

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

In March, Mozambique will hold the presidency of the Security Council.

Mozambique is expected to organise two signature events this month. One will be an open debate on [“Women, Peace and Security: Towards the 25th Anniversary of Resolution 1325”](#). The meeting will be chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mozambique, Verónica Nataniel Macamo Dlhovo. High-level representatives from UN Women, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the AU are expected to brief. A civil society representative is also expected to brief.

The second signature event will be a high-level debate on [“Countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism conducive to terrorism by strengthening cooperation between the UN and regional organisations and mechanisms”](#). President Filipe Jacinto Nyusi of Mozambique is expected to chair the meeting.

A briefing on [security sector reform](#) is anticipated in the middle of the month with representatives from the UN Secretariat, the AU, and civil society expected to brief.

Ecuador, the chair of the [1540 Committee](#), is expected to brief on the committee’s work this month. (Adopted in 2004, resolution 1540 aims to prevent non-state actors from obtaining access to weapons of mass destruction.)

A Council visiting mission to the [Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\)](#) is scheduled for 9-12 March. There will also be a briefing and consultations on the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO).

Several other African issues are on the programme of work this month, including:

- [“Silencing the Guns in Africa”](#), an open debate on the relationship between this initiative and development;
- [South Sudan](#), meeting on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and renewal of the

UNMISS mandate;

- [Sudan](#), meeting on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), and briefing by Ghana, the chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee; and
- [Somalia](#), meeting on the implementation of the Somalia Transition Plan (STP).

Middle East issues on the programme include:

- [Syria](#), monthly meetings on the political and humanitarian situations and on the chemical weapons track;
- [Yemen](#), monthly meeting on developments;
- [“The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”](#), monthly meeting on developments;
- [Lebanon](#), meeting on the implementation of resolution 1701; and
- [Golan](#), meeting on the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF).

Asian issues that will be addressed in March include:

- [Afghanistan](#), renewal of the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and meeting on the situation in the country;
- [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea \(DPRK\)](#), extension of the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee; and
- [Myanmar](#), meeting on the Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Five-Point Consensus.

As in past months, there are likely to be one or more meetings on [Ukraine](#) in March.

Other issues could be raised during the month, depending on developments.

1 March 2023
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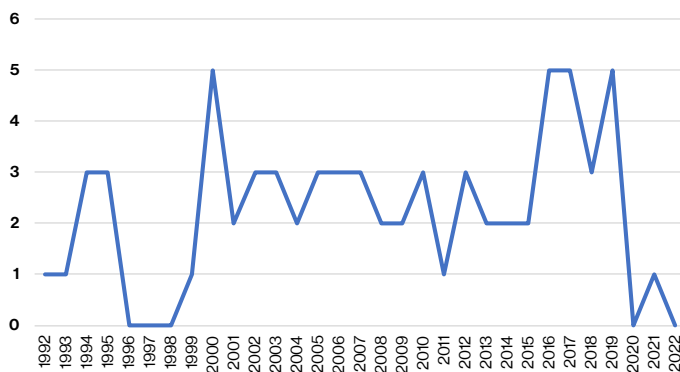
In Hindsight: The UN Security Council Returns to the Field

In March, the Security Council is expected to conduct its 70th visiting mission since 1992. This trip to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) will be only the second Council visiting mission since October 2019, and the first since it travelled to Mali and Niger in October 2021. In the few years preceding the outbreak of COVID-19, the Council undertook multiple such missions every year: five trips each in 2016, 2017 and 2019, with three in 2018.

Members missed using this important Council tool during the pandemic. During the 16 June 2021 working methods open debate, Kenyan Ambassador Martin Kimani observed that the Council “greatly benefits from understanding the physical setting of conflicts”, lamenting that this “important aspect of the Council’s work has been greatly impeded by the precautionary travel restrictions necessitated by COVID-19”. In late 2021, at Finland’s annual workshop for incoming Security Council members, several outgoing members noted that they had travelled to the field only once during their two-year term and implored their successors to visit the field as often as possible. One outgoing member observed that these trips provide an appreciation of the “feeling and texture” of situations that cannot be achieved in the Council chamber.

Although COVID-19 travel restrictions had receded by 2022, that year saw no visiting missions, seemingly due to a lack of consensus on potential destinations and the Council’s preoccupation with (and tensions generated by) the conflict in Ukraine.

Number of Visiting Missions per Year (1992-present)



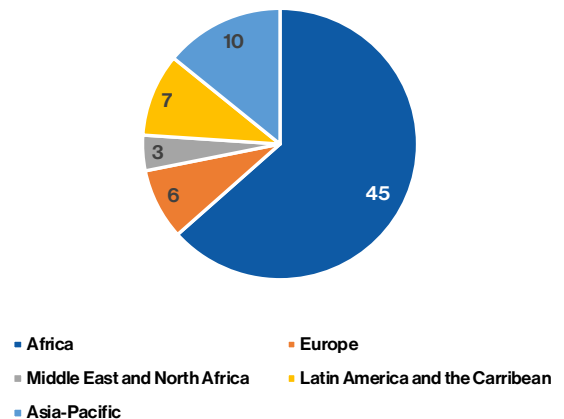
Over the years, the Council has made a point of visiting situations of high concern repeatedly. Such was the case with its eight trips to Burundi and to Rwanda, five trips to Mali, and four trips apiece to East Timor/Timor-Leste, Kosovo, Liberia, Haiti, and Sierra Leone.¹ Consistent with the Council’s work in recent decades having focused on hot spots in Africa, the continent accounts for the large majority of visiting missions. The leading destination has been the DRC, which the Council visited every year between 2000 and 2010, then returned to in 2013, 2016, and 2018. The upcoming visiting mission to the DRC may grant Council members a deeper understanding of the tenuous security situation in eastern DRC, as well as

1 Burundi: 1994, 1995, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2015, 2016; Rwanda: 1995, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2013; Mali: 2014, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2021; East Timor/Timor-Leste: 1999, 2000, 2007, 2012; Kosovo: 2000, 2001, 2002, 2007; Liberia: 2003, 2004, 2009, 2012; Haiti: 2005, 2009, 20012, 2015; and Sierra Leone: 2000, 2003, 2004, 2012.

2 This chart includes visiting missions that each covered two regions: the August 2014 mission to Europe and Africa (Belgium, the Netherlands, South Sudan, Somalia, Kenya), and the May 2016 trip to Africa and North Africa (Somalia, Kenya and Egypt). Each is counted here as constituting two visits.

enabling them to encourage efforts towards the holding of peaceful, transparent, inclusive, and credible national elections scheduled for December 2023.

Number of Visiting Missions per Region² (1992-Present)



Visiting missions are motivated by a combination of factors. The first-hand knowledge they offer is in the spirit of article 34 of the UN Charter, which allows the Council “to investigate any dispute, or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute”. This tool also enables members to assess the implementation of Council decisions, negotiate with conflict parties, respond to the concerns of civil society, and express support for political agreements.

With the Council now perhaps set to resume its practice of regular visiting missions, members may want to explore ways of maximising their engagement with the field —such as the use of mini-missions, joint missions, and new technology. Addressing the Council’s 2019, 2021, and 2022 working methods open debates, Security Council Report referred to the possibility of reviving mini-missions, which were common in the 1990s. Deploying sub-sets of Council members to the field would alleviate some of the complex logistical arrangements associated with a full Council mission, be more cost-effective, and enable members to travel more quickly in response to a crisis or to conduct follow-up. In a 27 December 2019 presidential note (S/2019/990), the members of the Council agreed that different “composition formats”—such as smaller visiting missions and missions that include the chairs of country-specific configurations of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)—would be an “effort to promote greater efficiency and flexibility”.

In recent years, some members have tried to revive the “mini-mission”, but it has gained little traction. One challenge has been how to determine the composition of each mission. Different formulas could be considered in this regard, such as having one member from each regional group taking part on a rotational basis, or including

In Hindsight: The UN Security Council Returns to the Field

the penholder(s) on the issue, the Council president for the month, and the chair of the relevant sanctions committee as part of a case-specific delegation. The increasingly difficult dynamics in the Council could make it hard to find common ground, however.

An example of a successful Council mini-mission was the five-member delegation (Malaysia, Namibia, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and the UK) dispatched to East Timor and Indonesia in 1999 after the violence that followed the Council-authorized referendum in which East Timor overwhelmingly opted for independence from Indonesia. Whereas visiting missions now are usually planned months in advance, that delegation departed within 24 hours of obtaining Indonesia's agreement. High-level engagement during the visit and a resolution upon the delegation's return authorising an enforcement operation with Indonesia's consent had significant impact on the situation and illustrates the Council's ability to use a visiting mission for conflict resolution and prevention.

Another idea referenced in the 27 December 2019 presidential note is joint visiting missions of the UN Security Council and regional or sub-regional counterparts. Joint visiting missions with coordinated views and unified messaging on pressing peace and security challenges could be particularly effective ahead of an election or in pushing for the implementation of an agreement. The presidential note said that such joint missions could be deployed "as appropriate and when necessary" and that the modalities of these visits "will be discussed and agreed upon on a case-by-case basis by the Council and the relevant regional and subregional organizations".

In 2018, in the joint communiqué issued at their 12th annual consultative meeting in New York, the Council and the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) reiterated their agreement in principle to pursue joint visiting missions. However, the two bodies have yet to discuss the modalities for such visits, including, for instance, the number of participants from both Councils, allocation of the financial costs, negotiating the terms of reference, and whether joint communiqués should be produced at the conclusion of such trips. Given the seeming logistical and financial impracticality of including all 30 members of the Council and the PSC, here, too, a case might be made for a combined mini-mission with agreed sub-sets of both Councils.

Council members could consider visiting host countries just prior to, or at the outset of, the deployment of peace operations, or when a new government comes to power. Such visits could help Council members to develop a rapport with national authorities, to get a first-hand view of the situation at an early stage of Council engagement, and to clarify expectations for mandate implementation with—and listen to—all relevant stakeholders (including the host government, UN officials in the field, and local civil society). Mending the Council's relations with a country hosting a peace operation can be difficult, once these relations are under strain, as shown during the Council's October 2021 visit to Mali.

Another option would be for the Council to visit countries whose peace operations have closed down to assess developments in the years following the closure of an operation. The Council's visit to Côte d'Ivoire in 2019 appears to have had this objective in mind, taking stock of the transition in that country following the end of the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) in 2017.³ In the future, such visits could be accompanied by an invitation to the former host country, in consultation with the UN Secretariat and UN Country Team representatives, to present a progress report on areas of the former mandate.

While not a substitute for in-person visits, new technologies have afforded members a textured view of developments in the field. For example, with the use of VR headsets in 2022, Council members heard the perspective of various civil society actors involved in the peace process in Colombia and saw the damage from the war in Yemen. More frequent use of virtual tools like this would be a cost-effective way for the Council to step up engagement with the field.

Visiting missions have long been one of the Council's more useful and versatile tools. In recent years, Council members recognised that the hiatus in visiting missions due to the COVID-19 pandemic created a gap in their work—in their ability to understand the complexities of situations and to engage directly with key stakeholders. The visiting mission to the DRC this month may help the Council engage thoughtfully and with unified messaging—as well as awakening its dormant muscle memory for the practice of visiting missions.

Status Update since our February Forecast

Iraq

On 2 February, the Security Council held an open briefing (S/PV.9253), followed by closed consultations, on Iraq. Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of UNAMI Ms. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert briefed on recent developments in the country and the Secretary-General's reports on UNAMI (S/2023/58) and the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-party nationals and missing Kuwaiti property (S/2023/51). Iraq participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Mali

On 7 February, Council members held a meeting on Mali under "any other business". Members discussed the treatment of Malian civil society representative Aminata Cheick Dicko since she briefed the Council on 27 January, and the related decision by Malian authorities on 5 February to expel Guillaume Ngefa-Atondoko Andali, the Director of the Human Rights Division of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mali. Albania, Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, Switzerland, the UK, and the US requested the meeting. Under-Secretary-General for

3 See S/2019/303 (10 April 2019) for the report on this mission, which also visited Guinea Bissau.

Status Update since our February Forecast

Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed. Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and head of the UN Human Rights Office in New York Ilze Brands Kehris also attended.

Children and Armed Conflict

On 13 February, the Security Council held a briefing on children and armed conflict that focused on prevention of grave violations against children (S/PV.9258). The meeting was one of the signature events of Malta's Council presidency. Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children Najat Maalla M'jid briefed. The Council was also briefed by Divina Maloum, a peacebuilder from Cameroon who works on prevention, children's rights, and gender-related issues.

Sea-Level Rise

On 14 February, the Security Council convened a ministerial-level open debate on sea-level rise and its implications for international peace and security, one of the signature events of the Maltese Council presidency (S/PV.9260). Malta's Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade Ian Borg chaired the meeting. UN Secretary-General António Guterres, President of the UN General Assembly Csaba Kőrösi, and Coral Pasisi, Director of Climate Change of the Pacific Community and President of Tofia Niue, briefed. Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu also briefed in his capacity as co-chair of the International Law Commission Study Group on Sea-level Rise.

Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 20 February, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement expressing "deep concern and dismay" with Israel's recent announcements regarding expansion of settlement activity and reiterating that continued Israeli settlement activity is imperilling the viability of the two-State solution (S/PRST/2023/1). This was the first presidential statement on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" adopted by the Council in over eight years and the first formal Council outcome since resolution 2334, which was adopted in December 2016.

After the adoption, the Security Council convened for an open briefing on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" (S/PV.9263). Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland and Deputy Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Leni Stenseth briefed.

Central African Republic

On 21 February, the Security Council held a briefing and consultations on the situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) (S/PV.9265). Special Representative for the CAR and head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) Valentine Rugwabiza briefed the Council on the latest developments in the country based on the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2023/108) published on 16 February. The Chair of the CAR Configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), Ambassador Omar Hilale (Morocco), also briefed the Council.

Somalia

On 22 February, the Security Council held a briefing and consultations on the situation in Somalia (S/PV.9267). Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) Anita Kiki Gbeho briefed on the latest political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country based on the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2023/109) published on 16 February. Special Representative of the AU Commission Chairperson (SRCC) for Somalia and head of the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) Mohamed El-Amine Souef, UN Women Executive Director Sima Sami Iskandar Bahous, and a civil society representative also briefed the Council. The meeting had a particular focus on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), and briefers and Council members highlighted various aspects of the WPS agenda during the meeting.

EU-UN Cooperation

On 23 February, the Security Council held its annual meeting on EU-UN cooperation under the agenda item "Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in maintaining international peace and security" (S/PV.9268). At the meeting, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell briefed Council members on strengthening the EU-UN partnership.

Libya

On 27 February, the Security Council held an open briefing (S/PV.9270) followed by closed consultations on Libya. Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Abdoulaye Bathily briefed the Council on recent developments in the country. Libya participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Afghanistan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) before it expires on 17 March.

The Council is also scheduled to receive a briefing on the situation in Afghanistan from Roza Otunbayeva, the Special Representative

of the Secretary-General and head of UNAMA. The briefing will be followed by closed consultations.

Key Recent Developments

Afghanistan continues to face a series of interlocking crises, with the humanitarian situation in the country remaining particularly dire.

UN DOCUMENTS ON AFGHANISTAN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2626](#) (17 March 2022) This resolution extended the mandate of UNAMA until 17 March 2023.

Afghanistan

According to OCHA's overview of the Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2022, which was published on 6 February, 26.1 million people—approximately 65 percent of the country's population—received humanitarian assistance in 2022. The overview also notes that millions of people who received assistance will continue to require multiple rounds of support over the course of 2023 in order to survive, including tailored packages of food, cash and nutritious supplies.

The humanitarian crisis has been exacerbated by the Taliban's 24 December 2022 decree directing NGOs working in Afghanistan to suspend all female employees. Shortly after the ban was announced, approximately 150 NGOs and aid organisations working in Afghanistan halted their operations. While several organisations have resumed working in the country, particularly after the Taliban granted exceptions to female staff working in the health and education sectors, the ban reportedly continues to affect humanitarian work throughout Afghanistan.

The suspension of female NGO workers was preceded by a 20 December 2022 Taliban edict banning female students from university. In a 27 December 2022 press statement, Council members "reiterated their deep concern of the suspension of school beyond the sixth grade" for girls and "called on the Taliban to reopen schools and swiftly reverse these policies and practices". The statement also noted that Council members were "profoundly concerned by reports that the Taliban have banned female employees of non-governmental organisations" and said that "these restrictions contradict the commitments made by the Taliban to the Afghan people, as well as the expectations of the international community".

The Council discussed both of these edicts during a private meeting on 13 January. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 12 January). On 16 January, a UN delegation led by Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohamed visited Afghanistan for a series of meetings with Taliban officials—including members of the Taliban's cabinet—humanitarian workers, representatives of civil society, and Afghan women, among others. In closed consultations held on 27 January, Mohamed briefed Council members on the delegation's visit. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 27 January).

On 28 January, the Taliban appeared to double down on banning women from attending university by announcing that girls will not be allowed to sit university entrance exams in late February. Some media outlets reported that the Taliban had also outlawed the sale and use of contraceptives in recent weeks, a claim denied by Taliban officials.

During the last week of January, officials from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, including Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths, travelled to Afghanistan and met with the Taliban. (The Inter-Agency Standing Committee formulates policy and mobilises resources in response to humanitarian crises and is composed of UN and partner agencies.) At a 30 January press conference following the visit, Griffiths told reporters that Taliban officials said that exceptions to the ban on female NGO workers would be granted for additional sectors and that Taliban authorities had indicated that they were developing relevant guidelines.

Terrorism remains an ongoing concern in Afghanistan. On 11 January, at least 20 people were killed and dozens more wounded when a suicide bomber detonated an explosive near the Taliban foreign ministry in Kabul. According to media reports, Chinese officials

were meeting representatives of the Taliban at the ministry when the blast struck. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province (ISKP), the Afghan affiliate of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), claimed responsibility for the attack, which Council members condemned in a 12 January press statement. The latest report of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1267/1989/2253 Sanctions Committee, which was published on 13 February, noted that "Afghanistan remains the primary source of terrorist threat for Central and South Asia" and said that terrorist groups in the country "enjoy greater freedom of movement" because of "the absence of an effective Taliban security strategy".

Tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan have risen in recent months. According to media reports, Pakistani authorities blamed the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a group with links to the Afghan Taliban, for a 30 January terrorist attack that struck a mosque in Peshawar, Pakistan. Pakistani officials reportedly suggested that the violence, which killed at least 63 people and was condemned by Council members in a 30 January press statement, emanated from Afghanistan. On 19 February, Taliban officials closed the Torkham border crossing between the two countries after accusing Pakistan of violating an agreement permitting Afghans to enter Pakistan without medical documents to seek medical care. Pakistani border guards and Taliban forces exchanged fire along the border the following day, leaving one Pakistani soldier wounded. The border crossing was reopened on 25 February after Pakistani Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif met with Taliban officials in Kabul on 22 February. Although Afghanistan continues to face economic difficulties, some economic indicators appear to have improved. According to the World Bank's Afghanistan Economic Monitor, which was published on 25 January, Afghanistan exported \$1.7 billion worth of goods between January and November 2022, compared to \$900 million and \$800 million for the full years 2021 and 2020. The report also says that the exchange rate and revenue collection have remained stable, while inflation has decreased and non-food items are widely available.

In an apparent sign of differences among the Taliban leadership, acting Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani delivered a speech on 11 February that appeared to implicitly criticise Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada. Two days later, on 13 February, acting Second Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi also seemed to indirectly critique the Taliban's ban on education for women and girls.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 20 January joint statement, the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Margaret Satterthwaite, and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, said that lawyers, judges, prosecutors and all other actors who are part of the legal system in Afghanistan "face grave risks to their safety" and that those still practising must endeavour to navigate a "deeply challenging, non-independent legal system". The rapporteurs noted that the Taliban has attempted to effectively ban all women from participating in the legal system and described the "all-male system implementing the Taliban's version of Sharia law" as a "human rights catastrophe".

On 27 December 2022, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, called on the de facto authorities in Afghanistan to immediately revoke their policies targeting the rights of women and girls. Calling the restrictions "unfathomable", Türk noted that

Afghanistan

they will increase the suffering of all Afghans and pose a risk beyond Afghanistan's borders. Türk also expressed deep concern that increased hardship in Afghan society is likely to increase the vulnerability of women and girls to sexual and gender-based violence and domestic violence.

Key Issues and Options

The renewal of UNAMA's mandate is a key issue for the Council. Given the difficult and evolving situation on the ground, the Council could choose to renew the mandate for a further 12 months without making any changes to UNAMA's priorities in order to give the mission more time to implement its mandate.

It appears that UNAMA is encountering some difficulties in implementing aspects of its mandate. The Council could hold an informal meeting with UNAMA's leadership ahead of the mandate renewal with a view to better understanding these challenges and to consider whether there is anything the Council can add in the renewal resolution to assist UNAMA in managing them.

The humanitarian crisis and the effect of the Taliban's edict banning female NGO workers on the provision of humanitarian aid are also major issues. One option is for Council members to hold a closed Arria-formula meeting with humanitarian organisations working in the country. Such a meeting could provide an opportunity to receive an update regarding the impact of the ban and consider whether there is anything the Council can do to help improve the situation.

If the Taliban remains unwilling to roll back its policies that violate the rights of women and girls, the Council could consider adopting a resolution that calls on the Taliban to reverse those policies, including the bans preventing women from working for NGOs and attending universities and high schools. Such a resolution could also urge the Taliban to uphold the human rights of other groups in the country, including children and minorities.

The ongoing threat posed by terrorism in Afghanistan is another area of concern. The Council could hold an informal meeting with a counter-terrorism expert, which would give Council members the opportunity to discuss the fight against terrorism in the country and help generate ideas for bolstering the Council's work in this area. Council members may also wish to consider whether sanctioning individuals involved with ISKP and other terrorist groups

active in the country will help combat terrorism in Afghanistan.

Council Dynamics

Although Council members are generally united in their desire to see a prosperous, peaceful Afghanistan free from terrorism and ruled by an inclusive government that respects the rights of women and girls, they are divided over how to achieve this goal. Some members, including the P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other like-minded states, argue that the Taliban must adhere to international norms if it wants to obtain international recognition and receive economic and development aid from the international community. China and Russia, on the other hand, have contended that the international community should provide assistance to Afghanistan without linking that assistance to other issues, such as human rights.

China and Russia have also called for Afghanistan's frozen assets to be returned to the country, while other members have said that these assets cannot be transferred to Afghanistan until a properly functioning central bank has been established. These members often express concerns that the funds could be used for terrorist purposes. Moreover, China and Russia tend to blame the US and NATO for the problems facing Afghanistan, while the US and others contend that the Taliban bears primary responsibility for the issues facing the country.

The last negotiations concerning UNAMA's mandate, which took place in March 2022, were difficult, reflecting sharp divisions among Council members in relation to several issues, including human rights; women, peace, and security; and inclusive governance. The prioritisation of the different components of UNAMA's mandate was a particularly contentious issue. While China and Russia apparently contended that UNAMA should focus primarily on assisting with efforts to address the humanitarian and economic crises in the country, a majority of other Council members strongly supported a more robust mandate spanning several additional areas, including the protection of human rights and the promotion of inclusive governance and gender equality. These components were ultimately included in resolution 2626, which extended UNAMA's mandate until 17 March. 14 Council members voted in favour of the resolution, with Russia abstaining.

Ukraine

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council may hold one or more meetings on the situation in Ukraine, depending on developments on the ground.

Key Recent Developments

One year into Russia's military incursion, the war continues to have devastating consequences for civilians and far-reaching effects on the global economy. As at 15 February, the Office of the UN High

Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had documented 21,293 civilian casualties, including 8,006 deaths, while noting that true figures are likely to be considerably higher. OHCHR has confirmed that at least 456 children have been killed in Ukraine and 684 injured. Moreover, the humanitarian and displacement crises in Ukraine continue to deteriorate. According to a 10 February OCHA humanitarian impact situation report, 17.7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, while approximately 13.4 million

UN DOCUMENTS ON UKRAINE Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9269 (24 February 2022) was a high-level briefing on Ukraine to mark the one-year anniversary of the war. S/PV.9266 (21 February 2022) was an open briefing under the TIPS agenda item requested by Russia. S/PV.9262 (17 February 2022) was an open briefing requested by Russia on the "Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements", also known as the Minsk II agreement, adopted on 12 February 2015. S/PV.9256 (8 February 2022) was an open briefing under the TIPS agenda item requested by Russia to discuss "the prospects for the peaceful settlement of the crisis around Ukraine in the context of the increasing supplies of Western armaments". S/PV.9254 (6 February 2022) was a humanitarian briefing on Ukraine. Selected General Assembly Document A/RES/ES-11/6 (23 February 2022) was a resolution titled "Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine".

Ukraine

people have been forcibly displaced by the war. That figure includes 5.4 million internally displaced people and eight million refugees who have fled Ukraine to neighbouring countries.

The war has entered a new phase, with a renewed Russian offensive marked by intensified fighting in several areas in the eastern Donbas region of Ukraine. Russian forces continue to conduct ground attacks near the city of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region as well as along the outskirts of Donetsk City, while heavy fighting has also been reported in the cities of Svatove and Kreminna in the Luhansk region.

The Security Council has been actively engaged on the situation in Ukraine in recent weeks. On 6 February, the Council held a briefing on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, at the request of Ecuador and France, the co-penholders on humanitarian issues in Ukraine. On 8 February, at Russia's request, the Council convened an open briefing under the "Threats to international peace and security" (TIPS) agenda item to discuss "the prospects for the peaceful settlement of the crisis around Ukraine in the context of the increasing supplies of Western armaments". On 17 February, Russia initiated an open briefing under the TIPS agenda item to mark the eighth anniversary of the "Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements", also known as the Minsk II agreement, adopted on 12 February 2015. Russia initiated another open briefing under the TIPS agenda item on 21 February, citing new evidence regarding the 26 September 2022 explosions that caused physical damage to the Nord Stream pipelines in the Baltic Sea. On 24 February, the Council held a ministerial-level briefing initiated by Malta, Council president for February, to mark the one-year anniversary of the war. (For more, see our *What's In Blue* stories of 7 February, 16 February, and 23 February.)

The General Assembly convened a meeting under the 11th Emergency Special Session (ESS) established by Security Council resolution 2623 of 27 February 2022. The meeting took place from 22 to 23 February. On 23 February, UN member states voted on a draft resolution titled "Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine". The resolution underscores the urgent need to reach a peaceful settlement to the conflict that is consistent with the UN Charter. Member states also voted on two draft amendments proposed by Belarus, both of which failed to be adopted. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 23 February.)

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 22 February, Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights Alexandra Xanthaki, Special Rapporteur on the right to education Farida Shaheed, and Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Nazila Ghanea issued a joint statement expressing concern at the extent of damage and destruction of sites, institutions, and objects of cultural, historical, and religious significance in Ukraine. Cultural properties are protected under Article 1 of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. As at 22 February, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had verified damage to 241 sites since the start of the war. The joint statement also expressed concern about the targeting of Ukrainian cultural symbols and reports of Russian troops detaining civil servants, educators, and local school directors for their refusal to implement Russian curricula.

Key Issues and Options

The overarching priority for the Council is to promote a solution to the conflict and facilitate dialogue among the parties to that end. Following the 23 February adoption of the General Assembly resolution calling for a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace, Council members may wish to request the Secretary-General to employ his good offices to promote the resumption of peace talks between Russia and Ukraine in pursuit of a peace agreement in line with the UN Charter. While a negotiated settlement may appear distant, establishing diplomatic lines of communication between the parties may contribute to preventing further escalation of the conflict.

A key issue for the Council is how to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. Periodic briefings from Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths or other OCHA officials could help keep the Council informed of the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Another key issue for the Council is how to ensure the effective implementation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) and the memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the UN's scope of engagement to facilitate unimpeded exports of Russian food products and fertilisers to global markets. On 15 February, Ukraine sent a letter to the Security Council expressing concern that Russia is deliberately "obstructing" navigation in the Black Sea, causing delays in shipments of Ukrainian foodstuffs related to the BSGI. The letter notes that Russian officials at the Joint Coordination Centre in Istanbul have "systematically [delayed] the inspection of vessels", leading to a "systematic decrease of freight turnover". Russia, for its part, argues that the MoU signed by Russia and the UN on 22 July 2022 has not been implemented. Council members may wish to convene a meeting with UN Coordinator for the BSGI Abdullah Abdul Samad Dashti and UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan. They may choose a closed, informal format, such as an informal interactive dialogue, to allow for a frank discussion about the challenges of implementing the BSGI and the MoU.

Another important issue for the Council is how to promote the safety and security of nuclear facilities in Ukraine. Efforts continue by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi to establish a nuclear safety and security protection zone around the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Council members may wish to seek a briefing from Grossi.

Council and Wider Dynamics

The Security Council remains starkly divided on the situation in Ukraine. Russia continues to justify its invasion, which it refers to as a "special military operation", while several Council members—including Albania, France, the UK, and the US—condemn Russia for what they consider to be an unprovoked war.

Ukraine and its allies have advocated for a just peace in line with the UN Charter, conditioned on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine's internationally recognised border. Other member states have called for an immediate cessation of hostilities without any preconditions, which could freeze the frontlines of the conflict and see Russia seize a significant amount of territory in eastern and southern Ukraine. Western governments have framed support for

Ukraine

the General Assembly resolution as support for upholding the rules-based international order.

The outcome of the ESS votes on 23 February signalled the international community's continued support for Ukraine and commitment to its sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. However, the high number of abstentions and absences, particularly on the draft amendments, demonstrates a persistent unwillingness by some member states—predominantly from the Global South—to be perceived as aligning themselves with either side to the conflict. Approximately 41 percent of African states and about 28 percent of Asia-Pacific states either abstained or did not cast a vote on the resolution. When assessing the votes on the draft amendments, the proportion increases to roughly 76 percent for African states and 62 percent for Asia-Pacific states.

The 32 member states that abstained from voting on the resolution include some of the leading members of the Global South, such as China, India, Senegal—which currently chairs the AU—and South Africa. Analysts have noted that many of the member states that have abstained from voting on the General Assembly resolutions and continue to do so have close economic, historical, or military ties to the Kremlin. Some analysts have argued that these member states' reluctance to condemn Russia at the General Assembly is

not equivalent to approval of Russia's actions in Ukraine but reflects dissatisfaction with the approach taken by western governments to addressing the war and its ricocheting effects on the global economy. Many African and Asia-Pacific member states have expressed support for an immediate cessation of hostilities given their primary concern over the spillover effects of the conflict, including on global energy and commodity prices. They have also been uncomfortable with sanctions on Russia, with many enhancing economic relations with Russia since the start of the war.

On 24 February, China released a 12-point position paper on a political settlement to the war in Ukraine. The 12 points include calls for respecting the sovereignty of all countries, abandoning the "Cold War mentality" to which China has also referred in its statements, ceasing hostilities, resuming peace talks, resolving the humanitarian crisis, protecting civilians and prisoners of war, keeping nuclear power plants safe, facilitating grain exports, stopping unilateral sanctions, keeping industrial and supply chains stable, and promoting post-conflict reconstruction. While many countries, including Ukraine, have welcomed China's intensified diplomatic engagement on the war, some have noted with concern that China's position paper makes no reference to the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine.

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) before its 15 March expiration. Prior to this, the Council is expected to hold a briefing, followed by consultations, on the Secretary-General's 90-day UNMISS report, released on 22 February.

Key Recent Developments

On 4 August 2022, all signatories to the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) agreed to a roadmap extending the transitional period by 24 months to enable the implementation of its key outstanding tasks. The original transitional period agreed to in the R-ARCSS ended on 22 February. Key aspects of the roadmap relate to the unification of forces and their redeployment, drafting of the permanent constitution, and the electoral process. In a 21 February press statement, the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) announced the commencement of the extended transition period ending 22 February 2025, with elections to be held in December 2024.

The most recent report (covering 1 October to 31 December 2022) of the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the R-ARCSS, noted that the ongoing sub-national and intercommunal conflict taking place in Upper Nile and Jonglei states continues to deter humanitarian actors from providing life-saving assistance to thousands of people in need and has forced them to

halt operations and relocate staff to safer locations. It added that the redeployment of the NUF (Necessary Unified Forces) and a campaign for civilian disarmament remain the key aspects to addressing intercommunal conflicts. According to the report, the passage of the Permanent Constitution Making Process Bill and reorganising the security sector are key outstanding tasks. The report added that the training of some NUF forces is behind schedule, while the deployment of others has been delayed, except for approximately 900 soldiers who were deployed to Anet in the northern part of Warrap state.

The first International Conference on Women's Transformational Leadership—hosted by South Sudanese Vice President Rebecca Nyandeng De Mabior, whose portfolio includes gender and youth issues—was held from 13 to 15 February in Juba. The conference brought together 400 female leaders from 15 African nations, including current and former presidents. In a video statement to the conference, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed noted that "we need to build a movement for transformational leadership, and South Sudan is a good place to start". Speaking at the beginning of the conference, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir Mayardit said that South Sudan "cannot afford gender-based violence, as it hinders peace and development". He expressed his government's commitment to addressing the challenges faced by women and empowering them across the country.

Intercommunal and subnational violence persists in many areas of the country. According to the 17 February quarterly brief on violence affecting civilians (covering October to December 2022) by UNMISS' Human Rights Division, there was a 42 percent increase

South Sudan

in violent incidents registered by UNMISS as compared with the previous reporting period. It added that, during the reporting period, the number of civilians killed increased by 79 percent and incidents related to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) increased by 360 percent in comparison with the same reporting period in 2021.

On 2 February, deadly violence in the Kajo-Keji county of Central Equatoria state claimed at least 27 lives and left many others injured. In a 5 February press release, UNMISS expressed grave concern about the “resurgence of killings and violence stemming from long-standing tensions between cattle keepers and host communities in Central Equatoria State and in other parts of the country”. The press release noted that since the 2 February clashes, at least 2,000 people, mainly women and children, have become internally displaced, including 30 unaccompanied children.

The humanitarian situation remains dire. According to OCHA’s 25 November 2022 South Sudan Humanitarian Needs Overview, 9.4 million people—almost 76 percent of South Sudan’s population—will require humanitarian assistance in 2023, compared with 8.9 million in 2022. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), released on 3 November, indicated that about two-thirds of the country’s population—7.76 million people—are likely to face acute food insecurity during the April-July lean season this year, and 1.4 million children will be malnourished. According to OCHA, three aid workers have lost their lives while on duty since the beginning of 2023.

Council members were last briefed on South Sudan on 13 December 2022 by Special Representative and head of UNMISS Nicholas Haysom, who discussed the Secretary-General’s 90-day report on South Sudan dated 7 December 2022. Haysom expressed concern that the delays in the implementation of the R-ARCSS have a domino effect on subsequent key benchmarks, saying that the two-year extension “should not be regarded as a holiday break”. He expressed support for an approach to the elections focused on fulfilling legal requirements, preparing the environment for the elections and providing material assistance for their conduct. He added that it was critical that the Council and the international community convey a unified message on the significance of implementing the provisions concerning elections. He also expressed concern about the clashes among armed militias, which are causing displacement in northern Jonglei and Upper Nile, intercommunal violence in northern Warrap, and ongoing cattle-raiding and migration-related conflicts in the Equatorias.

Human Rights-Related Developments

Members of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, led by its chairperson, Yasmin Sooka, concluded their five-day visit to the country on 18 February. During the visit, commission members met with survivors of human rights violations, government officials, members of civil society, jurists, UN agencies, and UNMISS officials with the goal of discussing the human rights situation in South Sudan. In a 17 February press conference at UNMISS headquarters in Juba, Commissioner Barney Afako expressed regret that the suffering across the country remained immense and called upon the political leaders to reorient their priorities to protect the human rights of South Sudanese. Commissioner Andrew Clapham indicated that the commission will be identifying some individuals who bear responsibility for certain events in their next report for the UN. The commission is expected to brief the Human Rights Council at its 52nd session in early March.

Peacebuilding Commission-Related Developments

On 26 October 2022, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened its first meeting on South Sudan. The meeting’s focus was on generating and providing support to South Sudan—in particular, efforts to improve accountable governance, public finance management, and the delivery of social services at the local level—in support of the implementation of the R-ARCSS. The session included briefings by South Sudan’s peacebuilding minister, defence minister, and health minister, as well as senior officials from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the World Bank, and the UN.

From 6 to 9 December 2022, the Chair of the PBC, Ambassador Muhammad Abdul Muhith (Bangladesh), led a PBC mission to South Sudan. According to the mission report, the PBC delegation sought to explore ways for the commission to enhance its engagement with South Sudan in addressing the root causes of conflict and overcoming the country’s political, humanitarian and development challenges. The PBC convened a meeting on its mission on 31 January. In a press statement released on 31 January, the commission “noted the urgency of staying the course” on the implementation of the outstanding provisions of the peace agreement in line with the timeline set out in the Agreement on the Roadmap to Peaceful and Democratic End of the Transitional Period of the R-ARCSS, adopted in August 2022. It further encouraged South Sudan’s government to promote the participation of all stakeholders in the peace process.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 17 February, the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee held an open briefing to allow member states, particularly regional states, to provide their views on the interim report of the South Sudan Panel of Experts, which was released on 1 December 2022.

Key Issues and Options

An immediate issue for the Council is to consider what changes are necessary in the mandate of UNMISS. The most likely option is for the Council to renew the mandate for one year, maintaining the four pillars of the mission’s mandate while making some adjustments. In doing so, Council members will be informed by the findings and recommendations of the Secretary-General’s latest 90-day report. The four pillars of the UNMISS mandate include: protection of civilians; creating conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance; supporting the implementation of the revitalised agreement and the peace process; and monitoring, investigating and reporting on violations of humanitarian and human rights law.

An ongoing concern for the Council is the significant political challenge in South Sudan related to the delays in implementing the R-ARCSS. A key issue in this regard is what the Council can do to encourage the parties to demonstrate progress towards implementing the outstanding elements of the R-ARCSS in accordance with the deadlines set out in last year’s roadmap. Another issue for several Council members is the need for the government to engage with civil society and other interested parties in relation to the roadmap and its implementation. The Council could consider adopting a presidential statement urging the parties to implement the roadmap in an inclusive and timely manner. Another option is to consider a Council visiting mission to South Sudan to assess the situation and engage further with the various parties. (The last Council visiting mission to South Sudan was in 2019.)

Another key issue Council members will want to follow closely is the humanitarian and food security situation. An option would be

South Sudan

to seek regular briefings from OCHA on the situation.

Council Dynamics

Members are supportive of the UNMISS mandate and its four pillars. Last year, language was added and amended in relation to the mission's mandate, including with reference to elections and the constitution-making process. Substantial amendments and additions were made to the section addressing the South Sudan peace process. These additions included: an expression of deep concern about delays in implementing the R-ARCSS; the need to establish free and open civic space; the importance of an inclusive constitution-drafting process, economic transparency and public financial management reform; and a recognition of the detrimental effect of corruption and misuse of public funds.

Differences of view on issues such as how to depict the situation

on the ground in South Sudan, the utility of sanctions, and the effects of climate change continue to colour Council dynamics, as they have in previous years. One of the most difficult issues during negotiations last year was language on climate change, despite the support of most Council members, including the penholder: proposed language calling on UNMISS to assist in developing mitigation measures against increasingly frequent and extreme weather, which may exacerbate communal violence, was removed at the request of Brazil, China, and Russia.

Most Council members share similar concerns about the delays in implementing the R-ARCSS, the ongoing sub-national and inter-communal violence, the high levels of sexual violence, and the economic and humanitarian crises in the country.

The US is the penholder on South Sudan.

Syria

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council will hold its monthly meetings on political and humanitarian developments in Syria and on the use of chemical weapons in the country.

Key Recent Developments

Syria continues to grapple with the devastating humanitarian consequences of the recent earthquakes in the country. A 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck south-east Türkiye and northern Syria on 6 February. During an 8 February press briefing, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator ad interim for Syria El-Mostafa Benlamlh noted that 10.9 million people in Syria have been affected by the earthquake in the north-western governorates of Hama, Latakia, Idlib, Aleppo, and Tartus. On 20 February two additional earthquakes, measuring 6.4 and 5.8 in magnitude, hit the same region. According to OCHA's 23 February flash update, more than 4,500 deaths and 8,500 injuries have been reported in north-west Syria as a result of the earthquakes. During a press briefing on 21 February, OCHA's Director of Operations and Advocacy Ghada Eltahir Mudawi said that the 20 February earthquakes injured at least 195 civilians in Aleppo and Idlib according to initial assessments.

On 13 February, the Security Council held a private meeting, followed by closed consultations, to discuss the humanitarian situation in Syria in the aftermath of the 6 February earthquake. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths briefed the Council on his recent visit to earthquake-affected areas in Türkiye and Syria. He provided an update on the Syrian government's decision to open two additional crossing points—Bab Al-Salam and Al Ra'ee—from Türkiye to north-west Syria for an initial period of three months for the delivery of humanitarian aid. Prior to this decision, humanitarian assistance was being delivered to Syria from Türkiye only through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, in accordance with resolution 2672 of 9 January. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 13 February.)

In a 13 February statement, Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed this decision and noted that “as the toll of the 6 February earthquake continues to mount, delivering food, health, nutrition, protection, shelter, winter supplies and other life-saving supplies to all the millions of people affected is of the utmost urgency”. During a 9 February press encounter, Guterres mentioned that many non-UN relief agencies are delivering aid through other crossings.

According to data provided by OCHA, a total of 456 trucks loaded with aid provided by six UN agencies have crossed to north-west Syria from Türkiye since 9 February: 358 using the Bab al-Hawa crossing, 82 across Bab al-Salam, and 16 across Al Ra'ee.

On 14 February, Guterres launched a flash appeal seeking \$397.6 million for the provision of humanitarian assistance to 4.9 million Syrians over a three-month period from February to May. The appeal covers several different sectors, including food security and agriculture; early recovery and livelihoods; water, sanitation and hygiene health; nutrition; and protection. At the time of writing, the flash appeal for Syria was 38 percent funded.

On 15 February, Security Council members held a meeting on Syria under “any other business” at the request of France. Griffiths briefed members on the UN's efforts to facilitate the continued flow of humanitarian aid to those in need. It seems that France called the meeting to discuss the modalities of the ongoing cross-border operations and OCHA's plans to operationalise the additional border crossings.

On 16 February, Security Council members held an informal interactive dialogue (IID), in accordance with resolution 2672 of 9 January, which encouraged Council members to convene IIDs every two months “with participation of donors, interested regional parties and representatives of the international humanitarian agencies operating in Syria”. The meeting featured a briefing by Tareq Talahma, OCHA's Acting Director for Operations and Advocacy. Three other UN officials— Benlamlh, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2672](#) (9 January 2023) extended the authorisation for the Syria cross-border aid mechanism for an additional six months until 10 July 2023. [S/RES/2642](#) (12 July 2022) reauthorised the cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism in Syria for six months until 10 January 2023. [Secretary-General's Reports S/2023/127](#) (21 February) was the 60-day report on the implementation of resolution 2672. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9255](#) (7 February 2023) was a meeting on the chemical weapons track in Syria. [S/PV.9248](#) (25 January 2023) was a briefing on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria.

Syria

for the Syria Crisis Muhannad Ibrahim Ahmed Hadi, and Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria crisis ad interim on surge to Türkiye David Carden were also on hand to respond to questions. In addition to Council members and Syria, interested regional parties (Iran and Türkiye) and donors (Canada, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and the EU) also participated in the meeting. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 15 February.)

On 22 February, Security Council members held a meeting on Syria under “any other business” at the request of the US. Griffiths briefed the Council on developments in Syria since the 16 February IID. Reportedly, he provided an update on the delivery of cross-border humanitarian aid to Syria and called for more funding for the humanitarian response in the country.

On 22 February, the Deputy Special Envoy for Syria Najat Rochdi convened the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) Humanitarian Task Force (HTF) in Geneva. This was the second meeting of the HTF since the 6 February earthquake hit the country. According to a 22 February statement of the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, the meeting focused on the “needs and key asks to facilitate humanitarian assistance to all affected areas” and quick disbursement of funding in response to the 14 February flash appeal. In her remarks, Rochdi called for resumption and increase of cross-line operations (that is, across domestic frontlines from Syrian government-held areas into areas outside government control) into north-west Syria and emphasised the need for the concerned parties and those with influence to secure the necessary approvals and security guarantees without delay. She added that simplified and expedited procedures must be ensured for the movement of the humanitarian staff into north-west Syria.

On 7 February, the Council convened a briefing, followed by consultations, on the Syria chemical weapons track. At the meeting, Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fernando Arias updated the Council on the findings of the third report of the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team (IIT), dated 27 January. The report provided the findings of the investigations conducted from January 2021 to December 2022 on the 7 April 2018 Douma incident and concluded that there are “reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian Arab Air Forces were the perpetrators of the chemical weapons attack”. The report says that at least one Mi-8/17 helicopter of the Syrian Arab Air Forces, departing from Dumayr air base, “dropped two yellow cylinders which hit two residential buildings” in a central area of the city, killing at least 43 people, including 17 women, nine boys, and ten girls. Arias noted that the evidence collected and analysed corroborated the conclusions of the report and rejected other scenarios. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 6 February.)

On 28 February, the Council convened its monthly meeting on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria. Griffiths; Geir O. Pedersen, the UN’s Special Envoy for Syria; and Rasha Muhrez, Country Director of Save the Children, briefed. Griffiths highlighted the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country as a result of the 6 February earthquake and its aftershocks. Regarding the resumption of the cross-line operations, he noted that the UN continues to liaise with the relevant parties to explore all viable options. In his remarks, Pedersen welcomed the introduction

of earthquake-related exemptions in several unilateral sanctions, imposed by several countries, including the US, the UK and the EU. He noted that the unresolved political challenges in Syria will pose obstacles as the focus moves from emergency response to recovery. In this regard, he added that the approach of seeking reciprocal and verifiable confidence-building measures through the “step-for-step” initiative remains critical in making further progress.

Hostilities continue in some parts of Syria. On 19 February, a missile attack struck the Kafr Sousa neighbourhood of central Damascus, which reportedly killed a number of civilians and injured at least five others, according to media reports. In a 21 February statement, UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria ad interim Mike Robson expressed deep concern about the strikes in Damascus and noted that “civilians continue to suffer the tragic consequences of ongoing hostilities in parts of Syria, in addition to the tragic earthquake which hit Türkiye and Syria on 6 February”. According to a 22 February Reuters article, sources close to the Syrian government said that the strike hit a gathering of Syrian and Iranian technical experts in drone manufacturing and killed one Syrian engineer and one Iranian official.

Human Rights-Related Developments

According to the Secretary-General’s 60-day report on the implementation of resolution 2672, released on 21 February (covering period from December 2022 to January 2023), the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had verified several incidents across the country in which 42 civilians, including 4 women and 13 children were killed as a result of hostilities.

Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Security Council is how to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Syria in the aftermath of the 6 February earthquake. Periodic briefings from Griffiths or other OCHA officials could help keep the Council informed of the humanitarian situation on the ground. Council members could also consider inviting representatives of Syrian humanitarian aid organisations to engage with them to explore avenues for improving aid delivery mechanisms in Syria.

The Council could consider adopting a presidential statement that:

- expresses strong concern about the dire humanitarian consequences of the 6 February earthquake;
- expresses strong support for the efforts of the UN and humanitarian actors on the ground;
- welcomes the opening and commencement of delivery of aid through additional border crossings—Bab Al-Salam and Al Ra’ee—and further emphasises the Council’s intention to closely monitor the delivery of humanitarian aid through additional border crossings;
- encourages donors to enhance their support for the Syrian humanitarian response plan, including early recovery efforts and the Secretary-General’s 14 February flash appeal; and
- urges the Syrian government to facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access for the UN and other humanitarian agencies in the earthquake-affected areas.

Council Dynamics

It seems that Council members have divergent views about the need to adopt a product to respond to the humanitarian crisis that has been exacerbated by the earthquake. During the 13 February closed

Syria

consultations, members apparently expressed opposing views, with some members calling for a resolution recognising the opening of the two additional border crossings and the need to monitor the delivery of humanitarian aid through these crossings. It seems that these members argued that such a resolution is necessary to ensure the predictable delivery of aid to affected areas. Other Council members apparently strongly opposed the idea of a Council resolution on the matter, emphasising the need to respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It seems that some members indicated an interest in having further discussions on the issue.

In a 13 February Twitter post, Ambassador Nicolas de Rivière (France) emphasised that if the Syrian government fails to implement its commitment to open the two crossing points, the Security Council "will have to take its responsibilities and adopt a resolution".

At a media stakeout on 14 February, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield (US) welcomed the opening of additional border crossings, describing this decision as "long overdue". She emphasised the need for a resolution with monitoring mechanisms that "codifies additional crossing[s] and offers predictability" for the UN and humanitarian actors on the ground. At the 28 February Council briefing, Russia noted that the Syrian government's decision to open additional border crossings "corresponds to the guiding principles for humanitarian assistance" and thus does not require any further Council action.

Brazil and Switzerland, the co-penholders on the Syria humanitarian file, apparently proposed a draft press statement on the situation in Syria following the 16 February IID. It seems, however, that Council members were unable to reach consensus on the text.

Women, Peace and Security

Expected Council Action

On 7 March, the Security Council will hold an open debate on the theme, "Women, Peace and Security: Towards the 25th Anniversary of Resolution 1325". One of the signature events of Mozambique's presidency, the meeting will be chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mozambique Verónica Nataniel Macamo Dlhovo. High-level representatives from UN Women, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the African Union are the anticipated briefers. A civil society representative is also expected to brief.

Background and Key Recent Developments

It appears that Mozambique intends to use the open debate to galvanise UN member states' efforts towards the full implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in preparation for the agenda's 25th anniversary in October 2025. The open debate is intended to provide an opportunity for taking stock of implementation thus far and to set goals for achieving key objectives of the agenda, such as the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in peace processes, and efforts to integrate WPS concerns in Council deliberations and decisions.

On 31 October 2000, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1325, which was the first resolution on WPS. Reaffirming women's key role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, resolution 1325 calls for the adoption of a gender perspective in peace agreements and for the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence. Since resolution 1325, the Council has adopted nine further resolutions under the WPS agenda item. Five of these focus on conflict-related sexual violence, while the other four have a wider focus, including on issues such as women's political participation, integration of a gender perspective in various aspects of the work of the Security Council and the UN, and the full implementation of the WPS agenda. Many recent Security Council resolutions, such as those renewing the mandate of UN peace operations, include provisions on WPS. Since the inception of the WPS agenda, several

national, regional, and international initiatives have focused on taking stock of the agenda's impact and have concentrated on strengthening its implementation, consolidating its gains, and resisting push-back. Nevertheless, as the 2022 Secretary-General's report on WPS says, the world is currently "experiencing a reversal of generational gains in women's rights while violent conflicts, military expenditures, military coups, displacements and hunger continue to increase". Gender perspectives remain at the margins of conflict prevention, women are often excluded from peace processes, and their organisations report increasing restrictions to their work.

In 2022, Council members strengthened WPS language in several Council products, including on the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and on the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) (Yemen). In resolution 2663, the Council included WPS language for the first time in a mandate renewal of the 1540 Committee and its Group of Experts. (Adopted in 2004, resolution 1540 aims to prevent non-state actors from obtaining access to weapons of mass destruction.) A new reference in the draft "urging" the 1540 Committee to consider the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in its activities had to be downgraded to "encouraging" the Committee to do so, and was moved from the operative to the preambular section of the resolution, as a result of Russia's opposition.

In January, the Council adopted resolution 2674, renewing the mandate of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) for one year. Resolution 2674 strengthened language regretting the lack of participation of women in the settlement process and on the implementation of an Action Plan on ways to ensure women's participation in the process.

The Informal Experts Group (IEG) on WPS held a meeting on Afghanistan on 26 January, which was the first IEG meeting convened at the level of Deputy Permanent Representative rather than of experts. Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan Markus Potzel briefed. On 20 February, the IEG

UN DOCUMENTS ON WPS Security Council Resolutions S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000) was the first Security Council resolution on WPS. S/RES/2242 (13 October 2015) expressed the Council's intention to convene an IEG on WPS and invite women civil society briefers to country-specific and thematic meetings of the Security Council. Secretary-General's Report S/2022/740 (5 October 2022) was the Secretary-General's annual report on WPS.

Women, Peace and Security

met on South Sudan, with Deputy Special Representative in the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Sara Beysolow Nyanti briefing.

Since the start of 2023, members which have signed on to the 1 December 2021 Statement of Shared Commitments on WPS—Albania, Brazil, Ecuador, France, Gabon, Japan, Malta, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the UK—have delivered joint WPS-focused statements to the press on Afghanistan (in January) and Somalia (in February). The US, which has not signed on to the shared commitments, joined the commitment holders in the delivery of the statement on Afghanistan.

One of the shared commitments is a pledge to “[m]aking WPS-related issues an explicit focus of at least one mandated geographic meeting of the Council or specifically host a WPS signature event in each Presidency and requesting UN briefers to focus on this aspect”. Malta elected to have a WPS focus to the 22 February Council meeting on Somalia and circulated a concept note encouraging Council members to address various aspects of the WPS agenda in their interventions at the meeting. The concept note highlighted pertinent WPS-related issues raised in the Secretary-General’s reports on Somalia, reports on children and armed conflict and recommendations made by UN Women as the secretariat of the IEG. This appears to be the first time that a concept note has been circulated to Council members ahead of a mandated meeting on a country or region with a WPS focus.

Key Issues and Options

The main issue for the Security Council remains strengthening the substantive implementation of the WPS agenda.

Mozambique, as the Council president for March, could prepare a chair’s summary of the 7 March open debate to capture the key themes of the discussion and share it with Council members.

Preserving and strengthening WPS language in upcoming mandate renewals are important objectives for members supportive of the WPS agenda at the Council. Among other elements, members may consider ways to ensure that UN missions have adequate gender-related expertise, capacity and resources.

In line with resolution 2242 and the 1 December 2021 Statement of Shared Commitments on WPS, members should continue to invite diverse women civil society representatives to brief the Council regularly and follow up on their information and recommendations.

On 7 February, Council members held a meeting on Mali under “any other business”. This followed the negative remarks by Mali’s Transitional Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdoulaye Diop on the presence of civil society representative Aminata Cheick Dicko at the 27 January Council meeting on Mali, reports of threats and a misinformation campaign on social media faced by Dicko after her briefing, and the decision by Malian authorities to expel Guillaume Ngefa-Atondoko Andali, the Director of the Human Rights Division of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. It is essential that members and the UN take all possible measures to keep briefers safe, in consultation with the briefer, including carrying out risk assessment, developing protection plans and responding to any reprisals.

Members may convene a closed Arria-formula meeting with Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders Mary Lawlor, the representatives of relevant UN entities, and NGO coalitions to discuss ways to reinforce the prevention and response to reprisals against human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders. The organisers may want to include a focus on the interaction between long-term and short-term strategies to prevent reprisals and circulate a summary of the proceedings after the meeting.

Council Dynamics

Council dynamics on WPS remain difficult and have been further complicated by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Supportive Council members and civil society actors emphasise the importance of implementing the existing normative framework on WPS rather than pursuing further Council outcomes, in order to avoid language that is redundant or less robust than the existing content of WPS resolutions.

In January 2023, Switzerland and the UAE succeeded Ireland and Mexico as IEG co-chairs. The UAE’s co-chair position will become vacant when its Council term ends in December 2023.

Norway, which led on the 1 December 2021 Statement of Shared Commitments, and the founding members of the “Presidency Trio” for WPS—Ireland, Kenya, and Mexico—ended their Council terms in December 2022. Of the members who started their terms in January 2023, Ecuador, Japan, Malta, and Switzerland have joined the initiative thus far.

The UK is the penholder on WPS, and the US is the penholder on conflict-related sexual violence.

Security Sector Reform

Expected Council Action

In March, Council President Mozambique is expected to convene an open briefing on security sector reform. Representatives from the UN Secretariat, African Union (AU), and civil society are expected to brief. There is no planned outcome from the meeting.

Background and Key Recent Developments

While the definition of security sector reform (SSR) has evolved over the years, the core aim of SSR remains to enhance the effectiveness and accountability of domestic security institutions, such as defence, law enforcement, corrections, intelligence services, and border management. Security sector governance and reform (SSG/R) encompasses how to facilitate the application of the principles of good governance to the provision of public security, including accountability and the rule of law.

The Security Council first discussed SSR as a thematic issue in 2007 in an open debate during Slovakia's February presidency. The Council issued a presidential statement following the debate that stressed the importance of SSR in post-conflict environments and underlined the sovereignty and primary responsibility of the country concerned in determining its SSR priorities. The statement also requested the Secretary-General to report on lessons learned as well as core SSR functions the UN system could perform. The subsequent report, "Securing Peace and Development: the role of the UN in supporting SSR", was discussed during a briefing on 12 May 2008 under the UK presidency. The report observed that UN support for SSR had largely been pursued as an ad hoc undertaking, hampered by weak capacity and insufficient resources to deliver effective support to national authorities.

The Council held a second open debate on SSR on 12 October 2011 under the presidency of Nigeria. The presidential statement issued after the debate noted that the bulk of international assistance in the area of SSR takes place in, and is directed to, countries in Africa, and highlighted the need to give greater consideration to African perspectives on SSR. It also stressed the need to continue to include, as appropriate, SSR aspects as an integral part of the planning of UN operations.

On 28 April 2014, the Security Council adopted resolution 2151, the first thematic resolution on SSR, following an open debate. The debate and resolution were initiated by Nigeria, following its return to the Council after two years. While reaffirming that SSR should be a nationally owned process, resolution 2151 focused on the key role of the UN system in supporting SSR. Among other things, it requested the Secretary-General to develop additional guidance to help UN officials in delivering on mandated SSR tasks and to highlight updates on progress in SSR in reporting to the Council.

On 20 August 2015, the Council convened for a briefing under Nigeria's presidency to take stock of the UN system's implementation of resolution 2151. At the meeting, Council members acknowledged

the important role that SSR plays in stabilising countries in post-conflict situations and expressed support for more focused engagement by UN peace operations in SSR efforts based on national ownership and in cooperation with regional organisations such as the AU. Some Council members referred to the need to involve the voices of women, youth and civil society in reform efforts and to increase women's participation in the security sector.

On 3 December 2020, under South Africa's presidency, the Council convened a ministerial-level debate on SSR. Following that meeting, the Council adopted resolution 2553, which built upon and updated resolution 2151. This second thematic resolution on SSR contained new language reflecting progress in the implementation of the SSR agenda since 2014 and broader developments in the UN's approach to the issue. It referenced the need to facilitate inclusivity in SSR processes, including by considering the needs of the entire population and promoting the participation of women in the security sector. It also sought to address gaps in the implementation of resolution 2151, including through strengthened provisions on reporting by the Secretary-General on SSR in country-specific updates to the Council. Additionally, resolution 2553 requested the Secretary-General to submit a stand-alone report to the Security Council on his efforts to strengthen the UN's comprehensive approach to SSR. That report was published in March 2022.

Since 2014, the Council has adopted over 20 country-specific resolutions mandating 11 peace operations to implement an increasingly wide range of SSR tasks. Concurrently, the Secretary-General's independent reviews of peace operations, such as the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), have highlighted the role that UN support for SSR plays in advancing political solutions to conflict. Additionally, peace agreements signed since 2010 increasingly contain provisions on SSG/R, recognising the importance of integrating armed groups in post-conflict security arrangements. Such agreements include those signed in South Sudan (2015, 2018), Mali (2016), the Central African Republic (2019) and Sudan (2020).

Key Issues and Options

This meeting will provide Security Council members with an opportunity to review implementation of resolutions 2151 and 2553. It will also allow them to consider the challenges and recommendations that the Secretary-General's latest report identified in the UN's provision of support for SSR.

One area that may be a focus for some members is how the Council could improve its oversight of SSR in the context of peace processes. In this context, Council members may consider establishing a more regular reporting cycle on the topic. They may also encourage the Secretary-General to include SSR reporting more systematically in relevant country-specific updates to the Council, in accordance with resolution 2553.

UN DOCUMENTS ON SECURITY SECTOR REFORM **Security Council Resolutions** S/RES/2553 (3 December 2020) was the second thematic resolution on security sector reform. S/RES/2151 (28 April 2014) was the first-ever stand-alone resolution on security sector reform. **Security Council Presidential Statements** S/PRST/2011/19 (12 October 2011) highlighted the need to expand the consideration given to African perspectives on security sector reform. S/PRST/2007/3 (21 February 2007) recognised the link between security sector reform, DDR, and small arms and light weapons control. **Secretary-General's Reports** S/2022/280 (15 March 2022) was the report on "Strengthening security sector reform". S/2013/480 (13 August 2013) was the report on "Securing States and societies: strengthening the United Nations comprehensive support to security sector reform". S/2008/39 (23 January 2008) was on "Securing peace and development: the role of the United Nations in supporting security sector reform". **Security Council Letter** S/2020/1145 (25 November 2020) contained a concept note prepared by South Africa ahead of the ministerial-level debate on "Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace: Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSR)". **Security Council Meeting Records** S/2020/1176 (8 December 2020) contained a record of the statements made at the Security Council meeting on "Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace: Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/R)", which took place on 3 December 2020. S/PV.7508 (20 August 2015) was a briefing on SSR under the presidency of Nigeria. S/PV.6630 (12 October 2012) was an open debate on SSR under the presidency of Nigeria. S/PV.5889 (12 May 2008) was a briefing on SSR under the UK presidency. S/PV.5632 (20 February 2007) was the first open debate on SSR under the presidency of Slovakia.

Security Sector Reform

Another central challenge is to acknowledge SSR as an inherently political activity rather than a purely technical exercise. As the Secretary-General noted in his report, “[w]hile capacity-building is important [...] it is vital to understand the political and economic role of [security] institutions from the perspective of different actors and communities”. The Council may therefore wish to consider mechanisms to strengthen linkages between UN-supported SSR activities and broader political processes in relevant country situations, including through the UN Inter-Agency Security Sector Reform Task Force and the Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law, with a view towards reaffirming the primacy of politics and a unified UN approach to the issue.

Relatedly, the Secretary-General’s report noted difficulties in the coordination of SSR support between the UN and other actors, such as regional organisations and donor countries. The Council may therefore wish to consider mechanisms to strengthen coordination in both the multilateral and bilateral provision of SSR support to host countries. Enhancing partnerships with regional organisations such as the AU may also be discussed in this context.

Another key SSR priority for the Council arises in the context of peacekeeping transitions. As an operation draws down, it is critical to ensure the orderly handover of tasks to the UN country team. In this

regard, the Council may wish to study best practices from relatively successful transitions, such as the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI), including the role of the Peacebuilding Fund in ensuring sustainable financing for continued SSR activities.

Finally, regarding the enhanced representation and participation of women in the security sector, the Secretary-General’s report notes that gender is featured in the language of only four out of 11 peacekeeping mandates on SSR. As such, Council members may consider adding gender-responsive SSR provisions to relevant mandates currently lacking such language.

Council Dynamics

While SSR has become a standard element in the mandates of multidimensional peacekeeping operations, some Council members remain cautious about UN engagement in security management and are averse to what they consider overly prescriptive approaches from the Security Council in post-conflict settings. In this regard, Council members at the March meeting are likely to express typically divergent views on certain cross-cutting thematic issues, such as the extent to which the UN should promote human rights and a gender perspective in its support of national SSR processes.

Myanmar

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is expected to receive an oral briefing on the UN’s support for the implementation of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar from the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy on Myanmar Noeleen Heyzer. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi may also brief. At the time of writing, the format of the meeting had not been confirmed.

Key Recent Developments

On 21 December 2022, the Council adopted resolution 2669 on Myanmar with 12 votes in favour and China, India, and Russia abstaining. The resolution demands an end to all forms of violence and urges restraint and de-escalation of tensions. It also calls for the release of all prisoners and expresses concern about violence across Myanmar, attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, and human rights abuses and violations. The resolution requested a briefing from the Secretary-General or his Special Envoy, in coordination with ASEAN’s Special Envoy, on the UN’s support for the implementation of the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus by 15 March. (The Five-Point Consensus was adopted by ASEAN in April 2021 and called for an immediate cessation of violence, constructive dialogue among all parties, a special envoy of the ASEAN chair to facilitate mediation of the dialogue process, humanitarian assistance, and a visit to Myanmar by the ASEAN Special Envoy to meet all parties concerned).

Although the Five-Point Consensus was agreed almost two years ago, four of the five priorities are currently unmet or partially met. The only priority fully executed has been the appointment of the

ASEAN special envoy, which has tended to be the foreign minister of the ASEAN chair. Indonesia, which assumed ASEAN’s rotating chairmanship for 2023 in January, appears to be taking this one step further by establishing an Office of the Special Envoy to Myanmar, headed by its foreign minister Retno Marsudi.

In remarks delivered during a meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers that ran from 3 to 4 February, Marsudi reportedly acknowledged that the lack of progress “tests [ASEAN’s] credibility” and said that ASEAN’s future efforts will be coordinated with other countries and the UN. According to media reports, Indonesia has raised the possibility of appointing a military general as special envoy to Myanmar.

On 22 December 2022, Thailand hosted an informal regional meeting with three cabinet ministers from Myanmar’s military government. Representatives of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam participated in the meeting, while officials from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore did not attend.

The situation in Myanmar has continued to deteriorate since resolution 2669 was adopted. On 27 January, the Myanmar military issued the Political Party Registration Law, which introduced new requirements for political parties intending to compete in parliamentary elections. Prior to the announcement of the law, the military authorities had pledged to hold elections in August. Under the terms of the legislation, parties are required to have 100,000 members and at least 100 million kyat in funds (approximately USD\$47,000) and must commit to running within 60 days in order to participate in the elections. According to Human Rights Watch, these requirements will make it “nearly impossible” for smaller parties to run. The law

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also disqualifies political groups declared as an “unlawful association or terrorist organisation under any existing law” from taking part in the elections. The National Unity Government (NUG)—an alliance of ousted politicians from the National League of Democracy (NLD), the opposition party led by Aung San Suu Kyi, which won the November 2020 election—has been declared as a terrorist organisation by Myanmar’s military.

On 1 February, exactly two years after seizing power from the NLD, the military authorities announced an extension of the nationwide state of emergency for a further six months. Given that parliamentary elections cannot be held while a state of emergency persists, the announcement has raised questions about whether the elections will take place in August. The second anniversary of the coup was also marked by a series of silent protests that saw deserted streets in major cities across Myanmar, after activists called for people to close businesses and stay indoors to signal their opposition to the junta. The following day, the military announced that it had imposed martial law in 37 townships across eight of the country’s 14 regions and states, including 11 townships in Sagaing region and Chin state, where opposition to the regime has been particularly strong.

The security situation in Myanmar remains highly volatile. The military continues to clash with the People’s Defence Force (PDF)—a group comprising local civilian militias created in response to the February 2021 coup—and various ethnic armed groups in different parts of the country. The clashes with the PDF and other forces appear to pose a serious challenge to the military’s authority. In comments reported by state media on 1 February, General Min Aung Hlaing, the head of the junta, acknowledged that more than one-third of townships are not under full military control. Reports have also emerged of increasing air strikes carried out by the junta within Myanmar, including an 18 January attack that reportedly targeted a village in the central Sagaing region, killing at least seven people and injuring five more.

The fighting has contributed to ongoing refugee and humanitarian crises in Myanmar. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the violence has caused tens of thousands of refugees to flee to neighbouring countries and displaced over 982,000 people within the country. In January, UNHCR also reported that more than 3,500 Rohingya had attempted to leave Bangladesh and Myanmar by sea in 2022, a 360 percent increase over the previous year. In an update published on 2 February, OCHA noted that 17.6 million people—nearly one-third of the population—are estimated to be in humanitarian need in 2023. On 17 February, the World Food Programme (WFP) announced that rations for Rohingya refugees, who have been in camps in Bangladesh since 2017, will be cut by 17 percent due to a lack of funding.

On 23 December 2022, US President Joe Biden signed the Burma Unified through Rigorous Military Accountability Act (the BURMA Act) into law. Among other matters, the BURMA Act requires Biden “to direct the US Permanent Representative to the [UN] to use the voice, vote, and influence of the US to spur greater action by the [UN]” on Myanmar. This includes “pushing the UN Security Council” to consider a resolution “condemning the February 2021 coup” and a resolution “that immediately imposes a global arms embargo against [Myanmar]”.

Human-Rights Related Developments

On 31 January, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, released a report on the February 2021 coup. In the report, Andrews argues that the coup was “illegal” and that the military’s “claim as Myanmar’s government is illegitimate” and outlines several recommendations for member states and UN organs, including the Security Council. In a statement accompanying the report, Andrews warned that the military is planning to seek legitimacy in 2023 through the means of “sham elections” and urged the international community to “explicitly denounce what will be a farcical exercise to perpetuate military control of Myanmar’s political system”.

In a 27 January statement, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk observed that Myanmar has undergone a “wholesale regression in human rights” and noted that credible sources estimate that “at least 2,890 people have died at the hands of the military”, which he described as “almost certainly an underestimation of the number of civilians killed as a result of military action”. Türk emphasised that restoring respect for human rights is necessary to end the crisis and also said that “those responsible for the daily attacks against civilians and the human rights violations must be held accountable”.

Key Issues and Options

The lack of progress in the implementation of ASEAN’s Five-Point Consensus is a significant issue for Council members. One option is for the Council to convene a private meeting with a briefing from the ASEAN Special Envoy for Myanmar. Such a briefing could provide an opportunity for Council members to learn more about the dynamics within ASEAN and consider whether there is anything the Council could do to support the implementation of ASEAN’s consensus plan. The Council could also request a regular report from the Secretary-General regarding the Five-Point Consensus and the situation in Myanmar more broadly. A regular report could give the Council greater insight into the problems facing the country and provide an opportunity for Council members to monitor the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus more closely.

The ongoing violence in Myanmar is another major issue for the Council. If the fighting escalates, the Council could choose to pursue a resolution that includes the possibility of Article 41 measures including, for example, an arms embargo that prohibits the sale of materials used by the military’s air force, or an asset freeze targeted at the military leadership.

Another option is to hold an Arria-formula meeting with experts in international criminal law. Such a meeting could provide a platform for discussing whether referring the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC) is an appropriate course of action for the Council.

The humanitarian and refugee crises in Myanmar are also areas of concern. Members could urge member states to make greater contributions to humanitarian relief efforts, particularly given the WFP’s recent announcement that rations will be cut for Rohingya refugees. The Council could also request briefings from OCHA and UNHCR regarding their work in Myanmar and Bangladesh, with a view to better understanding how the conflict in the country is fueling the crises and whether there is anything the Council can do to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council dynamics on Myanmar have been difficult since the issue came onto the Council’s agenda in 2006. China has resisted stronger

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action from the Council for many years. It seems Russia has become increasingly engaged, as it has strengthened its ties with the military regime and in negotiations of outcomes has often opposed language that singled out the military. For several years, a group of elected members has pushed for more attention to be paid to the situation in Myanmar. The UK, the penholder on the file, which has for the last few years advocated for allowing ASEAN to take the lead on this issue, now appears more inclined for the Council to take on a more proactive role. ASEAN continues to be a key player, with some ASEAN members apparently playing an instrumental role in persuading China to abstain on the December resolution. Internal divisions within ASEAN on Myanmar may, however, make it even more difficult for the organisation to play a constructive role.

Since the military takeover, members have been able to agree on the need to exercise restraint and release all political prisoners but attributing responsibility for attacks and human rights language have

been sensitive issues for some members. During the negotiations on resolution 2669, references to further measures and a regular reporting cycle by the Secretary-General were also contentious issues.

Among the elected members, since 2019, there has been either an ASEAN member (Indonesia, Vietnam) or a neighbouring country (India) in the Council. These members were vocal about ASEAN and the regional actors taking the lead on this issue. While neither a direct neighbour nor a member of ASEAN, Japan has had historically close ties to Myanmar and strong diplomatic and economic links with ASEAN. It has also been involved in efforts to promote dialogue among the different parties. March's meeting might provide an indication as to whether the new mix of members in the Council in 2023 may be more amenable to greater Council engagement on this situation following the adoption of resolution 2669 in December 2022.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council will hold its monthly briefing, followed by closed consultations, on Yemen with UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg and a representative of OCHA. The chair of the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Ferit Hoxha (Albania), may also brief. The head of the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), Major General Michael Beary, is expected to brief during consultations.

Key Recent Developments

Yemen continues to experience its longest lull in fighting since the truce agreement between the Yemeni government and the Houthi rebel group started on 2 April 2022, despite sporadic clashes and the parties' failure to renew the agreement in early October 2022. Since October, the Houthis and Saudi Arabia—which leads a military coalition in support of the Yemeni government—have been holding talks, facilitated by Oman, that are reportedly focused on a potential comprehensive agreement to end the war.

On 15 February, the Council adopted resolution 2675, extending the Yemen asset freeze and travel ban sanctions measures until 15 November 2023 and the mandate of the Yemen Panel of Experts until 15 December 2023. The resolution requests that the Panel of Experts provide a midterm update to the 2140 Committee no later than 15 June and a final report no later than 15 October.

Deviating from past years, resolution 2675 was a short one-page text, or a “technical rollover”, of the Yemen sanctions regime. The UK, as penholder, proposed the technical rollover to give space to peace talks and avoid potential changes that could expand the sanctions and negatively impact the talks. The nine-month extension, instead of the customary one-year renewal, appears intended to allow Council members still to consider amendments to the sanctions regime later this year, especially if the Houthi-Saudi talks prove

unsuccessful. Following the adoption, Council members held their monthly meeting on Yemen in closed consultations, receiving briefings from Grundberg, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya, and Beary.

On 13 February, several donor states, including Council members, met in New York with Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Achim Steiner and UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen David Gressly. The meeting was organised amid donors' frustrations over the delay in starting the salvage operation on the FSO Safer, the floating oil and offloading vessel that is moored off Hodeidah city. At the meeting, donors expressed “steadfast support for urgent action to prevent a disastrous oil spill from the [FSO Safer] tanker in the Red Sea”, according to the US Department of State.

The UN announced the planned operation in May 2022, saying at the time that the operation could begin once donors committed the required funds to conduct the operation's first phase, which entails transferring the oil stored on the decrepit ship to a temporary vessel. While this funding has been raised, the UN said in January that it cannot begin the operation until it secures the crude carrier that will permanently replace the FSO Safer. On 27 January, the UN issued an appeal through Lloyd's List—a publication about global shipping markets—for help in finding a shipowner or group of industry philanthropists that may put up a direct financial subvention or enter a charter arrangement for a vessel.

On 27 February, Sweden and Switzerland co-hosted a pledging event in Geneva for the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan for Yemen (HRP). Attended by Secretary-General António Guterres, the conference raised \$1.2 billion of the \$4.3 billion that the UN says is required in 2023 to assist 17.3 million people considered particularly vulnerable.

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2675](#) (15 February 2023) extended the Yemen asset freeze and travel ban sanctions measures for nine months until 15 November and the mandate of the Yemen Panel of Experts until 15 December. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9244](#) (16 January 2023) was a briefing on Yemen. [Sanctions Committee Document S/2023/130](#) (21 February 2023) was the final report of the Yemen Panel of Experts.

Yemen

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is how to support ongoing peace talks and efforts to establish a formal ceasefire and political process. Grundberg's mediation efforts appear very much contingent on progress in the Houthi-Saudi talks. Council members could reiterate the importance of coordination between this process and the work of the Special Envoy, as well as the importance of an inclusive Yemeni political process under UN mediation for a sustainable resolution to the conflict.

The humanitarian situation remains a key issue. An estimated 21.6 million people in Yemen require aid or protection. Relief efforts also face significant challenges from interference and access constraints and a dangerous security environment. This includes the Houthis' enforcement of mahram over the past year, requiring women to be accompanied by male guardians, that is negatively affecting aid operations. Land mines and explosive remnants of war have become an increased issue of concern as the leading cause of civilian casualties in the truce and post-truce period. Support for Yemen's economy is also critical to mitigate the humanitarian crisis.

Members may urge donors, especially those in the region, to provide more support to the 2023 HRP. They may further call on all parties to the conflict to facilitate the safe, rapid, and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief to all civilians in need and to protect humanitarian personnel and assets in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law. Members are also likely to continue closely monitoring progress towards starting the salvage operation on the FSO Safer oil tanker.

Council Dynamics

Council members welcome the Houthi-Saudi talks and have

expressed cautious optimism about their potential to yield meaningful results. At the same time, members have reiterated the importance of the UN Envoy being kept informed of these negotiations and of an inclusive Yemeni political process facilitated by UN mediation to achieve a sustainable resolution to the conflict. The Council's general unity of approach towards Yemen is demonstrated by the continued joint meetings of the Riyadh-based ambassadors to Yemen of the Council's permanent members (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US).

Differences can still arise among Council members. With the latest sanctions renewal, members agreed to a technical rollover of the Yemen sanctions regime to give space for current peace talks but also to avoid a potential repeat of the negotiations in February 2022 to renew the sanctions, which led to four abstentions. The United Arab Emirates (UAE)—an elected Council member that is a member of the Saudi Arabia-led coalition—actively pushes for its views to be reflected in Council products. Regarding the sanctions regime, the UAE's objections to the UN Secretariat's proposed candidates to serve as the Yemen Panel of Experts' regional expert resulted in the panel operating with only four of its five members in 2022. Since 2021, the US has had a Special Envoy for Yemen, Timothy Lenderking, who has actively supported Grundberg's efforts to establish a political process and to resolve the environmental threat of the FSO Safer. Saudi Arabia exercises leverage on the Yemeni government, and Oman plays an important role as an interlocutor with the Houthis.

The UK is the penholder on Yemen. Ambassador Hoxha (Albania) chairs the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee, which met on 20 February to consider the 2022 final report of the Yemen Panel of Experts.

Lebanon

Expected Council Action

In March, Council members expect to receive a briefing in consultations on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701. Adopted in 2006, resolution 1701 called for a cessation of hostilities between the Shi'a group Hezbollah and Israel. The report is due by 9 March. Special Coordinator for Lebanon Joanna Wronecka and Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix are the expected briefers.

Key Recent Developments

Since Lebanese President Michel Aoun's term expired on 31 October 2022, the Lebanese Parliament has held over ten sessions to elect a successor, to no avail. According to Lebanon's power-sharing arrangement, the president must be a Maronite Christian, while the prime minister is a Sunni Muslim and the parliamentary speaker a Shi'a Muslim. None of the major Lebanese parties and blocs have the numbers independently to impose a candidate. At the time of writing, it remains unclear whether the parties will be able to agree on a compromise candidate and when the next voting session will be scheduled.

Over nine months since the 15 May legislative elections, Lebanon's government remains in caretaker status. Divisions continue among political actors regarding the caretaker government's powers during this presidential vacuum, as well as over the capacity of the Parliament to act as a legislative assembly or merely as an electoral body during this period.

Progress towards achieving the conditions required by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to unlock a deal worth around \$3 billion has been markedly slow and—in light of the current political crisis—is unlikely to pick up significant speed in the near future. On 1 February, Lebanon devalued the Lebanese pound from an official exchange rate of just over 1,500 to the US dollar to 15,000 per US dollar. The parallel market rate, commonly used to buy and sell most goods in Lebanon, in mid-February touched a new low of 80,000 Lebanese pounds to the dollar.

In the absence of relevant reforms, the Lebanese population and the large number of refugees hosted by Lebanon continue to face the consequences of a prolonged socioeconomic crisis. Against a backdrop of compromised access to health care and clean drinking water, a cholera outbreak spread from Syria to Lebanon in late October 2022.

Lebanon

According to an 11 February WHO update, cases in Lebanon “are currently declining” while the outbreak continues in parts of Syria.

On 31 December 2022, a boat carrying over 230 people started sinking off the coast of Lebanon. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) navy and vessels operated by the Maritime Task Force of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) rescued 232 people. However, a Syrian woman and a child died. The UN and human rights organisations continue to emphasise the importance of non-refoulement of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, where anti-refugee rhetoric remains a source of concern. According to an article by the Associated Press, shortly after the 31 December 2022 rescue operation, “the Lebanese army loaded nearly 200 rescued Syrians into trucks and dropped them” on the Syrian side of the Lebanese-Syrian border, where they “were intercepted by men wearing Syrian army uniforms”, who held them captive “until family members paid to have them released and brought back to Lebanon by smugglers”.

There continues to be no substantial progress in the inquiry into responsibility for the 4 August 2020 Beirut port explosion. Recently, Tarek Bitar, the judge who has led the investigation since February 2021, unsuccessfully attempted to resume his inquiry after a suspension of over a year. The inquiry has been repeatedly delayed by legal complaints against Bitar filed by some of the officials he intended to question, causing the investigation to be suspended pending a ruling on the complaints. On 23 January, Bitar attempted to restart the inquiry and issued charges against current and former senior officials, including the public prosecutor at the Court of Cassation, Ghassan Oueidat. On 25 January, Oueidat imposed a travel ban on Bitar and charged him with “rebelling against the judiciary and usurping power”. In early February, Bitar reportedly postponed the hearings he had scheduled for that month until the dispute with Oueidat could be resolved. In response to these developments, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch repeated their previous calls for the Human Rights Council (HRC) to pass a resolution to establish an impartial international fact-finding mission into the port explosion.

In his 20 February briefing at the Security Council monthly meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland said that the situation along the Blue Line, a border demarcation between Israel and Lebanon, remains “mostly calm”.

According to the latest Secretary-General’s report on resolution 1701, covering the period from 21 June to 2 November 2022, violations of the resolution continued. For instance, the report said that the Israel Defense Forces continued to enter Lebanese airspace. The report also said that UNIFIL observed unauthorised weapons in its area of operations and “a progressive upgrade of facilities and the installation of permanent structures” at two firing ranges in the mission’s area of operations. (The Secretary-General first reported observing these and other firing ranges in his 14 July 2022 report on resolution 1701.) The report further said that the mission had yet to gain access to several locations of interest and that, while UNIFIL’s “freedom of movement was respected in most cases, the mission encountered several impediments in that regard”.

Independent investigations by Lebanese and Irish officials are ongoing following the 14 December 2022 attack against a UNIFIL convoy, in which an Irish peacekeeper was killed and three were

injured. On 27 February, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric said that the UN internal investigation into the incident had been completed and that a copy of the relevant report had been provided to both the governments of Ireland and Lebanon. Following the incident, Council members condemned the attack in a press statement and called on the Lebanese government to investigate the incident and bring the perpetrators to justice. The statement also recalled “the necessity for all parties to ensure that UNIFIL personnel are safe and secure”.

In line with resolution 2650, which extended UNIFIL’s mandate until 31 August 2023, the mission has been providing non-lethal material (fuel, food, and medicine) and logistical support to the LAF in the framework of LAF-UNIFIL joint activities. The upcoming report on the implementation of resolution 1701 may include an update on the provision of this support which, according to resolution 2650, was to be provided for a period of six months and “no longer than 28 February”. (For more, see our *What’s in Blue* story of 30 August 2022.)

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 4 February 2021, Lokman Slim, a Lebanese activist and an outspoken critic of Hezbollah, was found dead in the village of Addoussieh in southern Lebanon. On 2 February, four Special Rapporteurs of the HRC issued a statement reiterating previous calls for an effective investigation into Slim’s killing and expressing “deep concern at the lack of progress by the authorities to ensure accountability two years after his assassination”.

Key Issues and Options

The lack of implementation of resolution 1701, including through a permanent ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, remains a key issue for the Council. The substantial amount of weaponry held by Hezbollah and other non-state actors in Lebanon as well as Israel’s violations of Lebanon’s territorial integrity and sovereignty remain ongoing issues for the Council.

A prolonged presidential vacuum is likely to compound Lebanon’s long-standing socioeconomic crisis. If the process of appointing a president continues to be stalled, Council members may consider issuing a presidential statement urging the Lebanese Parliament to elect a president and calling for the formation of a new government. The statement could also underscore the importance of reforms to promote socioeconomic stability and stress the importance of respecting the principle of non-refoulement.

Council Dynamics

While the Council has not met on Lebanon since Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, and Switzerland joined in January, the arrival of these five members seems unlikely to change the Council’s broad support for Lebanon’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence, and security. Differences over Hezbollah remain among Council members. Some members distinguish between Hezbollah’s political and military wings and have designated only its military wing as a terrorist organisation. Other members, including the UK and the US, have listed the Shi’a group in its entirety as a terrorist organisation. In contrast, Russia sees Hezbollah as a legitimate sociopolitical force.

Sudan

Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council will hold a briefing followed by consultations on the Secretary-General's 90-day report on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), which members were expected to receive by 28 February. The chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Harold Adlai Agyeman (Ghana), is also expected to provide the quarterly briefing to the Security Council on the committee's work.

The mandate of UNITAMS expires on 3 June.

At the time of writing, Council members continue to discuss the possibility of renewing the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the Sudan sanctions committee, which expires on 12 March.

Background and Key Recent Developments

On 5 December 2022, a broad grouping of Sudan's civilian political actors and its military signed the Sudan Political Framework Agreement with the intention of paving the way for a two-year, civilian-led transition ahead of elections. The agreement did not contain specific deadlines for the transition process, however, and was opposed by several groups. Its signing was welcomed by Secretary-General António Guterres and by the Friends of Sudan (Canada, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, the US, and the EU). In an 8 December 2022 press statement, Council members also welcomed the agreement.

On 8 January, the signatories to the Political Framework Agreement launched the final phase of talks aimed at reaching a "final and just" political agreement under the facilitation of the Trilateral Mechanism—the African Union (AU), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and UNITAMS. This includes broad consultations on five issues identified in the Political Framework Agreement: dismantling the former regime, security sector reform, justice and transitional justice, implementation of the Juba Agreement, and the question of eastern Sudan. In a 30 January statement, the Trilateral Mechanism noted that the recommendations emanating from these workshops will provide substance for the next phase, including direct negotiations between the different stakeholders to produce a final agreement.

The final workshop, on the roadmap for political and security stability and sustainable development in eastern Sudan, culminated on 15 February with a series of recommendations on issues relating to government continuity and restorative justice in that region. Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan and head of UNITAM Volker Perthes, in his closing remarks on behalf of the Trilateral Mechanism, noted that the workshop succeeded in bringing diverse voices from across the political, professional, ethnic, tribal, and social spectrum in eastern Sudan. He added that the workshop's recommendations will "allow the international community to know what foreign aid is required", and that "foreign aid will only benefit if it is in line with internal consensus and political will in [eastern Sudan] and Khartoum".

On 13 February, the workshop to evaluate the implementation of the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) began in Juba, hosted by the government of South Sudan. The Sudanese government delegation—headed by Yasir El-Ata, a member of the Sudanese sovereignty

council, and accompanied by Yasin Ibrahim, Sudan's minister of defence, and Suleiman El Dabello, head of Sudan's peace commission—met South Sudanese President Salva Kiir Mayardit on 13 February. In a 16 February statement, the Trilateral Mechanism, in its capacity as the mediator of the agreement, welcomed the opening of the workshop. At the conclusion of the workshop, on 19 February, the parties to the JPA signed a two-year implementation matrix for the implementation of the JPA which, reportedly, addresses several key issues, including security arrangements for Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile states along with wealth and power sharing with opposition groups in central and northern Sudan. Among others, the chairman of Sudan's Sovereign Council Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, South Sudan's President Salva Kiir, and Egypt's Ambassador to South Sudan Moataz Abdel-Qader, attended the signing ceremony.

The Trilateral Mechanism also organised a workshop on the "JPA and completion of peace" from 31 January to 3 February as part of the final phase of the political process launched by the signatories of the Political Framework Agreement. In his remarks at the commencement of the Trilateral Mechanism's JPA workshop on 31 January, Perthes emphasised the urgent need for the full implementation of the provisions of the JPA. He added that the aim of the workshop was to explore and better address the drivers of conflict and the conditions that affect people in conflict areas.

On 9 February, the Trilateral Mechanism held a meeting with the civilian and military signatories of the Political Framework Agreement, along with the representatives of political parties and movements that did not sign the agreement. In a statement released following the meeting, the Mechanism urged the parties to reach an agreement as a step toward ending the political crisis and achieving greater political inclusivity.

On 9 February, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with al-Burhan; his deputy, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (known as General Hemeti); and the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Al-Sadiq Ali. Lavrov held a joint press conference with Al-Sadiq following the meetings, during which he expressed his support for the lifting of sanctions imposed on Sudan by the Security Council and the "Sudanese leadership's efforts to stabilise the domestic political situation".

On 10 February, special envoys and representatives of France, Germany, Norway, the UK, the US, and the EU concluded a two-day visit to Khartoum, during which they met with a range of Sudanese representatives, including civilian signatories to the Political Framework Agreement, members of civil society, resistance committees, JPA signatories, and the military leadership. In a statement released after the visit, the representatives urged the Sudanese parties to "expand their commitment to inclusivity and bring together women, youth and representatives from all over Sudan" to take part in the process. They noted that the establishment of a civilian-led transitional government remained the key to the resumption of international assistance and investment.

An intra Sudanese dialogue was organised in Cairo by the Egyptian government from 2 to 7 February. According to local media reports, 85 participants representing 35 political parties and groups participated in the workshop and adopted a document titled "Political Accordance Document", purported to be the governing

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2620 (15 February 2022) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts until 12 March 2023. **Secretary-General's Report S/2021/696** (31 July 2021) was a review of the situation in Darfur and benchmarks to assess the measures on Darfur. **Security Council Letter S/2023/88** (8 February 2023) was a letter circulated by Qatar on behalf of the Group of Arab States calling for lifting the sanctions on Sudan. **S/2023/67** (30 January 2023) was a letter by Sudan calling for an immediate lifting of the sanctions without conditions or benchmarks.

Sudan

document for the transitional period. Reportedly, the participants reaffirmed their commitment to implement the JPA and agreed that the situation in eastern Sudan must be addressed through an agreed upon negotiating platform acceptable to the people of the east.

Sudan's humanitarian needs are significant. An estimated 15.8 million people—about one-third of the population—are projected to need humanitarian assistance this year, according to OCHA's Humanitarian Needs Overview for 2023. The overview said the number of food-insecure people increased by about two million compared to 2022, and there are 3.7 million internally displaced people and 926,000 refugees in Sudan.

Human Rights-Related Developments

The newly appointed UN expert on human rights in Sudan, Radhouane Nouicer, conducted his first official visit to Sudan from 28 January to 3 February. In a 2 February press conference, Nouicer urged Sudanese authorities to "hold to account" officials who abused their powers and called for "a clear roadmap for security sector reform". In his statement, Nouicer emphasised that the "immunity from prosecution of members of the security forces implicated in human rights violations must be lifted". During his visit, Nouicer met with al-Burhan and his deputy, Dagalo.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 6 February, the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee held informal consultations during which it received a presentation regarding the final report of its Panel of Experts, released on 7 February.

On 7 February, the Panel of Experts assisting the Sudan Sanctions Committee transmitted its final report to the Council. Among other things, it noted that the proliferation of weapons and ammunition in Darfur intensified; armed movements signatory to the JPA gave up only a limited number of small weapons while keeping the heavy ones; and violations of the arms embargo continued as the government of Sudan did not obtain the permission of the Sudan sanctions committee for the transfer of military supplies and weapons into Darfur. It added that the implementation of the travel ban and asset freeze remained a challenge because of the lack of cooperation by the government of Sudan and regional states.

Key Issues and Options

An immediate issue for the Council is renewing the mandate of the Panel of Experts.

Another issue is whether it is feasible to consider reviewing the sanctions measures on Darfur, as signalled in past resolutions that renewed the mandate of the Panel of Experts; these have recently attracted fresh scrutiny.

A further issue is whether an agreement can be reached on establishing clear, well-identified, and measurable key benchmarks to guide the Council in reviewing the sanctions measures, an intention expressed by the Council in resolutions 2455, 2508, 2562, and 2620.

Council members could have a frank conversation about possible benchmarks in a closed, informal setting with representatives of the government of Sudan and UN Secretariat officials.

A related issue is monitoring the political situation in Sudan. The Council could consider holding an informal interactive dialogue (IID) with key stakeholders, including representatives of the Tripartite Mechanism. The IID is a closed format that, unlike consultations, allows for the participation of non-UN officials and briefers.

Another option is to consider a Council visiting mission to Sudan to assess the situation and engage further with the various parties. (The last Council visiting mission to Sudan was in 2011.)

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members' divergent views over the utility of the Sudan sanctions regime have in turn affected the Council's ability to agree on the renewal of the mandate of the Panel of Experts and benchmarks for adjusting the regime. Several Council members see benchmarks as a starting point to continue the discussions about modifying, suspending or progressively lifting the sanctions. On the other hand, some Council members, including China, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and the African members, echo the concerns expressed by Sudan in a 27 January letter to the President of the Security Council, which calls for an immediate lifting of the sanctions without conditions or benchmarks.

On 3 February, Qatar wrote a letter to the Council President on behalf of the Group of Arab States calling to bring an end to the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the Sudan sanctions committee and for lifting the sanctions. The letter noted that the sanctions imposed on Sudan are not commensurate with the facts on the ground and lifting such measures would allow the Sudanese government to "rebuild the capacity of its security forces and law enforcement agencies to maintain and promote peace". It appears that on 10 February, similar letters were also addressed to the Council by Pakistan as chair of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Group in New York and Egypt in its capacity as the chair of the African Group.

The decision to establish benchmarks has been contentious for some time, particularly their scope. Resolution 2562 of 11 February 2021 requested a report on the issue from the Secretary-General by 31 July 2021. The report recommended four key benchmarks and related targets, namely progress on political and economic governance issues, transitional security arrangements in Darfur, the National Plan for Civilian Protection, and transitional justice and accountability.

The UK is the penholder on Sudan, and the US is the penholder on Sudan sanctions. Ambassador Harold Adlai Agyeman (Ghana) chairs the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee until December 2023.

DPRK (North Korea)

Expected Council Action

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

mandate expires on 30 April.

Key Recent Developments

On 18 February, the DPRK tested a Hwasong-15 intercontinental

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DPRK Security Council Resolution S/RES/2627 (25 March 2022) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee until 30 April 2023. **Sanctions Committee Document S/2022/668** (7 September 2022) was the midterm report of the Panel of Experts.

DPRK (North Korea)

ballistic missile (ICBM). According to Republic of Korea (ROK) officials, the missile travelled approximately 900 kilometres at a maximum altitude of 5,700 kilometres. In an 18 February press briefing, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters that the ICBM landed in waters west of Hokkaido in Japan's exclusive economic zone. The following day, Secretary-General António Guterres strongly condemned the DPRK's ICBM launch while the ROK and the US held joint air exercises involving strategic bombers in response to the test. On 20 February, the DPRK fired two short-range ballistic missiles into the sea off its east coast.

The 18 February ICBM test prompted Albania, Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, the UK, and the US to request an open briefing, which took place on 20 February. Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific Mohammed Khaled Khiari briefed. During the meeting, the US indicated that it will pursue a presidential statement on the DPRK.

The briefing came four days after Council members convened for closed consultations on the DPRK on 16 February. Albania, Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, the UK, and the US requested the meeting to discuss the DPRK's weapons programmes and how the Council can address the threat they pose to international peace and security. Khiari and Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi briefed during the consultations. On 17 February, the DPRK's foreign ministry said that it would consider additional military action if the Council continues to pressure the DPRK.

The Panel provided its final report to the Committee on 3 February. The Committee discussed the report, which is due to be provided to the Council by 3 March, on 22 February. According to media outlets claiming to have seen the report, it notes that the DPRK has "used increasingly sophisticated cyber techniques both to gain access to digital networks involved in cyber finance, and to steal information of potential value, including to its weapons programmes". Media reports also say that the report describes ongoing sanctions evasion by the DPRK and indicates that hackers linked to the DPRK stole a record \$630 million in cryptocurrency assets in 2022. On 10 February, the ROK announced that it had imposed sanctions on individuals and entities linked to the DPRK's cyber activities for the first time. On 27 February, Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl (Switzerland) briefed Council members in closed consultations on the 90-day report regarding the committee's work.

On the evening of 8 February, the DPRK staged a military parade celebrating the 75th anniversary of the founding of its armed forces. According to media reports that analysed images of the parade released by DPRK state media, at least 15 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) were on display, including as many as 11 Hwasong-17s, the DPRK's most advanced ICBM. Several analysts have noted that the ICBMs paraded by the DPRK could potentially overwhelm US missile defence systems if fired simultaneously. Analysts have also noted that the DPRK may have revealed a new land-based, solid-fuel ICBM during the parade. (Solid-fuel ICBMs take less time to launch and are harder for missile defence systems to detect.)

Days earlier, DPRK leader Kim Jong-un reportedly ordered the country's military to expand its combat drills and bolster its preparedness for war during a 6 February meeting of the Central

Military Commission of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea (WPK). The meeting came shortly after ROK Minister of Foreign Affairs Park Jin met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on 3 February. In a press conference following that meeting, Park said that the ROK and the US are "committed to strengthening extended deterrence while maintaining a robust combined defence posture". Park and Blinken's meeting followed a 31 January visit by US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin to Seoul, where he met with ROK President Yoon Suk-yeol and ROK Minister of National Defence Lee Jong-sup. During the trip, Lee told reporters that the ROK and the US had pledged "to expand the scale and elevate the level of [their] combined exercises and training". The following day, the ROK and the US carried out a series of air drills involving long-range strategic bombers and stealth fighters in the Yellow Sea off the ROK's west coast.

In a 2 February statement, the DPRK's foreign ministry said that the military and political situation on the Korean peninsula had reached an "extreme red line" because of the expansion of military exercises between the ROK and the US and warned that the DPRK was prepared to respond with the "most overwhelming nuclear force".

On 13 February, DPRK authorities announced the "expansion and reorganisation" of "many" of its military units due to the "new situation" in the region. Several experts have commented that the announcement, taken together with photos of the 8 February parade that show a new flag attached to an ICBM, appears to suggest that the DPRK has created a new military unit specifically responsible for operating ICBMs.

The ROK released its latest biennial defence white paper on 16 February. The document described the DPRK as the ROK's "enemy" for the first time since 2016 and reported that the DPRK has increased its stockpile of weapons-grade plutonium to approximately 70 kilograms, a 40 percent increase over the 50 kilograms estimated in the previous white paper. It also said that the DPRK holds "substantial amounts of highly enriched uranium" and possesses a "significant level of capability" to miniaturise nuclear weapons.

The prospects of the DPRK engaging in denuclearisation dialogue remain dim. In its 2 February statement, the DPRK's foreign ministry said that "the DPRK is not interested in any contact or dialogue with the US as long as it pursues its hostile policy and confrontational line". The statement also described the US' offers to resume talks as "shameless" and an attempt to "gain time". During a 27 January news conference, ROK Unification Minister Kwon Young-se said that the ROK intends to promote civilian efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the DPRK with the aim of "reopen[ing] a path for dialogue between the two countries". The DPRK has strongly rejected similar offers in the past. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 5 October 2022.)

Food insecurity in the DPRK appears to be worsening. On 6 February, DPRK state media reported that the Workers' Party Politburo had scheduled a plenary meeting of the party's Central Committee to discuss the "correct strategy for the development of agriculture" and "take relevant measures for the immediate farming ... to promote the overall development of socialist construction". On 15 February, the ROK's unification ministry noted that the DPRK rarely schedules such meetings and said that the food situation in the DPRK "seems to have deteriorated". According to media reports published on the same day, Kwon told the ROK parliament that the DPRK

DPRK (North Korea)

had requested assistance from the World Food Programme (WFP) but talks between the organisation and the DPRK were unsuccessful due to disagreements regarding aid monitoring. The meeting of the Workers' Party Central Committee began on 26 February.

Key Issues and Options

Sanctions evasion, together with the overall effectiveness and impact of the 1718 sanctions regime, are important issues for the Council, particularly given that the DPRK is widely believed to have increased its nuclear arsenal since the regime was introduced in 2006 and has shown little inclination to scale back its weapons programmes.

The Council could pursue several options. In extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts, Council members could add language urging member states to comply with existing sanctions. The Council could also request that the Panel provide the Committee with a report on sanctions enforcement that specifically considers whether there are any steps the Council could take to counter sanctions evasion.

Council members may also wish to consider convening an informal briefing by cybersecurity experts on the DPRK's cyber activities. Such a meeting could provide an opportunity to better understand how the DPRK conducts cyber espionage and discuss whether there is anything the Council can do to address the problem.

The Council could also hold an informal interactive dialogue with humanitarian organisations focusing on the DPRK with a view to better understanding the impact that sanctions are having on the humanitarian situation in the country.

Council Dynamics

The Council remains sharply divided over the DPRK. The P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other like-minded members regularly condemn its ballistic missile tests and argue that they destabilise the Korean Peninsula and increase tensions throughout the region. These members are generally supportive of using sanctions to manage the threat posed by the DPRK and often urge the country to engage in dialogue and abandon its weapons programmes while emphasising that it is responsible for escalating tensions.

China and Russia, on the other hand, blame the US for heightening tensions and accuse it of not doing enough to incentivise the DPRK to participate in denuclearisation talks. The two countries have also contended that sanctions should be eased because of their impact on the humanitarian situation and continue to express their support for a draft resolution circulated by China in October 2021 that would provide sanctions relief to the DPRK if adopted. Other Council members, including Brazil and Gabon, have expressed apparent concerns about the overall efficacy of the 1718 DPRK sanctions regime.

It is possible that members' divergent views will lead to contentious negotiations on the resolution extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts. The overall dynamic could change, however, if the DPRK conducts a nuclear test.

The US is the penholder on the DPRK. Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl (Switzerland) chairs the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee.

Non-proliferation (1540 Committee)

Expected Council Action

In March, Ambassador Hernán Pérez Loose (Ecuador), the chair of the 1540 Committee, is expected to brief the Council.

Background and Key Recent Developments

Adopted in 2004, resolution 1540 aims to prevent non-state actors from obtaining access to weapons of mass destruction. It requires states to establish relevant domestic controls and encourages enhanced international cooperation to prevent the proliferation of such weapons.

In April 2011, with the adoption of resolution 1977, the Council renewed the mandate of the 1540 Committee for ten years and approved the appointment of a group of experts to assist the Committee in its work. Experts are appointed by the Secretary-General and approved by the 1540 Committee. The resolution called for the Committee to conduct two comprehensive reviews on the implementation of resolution 1540: one after five years and the other before the renewal of the Committee's mandate in 2021.

The final report of the second comprehensive review has been completed but has yet to be published at the time of writing. (The review, which was due in 2021, had been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.) It reportedly will note that most states had strengthened measures preventing non-state actors from manufacturing, acquiring

or transferring nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. It apparently will also acknowledge the varying industrial capabilities and political, economic, and security situations of states in their efforts to implement resolution 1540. In addition, the report is expected to say that eight states have yet to submit their first national report, a decrease from 17 in 2016; it is likely further to observe that 77 states have submitted national reports or submitted additional information to the Committee on implementation since 2016.

The Council unanimously adopted resolution 2663 on 30 November 2022, extending the mandate of the 1540 Committee and its Group of Experts for ten years until 30 November 2032. The resolution tasks the Committee with conducting two comprehensive reviews on the status of implementation of resolution 1540, including through the holding of open consultations: one after five years and the other prior to the renewal of its mandate. In addition, it decides that the Committee shall continue to submit an annual programme of work to the Council before the end of each January and that its chair shall brief the Council in the first quarter of each year. The resolution reiterates that all states should implement fully and effectively resolution 1540 and should submit national implementation reports, while also encouraging the submission of voluntary national implementation action plans and the provision of national

UN DOCUMENTS ON NON-PROLIFERATION Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2663 (30 November 2022) extended the mandate of the 1540 Committee and its Group of Experts for ten years until 30 November 2032. S/RES/1540 (28 April 2004) established the 1540 Committee and its mandate, affirming that proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and their means of delivery constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

Non-proliferation (1540 Committee)

points of contact. While much of resolution 2663 reflected agreed language from previous resolutions, one new provision directed the Committee to review its internal guidelines on matters regarding its Group of Experts by 30 April 2023. In addition, for the first time, the Council included women, peace and security language in a mandate renewal of the 1540 Committee and its Group of Experts, encouraging the Committee to consider the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in its activities.

On 20 February, the 1540 Committee agreed its programme of work for the period ending on 31 January 2024. In its programme, the Committee said that it would intensify efforts to promote the implementation of resolution 1540 by all member states. In this regard, it noted that it would facilitate the voluntary sharing of information by member states of best practices and lessons learned and that it would take note of the evolving risks of proliferation presented by changes in technology and science. The programme also stated that the Committee would facilitate technical assistance by offering expertise to member states requesting assistance.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council (and its 1540 Committee) is the need to continue to strengthen the efforts of states to implement resolution 1540. The Committee's efforts to facilitate the provision of technical assistance to states is critical in this regard, as it links states to appropriate service providers, organises workshops for them on relevant topics, and shares information with them on capacity-development initiatives.

Another important issue is the need to agree on the roles and responsibilities of the Group of Experts as reflected by the decision in resolution 2663 for the Committee to review its guidelines by the

end of April. There are differing views among Council members regarding the level of oversight that the Committee should provide to the Group of Experts' work.

In the future, the Council could consider a private meeting with the eight member states that have yet to submit national reports to discuss how the 1540 Committee and other regional and international entities could best assist them in implementing resolution 1540.

Council Dynamics

Council members support an active role for the Committee and its Group of Experts in engaging with member states to provide technical assistance and capacity development in implementing resolution 1540.

Some members advocate less committee oversight of the work of the Group of Experts. Currently, proposals by the 1540 Committee's Group of Experts must be approved by the committee members through a no-objection procedure. During open consultations on the comprehensive review of the implementation of resolution 1540 that were held in late May 2022, the US argued that the Group of Experts should have a clear mandate to do its work "without having to seek individual approval for each and every action it seeks to undertake", adding that "no other subsidiary body of the Security Council is forced to operate under such self-defeating constraints". Russia, however, believes that the Committee should act under the Committee's strict direction and purview. When the Council extended the 1540 Committee's mandate in February 2022, Russia cautioned against the Committee becoming "an invigilator, controller or judge" and against endowing the Group of Experts with "attributive functions, permitting it to interfere in the internal affairs of States".

Ecuador is the chair of the 1540 Committee.

Counter-Terrorism

Expected Council Action

In March, Mozambique is organising a high-level debate on "Countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism by strengthening cooperation between the UN and regional organisations and mechanisms". The debate, which is expected to have a particular focus on cooperation between the UN and regional organisations and mechanisms in Africa, will be one of the signature events of Mozambique's presidency.

Background

Several regional counter-terrorism initiatives are currently active in Africa. Of these, the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (FC-G5S)—which was established in 2017 by the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel), consisting of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger—has received the most attention from the Council. The FC-G5S carries out counter-terrorism operations and implements measures to combat transnational organised crime in the territory of its member states. On 15 May 2022, Mali withdrew

from all G5 Sahel institutions, including the FC-G5S.

Council discussions on counter-terrorism in Africa have often focused on funding African counter-terrorism initiatives through UN assessed contributions. During the negotiations on resolution 2359 of 21 June 2017, which welcomed the deployment of the FC-G5S to the region, the question of UN funding was a significant issue. Initial drafts apparently included language that specifically authorised the force, rather than merely welcoming its deployment; however, the UK and the US opposed explicit authorisation of the FC-G5S, partly because of the potential financial commitments from the UN budget that this implied. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 20 June 2017.)

Since the adoption of resolution 2359, the Council has continued to consider the appropriate level of UN support for the FC-G5S. In a 4 October 2021 letter to the Council, the Secretary-General proposed two options for increasing support for the force. The first was a dedicated UN office to provide logistical support for the FC-G5S operations. According to the letter, this option would entail

Counter-Terrorism

expanding the support provided by the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to cover engineering, maintenance, communications and information technology services, transportation of cargo, medical supplies, and medical and casualty evacuation in all areas of FC-G5S operations. The support would be funded through UN assessed contributions or voluntary funding. The Secretary-General noted in the letter that this was his preferred option.

The second option involved establishing an “Advisory Office to the G5 Sahel Executive Secretariat”. This office would provide technical assistance to the FC-G5S in the areas of political affairs, human rights, and operational and administrative planning, to enhance the force’s self-sufficiency.

At the time of writing, neither office has been created. Pursuant to resolution 2640 of 29 June 2022, MINUSMA currently provides support to the FC-G5S in the form of “life support consumables and use of engineering plant equipment, material, and enabling units”. (For more, see our coverage of Mali and the G5 Sahel Joint Force.)

Other regional counter-terrorism initiatives operating in Africa include the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS/AMISOM), the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the Accra Initiative, and the Nouakchott Process. ATMIS provides support to ongoing military operations in Somalia against Al-Shabaab, a terrorist group with links to Al-Qaeda, and assists in stabilising liberated areas and safeguarding critical infrastructure. The MNJTF includes contributions from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria and fights the terrorist group Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin region. The Accra Initiative was created in 2017 in response to the spread of terrorism to the coastal states of West Africa. In November 2022, its member states (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Niger, and Togo) decided to establish a 10,000-troop entity, also called the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF/AI). The Nouakchott Process is designed to strengthen regional security cooperation and information-sharing in the fight against terrorism, and is also tasked with making the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) operational in the Sahelo-Saharan region.

The UN and the AU have also established other initiatives with a specific focus on terrorism, including the UN-AU technical working group on preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism, which aims to increase coordination between the two organisations in relation to counter-terrorism. In September 2022, Secretary-General António Guterres announced that the UN, together with the AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the G5-Sahel, had established the Independent High-Level Panel on Security Governance and Development in the Sahel. The panel will provide recommendations for responding to the challenges facing the region, including terrorism and violent extremism.

On 31 August 2022, the Council adopted a presidential statement on capacity-building support to African countries. Among other matters, the statement requested that the Secretary-General provide updates on progress made by the UN and the AU to fulfil the commitments set out in resolution 2320 of 18 November 2016 on cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations and resolution 2378 of 20 September 2017 on peacekeeping reform. The report, which is due by 30 April, is also expected to include “recommendations on moving forward that reflect good

practices and lessons-learned with the view to secure predictable, sustainable and flexible resources”. (For more, see our *What’s in Blue* story of 30 August 2022.)

March’s meeting will be the fourth signature event on counter-terrorism since October 2022. In October 2022, Gabon organised a high-level debate on “Strengthening the fight against the financing of armed groups and terrorists through the illicit trafficking of natural resources”. In November 2022, Ghana held a high-level debate on “Counter-terrorism in Africa—an imperative for peace, security, and development”. In December 2022, India convened a high-level briefing on “Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts: global approach to counter-terrorism—challenges and way forward”.

Key Issues and Options

Enhancing the capacity of counter-terrorism initiatives in Africa is an important issue. The latest report of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee, which was published on 13 February, noted that “Africa has emerged in recent years as the continent where the harm done by terrorism is developing most rapidly and extensively”.

The FC-G5S has carried out some operations, but its persistent challenges in securing financial and material resources prevent it from becoming fully operational. Mali’s withdrawal was a significant setback for the force.

In their statements during the debate, Council members may elect to:

- advocate for financial and material support for regional counter-terrorism forces;
- emphasise the need for such forces to adhere to international human rights standards; or
- call for efforts to promote a continent-wide approach to counter-terrorism.

In the future, after considering the content and recommendations of the Secretary-General’s report due on 30 April, Council members could choose to issue a product expressing their support for the use of UN assessed contributions to fund certain African counter-terrorism initiatives. On 18 February, at the AU Summit in Addis Ababa, the Secretary-General said that the UN “wholeheartedly support[s] the creation of a new generation of robust peace-enforcement missions and counter-terrorist operations, led by the African Union with a Security Council mandate under Chapter VII and with guaranteed, predictable funding, including through assessed contributions”.

Council Dynamics

Council members share concerns about the spread of terrorism in Africa, including to previously unaffected sub-regions, and its impact on civilians. Despite this general agreement, the question of how to provide more adequate, sustainable, and predictable financing for African counter-terrorism operations, such as the FC-G5S, has proven divisive for Council members over the years, particularly in relation to the possible use of assessed contributions to fund such operations. Some members, including France and the African members of

Counter-Terrorism

the Council, have argued in favour of using assessed contributions to fund the FC-G5S. Other members have opposed this proposal, citing concerns regarding the force's record of human rights violations.

The US, the UN's largest funder, opposed UN funding for AU-led peace support operations during the Trump Administration. In 2018, it threatened to veto a draft resolution on the financing issue that was proposed by the three African members (A3). However, there seems to be a window of opportunity for progress on this issue because of the Biden Administration's keenness to strengthen US relations with Africa. At the 11 October Council debate on UN-AU Cooperation, the US Permanent Representative, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, made clear that "the implementation of [human rights and international humanitarian law] frameworks and other oversight mechanisms...remain key considerations for any discussions about the use of UN assessed contributions".

Mozambique is currently battling an insurgency by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) affiliate Ahl al-Sunna Wal-Jama'a (ASWJ) in its northern Cabo Delgado Province. On 15 July 2021, Mozambique approved the deployment to Cabo Delgado of the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), a 2,000-troop force comprising units from eight Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states. Rwanda, which is not a member of the SADC, has also sent soldiers to fight against ASWJ. According to the latest report of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1267/1989/2253 Sanctions Committee, the deployment of regional forces in Cabo Delgado "has had a significant impact on ASWJ, disrupting its leadership, command structures and bases". Mozambique's experience with SAMIM and Rwandan troops may underpin its motivation for organising this meeting.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Expected Council Action

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

Council members are also scheduled to undertake a visiting mission to the DRC from 9 to 12 March.

Key Recent Developments

The security situation in the eastern DRC has continued to deteriorate. The M23 Movement, an armed group that has traditionally operated in North Kivu province, became active again in 2022, following a lull of several years. Regional diplomatic efforts had reportedly led the group to withdraw from some of the territories it controlled in North Kivu; however, it seized control of several villages—including a strategic town, Kitshanga, cutting off the road to Goma, the regional capital—following the recent resumption of intense fighting in January with the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) and allied militias.

Other armed groups operating in eastern DRC, such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the Coopérative pour le Développement du Congo (CODECO), and the Mai-Mai Group, have also continued to commit heinous crimes against civilians. On 24 January, the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, expressed alarm about reports she received of "multiple attacks against civilians along ethnic lines, as well as of mass killings, sexual violence, abductions, destruction of property and attacks against IDP [internally displaced persons] camps" perpetrated by these armed groups.

The escalating insecurity in the eastern DRC has continued to stoke tensions between the DRC and Rwanda. On 24 January, Rwanda accused the DRC of violating its airspace and said that it

had taken defensive measures against a Congolese aircraft, which was fired upon but did not sustain significant damage. The DRC denied the accusation, saying that the plane was within DRC airspace and that it considered Rwanda's actions "a deliberate act of aggression". On 26 January, Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region Huang Xia expressed deep concern about the incident and urged both countries to exercise maximum restraint and work towards defusing tensions through dialogue.

On 4 February, the East African Community (EAC) leaders met in the Burundian capital of Bujumbura in an extraordinary summit to discuss the deteriorating security situation in the eastern DRC. The presidents of the DRC and Rwanda and other regional leaders attended the summit, which resulted in a communiqué calling for an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of all foreign armed groups. The summit also instructed the EAC chiefs of defence forces to meet urgently and set new timelines for the withdrawal of these forces. The EAC has been implementing a two-track approach, known as the Nairobi process, to address the situation in eastern DRC: facilitating political dialogue between the Congolese government and armed groups and deploying a regional force to deal with those who refuse to join the dialogue process.

So far, three rounds of talks have been held under the Nairobi process, and in a 9 February press statement, the EAC Facilitator of the peace process in the eastern DRC, former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, expressed his intention to convene the fourth round. The EAC regional force started deploying in eastern DRC in August 2022, and has recently taken up positions in areas from which the M23 has reportedly withdrawn, but has not yet engaged in offensive operations against armed groups. The EAC chiefs of defence forces met in Nairobi on 8-9 February based on the EAC summit decision to assess the security situation in eastern DRC, but the outcome of their meeting has not been made public. As the M23 continues to advance and control new territories in North Kivu,

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2667 (20 December 2022) lifted the notification requirements related to the arms embargo imposed within the framework of the 1533 DRC sanctions regime. S/RES/2666 (20 December 2022) renewed MONUSCO's mandate for one year until 20 December 2023. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9226 (20 December 2022) was on the situation in the DRC. Security Council Press Statements SC/15193 (06 February 2023) was on the attack against MONUSCO. SC/15191 (03 February 2023) was on the situation in the DRC.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

public sentiment towards the EAC regional force is souring in the region, with protests taking place against the force. The Congolese government insists on the need for the regional force to undertake offensive operations against M23.

Council members have agreed on the terms of reference for the upcoming visiting mission, which France and Gabon are expected to co-lead. During the visit, Council members intend to meet with the Congolese government; leaders of political parties; civil society organisations, including women and youth; representatives from relevant regional organisations; the EAC Regional Force; MONUSCO; the UN country team and other UN entities; and humanitarian actors. The last Council visiting mission to the DRC was in October 2018 ahead of the general elections in that country on 23 December 2018.

Sanctions-Related Developments

The Group of Experts assisting the work of the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee submitted its midterm report on 16 December 2022 pursuant to resolution 2641 of 30 June 2022. The report said that the group had found substantial evidence of direct Rwandan involvement in the DRC, either to reinforce the M23 or to conduct military operations against the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and through the provision of weapons, ammunition, and uniforms to the M23. The report also detailed video, audio, and other documentation that substantiate the support and cooperation between FARDC and foreign and local armed groups operating in eastern DRC, including the FDLR.

Human Rights-Related Developments

The UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris visited the DRC from 13-22 February, during which she met with senior government officials, members of parliament, civil society representatives, and victims of human rights violations and abuses. Brands Kehris also visited the eastern provinces of North Kivu and Ituri.

Key Issues and Options

A key priority for Council members in March is likely to be the deteriorating security situation in eastern DRC and the increasing tensions between the DRC and Rwanda. This is also expected to figure prominently during the Council's visiting mission to the DRC in March. Among other things, Council members may focus on the following major issues:

- assessing the security situation in the DRC and the efforts of MONUSCO to implement its mandate;
- assessing the humanitarian situation in the country, including efforts to ensure humanitarian access, protect refugees and IDPs, hold perpetrators of violence against civilians (including against children) accountable, and combat and prevent sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations;
- expressing support for the implementation of the Congolese government's Demobilisation, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilisation Program (P-DDRCS) and security sector reform;
- expressing support for ongoing regional efforts under the auspices

of the EAC and the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR); and

- encouraging all political stakeholders to continue to work towards the holding of peaceful, transparent, inclusive, and credible elections scheduled for December 2023.

A possible option for Council members is to adopt a presidential statement following the visiting mission, among other things reaffirming the need to address the situation in eastern DRC within the framework of the ongoing regional initiatives and calling for the full and effective implementation of the decisions adopted by the EAC and ICGLR.

Council Dynamics

Council members support MONUSCO's work and the gradual, responsible, and conditions-based drawdown of the mission. But the negotiations on the mission's mandate renewal in December 2022 were difficult, with some members opposing references to civil society and human rights. The streamlining of the text also resulted in a significant reduction of thematic language, including on the protection of civilians. The negotiations were also complicated by the discussion about the lifting of the notification requirements under the 1533 DRC sanctions regime. Although some Council members were not comfortable discussing the matter so far in advance of July, when the 1533 DRC sanctions regime is set to be extended, the Council voted on a separate resolution deciding to lift the notifications requirement and requesting that the Congolese government provide a report on its weapons and ammunition management no later than 31 May.

The security situation in eastern DRC continues to be a major preoccupation. In the Council's meeting on 9 December 2022, the US and France were openly critical of Rwanda's alleged support for M23. In particular, the US "urge[d] Council members to consider how this kind of support runs afoul of existing sanctions regimes". On the other hand, Rwanda is said to have proposed several names for designation under the 1533 DRC sanctions regime.

Council members support ongoing regional initiatives to address the security situation in eastern DRC, but some members hesitate to express unqualified support to the EAC regional force in the absence of adequate information about its deployment. Council members are likely to continue emphasising the need to ensure accountability for crimes against peacekeepers, especially in light of deadly attacks on MONUSCO personnel in 2022. They may also continue to express grave concern over the alarming rise of hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation in eastern DRC and reiterate the need to strengthen MONUSCO's strategic communications and enhance its community engagement.

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

Silencing the Guns in Africa

Expected Council Action

In March, the Council is expected to hold an open debate on peace and security in Africa to discuss the nexus between the AU initiative “Silencing the Guns in Africa” and development. Briefings may be provided by Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed; Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security of the AU Commission Bankole Adeoye; and a civil society representative.

Background and Recent Developments

The AU heads of state and government adopted the programme for “silencing the guns by 2020” as part of the May 2013 Solemn Declaration marking the 50th anniversary of the AU and its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity. According to the declaration, AU states expressed their “determination to achieve the goal of a conflict-free Africa, to make peace a reality for all our people and to rid the continent of wars, civil conflicts, human rights violations, humanitarian disasters and violent conflicts, and to prevent genocide”. The declaration continued, “We pledge not to bequeath the burden of conflicts to the next generation of Africans and undertake to end all wars in Africa by 2020.” To address implementation, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) adopted an AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns during a November 2016 retreat in Lusaka, Zambia.

As this aspirational deadline for eradicating conflict in Africa approached, the AU Assembly held an extraordinary session on “Silencing the Guns” on 6 December 2020. At the session, the Assembly extended the implementation of the AU Master Roadmap for a period of ten years from 2021 to 2030, with periodic reviews every two years. The AU Assembly further extended until 2030 the annual September commemoration and conduct of Africa Amnesty Month for the surrender and collection of illicit arms and light weapons. The amnesty month has been in place since 2017 to encourage civilians voluntarily to surrender illicit weapons in their possession on condition of anonymity and immunity from prosecution.

The AU Assembly’s decision to extend the “Silencing the Guns” programme until 2030 included requesting the Chairperson of the AU Commission to create an institutional mechanism to coordinate the effective planning, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the roadmap. The Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism for the AU Master Roadmap of Practical Steps for Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2030 was adopted in Nairobi in May 2021. The AU Assembly endorsed this mechanism in February 2022, urging member states and the regional economic communities and regional mechanisms (RECs/RMs), as well as all other relevant key stakeholders to effectively use the monitoring and evaluation mechanism as a guiding tool for monitoring the implementation of the master roadmap and reporting on progress.

More recently, on 21 January, AU Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat announced the appointment of Mohamed Ibn Chambas as the AU High Representative for Silencing the Guns. Chambas succeeds Algerian Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra, who last served in this position.

The UN Security Council held a high-level open debate on “Silencing the Guns” on 27 February 2019, organised by Equatorial

Guinea during its Council presidency. At that meeting, the Security Council adopted resolution 2457, which welcomed the AU’s “determination to rid Africa of conflicts and create conditions favourable for the growth, development and integration of the continent as encapsulated in its goal of Silencing the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020 and its Master Roadmap”. The resolution expressed the Council’s “readiness to support the implementation of the African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns in Africa by year 2020”.

Among other things, the resolution underlined the need for effective implementation of relevant arms control and disarmament instruments and regimes, encouraged AU member states to strengthen the regulation of natural resource management, and referenced the use of the Secretary-General’s good offices, when appropriate, in the context of integrating AU-UN efforts towards preventive diplomacy. (For more, see our *What’s in Blue* story of 26 February 2019.) Council members have also discussed the “Silencing the Guns” programme during its annual consultations with the AU PSC, and they held an Arria-formula meeting on the initiative in October 2018.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the upcoming briefing is the nexus between “Silencing the Guns” in Africa and development. “Silencing the Guns” is one of the flagship projects under the AU’s Agenda 2063, which have been identified as key to accelerating Africa’s economic growth and development. (Agenda 2063 is the AU master plan for achieving inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development over a 50-year period.) The Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silence the Guns recognises, among other things, economic, social and governance challenges and sets out steps to address these, such as by creating a conducive environment and incentives for investment and reducing vulnerabilities to livelihoods from climate change.

Despite the “Silencing the Guns” initiative since 2013, an important issue is the continent’s arguably worsening security trends. This includes the spread of terrorism and violent extremism, resource-linked and inter-communal conflict, a resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government, and intra-state conflicts such as in Cameroon, Ethiopia, and South Sudan.

Council members could consider discussing elements from the “Silencing the Guns” initiative, such as conflict prevention, and explore how the Council could further help support the initiative through a resolution or other outcome. A Council product could also welcome the AU’s decision to extend the initiative until 2030.

Council Dynamics

Council members are supportive of the “Silencing the Guns” initiative. However, it covers a broad spectrum of issues for ending conflict, from addressing socioeconomic and governance challenges to increasing resources for the AU’s preventive diplomacy and AU peace operations. Differences therefore arise among Council members on some of these issues, including members’ differing positions on sanctions. While the master roadmap sets out actions such as imposing arms embargoes on parties engaged in conflict and in

UN DOCUMENTS ON SILENCING THE GUNS Security Council Resolution S/RES/2457 (27 February 2019) welcomed the AU’s determination to rid Africa of conflicts and create conditions favourable for the growth, development and integration of the continent as encapsulated in its goal of Silencing the Guns in Africa by the Year 2020. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8473](#) (27 February 2019) was an open debate on Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020.

Silencing the Guns in Africa

the distribution of small arms and light weapons, the Council's three African members (currently Gabon, Ghana, and Mozambique) have championed AU PSC calls since 2022 to end existing Security Council arms embargoes in conflict situations such as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan. The US and European members, for example, do not agree with these calls. The use of UN assessed contributions to provide more predictable funding for AU-led peace enforcement or counter-terrorism operations also remains a controversial issue among Council members.

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