

Monthly Forecast

- 1 Overview
- 2 In Hindsight: The Demise of the Syria Cross-border Aid Mechanism
- 4 Status Update since our July Forecast
- 6 Conflict and Food Insecurity
- 8 Syria
- 10 UNRCCA (Central Asia)
- 11 Yemen
- 13 Libya
- 15 Ukraine
- 16 Lebanon
- 18 Mali
- 20 DPRK (North Korea)

Overview

In August, the US will hold the presidency of the Security Council.

As the signature event of its presidency, the US plans to convene a ministerial-level open debate early in the month on [conflict and food insecurity](#). US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will chair. Expected briefers include UN Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator Reena Ghelani; Navyn Salem, the founder and CEO of Edesia—a non-profit that combats malnutrition; and President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Rescue Committee David Miliband.

Also anticipated in August is a briefing on the Secretary-General's bi-annual strategic-level report on [the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant \(ISIL/Da'esh\)](#) to international peace and security.

Middle Eastern issues on the programme of work in August are:

- [Syria](#), meetings on the political, humanitarian, and chemical weapons tracks;
- [Yemen](#), monthly meeting on developments;
- [The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question](#), the monthly meeting; and
- [Lebanon](#), meeting with the troop-contributing

countries to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), consultations on UNIFIL's work, and renewal of the mission's mandate.

African issues on the programme of work are:

- [Libya](#), meeting on the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and the 1970 Libya sanctions regime; and
- [Mali](#), meeting on developments and vote to renew the 2374 Mali sanctions regime and the mandate of its Panel of Experts.

Asian issues on the programme of work are:

- [Central Asia](#), meeting on the work of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA); and
- [Democratic People's Republic of Korea \(DPRK\)](#), briefing on the work of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee.

The Council is also expected to hold a briefing on [Ukraine](#) in August. The Council may also hold additional meetings on Ukraine during the month.

Other issues could be raised in August depending on developments.

1 August 2023

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In Hindsight: The Demise of the Syria Cross-border Aid Mechanism

In July, the Council failed to adopt a resolution reauthorising the Syria cross-border aid mechanism. As a result, a nine-year old mechanism, which had allowed the delivery of humanitarian assistance into non-government-controlled parts of Syria without requiring the consent of the Syrian government, was shut down. The draft put forward by the co-penholders (Switzerland and Brazil), with a nine-month extension of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, was vetoed by Russia. Russia's alternative draft, which would have reauthorised the same border crossing for six months, drew only two affirmative votes, well short of the nine favourable votes needed for a resolution to be adopted.

The failure to reauthorise this long-standing mechanism has given rise to several pertinent questions regarding the humanitarian situation in Syria and the future engagement of the Security Council and other international actors in the country. Without a resolution reauthorising the cross-border mechanism, can aid continue to flow predictably and unimpeded across the border into northwest Syria? Will the Security Council remain engaged on humanitarian issues in Syria? How will donors to Syria's early recovery efforts respond to the failure to reauthorise the mechanism?

Background to the Vote

Since 2017, members have struggled to continue the cross-border mechanism authorised in July 2014 under resolution 2165. By 2020, only one of the original four crossings remained in the resolution. China and Russia have long argued that cross-border aid deliveries without the government's consent were extraordinary measures that undermined Syria's sovereignty and should be supplanted as soon as possible by "cross-line" assistance—supplies delivered via Syrian government-held areas.

Abstentions were common from 2017, and since 2019 all but two adoptions¹ have come only after competing draft resolutions, vetoes and resolutions that failed due to insufficient votes. Each agreement required diplomatic compromises and, at times, constructively ambiguous text. Still, it seemed that it suited both Russia and Syria to allow the Bab al-Hawa border crossing from Türkiye into northwest Syria to stay open. (For more, see our "In Hindsight" from the August 2020 *Monthly Forecast*, titled: "Six Days, Five Resolutions, One Border Crossing".)

Initially, this year's negotiations appeared to be unfolding according to the same pattern. Members were divided over the duration of the cross-border aid mechanism, language on cross-line assistance, the proposed expansion of humanitarian activities in Syria, reference to unilateral coercive measures and the prospect of authorising two additional border crossings (Bab al-Salam and Al Ra'ee) along with Bab al-Hawa. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 11 July.)

The backdrop of geopolitical events that heightened tensions around this year's negotiations included the protracted war in Ukraine, a mutiny in Russia, the faltering grain deal between the UN and Russia, and the move towards NATO membership by Finland and Sweden. And in February, Syria's humanitarian challenges intensified with a 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck the country's north, as well as southeast Türkiye. Syria opened two additional border crossings from Türkiye into northwest Syria, Bab al-Salam and Al Ra'ee, for the delivery of humanitarian aid for three months

beginning on 13 February, extended for three more months on 13 May. These two crossings were cited as possible models for aid delivery if the UN cross-border mechanism were to be shut down.

Negotiations Down to the Wire

With the 10 July deadline fast approaching, the penholders circulated an initial draft on 29 June, proposing a 12-month renewal of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing. From the start, members were divided over this duration and the number of crossings. The UK and the US, among others, wanted to include authorisation for the Bab al-Salam and Al Ra'ee crossings. Russia, openly opposed to a 12-month extension, proposed six months, while China maintained that a 12-month extension required strengthening the resolution's language on cross-line deliveries and early recovery efforts; neither supported authorising additional crossings.

The draft the penholders placed under silence procedure on 6 July included a 12-month authorisation of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, while introducing new language on cross-line deliveries, expanding humanitarian activities to include humanitarian mine action, and acknowledging the scale of the displacement crisis in Syria. Russia broke silence the next day, placing under silence its own draft text, which included a six-month reauthorisation of the Bab al-Hawa crossing and requested the Secretary-General to provide a special report on the impact of unilateral sanctions on the humanitarian situation and needs in Syria by 10 December 2023.

The penholders made further revisions in an attempt to bridge the differences and put a fresh draft into blue on 7 July, retaining the 12-month mandate; Russia placed its draft into blue soon afterwards. The vote, planned for that day, was postponed. Over the weekend (8-9 July), the penholders continued to engage with Council members, as well as with Syria, to find common ground.

On Monday morning (10 July), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) sought a postponement of the vote to allow for further deliberations on the draft text. The E-10 members also held a meeting that morning and supported a compromise nine-month reauthorisation for the Bab al-Hawa border crossing proposed by the A3 members and the UAE. Later that day, in an attempt to strike a compromise, the UAE conveyed a number of textual edits from Russia and Syria to the penholders. These included a six-month reauthorisation of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing with a provision for a three-month extension with the written consent of the Syrian government. Ultimately these were not incorporated, as the penholders believed that most Council members would not find them acceptable.

With the expiry of the existing cross-border authorisation hours away, the penholders circulated a revised version of their previous draft in blue, authorising the Bab al-Hawa crossing for nine months. The penholders' text and the Russian text were scheduled for a vote the next day (11 July). There was no expectation that either draft would be adopted, and neither was: the penholders' draft (S/2023/506) received 13 votes in favour and one abstention (China) and was vetoed by Russia, while the draft initiated by Russia (S/2023/507) received two votes in favour (China and Russia) and three against (France, the UK, and the US), while the ten elected members abstained.

In the past, a Russian veto on this issue—this was their fifth Syria

¹ S/RES/2585 (9 July 2021) and S/RES/2672 (9 January 2023)

In Hindsight: The Demise of the Syria Cross-border Aid Mechanism

cross-border-related veto since 2019—did not signal the end of the road for reauthorisation. Rather, it appeared to have become part of the negotiation process, leading to new drafts from the penholders and Russia and, ultimately, an acceptable text. This time Russia did not appear willing to continue negotiating even though the penholders still sought to engage with other Council members to find compromises and revive the mechanism. Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya (Russia) said, before the 11 July vote on the Russian draft, “if our draft resolution does not pass, the mechanism can as well shut down”.

Council Dynamics

Reauthorisation had wide support. During the 29 June Council briefing on political and humanitarian developments in Syria, a majority of Council members advocated reauthorisation of the mandate, including European members (Albania, France, Malta, Switzerland and the UK); the three African members, the “A3” (Gabon, Ghana, and Mozambique), Brazil, Ecuador, Japan, the UAE, and the US.

The Syria humanitarian track has a history of strong elected member engagement. Since its creation by Australia and Luxembourg in 2014, elected members have continued to play a crucial role on this track, as penholders and as a group. The E10 members have usually been cohesive on this issue, and in the last two years, delivered joint statements in support of the cross-border mechanism before the votes. This year, the two penholders were strongly supported by the other elected members in their attempts to obtain agreement on their draft resolution, and, for the first time, the A3 also delivered a joint statement expressing support for the nine-month mandate and the E10 position, stating that they would vote for the penholders’ draft.

The penholders on this issue have often had to tread a fine line between the demands of the P3 and Russia and China. This balancing act has become more difficult as relations between the P3 and Russia deteriorated following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. And as more countries re-establish diplomatic ties with the Syrian government, some elected members may find it harder to be as supportive of positions that are not favourable to the Syrian government.

The Aftermath

On 13 July, Ambassador Bassam Sabbagh (Syria) informed the President of the Security Council of the Syrian government’s decision to grant the UN and its specialised agencies permission to use the Bab al-Hawa crossing to deliver humanitarian aid to civilians in need in northwest Syria, “in full cooperation and coordination with the Syrian Government”, for a period of six months, starting that day.

On 14 July, OCHA circulated a note to Council members stating that the “Syrian Government’s permission can be a basis for the [UN] to lawfully conduct cross-border humanitarian operations via the Bab al-Hawa border crossing for the specified duration”, but raising concerns about the “conditions” set out in the Syrian government’s letter: that the UN not communicate with entities designated as “terrorist”, and that the ICRC and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) supervise and facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid in northwest Syria. The UN and its implementing partners must continue to engage with relevant state and non-state parties as operationally necessary to carry out safe and unimpeded humanitarian operations, OCHA said, in line with the mandate of the Emergency

Relief Coordinator under General Assembly Resolution 46/182. The Syrian government’s demand that the ICRC and the SARC supervise and facilitate aid was neither consistent with the independence of the UN, nor practical, OCHA noted, as the ICRC and SARC are not present in northwest Syria.

Some Council members, including China, Russia, and the UAE, welcomed the Syrian government’s decision, and now view the delivery of aid into northwest Syria as a bilateral matter between the UN and the Syrian government. They have encouraged the international community to support such cooperation. The P3 and like-minded member states, meanwhile, would like the Council to reauthorise the cross-border mechanism, including the UN Monitoring Mechanism (UNMM). (The UNMM, established by resolution 2165 of July 2014 and most recently renewed by resolution 2672, monitored the UN and implementing partners’ cross-border consignments flowing through Council-authorized border crossings. The mandate for the UNMM at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing expired along with resolution 2672). They believe that this would promote the predictable and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid into northwest Syria. There are also concerns among donor countries that in the absence of a robust monitoring mechanism, aid could be diverted, looted or prevented from reaching certain communities.

The Implications

With the difficult negotiations in recent years, many Council members and UN officials understood that the cross-border mechanism would eventually come to an end. Still, the abrupt end to the mechanism in July took many by surprise.

The Council’s failure to adopt a new resolution has implications beyond shutting down the mechanism. Some Council members have used the Syrian government’s decision to open the Bab al-Hawa border crossing to strengthen their call for permanently shutting down the Council-authorized mechanism. Other members object, asserting that the Council needs to maintain a leading oversight role. At the time of writing, OCHA had been engaging with the Syrian government in a bid to clarify the potential modalities for continuing aid delivery via Bab al-Hawa.

More broadly, the Council’s future engagement on Syrian humanitarian issues is under scrutiny. Russia believes that the absence of a resolution reauthorising the cross-border mechanism now negates all Council engagement on Syria humanitarian issues and nullifies the effect of all provisions contained in the previous resolutions, including the reporting requirements. Some others take the view that the provision reauthorising the cross-border mechanism, and the remainder of resolution 2672, are mutually exclusive—that all the provisions except the cross-border mechanism are open-ended, and thus still applicable.

The Syria humanitarian reporting requirements have long been robust, covering the Secretary-General’s reporting on access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas (resolution 2139 of February 2014) and the implementation of resolution 2165 of July 2014, and subsequent resolutions reauthorising the cross-border aid mechanism. Over time, trends in UN cross-line operations and early recovery projects were also incorporated into the reporting, among other issues. The framework included a monthly briefing from the

In Hindsight: The Demise of the Syria Cross-border Aid Mechanism

Secretary-General to keep the Council abreast of humanitarian developments. Some members question whether these reporting requirements remain in effect.

Some Council members, particularly donor countries, appear to believe that the lack of a new resolution authorising the cross-border mechanism may complicate their ability to continue funding early recovery projects in northwest Syria. In remarks during the 24 July Council briefing, Ambassador Nicolas de Rivière (France) said that “by censoring cross-border access a few days ago, Russia at the same time put an end to the mandate given to the [UN] to engage in early

recovery activities”.

The cross-border mechanism was born out of a lack of trust in the Syrian government’s willingness to distribute aid fairly into opposition-led areas. With the Syrian government keen to prove its legitimacy and to normalise ties with the international community, members will be watching carefully to see whether aid delivery is in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. Should it fall short, members may once again seek ways of ensuring greater transparency and accountability in the delivery of humanitarian aid into Syria.

Status Update since our July Forecast

Children and Armed Conflict

On 5 July, the Security Council held its annual open debate on children and armed conflict (S/PV.9366). Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba presented the Secretary-General’s annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2023/363). UNICEF Deputy Executive Director for programmes Omar Abdi and a child civil society representative from Colombia also briefed.

The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict conducted a field visit to Nigeria between 10 and 13 July. The chair of the working group, Ambassador Vanessa Frazier (Malta), briefed Council members on the visit on 28 July during “any other business”.

Haiti

On 6 July, the Security Council held an open briefing (S/PV.9368), followed by closed consultations, on Haiti. Special Representative and head of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) María Isabel Salvador briefed on recent developments and the Secretary-General’s latest report on BINUH, dated 3 July (S/2023/492). The chair of the 2653 Haiti Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang (Gabon), and civil society representative Marie-Yolène Gilles also briefed. Barbados, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Jamaica participated under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure.

On 14 July, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2692, which renewed BINUH’s mandate until 15 July 2024.

Iran

On 6 July, the Security Council held its biannual open briefing (S/PV.9367) on the implementation of resolution 2231 of 20 July 2015, which endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran’s nuclear programme (JCPOA). Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed on the Secretary-General’s latest report on the implementation of resolution 2231, dated 23 June (S/2023/473). The Security Council’s facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231, Ambassador Vanessa Frazier (Malta), reported on the Council’s work regarding resolution 2231. The head of the EU delegation to the UN, Ambassador Olof Skoog, briefed on the work of the JCPOA’s Joint Commission. The commission comprises the current parties to the JCPOA—China, France, Germany, Iran, Russia, and the UK—and the EU serves as its coordinator.

Germany, Iran, and Ukraine participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure. At the beginning of the meeting, Russia requested a procedural vote on Ukraine’s request to participate, which it claimed was “far from being routine” since Ukraine was neither a Council member nor a party to the JCPOA. The US argued for Ukraine’s participation, alleging that “[b]oth Iran and Russia have violated their obligations under resolution 2231 by participating in the transfer of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) without obtaining advance approval from the Security Council” with “direct implications for Ukraine”. The procedural vote passed with 12 votes in favour, two against (China and Russia), and one abstention (Mozambique).

The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 7 July, Security Council members convened for closed consultations on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. The meeting was requested by Brazil, France and the United Arab Emirates following the 3–5 July large-scale military operation by the Israel Defense Forces in the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank. Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory Lynn Hastings briefed.

On 27 July, the Security Council held its quarterly open debate on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” (S/PV.9387). Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari briefed.

Cyprus

On 12 July, the Council members held closed consultations on the situation in Cyprus. Special Representative and head of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) Colin Stewart briefed the Council, presenting the Secretary-General’s report on his good offices in Cyprus (S/2023/497) and on UNFICYP (S/2023/498). Council members released a press statement on the same day that expressed full support for UNFICYP and stressed the importance of full respect for its mandate and implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions.

Status Update since our July Forecast

Colombia

On 12 July, the Security Council held an open briefing (S/PV.9374), followed by closed consultations, on Colombia. 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/2023/477). The Council was also briefed by Diana Maria Salcedo López, the Spokesperson for the Special Women's Instance for the follow-up of the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement in Colombia and Director of the Colombian section of the non-governmental organisation the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

On 20 July, Council members issued a press statement on Colombia (SC/15361). 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. Among other issues, they expressed concern at continued conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls and stressed the need to further implement the gender provisions of the 2016 agreement. Members also emphasised the need to increase the integrated presence of the state in conflict-affected areas and urged the government to take all necessary steps to ensure fair and safe political participation at the departmental and municipal elections that will take place in October.

Arria-formula Meeting on Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers

On 13 July, Russia convened a Security Council Arria-formula meeting titled "Migrants, Refugees and Asylum seekers crossing borders on Land and at Sea: New Wave of Crisis". The briefers were: Elizabeth Tan, the Director of the International Protection Division of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); Federico Soda, the Director of the Operations and Emergencies Department of the International Organization for Migration (IOM); Angelina Nyachola, a financial consultant; and Daniel Kovalik, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law and a labour and human rights lawyer.

Sudan

On 13 July, the Council held its semi-annual briefing (S/PV.9375) on the International Criminal Court (ICC)'s Darfur-related activities. ICC Prosecutor Karim Asad Ahmad Khan briefed. Sudan participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

Women, Peace and Security

On 14 July, the Security Council convened for its annual open debate on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), which this year was titled "Promoting Implementation of Security Council Resolutions on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence" (S/PV.9378). The meeting was chaired by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, the UK Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and the UN, and Special Representative of the UK Prime Minister for Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. The briefers were: the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten;

a member of the advisory board of the Women's League of Burma, Naw Hser Hser; and a "survivor champion" named only as Nadine.

Artificial Intelligence

On 18 July, the Security Council convened a high-level briefing on "Artificial Intelligence: Opportunities and Risks for International Peace and Security" (S/PV.9381). The meeting, which was one of the signature events of the July Council Presidency of the UK, was chaired by James Cleverly, the UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs. The briefers were: Secretary-General António Guterres; Co-founder of Anthropic Jack Clark; and Yi Zeng, Professor at the Institute of Automation, Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Council members presented contrasting perspectives on AI. Some highlighted its transformative potential in tackling global challenges, such as accelerating progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, while others emphasised the risks, including the potential to intensify conflicts through malicious cyber operations and the spread of mis- and dis-information. Several members stressed the crucial role of human decision-making in autonomous weapons systems and advocated for the establishment of an ethical framework for global AI governance.

Arria-formula Meeting on the Contribution of the ICC to the Maintenance of International Peace and Security

On 18 July, an Arria-formula meeting on "The 25th anniversary of the Rome Statute: the contribution of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to the maintenance of international peace and security" took place. The meeting was organised by Japan and Switzerland and co-sponsored by Security Council members Albania, Ecuador, France, Gabon, Ghana, Malta, and the UK and incoming Council members Guyana, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Sierra Leone, and Slovenia. The briefers were: Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi, President, Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute; Deborah Ruiz Verduzco, Executive Director, Trust Fund for Victims; Dapo Akande, Professor of Public International Law, University of Oxford; and Melinda Reed, Acting Convenor, Coalition for the ICC.

West Africa and the Sahel

On 25 July, the Council held a briefing on West Africa and the Sahel (S/PV.9384), followed by closed consultations, to consider the Secretary-General's latest report on the region, dated 30 June (S/2023/490). Special Representative and head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) Leonardo Santos Simão briefed, making his first address to the Council since starting his position in May. The President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, Omar Alieu Touray, also briefed, elaborating on ECOWAS' efforts to integrate the various initiatives aimed at addressing security and political challenges in the region. The impact on the region of the pending withdrawal of the UN Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was a key theme of the discussion. During July, Council members also resumed negotiations on a draft presidential statement on West Africa and the Sahel, which members have been unable to agree on for over a year and a half.

Status Update since our July Forecast

Central African Republic

On 27 July, the Security Council adopted resolution 2693 extending the sanctions measures on the Central African Republic (CAR) until 31 July 2024 and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee until 31 August 2024 with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (China and Russia). The Council also lifted the arms embargo imposed on the CAR government, while maintaining all other sanctions measures, including the obligation for bilateral and multilateral partners to notify the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee, except for deliveries to the CAR government.

Peacekeeping

On 28 July, the Security Council received the annual briefing of

Heads of Military Components of UN peacekeeping missions (S/PV.9389). The briefers were Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and the heads of military components of three UN peacekeeping operations: Lieutenant General Mohan Subramanian, the Force Commander of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS); Lieutenant General Otávio Rodrigues de Miranda Filho, the Force Commander of the UN Organization Stabilization Operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); and Major General Aroldo Lázaro Sáenz, the Force Commander of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). This year, the briefing was focused on the protection of civilians and the role of the military components in the prevention and response to threats of physical violence.

Conflict and Food Insecurity

Expected Council Action

In August, the Security Council is expected to hold a high-level open debate on famine and conflict-induced global food insecurity. This is a signature event of the US Council presidency that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will chair. The expected briefers are UN Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator Reena Ghelani; Navyn Salem, the founder and CEO of Edesia—a non-profit that combats malnutrition; and President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Rescue Committee David Miliband.

Key Recent Developments

This year's annual report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians, dated 12 May, included a focus on the impact of conflict on food and water availability. According to the report, more than a quarter of a billion people faced acute hunger in 58 countries and territories in 2022. Conflict and violence were the most significant drivers of high levels of acute food insecurity for approximately 117 million people in 19 countries and territories, including the Central African Republic, the Central Sahel, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Causes of conflict-induced food insecurity in these and other conflict situations included direct harm to food and water sources and impediments to food and water production, delivery, and access.

The report also cited key factors that have compounded hunger in the past year. These include Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which has exacerbated food insecurity worldwide. Ukraine and Russia are among the leading global suppliers of foodstuffs, with Russia also being a top exporter of fertilisers; many countries that depended on these supplies were adversely affected in the past year, including Burkina Faso, the DRC, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Yemen. Trade disruptions due to the war in Ukraine contributed to historically high food and fertiliser prices, aggravating food insecurity across the globe. Climate change—which was manifested in droughts, heavy rainfall, and floods—also exacerbated hunger in several conflicts, according to the report.

On 8 June, OCHA sent Council members a white note on food security risks in Burkina Faso, the DRC and Haiti. OCHA submitted the note in accordance with resolution 2417 of May 2018, which requested the Secretary-General to report swiftly when “the risk of conflict-induced famine and wide-spread food insecurity” occurs. The white note highlighted that armed conflict and violence are the primary drivers of acute hunger in these three countries, affecting 32.9 million people, including 5.5 million people facing emergency conditions. The note observed that although similar factors exist elsewhere, conflict and violence are causing rapid deterioration in these three countries. Council members held an informal interactive dialogue (IID) on the white note on 28 July, receiving briefings by OCHA Assistant Secretary-General Joyce Msuya, Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Director of the Office of Emergencies and Resilience Rein Paulsen, and World Food Programme (WFP) Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau. Representatives of Burkina Faso and Haiti also participated.

On 17 July, Russia announced that it would suspend its participation in the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which has allowed Ukraine to export grain through the Black Sea since August 2022 and has been considered key to keeping global food prices stable. The agreement was set to expire at midnight that day after a two-month extension on 17 May. In announcing the decision, Russia cited a lack of progress in resolving five barriers that it says obstruct the export of Russian agricultural products to international markets. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 16 July.)

In other developments, Spain, the US, the EU, the AU, Colombia, Germany, Indonesia, and Nigeria co-hosted the Global Food Security Summit on 20 September 2022 in New York. A summit declaration underscored the need to respond to immediate humanitarian needs and to build more resilient agricultural and food systems along seven specific lines of action, including providing additional donor support for humanitarian organisations and strengthening agricultural productivity, particularly in the most affected countries, to build resilience and support domestic production.

UN DOCUMENTS ON CONFLICT AND FOOD SECURITY [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2417](#) (24 May 2018) requested the Secretary-General to report to the Council when there is a risk of armed conflict leading to famine or widespread food insecurity. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9327](#) (23 May 2023) was the Council's annual open debate on the protection of civilians. [S/PV.9133](#) (15 September 2022) was a briefing on conflict-induced hunger following OCHA's 26 August white note on widespread food insecurity due to conflict and violence in northern Ethiopia, northeast Nigeria, South Sudan, and Yemen. [S/PV.9036](#) (19 May 2022) was a ministerial-level open debate on conflict and food security.

Conflict and Food Insecurity

On 29 November 2022, the Secretary-General appointed Ghelani as the UN Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator. The newly created position, according to the UN, will be based in Nairobi and will lead and organise a cohesive system-wide response to rising food insecurity, drought and famine.

Key Issues and Options

The open debate will spotlight the scale of current levels of conflict-driven food insecurity. A key issue, according to the concept note that the US has circulated for the debate, is to identify opportunities to strengthen, coordinate and elevate efforts by the UN and its implementing partners, member states, civil society, and the private sector to strengthen global food systems and prevent future famines to reduce conflict. In this regard, the concept note sets out the following series of guiding questions that participants may address:

- how can the international community better align anticipatory actions to prevent severe hunger driven by conflict and climate change;
- what kind of investments can best tackle the root causes of conflict-induced food security that may result in famine;
- how can member states enhance collaboration and accountability to increase access to civilians requiring assistance during conflict, particularly children under five and women and girls;
- how has the Council succeeded in catalysing global efforts to prevent severe hunger and malnutrition in conflict, and what are best practices that can be scaled and replicated moving forward; and
- what more can the Council do to minimise the effects of conflict and climate in worsening global food insecurity and famines?

While not mentioned in the concept note, the recent failure to renew the Black Sea Grain Initiative and the impact of the Ukraine war on global food insecurity are likely to be prominent issues.

A recurring issue is the question of the adequacy of UN reporting to the Council on conflict-induced food insecurity, considering its current scale. This year's protection of civilians report contained, for the first time, a more detailed focus on the impact of armed conflict on hunger, while OCHA has submitted six white notes to the Council on various conflict-driven food crises since resolution 2417 was adopted in 2018.

The Council may adopt a presidential statement, which the US has proposed in connection with the open debate. Such a statement could highlight the importance of cooperation with regional and sub-regional organisations in preventing famine and conflict-induced

hunger, and request that the Secretary-General include recommendations for preventing famine in conflict situations in his regular country and regional reporting to the Council. UN member states may also sign on to a communiqué that the US is proposing on the open debate.

Council Dynamics

The impact of conflict on food insecurity has been a high-priority issue for the US. During its Council presidencies in March 2021 and May 2022, the US also convened ministerial-level open debates on conflict and food security. The US has frequently raised concerns that the UN is not keeping the Council sufficiently informed about conflict-driven food insecurity. At the Council debate on 23 May on the protection of civilians, US Permanent Representative Linda Thomas-Greenfield repeated this view: "We are not getting all the information we need. The white notes the Council receives are irregular. Too often they are delayed. Now, more than ever, it is critical that we receive the white notes of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs twice a year ... That could depoliticize the issue and ensure that we have timely information to act on". In 2021, the US proposed a presidential statement that would have requested two Secretary-General's reports a year on hunger and conflict, but the Council failed to adopt the statement, largely over some members' views that current reporting structures were adequate.

Russia has repeatedly 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. The Council's African members often worry that the issue creates a pretext to bring to the Council's attention countries that are not on its formal agenda. For instance, African members objected in 2021 to holding a Council meeting on a white note about the situation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia; eventually an IID was held. More recently, African Council members raised concerns about having a Council meeting on the 8 June white note because of the focus on the situation in Burkina Faso, which is not a formal Council agenda item: this, too, led to the discussion taking the form of an IID.

Brazil and Switzerland are the Council focal points on conflict and food security. Since the creation of this role in 2019, the focal points have organised Council discussions on the white notes and informal meetings of Council members to consider the FAO/WFP biannual updates on "monitoring food security in countries with conflict situations."

Syria

Expected Council Action

In August, the Security Council is expected to hold meetings on the political process, the humanitarian situation, and the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Key Recent Developments

On 11 July, the Security Council failed to reauthorise the Syria cross-border humanitarian aid delivery mechanism, which expired on 10 July and had allowed the delivery of humanitarian assistance from Türkiye to Syria without requiring the consent of the Syrian government. A draft resolution (S/2023/506) proposed by the penholders on the Syria humanitarian file (Brazil and Switzerland), which would have reauthorised the delivery of aid through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing for nine months, received 13 votes in favour and one abstention (China) but was vetoed by Russia. Another draft initiated by Russia (S/2023/507), which would have reauthorised the same crossing for six months, failed to be adopted because it did not receive the requisite votes. Two members voted in favour (China and Russia), three against (France, the UK, and the US) and the remaining ten members abstained. (For more, see *What's in Blue* story of 11 July.) In the ensuing days, the penholders continued to engage with other Council members in a bid to find a compromise on the divisive issues which could lead to a Council resolution reauthorising the Syria cross-border aid mechanism.

Prior to the 6 February earthquake that struck southeast Türkiye and north Syria, humanitarian aid was being delivered to northwest Syria from Türkiye through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing. From 13 February, the Syrian government opened two additional crossing points—Bab al-Salam and Al Ra'ee—from Türkiye to northwest Syria for an initial period of three months for the delivery of humanitarian aid. The Syrian government's authorisation for the additional border crossings expires on 13 August.

At the time of writing, the humanitarian operations through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing remain suspended. Since the expiry of the cross-border mechanism on 10 July, 21 trucks have crossed into northwest Syria from Türkiye through the Bab al-Salam border crossings. In contrast, on 10 July, 99 trucks crossed into northwest Syria from Türkiye: Bab al-Hawa (79 trucks) and Bab al-Salam (20 trucks). The Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric said on 11 July that, approximately 85 percent of the aid that reached northwest Syria from Türkiye by trucks, before the expiry of cross-border mechanism on 10 July, went through the Bab al-Hawa crossing.

Following Russia's veto, the General Assembly discussed the situation of Syria in a plenary session on 19 July. This was in accordance with General Assembly resolution A/RES/76/262, which states that the General Assembly is expected to convene "within 10 working days of the casting of a veto by one or more permanent members of the Security Council...a debate on the situation as to which the veto was cast". During the session, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy said that "Russia has never hesitated and will never hesitate to use the veto right not only to protect our interests and those of our allies" but also in the interests of the UN

partners. In her remarks, Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl (Switzerland) stated that the penholders engaged inclusively, constructively, and in good faith, and further spared no effort to accommodate the different concerns in order to reach consensus on the draft resolution. The Russian veto "enabled a single member of the Security Council to call into question the extension of the cross-border aid mechanism, the objective of which is purely humanitarian", she added.

On 13 July, Ambassador Bassam Sabbagh (Syria) sent a note verbale to the President of the Security Council transmitting a letter announcing the Syrian government's decision to grant the UN and its specialised agencies permission to use the Bab al-Hawa crossing to deliver humanitarian aid to civilians in need in northwest Syria "in full cooperation and coordination with the Syrian Government" for six months, starting that day. The letter stressed that the UN, its representatives, and staff should not communicate with "terrorist organizations" along with "groups and their affiliated illegal administrative entities in northwestern Syria". It reiterated the Syrian government's demand that the ICRC and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) be allowed to supervise and facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid in "areas controlled by terrorist organizations in northwest Syria".

On 14 July, OCHA circulated a note to Council members that responded to the Syrian government's 13 July letter. The note stated that the "Syrian Government's permission can be a basis for the [UN] to lawfully conduct cross-border humanitarian operations via the Bab al-Hawa border crossing for the specified duration". However, it also said that the Syrian government's letter contained two unacceptable conditions: that the UN should not communicate with entities designated as "terrorist", and that the ICRC and the SARC should supervise and facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid in northwest Syria. In this regard, the OCHA note said that the UN and its implementing partners must continue to engage with relevant state and non-state parties as operationally necessary to carry out safe and unimpeded humanitarian operations in line with the mandate of the Emergency Relief Coordinator under the General Assembly resolution 46/182. It added that the demand that the ICRC and the SARC supervise and facilitate aid is neither consistent with the independence of the UN nor practical, as the ICRC and SARC are not present in northwest Syria.

On 17 July, the Security Council held a private meeting, followed by closed consultations, to discuss the humanitarian situation in Syria. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths briefed the Council. He reiterated the concerns shared by OCHA in its 14 July note circulated to Council members. Apparently, he also said that he will further engage with the Syrian authorities in a bid to clarify the provisions of the letter. It seems that during the meeting, some Council members emphasised the need for Council authorisation of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, while other members welcomed the Syrian government's 13 July decision. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 16 July.)

On 24 July, the Council met on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria. OCHA Director of the Coordination Division Ramesh Rajasingham and the UN's Special Envoy for Syria Geir

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2672](#) (9 January 2023) extended the authorisation for the Syria cross-border aid mechanism for an additional six months until 10 July. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9371](#) (11 July 2023) was the meeting when the Council voted on competing draft resolutions reauthorising the Syria cross-border humanitarian aid delivery mechanism, neither of which were adopted. [S/PV.9372](#) (11 July 2023) was a meeting on the chemical weapons track in Syria. [Security Council Letter S/2023/526](#) (14 July 2023) was a letter dated 13 July from the Permanent Representative of Syria to the UN addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council. [Other S/2023/506](#) (11 July 2023) was the draft resolution proposed by the penholders on the Syria humanitarian file (Brazil and Switzerland) and vetoed by Russia, which would have reauthorised the delivery of aid through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing for nine months. [S/2023/507](#) (11 July 2023) was the draft resolution proposed by Russia which would have reauthorised the delivery of aid through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing for six months but failed to garner the necessary votes to pass.

Syria

O. Pedersen briefed on the humanitarian and political situations, respectively. Rajasingham took note of the 13 July letter from the Syrian government and said that OCHA would continue to engage in regard to the terms outlined in the letter and the modalities fundamental to the humanitarian operations. Along with the other border crossings—Bab al-Salam and Al Ra’ee—“most of the UN Agencies are currently using the humanitarian aid items that had been strategically prepositioned inside north-west Syria prior to 10 July to ensure continuity of the humanitarian assistance”, he noted. On the political front, Pedersen said that “months of potentially significant diplomacy have not translated into concrete outcomes for Syrians on the ground”. He emphasised the need for sustainable calm in the country, which could lead to a nationwide ceasefire. He added that the threat posed by listed terrorist groups remains and must be addressed in a cooperative manner.

On 11 July, the Council convened a briefing, followed by consultations, on the Syria chemical weapons track. At the meeting, Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Adedeji Ebo updated the Council on the findings of the report of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-Finding Mission (FFM), dated 28 June, regarding the alleged use of chemical weapons in Kharbit Massasneh on 7 July and 4 August 2017. The report concluded that the information obtained and analysed in line with the FFM’s mandate did not provide reasonable grounds for the FFM to determine that toxic chemicals were used as a weapon in the reported incidents.

Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 21 July statement following her six-day visit to Syria, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, appealed to member states whose nationals are detained in Northeast Syria to repatriate their nationals in line with their human rights obligations. She stated that “the dire conditions of detention for all categories men, women and especially children...make such returns absolutely imperative”. She added that the humanitarian conditions at the al-Hol refugee camp remain deplorable, particularly for women. In addition, she noted that “meaningful access to places of detention, including high-security sites, is essential to ensure that serious human rights violations are identified, reported, and prevented”.

On 11 July, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, cancelled his visit to Syria, citing a lack of cooperation from the Syrian government. In a statement issued on the same day, he stated that the preparations for the visit had been made in “full consideration of the sensitivities and realities on the ground, and in line with current practice for UN field missions in the country”. He expressed regret that the Syrian authorities had “failed to provide information and make steps necessary to allow the visit to take place”.

On 10 July, the Human Rights Council (HRC), during its 53rd session, adopted a resolution on the situation of human rights in Syria. Among other matters, the resolution demands that the Syrian government meet its responsibility to protect its population and to respect and protect the human rights of all persons within its jurisdiction, including persons in detention and their families; calls on the Syrian government to protect returning refugees and internally displaced persons, in particular women and children, from human rights violations and abuses and to help create the conditions necessary for the return of refugees; condemns all acts of sexual and gender-based violence and abuse in Syria; and reaffirms the need to end impunity through the prosecution of perpetrators of crimes under national and international law.

Women, Peace and Security

On 12 June, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic published a policy paper entitled “Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women and Girls”. In a context where pre-existing patterns of discrimination have worsened as a consequence of the conflict, the paper highlights the concerning situation of “tens of thousands of women across Syria” whose family members are missing or have been subjected to forcible disappearance. The paper says that “[t]he wives and family members left behind remain in a legal limbo” facing challenges in, for instance, accessing housing and property. It also notes that children in women-headed households in Syria face an exacerbated risk of statelessness and that early and forced marriages have reportedly increased in the country, primarily affecting girls. Among other recommendations, the Commission of Inquiry called on the Syrian government to “[c]ease all forms of incommunicado detention and enforced disappearances” and recommended that UN member states establish an independent institution “to coordinate and consolidate claims regarding missing persons, including persons subjected to enforced disappearance, and provide appropriate support for the families of the missing and disappeared”. On 29 June, the General Assembly adopted a resolution creating the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic which is mandated to “clarify the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons” in Syria and to “provide adequate support to victims, survivors and the families of those missing”.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is to ensure the continued flow of humanitarian aid to those in need in northwest Syria. The Council could consider holding a private meeting with Griffiths and a Syrian government representative for an update on their bilateral discussions regarding the potential modalities for continuing the delivery of aid through the Bab al-Hawa crossing. (A private meeting is a closed, formal meeting format; unlike closed consultations, non-Council member states are allowed to participate in this format.)

A related and broader issue is how to alleviate the growing humanitarian needs in Syria. Periodic briefings from OCHA 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 and expanding aid delivery mechanisms, including early recovery projects, in Syria.

Another key long-standing issue is finding a way to break the political impasse in Syria and to provide political support for the Special Envoy’s efforts in this regard. One option would be for the Council to hold a private meeting with Pedersen and other member states with influence over the parties in Syria to discuss recent developments in his “step-for-step” initiative. Through this initiative, Pedersen is asking the Syrian government, the opposition, regional states, and other stakeholders what concessions they are willing to make in exchange for reciprocal actions on matters such as abductees, detainees, and missing persons; humanitarian assistance and early recovery projects; and conditions for dignified, safe, and voluntary refugee returns.

Council Dynamics

Over the years, Syria has been one of the most divisive files on the Council’s agenda. China and Russia are supportive of the Syrian government, emphasising the need to respect the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and drawing connections between unilateral coercive measures on Syria and the challenging humanitarian

Syria

situation in the country. In contrast, 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.

Council members hold divergent views in regard to the future course of action in the aftermath of the Syrian government's decision to open the Bab al-Hawa border crossing with certain conditions. In a 13 July statement, Ambassador Barbara Woodward (UK) noted that “under the UN mandate, Bab al-Hawa had gold standard aid monitoring, to ensure aid was not misused”. She pointed out that without UN monitoring, control of the cross-border mechanism remains in the hands of the Syrian government. The priority, she said, needed to be “getting aid flowing again, fast, to the people who need it—and then getting certainty over its future”, adding that the UK will not hesitate to bring this matter back to the Security Council. In a Twitter post the same day, Polyanskiy said that, following the Syrian government's permission for the UN to use the Bab al-Hawa

border crossing, there was no need for a Council resolution. He noted that “efforts to put another draft to vote will constitute nothing but political games”. In addition, he said that the “cross-border mechanism which violated sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria is officially dead”.

Council members also hold divergent views about normalising ties with the Syrian government. In the 27 April Council briefing, the US noted that it will not normalise relations with Syria and has discouraged other member states from doing so. It added that the US will not lift sanctions on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad or support reconstruction in the absence of “genuine, comprehensive and enduring reforms and progress on the political process”. The European members of the Council hold a similar view. On the other hand, some Council members, including Russia, China, and the United Arab Emirates, support the normalisation of ties with the Syrian government.

UNRCCA (Central Asia)

Expected Council Action

In August, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) Kaha Imnadze is expected to brief Security Council members on UNRCCA's work in closed consultations. This will be the first time Imnadze has briefed the Council since his appointment in mid-June.

Key Recent Developments

The previous Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNRCCA, Natalia Gherman, briefed Council members in closed consultations on 30 January. Among other matters, she provided an update on UNRCCA's activities pertaining to counter-terrorism, transboundary water management, border demarcation, and the women, peace and security, and youth, peace and security agendas. Gherman also discussed with Council members the situation in Afghanistan and its impact on Central Asia and the September 2022 border clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Gherman finished her term at UNRCCA on 28 February and is now serving as the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED).

On 14 June, Secretary-General António Guterres announced Imnadze's appointment as his Special Representative and Head of UNRCCA. Prior to his appointment, Imnadze served as Georgia's Ambassador to Canada and its Permanent Representative to the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). He also served as Georgia's Permanent Representative to the UN from 2013 to 2022.

Since Gherman's last briefing, tensions between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have continued to ease, with officials from both sides reportedly participating in several rounds of talks regarding the demarcation of the disputed parts of the border between the two

countries. The talks followed four days of fighting between Kyrgyz and Tajik border forces in September 2022, during which at least 100 people were reportedly killed and more than 130 others were wounded. According to Kyrgyz authorities, a further 136,000 people were displaced by the violence. In a 2 May report, Human Rights Watch concluded that several of the attacks carried out by each side may amount to war crimes.

The war in Ukraine has continued to have a ripple effect in Central Asia, with several analysts speculating that the conflict may have contributed to diminished Russian influence in the region. Beginning on 18 May, Chinese President Xi Jinping hosted a two-day summit with the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in Xi'an, China. During the conference, Xi reportedly promised that China would provide Central Asian countries with 26 billion yuan (\$3.8 billion) in financing support and grants over the coming years. The leaders also adopted the Xi'an Declaration of the China-Central Asia Summit after the conference which, among other matters, noted that “the states of Central Asia ... are ready to actively cooperate within the framework of the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilisation Initiative put forward by China”.

The summit came approximately three months after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken travelled to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for a series of meetings with representatives of the Central Asian countries, including meetings with Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Uzbekistani President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and a “C5+1” meeting with the foreign ministers of each Central Asian state. Blinken also announced that the US will provide an additional \$25 million in funding to the region to support economic growth. The Biden administration had previously committed to providing \$25 million to the region for the same purpose.

UN DOCUMENTS ON UNRCCA [Security Council Letter S/2007/279](#) (7 May 2007) was from the Secretary-General on the establishment of a United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Ashgabat. [Security Council Press Statement SC/13179](#) (25 January 2018) welcomed further cooperation and coordination between UNRCCA, the Central Asian States, and relevant regional organisations, including those organisations of which the Central Asian States are members.

UNRCCA (Central Asia)

On 27 January, Mirziyoyev travelled to Bishkek to meet with Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov. During the meeting, the two leaders jointly announced that the process of demarcating the contested border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which includes an agreement to manage the Kempir-Abad reservoir together, had been completed. The agreement regarding the management of the reservoir has proved controversial in Kyrgyzstan; a group of activists, politicians, and journalists who opposed the agreement were arrested by Kyrgyz authorities in October 2022. On 22 June, the trial of 27 of those arrested began. If convicted, they could face more than ten years in jail.

The situation in Afghanistan continues to create a range of challenges for Central Asian states. On 15 February, Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) Chief of the Joint Staff Anatoly Sidorov claimed that 4,000 fighters from Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan Province (ISIL-K) were stationed near the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. In a statement during the Council's 21 June open briefing on Afghanistan, the representative of Tajikistan said that Tajik "law enforcement agencies seized 4.2 tons of narcotics at the border with Afghanistan in 2022, up from 2.4 tons in 2020". On 23 June, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) published a report on "The impact of the Afghan crisis on the environment, water and energy in Central Asian regions bordering Afghanistan: recommendations for the OSCE". Among other matters, the report concluded that climate change risk factors in the region "are compounded by the risks arising from the instability in Afghanistan and the difficulty of sharing water, weather, and climate data and disaster warnings in the Amu Darya River basin".

From 13 to 17 March, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk visited Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan at the invitation of each country. In press conferences delivered during his visit, Türk called for "after action" reviews of the July 2022 protests in the autonomous Karakalpakstan region of Uzbekistan and the January 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan, as well as calling for the criminalisation of domestic violence and greater action on the protection of journalists and freedom of expression.

Several elections have taken place in Central Asian countries during the last six months. On 19 March, Kazakhstan held snap parliamentary elections. A presidential election took place in Uzbekistan on 9 July, while Turkmenistan's parliamentary elections were held on 26 March.

Key Issues and Options

One of the main issues for the Council is how to make the best use of the UNRCCA's expertise and whether there is anything else the Council could do to support the UNRCCA's efforts to facilitate preventive diplomacy and regional cooperation.

The situation in Afghanistan and its impact on Central Asia is another issue for the Council. The Council could consider inviting a representative of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to participate in the consultations and provide information regarding developments in the country that may affect the wider region.

Another option would be for Council members to convene an informal interactive dialogue with representatives of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to discuss their border dispute and possible ways the international community could support their efforts to resolve it.

Council Dynamics

Council members are generally supportive of UNRCCA and view it as an important tool in promoting cooperation in Central Asia. Until 2015, Council members issued a press statement following the consultations, encouraging increased cooperation and coordination among the Central Asian countries, UNRCCA, and "relevant regional organisations". In September 2015, however, Russia, the penholder on UNRCCA, sought to add specific references in the statement to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), as well as the OSCE and the EU. The P3 (France, the UK, and the US) opposed these additions, seeing the CIS, the CSTO and the SCO as vehicles for enhancing Russian influence in the region. A press statement could not be agreed upon for more than two years owing to disagreements regarding this issue.

Kazakhstan was able to overcome these difficulties during its 2017-2018 term as an elected member by proposing compromise language. Press elements were issued in February 2017, and a press statement was agreed upon in January 2018.

Since then, however, Council members have again been unable to reach agreement on a UNRCCA press statement because of disagreements about referring to regional organisations. Press elements commending Gherman for her efforts and expressing support for UNRCCA's work were read out following the previous UNRCCA consultations in January.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In August, the Security Council will hold its monthly briefing, followed by closed consultations, on Yemen. UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg and a representative of OCHA will brief. The head of the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), Major General Michael Beary, is expected to brief during the consultations.

Key Recent Developments

There has yet to be a breakthrough in the Omani-facilitated talks that have continued since October 2022 between the Houthi rebel group and Saudi Arabia, which leads a military coalition in support of the internationally recognised government of Yemen. During his 10 July Council briefing, Grundberg appeared to express greater concern over the lack of progress and recent hostilities. He called on

UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2691 (10 July 2023) extended the mandate of the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement until 14 July 2024. 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.9370** (10 July 2023) was a briefing on Yemen.

Yemen

the parties to stop military provocations and to agree to a sustainable nationwide ceasefire. He further stressed the need to “reverse antagonistic economic policies”. Grundberg added that the parties must make progress on restarting an intra-Yemeni political process under UN auspices, which he described as urgent “in order to consolidate gains ... and prevent fragmentation”.

Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya, who also briefed at the session, similarly underscored concerns about the impact of economic conditions and policies that she said were a key driver of Yemen’s humanitarian crisis. She stressed the need for oil exports from Yemeni government-held areas to resume after they were forced to stop last year following a series of Houthi drone attacks on oil terminals in October and November 2022. This has created significant revenue shortages for the government, hurting its ability to provide basic services and pay public sector salaries. The obstruction to the transport of commercial goods from government- to Houthi-controlled areas must also be addressed, according to Msuya. This appeared to be a reference to the Houthi ban since late May on cooking gas produced in government-held areas—another significant source of revenue—and a requirement that cooking gas be imported through the Houthi-controlled ports in Hodeidah.

On 21 July, the head of the World Food Programme’s (WFP) office in Taiz, Moayad Hameidi, a Jordanian national, was shot and killed by unknown gunmen in Turbah, Taiz governorate, according to a WFP statement.

Progress continues in conducting the salvage operation of the FSO Safer oil tanker, the decrepit vessel moored off Hodeidah governorate that the UN has warned for years risks creating an environmental disaster in the event of an oil spill or explosion on the ship. On 25 July, Secretary-General António Guterres announced that the critical step of pumping the oil from the FSO Safer to a replacement ship had begun that morning. The ship-to-ship transfer of the oil is expected to take 19 days to complete. UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen David Gressly, who has led UN efforts to organise the salvage operation for the past two years, briefed at the Council’s 10 July session, noting that a crisis management team was deployed in Hodeidah to respond to any incidents that could occur during the oil transfer. Gressly drew attention to the continued need for funds for the operation’s estimated \$143 million budget; a gap of \$25 million remains, as Gressly noted, including for the repayment of the \$20 million that the UN’s Central Emergency Relief Fund loaned to get the operation started.

On 10 July, the Security Council adopted resolution 2691, which renewed the mandate of the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement for an additional year until 14 July 2024. Council members characterised the resolution, which was a short, one-page text, as a “technical rollover” of the mandate.

Human Rights- Related Developments

On 19 June, a group of UN experts issued a statement calling for the immediate release of 16 followers of the Baha’i faith who were abducted by the Houthis on 25 May. The experts reiterated their concern for the fate of the members of the group, whose whereabouts remain unknown, and emphasised that the abduction and concealment of their fate and whereabouts are “acts tantamount to enforced disappearance”. The experts noted that

they had expressed concern for several years regarding the “targeted persecution of religious minorities” in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. The statement observes that religious minorities in Yemen have been subjected to detention, torture, and ill-treatment by the Houthis in the past. The experts underscored their fear that the disappeared group is facing the risk of torture and other human rights violations and given the record, “may even face death sentences in connection with the legitimate exercise of their rights”.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 10 July, the Secretary-General informed the Council that he had appointed Jasser Al Shahed of Egypt to be the regional affairs expert of the Yemen Panel of Experts. The panel has not had an expert for regional affairs in over a year and a half.

On 20 July, the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee met with the Panel of Experts to discuss the panel’s mid-term update, which is an unpublished report on the implementation of the sanctions regime.

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. Houthi-Saudi talks have stalled since April, apparently over differences about the use of Yemen’s resources and associated revenues to pay the salaries of public employees. A related issue is the fragile relations between the various factions that make up the anti-Houthi forces and that form the Yemeni government’s Presidential Leadership Council. Council members could reiterate the importance of an inclusive Yemeni political process under UN mediation for a sustainable resolution of the conflict.

Despite some positive signs in the peace process, Yemen continues to face massive humanitarian needs. An estimated 21.6 million people require aid or protection. Access constraints and interference in relief operations include the Houthis’ enforcement of mahram, requiring women to be accompanied by male guardians, which has negatively affected aid delivery. Economic conditions risk undermining political efforts in addition to exacerbating the humanitarian situation. Landmines and explosive remnants of war have become an issue of greater concern since the reduction in fighting following last year’s now-expired April 2022 truce agreement.

Council members may highlight concerns over policies that are fuelling socioeconomic challenges and tensions. Members may further 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, which calls for \$4.3 billion but was only 30.1 percent funded as at 21 July.

Council members are also likely to continue closely monitoring progress in the FSO Safer salvage operation.

Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the UN Special Envoy’s mediation efforts. Members have further welcomed the potential for the Houthi-Saudi talks to yield meaningful results. At the same time, they stress the ultimate importance of an inclusive Yemeni political process under UN auspices to achieve a sustainable resolution to the conflict. Council members’ approach to mandate

Yemen

renewals this year—the February renewal of the Yemen sanctions regime and the renewal of UNMHA—has so far been to avoid significant changes that could disrupt ongoing diplomatic processes.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been a leading member of the Saudi Arabia-led coalition and is active in pushing for its views, coordinated with the Yemeni government and Saudi Arabia, to be reflected in Council products. Russia has traditionally objected to language in Council products that it perceives as too critical of the Houthis or not balanced. This dynamic played out during negotiations on resolution 2691, in which Russia raised objections about

mentioning Houthi hindrances to UNMHA’s freedom of movement while the UAE felt it was important that the mandate renewal address this issue, which the Secretary-General’s annual review of UNMHA documents as a key ongoing challenge. The opposing positions resulted in a small revision to the text of the resolution, which recalled the Houthi restrictions on the mission’s movement.

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

Libya

Expected Council Action

In August, the Security Council will hold its bimonthly briefing on the situation in Libya. Special Representative and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Abdoulaye Bathily will brief the Council on recent political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country and the Secretary-General’s latest report on UNSMIL. The chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Kimihiro Ishikane (Japan), will also brief on the committee’s activities.

Key Recent Developments

The political impasse between the rival Libyan governments continues. In February 2022—after the indefinite postponement of elections scheduled for December 2021 under the leadership of Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah, prime minister of the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity (GNU)—the House of Representatives (HoR) elected former Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha as prime minister of a competing faction that became known as the Government of National Stability (GNS). The GNS is based in Sirte and aligned with the self-styled Libyan National Army led by General Khalifa Haftar. In May, the HoR voted to suspend Bashagha as prime minister of the GNS and replace him with Finance Minister Osama Hamad—a move that some analysts believe was set in motion by Bashagha’s failed attempts to enter Tripoli last year. The protracted stalemate between the GNU and the GNS and the internal divisions within the two bodies contribute to Libya’s political, economic, and security instability.

Against this backdrop, both the UN and national actors have concentrated recent efforts on facilitating agreement on a new roadmap for national elections to unify the country’s divided government. In March, the HoR and the GNU-aligned High State Council (HSC) established a “joint 6+6 committee”—comprising six representatives from each body—to draft electoral laws that would allow elections to take place by the end of the year. On 7 June, after a two-week meeting in Bouznika, Morocco, the joint committee announced that it had reached agreement on draft legislation, which calls for

simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections and the formation of a unified interim government that will be responsible for conducting the elections, among other provisions.

The draft legislation has not yet been adopted, however. A planned signing ceremony in June with HoR speaker Aguila Saleh and HSC head Khalid al-Mishri was reportedly cancelled, prompting speculation that the two leaders objected to the draft that their joint committee had negotiated. In his 19 June briefing to the Council, Bathily acknowledged “the effort of the 6+6 committee as an important step forward” but said that the “flurry of mixed reactions” from Libyan stakeholders to the draft legislation indicates that “key issues remain strongly contested”. He highlighted four specific provisions in the draft legislation that have proven controversial:

- the eligibility criteria for candidates for the presidential election;
- the provision for a mandatory second round of the presidential election to take place between the two highest polling candidates, even if one of them had secured more than 50 percent of the votes in the first round;
- provisions stipulating that if the first round of the presidential election cannot be held for whatever reason, parliamentary elections will not take place either; and
- a provision requiring the establishment of a new interim government before elections can be held.

Bathily described these issues as “highly contentious” and said that a political agreement among major stakeholders will be necessary to make the draft electoral legislation implementable and avoid a new political crisis. In this context, he called on the Council to “increase its pressure on the relevant actors and use its collective and individual leverage” to ensure that Libyan actors honour their stated commitment to holding elections. He also informed the Council of his own intention “to intensify negotiations and convene major stakeholders...to reach a final settlement” on the draft legislation. In a 10 July statement, Bathily reaffirmed this intention and urged Libyan stakeholders to “refrain from any actions, including unilateral or non-inclusive decisions, that could precipitate a crisis and divert attention” from elections.

UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2684](#) (2 June 2023) renewed for one year the authorisation for member states to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya. [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) reaffirmed the Security Council’s commitment to an inclusive, Libyan-led and Libyan-owned political process leading to elections, facilitated by the UN and supported by the international community. [Secretary-General’s Report S/2023/248](#) (5 April 2023) was the 120-day report on UNSMIL. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9351](#) (19 June 2023) was a briefing on UNSMIL.

Libya

On 25 July, the full HoR approved the draft legislation, including the provision to form a new interim government to oversee elections. The following day, UNSMIL released a statement that “takes note” of the approval and reiterates warnings against “[u]nilateral actions”, which “like similar attempts seen in the past, could inflict serious negative consequences for Libya and trigger further instability and violence”. On 27 July, the French, German, Italian, UK, and US embassies to Libya released a joint statement endorsing the UN’s efforts to “address all contested elements of the electoral framework in order to make it implementable”.

On the security track, Bathily said in his June briefing to the Council that Tripoli remained relatively calm. However, he expressed concern about military operations that the GNU launched in May against alleged smuggling networks in the western city of Zawiyah, noting that the operations had “prompted allegations of political motives and could therefore risk undermining the relative stability” in the region. He also noted the risk of destabilising cross-border effects from the ongoing conflict in Sudan.

In addition, Libya’s oil resources have recently been the subject of renewed tensions. In early July, General Haftar called for a more equitable distribution of oil revenue—which is under the control of the Tripoli-based Central Bank of Libya—and suggested he might take military action if an agreement is not reached by August. Subsequently, the GNU announced the establishment of a joint financial oversight committee, comprising representatives of rival government entities and relevant technical bodies, to enhance transparency and equitability in public spending—a move that UNSMIL welcomed in an 8 July statement. Additionally, on 12 July, former Finance Minister Faraj Boumtari was arrested by the Internal Security Agency (ISA) and detained at an unknown location, allegedly because of his bid to replace the current—and GNU-aligned—governor of the Central Bank of Libya. In protest, the southern al-Zawi tribe, from which Boumtari hails, shut down three oil fields under its control. On 15 July, the ISA released Boumtari, and production resumed at two of the three oil fields. At the time of writing, the third oil field (known as the “108” field) was still closed.

The country’s human rights and humanitarian situations remain alarming. In his June briefing, Bathily expressed concern about an “increase of excessive controls by security agencies that...restrict fundamental rights, including freedom of assembly and freedom of movement”. Specifically, Bathily criticised recently adopted decisions by the GNU to require unaccompanied women traveling abroad to complete a form explaining their reason for travelling without a male companion—a move that was also denounced by UN human rights experts in a 19 July statement—and to regulate civil society organisations based

on a restrictive law from the era of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. Additionally, another group of UN human rights experts, in a 21 July statement, expressed serious concern about reports that human traffickers in Libya have detained, tortured, and held migrants and refugees for ransom, subjecting them to human rights violations that may constitute an enforced disappearance.

On 2 June, the Council adopted resolution 2684, renewing for one year the authorisation for member states, acting nationally or through regional organisations, to inspect vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya that they have reasonable grounds to believe are violating the arms embargo imposed on the country in resolution 1970 of 26 February 2011.

Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Security Council remains supporting the political momentum towards holding national elections later this year. The provisional agreement of the 6+6 committee on draft electoral legislation is a potentially positive development in this regard, but the outstanding issues that the legislation leaves unresolved and the delay in its implementation remain a concern. At the August briefing, Council members are likely to reiterate their expectation that all parties display the political will to meet their stated commitments through concrete action, noting that both the UN and the legislatures had set June as the deadline to finalise electoral legislation to hold elections by the end of the year. In this regard, members may also reiterate support for Bathily’s intensified efforts to facilitate agreement on a final settlement.

Council Dynamics

Council members remain united on the need for a Libyan-led inclusive process to lead to elections foreseen as restoring political, security, and economic stability. At the June briefing, most members acknowledged the 6+6 committee’s draft electoral legislation as a positive step and welcomed Bathily’s mediation efforts to resolve the law’s outstanding issues.

Broader geopolitical tensions still influence Council dynamics in respect of Libya, however. In his June statement, the Russian representative criticised the alleged “double agenda” of Western members, whom he accused of seeking to “provide resources for their own economic needs at the expense of Libya’s hydrocarbon resources” rather than supporting a long-term solution to the country’s problems. Russia also abstained from the vote adopting resolution 2684, claiming that the authorisation for maritime inspections—carried out by the EU—has not led to “practical results in terms of stabilisation on the ground”.

Ukraine

Expected Council Action

In August, the Security Council plans to hold a briefing on the situation in Ukraine. The Council may hold additional meetings on Ukraine during the month.

Key Recent Developments

In July, Ukrainian forces continued their counteroffensive across several frontline sectors, with Ukrainian authorities reporting some gains in the eastern Donetsk and southern Zaporizhzhia regions. Meanwhile, Russian forces initiated offensive operations near the city of Kupyansk, between the eastern Kharkiv and Luhansk regions.

Tensions escalated along the border between Belarus and Poland. On 20 July, the Belarusian Defense Ministry announced that units of the Russian private security company the Wagner Group had started training Belarusian soldiers along the country's border with Poland. The Wagner units were relocated to Belarus following their attempted mutiny in Russia in late June. Warsaw responded on 21 July by deciding to position its own military units on the country's eastern border with Belarus. At a meeting of Russia's national security council on 21 July, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Poland of nurturing "revanchist ambitions" and vowed to use "all the resources" at its disposal to defend Belarus.

In a 17 July statement, Moscow announced that it would not renew the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI), allowing it to expire the following day. The statement criticised the initiative as a "purely commercial" enterprise aimed at serving "Kiev and its Western curators' self-serving interests". It also argued that "none of the five systemic tasks envisaged by the Memorandum of Understanding [MoU] have been fulfilled", adding that the Secretary-General's "last-minute" proposal to provide SWIFT payment system access to a subsidiary of Russia's agricultural bank was "practically unrealizable and unviable". (The MoU, signed by Russia and the UN in July 2022, outlined the UN's scope of engagement to facilitate unimpeded exports of Russian food products and fertilisers to global markets.)

Following its decision to terminate the BSGI, Russia declared that all vessels sailing in the Black Sea would "be regarded as potential carriers of military cargo". On 21 July, Russia's navy reportedly conducted live-fire exercises in the Black Sea. Russian forces also launched a series of missile and drone attacks for several days following the BSGI's termination, destroying critical port infrastructure, facilities, and grain supplies in the Black Sea port cities of Odesa, Chornomorsk, and Mykolaiv. In a 20 July statement, Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the Russian attacks, while recalling that the destruction of civilian infrastructure may constitute a violation of international humanitarian law. Guterres stressed that the attacks contradict Moscow's commitments under the MoU to "facilitate the unimpeded export of food, sunflower oil and fertilizers from Ukrainian controlled Black Sea ports".

Russia's termination of the BSGI was met with broad disapproval. In a 17 July statement, Guterres expressed regret over Russia's decision, noting that the global price of wheat had already started to rise. Quoting the letter that he had sent to Moscow before the BSGI expired, Guterres refuted several of Moscow's justifications for terminating the agreement, emphasising that he felt "deeply

disappointed that [his] proposals went unheeded".

During the Security Council's 17 July briefing on Ukraine and the General Assembly's 18 July debate on "the situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine", several member states—notably many non-Western members—expressed regret at Russia's decision to withdraw from the BSGI. Briefing the Security Council during a 21 July meeting on Ukraine requested by Ecuador and France, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo described Russia's decision as a "further blow to global food security". She also underlined that threats to civilian vessels navigating in the Black Sea are "unacceptable", adding that "any risk of conflict spillover as a result of a military incident in the Black Sea—whether intentional or by accident—must be avoided at all costs". (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 16 July.)

In addition to the two briefings focused on the BSGI, the Security Council convened four meetings on other issues related to Ukraine in July. In an 11 July briefing requested by Russia, the Security Council discussed developments regarding the 26 September 2022 explosions that caused physical damage to the Nord Stream pipelines in the Baltic Sea that carry natural gas from Russia to Germany. On 26 July, the Council held two briefings on Ukraine: the first was a briefing requested by Russia focused on the alleged persecution of the followers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and the second was a briefing requested by Ukraine on Russian attacks on Odesa. At the time of writing, Russia had requested another briefing on Ukraine, scheduled for 31 July, to discuss "the systematic use of terrorist methods by the Kyiv regime as a factor exacerbating the crisis around Ukraine and postponing its political settlement".

In July, Ukraine's NATO allies strengthened their commitment to supporting Ukraine in its defence against Russia. Furthermore, several of Ukraine's closest allies offered to establish a framework for security guarantees to deter future aggression. During the NATO summit, held on 11 and 12 July in Lithuania, NATO members agreed on a three-element package aimed at bringing Ukraine closer to NATO. This includes a commitment to a multi-year programme of assistance designed to bolster Ukraine's security and defence sectors while bringing Ukraine's armed forces and military equipment up to NATO standards; the establishment of a NATO-Ukraine Council, a decision-making forum with Ukraine's participation; and agreement to expedite Ukraine's eventual NATO membership by removing the requirement for a membership action plan.

Following the summit, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg emphasised that NATO "will issue an invitation for Ukraine... when allies agree, and conditions are met". In a 12 July press release, Russia criticised the move, framing it as a continuation of NATO's "provocative expansion policy" and an effort to prolong "the hybrid war NATO has launched against Russia".

On 12 July, the Group of Seven (G7)—Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the US—together with the presidents of the European Council and the European Commission issued a statement announcing that each G7 member will develop specific, bilateral, long-term security commitments and arrangements with Ukraine to ensure a sustainable force capable of defending Ukraine and deterring future Russian aggression. The security commitments

UN DOCUMENTS ON UKRAINE Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9390 (31 July 2023) was a briefing on Ukraine requested by Russia. S/PV.9386 (26 July 2023) was a briefing requested by Ukraine. S/PV.9385 (26 July 2023) was a briefing on Ukraine requested by Russia. S/PV.9382 (21 July 2023) was a briefing on Ukraine requested by Ecuador and France. S/PV.9380 (17 July 2023) was a high-level briefing on Ukraine. S/PV.9373 (11 July 2023) was a meeting held under the "Threats to international peace and security" agenda item, requested by Russia to discuss developments related to the 26 September 2022 explosions that caused physical damage to the Nord Stream pipelines in the Baltic Sea.

Ukraine

include the provision of modern military equipment across land, sea and air domains, intelligence-sharing, cybersecurity support, economic assistance, and efforts to impose economic and other costs on Russia. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed the announcement as the first legal document symbolising that Ukraine has “an ‘umbrella’ of security guarantees” on its path to NATO membership.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 12 July, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk briefed the Human Rights Council (HRC) during its 53rd session. Presenting the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) report on “detention of civilians in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine” (A/HRC/53/CRP.3), Türk noted that his office had documented the detention of more than 900 civilians, including eight children, between 24 February 2022 and 23 May. Of the documented cases in the report, 864 were perpetrated by Russia. Türk underscored that many of the cases were “tantamount to enforced disappearances” and urged the Russian leadership to “instruct and ensure their personnel comply with international human rights and humanitarian law”.

During his briefing, Türk also presented the Secretary-General's report (A/HRC/53/64) on human rights violations in Crimea, Sevastopol, and Russian-occupied areas in the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. Noting arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and torture, the High Commissioner re-emphasised his concern that “accountability continues to be conspicuous by its absence” and mentioned that to the best of his knowledge, no investigations were being undertaken by Russia regarding violations and abuses committed by its forces in Ukraine against civilians.

At the conclusion of its 53rd session on 14 July, the HRC adopted a resolution (A/HRC/53/L.1) on cooperation with and assistance to Ukraine in the field of human rights. The resolution requests the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to continue presenting an oral report on the findings of the OHCHR on the situation of human rights in Ukraine to the HRC at every future session until its 59th session. The resolution was adopted with 28 votes in favour, three against, and 16 abstentions. Security Council members France, the UK, and the US voted in favour, the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

abstained, and China voted against the resolution.

Key Issues and Options

The overarching priority for the Council is to promote a solution to the conflict in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter and to facilitate dialogue among the parties to that end. The direct involvement of a permanent member in the conflict, however, continues to limit the Council's options.

A key issue for the Council is how to revive the BSGI. Russia has indicated its willingness to return to the agreement should its demands be met. However, Ukraine and its Western allies have been reluctant to renegotiate the terms of the agreement, viewing Russia's actions as an effort to extract concessions, including broader sanctions relief. On 3 August, the US is organising a ministerial-level open debate on famine and conflict-induced global food insecurity as a signature event of its August Council presidency. Council members have begun negotiating a draft presidential statement in connection with the upcoming debate. Members may wish to propose language encouraging the Secretary-General to reinvigorate his good offices efforts to help the parties break the current impasse and renew the agreement.

Council and Wider Dynamics

The Security Council remains starkly divided on the conflict in Ukraine and the appropriate framework for achieving a peaceful resolution. 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 front lines of the conflict, leaving Russia in control of a significant amount of territory in eastern and southern Ukraine.

Lebanon

Expected Council Action

In August, the Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) ahead of its 31 August expiry. Prior to that, Council members will hold closed consultations on UNIFIL. Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix is the anticipated briefer.

Key Recent Developments

On 20 July, Council members received a briefing in consultations on the Secretary-General's 13 July report on the implementation of resolution 1701, which in 2006 called for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah. The Secretary-General's report, which covers the period from 21 February to 20 June, documented numerous violations of resolution 1701 and said that UNIFIL continued to record the presence of unauthorised weapons in its area

of operations, including at a firing range in which it observed flags “with what appear to be Hizbullah symbols”. In the report, the Secretary-General condemned “the repeated self-acknowledged maintenance” of unauthorised weapons by Hezbollah “and other non-State armed groups” while noting that Israel's overflights in Lebanese airspace “remain of concern” and constitute violations of resolution 1701 and of Lebanese sovereignty.

The recent uptick in tension across the Blue Line was a key focus of the 20 July briefing in consultations and is likely to remain a focus of Council members' attention ahead of the negotiations on UNIFIL's mandate renewal. The Blue Line is a withdrawal line set by the UN in 2000 to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon. While not representing an international border, it acts in practice as a boundary between Lebanon and Israel in the absence of an agreed-upon border between the two states. Any

UN DOCUMENTS ON LEBANON Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2650 (31 August 2022) renewed the mandate of UNIFIL until 31 August 2023. S/RES/1701 (11 August 2006) called for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah. **Secretary-General's Report S/2023/522** (13 July 2023) was the most recent Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701.

Lebanon

unauthorised crossing of the Blue Line—only about half of which is visibly marked on the ground by blue barrels installed by the UN with the prior mutual agreement of Lebanon and Israel—constitutes a violation of resolution 1701.

The Secretary-General's report described several incidents of weapons-pointing between the IDF and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), crossings of the Blue Line and stone-throwing in connection with IDF construction works near the line. The IDF continued to occupy the northern portion of the village of Ghajar, which straddles the Blue Line, and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line in violation of resolution 1701. In a 13 July letter to the Security Council, Lebanon said that Israel had “surrounded the town with a metal fence, a concrete wall and barbed wire, and installed cameras” and called on the Security Council and the Secretary-General to “condemn this flagrant violation of Lebanese sovereignty”.

The Secretary-General's report also says that UNIFIL observed two tents recently installed south of the Blue Line in the area of the Sheb'a Farms, noting that the tents, “with individuals crossing from north of the Blue Line to gain access to the structure, constitute a clear violation of resolution 1701”. One of the two tents was apparently relocated north of the Blue Line on 1 July. In a 12 July speech, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah reportedly said that his party had erected a tent “behind the withdrawal line” in the Sheb'a Farms to draw national and international attention to Israel's occupation of northern Ghajar. (The Sheb'a Farms is an area of farmlands disputed between Syria and Lebanon and currently occupied by Israel. While a provisional definition of the Sheb'a Farms area is contained in the October 2007 Secretary-General's report on resolution 1701, its exact boundaries are yet to be agreed.)

The importance of UNIFIL freedom of movement and access to key sites in its area of operations were also apparently among the issues raised during the 20 July consultations. The Secretary-General's report said that, although UNIFIL's freedom of movement “was respected in most cases, the mission did encounter several restrictions”, including an incident during which a peacekeeper was hit on the head during a patrol and “masked individuals” damaged a patrol vehicle with an axe.

Despite “repeated requests” to the LAF, UNIFIL has yet to gain access to several locations of interest; the Secretary-General stressed in particular that the “continued lack of support” to access four unauthorised firing ranges is “unacceptable”. The report describes 18 containers and six watchtowers north of the Blue Line, with 12 of these sites displaying “Green without Borders” signs, noting that on several occasions the mission experienced restrictions to its freedom of movement in proximity to these sites. Lebanon says that Green without Borders is an environmental protection organisation. According to Israel, these structures belong to Hezbollah.

In other developments, the crisis of Lebanese political institutions continues to be a source of concern. Lebanon has been without a president since Michel Aoun's term ended on 31 October 2022, with opposing political blocks unable to agree on a compromise candidate. The presidential vacuum is compounded by the fact that Lebanon's government remains in caretaker status.

At the last presidential election session on 14 June, neither of the two candidates—Jihad Azour and Suleiman Frangieh—received the

required votes to be elected in the first round of voting, during which a candidate needs a two-thirds majority (86 votes) of the elected parliamentarians to win. While only a simple majority is needed in subsequent rounds, a quorum of 86 members of parliament is also necessary for a valid ballot. On 14 June, parliamentarians from Hezbollah and the Amal Movement reportedly withdrew after the first session, preventing a second round from taking place owing to a lack of quorum.

According to a joint statement issued after a 17 July meeting in Doha, representatives of Egypt, France, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the US discussed “options with respect to implementing measures against those who are blocking progress” on the election of a president.

Over one year since the April 2022 Staff Level Agreement between Lebanon and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), several actions set out in the agreement as a precondition for the IMF to support Lebanon with around \$3 billion remain outstanding. In a 29 June report, the IMF said that the economy had contracted by about 40 percent since the start of the economic crisis in 2019, inflation had skyrocketed, and the central bank had lost two-thirds of its foreign exchange reserves. While recognising that in 2022 the Lebanese economy showed “some signs” of stabilisation, the IMF stressed that it “remains severely depressed”.

Almost three years since the 4 August 2020 Beirut port explosion, the inquiry into responsibility for the blast remains stalled.

Women, Peace and Security

A 22 June UN Women update on the impact of the Lebanese financial crisis on women's economic participation in the country said that the crisis “is a dramatic setback to the already low women's economic participation in Lebanon, as it forced Lebanese and Palestinian women out of the workforce and drove Syrian women into low-paying jobs and often exploitative work conditions”. The update called for mobilising resources for investments by combating tax avoidance and tax evasion and using gender-responsive and program-based budgeting to reallocate public spending. It argued that the economic crisis provided an opportunity for building a more equal and equitable society through, among other things, “implementing strategic plans to recover and retain women's jobs and providing opportunities for decent work while addressing women's increased care responsibilities”.

Key Issues and Options

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

In August, UNIFIL's mandate renewal will be the pivotal issue for Council members. Protecting the mandate's integrity and providing the mission with the necessary tools to carry out its operations remain key priorities for the Council. One option is to renew UNIFIL's mandate for an additional year without substantive changes to the mission's mandate and configuration.

Council Dynamics

There is broad consensus among Council members in support of Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security. However, differences remain. For instance, some members distinguish between

Lebanon

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. Russia sees Hezbollah as a legitimate sociopolitical force.

While Council members have generally been supportive of UNIFIL, the negotiations for resolution 2650—which in August 2022 extended UNIFIL's mandate until 31 August—proved difficult. Resolution 2650 extended the provision requesting UNIFIL to provide non-lethal material and logistical support to the LAF that was originally introduced in 2021 because of concerns about the impact of Lebanon's socioeconomic crisis on the LAF's capacity to carry out its functions in UNIFIL's area of operations. While last year many Council members supported the re-authorisation of the temporary and special measures for one year, China and Russia opposed this, stressing that in 2021 they had assented to the measures on a temporary basis only. In an apparent compromise, the penholder (France) retained the language re-authorising the measures but reducing the period to six months “and no longer than 28 February 2023”.

During last year's negotiations, some members, including the United Arab Emirates and the UK, demanded that stronger language condemning the presence of weapons outside Lebanon's control be included in the resolution and, in the UK's case, explicitly mentioning Hezbollah. While an explicit mention of the Shi'a group

was ultimately not included, stronger language condemning the possession of weapons by “armed groups” features in resolution 2650.

The resolution also introduced language that says that, pursuant to the Agreement on the Status of the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (SOFA), “UNIFIL is authorized to conduct its operation independently”. Although some members expressed concern that this language might go beyond what the SOFA established, or that it needed to be further clarified, it was eventually retained. This language, however, was not well received by some Lebanese actors. For instance, the Lebanese Foreign Affairs Ministry said that the resolution included “wording that does not conform to the framework agreement Lebanon has signed with the UN”. (For more, see the Lebanon brief in our October 2022 *Monthly Forecast*.)

While similar issues, and associated dynamics, could re-emerge this year, it is likely that Council members will also consider language urging the Lebanese Parliament to elect a president and calling for the formation of a new government. Some members might also suggest language on women, peace and security (WPS), like former co-chairs of the Informal Experts Group on WPS Ireland and Mexico did last year. At the same time, other members might try to circumscribe or even block these attempts, having in past negotiations been wary of what they argued was overly prescriptive text regarding Lebanon's internal political matters.

Mali

Expected Council Action

In August, the Security Council is expected to have a briefing and consultations on Mali to consider the Secretary-General's plan for the transfer of MINUSMA's tasks. According to resolution 2690, which mandated the drawdown and withdrawal of MINUSMA, the Council should receive the plan by 15 August. In addition, the Security Council may renew during August the assets freeze and travel ban measures of the Mali sanctions regime, which expire on 31 August, and the mandate of the Mali Panel of Experts, which expires on 30 September.

Key Recent Developments

On 16 June, Malian Transitional Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdoulaye Diop called for the “withdrawal without delay” of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) during a Security Council briefing on Mali. Diop claimed that MINUSMA—which has been in Mali since 2013—had “become part of the problem, fuelling inter-community tensions exacerbated by extremely serious allegations that are highly detrimental to peace, reconciliation and national cohesion”. He added that “[t]he situation is creating a feeling of mistrust among the Malian population towards MINUSMA and causing a crisis of confidence between the Malian authorities and MINUSMA”.

Diop's call to end the mission surprised most Council members,

who had already begun negotiations to renew MINUSMA's mandate. It followed Malian authorities' increasingly hostile stance towards MINUSMA, however, which since last year has included restrictions on the mission's freedom of movement. The authorities expelled MINUSMA's spokesperson in July 2022 and the head of its human rights division in February. In May, they announced the opening of an inquiry into the UN staff that had drafted a recent OHCHR fact-finding report which said that Malian security forces and “foreign personnel” were likely responsible for killing at least 500 people during a counter-terrorism operation in the town of Moura in April 2022. (“Foreign personnel” was an apparent reference to the Wagner Group, the Russian private security company, which has partnered with Malian forces since late 2021.) Special Representative and head of MINUSMA El-Ghassim Wane, speaking to the press after the 16 June Council session, suggested that it would be “nearly impossible” for MINUSMA to remain in Mali without the host country's consent, which is a principle of UN peacekeeping. In the days following Diop's call, there were reports that authorities were blocking imports for MINUSMA.

On 30 June, the Security Council adopted resolution 2690, which ended the mandate of MINUSMA and requested the mission immediately to start the transfer of its tasks and the drawdown and withdrawal of its personnel, with the objective of completing the process by 31 December. The resolution requested the Secretary-General

UN DOCUMENTS ON MALI [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2690](#) (30 June 2023) terminated the mandate of MINUSMA and decided to start the drawdown and withdrawal of its personnel, with the objective of completing the process by 31 December. [Security Council Letter S/2023/463](#) (21 June 2023) was a letter from Mali that confirmed its request for the immediate withdrawal of MINUSMA. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9365](#) (30 June 2023) was the meeting record for the adoption of resolution 2690 terminating the mandate of MINUSMA and Council members' explanations of vote. [S/PV.9350](#) (16 June 2023) was a briefing on Mali at which Malian Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop called for the withdrawal of MINUSMA.

Mali

to engage with Mali's transitional government to articulate a plan for the transfer of MINUSMA's tasks. The plan, which the Council expects to receive by 15 August, should consider the possible contributions of the UN Country Team, the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), and other stakeholders, including support for the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali.

Resolution 2690 sets out a new limited mandate for MINUSMA. This includes for MINUSMA to respond to "imminent threats of violence" to civilians in consultation with Malian authorities, and to contribute to the safe, civilian-led delivery of humanitarian assistance until 30 September. The resolution requested the Transition Government of Mali to fully respect all provisions of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) until the departure of the "final element" of MINUSMA from Mali. In addition to presenting the transfer plan by 15 August, resolution 2690 requested the Secretary-General to keep the Council regularly informed about the withdrawal process.

Negotiations on MINUSMA's budget in the General Assembly's Fifth Committee resulted in an agreement on 29 June to allocate \$590 million for six months. On 30 June, the Secretary-General issued a statement on the Council's decision to end MINUSMA, which expressed concern over the budget appropriation that, he said, "increases the complexities and risks of the drawdown operation". He had requested at least \$750 million for nine months, also covering the mission's liquidation.

At a 9 July summit of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the regional bloc established a presidential commission composed of Benin, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria "to propose, within 90 days, a comprehensive response mechanism to the dual developments of the MINUSMA withdrawal and the presence of foreign private armies in the region", according to the summit communiqué. On 18 July, the presidents of these three countries and Niger met in Abuja. This "Troika + 1" decided that President Patrice Talon of Benin would re-engage with Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso to ensure adherence with their commitments to restore constitutional order. According to a communiqué, they also reviewed regional security initiatives.

In other developments, Malian voters approved a new constitution in a referendum held on 18 June, with 97 percent of votes in favour. Voter turnout was 39.4 percent of registered voters, according to Mali's electoral commission, which announced the outcome on 23 June. The new constitution strengthens presidential powers and grants amnesty for the perpetrators of previous coups d'état. The Permanent Strategic Framework for Peace, Security and Development (CSP-PSD), a coalition of armed groups in northern Mali, did not allow the vote to be held in the Kidal region. Regarding the Malian government's call for MINUSMA's withdrawal, the CSP-PSD said in a 22 June statement that the mission's exit would be a "fatal blow" to the 2015 peace agreement.

Women, Peace and Security

The Secretary-General's annual report on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), which was issued on 22 June, said that in 2022 MINUSMA verified 98 cases of CRSV, affecting 85 women and 13 girls. Significantly higher numbers were registered by humanitarian service providers, with 392 cases of sexual violence against women and 294 against girls. Where perpetrators could be identified, the report says that they were members of armed groups,

as well as "militia and self-defence groups". Members of the Malian Defence and Security Forces were also allegedly implicated, with the UN further documenting "cases in which foreign security personnel appear to have been allegedly implicated". The report notes that survivors who publicly testified before Mali's Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission "experienced further stigmatization".

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is to monitor and ensure the safe and orderly withdrawal of MINUSMA, including Mali's full cooperation and respect for its commitments regarding the withdrawal. Completing the withdrawal within six months, by 31 December, will be a challenge, given MINUSMA's size and complexity and the dangerous operating environment.

Another key issue is the potential gap resulting from MINUSMA's departure. There is serious concern that the withdrawal of the approximate 14,000-strong force will create a security vacuum and significantly increase the threat against civilians. Despite its operational challenges, MINUSMA's presence has had a deterrent and stabilising impact, especially in preventing the spread of conflict to urban centres. Likewise, the withdrawal of the mission and the loss of its good offices creates new challenges for maintaining the peace agreement and for implementing Mali's political transition to restore constitutional order. An additional potential repercussion is the economic impact of MINUSMA's departure, as the mission has been a significant provider of jobs and contributor to local economies.

In addition to discussing the Secretary-General's plan for the transfer of MINUSMA's tasks, Council members could reiterate, as stipulated in resolution 2690, that the Secretary-General keep the Council updated on the withdrawal process, especially when difficulties arise.

Renewing the sanctions regime is a key issue for the Council in August. The Council established sanctions in 2017 to increase pressure on the peace agreement's signatory parties to implement the accord. Since December 2022, northern armed groups have not participated in the agreement's monitoring mechanisms, accusing the government of not being committed to its implementation, which has been followed by a fresh cycle of tensions. To date, sanctions have been imposed on eight individuals from northern Mali. A related issue is the inability of the Panel of Experts to visit Mali after the government revoked its visas in June 2022; its last visit was in April 2022. The 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee discussed the Panel's final report on 25 July. An option for the Council is to extend the sanctions regime through a technical rollover.

Council Dynamics

Council members recognise the serious risks that MINUSMA's departure poses to the security and humanitarian situations in Mali and to the broader West Africa and Sahel region. Until Mali called for the mission's withdrawal, members appeared ready to renew MINUSMA with a reconfigured mandate for another year, despite their frustration over the obstacles that authorities were placing on its operations and the mission's other shortcomings, because of concerns about the potential security implications of its withdrawal. However, negotiations on resolution 2690 demonstrated that Council members agree that MINUSMA cannot stay in Mali without the host country's consent.

Mali

Switzerland and the UK indicated in their explanation of votes during the adoption of resolution 2690 that they did not consider six months sufficient time for a mission as large and complex as MINUSMA to leave the country. The six-month period was considered the most politically feasible, however, given Mali's request for MINUSMA's immediate withdrawal and the tense relations between the Malian authorities and the UN. (At one point during the negotiations, Mali had called for a three-month timeline.) Many Council members highlighted in their explanations of vote resolution 2690's request that Mali respect the SOFA until the "final element" of MINUSMA departs. Several members, including the three African members (A3)—Gabon, Ghana, and Mozambique—and Japan,

noted that the Council will still need to continue its engagement with Mali and regional actors to promote the implementation of the peace agreement and political transition. The US warned that MINUSMA should take precautions to avoid its assets falling into the hands of terrorist groups or the Wagner Group during the withdrawal.

Russia has close relations with Mali's transitional authorities. In the Fifth Committee negotiations, Russia proposed a reduced budget (\$191 million) and shorter time period than that requested by the Secretary-General, which appeared to align with Mali's call for a shorter withdrawal period.

France is the penholder on Mali. Ambassador Pedro Comissário Afonso (Mozambique) chairs the 2374 Sanctions Committee.

DPRK (North Korea)

Expected Council Action

In August, 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 the region have continued to escalate in recent months. On 12 July, the DPRK tested an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) which, according to Japanese officials, flew for 74 minutes to an altitude of about 6,000 kilometres and a range of around 1,000 kilometres before landing approximately 250 kilometres to the west of Japan's Okushiri Island in the Sea of Japan. DPRK state media subsequently reported that the country had tested a Hwasong-18, the first ICBM developed by the DPRK that utilises solid-fuel technology. (Solid-fuel ICBMs take less time to launch and are harder for missile defence systems to detect.)

The launch prompted Albania, France, Japan, Malta, the UK, and the US to request an open briefing on the DPRK, which took place on 13 July. Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari briefed, and both the DPRK and the Republic of Korea (ROK) participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. The meeting marked the first time the DPRK has participated in a Council meeting on the DPRK since 2017. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 13 July.) During a media stakeout following the meeting, Ambassador Jeffrey DeLaurentis (US) delivered a joint statement on the DPRK on behalf of Albania, Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, the ROK, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the UK, and the US.

The 12 July test took place approximately six weeks after the DPRK's failed attempt to launch a military satellite into orbit. On 31 May, DPRK state media reported that a "Chollima-1" rocket carrying a "military reconnaissance satellite" had been fired from a launching station in the northwestern part of the country and that it had crashed after losing thrust following the first and second stages

of separation. This was the first time that the DPRK has acknowledged attempting to launch a satellite into space for military purposes. Several analysts have noted that the Chollima-1 appeared to use engines developed by the DPRK for ICBMs.

The failed satellite launch led the Council to convene for an open briefing on the DPRK on 2 June following a request from Albania, Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, the UK, and the US. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed, and the ROK took part in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 2 June.)

The DPRK has also tested other types of weapons in recent months. On 15 June and 19 and 24 July, Pyongyang launched short-range ballistic missiles that flew eastwards before landing in the Sea of Japan. On 22 July, ROK authorities announced that the DPRK had fired several cruise missiles toward the Yellow Sea to the west of the Korean Peninsula.

The DPRK's latest round of weapons tests have taken place as Japan, the ROK, and the US deepen ties and amid ongoing military exercises between the ROK and the US in the region, including air and sea drills involving a US aircraft carrier and B-1B and B-52 bombers. On 21 May, Japanese President Fumio Kishida, ROK President Yoon Suk-yeol, and US President Joe Biden met on the sidelines of a G7 summit in Japan. In a statement issued after the meeting, the White House said that the three leaders "discussed how to take their trilateral cooperation to new heights, including with new coordination in the face of the DPRK's illicit nuclear and missile threats, on economic security, and on their respective Indo-Pacific strategies".

On 11 July, US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark Milley, the top-ranking US military official, met with his Japanese and ROK counterparts in Hawaii. According to Milley's spokesman, the DPRK's 12 July ICBM test took place following the conclusion of this meeting. Kishida and Yoon also held a previously scheduled meeting on the sidelines of NATO's Vilnius summit shortly after the ICBM test.

On 18 July, ROK and US officials convened for the first meeting of the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG), a bilateral mechanism announced in the 26 April Washington Declaration intended "to

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DPRK Sanctions Committee Document S/2023/171 (7 March 2023) was the final report of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee.

DPRK (North Korea)

strengthen extended deterrence, discuss nuclear and strategic planning and manage the threat to the non-proliferation regime posed by the DPRK". In a joint statement issued following the meeting, the ROK and the US said that they had established "a range of workstreams to bolster nuclear deterrence and response capabilities" and had discussed "joint planning and execution of ROK conventional support to US nuclear operations as well as how to enhance visibility of US strategic asset deployments around the Korean Peninsula". On the same day, a US nuclear-armed ballistic missile submarine docked in the ROK for the first time since the 1980s. The DPRK tested two short-range ballistic missiles shortly thereafter. Ballistic missile tests were also conducted by the DPRK on 24 July after a nuclear-powered US submarine arrived in the ROK on the same day.

The DPRK also appears to be seeking closer ties with Russia. In a statement reported by DPRK state media on 12 June, the country's leader, Kim Jong-un, called for "closer strategic cooperation" with Moscow and vowed to "hold hands firmly with the Russian president". According to data provided to the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee, Russia resumed exporting oil to the DPRK in December 2022 after ceasing such exports in September 2020. In a 12 June statement, a spokesperson for the US Department of State said that the US had confirmed that the DPRK had completed an arms delivery to Russia in November 2022 and noted that the US is "concerned that the DPRK is planning to deliver more military equipment to Russia". On 25 July, a Russian defence delegation led by Russian Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu arrived in the DPRK to take part in celebrations organised to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement. According to media reports, Shoigu attended a defence exhibition that included the DPRK's ballistic missiles. A Chinese delegation led by Li Hongzhong, a member of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party, also attended the celebrations.

On 21 July, G7 members Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the US, together with Australia, the EU, New Zealand, and the UK, sent a letter to Ambassador Zhang Jun (China) expressing concern over oil tankers using Chinese waters to "facilitate [the] trade of sanctioned petroleum products to the DPRK." The letter also called on the Chinese government "to do more to identify and prevent these vessels from anchoring or loitering in Chinese territorial waters", among other matters. In a 24 July tweet, China's UN spokesperson said that "China has always been strictly implementing [Council] resolutions and seriously fulfilling international obligations."

On 2 June, the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee approved updates to its seventh implementation assistance notice (IAN), titled "Guidelines for Obtaining Exemptions to Deliver Humanitarian Assistance to the DPRK". The updated IAN incorporates relevant elements of resolution 2664 of 9 December 2022, which established a "humanitarian carve-out" to the asset freeze measures imposed by UN sanctions regimes. The IAN was first adopted on 6 August 2018 and last updated on 30 November 2020.

Key Issues and Options

The DPRK's increasingly frequent weapons tests, 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 human rights and humanitarian situations 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 the DPRK's cyber programmes and how they contribute to the country's sanctions evasion efforts, while discussing whether there is anything the Council can do to address the problem.

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

Similarly, the Council could request an open briefing from UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk regarding the human rights situation in the DPRK. Every December from 2014 to 2017, the Council held an open briefing with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on this topic; these briefings, however, have not been held since then because of insufficient support among Council members. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 16 March.)

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 it 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. China and Russia have also repeatedly blocked attempts to issue a Council product responding to missile launches conducted by the DPRK throughout 2022 and 2023. Other Council members, including Brazil and Gabon, have previously expressed apparent concerns about the overall efficacy of the 1718 DPRK sanctions regime. During the

DPRK (North Korea)

13 July open briefing, Brazil said that “every new launch makes it clearer that a new approach is needed” and noted that Chapter VI of the UN Charter “gives the Council a wide toolbox that remains underexplored in this file.”

The US is the penholder on the DPRK.

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