution referring the issue to the General Assembly—have nonetheless emphasised the importance of upholding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.

Additionally, Article 51, which provides for “the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations”, has been brought up in the Council Chamber by both Russia and Ukraine. In a 23 February meeting on Ukraine, Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia (Russia) referred to this article, stating that the Russian intervention was being carried out “to protect people who have been subjected to abuse and genocide by the Kyiv regime”. In his Council statement on 25 February, Ukrainian Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya retorted: “Ukraine has been exercising its right to self-defence under Article 51 of the Charter. Russia does not have that excuse. Its perverse reading of the Charter is so sick that it is impossible to interpret. Calling occupying troops peacekeepers, claiming the right of self-defence — that is lunacy.”

(For more on Council members’ views on the UN Charter in connection with Ukraine, please see our March 2022 *In Hindsight: Ukraine and the Tools of the UN.*)

The last two months have shown that the multilateral system can act rapidly and decisively when faced with a crisis of this proportion. The divisions among the Security Council’s permanent members—and the fact that one of the permanent members is a party to the conflict—present enormous challenges to the Council in its efforts to grapple with this crisis. But the Council is only one part of the international architecture designed to deal with conflict, albeit a major one. Other parts of the UN—and the broader multilateral system—have been spurred to action. Soon after the Council referred the situation to the General Assembly on 27 February, the General Assembly adopted resolutions deploring the Russian invasion of Ukraine and focusing on the humanitarian situation, garnering 141 and 140 affirmative votes, respectively. On 4 March, the UN Human Rights Council established an independent international Commission of Inquiry to “investigate all alleged violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, and related crimes in the context of aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation”, and other related matters. The International Court of Justice rendered provisional measures on 16 March that ordered Russia to immediately suspend the military operations it commenced on 24 February in Ukrainian territory, among other matters. And on 2 March, ICC Prosecutor Karim Asad Ahmad Khan announced that he had decided to immediately proceed with an active investigation into the situation in Ukraine after receiving referrals from 39 ICC States Parties.

The recent hostilities in Ukraine have been a defining moment both for the Council and the larger multilateral system. Coinciding with calls for a revived multilateralism, efforts to address this conflict will focus and shape reflections on global cooperation within a rules-based order.

Status Update since our March Forecast

Afghanistan

On 2 March, Special Representative and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Deborah Lyons briefed the Council on the situation in Afghanistan and the work of UNAMA (S/PV.8984). Mariam Safi, the Executive Director of the Organisation for Policy Research and Development Studies, also briefed. Iran and Pakistan participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. The meeting was followed by closed consultations. On 17 March, the Council adopted resolution 2626, which extended UNAMA's mandate until 17 March 2023. Fourteen members voted in favour of the resolution, with Russia abstaining. On 25 March, Lyons briefed Council members under "any other business" on the Taliban's decision to prevent girls from attending secondary school.

Climate Finance for Sustaining Peace and Security

On 9 March, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) convened a ministerial-level Arria-formula meeting on climate finance (that is, the local, national or transnational financing of initiatives aimed at addressing climate change and its effects) as a means to build and sustain peace in conflict, post-conflict and crisis situations. The UAE's Special Envoy for Climate Change and Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology, Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, chaired the meeting. The briefers were: Yannick Glemarec, the Executive Director of the Green Climate Fund; Alok Sharma, the President of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference; Nafisah Abubakar, the Head of the Secretariat of Rural Women Energy Security (RUWES) Initiative in Nigeria; Paul Chet Greene, the Foreign Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, who chairs the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS); and John Kerry, the US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate.

South Sudan

On 7 March, Special Representative and head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Nicholas Haysom briefed the Council on the 90-day report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/156). Major General (Retired) Charles Tai Gituui, Interim Chairperson of the reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and Riya Williams Yuyada, a civil society representative, also briefed (S/PV.8987). On 15 March, the Council adopted resolution 2625, extending the mandate of UNMISS for one year, with 13 votes in favour. China and Russia abstained.

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

On 14 March, Security Council members held a briefing on the activities of the OSCE (S/PV.8992). Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs Zbigniew Rau, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office (CiO), and Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed. Ukraine participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. At the meeting, several Council members expressed support for the OSCE's activities in Ukraine. Rau said that strong UN-OSCE cooperation is "even more needed today, when the basic principles of the [UN] Charter and international law are being flagrantly violated in the very heart of

Europe". Russia accused Rau of overstepping his mandate, suggesting that the CiO's role is to "solve disagreement between [OSCE] participating states" rather than to "take biased steps that further inflate confrontation". Responding to Russia's accusation that the OSCE lacks impartiality, Rau argued that "impartiality ends where blatant violations of international and humanitarian law start".

1540 Committee

On 14 March, Council members convened for a briefing on the activities of the 1540 Committee (S/PV.8993). Ambassador Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) briefed the Council in his capacity as chair of the 1540 Committee. At the briefing, he noted that the Committee continued to conduct the comprehensive review of resolution 1540 (2005) in accordance with resolution 1977 (2011). The comprehensive review was launched in 2021, after being postponed by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He also confirmed that additional details regarding the open consultations of the comprehensive review "will be communicated soon since expectations and interest have remained high".

Lebanon

On 17 March, Council members held a briefing in consultations on the Secretary-General's latest report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (S/2022/214) and on recent developments in Lebanon. Special Coordinator for Lebanon Joanna Wronecka and Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed. Wronecka's briefing focused on the preparations for the parliamentary elections in Lebanon scheduled for 15 May, the continuing socio-economic crisis, and the need for reforms. She also encouraged Council members to continue extending their support to the Lebanese Armed Forces and security institutions. Lacroix covered developments related to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and its area of operations.

Cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States

On 23 March, the Council convened for a briefing on cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States (LAS) (S/PV.9001). Minister of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Khalifa Shaheen Almarar chaired the meeting. UN Secretary-General António Guterres, LAS Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit, and civil society representative Razan Farhan Alaql briefed. Yemen, which serves as chair of the Arab Group, participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. Following the briefing, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2022/1) welcoming the strong cooperation between the UN and the LAS and reiterating the Council's intention to consider further steps to promote closer cooperation and strategic coordination between the two organisations.

DPRK

On 7 March, Council members discussed a missile test conducted by the DPRK on 5 March under "any other business". Assistant Secretary-General Mohamed Khaled Khiari briefed. On 25 March, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2627, which extended the

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mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee until 30 April 2023. On the same day, the Council also held an open meeting, followed by closed consultations, to discuss the intercontinental ballistic missile test conducted by the DPRK on 24 March (S/PV/9004). Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo provided the briefing.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Conflict, Post-conflict and Humanitarian Settings

On 25 March, Mexico convened an Arria-formula meeting on ensuring access to mental health and psychosocial support in conflict, post-conflict and humanitarian settings. The briefers were Dévora Kestel, Director of the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Department at the World Health Organization (WHO); Micaela Serafini, Health Director of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); Norman Sartorius, President of the Association for the Improvement of Mental Health Programmes; and Pastora Mira García, a human rights defender from Colombia.

Sudan

On 28 March, the chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Harold Adlai Agyeman (Ghana), provided the quarterly briefing on the Committee's work (S/PV.9005). On the same day, Special Representative for Sudan and head of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) Volker Perthes briefed the Council (S/PV.9006) on the 90-day report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/172).

Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 29 March, the Security Council held a briefing and consultation on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) Bintou briefed the Council on the latest political, security and humanitarian situation in DRC and the activities of MONUSCO. She also provided updates on the implementation of MONUSCO's transition plan and the preparations being made toward the mission's withdrawal from Tanganyika province in June. Léa Babite Inyobondaye, a DRC civil society representative advocating for women and youth rights, was unable to brief the Council because of technical difficulties but her statement was circulated to members.

Somalia

On 24 March, at the request of the A3 (Gabon, Ghana and Kenya), Council members met under "any other business" to discuss the Al-Shabaab attack of that same day on the Mogadishu international airport. Following the meeting, Council members issued a press statement (SC/14840) condemning this attack and the 23 March Al-Shabaab attack in Beletweyne. On 31 March, the Council adopted a resolution authorising the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS)—the successor mission to the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)—to commence its operations in Somalia.

Golan Heights (UNDOF)

On 30 March, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed Council members in consultations on the work of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (Golan Heights).

Ukraine

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council is expected to convene an open briefing on Ukraine. Additional meetings on Ukraine are likely depending on developments on the ground.

Key Recent Developments

The Security Council, and the UN system more broadly, have been actively engaged on the situation in Ukraine in recent weeks. Since Russia's invasion on 24 February, the Security Council has convened seven open briefings and voted on three draft resolutions, two of which were not adopted. Previous meetings addressed the humanitarian situation (on 28 February, 7 March, 17 March, and 29 March), the safety of nuclear sites (on 4 March), and allegations about military biological activities in Ukraine (on 11 March and 18 March). (For more information, see our 5 March, 11 March and 17 March *What's In Blue* stories.) In addition, developments in Ukraine were a significant focus of the 14 March briefing on the activities of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

(For more information, see our 13 March *What's In Blue* story.)

The General Assembly has convened two meetings under the Emergency Special Session (ESS) established by Security Council resolution 2623 of 27 February. The first meeting took place from 28 February to 2 March and the second meeting from 23 to 24 March. Following each meeting of the ESS, UN members voted on a draft resolution on Ukraine. On 2 March, the General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/ES-11/1 titled "Aggression against Ukraine", and on 24 March, it adopted resolution A/RES/ES-11/2 titled "Humanitarian consequences of aggression against Ukraine".

On 26 February, Ukraine instituted proceedings against Russia before the ICJ, which rendered provisional measures on 16 March ordering Russia to immediately suspend the military operations it commenced on 24 February in Ukrainian territory, among other matters.

ICC Prosecutor Karim Asad Ahmad Khan announced on 2 March that he had decided to immediately proceed with an active investigation into the situation in Ukraine after receiving referrals

UN DOCUMENTS ON UKRAINE Security Council Resolution S/RES/2623 (27 February 2022) called for an "emergency special session" (ESS) of the General Assembly to consider and recommend collective action on the situation in Ukraine. **Selected General Assembly Documents** A/RES/ES-11/2 (24 March 2022) was a resolution titled "Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine". A/RES/ES-11/1 (2 March 2022) was a resolution titled "Aggression against Ukraine". **Selected Other Documents** A/ES-11/L.3 (22 March 2022) was a General Assembly resolution drafted by South Africa, which was put to a procedural vote and did not receive the necessary support to be considered by the General Assembly. S/2022/231 (23 March 2022) was a Security Council draft resolution on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine drafted by Russia. S/2022/155 (25 February 2022) was a Security Council draft resolution authored by Albania and the US and co-sponsored by 81 member states, deploring Russia's aggression against Ukraine in violation of Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter.

Ukraine

from 39 ICC States Parties.

The UN Human Rights Council established an independent international Commission of Inquiry on 4 March to “investigate all alleged violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, and related crimes in the context of aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation”, and other related matters.

Five weeks into Russia’s military offensive in Ukraine, the conflict shows no signs of abating. At the outset of the invasion, Russian troops made swift advances in southern Ukraine with the apparent aim of establishing a land corridor from the Crimean Peninsula—which it annexed in 2014—to the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the eastern Donbas region of Ukraine. This objective was partially derailed by Ukrainian military resistance in the southeast city of Mariupol. After encircling the city, Russian troops slowly advanced deeper into Mariupol’s centre, where shelling of residential areas and civilian infrastructure resulted in a significant number of civilian casualties. On 16 March, Russian forces bombed a theatre in Mariupol where hundreds of civilians were taking shelter. Security constraints have hindered access to humanitarian assistance in the city for over a month. Currently, roughly 160,000 people in Mariupol remain trapped and without basic necessities such as food, water and electricity, according to a 28 March OCHA humanitarian impact situation report.

From their base in Crimea, Russian forces also attacked the cities of Kherson, Mykolaiv and Zaporizhzhia in southern Ukraine. Kherson was the first major Ukrainian city to be captured by the Russian military during the offensive. After having taken partial control of Kherson on 2 March, Russian troops began preparing for a move to the south-west towards Odesa. According to some analysts, one of Russia’s objectives was to block Ukraine’s access to the Black Sea. However, Russian troops stalled at the city of Mykolaiv, where Ukrainian forces staged several counter-offensives, forcing Russian troops to retreat to Kherson in early March.

Heavy fighting has taken place in several cities in the northeast of Ukraine, including Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Sumy. The inability of Russian forces to seize control of Chernihiv derailed its push on Kyiv from the east. Although Chernihiv is encircled by Russian troops, Ukrainian forces have reportedly so far managed to retain the city’s centre.

Meanwhile, the number of civilians killed and displaced, and essential infrastructure destroyed, continues to rise, driving a significant increase in humanitarian needs across the country. Briefing the Council on 29 March, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya stressed that “our worst-case scenario has been reached and, in some areas, surpassed”. As at 30 March, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had documented 3,090 civilian casualties from the conflict, including 1,189 deaths, while noting that true figures are likely to be considerably higher. Most casualties have been attributed to the use of explosive weapons with a wide-impact area, such as shelling from heavy artillery, the use of multiple rocket launch systems and air attacks. Moreover, since the conflict erupted on 24 February, nearly 10.5 million people—approximately a quarter of Ukraine’s population—have been forcibly displaced, according to a 30 March OCHA

humanitarian impact situation report. This figure includes 6.5 million internally displaced people and four million refugees who have fled Ukraine to neighbouring countries.

In addition, fighting has caused significant damage to critical infrastructure and disrupted essential public services. According to a 16 March UNDP report, the conflict risks reducing 90 percent of the Ukrainian population to poverty, reversing almost two decades of socioeconomic progress in the country and region. At a 14 March press briefing, Guterres noted that 45 African and least-developed countries import at least one-third of their wheat from Ukraine or Russia and warned that “we must do everything possible to avert a hurricane of hunger and a meltdown of the global food system”. The conflict will affect the global economy, he said, “especially in the developing world”, as food, fuel and fertiliser prices increase, supply chains are disrupted, and the costs and delays of transportation of imported goods reach record levels.

At the time of writing, there had been seven rounds of peace talks between Russia and Ukraine since the start of Russia’s invasion. The first three rounds, which took place near the Belarus-Ukraine border, were held on 28 February, 3 March and 7 March. On 10 March, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu mediated the first high-level talks between the two sides, hosting Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in Antalya, Turkey. During this meeting, it appears that Lavrov reiterated demands that Ukraine de-militarise and accept a neutral status, while Kuleba sought to secure humanitarian ceasefire agreements.

From 14 to 17 March, the two sides held a fifth round of negotiations via videoconference. In a Facebook video posted after the meeting, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy characterised the talks as “more realistic”. According to media reports, the Ukrainian negotiating team had demanded a ceasefire, the withdrawal of Russian troops and security guarantees. On 14 March, a 15-point plan was reportedly discussed between the two sides. The plan involved Kyiv renouncing its NATO ambitions and intentions to host foreign military bases or weaponry in Ukrainian territory, in exchange for the withdrawal of Russian troops and security guarantees against a potential invasion. Media reports have indicated that the main sticking point in the talks was Russia’s demand that Ukraine recognise its claim to Crimea and the independence of the separatist regions in Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine.

On 21 March, the two sides convened for the sixth round of talks, which again yielded no results. Following the latest round of talks held on 29 March, Russia’s Deputy Minister of Defence Alexander Fomin said that the negotiations on “the neutrality and non-nuclear status of Ukraine, as well as on the provision of security guarantees to Ukraine” had entered a “practical stage” and announced that Russia would “dramatically reduce military activities” around Kyiv and Chernihiv “to increase mutual trust” and “create the necessary conditions for future negotiations”. Following Fomin’s announcement, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said that the US believes “this is a repositioning, not a real withdrawal, and that we should all be prepared to watch for a major offensive against other areas in Ukraine”. On 25 March, the deputy chief of staff of the Russian military, Sergey Rudskoy, announced that the Russian offensive would now focus on the “complete liberation of Donbas”.

Ukraine

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is determining what role it can play in facilitating an end to the conflict. While it can continue to hold regular public meetings on the situation in Ukraine, members may also wish to consider closed formats such as informal consultations, the informal interactive dialogue format or closed Arria-formula meetings, that would allow members to hear frank assessments of the situation from key actors.

The Council could also consider a presidential statement encouraging Secretary-General António Guterres to use his good offices to resolve the crisis. One possibility would be for the Secretary-General to appoint a personal envoy to oversee the political settlement process and its implementation. (Personal envoys undertake missions at the Secretary-General's initiative but do not require a mandate from the Security Council.) At a 28 March press briefing, Guterres announced that he had requested Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths to explore “the possible arrangements for humanitarian ceasefire in Ukraine”. While deploying Griffiths to engage with the parties on negotiations for a humanitarian ceasefire may serve as a viable entry point for the Secretary-General's good offices, a personal envoy could be given a broader political mandate. In addition, Council members could ask the Secretary-General to provide regular reports on the work of his personal envoy.

Another option for Council action would be a vote on a Chapter VI resolution urging a ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian access and calling on the parties to seek a solution through diplomatic means. Council members may choose to invoke Article 27(3) and request Russia to recuse itself from voting. For this to happen, members would have to agree that the decision falls under Chapter VI, that there is a dispute, and that Russia is a party to the dispute.

The safety of nuclear facilities in Ukraine is another issue for the Council. The Council could request periodic updates on this issue from the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Mariano Grossi, who has already briefed the Council once on Ukraine (on 4 March) following the outbreak of a fire at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant.

Another option would be for the Council to request a briefing from the ICJ president on the provisional measures the Court has rendered.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation in Ukraine is another important issue. The Council could invite the Emergency Relief Coordinator to present the findings of the report on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine and on the humanitarian response due on 1 April, as mandated by General Assembly resolution A/RES/ES—11/1 of 2 March.

The Council could also seek to bring a human rights perspective to its discussions, inviting the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet or Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris to brief the Council.

Council Dynamics

The Security Council remains starkly divided on the situation in Ukraine, with Russia justifying its invasion, on the one hand, and several Council members—including Albania, France, Ireland, Norway,

the UK, and the US—strongly condemning Russia's actions in Ukraine, on the other hand. Members of the latter group have consistently called for the immediate cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine. They view the humanitarian situation as stemming directly and exclusively from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and demand that any text addressing the humanitarian situation in the country explicitly reference Russia's role in igniting and exacerbating the crisis.

Several elected Council members—including the A3 (Gabon, Ghana and Kenya) and Brazil—have tended to be critical of the Russian intervention but have been uncomfortable with sanctions and the inclusion of political language in humanitarian texts. This is evidenced by their voting pattern at the Security Council and the General Assembly, which, for the most part, has been in line with that of the US and European members. The African members and Brazil voted in line with the US and the European members on the 25 February, 27 February and 23 March Security Council resolutions, as well as the 2 March and 24 March General Assembly resolutions that were adopted by 141 and 140 votes in favour, respectively. However, these members broke ranks and either abstained or voted in favour of considering South Africa's competing draft resolution at the General Assembly on 24 March, which was similar to Russia's Security Council draft text that failed to be adopted on 23 March. (Fifty states were in favour of voting on the South African General Assembly draft, too few for it to be put to the vote.) In its explanation of vote at the General Assembly, Brazil said that it would have preferred a resolution with “strictly humanitarian messages” rather than one containing “clearly divisive elements”, many of which went “beyond the humanitarian aspects of the conflict”.

An ally of both Russia and the US, India has attempted to take a neutral stance, having abstained on all Security Council and General Assembly resolutions to date since the outbreak of violence on 24 February. In explaining its vote at the General Assembly on 24 March, India said that the UN's efforts should contribute to de-escalation and “facilitate the immediate cessation of hostilities to promote dialogue and diplomacy”.

China has been unwilling to criticise Russia directly during the crisis, and it has demonstrated some support for Russian views regarding the European security architecture and the pitfalls of sanctions. It joined India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in abstaining on the 25 February and 27 February Security Council draft resolutions, arguing that any action should be “truly conducive to defusing the Ukraine crisis rather than adding fuel to the fire”. At the 25 February Council meeting, China said that “Russia's legitimate security aspirations should be given attention to and properly addressed”, given NATO's eastward expansion. It has also consistently criticised unilateral sanctions, maintaining that the “ever-escalating, sweeping, indiscriminate sanctions” against Russia will give rise to “new humanitarian problems” during the 29 March briefing. China voted in favour of Russia's humanitarian draft resolution on 23 March, abstained on the 24 March General Assembly resolution deploring Russia's intervention, and co-sponsored South Africa's competing text in the General Assembly on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine.

COVID-19

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council will hold a briefing on the implementation of resolution 2565 on the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, adopted during the UK presidency in February 2021. The session will be chaired by Lord Ahmad, UK Minister for South Asia, North Africa, the United Nations and the Commonwealth at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. Assistant Secretary-General Ted Chaiban, the Global Lead Coordinator for COVID-19 Vaccine Country-Readiness and Delivery; Esperanza Martinez, head of the ICRC's COVID-19 Crisis Management Team; and a civil society representative are expected to brief.

Key Recent Developments

Following the development of several COVID-19 vaccines by the end of 2020, the Security Council adopted resolution 2565 on 26 February 2021. The resolution called for strengthening national and multilateral approaches and international cooperation, such as the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, to facilitate equitable and affordable access to the vaccine in armed conflict situations, post-conflict situations and humanitarian emergencies. It also stressed that equitable access to safe, efficacious and affordable COVID-19 vaccines was essential to ending the pandemic and expressed concern about uneven progress in vaccine access, recognising that those affected by conflict and insecurity were particularly at risk of being left behind.

COVAX, a key mechanism for promoting vaccine distribution to low- and middle-income countries, is co-led by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Gavi Vaccine Alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, with UNICEF as its delivery partner. Initially, the rollout of COVAX vaccines was slow. By the end of last year, however, vaccine supplies had become more available. On 15 January, COVAX announced the delivery of its one-billionth COVID-19 vaccine dose as part of a shipment of 1.1 million doses to Rwanda.

On 17 February, the Secretary-General appointed Ted Chaiban of UNICEF as Global Lead Coordinator for COVID-19 Vaccine Country Readiness and Delivery at the level of Assistant Secretary-General. In this role, Chaiban leads a senior inter-agency team to promote an effective global response to the pandemic, supporting vaccine country readiness and delivery. He is also tasked with coordinating inter-agency efforts to forecast vaccine needs and provide financial and technical assistance to overcome bottlenecks in country-level implementation. In the press release announcing his appointment, Chaiban said that “[w]ith vastly improved supply, the world no longer has a global vaccine supply problem; it has a vaccine equity and delivery problem”.

At a 10 March briefing of the Human Rights Council on COVID-19 vaccines, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said that more than 10.5 billion vaccine doses had been administered globally, but of this total, only about 13 percent of people in low-income countries had been vaccinated, compared with almost 70 percent in high-income countries. “We have failed to administer the vaccines in a fair and equitable manner,” she said.

“This failure is prolonging the pandemic.” WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who also spoke at the briefing, said: “[c]ountries with high vaccination rates are reopening while others with low vaccination rates and low testing rates have been left behind. The result is more than 60,000 deaths per week, along with an increased risk of the emergence of new variants”.

Many conflict-affected countries have particularly low vaccination rates. As at 24 March, Burundi and Haiti have received enough doses to cover only three percent of their populations; the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Yemen, four percent; Cameroon, six percent; and Mali and South Sudan, eight percent, according to OCHA and the Centre for Humanitarian Data. Among other countries, Syria had received enough doses to vaccinate 35 percent of its population and Nigeria, 17 percent. Within such countries, however, areas that are affected by conflict, controlled by armed groups, or have displaced persons have had less vaccine access. Since resolution 2565's adoption, Council members met on 26 July and 13 December 2021 in closed consultations to discuss the resolution's implementation and the challenges of vaccine administration in conflict and humanitarian settings.

In other recent developments, the Gavi Vaccine Alliance announced on 11 March that Germany will host a high-level meeting on 8 April to help raise at least \$5.2 billion in urgent financial support for COVAX, including \$3.8 billion in donor funding for lower-income countries.

On 15 March, the US, the EU, India, and South Africa reached a tentative agreement to waive patent rights for COVID-19 vaccines. For the deal to enter into force, the consensus of the 164 members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is required, meaning that just one country rejecting it could still block the accord. According to news reports, the agreement reflects a compromise from the original proposal that sought broader waivers, as patents for COVID-19 vaccines will be suspended for either three or five years, and treatment and testing formulas will remain subject to intellectual property protections. It would also only apply to developing WTO member countries that made up less than 10 percent of world exports of COVID-19 vaccine doses in 2021.

Key Issues and Options

Drawing attention to the needs and challenges of COVID-19 vaccine delivery and administration in conflict-affected countries and humanitarian settings is a key issue. Such settings have limited logistics capacity, humanitarian access challenges, weak or decimated healthcare systems, and a shortage of healthcare workers. Without building up these capacities, conflict-affected and post-conflict countries are likely to lag behind in administering the vaccine, despite its growing availability.

Another key issue is the secondary socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic and the risk of increasing unrest over the next year. Countries that have low vaccination coverage and have not experienced the economic recovery occurring in wealthier countries are also facing the impacts of global inflation, including rising fuel and food prices resulting from the war in Ukraine.

UN DOCUMENTS ON COVID-19 Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2565 (26 February 2021) demanded humanitarian pauses to deliver COVID-19 vaccines. S/RES/2532 (1 July 2020) demanded a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on the Council's agenda to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Security Council Letter S/2021/157 (19 February 2021) contained the record of briefings and statements from Council members' 17 February videoconference debate on equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

COVID-19

Another issue is the difficulty in operationalising the COVAX humanitarian buffer. This was intended to make vaccines available as a measure of last resort for people living in areas of humanitarian crises and vulnerable groups, such as refugees, asylum seekers and stateless people, who risk being left out of national vaccine rollouts or where unavoidable gaps in coverage might arise.

Addressing vaccine hesitancy and maintaining assistance for other humanitarian needs remain further challenges for conflict-affected countries.

The role of UN peacekeeping and special political missions in trying to support vaccine rollouts is a further important issue.

The Council may continue to hold periodic meetings on the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain focus on the specific needs of conflict-affected countries due to the health crisis and to stay aware of the possible destabilising effects of the pandemic. Another option is holding more in-depth country-specific discussions on the impacts of the pandemic, including its socioeconomic effects, to identify and respond to relevant peace and security threats. Council meetings on the health crisis, whether thematically or at country level, could also function to bring enhanced attention to such threats and vaccine inequities in a way that may prompt other relevant actors to address these problems.

Council Dynamics

The Council swiftly agreed to resolution 2565 on COVID-19 vaccines, adopting it as a “presidential text”, meaning that all 15 Council members co-sponsored the resolution. The resolution also had 115 member state co-sponsors—the third-highest of any Council resolution. This represented a much different dynamic than the division in the Council around COVID-19—highlighted by US-China tensions—during the first year of the pandemic.

Differences of view over sanctions sometimes arise in discussing responses to the pandemic. China, Russia and others often reiterate their view that unilaterally imposed sanctions should be waived, as they can undermine countries’ capacity to respond to the pandemic. The US and European countries push back against such references to unilateral sanctions in Council products. Some Council members that are large suppliers of COVID-19 vaccines are keen to highlight their contributions to vaccine distribution. Other members may be more critical of booster-shot programmes because of the gaps that remain in vaccine coverage in many lower-income countries.

The UK was the penholder on resolution 2565. France and former elected member Tunisia were the penholders on resolution 2532, which the Council adopted in July 2020 to support the Secretary-General’s global ceasefire appeal to combat the pandemic.

Mali

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council will hold its quarterly briefing on Mali, followed by consultations. Special Representative and head of the UN Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) El-Ghassim Wane is expected to brief. The mandate of MINUSMA expires on 30 June 2022.

Key Recent Developments

Mali’s transitional authorities have continued negotiations with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on a new timeline for holding elections to restore constitutional order following coups d’état in August 2020 and May 2021. The initial 18-month transition period brokered by ECOWAS ended in March. On 31 December 2021, Mali submitted a new, five-year transition timeline to ECOWAS to hold presidential elections by December 2026. A revised calendar, proposed on 8 January, set the end of December 2025 for the presidential election.

ECOWAS rejected the proposal at a 9 January summit in Accra, Ghana, calling it “totally unacceptable”. The West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and ECOWAS announced new diplomatic, economic and financial sanctions on Mali, including a trade embargo (with exemptions for essential goods such as medical supplies and petroleum products) and the freezing of Mali’s assets at ECOWAS central and commercial banks. Sanctions would gradually be lifted only after an acceptable and agreed timeline is

finalised and satisfactory progress is realised, according to the summit communiqué.

The AU Peace and Security Council endorsed the ECOWAS decisions at a 14 January meeting, and on 4 February, the EU sanctioned five individuals for obstructing and undermining Mali’s transition, including Prime Minister Choguel Kokalla Maïga. Mali’s neighbour, Guinea, which is in a transition following a coup in September 2021, said it would not enforce the ECOWAS sanctions, and Mauritania, which is not part of ECOWAS, signed a new trade agreement with Mali on 14 February. Mali has defaulted, as at 1 March, on \$180 million in debt payments since the ECOWAS sanctions, according to the UEMOA.

Although Mali’s transitional parliament approved a five-year transition plan on 21 February, ECOWAS and Malian authorities continued negotiations for a shorter period. The ECOWAS mediator to Mali, Goodluck Jonathan, led a delegation to Bamako from 18 to 20 March, during which he met with transition president and coup leader Assimi Goïta. According to a statement issued by Mali, the authorities offered a 24-month period, which ECOWAS did not accept.

On 24 March, the UEMOA court of justice ordered the suspension of the sanctions that the eight-member state regional group had announced with ECOWAS against Mali in January. The ruling does not apply to the sanctions imposed by ECOWAS. The next day at an ECOWAS summit, ECOWAS urged Mali’s transitional

UN DOCUMENTS ON MALI [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8945](#) (11 January 2022) was a briefing on Mali. [Security Council Press Statement SC/14824](#) (7 March 2022) condemned the 7 March attack on MINUSMA near Mopti, in which two peacekeepers from Egypt were killed and four were wounded. [Sanctions-Related Documents SC/14800](#) (22 February 2022) was a 2374 Committee press release about its 8 February meeting with the Mali Panel of Experts. [S/2022/14](#) (6 January 2022) was a Secretary-General’s letter on the appointment of the Mali Panel of Experts.

Mali

authorities to accept a 12-to-16 month transition period and upheld its sanctions.

Meanwhile, France announced that it was withdrawing from Mali its troops that were part of its Sahel-wide counter-terrorism force, Operation Barkhane, amid deteriorating relations with the Malian authorities and the reported deployment in December 2021 of personnel from the Wagner Group, the Russian private security company. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian described Mali's authorities as "out of control" on 28 January. His comments followed Mali's 24 January demand that Denmark immediately withdraw its 90-troop contingent, soon after it had joined the European special operations mission in Mali, Task Force Takuba. Mali asserted that the Danish troops had entered the country without permission. Denmark denied the accusation but said that it would withdraw. On 31 January, Bamako gave France's ambassador to Mali 72 hours to leave the country.

On 17 February, France, other European countries and Canada announced that their forces would withdraw fully from Operation Barkhane and Task Force Takuba in Mali within six months. "Due to the multiple obstructions by the Malian transitional authorities... the political, operational and legal conditions are no longer met to effectively continue their current military engagement in the fight against terrorism in Mali", according to a joint statement by France, Canada and 23 other European and African countries. The statement said they would look to extend support to neighbouring countries in the Gulf of Guinea and West Africa to contain the expansion of terrorist groups in the Sahel.

Mali has claimed successes in counter-terrorism operations that it launched in December 2021. The Wagner Group has continued its deployment and numbers around 1,000 personnel, according to news reports. Mali has denied engaging any private security company, saying that the Russian personnel are part of its bilateral military cooperation with Russia.

In a 15 March report, Human Rights Watch alleged that the Malian army and armed Islamist groups had killed at least 107 civilians in central and southwestern Mali since December 2021. At least 71 of these deaths were linked to government forces and 36 to armed Islamist groups. In one of the incidents described in the report, soldiers are said to have extrajudicially executed at least 35 men, detained during recent military operations around 2 March in the Segou region, making it the most serious allegation involving government soldiers since 2012. In two incidents involving abuses by the Malian army, people interviewed for the report claimed that white soldiers were present and spoke a language they did not understand.

MINUSMA force commander General Kees Matthijssen assumed his command on 14 January. Chad's President, Mahamat Déby, announced on 21 February during a visit to Paris that Chad would increase its contribution to MINUSMA, while Sweden announced on 3 March that it would withdraw its 220 troops in MINUSMA one year earlier than originally planned. They are now scheduled to leave in June 2023.

Human Rights-Related Developments

The independent expert on the situation of human rights in Mali, Alioune Tine, conducted an official visit to the country from 8 to 17 February. In a statement

on 22 February, Tine said that "for the first time since the beginning of my visits in 2018, I noted a tangible improvement of the security situation, the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs), the human rights situation as well as endogenous peace dynamics, especially in Central Mali". However, he expressed serious concern over "the collapse of the education system" as well as shrinking civic space, including the role of the media.

During its 49th session, the Human Rights Council held a dialogue on 28 March with Tine and considered his report (A/HRC/49/94). The dialogue was to assess the changes in the human rights situation in the country, with a particular focus on the issue of space for civil society and human rights defenders.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 6 January, the Secretary-General informed the Council that he was appointing the members of the Mali Panel of Experts after Russia lifted a hold that it had been placing on the nomination following the Council's renewal of the Panel's mandate in August 2021. On 8 February, the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee met with the Panel, which presented an overview of its work plan for the following months.

On 16 March, the 2374 Committee convened informal consultations with Mali and regional states and actors to discuss the implementation of the Security Council travel ban and asset freeze sanctions imposed in 2017 to pressure the signatory parties of the 2015 Mali and Peace Reconciliation Agreement to fulfil the agreement. Mali, regional states, and committee members also discussed the new ECOWAS sanctions intended to pressure authorities to restore constitutional order.

Key Issues and Options

The political situation, including talks between Mali and ECOWAS about a new transition period and the gradual lifting of ECOWAS sanctions, is a key issue. Council members could call on Mali's authorities to accept ECOWAS' request for a shorter transition.

As the security situation remains critical, the effect the withdrawal of Operation Barkhane and Task Force Takuba will have on MINUSMA is another key issue. MINUSMA was established in 2013 based on the Secretary-General's recommendation that a parallel force would conduct counter-terrorism operations. While the Wagner Group supports Mali's counter-terrorism efforts, there are concerns over its presence. The Russian private security firm has difficult relations with the UN peacekeeping operation in the Central African Republic, where the company's personnel have been deployed for several years. Barkhane's departure also presents possible logistical issues. It provides flight services to MINUSMA; however, these could continue out of bases in Niger. The pending closure of Barkhane's hospital in Gao has raised concerns for various European troop-contributing countries to MINUSMA.

The Council could consider authorising an increase to the MINUSMA force ceiling to accommodate the new troops that Chad has offered. The mandate renewal of MINUSMA in June is a further opportunity for the Council to assess the significance of the new political and security landscape on the mission. There are also plans for an AU-UN joint strategic assessment of security in the Sahel, though it is unclear when it will be finalised.

Alleged human rights violations are a major concern. Members could reiterate the need for Mali's armed forces to respect human rights at all times, including during counter-terrorism operations, and encourage MINUSMA to release the latest report from its human rights division.

Mali

Another issue is the stalled implementation of the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement and growing concerns about the risk of hostilities resuming between the government and northern armed groups that are its signatory parties.

Council Dynamics

Council members initially sought to follow ECOWAS' lead and supported its call for an 18-month transition in Mali. Toward the end of last year, however, differences emerged among Council members over this approach, with Russia and, to an extent, China expressing sympathy with the authorities over the challenges of holding elections because of the security situation and the risk of further political instability, if elections take place prematurely. Following the Council's briefing on Mali in January, members were unable to

agree on press elements that apparently would have expressed support for ECOWAS' decisions, including the sanctions, due to Russian and Chinese objections. Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo is the current Chair of the ECOWAS Authority. Ghana champions ECOWAS positions with the support of the other African Council members, Gabon and Kenya.

The US and European members have strongly criticised the Wagner Group's deployment. Russia pushes back on such criticism, claiming a double standard given that private security companies from Western countries are deployed globally.

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

Colombia

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing from Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission, which was issued on 28 March. Colombian president Iván Duque is expected to represent Colombia at the meeting.

The verification mission's mandate expires on 31 October.

Key Recent Developments

On 13 March, Colombia held legislative elections for both houses of Congress (the Senate and House of Representatives) for 2022–2026. These were the second national elections in the country since the signing of the 2016 Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace between the government of Colombia and the former rebel group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). For the first time, voters in conflict-affected areas elected representatives for the 16 “special transitional electoral districts for peace”, which were stipulated in the 2016 agreement with the aim of promoting the participation of historically excluded populations, including members of indigenous communities and representatives of victims' and women's organisations. Sixteen additional seats in Colombia's House of Representatives have been designated solely for members of these groups for the 2022–2026 and 2026–2030 congressional periods.

Also on 13 March, Colombians voted in the presidential primary elections. Gustavo Petro, Federico Gutiérrez and Sergio Fajardo were elected to represent the three main political coalitions: the left-wing “Pacto Histórico”, the right-wing “Equipo por Colombia” and the centrist “Centro Esperanza”, respectively. These candidates, along with several other opponents running independently, will participate in the presidential elections on 29 May. If no candidate wins over 50 percent of votes in the first round, a second round will be held in June.

The results of the legislative elections have been contested, as

reports emerged of irregularities in the voting and vote count processes, including flaws in the ballots' design and insufficient training of vote counters. The Electoral Observation Mission (MOE)—a platform of civil society organisations that promotes the exercise of civil and political rights in Colombia—said that it has not found any evidence of election fraud but noted that the National Civil Registry and other election officials made “monumental errors”. The MOE emphasised the need to address such issues ahead of the presidential poll, warning about a possible loss of public trust in the electoral process. At the time of writing, the final results, which will determine the composition of the Congress, have yet to be announced.

Several instances of violence and intimidation against candidates from across the political spectrum were reported. According to the Secretary-General's report, which covers the period from 28 December 2021 to 25 March, several candidates from the 16 “special transitional electoral districts for peace” withdrew from the race, citing the lack of security guarantees. Additionally, the report notes that voters in several rural areas “faced obstacles while trying to exercise their right to vote” due to the activities of illegal armed actors. Other issues arose in connection with the electoral process, including significant delays in the disbursement of public funds to candidates in the special districts for peace, which hindered their ability to conduct their campaigns in remote areas.

Violence also continued to have deleterious effects on communities (including indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities), former FARC-EP members, human rights defenders, and social leaders. The verification mission verified the killing of 11 ex-combatants during the period covered by the Secretary-General's report, bringing to 315 the number of former FARC-EP members killed since the signing of the 2016 agreement. The report said that civilians were affected by increased levels of violence in several departments, including Arauca, Chocó and Putumayo. It expressed concern about the activities of illegal armed groups in ethnic territories, which endanger indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, while emphasising the severity of the situation in the Pacific Coast. During the reporting

UN DOCUMENTS ON COLOMBIA [Secretary-General's Report S/2022/267](#) (28 March 2022) was the most recent 90-day report. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8951](#) (20 January 2022) was the Security Council's latest quarterly meeting on Colombia. [Security Council Press Statement SC/14781](#) (27 January 2022) reiterated Council members' support for the implementation of the peace agreement.

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period, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) received reports of 25 large-scale killings; four of these cases were verified and had 12 victims. Additionally, the OHCHR received information about the killings of 43 human rights defenders and social leaders, including six Afro-Colombian and 13 indigenous leaders among them.

On 28 January, Colombia's Constitutional Court announced its decision to declare an "unconstitutional state of affairs", citing the large number of killings of former combatants since the signing of the 2016 peace agreement. The court ordered the government to implement the security guarantees stipulated in the 2016 agreement and decided to establish a special chamber within the court to monitor the government's compliance with its order. Among other things, the court called on the government to ensure the effective functioning of the National Commission on Security Guarantees, which is charged under the peace agreement with developing a public policy for dismantling criminal organisations and their support networks.

On 28 February, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), the judicial component of the transitional justice system established by the 2016 Peace Agreement, held a hearing on the National Commission on Security Guarantees. It ordered the commission to discuss and approve its internal regulations within 30 days and present an action plan for the public policy to dismantle illegal armed groups within 60 days. The National Commission on Security Guarantees met on 7 March for the first time in close to a year and unanimously adopted its internal regulations.

The Security Council last discussed the situation in Colombia on 20 January, when it was briefed by Ruiz Massieu and Luz Marina Giraldo, a signatory of the 2016 agreement and a leader promoting the rights of family members of former combatants and social leaders who were killed. Giraldo is the first former FARC-EP member to have briefed the Security Council. She called for a robust plan to facilitate the access of widows and orphaned children of ex-combatants to comprehensive social security systems and rights, higher education, healthcare, and the job market. This plan, she noted, is designed to "prevent them from falling into the trap of poverty, so that they will never be objectified or be victims of any stereotype of gender violence or discrimination". Immediately prior to the meeting, Security Council members participated in an immersive virtual reality experience, via headsets, to learn more about the peace process from actors on the ground in Colombia.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 8 March, during its 49th session, the Human Rights Council received a presentation on the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Colombia (A/HRC/49/19). The report, covering 1 January to 31 December 2021, focuses on the implementation of the human rights-related aspects of the 2016 peace agreement. It also includes a list of recommendations.

Women, Peace and Security

On 20 January, the permanent representatives to the UN of Albania, Norway and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – which in December 2021 pledged to make women, peace and security (WPS) a priority of their respective presidencies – held a WPS-focused press stakeout ahead of the Council's open briefing on Colombia. Ambassador Mona Juul (Norway) said that Norway, the UAE and Albania urge the full, equal and meaningful participation of women

leaders in the implementation of the Colombian peace accord. Ambassador Ferit Hoxha (Albania) said that the implementation of the agreement's gender provisions and its ethnic chapter are essential conditions for lasting peace. Ambassador Lana Nusseibeh (UAE) stressed that women former combatants' meaningful participation in economic reintegration still faces challenges and called for further progress. Albania, Norway and the UAE were joined by Ambassador Guillermo Fernández de Soto (Colombia), who reported on the implementation of the gender aspects of the peace agreement, as well as other relevant policies and programmes.

Key Issues and Options

The comprehensive implementation of the 2016 peace agreement remains a key issue for the Council. As next month's meeting will take place in the middle of the electoral cycle, Council members may wish to emphasise in a press statement the importance of implementing the agreement in its entirety, rather than selected aspects, regardless of the outcome of legislative and presidential elections. This message was conveyed by several members during the 20 January Council meeting and in the 27 January press statement Council members issued following the meeting. Members may recall that in 2017, Colombia's Constitutional Court endorsed a law which established the peace agreement as a frame of reference for the formulation of public policies and obliged civil servants to comply with the agreement for the following 12 years, irrespective of the outcome of elections.

An important related issue for the Council is how to increase the pace of the implementation of the gender-related provisions of the peace agreement and enhance women's participation in political processes. The Informal Experts Group (IEG) on Women, Peace and Security will hold a meeting focused on Colombia ahead of the Council's quarterly briefing. During the IEG meeting, members could develop a concrete set of recommendations on promoting such matters, including through the verification mission's work.

Progress in transitional justice processes is another likely focus for the Council, as the Truth Commission is set to issue its final report in June, and the SJP is expected to begin handing down sentences later in 2022. Council members may wish to interact with representatives of the SJP, the Truth Commission and victims' organisations to hear their views on ways in which the Council could further support transitional justice processes in the country. Members could either invite these representatives to brief during the Council's quarterly meeting on Colombia or hold such a discussion in an informal interactive dialogue, a closed meeting format that could allow for a frank exchange of ideas.

In recent months, several Council members initiated opportunities for diplomats, both in New York and in Bogotá, to interact informally with former FARC-EP members and Colombian civil society representatives. Council members may wish to continue holding such informal meetings to hear a broad array of voices address various aspects of the implementation of the agreement.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the peace process in Colombia. Some differences in tone exist, however, between members who are more deferential towards the government and those who emphasise the shortcomings of its approach. Russia, for

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example, has criticised the government for insufficient implementation of the peace agreement and its refusal to conduct dialogue with the armed group Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN). On the other hand, Brazil has apparently sought to highlight more positive aspects of the government's efforts, including during the negotiations on the 27 January press statement. During the January Council meeting, Brazil emphasised the “socio-economic, geographic and logistical problems the Colombian Government faces in order to reach the totality of its territory”, while noting that it too has faced

similar challenges.

The US decided to revoke its designation of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) as a terrorist organisation in November 2021. This move may affect its engagement on the Colombia file; prior to the revocation, US diplomats were apparently unable to participate in formal or informal meetings between Council members and former FARC members.

The UK is the penholder on Colombia.

Women, Peace and Security

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council will hold its annual open debate on conflict-related sexual violence, which this year is entitled “Accountability as Prevention: Ending Cycles of Sexual Violence in Conflict”. The UK Minister of State for South Asia, North Africa, the UN and the Commonwealth and Special Representative of the UK Prime Minister on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, is expected to chair the meeting. Secretary-General António Guterres, Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten, 2018 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Murad, and one or more civil society representatives are the anticipated briefers.

No outcome is expected.

Key Recent Developments

On 16 November 2021, the UK government—through an initiative of Foreign Secretary Liz Truss—launched a global campaign to stop sexual violence in conflict. In the context of this campaign, the government's website said that “[a]ll options are on the table, including an international convention, to end such heinous acts once and for all”. The UK has also announced that it will host a global conference this year in support of this campaign.

It appears that the UK has recently joined the statement of shared commitments on Women, Peace and Security jointly undertaken by Albania, Brazil, Norway, the United Arab Emirates, and former Council member Niger. In the statement, these countries pledged to make Women, Peace and Security a “top priority” during their respective presidencies. (This builds on the “presidency trio” initiative on Women, Peace and Security pursued by Ireland, Kenya and Mexico during their consecutive Council presidencies in September, October and November 2021.) The UK is the first permanent member to join this initiative.

The Secretary-General's annual reports define conflict-related sexual violence as “rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict”. This year's Secretary-General's annual report on conflict-related sexual violence will cover the period from

January to December 2021 and will provide the basis for the April open debate.

It appears that this year's annual report will include a dedicated section on Ethiopia. On 3 November 2021, OHCHR issued a joint report containing the findings of an investigation it had conducted with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, the national human rights institution of Ethiopia. According to the report, which covers the period from 3 November 2020 to 28 June 2021, the Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), the Eritrean Defence Force and the Tigray Special Forces were all “implicated in multiple reports of gang rape”. Among other violations, the report documented cases of violence against women and girls associated with fighters of opposing conflict parties, and cases of rape in detention. The report said that men and boys were also subjected to sexual and gender-based violence and highlighted cases of women's complicity in the perpetration of gender-based violence. The use of rape and other forms of conflict-related sexual violence in the conflict in northern Ethiopia has also been detailed by international NGOs, including Amnesty International, which has issued reports documenting how both the ENDF and allied forces and the Tigrayan forces perpetrated rape and other forms of sexual violence.

As highlighted in the latest report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, issued on 8 February, reports of sexual and gender-based violence in detention have continued. On 13 January, a German court sentenced a former Syrian intelligence official to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity, including rape and sexual assault. In a statement released the following day, Patten welcomed the verdict, saying that it brought a measure of justice for Syrian survivors. Regarding the fact that the case was heard under universal jurisdiction, Patten said that “[w]hen national governments are unwilling or unable to prosecute conflict-related sexual violence domestically, universal jurisdiction becomes one of the critical tools so that perpetrators of these crimes do not go unpunished”.

According to a 16 March Care International Rapid Gender Analysis on Ukrainian refugees in Poland, there are emerging reports of “sexual violence by Russian soldiers against Ukrainian women and girls in and fleeing the country”. On 28 February, Patten expressed concern about the situation in Ukraine and called for the protection of civilians, “especially women and girls, who are disproportionately

UN DOCUMENTS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2467](#) (23 April 2019) was on sexual violence in conflict, passed with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (China and Russia). [S/RES/2106](#) (24 June 2013) was focused on accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict and stressed women's political and economic empowerment. [S/RES/1960](#) (16 December 2010) established a monitoring, analysis and reporting mechanism on conflict-related sexual violence in situations on the Council's agenda. [Secretary-General's Report S/2021/312](#) (30 March 2021) was the Secretary-General's annual report on conflict-related sexual violence.

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affected by armed conflict and displacement”. She also urged all parties to comply with international human rights and humanitarian law, “including the categorical prohibition of all forms of sexual violence”. In a 16 March joint statement with Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children Siobhán Mullally and Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences Reem Alsalem, Patten expressed concern about the increased risks of “sexual violence, especially trafficking in persons, impacting significantly women and children fleeing the conflict in Ukraine and forcibly displaced”.

On 25 March, during the final day of the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield (US) delivered a joint statement “on the Situation of Women and Girls as a Result of Russian Aggression Against Ukraine” on behalf of a group of states (including Council members Albania, France, Ireland, Norway, UK and US) and the EU. Among other issues, the statement expresses concern about “the increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse, and discrimination that Ukrainian women and girls are facing, especially in the areas of Ukraine controlled by the Russian Federation as a result of Russia’s aggression”.

As mandated by resolution 1960 adopted in 2010, this year’s report will again include an annex listing “parties credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict on the agenda of the Security Council”. The 2021 annual report noted that over 70 percent of the parties listed in the annex were persistent perpetrators, meaning they had been listed in the annex for five or more years without taking corrective or remedial action.

Sanctions-Related Developments

Adopted on 28 February, resolution 2624 renewed the Yemen sanctions regime for one year and added the Houthis as an entity to the Yemen sanctions list. The annex to the resolution says that the Houthis have, among other violations, “implemented a policy of sexual violence and repression against politically active and professional women”. Resolution 2564, adopted on 25 February 2021, had sanctioned Houthi official Sultan Saleh Aida Aida Zabin for playing “a prominent role in a policy of intimidation and use of systematic arrest, detention, torture, sexual violence and rape against politically active women”.

On 21 December 2021, the 2127 Central African Republic Sanctions Committee added Ali Darassa – the founder of the armed group *Unité pour la Paix en Centrafrique* (UPC) – to its sanctions list. According to the Committee’s narrative summary explaining the reasons for the listing, the UPC is accused of killing, torturing, raping and displacing civilians, among other violations.

On 25 October 2021, the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee added Osama Al Kuni Ibrahim – the de facto manager of the Al-Nasr detention centre in Zawiyah – to its sanctions list. According to the Committee’s narrative summary, the Al-Nasr detention centre “has been singled out in public and in confidential reports describing the plight of migrants and asylum seekers in Libya, including torture, sexual and gender-based violence and human trafficking”.

Key Issues and Options

The holistic and substantive implementation of the Council’s resolutions on Women, Peace and Security is the overarching issue. Regarding the theme of the open debate, the main issue remains the persistence of conflict-related sexual violence across conflict situations. Adopted in 2019, resolution 2467 recognised that sexual

violence in conflict occurs on a continuum of interrelated and recurring forms of violence against women and girls. One option is to continue to include in Council discussions of conflict-related sexual violence a focus on the theme of the continuum of violence and other intersecting forms of inequality that women and girls face both during conflict and peacetime. Council members may also continue to address the nexus of protection and participation (as the Council did during the January open debate on “Protecting participation”) and address conflict-related sexual violence from a structural perspective, including through its political aspects and consequences.

Members could further support the deployment of women’s protection advisers in peace operations, as well as in transition processes from peacekeeping operations to special political missions and country teams, in line with the recommendations presented at the 16 November 2021 meeting with women’s protection advisers of the Informal Experts Group (IEG) on Women, Peace and Security. A further option is to strengthen the gender and conflict-related sexual violence expertise informing the work of sanctions committees and invite Patten to share information with these committees.

Council Dynamics

The UK, as the Council president for April, intends to focus this year’s annual open debate on conflict-related sexual violence on how strengthening accountability and addressing impunity for conflict-related sexual violence can deliver justice for survivors; hold implicated individuals, states, and non-state actors to account; and prevent future violence. It appears that the UK intends to promote a discussion of gaps in the delivery of justice and assistance to survivors, as well as ways to strengthen the international architecture on conflict-related sexual violence.

While notable implementation gaps persist, Council members are generally supportive of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and their views converge on the need to eradicate conflict-related sexual violence. At the same time, Council members have emphasised different priorities. During last year’s annual open debate on conflict-related sexual violence, several members noted the importance of addressing the deeper causes of conflict-related sexual violence. Ireland stressed that sexual and gender-based violence in times of conflict and crisis is “the transfer of violence from the private to the public sphere” and that in order to eliminate it, the “fundamental task is to achieve gender equality at every level”. Among other issues, Mexico emphasised the importance of addressing the correlation between the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. Some members focused on conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by terrorist groups, with Kenya calling for “stronger integration of the women and peace and security, counter-terrorism and counter-violent extremism agendas”. China called for promoting gender equality and for supporting a greater role for women in economic and social development as well as in peace and security. India said that, in order to avoid duplication, the Security Council should focus on conflict-related sexual violence “in situations of armed conflicts that threaten international peace and security”, as violence against women is already discussed by other UN bodies, such as the Human Rights Council.

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Divisions among Council members were clearly visible during the fraught negotiations of resolution 2467 in April 2019. This resolution, which is the most recent Council outcome on conflict-related sexual violence, encourages UN member states to adopt a survivor-centred approach. Among other issues, the US strongly resisted references to sexual and reproductive health, while members, including China and Russia, opposed the creation of a proposed Security Council working group on sexual violence in conflict. During the April 2021 open debate on conflict-related sexual violence, the US

said that it was committed “to providing sexual and reproductive health care and services for women around the world, especially women who have been impacted by conflict-related sexual violence”, marking a shift from the US position on the issue during the Trump administration. Council members, including France, Norway and Tunisia, called for access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

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

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council is expected to hold its monthly briefing on Yemen in closed consultations. Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya, and Major General Michael Beary, the head of the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), are expected to brief.

Key Recent Developments

As fighting continues on multiple fronts, Grundberg launched a series of consultations on 7 March in Amman, Jordan, with Yemeni political parties, experts and civil society representatives, intended to inform the development of his framework for a political process. As Grundberg explained at the Council’s 15 March briefing on Yemen, these meetings, which will take place over several weeks, are focused on: identifying short- and longer-term priorities for the political, security and economic tracks of the framework; exploring guiding principles for the political process; and getting an understanding of the participants’ vision for the future.

In a parallel development, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) invited Yemeni parties, including the Houthi rebel group, to meet for inter-Yemeni consultations from 29 March to 7 April at the GCC headquarters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The Houthis declined the invitation, claiming that it was open to such a dialogue but in a neutral country, according to reports. Saudi Arabia leads a military coalition supporting the government against the Houthis.

On 20 March, the Houthis fired missiles and drones at Saudi Arabia, targeting a petroleum products distribution terminal and water desalination plant in the southern Jizan region, a power transmission station in Dhahran Al Janub, a natural gas plant in Khamis Mushait and the Yasref refinery in the Red Sea port of Yanbu. The strikes caused a temporary drop in output at the refinery but no casualties, according to the Saudi energy ministry and state media. On 25 March, Houthi attacks struck an oil depot in Jeddah, which prompted coalition airstrikes on targets in Sana’a and Hodeidah. The Secretary-General issued a statement condemning the recent escalation, noting that the airstrikes in Sana’a reportedly killed eight civilians, including five children, and damaged the UN staff residential compound in the city.

During his 15 March briefing, Grundberg highlighted his continued engagement with the conflict parties on options for an immediate de-escalation. On 19 March, Grundberg held talks in Muscat with Houthi chief negotiator Mohammed Abdulsalam. One topic of discussion was a possible truce during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which starts in April. Abdulsalam described the idea as “a positive step”, according to news reports. On 26 March, one day after their latest attacks on Saudi Arabia, the Houthis announced a three-day truce, the possibility of a “permanent” ceasefire and their readiness to release all coalition prisoners.

The UN continues to warn of Yemen’s dire humanitarian situation and the funding crisis facing relief efforts. A new Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) analysis on food security in Yemen, released on 14 March, reported that 17.4 million people need food assistance and projected a rise to 19 million by June. According to the IPC analysis, 31,000 people are facing famine-like conditions, a total that is projected to increase to 160,000 by June. The UN also raised concern about the potential impact of the war in Ukraine on Yemen, which, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths noted at the 15 March briefing, imports about one-third of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine. Yemen’s fuel shortage and inflation could also be exacerbated by rising global oil prices brought on by the war in Ukraine.

On 16 March, the annual high-level pledging event for Yemen’s humanitarian crisis was held in Geneva, hosted by Sweden, Switzerland and the UN. Thirty-six donors pledged nearly \$1.3 billion, significantly less than the \$4.27 billion that the UN says it requires for the 2022 humanitarian response plan in Yemen.

There has been progress towards resolving the threat posed by the FSO Safer, the vessel moored off the Houthi-held port of Ras Issa in the Red Sea that is at risk of a major oil spill or explosion. On 5 March, the UN signed a memorandum of understanding with the Houthis and the Fahem Group (one of Yemen’s largest import companies) to transfer the oil on the Safer to a vessel that would replace the ageing tanker. The memorandum notes that the plan is contingent on donor funding and could entail an interim ship to hold the oil until a suitable replacement vessel for the Safer is acquired.

Major General Beary also addressed members during consultations at last month’s Council session on Yemen. Beary, who assumed

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.8995](#) (15 March 2022) was a briefing on Yemen.

Yemen

his position as the head of UNMHA in January, reportedly described the mission's four key areas of focus: establishing a mission presence in Yemeni government territory; increasing its monitoring capacity in Hodeidah's ports and conflict areas in Hodeidah governorate; reinstating liaison channels; and clearing landmines.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue is Grundberg's effort to restart an inclusive political process, based on the framework he is developing. Also critical are efforts to de-escalate the conflict and prevent further regional spill-over. While Grundberg has met with Houthi representatives in Muscat multiple times, he has yet to meet with the group's leadership in Sana'a. They have apparently set as pre-conditions for his visit the re-opening of Sana'a airport and the lifting of Yemeni government and coalition restrictions on imports entering Houthi-held ports. Members may encourage Grundberg to continue to develop and complete his framework, which the Council could then endorse.

Key issues related to Yemen's humanitarian crisis include protecting civilians, preventing famine, improving humanitarian access, supporting the economy, and raising funds for relief efforts. Members could encourage UN member states to support the economic framework that the UN has developed to stabilise the Yemeni rial through new foreign exchange injections, lowering commodity prices by lifting restrictions on fuel and other essential imports and establishing insurance subsidies for shippers, and paying civil servants' salaries.

Resolving the issue of the FSO Safer is an ongoing issue. Considering that past agreements between the UN and the Houthis on the

Safer have stalled, members are likely to continue to closely monitor the situation and encourage stakeholders to follow through with their commitments.

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. They also share concerns about the humanitarian situation and the threat posed by the FSO Safer.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), a Council member, is a key member of the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, and it supports several anti-Houthi armed groups in Yemen. Since Houthi missile and drone attacks hit Abu Dhabi in January, the UAE has sought to label the movement a terrorist organisation. Brazil, Ireland, Mexico, and Norway abstained on resolution 2624 renewing the Yemen sanctions regime in February, primarily because of their concerns about the resolution's description of the Houthis as a "terrorist group". Russia's vote in favour of the resolution was an unusual move, given its history of objecting to singling out the Houthis in Council products; its vote followed UAE abstentions in the preceding days on two Council resolutions addressing Russia's aggression against Ukraine. In March, Russia placed a technical hold, which can last up to six months, on a proposal in the Yemen 2140 Sanctions Committee submitted by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the US to add three additional Houthis to the Yemen sanctions list.

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

Western Sahara

Expected Council Action

In April, Security Council members expect to receive a briefing in consultations on the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The Special Representative for Western Sahara and head of MINURSO Alexander Ivanko, and the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura, are the anticipated briefers

The MINURSO mandate expires on 31 October.

Key Recent Developments

The upcoming Council meeting will be the first time de Mistura addresses the Council since his appointment as Personal Envoy in November 2021. The post had been vacant for two and a half years following the resignation of Horst Köhler, the former German President, in May 2019. Upon assuming office, de Mistura undertook diplomatic engagements with several stakeholders in the conflict, including Morocco, neighbouring countries and the Polisario Front—the entity representing the inhabitants of the Western Sahara region, known as Sahrawis. De Mistura visited the region on a trip that began on 12 January. He first met in Rabat with Moroccan

Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita and Ambassador Omar Hilale, the country's Permanent Representative to the UN. During the meeting, Morocco reportedly reiterated its position regarding its autonomy plan. (The plan, which Morocco submitted to the UN in 2007, calls for integrating the territory into Morocco, with the Sahrawi people managing their internal affairs while being represented externally by Morocco.)

On 15 January, de Mistura met with Polisario Front President Brahim Ghali and visited the Tindouf refugee camps in Algeria. A UNHCR report published in February states that these camps host some 90,000 Sahrawi refugees, although UNHCR also notes that the actual number is estimated to be much higher. The Polisario Front reportedly reiterated its "attachment to the organisation of a referendum of self-determination of the Saharawi people".

On 17 January, de Mistura met with Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani and Foreign Minister Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed in Mauritania's capital, Nouakchott. He returned to Algeria for a meeting with Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra and Amar Belani, Algeria's Special Envoy on the question of Western Sahara and Maghreb Countries. In a press release following

UN DOCUMENTS ON WESTERN SAHARA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2602 (29 October 2021) renewed MINURSO's mandate until 31 October 2022. **S/RES/2548** (30 October 2020) renewed MINURSO's mandate until 31 October 2021. **Secretary-General's Report S/2021/843** (1 October 2021) was the annual Secretary-General's report on the situation concerning Western Sahara, covering developments from 31 August 2020 to 1 October 2021. **Security Council Letter S/2021/903** (27 October 2021) transmitted a communiqué adopted by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union at its 984th meeting (9 March 2021), covering the situation in Western Sahara.

Western Sahara

de Mistura's visit, Algeria expressed support for direct negotiations without preconditions between Morocco and the Polisario Front and for the revitalisation of the joint settlement plan of 1991, which includes holding a referendum.

Secretary-General António Guterres commented on de Mistura's efforts during a 21 January press conference, expressing hope that the visit and de Mistura's good offices would give new impetus to the political process.

However, de Mistura has faced complex regional dynamics as he has embarked on his new role. In August 2021, Algeria cut diplomatic ties with Morocco after a period of increasingly strained relations. The rupture was triggered by a dispute between the countries regarding the Kabyle people, an ethnic minority group in Algeria striving for independence. In a 19 July letter to the Council, Algeria expressed discontent over a document distributed by Morocco to all member states of the Non-Aligned Movement. Algeria stated that Morocco outlined in this document "its support for what it claims is the right to self-determination of the Kabyle people, who, according to the document, have been subjected to the longest foreign occupation". Algeria further stated that it perceived the contents of Morocco's document as an admission that it has provided support to the Kabyle, which Algiers believes is a terrorist group that has caused wildfires in Algeria. In a 22 July 2021 letter to the Council reacting to a statement by Lamamra at a 13 July Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement in which he compared the situation in Western Sahara to a military conflict, Morocco asserted that "the situation in the Moroccan Sahara is calm and serene". On 24 August 2021, as a result of this dispute, Algeria severed diplomatic relations with Morocco.

Recent diplomatic developments may have added complexity to the regional dynamic. On 19 March, Algeria recalled its ambassador to Spain because of the latter's shift in position to support the Moroccan autonomy plan for Western Sahara, which Spain governed until 1975. The move improved Spain's relations with Morocco. Rabat, which recalled its ambassador to Spain in May 2021 because of Spain's admission of Ghali to the country to undergo COVID-19 treatment, welcomed the shift in position and returned its ambassador to Spain.

Key Issues and Options

The key issue for Council members to consider is how to bring all parties to the negotiating table. Resolution 2602 of 29 October 2021 called on all parties to resume negotiations with a view to "achieving a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara". The appointment of de Mistura gave new momentum to the peace process and revived the prospects for resuming negotiations.

Nonetheless, significant obstacles remain to making meaningful progress in the peace process. The Polisario Front announced in November 2020 that it would no longer respect the ceasefire agreement that it signed with Morocco in 1991. The announcement followed Morocco's deployment of armed forces into a buffer zone after Polisario protesters blocked traffic between the Moroccan-controlled side of Western Sahara and Mauritania at the border town of Gueruerat. This situation is now further compounded by the complex regional dynamics, which could overshadow prospects for a reinvigorated peace process.

A possible option for Council members would be to issue a press statement expressing their support for de Mistura's efforts and urging all parties to resume negotiations.

Council Dynamics

Council members continue to be divided on the issue of Western Sahara. The US, the penholder on Western Sahara, recognised Morocco's sovereignty over the region in December 2020, under the Trump administration. The Biden administration has not changed this position. On 3 February, de Mistura met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and discussed diplomatic engagement with international partners to reinforce a credible political process that will lead to an enduring and dignified resolution of the conflict. France has traditionally supported the Moroccan autonomy plan for the region, and Gabon and the UAE are also supportive of Morocco. Council members Ghana, Kenya and Mexico maintain diplomatic relations with the political representation of the Sahrawi people, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR).

Kosovo

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council is expected to hold its first briefing this year on the situation in Kosovo. The new Special Representative and head of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), Caroline Zia-deh, will brief on recent developments and the latest report of the Secretary-General. Serbia is expected to participate under rule 37 and Kosovo under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Key Recent Developments

On 15 January, the parliament of Kosovo decreed that it would

no longer allow Serbs living in Kosovo to vote in Serbian elections and referendums within Kosovo, effectively discontinuing the long-standing practice of allowing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to collect the ballots of eligible Serbian voters in Kosovo and send them to tallying centres in Serbia. During Serbia's 16 January national referendum on constitutional amendments aimed at judicial reform, Serbs residing in Kosovo were only permitted to vote by mail or in Belgrade's liaison office in Pristina.

At a 20 January meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, Permanent Representative of the US to the OSCE Michael Carpenter commended Serbia for organising the referendum as a "significant

UN DOCUMENTS ON KOSOVO Security Council Resolution S/RES/1244 (10 June 1999) authorised NATO to secure and enforce the withdrawal of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia forces from Kosovo and established UNMIK. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8880** (15 October 2021) was the most recent briefing on the situation in Kosovo.

Kosovo

step towards depoliticizing Serbia's judiciary in alignment with European standards" which, he added, would "support Serbia's EU accession process". While Carpenter acknowledged Kosovo's right to set the terms by which elections of other states are conducted within its territory, he said that the US had hoped that Pristina would continue to allow the OSCE to assist Serbs living in Kosovo to vote in Serbian elections.

This issue has recently resurfaced, as Serbia's general elections are set to take place on 3 April. On 18 March, Prime Minister Albin Kurti of Kosovo said that the 15 January parliamentary decision was not intended to "make it impossible" for "citizens of Kosovo who may be bearers of Serbian passports to exercise their right to vote". Instead, Kurti insisted that Belgrade enter into an agreement with Pristina on holding elections within its territory that is in line with "the legality and constitutionality of the country". Serbia does not recognise Kosovo's independence and continues to refer to it as an autonomous province. On 22 March, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić threatened to impose "restrictive measures" on Kosovo for restricting Serbian citizens' right to vote.

In a joint statement issued on 23 March, France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and the US—collectively known as the Quint—expressed "great disappointment" in Pristina for failing to "demonstrate its commitment to the principle of protecting the civil and political rights of all its citizens, including of members of minority groups".

In the northern Kosovo cities of Mitrovica and Gračanica, hundreds of ethnic Serbs protested on 25 March following the suspension of the head of the Mitrovica Basic Court, Liljana Stevanovic, for attending a meeting with Vučić in Belgrade. According to media reports, protesters demanded that Kurti reverse the 15 January decision. The Quint countries issued a statement on the same day expressing "concern at the risk of escalation or violence".

Meanwhile, the EU-facilitated talks between Belgrade and Pristina have been at an impasse since mid-2021. After a nine-month hiatus in high-level talks, Vučić and Kurti met on 15 June and 19 July 2021 under the auspices of EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell and EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Miroslav Lajčák. Following the meeting, the two leaders indicated that their positions remained far apart.

Relations between Belgrade and Pristina have remained generally stable since the Council's last briefing on 15 October 2021. However, the war in Ukraine has raised concerns about geopolitical tensions reverberating to the Western Balkans. At a press conference on 27 February, Borrell said that Russian influence "will have an impact on the Western Balkans", adding that countries in that region should align their foreign policy with the EU.

In a 24 February statement posted on Twitter, Kurti expressed Kosovo's full support for NATO and the EU in condemning Russia's aggression and called for "vigilance and soberness in the [Western Balkans]". Pristina has long been concerned about Russia's influence in the region. On 22 October 2021, President Vjosa Osmani of Kosovo declared two Russian officials *personae non grata*, saying that Kosovo's institutions were determined to "fight against the malign influence of [Russia] and [its] satellites in the region".

EU member states and the US have also expressed concern that

Russia may seek to destabilise Kosovo. At a press briefing during the Munich Security Conference, held from 18 to 20 February, Osmani suggested that Russia might use Serbia, its close ally, to destabilise the Western Balkans. This sentiment was echoed by the European Parliament, which adopted a resolution on 1 March noting with grave concern Russia's persistent efforts at destabilising Western Balkan countries and regretting "Serbia's non-alignment with EU sanctions against Russia which damages its EU accession process".

Kosovo and its Western allies have taken steps to minimise the potential escalation of tensions in the region. On 28 February, Pristina banned the broadcasting of Russian television channels. On 14 March, the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) announced that it would temporarily deploy an additional 92 officers of the European Gendarmerie Force (EUROGENDFOR) to reinforce the capacity of the existing EULEX police unit.

Kosovo has also renewed its calls for NATO membership. In a 27 February Facebook post, Kosovo's minister of defence, Armend Mehaj, said that "accelerating Kosovo's membership in NATO and having a permanent base of American forces is an immediate need to guarantee peace, security and stability in the Western Balkans". In a 10 March letter to US President Joe Biden, Osmani stressed that Kosovo's NATO membership "has become an imperative" and requested Washington to "use its leadership and influence to actively support and advance the complex process of NATO membership for Kosovo".

The EU's united position against Russia has reignited momentum for granting EU membership to Western Balkan countries. On 11 March, Lajčák said on Twitter that "the current geopolitical situation confirms the urgency and importance of full EU integration in the Western Balkans". German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock recently visited the Western Balkans, including Kosovo, on 10 March, and underlined her resolve to convey a message that Europe will not allow the region to fall under Russian influence.

From 13 to 16 March, Borrell visited the Western Balkans. In a 20 March blog post titled "Time to move forward on EU integration in the Western Balkans", Borrell maintained that "Russia's insidious and well-documented disinformation campaigns" have increased substantially since Russia launched its military offensive in Ukraine. He also recognised frustrations in the region "at delays in moving forward on the EU path" and reaffirmed "the EU's commitment to support the Western Balkans even more and to take forward the region's future in the EU".

Key Issues and Options

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

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

Another important issue is curtailing the spill-over of geopolitical tensions stemming from the war in Ukraine into Kosovo. Given the lack of progress in the EU-facilitated dialogue, Council members

Kosovo

could consider pursuing a presidential statement urging both parties to re-engage in diplomatic talks and to consider a joint peace declaration that would renounce the threat or use of force against one another.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in supporting the EU-facilitated dialogue to establish conditions for the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Members also share the expectation that both sides will engage without preconditions and in good faith, implement existing agreements, and refrain from actions and rhetoric that may increase tensions.

Nevertheless, deep divisions among permanent members have continued to characterise the Council's approach to the issue. While Kosovo has typically remained a low-intensity issue for the Council, heightened geopolitical tensions from the war in Ukraine, especially

between Russia and the US, are likely to raise its profile in the Council. Among the five permanent Council members, France, the UK and the US recognise Kosovo's independence and tend to be supportive of its government; China and Russia do not recognise its independence and strongly support Serbia's position and its territorial integrity. Five elected members (Albania, Gabon, Ireland, Norway and the United Arab Emirates) recognise Kosovo's independence, while five (Brazil, Ghana, India, Kenya, and Mexico) do not.

As a neighbouring state, Albania has a particular interest in the situation in Kosovo. Ethnic Albanians account for over 90 percent of Kosovo's population. The unification of Albania and Kosovo has been a widely discussed topic that enjoys considerable support from both sides. According to a poll conducted by the Open Society Foundation in 2019, about 75 percent of Albanians and 64 percent of Kosovo's citizens support unification.

Sudan/South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In April, the Council expects to receive a briefing on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), due by 15 April, as requested in resolution 2609. Consultations will follow the briefing.

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

Background and Key Recent Developments

Over the course of more than ten years, the governments of Sudan and South Sudan have not made significant progress in establishing joint institutions in Abyei, the disputed area along the Sudan-South Sudan border. UNISFA continues to face challenges in the implementation of its mandate, including the delayed issuance of visas for police, access to the Anthony airstrip, and the appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission (as requested by the Council in May 2019).

Incidents of violence and criminality continue. According to a 3 January statement by UNISFA, an armed group of about 70 Misseriya herders attacked the Ngok Dinka village of Miodol, northeast of Abyei Town, killing five people. In a statement on 8 March, the mission expressed concern over renewed violence in the southern part of the Abyei area, saying "longstanding grievances and disputes between communities in Abyei and neighbouring areas have resulted in over a month of violence particularly affecting Agok/Anet town, sector south, and Abyei Town". The attacks resulted in the death of several people and the displacement of thousands, the statement said. It also referred to three reported armed attacks on convoys carrying UNISFA peacekeepers on patrol, as well as to the forcible entry into the mission's headquarters in Abyei Town on 14 February, which resulted in injuries to ten local Ngok Dinka youth and three mission staff.

Last year, tensions in the region affected the mission, including public calls from Sudan for the replacement of all the Ethiopian troops. Until recently, Ethiopia had been the sole troop-contributing country since the mission's establishment in 2011. The Secretary-General's 17 September 2021 strategic review of UNISFA outlined plans for the replacement of the Ethiopian contingent with a multinational force. The report said that the replacement of personnel could commence in October 2021 and estimated that it would take between 100 days and six months. In recent months, new contingents have begun to deploy to UNISFA. In January, an advance party of the incoming Ghanaian battalion arrived in Abyei (Ghana is expected to deploy a battalion of 570 troops.) In February, the advance party of Pakistan's contingent joined UNISFA, with additional troops expected in April as part of its eventual deployment of a battalion also totalling 570 troops. The repatriation of Ethiopian peacekeepers began on 21 February. On 12 March, Bangladeshi troops took over JBVMM operations in Kadugli. On 15 March, Major General Benjamin Olufemi Sawyerr (Nigeria) assumed the position of force commander/acting head of mission for UNISFA, replacing Major General Kefyalew Amde Tessema (Ethiopia).

Following a one-month technical rollover in November 2021, the Council renewed UNISFA's mandate until 15 May with the unanimous adoption of resolution 2609 on 15 December 2021. The resolution also extended until 15 May the mission's support for the JBVMM. It reduced the authorised troop ceiling from 3,550 to 3,250 and maintained the authorised police ceiling at 640 police personnel, including 148 individual police officers and three formed police units. The resolution expressed the Council's serious concern about the delayed issuance of visas for UNISFA staff by Sudan, which is a key factor obstructing the deployment of the mission's police personnel. It called on Sudan and South Sudan to provide full support to the mission and the deployment of its personnel by

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN/SOUTH SUDAN [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2609](#) (15 December 2021) renewed the mandate of UNISFA until 15 May 2022. [S/RES/2606](#) (15 November 2021) was a technical rollover of UNISFA's mandate for one month. [Secretary-General's Report S/2021/881](#) (15 October 2021) was on UNISFA. [Security Council Letter S/2021/805](#) (17 September 2021) was from the Secretary-General, transmitting the strategic review of UNISFA. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.8932](#) (15 December 2021) was a meeting to adopt resolution 2609. [S/PV.8887](#) (27 October 2021) was a briefing on UNISFA and Sudan/South Sudan.

Sudan/South Sudan

removing any obstacles that hinder the implementation of its mandate and by ensuring freedom of movement. It further called on the parties to make demonstrable progress on border demarcation and outlined a series of measures in this regard, including supporting the establishment of a team site in Abu Qussa/Wunkur and resolving the challenges to the JBVMM's return to Gok Machar and team sites in Safaha/Kiir Adem and Sumayah/War Abar.

The Council was last briefed on Abyei on 27 October 2021 by Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix; the Secretary-General's then-Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga; and the Chairperson of the AU High-Level Implementation Panel, Thabo Mbeki. (Hanna Tetteh was appointed Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa in February, replacing Onanga-Anyanga.)

Key Issues and Options

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

- engagement by the AU, including the AU High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP), on political mediation;
- efforts of the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa to support the AU in helping the parties to establish temporary administrative and security arrangements for Abyei and to achieve a political solution to the status of Abyei;
- efforts to increase police numbers in Abyei, appoint a civilian deputy head of mission, access the Anthony airstrip, and obtain visas to support mandate implementation;
- human rights monitoring, as requested in resolution 2609;
- results of a joint consultation among the governments of Sudan, South Sudan, and relevant stakeholders, including the local community, to develop clear and realistic benchmarks and indicators for a responsible, successful and durable mission transition;

- a summary of actions taken to improve mission performance and address performance challenges; and
- overall mission performance.

Council and Wider Dynamics

It seems that the negotiations on resolution 2609 centred on several issues, including UNISFA's reconfiguration, the mission's performance and effectiveness, and the facilitation of the safety and security, access, and freedom of movement of UNISFA personnel. The issue of an exit strategy for UNISFA, which has been raised by the US—the penholder on Abyei—in previous Council discussions on the mission, was also raised during the negotiations. (For more, see our *What's In Blue* story of 14 December 2021.)

In a statement following the adoption of resolution 2609 on 15 December 2021, Russia expressed regret that the US “insisted on maintaining a stronger accusatory slant, blaming both states for the unresolved tasks before the mission” while acknowledging that issues remain “when it comes to staffing UNISFA's police contingent, the appointment of a civilian Head of Mission and access to the Anthony airstrip”.

At the same meeting, South Sudan expressed appreciation for the presence of UNISFA and welcomed “the renewed concern over the unresolved impasse between the parties on reaching an agreement on the final status of Abyei”. Its statement also called on “the Security Council, the AU Peace and Security Council, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and friends of both the Sudan and South Sudan to work towards the goal of realizing the final status” of Abyei.

Prior to the October 2021 coup in Sudan, improved relations between Sudan and South Sudan had created an enabling environment for progress in resolving the final status of Abyei. However, since then, Sudan has been more focused on its internal political situation than on addressing the situation in Abyei. Regional tensions continue, including as a result of the armed confrontation in Ethiopia. (On 25 March, the government of Ethiopia declared an indefinite humanitarian truce and the Tigrayan authorities committed to a cessation of hostilities effective immediately.)

The US is the penholder on Abyei.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

The Security Council last held a meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” on 22 March. During the meeting, Wennesland provided an oral report on the implementation of resolution 2334. Adopted in 2016, the resolution states that Israel's establishment of settlements in the occupied Palestinian

territory (oPt), including East Jerusalem, “constitutes a flagrant violation under international law” and calls for immediate steps to prevent violence against civilians, including acts of terror.

The recent period has seen an overall deterioration of the security situation. During the 22 March meeting, Wennesland reported that between 10 December 2021 and 18 March, Israeli security forces killed 24 Palestinians (including four children) during clashes, protests, security operations, attacks and alleged attacks against Israelis, and other incidents, and injured 2,966 Palestinians. Palestinians killed one Israeli civilian and injured 100 Israelis (including a child) in clashes, attacks and other incidents.

According to media reports, an Israeli citizen of Bedouin descent

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION Security Council Resolution S/RES/2334 (23 December 2016) condemned Israeli settlements; it was adopted with 14 votes in favour and a US abstention. **Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9000** (22 March 2022) was the March monthly meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. **S/PV.8973** (23 February 2022) was the February monthly meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

with previous ties to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), carried out a stabbing and ramming attack on 22 March in the Israeli city of Be'er Sheva, resulting in four civilian deaths and at least two wounded. Wennesland strongly condemned the attack in a statement issued the same day. Noting that this was the seventh stabbing attack against Israelis in March, he said that these incidents “highlight the volatility of the situation and the urgent need for all leaders to work together against the spiral of violence”.

ISIL/Da'esh has reportedly claimed responsibility for the shooting deaths of two Israeli border officers in the Israeli city of Hadera on 27 March, which also resulted in the wounding of several people. One of the two perpetrators had attempted to enter Syria in 2016 to fight for ISIL. Several suspected revenge attacks against Palestinians were reported by the media in the hours following the Hadera attack, including a number of Palestinian vehicles burned in the West Bank village of Jalud. On 29 March, a Palestinian killed at least five people (a police officer and four civilians) in a shooting attack in the Bnei Brak suburb of Tel Aviv.

Recent violent incidents in which Palestinians were killed—such as the young Palestinian shot in the head at close range on 1 March after he ran away upon noticing Israeli soldiers searching for Palestinian stone-throwers, as reported in OCHA's 11 March Protection of Civilians report—have generated concerns regarding the use of lethal force by Israeli security personnel. For instance, during the 22 March Council meeting, Ireland noted the continuation of incidents involving the use of excessive force by Israeli security forces and resulting in the killing and injuring of Palestinians, including children, and called for accountability. Echoing his previous calls, including an 8 March statement issued in response to the recent uptick in violent incidents, Wennesland said that security forces must reserve the use of lethal force for situations in which it is strictly unavoidable to protect life. Several Council members, including Kenya, also expressed concern about the fact that recent violent incidents have led to the deaths of minors and young people.

During the 22 March meeting, several Council members welcomed recent decisions by the Israeli authorities aimed at easing tensions, such as halting evictions and demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures in East Jerusalem during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Nevertheless, some members also stressed the need for longer-term solutions, with France calling for a permanent halt to evictions and demolitions, particularly in East Jerusalem. Wennesland said that while resolution 2334 called on Israel to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the oPt, including East Jerusalem, “no such steps were taken” during the reporting period. He provided an update on recent steps by Israeli authorities that advanced settlement activities, including the 28 February decision by the Jerusalem District Planning Committee to advance a plan for around 700 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Pisgat Ze'ev.

On 26 March, the second round of Palestinian local council elections was held in the West Bank. In a 21 March statement, the Palestinian Central Elections Commission condemned the arrests of several candidates by Israeli security forces and called for their immediate release. According to media reports, Israel suspects those taken into custody of terrorist activities. The first round of local

elections was held in December 2021. (On 29 April 2021, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas indefinitely postponed Palestinian parliamentary and presidential elections, originally scheduled for 22 May 2021 and 31 July 2021.)

On 26 March, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Israel on the first stop of a scheduled five-day trip that included visits to the West Bank, Algeria and Morocco. On 27 March, Blinken met with Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, President Isaac Herzog, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Defence Minister Benny Gantz before heading to Ramallah for a meeting with Abbas. On 27 and 28 March, Israel hosted a diplomatic summit attended by Blinken and the foreign affairs ministers of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Egypt, and Morocco. At the 28 March press conference, which closed the meeting, Lapid announced that the summit would become an annual event. “This new architecture—the shared capabilities we are building—intimidates and deters our common enemies, first and foremost Iran and its proxies”, he said, according to a report by Israeli news outlet Haaretz.

On 28 March, King Abdullah II of Jordan travelled to Ramallah for a meeting with Abbas. Ahead of the meeting, the Palestinian news agency Wafa reported King Abdullah II as saying that “[t]he region cannot enjoy security and stability without a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue”. This comes after the 10 March meeting between Lapid and King Abdullah II in Amman.

In a 1 February report, Amnesty International called for accountability for the crime of apartheid, which the organisation accuses Israel of committing against Palestinians. According to the report, “Israel has imposed a system of oppression and domination over Palestinians” through laws, policies and practices aimed at preventing “Palestinians from claiming and enjoying equal rights to Jewish Israelis within Israel and the OPT”. While the Palestinian Authority welcomed Amnesty's report, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a 31 January press release that the report “consolidates and recycles lies, inconsistencies, and unfounded assertions that originate from well-known anti-Israeli hate organizations”.

At the 23 February Council meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”, no Council members used the term “apartheid”. However, Ireland expressed concern about “how the policies of the Israeli authorities impact the human rights of Palestinians”, in particular “the unequal treatment of Palestinians, the application of different standards in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel's failure to ensure the protection and welfare of Palestinians living under its occupation”.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 49th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held an interactive dialogue on 4 March on the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in the oPt, including East Jerusalem (A/HRC/49/25). High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet told the HRC that during the reporting period, from 1 November 2020 to 31 October 2021, the human rights situation in the oPt had further deteriorated. There was a significant increase in violence, including the largest escalation of hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza since 2014, she said. Israeli forces killed 315 Palestinians and injured 17,597 – an almost five-fold increase compared to the previous reporting period. Palestinians killed 14 Israelis and injured 824. During her briefing, Bachelet also noted that it had been 18 months since Israel ceased renewing visas for OHCHR staff working in the oPt.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 24 March, the HRC considered the report of the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Michael Lynk (A/HRC/49/87). The report says that “the political system of entrenched rule in the occupied Palestinian territory which endows one racial-national-ethnic group with substantial rights, benefits and privileges while intentionally subjecting another group to live behind walls, checkpoints and under a permanent military rule [...] satisfies the prevailing evidentiary standard for the existence of apartheid”. The Israeli Mission to the UN in Geneva rejected the report in a statement saying that it “recycles baseless and outrageous libels”. During its 49th session, the HRC also considered the High Commissioner’s report on the implementation of the provisions of HRC resolution 46/26, which includes updates on settlement activities that are illegal under international law and their impact on the human rights of Palestinians (A/HRC/49/85).

Key Issues and Options

The overarching key issue remains determining how the Council can support the resumption of negotiations between the parties to move towards a resolution of the underlying causes of the recurrent cycles of violence affecting Israel and the oPt and to achieve a two-state solution.

An immediate key issue is to ease tensions and avoid any action or provocation that may set off a new escalation of violence. In April, the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the Jewish observance of Passover will overlap. Last year, clashes over restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities on gatherings at the Damascus Gate Plaza in the

Old City of Jerusalem were a key factor contributing to the May 2021 conflict between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza. At the 22 March meeting, several Council members, including China, Ireland, Norway, and the US, called for upholding the historic status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem. The UAE underscored the gravity of violating the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

One option for the Council would be to issue a statement calling for Palestinian and Israeli political and religious leaders to work together to de-escalate tensions ahead of the overlapping holidays.

Council Dynamics

Council members’ views converge on the importance of avoiding an escalation of violence that could trigger a conflict, as occurred in May 2021. While members have regularly called for an end to settlement activities and expressed support for a two-state solution, a resumption of the peace process does not seem to be in sight. During the 23 February meeting, the US said that although it is prepared to support the parties once they are ready to move forward, “holding meetings for the sake of meetings is not going to help”. Other members, such as Ghana and India, have instead called for the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties. Norway has argued that talks should not focus exclusively on economic issues, as the objective “should be to discuss a political horizon and a return to negotiations for a two-State solution”.

Syria

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Syria continues to face the devastating effects of 11 years of civil war. There are no signs of meaningful diplomatic progress that could end the ongoing conflict, and OCHA reports that some 14.6 million Syrians require humanitarian assistance. In an 11 March statement marking the war’s 11th anniversary, Secretary-General António Guterres emphasised the need to reach a negotiated political settlement. He lamented that the conflict has “exacted an unconscionable human cost” and that Syrians “have been subjected to human rights violations on a massive and systematic scale”. The reauthorisation of resolution 2585 in July, when it is set to expire, is “a moral and humanitarian imperative”, he said. Resolution 2585 mandates the delivery of cross-line (that is, across domestic frontlines from Syrian government-held areas into areas outside government control) and cross-border humanitarian aid (from Turkey into Syria through the Bab al-Hawa crossing) and welcomes early recovery projects in Syria.

On 25 February, the Council received briefings on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria from Special Envoy Geir O.

Pedersen and Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya, respectively. Pedersen said he had been trying “to identify areas where consensus might be found on a series of reciprocal confidence-building measures...that could be implemented in parallel, step by step” by the parties to the conflict. Pedersen has previously noted that confidence-building measures could focus on such matters as abductees, detainees, and missing persons; humanitarian assistance and early recovery; conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees; the restoration of better socioeconomic conditions; and diplomatic issues. During her briefing, Msuya noted the importance of cross-line humanitarian aid delivery in Syria while also emphasising that “there is no alternative in place now that can match the scale and scope of the massive United Nations cross-border [humanitarian] operation”.

On 3 March, Pedersen met with representatives of the League of Arab States (LAS), Egypt, the EU, France, Germany, Iraq, Jordan, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the UK, and the US in Washington, DC. to discuss the Syria crisis. In a joint statement issued after the meeting, the participating states:

- called for a nationwide ceasefire in Syria;
- emphasised the importance of unhindered humanitarian assistance “through all modalities, including through the re-authorization of cross-border humanitarian aid delivery...as well as

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2585](#) (9 July 2021) renewed the mandate of the cross-border humanitarian aid delivery mechanism and welcomed early recovery projects in Syria. [S/RES/2254](#) (18 December 2015) was on the political situation in Syria. [Security Council Meetings S/PV.8990](#) (10 March 2022) was a meeting on the chemical weapons track in Syria. [S/PV.8978](#) (25 February 2022) was a meeting on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria. [Secretary-General’s Reports S/2022/135](#) (21 February 2022) was the 60-day report on the humanitarian situation in Syria. [S/2021/1030](#) (15 December 2021) was a report mandated by resolution 2585 on the transparency of UN humanitarian operations in Syria.

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- cross-line aid and early recovery projects”;
- took note of Pedersen’s efforts to build momentum in the peace process through the “step-for-step” approach;
- affirmed their commitment to pursue accountability; and
- urged continued support for refugees from Syria and host countries.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) hosted Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for a state visit on 17-18 March, the first time an Arab state has hosted Assad since the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011. During his visit, Assad met with Mohammed bin Zayed, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, and Mohammed bin Rashid, the Ruler of Dubai. Emirati state media indicated that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed emphasised “that Syria is a fundamental pillar of Arab security, and that the UAE is keen to strengthen cooperation with it”.

US State Department spokesman Ned Price said that the US, a UAE ally, was “profoundly disappointed and troubled by this apparent attempt to legitimize Bashar al-Assad”.

High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu briefed the Council on 10 March on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. She reiterated that because of “identified gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain unresolved... Syria’s declaration cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention”.

The seventh round of the Syria Constitutional Committee was held from 21-25 March in Geneva. The parties discussed four principles during the first four days of the session— “Basics of Governance”, “State Identity”, “State Symbols”, and “Structure and Functions of Public Authorities”. On the final day, they discussed their amendments to proposals on constitutional principles. Pedersen released a statement at the conclusion of the session. He said: “All delegations offered at least some revisions to some of the texts presented. Some of these embodied amendments indicating an attempt to reflect the content of the discussions and narrow differences. Others contained no changes.” Pedersen added: “I will do everything I can to bring closer viewpoints among the members through exerting my good offices, which is plainly needed.”

On 24 March, Pedersen briefed the Council via videoconference on political developments in Syria, while Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths briefed in person on the humanitarian situation in the country. Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Hossam Zaki also briefed in person. Pedersen urged participants in the Syria Constitutional Committee’s seventh round, which was still in session at the time of his briefing, to start to narrow their differences and make compromises. Griffiths appealed for financial support for early recovery projects in Syria. Zaki called on the Council to reauthorise the delivery of cross-border aid into Syria in July, prior to the expiration of resolution 2585.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 18 March, during its 49th session, the Human Rights Council held an interactive dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on Syria and considered its report (A/HRC/49/77). Based on investigations conducted between 1 July and 31 December 2021, the report documents grave violations of

fundamental human rights and humanitarian law across the country. It notes that there were “significant levels of violence involving all parties to the conflict and a notable increase in pro-government air strikes and shelling in Idlib”. The report also states that “the delivery of critical aid was hindered by insufficient funding, the continued closure of additional border crossings [as the Security Council had for several years authorised the delivery of humanitarian aid through four such crossings but currently only authorises one], and impediments to cross-line operations in the northwest”.

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 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, and increased unemployment.

One option for the Council is to adopt a statement that supports the Special Envoy’s efforts to reinvigorate the political track.

Another option would be for the Council to request a briefing from a civil society representative who can speak to the importance of early recovery projects in Syria.

Council Dynamics

There are stark differences in the Council on Syria. China and Russia tend to be sympathetic to the Syrian government, emphasising the need to respect the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. They also argue that the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) conducts its work on the chemical weapons track in Syria in a biased manner. On the other hand, 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. They underscore the need to hold perpetrators of violence against civilians in Syria accountable and blame the Syrian government for obstructing the work of the OPCW in the country.

While there is general support for the work of the Constitutional Committee, several Council members have expressed deep frustration with its lack of progress since being launched nearly two and a half years ago. Some members, such as Albania, the P3 (France, the UK and the US) and Ireland, tend to accuse the Syrian government of not engaging in the process in good faith. For example, at the Council’s 25 February meeting on Syria, Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason (Ireland) said that the committee “must achieve substantive progress but cannot do so without meaningful engagement on texts, especially by the Syrian authorities”. On the other hand, Russia, a close ally of the Syrian government, has cautioned against imposing artificial deadlines on the committee’s work.

Although most members have repeatedly emphasised that the cross-border aid mechanism is an essential humanitarian tool in Syria, China and Russia maintain that cross-line deliveries should ultimately supplant cross-border deliveries.

The UAE, which joined the Council in January, has advocated engagement with the Assad government to help resolve the conflict in Syria. In its 26 January Council statement, the UAE said that “opening channels of communication and building bridges are the most successful paths to resolving the protracted crisis in a way that

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alleviates people's suffering and achieves stability", and that "it is important to strengthen and activate the Arab role in a way that is supportive of and consistent with Mr. Pedersen's diplomatic efforts". Damascus was suspended from the LAS in 2011, following the start

of the Syria conflict; however, sources indicate that a number of LAS member states are in favour of normalising relations with Assad.

Ireland and Norway are the humanitarian penholders on Syria.

Great Lakes Region (DRC)

Expected Council Action

The Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, Huang Xia, is expected to provide his biannual briefing to the Council in April on the implementation of the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSC Framework) for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Great Lakes region.

Key Recent Developments

The most recent briefing on the Secretary-General's biannual report on the PSC framework was held on 20 October 2021 during Kenya's Security Council presidency. Kenya sought to focus the meeting on sustainable and transparent management of natural resources as a means to address the root causes and drivers of conflict in the Great Lakes region. It spearheaded the adoption of a presidential statement which, among other things, indicated that individuals and entities involved in the illegal exploitation of natural resources may be designated by the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee.

At the October meeting, Council members underscored the importance of convening the Regional Oversight Mechanism (ROM) of the PSC Framework to monitor its implementation. More than three years since its last meeting in Kampala in October 2018, several regional leaders and guarantor institutions of the PSC Framework—the UN, the AU, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Regions (ICGLR), and the South African Development Community (SADC)—convened in Kinshasa on 24 February for the tenth meeting of the ROM. Based on a comprehensive report covering the period from October 2017 to February 2022 submitted by its Technical Support Committee, the ROM assessed the political and security situation in the region, including progress and challenges in the implementation of the national, regional and international commitments under the PSC Framework to consolidate peace and security in eastern DRC and to promote cooperation among countries of the region.

The communiqué adopted at the end of the meeting reaffirmed the regional leaders' commitment to the full implementation of the PSC Framework "as an important vehicle to address the causes and drivers of conflict and instability in the region". In the communiqué, the ROM also welcomed the adoption of the UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region (2020-2030), which was developed by the Office of the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes and published in January 2021. The ROM further called for the swift implementation of the strategy's action plan, which was developed in consultation with various stakeholders, including representatives of the AU,

ICGLR, signatory countries of the PSC Framework, diplomatic missions in the region, bilateral and multilateral partners, and civil society organisations.

The reopening of the Gatuna/Katuna border between Rwanda and Uganda in January is a positive development welcomed by the ROM in the communiqué. This followed a visit by Lieutenant General Muhoozi Kainerugaba, the Commander of the Land Forces of the Ugandan Peoples' Defence Forces and President Yoweri Museveni's son, to Kigali, where he met with Rwandan President Paul Kagame. The border had been closed for three years because of strained relations between Rwanda and Uganda. Rwanda alleged that Uganda was supporting rebel groups intent on overthrowing its government, while Uganda claimed that Rwanda was carrying out illegal intelligence activities in Uganda.

The recent decision by the US and the EU to lift the economic sanctions imposed against Burundi in 2015, when former President Pierre Nkurunziza sought to change the constitution and run for a third term, is another important development in the region. The decision was said to be an acknowledgement of the reform progress under the leadership of his successor, President Évariste Ndayishimiye. While the ROM and ICGLR welcomed the decision, human rights groups criticised it, arguing that the situation in the country has not shown much improvement.

Despite some positive developments, the Great Lakes region continues to face persistent security challenges, including the activities of armed groups in eastern DRC that pose a major threat to regional peace and stability. In a 4 February press statement, Security Council members condemned the attack by the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo (CODECO)*, an armed group active in Ituri province, on the Savo camp for internally displaced persons, which left at least 58 civilians dead and more than 40 injured. Media reports indicate that CODECO has continued to attack IDP camps. On 15 March, the *Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)*, an armed group affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), attacked several villages in eastern DRC and killed more than 60 people, according to media reports. There are also indications that the *M23 Movement*, a rebel group previously operating in North Kivu Province, has resumed its military activities. Attacks by armed groups have continued unabated despite the "state of siege", namely the measures that the Congolese government has imposed since May 2021 to address security challenges in the Ituri and North Kivu provinces, and the ongoing joint military operations by DRC and Uganda, which were launched in November 2021 targeting the ADF.

The UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE GREAT LAKES Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2021/19 (20 October 2021) was on the situation in the Great Lakes region. Secretary-General's Report S/2021/836 (30 September 2021) was on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8884 (20 October 2021) was a Security Council briefing on the situation in the Great Lakes region.

Great Lakes Region (DRC)

(MONUSCO) has enhanced its efforts to prevent, deter and stop armed groups by carrying out unilateral and joint operations with the Congolese armed forces (FARDC). Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in late February, however, the Ukrainian government informed the UN that it is withdrawing its military contingent—as well as helicopters and other equipment—that has been deployed as part of MONUSCO. The Ukrainian contingent consists of 268 peacekeepers, including 250 troops, six staff officers, five individual police, and seven experts, according to the UN. Ukraine also has eight helicopters deployed in eastern DRC. The decision to repatriate these peacekeepers and equipment was apparently made to strengthen Ukraine's defences in the war effort at home. The UN spokesperson indicated that the process to facilitate their departure is underway, while discussions have been initiated with other troop-contributing countries to fill the gap that this will cause.

Aside from the ongoing military efforts to counter the activities of armed groups, countries in the region have been working on non-military measures to address security challenges. In May 2021, a Contact and Coordination Group (CCG) composed of security experts from Burundi, the DRC, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda was launched. These experts met in Goma (eastern DRC) on 17 December 2021 to discuss concrete actions to be taken, including the establishment of an operational cell in Goma to coordinate activities related to the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is how to comprehensively address the persistent security challenge facing the DRC and the region. In this regard, Council members may express concern over the increasing insecurity in eastern DRC, reiterate their support for regional cooperation initiatives to respond to this challenge, and underscore the need for the full and effective implementation of the PSC

Framework and the UN strategy.

Another key issue is how to sustain the momentum generated by the rapprochement between countries in the region to foster lasting peace, stability and development in the Great Lakes. Council members may wish to welcome the reopening of the border between Rwanda and Uganda. They may also welcome the convening of the ROM, which is critical in overseeing the implementation of the PSC Framework.

A possible option for Council members is to issue a press statement welcoming the outcome of the ROM meeting and reaffirming their support for ongoing efforts to promote durable peace and stability in the DRC and the Great Lakes region.

Council Dynamics

Council members are broadly supportive of addressing the root causes and drivers of conflict in the Great Lakes region through a comprehensive regional approach. They also appreciate the Special Envoy's efforts and support the role of regional and sub-regional organisations.

Several members support non-military solutions to the persistent security challenges in the region. Some emphasise the significance of addressing the region's challenges through the peace, security and development nexus. There are also members that focus on addressing the issue of illegal exploitation of natural resources as well as the spread of small arms and light weapons. The US, in particular, may refer to its 17 March decision to impose sanctions on Belgian businessman Alain Goetz and affiliated companies (in the Great Lakes region and elsewhere) for his involvement in illegal gold exports from DRC. Others continue to attach particular importance to the humanitarian and human rights situation and stress the need to ensure accountability for crimes committed in eastern DRC, including sexual exploitation and abuse.

Libya

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council will receive the semi-annual briefing of ICC prosecutor Karim Asad Ahmad Khan concerning the court's cases in Libya. Consultations on the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) are anticipated. The Council is also expected to renew the mandate of UNSMIL.

Key Recent Developments

Khan last briefed the Council on the court's work in Libya on 23 November 2021, including outstanding arrest warrants issued by the court and the status of ongoing investigations. Libya is one of two country situations (Sudan is the other) that the Council has referred to the court for investigations. The Council referred Libya to the ICC through

resolution 1970 of 26 February 2011, which also invited the prosecutor to brief the Council on the status of investigations every six months. Three outstanding arrest warrants pertaining to Libya are currently before the court. One is for Saif al-Islam Qaddafi, the son of deposed Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi. In November 2021, Saif al-Gaddafi, who is sought on two counts of alleged crimes against humanity, announced his candidacy for the Libyan presidential elections.

Libya continues to be mired in political turmoil. More than three months after presidential and parliamentary elections were postponed, no new date for the polls has been determined. On 10 February, the House of Representatives appointed former Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha as interim prime minister while the incumbent prime minister, Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah, was still in

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/2595 (15 September 2021) extended UNSMIL's mandate until 30 September 2021. S/RES/2542 (15 September 2020) renewed UNSMIL's mandate until 15 September 2021. Security Council Presidential Statements S/PRST/2021/24 (24 November 2021) welcomed the Paris International Conference and the Libya Stabilisation conference and expressed support for the parliamentary and presidential elections set to take place on 24 December. S/PRST/2021/12 (15 July 2021) welcomed the second Berlin Conference on Libya held on 23 June 2021. 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/2021/958 (17 November 2021) was a letter submitted to the Council by Germany, France, Italy and Libya, transmitting the declaration of the 12 November 2021 Paris Conference on Libya. S/2021/716 (6 August 2021) was from the Secretary-General, transmitting the strategic review of UNSMIL.

Libya

office. (Dbeibah was elected in February 2021 by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum to head the interim Government of National Unity, or GNU.) As a result, the country finds itself with two parallel governments, raising fears of a possible return to violence.

The election has also become a major bone of contention with the two sides proposing competing electoral roadmaps. The House of Representatives tasked Bashagha to organise elections within the next 14 months, while Dbeibah proposed a roadmap for holding elections in June. The UN and several member states have continued attempts to mediate between the two competing political factions with the goal of reaching agreement on a common path forward that would also be acceptable to the Libyan people.

When referring to Libya's political situation, the UN has emphasised that elections should be held as soon as possible and that a political consensus supported by Libyans is necessary. Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Libya Stephanie Turco Williams has engaged with Bashagha and Dbeibah, while reiterating the need for elections to take place “in a timely manner with a sound constitutional basis” to respect the aspirations of the 2.8 million Libyans who have registered to vote.

Williams has also suggested the formation of a “6+6” constitutional committee to develop a consensual constitutional basis for holding elections. The committee would include six members of the House of Representatives and six members of the High Council of State, the executive institution and constitutional authority established by the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) that is mandated to propose policies and recommendations on various issues, including the LPA's implementation. At the time of writing, meetings to clarify the constitutional basis for elections have commenced in Tunisia under UN auspices, but only the High Council of State has sent representatives. Media reports indicate that several members of the House of Representatives rejected William's proposal to form a joint committee.

During a visit to Tripoli, US Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland spoke on 17 March with the President of the GNU's Presidency Council, Mohamed Younis al-Menfi, and with Dbeibah, encouraging them to hold elections as soon as possible and urging Dbeibah to engage with Bashagha to avert an escalation of tensions that could lead to violence. (In recent weeks, military forces from both sides have increased their presence in the area around Tripoli, but the security situation has thus far remained calm.)

Bashagha and Dbeibah reportedly met on 18 March in an effort to defuse tensions around Tripoli and to find a way forward on a political consensus. While committing themselves to denounce violence, they do not appear to have reached a political agreement. Pending clarification of the legislative framework for elections, the head of Libya's High National Electoral Commission (HNEC), Emad al-Sayeh, confirmed during a 19 March meeting with Norland that the HNEC was ready to hold elections once a political agreement had been reached to chart the way forward.

Women, Peace and Security

Jazia Jibril Mohammed Shuaiteer – a legal scholar, activist and candidate in the upcoming parliamentary elections – briefed the Council on 16 March. In her brief, Shuaiteer stressed the importance of maintaining peace, re-establishing consensus among the Libyan political parties and adopting a permanent constitution. She also underscored the need for free, inclusive, and fair elections and called for the Council to support international election monitoring. Shuaiteer also called on the Council to urge the Libyan leadership to comply with “all the ratified treaties and conventions to respect women and ensure a gender perspective in all policies, legislation and national strategies”.

Key Issues and Options

How UNSMIL can support a solution to the current political impasse and pave the way for elections will be a key issue for the Council in advance of the mission's upcoming mandate renewal. While UNSMIL's renewal in September was expected to restructure the mission to address the political situation following the October 2020 ceasefire agreement, the formation of the GNU and the scheduling of national elections on 24 December 2021, Council members have been unable to agree on the mission's future and have instead adopted three short-term mandate extensions.

Another issue for the Council remains the mission's leadership. No successor has yet been identified to former Special Envoy Jan Kubiš, who resigned in November 2021, or for the position of Special Representative that is expected to replace the Special Envoy under UNSMIL's proposed restructuring. Special Advisor Williams continues to lead mediation efforts on the ground.

The Council may consider requesting more frequent reporting from UNSMIL on the situation in the country, particularly regarding progress with finding political consensus and organising elections. The Council may also consider issuing a statement calling on all parties to reach a political consensus based on dialogue and urging them to maintain a stable security environment.

Council Dynamics

Council dynamics regarding the future of the mission and UNSMIL's leadership remain difficult. When the Council last met to discuss the situation in Libya on 16 March, several Council members voiced their support for a substantive mandate renewal in April. Whether the Council can agree on such a renewal, especially without a prospective candidate to lead the mission, remains unclear. There is unity, however, on the need for Libyan political stakeholders to agree on a plan for holding elections to fulfil the aspirations of the Libyan people. Russia, the only Council member to have openly supported Bashagha, nonetheless signalled its intent during the 16 May Council meeting to respect any leadership decisions Libyans may take. Several Council members—including France, the UK and the US—expressed support for Williams and her initiatives on the ground, but Russia reiterated its call for the Secretary-General to quickly appoint a new head of UNSMIL, stating that the prospective candidate should be acceptable to Libyans, regional stakeholders and the Council. The three African members of the Council (Kenya, Gabon and Ghana) expressed a preference for an African candidate to lead the mission.

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