

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

In April, Russia holds the presidency of the Security Council.

Russia is expected to hold two signature events during its presidency. One will be an open debate on “[Risks stemming from violations of the agreements regulating the export of weapons and military equipment](#)”. High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu may brief. The other will be a ministerial-level open debate, chaired by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, on “[Effective multilateralism through the defense of the principles of the UN Charter](#)”, which may feature a briefing by the Secretary-General.

Russia also plans to encourage ministerial-level participation in the quarterly open debate on “[The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question](#)”, which Lavrov is expected to chair. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland is the anticipated briefer.

Several African issues are on the programme in April, including:

- [Mali](#), meeting on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA);
- [Western Sahara](#), meeting on the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO);
- [Libya](#), meeting on the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and the work of the 1970

Libya Sanctions Committee; and

- [Great Lakes Region](#), meeting on the implementation of the 2013 Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Great Lakes region.

In addition to the quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, other issues related to the Middle East on the programme this month are:

- [Yemen](#), the monthly meeting on developments; and
- [Syria](#), the monthly meeting on political and humanitarian issues.

Two issues on the Americas will be on the programme:

- [Colombia](#), a meeting on the UN Verification Mission in Colombia; and
- [Haiti](#), a meeting on the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH).

Regarding European issues, there will be a briefing on the work of the UN Interim Administration Mission in [Kosovo](#) (UNMIK).

As in past months, there may be one or more meetings on [Ukraine](#) in April.

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

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The United Nations in Hindsight: Financing African Union-Led Peace Support Operations

By the end of April, the United Nations Secretary-General will publish a report on the financing of African Union (AU)-led peace support operations (AUPSOs). By our count¹, this will be the eighth major report or review on financing AUPSOs since 2007², when the AU first formally requested the UN to examine the possibility of funding such operations from UN-assessed contributions. It has remained an unresolved issue in the relationship between the UN and the AU even as the UN Security Council has adopted five resolutions and eight presidential statements since 2008 recognising the need to provide “adequate, predictable and sustainable” funding for AU peace operations.

The way the Security Council discusses this issue has evolved, with Council members increasingly acknowledging the AU’s proactive role on matters of peace and security in Africa, including its enhanced capacity to respond expeditiously to conflict and crises on the continent—particularly through deploying peace support operations. But despite advances in recent years, the AU’s Achilles heel is its lack of adequate resources to support and sustain these operations.

Proponents of securing UN-assessed contributions for AUPSOs have reason to sense fresh momentum in 2023. After a previous push for a Security Council resolution in 2018 was derailed partly by disunity, the AU recently adopted a “consensus paper” on the issue. Worldwide geopolitical shifts now foreground Global South priorities, and especially those put forward by African states, more than they have in recent years. The US administration, which under former President Donald Trump had threatened to veto the 2018 draft resolution, is actively courting Africa. And finally, AUPSOs may hold out the prospect of responding to several governments’ preference for external forces that will deploy quickly and play combat roles, demands that traditional UN peacekeeping cannot meet.

Background and History

In 2002, the AU set up a Peace Fund, as part of its African Peace and Security Architecture, to finance the organisation’s peace and security activities. The funds it mobilised nonetheless fell far short of the significant resources needed to support and sustain AUPSOs. The AU continued relying on external donors, particularly the EU, but recognised the difficulties of supporting and sustaining AUPSOs solely through ad hoc financial and logistical arrangements.

Since the AU’s 2007 request for UN-assessed funds for AUPSOs, the African members of the UN Security Council (the A3) have tried, individually and collectively, to advance this discussion. As well, two major reports—the 2008 Report of the AU-UN panel on modalities for support to AU peacekeeping operations (the Prodi Report) and the 2015 report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United

Nations Peace Operations (the HIPPO report)—supported the AU’s quest by recommending the use of UN-assessed contributions on a case-by-case basis to provide support to AUPSOs. The AU also took a landmark decision during its 2016 Summit in Kigali to revitalise its peace fund to enable the AU to finance its peace and security activities, including 25 percent of its peace operations budget.

The A3 used the momentum generated by these developments to advance the financing issue in the Council, which adopted two resolutions reflecting the Council’s willingness to consider proposals for support to future AU-led peace support operations through UN-assessed contributions. Resolution 2320 of 18 November 2016, on cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organizations, and resolution 2378 of 20 September 2017, on peacekeeping reform, expressed the Council’s readiness to take practical steps to support AUPSOs, but also stressed the need for the AU to fulfil several administrative, financial, and other conditions, including compliance with AU and UN norms and international obligations, to access support through UN-assessed contributions.

Actions Since 2018

In 2018, the A3 (then consisting of Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, and Equatorial Guinea) proposed a draft resolution laying out the principle and framework for translating the Council’s commitment into action. The draft text placed in blue in December 2018 had the support of most Council members but was never put to a vote because the United States threatened to cast its veto. In 2019, South Africa joined the Council and tried to initiate negotiations on a resolution, but the AUPSC called on the A3 (then also including Côte d’Ivoire and Equatorial Guinea) to suspend their efforts until the AU developed a common position on outstanding issues raised during the negotiations, including burden-sharing, accountability and compliance frameworks, planning and oversight mechanisms, and reporting systems.

This was followed by a nearly two-year lull in discussion of the financing of AU-led peace support operations. The change of administration in the United States in 2021 seemed to rekindle a sense of hope for advancing the discussion in the Security Council. In 2022, the challenges that larger UN peacekeeping operations in Africa faced in their relations with host countries and communities also injected new dynamism into the discourse. At the same time, there were increasing calls for robust regional and international engagement to deal with the threats posed by terrorists and other armed groups in countries where these peacekeeping operations are deployed. Changing geopolitical dynamics on the continent—including the increasing tendency by some African countries to rely on mercenary groups such as the Wagner Group, a Russian private

¹ In mid-April, Security Council Report will publish a research report (available at www.securitycouncilreport.org) which traces the evolution of the financing issue and discusses the options for UN support for AUPSOs in greater detail.

² Report of the Secretary-General on the relationship between the UN and regional organisations, in particular the AU, in the maintenance of international peace and security (S/2008/186); Report of the Secretary-General on the support to AU peacekeeping operations authorised by the UN (S/2009/470); Report of the Secretary-General on the joint African Union-UN review of available mechanisms to finance and support AU peace support operations authorised by the UN Security Council (S/2016/809); Report of the Secretary-General on options for authorisation and support for AU peace support operations (S/2017/454); Report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the partnership between the UN and the AU on issues of peace and security in Africa, including the work of the UN Office to the AU (S/2018/678); Report of the AU-UN panel on modalities for support to AU peacekeeping operations (S/2008/813); Report of the Secretary-General on the future of UN peace operations: implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (S/2015/682).

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security company—have also created serious concerns on the part of the United States and its allies. As a result, some Council members seem to have grown more inclined to favour UN support to AUPSOs.

The financing issue has been a focus of formal and informal Council meetings since the second half of 2022 and was raised at the annual meeting of the Security Council and the AUPSC in October 2022 in New York, as well as the annual UN-AU conference between the leaderships of the two organisations in Addis Ababa in December 2022. Following a debate on peace and security in Africa facilitated by the Chinese presidency in August 2022, the Council adopted a presidential statement which, among other things, requested the Secretary-General to provide the Security Council, by 30 April 2023, a report on progress made by the UN and the AU to fulfil the commitments set out in resolutions 2320 and 2378.

Meanwhile, the AU elaborated its position on issues surrounding the financing of AUPSOs in a “consensus paper on predictable, adequate, and sustainable financing for AU peace and security activities” endorsed during the 36th AU Summit held in Addis Ababa in February 2023. This is understood as paving the way for the current A3 (Gabon, Ghana, and Mozambique) now to pick up negotiations on a UN Security Council resolution on the financing issue.

Security Council Dynamics Around the Hard Questions

Among the A3, Ghana appears to be willing to take the lead in advancing the financing discussion in the Council and may propose a substantive resolution later this year. First, the A3 may coordinate with other like-minded members to convene a formal Council meeting to discuss the Secretary-General’s April report.

While negotiations on a substantive resolution are likely to build on the work done in the past, the 2018 and 2019 discussions left a number of issues unresolved, including burden-sharing, accountability and compliance frameworks, planning and oversight mechanisms, and reporting systems. In recent years, the AU has been working towards enhancing its human rights compliance framework with the support of the UN and other partners. The issue of burden sharing may present a tougher problem. Whereas some members would want to see the AU contributing 25 percent of each AUPSO requesting support from UN-assessed contributions, the consensus paper foresees the AU’s 25 percent contribution going towards its peace and security activities as a whole, including mediation and preventive diplomacy, institutional capacity, and peace support operations. This proposition—under which individual AUPSOs might not receive 25 percent AU funding—may prove unsatisfactory to some Council members, who maintain that such a commitment is critical to securing the Council’s support and that the AU can seek other bilateral and multilateral support to make up for any mission-specific shortfalls.

Another contentious issue is likely to be the AU’s broader definition of AUPSOs. The consensus paper envisages that various types of operations deployed by regional mechanisms would benefit from access to UN-assessed contributions. While this corresponds to the growing calls by African countries and regions for robust regional and international engagement to deal with the serious security

threats posed by terrorists and other armed groups, some Council members would prefer to limit the financing discussion to peace support operations deployed under AU authority and management. They remain extremely reluctant to provide support to African counter-terrorism operations through the UN because of accountability and oversight issues, preferring to continue channelling their support through bilateral arrangements. Others are concerned about compromising the basic principles of UN peacekeeping—consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.

Possible Forms of UN Support

In 2017, the Secretary-General presented options for support to peacekeeping in Africa that included voluntary contributions through a UN-managed trust fund, a subvention in exceptional emergency situations, joint financing of a jointly developed budget, the establishment of a UN support office, or joint financing of a hybrid mission. His upcoming report is likely to focus on some of these options.

In its consensus paper, the AU indicates its preference for the hybrid and the support office options. The AU believes that the hybrid option guarantees predictable and sustainable funding, but it also requires a high degree of UN-AU coordination on planning, decision-making, management, and oversight, including shared political analysis of the conflict situation. Some of these issues created challenges for the sole hybrid experience in Africa to date, the UN-AU Hybrid Operation in Darfur, known as UNAMID: the Secretary-General’s report on lessons learned from the experience of UNAMID (S/2021/1099) notes that “achieving the necessary alignment on a common vision and political direction between the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council proved challenging because of diverging views among the membership of the Councils.”

The support office option appears relatively attractive to both the UN and the AU. In the case of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)/African Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), the UN provides a logistical support package, whereas the AU would also seek troop allowances.

Contentious Issues

The complications underlying AU access to UN-assessed contributions appear to be threefold: doctrinal (that UN resources cannot be used to fight counter-terrorism operations); accountability and oversight (that the AU meet the necessary financial, administrative, and accountability standards), and burden-sharing (that the AU contribute 25 percent to finance AUPSOs). As described above, the AU’s broader definition of AUPSOs, which also includes various types of operations deployed by regional mechanisms, is likely to be controversial. Some members would be reluctant for UN-assessed contributions to be used to support counter-terrorism operations that are not overseen by or accountable to the UN and compromise the organisation’s core peacekeeping tenets.

Regarding accountability and oversight, the AU continues to work

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towards fulfilling the requirements set out in resolutions 2320 and 2378 with the support of the UN and other partners; some Council members are likely to insist on the AU taking further steps, while others may argue on the need for the Council to show some flexibility.

The nature of burden sharing may become a red line issue for some members, notably the arrangement described in the consensus paper whereby the AU would fund 25 percent of its peace and

security activities as a whole, rather than for each individual AUPSO.

Despite the renewed momentum on the financing of AUPSOs, questions surrounding burden sharing, accountability and peace operations doctrine may still cloud prospects for reaching agreement in 2023. Council members will be under pressure, however, from the prevailing security challenges in Africa and the changing global geopolitical dynamics.

Status Update since our March Forecast

South Sudan

On 6 March, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan and head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Nicholas Haysom briefed the Security Council (S/PV.9274) on the Secretary-General's most recent 90-day report on South Sudan (S/2023/135). OCHA's Acting Director of Operations and Advocacy, Tareq Talahma, also briefed. Closed consultations followed the briefing.

On 15 March, the Security Council adopted resolution 2677, renewing the mandate of UNMISS until 15 March 2024. The resolution was adopted with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (China and Russia).

Women, Peace and Security

On 7 March, the Security Council held a ministerial-level open debate on women, peace and security (WPS) titled "Women and peace and security: towards the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000)" (S/PV.9276). The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Mozambique, Verónica Nataniel Macamo Dlhovo, chaired the meeting. The Council was briefed by: UN Women Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the AU Commission on WPS Bineta Diop, and 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate Leymah Gbowee.

Afghanistan

On 8 March, the Council convened for an open briefing on Afghanistan (S/PV.9277). Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Roza Otunbayeva and Zubaida Akbar, Afghanistan Programme Officer at Freedom Now, briefed. Representatives of Afghanistan, India, Iran, and Pakistan participated in the briefing under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. The briefing was followed by closed consultations.

On 16 March, the Council unanimously adopted two resolutions on Afghanistan: resolution 2678, which extended UNAMA's mandate until 17 March 2024, and resolution 2679, which requested that the Secretary-General provide the Council with an independent assessment of the international community's approach to

Afghanistan by 17 November (S/PV.9283).

On 28 March, Council members issued a press statement (SC/15246) that condemned "the continued heinous terrorist attacks targeting civilians in Afghanistan, including the attack near the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan on 27 March, which was claimed by ISIL (Da'esh)-K and resulted in at least six people killed and several wounded".

Sudan

On 8 March, the Security Council adopted resolution 2676, renewing the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee until 12 March 2024. The resolution decided to reaffirm and renew the measures of the Sudan sanctions regime until 12 September 2024, and to make a decision regarding their further renewal no later than that date. The resolution was adopted with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (China and Russia).

On 20 March, the chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Harold Adlai Agyeman (Ghana), provided the quarterly briefing on the Committee's work (S/PV.9288). On the same day, Special Representative for Sudan and head of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) Volker Perthes briefed the Council (S/PV.9289) on the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on Sudan (S/2023/154).

Myanmar

On 13 March, the Council convened for a private meeting on Myanmar. Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar Noeleen Heyzer and Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi briefed. The meeting was held pursuant to resolution 2669 of 21 December 2022, which requested that the Secretary-General or his Special Envoy, in coordination with the Special Envoy of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), report orally to the Council on "UN support on implementation of the Five Point Consensus". (The Five-Point Consensus, which was adopted by ASEAN in April 2021, 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.)

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Lebanon

On 16 March, Council members received a briefing in consultations on the latest Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (S/2023/184). Special Coordinator for Lebanon Joanna Wronecka and Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed.

Libya

On 16 March, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/2) on Libya. In the statement, the Council said that it is encouraged by the launch of the Libyan High-Level Panel for Elections, which Special Representative for Libya and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Abdoulaye Bathily announced during his 27 February Council briefing (S/PV.9270).

Security Sector Reform

On 16 March, the Security Council held an open briefing (S/PV.9285) on security sector reform at the initiative of Council president Mozambique. Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions Alexander Zuev and AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security Bankole Adeoye briefed the Council. Representatives of Slovakia and South Africa, the co-chairs of the Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform, participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Arria-formula Meeting on Integrating the Human Rights of LGBTI Persons into the Work of the Security Council

On 20 March, Security Council members held an Arria-formula meeting on "Integrating the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex (LGBTI) Persons into the Council's Mandate for Maintaining International Peace and Security". Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield (US) chaired the meeting. The briefers were: the UN Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), Victor Madrigal-Borloz; the founder and director of the NGO Afghan LGBT Organization, Artemis Akbary; and María Susana Peralta Ramón, a lawyer and scholar who leads the peace and transitional justice team at the NGO Colombia Diversa. All Security Council members were represented at the meeting, but Mozambique, Gabon, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) did not deliver remarks. This was the first open informal meeting of Council members on LGBTI issues.

DPRK (North Korea)

On 17 March, Albania and the US convened an Arria-formula meeting titled "the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)". The meeting was co-sponsored by Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK Elizabeth Salmón, Chief of the Prevention and Sustaining Peace Section at the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) James Turpin, and two refugees from the DPRK briefed. The meeting was not broadcast on UNTV after China raised an objection to webcasting it on the official UN channel; however, it was streamed on the Albanian mission's Facebook page.

On 20 March, the Council convened for an open briefing on the DPRK (S/PV.9287). Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia, and the Americas Miroslav Jenča briefed. Albania, Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, the UK, and the US requested the meeting after the DPRK launched an intercontinental ballistic missile on 16 March. The ROK participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

On 23 March, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2680, which extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee until 30 April 2024 (S/PV.9292).

1540 Committee

On 23 March, Council members convened for a briefing on the activities of the 1540 Committee (S/PV.9293). Ambassador Hernán Pérez Loose (Ecuador) briefed the Council in his capacity as chair of the 1540 Committee. At the briefing, he discussed the latest developments since the Committee's previous report to the Council. He emphasised the Committee's successful completion of its comprehensive review of resolution 1540, along with the extension of its mandate until 30 November 2032. Pérez also presented the Committee's planned programme of work for 2023.

Somalia

On 27 March, the Security Council held a private meeting on the situation in Somalia. The meeting was convened pursuant to resolution 2670 of 21 December 2022, which extended the operational timeline for the drawdown of the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) by six months until 30 June. Special Representative of the AU Commission Chairperson (SRCC) for Somalia and head of the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) Mohamed El-Amine Souef, EU Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Annette Weber, representatives of Somalia, and ATMIS troop-contributing countries attended the meeting.

Counter-Terrorism

On 28 March, the Council convened for 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" under the agenda item "Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts" (S/PV.9296). The debate was one of the signature events of Mozambique's presidency and was chaired by Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres and Chairperson of the AU Azali Assoumani briefed. Rwanda participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 29 March, the Security Council held a briefing, followed by closed consultations, on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), including the work of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO). Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of MONUSCO Bintou Keita briefed on MONUSCO and recent developments in the DRC based on the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2023/208).

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The representatives of Burundi, DRC, and Rwanda participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

France and Gabon, which co-led Council members' visiting mission to DRC from 9 to 12 March, provided a formal briefing about the series of engagements with the Congolese authorities, MONUSCO and the UN Country Team, and other stakeholders. The Council also adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/3) as a follow-up to the visiting mission, which underlines the importance of a political resolution to the peace and security challenges in eastern DRC and reiterates its support for regional efforts.

UNDOF (Golan)

On 29 March, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed Council members in consultations on the

work of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and recent developments based on the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2023/203)

Silencing the Guns

On 30 March, the Council held an open debate on "Peace and security in Africa: The impact of development policies in the implementation of the Silencing the Guns initiative". There were briefings by: Cristina Duarte, Special Adviser of the UN Secretary-General on Africa; Mohamed Ibn Chambas, High Representative of the AU for Silencing the Guns Initiative; Mirko Manzonei, Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Mozambique. President Filipe Jacinto Nyusi of Mozambique chaired the meeting. Mozambique circulated the concept note for the open debate in a letter dated 24 February.

Effective Multilateralism Through the Defence of the Principles of the UN Charter

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council will hold a ministerial-level open debate on "Effective multilateralism through the Defense of the Principles of the UN Charter", one of the signature events of the Russian presidency. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is expected to chair the meeting.

Background and Key Recent Developments

The Council has discussed the UN Charter and the multilateral system several times in the past few years. The most recent such discussion was on 14 December 2022, during India's Security Council presidency, on the topic of "New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism". Previous meetings on similar topics have included an open debate on "Upholding multilateralism and the UN-centred international system", organised by China on 7 May 2021, and an open debate organised by Viet Nam on 9 January 2020 on "Upholding the UN Charter". In connection with the latter, Council adopted a presidential statement that "reaffirm[ed] its commitment to multilateralism and the central role of the United Nations" and "recognised the critical importance of the Charter to the maintenance of international peace and security and development of international law".

Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, China and Russia issued a joint statement on 4 February 2022 emphasising that "the world is going through momentous changes", including a "transformation of the global governance architecture and world order". The statement criticised the actions of "some actors representing but the minority on the international scale" for employing unilateral approaches to addressing international issues. It also detailed a vision of effective multilateralism based on consensus rather than through decisions taken "in private by certain nations or blocs of nations". The two

countries argue that while democratic principles based on the sovereign equality of states should be fully implemented at the global level, the attempts by certain states "to impose their own democratic standards on other countries" go against "the spirit and true values of democracy" and "undermine the stability of the world order".

The war in Ukraine has been widely seen as a global geopolitical turning point. In a 5 December 2022 article, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz described the war as bringing in an "epochal tectonic shift", or *Zeitenwende*, in which new and emerging powers such as China compete for influence in a new multipolar world. Russia's invasion of Ukraine was considered by many countries to be a violation of one of the most fundamental tenets of the post-World War II international rules-based order: namely, the commitment to refrain from the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of a member state, enshrined in article 2 (4) of the UN Charter.

Key Issues and Options

An overarching issue is how Council members can find common ground in resolving threats to international peace and security, notwithstanding their different views of the world order and interpretations of the UN Charter.

Another key issue is how to strengthen multilateralism to meet current challenges and threats to international peace and security. An important factor in this respect is how the Council can most effectively cooperate with other UN bodies, member states, and civil society to address global challenges such as terrorism, climate change, cyber security, and transnational organised crime.

More strategic use of certain UN Charter articles could enhance the Council's ability to address issues of peace and security. For example, urging the Secretary-General to make more frequent and

UN DOCUMENTS ON MULTILATERALISM Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/1 (9 January 2020) was a presidential statement adopted during the ministerial-level debate on "Maintenance of international peace and security: upholding the UN Charter". Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9220 (14 December 2022) was an open debate titled "New Orientation for Reformed Multilateralism" under the agenda item "Maintenance of international peace and security". S/PV.9149 (11 October 2022) was a debate on "Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in maintaining international peace and security". S/2021/456 (11 May 2021) was a letter that transmitted the meeting record of the high-level videoconference briefing on "Maintenance of international peace and security: Upholding multilateralism and the United Nations-centred international system", which was held on 7 May 2021. S/PV.8699 (9 January 2020) was a ministerial-level open debate on "Maintenance of international peace and security: upholding the UN Charter", where member states reflected on and reaffirmed their commitment to upholding Charter principles, particularly in the context of international peace and security.

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explicit use of his article 99 powers might be a constructive step in the current difficult climate. A deeper and more systematic exploration of the scope of Chapter VIII, on regional arrangements, could also be timely.

In the future, the Council could also consider holding a private meeting with representatives of the General Assembly's "Special Committee on the Charter of the UN and the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization" to discuss the committee's activities and to consider potential ideas for strengthening the Council's work.

Council Dynamics

Council members are expected to reiterate their commitment to the UN Charter and multilateralism. However, different perspectives on the world order and the UN Charter will be expressed. China and Russia may underscore the view that Western adherence to the

Charter has been selective over the years, and that the US is more interested in being a global hegemon than a constructive international actor. Western and other like-minded states may argue that Russia's invasion of Ukraine represents a gross violation of the UN Charter, and an assault on the rules-based international order.

Some members may encourage more frequent use of Chapter VI (Peaceful Settlement of Disputes) and VIII (Regional Arrangements) tools of the UN Charter, rather than sanctions and other coercive measures outlined in Chapter VII (Action with respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression), which are often more controversial.

It is also possible that some participants will argue that the Council does not reflect today's geopolitical realities, while calling for the structural reform of the organ. There may also be expressions of concern about the use of the veto.

Ukraine

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Hostilities remain concentrated in Ukraine's eastern region. In recent weeks, the intensity of Russian offensive operations near the city of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region appears to have subsided. In a 25 March intelligence update, the UK's Ministry of Defence said that Russia's efforts in Bakhmut have "largely stalled" because of "extreme attrition". The update suggested that Russia is shifting its operational focus towards the city of Avdiivka in Donetsk and along the Svatove-Kreminna line in the Luhansk region.

Meanwhile, Russia has continued to launch air and missile assaults targeting civilian infrastructure across Ukraine, triggering blackouts and a reduction in water supplies throughout the country. On 9 March, Russia launched one of its biggest waves of missile attacks since the start of the war, killing at least nine civilians and temporarily cutting off power to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP).

The Security Council remains actively engaged on the situation in Ukraine. On 14 March, the Council held a briefing requested by Russia to discuss "Russophobia as a factor which complicates the prospects to find a lasting solution" under the "Threats to international peace and security" agenda item. On 17 March, the Council convened for a humanitarian briefing at the request of Ecuador and France, the co-penholders on humanitarian issues in Ukraine. The Council also held a briefing on 31 March at Ukraine's request following Russian President Vladimir Putin's announcement on 25 March that Moscow intends to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. (For more, see our What's In Blue story of 16 March.)

On 27 March, Russia tabled a Security Council draft resolution

on the 26 September 2022 explosions that caused physical damage to the Nord Stream pipelines in the Baltic Sea. The draft resolution requested the Secretary-General to establish an international commission to conduct an investigation into the incident. The draft text failed to be adopted because it did not garner the requisite support. It received three votes in favour (Brazil, China, and Russia) and 12 abstentions. The draft text was co-sponsored by Belarus, China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Eritrea, Nicaragua, Syria, and Venezuela. (For more, see our What's in Blue story of 26 March.)

On 17 March, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Putin and his commissioner for children's rights, Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, for allegedly committing the war crime of "unlawful deportation" and "unlawful transfer" of children from Ukraine to Russia. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the ICC's decision "historic", stressing that over 16,000 cases of forced deportation of Ukrainian children have been documented by Ukrainian law enforcement officers.

Russia signed the Rome Statute of the ICC in 2000, but withdrew its signature in November 2016 after the court classified the 2014 conflict in eastern Ukraine as an "international armed conflict" and ruled that Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014 amounted to a "state of occupation". Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused the ICC of being "openly biased, unprofessional, corrupt and addicted to double standards" during a 23 March press briefing, and described its recent arrest warrants as "null and void" at a 16 March press briefing. Russia's Permanent Representative to the UN Vassily Nebenzia announced at a 20 March press conference that Russia intends to organise an Arria-formula meeting on "the Ukrainian children in Russia" in early April.

After weeks of intense negotiations, Türkiye, Russia, and Ukraine agreed to an extension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI).

UN DOCUMENTS ON UKRAINE Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9300 (31 March 2023) was a briefing requested by Ukraine. S/PV.9286 (17 March 2023) was a briefing on Ukraine requested by Ecuador and France. S/PV.9280 (14 March 2023) was a briefing on Ukraine requested by Russia. **Other Documents** S/2023/212 (21 March 2022) was a Security Council draft resolution prepared by Russia on the September 2022 Nord Stream pipelines incident.

Ukraine

However, the parties have offered different interpretations of the agreed duration of the extension. Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister for Restoration and Minister for Communities, Territories Development and Infrastructure Oleksandr Kubrakov announced in an 18 March tweet that the BSGI has been extended for 120 days. In a tweet later that day, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyanskiy posted a picture of a letter notifying the UN of Russia's intention to renew the initiative for 60 days, with further extensions "subject to tangible progress in the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding" between Russia and the UN to facilitate unimpeded exports of Russian food and fertilisers to global markets.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 15 March, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine submitted a report to the Human Rights Council (HRC) detailing the results of its investigation. The report found that Russia committed "a wide range of violations" of international human rights law (IHRL) and international humanitarian law (IHL) in many regions of Ukraine and in Russia, and that many of these violations amount to war crimes, including "wilful killings, attacks on civilians, unlawful confinement, torture, rape, and forced transfers and deportations of children".

On 24 March, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published the 35th periodic report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, covering the period from 1 August 2022 to 31 January, which found that the war in Ukraine "has led to a wide range of human rights violations affecting both civilians and combatants". In a 24 March thematic report titled "Treatment of prisoners of war and persons hors de combat in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine", OHCHR identified patterns of IHL and IHRL violations in relation to the treatment of prisoners of war by both Russia and Ukraine. Both reports are expected to be discussed by High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk at the HRC interactive dialogue on 31 March.

Women, Peace and Security

According to a 13 February update by the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), while women are at the forefront of the emergency response to the situation in Ukraine, across 46 separate Council meetings on Ukraine, "fewer than 1% of all references to women in Ukraine made by Council members acknowledged women's role in peace, political or humanitarian efforts". The update further stresses that in 2022, Council members made no references to the importance of women human rights defenders and peacebuilders in Ukraine and their safety and security, despite the fact that members dedicated considerable attention to this issue during thematic meetings on WPS in the past year.

Key Issues and Options

The overarching priority for the Council is to promote a solution to the conflict in line with the UN Charter and to see dialogue facilitated among the parties to that end. 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. 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. Hostilities have resulted in a severe deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the eastern Donetsk region of Ukraine, especially in Bakhmut and Avdiivka. According to a

24 March OCHA humanitarian response flash update, humanitarian access to Avdiivka has become "extremely challenging" because of the ongoing fighting. 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 important issue for the Council is how to promote the safety and security of nuclear facilities in Ukraine. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi has continued efforts to ensure nuclear safety and security at the ZNPP. On 30 March, the IAEA issued an update acknowledging that the "initial proposal to establish a [protection] zone around the plant" had evolved to "now focus more on what should be avoided to ensure its protection, rather than on territorial aspects". Council members may consider requesting a briefing from Grossi on this matter.

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, Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, Switzerland, the UK, and the US—condemn Russia for what they consider to be an act of aggression.

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 borders. Other member states have called for an immediate cessation of hostilities without any preconditions, which could freeze the frontlines of the conflict, resulting in Russia seizing a significant amount of territory in eastern and southern Ukraine. On 24 February, China released a 12-point position paper on a political settlement to the war in Ukraine. The paper included calls for respecting the sovereignty of all countries, ceasing hostilities, and resuming peace talks, but did not mention Russia's military withdrawal from Ukraine. Zelenskyy welcomed Beijing's initiative during a press conference on 24 February, but stressed that "if the principle of respect for territorial integrity does not provide for the withdrawal of all Russian troops from the territory of Ukraine, then this does not suit our state".

Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Moscow from 20 to 22 March, demonstrating China's commitment to deepening its relationship with Russia. On 21 March, Putin and Xi issued a joint statement acknowledging that the provisions of China's position paper "are consonant with Russian approaches and can be taken as the basis for a peaceful settlement when the West and Kiev are ready for it". A joint statement on 22 March also acknowledged that Russia "speaks positively of China's objective and impartial position on the Ukraine issue" and "welcomes China's willingness to play a positive role" in finding a political and diplomatic settlement to the war. However, US National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby argued at a 21 March press briefing that China cannot be seen "as impartial in any way" since it has not condemned Russia's invasion nor stopped buying Russian oil and Russian energy.

Mali

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

The security situation in Mali remains dire while MINUSMA continues to face operational constraints and challenges amid strained relations with Malian transitional authorities. Jordan became the latest troop-contributing country (TCC) to end its participation in the UN peacekeeping operation when it decided in January to withdraw its contingent, which had participated in MINUSMA's mobile task force.

On 16 January, the UN submitted the report of its internal review of MINUSMA to the Council. The Council requested the review in resolution 2640 of 29 June 2022, which renewed MINUSMA's mandate, because of the mission's increased operational constraints and challenges. The review said that MINUSMA has been stretched "beyond capacity" since the Council expanded its mandate in 2019 to include supporting the stabilisation of central Mali without increasing its resources. The withdrawal of French and other European counter-terrorism forces in 2022 exacerbated this challenge. According to the review, the situation has left MINUSMA unable to meet the expectations of Malians and subjected it to increasing criticism by the authorities and the population.

The internal review presented three sets of options for the reconfiguration of the mission. One option is to increase MINUSMA's uniformed personnel, currently set at 13,289 military personnel and 1,920 police. A second option is to consolidate the mission's presence to optimise the use of its resources. According to the review, these two options require four key conditions or "parameters" for MINUSMA to operate: (1) advances in Mali's political transition, in accordance with the electoral timetable; (2) progress in the implementation of the Mali 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement; (3) MINUSMA's freedom of movement, including for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets critical for the safety and security of peacekeepers; and (4) MINUSMA's ability to implement its entire mandate, including its human rights provisions.

If these conditions will not be met, the review presented, as the third option, withdrawing uniformed personnel and converting MINUSMA into a special political mission based in Bamako. The review noted that this option "would likely result in a serious deterioration in the security situation in Mali". An annex attached to the report presented the Malian authorities' preferences. These include that MINUSMA increase cooperation with and support to the Malian armed forces, giving "top priority to the security dimension of its mandate", and refrain from "politicization and instrumentalization of the question of human rights". (For more, see our What's in Blue story of 26 January.)

On 27 January, the Security Council held its quarterly briefing, followed by closed consultations, on Mali, in which the review

figured prominently. At the meeting, civil society briefer Aminata Cheick Dicko of l'Observatoire Kisal, an organisation that defends the rights of pastoralist communities in the Sahel, asserted that Russian forces, with which Mali has partnered since December 2021 in its counter-terrorism operations, have committed "serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law". Transitional Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdoulaye Diop, who represented Mali at the briefing, concluded his intervention by strongly criticising Dicko's participation in the meeting.

On 5 February, Mali's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared Guillaume Ngefa-Atondoko Andali, the director of MINUSMA's Human Rights Division, persona non grata, criticising his role in selecting Dicko as a briefer and giving him 48 hours to leave the country. Ngefa's expulsion and threats reportedly directed at Dicko following her briefing led Council members to meet in closed consultations on 7 February to discuss the situation with Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris. Dicko reportedly fled Mali because of threats against her.

In a 1 March letter to Security Council members, Mali said that it "rejects" France continuing to serve as the Council penholder on Mali, the latest evidence of the rift in French-Malian relations. Following a request by Russia, Council members discussed the letter in closed consultations under "any other business" on 8 March.

Northern armed groups suspended their participation in the mechanisms of the 2015 peace agreement on 21 December 2022 following a dispute over the government's level of participation in the Agreement Monitoring Committee (CSA). Tensions between the signatory parties heightened further after Mali's Minister for National Reconciliation Ismaël Wagué sent a letter, dated 24 February, to the foreign minister of Algeria, accusing the Coordination of the Azawad Movements (CMA) of repeated violations of the agreement and of "increasingly obvious collusion with terrorist groups". The government, Wagué added, "while remaining committed to the intelligent implementation of the agreement, will automatically reject any accusation that would hold it responsible for the possible consequences of [its] violation".

On 27 February, Mali's transitional president, Assimi Goïta, received the "final" draft of a new constitution. On 10 March, the transitional government announced the postponement of the constitutional referendum, which had been scheduled for 19 March. The delay had been expected because of a lack of preparations to hold the referendum, but it also followed criticism of the draft constitution's principle of secularism by religious leaders of the Mali League of Imams and Scholars for Islamic Solidarity, who called on Muslims to oppose the constitution.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 21 February, the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee met to discuss the mid-term report of the Mali Panel of Experts. The report highlighted the stalled implementation of the peace agreement due to a lack of trust between the parties and the erosion of belief in the accord as an instrument to achieve durable peace and security in Mali. Committee members were unable to agree on a press release about the meeting, apparently over whether to

UN DOCUMENTS ON MALI [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2640](#) (29 June 2022) renewed the mandate of MINUSMA until 30 June 2023. [Secretary-General's Reports S/2023/36](#) (16 January 2023) was the internal review of MINUSMA. [Security Council Letter S/2023/161](#) (1 March 2023) was a letter from Mali rejecting France's continued role as penholder on Mali. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9251](#) (27 January 2023) was a briefing on Mali. [Security Council Press Statement SC/15207](#) (21 February 2023) condemned the attack against MINUSMA earlier that day that killed three peacekeepers from Senegal and injured five others. [Sanctions Committee Document S/2023/138](#) (22 February 2023) was the midterm report of the Mali Panel of Experts.

Mali

include a sentence regretting that the Panel had been unable to visit Mali. As the report notes, the Panel members' visas were revoked in June 2022.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 20 February, the UN independent expert on the human rights situation in Mali, Alioune Tine, issued a statement at the end of his ten-day visit to the country. He noted the progress made in the democratic transition as Mali embarks on an electoral process. However, Tine observed that he faced difficulties during his visit, emphasising that his mission "took place in a tense context, marked by the continued shrinking of civil space, attacks on human rights defenders and civil society by state and non-state actors". He underscored his concern about the attacks on human rights defenders, who were denounced by the National Human Rights Commission of Mali, adding that he himself was verbally attacked on social networks before and during his visit.

Tine's statement followed the 31 January statement from several independent UN human rights experts, who called for an immediate independent investigation into "gross human rights abuses and possible war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Mali by government forces and the Russian private military contractor known as the Wagner Group since 2021."

On 22 March, MINUSMA issued its quarterly note on trends in and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Mali for the period 1 October to 31 December 2022. Among its findings, the number of people killed grew from 584 in 2021 to 1,277 in 2022, and 2,001 people were impacted by acts of violence last year, including 370 who were abducted or disappeared. Terrorist groups were the main perpetrators of violence against civilians (56 percent of the total); Malian forces, sometimes accompanied by "foreign personnel", caused 35 percent of the violations.

Women, Peace and Security

In a recent report based on his eighth visit to Mali, in August 2022, Tine, expressed concern at the situation of women and girls in the country and at the significant impact that the degradation of the security situation continues to have on their rights, in particular through the disturbing recurrence of cases of gender-based violence. The report also notes that women and girls continue to be negatively affected by rules set by violent extremist groups, such as imposing the separation of men and women in public spaces. The report further says that some civil society actors reported having received death threats or threats of detention or having suffered physical attacks and attacks on their property because of their opinions.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue will be considering progress in the four parameters that the Secretary-General's internal review of MINUSMA says are critical for the mission to operate. Access restrictions, especially denials of permission for MINUSMA surveillance flights, continue to be a problem, impeding the mission's ability to carry out its mandate and imperilling UN peacekeepers. Mali's objections to MINUSMA's reporting on human rights also remain a challenge to implementation of the mission's mandate.

Replacing the TCCs that have withdrawn from the mission is another important issue. Announced troop withdrawals over the past year (prior to Jordan's departure) represented 17 percent of

MINUSMA's current force strength.

Stalled implementation of the peace agreement and heightened tensions between the signatory parties is a key issue. Regarding Mali's political transition—another major issue—organising the referendum on the draft constitution is an important step for holding elections to restore an elected government by 29 March 2024, the new timeline that transitional authorities and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) agreed last year.

The upcoming meeting will allow members to advance their consideration of the options presented in the internal review for the mandate renewal of MINUSMA in June. Council members may reiterate calls on the authorities to cease restrictions on MINUSMA's freedom of movement and allow it to conduct human rights monitoring. Some members may highlight concerns that the UN has not released investigation findings on Mourah—the central Mali village where, according to credible allegations, Malian forces and personnel of the Wagner Group, a Russian private security company, executed approximately 300 civilians and suspected terrorists from 27 to 31 March 2022.

Council Dynamics

It seems that Council members consider the Secretary-General's internal review of MINUSMA as a good basis for discussing the upcoming mandate renewal. Most members have expressed concerns about the restrictions on MINUSMA and have encouraged Malian authorities to cooperate and respect the status of forces agreement with MINUSMA. The P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other members also highlight concerns about international human rights violations and the need for MINUSMA to carry out its human rights mandate, including reporting. The A3 (Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique) stress the importance of MINUSMA for regional stability.

China and Russia are supportive of the positions and views of the Malian authorities. Besides the presence of the Wagner Group, Russia's growing cooperation with Mali has included deliveries of combat aircraft and helicopters. On 7 February, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov pledged further military support to Mali during his first visit to the country.

The issue of France's penholdership on Mali appears to remain unresolved. At the 8 March meeting on Mali's letter, it seems that no member said that France should cease to act as penholder, nor did any member offer to take on the role. Several members apparently suggested that the Council's Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Matters, which has a standing agenda on penholdership, should be the forum for further discussion of the issue.

Ambassador Pedro Comissário Afonso (Mozambique) chairs the Mali 2374 Sanctions Committee.

Colombia

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council will hold its quarterly meeting on Colombia. Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu is expected to brief on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission, dated 27 March.

The verification mission's mandate expires on 31 October 2023.

Key Recent Developments

During the first quarter of 2023, the administration of Colombian President Gustavo Petro Urrego continued to advance its policy of "total peace", which entails the implementation of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace signed in 2016 between the government of Colombia and the former rebel group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) as well as the promotion of dialogue with armed groups operating in the country. While some progress was made on both processes, violence continued in conflict-affected areas of the country.

The government has been pursuing peace talks with armed groups it deems as having a political agenda, while also discussing possible agreements with groups characterised as criminal that focus on ceasing violence in exchange for judicial benefits. On 31 December 2022, Petro announced that five armed groups had agreed to bilateral six-month ceasefires with the government. The government characterises two of these groups as political, namely the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and the Estado Mayor Central (EMC), which mainly consists of former FARC-EP dissidents who did not sign the 2016 accord. The remaining three groups are described by the government as "high-impact criminal structures": the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC), the Autodefensas Conquistadores de la Sierra, and the Segunda Marquetalia (which consists of former FARC-EP dissidents who signed the 2016 agreement but took up arms again). Analysts warn, however, against making conclusive distinctions between the various groups, as some of them—such as the AGC—claim to have political origins, while groups that hold a political agenda also engage in illicit activities such as drug trafficking.

Shortly after the government's announcement, the ELN said in a 3 January statement that it had not agreed to a bilateral ceasefire, emphasising that the issue should be discussed at the negotiating table. Moreover, to date, only the EMC has reportedly signed a ceasefire agreement with the government, while the others have yet to be operationalised due to legal and political challenges. A 24 February report by the International Crisis Group said that during the first months that the "total peace" policy had been implemented there was "a slower tempo of hostilities involving these groups, and a fall in homicides perpetrated by them in some regions" but these groups used other ways to persecute and assert control over rural communities, including through child recruitment, sexual and gender-based violence, and movement restrictions.

In a 14 February letter to the Security Council (S/2023/112), Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs Álvaro Leyva Durán announced the resumption of dialogue with the ELN. He also

shared the decrees declaring the bilateral ceasefires with the other four groups that were issued by the government in December 2022 following its announcement. Leyva indicated the government's intention to request UN verification of these processes. He noted in this regard that: "[w]e trust that the Security Council will consider favorably the possible expansion of the role of the verification mission in Colombia".

Following the first round of peace talks between the government and the ELN held from 22 November to 12 December 2022, a second round was held in Mexico between 13 February and 10 March. At the conclusion of this round, the sides announced that they had agreed, among other things, to discuss the modalities of a national and temporary bilateral ceasefire in the next round of negotiations, which at the time of writing is scheduled to take place in Cuba in April. However, a 29 March attack in the Catatumbo region which claimed the lives of nine government soldiers and was reportedly perpetrated by the ELN may entail setbacks for the process.

On 28 February, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP)—the judicial component of the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition established by the 2016 agreement—convened a special hearing, citing concerns about the continued killing of former FARC-EP combatants. The hearing followed up on the SJP's July 2020 order which called for the National Commission on Security Guarantees (NCSG), the body charged under the peace agreement with developing a public policy for dismantling criminal organisations and their support networks, to present guidelines and an action plan for the policy.

At the hearing, civil society representatives to the NCSG expressed concern about the lack of the NCSG's participation in processes relating to legislation on justice against high-impact criminal structures. Additionally, the representatives raised concerns over the institutional weakening of government bodies charged with the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement. At the hearing, the SJP underscored the importance of aligning the work of the NCSG and the "total peace" policy and ordered the government to present a policy for dismantling criminal organisations by 2 May.

On 14 March, ex-combatants from the former territorial area for training and reintegration (TATR) in the Mesetas municipality in the Meta department announced that more than 200 families of former combatants had received threats from the EMC demanding that they leave the area. This message came a day after the government said that it would soon start peace talks with the dissident group.

The threats against the residents of the Mesetas TATR were denounced by many national and international actors. In a 15 March statement, a commission in the House of Representatives (the lower house of Colombia's Congress) monitoring the implementation of the 2016 accord said that such threats by armed groups raise doubts about their commitment to the achievement of "total peace". The statement highlighted the need to address the situation, stressing that "without security for the signatories of the Final Peace Agreement and [its] integral implementation", achieving "total peace" will be very difficult.

On 29 March, Petro visited the Mesetas TATR, where the government established a "unified command post for life"—an

Colombia

inter-institutional mechanism to coordinate preventive responses that involve state entities, local authorities, and civil society. During his visit, Petro announced that the government is working on mechanisms to expediate the implementation of the 2016 agreement, adding that his ministerial cabinet will become “the peace cabinet” and that an official will be appointed to oversee the implementation of the peace process with the former FARC-EP.

Human Rights-Related Developments

At the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk presented the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) report on Colombia (A/HRC/52/25). In his report, Türk noted the Colombian government’s willingness to discuss human rights challenges frankly and stressed the need for the government to utilise a human rights approach when dealing with armed actors, victims, and any affected communities. Türk also noted that his office documented 92 massacres in which 321 people were killed in 2022, as well as 116 killings of human rights defenders. The report condemns the massacres, which “disproportionately affect indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples”.

Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)-Related Developments

Last year’s PBC Chair, Ambassador Muhammad Abdul Muhith (Bangladesh), delivered the PBC’s first briefing or “oral advice” to the Security Council at a 12 October 2022 Council briefing on Colombia. Muhith highlighted the importance of the 2016 agreement’s elements on comprehensive rural reform, reconciliation based on a shared understanding of the past, and the rights of victims. Among other points, Muhith welcomed the government’s commitment to reducing inequality and underlined the importance of “inclusive approaches to addressing inequalities as drivers of conflicts”.

For the Council’s 11 January briefing on Colombia, the PBC submitted written advice to Council members in a letter dated 9 January, commending the Colombian government and the ELN for the resumption of negotiations, including the strong representation of women on both sides.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is to consider the Colombian government’s request for expanding the verification mission’s mandate to have a role in supporting dialogue efforts with armed groups operating in the country, including through the monitoring of potential ceasefires. At the time of writing, Council members were apparently considering sending a letter to the Secretary-General requesting him to submit recommendations to the Security Council on the matter.

The persistent violence in Colombia is a major ongoing concern. In this regard, Council members emphasised in a 13 January press statement on Colombia that the approval and implementation of a public policy on dismantling illegal armed groups and criminal organisations would be a significant step towards violence reduction. Members may consider interacting with representatives to the

NCSG to hear their views about the challenges they are facing in their work and potential ways to increase complementarity between this body and the “total peace” policy. They may choose to do so in an informal meeting, such as an informal interactive dialogue, or to invite a representative to brief at a Council meeting.

In light of concerns raised by some Colombian actors that national and international attention is increasingly focused on the new outreach efforts to armed groups operating in the country, members may wish to reiterate the continued importance of the comprehensive implementation of the 2016 agreement. They may also consider interacting with members of the former FARC-EP to hear their recommendations on how the Council can better support the implementation of the agreement. Another option would be for Council members to conduct a visiting mission to Colombia. In this regard, Vice President Francia Márquez of Colombia invited Council members to her country at the Council’s 11 January meeting.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the peace process in Colombia and for the verification mission’s work. Members are generally deferential to the Colombian government and have often responded positively to its requests for expansions of the mission’s mandate. For example, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2673 of 11 January, expanding the mandate of the verification mission to monitor the implementation of the chapter on comprehensive rural reform and the ethnic chapter of the 2016 agreement, following a request contained in a 17 October 2022 letter from Leyva. (For more information, see our What’s in Blue story of 11 January.)

Council deliberations on the government’s recent request for an expansion of the mission’s mandate might prove more sensitive. Some members may feel that a more cautious approach is needed regarding groups characterised as criminal and advocate a case-by-case analysis about a possible UN role in support for such dialogue efforts. Some members may also raise concerns about the potential risks to UN personnel, particularly in light of two incidents in the Catatumbo region in February and March in which staff from the verification mission and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), respectively, were temporarily detained and their vehicles were stolen in areas with ELN presence. The Council previously temporarily expanded the verification mission’s mandate to monitor compliance with a ceasefire observed by the ELN and the government through resolution 2381 of 6 October 2017.

The UK is the penholder on Colombia.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council will hold its monthly briefing, followed by closed consultations, on Yemen with UN Special Envoy Hans

Grundberg and a representative of OCHA. The head of the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), Major General Michael Beary, is expected to brief during consultations.

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.9282** (15 March 2023) was a briefing on Yemen by Special Envoy Hans Grundberg, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya, and Deputy Ambassador Albana Dautllari (Albania) on behalf of the chair of the Yemen 2140 Sanctions Committee.

Yemen

Key Recent Developments

Yemen continues to experience its longest lull in fighting since the April 2022 truce agreement between the Yemeni government and the Houthi rebel group, despite sporadic clashes and the agreement's expiration in early October 2022. Since October 2022, Oman has been facilitating talks between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, which leads a military coalition in support of the Yemeni government. These talks are reportedly focused on a potential comprehensive agreement to end the war. Grundberg has described them as representing “a potential step change” in the eight-year conflict.

In a significant new regional development, Saudi Arabia and Iran, which is allied with the Houthis, agreed on 10 March in Beijing to restore diplomatic relations, which had been suspended since 2016. Briefing the Council on 15 March via videoconference from Riyadh, Grundberg welcomed this agreement, saying that good relations between the two countries are “important for the region and for Yemen”. He added, “The parties must seize the opportunity presented by that regional and international momentum to take decisive steps towards a more peaceful future”. At the meeting, the Council also heard briefings by Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya and Deputy Ambassador Albana Dautllari (Albania) on behalf of the chair of the Yemen 2140 Sanctions Committee. Beary briefed in closed consultations.

There was progress in March towards beginning the salvage operation on the FSO Safer, the decrepit oil tanker moored off the Ras Isa peninsula in the Red Sea. On 9 March, the UN announced that it had signed an agreement earlier that day to purchase a “Very Large Crude Carrier” (VLCC) to replace the FSO Safer. The UN-coordinated plan to remove the oil from the FSO Safer and replace the decaying ship had been delayed in recent months, as the UN said that it could not begin the salvage operation until it had secured the replacement vessel.

Achim Steiner, the administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), which is leading the plan's implementation, said at a press conference about the purchase of the VLCC that the ship is being modified in China to serve as a floating storage and offloading vessel. It is expected to reach the Red Sea by early May, after which the operation can start. Steiner stressed, however, that there is a risk of a further delay if the UN does not obtain the additional \$34 million required for the operation. According to a 9 March UN statement, pledged funds total \$95 million, of which \$75 million have been received, out of the \$129 million required for the operation's “emergency phase”.

On 20 March, the Yemeni government and the Houthis agreed on an implementation plan for the release of 887 conflict-related detainees from all sides. The agreement came at the end of ten days of talks in Switzerland during the seventh meeting of the Supervisory Committee on the Implementation of the Detainees' Exchange Agreement, which is chaired by the Office of the Special Envoy and the ICRC. The parties also agreed to reconvene in May to discuss more releases and committed to undertake joint visits to each other's detention facilities and to enable access to all detainees during these visits, according to a joint statement by the Special Envoy's Office and the ICRC. At a press conference in Geneva about the deal, Grundberg urged the parties “to facilitate the speedy implementation of

the releases, and to build further on today's outcome and agree on more releases”.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), which began on 27 February, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, delivered an oral update on the activities of his office as well as recent human rights developments. Volker noted that all parties need to listen to the population “exhausted by eight years of brutal warfare” and take decisive steps towards a UN-led peace process. He noted that for any peace agreement to hold, transitional justice and accountability must be at the forefront, and women must be full participants in any negotiations. He also emphasised that two UN staff members, one from UNESCO and another from OHCHR, have been detained for 16 months and must be immediately released.

Women, Peace and Security

At the 15 March open briefing on the situation in Yemen, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Joyce Msuya said that Yemeni women aid workers are still not allowed to travel without male guardians, both within and outside the country, and that this situation “has caused serious disruptions to the ability of agencies to assist women and girls safely and reliably”. During the meeting, members, including France, Malta and Switzerland, stressed the need to lift restrictions on women humanitarian workers in Yemen. Ghana expressed concern at women's rights violations “particularly their fundamental rights to movement, expression, work and access to health care, as well as protection from gender-based violence”. Members, including Ecuador and Malta, called for the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in peace negotiations.

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 face significant challenges from interference, 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, which is negatively affecting aid operations. Land mines and explosive remnants of war have become an issue of greater concern, as they have been the leading cause of civilian casualties in the truce and post-truce period.

Support for Yemen's economy is also critical to mitigating the humanitarian crisis. While Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in recent months have made new deposits into Yemen's Central Bank Aden headquarters to help stabilise the Yemeni rial, Houthi drone attacks that targeted oil export infrastructure last October have led to a loss of the government's most significant revenue source, undermining its ability to pay civil servants and provide basic services.

Members may continue to urge donors to support the Yemen 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), which raised \$1.2 billion of the \$4.3 billion that the UN has estimated is necessary for its aid operations at a 27 February pledging conference. In addition,

Yemen

members may 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. They are also likely to continue closely monitoring progress towards starting the salvage operation on the FSO Safer oil tanker.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members welcome the Houthis-Saudi talks and have expressed cautious optimism about their potential to yield meaningful results. At the same time, members stress the ultimate importance of an inclusive Yemeni political process facilitated by UN mediation to achieve a sustainable resolution to the conflict. 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) are evidence of the Council's general unity of approach towards Yemen.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been a leading member in the Saudi Arabia-led coalition and often pushes for its views to be reflected in Council products. 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 threat of the FSO Safer. China helped mediate the Saudi-Iran agreement to restore relations, which it highlighted at the Council's 15 March briefing, observing that it could help create conditions for resolving Yemen's conflict. Arms from Iran appear to be the main source of external weapons for the Houthis, as indicated in the reports of the Yemen Panel of Experts. 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 Ferit Hoxha (Albania) chairs the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee.

Libya

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council will hold a briefing, followed by consultations, on the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). The chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Kimihiro Ishikane (Japan), will also brief on the committee's activities.

Key Recent Developments

More than one year has passed since the postponement of Libyan national elections planned for December 2021 and seven years since the signing of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA). The leadership stand-off continues between incumbent Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah, elected in February 2021 to head the interim Government of National Unity (GNU), and former Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha, who was elected interim prime minister by the House of Representatives (HoR)—the Libyan legislature based in Tobruk—in February 2022. The protracted stalemate contributes to the country's political, economic, and security instability.

Against this backdrop, Special Representative for Libya and head of UNSMIL Abdoulaye Bathily has concentrated recent efforts on facilitating agreement among national actors and international partners on a new roadmap for national elections. In his 27 February briefing to the Council, Bathily presented the results of this engagement. He announced his intention to establish a Libyan High-Level Panel for Elections (HLPE), which will “bring together all relevant Libyan stakeholders, including representatives of political institutions, major political figures, tribal leaders, civil society organisations, security actors, women, and youth representatives”. According to Bathily, the HLPE will be tasked with facilitating “the adoption of the legal framework and time-bound roadmap to the holding of elections in 2023”, as well as providing “a platform to advance consensus around related matters, such as election security and the adoption of a Code of Conduct for all candidates”.

In parallel to Bathily's efforts, the rival Libyan legislatures have been engaged in a separate effort to establish a constitutional basis for elections. On 8 February, the HoR adopted the 13th constitutional amendment to the 2011 Constitutional Declaration, defining the roles of the president, prime minister, and parliament, and outlining its own election roadmap. On 2 March, after several failed attempts, the High State Council (HSC)—which was established by the LPA to serve as an advisory body and now performs legislative functions—endorsed the amendment. Subsequently, the two bodies announced the establishment of a “joint 6+6 committee” to draft electoral laws.

In his February Council briefing—which took place prior to the HSC's endorsement of the constitutional amendment—Bathily described the legislation as “controversial within the Libyan political class and general citizenry” and criticised it for a perceived lack of clarity that failed to “address key contentious issues such as the eligibility criteria for presidential candidates”—an assessment that some independent analysts have echoed. At an 11 March press briefing, however, Bathily appeared to acknowledge that the 6+6 committee will have the primary responsibility for drafting electoral laws. He urged the body to “address all the gaps and shortcomings of the 13th Amendment within a reasonable timeframe, thus producing a credible and implementable constitutional and legal basis for the elections”. He further said that the UN “stand[s] ready to support the 6+6 in any way” and described the role of the HLPE as an auxiliary mechanism that will focus on related issues, such as election security and drafting a “code of good conduct” for candidates. On 16 March, the Security Council issued a presidential statement in which it welcomed “the gradual progress made on the constitutional framework for elections and the 13th amendment of the constitutional declaration” and said it was “encouraged by” the launch of the HLPE.

On the security track, the Secretary-General's most

UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2656](#) (28 October 2022) extended UNSMIL's mandate until 31 October 2023. [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2023/2](#) (16 March 2023) was about the situation in Libya in which the Security Council said it was encouraged by the launch of the Libyan High-Level Panel for Elections. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9223](#) (16 December 2022) was a briefing on UNSMIL. [Secretary-General's Report S/2022/932](#) (9 December 2022) was the 60-day report on UNSMIL. [Security Council Press Statement SC/15156](#) (20 December 2022) expressed, among other things, deep concern at the persistent political deadlock in Libya.

Libya

recent report on Libya, dated 9 December 2022, said that the 2020 ceasefire agreement continues to hold, although the security situation remains tense throughout the country. The report also noted that UNSMIL has continued to support the establishment of an effective Libyan ceasefire monitoring mechanism able to coordinate, monitor, and assess progress on the withdrawal of foreign forces, foreign fighters, and mercenaries. On 8 February, after a two-day meeting in Cairo that was chaired by Bathily, the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC)—which is entrusted with overseeing the security aspects of the Libyan peace process—and liaison committees from Libya, Sudan, and Niger reached agreement on an integrated coordination and data-exchange mechanism to facilitate the full withdrawal of mercenaries and foreign fighters from the country. In his closing address at that meeting, Bathily described the agreement as “an important step toward creating a favourable climate for the political process, including the organization of elections in 2023”. The mechanism was subsequently launched at the margins of a meeting of the Security Working Group of the Berlin Process International Follow-up Committee on Libya (IFCL) held in Tunis on 17 March.

Additionally, the JMC recently convened two meetings with eastern, western, and southern military commanders on the issue of election security. After the first meeting held on 15 March, the participants issued a joint statement affirming that they had “agreed to come together and move forward towards organizing free and fair elections in Libya this year” and stressing “the need to abstain from using force, violence, arrest, or threats for political or material gains or for regional or factional interests”. At the second meeting held on 27 March, the participants reaffirmed those commitments and emphasised “the need for the House of Representatives and the High Council of the State to complete the tasks entrusted with them” to advance the political process.

The country’s human rights and humanitarian situation remains a concern. In his February briefing, Bathily expressed regret that “the already limited civic space in Libya continues to be further restricted, silencing the voices of civil-society groups and activists”. The Secretary-General’s report observed that violations against migrants and refugees continue with impunity, including arbitrary detention “in inhumane and degrading conditions in both official and unofficial centres managed by state and non-state actors”. Similar findings were presented by the UN Independent Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on Libya—established by the Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2020—which, in its final report published on 27 March, concluded that “there are grounds to believe a wide array of war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed by State security forces and armed militia groups”, with migrants, in particular, having been “systematically tortured” and subjected to “sexual slavery”. In a joint letter dated 6 March, several international human rights organisations called on the HRC to follow up on the FFM’s findings by establishing an “accountability mechanism to continue documenting and reporting on the human rights and impunity crisis

in Libya and monitoring the implementation of the FFM’s recommendations”. In a related development, the co-chairs of the Working Group on International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights of the IFCL released a summary on 18 March of a series of dialogues they have facilitated with a range of Libyan civil society actors on the country’s “most pressing human rights issues as well as actions required to protect gains, overcome obstacles, and ultimately, to advance human rights in Libya”.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Security Council is to support the political momentum towards holding national elections in 2023. The adoption of the 13th constitutional amendment and the launch of the HLPE are two potentially positive developments in this regard, but it remains unclear whether the initiatives will ultimately reinforce or compete with one another: while the GNU has publicly expressed receptiveness to the UN-facilitated initiative, the HoR in a statement following Bathily’s February briefing took issue with his characterization of the constitutional amendment and accused him of bias. In this context, the Security Council’s presidential statement of 16 March can be viewed as an attempt to resolve tension between the two tracks while maintaining political pressure on the GNU and HoR to achieve tangible progress towards elections.

At the April briefing, Council members are likely to reiterate their expectation that all parties display the political will to meet their stated commitments through concrete action. In addition, some Council members are expected to express continued concern at the alarming human rights situation in the country, which remains particularly dire for civil society activists, migrants, women, and girls.

Council Dynamics

Council members remain united on the need for a Libyan-led inclusive process to hold elections that will restore political, security, and economic stability. However, there are differences of view about the best way forward. During the February briefing, several Council members—including France, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the UK, the US, and the A3 countries (Gabon, Ghana, and Mozambique)—expressed strong support for Bathily’s election initiative. China and Russia, however, voiced their general support for Bathily’s mediation efforts but were more reserved in their judgment of the HLPE. Russia acknowledged that “a solution to [the political stalemate] could be the organization of national elections”, yet cautioned against organising them “too hastily” and claimed that “it would be counterproductive to discard the achievements already made by the House of Representatives and the High State Council, in which so much work has been invested”. These divergent views were evident during negotiations on the recent presidential statement (For more, see our What’s in Blue story of 16 March) and may be reiterated at the April briefing.

Great Lakes Region (DRC)

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Peace and stability continue to elude DRC and the region. The deteriorating security situation in eastern DRC, with the military activities of various armed groups, has caused a major humanitarian crisis, displacing five million people and stoking tensions between countries of the region. In his statement marking the tenth anniversary of the PSC-F on 24 February, Xia noted the persistent peace and security challenges in the region and called on signatory countries of the PSC-F to renew their commitment to work towards restoring regional peace and stability.

On 17 February, the East African Community (EAC) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) held a mini-summit in Addis Ababa on the margins of the AU Summit to discuss the security situation in eastern DRC. The two organisations have been leading regional mediation efforts known respectively as the Nairobi and Luanda processes to address the situation in eastern DRC and ease the tensions between the DRC and Rwanda. The outcome of their mini-summit fed into the discussions at the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) meeting held the same day at the level of heads of state and government to consider the situation in the eastern DRC. The AUPSC, among other things, reaffirmed through its communiqué that the PSC-F “remains a viable instrument to support the DRC and institutions in the region to achieve peace and stability”, and called for its “urgent revitalization”.

Angolan President João Lourenço, the ICGLR Chair, engaged recently with the M23, a resurgent armed group operating in the DRC's North Kivu province that was dormant in the past decade and became active again in 2022, to secure a ceasefire, which was supposed to take effect on 7 March. Fighting continued unabated, however, with the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) accusing the M23 of violating the ceasefire. Subsequently, Angola decided to deploy 500 troops in North Kivu for 12 months to secure areas where the M23 is supposed to be stationed after a ceasefire and to protect members of the Ad-Hoc Verification Mechanism established under the Luanda process.

On 4 February, the EAC heads of state and government held their 20th extraordinary summit in Bujumbura, Burundi, to discuss the security situation in eastern DRC. They called for an immediate ceasefire by all parties and the withdrawal of all foreign armed groups. The EAC has set up its own monitoring and verification mechanism in addition to the existing mechanisms deployed by the ICGLR in eastern DRC. The EAC summit directed all troop-contributing countries of the EAC Regional Force (EACRF) to deploy their forces immediately. So far, Kenya and Burundi have done so, with Uganda and South Sudan expected to follow suit. The EAC facilitator for the Nairobi process, former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, was planning to convene a fourth round of dialogue

between the Congolese government and armed groups in mid-February in eastern DRC but it has not yet happened. (The previous three rounds of dialogue were held in Nairobi.) In January, Kenyatta met with the chairman and senior political and military leaders of the M-23 group in Mombasa, Kenya. In March, he met with Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi in Kinshasa, DRC.

The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) also focused on the situation in eastern DRC in the 31 January summit of its Troika—consisting of the chairperson, the incoming chairperson, and the outgoing chairperson of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence, and Security, currently Namibia, Zambia, and South Africa, respectively—in Windhoek, Namibia. The summit decided to initiate dialogue with the different sub-regional organisations that have deployed forces in the DRC to promote effective coordination of interventions in the DRC. SADC also sent a field assessment mission to eastern DRC from 27 February to 8 March. Furthermore, the situation in eastern DRC was a subject of discussion at the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), which held its ordinary summit in Kinshasa on 25 February. Tshisekedi handed over the rotating ECCAS chairmanship to Gabonese President Ali Bongo Ondimba. Rwanda, which is also a member of ECCAS, reportedly complained that it had been excluded from participating in the summit hosted by the DRC.

Council members visited the DRC from 9 to 12 March to assess the security situation in the country and the implementation of the mandate of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). They met with Congolese senior government officials, parliamentarians, political parties, civil society representatives, MONUSCO, and the UN country team. Council members also visited Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, to meet with provincial authorities and speak with internally displaced persons. (For coverage of the visiting mission, please read our “Dispatches from the Field” in What's in Blue.) At the time of writing, Council members were negotiating a draft presidential statement proposed by France, the penholder on the DRC and the Great Lakes, as a follow-up to the visit.

Women, Peace and Security

On 12 March, the last day of the Council's visiting mission to the DRC, Council members held a working breakfast with women civil society representatives and visited the Bushangara camp on the outskirts of Goma, which hosts internally displaced persons (IDPs). At the working breakfast, women civil society representatives highlighted the hardship that Congolese women had endured over the past two decades. Pointing to widespread rapes, including in IDP camps, they underscored that violence is being used against women and girls as a weapon of war.

The civil society representatives described recent attacks and violence against civilians perpetrated by armed groups, the economic insecurity faced by women in eastern DRC, and drew attention to the illegal exploitation of natural resources and the impact of the conflict on education. The representatives said that while women play a key role in supporting those affected by conflict, they are left out of peace processes and stressed the importance of peace for women's participation in the upcoming elections as both voters and candidates.

Council members assured the representatives that their testimonies will be considered in Council discussions and actions. Members also emphasised that the Council can only support efforts by the Congolese themselves, however, and encouraged the civil society representatives to work towards

Great Lakes Region (DRC)

finding local solutions by actively engaging with their government.

Ahead of the 29 March Council briefing on the DRC, the members that endorsed the 1 December 2021 Shared Commitments on Women, Peace and Security, joined by Ghana, Mozambique and the US in their national capacity, delivered a statement at the stakeout. The statement included a segment in French directed to women leaders in the DRC which said: “We heard you. Today we share your message to the Security Council. We will not spare our efforts to translate your recommendations into actions”.

Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Developments

The PBC submitted written advice on the Great Lakes region to Council members in a letter dated 21 October, ahead of the Council’s 26 October 2022 briefing on the situation. The PBC stressed the importance of involving civil society and traditional leaders in dialogue initiatives and underscored the need to promote the sustainable and transparent management of natural resources in the region. It urged the adoption and implementation of national action plans on youth, peace and security across the region in line with resolution 2250. The PBC also underlined the need for the Special Envoy to undertake a comprehensive mapping exercise on stabilisation efforts in the eastern part of the DRC and the wider region to promote strategic alignment.

On 31 October 2022, the PBC met on the Great Lakes region to be updated on political processes in the region and mobilise diplomatic and financial support for flagship initiatives derived from the UN Strategy for Peacebuilding, Prevention and Resolution of Conflicts in the Great Lakes Region Action Plan. The session included briefings by Special Envoy Xia; the Special Envoy of EAC Facilitator of the Nairobi Process, Macharia Kamau; and MONUSCO Deputy Special Representative and Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in the DRC Bruno Lemarquis.

Burundi informed the PBC in November 2022 of its decision to end the commission’s country configuration on Burundi, which was established in 2006 as one of the PBC’s first agenda situations. A 30 November 2022 PBC meeting explored possible forms of future cooperation between the PBC and Burundi. The configuration, which had been chaired by Switzerland since 2009, officially concluded on 31 December 2022.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council remains how to comprehensively address the persistent security challenge facing the DRC and the region. In this regard, Council members may express concern over the increasing insecurity in eastern DRC and reiterate their support for regional efforts through the Nairobi and Luanda processes.

The other major issue is how to continue supporting the full

and effective implementation of the PSC-F to promote peace and security in the Great Lakes region. A possible option is for Council members to adopt a resolution marking the 10th anniversary of the PSC-F, and requesting the Secretary-General to present, as part of his next biannual report, concrete recommendations, following consultations with the signatory states and guarantors, on how the PSC-F can be revitalised.

Council Dynamics

Council members are broadly supportive of addressing the root causes and drivers of conflict in the Great Lakes region through a comprehensive regional approach. They are likely to continue to emphasise that there is no military solution to the situation in eastern DRC and reaffirm their support for a peaceful solution through dialogue within the framework of the ongoing regional initiatives. But they may also stress the need for enhanced coordination and harmonisation of regional efforts, with the support of MONUSCO and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region. In the context of addressing the root causes of conflict, Council members may continue to support efforts to counter the illegal exploitation of natural resources and underline the need to implement the various regional and continental frameworks to identify and trace minerals illegally exploited from the DRC.

During the March visiting mission, the Congolese authorities accused Rwanda of stoking the conflict by continuing to support the M23 Movement, and in this regard, referred to the findings of the most recent report of the Group of Experts assisting the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee, dated 16 December 2022. Calling on Council members not to remain silent in the face of evidence provided by this report, the officials asked that sanctions be imposed on Rwanda. While this does not currently appear feasible, the Council may consider designating individuals and entities that are engaged in undermining the DRC’s peace and security in the context of the 1533 DRC Sanctions regime. Rwanda is also said to have proposed several names for designation under the 1533 DRC sanctions regime; some Council members have asked to put these requests on hold.

Western Sahara

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

On 27 October 2022, the Security Council adopted resolution 2654, renewing the mandate of MINURSO for another year, until

31 October 2023. It was adopted with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (Russia and then-Council member Kenya). The resolution introduced new language stressing the importance for “all concerned expanding on their positions in order to advance a solution”. It seems that the term “all concerned” was inserted as ambiguous language to accommodate different views regarding who are considered the parties to the conflict, while giving de Mistura space to determine how to move forward with the political process. The resolution also expressed support for “building on the progress and framework of the former Personal Envoy” and strongly encouraged Morocco, the Polisario Front, Algeria, and Mauritania to engage

UN DOCUMENTS ON WESTERN SAHARA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2654 (27 October 2022) renewed the mandate of MINURSO until 31 October 2023. **Secretary-General’s Report S/2022/733** (3 October 2022) was the latest Secretary-General’s report concerning the situation in Western Sahara. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9168** (27 October 2022) contained the explanation of votes after the adoption of resolution 2654 renewing MINURSO’s mandate.

Western Sahara

with the Personal Envoy. In addition, the resolution introduced new language calling for the resumption of the safe and regular resupply of MINURSO team sites. This language appears to have been added in response to movement restrictions imposed on the mission by the Polisario Front, which have negatively affected the serviceability and lifecycle of equipment, according to the Secretary-General's October 2022 report on Western Sahara. (For more, see our What's in Blue story of 26 October 2022.)

De Mistura has faced complex regional dynamics as Personal Envoy. Only two months prior to his assuming this position in October 2021, Algeria suspended diplomatic ties with Morocco. In March 2022, Spain shifted its long-standing position of "active neutrality" on Western Sahara by saying it supported Morocco's autonomy plan for the territory, which Spain governed until 1975. (Morocco's autonomy plan, which it submitted to the UN in 2007, calls for integrating the territory into Morocco, with the Sahrawi people managing their internal affairs while being represented externally by Morocco.) On 8 June 2022, Algeria announced it was suspending its cooperation treaty with Spain, in force since 2002, because of Spain's recognition of Morocco's autonomy plan.

The tense relations between Morocco and Algeria were apparent during the annual African Union (AU) summit held in Addis Ababa from 17 to 19 February. During the summit, the divisions between Morocco, on one hand, and Algeria and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), on the other, prevented the appointment of a North African country representative as Vice-President of the AU Bureau.

On 16 December 2022, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna met Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita in Rabat. In a press conference following the meeting, Colonna noted that France's position on the Moroccan autonomy plan remains favourable to Morocco. She added that France's position is "clear and steady" while noting that her country supports a ceasefire and the efforts undertaken by de Mistura. She also emphasised the need for the resumption of negotiations between the parties for a "just and realistic solution". In a 21 December 2022 press briefing, the French Foreign Ministry announced that Colonna's visit was part of the preparations for a state visit that will take place in the first quarter of 2023. It had been expected that French President Emmanuel Macron would visit Morocco in mid-January, but at the time of writing, the visit had reportedly been postponed to April.

On 5 January, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell travelled to Morocco on a two-day visit to meet, among others, the Moroccan head of government, Aziz Akhannouch and Bourita. During a 5 January press conference following the meeting with Bourita, Borrell noted that the EU supports the UN process on Western Sahara and the initiatives of de Mistura to "achieve a political solution that is fair, realistic, pragmatic, sustainable and mutually acceptable and based on compromise, in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council".

Borrell also visited Algeria on 12-13 March, where he met Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Prime Minister Aïmene Boudjarradj, and Minister for Foreign Affairs Ramtane Lamamra. Following the meeting, Borrell reportedly called for an end to obstacles to trade between Algeria and Spain that have been in place since June 2022.

On 10 March, de Mistura held a telephone conversation with Tariq Ahmad, UK Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Following the conversation, Lord Ahmad tweeted that the UK strongly supports the work undertaken by de Mistura and encouraged all parties and international partners "to work towards a renewed political process".

On 16 March, UN Secretary-General António Guterres announced the appointment of Major General Md. Fakhrul Ahsan (Bangladesh) as the Force Commander of MINURSO. Ahsan succeeds Major General Zia Ur Rehman (Pakistan), who completed his tenure at the end of March.

On 20 March, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Bourita in Washington, D.C. According to a press release circulated after the meeting, Blinken and Bourita affirmed their support for the efforts undertaken by de Mistura "in advancing an enduring and dignified political solution to the Western Sahara conflict". In addition, Blinken underlined Morocco's autonomy plan as "serious, credible, and realistic, and one potential approach to meet the aspirations of the people of Western Sahara".

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members to consider is how to bring all parties to the negotiating table. Resolution 2654 called on all parties to resume negotiations with a view to "achieving a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara".

Significant obstacles remain in the peace process. The Polisario Front announced in November 2020 that it would no longer respect the ceasefire agreement it signed with Morocco in 1991.

An important issue, which is described in the Secretary-General's 3 October 2022 MINURSO report, is the constraints on MINURSO's logistical supply and maintenance of team sites east of the berm, which purportedly have serious consequences for the mission's ability to sustain its field presences in the difficult conditions of the region.

The human rights situation is another issue of concern. The Secretary-General's 3 October 2022 report notes that OHCHR was unable to conduct any visits to Western Sahara for the seventh consecutive year despite multiple requests and despite the Security Council strongly encouraging enhanced cooperation in resolution 2602 (2021). The report added that OHCHR continued to receive allegations of human rights violations in Western Sahara, reportedly committed by Moroccan security forces.

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

Council Dynamics

The US, the penholder on Western Sahara, recognised Morocco's sovereignty over the region in December 2020 during the Trump administration. The Biden administration has not changed this position. France has traditionally supported the Moroccan autonomy plan, and Gabon and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are also supportive of Morocco. Council members Ghana and Mozambique maintain diplomatic relations with SADR.

Divisions among Council members were apparent in the meeting

Western Sahara

on Western Sahara on 27 October 2022. In its explanation of vote following the adoption of resolution 2654, Russia noted that “[i]n the past few years, the resolutions on the renewal of MINURSO’s mandate have included amendments that in our view harm the unbiased and impartial approach needed to resolve the issue of Western Sahara”. It objected to the references to the “round-table format” meetings, calling them irrelevant and limiting the mediation efforts

of de Mistura. In addition, Russia noted that the final settlement should be based on mutually acceptable outcomes that could contribute to a fair political resolution for Morocco and the Polisario Front and provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. On the other hand, the UAE expressed support for Morocco’s autonomy plan, while recognising its sovereignty over the entire Western Sahara.

Kosovo

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council is expected to hold its first briefing this year on the situation in Kosovo. Special Representative and head of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) Caroline Ziadeh will brief on recent developments and the Secretary-General’s latest report.

Key Recent Developments

Throughout the latter half of 2022, tensions in northern Kosovo escalated because of a long-standing license plate dispute. Between 2011 and 2021, Kosovo and Serbia had an agreement under which Kosovo permitted vehicles displaying either KS (Kosovo) license plates, which were acceptable to Serbia, or RKS (Republic of Kosovo) plates, which were not. When the agreement expired on 15 September 2021, Pristina began enforcing a new policy requiring all vehicles in Kosovo to display the RKS license plate, leading hundreds of Kosovo Serbs to protest at the border. After two days of EU-facilitated negotiations in Brussels, a provisional agreement was reached on 30 September 2021, under which special stickers would replace national symbols on vehicle license plates.

On 29 June 2022, however, Pristina announced that it would move forward with implementing its policy, requiring all vehicles with Serbian plates to re-register with RKS plates by 30 September 2022. On 31 July 2022, Pristina postponed the implementation of the policy by one month. Facing pressure from the EU and the Quint countries (France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and the US), Prime Minister Albin Kurti of Kosovo announced on 28 October 2022 a gradual implementation of the policy, with warnings issued during the first three weeks, followed by fines, and then by vehicle confiscation by 21 April 2023.

On 3 November 2022, Kosovo’s interior minister, Xhelal Sveçla, suspended the police chief of northern Kosovo because he refused to issue warnings to drivers with Serbian license plates. In response, hundreds of Kosovo Serb judges, lawmakers, and police officers resigned on 5 November, and thousands of people protested in Mitrovica the following day. On 23 November, facing continued international pressure, Belgrade and Pristina reached an agreement to end the license plate dispute, with Kosovo allowing Serbian plates and Serbia ceasing to issue plates with Kosovo cities’ denominations.

In late December 2022, as tensions eased, the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue shifted its focus from crisis management to advancing the normalisation of relations and the two sides’ respective

European futures. On 15 December, Kosovo submitted a formal application for EU membership.

At a 27 February meeting in Brussels, Kurti and Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić agreed in principle to an EU proposal on normalising ties. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell and the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue Miroslav Lajčák facilitated the meeting. The proposal was based on an earlier draft prepared by French and German diplomats in September 2022. The 11-point agreement specifies that Kosovo and Serbia develop normal, good-neighbourly relations with each other on the basis of equal rights and recognise each other’s documents and national symbols, including passports and license plates. The text also stipulates that neither can represent the other in the international sphere and that Serbia will not object to Kosovo’s membership in international organisations.

While the agreement does not refer to the issue of establishing an association of Serb-majority municipalities in northern Kosovo, it commits Kosovo to forming “specific arrangements and guarantees... to ensure an appropriate level of self-management” for the Serbian community in Kosovo. The agreement also says that the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo should be formalised and a strong level of protection afforded to Serbian religious and cultural heritage sites.

On 18 March, Borrell convened a further meeting in Ohrid, North Macedonia, during which Kurti and Vučić agreed on an annex outlining steps for the agreement’s implementation. The annex says that the 11 articles comprising the agreement will be implemented independently of each other and that all implementation-related discussions will take place under the EU-facilitated dialogue. It also notes that the agreement and annex will become integral parts of the parties’ respective EU accession processes.

In a 19 March post on Twitter, UNMIK said that Ziadeh welcomes the progress achieved in Ohrid and calls on both sides to “sustain their constructive engagement and fulfil their commitments in good faith”. In a statement the following day, Secretary-General António Guterres expressed the UN’s commitment to supporting the implementation of all agreements reached through the EU-facilitated dialogue.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a November 2022 statement, Jerome Bouyjou, Chief of UNMIK’s Human Rights Component and Representative of the UN High Commissioner for

UN DOCUMENTS ON KOSOVO Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9155 (18 October 2022) was a meeting on the situation in Kosovo.

Kosovo

Human Rights in Kosovo, commented on the third report on the human rights situation in Kosovo. Written jointly by a group of 37 key non-government organisations with support from UNMIK, the report provides insights into a wide range of issues, focusing on cross-cutting human rights topics such as “corruption and human rights, transitional justice, the right to freedom of expression and the environment and human rights”. Bouyjou noted that human rights reporting, analysis and monitoring by civil society organisations is “crucial to advance human rights in Kosovo and increase the accountability of institutions”.

Key Issues and Options

The Council’s main priority is to maintain stability in Kosovo and promote the de-escalation of tensions in the north. It will continue to monitor diplomatic efforts to advance the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue and any efforts towards reaching a final, legally binding agreement on Kosovo. In this regard, Council members could consider pursuing a presidential statement welcoming the 27 February agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia and calling on both sides to implement the 18 March annex in good faith.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members are united in supporting the EU-facilitated dialogue to establish conditions for the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Several members—including Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the UK, and the US—commended the implementation agreement. During the Council’s 18 October 2022 briefing, however, Russia criticised the EU, arguing that the French-German proposal “was designed to force Belgrade to agree with Kosovo’s statehood”.

Deep divisions among permanent members have continued to characterise the Council’s approach to the issue. Among the five permanent Council members, France, the UK, and the US recognise Kosovo’s independence and tend to be supportive of its government; China and Russia do not recognise its independence and strongly support Serbia’s position and its claim to territorial integrity. Seven elected members (Albania, Gabon, Ghana, Japan, Malta, Switzerland, and the UAE) recognise Kosovo’s independence, while three (Brazil, Ecuador, and Mozambique) do not.

The issue of modifying UNMIK’s mandate with a view to its

possible drawdown is another point of contention among Council members. The US has been the most vocal proponent of ending UNMIK’s mandate as well as reducing the frequency of briefings, citing the level of stability in Kosovo. Similarly, the UK has called for a review of UNMIK’s mandate, arguing that conditions on the ground have completely changed since UNMIK was established 23 years ago. At the 18 October briefing, Albania proposed reducing the frequency of Council meetings to only one per year.

While a representative of Kosovo typically participates in the Council’s briefings under Rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure, Russia may attempt to challenge this practice at next month’s meeting. During the Council’s briefing on the situation in Ukraine on 17 March, Russia proposed that Daria Morozova, in her capacity as “ombudsperson of the Donetsk Region,” brief the Council under Rule 39. In response, the US called for a procedural vote, characterising Russia’s request as an attempt “to implicitly extend recognition to illegitimate authorities”. Additionally, the US argued that Morozova’s participation would be a violation of General Assembly Resolution ES-11/4, which called on all states to refrain from any dealings that might be interpreted as recognising an altered status of the Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine.

The Council voted not to allow Morozova to participate, after which Russia argued that the US’ reasoning could also be applied to Kosovo’s participation in Council meetings under Rule 39. According to Russia, that participation is “a clear violation of [Security Council] Resolution 1244” of 1999, which established UNMIK. Russia then hinted that it might raise this issue at the upcoming briefing on the situation in Kosovo. The US cautioned Council members to be wary of attempts to draw reductionist parallels to other situations that are not comparable. Supporting the US position, Albania noted that in a 2008 advisory opinion, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) determined that Kosovo’s declaration of independence on 17 February 2008 did not violate international law, while in March 2022, the ICJ called on Russia to immediately suspend its military operation in Ukraine. Albania stressed that Kosovo and Serbia are negotiating to find mutually agreed solutions through dialogue, rather than war.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council will hold its quarterly open debate on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. It appears that Russia, April’s Council President, has chosen to convene the debate at ministerial level. Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov is expected to chair the meeting. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland is expected to brief.

Key Recent Developments

In his 22 March Council briefing, Wennesland drew members’ attention to the significant increase in daily violence in the West Bank and Israel in the recent period. He said that between 8 December 2022 and 13 March, 82 Palestinians “were killed by Israeli security forces during demonstrations, clashes, security operations, attacks against Israelis and other incidents”, while four were killed “in a growing number of attacks by Israeli settlers”. During the same period, 13 Israeli civilians were killed by Palestinians “in shooting and ramming attacks, clashes and other incidents”.

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION Security Council Resolution S/RES/2334 (23 December 2016) condemned Israeli settlements; it was adopted with 14 votes in favour and a US abstention. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2023/1 (20 February 2023) reiterated that continued Israeli settlement activity is imperilling the viability of the two-state solution.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Recent incidents have included the single deadliest Israel Defense Forces (IDF) operation in the West Bank since 2005, resulting in the killing of 11 Palestinians during a 22 February raid in the West Bank city of Nablus, and the 27 January Palestinian shooting attack in East Jerusalem that led to six deaths, which Wennesland identified as the deadliest attack against Israelis since 2005. Following a Palestinian attack in which two Israeli brothers were killed on 26 February, hundreds of Israeli settlers carried out—often in the presence of IDF soldiers—multiple attacks in the West Bank town of Huwwara, during which Palestinian houses and cars were set on fire and a Palestinian man was killed in what has been described as “the worst such violence in decades”.

Settlement activity and seizures and demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures have intensified in the recent period. On 19 March, OCHA reported that the month of February “accounted for the highest monthly number of structures demolished in East Jerusalem since April 2019”, noting that a total of 36 structures were demolished, compared with a monthly average of 11 in 2022. Regarding settlement activity, the Israeli government announced on 12 February that, in response to recent terrorist attacks in Jerusalem, it would retroactively authorise nine West Bank outposts that were built without the permission of Israeli authorities and would approve the construction of new residential units in existing settlements.

Following this announcement, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement on 20 February expressing “deep concern and dismay” at Israel’s decision and reiterating that continued Israeli settlement activity is imperilling the viability of the two-state solution. (For background, see our 20 February What’s in Blue story.) Nevertheless, following through on its 12 February announcement, on 22 and 23 February, Israel approved plans advancing over 7,000 housing units in settlements across the West Bank, significantly more than the units approved in 2022 and 2021, which totalled 4,427 and 3,645, respectively. On 21 March, the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) repealed the provisions of the 2005 Disengagement Law pertaining to four northern West Bank settlements that were evacuated concurrent with Israel’s disengagement from the Gaza Strip.

On 19 March, senior officials from Israel, the Palestinian Authority, the US, Egypt, and Jordan held a meeting in the Egyptian town of Sharm El Sheikh to discuss, according to the Joint Communiqué issued after the summit, “ways and means to de-escalate tensions on the ground between Palestinians and Israelis”. This meeting followed the 26 February summit of the same five parties in the Jordanian city of Aqaba.

The 19 March communiqué said that Israel and the Palestinian Authority “agreed to develop a mechanism to curb and counter violence, incitement, and inflammatory statements and actions” and that the five parties “agreed to establish a mechanism to take the necessary steps towards improving the economic conditions of the Palestinian people” and to enhance the fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority. According to the communiqué, both mechanisms “will report to the quintet leadership in April, in a resumed session of the meeting in Sharm El Sheikh”. The communiqué reiterated some of the commitments undertaken by the parties in Aqaba, such as Israel’s pledge “to stop discussion of any new settlement units for 4 months, and to stop authorization of any outposts for 6 months”. While these meetings have brought Israeli and Palestinian officials to

the same table, analysts have argued that, far from signifying a restart of the peace process, the initiative is limited to the short-term goal of lowering tensions and does not directly address key issues such as settler violence and demolitions.

Large-scale demonstrations in Israel against the government’s plans for a major judicial overhaul have also characterised the recent period. On 26 March, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dismissed Defence Minister Yoav Gallant after Gallant argued that the government’s plans are causing a “rift” within Israeli society that is “penetrating the IDF and security agencies”, therefore posing “a clear and tangible danger to the security of the state”. Following mounting national and international pressure, including from the US, Netanyahu announced on 27 March the suspension of the vote on the proposed judicial overhaul until the summer.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 3 March, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held an interactive dialogue with High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk regarding his report on the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to accountability and justice.

In his statement, Türk emphasised that the situation in the OPT is a “tragedy, above all for the Palestinian people”, noting that Israelis also suffer from the same situation and have a right to live in peace in their state, just as Palestinians do, in a state that is “recognised and viable”. He observed that 2022 saw the highest number of Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces since 2005. His report found that 131 Palestinians were killed in the context of law enforcement activities, including 65 unarmed persons, noting that since 2017, fewer than 15 percent of these killings have been investigated. Türk also noted that 13 Israelis were killed by Palestinians during the period covered by the report and that 2022 saw the highest number of Israelis killed since 2016. He condemned the violence, saying that for it to end, the occupation must end.

Key Issues and Options

The overarching issue for the Council remains determining how it can better support the resumption of political negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians in order to move towards a resolution of the conflict and achieve a two-state solution. Members continue to be concerned about the deterioration of the security situation and violence against civilians in the West Bank and Israel. Other ongoing issues include deterring developments that undermine the viability of the two-state solution and a peaceful resolution of the conflict, such as the expansion of Israeli settlements, forced evictions and demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures, and the alteration of the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem.

In April, the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the Jewish observance of Passover will overlap. In 2021, clashes over restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities on gatherings at the Damascus Gate Plaza in the Old City of Jerusalem were a key factor contributing to the May 2021 conflict between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza. At the 22 March Council meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”, several members called for restraint ahead of the start of this delicate period and for upholding the historic status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem. One option would be to issue a press statement calling for the status quo at the holy sites to be upheld, to avoid any unilateral measures and provocations, and to maintain calm and restraint.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Members that pledged to make Women, Peace and Security (WPS) a top priority by endorsing the 1 December 2021 Statement of Shared Commitments on WPS may consider stressing the importance of including a gender analysis in UN reporting on this file and integrating WPS language in related Council products.

Council Dynamics

There is broad support among Council members for the two-state solution. With varying degrees of emphasis, members also routinely call for an end to settlement activity and demolitions and condemn violence against civilians, including acts of terror and settler-related violence. For instance, at the 22 March meeting, several members expressed concern at Israel's repeal of sections of the 2005 Disengagement Law.

The 20 February presidential statement was the first to be adopted by the Council on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” in over eight years and the first formal Council outcome since resolution 2334, which was adopted in 2016. The statement is an indicator of where the lowest common denominator of the Council's consensus on Israeli settlements currently lies. While the statement reiterates that settlement activity imperils the viability of the two-state solution and calls for full respect for international humanitarian law, it does not contain language echoing resolution 2334 on the illegality of settlements under international law or directly demanding that Israel cease all settlement activities.

The statement should also not be interpreted as marking a

breakthrough in Council dynamics on this file that would result in a more proactive and outspoken Council. Members could not achieve consensus on proposed press elements following the 28 February closed consultations on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”.

Russia has regularly accused the US of blocking the Council's adoption of any substantive decision on the Middle East peace process and the efforts of the Middle East Quartet—which consists of the EU, Russia, the UN, and the US. In a likely reference to the recent meetings of Israeli, Palestinian, US, Egyptian, and Jordanian officials in Aqaba and Sharm El Sheikh, Russia accused the US during the 22 March Council meeting of trying to monopolise the peace process and re-format it as best suits Washington, of imposing an “economic peace” on the Palestinians, and of forcing “back-room schemes” on the parties, thereby bypassing the Security Council.

Several other members, however, referred to the Aqaba and Sharm El Sheikh meetings in positive terms and stressed the importance for the parties to observe the commitments undertaken during these meetings. Many voiced concern over, and condemned, the remarks by Israeli Finance Minister and leader of the far-right Religious Zionist Party Bezalel Smotrich, who on 1 March called for the town of Huwwara to be “wiped out” and on 20 March claimed—while speaking at a podium featuring the outline of a map of Israel's borders extended to include the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and Jordan—that “there's no such thing as a Palestinian people”.

Haiti

Expected Council Action

In April, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing from newly appointed Special Representative and head of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) María Isabel Salvador on recent developments and the Secretary-General's 90-day report on BINUH. A representative of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is also expected to brief.

BINUH's mandate expires on 15 July 2023.

Key Recent Developments

Haiti remains mired in a multidimensional crisis marked by political gridlock and significant security and humanitarian challenges. In her January briefing to the Security Council, former Special Representative for Haiti and head of BINUH Helen La Lime invoked the 13th anniversary of the 2010 Haiti earthquake and warned that “years of hard-fought recovery gains are being undone”.

The country's political impasse remains a key concern. On 9 January, a symbolic milestone was reached when the terms of the last ten remaining senators expired, leaving the country without a single democratically elected official. Efforts to organise elections and restore the legitimacy of public institutions have achieved only mixed results. On 21 December 2022, Prime Minister Ariel Henry—who

assumed office after the assassination of Prime Minister Jovenel Moïse in July 2021—signed a document titled “The National Consensus for an Inclusive Transition and Transparent Elections”, along with representatives of political parties, civil society organisations, and members of the private sector. The document outlines the necessary steps for holding elections in the country, stipulating a 14-month transition period, with general elections to be held in 2023 and a new elected government to enter office on 7 February 2024. To facilitate this process, the document calls for the establishment of a “High Transitional Council” and a “Control Body for Government Action”, which will be responsible for promoting a political dialogue among various factions and the proper functioning of public institutions during the transitional period. On 6 February, Henry formally installed the High Transitional Council, comprising three members from the country's political, business and civil sectors.

This transition process has not garnered universal domestic support, however. The Secretary-General's latest report on BINUH, dated 17 January, said that the leadership of the Montana Group—a coalition of civil society organisations that had previously put forward a transition plan seeking a two-year transitional government under different interim leadership—had rejected the national consensus document, labelling it a “manoeuvre designed for electioneering

UN DOCUMENTS ON HAITI Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2653 (21 October 2022) established a sanctions regime on Haiti, including targeted assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo measures. S/RES/2645 (15 July 2022) renewed the mandate of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) for one year. **Secretary-General's Reports S/2023/41** (17 January 2023) was the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on Haiti. S/2022/747 (8 October 2022) outlined options for enhanced security support to Haiti, submitted in line with resolution 2645 of 15 July. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9247** (24 January 2023) was on the situation in Haiti.

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purposes”. Additionally, according to Haitian local media reports, the ten political parties that secured the most votes during the last presidential election in 2016 have not acceded to the document. During the Council’s January briefing on Haiti, several members cautiously welcomed the signing of the document but urged stakeholders to seek a broader consensus.

Meanwhile, the country’s security and humanitarian situations continue to deteriorate. While the UN estimated in December 2022 that approximately 60 percent of Port-au-Prince, the capital, was controlled by armed gangs, some analysts now believe the number is closer to 90 percent. The Haitian National Police (HNP) have reportedly retreated from large parts of the city, urging “more citizen participation” to fill the security vacuum. This growing instability has fuelled increasingly dire humanitarian conditions. According to the most recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification survey—conducted by a group of humanitarian organisations and inter-governmental institutions—nearly five million Haitians (almost half the population) are experiencing acute food insecurity. Additionally, there are an estimated 155,000 internally displaced persons in the country, which according to the Secretary-General’s January report represents an increase of 77 percent since the end of August 2022. These trends are being exacerbated by the resurgence of cholera in the country: since the first reported case in October 2022, the number of suspected cases has exceeded 20,000, according to the Secretary-General’s report. Reflecting the country’s worsening conditions, the UN’s 2023 humanitarian appeal for Haiti will reportedly call for \$715 million, which is more than double last year’s appeal and the highest since the 2010 earthquake.

In October 2022, seeking to stabilise the country’s security situation and stem the multidimensional crisis, the Haitian government appealed for the immediate deployment of an “international specialised force” to temporarily reinforce the efforts of the HNP to combat gangs. Subsequently, Secretary-General António Guterres submitted to the Security Council a special report outlining options to enhance security support for Haiti, requested by resolution 2645 of 15 July 2022, which most recently renewed BINUH’s mandate. The report recommended that “[o]ne or several Member States, acting bilaterally at the invitation of and in cooperation with the Government of Haiti, could deploy, as a matter of urgency, a rapid action force” to support the HNP. In her briefings to the Council in October 2022 and January, La Lime reiterated the Secretary-General’s call.

The Security Council has yet to respond to Haiti’s request. At the Council’s October 2022 meeting on Haiti, the US noted that it and then-Council member Mexico (co-penholders on Haiti) were working on a resolution that would “authorize a non-UN international security assistance mission to help improve the security situation”. The US added that such a mission would be “led by a partner country with the deep, necessary experience required for such an effort to be effective” and would “operate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter”. At the time of writing, no member state had indicated its willingness to lead or participate in such a mission. According to media reports, the US had identified Canada as its preferred candidate, but Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has publicly expressed scepticism about taking on this responsibility, instead pledging other forms of support to Haiti. In addition, Haitian civil society appears

divided on the issue, with some opinion polls showing a majority in favour, but some civil society activists and analysts arguing that such a deployment would primarily serve the political interests of the current unelected government. The initiative now appears to have stalled, and neither the US nor Ecuador (which has replaced Mexico as co-penholder) explicitly referred to the deployment of an international force during the Council’s January meeting on Haiti.

On 1 March, the Secretary-General announced the appointment of Maria Isabel Salvador (Ecuador) to replace La Lime as Special Representative for Haiti and head of BINUH. The April meeting on Haiti will be the Council’s first since Salvador assumed her duties.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During the Council’s January meeting on Haiti, La Lime noted that gang-related violence in the country has “reached levels not seen in decades”, as more than 2,100 murders and 1,300 kidnappings were committed in 2022, representing an increase in these crimes for the fourth consecutive year. According to BINUH, this trend has continued in 2023: from the beginning of the year to 15 March, 531 people were killed and 277 kidnapped in gang-related incidents that took place mainly in Port-au-Prince. The situation is particularly dire for vulnerable populations: from 2021 to 2022, the UN has reported a nine-fold increase in violence targeting schools, leading to repeated school closures, and a 45 percent increase in documented incidents of sexual violence against women and girls. During a visit to the country in February, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk said the estimated 200 gangs operating in the capital are “perpetrating a near permanent climate of terror” and described the situation as “a living nightmare”.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Security Council is how to support Haitian authorities in addressing the country’s security crisis. The deployment of an international force authorised by the Council is one option, but in the absence of a country willing to lead such an operation, these deliberations seem to have reached an impasse.

Another option may be to designate more individuals under the Council’s sanctions regime for Haiti, established by resolution 2653, which the Council adopted on 21 October 2022. Currently, only one person is designated under the regime: Jimmy Chérizier (also known as “Barbeque”), who heads an alliance of Haitian gangs known as the “G9 Family and Allies”. At the Council’s January meeting on Haiti, the US said it is “identifying additional targets involved in the unrest in Haiti to nominate at the United Nations”.

The Security Council may also consider changes to BINUH’s mandate, which expires on 15 July. The Council established BINUH as a special political mission in 2019 with resolution 2476, based on Chapter VI of the UN Charter relating to “the peaceful settlement of disputes”. This mission followed the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH, 2004-2017) and the UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH, 2017-19), larger peacekeeping operations established under Chapter VII of the Charter, which authorises the use of force. Although it remains unclear whether Council members have the political will to mandate a new multidimensional peacekeeping operation, there appears to be growing recognition that BINUH’s mandate is not currently fit for purpose given the scale of the challenges Haiti is facing. Consequently, in the absence of an international force authorised by the Security Council, a recalibration of BINUH’s

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mandate may be an alternative. The US has reportedly begun considering this option.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their concern for the spiralling situation in Haiti. They generally agree on the need for a multidimensional Haitian-led political solution that addresses both security and socioeconomic challenges. Notably, this consensus includes the use of UN sanctions as a tool to target individuals fomenting violence.

Views diverge on other possible Council responses, however. Co-penholders Ecuador and the US, as well as other members such as Albania, Brazil, and the A3 countries (Gabon, Ghana, and Mozambique), appear still to support the deployment of an international force as requested by the Haitian government and recommended by the Secretary-General, but other members such as China and Russia have cautioned against such a measure. At the Council's January meeting on Haiti, China urged the international community to "take

into full consideration the various views within Haiti and draw the appropriate lessons from failed external interventions so as to avoid repeating those mistakes".

This difference of opinion also appears linked to Council members' views of the current Haitian government led by Henry. A majority of members have encouraged the government to engage with Montanans signatories to build stronger support around the national consensus document. Members in favour of an international force have also voiced general support for the government's efforts. By contrast, China and Russia have been more critical of Henry's leadership and have highlighted the concerns voiced by opposition groups. At the Council's January meeting, the Chinese representative said that the "crisis of political legitimacy is the fundamental crisis in Haiti", while the Russian representative similarly said that "the legitimacy crisis is one of the key obstacles to breaking the country's vicious cycle of lawlessness, violence and socioeconomic degradation".

Syria

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Syria continues to grapple with the devastating humanitarian consequences of the 6 February earthquake and its aftershocks. According to OCHA's 16 March situation report, at least 5,791 people were killed and 10,041 injured in Syria, including 4,377 dead and 7,692 injured in north-west Syria. The report notes that the healthcare system is at risk of collapse in some areas.

Syria continues to suffer from an outbreak of cholera, which has exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation. According to OCHA's 28 February situation report on the cholera outbreak in Syria, 92,649 suspected cases, including 101 deaths attributed to the disease, were reported across the country between 25 August 2022 and 15 February.

The opening of two additional border crossings—Bab al-Salam and Al Ra'ee—in north-west Syria has allowed the UN and other humanitarian organisations to accelerate the delivery of aid to people in need. According to data provided by OCHA, at the time of writing, a total of 1202 trucks carrying humanitarian supplies from seven UN agencies have crossed to north-west Syria from Türkiye since 9 February through three border crossings: Bab al-Hawa (932 trucks), Bab al-Salam (225 trucks), and Al Ra'ee (45 trucks).

On 11 March, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi concluded a five-day visit to earthquake-affected areas of Syria and Türkiye. In a 13 March press release, Grandi noted that "much more humanitarian aid and early recovery resources are needed" to allow people to rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

On 16 March, Council members held a meeting on Syria under

"any other business" at the request of China and Russia. OCHA Deputy Director of Operations and Advocacy Ghada Eltahir Mudawi and Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas Miroslav Jenča briefed Council members on the impact of the 7 March airstrikes on the Aleppo airport, allegedly conducted by Israel, on the delivery of humanitarian aid to earthquake victims. According to the Syrian Ministry of Transport, the airport was forced to shut down, and all flights carrying earthquake aid were diverted to Damascus and Latakia. According to Syrian officials, the Aleppo airport was hit again by Israeli airstrikes on 22 March, in the third attack on the airport in six months. According to a 22 March Reuters article, regional intelligence sources said that the 22 March airstrikes "hit an underground munitions depot linked to the nearby Nairab military airport, where missile systems delivered on several Iranian military planes had been stored".

On 21 March, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths visited Syria, where he met Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and Foreign Minister Fayssal Mekdad. Deputy Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Farhan Haq said later that day that during these meetings Griffiths had emphasised the need for expanded humanitarian access to continue to address the growing needs throughout Syria.

The international community has mobilised support in the past weeks to address the myriad of new and ongoing humanitarian challenges in the country. On 20 March, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the Prime Minister of Sweden, Ulf Kristersson, co-hosted an international donors' conference attended by 60 delegations from the EU and its member states and partners, including the UN and international financial institutions. The conference resulted in a total pledge of 950 million euros in grants for Syria.

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA Security Council Resolution 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. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9291 (23 March 2023) was a briefing on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria.

Syria

At the time of writing, the flash appeal for earthquake relief in Syria was 78.6 percent funded, and the humanitarian response plan for 2023 was 5.7 percent funded.

On 21 March, a meeting of envoys focused on Syria was held in Amman to discuss the situation in the country in the aftermath of the recent earthquakes. The envoys of Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Norway, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the UK, the US, the EU, and the League of Arab States attended the meeting. In a 23 March joint statement, the representatives called for a nationwide ceasefire and for unhindered humanitarian access to all Syrians through all modalities, including cross-border and cross-line (that is, across domestic frontlines from Syrian government-held areas into areas outside government control). They also called for the expansion of UN cross-border aid and further supported the efforts undertaken pursuant to resolution 2254 of 18 December 2015, which focused on a political solution to the conflict.

The political track in Syria remains at a standstill and the Syrian Constitutional Committee has not met since June 2022. At an 8 March press briefing, Geir O. Pedersen said that the work of the Constitutional Committee should not be held hostage to issues that have nothing to do with Syria and the committee needs to reconvene and move forward on substance. He added that all the challenges that existed before the earthquakes still remained and that to move beyond an emergency response to the earthquakes, political issues needed to be addressed, including the drafting of a new constitution. Among other unresolved issues that he highlighted were Syria's governance, sovereignty, and territorial integrity; the need for a nationwide ceasefire; the challenges posed by terrorist groups; safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); and post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation.

On 23 March, the Council convened its monthly meeting on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria. Pedersen and OCHA Acting Director of Operations and Advocacy Tareq Talahma briefed. Talahma provided an overview of the increasingly dire humanitarian situation in the country and described the recent efforts of the UN and other actors to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria. He noted that the recent earthquakes have strained the existing delivery infrastructure in the country and have resulted in death and injury to humanitarian aid workers, including UN staff members. He added that the UN has continued to conduct daily missions in earthquake-affected areas, delivering assistance, assessing the structural integrity of buildings, and identifying protection requirements. Talahma also apprised the Council of a cross-line operation undertaken by a UN inter-agency team to the town of Ras Al-Ain in Al-Hasakeh governorate in late February.

In his remarks, Pedersen noted that there has been a sharp rise in shelling, rocket fire, cross-line raids by terrorist groups, and air strikes attributed to Israel. He highlighted his continued engagement with regional stakeholders toward finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis and promoting calm in the country. He also called for more engagement with Syrian parties on ways to create an enabling environment for earthquake rehabilitation and with other actors on how they can provide enhanced resources and remove hindrances arising from sanctions.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 13 March, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria launched its latest report covering the period from 1 July to 31 December 2022. Among other things, the report noted that violations of human rights and humanitarian law continued across the country; conflict intensified across several front lines; and insecurity persisted across government-controlled areas, notably in the south with unabating clashes and targeted killings. Following the report's launch, the Commission of Inquiry noted that parties to the conflict in Syria committed "widespread human rights violations and abuses" in the months leading up to the recent earthquakes in the country. On 21 March, the Commission presented its 13 March report to the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva. In his remarks, Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Commission, stressed that the Syrian government delayed in giving consent for allowing the cross-border aid to reach into north-west Syria from Türkiye and further impeded aid delivery, along with UN-designated terrorist group Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the Syrian National Army (SNA). He added that the Commission is probing the recent incidents of "shelling, obstruction of humanitarian assistance and looting of vacated homes" by the parties in the earthquake-affected areas, including the reported Israeli airstrikes on Aleppo airport. He also expressed his support for the assessment of the effectiveness of the humanitarian response plan undertaken by the UN and other humanitarian aid organisations in the aftermath of the recent earthquakes.

Key Issues and Options

A 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.

Another key, long-standing issue is finding a way to break the political impasse in Syria, and to provide political support for the Special Envoy's efforts in this regard.

The Council could consider adopting a presidential statement that:

- expresses strong concern about the dire humanitarian consequences of the 6 February earthquake and its aftershocks;
- expresses strong support for the efforts of the UN and humanitarian actors on the ground;
- condemns attacks on civilians and underscores the need for the parties to the conflict to abide by international humanitarian law and human rights law;
- 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;
- urges the Syrian government to facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access for the UN and other humanitarian agencies in the earthquake-affected areas; and
- expresses strong support for the Special Envoy's efforts to rein-vigorate the political process.

Council Dynamics

Strong divisions persist among Council members on the Syria file. China and Russia tend to be sympathetic to the Syrian government, emphasising the need to respect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and drawing connections between unilateral sanctions

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on Syria and the challenging humanitarian situation in the country. On the other hand, the P3 (France, the UK and the US) and other like-minded members criticise the government for violating international humanitarian law and human rights law, arbitrarily detaining people, and not engaging meaningfully in political dialogue.

Most members emphasise that the cross-border aid mechanism is essential to saving lives in Syria and strongly support its continuation. Other members, such as China and Russia, continue to argue that cross-border deliveries are extraordinary measures that undermine Syria's sovereignty and should be supplanted as soon as possible by enhanced cross-line assistance.

Council members hold starkly different views on the chemical weapons track in Syria. China and Russia and some others have long complained about the frequency of the meetings on the Syria chemical weapons track, calling for an end to the practice of monthly meetings, given that the meetings infrequently provide any new information. In organising the programme of work for April, Russia, in its capacity as Council president for April, has not included a meeting on Syria chemical weapons, in contrast with established practice. At the time of writing, it remains unclear if any other Council member will challenge this decision by requesting a meeting on the Syria chemical weapons track.

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