

Monthly Forecast

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Overview

In September, Albania is the president of the Security Council.

Albania plans to organise three signature events. The first signature event is the annual [working methods open debate](#), which will be held under the “Implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2017/507)” agenda item. Ambassador Ferit Hoxha, Albania’s Permanent Representative to the UN and Chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions (IWG), is the anticipated briefer.

The second signature event is an open debate on [“Advancing Public-Private Humanitarian Partnership”](#). The meeting is expected to focus on how to better coordinate the efforts of member states, the private sector, philanthropies, and other humanitarian actors in responding to humanitarian crises. Albanian Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Olta Xhaçka will chair the meeting. The expected briefers are Cindy H. McCain, Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP); Eric Schmidt, co-founder of Schmidt Futures—a philanthropic venture that funds science and technology research; Michael Miebach, CEO of the payment-processing corporation Mastercard; and a civil society representative.

The third signature event is an open debate on [“Upholding the purposes and principles of the UN Charter through effective multilateralism: Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine”](#). Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama is expected to chair the meeting, which will be held during the UN General Assembly’s high-level segment.

In September, the Security Council will also hold a briefing on [peacekeeping reform](#) pursuant to resolution 2378 of 20 September 2017. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix is the anticipated briefer.

Council members are also expected to hold a high-level Informal Interactive Dialogue (IID) with the Secretary-General of the League of Arab

States (LAS), Ahmed Aboul Gheit, and members of the Arab Summit Troika—a group of three rotating countries that monitor the implementation of resolutions and commitments adopted by the LAS, which consists of the outgoing, current, and incoming Arab Summit chairs (Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain).

African issues on the programme of work in September are:

- [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO);
- [Libya](#), reauthorisation of the mandate to inspect and seize vessels suspected of being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking;
- [South Sudan](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS); and
- [Sudan](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) and briefing on the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee.

Middle Eastern issues on the programme are:

- [Iraq](#), renewal of the mandate of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL (UNITAD);
- [Yemen](#), the monthly meeting;
- [Syria](#), meetings on the political, humanitarian, and chemical weapons tracks; and
- [“The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”](#), the monthly meeting.

There will also be a briefing and consultations on the UN Assistance Mission in [Afghanistan](#) (UNAMA), the one Asian issue expected to be discussed in September.

Other issues could be raised in September depending on developments.

1 September 2023

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In Hindsight: Five Messages of A New Agenda for Peace for the UN Security Council

Introduction

In July 2023, UN Secretary-General António Guterres released *A New Agenda for Peace*. It is one of 11 policy briefs connected to his 2021 report, *Our Common Agenda*, reflecting his vision for the future of multilateralism and intended to feed into the UN's Summit of the Future in September 2024. In keeping with UN General Assembly resolution 76/307 of 8 September 2022, the summit aspires to reinvigorate the multilateral system and to culminate in the adoption of "a concise, action-oriented outcome document entitled 'A Pact for the Future', agreed in advance by consensus through intergovernmental negotiations".

A New Agenda for Peace represents the Secretary-General's ideas for member states to prevent conflict and advance peace. Its relevance to the UN Security Council is self-evident, given that the Council is conferred by UN member states with "the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security" and acts on their behalf in "carrying out its duties under this responsibility", under article 24 (1) of the UN Charter.

Below are five key takeaways from *A New Agenda for Peace* relevant to the Security Council's work.

1. A New Agenda for Peace sets out the range and complexity of current, and coming, security challenges, with specific recommendations for the Security Council.

A New Agenda for Peace describes a much different world than its 1992 forerunner, *An Agenda for Peace*, which observed that the thaw in East-West relations had created "new possibilities...to meet successfully threats to common security". Declaring that the "post-cold war period is over", *A New Agenda for Peace* finds that promoting peace and preventing conflict will require "major changes" by member states.¹ Member states' unity of purpose has waned since the early 1990s, replaced by an emerging global order characterised by political and economic fragmentation, growing great power competition, and the rise of non-traditional security threats such as climate change, the use of uncrewed aerial vehicles, cyber threats, biorisks, and artificial intelligence. Institutions developed to manage risk, such as arms control agreements, are on the decline, and the growing distrust among nuclear powers has led to a resurgent threat of nuclear oblivion, according to the policy brief.

The *New Agenda* posits that a more secure world will be predicated on enhancing trust and solidarity among UN member states—as well as a more universal adherence to the norms enshrined in international law, including the UN Charter, such as respect for human rights and the territorial integrity of member states. It emphasises the importance of women's rights, with a call to "dismantle the patriarchy" focusing on "progress on gender equality or women's full, equal and meaningful participation in political life".

The disunity described in the *New Agenda* is visible in the Security Council. In recent years negotiations have rarely been smooth, and in 2022, one-third of all resolutions were adopted non-unanimously. The *New Agenda* proposes a range of actions for the Security Council,

notably a commitment to punitive measures in connection with the threat or use of nuclear weapons, improved use of sanctions, and "democratized" procedures.

2. Conflict prevention and mediation remain key to the Secretary-General's vision for the multilateral system.

When Secretary-General António Guterres came into office in 2017, he called for a "surge in diplomacy for peace", and the policy brief calls for a "commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes". It says that the "underutilization of the different tools referred to in article 33 of the Charter remains one of our greatest collective shortcomings". The article, in Chapter VI of the Charter, names these tools as "negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means" that the parties may choose to pursue. Article 33 also says that the Security Council "shall, when it deems necessary, call upon the parties to settle their dispute by such means".

The Council makes frequent reference to article 33 in its work, as elements of this article can be found throughout the mandates of peace operations authorised and overseen by the Council. While not mentioned in the *New Agenda*, the Security Council's visiting missions draw on elements of article 33, in that the Council frequently meets with parties to disputes, encouraging them to resolve their differences peacefully.

That the Council has undertaken only two visiting missions since late 2019 has been attributed to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, although difficult Council dynamics have played a role as well. Reinvigorating use of this instrument would be one response to the Secretary-General's recommendations.

The policy brief advocates developing confidence-building and transparency measures with respect to nuclear arsenals. Here, the Council could play a greater role, especially given its experience on non-proliferation issues in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Iran and its stewardship of the 1540 Committee, which helps UN member states develop their capacities to prevent terrorist groups from acquiring weapons of mass destruction. (For more, see our "In Hindsight" from the September 2022 Forecast, "[The Security Council and Weapons of Mass Destruction](#)".)

3. Serious reflection is needed on the direction of peace operations, in light of the complex and evolving security environment.

The *New Agenda* highlights the enormous challenges facing peace operations today, and calls for the Security Council and the General Assembly to reflect on the "limits and future of peacekeeping in light of the evolving nature of conflict", which is marked by "complex domestic, geopolitical and transnational factors".

Council members are increasingly questioning whether peacekeeping is the right tool in hostile environments in places such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali, whose government in June called for the expeditious withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping

¹ For an analysis of the similarities and differences between *An Agenda for Peace* and *A New Agenda for Peace*, see Richard Gowan, "What New about the UN's New Agenda for Peace?", Crisis Group, 19 July 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/whats-new-about-uns-new-agenda-peace>

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operation there. The policy brief underlines the increased need for peace enforcement, and recommends that the Council authorise multinational forces where required. The Council has a long history of authorising such forces, and may consider doing so again in the near future to restore order to Haiti, whose capital is largely controlled by violent gangs.

The policy brief recommends that the Security Council and the General Assembly reflect “on the limits and future of peacekeeping...with a view to enabling “more nimble, adaptable and effective mission models”, leveraging the full range of civilian capacities and expertise across the UN system and beyond, with appropriate transition and exit strategies.

Typically, the *New Agenda* recommends support to the African Union and subregional peace support operations authorised under Chapters VII [coercive measures] and Chapter VIII [regional arrangements] of the UN Charter, with the UN footing at least part of the bill where required. African members of the UN Security Council have long called for enhanced UN resources for AU peace support operations, which has now gained greater traction. Elected member Ghana may pursue a resolution authorising support for AU peace support operations from UN-assessed contributions before the end of 2023. Early indications are that Council members, including the US, may be amenable to some form of financial backing for these operations. (For more, see our April 2023 research report, “[The Financing of AU Peace Support Operations: Prospects for Progress in the Security Council?](#)”)

4. A New Agenda for Peace strongly endorses the Council’s work on climate change, peace and security.

The Council has grappled with climate change since 2007, with significantly heightened engagement since 2017. The Secretary-General discusses this issue under a section on “Preventing Conflict and Sustaining Peace”. This heading is consistent with many Council members’ view of climate action as a conflict prevention tool and an opportunity to build and sustain peace.

The brief recommends that the Council “systematically address the peace and security implications of climate change in the mandates of peace operations and other country or regional situations on its agenda”. Notwithstanding political divisions among its members, the Council has been considering the effects of climate change in mandates for several years—including in the CAR, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan, among other situations. Even if the worst-case scenarios are avoided, the climate crisis is likely to deepen, bringing linkages between climate-related factors and conflict into sharp relief. This may necessitate the Council’s ongoing and enhanced engagement on the adverse effects of climate change in multiple contexts. (For more background on the Security Council and climate change, see our research reports: “[The UN Security Council and Climate Change: Tracking the Agenda after the 2021 Veto](#)” in December 2022 and “[The UN Security Council and](#)

[Climate Change](#)” in June 2021.

5. There is an urgent need to reform the Security Council and make its working methods more democratic.

The *New Agenda* emphasises the urgent need for a Security Council “more representative of the geopolitical realities of today, and of the contributions that different parts of the world make to global peace”, as well as a “genuine democratization of its working methods”. This reflects long-standing concerns about the need to enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Council, which have become more pronounced in recent years, at least in part due to the Council’s ineffectiveness in responding to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

With regard to structural reform, the *New Agenda* recommends that “urgent progress” be made in the intergovernmental negotiations (IGN) on Council reform in the General Assembly. The IGN process began in 2008 but has yet to make clear progress, with member states unable to agree to hold text-based negotiations.² Complicating the prospects for reform in the near term is that various groups of member states have for many years pursued different and often competing reform plans, and any reform would require a 2/3 vote of the General Assembly membership, including all the permanent members of the Council, in accordance with article 109 (2) of the UN Charter. (For more on Security Council reform, see our “In Hindsight” from the October 2022 Forecast, “[The Long and Winding Road to Security Council Reform](#)”.)

Clearer are the recommendations for the Council to “democratize its procedures”, including through “more burden-sharing among Council members on resolutions, in particular in situations in their region to which they are not a party”. This echoes some members’ concern that the permanent members, in particular the P3 (France, the UK, and the US), hold the pen on the majority of situations on the Council’s agenda.

There have been significant developments on this front, with a surge in co-penholding among permanent and elected members in 2022. The Ukraine crisis created new penholding needs, leading to Albania and the US co-penholding on the political aspects, and France and Mexico on the humanitarian aspects of the Ukraine war. In 2022, Mexico also shared the pen with the US on Haiti and the UK on Colombia. Mexico chaired the 2374 Sanctions Committee in 2021–2022 and served as co-penholder with France on the resolution renewing the Mali sanctions regime in August 2022. This trend has continued into 2023, with Ecuador co-penholding on Haiti with the US and on Ukraine humanitarian issues with France.

The brief also recommends promoting “greater accountability for the permanent members for the use of the veto”. The 2022 “veto initiative” led by Liechtenstein, prompted by the Council gridlock on Ukraine, is a notable effort to promote such accountability in the General Assembly. Resolution 76/262 from April 2022 requires the president of the General Assembly to convene a meeting “within 10 working days of the casting of a veto by one or more permanent

² Stewart Patrick, “Cutting the Gordian Knot: Global Perspectives on UN Security Council Reform”, in UN Security Council Reform: What the World Thinks, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 28 June 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/06/28/un-security-council-reform-what-world-thinks-pub-90032#:~:text=In%20October%202008%2C%20the%20UN,never%20agreed%20to%20negotiate%20on>

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members of the Security Council, to hold a debate on the situation as to which the veto was cast, provided that the Assembly does not meet in an emergency special session on the same situation”. It also invites the Council, in accordance with article 24(3) of the UN Charter, to submit a special report on the use of the veto at least 72 hours before the relevant discussion in the General Assembly. Since the adoption of this General Assembly resolution (“the veto initiative”), vetoes have been cast in the Council on DPRK sanctions, the renewal of the cross-border aid mechanism in Syria, the referendum in four provinces in Ukraine, and the renewal of the Mali sanctions regime.

It is still unclear what impact this new initiative will have on the use of the veto, if any. But it is a mechanism that lets the General Assembly hold permanent members accountable for the use of the veto, and has also revitalised talk of Council reform. (For more on

Security Council’s Working Methods, see our May 2023 research report, “[Security Council Working Methods in Hard Times](#)”.)

Conclusion

The contentious dynamics in the Security Council are in many ways symptomatic of broader changes in an increasingly fragmented global system. Some analysts warn that the multi-polar world order that is taking shape is particularly dangerous because it increases possibility of misjudgment.³ In the current environment, the arguments in favour of a more effective Security Council may be stronger than ever. As the *New Agenda* argues, the “engagement of the P5 in the day-to-day business of the Council – in close cooperation with the elected members – can be a powerful incentive for dialogue and compromise, which in turn can help rebuild trust”.

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Colombia

On 2 August, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2694, expanding the mandate of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia to monitor and verify the implementation of a bilateral ceasefire between the Colombian government and the guerrilla group Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) that began on 3 August. The resolution also indicates the Council’s willingness to consider mandating the mission to monitor and verify a ceasefire with the Estado Mayor Central Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (EMC FARC-EP) when the Secretary-General “confirms a ceasefire including appropriate verification protocols has been reached” with the armed group.

Conflict and Food Insecurity

On 3 August, the Council held an open debate on famine and conflict-induced global food insecurity. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken chaired the debate, a signature event of the US August Council presidency (S/PV.9392). UN Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator Reena Ghelani, President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Rescue Committee David Miliband, and Navyn Salem, the founder and CEO of Edesia—a non-profit that combats malnutrition—briefed. At the session, the Council adopted a presidential statement, which highlighted “the need to break the vicious cycle between armed conflict and food insecurity” and the responsibility of regional and subregional organisations “in contributing to international efforts to uphold the Charter and prevent famine, and conflict-induced food insecurity and malnutrition” (S/PRST/2023/4). In addition, 91 UN member states signed a joint communiqué that the US had proposed, committing to take action to end the use of food as a weapon of war and the starvation of civilians as a tactic of warfare.

Georgia

On 10 August, Security Council members discussed the situation in Georgia under “any other business”. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed. The meeting, which marked the 15th anniversary of the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia, was requested by Albania, France, Japan, Malta, the UK, and the US. Following the meeting, those members delivered a joint statement at a press stakeout reaffirming their support for Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and condemning Russia’s military presence in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.

Sudan/South Sudan

On 9 August, the Security Council held an open briefing to discuss the situation in Sudan at the request of the UK, the penholder on the file (S/PV.9394). Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations (DPPA-DPO) Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee and Director of OCHA’s Operations and Advocacy Division Edem Wosornu briefed.

UNRCCA (Central Asia)

On 10 August, Council members held closed consultations on the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA). Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNRCCA Kaha Imnadze briefed.

Nagorno-Karabakh Region

On 16 August, Security Council members held a briefing on the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh region (S/PV.9397). Armenia requested the meeting in an 11 August letter to the Council invoking Article 35 of the UN Charter (S/2023/594). Under Article 35 (1), any UN member state “may bring any dispute, or any situation

³ Matthew Kroenig, “International Relations Theory Suggests Great-Power War Is Coming”, *Foreign Policy*, August 27, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/27/international-relations-theory-suggests-great-power-war-is-coming/>

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referred to in Article 34 [that is, one that may lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute], to the attention of the Security Council or of the General Assembly". OCHA's Director of Operations and Advocacy Edem Wosornu briefed. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. Several Council members urged both parties to uphold the commitments established in the 2020 trilateral agreement between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia. They emphasised the need to normalise relations as a foundation for a prospective peace treaty and underscored the importance of allowing humanitarian aid to reach the residents of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

DPRK (North Korea)

On 17 August, the Council convened for an open briefing on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) (S/PV.9398). The meeting was requested by Albania, Japan, and the US to discuss the links between human rights abuses and violations in the DPRK and international peace and security. The briefers were UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK Elizabeth Salmón, and Ilhyeok Kim, a civil society representative. The Republic of Korea (ROK) participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. This was the first Council open briefing on the human rights situation in the DPRK since December 2017.

On 25 August, the Council convened for an open briefing on the DPRK's failed launch of a military reconnaissance satellite on 24 August (S/PV.9406). Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Khaled Khiari briefed. The DPRK and the ROK participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

On 30 August, Chair of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl (Switzerland) briefed Council members in closed consultations on the 90-day report on the Committee's work.

Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 21 August, the Security Council convened for an open briefing, followed by closed consultations, on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" (S/PV.9400). Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland briefed.

Cyprus

On 21 August, Security Council members held a meeting on the situation in Cyprus under "any other business". The UK requested the meeting to discuss an incident that occurred on 18 August, in which Turkish Cypriot security forces attacked members of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). Colin Stewart, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Cyprus and head of UNFICYP, briefed.

Myanmar

On 23 August, Council members held closed consultations on Myanmar. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths and Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari briefed. The UK, the

penholder on the file, requested the meeting.

The UK delivered a joint statement on Myanmar after the consultations. The statement strongly condemned the killing of civilians in Myanmar, particularly the continued use of airstrikes, and reaffirmed the need to respect international law and protect civilians. Among other matters, the statement noted with concern that there has been insufficient progress on the calls made by the Council in resolution 2669, which relate to the immediate release of all arbitrarily detained prisoners, the need to fully respect human rights and uphold the rule of law, respect for the democratic will of the people of Myanmar, swift and full implementation of ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus, the need to address the root causes of the crisis in Rakhine State, and the full protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Every Council member except China and Russia signed the statement.

Lebanon

On 24 August, Council members held closed consultations on the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari briefed.

On 31 August, the Security Council adopted resolution 2695, extending the mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for another year, until 31 August 2024. The resolution received 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (China and Russia). It seems that on 30 August the UAE submitted an amendment to a paragraph in the draft resolution in blue to be voted on prior to the vote on the entire draft text. The UAE, however, apparently decided shortly before the vote to withdraw its amendment; the Council therefore only voted on the entire resolution.

Counter-Terrorism

On 25 August, Council members convened for a briefing on the Secretary-General's 17th biannual strategic level report (S/2023/568) on the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) to international peace and security (S/PV.9405). The briefers were: Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism and head of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) Vladimir Voronkov, Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED) Natalia Gherman, and President of the Farida Global Organisation Farida Khalaf. Council members that have signed on to the shared commitments on WPS—Albania, Brazil, Ecuador, France, Gabon, Japan, Malta, Switzerland, the UAE, the UK, and the US—read a joint statement on the use of sexual and gender based-violence by terrorist groups following the meeting.

On 16 August, Council members issued a press statement condemning the 13 August terrorist attack at the Shah-e-Cheragh shrine in Shiraz, Iran (SC/15386). The attack was claimed by ISIL and killed two people and injured eight more.

Mali

On 28 August, the Council held a briefing (S/PV.9407), followed by closed consultations, on the Secretary-General's plan (S/2023/611) for the transfer of tasks of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which is withdrawing

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from Mali by the end of this year. Special Representative and head of MINUSMA El-Ghassim Wane and Beatrice Odountan Abouya, the Acting Regional Director of Search for Common Ground, briefed in the open session. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support Atul Khare briefing during the closed consultations.

On 30 August, the Council voted on two separate draft resolutions to renew the Mali sanctions regime (S/PV.9408). Russia vetoed a draft resolution (S/2023/638) proposed by France and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that would have renewed the Mali asset freeze

and travel ban measures, and extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts that supports the 2374 Mali Sanctions Committee for an additional year. This draft resolution received 13 votes in favour and one abstention (China). An alternative draft (S/2023/639) that Russia proposed to extend the sanctions measures but dissolve the Panel of Experts failed to be adopted because it did not garner the requisite votes. It received one vote in favour (Russia), one against (Japan), and the remaining 13 Council members abstained. The sanctions measures were set to expire on 31 August, while the mandate of the Panel expires on 30 September.

Working Methods Open Debate

Expected Council Action

In September, the Council will hold its annual working methods open debate. Ambassador Ferit Hoxha (Albania), the chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, will brief. Ahead of the debate, Albania is expected to circulate a concept note. The debate will be held under the agenda item “Implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2017/507)”, referring to the most recent version of the comprehensive compendium of Council working methods.

Key Recent Developments

The Council held its last working methods open debate on 28 June 2022, with a resumption the following day. Karin Landgren, Executive Director of Security Council Report and Loraine Sievers, co-author of “The Procedure of the UN Security Council” (4th edition), were the briefers. Thirty-five member states, other than Council members, participated in the meeting. Among the areas highlighted during the debate were the monthly assessments by Council Presidents, wrap-up sessions, implementation of Note 507, the selection of subsidiary body chairs, the need to increase the effectiveness of UN sanctions, the balance between open and closed meetings and the use of the veto. The elected members (E10) delivered a joint statement for the fourth time. Brazil and India also delivered a joint statement with a stronger focus on Security Council reform.

On 30 December 2022, the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions (IWG) adopted its first annual report. It covers the activities of the IWG in 2022 and includes an annex with selected indicators on the implementation of Note 507 and subsequent notes.

The IWG met five times in 2022. It has met four times in 2023: on 24 February, 28 April, 27 June, and 22 August. The IWG has maintained “Strengthening and advancing the implementation of the Note by the President of 30 August 2017” as a standing agenda item. This gives recent presidencies the opportunity to brief on their working methods commitments. At Brazil’s initiative, the IWG added “penholdership, penholders and co-penholders on Council resolutions, presidential statements” as a standing agenda item. Recent

penholders provide an assessment of their experiences in preparing and negotiating drafts.

In August 2023, the IWG agreed to presidential notes on the orderly conduct of a minute of silence and chairing subsidiary bodies if the chairs have not been agreed on by 1 January. The note on subsidiary bodies states that if by 1 January there is no agreement on the appointment of chairs and vice-chairs, “the responsibilities of the subsidiary bodies of the Council during the month of January shall devolve to the President for the month of January”. Members are currently discussing two draft presidential notes on penholdership.

Russia organised an Arria-formula meeting on penholdership arrangements in August 2022. Among the issues raised were the need for a more structured practice in selecting penholders and co-penholders and a code of conduct for penholders.

Arria-formula meetings continue to be widely used. By the end of July, 14 Arria-formula meetings had been held in 2023. (There were 21 meetings in this format last year.) A new development is the opposition to webcasting these meetings. In 2022, all but one of the 21 Arria-formula meetings were webcast. Three of this year’s Arria-formula meetings have not been webcast to date due to opposition from various members or because the organiser chose not to do so.

Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 76/262 (“the veto initiative”), vetoes have been cast in the Council on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea sanctions, the renewal of the cross-border aid mechanism in Syria in both 2022 and 2023, and the referendum in four provinces in Ukraine.

The Security Council adopted its annual report on 30 May, presenting a factual overview of the Council’s work in 2022. The introduction noted the Council’s return to its regular working methods after the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It also documented the number and types of meetings held, areas of significant Council attention, and the key resolutions adopted in 2022.

The Council visiting mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in March marked the return to this working method after a year and a half. Due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, Council members had no visiting missions in 2020. In 2021, with travel restrictions gradually easing, members undertook

UN DOCUMENTS ON WORKING METHODS Selected Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9079 (28 June 2022) was on the Security Council debate on the implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2017/507) **Selected General Assembly Documents A/RES/76/262** (26 April 2022) stipulated that the president of the General Assembly shall convene a formal meeting of the General Assembly within ten working days of a veto being cast by a permanent member of the Security Council. **A/77/2** (30 June 2023) was the report on the work of the Security Council in 2022. **A/RES/47/233** (28 February 2022) was on holding a substantive debate on the annual reports from the Security Council. **Selected Notes by the President of the Security Council S/2023/612** (21 August 2023) was on the orderly conduct of minutes of silence in the Security Council. **S/2023/615** (21 August 2023) was on the functioning of subsidiary body chairs. **Other S/2022/1032** (30 December 2022) was the annual report of the IWG. **S/2022/1011** (29 December 2022) was a letter from the Permanent Representatives of India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, and Norway to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council.

Working Methods Open Debate

one visiting mission, to Mali and Niger in October. Although COVID-19 travel restrictions had largely been lifted by 2022, there were no visiting missions that year.

On 28 June, Japan, together with Albania, Kuwait and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, launched an interactive version of the “Handbook on UN Security Council Working Methods” based on the “Green Handbook” which contains the Provisional Rules of Procedure, Note 507, and all subsequent Notes of the President on working methods.

Key Issues and Options

An overarching issue is the implementation of Note 507 and the presidential notes adopted subsequently. Two positive developments are the new mechanism for tracking the implementation of working methods, and discussing the implementation of presidential notes on working methods as a standing item for IWG meetings. Future options could include identifying aspects of Note 507 that are not being addressed in commitments made by Council Presidents and discussing the obstacles to their implementation in the IWG.

An emerging issue is the politicisation of working methods and procedural matters as a result of the frayed relations between some members. Rule 37 invitations to briefers and Rule 39 invitations to member states have become particularly controversial. And in August, members were not able to agree on the programme of work for the month. Such procedural wrangling is not conducive to the efficient functioning of the Council, as it requires a significant investment of time and energy. Informal guidelines on some of the more controversial issues may allow members to move past procedural squabbles to more substantive matters.

A related issue is the use of the Arria-formula meeting format to amplify and promote specific agendas. The topics of Arria-formula meetings this year have tended towards presentation of particular political perspectives, which coupled with the high number of such meetings in recent years, has brought a degree of Arria-formula meeting exhaustion. Members may wish to assess the usefulness of this format and discuss ways of restoring its credibility.

There have been some positive developments on penholderships, but unresolved issues remain, including how to allocate penholding opportunities among elected members without creating a rigid system. Among the suggestions are that the chair of a given subsidiary body be the co-penholder on the related country file, and that the Council member from the region in question would be an appropriate co-penholder. A more informal system where “shadow penholders” could be consulted during the drafting process appears to be emerging on some issues. Another option being floated is for a group of members to work together on drafts as Groups of Friends have in the past on issues such as Afghanistan and still do on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Members are currently discussing an E10 draft

on penholders initiated by Brazil and the UAE and a French draft on a code of conduct for penholders. Brazil and the UAE held two workshops on penholdership in November and December 2022.

An issue for the Council is finding the right balance between the transparency of open meetings and the need for more private discussion in consultations. The balance between open and closed meetings has been a regular topic at working methods debates. Since 2001, public meetings have predominated, and the Council’s 276 public meetings in 2022 were up some 12 percent over 2021. This can largely be attributed to the number of meetings the Council held on Ukraine, almost exclusively in open sessions.

The paucity of analysis in the Council’s annual report to the General Assembly has long been an issue for some of the wider membership. Some members have called for the annual report to provide more details of the challenges faced by the Council, on resolutions that failed to be adopted, and on the use of the veto. A related issue is the inconsistent submission of assessments by Council Presidents, which are used in the drafting of the overview of the Annual Report.

A significant issue is the timely selection of the chairs of subsidiary bodies. This requires early consultations among incoming members and a willingness to be flexible during the process. Following the elections, current chairs could also use the regular E10 meetings to provide pertinent information about specific subsidiary bodies to the incoming members, deepening their familiarity with the workload and challenges of particular subsidiary bodies.

Council Dynamics

Both the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine strained already difficult relations among permanent members. In the current environment, working methods are a highly political tool that can be used by permanent members to block the activities of other permanent members.

The elected members (E10) have generally remained united on working methods and are likely to deliver a joint statement for the fifth year. Last year, there was a small crack in the unity, when Brazil and India delivered a separate joint statement highlighting the need for reform, although they associated themselves with the E10 statement. The need for a more equitable distribution of work and greater burden sharing remains a common objective for elected members. Elected members have made clear their desire to be penholders. The years of pushing for this appear to have led the P3, who are the penholders on most issues, to accept that penholding cannot be a permanent member monopoly. Changes in the relationship between some P3 penholders and host governments may also have prompted this shift in attitude.

A number of members see working methods as a way of reforming the Council from within. In this context, there is particular interest in the veto initiative and how it can be further strengthened.

UN Peacekeeping

Expected Council Action

In September, the Security Council will hold a briefing on peacekeeping reform pursuant to resolution 2378 of 20 September 2017. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix is the anticipated briefer.

Key Recent Developments

Resolution 2378 requested the Secretary-General to provide a comprehensive briefing to the Security Council on the reform of UN peacekeeping every 12 months, to be followed by a debate. Last year, the Council held the annual meeting on 6 September in a briefing format. Lacroix briefed on progress and challenges in the implementation of the initiatives Action for Peacekeeping (A4P), Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+) (which outlines the eight priorities of peacekeeping reform in 2021 and beyond), and the Secretary-General's initiative to accelerate peacekeeping reform.

Lacroix highlighted the complex geopolitical environment under which peacekeeping missions are operating and underscored the need to “preserve the space needed for United Nations peacekeeping operations, which continue to visibly manifest a multilateral system in action on the ground”. He drew particular attention to the continuing critical capability gaps in UN peacekeeping missions, particularly the limited number of utility and armed helicopters, and called for the support of Council members to address these gaps. Lacroix expressed concern about the increasing number of fatalities from attacks on peacekeepers, including from explosive ordnance and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and described efforts to address this threat. He set out UN efforts to strengthen strategic communication to counter misinformation and disinformation and enhance better engagement with local communities. Furthermore, he stressed women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in peacekeeping as a key priority, and noted the progress toward achieving the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018-2028 published in 2019, which set targets for the participation of women in uniformed roles.

It has been five years since the Secretary-General launched his A4P initiative, and the third progress report on the implementation of A4P+, released in June, highlighted progress in the seven priority areas—collective coherence behind a political strategy, strategic and operational integration, capabilities and mindsets, accountability to peacekeepers, accountability of peacekeepers, strategic communication, and cooperation with host countries.

On 20 July, the Secretary-General launched the policy brief on *A New Agenda for Peace*, which recognises the “challenges posed by long-standing and unresolved conflicts, without a peace to keep, by complex domestic, geopolitical and transnational factors” and “the limitations of ambitious mandates without adequate political support”. In this regard, it calls for “a serious and broad-based reflection” on the future of peacekeeping, underscoring the need to move towards “nimble adaptable models with appropriate, forward-looking transition and exit strategies”. The policy brief particularly recommends authorising peace enforcement, counter-terrorism, and counter-insurgency operations by regional and subregional organisations.

In February, the 36th AU summit adopted a Consensus Paper on Predictable, Adequate, and Sustainable Financing for AU Peace

and Security Activities. The paper includes a description of progress in enhancing the AU's Compliance Framework (AUCF), which is one of the benchmarks set out by the Security Council, pursuant to resolution 2320 on cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations and resolution 2378 on peacekeeping reform, for advancing the discussion on the financing of AU-led peace support operations (AUPSOs).

The discussion about the financing of AUPSOs from UN-assessed contributions has also been revived in the Council since last year. Pursuant to a 31 August 2022 Security Council presidential statement (S/PRST/2022/6), the Secretary-General presented his report on this issue on 1 May (S/2023/303), building on his previous report on options for authorisation and support for AUPSOs. As stated in the AU Consensus Paper and the Secretary-General's 1 May report, both the AU and the UN are of the view that two financing options—hybrid missions and a UN support office—are more feasible and can provide predictable and sustainable financing for AUPSOs.

On 12 May, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) requested the three African members of the UN Security Council, known as the A3 (Gabon, Ghana, and Mozambique), to “resume consultations with the relevant stakeholders towards the adoption of a UN Security Council resolution on financing AU-led PSOs”. The US, which opposed the 2018 draft resolution on the financing of AUPSOs, now appears more amenable to a serious discussion about the matter. (For more information, see our 26 April research report *The Financing of AU Peace Support Operations: Prospects for Progress in the Security Council?*)

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members is how to keep UN peace operations fit for purpose considering current geopolitical realities, including strong divisions among the Council's permanent members—as well as complex operating environments and the erosion of host country consent in several cases. Council members could consider convening a dedicated session to discuss the peacekeeping-related recommendations of the policy brief on *A New Agenda for Peace*.

Another important issue is how to advance the discussion on the long-standing request for the UN to support AU-led peace support operations through the use of assessed contributions. Ghana is spearheading A3 efforts to propose a draft framework resolution that is expected to be negotiated among Council members over the coming months. The issue could also be discussed during the annual consultation between the Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC), which is expected to take place in October in Addis Ababa.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Peacekeeping remains one of the most important tools at the Security Council's disposal in discharging its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. However, geopolitical dynamics and the changing nature of conflict have posed serious challenges to peacekeeping operations. The growing frustration among host countries and communities because of the perceived

UN DOCUMENTS ON PEACEKEEPING Security Council Resolution S/RES/2378 (20 September 2017) requested the Secretary-General to provide a comprehensive briefing to the Security Council on the reform of UN peacekeeping every 12 months, to be followed by a debate. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9123 (6 September 2022) was a briefing on peacekeeping reform.

UN Peacekeeping

ineffectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations has also complicated the operating environment.

Following Mali's request for the immediate withdrawal of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the Security Council decided to terminate the mandate of the mission. The UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) is currently undergoing transition. Following an anti-MONUSCO protest in July 2022, however, the Congolese government called for a revision of the mission's transition plan to accelerate its drawdown and exit.

It has been nearly a decade since the Security Council authorised a UN peacekeeping mission. One emerging trend is the apparent desire to enhance the role of special political missions (SPMs), particularly those with a regional mandate, in light of the drawdown and exit of some of the bigger multidimensional peacekeeping operations. In terminating MINUSMA's mandate, the Security Council referred to the possible role of the UN Office in West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in support of the Malian peace agreement.

The Secretary-General's report on MONUSCO's reconfiguration, pursuant to resolution 2666 of 20 December 2022, also proposed an enhanced role for some of the regional SPMs, such as the Office of the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes or the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), to support the efforts of the Congolese government and the UN country team during the transition process and reinforce ongoing regional initiatives to address the situation in eastern DRC.

This trend is likely to continue, depending on how the discussion on the financing of AUPSOs evolves in the Security Council over the coming months, with SPMs assuming a greater role in providing political and logistical support to these operations. There seems to be a desire to agree on a framework resolution on support to AUPSOs through UN-assessed contributions before the end of the year, and Council members are waiting for the A3 to propose a draft. Despite this, issues related to accountability and human rights, burden-sharing, and fiduciary responsibilities are expected to complicate the negotiations.

Syria

Expected Council Action

In September, 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 was last authorised by resolution 2672 of 9 January until 10 July. It had allowed for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to north-west Syria from Türkiye through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing without requiring the consent of the Syrian government. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 11 July and the "In Hindsight" in our August *Monthly Forecast*.)

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 north-west Syria "in full cooperation and coordination with the Syrian Government" for six months, starting that day. In a 14 July note to Council members, OCHA responded to the Syrian government's 13 July letter, saying 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 Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) should supervise and facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid in north-west 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 to Council members. Apparently, he also said that he would engage further with the Syrian authorities in a bid to clarify the provisions of the letter. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 16 July.)

Following weeks of bilateral engagement, the UN and the Syrian government reached an understanding on the continued use of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing to deliver humanitarian aid into north-west Syria, formalised through an exchange of letters (S/2023/603). In a 5 August letter addressed to Sabbagh, Griffiths noted that "[c]ooperation and coordination with the Syrian government to facilitate cross-border assistance can be undertaken in a manner consistent with the core principles and current structure and practice that comprise the UN's humanitarian response in Syria". It further stated that a version of the UN Monitoring Mechanism (UNMM) should operate to monitor UN humanitarian assistance prior to its entry into Syria. The letter added that "[t]hese arrangements can be reviewed or enhanced through the involvement of others, in close coordination between the relevant sides". The letter further stated that, although neither ICRC nor SARC has a presence in north-west Syria, "their involvement in this process may be explored when circumstances permit".

In a 6 August letter, Sabbagh responded, reiterating the Syrian government's 13 July decision to open the Bab al-Hawa border for a period of six months. It further announced the government's decision to extend its authorisation for the use of the Bab al-Salam and

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 Letter S/2023/603](#) (16 August 2023) was a letter from the President of the Security Council, transmitting the exchange of letters between OCHA and the Syrian government. [S/2023/526](#) (14 July 2023) was a 13 July letter 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 that 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

Al Ra'ee border crossings until 13 November. It also approved the use of the Sarmada and Saraqib crossings for cross-line operations—that is, across domestic conflict lines from Syrian government-held areas into areas outside government control—for a six-month period, until 1 February 2024. Sabbagh's letter took note of the UN's desire to "use a version of the stringent and independent monitoring arrangements for aid consignments at the borders". It said that the Syrian government would continue to engage with the UN about the possible involvement of the ICRC and the SARC in the ongoing humanitarian operations.

On 21 August, the Council again held a private meeting, followed by closed consultations, to discuss the humanitarian situation in Syria, at which Griffiths briefed. He apparently provided an update on OCHA's engagement with the other stakeholders in north-west Syria about the delivery of humanitarian aid. It appears that several Council members emphasised the importance of continued reporting on humanitarian developments and an oversight mechanism for the delivery of humanitarian aid. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 18 August.)

On 15 August, the Arab ministerial liaison committee that was established following Syria's readmission into the League of Arab States (LAS) on 7 May to liaise with the Syrian government and seek a solution to the Syrian crisis through reciprocal steps—comprising Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and LAS Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit—met with the Syrian foreign minister, in Cairo. In a press statement circulated after the meeting, the leaders expressed the hope that the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee would convene in Oman with UN facilitation before the end of this year. They stressed the need to address the refugee crisis and strengthen cooperation between the Syrian government and countries hosting refugees from Syria to facilitate refugees' voluntary and safe return in cooperation with the relevant UN agencies. They further expressed their aim to continue and intensify cooperation between Syria and regional countries to combat drug manufacturing and smuggling in the region.

On 21 August, Pedersen spoke by telephone with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi. In a Twitter post following the conversation, Safadi noted that the discussion focused on efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis in accordance with resolution 2254 of 18 December 2015 through Arab and UN tracks. During the conversation, both sides agreed to maintain coordination for bringing an end to the conflict and addressing its consequences. The next day, Pedersen spoke to Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry. They discussed the outcomes of the 15 August meeting of the Arab ministerial liaison committee and exchanged views on the efforts being undertaken to address the Syrian crisis, according to media reports.

On 23 August, the Council met on the political situation in Syria. UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen and Deputy Director of Women Now for Development Lubna Alkanawati briefed. In his briefing, Pedersen gave a detailed account of the continued hostilities within Syria and called for a sustained calm to build a nationwide ceasefire and address the threats posed by "proscribed terrorist groups". He welcomed the fact that reconvening the Constitutional Committee is a point of consensus among several key actors. He emphasised the importance of resuming the Constitutional

Committee's work and said that he "continue[s] to seek to facilitate consensus to overcome the issues that have prevented the Constitutional Committee from meeting in Geneva".

The continuing hostilities in parts of Syria include Russian air strikes that hit the western outskirts of Idlib governorate on 21 August, targeting a Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) military base. (HTS is an armed opposition group that is designated by the Security Council as a terrorist organisation and that controls parts of Syria's north-west.) According to media reports, the attack killed at least eight HTS fighters and wounded several others. Later the same day, the Israel Defence Forces conducted airstrikes in the vicinity of Damascus, wounding one soldier and causing material damage, according to media reports.

Human Rights-Related Developments

During its 54th session, the Human Rights Council is expected to hold an interactive dialogue on 22 September with the Commission of Inquiry on Syria and consider its report, which was not yet available at the time of writing (A/HRC/54/58).

Women, Peace and Security

On 2 May, the Informal Experts Group (IEG) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) met on the situation in Syria. Pedersen and the Deputy Director of OCHA's Operations and Advocacy Division, Heli Uusikyla, briefed. According to the summary of the meeting issued on 3 August by Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as the IEG co-chairs, together with the UK as the penholder on WPS, Council members asked questions on the humanitarian situation in the wake of the February 2023 earthquakes; gaps in humanitarian aid for women and girls, including their access to sexual and reproductive health and rights; and barriers to women's participation in conflict resolution and humanitarian planning, among other issues. UN Women, as the IEG Secretariat, recommended that in any upcoming resolution or presidential statement the Council should consider urging greater investment in local women's organisations to support grassroots peacebuilding efforts and humanitarian aid delivery, as well as the full, equal, and meaningful participation of diverse Syrian women in peace negotiations, political dialogues, discussions on confidence-building measures and national consultations on Syria's future. UN Women also recommended urging the international community to fully fund the Humanitarian Response Plan 2023, with special attention to, among other matters, addressing all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls, and ensuring women's participation and leadership in decision-making at all levels of the humanitarian response and throughout the humanitarian programme cycle.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is to ensure the continued flow of humanitarian aid to those in need in north-west Syria. A related and broader issue is how to alleviate the growing humanitarian needs in Syria. The deteriorating socioeconomic conditions are also an issue of concern. At the 23 August Council briefing, Pedersen noted that the Syrian pound has lost over 80 percent of its value in the past three months.

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 option for Council members is to continue holding informal interactive dialogues (IIDs) with donor countries, interested regional parties, and representatives of the international humanitarian agencies operating in Syria

Syria

to review the progress on the cross-border and cross-line delivery of humanitarian aid and early recovery projects. (The IID is a closed format that, unlike consultations, allows for the participation of non-UN officials and briefers.)

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 interested member states with influence over the parties in Syria to discuss recent developments in his “step-for-step” initiative.

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 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 differing opinions on whether the provision for monthly Council briefings on humanitarian developments in Syria and the reporting requirements set out by resolution 2672 remain in effect. It appears that Russia takes the position that the absence of a resolution reauthorising the cross-border aid

mechanism nullifies the effect of all provisions contained in previous resolutions, including the reporting requirements. Some other Council members apparently take the view that the provision reauthorising the cross-border mechanism, and the remainder of resolution 2672, are mutually exclusive—that all provisions except the cross-border mechanism are open-ended, and thus still applicable. It seems some Council members have also argued that the reporting requirements as outlined in resolution 2139 remain in effect; these included reporting on access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas and humanitarian access for the UN and its implementing partners across conflict lines and borders.

The P3 and E10 (elected) members appear to support continued Council engagement on humanitarian developments in Syria. On the other hand, Russia seems to oppose any further Council engagement on Syrian humanitarian issues.

Council members also hold diverging views on 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, other Council members, including Russia, China, and the United Arab Emirates, support the normalisation of ties with the Syrian government.

Yemen

Expected Council Action

In September, 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

On 11 August, the UN announced the completion of the ship-to-ship transfer of more than one million barrels of oil from the FSO Safer to the replacement vessel, the MOSTYemen (previously named the Nautica). The successful operation, which started on 25 July, ended the threat that the decrepit oil tanker, moored in the Red Sea off Hodeidah governorate, would have an oil spill or explosion, creating a major environmental and humanitarian disaster. The next step of the UN-facilitated plan, to tow and scrap the FSO Safer, can now begin, though the UN must still fill a \$22 million donor funding gap to carry out this work.

Recent weeks saw increased reports of attacks by Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) on Yemeni government-affiliated forces in Abyan and Shabwa governorates. On 11 August, the UN

announced the release of five UN staff members of the UN Department of Safety and Security, who had been held for 18 months after AQAP kidnapped them in Abyan on 11 February 2022. According to a Secretary-General's statement on their release, available information suggested that all five personnel were in good health. Two other UN staff, whom the Houthi rebel group arrested in Sana'a in October 2021, remain detained.

On 1 August, Saudi Arabia announced that it would provide \$1.2 billion to support the Yemeni government, which has witnessed a major decrease in revenues after being forced to stop oil exports last year following a series of Houthi drone attacks on oil terminals in October and November 2022. Government revenue shortages, also exacerbated by Houthi restrictions and fees on inter-Yemeni trade, have further hindered the provision of basic services, which has caused recent protests in Aden and surrounding governorates in the wake of extensive power outages and the depreciation of the Yemeni rial in government-held areas.

The Council met on Yemen on 16 August. Omani-facilitated talks between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, which leads a military coalition in support of Yemen's internationally recognised government, have remained stalled. Referring to this process, Grundberg said

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.9396** (16 August 2023) was a briefing on Yemen.

Yemen

at the 16 August briefing, “The issue of salary payments [to public employees], including the question of revenue sources, remains a central issue for which the parties need to find a mutually agreeable solution”. In addition to the usual engagement with Yemeni and Houthi interlocutors in Riyadh and Muscat that Grundberg holds between his monthly Council briefings, he reported on recent meetings that his office has held in Sana’a and Aden with military officials and local security actors regarding technical elements required for a future ceasefire agreement and the work of the Military Coordination Committee, which was established during last year’s truce to de-escalate security incidents. Though hostilities have not returned to pre-truce levels, Grundberg noted continued intermittent fighting along front lines and said that “there have been public threats to return to war”. He called on the parties “to refrain from escalatory rhetoric”.

Director of OCHA’s Operations and Advocacy Division Edem Wosornu provided an update on relief efforts at the Council session. During her intervention, Wosornu called “for a comprehensive investigation into the attack” that killed the head of the World Food Programme’s office in Taiz, Moayad Hameidi, on 21 July, and “for those behind it to be held accountable”.

The Council also heard a briefing by Amat al-Salam Abdullah Abdo al-Hajj, founder and president of the Abductees’ Mothers Association. Al-Hajj said that since 2016, her organisation has documented the abduction of 9,568 civilians by different parties to the conflict in Yemen, with the Houthis responsible for 9,130 abductions, including 130 women. Thousands who have been released have permanent injuries from torture, according to al-Hajj, who also reported that 140 people have died from torture or medical malpractice while in prisons. Saudi Arabia’s Ambassador to the UN, Abdulaziz M. Alwasil, also participated—only the third time that a Saudi representative has addressed the Council on Yemen since the coalition intervened in March 2015, all of which have occurred since Alwasil became ambassador in August 2022. “We reiterate our strategic initiative to end the war in Yemen and reach a comprehensive political solution”, he said, in an apparent reference to Saudi Arabia’s continuing talks with the Houthis. He also expressed Saudi Arabia’s support for UN efforts to achieve a political solution as per resolution 2216, which the Council adopted in April 2015.

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 on 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 encourage the parties to continue talks and show flexibility for a ceasefire agreement. They may further reiterate the importance of an inclusive Yemeni political process under UN mediation for a sustainable resolution of the conflict.

Yemen continues to face massive humanitarian need, which remains a key issue. An estimated 21.6 million people require aid or protection. Access constraints and interference in relief operations include the Houthis’ enforcement of mahram, requiring Yemeni women aid workers to be accompanied by male guardians, which has negatively affected aid delivery. Major funding shortfalls for the 2023 UN humanitarian response plan are causing relief programmes and services to be scaled back or cut. Moreover, economic conditions are exacerbating the humanitarian situation in addition to potentially undermining political efforts. At the August briefing, Worsunu also highlighted the negative impact of increasing misinformation and disinformation against humanitarians in Yemen.

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 31.2 percent funded as at 18 August. Council members could similarly reiterate calls for donors to help fill the remaining funding requirements for completing the FSO Safer 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. 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.

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

Sudan

Expected Council Action

In September, the Security Council will hold a briefing and consultations on the Secretary-General's 90-day report on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), which was due by 30 August. The chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Harold Adlai Agyeman (Ghana), is expected to provide the quarterly briefing on the committee's work.

The mandate of UNITAMS expires on 3 December.

Background and Key Recent Developments

Sudan has been grappling with the devastating consequences of fighting that erupted on 15 April between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, Sudan's military leader and chairperson of the Transitional Sovereign Council, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (known as Hemedti). The fighting, which was initially centred around Khartoum, has steadily engulfed several parts of the country.

On 9 August, the Security Council held an open briefing to discuss the situation in Sudan at the request of the UK, the penholder on the file. Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations (DPPA-DPO) Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee and Director of OCHA's Operations and Advocacy Division Edem Wosornu briefed. In her remarks, Pobee noted that clashes between the Sudanese warring parties continued across various parts of the country, including Khartoum, Bahri, Omdurman, and Darfur, with neither side achieving victory nor making any significant gains. She added that eastern Sudan, which has been relatively calm, has witnessed active mobilisation efforts in support of the SAF, which "risks plunging the east into conflict along ethnic lines, further highlighting the fragility of the region". Wosornu provided an overview of the increasingly dire humanitarian situation in the country and described the recent efforts of the UN to provide humanitarian assistance. She noted that intense fighting and the difficult operating environment are limiting the ability of humanitarian actors to deliver aid. She emphasised the need to establish a platform for direct and regular contact at a senior level with the Sudanese warring parties on humanitarian issues to negotiate access and protect humanitarian operations in the Sudan. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 8 August.)

The situation in Darfur has deteriorated further with the outbreak of inter-communal fighting, with Arab militias supporting the RSF and targeting non-Arab groups. In a 4 August statement, the Troika on Sudan (Norway, the UK, and the US) condemned the ongoing violence in Darfur, especially reports of killings based on ethnicity and widespread sexual violence by the RSF and allied militias. They expressed concern about reports of a military build-up near El Fasher and Nyala. "Those responsible for any atrocities against civilians, especially those including [conflict-related sexual violence] and the targeting of humanitarian relief actors, medical personnel, and other service providers, must be held to account", the statement added.

In recent weeks, the fighting has intensified in several parts of the country. In a 14 August press release, OCHA expressed concerns about reports of deadly clashes in Nyala, South Darfur. According

to a 23 August OCHA Humanitarian Update, these clashes, which took place from 11 to 17 August, displaced approximately 50,000 people, killed at least 60 and injured 250 others.

On 14 August, clashes between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) Al Hilu faction and the SAF were also reported near the Hajr Al-Maak neighbourhood in Kadugli Town, South Kordofan, forcing at least 6,700 people to flee to the town's western Al Radaif neighbourhood.

In recent months, several regional and international stakeholders have led mediation efforts aimed at resolving the crisis. The members of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Quartet (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan) held their first meeting on 10 July in Addis Ababa. In a communiqué adopted following the meeting, the Quartet expressed concern over the spread of violence beyond Khartoum to other parts of Sudan, particularly Darfur and Kordofan. The members resolved "to request the East Africa Standby Force (EASF) summit to convene in order to consider the possible deployment of the EASF for the protection of civilians and [to] guarantee humanitarian access". They further emphasised the centrality of IGAD in coordinating the different diplomatic efforts alongside the AU. In an 11 July press release, the Sudanese Foreign Ministry rejected the call for deployment of the EASF and stated that it will consider any such forces being deployed as "aggressor forces".

On 19 August, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir met Kenyan President William Ruto in Nairobi. According to a 20 August Sudan Tribune article, South Sudanese Minister of Presidential Affairs Barnaba Marial Benjamin said that the situation in Sudan was a central focus of the discussions. He added that "[t]he situation has progressed beyond being solely a humanitarian crisis to now encompassing broader regional dynamics".

On 13 July, Egypt hosted the "Sudan's Neighboring States Summit", bringing together the heads of state and governments of the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya, and South Sudan, with the aim of finding a solution to the ongoing crisis in Sudan. The leaders agreed to establish a ministerial mechanism comprising foreign ministers of Sudan's neighbouring states to coordinate their efforts to resolve the conflict. The first meeting of the ministerial mechanism was held in N'Djamena on 7 August. The communiqué adopted following the meeting noted that the foreign ministers had developed a three-part plan of action: the achievement of a definitive ceasefire; the organisation of an inclusive inter-Sudanese dialogue; and the management of humanitarian issues.

Sudan's humanitarian needs are significant and have been evolving rapidly. According to the latest Integrated Food Security Phase (IPC) projections, around 20.3 million people, representing more than 42 percent of the country's population, are expected to experience high levels of acute food insecurity between July and September.

Attacks on humanitarian personnel remain a major impediment to the delivery of humanitarian relief to vulnerable populations. According to OCHA's 23 August update, 19 aid workers have been killed in Sudan and 26 have been detained since 15 April. Attacks on civilian infrastructure and healthcare facilities also remain an issue of concern. At the time of writing, the World Health Organization

Sudan

(WHO) had verified 53 attacks on healthcare centres, staff, ambulances, and warehouses in Sudan since the conflict began.

In a 25 August statement, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths warned that the ongoing conflict, food insecurity, spread of disease, and displacement threaten to “consume the entire country”. He noted that food stocks are fully depleted in Kadugli, as clashes and road blockages prevent aid workers from reaching people in need. In West Kordofan’s capital, El Fula, humanitarian offices have been ransacked and supplies looted, he added. He further expressed concern that a protracted conflict in Sudan could engulf the entire region into a humanitarian catastrophe.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 15 August, High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk highlighted in a press release that the “disastrous, senseless” war in Sudan has resulted in acts that may amount to war crimes. There are reasonable grounds to believe that the SAF and the RSF have committed serious violations of international law, he said, and noted the impact of the war on civilians, including women and children, as well as humanitarian and health workers. The statement highlighted the dire humanitarian situation, with the displacement of more than four million people due to the war. It further indicated that hundreds of people, including political activists and human rights defenders, have been detained arbitrarily and held incommunicado by both parties to the conflict.

During its 54th session, the Human Rights Council is expected to hold an interactive dialogue on 12 September on the oral update of the High Commissioner on the situation in Sudan.

Sanctions-Related Developments

On 7 August, the Panel of Experts assisting the Sudan Sanctions Committee transmitted its interim report to the Council. It appears that the report described various aspects of the ongoing conflict, including its dynamics, funding, humanitarian impact, recruitment patterns of the warring parties, the proliferation of weapons and violation of the arms embargo, and its regional impact.

On 11 August, the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee held informal consultations during which it received a briefing on the panel’s interim report.

Women, Peace and Security

Following the 25 August Council briefing on the Secretary-General’s 17th biannual strategic-level report on the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) to international peace and security, the members that endorsed the 1 December 2021 Shared Commitments on Women, Peace and Security – Albania, Brazil, Ecuador, France, Gabon, Japan, Malta, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the UK, and the US – delivered a statement on Sudan expressing “grave concern regarding the continued reports of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan’s conflict”. The statement referred to reports of systematic and widespread use of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, kidnapping and sexual exploitation in Darfur and other areas of Sudan. Recalling UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk’s 15 August remarks on the conflict in Sudan, the statement underscored that “perpetrators must be held accountable”.

Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Security Council is how to stop the fighting in Sudan. A further issue is the situation in Darfur and the levels of intercommunal violence and insecurity across the country. The Council could consider holding an informal interactive dialogue (IID) with key stakeholders, including Sudanese civilian leaders, interested member states and regional and sub-regional

organisations to discuss the search for a mediated solution to the crisis. The IID is a closed format that, unlike consultations, allows for the participation of non-UN officials and briefers.

Another issue for the Security Council is the humanitarian crisis and how to ensure continuous and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid and, at the same time, secure the safety and security of UN officials and other humanitarian actors. Periodic briefings by OCHA could help keep the Council informed of the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Considering the increasingly dire humanitarian situation in Sudan and rising incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, Council members may consider inviting Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten to brief the Council at its next meeting in September.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Most Council members share similar concerns about the political, security, human rights, and humanitarian situations in Sudan. The Council members are also supportive of the Trilateral Mechanism, which is comprised of the AU, IGAD, and UNITAMS.

Since the outset of the conflict in Sudan, the regional bodies have strived to find a resolution to the conflict. It appears that these initiatives have been riddled with complex regional dynamics, limiting their prospects. According to media reports, in a BBC radio interview on 4 June, Malik Agar, the deputy chairman of Sudan’s Sovereign Council, declared that “Sudan is not part of the African Union’s initiative”, noting its suspension from the AU, which occurred following the October 2021 coup. He added that Sudan “cannot even discuss [the AU’s] initiative”. Regarding the IGAD initiative, the Sudanese government issued a statement on 15 June rejecting the sub-regional body’s decision to appoint Kenya to succeed South Sudan in leading the mediation, accusing Kenya of adopting “the positions of the rebel Rapid Support Forces”. The SAF did not participate in the 10 July meeting of the IGAD Quartet, citing its objection to Kenyan President William Ruto’s chairmanship of the Quartet. The statement issued by the Sudanese Foreign Ministry following the meeting said that “failure to respect the positions of Member States will cause the Government of Sudan to reconsider the usefulness of its membership in IGAD”. (For more, see our *What’s in Blue* stories of 22 June and 8 August.)

It seems that Council members have diverging views on appropriate Council engagement in response to the escalation of violence in Sudan. Apparently, the three African members (Gabon, Ghana, and Mozambique, known as the A3), with the support of Russia and China, have argued that adopting a Council product could duplicate messaging and create complications at a delicate time. This also appears to reflect Sudan’s national position: in a 12 May press statement, Sudan’s Permanent Representative to the UN, Al-Harith Idriss al-Harith Mohamed, noted that “we do not prefer an involvement of [the] Security Council in terms of any products”. He added that the Council’s engagement on the ongoing situation in Sudan might undermine the AU’s efforts to engage positively with the situation.

Following the Sudanese government’s 8 June decision to declare Special Representative and head of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) Volker Perthes persona

Sudan

non grata, Council members hold diverging views about Perthes continuing in this role. During the 9 August Council meeting, while some Council members, including Albania, France, Switzerland, and the US, supported Perthes' efforts, Russia maintained that Perthes has lost the confidence of the Sudanese people. During the meeting, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield (US) said that "the Sudanese government threatened to end the UN Mission in Sudan if the SRSG [Perthes] participated in this briefing". In a

press stakeout following the meeting, Ambassador Al-Harith Idriss al-Harith Mohamed (Sudan) referred to his government's decision on Perthes and said that the government opposes any "working relationship" with the special representative.

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

Protection of Civilians

Expected Council Action

In September, Albania is planning to convene an open debate titled "Advancing Public-Private Humanitarian Partnership" under the "Maintenance of international peace and security" agenda item. Olta Xhaçka, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, will chair the meeting. The expected briefers are Cindy H. McCain, Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP); Eric Schmidt, co-founder of Schmidt Futures—a philanthropic venture that funds science and technology research; Michael Miebach, CEO of Mastercard; and a civil society representative.

No outcome is anticipated.

Key Recent Developments and Background

According to the Secretary-General's latest annual report on the protection of civilians (PoC), dated 12 May, the UN recorded at least 16,988 civilian deaths across 12 armed conflicts in 2022, a 53 percent increase compared with 2021. Conflict situations where civilian casualties increased include Ukraine, Somalia, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, while certain contexts such as Yemen and Syria saw decreases. Harms suffered by civilians included death and injury, enforced disappearance, torture, rape, ill-treatment, psychological trauma, and forced displacement. Children remained particularly vulnerable to killing, abduction, displacement, and recruitment across a range of conflict situations, while women and girls accounted for at least 95 percent of victims of documented sexual violence. Humanitarian action continued to face overlapping impediments ranging from violence, bureaucratic hurdles, sanctions, and counter-terrorism measures to shortages and rising costs of essential supplies, including food, medicine, and fuel.

The UN's 2023 Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO) July update said that \$55.2 billion was required to assist 248 million people in need. The gap between financial requirements and resources was \$41 billion, slightly down from the \$43 billion recorded in the June update, which was the highest ever gap and more than double the entire requirements of the GHO (\$20 billion) in 2016.

Against this backdrop, the concept note that Albania has prepared for the September open debate says that local, regional, and multinational private sector enterprises have become increasingly important actors in humanitarian response operations since the 2005 reform of the UN humanitarian architecture. This trend accelerated following the adoption of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),

which include SDG 17 on "partnerships for the goals," aiming to revitalise global partnerships for sustainable development. More recently, in 2022, Secretary-General António Guterres appointed Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Muraikhi of Qatar as his Special Adviser on Public-Private Partnerships and Islamic Social Finance. Al Muraikhi previously served as the Secretary-General's humanitarian envoy from 2016 to 2019.

Albania's concept note highlights technology as a particularly important area of cooperation between the private sector and UN humanitarian agencies. Technological innovation driven by the private sector has created efficiencies in the humanitarian system, increasing the efficiency of donor funding to maximise life-saving interventions and scaling impact in conflict-afflicted areas. Technology sector platforms also continue to inform multilateral policy in areas such as disease outbreak data collection, climate change forecasting, and early warning systems, among others. In addition, private logistics and freight-forwarding companies are integrated into UN-led operations and routinely expedite delivery of aid in conflict settings.

The September open debate will seek to identify and advance public-private partnership solutions to promote international peace and security by addressing current and future humanitarian needs. Among other issues, it may provide member states with an opportunity to consider how private sector partnerships with UN humanitarian actors have contributed to the maintenance of peace and security; how the UN-led humanitarian response architecture can address conflict-induced humanitarian needs through enhanced public-private partnership structures; and what role private sector finance, logistics, and technology can play in scaling and improving efforts by the UN and its partners to respond to conflict-driven humanitarian needs.

While the September open debate appears to be the first Council meeting on public-private partnerships in the context of humanitarian action, in March 2022, the Council convened a ministerial-level open debate on such partnerships in relation to the women, peace and security agenda. The debate, which was convened by the UAE presidency, was titled "Advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda through partnerships: Women's economic inclusion and participation as a key to building peace". (For more, see our What's In Blue story of 7 March 2022).

UN DOCUMENTS ON PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS Secretary-General's Report S/2023/345 (12 May 2023) was the Secretary-General's annual report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Iraq (UNITAD)

Expected Council Action

In September, the Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL in Iraq (UNITAD). The current mandate expires on 17 September.

Background and Key Recent Developments

The Council established UNITAD through resolution 2379 of 21 September 2017 for an initial period of two years, following a request by the Iraqi government. It has since renewed the mechanism annually, most recently with resolution 2651 of 15 September 2022. The team is mandated to support Iraqi domestic efforts to hold ISIL accountable for crimes it committed in the country “by collecting, preserving, and storing evidence in Iraq of acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide”. The collected evidence is intended to support investigations carried out by Iraqi authorities or by authorities in third countries at their request.

Resolution 2379 emphasised that UNITAD should be “impartial, independent, and credible” and act consistently with its terms of reference, the UN Charter, UN best practice, and relevant international law, including international human rights law. UNITAD’s investigative priorities include the development and use of chemical and biological weapons by ISIL; attacks committed by ISIL against the Yazidi community in the Sinjar district in August 2014; crimes committed by ISIL in Mosul between 2014 and 2016; the mass killing of unarmed Iraqi air force cadets from Tikrit Air Academy in June 2014; and crimes committed against the Christian, Kaka’i, Shabak, Shi’a Turkmen, and Sunni communities. Specialised thematic units are also investigating sexual and gender-based crimes, crimes against children, and the financing of ISIL.

Because UNITAD is implementing its mandate in accordance with “UN best practice”, it does not share evidence for criminal proceedings in which capital punishment could be imposed. At present, the international crimes that UNITAD is mandated to investigate have not been incorporated into Iraq’s legal system. As a result, perpetrators who have committed acts that contravene international criminal law are usually charged with terrorism offences. Under Iraqi law, the death penalty can be imposed for these offences, which has prevented UNITAD from sharing its evidence of ISIL’s potential violations of international criminal law with Iraq’s government—the primary intended recipient. In October 2020, a draft law that would incorporate international crimes into Iraq’s domestic legal system was proposed in the Iraqi parliament, but the legislation has not advanced since then. On 6 March, UNITAD and Iraqi authorities announced the establishment of a joint working group to study the issue further.

UNITAD is led by a Special Adviser who is responsible for developing the team’s investigative strategy, promoting accountability globally for atrocity crimes committed by ISIL, and providing biannual updates to the Council on the team’s activities. On 7 September 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres announced the appointment of Christian Ritscher of Germany as the second Special Adviser and head of UNITAD, succeeding Karim Asad Ahmad Khan of the UK, who now serves as ICC Prosecutor.

During his latest briefing to the Council on 7 June, Ritscher noted

UNITAD’s most recent achievements and outlined advances in its different areas of investigation. He described progress in the team’s case-assessment reports on ISIL’s gender-based crimes, crimes against children, and crimes committed against the Sunni population in Al-Anbar and against the Christian communities in Nineveh. He also described the team’s continued provision of capacity-building and technical assistance to Iraqi judicial authorities, including a large-scale effort to digitise ISIL records and battlefield evidence “to ensure that this evidence is admissible before any competent court, whether in Iraq or in other States where prosecutions of ISIL members for international crimes are taking place”. He said the effort has so far led to the digitisation of eight million pages of evidentiary material.

During the June briefing, Ritscher reiterated that “the purpose of UNITAD’s work in Iraq is not simply to establish a record for ISIL crimes, but to hold ISIL members who committed such heinous international crimes accountable through evidence-based trials and before competent courts”. He identified “an appropriate legal framework” as the “most important element” and “main challenge” to achieving this outcome. He underscored that UNITAD remains committed to supporting the Iraq-led process for the implementation of a legal framework that will enable the prosecution of ISIL’s criminal acts as international crimes before national courts, and noted the establishment of the joint working group as a positive development in that regard.

On 13 June, UNITAD, India, and Iraq hosted an event at UN headquarters in New York titled “ISIL’s Use of Chemical Weapons: Global Threat”. Speakers at the event included Ritscher; Ambassador R. Ravindra (India); Charge d’Affaires Sarhad Fatah (Iraq); Ali Noaman Jabbar, Judge of the Taza Investigation Court in Iraq’s Kirkuk governate; and UNITAD investigators and UN technical experts.

The Secretary-General’s latest biannual report on the threat posed by ISIL to international peace and security, dated 31 July, said that the group continued to command between 5,000 and 7,000 members across Iraq and Syria, “despite sustained counterterrorism operations by Member States”. According to the report, counterterrorism efforts by Iraqi forces continued to result in a reduction in ISIL activities, but the group has still maintained its low-grade insurgency, exploiting security gaps along the border of the Kurdistan region of Iraq to enable attacks and resupply its cells in desert and mountainous areas.

Key Issues and Options

The primary issue for the Council in September is the renewal of UNITAD’s mandate. According to resolution 2379, mandate renewals are “to be decided at the request of the Government of Iraq or any other government that has requested the Team to collect evidence of acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide, committed by [ISIL] in its territory”. In practice, this has been interpreted to mean that UNITAD’s annual mandate renewals are dependent upon the Council’s receipt of a letter from Iraq requesting the extension. This year, pending receipt of the letter, the UK is likely to seek another straightforward one-year extension.

Council and Wider Dynamics

Both the Council and the Iraqi government are generally supportive

Iraq (UNITAD)

of UNITAD. Since the team's establishment, its annual mandate renewals have been requested by Iraq and unanimously adopted by Council members.

Differences exist, however, regarding the interpretation of UNITAD's mandate. Certain members, particularly those that have abolished capital punishment in their own legal systems, remain concerned about the possibility that evidence collected by UNITAD might be used in criminal proceedings in which the death penalty could be imposed, and emphasise the need for Iraq to incorporate international crimes into its legal framework. Some of these members share the UN's view that UNITAD's mandate prevents it from providing evidence to Iraqi authorities while there is still a possibility that this evidence would be used in cases that could result in the death penalty.

Others argue, however, that Iraq bears primary responsibility for determining how to prosecute those who have committed crimes on its territory and encourage UNITAD to share evidence with Iraqi

authorities as soon as possible. These members tend to suggest that Iraq is intended to be the main recipient of evidence collected by UNITAD and often emphasise the importance of respecting Iraq's sovereignty when it comes to pursuing accountability for international crimes.

The Council has typically renewed the team's mandate through straightforward extensions, but during negotiations in 2022, the latter group—supported by Iraq—was successful in calling for a new preambular paragraph underscoring “the importance of sharing evidence collected by [UNITAD] with the relevant Iraqi authorities, in a timely manner, for eventual use in fair and independent criminal proceedings”. To placate opposing members, however, the UK, which is the penholder on UNITAD, also included language specifying that this must be done “consistent with applicable international law and the Investigative Team's Terms of Reference”. It is likely that the same issue will affect negotiations over this year's renewal.

Ukraine

Expected Council Action

In September, the Security Council is expected to hold a high-level open debate on “Upholding the purposes and principles of the UN Charter through effective multilateralism: maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine”. This meeting will be one of the signature events of Albania's Council presidency.

Key Recent Developments

Over 18 months into Russia's military incursion, the war continues to have devastating consequences for civilians and far-reaching effects on the global economy. According to a 3 August OCHA situation report, 17.6 million people in Ukraine require humanitarian assistance, while approximately 11 million people in the country have been forcibly displaced by the war. That figure includes roughly 5.1 million internally displaced people and 5.9 million refugees who have fled Ukraine to neighbouring countries.

Hostilities remain concentrated in the eastern Donetsk and southern Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine. Since launching their counteroffensive in June, Ukrainian forces have struggled to breach Russia's defensive lines, which are fortified by extensive minefields. On 22 August, however, Ukraine announced that it had recaptured the village of Robotyne in the Zaporizhzhia region, potentially a milestone in its counteroffensive. Meanwhile, Russian forces continued offensive operations near the cities of Kupiansk and Lyman in the Kharkiv and Donetsk regions, respectively.

Russia has continued its missile and drone attacks on Ukraine, particularly targeting Ukraine's grain infrastructure. Following Russia's termination of the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) on 17 July, Ukraine has relied heavily on exporting grain to Romania via the Danube River. In response, Russia has launched frequent attacks on ports and grain depots along the Danube River in Ukraine, destroying hundreds of thousands of tonnes of grain, according to Ukrainian officials. The port of Reni in the southern Odesa region, located only

200 metres from the border with NATO member Romania, has been among those targeted by air raids. As at 23 August, Russia had carried out 14 such attacks since 11 July, according to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU).

Under significant pressure to rejoin the BSGI, Russia has sought to present itself as a viable alternative to Ukrainian grain exports and as a reliable food and grain supplier to developing countries, particularly in Africa. In a video address to the BRICS Business Forum in South Africa on 22 August, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Russia “has the capacity to replace Ukrainian grain”. He further contended that the BSGI primarily benefitted high- and upper-middle income countries, while noting that Russia has extended offers to provide six African countries with 25,000 to 50,000 tonnes of Russian grain at no cost.

In addition to attacks on grain facilities, Russian missile and drone assaults have targeted other civilian infrastructure throughout Ukraine. On 19 August, a Russian missile hit a central square in the northern city of Chernihiv, resulting in at least 144 civilian casualties, including seven deaths. On 23 August, a strike on a school in the north-eastern Sumy region reportedly killed four educational workers, while an attack on a hospital in the southern Kherson region prompted a halt to humanitarian aid deliveries in the area.

Moscow claims that Ukraine has been carrying out its own drone assaults on targets inside Russia. On 18 August, Russian authorities reported shooting down a Ukrainian drone over Moscow, with its wreckage causing damage to a non-residential building, according to media reports. On 23 August, a presumed drone attack targeted a skyscraper under construction in Moscow. While Ukrainian officials have not officially acknowledged launching attacks on Moscow, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has previously said that attacks on Russian soil are an “inevitable, natural and absolutely fair process”.

On 23 August, a business jet travelling from Moscow to St. Petersburg crashed, killing all ten people on board. Russia's Investigative

UN DOCUMENTS ON UKRAINE Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9404 (24 August 2023) was a briefing on Ukraine initiated by the US. S/PV.9399 (17 August 2023) was a briefing on Ukraine requested by Russia.

Ukraine

Committee—a federal authority that investigates serious crimes in the country—confirmed on 27 August that Yevgeny Prigozhin, head of the Russian private military company the Wagner Group, was killed in the crash. In late June, Prigozhin orchestrated an attempted armed mutiny against Russia’s military leadership. The mutiny ended on 24 June with an agreement between Putin and Prigozhin under which Prigozhin would call off the mutiny in exchange for amnesty and his exile to Belarus. The Kremlin has denied any involvement in Prigozhin’s death. On 25 August, Putin signed an executive order requiring all “people joining volunteer units and other persons contributing to fulfilling the objectives of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” and other security entities taking part in Russia’s “special military operation” to swear allegiance to Russia.

On 5 and 6 August, Saudi Arabia hosted the second meeting of national security advisors and other high-level officials to discuss fundamental principles for restoring peace in Ukraine. This followed an earlier meeting held on 24 June in Copenhagen, Denmark. The gathering in Jeddah saw participation from over 40 countries, including several that have not condemned the Russian aggression, most notably China. Russia was not invited. Attendees agreed to hold a third meeting in the coming months.

Despite a surge in diplomatic efforts over recent months aimed at reinvigorating peace talks between Kyiv and Moscow, prospects for a negotiated settlement remain distant. Both sides continue to rely on military means to shape the war’s outcome. Speaking at a panel event in Norway on 15 August, Director of the Private Office of the NATO Secretary General Stian Jenssen suggested that Ukraine could concede territory in exchange for NATO membership and an end to the conflict. Facing public backlash, Jenssen retracted his comments the next day. Speaking at an event on 23 August, Zelenskyy reaffirmed that Ukraine “will not exchange territories for any membership in any union”.

The Security Council remains actively engaged on the situation in Ukraine. At Russia’s request, the Council convened on 17 August to discuss the supply of Western arms to Ukraine and their impact

on prospects for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The meeting was held under the “Threats to international peace and security” agenda item. High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu and journalist Danny Haiphong briefed. On 24 August, the Council held a briefing to mark a year and a half since the outbreak of hostilities on 24 February 2022. (For more, see our *What’s in Blue* story of 23 August.)

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 24 August, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Ukraine issued a press release regarding its third visit to Ukraine, which was scheduled to take place from 28 August to 4 September 2023. As part of their mandate to “investigate all alleged violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law...against Ukraine by the Russian Federation”, the commissioners are scheduled to visit multiple locations in Ukraine, where they will meet with victims and witnesses. A press conference in Kyiv is scheduled upon the mission’s conclusion on 4 September.

During its 54th session, the Human Rights Council is expected to hold an interactive dialogue on 25 September on the oral update about the Ukraine COI.

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.

Council 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.

Afghanistan

Expected Council Action

In September, the Security Council will convene for its quarterly meeting on Afghanistan. Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Roza Otunbayeva and a representative of civil society are expected to brief. UNAMA’s mandate expires on 17 March 2024.

Key Recent Developments

Afghanistan continues to face multiple crises, with the humanitarian situation in the country remaining particularly dire. According to OCHA’s July humanitarian update on Afghanistan, which was published on 13 August, 29.2 million Afghans—over 70 percent of the country’s population—are in need of humanitarian assistance, a

significant increase from the 18.4 million people who required such assistance prior to August 2021, when the Taliban seized power. Despite the scale of the crisis, the 2023 Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan remains underfunded. At the time of writing, only 26.8 percent of the \$3.2 billion required by the plan—an amount which was revised down from \$4.6 billion in early June—has been received.

This lack of funding has begun to negatively affect the humanitarian response in Afghanistan. OCHA’s July humanitarian update notes that “severe underfunding has already led to a massive reduction in the number of people targeted for food assistance each month—down from 13 million at the beginning of the year to nine million between March and April, and five million people in May”. The World Food Programme (WFP) has also said that food

UN DOCUMENTS ON AFGHANISTAN Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2678 (16 March 2023) extended UNAMA’s mandate until 17 March 2024. S/RES/2679 (16 March 2023) requested that the Secretary-General conduct and provide an independent assessment on Afghanistan. S/RES/2681 (27 April 2023) condemned the ban on Afghan women working for the UN and called on the Taliban to swiftly reverse the policies and practices that restrict the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls.

Afghanistan

assistance in Afghanistan could cease entirely by the end of October due to funding constraints. Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that Afghanistan's healthcare system is experiencing a significant funding deficiency, with eight million people at risk of losing access to essential health assistance if underfunding of the health sector continues.

The Taliban's policies and practices have also complicated efforts to respond to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. According to OCHA's humanitarian access snapshot for July, "the barring of women humanitarian staff continues to affect the reach of humanitarian assistance to women and children beneficiaries, with additional bureaucratic challenges reported by partners". The snapshot also reports that 56 programmes were temporarily suspended in July due to humanitarian access incidents, including incidents involving interference with the implementation of humanitarian activities, restriction of movement, and violence against humanitarian personnel and facilities.

The human rights situation in Afghanistan has continued to worsen, particularly for women and girls. UNAMA's latest update on human rights in Afghanistan, which covered May and June and was published on 17 July, notes that the Taliban has continued to restrict the rights of women and girls and describes several examples of steps taken by Taliban officials to enforce previously announced edicts limiting women's freedom of movement and participation in employment. On 4 July, a spokesperson for the Taliban's Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice announced that all beauty salons, which had previously provided a source of employment for tens of thousands of Afghan women, would be closed and have their licences revoked. The announcement sparked public protests by Afghan women that were forcibly suppressed by Taliban authorities.

According to media reports, in recent weeks the Taliban has also prevented a group of Afghan women from travelling to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to attend university and banned women from entering a national park outside Kabul. In a 15 August statement marking the two-year anniversary of the Taliban's seizure of power, UN Women Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous said that the Taliban has "imposed the most comprehensive, systematic, and unparalleled assault on the rights of women and girls" and "created a system founded on the mass oppression of women that is rightly and widely considered gender apartheid".

On 22 August, UNAMA released a report titled "A barrier to securing peace: Human rights violations against former government officials and former armed force members in Afghanistan". The report, which covers the period spanning 15 August 2021 to 30 June 2023, says that UNAMA has documented at least 800 instances of human rights violations against former government officials and ex-members of Afghanistan's armed forces, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and torture and ill-treatment. It also notes that these violations were committed despite the Taliban's announcement of a "general amnesty" for these individuals in August 2021 and concludes that the Taliban's failure to respect the amnesty and hold perpetrators accountable "may have serious implications for the future stability of Afghanistan".

The threat of terrorism emanating from Afghanistan remains an

ongoing concern. On 31 July, ISIL-K, ISIL's Afghan affiliate, reportedly claimed responsibility for a 30 July suicide bombing at a political rally in northwest Pakistan that killed at least 44 people and injured over 100 more. (Council members condemned the attack in a 31 July press statement.) The latest report of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1267/1989/2253 Sanctions Committee, which was issued on 25 July, notes that member states "reported that Afghanistan remained a place of global significance for terrorism, with approximately 20 terrorist groups operating in the country". The report also indicates that members of Al-Qaeda have infiltrated Afghan law enforcement agencies and public administration bodies and says that member states have assessed ISIL-K as the most serious terror threat in the region, with the group "benefiting from increased operational capabilities" inside Afghanistan.

On 30 and 31 July, a US delegation attended an official meeting with representatives of the Taliban in Doha. Among other matters, the US delegation "voiced openness" to technical dialogue on economic stabilisation and ongoing discussion on counternarcotics, while Taliban officials reportedly mentioned lifting sanctions on Taliban leaders and the return of frozen assets belonging to Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB), Afghanistan's central bank. According to a 21 July Reuters article, a recent US-funded audit of DAB has not changed the US Treasury Department's view that the central bank must be reformed before its frozen assets, which were seized by the US and other member states following the Taliban's takeover, can be returned.

On 3 July, the UN Country Team in Afghanistan (UNCT) published the UN Strategic Framework for Afghanistan 2023 – 2025, which articulates the UN's approach to addressing basic human needs in Afghanistan.

Human Rights-Related Developments

On 14 August, a group of UN human rights experts released a joint statement marking two years since the Taliban's takeover. It highlighted that the policies of the Taliban have "resulted in a continuous, systematic and shocking rescinding of a multitude of human rights, including the rights to education, work, and freedoms of expression, assembly and association" along with "consistent credible reports of summary executions and acts tantamount to enforced disappearances, widespread arbitrary detention, torture, and ill treatment, as well as arbitrary displacement". The statement also emphasised the "system of discrimination with the intention to subject women and girls to total domination so egregious, that the collective practices constitute gender persecution, a crime against humanity".

On 11 September, during its 54th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) is expected to hold an interactive dialogue on the oral update of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett. On 12 September, the HRC is expected to hold an interactive dialogue on OHCHR's upcoming report on Afghanistan, which was not yet available at the time of writing (A/HRC/54/21).

Key Issues and Options

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is a significant issue for the Council. An informal meeting with humanitarian organisations working in Afghanistan could allow Council members to learn more about the problems facing those working to deliver aid in the country, particularly after the Taliban banned women from working for the UN, while also providing an opportunity to consider whether there is anything the Council can do to help manage these challenges.

The human rights situation in Afghanistan, particularly for

Afghanistan

women and girls, is another major issue. Council members could hold an informal meeting with representatives of UN Women, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and civil society to discuss how the Council can exert pressure on the Taliban regarding its practices and policies that restrict human rights.

The Council could also consider reviewing the 1988 Afghanistan sanctions regime, which, apart from the humanitarian exception established by resolution 2615, has not been updated since the Taliban seized power in August 2021. Such a review could analyse whether the regime is fit for purpose and whether it should be updated in light of current circumstances.

The terrorist threat in Afghanistan is another key concern. The Council could meet with a counter-terrorism expert, which would give members a chance to discuss possible options for bolstering the Council's effort to manage the threat posed by terrorism in Afghanistan.

Council Dynamics

Although Council members are generally united in their desire to see a prosperous, peaceful Afghanistan free from terrorism and ruled by an inclusive government that respects the rights of women and girls, they are divided over how to achieve this goal. Some members,

including the P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other like-minded states, argue that the Taliban must adhere to international norms if it wants to obtain international recognition and receive economic and development aid from the international community. Several of these members tend to favour maintaining pressure on the Taliban, particularly regarding its policies and practices that violate the rights of women and girls.

China and Russia, on the other hand, have contended that the international community should provide assistance to Afghanistan without linking that assistance to other issues, such as human rights, and appear to prefer dialogue and engagement with the Taliban over increased pressure.

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

South Sudan

Expected Council Action

In September, the Security Council will hold a briefing and consultations on the Secretary-General's 90-day report on South Sudan, which members expect to receive by 8 September.

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

Background and Key Recent Developments

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

The most recent quarterly report of the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the R-ARCSS, covering the period from 1 April to 30 June, was released on 22 July. It noted that the critical pending tasks outlined in the roadmap either remained unfinished or had not yet commenced, notably the passage of the

2023 National Election Bill and the reconstitution of the National Constitution Review Commission and the Political Parties Council. It said that, despite the graduation of 55,000 troops between August 2022 and January, there was no progress on the unification of the Necessary Unified Forces (NUF). The main reasons for the delayed deployment of the NUF are the unresolved unification of the middle- and lower-level command echelons and the lack of funding for deployment, the report added.

The quarterly report further noted that in light of South Sudan's reliance for revenue on oil exports through Port Sudan, the RTGoNU has set up an emergency task force to monitor continuously the impact of the ongoing conflict in Sudan on crude oil exports. The South Sudanese government had also negotiated with the Sudanese warring parties to ensure the safety of the oil installations and pipelines in Sudan.

In a 2 August press conference, Special Representative and head of UNMISS Nicholas Haysom noted that the country is not currently ready for elections, but "elections could be held on schedule if there is adequate political will, a practical political approach to the arrangements and commensurate resources are applied to achieving the benchmarks in the roadmap". The South Sudanese government needs to make several critical decisions, he said, including with regard to the type and format of elections, the establishment of relevant bodies and legal structures that can address election-related disputes, the census, voter registration, and the inclusion of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the election process. Other issues that need to be addressed urgently relate to transnational

UN DOCUMENTS ON SOUTH SUDAN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2677](#) (15 March 2023) was the resolution that renewed the mandate of UNMISS until 15 March 2024.

South Sudan

security arrangements, particularly the ranking of the middle echelons of the uniformed forces and the training and deployment of the NUF. Haysom added that at the request of the South Sudanese government, UNMISS, the AU, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have presented a list of immediate decisions about elections that need to be taken by the parties to the peace agreement. (On 24 January, the South Sudanese government had requested comprehensive UN electoral assistance for the upcoming election process.)

Haysom also highlighted the impact of the conflict in Sudan on the increasingly dire humanitarian situation in South Sudan. He said that congestion in and around the border towns with Sudan and increased competition for scarce resources because of the influx of refugees from Sudan could exacerbate existing inter-communal tensions between the returnees and host communities and among some of the returnee communities. In this regard, he explained that UNMISS has intensified its patrols and reinforced its presence in Renk to mitigate and prevent outbreaks of violence.

According to data published by UNHCR, at the time of writing, a total of 229,678 individuals have crossed into South Sudan since the outbreak of fighting in Sudan on 15 April, including 16,006 Sudanese refugees, 3,435 non-Sudanese refugees, and 210,237 refugee returnees.

In a 26 July press release, OCHA requested \$26.4 million to continue providing transportation until the end of the year for people entering South Sudan from Sudan so they can reach their final destinations. The press release said that without such support, more people will become stranded in and around the border towns where humanitarian services are already overstretched.

Intercommunal and subnational violence persists in many areas of the country. According to the 16 June quarterly brief on violence affecting civilians (covering January to March), UNMISS' Human Rights Division documented 194 incidents of violence affecting 920 civilians. During the reporting period, the proportion of civilians killed increased by 35 percent (from 300 to 405) and incidents related to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) decreased by 78 percent (from 63 to 14) in comparison with the same reporting period in 2022, according to the quarterly brief.

On 14 August, the US Departments of State, Labor, and Commerce issued a business advisory on South Sudan, highlighting growing reputational, financial, and legal risks to US businesses and citizens conducting business or transactions with companies that have significant ties to the R-TGoNU or that are controlled by family members of government officials. A press release about the advisory said that the “transitional government’s continued failure to adhere to its own laws in the transparent management of its oil revenue could adversely impact US businesses, individuals, other persons and their operations in South Sudan and the region”.

Peacebuilding Commission-Related Developments

On 20 June, the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ivan Šimonović, briefed the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) about South Sudan during an ECOSOC meeting on “Transition from Relief to Development”. Šimonović reiterated the importance of the full and timely implementation of the R-ARCSS. He called for investment in capacity and institution-building to ensure the effective delivery of and access to basic social and economic

services. Efficient and inclusive state institutions and governance at all levels are critical for peacebuilding and fostering the transition from humanitarian relief to long-term sustainable development, Šimonović said. Among other points, he highlighted civil society’s role in advancing social cohesion, and the importance of partnerships, including with international financial institutions.

Key Issues and Options

An ongoing concern for the Council is the significant political challenges in South Sudan stemming from the delays in implementing the R-ARCSS. A key issue in this regard is what the Council can do to encourage the parties to make progress in implementing the outstanding issues of the R-ARCSS in accordance with the timelines set out in the roadmap. Council members could consider adopting a presidential statement urging the parties to implement the roadmap in a timely and inclusive manner. Another option is to hold an informal interactive dialogue (IID) with the various stakeholders of the South Sudanese political process, the leadership of UNMISS, and interested regional and subregional organisations. (The IID is a closed format that, unlike consultations, allows for the participation of non-UN officials and briefers.)

A related issue for several Council members is the need for the government to engage with civil society in relation to the roadmap and its implementation. The civil society briefer Albania intends to invite in September may provide insights on challenges to implementing the agreement and to holding elections.

Another option is to consider a Council visiting mission to South Sudan to assess the situation on the ground and engage with the various parties to the R-ARCSS. (The last Council visiting mission to South Sudan was in 2019.)

An additional key issue for Council members is the humanitarian and food security situations. An option would be to seek regular briefings on these matters from OCHA.

The impact of the conflict in neighbouring Sudan on the humanitarian and political situations in South Sudan is also an important matter for the Council.

Council Dynamics

Most Council members share similar concerns about the delays in implementing the R-ARCSS, the ongoing sub-national and inter-communal violence, the high levels of sexual violence, and the economic and humanitarian crises. Members such as the UK and the US expressed reservations about extending the transitional period in August 2022 and called on the government to demonstrate its commitment to implementing the R-ARCSS in line with the deadlines set out in the roadmap. On the other hand, in the 6 March briefing, Russia said that “the decision to extend the transitional period until February 2025 is the right one under the current circumstances”.

Differences of view on issues such as how to depict the situation on the ground in South Sudan, the extent to which the Council can and should apply pressure on the parties to fully implement the R-ARCSS, the utility of sanctions, and the effects of climate change on the situation in South Sudan also continue to colour Council dynamics.

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

Libya

Expected Council Action

In September, the Council is expected to renew the authorisation for member states, acting nationally or through regional organisations, to inspect and seize vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya that they have reasonable grounds to suspect are being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking from Libya. The current authorisation expires on 29 September.

Key Recent Developments

At the time of writing, Council members were expecting to receive the Secretary-General's annual report on migrant smuggling and human trafficking on the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Libya, which was due by 29 August. The previous report, covering developments from 2 September 2021 to 29 August 2022, said the Mediterranean Sea was "among the deadliest routes for refugees and migrants trying to reach Europe". During that reporting period, an estimated 1,751 migrants died or went missing on the route. More than 111,795 migrants arrived in Europe, over 36,253 of whom had departed from Libya. The EU estimated that approximately 52,537 people were rescued or intercepted in 1,125 operations by various vessels in the area of operations of the EU Naval Force military operation in the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED IRINI). Through Operation IRINI, the EU is the only regional organisation implementing the authorisation given by the Council to inspect vessels suspected of migrant smuggling and human trafficking off the coast of Libya.

The Secretary-General's latest report on Libya, dated 8 August, details more recent developments relevant to the upcoming reauthorisation. Citing the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the report said that between January 2022 and February 2023, the number of migrants in Libya increased from 635,051 to 706,062. The number of migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea from the country also increased: as at 1 July, 8,496 individuals had been intercepted and returned to Libya since the start of 2023. An additional 780 people were reported dead and 944 missing during the same period. The Secretary-General's report said that migrants and refugees who disembarked at Libyan ports to which UN humanitarian agencies have access received basic emergency relief items as well as health-care services and protection. Most of them were subsequently transferred to detention centres, to which the UN has limited access.

According to the report, "[t]he humanitarian, human rights and protection situation of migrants and refugees remains of serious concern". On 1 May, Libya's Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration announced a country-wide campaign to arrest migrants. The report said that the campaign included raids on migrants at their homes and workplaces and on the streets, with thousands arrested and arbitrarily detained. Hundreds were forcibly deported across the borders into neighbouring countries without legal review.

The report described the situation of migrant children in Libya as especially concerning. It said that the UN has continued to observe children's "prolonged detention...with no judicial process,

in violation of the country's obligations under international human rights law". The detained children were reportedly released only if they had guaranteed durable solutions, namely voluntary humanitarian return facilitated by IOM or resettlement or evacuation to a third country facilitated by UNHCR. The UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) verified 24 cases of children who had been abducted from Sudan, where they had been registered as asylum-seekers and subsequently trafficked to Libya. Monitoring by UNSMIL indicated that these children were subjected to further human rights violations in Libya, including forced labour in military camps.

The Secretary-General's report also referenced recent deadly incidents involving migrants transiting through Libya. On 14 June, a fishing boat that was carrying several hundred migrants from Tobruk in Eastern Libya to Italy capsized off the coast of Greece in what is considered one of the deadliest shipwrecks in Europe in recent years. Additionally, in July, following clashes between residents and migrants in Sfax, Tunisia, hundreds of primarily sub-Saharan migrants were forcibly transported to a deserted area on the border between Tunisia and Libya and abandoned without food or water. On 10 August, Libya and Tunisia announced an agreement to provide shelter to the stranded migrants.

Other entities have also expressed concern about the situation facing migrants in Libya. In March, the UN Independent Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on Libya—established by the Human Rights Council (HRC) in 2020—published its final report, which concluded that "there are grounds to believe a wide array of war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed by State security forces and armed militia groups", with migrants, in particular, having been "systematically tortured" and subjected to "sexual slavery". In a joint letter dated 6 March, several international human rights organisations called on the HRC to follow up on the FFM's findings by establishing an "accountability mechanism to continue documenting and reporting on the human rights and impunity crisis in Libya and monitoring the implementation of the FFM's recommendations". Human rights organisations have also criticised the EU for providing support to the Libyan Coast Guard, which has been accused of human rights violations against the migrants it intercepts on the Mediterranean Sea.

Regarding the broader political situation in Libya, the country remains divided between the UN-recognised Government of National Unity (GNU) in Tripoli, led by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah, and the Government of National Stability (GNS) in Sirte, led by Prime Minister Osama Hamad and supported by the House of Representatives (HoR) in Tobruk. 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. Draft electoral legislation that would pave the way for elections is currently pending in the country's rival legislatures, but several of its elements remain contested, particularly a provision to establish a new interim unity government that would be responsible for organising the elections. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 21 August.)

UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2684](#) (2 June 2023) renewed 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. [S/RES/2656](#) (28 October 2022) extended UNSMIL's mandate until 31 October 2023. [S/RES/2652](#) (29 September 2022) renewed the authorisation for member states, acting nationally or through regional organisations, to inspect and seize vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya that they have reasonable grounds to suspect are being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking from Libya. [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/2023/589](#) (8 August 2023) was the 120-day report on UNSMIL. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9351](#) (19 June 2023) was on the situation in Libya.

Libya

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 regarding Libya in September is the expiration of the authorisation to combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking off the coast of Libya, which was most recently extended by resolution 2652 of 29 September 2022. Prior to this year's reauthorisation, the Council may invite a briefer from the EU to update members on recent activities of operation IRINI. In the past, such briefings have taken place in an informal setting during Council negotiations or in an informal interactive dialogue, which is a closed format that, unlike consultations, allows for the participation of non-UN Secretariat officials and briefers.

Council Dynamics

The Council initially established the anti-migrant smuggling and human trafficking authorisation with resolution 2240 of 9 October 2015 and has since renewed it annually through straightforward extensions. Each renewal has been unanimous, except in 2016, when then-member Venezuela abstained. It is likely that this year's co-penholders will aim for another straightforward extension by unanimous adoption.

Concerning the situation in Libya more broadly, 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. However, there are differences of view about the best way forward. Some members support the establishment of a new interim government prior to holding elections—as stipulated by the pending electoral legislation—while most Western members and the UN have expressed concern that such a move would diminish stakeholders' incentive to follow through on their electoral commitments, instead reinforcing the status quo. During the Council's 22 August meeting on Libya, however, both the US and Special Representative and head of UNSMIL Abdoulaye Bathily indicated potential willingness to support the establishment of a new interim government, which, according to some analysts, suggests that the dynamics on this issue may be shifting.

Geopolitical tensions still influence Council dynamics in respect to Libya. In his statement at the 22 August meeting on Libya, the Russian representative said his country was “concerned by attempts of some Western countries to use the situation in Libya to address some geopolitical and economic issues, including on the hydrocarbon market”, implying that these countries prioritise securing Libya's oil supply over supporting a long-term solution to the country's challenges. 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”.

France and Malta are co-penholders for the authorisation on Libya under consideration in September.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Expected Council Action

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

Key Recent Developments

Following the July 2022 anti-MONUSCO protests that led to the death of four peacekeepers, the Congolese government requested an accelerated implementation of MONUSCO's transition plan. This is aimed at fast-tracking the mission's drawdown and exit after the national elections scheduled for December. Subsequently, MONUSCO engaged with the Congolese government to identify the key benchmarks that would create the minimum security conditions for the mission's withdrawal. The Congolese government expressed its intention to retain only four of the 18 benchmarks contained in the transition plan—namely the protection of civilians; implementation of the Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Program (P-DDRCS); security sector reform; and the electoral process—and to transfer the remaining benchmarks to the

UN country team for their implementation.

Accordingly, it seems that an understanding has been reached between the Congolese government and MONUSCO on these four benchmarks, which are also aligned with the mission's priority tasks outlined in resolution 2666 of 20 December 2022. This resolution, which renewed MONUSCO's mandate, requested the Secretary-General to provide options for adapting MONUSCO's configuration. The options were expected to take into account the mission's role in light of other existing international, regional, and bilateral initiatives in support of the DRC. These include diplomatic efforts spearheaded by the East African Community (EAC) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) to address the situation in eastern DRC, known as the Nairobi and Luanda processes, respectively. The EAC also deployed a regional force (EACRF) in areas vacated by the M23—an armed group operating in the DRC's North Kivu province that was dormant in the past decade and became active again in 2022—to pave the way for a dialogue process. As described below, the South African Development Community (SADC) is also preparing to deploy troops in eastern DRC later this year.

The Secretary-General submitted his report pursuant to resolution

UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO Security Council Resolution S/RES/2688 (27 June 2023) extended the 1533 DRC sanctions regime until 1 July 2024 and the mandate of the Group of Experts assisting the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee until 1 August 2024. **Secretary-General's Report S/2023/574** (2 August 2023) was on options for adapting the configuration of MONUSCO and the future UN configuration in the country beyond the current mandate of the mission. **Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2023/3** (29 March 2023) was on the situation in the DRC. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9358** (26 June 2023) was on the situation in the DRC.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

2666 on 2 August with a proposal to reconfigure MONUSCO with the goal of facilitating the implementation of the joint revised transition plan and supporting regional peace initiatives. The report proposes that the mission's footprint in Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu, which continue to face persistent insecurity, be consolidated, and then gradually reduced as the Congolese government extends its authority and regional initiatives advance. In particular, the report proposes the withdrawal of all units from South Kivu (southern sector), one battalion from North Kivu (central sector), and some specialist units, military observers, and staff officers in the mission. The proposed withdrawals would reduce the mission's deployed strength from 12,500 to approximately 10,500 military personnel. This consolidation would still allow the mission to focus on North Kivu and Ituri and maintain a projection capacity in South Kivu, according to the report. Additionally, the report envisages a further drawdown of all remaining units from North Kivu (central sector), which would leave MONUSCO with approximately 8,500 military personnel (no timeframe was indicated), based on the assumption that the Congolese government enhances its presence in these provinces with the support of regional security forces.

The Congolese government, frustrated by the EACRF's perceived lack of willingness to engage in combat operations against M23, has turned its attention towards the Southern African Development Community (SADC). On 11 July, the SADC Troika—consisting of the chairperson (Namibia), the incoming chairperson (Zambia), and the previous chairperson (South Africa) of the SADC Organ on Politics, Defence, and Security—held its extraordinary summit virtually to discuss the situation in eastern DRC. The meeting was also attended by Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi, the current chair of SADC, and troop-contributing countries of the MONUSCO Force Intervention Brigade, namely Malawi, Tanzania, and South Africa. The meeting approved the mandate and supporting legal and operational instruments for deploying the SADC Mission in DRC (SADCIDRC). According to the Chairperson of the SADC Troika, SADCIDRC is expected to be deployed by 30 September.

While Council members welcomed the various initiatives by regional mechanisms, they have underscored the need to ensure that these regional initiatives are complementary and mutually reinforcing. On 27 June, a Quadripartite Summit of the EAC, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), ICGLR, and SADC was held in Luanda under the AU's auspices. Other participants included the DRC, Rwanda, and the UN. The meeting agreed on a joint framework that seeks to promote coherence of the existing peace initiatives of the four regional mechanisms with a clear division of responsibilities and agreed timelines.

Women, Peace and Security

On 14 July, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten briefed the Security Council at its annual open debate on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). She said that, with 701 CRSV violations, the DRC presented the highest number of UN-verified cases of CRSV in 2022. Patten added, however, that thousands more cases of sexual and gender-based violence were reported by UN humanitarian service providers, "including alarming levels of sexual exploitation of children at more than 1,000 sites in and around displacement camps". Addressing

the prevalence of sexual violence perpetrated against women carrying out livelihood activities around the camps, such as searching for food and collecting wood or water, Patten said that "women and girls face an unacceptable choice between economic subsistence and sexual violence and between their livelihoods and their lives" and underscored the importance of not underestimating "how food insecurity increases the risk of exposure to sexual violence".

Key Issues and Options

Key issues for the Council in September are the Secretary-General's options for MONUSCO's reconfiguration and the implementation of the mission's transition plan. MONUSCO's revised transition plan and the Secretary-General's report on its reconfiguration are also likely to inform the upcoming mandate renewal negotiations in December. A possible option is for the penholder to convene an expert-level informal meeting to reflect on the progress and challenges in the implementation of MONUSCO's transition plan and unpack the contents of the Secretary-General's report and recommendations. This may not be adequately discussed by Council members in the regular briefing and consultations, and the informal meeting would provide an opportunity for the experts to gain a nuanced understanding of the transition process and the implications of the mission's reconfiguration as they prepare for the upcoming mandate renewal negotiations in December.

The implementation of the revised transition plan and the mission's reconfiguration depends on national elections planned for December. In this regard, Council members might be interested to learn more about the preparations for these elections.

The security situation in eastern DRC also remains a major concern, and Council members might be keen to follow up on the progress in the ongoing regional initiatives under the Nairobi and Luanda processes. A possible option for Council members is to adopt a press statement reacting to some of the regional developments, including the Quadripartite Summit.

Council Dynamics

Council members have been broadly supportive of implementing MONUSCO's transition plan in a phased and responsible manner, contingent upon the improvement of the security situation on the ground. At the last meeting of the Council on the situation in DRC on 26 June, the US in particular expressed concerns about the Congolese government's increasing calls for MONUSCO to leave following the elections in December. They argued that the minimum conditions agreed by the Congolese government and MONUSCO will not be met and warned that the mission's hasty withdrawal is likely to create a security vacuum with devastating effects for civilians. The UK also underscored the need to draw lessons from previous peacekeeping closures to avoid repeating past mistakes in DRC.

Council members support ongoing regional initiatives to address the security situation in the eastern DRC, but they are likely to welcome the convening of the Quadripartite Summit and take note of its outcome, which could contribute to ensuring the necessary complementarity and coherence between these regional initiatives.

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

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