

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

In May, Switzerland holds the presidency of the Security Council.

Switzerland is expected to convene two signature events during its presidency. One will be an open debate on “[Futureproofing Trust for Sustaining Peace](#)”, under the “Peacebuilding and sustaining peace” agenda item. Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis will chair the debate. The expected briefers are UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk; Cynthia Chigwenya, AU Youth Ambassador for Peace for Southern Africa; and ‘Funmi Olonisakin, Vice-President and Professor of Security, Leadership and Development at King’s College London. It seems that Switzerland is keen to draw attention to the “New Agenda for Peace” during this debate.

Switzerland’s other signature event for the month will be the annual open debate on the [protection of civilians](#) in armed conflict. President of the Swiss Confederation Alain Berset is expected to chair the debate. Secretary-General António Guterres, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, and a woman civil society representative are the anticipated briefers. The focus of this year’s debate will be on food insecurity and the protection of essential services and critical infrastructure in conflict situations.

Switzerland will convene the annual briefing by the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe \(OSCE\)](#) Chairperson-in-Office (CiO). Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia Bujar Osmani, the current CiO, is expected to brief at the meeting, which will be chaired by Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis.

Upon the request of the three African members of the Council (Gabon, Ghana, and Mozambique), Switzerland will convene a briefing on peace and security in Africa to discuss the Secretary-General’s upcoming report on the [financing of AU-led peace support operations](#) pursuant to a 31 August 2022 presidential

statement (S/PRST/2022/6). UN and AU officials as well as a civil society representative are expected to brief.

African issues on the programme in May are:

- [Sudan](#), meeting on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS);
- [Sudan/South Sudan](#), meeting on the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA);
- [South Sudan](#), renewal of the 2206 South Sudan sanctions regime and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee;
- [Libya](#), briefing by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on the court’s Libya-related activities; and
- [Sahel](#), meeting on the G5 Sahel.

Middle East issues on the programme include:

- [Syria](#), meetings on the political, humanitarian, and chemical weapons tracks;
- [Yemen](#), monthly meeting on developments;
- [Iraq](#), meeting on the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and renewal of UNAMI’s mandate;
- [Lebanon](#), consultations on the Secretary-General’s 1559 report; and
- “[The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question](#)”, the monthly meeting.

Regarding European issues, the semi-annual debate on [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) is expected to take place in May.

In terms of Asian issues, Council members are expected to receive a briefing in consultations on the work of the 1718 [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea](#) (DPRK) Sanctions Committee.

There may be one or more meetings on [Ukraine](#) in May, and other issues could also be raised during the month, depending on developments.

1 May 2023
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In Hindsight: Security Council Working Methods in Hard Times

In the space of about three years, the Council has grappled with two major crises—the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine—that could have threatened its ability to function. Yet, except for a brief moment at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council continued to operate, adapting its working methods to new realities. These twin crises have both changed and challenged how the Council exercises its role, illuminating the role of working methods as the Council’s foundation for functioning in hard times.

While the Council has shown its ability to adapt and innovate when necessary, there has been a cost in efficiency and transparency. Not only practicalities but geopolitical tensions have shaped the Council’s use of its working methods in these years. Relations among the permanent members were fraught before the pandemic, and the two crises deepened divisions and escalated tensions. Not surprisingly, negotiations on Council outcomes became harder and yielded a high number of non-unanimous decisions.

Security Council Report’s report of 2 May, *Security Council Working Methods in Hard Times*, analyses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine crisis on the Council’s working methods and on its transparency, effectiveness, and accountability. These events affected many aspects of life in the Council: how it meets, how it votes, whom it invites to participate in its meetings, and whom it hears from. They presented elected Council members with challenges but also opportunities to make a difference in the work of the Council. The report also covers the work of key groupings that helped shape the Council’s working methods during this period, including the Security Council’s Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions (IWG) and the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT).

The Crises

The COVID-19 pandemic brought drastic changes in the Council’s working methods, almost all of which were rolled back as the pandemic receded. With the World Health Organization (WHO) declaring COVID-19 a global pandemic on 11 March 2020 and New York City becoming an epicentre, the Secretary-General decided to close the UN Headquarters on 16 March to all but essential personnel. The Security Council was faced with having to fulfil Article 28 of the UN Charter, namely that it “shall be so organized as to function continuously”.

After a two-week period of seeming paralysis in mid-March, the Council steadily put in place the working methods that would allow it to operate, relying on the provisional rules of procedure, the UN Charter, and Council practice to carry out its work. By the end of June 2020, VTCs had replicated almost all the regular Council formats. But members could not agree to consider virtual discussions held by the Security Council as formal meetings. This meant that while its virtual discussions were guided by the Council’s provisional rules of procedure, these meetings could not have official verbatim records; if a new item was discussed, it could not be added to the Council’s formal agenda; and no procedural votes could be taken.

It was not business as usual, in other words—but the basic business of the Council continued. The concept of agility was added to transparency, effectiveness, and accountability as a key component of working methods.

By early 2022, with the world continuing to emerge from the global pandemic and the Council having reverted to its habitual working methods, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine brought to the fore a fresh set of challenges—including issues around Council working methods.

The Council’s failure to adopt a resolution condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine prompted it to use “Uniting for Peace” for the first time in forty years when it referred the situation in Ukraine to the General Assembly. The General Assembly’s activation arguably left it more open to adopting the veto initiative a mere two months later. This mix of Council paralysis and General Assembly activism has also brought heightened attention to questions of Security Council reform, including of its membership, the use of the veto, and the relationship between the Council and other UN organs. As well, the invasion of Ukraine has led to further divisions within an already divided Council.

Observations

COVID-19 had detrimental effects on the Council’s work. Meetings rarely deepened constructively beyond the reading of statements, face-to-face negotiations were no longer the norm, and Council visiting missions all but disappeared. Almost all decisions had to be made by consensus under the COVID-19 pandemic working methods. This appeared to become, and remains, the default mode of operating for most Council members.

Because COVID-19 pandemic protocols restricted the application of some rules of procedure, a degree of inconsistency in their use appears to have set in. In a departure from the letter of the Charter and the provisional rules of procedure, the Council presidency has been given greater leeway to determine which member states participate in, and who briefs, at Council meetings, decisions which—left increasingly to the monthly presidency—also appear to have become more politicised with the heightened geopolitical tensions. In recent years—and especially since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine—meeting formats have increasingly been used to further political positions, notably so in the case of Arria-formula meetings, where members have amplified and promoted specific agendas, obscuring the original purpose of informative enquiry. Similarly, proliferating public meetings have showcased members’ positions and at times become an arena for procedural battles. This may cause the pendulum to swing back towards more use of informal consultations, but until dynamics among the P5 improve, is unlikely to lead to interactive exchanges and consensus building. Alternatives may be greater use of private meetings and informal interactive dialogues to allow for more confidential briefings.

Almost every Council outcome is hard fought. There are few easy negotiations and compromises are needed to secure agreement on any kind of outcome. This is unlikely to change in the coming years; high numbers of non-unanimous decisions, now the norm on sanctions and some peace operations renewals, are also likely to continue. Even issues on which members had been united, such as nuclear non-proliferation, have seen vetoes, reflecting a hardening of positions on many issues, including climate and security and human rights. Members in the last few years have had to protect the agenda items that they care about and prevent their degradation, rather than seeking to move them forward.

In Hindsight: Security Council Working Methods in Hard Times

As a result, the focus on implementation of thematic issues is likely to continue. Several members have made commitments to advance the Council's working methods and to integrate the women, peace and security agenda more systematically across the Council's work. A similar attempt on climate and security has been launched: it remains to be seen whether a proliferation of commitments will be useful if members struggle to implement them.

Elected members who began their term during the COVID-19 pandemic did not experience the normal functioning of the Council, while the Ukraine crisis raised existential questions about the Council. But in these difficulties, elected members also found opportunities: the chairs of the IWG brought the critical working methods challenges into the heart of the IWG's work. Elected members have often driven the necessary changes as the Council moved to a virtual work environment. And at a time when the permanent members' relationships are strained, elected members have found a way to work together on thorny issues, finding strength in cross-regional partnerships. The Ukraine crisis created new penholding needs, and the P3 were rather unusually ready to share the pen with elected members on these.¹ Penholder allocation, increasingly contested, will continue to be hotly discussed.

The influence of the African members, already significant, strengthened during these years. In 2020, the A3 plus 1 (South Africa, Kenya, Tunisia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) formed a strong partnership that allowed them to work closely together despite having to operate virtually. In 2022, the Ukraine crisis and the divisions between the European members and the US, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other, gave fresh leverage to the African and some other elected members.

The perception that other vital issues are receiving less attention than Ukraine may lead to a growing divide between the European elected members and those from the Global South, unless a concerted effort is made to address some long-standing intractable issues on the Council's agenda, such as CAR, Haiti, Mali, and South Sudan. How much attention the Council pays to increasingly volatile issues such as Afghanistan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Sudan will also affect the overall dynamics among Council members. In 2023, the African members will be looking for support on one of their priority issues, the financing of AU Peace Support Operations.

The role of the General Assembly is likely to remain significant, as the Council grapples with a conflict that it appears to have little ability to affect. The Council's use of Uniting for Peace, which gave the General Assembly a larger role in addressing the Ukraine situation, and the recent veto initiative, have added momentum to the discussion of Security Council reform, and to the better use of some working methods. The wider membership, having been cut off from interacting with the Council for a year and a half during COVID-19, may be looking for ways to exert greater influence. The role of the ACT Group and other like-minded members that have been advocating greater transparency and accountability in the Council is expected to continue to remind the Council of its responsibilities.

Council members need to guard against the weaponisation of working methods which, in divisive times, can be used to distract from more substantive issues and to create further divisions among members. On the other hand, the agile, flexible, and creative application of its working methods has helped the Security Council weather a very turbulent three years. Some of the lessons learnt from these years may help members navigate these difficult times.

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Afghanistan

On 6 April, Council members convened for closed consultations on Afghanistan. The meeting was requested by Japan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the co-penholders on the file, after the Taliban decided to prohibit Afghan women from working for the UN. Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Roza Otunbayeva briefed.

On 27 April, the Council adopted resolution 2681 condemning the Taliban's decision to ban Afghan women from working for the UN and stating that it undermines human rights and humanitarian principles.

Export of Weapons and Military Equipment

On 10 April, Russia convened an open debate on "Risks stemming from violations of the agreements regulating the export of weapons and military equipment" under the "Threats to international peace and security" agenda item (S/PV.9301). High Representative

for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu briefed. She argued that: "Transparency in armaments is yet another confidence-building measure that can serve to reduce tensions, ambiguities and misperceptions among Member States."

Mali

On 12 April, the Council held an open briefing, followed by closed consultations, on Mali (S/PV.9302). Special Representative and head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) El-Ghassim Wane briefed, presenting the Secretary-General's 30 March report on Mali (S/2023/236). The session included assessing progress on the four conditions, or "parameters", that the Secretary-General's internal review of MINUSMA (S/2023/36), dated 16 January, identified as key for the mission to operate: (1) advances in Mali's political transition, in accordance with the electoral timetable; (2) progress in the implementation of the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali; (3)

¹ In 2020, Albania and the US were penholders on the political aspects, and France and Mexico on the humanitarian aspects, of the Ukraine war. Mexico also was co-penholder with the US on Haiti and the UK on Colombia and served as co-penholder with France on the resolution renewing the Mali sanctions regime in August 2022.

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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.

Colombia

On 13 April, the Security Council held an open briefing, followed by closed consultations, on Colombia (S/PV.9303). Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu briefed on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission (S/2023/222). The Council was also briefed by Ambassador Ivan Šimonović (Croatia), chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), and Rodrigo Londoño, president of the Comunes party, which is comprised of former members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP).

Prior to the quarterly meeting, on 12 April, the president of the Security Council sent a letter to the Secretary-General referencing a 14 February letter by Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs Álvaro Leyva Durán, in which he requested the Council to consider the possible expansion of the verification mission's mandate to include a role in the government's dialogue processes with armed groups active in the country. In the letter, the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to submit within 60 days recommendations on the possible role that the UN can play in this regard, including "implications for the configuration of the verification mission".

On 17 April, Council members issued a press statement on Colombia (SC/15259). In it, they stressed the importance of ensuring the comprehensive 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 FARC-EP.

Myanmar

On 13 April, Council members discussed airstrikes carried out by the Myanmar military that reportedly killed over 100 people in the north-western Sagaing region on 11 April under "any other business" at the request of the UK, the penholder on Myanmar. Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari briefed. The UK circulated a draft press statement regarding the attack to Council members on 11 April. The draft apparently strongly condemned the attack, stressed the need to ensure accountability, reiterated Council members' call for the immediate cessation of violence, stressed the need for unhindered humanitarian access, and demanded the full implementation of resolution 2669, among other matters.

While the draft appeared to enjoy broad support from a majority of Council members, it seems that it was blocked by China and Russia, who apparently argued that the circumstances surrounding the attack were unclear, noting that the military authorities had provided information concerning the attack that differed from the witness accounts referred to in media reports. It seems that China and Russia also contended that the Council should refrain from taking sides in internal affairs and encourage the parties in Myanmar to resolve their differences through dialogue and reconciliation.

The UK apparently requested the meeting after China and Russia expressed their opposition to the draft press statement.

Great Lakes Region (DRC)

On 19 April, the Security Council held its biannual briefing and consultations on the situation in the Great Lakes region (S/PV.9307). Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region Huang Xia briefed on the Secretary-General's latest report on the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the region (S/2023/237). The chair of the Peacebuilding Commission Ivan Šimonović (Croatia) also briefed. Burundi, DRC, and Rwanda participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Western Sahara

On 19 April, Council members received a briefing in consultations on the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The Secretary-General's Personal Envoy to Western Sahara Staffan de Mistura and Special Representative and head of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) Alexander Ivanko briefed.

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

On 24 April, the Security Council held a ministerial-level open debate on "Effective multilateralism through the defence of the principles of the UN Charter" under the "Maintenance of international peace and security" agenda item (S/PV.9308). Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov chaired the meeting, while Secretary-General António Guterres briefed. Guterres said that multilateral cooperation was the "raison d'être and guiding vision" of the UN. He expressed concern about the "risks of conflict, through misadventure or miscalculation" at a time of great tensions between the big powers, while calling on countries to uphold their responsibilities under the UN Charter.

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 6 April, Security Council members convened for closed consultations on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". China and the United Arab Emirates requested the meeting. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland briefed. While the possibility of issuing a product was discussed during the consultations, members could not reach consensus.

On 25 April, the Security Council held its quarterly open debate on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" (S/PV.9309). Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov chaired the meeting. Wennesland briefed. Riad al-Maliki, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine, said that "as long as Israel reaps the benefits of its occupation while [the Palestinians] pay the cost, annexation and apartheid are the only reality [Palestinians] are left with". He called on UN members to recognise the State of Palestine and ban products originating in Israeli settlements, among other things. After delivering a statement expressing outrage and sadness at the open debate coinciding with

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Israel's Memorial Day—which commemorates fallen Israeli soldiers and civilian victims of terrorism—the Israeli delegation left the Council chamber. Ambassador Gilad Erdan (Israel) said that Israel's request for a change of date for the open debate had been turned down, proving what Israelis know about “this biased organisation”. During a press conference on the same day, Lavrov said that Council members had not raised any objections to holding the meeting on 25 April, and that the meeting was not intended to be an anti-Israel event.

Haiti

On 26 April, the Security Council held an open briefing followed by closed consultations on Haiti (S/PV.9311). Special Representative and head of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) Maria Isabel Salvador briefed on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest report on BINUH, dated 14 April. Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Ghada Fathi Waly also briefed on the country's security situation. Canada (on behalf of the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti), the Dominican Republic, and Haiti participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Kosovo

On 27 April, the Council held its first briefing this year on the situation in Kosovo (S/PV.9312). Special Representative and head of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) Caroline Ziadeh briefed on the latest Secretary-General's report (S/2023/247). First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia Ivica Dačić briefed under Rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora of Kosovo Donika

Gërvalla-Schwarz addressed the Council under Rule 39.

At the meeting, Gërvalla-Schwarz said that she had not been permitted to speak in Albanian by Russia, in its capacity as Security Council president in April. Albania noted that two Council members, apparently Albania and the US, supported a formal request to allow Kosovo to speak in a language of its choosing, but Russia opposed the request. Citing Rule 44, which states that “any representative may make a speech in a language other than the languages of the Security Council”, Albania accused Russia of partiality and stated that it accepted the presidency's ruling in order to avoid putting the Council in a “difficult position”.

Russia rejected Albania's assertion, arguing that Gërvalla-Schwarz, as a participant under Rule 39, “does not fall under the category of representative” as defined in Rule 44. While acknowledging precedents in which Rule 39 participants briefed in a language of their choosing, Russia insisted that in those cases “exceptions were made for the speakers who did not speak [any] of the six official UN languages”, adding that Gërvalla-Schwarz “masters English more than decently”.

Children and Armed Conflict

On 28 April, there was a Security Council Arria-formula meeting titled “Addressing the Abduction and Deportation of Children During Armed Conflict: Concrete Steps for Accountability and Prevention”. The meeting was organised by Albania, France, and the US, together with non-Council member Ukraine. Briefings were provided by Ezequiel Heffes, Director of Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict; Dmytro Lubinets, the Ombudsperson of Ukraine; Daria Herasymchuk, Adviser-Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for the Rights of the Child and Child Rehabilitation; and Ukrainian civilian who provided a first-hand account.

Protection of Civilians

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council will hold its annual open debate on the protection of civilians (PoC) in armed conflict. Switzerland, the Council president for the month, is convening the debate as a ministerial-level signature event with an expected focus on food insecurity and the protection of essential services in conflict situations. Secretary-General António Guterres, ICRC President Mirjana Spoljaric Egger, and a female civil society representative are expected to brief. President of the Swiss Confederation Alain Berset will chair the meeting.

Council members will receive the Secretary-General's annual PoC report by mid-May.

Background and Key Recent Developments

This year's debate is expected to focus on the intertwined challenges of conflict-induced food insecurity and the protection of critical civilian infrastructure and essential services in conflict. It will provide an

opportunity to review implementation of two relevant resolutions in this regard: resolution 2417 on armed conflict and food security, adopted on 24 May 2018, and resolution 2573 on the protection of indispensable civilian objects, adopted on 27 April 2021.

Resolution 2417 identified how conflict contributes to hunger—either through the direct effects of war, such as displacement from farming or grazing land and the destruction of agricultural assets, or indirectly by disrupting markets and increasing food prices. The resolution called on conflict parties to comply with relevant international law, including the Geneva Conventions; condemned the use of starvation as a method of warfare; and recalled that the Council had adopted and could consider adopting new sanctions on those responsible for obstructing humanitarian assistance. Additionally, the resolution called on the Secretary-General to report to the Council swiftly when there is an acute risk of conflict-induced famine and widespread food insecurity in the context of armed conflict and to update the Council on the resolution's implementation every 12

UN DOCUMENTS ON PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2573 (27 April 2021) condemned attacks on civilian infrastructure in conflict. S/RES/2417 (24 May 2018) condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare as well as the unlawful denial of humanitarian access. **Secretary-General's Report S/2022/381** (10 May 2022) was the latest annual report on protection of civilians. **Security Council Letter S/2022/875** (21 November 2022) was from the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, transmitting the 11th issue of the biannual joint FAO/WFP update, titled “Monitoring food security in food crisis countries with conflict situations”. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9036** (19 May 2022) was a ministerial-level open debate on conflict and food security.

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months during his annual briefing on the protection of civilians.

Resolution 2573 condemned attacks against civilians and civilian objects in situations of armed conflict and demanded that all parties to conflict cease such practices. It further encouraged efforts to protect objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, which may include those objects essential for food production and distribution. The resolution urged conflict parties to ensure the proper functioning of food systems and markets in situations of armed conflict and—like resolution 2417—condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, which it noted may constitute a war crime.

Recent years have seen a resurgence in global food insecurity, primarily driven by conflict. According to the 2023 global food policy report by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the number of people experiencing acute food insecurity nearly doubled between 2016 and 2022 to 205 million people in 45 countries, “most [of whom] live in protracted crisis situations...marked by prolonged civil strife and conflict, repeated weather shocks, and economic decline, or some combination thereof”. The most recent biannual joint report by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Program (WFP) monitoring food security in conflict situations—published in November 2022—provided more detail on specific country situations. Using the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system, the report listed Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Haiti, Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen as “hunger hotspots of highest concern”, with populations facing or projected to face starvation (Catastrophe, IPC Phase 5) or at risk of deterioration towards catastrophic conditions as they already have critical food insecurity (Emergency, IPC Phase 4) and are facing severe aggravating factors. The report said that while food crises in these countries “continue to be driven by multiple, interlinked drivers that are often mutually reinforcing, conflict/insecurity remains the main driver”, in part due to the “impact on essential food systems and objects indispensable to the survival of civilian populations”.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has also highlighted the links between conflict, hunger, and critical civilian infrastructure. As Russia and Ukraine are among the world’s most significant producers of agricultural commodities and—in the case of Russia—fertilisers, the war has further exacerbated food insecurity worldwide. According to IFPRI’s 2023 report, international food prices rose 32 percent, and fertiliser prices tripled following Russia’s invasion, and while these prices have since fallen, they “remain high by historical standards”. Additionally, hunger is rising inside Ukraine, partially as a result of Russia’s attacks on civilian infrastructure, which have targeted Ukraine’s grain silos and water supply. The ICC recently announced that it would initiate a case against Russia for attacks on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine.

In accordance with resolution 2417, OCHA has submitted a number of “white notes” to the Council, alerting it to acute situations of conflict-induced food. These have pertained to South Sudan (August 2018); Yemen (October 2018); the Democratic Republic of the Congo, northeast Nigeria, South Sudan, and Yemen (September 2020); northern Ethiopia (May 2021); and northern Ethiopia, northeast Nigeria, South Sudan, and Yemen (August 2022).

May’s debate follows several Council meetings over the past year

on conflict, food security, and the protection of civilian infrastructure. In April 2022, Ireland organised an Arria-formula meeting on conflict and hunger. In May 2022, the US convened a ministerial-level open debate on conflict and food security as a signature event of its Council presidency after organising a similar high-level open debate during its March 2021 presidency. In September 2022, the Council convened a briefing on armed conflict and food security following the issuance of OCHA’s latest white note. In October 2022, France and then-Council member Mexico—the humanitarian co-penholders on Ukraine—convened a briefing on the protection of civilians and critical infrastructure in the country. In March, Mozambique and Switzerland convened a ministerial-level Arria-formula meeting on “Protection of Water-related Essential Services and Infrastructure During Armed Conflicts”.

Key Issues and Options

Identifying existing and potential conflict-related food security crises and addressing the increase in conflict-induced hunger are key issues for the Council. Related to this is the Council’s responsibility to maintain humanitarian access, protect aid workers and hold conflict parties accountable for depriving civilians of food by targeting food production and systems or other critical infrastructure. As recalled in resolution 2417, the Council may impose sanctions on those who obstruct the delivery of, access to, or distribution of humanitarian assistance.

The impact of the war in Ukraine on food insecurity is another prominent issue. This includes the war’s effects on Ukraine’s agricultural productivity and exports and the possible consequences for the global food system of the sanctions imposed on Russia. In this context, Council members may urge the conflict parties to extend the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which is set to expire in May and has reportedly been the subject of renewed tensions between Russia and Ukraine.

An additional key issue is reporting to the Council on acute situations of conflict-induced food insecurity, as mandated by resolution 2417. One option Council members have considered is requesting the Secretariat to submit white notes more regularly on such situations. Related to this is whether the information provided is sufficiently detailed for the Council to take action; members could encourage the Secretariat to include more information that identifies specific violations of international humanitarian law that cause food insecurity, including attacks on critical civilian infrastructure. Members could also consider creating UN special envoys or focal points on the implementation of resolutions 2417 and 2573 or, similarly, consider the recommendation made in the most recent FAO-WFP report to establish an independent body of experts to collect and channel critical information to enable the Security Council and the Secretary-General to take preventive action.

Council Dynamics

Several members are keen to see the Council be more active in considering and addressing conflict-induced hunger. Council members France, Ecuador, Switzerland, the UK, and the US are part of a 14-member Group of Friends of Action on Conflict and Hunger. The group also includes recent Council members Estonia, Ireland, Mexico, Niger, and Norway.

Other members have expressed scepticism about the Council’s

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consideration of conflict and hunger. Russia has argued that the Council is not the appropriate body to consider food insecurity as a thematic issue since other UN organs are mandated to address hunger, which can have multiple causes. Brazil has stressed that the Council has a role in addressing conflict-induced hunger but should not highlight hunger as a cause of conflict, which they contend is a development and peacebuilding issue. Some members have also been wary about hunger being used as a pretext for adding country situations to the Council's agenda.

There have also been differences of view over the reporting that the Council should receive from the Secretariat on hunger and conflict. In March 2021, the Council failed to agree on a US-proposed presidential statement that would have requested a biannual report from the Secretary-General on the issue. At the April 2022 Arria-formula meeting, the US similarly called on OCHA to provide biannual white notes on acute situations of conflict-induced food insecurity.

Members opposed to increased reporting on this issue have either questioned its value given existing reporting requirements or argued that resolution 2417 should be interpreted as requesting the Secretariat to provide white notes as risks arise, which is not compatible with a periodic reporting mandate. Additionally, some members argue that efforts should concentrate on integrating conflict-induced hunger as a cross-cutting issue into discussions of country situations—similar to the woman, peace, and security (WPS) agenda—and that additional stand-alone reporting on the issue might insulate it from broader attention.

Another dynamic is members' diverging views about the role of the Ukraine war on global hunger. Some members highlight Russia's responsibility for having invaded Ukraine, while Russia points to the negative effect of unilateral sanctions. The US has stressed that the sanctions on Russia do not apply to food and agricultural products.

Sudan

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council will hold a briefing, followed by consultations, on the Secretary-General's 90-day report on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), which members are expected to receive by 15 May.

The mandate of UNITAMS expires on 3 June.

Key Recent Developments

Fighting erupted in the morning of 15 April in and around Khartoum between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), headed by Lieutenant General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, Sudan's military leader and Chairperson of the Transitional Sovereign Council, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, the Deputy Chairman of the Transitional Sovereign Council. According to local media reports, the fighting initially started in the Soba suburb, south of Khartoum, and spread to several strategic areas in the capital, including Sudan's presidential palace, the headquarters of the state television, Khartoum International Airport, and the military's headquarters.

On 17 April, Council members met to discuss the situation in Sudan under "any other business". Special Representative and head of UNITAMS Volker Perthes briefed members on the latest developments in the country and apparently expressed concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation, especially in light of recent attacks targeting humanitarian workers. It seems that Council members were united in calling for de-escalation, a cessation of hostilities, and the restoration of calm in the country. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 17 April.)

On 20 April, the AU Commission held an urgent special ministerial meeting on Sudan, convened via VTC. The meeting was attended by Secretary-General António Guterres, representatives of the Security Council's permanent five members (P5), the African

(A3) members, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the League of Arab States (LAS), and other regional stakeholders.

A communiqué was adopted at the meeting calling for an immediate and unconditional humanitarian ceasefire for a week starting from 20 April that could pave the way for "a more permanent ceasefire". It also called on the SAF and the RSF to establish humanitarian corridors and allow for unhindered humanitarian access and the evacuation of injured civilians. The communiqué further called for the immediate resumption of the political process through dialogue and negotiations, with the aim of establishing a civilian-led government. It requested the Trilateral Mechanism (which is comprised of the AU, IGAD, and UNITAMS), in coordination with the LAS, the EU, the Troika (Norway, the UK, and the US), and other actors, to engage with the SAF and the RSF to ensure the communiqué's implementation, including by developing an urgent plan for de-escalation. In this regard, the communiqué requested the two parties to designate interlocutors to work with the Trilateral Mechanism, to monitor and verify the humanitarian ceasefire, and to further elaborate permanent ceasefire arrangements, including the withdrawal of forces from urban areas.

At a press stakeout following the 20 April meeting, Guterres called for a ceasefire to mark the Eid al-Fitr celebrations, adding that this must be followed by serious dialogue that will facilitate a transition to a civilian government. He expressed deep concern about the hostilities' negative effects on civilians and about the prospect of further escalation. He added that humanitarian operations have become virtually impossible, as warehouses, vehicles, and other humanitarian assets have been attacked, looted, and seized. On 21 April, the Permanent Representative of Sudan to the UN, Ambassador Al-Harith Idriss al-Harith Mohamed, sent a letter to the Security Council, informing it that al-Burhan had announced a three-day

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2636](#) (3 June 2022) was the resolution extending the mandate of UNITAMS for one year. [Security Council Press Statement SC/15257](#) (15 April 2023) was the statement expressing concern over the military clashes in Sudan. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9310](#) (25 April 2023) was a briefing on the situation in Sudan.

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humanitarian truce starting on the same day. Despite this, fighting reportedly persisted, with a 23 April OCHA flash update noting that clashes had continued throughout the three-day period.

In a 24 April press statement, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the SAF and the RSF had agreed to implement a 72-hour nationwide ceasefire starting at midnight on 24 April. He urged both parties to immediately and fully uphold the ceasefire. Blinken added that, to support a durable end to the fighting, the US will “coordinate with regional and international partners, and Sudanese civilian stakeholders” to “assist in the creation of a committee to oversee the negotiation, conclusion, and implementation of a permanent cessation of hostilities and humanitarian arrangements in Sudan”.

On 25 April, the Council convened for an open briefing to discuss the situation in Sudan at the request of the UK (the penholder on the file). Guterres, Perthes, Permanent Observer for the AU Fatima Kyari Mohammed and Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Joyce Msuya briefed. In his remarks, Guterres indicated that the clashes in Sudan have the potential to spread across borders, cause immense suffering, and push back development for years. He called on the Council members, the wider UN membership, and regional organisations with influence to press the Sudanese leaders to de-escalate tensions. Msuya 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 Sudan. Among other things, Perthes noted that, although the 72-hour ceasefire had been upheld in some parts, both parties accused each other of ceasefire violations with no sign that either side is ready to negotiate; fighting has continued and, in some cases, intensified (including air strikes and heavy shelling); and cases of attempted sexual assaults and prisoners being released from detention centres have been reported.

In light of the continued fighting, deteriorating humanitarian situation and persisting insecurity, media reports indicate that many member states have been evacuating their diplomatic staff and citizens from Sudan. According to the 23 April OCHA flash update, several humanitarian organisations have evacuated or relocated their staff members from locations where operations are not currently feasible.

In a 26 April press briefing, Deputy Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Farhan Haq noted that the UN is preparing for refugee influxes into countries across the region, including the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Sudan. He added that the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) successfully evacuated 17 UN staff members and aid workers from Darfur into Juba. According to the UNHCR, at the time of writing, nearly 4,000 people have crossed into South Sudan from Sudan, and 20,000 into Chad since the outbreak of fighting on 15 April.

According to the 23 April OCHA flash update, at least 427 people have been killed and over 3,700 injured because of the ongoing fighting. Two humanitarian organisations—the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)—have suspended their operations. A 22 April IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix noted that displacements have been reported in Khartoum, as well as in Blue Nile, North Kordofan, North Darfur, West Darfur, and South Darfur states.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In an 18 April statement, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk called for an immediate end to hostilities in Sudan and for the parties to the conflict to return to the negotiating table. He noted that the majority of fighting had been concentrated in heavily populated parts of the capital Khartoum and residential areas of cities elsewhere in the country. Moreover, air strikes and artillery shelling, including the use of explosive weapons, have exposed civilians to the risk of death and injury. He called for “prompt, thorough and independent investigations” into the killings of civilians, including three staff members of the UN’s World Food Programme.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Security Council is how to stop the fighting in Sudan and avert a humanitarian crisis. A related issue is assessing what role UNITAMS can play in bringing a credible, sustainable, and long-term ceasefire. Another issue for the Security Council is to ensure continuous and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid, and at the same time, secure the safety and security of UN officials and other humanitarian actors. Periodic briefings from Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths or other OCHA officials could help keep the Council informed of the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Another major issue is the difficulty for UNITAMS in carrying out its responsibilities in the midst of the current conflict. According to a 24 April UNITAMS press statement, the UN temporarily relocated its internationally-recruited personnel from Khartoum to Port Sudan for onward evacuation to neighbouring countries. It added that a small number of internationally-recruited personnel, including Perthes, will remain in Sudan and will “continue to work towards a resolution to the current crisis and returning to the UN mandated tasks”. Perthes, in the same statement, said: “our presence on the ground has been adjusted in light of the security situation but [...] there is no plan or thinking of the UN leaving Sudan”. At the time of writing, the UN in Sudan has a total of 4,149 staff members, including 877 internationally-recruited staff and 3,272 national staff.

Another significant issue is the mandate renewal of UNITAMS. In light of these circumstances, an option for Council members is to consider a technical rollover of the mission’s mandate for three to six months in anticipation of the situation stabilising sufficiently for the mission to return to Khartoum and resume its work.

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

The Council could consider adopting a presidential statement that:

- condemns the continued military clashes between the SAF and RSF;
- expresses regret over the immense human suffering, including the death of civilians and damage to civilian infrastructure;
- calls upon both parties to adhere to the ceasefire and demands a full cessation of hostilities;
- welcomes the diplomatic efforts by the AU, IGAD, the LAS, UNITAMS, and other regional stakeholders to resolve the crisis;
- stresses the need for full, safe, and unimpeded humanitarian access; and
- demands that the parties commit to the safety, security and

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protection of civilians, diplomatic missions and personnel, UN, humanitarian and medical personnel.

Council Dynamics

Most Council members share similar concerns over the political, security, human rights, and humanitarian situations in Sudan and are supportive of the Trilateral Mechanism. But there was apparent disagreement on a draft press statement proposed by the UK following the AU Commission's ministerial meeting on 20 April. It appears that, among other matters, the draft text condemned the continued military clashes between the SAF and RSF; regretted the death of civilians and damage to civilian infrastructure; welcomed the diplomatic efforts by the AU, IGAD, the LAS, and UNITAMS

to resolve the crisis; reiterated the need for full, safe, and unimpeded humanitarian access; and demanded that the parties commit to the safety, security, and protection of civilians, diplomatic missions and personnel, UN, humanitarian and medical personnel, including to ensure the safe departure of foreign nationals from Sudan. Council members were unable to reach consensus, with the A3 apparently opposing the draft press statement and arguing that it could lead to duplicate messaging and create complications at a delicate time. It seems that China and Russia supported the A3 position.

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

Ukraine

Expected Council Action

In May, 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 the eastern Donbas region of Ukraine, although Russian offensive operations appear to have decreased in recent weeks. Ukraine's Defence Intelligence Chief Kyrylo Budanov said in a 24 April interview that Russian forces have switched to defensive positions everywhere except for the city of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region. The UK's Ministry of Defence agreed with Budanov's assessment, noting in a 25 April intelligence update that Russia's average daily casualty rate has fallen by approximately 30 percent compared with previous months, suggesting that its forces have switched to defensive positions in preparation for anticipated Ukrainian offensive operations. In the southern Kherson region, Ukrainian forces appear to have established positions on the eastern side of the Dnipro River. Reports also suggest that Ukraine is amassing troops near the frontline in the southern Zaporizhzhia region.

April marked the first month since December 2021 that the Security Council did not convene for a formal meeting on Ukraine. During its April Council presidency, Russia organised two signature events: an open debate on "Risks stemming from violations of the agreements regulating the export of weapons and military equipment" on 10 April, and a 24 April ministerial-level open debate on "Effective multilateralism through the defense of the principles of the UN Charter", which was chaired by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Although the Ukraine war was not the stated focus of these meetings, the issue was raised by many participants at both events. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* stories of 9 April and 23 April.)

Russia also organised an Arria-formula meeting on 5 April titled "Children and Armed Conflict: Ukrainian Crisis. Evacuating Children From Conflict Zone", which featured controversial briefings

by Russia's Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights Maria Lvova-Belova and representatives from the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Lvova-Belova and Russian President Vladimir Putin in March for allegedly committing the war crime of "unlawful deportation" and "unlawful transfer" of children from Ukraine to Russia. During the 5 April meeting, representatives of several Council members—including Albania, Malta, the UK, and the US—walked out of the conference room when the contentious briefers took the floor. The meeting was not broadcast on UNTV because the UK raised an objection to webcasting the meeting on the official UN channel. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 4 April.)

On 28 April, Albania, France, and the US, together with non-Council member Ukraine, organised an Arria-formula meeting on "Addressing the Abduction and Deportation of Children During Armed Conflict: Concrete Steps for Accountability and Prevention". (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 28 April.)

In April, a collection of classified US documents was leaked online, revealing details about the war in Ukraine. US Pentagon officials have verified the authenticity of some of the documents. The leaked information included confidential communications between Secretary-General António Guterres and other UN officials. One of the documents suggested that Guterres was willing to concede to Russia's demands regarding the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI), potentially "undermining broader efforts to hold Russia accountable". Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric dismissed the narrative presented by the leaked documents, stating during a 13 April press briefing that "the Secretary-General is not soft on any one country or another", adding that "he has been very clear about the violations of international law" in the context of the conflict in Ukraine.

On 11 April, the UN issued a note to correspondents stating that the Joint Coordination Centre (JCC), which is responsible for facilitating the BSGI, has been unable to conduct vessel inspections

UN DOCUMENTS ON UKRAINE [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9308](#) (24 April 2023) was a ministerial-level open debate on "Effective multilateralism through the defense of the principles of the UN Charter". [S/PV.9301](#) (10 April 2023) was an open debate on "Risks stemming from violations of the agreements regulating the export of weapons and military equipment".

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as the parties failed to reach an agreement on “operational priorities”. Ukraine has expressed concern that Russia is intentionally obstructing navigation in the Black Sea, causing delays in the shipment of Ukrainian foodstuffs. On 13 April, the Kremlin issued a statement accusing the UN of “distort[ing] data and facts” and blaming Ukraine for stalling the registration and inspection of ships. In addition, Russia threatened that it would not renew the BSGI “without any progress regarding the five systematic problems”, which include reconnecting Russia’s agricultural bank to the SWIFT payment system and unblocking the Tolyatti-Odesa ammonia pipeline that has been inactive since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The BSGI is set to expire on 18 May, four days after Türkiye’s general elections.

Guterres held a meeting with Lavrov on 24 April to discuss the BSGI and the operational challenges encountered by the JCC. During the meeting, Guterres presented Lavrov with a letter outlining a proposed plan to improve, extend, and expand the BSGI, taking into account the positions recently expressed by the parties and the risks associated with global food insecurity. A similar letter was reportedly sent to Ukraine and Türkiye, the two other signatories to the agreement.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 31 March, at the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk spoke at the interactive dialogue on Ukraine, emphasising that after 13 months of Russia’s war against Ukraine, “severe violations of human rights and international humanitarian law have become shockingly routine”. Türk noted that the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has verified more than 8,400 civilian deaths and more than 14,000 civilian injuries since the beginning of the invasion, observing that most of the casualties resulted from Russia’s use of “wide-impact explosive weaponry in residential neighborhoods”.

In his statement, Türk noted that OHCHR has interviewed more than 400 prisoners of war (POWs) on both sides. He underscored that it is essential for international monitors and OHCHR staff to receive “unfettered access to all individuals detained by Russian forces”. Türk also observed that OHCHR continues to gather and analyse information about the incident in Olenivka in July 2022, in which at least 50 Ukrainian POWs were killed.

Women, Peace and Security

In a 30 March joint statement, Valiant Richey, the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and Pramila Patten, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, said that over eight million people have fled Ukraine since the beginning of the war. Patten and Richey called for strengthening prevention and protection measures both inside and outside Ukraine and for “sustainable solutions that increase societies’ resilience against trafficking in persons, especially women and children for the purpose of sexual exploitation and sexual violence”. They stressed the importance of adopting a gender-sensitive and survivor-centred approach in preventing and combatting trafficking and called for more coordinated efforts to “disrupt and dismantle the human trafficking business model”. The statement notes that, coinciding with the large-scale displacement, “there are large spikes in online searches for explicit content and sexual services from Ukrainians” and stresses the urgency of rooting out “those who create the demand and platforms that allow for this type of violence and exploitation to thrive”. In this regard, Patten and Richey called on states “to put in place policies mandating proactive monitoring and removals of exploitative materials, as well as mechanisms for public reporting and for shutting down abusive platforms”.

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 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 ensuring the extension of the BSGI. Council members may wish to convene a meeting with UN Coordinator for the BSGI Abdullah Abdul Samad Dashti and UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan. They may choose a closed, informal format, such as an informal interactive dialogue, to allow for a frank discussion about the challenges to the implementation of the BSGI and the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Russia and the UN to facilitate unimpeded exports of Russian food and fertilisers to global markets.

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, 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. Nonetheless, prospects for a negotiated settlement remain low as Russia and Ukraine remain focused on influencing the outcome of the war through military means.

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. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed Beijing’s engagement on Ukraine 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”.

French President Emmanuel Macron visited Beijing on 6 April, taking part in a trilateral meeting with EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Chinese President Xi Jinping. According to media reports, Macron urged Xi to “bring Russia back to reason” and to encourage all parties to return to the negotiating table. While the leaders agreed that nuclear weapons should not be used in the conflict, Xi emphasised the importance of taking the legitimate concerns of all parties into consideration.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has sought to position the country as a potential mediator in the conflict. Lula has

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proposed the creation of a “political G20” to facilitate a peaceful resolution to the war in Ukraine. After a meeting between Lula and Xi on 14 April, the two countries issued a joint statement calling on more countries to play a constructive role in promoting a political settlement to the Ukrainian crisis. While Brasília has condemned Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, it has refrained from participating in sanctions against Russia. However, Lula has faced criticism from Kyiv and some of its Western allies for implying that Ukraine shares responsibility for the conflict and that the US and Europe are prolonging it. On 18 April, US National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby, accused Brazil of “parrotting Russian and Chinese propaganda” by “suggesting that the [US] and Europe are somehow not interested in peace or that [they] share responsibility for the war”, a claim that Brazil denies.

Although Western officials have criticised Brazil and China for not engaging with Kyiv on their peace proposals and instead

fostering relations with Moscow, the two countries have recently made efforts to reach out to Ukraine’s leadership. On 21 April, Brasília announced that Lula’s chief advisor, former Foreign Minister of Brazil Celso Amorim, would travel to Kyiv. Amorim discussed Brazil’s peace proposal with Putin in early April. On 26 April, Xi held his first telephone call with Zelenskyy after his meeting with Putin in Moscow from 20 to 22 March. During their hour-long conversation, Zelenskyy expressed hope for China’s “active participation in efforts to restore peace”, while underscoring the need to refrain from supporting Russia, including through the supply of weapons. Xi stressed the importance of seizing the opportunity and building up favourable conditions for a peaceful settlement, given that “rational thinking and voices” are “now on the rise”. China will also send the Special Representative of the Chinese Government on Eurasian Affairs to Ukraine for “in-depth communication...on the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis”.

Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council will hold an open debate on “Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace: Futureproofing Trust for Sustaining Peace”, one of the signature events of Switzerland’s presidency. Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland Ignazio Cassis will chair the debate. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk; Cynthia Chigwenya, Youth Ambassador for Peace for Southern Africa; and Funmi Olonisakin, Vice-President and Professor of Security, Leadership & Development, King’s College London, are expected to brief.

Key Recent Developments

On 21 September 2020, the General Assembly adopted a declaration marking the UN’s seventy-fifth anniversary and requested the Secretary-General to report back with recommendations on how to respond to current and future challenges facing the world. Accordingly, the Secretary-General released his report “Our Common Agenda” on 10 September 2021, presenting his vision for the future of multilateral cooperation to effectively address global challenges and threats. In his report, the Secretary-General outlined six potential areas for a new agenda for peace, including, but not limited to, the following: (1) reducing strategic risks; (2) strengthening international foresight and capacities to identify and adapt to new risks; (3) reshaping responses to all forms of violence; (4) investing in prevention and peacebuilding; (5) supporting regional prevention and; (6) putting women and girls at the centre. General Assembly resolution A/RES/76/6, adopted on 15 November 2021, welcomed the Secretary-General’s report as a basis for further consideration by member states. In informal thematic consultations organised by the President of the General Assembly on “Our Common Agenda” in February and March 2022, the UN system was invited to develop a “New

Agenda for Peace” in close consultation with member states and in collaboration with all relevant partners, as part of the preparations for the Summit of the Future. (The Summit of the Future, proposed in “Our Common Agenda”, will be held on 22-23 September 2024.)

The UN Secretariat has been consulting with member states, regional groups and other actors for their views, priorities, and recommendations, based on which the UN is expected to produce a policy paper in June on the New Agenda for Peace. On 18 April, the High-Level Advisory Board (HLAB) on Effective Multilateralism, which the Secretary-General established in March 2022 as part of the Our Common Agenda initiative, published its report that contains recommendations on strengthening the UN and multilateral system’s ability to address pressing global challenges, from climate change and future pandemics, to preventing conflict, attaining the Sustainable Development Goals, and supporting a just digital transformation.

On 26 January, the Council held an open debate convened by Japan on “Investment in people to enhance resilience against complex challenges” under the Council’s peacebuilding and sustaining peace agenda item. The debate considered how to adapt and strengthen UN peacebuilding to respond to new challenges such as food security, pandemic diseases, and climate change through investment in people, including by promoting socioeconomic development and protecting human rights and human security. Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed, who briefed at the session, highlighted the central role of “inclusion” in the New Agenda for Peace, which involves the meaningful participation of “all constituencies and communities, particularly those traditionally underrepresented” in peace and security processes, as well as in a country’s social, economic and political life.

UN DOCUMENTS ON PEACEBUILDING AND SUSTAINING PEACE Secretary-General’s Report A/75/982 (5 August 2021) was the report on “Our Common Agenda”. **Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9250 (Resumption 1)** (26 January 2023) was the second half of the meeting record of the open debate on “Investment in people to enhance resilience against complex challenges”. **S/PV.9250** (26 January 2023) was an open debate on “Investment in people to enhance resilience against complex challenges” under the peacebuilding and sustaining peace agenda. **General Assembly Document A/RES/76/305** (8 September 2022) was a General Assembly resolution on financing for peacebuilding. **Peacebuilding Commission Document A/77/720-S/2023/86** (17 February 2023) was the annual report of the PBC on its 16th session.

Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace

Peacebuilding Commission-Related Developments

On 30 January, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) convened a meeting on the New Agenda for Peace with Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo. Noting the deteriorating global peace and security environment and deepening divisions among states, DiCarlo said that the New Agenda for Peace seeks to articulate a unifying vision to help reforge member states' commitment to the collective security system and the values of the UN Charter. She reiterated that conflict prevention and peacebuilding were at the heart of the New Agenda. Commission members expressed support for expanding the PBC's role to more geographical and substantive settings, and addressing cross-cutting issues of security, climate change, health, gender equality, development, and human rights, which the Secretary-General proposed in Our Common Agenda.

On 2 February, the PBC elected Ambassador Ivan Šimonović (Croatia) as commission chair. The outgoing chair, Ambassador Muhammad Abdul Muhith (Bangladesh), and Ambassador Antje Leendertse (Germany) were elected as the new vice-chairs.

On 3 March, the PBC sent a letter of advice to the Council on South Sudan, the first time that the PBC has advised the Council on the country. It followed the commission's first meeting on South Sudan in October 2022 and a PBC mission led by Mutih to South Sudan from 6 to 9 December 2022. On 29 March, the PBC also held its first meeting on Mozambique.

So far in 2023, the PBC has advised the Council eight times. It submitted written advice for Council meetings on West Africa and the Sahel, Colombia, sea-level rise, and South Sudan, while commission representatives have briefed the Council at meetings on the Central African Republic, the Great Lakes region, Colombia and at the 26 January open debate on peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

Key Issues and Options

Switzerland has circulated a concept note, which states that the aim of the open debate is to take stock, review and strengthen the approaches of the Security Council towards building trust to foster sustainable peace in light of current and emerging threats. Key issues are how to promote inclusion, international normative frameworks, and “facts” (or data), which the concept note suggests are important for building trust in conflict prevention and resolution efforts and in national peacebuilding processes.

Resolutions 2282 of the Security Council and the General Assembly (A/RES/70/262) in April 2016 on the ten-year review of the UN peacebuilding architecture established the importance of “inclusivity” for effective peacebuilding. According to the concept note, inclusion of all stakeholders, including women and youth, is key for building trust, while at the multilateral level, it is important for the Council to consider how to better involve the wider peacebuilding architecture and regional and subregional organisations. The international normative frameworks, including international

human rights law, enable accountability and predictability, which are also conducive to building trust. Data from scientifically driven and evidence-based insights are key to informing Council decision-making to prevent and resolve conflict and build peace. Additionally, using data and facts can foster trust among Council members.

In addition to the opportunity for the “Council to reflect on its responsibility, potential and tools to shore up trust”, as the concept note states, the open debate aims to contribute to the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace, including possible elements of confidence- and trust-building measures that can be included in the New Agenda. Our Common Agenda posits “trust” as one of the foundations for a renewed social contract, and highlights the importance of delivering basic services, promoting justice, and countering disinformation to respond to the overall breakdown in trust in major institutions worldwide. Following the release of the policy paper on the New Agenda for Peace, the Council could consider holding a formal or informal meeting to discuss the paper.

Council Dynamics

Switzerland chaired the PBC's Burundi configuration from 2009 until the configuration was discontinued at the end of last year. Elected Council member Brazil serves as the PBC and Council informal coordinator, which plays an important role in identifying opportunities for cooperation between the two bodies. Japan is another elected member that has long been an active proponent of peacebuilding and the PBC.

Nine Council members currently serve on the PBC's 31-member Organizational Committee. Seven PBC seats are allocated to the Security Council, which always include the P5 (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US). Ecuador and Mozambique hold the other two Council-allocated seats. Brazil serves as one of the seven member states that the General Assembly elects to the PBC. Japan is one of five PBC members selected for being a top UN financial contributor. Traditionally the P5 were seen as more cautious about having the PBC advise the Council, which they viewed as potentially interfering in the Council's responsibility to maintain international peace and security. But this dynamic has evolved significantly in recent years as interest has grown in improving UN peacebuilding and the impact of the PBC, including its advisory role. This is evidenced by the rise in PBC advisories and the Council's agreement last year to allow the PBC to receive advance copies of relevant Secretary-General's reports to the Council.

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

Expected Council Action

In May, North Macedonia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bujar Osmani, in his capacity as the current Chairman-in-Office (CiO) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), is expected to brief the Security Council on the organisation's activities. Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis is expected to chair the meeting.

Background and Key Recent Developments

The Council has received annual briefings from the OSCE CiO since 2004. The chairmanship of the OSCE rotates yearly, and on 1 January, North Macedonia succeeded Poland in this function. May's briefing will give Osmani an opportunity to inform the Council about North Macedonia's main priorities as chair and discuss possible avenues to strengthen OSCE-UN cooperation. The meeting will also mark the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Framework for Cooperation and Coordination by the UN and the OSCE on 26 May 1993.

North Macedonia outlined its priorities as OSCE chair at a 12 January session of the OSCE Permanent Council. At that meeting, Osmani said that Ukraine will remain the chairmanship's top priority, while instability in other crisis settings across the region will require the organisation's continued attention. He indicated that while the chairmanship's priorities will largely depend on security developments, it will strive to advance several overarching objectives, including the promotion of human security through support for sustainable economic growth and environmental cooperation, as well as upholding human rights and promoting tolerance as prerequisites for comprehensive security. Osmani further stated: “[c]hallenges will continue to emerge, but we are here to persevere.”

The OSCE has come under significant stress since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Ukraine has been a major focus of the organisation's work since the outbreak of hostilities in 2014, which saw fighting between the Ukrainian government and pro-Russian separatists in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. In line with the OSCE's responsibility for monitoring the 2015 Minsk II agreement—which outlined steps for ending the conflict in eastern Ukraine through a political settlement—its Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) had gathered daily information related to ceasefire violations and the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the Donbas region.

The OSCE has had to alter considerably its Ukraine-related work since Russia's invasion. The organisation announced the closure of its two field operations in the country, the SMM and the Project Co-ordinator—which supported Ukraine in developing its legislation, institutions, and practices in line with democratic standards by working with the government and civil society on such issues as combatting human trafficking and humanitarian de-mining—on 28 April and 30 June 2022, respectively. OSCE Secretary-General Helga Maria Schmid emphasised that the field operations were not closed because of security reasons, but because of Russia's opposition to the extension of their mandate. (OSCE decisions require the consensus of its 57 members.) On 1 November 2022, the OSCE launched a donor-funded support programme in Ukraine to continue work on areas previously addressed by the Project Co-ordinator. Since April

2022, three Ukrainian OSCE personnel have been detained by pro-Russian forces in Luhansk, two of whom were sentenced on 19 September 2022 to 13 years in prison for alleged treason.

Osmani has highlighted on several occasions, including during the UN Security Council's 24 February meeting marking one year since Russia's invasion, the importance of the OSCE's work aimed at promoting accountability for crimes committed in the context of the Ukraine war. In 2022, 45 participating states twice invoked the Moscow Mechanism to create an independent fact-finding mission to investigate abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in Ukraine. (The mechanism, which was created by 1991, allows participating states to initiate an investigation into human rights violations over the opposition of the state under scrutiny.) The fact-finding missions presented their findings in reports dated 12 April and 11 July 2022.

On 30 March, the same 45 participating states invoked the Moscow Mechanism again, requesting the establishment of a fact-finding mission to investigate possible violations of human rights, international humanitarian law, and international human rights law, as well as possible cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity associated with “the forcible transfer of children within parts of Ukraine's territory temporarily controlled or occupied by Russia and/or their deportation to the Russian Federation”. This request followed the 17 March decision by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to issue arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russia's commissioner for children's rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, for allegedly committing the war crime of “unlawful deportation” and “unlawful transfer” of children from Ukraine to Russia.

Objections by Russia have been preventing unanimity on broader decisions crucial to the OSCE's work. The organisation has been unable to agree on its annual budget for 2022 and 2023; as a result, the OSCE has been working on monthly allotments. In a 1 December 2022 statement, Schmid called the situation “untenable” and noted that the OSCE is struggling to attract and retain staff. Agreement has also not been reached on the organisation's 2024 CiO, as Russia has been opposing the candidature of Estonia, which launched its bid for the role in 2020.

The heightened tensions within the organisation have not only created operational constraints but have also led some to call into question the utility of the OSCE, an organisation whose *raison d'être* is to serve as a platform for dialogue on regional security issues between Russia and Western states. Speaking at a 23 February meeting of the General Assembly on Ukraine, Osmani asserted that “[t]he Russian aggression against Ukraine also erodes the foundations” of the OSCE by “violating the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act”. The Helsinki Final Act, which was signed in 1975, enshrined the OSCE's founding principles, which commit the organisation's members, among other things, to refrain from the use of force and to settle disputes peacefully.

Osmani and Schmid have continued to stress that despite the fundamental challenges faced by the OSCE, it has adapted its operations and continued to deliver, both in Ukraine and beyond. It has continued to play a role in international efforts regarding frozen conflicts in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Transdniestria. Given

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE OSCE Security Council Resolution S/RES/2202 (17 February 2015) endorsed the “Package of measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements” signed on 12 February 2015. Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9262 (17 February 2023) was a meeting requested by Russia under the “Threats to international peace and security” agenda item. S/PV.8992 (14 March 2022) was a briefing on UN-OSCE cooperation.

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

that these conflicts are not regularly discussed by the Council, some members might want to use May's briefing to hear about the OSCE's mediation efforts in these situations.

Analysts have warned that if the difficult dynamic within the OSCE continues, the organisation may decline in relevance and capacity. Some of them have emphasised the importance of the OSCE as the only multilateral forum outside the UN where Russia and Western countries can hold dialogue on security issues. In light of the markedly altered context in which the organisation operates, members may also discuss new avenues for cooperation between the organisation and the UN that utilise the OSCE's expertise. In the context of the war in Ukraine, members might suggest a possible role for the OSCE in monitoring potential future interim agreements, for example on securing the safety of nuclear sites—an issue which has been discussed at the UN Security Council on multiple occasions.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Over the years, Council members have expressed sharply diverging positions on issues within the OSCE's purview, most notably Ukraine, and on the broader European security architecture. These divisions have become more pronounced following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The Council's last meeting on OSCE-UN cooperation was held on 14 March 2022, less than a month after the invasion. At that meeting, several Council members—including the P3 (France, the UK, and the US)—argued that Russia ignored the efforts of the

OSCE's then-CiO, Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs Zbigniew Rau, to prevent the crisis by addressing Russia's security concerns through his Renewed European Security Dialogue initiative. Russia dismissed such allegations and said that such a dialogue would not have been successful due to the Western countries' position on the principle of "indivisible security". It claimed that this principle "requires avoiding any actions that would strengthen one party's security to the detriment of the security of any other country" and blamed Western countries for ignoring such a requirement by prioritising "the right of any country to choose which alliance it wished to join". China expressed a similar position during a 17 February Council meeting requested by Russia to mark the eighth anniversary of the Minsk II agreement, in which it maintained that "the Ukraine crisis is the culmination of European security conflicts that are closely related to NATO's constant eastward expansion since the Cold War".

At the 17 February meeting, several Council members, including the P3 and several European members, highlighted the OSCE's crucial work in the region and its continued relevance. Switzerland noted in this regard the organisation's expertise in monitoring, confidence-building measures, and verification. Russia for its part accused the OSCE of partiality and argued that it had provided biased reporting on the implementation of the Minsk II agreement. Such differing positions are likely to colour the discussion during the briefing in May.

Syria

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Syria continues to grapple with the devastating humanitarian consequences of the 6 February earthquake and its aftershocks. According to UNICEF's 18 April situation report, approximately 6,000 people were killed and more than 12,000 injured in Syria. An outbreak of cholera has further compounded the already dire humanitarian situation in the country. According to OCHA's 3 April situation report on the cholera outbreak in Syria, 105,959 suspected cases, including 104 deaths attributed to the disease, were reported across the country between 25 August 2022 and 19 March.

Prior to the earthquake, humanitarian aid was delivered to northwest Syria from Türkiye through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing. The opening of two additional border crossings in northwest Syria, Bab al-Salam and Al Ra'ee, has allowed the UN and other humanitarian organisations to accelerate aid delivery. According to OCHA data, at the time of writing, a total of 1,506 trucks carrying humanitarian supplies from seven UN agencies have crossed to northwest

Syria from Türkiye since 9 February through the three border crossings: Bab al-Hawa (1,181 trucks), Bab al-Salam (273 trucks), and Al Ra'ee (52 trucks).

On 26 April, Security Council members held an informal interactive dialogue (IID), in accordance with resolution 2672 of 9 January, which encouraged Council members to convene IIDs every two months "with participation of donors, interested regional parties and representatives of the international humanitarian agencies operating in Syria". This was the second IID held since the 6 February earthquake. The meeting featured a briefing by Tareq Talahma, OCHA's Acting Director for Operations and Advocacy. Three other UN officials—UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator ad interim for Syria El-Mostafa Benlamlah, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis Muhannad Ibrahim Ahmed Hadi, and Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria crisis ad interim on surge to Türkiye David Carden—were also on hand to respond to questions. In addition to Council members and Syria, interested regional parties (Iran and Türkiye) and donors (Canada, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and the EU) also participated in the meeting.

In recent months, securing funding for the myriad of new and ongoing humanitarian challenges in the country has continued to be difficult. At the time of writing, although the flash appeal for

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2672 (9 January 2023) was the resolution extending the authorisation for the Syria cross-border aid mechanism for an additional six months, until 10 July 2023. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9314 (27 April 2023) was a briefing on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria.

Syria

earthquake relief in Syria was 96.6 percent funded, the humanitarian response plan for 2023 was only 7.5 percent funded. According to OCHA's 20 April situation report, the Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund (SCHF) has allocated \$36.1 million in its first phase of the reserve allocation, funding 58 projects in the country. Following the 6 February earthquake, SCHF launched a series of reserve allocations, aimed at releasing at least \$50 million in two phases. The first phase is proposed to focus on providing immediate lifesaving response, whereas the second phase will concentrate on sustaining the medium-term response.

On 12-13 April, Syrian Foreign Minister Fayssal Mekdad visited Saudi Arabia, where he met Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud in Jeddah. This was the first high-level visit between the two countries since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011. According to the joint statement released following the meeting, the delegations discussed efforts to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis that "preserves Syria's unity, security, stability, Arab identity, and territorial integrity". It added that, during the meeting, the delegations stressed the need to "support the institutions of the Syrian state to extend its control over its territories to end the presence of armed militias and external interference in the Syrian internal affairs". Both sides also welcomed the start of procedures for resuming consular services and flights between the two countries.

On 14 April, Saudi Arabia hosted a high-level meeting of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates [UAE]), Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq to discuss the possibility of normalising relations with Syria and its readmission to the Arab League. According to a 15 April Financial Times article, officials with knowledge of the meeting said that there was sharp pushback against Saudi Arabia's rapprochement efforts with Syria from several countries, including Qatar, Kuwait, and Jordan.

On 18 April, bin Farhan met with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad in Damascus, marking the first high-level visit from Saudi Arabia to Syria since 2011. According to a press release following the meeting, the two leaders discussed the "necessary steps to achieve a comprehensive political settlement of the Syrian crisis that would end all its repercussions, achieve national reconciliation, and contribute to the return of Syria to its Arab surroundings and the resumption of its natural role in the Arab world". During the meeting, bin Farhan stressed, among other things, the importance of ensuring a suitable environment for aid to reach all regions in Syria.

On 27 April, Pedersen and OCHA Director for Humanitarian Financing and Resource Mobilization Division, Lisa Doughton briefed the Council on the recent political and humanitarian developments in Syria, respectively. Pedersen noted that there has been a rise in shelling, rocket fire, cross-line raids by terrorist groups, air strikes attributed to Israel and sporadic attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). He added that renewed engagement on Syria, particularly from the region, could assist in advancing a political solution to this conflict, in line with resolution 2254. Doughton 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. She noted that the UN and other humanitarian partners continue to use all

three available border crossings and that the UN hopes that such modalities will be extended for facilitation of urgent humanitarian operations.

Earlier, on 28 March, the US circulated a letter to the President of the Security Council, noting that, on 23 March, it had conducted targeted strikes in eastern Syria directed against facilities used by groups affiliated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps for command and control, munitions storage, and other purposes. The 23 March US airstrike came as a response to an attack, purportedly conducted by Iran, earlier the same day on a US military base that killed one American contractor and injured six others, including five US service members. In a 3 April statement, the US Army Central Command (CENTCOM) noted that it had conducted a unilateral strike in northwest Syria that killed an Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) senior leader, Khalid 'Aydd Ahmad al-Jabouri.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 4 April, during its 52nd session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted a resolution on the situation of human rights in Syria. Among other things, the resolution called on all parties, particularly the Syrian authorities, to maintain rapid, unhindered, safe and sustainable humanitarian access; reiterated the call for an immediate and nationwide ceasefire throughout Syria; extended the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry (COI) for one year; and requested the COI to present an oral update during an interactive dialogue at its 53rd session and present an updated report during its 54th and 55th sessions. The resolution was adopted with 26 votes in favour, five against, and 16 abstentions. Security Council members France, Gabon, the UK, and the US voted in favour, whereas the UAE abstained, and China voted against the resolution.

Women, Peace and Security

On 13 March, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI) released its latest report, covering the period from 1 July to 31 December 2022. Among other issues, the report provided an update on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the country. The report says that the COI found that rape and other forms of sexual violence taking place in government-controlled detention facilities amount to crimes against humanity and that members of armed groups, such as the Syrian National Army and Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham, have committed the war crime of rape and other forms of sexual violence. The report notes that SGBV continues to be perpetrated "countrywide, against the framework of national legislation that fails to effectively criminalize domestic violence, marital rape and other forms of gender-based violence". According to the report, UN representatives in Syria estimated that as many as 7.3 million people, overwhelmingly women and girls, are in need of services related to gender-based violence.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Security Council is how to alleviate the growing humanitarian needs in Syria. Periodic briefings from Griffiths and other OCHA officials have helped 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.

A related issue is ensuring the continued flow of humanitarian aid into northwest 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.

Syria

The Council could consider adopting a presidential statement that:

- expresses strong concern about the growing humanitarian needs in the country;
- 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;
- 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 reinvigorate 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 on Syria and the dire 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.

Brazil and Switzerland are the penholders on Syria humanitarian issues.

Lebanon

Expected Council Action

In May, Council members expect to receive a briefing in consultations on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1559. Adopted in 2004, resolution 1559 called for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon, the disarmament of all militias, and the extension of government control over the whole Lebanese territory. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo is expected to brief.

Key Recent Developments

On 6 April, over 30 rockets were fired from southern Lebanon towards Israel in response to raids by the Israeli police on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount site in Jerusalem's Old City. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 5 April.) This was the highest number of rockets fired from southern Lebanon towards Israel since 2006. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) blamed the launches on the Palestinian group Hamas and, in response, carried out airstrikes on what it identified as Hamas targets in southern Lebanon.

Noting that “[b]oth sides have said they do not want a war”, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in a 7 April statement urged all parties to cease all actions across the Blue Line—a border demarcation between Lebanon and Israel—stressing that the previous day's actions were dangerous and risked a serious escalation. Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister, Najib Mikati, said that Lebanon rejects the use of its territory to carry out destabilising operations. At the same time, Lebanon also condemned Israel's airstrikes as “an act of aggression, a flagrant violation of Lebanon's sovereignty, a threat to the stability that southern Lebanon enjoyed, a blatant violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and a threat to international peace and security”. During the same flare-up, which

later subsided, rockets were also fired towards Israel from the Gaza Strip and Syria, prompting IDF response fire.

On 26 April, Foreign Minister of Iran Hossein Amir-Abdollahian travelled to Lebanon. After holding meetings with Lebanese authorities in Beirut, he travelled to southern Lebanon. During a visit to a viewpoint overlooking Israel in the village of Maroun El Ras, near the Blue Line, he reportedly said that recent activities against Israel by Iran and its allies will lead to Israel's “isolation and destruction”.

Almost one year since the 15 May 2022 legislative elections, Lebanon's government remains in caretaker status, while the political impasse continues over the election of Lebanon's next president—who, according to Lebanon's power-sharing set-up, must be a Maronite Christian. Lebanon has been without a president since President Michel Aoun's term expired on 31 October 2022. None of the major Lebanese parties and blocs have the numbers independently to elect a candidate and, at press time, it remains unclear whether they will be able to agree on a compromise candidate.

Amid concerns that sufficient funding for the municipal elections had not been secured, the Lebanese parliament voted on 18 April to extend the term of local government officials until 31 May 2024, paving the way to a postponement of the elections for up to a year. Municipal elections were originally supposed to take place in May 2022, but were initially postponed to May 2023 to avoid their coinciding with the May 2022 legislative elections. A new date for the municipal elections is yet to be announced. In a 19 April post on Twitter, Special Coordinator for Lebanon Joanna Wronecka said that it was “vital that Lebanon's leaders put aside partisan and political differences to deliver the municipal elections in a timely manner”. While enough parliamentarians to secure the needed quorum attended the vote on the elections' postponement, several others boycotted

UN DOCUMENTS ON LEBANON Security Council Resolution S/RES/1559 (2 September 2004) urged withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon, disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, extension of the Lebanese government's control over all Lebanese territory and free and fair presidential elections. **Secretary-General's Report S/2023/280** (17 April 2023) was the most recent Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1559.

Lebanon

it as disagreement persists over the capacity of parliament to act as a legislative assembly, or merely as an electoral body, during the period of presidential vacancy.

In March, an International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission visited Beirut. In a statement, the IMF staff who carried out the visit said that Lebanon continues to face the consequences of a prolonged socioeconomic crisis and stressed that there has been “limited progress” in implementing the reforms set out in the April 2022 Staff Level Agreement as a precondition for the IMF to support Lebanon with around \$3 billion. The statement said that “Lebanon is at a dangerous crossroads” and restated the reforms the IMF requires Lebanon to implement. These include adopting a medium-term fiscal strategy to “restore debt sustainability and create space for increasing social and development spending” and a thorough reform of the banking sector.

Anti-refugee rhetoric and deportations remain a source of concern in Lebanon, which hosts the largest number of refugees per capita in the world. On 13 April, the BBC reported Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rahi as saying that Syrian refugees in Lebanon are “draining the state’s resources, disturbing social security, and competing with the Lebanese for their livelihood”. During two weeks in April, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) deported over 50 Syrian refugees to Syria, AFP reported. According to UNHCR, 58 percent of Syrian refugee families in Lebanon live in inadequate and unsafe shelters, and 67 percent are moderately or severely food insecure.

There continues to be no substantial progress in the inquiry into responsibility for the 4 August 2020 Beirut port explosion. In a 5 April statement, UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers Margaret L. Satterthwaite condemned “the undue delays that have prevented justice for those affected by the blast”. She said that Tarek Bitar, the Lebanese judge currently leading the investigation, has faced increasing obstacles and threats while carrying out his work, including “credible death threats”. Satterthwaite urged the Lebanese authorities to ensure that these threats are investigated and that Bitar, his colleagues, and his family are adequately protected.

A 20 April joint statement by several civil society organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, denounced as a violation of freedom of expression the 3 March decision by the Beirut Bar Association to amend its code of ethics to stipulate that “lawyers will only be allowed to participate in a conference or legal seminar, or provide an interview or information to a media outlet, social media outlet, website, or group after soliciting

and receiving the permission of the Bar Association President to do so”. The statement says that this amendment “egregiously curtails legal defense work, particularly impact, strategic, and rights litigation which require public engagement, campaigning, and advocacy”.

Key Issues and Options

The peace and security situation in southern Lebanon remains in precarious balance. The substantial amount of weaponry held by Hezbollah and other non-state actors in Lebanon, as well as Israel’s violations of Lebanon’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, are ongoing issues. Key aspects of resolutions 1559 and 1701, which in 2006 called for a cessation of hostilities between the Shi’a group Hezbollah and Israel, remain unimplemented.

Analysts attributed the tense calm after the April exchange of fire across the Blue Line to the fact that none of the actors involved seemingly wanted a wider escalation. Nevertheless, while the Palestinian question remains unsolved, and the Middle East peace process is perpetually stalled, outbursts of this type are likely to happen again. Against the fragile backdrop of the peace and security situation in southern Lebanon, serious incidents across the Blue Line could trigger a chain reaction leading to a violent escalation with severe consequences for the whole region.

The swift election of a president, the formation of a government, and the implementation of reforms aimed at addressing the ongoing socioeconomic instability are further issues.

Council members may consider issuing a presidential statement stressing the importance of the effective implementation of resolutions 1559 and 1701, urging the Lebanese parliament to elect a president and calling for the formation of a new government. The statement could also underscore the importance of reforms to promote socioeconomic stability and of respecting the principle of non-refoulement.

Council Dynamics

There is broad consensus among Council members in support of Lebanon’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security. Differences over Hezbollah remain among Council members. Some draw a distinction between Hezbollah’s political and military wings and have designated only its military wing as a terrorist organisation. Other members, including the UK and the US, have listed the Shi’a group in its entirety as a terrorist organisation. In contrast, Russia sees Hezbollah as a legitimate sociopolitical force.

France is the penholder on Lebanon.

Sudan/South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council expects to receive a briefing on the Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), due by 1 May, as requested in resolution 2660 of 14 November 2022. Consultations will follow the briefing.

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

Key Recent Developments

The Council was last briefed on Abyei on 27 October 2022 by

UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN/SOUTH SUDAN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2660 (14 November 2022) renewed the mandate of UNISFA until 15 November 2023. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9170** (27 October 2022) was a briefing on UNISFA.

Sudan/South Sudan

Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations (DPPA-DPO) Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee and Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa Hanna Serwaa Tetteh. On 14 November 2022, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2660, extending the mandate of UNISFA and the mission's support for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM) until 15 November. The JBVMM was established in 2011 to conduct monitoring and verification activities along the Sudan-South Sudan border.

On 2 April, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, the Deputy Chairperson of Sudan's Transitional Sovereign Council, chaired a meeting in Khartoum of the Higher Committee for Political and Administrative Oversight of the Abyei area, the disputed area along the Sudan-South Sudan border. In a press statement following the meeting, the rapporteur of the committee, Mohamed Abdullah Wad-Abuk, noted that the discussions focused on examining the humanitarian and security situation in Abyei and setting directives for maintaining security and stability in the region. He also emphasised the need to implement the agreement on administrative and political arrangements signed by Sudan and South Sudan.

On 10 April, Dagalo and Tut Gatluak, South Sudan's presidential adviser, met in Khartoum to discuss the situation in Abyei. According to local media reports, the discussion focused on the provision of humanitarian assistance and services in Abyei, as well as the implementation of development projects in the area, with the support of the UN and other international actors. The two sides agreed to a future meeting in Juba to continue discussions on Abyei, including on the final status of the region. Given recent developments in Sudan, this meeting is unlikely to happen soon.

From 3 to 6 April, representatives from the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities, including women and youth leaders and politicians, participated in the Inter-Communal Peace Conference in Wau, South Sudan. During the conference, among other things, the communities agreed to cease hostilities, allow unhindered movement for humanitarian assistance, and facilitate the return of internally displaced persons.

In a 20 April statement, UNISFA welcomed the holding of the Inter-Communal Peace Conference and urged the Ngok Dinka and Twic Dinka communities to adhere to the outcome of the meeting and engage constructively to resolve their differences. It also extended support for the proposal put forth by the governor of Warrap State and the chief administrator of Abyei to establish a joint committee comprising representatives of the two communities and "peace partners" such as UNISFA and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). The proposal calls for the joint committee to meet with South Sudanese President Salva Kiir Mayardit and the political and security leadership of South Sudan to convey the ideas of both communities and concerns regarding the "buffer zones".

UNISFA, along with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), and Concordis International (a peacebuilding non-governmental organisation) organised a four-day conference in Todach, Abyei from 20 to 23 March aimed at reviving and reviewing the agreements signed by the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities in 2016 on the peaceful management of the annual transhumance migration. Over

the decades, both communities have had disagreements over the ownership of land, access to water, and grazing areas. According to UNISFA's 23 March press statement, the sides reached a peace agreement ensuring freedom of movement in Abyei, the withdrawal of all militias and armed units from Abyei, and the reactivation of the Joint Peace Committee to ensure continuous communication and dialogue between the two communities at the leadership level through quarterly conferences. Among other things, both communities called on UNISFA to intensify patrolling along the roads and villages within Abyei and to ensure that Sudan and South Sudan withdraw armed groups and militias from Abyei.

In a 1 March statement, UNISFA condemned the movement of armed elements within the southern part of Abyei on 28 February. It expressed deep concern that this development might exacerbate the conflict in the area and increase humanitarian challenges for the civilians in the area. The statement reaffirmed that Abyei remains a weapons-free area that should not have the presence of any force of both communities. It urged all parties to cease fire and allow the political process to resolve the crisis.

According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), an organisation that collects conflict- and crisis-related data, in 2022, Abyei witnessed the highest number of violent incidents recorded by ACLED for any year since 2011, with 48 incidents.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is finding an avenue to continue the renewed engagement in the political process to address the final status of Abyei and Sudan-South Sudan border issues. It remains to be seen if the recent fighting that erupted in Sudan on 15 April, between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group, may hinder the political process.

A likely option is for Council members to consider the findings and recommendations of the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of UNISFA's mandate, due by 1 May.

The report is expected to provide updates on several long-standing issues, in particular:

- progress on the deployment of police;
- the appointment of a civilian deputy head of mission;
- usage of the Anthony airstrip, which is crucial for medical evacuations; and
- the issuance of visas to support implementation of the mandate.

Council Dynamics

Council members agree on the key role that UNISFA and the JBVMM play in support of achieving peace, security, and stability in Abyei and the broader region. Many members are critical of the lack of progress by Sudan and South Sudan in resolving the final status of Abyei, as well as on the long-standing issues outlined above.

The unanimous adoption of resolution 2660 demonstrated that the Council remains unified in its view that UNISFA plays an important role in regional stability and advancing efforts toward the political settlement of the Abyei question.

The US is the penholder on Abyei.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council will hold its semi-annual debate on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The current authorisation for the EU-led multinational stabilisation force (EUFOR ALTHEA) expires on 2 November 2023.

Background and Key Recent Developments

The 1995 General Framework Agreement for Peace, also known as the Dayton Agreement, created two entities within BiH: the predominantly Bosniak and Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the predominantly Serb Republika Srpska (RS). The two entities are linked by a rotating tripartite inter-ethnic presidency and a two-chamber legislative branch with equal representation by the three major ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs). Both entities also have their own executive and legislative branches.

BiH continues to experience political instability amid growing nationalist and separatist actions and rhetoric. On 28 December 2022, the National Assembly of the RS (NARS) adopted a law on “Immovable Property Used for the Functioning of Authorities”, which seeks to establish RS’ ownership of select property used by RS public authorities. A similar law, which had been adopted by NARS on 10 February 2022, had been deemed unconstitutional on 22 September 2022 by BiH’s Constitutional Court, which ruled that property used by public authorities falls under the jurisdiction of the Bosnian state rather than either of its entities. High Representative for BiH Christian Schmidt issued a decree on 27 February suspending the new law until the Constitutional Court renders a decision.

In a 27 February statement, RS President Milorad Dodik rejected the decree and insisted that the law remains in force. He threatened that RS would secede from BiH if there was any interference in implementing the legislation. RS has not recognised Schmidt’s authority as the High Representative for BiH since October 2021, which is when a law passed by NARS on 30 July 2021 entered into force, declaring that decisions of the High Representative did not apply to RS.

On 23 March, NARS adopted amendments to RS’ criminal code, criminalising acts of defamation, which received widespread criticism. In a 10 March statement, the US embassy in BiH described the legislation as repressive and anti-democratic and argued that it “benefit[s] only the ruling coalition in its effort to consolidate power”. A day prior to the legislation’s adoption, the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board (PIC SB) described it in a joint statement as an attempt to “shrink the civic space and reduce public debate”, urging NARS to “stop any activities that silence independent voices among media and civil society”. (The PIC was established in December 1995 to garner international support for the Dayton Agreement.)

General elections in BiH were held on 2 October 2022. Shortly after polling stations closed, Schmidt issued a set of decrees, known as the Functionality Package, intended to improve the functionality of FBiH’s political institutions and ensure the timely implementation of election results. FBiH ministers elected in 2015 after the 2014 elections have been serving under a technical mandate since 2018 because political processes have been blocked over demands for electoral reform. Schmidt’s decrees sought to improve

the proportionality of representation and establish mechanisms to unblock paralysis in FBiH’s legislatures, including setting deadlines for the formation of the government.

Although the president and two vice-presidents of the entity were appointed by FBiH’s parliament on 16 February, FBiH has been unable to form a new government as political parties missed the 6 April deadline set by Schmidt’s decrees. In a 7 April statement, Schmidt urged politicians to set aside “their partisan and individual interests and recognise the higher interests of the Federation”. On 27 April, Schmidt issued a set of decrees that aim to strengthen BiH’s criminal code and to unblock FBiH’s formation of government.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 20 January statement at the end of an eight-day visit to BiH, Fionnuala D. Ní Aoláin, UN Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights, acknowledged human rights progress achieved in critical areas, including prisons, and noted her positive impression of the “individualised and constructive approach to prisoner rehabilitation, including for persons convicted of terrorism”. However, Ní Aoláin observed that the “failure to address the legacy of the past” in BiH through transitional justice measures and rule of law reform in justice and security institutions enabled conditions that directly contribute to the rise of violent extremism. “Divisive ethno-nationalist politics undermine conflict transition and actively work against both security and human rights in the country”, she concluded.

Key Issues and Options

The role of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) remains a key issue for the Council. Neither China nor Russia recognise Schmidt’s authority as High Representative and may call for the early closure of the OHR in this month’s debate. One option for the Council is to consider a presidential statement proposing a review of OHR’s future role in exchange for recognition by the P2 (China and Russia) of Schmidt’s legitimacy as High Representative.

Another important issue is the need to address the increasing nationalist and separatist actions and rhetoric. Schmidt’s 27 February decree suspending NARS’ law on property used by RS authorities will be a crucial indicator of the RS leadership’s willingness to challenge OHR’s authority and of the High Representative’s determination to enforce the orders if the RS decides to resist. Council members may consider issuing a presidential statement reaffirming the continued relevance of the Dayton Agreement and urging all parties to refrain from divisive rhetoric and actions.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Deep divisions related to BiH’s Euro-Atlantic integration and possible accession to NATO—particularly between Russia on the one hand and the US and European Council members on the other—colour Council dynamics on BiH. The situation in Ukraine is likely to continue to permeate the Council’s engagement on BiH and contribute to further division between these two camps.

On 15 December 2022, the European Council unanimously voted to grant BiH candidate country status, marking a milestone in the country’s path towards EU integration. In a 21 February statement, Dodik welcomed the announcement but emphasised that “BiH is a negotiating party on the way to the EU... [rather than] a subject”. He also expressed RS’s differing opinions about BiH’s potential NATO

UN DOCUMENTS ON BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2658 (2 November 2022) was a straightforward renewal of the authorisation of the EU-led multinational stabilisation force (EUFOR ALTHEA) for another year. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9179 (2 November 2022) was the semi-annual debate on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

membership. During a 22 December press briefing, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova described the European Council's decision as a "tool of economic and political coercion" and stressed Moscow's commitment to "rid sovereign and independent Bosnia and Herzegovina of the obsolete external protectorate regime".

Meanwhile, relations between RS and the UK and US have deteriorated as RS authorities pursue closer ties with China and Russia. On 8 January, Dodik reportedly awarded Russian President Vladimir Putin the RS' highest medal of honour for his "patriotic concern and love" for Bosnian Serbs. Dodik thanked Putin for helping preserve RS' "voice and position...under the onslaught of international interventionism". On 8 April, Dodik said that RS "will cooperate

with [China] in all areas", stressing that if RS is unable to pursue its interests "with the EU, it can be done with someone else".

On 24 March, Dodik said that RS will no longer cooperate with the staff of the UK and US embassies in BiH after the US imposed sanctions on three individuals, including Director of the RS Administration for Geodetic and Property Affairs Dragan Stankovic. On 11 April, Dodik further announced that RS will suspend all cooperation activities with NATO. In response, the US embassy to BiH issued a statement noting that Dodik does not have the authority to unilaterally suspend or amend the 2005 Law on Defense, which mandates RS' cooperation with NATO.

Libya

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council will receive the biannual briefing of the ICC Prosecutor, Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, on the ICC's Libya-related activities.

Background and Key Recent Developments

Libya is not a state party to the Rome Statute of the ICC. The Security Council referred the situation in Libya to the ICC through the unanimous adoption of resolution 1970 on 26 February 2011, which invited the ICC Prosecutor to update it every six months. The ICC has jurisdiction over crimes listed in the Rome Statute committed on Libya's territory or by its nationals from 15 February 2011 onwards. The ICC opened investigations in March 2011 related to alleged crimes against humanity, including murder, imprisonment, torture, persecution, and other inhumane acts; and war crimes, including murder, torture, cruel treatment, and outrages upon personal dignity.

There is currently one open case before the court, centred on Saif al-Islam Qaddafi, the son of deposed Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi. On 27 June 2011, the court charged Qaddafi with two counts of alleged crimes against humanity and issued a warrant for his arrest. In November 2021, Qaddafi, who remains at large, announced that he would be a candidate in the Libyan presidential elections that were scheduled for December 2021 but subsequently postponed. In January 2023, Qaddafi's legal team reiterated his intention to run for election.

Khan last briefed the Council on the court's work in Libya on 9 November 2022. He delivered his briefing from Libya, marking the first visit of an ICC Prosecutor to the country in over ten years. In his remarks, Khan reiterated the court's commitment to its "renewed investigative strategy" involving the allocation of additional resources, increased engagement with those affected by alleged crimes in Libya, and more effective cooperation with Libyan authorities. Khan said the court had made "good progress on implementing this new approach" over the prior six months, having maintained a constant presence in the region for the first time since 2011. His office had

undertaken over 20 missions to six countries, collecting "a variety of evidentiary material" that the court's written report further specifies as "video and audio material, forensic information, witness statements and satellite imagery". Based on this progress, additional arrest warrants—currently under seal—had been submitted to the ICC judges.

Khan also noted that the Office of the Prosecutor in September 2022 became a formal member of the joint team investigating crimes against migrants and refugees in Libya, joining relevant national authorities from Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the UK, and supported by the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol). In October 2022, that cooperation led to the arrest of two key suspects, who were extradited from Ethiopia to Italy and the Netherlands, respectively.

On the political track, both the UN and national actors have concentrated recent efforts on facilitating agreement on a new roadmap for national elections. In his 18 April briefing to the Council, Special Representative for Libya and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Abdoulaye Bathily said that he had "launched [the] implementation" of the UN-facilitated Libyan High-Level Panel for Elections (HLPE), which is intended to gather a wide range of national stakeholders to agree on a political and legal framework for holding elections in 2023.

Parallel to this initiative, the rival Libyan legislatures have engaged in a separate effort to establish a constitutional basis for elections. They recently adopted the 13th constitutional amendment to the 2011 Constitutional Declaration—specifying the powers of the president, prime minister, and parliament—and subsequently established a "joint 6+6 committee" responsible for drafting electoral laws. On 6 April, the committee held its first meeting, after which a committee member confirmed its intention to agree on legislation by mid-June in order to hold elections by the end of the year.

On 16 March, the Security Council adopted 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

UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2656](#) (28 October 2022) extended UNSMIL's mandate until 31 October 2023. [S/RES/1970](#) (26 February 2011) referred the situation in Libya to the ICC, imposed an arms embargo and targeted sanctions (assets freeze and travel ban), and established a sanctions committee. [Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2023/2](#) (16 March 2023) said the Security Council was encouraged by the launch of the Libyan High-Level Panel for Elections. [Secretary-General's Report S/2023/248](#) (5 April 2023) was the 120-day report on UNSMIL. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9306](#) (18 April 2023) was a briefing on UNSMIL. [S/PV.9187](#) (9 November 2022) was the biannual briefing of the ICC Prosecutor.

Libya

launch of the HLPE. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 16 March.)

Human-Rights Related Developments

Speaking on 3 April, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk emphasised that his office will strengthen its work on Libya, noting that as the Independent Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on Libya ended its operations and handed over their archives and evidence to the UN Human Rights Office. Türk underscored that no one should assume that “the eyes of international community have now left Libya”.

The FFM on Libya—established by the Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2020—published its final report on 3 March. The report 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”. Among numerous recommendations to promote accountability for these crimes, the report called on Libyan authorities to “cooperate fully with and facilitate unhindered and safe access to the International Criminal Court”. (In his November 2022 Council briefing, Khan described the cooperation of Libyan authorities with the court as “not perfect”.) The FFM also urged OHCHR to “establish a distinct and autonomous mechanism with an ongoing mandate to monitor and report on gross human rights violations in Libya”.

Key Issues and Options

An underlying key issue for the Council is how to promote justice and accountability for atrocities committed in Libya. In addition to receiving Khan’s briefing, Council members that are party to the ICC may continue the practice of holding a joint press stakeout in connection with the meeting. Members could also encourage the ICC to make use of the FFM’s latest findings in its investigations and to support the FFM’s recommendation that OHCHR establish a follow-up mechanism to monitor and report on human rights violations in the country.

In addition to the ICC’s pursuit of accountability in Libya, another key issue for the Council continues to be the precarious security and political situations overhanging Libya’s uncertain electoral path. A related concern for the Council is how to foster common political

ground between the country’s two rival governments so they can agree on a constitutional framework to pave the way for Libya’s long-delayed elections. In this regard, Council members may welcome the progress represented by the establishment of the HLPE and the 6+6 commission while reiterating their expectation that all stakeholders display the political will to meet their stated commitments through concrete action.

Council Dynamics

The Council is united on the need for a Libyan-led inclusive process to hold elections that will restore political, security, and economic stability—a consensus recently evidenced by the presidential statement of 16 March. Members are more divided on the work of the ICC, however. Albania, Brazil, Ecuador, France, Gabon, Ghana, Japan, Malta, Switzerland, and the UK are states parties to the Rome Statute of the ICC, while China, Mozambique, Russia, the UAE, and the US are not. These distinctions largely reflect how members view the court’s work on Libya, with the notable exception of the US, which despite not being a party to the Rome Statute, is supportive of the ICC’s efforts regarding the country. Among the wider UN membership, African countries have long expressed concerns about the court’s disproportionate focus on Africa.

At the November 2022 briefing, Russia criticised what it called “the biased and politicized activities” of the ICC and urged the Council to “seriously consider ... possibly withdrawing the Libyan file from the ICC”. This position may have further hardened following the court’s announcement on 17 March that it had issued arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and his commissioner for children’s rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, for allegedly committing the war crime of “unlawful deportation” and “unlawful transfer” of children from Ukraine to Russia. During the ICC briefing on Libya this month, Russia may object to inviting Khan as the briefer and call for a procedural vote on the matter.

The UK is the penholder on Libya.

Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council is expected to hold its bi-annual briefing and consultations on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (FC-G5S) that Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger (G5 Sahel) established in 2017 to fight terrorism and transnational organised crime.

Key Recent Developments

The security situation in much of the Sahel has remained dire as terrorist groups in the region increasingly threaten coastal West African countries. In June 2022, Mali withdrew from the G5 Sahel, including the FC-G5S, after some members of the regional group opposed letting the transitional authorities in Mali assume the organisation’s

rotating presidency. Speaking at the Council’s 16 November 2022 briefing on the FC-G5S, Executive Secretary of the G5 Sahel Eric Tiaré described how Mali’s withdrawal “plunged our subregional organization into an institutional crisis”. Tiaré stated, however, that the G5 Sahel countries were committed to continuing their collaboration. They were in the process of developing a new concept of operations for the FC-G5S and updating the Priority Investment Programme, which focuses on addressing the socio-economic drivers of conflict in the region.

G5 Sahel ministers of foreign affairs of the four remaining countries met in N’Djamena on 18 January to discuss how to preserve and revitalise the organisation. At its conclusion, they proposed holding an extraordinary summit of heads of state as soon as possible to

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE G5 SAHEL [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2391](#) (8 December 2017) was a resolution on MINUSMA’s providing support to the G5 Sahel Joint Force. [Secretary-General’s Report S/2022/838](#) (9 November 2022) was on the G5 Sahel Joint Force. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9194](#) (16 November 2022) was a briefing on the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force

relaunch G5 Sahel activities. The summit, the first since 2021, took place on 20 February in N'Djamena, and was attended by Chad's transitional President Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, Nigerien President Mohamed Bazoum, and Burkina Faso's transitional Defence Minister Kassoum Coulibaly. Leaders assessed the security situation in G5 Sahel countries and “reaffirmed their desire to preserve and consolidate this important framework for cooperation and coordination between the four countries”, according to a 22 February communiqué of the summit, which concluded with Déby handing over the G5 Sahel presidency to Ghazouani for a one-year term.

In Mali, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) continued its military offensive in the Ménaka and Gao regions, near the borders of Niger and Burkina Faso, which created a major displacement crisis. On 10 April, ISGS took over the town of Tidermène in the Ménaka region, which, according to news reports, has left Ménaka city isolated and surrounded.

In Burkina Faso, at least 51 soldiers were killed in Oudlan province on 21 February when their unit was ambushed by jihadist militants. It was the highest reported death toll from a single attack since November 2021, when 57 gendarmes were killed in another attack. On 15 April, the interim government announced a “general mobilisation” to give the state “all necessary means” to combat terrorist groups. On 20 April, at least 150 civilians may have been killed, and many others injured, allegedly by Burkina's defence and security forces accompanied by paramilitary auxiliaries known as Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP), according to a statement by the spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The killings, in Karma village in northern Yatenga Province, occurred following an attack on a VDP base on 15 April in which—according to the provincial governor—eight soldiers and 32 VDPs were killed and more than 30 injured.

Recent months saw relations deteriorate between France and Burkina Faso, which requested on 23 January that France withdraw its military forces, numbering 400 troops. France completed the withdrawal on 18 February. Meanwhile, Burkina Faso's interim authorities, who came to power following the country's second coup in nine months in September 2022, and the military juntas in Mali and Guinea, have sought to strengthen their cooperation. On 9 February, the foreign ministers of the three countries met in Ouagadougou and, according to their joint statement, “agreed to pool their efforts and undertake joint initiatives for the lifting of the suspension measures and other restrictions” imposed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the AU. They further agreed on “the need to combine their efforts and those of the countries of the sub-region and the region” to deal with the security situation.

Amid rising anti-French sentiment in Africa, French President Emmanuel Macron announced on 7 November 2022 the end of France's regional counter-terrorism force in the Sahel, Operation Barkhane, which was established in 2014. Despite the conclusion of the operation, Macron stressed that France would maintain its forces in the region but that they would operate through bilateral arrangements.

Key Issues and Options

Key issues are how to strengthen support for the FC-G5S and cooperation among G5 Sahel countries. With the evolving security landscape and challenges facing the FC-G5S, another issue is how to support other security mechanisms in West Africa and the Sahel. These include the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) fighting Boko Haram-affiliated groups in the Lake Chad basin, the Accra Initiative involving Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Niger, and Togo for enhancing security cooperation, the Nouakchott Process on security cooperation in the Sahelo-Saharan region, and the ECOWAS Standby Force.

A related issue is the role of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and questions about the future of the peacekeeping operation amid the withdrawal of troop-contributing countries from the mission and tenuous relations with Mali's authorities (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 11 April.)

Alleged violations against civilians by Sahel countries' militaries remain a significant issue of concern.

Additionally, tackling structural conflict drivers in the Sahel, such as weak governance, under-development, and climate change, is a key issue. Multiple strategies to address these problems have been developed since 2013, including the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the G5 Sahel Priority Investment Plan. Council members could consider discussing the UN Development Programme report titled “Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement” at the Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa. The report, published on 7 February, is based on personal testimonies from nearly 2,200 respondents in eight Sahel countries and describes the factors that can lead an individual to violent extremism.

Completing political transitions in Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mali within their current timetables is another key issue. After delays in the transitions in Chad and Mali, all three countries are expected to hold national elections next year.

The humanitarian situation is another critical issue. In Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, 2.6 million people are internally displaced—76 percent of whom are in Burkina Faso, according to a 19 April OCHA humanitarian snapshot. The Secretary-General's 3 January report on West Africa and the Sahel depicted notably worsening trends because of the impact of the conflict in Ukraine, ongoing violence, and the effects of climate change.

The ongoing strategic assessment of the Sahel being conducted by the Independent High-Level Panel on Security and Development led by former Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou on behalf of the UN, the AU, ECOWAS, and the G5 Sahel is an important process that may inform future Council discussions and action regarding the region. Until its completion, including during the upcoming May briefing, Council members may encourage cooperation between regional and international actors to combat terrorist groups and stress the equal importance of addressing the root causes of the region's instability to complement security responses. Members may further highlight the need for donors to contribute to the region's humanitarian relief efforts.

Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force

Council Dynamics

Previously, Council discussion on the FC-G5S revolved around whether to authorise a UN office to provide logistical support and more predictable funding, with members being divided over the issue. This debate, however, has been sidelined over the past year because of the divisions among G5 Sahel countries and the withdrawal of Mali from the organisation. Uncertainty about the future of the FC-G5S and the expanding presence of terrorist groups towards littoral West African states have also caused members to focus more on other security initiatives by ECOWAS and through the Accra Initiative, of which elected member Ghana is a member. Council members have been awaiting the recommendations of the Issoufou panel, though some

members appear frustrated over the delays in this process.

Russia's entry into the Sahel since late 2021 through the provision of military assistance to Mali and the deployment of the Wagner Group, a private Russian security company, has contributed to polarising Council discussion on the region. Western Council members have condemned Mali's cooperation with the Wagner Group, and there are concerns that Burkina Faso could also partner with Wagner. While France has ended Operation Barkhane and has withdrawn its forces from Mali and Burkina Faso, it has strengthened its presence in neighbouring Niger and says it remains engaged in the Sahel, Gulf of Guinea, and Lake Chad regions.

France is the penholder on the FC-G5S.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In May, 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.

Key Recent Developments

Last month witnessed some promising signs in efforts to resolve Yemen's more than eight-year war. Between 8 and 13 April, a delegation from Saudi Arabia and Omani mediators held talks in Sana'a with leaders of the Houthis rebel group. The visit to the Houthi-held Yemeni capital raised expectations that the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, which leads a military coalition in support of Yemen's internationally recognised government, could be nearing an agreement in talks that Oman has facilitated since October 2022, when Yemen's truce agreement from April 2022 expired. A statement issued by Saudi Arabia described the recently concluded talks in Sana'a as "constructive" and said that discussions would "resume as soon as possible".

From 14 to 16 April, the conflict parties released 869 detainees, implementing the release plan that the Yemeni government and the Houthis agreed to in Switzerland on 20 March at the conclusion of the seventh meeting of the UN- and ICRC-chaired Supervisory Committee on the Implementation of the Detainees' Exchange Agreement. The three-day operation involved 15 ICRC flights to six cities: Abha and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia and Aden, Marib, Mokha, and Sana'a in Yemen. On 17 April, the ICRC facilitated a separate unilateral release of 104 detainees from Saudi Arabia to Yemen. The releases constituted the second-largest exchange of prisoners—over 1,000 detainees had similarly been released in October 2020—since the December 2018 Stockholm Agreement, which established a prisoner exchange mechanism between the parties. According to the 20 March agreement, the government and the Houthis will meet again in May to discuss further releases.

Military hostilities escalated in the run-up to the Houthi-Saudi talks in Sana'a. The Houthis launched new attacks in Marib

governorate on 21 March and in Shabwah governorate on 25 March. A Houthi drone attack on 25 March in Taiz governorate targeted a convoy transporting senior government officials, including Yemen's defence minister and Taiz's governor, killing at least one person. According to OCHA, escalating fighting in Marib and Shabwah displaced nearly 10,000 people. In a 4 April press statement, Council members condemned the escalation while welcoming the 20 March agreement on the release of detainees.

At the Council's 17 April briefing on Yemen, Grundberg expressed concern about this recent military activity and called on the parties to exercise maximum restraint. But he described other developments as the most "serious opportunity for making progress towards ending the conflict in eight years". Grundberg noted that he was working closely with regional and Yemeni stakeholders to ensure that the Omani-facilitated talks feed into UN mediation efforts for an intra-Yemeni political process on future political, economic and security governance. On 27 April, Council members issued a press statement that welcomed the visit to Sana'a by the Saudi and Omani delegations, and called for all Yemeni parties to continue dialogue, engage constructively in the peace process and negotiate in good faith.

Also in April, the UN reported progress in the operation to salvage the FSO Safer, the decrepit oil tanker moored off the Ras Isa peninsula in the Red Sea. On 6 April, the very large crude carrier, which the UN purchased last month to replace the FSO Safer, began its journey to the Red Sea from Zhoushan in China. According to a UN announcement, the ship, called the Nautica, should arrive in early May after making a stop for some technical modifications. During the Council briefing on Yemen, the UK announced that it would co-host with the Netherlands a pledging conference on 4 May to raise funds for the salvage operation. In their 4 April press statement, Council members called on donors, including the private sector, to contribute the remaining \$34 million needed to undertake the operation's emergency phase while reiterating the importance of a timely implementation of the project to prevent an economic, environmental, and humanitarian disaster. OCHA Deputy Director of Operations and Advocacy Ghada Eltahir Mudawi, who briefed

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.9304](#) (17 April 2023) was a briefing on Yemen by Special Envoy Hans Grundberg and OCHA Deputy Director of Operations and Advocacy Ghada Eltahir Mudawi.

Yemen

at the 17 April Council meeting, said that the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund had made a \$20 million loan available to the operation to avoid any delays while further contributions come in.

On 19 April, at least 78 people were killed during a stampede in Sana'a. The tragic incident occurred at a charity event for Ramadan after Houthis fired into the air in an attempt at crowd control, apparently striking an electrical wire and causing it to explode, which sparked panic among the crowd.

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. Details of a potential deal in the Houthi-Saudi talks have not been made public, but according to news reports, they may include establishing a ceasefire and the payment of public employees in Houthi territory, possibly through revenues from Yemen's oil and gas reserves, which the Yemeni government controls. A deal may also aim to relaunch broader talks among Yemeni parties. 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 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 are the leading cause of civilian casualties in the truce and post-truce period. Support for Yemen's economy is also critical in mitigating the humanitarian crisis.

Members may reiterate calls on all parties 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. In addition, they may urge donors to support the Yemen 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), for which a 27 February pledging conference raised \$1.2 billion of the \$4.3 billion that the UN has estimated is necessary for its aid operations. They are also likely to continue closely monitoring progress in the FSO Safer salvage operation.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members have expressed cautious optimism about the potential of the Houthi-Saudi talks 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. 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 posed by the FSO Safer. China helped mediate the Saudi-Iran agreement on 10 March to restore relations between those two countries, which it has highlighted could help create conditions to improve the situation in Yemen. 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, which was scheduled to meet on 28 April to discuss its work plan with the Yemen Panel of Experts. Since resolution 2675 of 15 February renewed its mandate until 15 December, the panel members have been appointed, with the exception of its regional expert.

Iraq

Expected Council Action

In May, the Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), which expires on 31 May. Special Representative and head of UNAMI Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert is also scheduled to brief the Council on recent developments in Iraq and the Secretary-General's upcoming reports on UNAMI and the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-party nationals and missing Kuwaiti property. The briefing will be followed by closed consultations.

Key Recent Developments

The new Iraqi cabinet approved by parliament in October 2022—which ended the political deadlock that had gripped the country following the October 2021 parliamentary election—continues to

move forward with its government programme under the leadership of Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani. Presented on 27 October 2022, the programme highlights the following objectives: combatting corruption, addressing unemployment and creating work opportunities, supporting vulnerable and low-income groups, reforming the economic and financial sectors, and enhancing public services. On 13 March, al-Sudani announced that the government had finalised its draft budget law for 2023–2025 to advance these priorities. The budget now awaits parliamentary approval.

The programme also committed the government to amending electoral legislation and to holding early parliamentary elections within a year. Consequently, parliament voted on 27 March to abolish the 2020 election law, which was adopted in the wake of the

UN DOCUMENTS ON IRAQ Security Council Resolution S/RES/2631 (26 May 2022) extended UNAMI's mandate until 31 May 2023. **Security Council Press Statement SC/15016** (1 September 2022) condemned the violence throughout Iraq on 29 and 30 August and expressed deep concern over reported deaths and injuries. **Secretary-General's Report S/2023/58** (25 January 2023) was the 120-day report on UNAMI.

2019 anti-government protests, and to reinstate the prior election law of 2018. The restored law replaces a first-past-the-post system with proportional representation and 83 electoral districts with 18 provincial seats, which some analysts predict will favour established political parties at the expense of independent candidates. The legislation, combined with a recent government crackdown on social media content and newly launched enforcement of a dormant 2016 law banning alcohol, has raised concerns among some minority religious communities and human rights activists.

On 13 April, influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr announced that he was suspending his organisation for one year in an effort to curb “corruption”—a reference to a fringe element of al-Sadr’s adherents, who claim that he is a messianic figure and whom the Iraqi Supreme Judicial Council has labelled a “gang” and ordered arrested. Al-Sadr’s movement won the most seats in the 2021 parliamentary election, but his followers were unable to form a government as a sharp divide emerged between them and the Iran-aligned Shiite Coordination Framework (SCF), which backed al-Sudani. After violent clashes broke out in Baghdad’s Green Zone between al-Sadr’s supporters and pro-Iranian factions, al-Sadr announced his retirement from politics in August 2022. His most recent announcement suspending his organisation—and deactivating his Twitter account—may signal a further step back from public life.

On the economic front, the government has announced a series of agreements in recent months with international energy companies to boost domestic oil, gas, and renewables production, including a \$27 billion project with TotalEnergies over which negotiations had long been stalled. Tensions over the sharing of oil revenue between the federal government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) persist, however. On 23 March, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) ruled that the export of oil by the KRG to Turkey without Baghdad’s approval violated a 1973 pipeline agreement between Iraq and Turkey, prompting the latter to halt these oil flows, which constitute approximately 0.5 percent of global supply. Although Baghdad and Erbil subsequently reached a temporary agreement to restart the exports, Turkey has reportedly not yet reopened the pipeline, while a separate but related case remains pending with the ICC. Regarding the prospects of a general hydrocarbon law to regulate revenue-sharing between the federal government and the KRG, al-Sudani said on 18 February at the Munich Security Conference that he expected a law to be passed “by the end of the year”.

There have been noteworthy developments in the security situation in recent months. On 29 November 2022, following a series of Iranian air strikes in September and November 2022 against Kurdish-Iranian opposition groups in Iraq’s Kurdistan region, al-Sudani met with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran. In a joint news conference after the meeting, al-Sudani reportedly said that Iraq will strengthen its security cooperation with Iran and prevent “the use of Iraqi lands to threaten Iran’s security”. Subsequently, on 19 March, the two countries announced a border security agreement aimed at “protecting the common borders between the two countries and consolidating cooperation in several security fields”, according to a statement released by al-Sudani’s office.

On 7 April, Turkey launched a drone attack near Sulaymaniyah airport in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, allegedly targeting a travelling

commander of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The strike, which did not result in any casualties, was the latest in a series of military operations Turkey has conducted against Kurdish targets in the region. Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid reportedly condemned the attack and what he described as Ankara’s “approach of intimidating civilians under the pretext that forces hostile to it are present on Iraqi soil”.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) remains a threat. According to the Secretary-General’s latest report, dated 25 January, ISIL conducted 116 attacks across the country between 4 October and 31 December 2022, mostly targeting Iraqi security forces. The Iraqi military estimates that there are approximately 500 ISIL fighters still active in the country, though it assesses that recent military operations have further degraded the group’s recruitment capabilities. On 18 April, Iraqi authorities unexpectedly closed the Jadah 5 camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs)—which housed approximately 300 families with alleged ties to ISIL—reportedly giving each family 1,500,000 Iraqi dinars (\$1,030) to “return to their original areas of residence on a voluntary basis”. The decision prompted a press release from UNAMI that expressed concern at the lack of “adequate notification and preparation for the IDPs and the receiving communities”.

March marked the 20th anniversary of the US-led invasion of Iraq. Secretary-General António Guterres travelled to the country for the first time in six years, reiterating in a joint press conference with al-Sudani in Baghdad on 1 March “the commitment of the United Nations to support Iraq in the consolidation of its democratic institutions and advancing peace, sustainable development and human rights for all Iraqis”. One week later, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin also travelled to Baghdad and, after a meeting with al-Sudani, reaffirmed the US commitment to retaining its current military presence of 2,500 troops in the country. On 20 March, Russia’s ambassador to the UN, Vassily Nebenzia, held a press conference on “the 20th anniversary of US aggression against Iraq”.

Human-Rights Related Developments

On 4 April, the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances published the full report of its visit to Iraq from 12-25 November 2022. The report underscores that up to one million people are estimated to have been “disappeared” over the past five decades with “impunity and revictimization prevail[ing]”. Emphasising that the crisis is continuing with “ongoing patterns”, the Committee appealed to the government of Iraq to “immediately establish the basis to prevent, eradicate and repair this heinous crime”.

Key Issues and Options

An overarching issue for the Council is how UNAMI can most effectively support the new Iraqi government, in light of changing political and security dynamics in the country. In this regard, the key issue in May is the renewal of UNAMI’s mandate.

The most likely option is for the Council to renew the mandate without significant changes. However, some Council members may propose further strengthening UNAMI’s engagement on thematic issues, such as women’s participation, human rights, and climate change. In addition, some members—as well as Iraq—may request a further reduction in the frequency of Council briefings on UNAMI after the last renewal extended the reporting cycle from three to four months.

Iraq

In the longer term, there is a growing perception among several Council members that the political and security situations in the country have stabilised to such a degree that UNAMI's broader configuration should be reviewed. Consequently, the Council may consider requesting an independent strategic review to make recommendations on changes to UNAMI's mandate to reflect improving conditions on the ground.

Council Dynamics

Council members are generally unanimous in their support for UNAMI and their desire to see positive developments in the Iraqi political process and Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations. While divisions emerged among Council members in relation to proposed Council products concerning the strikes carried out by Iran in the Kurdish region of Iraq in September and November 2022, these tensions have seemingly eased and may further ebb following the March announcement

of a border security agreement between Iran and Iraq.

Council members expect this general consensus to extend to negotiations on UNAMI's mandate. Last year's negotiations went relatively smoothly with the partial exception of language about climate change, which was the subject of debate between Council members seeking to strengthen UNAMI's support for Iraqi authorities on this issue and other members who questioned its relevance to the mission.

Regional dynamics continue to affect Iraq, as demonstrated by Iran's and Turkey's attacks in Iraqi Kurdistan, and the influence of countries in the region on domestic politics. The Iraqi government routinely declares that it does not wish to become a theatre for broader geopolitical tensions, seeking a balanced relationship with regional and international security partners.

The US is the penholder on Iraq issues in general, and the UK is the penholder on Iraqi-Kuwaiti issues.

DPRK (North Korea)

Expected Council Action

In May, the Chair of the 1718 Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl (Switzerland), is scheduled to brief Council members in closed consultations on the 90-day report on the Committee's work.

Key Recent Developments

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula and throughout Northeast Asia have continued to escalate significantly in recent weeks. On 13 April, Republic of Korea (ROK) military officials announced that the DPRK had fired a "new type of ballistic missile with an intermediate or intercontinental range" that had been launched on a high angle before travelling approximately 1,000 kilometres and landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. The launch prompted Japan to issue an emergency alert for residents in parts of Hokkaido prefecture, which was subsequently retracted after officials determined that the missile would not land on Japanese territory.

On 14 April, DPRK state media announced that the test involved a new type of intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), which it referred to as the Hwasong-18, and claimed that the Hwasong-18 utilised solid-fuel technology. (Solid-fuel ICBMs take less time to launch and are harder for missile defence systems to detect.) According to media reports, ROK officials later confirmed that the DPRK had tested a solid-fuel ICBM and said that the DPRK would "need more time and effort before completing its development".

The 13 April test prompted Albania, France, Japan, Malta, the UK, and the US to request an open briefing, which took place on 17 April. Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari briefed. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 17 April.) Before the open briefing began, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield (US) delivered a joint statement on behalf of Albania, Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, the ROK, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the UK, and the US.

Among other matters, the statement called on the DPRK to return to denuclearisation dialogue and said that the Council must overcome its prolonged silence, act on its responsibility to effectively address the security threat posed by the DPRK, and promote peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

The open briefing was followed by closed consultations, which were requested by the US to provide Council members with an opportunity to have a frank and constructive discussion regarding a possible Council product on the DPRK. It appears that the US circulated a draft presidential statement on the DPRK to all Council members following the consultations. At the time of writing, negotiations concerning the draft were still ongoing.

The 13 April launch was the second ICBM test conducted by the DPRK in less than a month. On 16 March, the DPRK fired an ICBM that travelled approximately 1,000 kilometres to the east of the DPRK and reached an altitude of around 6,000 kilometres before landing in waters outside Japan's exclusive economic zone. The test was conducted a day after the ROK and the US began a series of joint military exercises known as "Freedom Shield 23". The joint drills involved field exercises and computer simulations and were reportedly the largest carried out by the two allies since 2017. Following the test, Albania, Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, the UK, and the US requested an open briefing, which was held on 20 March. Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia, and the Americas Miroslav Jenča briefed. (For more information, see our 19 March *What's in Blue* story.)

The 16 March ICBM launch came hours before Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and ROK President Yoon Suk-yeol met at a summit in Tokyo to discuss economic and security ties between the two states. In a joint statement following the summit, which was the first meeting between leaders of the two countries in 12 years, Kishida announced that Japan and the ROK had agreed to resume bilateral security talks and regular high-level visits, while Yoon stressed

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DPRK Sanctions Committee Document S/2023/171 (7 March 2023) was the final report of the Panel of Experts.

DPRK (North Korea)

that their two countries must work closely together to counter the threat posed by the DPRK. Several analysts have described the summit as a landmark breakthrough in Japan-ROK relations.

The DPRK has carried out multiple tests of other weapons in recent weeks, including short-range ballistic missiles, strategic cruise missiles, and what it described as a nuclear attack drone. On 28 March, the DPRK released images purporting to unveil smaller nuclear warheads capable of being fitted to short-range missiles for the first time.

Japan, the ROK, and the US have conducted trilateral anti-submarine drills in the region as well as separate air exercises involving US B-52 bombers. The ROK and the US have also engaged in naval drills and staged an amphibious assault. On 22 March, ROK officials announced that ROK and US forces will hold their largest live-fire drills ever in June.

The final report of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee was issued on 7 March. Among other matters, the report described continued violations of the sanctions imposed by the Council. The Panel noted, for example, that refined petroleum products continue to be illicitly provided to DPRK tankers in its exclusive economic zone and also found continuing ship-to-ship imports of other cargo in DPRK territorial waters and ship-to-ship exports of DPRK coal, both of which are prohibited by the sanctions regime. The Panel further observed that the DPRK has used increasingly sophisticated cyber techniques to gain access to digital networks and steal information of potential value, including for its weapons programmes, and concluded that DPRK actors stole a higher value of cryptocurrency assets in 2022 than in any previous year. Regarding the humanitarian impact of UN sanctions, the Panel noted that their relative role is impossible to disaggregate from other factors but determined that they have had an unintended effect on the humanitarian situation in the country.

In a 30 March announcement, the White House said that it has new evidence that Russia is seeking weapons from the DPRK for use in Ukraine. US National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby told reporters that “as part of this proposed deal, Russia would receive over two dozen kinds of weapons and munitions from Pyongyang”, adding that “we also understand that Russia is seeking to send a delegation to [the DPRK] and that Russia is offering the DPRK food in exchange for munitions”.

On 30 March, the ROK’s Ministry of Unification published a report on human rights in the DPRK. According to media reports, the report concluded that thousands of DPRK workers remain in China and Russia and noted that the DPRK “has found various ways to evade sanctions and continue to send workers to Russia and China, including sending them out on student and tourist visas”.

Yoon met with US President Joe Biden in Washington on 26 April. On the same day, US officials told reporters that the two countries had agreed the Washington Declaration, by which the US promised to give the ROK a central role in strategic planning for the use of nuclear weapons in any conflict with the DPRK in exchange for the ROK agreeing not to develop its own nuclear arsenal. The Washington Declaration also said that the US “will further enhance the regular visibility of strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula” and referred to “an upcoming visit of a US nuclear ballistic missile submarine to the ROK”, the first such visit since the 1980s.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 4 April, the Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted a resolution on the situation of human rights in the DPRK (A/HRC/52/L.9). Among other matters, the resolution extended the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK for one year and urged the DPRK to “acknowledge its crimes, abuses and human rights violations” and to take “all steps necessary to end” them. The annual resolution, which has been adopted every year since 2003, was co-sponsored by the ROK for the first time since 2016.

On 28 March, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published a report highlighting allegations of human rights violations that may constitute enforced disappearances committed in and by the DPRK. The report draws on 80 interviews with victims of enforced disappearances. In a statement regarding the report, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk noted that the “anguish, sorrow and reprisals that families [...] have had to endure are heart-breaking”. The report calls for renewed efforts for truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-recurrence.

Women, Peace, and Security

On 20 March, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK Elizabeth Salmón—the first woman to be appointed to this position—presented her first report to the HRC. The report, which focused on the human rights of women and girls, concluded that discrimination against women and girls continued in the DPRK and that “[w]idespread gender stereotypes in the country are the root cause of discrimination against women.” Among other issues, the report focused on the situation of women in detention in the DPRK, noting that women are held in “inhumane conditions and deprived of food” and are subjected to “torture and ill-treatment, forced labour and gender-based violence, including sexual violence by State officials”. The report highlighted that, with the emergence of informal markets in the DPRK, women have developed opportunities to earn income and become the primary breadwinners for their families. Due to inadequate legal and economic reforms that created an “uncertain legal environment” for people carrying out “low-level market activities”, however, women have been exposed to corruption, abuse, and sexual exploitation.

Key Issues and Options

The DPRK’s increasingly frequent weapons tests, many of which violate Council resolutions, are a major issue for the Council. Sanctions evasion is another important issue, as is the overall effectiveness of the sanctions regime, particularly given that the DPRK is widely believed to have increased its nuclear arsenal since the regime was introduced in 2006 and has shown little inclination to scale back its weapons programmes. The DPRK’s ongoing refusal to engage in denuclearisation dialogue and the humanitarian situation in the country are also problems facing the Council.

In light of these issues, the Council could issue a product that condemns the recent missile tests, urges member states to comply with existing Council resolutions, and calls on the DPRK to return to the negotiating table. The Council could also consider updating and strengthening the 1718 DPRK sanctions regime to exert further pressure on the DPRK.

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

The Council could also hold an informal interactive dialogue with humanitarian organisations focusing on the DPRK with a view

DPRK (North Korea)

to better understanding the impact that sanctions are having on the humanitarian situation in the country.

Council Dynamics

The Council remains sharply divided regarding the DPRK. The P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other like-minded countries regularly condemn its ballistic missile tests and argue that they destabilise the Korean Peninsula and increase tensions throughout the region. These members generally support using sanctions to manage the threat posed by the DPRK and call on member states to comply with existing Council resolutions. They often urge the country to engage in dialogue and abandon its weapons programmes, while emphasising that it is responsible for escalating tensions. Some of these members also call for the Council to show unity and respond

to the DPRK's weapons tests and argue that China and Russia have emboldened the DPRK by blocking Council action on the file.

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

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

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In May, the Council expects to vote on a draft resolution to renew the South Sudan sanctions regime (including targeted sanctions and an arms embargo), which expires on 31 May, and extend the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee, which expires on 1 July.

The mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) expires on 15 March 2024.

Background and Key Recent Developments

On 4 August 2022, all signatories to the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) agreed to a roadmap extending the transitional period by 24 months to enable the implementation of its key outstanding tasks. The original transitional period in the R-ARCSS ended on 22 February. Key aspects of the roadmap relate to the unification of forces and their redeployment, the drafting of the permanent constitution, and the electoral process. In a 21 February press statement, the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) announced the beginning of the extended transition period, which is to end on 22 February 2025, with elections to be held in December 2024. In addition, the government also declared that there would be no more extensions of the timelines.

The most recent quarterly report (covering the period from 1 January to 31 March) of the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the R-ARCSS, noted that it continued to face multifaceted challenges, including lack of dedicated financial resources and an insufficient level of trust and confidence among the signatory parties to the R-ARCSS. It added that attacks on humanitarian workers and looting of their supplies have exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation in the country. According to the report, the drafting of the permanent constitution and all elections-related tasks, including the establishment and functioning of

institutions that drive the elections process, are behind schedule. It further noted that, in March, the signatory parties reached an agreement on the unification of the middle and lower-level military command structures, based on a 60 percent ratio for the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), 30 percent for the SPLM-in Opposition (SLPM-IO), and 10 percent for the South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSOA).

The Sant'Egidio Community-mediated peace talks between R-TGoNU and the non-signatories to the R-ARCSS were held in Rome from 21 to 24 March. Minister for Presidential Affairs Barnaba Marial Benjamin led the South Sudanese government delegation, while the Non-Signatory South Sudanese Opposition Group (NSSSOG) was represented by Thomas Cirillo, chairperson of the National Salvation Front; Paul Malong, former Chief of General Staff of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA); and Pagan Amum, spokesperson of NSSSOG.

Intercommunal and subnational violence persists in many areas of the country. According to the 18 March annual brief on violence affecting civilians (covering the period from January to December 2022) by UNMISS' Human Rights Division, 3,469 cases were documented relating to civilians affected mostly by killing, injury, abduction, or subjected to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), amounting to a two percent increase over 2021. It added that, during the reporting period, the number of recorded cases of injuries, abductions and CRSV increased by 17, six and 96 percent, respectively.

On 13 March, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed met South Sudanese President Salva Kiir Mayardit and First Vice President Riek Machar in Juba to discuss bilateral relations, regional issues, and the progress in the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement. On the same day, a high-level Sudanese delegation, which included the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Defence, visited Juba to engage with the South Sudanese leaders to reduce current intra-South Sudan political tensions and discuss bilateral relations. (Sudan is the current chair of IGAD, the

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOUTH SUDAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2677 (15 March 2023) renewed the mandate of UNMISS until 15 March 2024. S/RES/2633 (26 May 2022) renewed the South Sudan sanctions regime until 31 May 2023. Secretary-General's Report S/2023/135 (22 February 2023) was the 90-day report on South Sudan. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9274 (6 March 2023) was a briefing on South Sudan.

South Sudan

Intergovernmental Authority on Development).

Council members were last briefed on South Sudan on 6 March by Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan and head of UNMISS Nicholas Haysom and OCHA Acting Director of Operations and Advocacy Tareq Talahma. In his remarks, Haysom noted that this is a “make-or-break year” for South Sudan and a test for all parties to the R-ARCSS, highlighting several key challenges that parties should address, including drafting a new constitution, preparing for inclusive and credible elections, deploying the necessary unified forces (NUF), and tackling subnational violence. He also mentioned his request to UN headquarters to carry out a study to assess UNMISS’ capacity to adequately protect civilians and support the implementation of the R-ARCSS.

On 3 March, President Kiir dismissed Defence Minister Angelina Teny and Interior Minister Mahmoud Solomon. According to the R-ARCSS, the party of First Vice President Machar, the SPLM-IO, is responsible for the appointment of the defence minister. In a 29 March decree, Kiir named a member of his own party (SPLM), Chol Thon Balok, as the new defence minister. According to a 30 March Al Jazeera article, Machar’s spokesperson said that “the appointment of Chol Thon as a minister of defence is unilateral and a new blatant violation of the peace agreement”.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 3 April, the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan issued a report, providing findings of the investigations it had conducted in six states of South Sudan as well as the neighbouring region over the last year. Among other things, the report concluded that armed violence continues to damage communities and people have been subjected to gross human rights violations and abuses, including killings, torture, conflict-related sexual violence and the looting and destruction of homes and livelihoods; effective prosecutions remain woefully insufficient; impunity has been driving conflict and human rights violations throughout the country; and victims, including survivors of sexual violence, are unable to access medical care. Commissioner Andrew Clapham noted that “the State continues to fail in its duty to protect civilians, and to ensure accountability for violations”. He called on the authorities to investigate alleged perpetrators, irrespective of their rank or office, and strengthen justice mechanisms.

During its 52nd session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted a resolution on advancing human rights in South Sudan. It extended the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan for one year and requested the Commission to present a comprehensive written report on the situation of human rights in South Sudan to the HRC at its 55th session, followed by an enhanced interactive dialogue with the participation of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The resolution also called on the government of South Sudan to investigate allegations of human rights violations and abuses and to hold the perpetrators accountable. Council members France, the UK, and the US voted in favour, whereas Gabon abstained, and China voted against.

Women, Peace and Security

On 20 February, the Informal Experts Group (IEG) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) met on South Sudan. UNMISS Deputy Special Representative Sara Beysolow Nyanti briefed. Among the issues members discussed during the meeting were women’s participation in public decision-making, reprisals against women human rights defenders and peacebuilders, and the increase in reported CRSV cases in 2022. According to the summary of the meeting – issued on 5 April by Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as the IEG co-chairs, together with the UK, as the penholder on WPS – the UN verified 299 incidents of CRSV in South Sudan in 2022, compared with 194 in 2021. While the majority of these cases were attributed to

non-state armed groups, 38 percent were attributed to the armed forces and 5 percent to the police. Among other recommendations put forward by UN Women, which serves as the IEG secretariat, was for the Council to request enhanced gender analysis in the Secretary-General’s reports, with particular attention to “the reasons behind the persistent under-representation of women in decision-making and the continued high levels of sexual violence” in South Sudan.

Sanctions-Related Developments

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

The interim report describes “widespread subnational violence, pervasive human rights abuses, including endemic and systemic conflict-related sexual violence, and humanitarian and economic crises” and notes that “key humanitarian indicators, most notably food security, are at their worst levels since the achievement of independence”. The report expresses concern that despite the graduation of some NUF, there was no clarity on their deployment and that “fragmentation, not unification, is the prevailing force beyond Juba”.

Key Issues and Options

An immediate key issue for the Council is the extension of the sanctions regime and the mandate renewal of the Panel of Experts.

A related issue is assessing progress achieved on the five benchmarks outlined in resolution 2577 of 28 May 2021 to guide the Council in reviewing the arms embargo. South Sudan has been calling for the lifting of the arms embargo, an issue on which Council members are divided. These benchmarks address the following:

- completion of the Strategic Defense and Security Review (SDSR) process contained in the R-ARCSS;
- formation of a unified command structure for the NUF and allocation of necessary resources for the planning and implementation of the redeployment of the NUF;
- progress on the establishment and implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process;
- progress on proper management of existing arms and ammunition stockpiles; and
- the implementation of an action plan for the Armed Forces on addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

Another key issue for the Council is the implementation of the arms embargo and targeted sanctions.

An ongoing concern for the Council is the significant political challenge in South Sudan related to the delays in implementing the R-ARCSS. A key issue in this regard is what the Council can do to encourage the parties to make progress towards implementing the outstanding tasks of the R-ARCSS in accordance with the deadlines set out in last year’s roadmap. Another issue for several Council members is the need for the government to engage with civil society and other interested parties in relation to the roadmap and its implementation.

An option for Council members is to renew the sanctions regime while retaining the benchmarks and calling for further progress in their implementation.

Although the focus of the Council’s engagement next month is on the South Sudan sanctions regime, the Council could also consider adopting a presidential statement urging the parties to implement the R-ARCSS in an inclusive and timely matter.

South Sudan

Council and Wider Dynamics

The discussion on sanctions imposed on South Sudan remains a divisive issue in the Council. When the Council last renewed the sanctions regime in May 2022 through resolution 2633, five Council members abstained—China, Gabon, then-Council members India and Kenya, and Russia.

Several Council members, including France, the UK, and the US, believe that sanctions are a useful tool to maintain pressure on the parties to implement the R-ARCSS. These members maintain that the arms embargo, initially imposed in July 2018 with the adoption of resolution 2428, has contributed to the reduction of violence by curtailing the flow of weapons to South Sudan. Therefore, they expressed concern that the lifting of the arms embargo would negatively affect the security situation.

On the other hand, China and Russia have long opposed the South Sudan sanctions regime. African members of the Council have also expressed concerns about maintaining the sanctions regime, which in their view, could undermine progress in the political and security spheres.

The AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) and IGAD have repeatedly called for lifting the arms embargo imposed on South Sudan, and several regional states have expressed opposition to the arms embargo. In a 28 February communiqué, the AUPSC appealed to the international community to lift the arms embargo and other sanctions imposed on South Sudan.

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

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