

# Monthly Forecast

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## Overview

In December, Ecuador will hold the presidency of the Security Council.

Ecuador plans to organise one signature event during the month. This will be a ministerial-level open debate on [transnational organised crime](#) under the “Threats to international peace and security” agenda item. Ecuador’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, Maria Gabriela Sommerfeld, is expected to chair the meeting. The expected briefers are UN Secretary-General António Guterres, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Executive Director Ghada Fathi Waly, and a civil society representative. Ecuador apparently intends to propose a draft presidential statement in conjunction with France as a possible outcome of the meeting.

Ecuador will also convene an open debate on [“Addressing the threat posed by diversion, illicit trafficking and misuse of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition to peace and security”](#). The meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss the Secretary-General’s biennial report on small arms and light weapons submitted pursuant to resolution 2220 of 22 May 2015. The anticipated briefers are High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu; Deputy Director of the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) Cécile Aptel; and a civil society representative.

In December, the Council is scheduled to hold its semi-annual debate on the [International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals \(IRMCT\)](#).

The outgoing chairs of the Security Council’s [subsidiary bodies](#) are also expected to brief the Council on their experiences of facilitating the work of those bodies.

African issues on the programme of work in December are:

- [Libya](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL);
- [South Sudan](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and briefing by the chair of the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee;
- [Central Africa region](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Regional Office for Central

Africa (UNOCA) and the implementation of the UN’s regional strategy to combat the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA);

- [The Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\)](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and renewal of MONUSCO’s mandate; and
- [Sudan](#), briefing by the chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee and vote on a draft resolution on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS); and
- [Somalia](#), vote on two draft resolutions: one renewing the sanctions measures against Al-Shabaab and another lifting the arms embargo on the Somali government.

Middle East issues on the programme include:

- [Syria](#), monthly meeting on political and humanitarian developments;
- [Golan](#), consultations on the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the mandate renewal of UNDOF;
- [Yemen](#), the monthly meeting on developments;
- [“The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question”](#), the monthly meeting, with the possibility of additional meetings depending on the situation in Gaza and Israel; and
- [Iraq](#), a briefing on the Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL (UNITAD).

In terms of European issues, the Council is likely to hold one or more meetings on [Ukraine](#).

The only Asian issue planned in December is [Afghanistan](#). The Council will hold its quarterly meeting on the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and will renew the mandate of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee. Under resolution 2615 of 22 December 2021, which established a humanitarian exception to the 1988 sanctions regime, the Council is also scheduled to receive a briefing on the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan.

**1 December 2023**  
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Regarding the Americas, there will be a briefing by the chair of the 2653 [Haiti Sanctions Committee](#).

Regarding non-proliferation, the Council is expected to receive a briefing on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 2231 of 20 July 2015, which endorsed the

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on [Iran's](#) nuclear programme.

Other issues could be raised in December depending on developments.

## In Hindsight: UN Security Council Sanctions

### Introduction

In August 2022, the UN Security Council called for the effective implementation of its sanctions measures “as a tool for achieving peace and stability in Africa”.<sup>1</sup> In reality, however, support for UN sanctions has eroded among some members, a disagreement reflecting the broader geopolitical divisions colouring the Council's work.

The sanctions divide is particularly stark between Western countries, on the one hand, and China, Russia, and African countries, on the other. Western countries often maintain that arms embargoes and targeted sanctions, such as assets freezes and travel bans, are vital tools in mitigating violence and supporting the implementation of peace agreements. While China, Russia, and the Council's African members recognise that sanctions can be a useful tool of the Council, they point to countries that remain under Council sanctions for several years as evidence that sanctions are insufficiently adjusted to account for progress. At an 8 March meeting on the Sudan sanctions regime, China remarked that “the Council's discussions over the past two years led us to believe that certain members have no intention of lifting sanctions, but rather attempt to perpetuate sanctions by setting benchmarks that are too high to ever be met”.<sup>2</sup> Beyond questioning their effectiveness, members of this group argue that sanctions are often counter-productive, harming the ability of the target country to serve its people.

### Brief History and Background

The Security Council's authority to impose sanctions is outlined in Article 41 of the UN Charter. During the Cold War, the Council imposed mandatory sanctions twice: on Southern Rhodesia in 1968 and South Africa in 1977. The Council had previously authorised voluntary sanctions on South Africa (1963) and Southern Rhodesia (1965).<sup>3</sup>

1 UN Document S/PRST/2022/6, 31 August 2022.

2 UN Document S/PV.9278, 8 March 2023.

3 Security Council Report, UN Sanctions, Special Research Report, 25 November 2013, p. 3

4 As David Cortright and George A. Lopez noted in *The Sanctions Decade: Assessing UN Strategies in the 1990s*: Whereas the Council had only imposed sanctions twice in the first forty-five years of its existence...during 1990s, the Security Council imposed comprehensive or partial sanctions against Iraq (1990), the former Yugoslavia (1991,1992 and 1998), Libya (1992), Liberia (1992), Somalia (1992), parts of Cambodia (1992), Haiti (1993), parts of Angola (1993, 1997, and 1998), Rwanda (1994), Sudan (1996), Sierra Leone (1997), and Afghanistan (1999). David Cortright and George A. Lopez, *The Sanctions Decade: Assessing UN Strategies in the 1990s*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 2000, p. 2.

5 UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), *Subsidiary Organs of the United Nations Security Council, 2023 Fact Sheets*, p. 4. This DPPA report notes that targeted measures are “intended to have limited, strategic focus on certain individuals, entities, groups or undertakings”. [https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sites/www.un.org/securitycouncil/files/subsidiary\\_organ\\_series\\_7sep23\\_.pdf](https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sites/www.un.org/securitycouncil/files/subsidiary_organ_series_7sep23_.pdf)

6 Security Council Report, UN Sanctions, Special Research Report, 25 November 2013, [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/special\\_research\\_report\\_sanctions\\_2013.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/special_research_report_sanctions_2013.pdf)

7 Sue Eckert, “The Role of Sanctions”, in *The UN Security Council in the 21st Century*, edited by Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone, and Bruno Stagno Ugarte, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 2016, p. 415. Of these three categories, Eckert notes, “...the international community generally employs sanctions to achieve three strategic purposes: to coerce targets into changing policies or behavior (the most widely perceived goal of sanction); to constrain targets in their ability to conduct proscribed activities; and to signal support for an international norm or stigmatize targets. Such purposes are not mutually exclusive, and most sanctions have multiple objectives”. See also Security Council Report, UN Sanctions, Special Research Report, 25 November 2013, [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/special\\_research\\_report\\_sanctions\\_2013.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/special_research_report_sanctions_2013.pdf)

8 Thomas J. Biersteker, Marcos Tourinho, and Sue E. Eckert, “The effectiveness of United Nations Targeted Sanctions” in *Targeted Sanctions: The Impacts and Effectiveness of United Nations Action*, edited by Thomas J. Biersteker, Sue E. Eckert and Marcos Tourinho, Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 226.

9 *Ibid*, pp. 232-233

10 Enrico Carisch and Loraine Rickard-Martin, “Implementation of United Nations Targeted Sanctions”, in *Targeted Sanctions: The Impacts and Effectiveness of United Nations Action*, edited by Thomas J.

# In Hindsight: UN Security Council Sanctions

the appointment of, and candid reporting by, these panels of experts. One criticism has been that the permanent members have influenced

the appointment of experts with regard to non-proliferation sanctions regimes, with potential implications for their independence.<sup>11</sup>

SANCTIONS	TYPES OF SANCTIONS								
	Arms Embargo	Travel Ban	Assets Freeze	Charcoal Ban	Illicit Petroleum Export	IED Component Ban	Trans-port (regarding aviation documentation and standards)	Customs Controls	Other Measures <sup>12</sup>
Al-Shabaab Sanctions	X	X	X	X		X			
1267, 1989 and 2253 ISIL (D'aesh) & Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee	X	X	X						
1518 Iraq Sanctions	X		X						
1533 DRC Sanctions	X	X	X				X	X	
1591 Sudan Sanctions	X	X	X						
1636 Lebanon Sanctions		X	X						
1718 DPRK Sanctions	X	X	X						X
1971 Libya Sanctions	X	X	X		X				
1988 Afghanistan Sanctions	X	X	X						
2048 Guinea-Bissau Sanctions		X							
2127 CAR Sanctions	X	X	X						
2140 Yemen Sanctions	X	X	X						
2206 South Sudan Sanctions	X	X	X						
2653 Haiti Sanctions	X	X	X						

In 2023, through the end of October, the Council voted on 12 sanctions-related draft resolutions. Only six of these votes resulted in unanimous adoptions. The resolutions on sanctions in Sudan

(Darfur), South Sudan, and the Central African Republic (CAR) were adopted with two or more abstentions. There was one abstention on a resolution renewing the authorisation for member states

Biersteker, Sue E. Eckert and Marcos Tourinho, Cambridge University Press, p. 154, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Alix Boucher and Caty Clement, "Coordination of United Nations Sanctions with other actors and instruments" in Targeted Sanctions: The Impacts and Effectiveness of United Nations Action, edited by Thomas J. Biersteker, Sue E. Eckert and Marcos Tourinho, Cambridge University Press, pp. 125-126, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Among others additional measures, the DPRK sanctions include bans on items related to mass destruction-related programmes and ballistic missiles, various energy products; seafood; and luxury goods.

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to inspect vessels suspected of violating the arms embargo on Libya. Two votes were held on Mali sanctions: one draft that would have renewed the sanctions regime and its panel of experts was vetoed by Russia, while a second draft, presented by Russia—which would have renewed the sanctions regime but not its panel of experts—fell short of enough votes. With the failure of these draft resolutions, the Mali sanctions regime was terminated.

The end of the Mali regime, among other Security Council decisions in 2023, suggests that several members have a growing unease with UN sanctions, or their mechanisms, or believe in particular cases that conditions on the ground merit the easing of sanctions. In March 2023, the Council introduced a potential “sunset clause” for the future of the Darfur sanctions regime, on which it would decide within 18 months, by September 2024. Renewing the South Sudan sanctions regime in May, the Council decided that the South Sudanese authorities no longer needed to notify the sanctions committee of the supply, sale, or transfer of non-lethal military equipment in support of the implementation of the peace agreement. And in July, when it extended the CAR sanctions regime, the Council lifted the arms embargo on the CAR security forces.

The Council’s deliberations on sanctions have been notably difficult in cases where the major powers have strategic interests. In May 2022, China and Russia both vetoed a US-initiated draft resolution that would have strengthened sanctions on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), arguing in the negotiations that the resolution would adversely affect the humanitarian situation there and would not help to resolve tensions on the Korean peninsula. This was the first time a DPRK sanctions resolution was vetoed. A draft resolution that China circulated in October 2021 that would have eased sanctions on the DPRK has not been the subject of negotiations involving all Council members, nor has it been tabled for a vote, apparently because it lacks the necessary support to be adopted. Council engagement on CAR and Mali sanctions has also been contentious, as the permanent members have jostled for influence in these countries. The P3 (France, the United Kingdom and the United States) and their allies have criticised the involvement of the Wagner Group, a Russian security company, in the CAR and Mali, former French colonies that until recently hosted French military forces—a tension reflected in the demise of the Mali sanctions regime.

Council members give considerable attention to the unintended humanitarian effects of sanctions. In recent years, Russia and others have accused Western countries of downplaying the humanitarian impacts of both Security Council sanctions and those imposed outside the UN context,<sup>13</sup> accusations that Western countries deny. A notable recent development on UN sanctions was the adoption of resolution 2664 in late 2022. Drafted by Ireland and the United States in the context of rising food and energy prices resulting from

the war in Ukraine, this resolution established a standing humanitarian exemption to assets freeze measures that the Security Council imposes.<sup>14</sup>

### Panels of Experts Facing Resistance

While panels of experts have been subjected to scrutiny in the past, 2023 has been a particularly hard year. In August 2023, Russia placed a six-month hold on appointments to the CAR panel, which had reported in May that the transfer of certain weapons and aircraft from Russia to the CAR did not comply with the notification requirements of the CAR Sanctions Committee.<sup>15</sup> The panel is currently not functional because of this hold.<sup>16</sup> When Russia vetoed the extension of the Mali sanctions regime in August, it accused the Mali panel of experts of becoming “a means of foreign influence”,<sup>17</sup> after the panel claimed that Malian armed forces and foreign security forces, ostensibly from the Wagner Group, had committed conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>18</sup> Council members have also sparred over whether the DPRK panel of experts has the authority to issue incident reports regarding missile launches conducted by the DPRK.

Panels of experts’ reports tend to offer valuable analysis of the political, security and economic developments in the target countries, and are frequently more incisive than the reports produced by the UN Secretary-General on UN peace operations. As well, they often provide useful recommendations on sanctions for the Council’s consideration. In 2016, two leading scholars argued that sanctions regimes linked to panels of experts are generally more effective than those that are not, stating that “this explains the now standard recourse to panels for each sanctions resolution and their continued renewal”.<sup>19</sup> Efforts to hobble or eliminate panels of experts may downgrade the quality of information reaching the Security Council.

### The Road Ahead

Complicated negotiations on sanctions are expected to continue in 2024 and may lead to further adjustments to current sanctions regimes.

It remains unclear how the hold on the CAR sanctions regime’s panel of experts will be resolved. During the MINUSCA mandate negotiations in mid-November, it appears that China and Russia referred to the improved situation in the CAR and urged the Council to adjust the CAR sanctions regime accordingly. The Council is expected to vote on the renewal of these sanctions in July 2024.

The future of Darfur sanctions is also likely to be a focus of the Council. In April 2023, one month after the Council introduced the “sunset clause” on Sudan sanctions, the country descended into a civil war marked by widespread violence against civilians, largely in the Darfur region. In 2024, the Council will need to determine whether the “sunset clause”—originally proposed by the African members of the Council and the United Arab Emirates—is still relevant, especially if the political and security situation in Sudan does not improve.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the Security Council open debate hosted by Russia on “General issues related to sanctions: Preventing their humanitarian and unintended consequences”, S/PV.8962 (7 February 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Security Council Report, “Sanctions: Vote on a Resolution Establishing a Standing Humanitarian Carveout to UN Sanctions Regimes”, What’s in Blue, 9 December 2022, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2022/12/sanctions-vote-on-resolution-establishing-a-standing-humanitarian-carve-out-to-un-sanctions-regimes.php>

<sup>15</sup> UN Document S/2023/360, “Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic extended pursuant to Security Council resolution 2648 (2022)”, 18 May 2023.

<sup>16</sup> See “Guidelines of the Committee for the Conduct of its Work” for the CAR Sanctions Committee, [https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil/files/car\\_cttee\\_guidelines\\_eng\\_7oct23.pdf](https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil/files/car_cttee_guidelines_eng_7oct23.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> UN Document S/PV.9408, 30 August 2023

<sup>18</sup> UN Document S/2023/578, “Final report of the Panel of Experts on Mali established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2374 (2017)”, 3 August 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Brzoska and George A. Lopez, “Security Council dynamics and sanctions design”, in *Targeted Sanctions: The Impacts and Effectiveness of United Nations Action*, edited by Thomas J. Biersteker, Sue E. Eckert and Marcos Tourinho, Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 77.



# In Hindsight: UN Security Council Sanctions

## Some Options for UN Sanctions

Many suggestions have been made over the years regarding the design, implementation and management of UN sanctions regimes that could help to enhance their effectiveness and perceived credibility.

One option that has been floated is to expand the Office of the Ombudsperson –currently responsible solely for handling delisting requests for the 1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant [ISIL/Da’esh] and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee—to review and proffer recommendations on delisting requests for all UN sanctions committees where individuals and entities are designated. When the Council established the Haiti sanctions regime in October 2022 through resolution 2653, it expressed its intention to consider authorising the Ombudsperson to receive delisting requests but has not yet done so. A more systematic review of delisting requests by an Ombudsperson across all relevant sanctions regimes—or, alternatively, a strengthening of the Secretariat’s Focal Point for Delisting—could enhance the sense of fairness in the work of sanctions committees, potentially increasing their legitimacy and their effectiveness. (The Focal Point for Delisting is a Secretariat mechanism established by resolution 1370 of 19 December 2006 to receive and transmit to the Council delisting requests from designated individuals and entities. Unlike the Ombudsperson, it covers all sanctions regimes, but does not play an independent advisory function and is not mandated to recommend specific action on delisting requests.)

The Council could also make preassessment visits to potential target countries to analyse the potential adverse humanitarian effects

of sanctions being considered.<sup>20</sup> There are precedents for such visits, for example to Sudan in 1997 and Angola in 1998.<sup>21</sup>

Another potential measure is for the Council to resurrect its Informal Working Group on General Issues of Sanctions, which was established in 2000 to “develop general recommendations on how to improve the effectiveness of United Nations sanctions” but was discontinued in 2006.<sup>22</sup> China suggested re-establishing the Working Group in 2022, noting that it had done “crucial work in order to help fine-tune and improve Council sanctions”.<sup>23</sup> The accomplishments of this Working Group included creating “a rudimentary ‘delisting’ process for names of individuals and entities added to targeting lists and the establishment of a ‘focal point’ position—a UN staff member—charged with the responsibility of facilitating communication with those who wish to petition any listings”.<sup>24</sup> The Working Group could provide a forum for members to discuss best practices and find common ground on the use of sanctions.

The *New Agenda for Peace*, in which UN Secretary-General António Guterres presented his ideas for preventing conflict and advancing peace, asserts that Security Council sanctions “remain an important Charter instrument to address threats to international peace and security”. It also emphasises values such as trust and solidarity for healing the rifts among UN member states. Sanctions regimes, with their current divisiveness, could benefit from trust-building measures, however modest, to restore and retain their intended function as a critical Security Council tool for the maintenance of international peace and security.

## Status Update since our November Forecast

### Bosnia and Herzegovina

On 2 November, the Council held its semi-annual debate on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) (S/PV.9466) and unanimously adopted resolution 2706, renewing the authorisation of the EU-led multinational stabilisation force (EUFOR ALTHEA) until 2 November 2024. There was no briefer.

### “The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question”

On 6 November, Security Council members convened for closed consultations on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) called for the meeting to discuss the worsening situation in Gaza and Israel’s airstrikes on the Jabalia refugee camp and on a convoy of ambulances near Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths and Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland briefed.

On 10 November, the Security Council held an open briefing on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”

(S/PV.9472). The UAE called for the meeting to discuss the deteriorating situation in Gaza, citing the “spiraling health crisis amidst continued attacks on hospitals”. Director General of the World Health Organization Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and Director General of the Palestine Red Crescent Society Marwan Jilani briefed.

On 15 November, the Security Council adopted resolution 2712 with 12 votes in favour and three abstentions (Russia, the UK, and the US). The resolution calls for “extended humanitarian pauses and corridors” in the Gaza Strip for “a sufficient number of days” to enable unhindered humanitarian access to facilitate the provision of “essential goods and services important to the well-being of civilians, especially children”. Resolution 2712 also calls for the release of “all hostages held by Hamas and other groups, especially children”.

On 22 November, the Security Council convened for an open briefing on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” (S/PV.9484). Malta and the UAE requested the meeting, citing “the deeply concerning developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and the severe impact on women and children”.

20 David Cortright and George A. Lopez, *The Sanctions Decade: Assessing UN Strategies in the 1990s*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 2000, p. 225.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 225–226.

22 UN Document S/2000/319, “Note by the President of the Security Council,” 17 April 2000. See Sue Eckert, “The Role of Sanctions,” in *The UN Security Council in the 21st Century*, edited by Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone, and Bruno Stagno Ugarte, 2016, p. 432.

23 UN Document S/PV.8962, 7 February 2022

24 Joanna Weschler, “The evolution of security council innovations in sanctions”, *International Journal*, Winter 2009–10, p. 42.

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UN Women Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous, UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell, and UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Executive Director Natalia Kanem briefed.

On 27 November, Council members held a private meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”, which was requested by Russia. Director of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Representative Office in New York Gréta Gunnarsdóttir and OCHA Head in Geneva and Director of the Coordination Division Ramesh Rajasingham briefed. During the meeting, representatives of Egypt and Qatar provided an update on developments related to the pause in the fighting between Israel and Hamas.

On 29 November, the Security Council convened for a ministerial-level briefing on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi chaired the meeting. Secretary-General António Guterres and Wennesland briefed.

### Arria-formula Meeting on “Combating Forced Separation and Illegal Exploitation of Children”

On 10 November, Russia convened an Arria-formula meeting titled “Combating forced separation and illegal exploitation of children”. The meeting featured briefings by Mira Terada, Director of the Foundation to Battle Injustice; Arun Dohle, Director of Against Child Trafficking; and Sonja van den Ende, a journalist from the Netherlands.

### Sudan/South Sudan

On 14 November, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2708, renewing the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) for another year, until 15 November 2024. The resolution also extended for one year the mission’s support for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM).

### Elections to the International Court of Justice

On 9 November, the Security Council and the General Assembly re-elected one judge who is currently serving on the bench of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Hilary Charlesworth (Australia). Another judge currently on the bench, Kirill Gevorgian (Russia), was not re-elected. Four new judges were also elected: Bogdan-Lucian Aurescu (Romania); Sarah Hull Cleveland (United States); Juan Manuel Gómez Robledo Verduzco (Mexico); and Dire Tladi (South Africa). Three other candidates were unsuccessful: Chaloka Beyani (Zambia); Ahmed Amin Fathalla (Egypt); and Antoine Kesia-Mbe Mindua (Democratic Republic of the Congo). The Security Council went through five rounds of voting (S/PV.9471), while the General Assembly needed only one round. To be elected, candidates must secure an absolute majority in the Security Council (8 votes) and the General Assembly (97 votes).

### Counter-Terrorism

On 15 November, the Council convened for the annual open briefing on the work of its counter-terrorism-related committees (S/PV.9478). The briefers were Ambassador Vanessa Frazier (Malta), chair of the 1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee; Ambassador

Lana Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates), chair of the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC); and Ambassador Andrés Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador), chair of the 1540 Committee. Nusseibeh delivered a joint briefing on behalf of the three chairs, which was followed by a briefing from each chair on the work of their respective committees.

### UN Peacekeeping

On 14 November, the Security Council held its annual briefing with the heads of police components of UN peace operations (S/PV.9475). The focus of the discussion was on how the UN Police (UNPOL) can contribute to the implementation of the recommendations in *A New Agenda for Peace*, a policy brief released in July outlining the Secretary-General’s vision for the UN’s work on peace and security in a changing world. The briefers were: Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix; Police Commissioner of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) Christophe Bizimungu; Police Commissioner of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Christine Fossen; UN Police Adviser Faisal Shahkar; and the Executive Director of Security Council Report, Karin Landgren.

### Central African Republic

On 15 November, the Security Council adopted resolution 2709, renewing the mandate of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) for another year, until 15 November 2024 (S/PV.9476). Fourteen members voted in favour and one member abstained (Russia). In its explanation of vote, Russia said that “the text continues to include obsolete elements that no longer reflect the situation in the Central African Republic”. Russia expressed disappointment that the text did not include the contribution of bilateral partners, seemingly in reference to the role of the Wagner Group, a Russian private security company, “as part of the country’s stabilization”.

### Somalia

On 15 November, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2710, extending the authorisation of the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) until 30 June 2024. The resolution also authorised the extension of the drawdown of 3,000 ATMIS personnel until 31 December. On the same day, the Security Council also unanimously adopted resolution 2711, a short technical rollover of the 751 Al-Shabaab sanctions regime until 1 December, to allow time for further deliberations on its renewal.

### Sudan

On 16 November, the Security Council convened for an open briefing, followed by closed consultations, on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) (S/PV.9480). Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations (DPPA-DPO) Martha Ama Akyaa Pobe briefed on the Secretary-General’s latest 90-day report (S/2023/861), which was circulated to Council members on 10 November and covered developments from 21 August to 31 October. Director of OCHA’s Operations and Advocacy Division Edem Wosornu also briefed Council members in the closed consultations.

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On 16 November, Sudan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Al-Harith Idriss Al-Harith Mohamed, sent a letter to the Secretary-General conveying the Sudanese government's decision to terminate the mandate of UNITAMS with immediate effect. The letter said that, in the context of the current situation in the country, the mission no longer meets the aspirations of the Sudanese people and government. The letter further stated that Sudan is willing to engage with the Council and the UN Secretariat on a "new, appropriate and agreed upon formula". In this regard, the letter added that General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the chairperson of Sudan's Transitional Sovereign Council and the head of the Sudanese Armed Forces, has appointed an envoy to lead a high-level delegation to engage on the matter with the members of the Security Council and the UN Secretariat.

### Promoting Sustainable Peace through Common Development

On 20 November, the Security Council held an open debate on promoting sustainable peace through common development under the "Maintenance of international peace and security" agenda item (S/PV.9482 and Resumption 1). This was the signature event of China's Council presidency. The briefers were: UN Secretary-General António Guterres; Dilma Rousseff, the President of the New Development Bank and former President of Brazil; and Professor Jeffrey Sachs, President of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network—a non-profit established by the UN to promote implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at national and international levels—and Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University.

### Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force

On 21 November, Security Council members held their biannual

meeting on Group of Five for the Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) in closed consultations. Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee briefed. Ahead of the meeting, the Secretary-General recommended that the Council end the Secretariat's reporting obligations on the FC-G5S in a 10 November letter that provided an update on recent developments regarding the force.

### Lebanon

On 22 November, Security Council members received a briefing in consultations on the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/879) on the implementation of resolution 1701. (Adopted in 2006, resolution 1701 called for a cessation of hostilities between the Shi'a group Hezbollah and Israel.) Special Coordinator for Lebanon Joanna Wroncka and Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed. Council members apparently considered issuing press elements following the meeting. However, consensus could not be achieved.

### DPRK (North Korea)

On 27 November, the Council convened for an open briefing on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) (S/PV.9485). Albania, Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the UK, and the US requested the meeting after the DPRK claimed that it had successfully launched a military reconnaissance satellite on 21 November. Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari briefed. The DPRK and the Republic of Korea (ROK) participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. On 30 November, the 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.

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## Afghanistan

### Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council will convene for its quarterly open briefing on Afghanistan. Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Roza Otunbayeva; Ambassador José de la Gasca (Ecuador), the Chair of the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee; and a representative of civil society are expected to brief. Closed consultations are expected to follow the briefing.

In addition, the Council is scheduled to renew the mandate of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee. Under resolution 2615, the Council is also scheduled to receive a briefing on the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan.

UNAMA's mandate expires on 17 March 2024.

### Key Recent Developments

Afghanistan continues to face a series of overlapping crises, with

the humanitarian situation in the country remaining particularly bleak. According to the World Food Programme (WFP) Afghanistan Situation Report for October, 29.2 million people—over 70 percent of Afghanistan's population—require multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance in 2023.

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan was compounded in mid-October when four 6.3-magnitude earthquakes struck Herat province in a span of eight days, killing and injuring thousands of people and causing widespread destruction. OCHA's Revised Herat Earthquake Response Plan, which was published on 16 November, said that more than 275,000 people were directly affected by the earthquakes, with "10,002 houses completely destroyed, 220,430 houses severely damaged, and 17,588 houses moderately damaged". The plan, which called for \$173 million in funding to deliver life-saving response activities and support early recovery efforts over the next six months, also noted that the earthquakes impacted vulnerable

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON AFGHANISTAN** Security Council Resolutions 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. S/RES/2679 (16 March 2023) requested that the Secretary-General conduct and provide an independent assessment on Afghanistan. S/RES/2678 (16 March 2023) extended UNAMA's mandate until 17 March 2024.



# Afghanistan

communities “already grappling with decades of conflict and underdevelopment”, leaving them with “little resilience to cope with multiple, simultaneous shocks”. In comments reported by Associated Press on 12 October, Afghanistan representative for the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) Jaime Nadal observed that there was a “gender dimension” to the death toll, saying “at that time of day, men were out in the field” and “many men migrate to Iran for work. The women were at home doing the chores and looking after the children. They found themselves trapped under the rubble. There was clearly a gender dimension”.

Humanitarian needs in Afghanistan have also worsened following the Pakistani government’s 3 October announcement that it planned to repatriate all “illegal foreigners” remaining in Pakistan after 1 November, a move widely perceived as targeting the estimated 1.3 million undocumented Afghans living in the country. According to a 17 November report published by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 350,000 people have returned to Afghanistan since the announcement, with the number of people arriving at border crossings “exhausted and in need of emergency assistance” continuing to grow. The report also noted that the sudden return of hundreds of thousands of Afghans shortly before winter “is expected to worsen the country’s already severe humanitarian crisis”. An inter-agency appeal launched by several UN agencies and their humanitarian partners seeks \$51.9 million in funding to support the humanitarian response to this development.

Despite the scale of humanitarian needs in Afghanistan, the 2023 Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan remains underfunded. At the time of writing, only 39.6 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. OCHA’s latest review of the plan, which covers the period ending 30 September, noted that several streams of humanitarian assistance “face pipeline break risks due to funding gaps” and said the provision of urgent funding is crucial.

On 9 November, Council members received the report of the independent assessment on Afghanistan requested by resolution 2679. In accordance with the resolution, the report provides recommendations for an integrated and coherent approach to addressing the current challenges faced by Afghanistan among relevant actors in the international community. On 28 November, the Council convened for a private meeting on the report. Feridun Sinirlioglu, the special coordinator of the independent assessment, briefed. (For more, see our *What’s in Blue* story of 27 November.)

The terrorist threat in Afghanistan remains an ongoing concern, with terrorist attacks continuing to occur in the country, including a 13 October attack that struck the Imam Zaman Mosque in Baghlan province, killing dozens of people and wounding many more. In a 14 October press statement, Council members condemned the attack, which was claimed by ISIL-K, ISIL’s Afghan affiliate.

On 15 September, the Taliban held a ceremony to welcome China’s new ambassador to Afghanistan, Zhao Sheng. According to media reports, the office of Taliban Prime Minister Hasan Akhund subsequently said on X, formerly known as Twitter, that Akhund had “accepted the credentials of the new Chinese ambassador” and expressed hope that the appointment would “elevate the diplomatic relations between the two countries to a higher level”. In a statement

regarding Zhao’s appointment, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it was the “normal rotation of China’s ambassador to Afghanistan” and “intended to continue advancing dialogue and cooperation”. On 19 October, the Taliban’s acting Commerce Minister, Haji Nooruddin Azizi, told reporters that his administration wants to join China’s Belt and Road Initiative and said that the Taliban planned to send a team to Beijing to discuss the prospect of taking part in the infrastructure project.

On 18 October, Special Representatives and Envoys for Afghanistan from Canada, the EU, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, the UK, and the US held a meeting in Rome. A joint statement on Afghanistan was issued following the meeting, which was also attended by special observers from Türkiye, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the OIC, UNAMA, and UNODC.

On 29 September, the fifth meeting of the Moscow Format Consultations on Afghanistan was held in Kazan. Special representatives and senior officials from China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, and Turkmenistan attended the meeting, together with the Taliban’s Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi. Representatives of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) attended as guests of honour. Participants issued the Kazan Declaration after the meeting.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 24 October, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, presented his report to the General Assembly. The report, which primarily covers developments from February to August 2023, documents the deteriorating human rights situation in Afghanistan, including the “severe and unparalleled attack on women’s and girls’ rights in the country”. In his statement, Bennett stressed that there is currently “a culture of impunity for torture and inhumane treatment in detention centres, as well as for human rights violations against former government officials and military personnel, despite promises being made to the contrary”. He also stressed the need to resume the education of girls beyond the sixth grade and women’s tertiary education, noting that the Taliban have repeatedly said the suspension was “temporary”. Bennett also underscored that “the Taliban’s actions may amount to gender persecution” and said that “systematic discrimination, oppression and segregation of women and girls require further examination of the evolving phenomenon of gender apartheid”.

On 11 October, during its 54th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted a resolution on Afghanistan without a vote (A/HRC/RES/54/1). Among other matters, the resolution condemns in the strongest possible terms all human rights violations and abuses and violations of international humanitarian law committed in Afghanistan and expresses deep concern at the lack of accountability.

On 12 September, during the interactive dialogue on Afghanistan at the 54th session of the HRC, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk stated that human rights in Afghanistan are “in a state of collapse”. The High Commissioner observed that the most recent OHCHR report on Afghanistan (A/HRC/54/21) demonstrates the “stripping back of institutional protections of human rights at all levels” in the country and said that the Taliban have perpetuated a “systematic assault” on the rights and freedoms of the Afghan people that particularly targets women and girls and excludes them from most aspects of public and daily life.

## Key Issues and Options

Considering how to respond to the report of the independent assessment on Afghanistan requested by resolution 2679 is a priority issue for the Council. Council members could choose to adopt a resolution that endorses the report and operationalises the recommendations outlined in it that require action from the Council.

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is a significant issue for



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# Afghanistan

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 women and girls, is another major issue. Council members could hold an informal meeting with representatives of UNWomen, 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 have been divided over how to achieve this goal. Some

members, including the P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other like-minded states, have argued 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 appear 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 it 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 challenges facing the country.

It remains to be seen how the independent assessment report will affect Council dynamics on the file. While it seems that members are generally supportive of the report and its recommendations, albeit to varying degrees, Council members appear to have questions and concerns about how the recommendations outlined in the report would work in practice. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 27 November.)

# Transnational Organised Crime

## Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council plans to convene an open debate on “Transnational organised crime, growing challenges and new threats” under the “Threats to international peace and security” agenda item. Ecuador’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, Maria Gabriela Sommerfeld, is expected to chair the meeting, which is the signature event of Ecuador’s Council presidency. The anticipated briefers are Secretary-General António Guterres; Ghada Waly, the Executive Director of UNODC; and a civil society representative. A presidential statement is a possible outcome.

## Key Developments

During the past 15 years, the Security Council has held several meetings and adopted key outcomes focusing on the various challenges posed by transnational organised crime—an issue that manifests itself in various illegal activities that threaten international peace and security, including migrant smuggling, illegal mining, drug and human trafficking, arms trafficking, extrajudicial killings, sexual and gender-based violence, kidnapping, money laundering, and trafficking in cultural artifacts, among others.

The Council’s first open debate on drug trafficking and organised crime was convened on 8 December 2009, during Burkina Faso’s Council presidency. The meeting resulted in a presidential statement that noted the threat “posed in some cases by drug trafficking and related transnational organized crime to international security in different regions of the world, including in Africa”. The statement also recognised the contribution of states and regional and subregional organisations in tackling drug trafficking and encouraged them to share information about illicit drug trafficking networks.

France initiated a briefing on 24 February 2010 on global threats to international peace and security posed by organised crime. As an outcome to the meeting, the Council adopted a presidential statement on the linkages between drug trafficking and organised crime. The statement also expressed concern about the development of cybercrime and that kidnapping and hostage-taking were being used by criminal groups to raise funds or garner political concessions.

On 21 February 2012, during an open debate convened by Togo on the impact of transnational organised crime on peace, security and stability in West Africa and the Sahel region, the Council adopted a presidential statement that identified transnational organised crime as a serious threat to international peace and stability “including illicit weapons and drug trafficking, piracy and armed robbery at sea, as well as terrorism”.

Chad held an open debate on 19 December 2014, which focused on the linkages between transnational organised crime and terrorism. At the debate, the Council adopted resolution 2195, which called on UN member states “to strengthen border management to effectively prevent the movement of terrorists and terrorist groups, including those benefiting from transnational organized crime”.

More recent Council meetings related to transnational organised crime have focused on issues such as human trafficking (the

US, Spanish, and Italian Council presidencies in December 2015, December 2016 and November 2017, respectively); the protection of cultural heritage (Italy’s Council presidency in November 2017); and organised crime at sea (Equatorial Guinea’s presidency in February 2019).

As well, efforts to tackle organised crime have been evident in the Council’s recent work on sanctions. In November 2022, when the Council renewed the Al-Shabaab Sanctions regime in Somalia, it encouraged the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to bring together relevant states and international organisations to “enhance regional cooperation on responding to illicit maritime flows and disrupt all forms of trafficking in licit and illicit goods that may finance terrorist activities”. In addition, when renewing the Haiti Sanctions regime this October, the Council welcomed the launch of technical programmes by the UNODC to “assist national authorities to promote border and ports control, trace illicit financial flows, [and] collaborate across borders to combat transnational crime, corruption, and drug and arms trafficking”.

## Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council is identifying trends and addressing gaps in efforts to counteract transnational organised crime. Another important issue is how to enhance coordination and coherence among the various international, national, and local stakeholders working on this issue.

One option would be to invite a civil society representative, who works on addressing the peace and security threat posed by transnational organised crime, to brief on its effects in his or her region and strategies for addressing these threats.

Another option would be for the Council to pursue a presidential statement that:

- highlights the adverse effects of transnational organised crime in the current global security context;
- encourages international, regional and national actors to cooperate in sharing best practices on transnational organised crime; and
- encourages member states and regional organisations to enhance their capacities to tackle this threat.

## Council Dynamics

It appears that Ecuador sees the open debate as an opportunity to explore how the Council can best address the multiple manifestations of transnational organised crime. This more holistic approach would be a departure from the narrower focus of some past Council meetings on this issue (for example, the relationship between transnational organised crime and human trafficking). Some members may also maintain during the meeting that underdevelopment is a fundamental factor leading to the rise of organised crime. It seems that Ecuador is collaborating with France, which has traditionally favoured Council engagement on transnational organised crime, to pursue a presidential statement on this issue.

**UN DOCUMENTS ON TRANSNATIONAL ORGANISED CRIMES** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2700 (19 October 2023) renewed the Haiti sanctions regime for one year. S/RES/2662 (17 November 2022) renewed the 751 Somalia sanctions regime for one year. S/RES/2195 (19 December 2014) focusing on the linkages between transnational organised crime and terrorism. Security Council Presidential Statements S/PRST/2012/2 (21 February 2012) identified transnational organised crime as a serious threat to international peace and stability. S/PRST/2010/4 (24 February 2010) focused on the linkages between drug trafficking and organised crime. S/PRST/2009/32 (8 December 2009) was on the threat that drug trafficking and related transnational organised crime posed to the security of different regions of the world, including Africa. Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.7351 (19 December 2014) was on the linkages between transnational organised crime and terrorism. S/PV.6717 and Resumption 1 (21 February 2012) was an open debate on the impact of transnational organised crime on peace, security and stability in West Africa and the Sahel region. S/PV.6277 (24 February 2010) was a briefing on transnational organised crime. S/PV.6233 and Resumption 1 (8 December 2009) was on drug trafficking and related transnational organised crime.

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# Iraq (UNITAD)

## Expected Council Action

In December, the Council will receive the biannual briefing from the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL in Iraq (UNITAD). Special Adviser and head of UNITAD Christian Ritscher is expected to brief the Council. UNITAD's final mandate expires on 17 September 2024.

## Background and Key Recent Developments

The Council established UNITAD through resolution 2379 of 21 September 2017 for an initial period of two years. It has since renewed the mechanism annually, most recently with resolution 2697 of 15 September 2023, which renewed the team for a final one-year non-extendable term. UNITAD is mandated to support Iraqi domestic efforts to hold the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Da'esh) 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. 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 in Iraq 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. In March, UNITAD and Iraqi authorities announced the establishment of a joint working group to study the issue further. While seeking a comprehensive solution, UNITAD and the Iraqi authorities have also pursued initiatives to facilitate information-sharing in specific areas, for instance, with regard to ISIL's financial crimes and requests to designate ISIL members under the 1267 ISIL/al-Qaida sanctions regime.

Despite these efforts, prior to UNITAD's most recent mandate renewal in September, Iraq sent a letter to the Council requesting the renewal of UNITAD's mandate for a period of one year “without the possibility of extension”. The letter emphasised that during this period, the team “must turn over” all the evidence that it has obtained in Iraq since the start of its mandate. It also requested UNITAD not to share further evidence with third countries and to disclose to Iraqi authorities the evidence that the team has previously shared.

Consequently, resolution 2697 extended UNITAD's mandate until 17 September 2024 “only”. It noted Iraq's request for

UNITAD to share its evidence with national authorities within this period and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Security Council, by 15 January 2024, a report setting out recommendations for implementing this request “with full respect for the sovereignty of Iraq”. It also requested UNITAD, with Iraq's approval, to determine the modalities for evidence-sharing with third countries and to communicate to Iraq what previous evidence has been shared. Finally, it requested UNITAD to develop, by 15 March 2024, in consultation with Iraq, a roadmap for the completion of the team's mandate and the necessary steps for the team's closure.

At the Council's December briefing, Ritscher will present the team's eleventh biannual report, which was circulated to Council members on 16 November but was not yet publicly available at the time of writing. The report says that UNITAD has “adjusted its priorities” in response to resolution 2697, “while continuing to deliver on core mandated tasks...in accordance with its Terms of Reference”. As a first step towards meeting the mandated requests, the report says that UNITAD has communicated to Iraqi authorities what evidence has previously been shared with third countries and that the parties have “successfully determined modalities” for such evidence-sharing. The report also notes that the UN Secretariat has instructed UNITAD to provide input to the Secretary-General's report outlining recommendations for evidence-sharing between UNITAD and Iraqi authorities, and that the team will focus on developing the requested roadmap for the completion of its mandate during the next reporting period. More broadly, the report reiterates UNITAD's “continued commitment to acting in full respect of the sovereignty of Iraq and to cooperating with Iraq throughout all stages of mandate implementation”, guided by Council resolutions, the team's terms of reference, UN best practice, and “relevant international law, including international human rights law, notably the right to a fair trial and other due process provisions”.

The report also describes progress in several investigative tracks. These include the preparation of a case assessment report on ISIL's manufacturing and use of chemical weapons in Iraq, which was shared with Iraqi authorities; the preparation of a report on sexual violence committed by ISIL against women and girls, which was also shared; and updates to case assessments concerning several other files, such as ISIL's financing; crimes perpetrated against Iraq's Christian community; violence committed against the Yazidi community in Sinjar; and the massacre of unarmed military cadets at Tikrit Air Academy. The report notes UNITAD's intention to share analytical and structural findings regarding these investigations with the Iraqi judiciary in the next reporting period, while shifting part of its focus to the preparation of an overarching preliminary report on ISIL's destruction of cultural heritage and reports on ISIL crimes committed in Mosul, Tikrit, and Al Alam, as well as crimes committed against other minority groups in Iraq.

The December briefing will take place in the context of continued military pressure against ISIL in Iraq. According to the Secretary-General's latest report on the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), covering developments from May to September, ISIL has continued to conduct asymmetric attacks—primarily in Anbar, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninawa, and Salah al-Din Governorates—while Iraqi security forces have continued counterterrorism

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## Iraq (UNITAD)

operations in response to the terrorist group's activity. A total of 178 attacks were attributed to ISIL/Da'esh during the first half of 2023, compared with 526 attacks during the first half of 2022. That figure was the lowest reported over a six-month period since Iraq declared victory over ISIL in December 2017, which the Secretary-General's report says is "indicative of the overall decline in attacks attributed to the group".

### Key Issues and Options

The key ongoing issue is how the Council can continue to support UNITAD's efforts to promote accountability for ISIL's crimes in Iraq, which in turn contributes to the country's security and political stability.

At the December briefing, Council members are expected to welcome continued investigative progress and the completion or advancement of additional case files. Since the briefing will be the first to take place following the adoption of resolution 2697, members are also likely to express their expectations for the Secretary-General's upcoming report recommending modalities for evidence-sharing with Iraqi authorities and UNITAD's upcoming roadmap for the completion of its mandate, both of which will inform future Council action on the team's drawdown.

### Council and Wider Dynamics

Both the Council and the Iraqi government have been generally

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

The issue of evidence-sharing, however, has been a longstanding source of contention. Members who oppose the death penalty—such as France, Malta, Switzerland, and the UK—have been concerned about the possibility that evidence shared by the team with the Iraqi authorities might be used in criminal proceedings in which the death penalty could be imposed. Other members—such as China, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates—have maintained that the use of the death penalty is Iraq's sovereign right, a point Iraq has also emphasised.

During negotiations over UNITAD's mandate renewals—which the Council adopts at Iraq's request—Iraq and like-minded Council members have exerted increasing pressure to mandate the team to promptly share its evidence holdings. Prior to the last renewal in September, Iraq agreed to request only one final extension, on this condition. Given their diverging interpretations of international human rights law and UN best practice, however, Council members reached a compromise by requesting the Secretary-General to provide recommendations on how to implement Iraq's request.

The UK is the penholder on UNITAD.

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## Ukraine

### Expected Council Action

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

### Key Recent Developments

Hostilities in Ukraine are concentrated in the eastern Donbas and southern Kherson regions. In November, Ukrainian forces established positions on the eastern bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson. Concurrently, Ukrainian troops are repelling Russian offensives in the eastern Luhansk and Donetsk regions, with heavy fighting reported along the Kupiansk axis and around the city of Avdiivka, respectively. In an 18 November intelligence update, the UK's Ministry of Defence said that "neither side has achieved substantial progress" on any front, noting that "[a]s colder winter weather sets in earnest in eastern Ukraine, there are few immediate prospects of major changes in the frontline".

On 1 November, General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, acknowledged that the war had reached a stalemate and that the counteroffensive launched by Ukraine in June might not achieve a significant breakthrough. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has previously recognised the counteroffensive's slow progress, cautioning against overly optimistic expectations of rapid success. Deputy Head of the Office of the

President of Ukraine Ihor Zhovkva rejected Zaluzhnyi's assertion on 4 November, arguing that his statement "eases the work of the aggressor" and stirred "panic" among Kyiv's allies.

Last month, the Security Council maintained its regular focus on Ukraine, holding four meetings, consistent with its engagement level in previous months. On 8 November, Council members convened for an emergency meeting on Ukraine at Russia's request to discuss an incident that occurred on 7 November, in which shelling by Ukrainian forces reportedly killed six people and injured at least 11 others in the city of Donetsk. Following that meeting, the Council held closed consultations regarding the 26 September 2022 explosions that damaged the Nord Stream pipelines in the Baltic Sea.

On 17 November, the Council convened for an open briefing on Ukraine under the "Threats to international peace and security" agenda item. Russia requested the meeting to discuss its allegations that Ukrainian authorities are persecuting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* stories of 7 November and 16 November.) At the request of Albania and the US, Council members held a briefing on 21 November to discuss the humanitarian consequences of the war, in particular its effects on domestic and global food security. At a press briefing following the meeting, Russian Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia announced that Russia would organise an Arria-formula meeting on 8 December, focused on the history of Maidan. (The Maidan, or Euromaidan,

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UN DOCUMENTS ON UKRAINE Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9483 (21 November 2023) was a briefing on Ukraine, requested by Albania and the US. S/PV.9481 (17 November 2023) was a briefing on Ukraine, requested by Russia. S/PV.9470 (8 November 2023) was a briefing on Ukraine, requested by Russia.



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# Ukraine

protests in 2013 and 2014 led to the ouster of former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014.)

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 16 November, the Humanitarian Research Lab at the Yale School of Public Health (Yale HRL) issued a report titled “Belarus’ Collaboration with Russia in the Systematic Deportation of Ukraine’s Children”. The report found that at least 2,442 children, including children with disabilities, have been taken to Belarus from 17 cities across the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions. The report emphasises that “Russia’s systematic effort to identify, collect, transport, and re-educate Ukraine’s children has been facilitated by Belarus” and is “ultimately coordinated” between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko.

On 15 November, the Third Committee of the General Assembly adopted a resolution (A/C.3/78/L.42) by a vote of 77 in favour, 14 against, and 79 abstentions on the “Situation of human rights in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol”. The resolution condemns Russia’s ongoing occupation of the Ukrainian territories and urges Russia to adhere to its obligations under relevant international law and bring an “immediate end” to violations of international human rights law against residents in the occupied territories.

## 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 and Wider Dynamics

The Security Council remains starkly divided on the conflict in Ukraine and the appropriate framework for achieving a peaceful resolution. Ukraine and its allies have advocated for a just peace, conditioned on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine’s internationally recognised borders. Other member states have emphasised de-escalation and diplomacy, with some calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities without any preconditions, a move that could freeze the front lines of the conflict and leave Russia in control of a significant amount of territory in eastern and southern Ukraine. Most members continue to express concern over the mounting toll of the conflict on civilians and civilian infrastructure and the conflict’s global repercussions.

On 8 November, the European Commission, an executive body of the EU, recommended initiating EU accession negotiations with Ukraine. Zelenskyy welcomed the recommendation, saying that “Ukrainians have always been and remain part of our common European family”. EU leaders are expected to discuss Ukraine’s EU bid on 14 and 15 December. On 9 November, EU member Hungary opposed starting membership talks with Ukraine, advocating instead

for a form of “privileged partnership” rather than full membership.

November saw persistent concerns in Kyiv regarding the possibility of diminishing Western financial support for Ukraine in light of disagreements within the US House of Representatives over US assistance to Ukraine. In October, US President Joe Biden appealed to the US Congress to endorse a \$106 billion emergency aid package for Israel, Ukraine, and the southern US border. However, on 2 November, the House of Representatives passed a \$14.3 billion standalone aid package for Israel, which was subsequently blocked by the US Senate on 14 November. Moreover, a temporary spending bill signed into law by Biden on 16 November did not address the issue of continued aid for Ukraine.

The ongoing crisis in the Middle East, triggered by the 7 October attack by the Palestinian armed group Hamas on Israel, has continued to cast doubts on the ability of Kyiv’s Western allies to maintain their level of international political support for Ukraine. On 6 November, Zelenskyy acknowledged that the escalating situation in the Gaza Strip was “taking away the focus” from the conflict in Ukraine.

In his speech at the 2023 EU Ambassadors’ Conference on 6 November, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell Fontelles echoed Zelenskyy’s concerns, noting that “the crisis in the Middle East is already having a lasting impact on [the EU’s] policy in Ukraine”. Borrell acknowledged that “international support for Ukraine may erode in light of what is being seen as the practice of double standards”, as some “take advantage of the crisis in the Middle East to underscore what they see as a contradiction in our positioning”. Russia has increasingly criticised Western countries’ approach to the situation in the Middle East. During the 8 November Council briefing on Ukraine, Russia drew parallels between the residents of Donbas and those of Gaza, claiming that since 2014, the former have been living in a similar “paradigm” to the latter, in which Western countries have ignored Kyiv’s crimes against the civilian population as they have done with Israel’s aggression against Gazans.

Ukraine’s Western and other allies, nonetheless, have sought to reassure Kyiv of their unwavering support. At a press conference on 7 November before a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Group of Seven (G7) coalition of highly developed nations, Japanese Foreign Minister Yōko Kamikawa stressed the importance of the G7 reaffirming its “unchanging commitment to strict sanctions against Russia and strong support for Ukraine”, particularly “as tensions increase in the Middle East”. In a statement following the meeting, the G7 emphasised that its “steadfast commitment to supporting Ukraine’s fight for its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity will never waver”.

# Democratic Republic of the Congo

## Expected Council Action

In December, 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 and head of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), Bintou Keita.

The Council is also expected to renew MONUSCO's mandate, which is set to expire on 20 December.

## Key Recent Developments

After a six-month lull in North Kivu, fighting reportedly resumed in October between the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) and allied militias on the one hand and the Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) on the other. The ceasefire facilitated in March by the ongoing regional initiatives under the auspices of the East African Community (EAC) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)—known as the Nairobi and Luanda processes, respectively—has been violated, and M23 has reportedly regained control of several areas that it had vacated. The EAC Regional Force (EACRF)—deployed in eastern DRC as part of the regional initiatives—also came under fire in the latest round of fighting. In October, a Ugandan convoy was targeted, injuring two soldiers, and a Kenyan soldier was killed in another attack. The M23 has accused Burundian forces of supporting armed groups and militias allied with the FARDC. Burundi denies the accusations, and an EAC statement refuted the claims against the Burundian contingent of the EACRF.

The latest round of fighting appears to be approaching Sake, a town 20 kilometres away from Goma, the regional capital, stoking fears that the city could fall to M23 forces. MONUSCO and the FARDC launched a joint operation on 3 November, codenamed Springbok, aimed at protecting Goma. The MONUSCO Force Commander, Otávio Rodrigues de Miranda Filho, said in a joint press briefing with FARDC officials on 8 November that they were taking a defensive approach for the moment but that the mission would shift to an offensive posture were Goma to be attacked.

The resumption of fighting seems to have increased tensions between the DRC and Rwanda. In his briefing to the Council on 17 October, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes, Huang Xia, said that “[t]he risk of a direct confrontation between the DRC and Rwanda, which continue to accuse each other of supporting enemy armed groups—M23, on the one hand, and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, on the other—remains real”. He added that “[t]he military build-up in both countries, the absence of direct high-level dialogue and the persistence of hate speech are all worrisome signs that we cannot ignore”.

The DRC is gearing up to hold elections on 20 December against the backdrop of these security developments. The president of the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), Denis Kadima, continues to insist that elections will be held on 20 December as scheduled despite the challenges, including the insecurity in eastern DRC. Congolese opposition parties have expressed concerns about the perceived lack of transparency and inclusivity of the electoral process and have questioned the integrity of state institutions, such as the CENI and the Supreme Court. They expressed particularly

serious doubts about the voter registration process and called for an external audit of the electoral register, which Kadima rejected, according to the Secretary-General's 21 September report. Kadima reportedly met all the presidential candidates on 13 November, before campaigning began, and recognised the need to improve CENI's image and enhance public trust in the electoral process. According to media reports, 26 candidates, including the incumbent, will be contesting the presidential elections. Representatives of five leading opposition groups reportedly met in South Africa recently to look at the possibility of fielding a single candidate.

The Congolese elections coincide with the MONUSCO mandate renewal in December. On 2 August, the Secretary-General submitted his report pursuant to resolution 2666 of 20 December 2022 with a proposal to reconfigure MONUSCO to facilitate the implementation of the joint revised transition plan agreed by the mission and the Congolese government, which supports 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 a 1 September letter to the president of the Security Council, the Congolese government requested that the UN start the mission's withdrawal before the end of this year. The letter was sent following an anti-MONUSCO protest that took place on 30 August in Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, during which at least 43 people were reportedly killed and 53 were injured in clashes with local authorities. On 16 October, the Council adopted a presidential statement expressing its “readiness to decide by the end of 2023 on the future of MONUSCO, its gradual, responsible and sustainable withdrawal and the concrete and realistic steps to be undertaken, as a matter of priority to implement this withdrawal”. The Council requested MONUSCO and the Congolese government to develop, by November, a comprehensive disengagement plan with a timetable for MONUSCO's progressive and orderly withdrawal, building on the revised transition plan and its four key benchmarks. At the time of writing, the disengagement plan had yet to be circulated to Council members.

On 8 December, the mandate of the EACRF is set to expire, and media reports quoted a Congolese government spokesperson as saying that “the EAC regional force must leave the DRC by December 8, as agreed, because it has not been able to resolve the problem, particularly that of the M23”. The DRC has already turned its attention towards the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which on 8 May decided to deploy its force to restore peace and stability in eastern DRC, known as the SADC Mission in DRC (SAMIDRC). On 4 November, SADC met in an extraordinary summit to provide strategic guidance on the deployment of SAMIDRC, according to a communiqué adopted at the end of the meeting.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 9 October, during its 54th session, the Human Rights Council (HRC) held an interactive dialogue on the reports of the High Commissioner (A/HRC/54/73) and the team of international experts on the situation of human rights (A/HRC/54/76) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In her statement, Deputy UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada Al-Nashif highlighted that the report of the High Commissioner, covering the period from 1 June 2022 to 31 May 2023, documented

**UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO** Security Council Resolution S/RES/2666 (20 December 2022) renewed MONUSCO's mandate until 20 December 2023. **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. **S/2023/691** (21 September 2023) was on MONUSCO. **Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2023/5** (16 October 2023) was on the situation in the DRC. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9427** (28 September 2023) was on the situation in the DRC.

# Democratic Republic of the Congo

5,135 instances of human rights violations and abuses, with North Kivu and Ituri being the most severely affected regions. Despite significant efforts by the authorities, Al-Nashif pointed out that the number of fatalities had increased compared to the previous reporting period. Emphasising the compounding effect of natural disasters and epidemics, she underscored that these violations have contributed to an “unprecedented” humanitarian crisis.

## Women, Peace and Security

The presidential statement adopted by the Security Council on 16 October condemned violence and human rights abuses by armed groups in the DRC, including sexual and gender-based violence, and encouraged the DRC authorities “to ensure the full, equal, effective and meaningful participation” of women as both candidates and voters in the elections scheduled for December.

On 6 November, the Informal Experts Group (IEG) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) met on the situation in the DRC. Keita briefed. It appears that Keita and Council members discussed issues such as the role of WPS in the transition process of MONUSCO, women's participation in the electoral process and the UN's engagement with DRC authorities and political parties to support women's safety during the elections in light of cases of harassment and violence against women in politics. It seems that Keita stressed, among other issues, food insecurity and the socioeconomic situation of women as factors exacerbating sexual and gender-based violence in the DRC. UN Women, as the IEG Secretariat, apparently recommended that, in the upcoming negotiations on MONUSCO's mandate renewal, the Council retain all WPS references present in resolution 2666, which in December 2022 renewed MONUSCO's mandate until 20 December 2023. It seems that UN Women also recommended that Council members consider incorporating language demanding the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all stages of peace processes, including in regional initiatives; stressing the importance of a gender-responsive transition process; and requesting the UN to regularly consult with women's civil society organisations across the DRC on all aspects of the transition.

## Sanctions-Related Developments

In December, the chair of the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang (Gabon), is expected to brief the Council on the committee's work. On 27 September, France, the UK, and the US jointly proposed designating one member of M23 and one member of the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) under the 1533 DRC sanctions regime. On 25 October, the committee approved their addition to the sanctions designation list. Several months ago, Rwanda also proposed individuals for designation, but it seems that Council members have not yet agreed to designate them.

## Key Issues and Options

The key issue for Council members in December is the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate. The mission's revised transition plan, the Secretary-General's report on its reconfiguration, and the detailed disengagement plan are likely to inform the upcoming mandate renewal negotiations. An option for Council members is to consider, in line with the Secretary-General's recommendations, the mission's possible withdrawal from South Kivu, where the security situation is relatively better, and to enhance its robust presence in North Kivu and Ituri, where there are acute security challenges. Depending on the detailed recommendations to be provided by the disengagement

plan, Council members may also consider how regional initiatives can be supported in full compliance with the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy.

The other key issue for Council members is the general elections in the DRC, which will take place on 20 December. Council members are likely to reiterate their call for peaceful, transparent, inclusive, and credible elections. They may also continue to encourage the Congolese authorities to ensure free civic space and call upon all parties to seek dialogue and consensus to resolve any election-related disputes.

The deteriorating security situation in eastern DRC continues to be a major concern, and Council members might be keen to learn more about the violation of the ceasefire in North Kivu and the escalating fighting between FARDC and allied militias on the one hand and M23 on the other. They may also express concerns about the increasing tensions between the DRC and Rwanda along the border and call on both countries to exercise restraint.

## Council Dynamics

Council members have been broadly supportive of implementing MONUSCO's transition plan in a phased and responsible manner, contingent on the improvement of the security situation on the ground. At the Council's last meeting on the situation in the DRC on 28 September, France, the penholder on the DRC, highlighted the central role of the Congolese authorities in the upcoming discussions on MONUSCO's orderly drawdown. The US raised doubts about the capacity of Congolese and regional security forces to address the security challenges in eastern DRC and stressed the need “to avoid endorsing greater support by MONUSCO for the EAC without appropriate safeguards to address human rights, accountability and command-and-control concerns”. The UK emphasised the need to “carefully consider the implications of MONUSCO's drawdown on the civilian population”, as “The consequences of a rushed departure would be severe”. Russia said that it was necessary to listen to the host country's views in the upcoming discussions on MONUSCO's drawdown while also underlining the need for the Council to be “guided primarily by rational considerations, taking into account the evolution of the situation on the ground and acting gradually and responsibly”. China also supported this approach. Similarly, the three African members (Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique, known as the A3) stressed “the need for close cooperation between the Congolese authorities and MONUSCO, as well as with all other relevant stakeholders, with a view to ensuring a smooth, orderly, progressive and coordinated withdrawal that guarantees the protection of civilians and the safety and security of the personnel of the Mission”.



# International Criminal Tribunals

## Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council is scheduled to hold its semi-annual debate on the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT). The President of the IRMCT, Judge Graciela Gatti Santana, and the Chief Prosecutor of the IRMCT, Serge Brammertz, are expected to brief during the debate and to meet with the Informal Working Group on Tribunals prior to that.

The term of the Chief Prosecutor and the IRMCT's operating period expire on 30 June 2024.

## Background and Key Recent Developments

The IRMCT—with branches in The Hague, the Netherlands, and Arusha, Tanzania—focuses on completing the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), which closed in December 2017 and December 2015, respectively. Since its establishment, the IRMCT's tasks have included hearing the remaining trials and appeals from the ICTY and the ICTR; locating and arresting the three remaining fugitives indicted by the ICTR; assisting national jurisdictions with requests related to prosecuting international crimes committed in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia; monitoring cases referred to national courts; enforcement of sentences; protection of witnesses and victims; and the preservation of archives.

The IRMCT was established in 2010 by resolution 1966, which said that “the Mechanism shall continue the jurisdiction, rights and obligations and essential functions of the ICTY and the ICTR” and that it “should be a small, temporary and efficient structure, whose functions and size will diminish over time, with a small number of staff commensurate with its reduced functions”.

Under resolution 1966, the IRMCT was mandated to operate for an initial period of four years and for subsequent periods of two years unless the Council decides otherwise. The Council most recently extended the IRMCT's operating period and Brammertz's term in resolution 2637, which was adopted on 22 June 2022 with 14 votes in favour and Russia abstaining. It contained new elements—including language urging member states to intensify cooperation to enforce sentences handed down by the ICTR, the ICTY, and the IRMCT—and welcomed the continuing support already provided by states in this regard. It called on the IRMCT, as part of its completion strategy, to provide options regarding the transfer of its remaining activities in due course. It also noted the prosecutor's confirmation in May 2022 of the deaths of two fugitives indicted by the ICTR and included new language noting that decisions on the relocation of persons who have been acquitted or completed their sentences should take into account, among other matters, the readiness of the state of origin to accept its nationals, the consent or any objections raised by the individuals to be relocated, and the availability of other relocation states. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 21 June 2022.)

The Council's last semi-annual debate on the IRMCT took place on 12 June. Brammertz and Gatti Santana briefed. In her briefing, Gatti Santana noted that the IRMCT's Appeals Chamber had recently handed down its last judgment regarding crimes committed during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the case Prosecutor v.

Jovica Stanišić and Franko Simatović and said “with that judgment, the ambitious journey of the [ICTY] has come to an end, insofar as the cases against all 161 persons indicted by that Tribunal have concluded”. Gatti Santana also updated Council members on the final case concerning core international crimes on the IRMCT's docket, the trial of Félicien Kabuga. In this regard, she highlighted the Trial Chamber's 6 June decision to continue the proceedings through an alternative finding procedure despite its finding that Kabuga is unfit to stand trial. She further mentioned “three main areas that require the Council's urgent attention and vigorous backing”: enforcement of sentences, the situation of acquitted or released persons relocated to Niger in December 2021, and “attempts to undermine our current work and the judgments issued by the ICTR, the [ICTY] and the [IRMCT]”.

Brammertz noted that under Gatti Santana's leadership the IRMCT “is actively planning its future as a true residual institution”, while emphasising that it still has “important work to do”. He mentioned that more than 1,000 fugitives have not yet been prosecuted in Rwanda and said that national prosecutors in the former Yugoslavia are still processing several thousand cases before observing that his office “has received more requests for assistance than ever before”. Brammertz also highlighted the 24 May arrest of Fulgence Kayishema, who was indicted for the April 1994 murders of more than 2,000 people in Rwanda, and commended the work of national authorities that led to the arrest.

On 7 August, the IRMCT's Appeals Chamber overturned the Trial Chamber's 6 June decision to continue proceedings against Kabuga using an alternative finding procedure, concluding that “neither the Statute nor the jurisprudence of the [IRMCT] and its predecessor tribunals allow for the conduct of an ‘alternative finding procedure’...in lieu of a trial”. On 8 September, the Trial Chamber stayed the proceedings against Kabuga indefinitely.

## Key Issues and Options

Continuing to monitor the work of the IRMCT and the implementation of its mandate is a key issue for the Council. Members could choose to use the closed format of the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals to have a frank discussion with Gatti Santana and Brammertz regarding the next phase of the IRMCT's operations. Members could also use this format to ask questions about whether there is anything the Council can do to help manage the three issues identified by Gatti Santana during her 12 June briefing.

## Council Dynamics

Council members generally have a positive assessment of the IRMCT and the progress it has made, with the exception of Russia. Russia has regularly criticised the appointment of Brammertz, who was the ICTY prosecutor from 2008 until its closure in 2017, and it abstained on resolutions reappointing him in 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2022. Russia was also consistently critical of the ICTY.

The negotiations on resolution 2637, which most recently extended Brammertz's term, were lengthy and difficult. An area of disagreement during the negotiations was how to characterise the conclusions of the 23 February 2022 report of the UN Office of



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## International Criminal Tribunals

Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) reviewing the methods and work of the IRMCT. Russia apparently proposed language noting that the IRMCT failed to implement all OIOS recommendations and suggested language calling on the OIOS to generate new recommendations on the evaluation of the IRMCT's methods and work pertaining to its closure, especially with a focus on staff reduction. Russia also apparently sought the inclusion of language expressing concern that the IRMCT had failed to demonstrate any visible reduction in its staff or budget. Most members did not support such language, however, and it was not added to the resolution.

Language regarding the importance of ensuring the rights of persons detained on the authority of the IRMCT—including those related to healthcare—was also contentious. At least two members were apparently in favour of deleting this text, but Russia opposed the deletion. Russia has repeatedly emphasised the importance of protecting persons detained by the IRMCT and maintaining their access to medical care, often by specifically referring to the case of Ratko Mladić.

Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang (Gabon) chairs the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals.

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## UNDOF (Golan)

### Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council is expected to extend the mandate of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), which expires on 31 December. Ahead of the mandate renewal, a representative of the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) is expected to brief Council members in closed consultations on the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on UNDOF, due on 1 December, and the most recent developments.

### Background and Key Recent Developments

UNDOF was established following the conclusion of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement (the 1974 agreement) between Israel and Syria, which ended the Yom Kippur War. Its mandate is to maintain the ceasefire between the parties and supervise the disengagement of Israeli and Syrian forces as well as the areas of separation (a demilitarised buffer zone) and limitation (where Israeli and Syrian troops and equipment are restricted) in the Golan.

On 29 June, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2689, renewing UNDOF's mandate for six months, until 31 December. The resolution called on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and prevent any breaches of the ceasefire and the area of separation. It further encouraged them "to take full advantage of UNDOF's liaison function regularly to address issues of mutual concern".

The Secretary-General's most recent report on UNDOF's activities, dated 26 September, noted that the ceasefire between Israel and Syria generally held during the reporting period of 21 May to 20 August. It said, however, that violations of the 1974 agreement persisted, observing that the overall security situation in UNDOF's area of operations remained volatile and raising concerns about the safety and security of the military and civilian personnel of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan (OGG), which is comprised of military observers from the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO).

The report added that UNDOF maintained its assessment that UN personnel in its area of operations faced a significant threat from "explosive remnants of war, including unexploded ordnance and mines, as well as a probable threat from the possible presence of sleeper cells of armed groups". It further observed that although the security situation in the northern and central parts of UNDOF's area of operations on the Bravo side (Syrian Golan) generally

remained calm, the southern sector continued to be volatile, with security incidents reportedly occurring in locations within the area of limitation, including along UNDOF patrol routes in Syria's south-western Daraa Governorate.

During the period covered by the Secretary-General's report, UNDOF observed the continued presence of Syrian armed forces within the area of separation as well as Israel's Iron Dome air defence system, armoured vehicles, artillery systems, and multiple rocket launcher systems in the area of limitation on the Alpha side (Israeli-occupied Golan). The presence of this military equipment and personnel in the areas of separation and limitation constitutes a violation of the 1974 agreement, noted the report.

The region has witnessed a sharp rise in hostilities following the 7 October attack against Israel by Hamas, the Palestinian armed group and de facto authority in Gaza, and the subsequent response from Israeli forces, including airstrikes and ground operations in the Gaza Strip. On 10 October, a number of mortars were reportedly fired from Syria towards the Golan, several of which crossed into Israeli territory, prompting retaliatory artillery strikes by Israel in Syria. According to media reports, on 25 October, in response to rockets fired from Syria targeting areas in Golan under Israeli control, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) struck military infrastructure belonging to the Syrian army in the city of Daraa, south-western Syria. As a result, eight Syrian soldiers died and seven others were injured, according to Syrian state media. A military installation was targeted again, allegedly by Israel, in Nawa in the western countryside of Daraa on 12 November, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a UK-based human rights monitoring organisation.

There have also been reports of instances in which missile strikes, allegedly conducted by Israel from the direction of Golan, targeted locations around Damascus and Aleppo. On 17 November, the Syrian army reportedly intercepted missile strikes targeting several locations around Damascus. According to a 26 November Reuters article, airstrikes conducted by Israel hit the Damascus airport earlier the same day, putting it out of service. On multiple occasions since 7 October, the Aleppo and Damascus airports have been subjected to attacks, allegedly conducted by Israel. Although it has not commented on the strikes, Israel has traditionally argued that it carries out airstrikes in Syria to disrupt Iranian supply lines to its proxy

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## UNDOF (Golan)

groups. In her briefing at the 28 November Council meeting on Syria, Deputy Special Envoy for Syria Najat Rochdi said that the air-strikes on the Damascus airport temporarily interrupted the operations of the UN's Humanitarian Air Service.

Amid rising tensions in the region, approximately 700 Hezbollah-linked fighters have been deployed in some areas in Quneitra and Rif Dimashq Governorate bordering the Golan, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Reportedly, these fighters were trained by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and come from different parts of the region, including Iraq, Syria, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). Since 7 October, Hezbollah and Israel have exchanged fire on multiple occasions, but these incidents have been largely limited to the Israel-Lebanon border. (For more, see the Lebanon brief in our November Monthly Forecast.)

On 28 November, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution titled "[T]he Syrian Golan" (A/78/L.10), which determined that "the continued occupation of the Syrian Golan and its de facto annexation constitute a stumbling block in the way of achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region". The resolution called on Israel to "resume the talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and to respect the commitments and undertakings reached during the previous talks". It further demanded that "Israel withdraw from all the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions". The resolution was adopted with 81 votes in favour, 8 against, and 62 abstentions.

### Key Issues and Options

A key priority for the Council in December is the renewal of UNDOF's mandate. A related issue is ensuring that UNDOF personnel are equipped with the necessary resources to fulfil the mission's mandate, along with maintaining the safety and security of peacekeeping personnel.

Another key issue is the challenges the mission faces in carrying out its mandate amidst continuing violations of the 1974 agreement by the parties, such as the restrictions on the movement and access of UNDOF personnel. Since early March 2020, the IDF have restricted the movement of UNDOF and OGG personnel through the Alpha gate at the Quneitra crossing, requiring advance notice of

the movement, thereby hindering the operational and administrative activities of the mission, according to the Secretary-General's 26 September report.

A related issue is the continuing hostilities in the region and the risk of wider escalation. Members may consider pursuing a press or presidential statement urging the parties to adhere to international law and their commitments under the 1974 agreement while expressing concern about the risk of escalation resulting from these violations and the potential danger they pose to the safety of peacekeepers.

At this month's consultations, Council members may be interested in receiving information from the DPO briefer on how the escalation of hostilities in the region has affected UNDOF's activities. They may also wish to receive updates regarding progress on UNDOF's return to the Bravo side. The military observers of OGG had to vacate the observation posts in 2014 owing to the deteriorating security situation in Syria.

### Council Dynamics

The unanimous adoption of resolution 2689 on 29 June, which reauthorised UNDOF's mandate for six months, illustrated that the Council remains united in its view that UNDOF plays an important role in regional stability. There was little disagreement among Council members during the negotiations, which were apparently straightforward, and no Council member felt that an explanation of vote was necessary following the adoption. Some Council members believe that the situation has turned into a protracted conflict owing to continued violations of the 1974 agreement by both sides.

Despite deep divisions in the Council regarding the Syria file and opposing positions by the UNDOF co-penholders—Russia and the US—about who holds sovereignty over the Golan, the two countries continue to consider UNDOF as a separate issue on which they agree. It seems that the antagonism between Russia and the US over the conflict in Ukraine has not affected their work on UNDOF; the difficult dynamics witnessed in other Council files were not evident during the negotiations on UNDOF's mandate in June.

It remains unclear whether and how the recent escalation of conflict in the region will affect the Council's work on the Golan file.

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## Yemen

### Expected Council Action

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

### Key Recent Developments

Talks continue between the Houthis rebel group and Saudi Arabia and are believed to be nearing a comprehensive agreement for a

long-term ceasefire. Saudi Arabia leads a military coalition that has supported Yemen's internationally recognised government during the more than eight-year war in Yemen. At the same time, regional developments and Houthi attacks against Israel since the outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas, the Palestinian armed group and de facto authority in Gaza, risk undermining Yemen's peace efforts.

Since 19 October, the Houthis have carried out repeated missile and uncrewed aerial vehicle (UAV) attacks targeting Israel, which so far have been intercepted by US and Israeli forces or have failed to cause damage. In the group's first public statement on 31 October

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN** Security Council Resolution S/RES/2707 (14 November 2023) renewed the Yemen assets freeze and travel ban sanctions until 15 November 2024 and the mandate of the Yemen Panel of Experts until 15 December 2024. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9473** (14 November 2023) was the adoption of resolution 2707 renewing the Yemen sanctions and contained explanations of vote by the UK and Russia.

# Yemen

confirming responsibility for the spate of attacks, Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sare'e said that the missile and drone attacks will continue "until Israel ceases its aggression" in Gaza. Other Houthi missile and drone attacks were reportedly conducted on 1 November, 6 November, and 9 November, and the Houthis shot down a US drone, which the group claimed on 8 October had been "carrying out hostile, monitoring, and spying operations in the Yemeni territorial waters".

On 14 November, Houthi leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi vowed in a televised speech to continue attacks on Israel and to target Israeli ships in the Red Sea. The threat was followed by Sare'e announcing that the Houthis had conducted additional ballistic missile and drone attacks. Israel said that same day that it used its Arrow aerial defence system to intercept a missile in the vicinity of the Red Sea after air raid sirens had sounded in the southern Israeli city of Eilat.

On 19 November, the Houthis seized a Bahamas-flagged cargo ship, called the *Galaxy Leader*, in the Red Sea and took its 25 crew members hostage. The Houthis released a video showing armed men jumping on the ship from a helicopter to capture the vessel. According to NYK, the Japanese company that operates the boat, the ship was carrying no cargo, adding that its crewmembers were from Bulgaria, Mexico, the Philippines, Romania, and Ukraine. Israel denied ownership of the vessel, stressing that it was British-owned and Japanese-operated. Media reports, however, said public shipping databases associated the ship's owners with Ray Car Carriers, founded by Abraham "Rami" Ungar, who is known as one of the richest men in Israel. Announcing the seizure, Sare'e said that all ships linked to or owned by Israelis would be targeted until the end of Israel's campaign against Hamas.

Grundberg has been keen to avoid conflating the regional developments with peace efforts in Yemen. In a statement on Grundberg's 15 November visit to Riyadh, the Special Envoy's office noted that during his meeting with the Saudi Ambassador to Yemen, Mohamed Al Jaber, who has been leading Saudi negotiations with the Houthis, the two "agreed on the importance of maintaining an enabling environment for continued constructive dialogue aimed at reaching an inclusive political settlement in Yemen". During consultations with Council members on 16 November, Grundberg reported progress in the Houthi-Saudi talks. He also indicated that following a possible agreement, his office would develop a roadmap, which would then guide the inter-Yemeni political process that the UN is expected to facilitate for a comprehensive resolution to the conflict.

On 26 November, armed assailants temporarily seized the commercial vessel, the *M/V Central Park*, linked to another Israeli company in the Gulf of Aden. A US naval vessel responding to the incident detained the five assailants after they debarked from the ship and tried to escape in a small boat. According to a US statement, "two ballistic missiles were fired from Houthi controlled areas in Yemen towards the general location" of the ships after the US intervention but did not cause any damage or injuries. A US military spokesperson said later that the detained attackers of the *M/V Central Park* appeared to be Somali.

On 14 November, the Security Council adopted resolution 2707, renewing the Yemen assets freeze and travel ban sanctions until 15 November 2024 and the mandate of the Yemen Panel of

Experts until 15 December 2024.

## Key Issues and Options

A key issue is how the Council can support ongoing peace talks and efforts to establish a formal ceasefire and an inter-Yemeni political process under UN auspices. Issues under negotiation in the Houthi-Saudi talks include the use of Yemen's resources and associated revenues to pay the salaries of public employees in Houthi-held territory; the opening of roads and ports in Yemen; and the withdrawal of foreign military personnel from the country. Other key issues related to the political process are the fragile relations between the factions that form the Yemeni government's Presidential Leadership Council and how a political process should address some PLC members' calls for a separate southern Yemeni state.

An emerging key concern is the risk that the war in Gaza and Houthi attacks against Israel, including the elevated threats to international shipping in the Red Sea, will undermine progress in the Yemen peace talks.

The humanitarian situation in Yemen remains a key issue. This includes a funding shortage for relief efforts, which is forcing humanitarian agencies to scale back programmes. As at 22 November, the 2023 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan, which calls for \$4.344 billion, was only 36.2 percent funded. Addressing Yemen's economic conditions is a related key issue to mitigate the country's humanitarian needs.

Members may reiterate calls for 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. They could also highlight worries about policies that have fuelled socioeconomic challenges and tensions: Houthi drone attacks on oil terminals last year and restrictions on inter-Yemeni trade have caused significant revenue shortages for the government, which have hindered it from providing services.

## Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the different mediation efforts. Members have 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. Regarding last month's Yemen sanctions renewal, Council members agreed to a technical rollover of the sanctions regime to give space for the Houthi-Saudi peace talks and avoid disrupting the process. This was the same approach—agreeing to a technical rollover—Council members took earlier this year when the Council adopted resolution 2675 in February, which extended the Yemen sanctions regime for nine months, and resolution 2691, which renewed the mandate of UNMHA for one year in July.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been a leading member of the Saudi Arabia-led coalition and takes a keen interest in how the Council addresses the situation in Yemen. (The December briefing will be the last scheduled Council meeting on Yemen before the UAE's two-year Council term ends.) Russia often objects to language in Council products that it perceives as too critical of the Houthis or

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## Yemen

not balanced. For Russia, a long-standing red line has been identifying Iran as supplying the Houthis with arms in the Council's Yemen products. Since 2021, the US has had a Special Envoy for Yemen, Timothy Lenderking, who has sought to support UN and regional mediation efforts. He undertook a new round of shuttle diplomacy in the Gulf region in November, seeking to emphasise the current opportunity for Yemenis to end the country's conflict, while warning of the risks that wider regional conflict poses to peace in Yemen, according to a State Department statement.

Japan has a strong concern over the Houthis' capture of the *Galaxy Leader*, which is operated by a Japanese company. A statement on 28 November on the situation in Israel and Gaza by the G7, which includes France, Japan, the UK, and the US, called on the Houthis "to immediately cease attacks on civilians and threats to international shipping lanes and commercial vessels and release the *M/V Galaxy Leader* and its crew".

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

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## UNOCA (Central Africa)

### Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council will hold a briefing and consultations on the Secretary-General's semi-annual report on the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the implementation of the UN's regional strategy to combat the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Special Representative and head of UNOCA Abdou Abarry is expected to brief.

The mandate of UNOCA expires on 31 August 2024.

### Key Recent Developments

Following a controversial election in Gabon (an elected Security Council member from 2022-2023) in August, military leaders staged a coup overthrowing President Ali Bongo Ondimba, who had ruled the country since 2009. General Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, one of the coup leaders, was inaugurated as the "transitional president" of the Gabonese Republic on 4 September. During the inauguration, he expressed his commitment to restoring constitutional order and appointed a civilian prime minister. According to media reports, the Gabonese military leaders announced plans to hold elections in August 2025, a process that they say will be approved through a national dialogue involving civil society groups and other stakeholders. They have also indicated that they would propose a new constitution at the end of October 2024, which will be submitted for a referendum in November-December 2024.

Following the coup, Abarry met with Oligui Nguema and Ondimba, who was later released from house arrest. (Ondimba's wife has reportedly been charged with money laundering, forgery, and falsification of records.) Gabon was the chair of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) when the coup took place; ECCAS suspended Gabon from all activities of the organisation but stopped short of imposing sanctions on the country. The regional leaders also decided to move the ECCAS headquarters temporarily from Libreville to Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, until the restoration of constitutional order. The president of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, who was the Vice-Chair of ECCAS, assumed the rotating chairmanship of the organisation, and the president of the Central African Republic (CAR), Faustin-Archange Touadéra, was appointed as its facilitator to engage with the Gabonese military leaders with the goal of restoring constitutional

order. Recently, Oligui Nguema has been on a regional tour to request that ECCAS members allow Gabon back into the regional fold.

On 31 August, the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) decided to suspend Gabon from all activities of the AU and its organs and institutions until constitutional order is restored. On 23 October, the AUPSC welcomed the efforts by ECCAS and the latest developments in Gabon, namely the appointment of a civilian prime minister and the formation of a transitional government. The AUPSC urged the members of the transitional government to refrain from presenting their candidatures for the elections to be held at the end of the transition period and underscored the need to ensure inclusive constitutional and institutional reform processes by promoting the participation of all stakeholders, including women and youth.

In June, members of the National Transitional Council in Chad adopted a new constitution to pave the way for the return of constitutional order in that country, which has been undergoing transition following the death of former president Idriss Déby in April 2021. A referendum on the new constitution is expected to be held in December. On 20 September, a high-level event on "The return to constitutional order in Chad: challenges and perspectives" was held in New York on the margins of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly; bilateral, regional, and international partners participated in the event. In a joint statement at the end of the meeting, the participants took note of the evolution of the transition in Chad and reiterated their support for the restoration of constitutional order within the prescribed time frame through a peaceful approach that includes women, youth, and marginalised groups.

In October 2022, ECCAS appointed the president of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Félix Tshisekedi, to be the facilitator of the Chadian political transition process. On 2 May, Tshisekedi met with Succès Masra, the leader of a Chadian opposition group known as the Transformers, in Kinshasa to discuss the political transition in Chad. Masra fled Chad last year after the military government suspended his party and six others following protests against the military government's decision to extend the transition. On 1 November, Tshisekedi announced an agreement between the military government and the Transformers in Kinshasa that allowed Masra to return to the country on 3 November. Masra called for reconciliation at a rally in N'Djamena on 19 November, but other

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UN DOCUMENTS ON UNOCA Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2019/10 (12 September 2019) expressed the Council's full support for UNOCA Secretary-General's Report S/2023/389 (31 May 2023) was the semi-annual report on UNOCA Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9338 (5 June 2023) was a meeting on the situation in Central Africa.



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## UNOCA (Central Africa)

Chadian opposition groups that remain in exile reportedly rejected the agreement and accused Masra of collaborating with the transitional government.

In Cameroon, the security situation remains a concern in the Anglophone northwest and southwest regions. According to media reports, several people were killed in recent fighting in these areas. The Secretary-General strongly condemned attacks on civilians and urged all Cameroonian stakeholders to work towards a political solution to the crisis in these regions. In a 20 January statement following several months of secret talks reportedly held in Toronto and other locations in Québec, Canadian Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly welcomed an agreement between the Cameroonian government and parties from the Anglophone regions to find a negotiated solution to the long-standing conflict. However, media reports quoted Cameroonian government spokesperson René Emmanuel Sadi as saying that his government “has never entrusted any country with the role of facilitator or mediator”. Cameroon is expected to hold general elections in 2025, and the country’s political elites appear to be competing to succeed President Paul Biya, who has been in power since 1982. Biya reportedly reshuffled his senior military personnel following the coup in neighbouring Gabon in August.

### Key Issues and Options

The political and security situations in several parts of Central Africa continue to be a key concern for the Council. Council members are likely to be interested in hearing Abarry’s assessment of developments in Gabon following the coup and the political transition in Chad. Additionally, they may be keen to understand the regional implications of the fighting in Sudan and its impact on the situation

in Chad and the CAR.

The other major issue relates to the elections that are taking place in countries in the region in 2023. Of particular interest to Council members could be the elections in the DRC in December and Chad in 2024.

The continued threat of terrorism in the Lake Chad basin and maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea also remain matters of concern.

An option for Council members is to try to conclude the negotiations on the draft presidential statement on UNOCA that has been lingering for more than a year.

### Council Dynamics

Council members support a holistic regional approach to addressing the peace and security challenges in Central Africa, based on cooperation between UNOCA and the various regional mechanisms. They tend to underscore challenges in the region related to: political transitions; humanitarian crises, including the rising number of refugees and internally displaced persons; the threats posed by terrorism and violent extremism; and the adverse effects of climate change. Some members also continue to raise concerns about the destabilising role of the Wagner Group, a Russian private security company, and its reported involvement in human rights abuses in the region, particularly in the CAR.

It seems that there have been repeated attempts to revive the discussions on the draft presidential statement on UNOCA that was initiated last year; however, Council members have not yet been able to build the necessary consensus on the text. Differences remain regarding the language on climate, peace, and security.

Gabon and the UK are the co-penholders on UNOCA.

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## South Sudan

### Expected Council Action

In December, 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 December. Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang (Gabon), chair of the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee, is expected to brief on the committee’s work. Consultations will follow the briefing.

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. (Central 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 outlined 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 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 July to 30 September, was released on 23 October. The report noted that lack of progress towards a permanent constitution and transitional security arrangements remain the most critical pending issues. During the period covered by the report, deployment of Phase I of the Necessary Unified Forces (NUF) was not completed, and the Phase II training, scheduled to start in November 2022, had not commenced. The unification of forces remains a key component of the security apparatus required for holding elections and guaranteeing the overall security of the country, the report added.

On 3 November, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir Mayardit issued presidential decrees on the commencement of the process to reconstitute South Sudan’s National Constitutional Review Commission, National Elections Commission and the Political Parties’ Council. In a 9 November joint statement, the African Union

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UN DOCUMENT 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

Mission in South Sudan (AUMISS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and UNMISS welcomed the signing of the presidential decrees, calling it a critical development. The statement called on the parties to the R-ARCSS to engage in immediate dialogue to resolve the remaining outstanding issues and on the South Sudanese government to disburse the necessary resources to ensure the institutional readiness of the reconstituted entities. The statement added that such efforts must be complemented by immediate deployment of the NUF to facilitate the peaceful completion of the transition.

On 16 November, the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) held a meeting on the situation in South Sudan. In his remarks at the meeting, Special Representative and head of UNMISS Nicholas Haysom noted that despite the passage of critical legislation, the timelines set out in the roadmap remain behind schedule. He added that continuing security and political tensions across the country have the potential to intensify as the electoral date comes closer. He further noted that the country has recently witnessed a “spate of military defections which threatens to undermine the much-needed trust between the parties”. In light of the contrasting statements on election preparedness made by the parties to the R-ARCSS, he said, efforts need to be made to achieve consensus on the conditions that are required in order for elections to be held. While Kiir maintains that the electoral timeline will remain the same, members of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-in-Opposition have expressed concerns about the lack of necessary preparations.

At the AUPSC meeting, Haysom also highlighted the impact of the conflict in Sudan on the increasingly dire humanitarian situation in South Sudan. He said that the “situation in some border areas is shifting from a humanitarian challenge to a security crisis as host, returnee and refugee populations contend for diminishing aid”.

According to data published by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, as at 15 November, 368,880 people have crossed into South Sudan since the outbreak of fighting in Sudan on 15 April, including 50,947 Sudanese refugees, 3,446 non-Sudanese refugees, and 314,487 refugee returnees.

Intercommunal and subnational violence persists in many areas of the country. According to the 26 September quarterly brief on violence affecting civilians (covering April to June), UNMISS’ Human Rights Division documented 222 incidents of violence affecting 871 civilians. During the reporting period, the proportion of violent incidents increased by 14 percent (from 194 to 222) and incidents related to conflict-related sexual violence increased by 107 percent (from 14 to 29) over the previous quarter (January to March).

At the time of writing, a visit to South Sudan by members of the Informal Experts Group (IEG) on Women, Peace and Security was expected to take place from 11 to 14 December.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 5 October, the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan—which was established by the Human Rights Council in 2016—released a report describing incidents relating to “systematic narrowing and regression in civic space, a singular lack of political tolerance and dissent, as well as the ongoing repression of journalists, civil society actors and human rights defenders, and political actors”. The report added that the state of “pervasive impunity” in the country has further contributed to the severe constriction of democratic space.

In a 10 October statement, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Paula Gaviria Betancur, expressed disappointment regarding the decision of the South Sudanese government to postpone her planned visit to the country, scheduled to take place from 9 October to 20 October. Betancur said that “[c]iting the recent [5 October] South Sudan Commission on Human Rights report on civic space, and the UN Secretary-General’s report on ‘Cooperation with the UN, its representatives, and mechanisms in the field of human rights’, [released on 14 September 2022] as reasons for postponement sends the wrong message at a time when the protection of internally displaced persons in the country requires engagement of all humanitarian and development partners as well as the authorities to realise their human rights”.

## Sanctions-Related Developments

On 17 November, the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee held informal consultations to receive a briefing from the Panel of Experts assisting the committee’s work on its interim report, which was circulated to Council members on 3 November.

Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang (Gabon), chair of the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee, and some of the committee members visited South Sudan from 21 to 28 October.

## Key Issues and Options

An ongoing concern for the Council is the significant political and security 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.

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.

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 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.)

The humanitarian situation in South Sudan remains a key issue. According to OCHA’s 2023 South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), 9.4 million people—almost 76 percent of the country’s population—require humanitarian assistance in 2023, including 2.2 million women and 4.9 million children. At the same time, a funding shortage for relief efforts is forcing humanitarian agencies to prioritise activities and suspend programmes in some cases. As at 19 November, South Sudan’s 2023 HRP, requiring \$2.05 billion, was 48.2% funded.

The high incidence of attacks on humanitarian workers and looting of humanitarian assets in recent months has been a matter of concern for Council members. At the time of writing, 28 aid workers have died and 44 have been injured in South Sudan in 2023 as a result of deliberate acts of violence perpetrated against them, according to data released by the Aid Worker Security Database, a compilation of reports on major security incidents against aid workers.

Council members could seek regular briefings on these and other related issues from OCHA.

The impact of the conflict in neighbouring Sudan on the humanitarian and political situations in South Sudan remains a matter of concern for Council members.

# South Sudan

## 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, Russia maintains that

the decision to extend the transitional period until February 2025 was necessary.

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.

## Briefing by the Outgoing Chairs of the Security Council's Subsidiary Bodies

### Expected Council Action

As is customary in December, the outgoing chairs of the Council's subsidiary bodies are expected to provide a briefing on their experiences. The representatives of the five members completing their two-year terms on the Council at the end of 2023 and the subsidiary bodies they each chaired are:

- Ambassador Harold Adlai Agyeman (Ghana)—the 2127 Central African Republic (CAR) Sanctions Committee, the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, and the Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations;
  - Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang (Gabon)—the 1533 Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Sanctions Committee, the 2653 Haiti Sanctions Committee, the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals, and the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee;
  - Ambassador Ferit Hoxha (Albania)—the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, the 1518 Iraq Sanctions Committee, the 1636 Lebanon Sanctions Committee, and the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee; and
  - Ambassador Lana Zaki Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates)—the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee; the 2048 Guinea-Bissau Sanctions Committee; and the 1566 Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.
- Brazil's permanent representative did not chair any subsidiary bodies.

### Background

The practice of briefings by the outgoing chairs of subsidiary bodies was established during the Colombian presidency of the Council in December 2002. It is considered an important aspect of promoting transparency in the work of the sanctions committees and working groups. Since not all subsidiary bodies produce an annual report, this December briefing has also served over the years as a means of creating a publicly accessible institutional memory of these bodies' activities.

### Key Recent Developments

At this briefing, the chairs will be able to review developments within their committee or working group during their two-year term, assess their experience, suggest recommendations for improvements, and provide advice to their respective successors.

Briefing on the activities of the [2127 CAR Sanctions Committee](#),

Ambassador Agyeman is likely to highlight his visit in June to the CAR to discuss with authorities in Bangui the implementation of the sanctions regime. He could mention the adoption of resolution 2693 of 27 July 2023 to lift the notification requirements imposed on CAR under the regime. Agyeman may, however, note that since then, the appointment of members of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2127 Sanctions Committee remains pending because of a request by a Council member to place the appointments on hold. As chair of the [1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee](#), Agyeman may address some of the committee's recent discussions on the humanitarian and security aspects of the fighting, since 15 April, between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, a paramilitary group in Sudan. Meanwhile, it seems that the [Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations](#) has been relatively inactive over the past two years.

Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang chaired four committees during Gabon's Council term. During his briefing, Biang is likely to describe his experience serving as the inaugural chair of the [2653 Haiti Sanctions Committee](#), which resolution 2653 established in October 2022. He may describe his efforts to draft and adopt the committee's internal guidelines. He might also mention the field visit he undertook to Haiti and the Dominican Republic from 12 to 16 June to gain first-hand insight into the situation on the ground.

As chair of the [1533 DRC Sanctions Committee](#), Biang may refer to his visit to the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda in November 2022 and the discussions he held with the relevant authorities of those countries on the committee's work. He may also mention the adoption of resolution 2667 on 20 December 2022, lifting the notification requirements imposed on the DRC under the sanctions regime. In the context of the situation in eastern DRC, he may allude to the decision by the sanctions committee to add two individuals to the sanctions designation list. As chair of the [2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee](#), Biang visited South Sudan from 21 to 28 October along with other committee members. Among other activities, he could note that the 2206 Committee received two briefings from Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba in July 2022 and October 2023.

Biang has also chaired the [Informal Working Group on International Tribunals](#). He might describe the Working Group's meetings with the president and prosecutor of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) ahead of their

**N DOCUMENTS ON SUBSIDIARY BODIES Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9218** (12 December 2022) was a briefing by the outgoing chairs of the Security Council subsidiary bodies. **Other S/2017/507** (30 August 2017) was a note by the President of the Security Council containing the compendium of the Council's working methods.

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## Briefing by the Outgoing Chairs of the Security Council's Subsidiary Bodies

semi-annual briefings to the Council in June and December. On 22 June 2022, the Council adopted resolution 2637, which was drafted by Gabon and extended Serge Brammertz's term as prosecutor of the IRMCT until 30 June 2024, which Biang may also highlight.

As part of his briefing, Ambassador Ferit Hoxha is expected to cover the activities of the [Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions \(IWG\)](#) over the last two years. The IWG met every two months or so, holding five meetings in 2022 and five meetings so far in 2023. It also adopted its first annual report in December 2022, which covers the activities of the IWG in 2022 and includes an annex with selected indicators on the implementation of Note 507 and subsequent notes on the Council's working methods. The IWG has also incorporated into its agenda regular discussions on the implementation of Note 507 and penholders. So far, the IWG has adopted two 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. Members are currently negotiating a draft presidential note on penholders.

Hoxha could mention meetings that the [2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee](#) held during the past two years, including in May on the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM), which supports the implementation of the targeted arms embargo by monitoring and inspecting vessels sailing to Yemeni ports that are not under the government's control, and a joint meeting in December 2022 with the Al-Shabaab Sanctions Committee on arms smuggling. He could note, among other issues, the committee's designations in September and October 2022 of three additional individuals on the Yemen sanctions list. It seems that the [1518 Iraq Sanctions Committee](#) and the [1636 Lebanon Sanctions Committee](#), which Hoxha also chairs, have remained dormant.

In briefing on her experience chairing since January the [1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee \(CTC\)](#), Ambassador Nusseibeh may mention the ongoing negotiations regarding the development of the non-binding principles referred to in the Delhi Declaration. (The "Delhi Declaration on countering the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes" was adopted during a special session of the CTC that was held in India in October 2022. Among other matters, it expressed an intention to develop, with support from the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, a set of

non-binding guiding principles to assist member states to counter the threat posed by the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes.) She may also refer to meetings held by the CTC this year, such as the 31 August open briefing on border control and security in the context of counter-terrorism.

The [2048 Guinea-Bissau Sanctions Committee](#) met once during Nusseibeh's chairmanship. The committee meeting, which was held in March and was the first since 2020, allowed it to hear about recent developments and the current situation in Guinea-Bissau, including the political situation, from Guinea-Bissau's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Samba Sané, and UN Assistant Secretary-General for Africa Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee. The [1566 Working Group on Counter-Terrorism](#), which Nusseibeh also chaired, remained dormant in 2022 and 2023.

### Council Dynamics

After the annual Security Council elections were moved forward from October to June in 2016, there have been significant changes in how chairs of the Council's subsidiary bodies are appointed. In July 2016, Council members agreed on a presidential note concerning the preparation of newly elected members during the transitional period between the election and the beginning of their term, including the selection and preparation of chairs of subsidiary bodies. The note established a more consultative process for the chairs' appointment, co-led by a permanent member and the chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions (IWG), and stipulated that the appointments should be completed by 1 October.

It seems that an agreement was reached in the second half of October on the appointment of next year's chairmanships. This would be the soonest that the chairs' appointments have been agreed to since the July 2016 note. It follows last year's delay in naming subsidiary body chairs, which took until the end of January 2023.

Elected members chair all sanctions committees and other formal and informal subsidiary bodies of the Council. While many elected members find the chairing of subsidiary bodies rewarding, there has from time to time been a suggestion to have permanent members share the responsibility of chairing these bodies.



# Small Arms and Light Weapons

## Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council will hold an open debate on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). The meeting will take place based on the Secretary-General's biennial report on SALW pursuant to resolution 2220 of 22 May 2015. Ecuador is expected to circulate a concept note to help guide the debate.

## Key Recent Developments

Two recent Council members, Kenya and Mexico, which served in 2021–2022, facilitated various discussions on SALW and advocated the integration of SALW-related matters in the Council's country-specific and thematic work.

On 6 October 2021, Kenya convened a briefing on the threat posed by the illicit flow of SALW in peace operations as one of the signature events of its Council presidency that month. UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu briefed the Council on the Secretary-General's seventh biennial report on SALW, submitted pursuant to resolution 2220. She said, "In contexts where UN peace operations have been mandated, illicit flows and the easy availability of arms can exacerbate and sustain conflict dynamics, render arms embargoes ineffective, endanger peacekeepers, humanitarian workers, and local populations, and complicate the implementation of peace agreements." Nakamitsu noted that arms-related provisions are incorporated in the mandates of UN peace operations deployed in Abyei, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Libya, Mali, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Yemen.

On 22 November 2021, Mexico convened a ministerial-level open debate to discuss "The impact of the diversion and trafficking of arms on peace and security". This open debate built upon the virtual Arria-formula meeting that Mexico held on 16 September 2021 on the threat to international peace and security posed by the illicit trade in SALW. Robin Geiss, director of the UN Institute for Disarmament Research, and María Pía Devoto, member of the Control Arms Governance Board, briefed the Council during the open debate. The meeting focused on how the unrestricted flow of weapons continued to fuel violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. It also considered efforts to address SALW in the context of conflict prevention and the implementation of indicator 16.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, including through the reduction of the illicit flow of SALW. Additionally, the meeting explored the link between illicit financial flows and the illegal trade in SALW as a source of finance for non-state actors.

On 22 December 2021, the Council adopted resolution 2616, proposed by Mexico, which addressed the illicit transfer, destabilising accumulation, and diversion of arms and related materials in violation of Council-mandated arms embargoes. The resolution expressed the Council's intention to consider whether and how UN peace operations mandates "could support relevant national authorities in combating the illicit transfer and diversion of arms in violation of the arms embargoes in their respective areas of operation" during

mandate renewals. It also emphasised that when the Council evaluated the possible lifting of an arms embargo, it would consider the capacity of states under the arms embargo to prevent its existing arms and ammunition stockpiles from being diverted to the illicit market.

## Key Issues and Options

A key issue for members to consider at the open debate is how to address the spread of SALW as a threat to international peace and security. In particular, they may analyse this issue in the context of the Secretary-General's *A New Agenda for Peace*, which encourages member states "to develop and implement regional and subregional instruments, road maps and action plans to address region-specific challenges related to the diversion of small arms and light weapons and ammunition, as well as their proliferation and misuse, in accordance with international arms control treaties and political frameworks".

Council members may also be guided by the specific recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's latest biennial report, which include:

- encouraging member states to work with UN country teams to integrate SALW considerations into the country analysis and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks;
- encouraging the Council to consider systematically and comprehensively good practices related to weapons and ammunition management in relevant decisions;
- encouraging peace operations to integrate conventional arms and ammunition-related risks in conflict analysis, prevention, management, and resolution efforts;
- encouraging the Council to continue seeking reports from member states on the steps that they have taken to implement arms embargoes and on their efforts to cooperate and share information with the panels of experts; and
- universalising relevant legally binding instruments, such as the Firearms Protocol and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), and the implementation of politically binding instruments, such as the Programme of Action on Small Arms and the International Tracing Instrument.

A possible option for Council members is to consider adopting a presidential statement in response to some of the recommendations of the Secretary-General's report that are relevant to the work of the Council, building on resolution 2616.

## Council Dynamics

Several members are supportive of the Council's deliberations on SALW, recognising the Council's responsibility to address the issue as a driver of conflict. They also support integrating SALW issues into the Council's consideration of country-specific situations and other thematic issues, including children and armed conflict; women, peace and security; climate change; and sustainable development.

Among the current elected members, SALW seems to be a priority issue for Ecuador, given the challenge that these pose to its own region. On the other hand, other members tend to underscore the

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON SMALL ARMS** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2616 (22 December 2021) was on addressing the illicit transfer, destabilising accumulation, and diversion of arms and related materials in violation of Council-mandated arms embargoes. S/RES/2220 (22 May 2015) contained provisions aimed at strengthening UN coordination and action on SALW, promoting effective implementation of UN arms embargoes, and supporting the ATT. S/RES/2117 (26 September 2013) was the first thematic resolution on SALW adopted by the Council, focusing on their illicit transfer, destabilising accumulation, and misuse. **Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2020/5** (11 March 2020) recognised the impact and challenges posed by the illicit trade in and diversion of SALW in Africa, enabling terrorist groups to considerably increase their armed capabilities. **Secretary-General's Report S/2023/823** (1 November 2023) was the seventh biennial report on SALW. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.8909** (22 November 2021) was a ministerial-level open debate on the impact of the diversion and trafficking of arms on peace and security.

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## Small Arms and Light Weapons

primary role and responsibility of national governments in handling the issue. Russia, in particular, maintains that the General Assembly is the most appropriate place for discussion of SALW issues and opposes attempts to link them to other thematic topics. It does, however, appear to be amenable to discussing SALW in relation to peacekeeping, arms embargoes, security sector reform, disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration.

The ATT and the repeated call for all states to ratify and accede to the treaty are contentious issues. Among Council members, Ecuador,

Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and the US are not parties to the treaty, and some of these members tend to oppose references to the ATT in Council products.

Past negotiations on SALW have been controversial. Six Council members abstained (Angola, Chad, China, Nigeria, Russia, Venezuela) on the adoption of resolution 2220 because the text did not include language critical of the transfer of SALW to non-state actors. Three Council members (China, India, Russia) also abstained on the adoption of resolution 2616.

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## Libya

### Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council will hold its bimonthly briefing on the situation in Libya. Special Representative and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Abdoulaye Bathily will brief the Council on recent political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country and the Secretary-General's latest report on UNSMIL.

### Key Recent Developments

Two years have passed since the indefinite postponement of the Libyan national elections that were planned for December 2021. The political impasse continues between the UN-recognised Government of National Unity (GNU), based in Tripoli and led by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah, and the eastern-based Government of National Stability (GNS), led by Prime Minister Osama Hamad and aligned with the House of Representatives (HoR) and the self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) under the command of General Khalifa Haftar. The prolonged stalemate between the rival governments is a key driver of Libya's political, security, and economic instability.

In this context, both the UN and national actors have concentrated recent efforts on facilitating agreement on a new roadmap for national elections to unify the country's divided government. In March, the HoR and the GNU-aligned High State Council (HSC) established a "joint 6+6 committee"—composed of six representatives from each body—to draft electoral laws to enable elections. On 7 June, the committee announced that it had reached agreement on draft legislation, which the HoR and HSC subsequently approved.

The proposed legislation proved to be controversial, with various political factions contesting several of its provisions and calling for revisions. On 29 September, the 6+6 committee submitted to the HoR an amended version of the draft legislation, which the HoR approved on 2 October. On 6 October, however, HSC President Mohamed Takala—who is considered a political ally of Dbeibah—said that the HSC had rejected the amended legislation and withdrawn from the 6+6 committee. This assertion was reportedly denied by other HSC members.

In a 12 October statement, UNSMIL said that it had completed a "technical review" of the amended legislation, which it described as

a "working basis" for holding elections while finding that it still contained "[c]ontentious issues that need to be addressed and resolved through a political settlement". The controversial provisions include:

- mandating a second round of presidential elections even if one candidate receives a majority of votes in the first round;
- making the holding of parliamentary elections contingent on the success of the presidential elections; and
- establishing a unified interim government to organise elections.

At the Council's 16 October briefing on Libya, Bathily praised the amended legislation for incorporating some technical revisions proposed by UNSMIL and Libya's High National Elections Commission to make it possible to hold the elections, but he reiterated the need for stakeholders to reach a compromise on the outstanding political issues. The most contentious of these remains the establishment of a unified interim government to organise elections, which Bathily said is necessary for "creating a level playing field for all candidates" but must be the consensual outcome of "political negotiations amongst major players". He said that HSC's rejection of the amended legislation "risks obstructing the electoral process" and urged the body to renounce that position. At the same time, he cautioned against the unilateral appointment of an interim government, which he said could trigger violent conflict. In this context, Bathily reiterated his call for all stakeholders to agree on a binding political settlement for "a peaceful electoral process, the backbone of which will be a unified Government able to lead Libya to elections".

Since then, Bathily has continued to consult with national actors. In a 23 November statement, UNSMIL announced that Bathily had invited key Libyan institutional stakeholders to a meeting to reach a settlement on the politically contested electoral issues. To this end, the statement said that Bathily had requested the HoR, HSC, LNA, and Presidential Council to designate representatives to attend a preparatory meeting to discuss the date, venue, and agenda of the meeting of their principals. Following this announcement, the embassies of France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and the US to Libya issued a joint statement welcoming Bathily's invitation and urging the parties to "seize this opportunity to set Libya on the path to long-term stability". On 27 November, however, the HoR issued a statement expressing their disappointment that the GNS—which the UN

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA** [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2702](#) (30 October 2023) extended UNSMIL's mandate until 31 October 2024. [Secretary-General's Report S/2022/632](#) (19 August 2022) covered developments in Libya between 20 May and 19 August 2022. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9438](#) (16 October 2023) was on Libya. [Security Council Press Statement SC/15394](#) (23 August 2023) reaffirmed Council members' strong commitment to an inclusive, Libyan-led and Libyan-owned political process, facilitated by the UN, which builds on progress achieved in negotiations thus far and addresses the issues of who will govern the country through elections.

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## Libya

does not officially recognise—had not been invited to the meeting and reportedly reiterating its “rejection of any political dialogue or agreement failing to respect the Libyan will and elected institutions”.

On the security track, the 2020 ceasefire agreement has continued to hold despite sporadic clashes in recent months. In August, a conflict between two armed groups affiliated with different factions of the GNU led to violence in Tripoli, reportedly resulting in at least 55 people being killed. In October, the LNA’s attempt to arrest Al-Mahdi Al-Barghathi—the former Minister of Defence in the Government of National Accord, the predecessor to the GNU—led to armed clashes and several casualties in Benghazi. Most recently, forces associated with the GNU launched a military operation in November around the western city of Zuwara, a region inhabited by the Amazigh—Libya’s largest ethnic minority—that is mainly governed by the Amazigh Supreme Council (ASC), as well as some Arab militias. The GNU described the operation as a mission to secure the Ras Ijdir border crossing to Tunisia, which has allegedly been the site of illicit smuggling operations, but the ASC warned of destabilising consequences, and the GNS accused the GNU of “trying to impose its control over the country by force under the pretext of imposing security”. Some independent analysts have cited control over the illicit economic activities taking place at the border crossing as the main cause of the dispute.

Regarding the humanitarian situation, recovery and reconstruction efforts continue following the catastrophic damage wreaked by Storm Daniel, which hit the eastern city of Derna in September. According to OCHA’s latest available numbers as at 31 October, 4,300 people died in the storm, more than 8,000 people are still missing, and 43,400 people remain displaced. In a 2 October statement, UNSMIL cautioned against “the emergence of unilateral and competing initiatives from various Libyan actors and institutions” on reconstruction, instead calling for a “unified national mechanism” to coordinate efforts. The Council echoed this call in resolution 2702 of 30 October, which most recently renewed UNSMIL’s mandate, underscoring the need for “the reconstruction to be managed and distributed transparently, with effective oversight and accountability to the Libyan people”. From 1 to 2 November, the GNS held a reconstruction conference that convened 400 participants

representing international donors and the private sector, but it reportedly did not include any GNU officials.

### Key Issues and Options

Supporting political momentum towards national elections to unify Libya’s divided government remains the key issue for the Security Council. In this context, an important objective for the Council is to help foster common political ground between the country’s rival legislatures to agree on electoral laws—a goal that Bathily has repeatedly urged Council members to support by wielding their influence on national stakeholders. At December’s meeting, members may reiterate their call on Libyan actors to engage in good-faith negotiations to finally achieve consensus on outstanding political issues, noting that the rival governments had originally expressed their intent to finalise legislation in time to hold elections by the end of the year. In this context, some members may welcome Bathily’s proposed meeting of institutional stakeholders and urge them to productively participate in these discussions. Members may consider issuing a press statement conveying this message.

### Council Dynamics

Council members remain united on the need for a Libyan-led, inclusive political process resulting in elections that will help to restore political, security, and economic stability to the country. They also remain broadly supportive of Bathily’s mediation efforts in this regard.

Broader geopolitical tensions still influence Council dynamics in respect to Libya, however. The US and other Western members remain concerned about the presence of the Wagner Group—the private Russian security organisation—in Libya and growing ties between Haftar and Russian President Vladimir Putin, who most recently met in Moscow in September and have reportedly discussed the establishment of a Russian naval base in eastern Libya. For its part, Russia routinely blames Libya’s current instability on the NATO-led military intervention in 2011 and accuses Western countries of seeking to exploit Libya’s oil reserves for economic gain.

The UK is the penholder on Libya.

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## Iran

### Expected Council Action

In December, the Council is expected to convene a briefing on the Secretary-General’s biannual report on the implementation of resolution 2231 of 20 July 2015, which endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran’s nuclear programme. The Council will also receive reports from its 2231 facilitator, Ambassador Vanessa Frazier (Malta), and the Joint Commission, which was established to oversee the implementation of the JCPOA and comprises the current parties to the agreement: China, France, Germany, Russia, the UK, and Iran. Under-Secretary-General for Political and

Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo, Frazier, and a representative of the EU in its capacity as coordinator of the Joint Commission are expected to brief the Council.

### Background and Key Recent Developments

Efforts to revive the JCPOA remain frozen following a breakdown in negotiations last year and subsequent political developments that have led to a further deterioration in relations between the parties. In May 2018, then-US President Donald Trump announced that the US, which was originally a signatory to the JCPOA, was withdrawing

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UN DOCUMENTS ON IRAN [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2231](#) (20 July 2015) endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran. [Secretary-General’s Report S/2023/473](#) (29 June 2023) was the biannual report on the implementation of resolution 2231.

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## Iran

from the agreement, and went on to impose unilateral sanctions on Iran. Although Iran formally remained in the JCPOA, it took steps that directly contravene its terms, including enriching uranium to levels beyond the JCPOA-mandated limits and removing cameras and monitoring equipment required by the agreement. Following the election of current US President Joseph Biden, the US, Iran, and other parties to the JCPOA began talks in April 2021 in Vienna to revive the agreement.

Those discussions progressed until August 2022, when the EU circulated what it described as a “final” draft agreement. Iran reportedly insisted as a condition for accepting the deal that the IAEA close its investigation into traces of enriched uranium it had discovered at three undeclared sites in Iran in 2019. The US and European parties to the JCPOA objected to this demand, which they viewed as a separate issue related to Iran’s obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the country’s NPT Safeguards Agreement, which every non-nuclear NPT state party is required to conclude with the IAEA to ensure that its nuclear activities are for peaceful purposes. In a 17 November 2022 resolution, the IAEA Board of Governors censured Iran and directed it to comply with the IAEA’s investigation. In response, Iran announced on 22 November 2022 that it had started enriching uranium to 60 percent purity at its Fordow nuclear facility, approaching the roughly 90 percent level required to produce a nuclear weapon and well above the 3.67 percent limit imposed by the JCPOA.

With negotiations to revive the JCPOA stalled, Iran has increased its production of highly enriched uranium. The IAEA’s latest quarterly verification and monitoring report, dated 15 November, estimated that Iran’s stockpile of 60 percent enriched uranium totalled 128.3 kilograms, an increase of 6.7 kilograms from the agency’s previous report. In its latest quarterly report on implementation of Iran’s NPT Safeguards Agreement, also dated 15 November, the IAEA reiterated its call on Iran to provide the agency with “technically credible explanations” for the presence of depleted uranium at the two undeclared nuclear facilities that remain under investigation. (The agency had previously suspended its investigation into a third site, Marivan, after Iran provided the agency with a “possible explanation” for the detection of uranium there.)

Cooperation between the IAEA and Iranian authorities has been strained since Iran began breaching the terms of the JCPOA. After the IAEA’s February verification and monitoring report said that the agency had detected traces of uranium enriched to 83.7 percent at Iran’s Fordow facility—which Iran claimed was accidental—the IAEA and the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran issued a joint statement on 4 March permitting the IAEA to “implement further appropriate verification and monitoring activities”, including the installation of surveillance cameras and enrichment-monitoring devices at certain nuclear facilities. According to the agency’s latest safeguards report, however, while “limited progress” was made in implementing the commitments set out in the joint statement during the March-June reporting period, “no further progress” was made in the June-September period. The report states that IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi is “seriously concerned” that Iran appears to have “frozen” implementation of the agreement.

In parallel to this dispute, Grossi issued a statement on 16

September announcing that Iran had withdrawn the designation of several IAEA inspectors assigned to conduct verification activities in Iran under the NPT Safeguards Agreement. Grossi said that although the measure is formally permitted by the agreement, Iran had exercised it “in a manner that affects in a direct and severe way the ability of the IAEA to conduct effectively its inspections” in the country. On 18 September, France, Germany, and the UK—known within the Joint Commission as the E3—and the US issued a joint statement calling on Iran to “immediately reverse these inspector de-designations and fully cooperate with the Agency to enable them to provide assurances that Iran’s nuclear programme is exclusively peaceful”.

While JCPOA negotiations remain dormant, Iran and the US concluded a bilateral agreement on 18 September under which Iran released five US citizens imprisoned in Iran in exchange for access to \$6 billion dollars in frozen oil revenue. The funds, held in South Korean banks, were transferred to a restricted account in Qatar, from which Iran could withdraw them for humanitarian needs. The deal reportedly also included informal commitments to reduce tensions between US forces and Iran-backed militias in Syria, which had clashed in previous months. However, following the 7 October attack on Israel by Hamas—which Iran supports politically and financially—the US and Qatar agreed to temporarily block Iran’s access to the funds, and tensions between the US and Iranian proxies in the region have since escalated.

Pursuant to resolution 2231, restrictions on Iran’s ballistic missile program expired on 18 October. In a 14 September joint statement, the E3 announced that they would retain the restrictions past this date through their national sanctions regimes because of “Iran’s consistent and severe non-compliance with its JCPOA commitments since 2019”. On 17 October, the EU announced that it would take similar measures under the EU non-proliferation regime on Iran. On 18 October, the US announced new sanctions on several individuals and entities linked to Iran’s ballistic missile and uncrewed aerial vehicle (UAV) programmes, citing Iran’s alleged transfer of these weapons to Hamas and Russia. The same day, 46 countries participating in the Proliferation Security Initiative—a group of states promoting non-proliferation efforts—issued a statement affirming their “commitment to take all necessary measures to prevent the supply, sale, or transfer” of ballistic missile-related items to and from Iran.

### Key Issues and Options

As the prospects for a revival of the JCPOA grow increasingly remote, the key issue for the Security Council is how to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Analysts have suggested that Iran’s steps since the US’ withdrawal from the agreement, including its uranium-enrichment activities, are likely to make a return to the original terms of the agreement and full compliance with those terms difficult, particularly given the institutional knowledge acquired by Iran’s nuclear programme and the IAEA’s diminished monitoring capabilities, which prevent it from establishing a new baseline against which to measure compliance with a future agreement. The Iranian government’s apparent support for Hamas and the Russian war effort in Ukraine have also made reviving the JCPOA politically difficult for Western countries.

Given Iran’s non-compliance with the JCPOA, Council members



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## Iran

could initiate the “snapback mechanism” in resolution 2231 if they decide the agreement is no longer viable. This process—which is not subject to the veto—would reinstate the UN sanctions that were in place before the JCPOA was agreed upon. It does not appear that such a measure is imminent, however, as the P3 countries—France, the UK, and the US—maintain that their “red line” for initiating the snapback remains the detection of weapons-grade uranium in Iran. In the E3’s joint statement announcing the retention of national sanctions on Iran’s ballistic missile programme, they underscored that their decision “does not amount to...triggering the snapback mechanism”.

An alternative means by which the P3 and like-minded countries could apply pressure on Iran is to adopt a resolution censuring the country at the next meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors. Since Iran ceased to comply with the JCPOA, however, the board has adopted three such resolutions, most recently in November 2022. In a joint statement during the most recent board meeting this November, France, Germany, the UK, and the US said that “if Iran fails to implement the essential and urgent actions” contained in that resolution, the board will have to be prepared to take further action, “including the possibility of additional resolutions”.

### Council Dynamics

A revival of the JCPOA has grown increasingly unlikely given current geopolitical dynamics.

The P3 and other Western countries remain concerned about Iran’s activities that contravene the JCPOA and its lack of cooperation with the IAEA. Some may call on Iran to re-certify the agency’s inspectors and to fully implement the March joint statement on verification and monitoring measures. The US and European members might reiterate allegations that Iran has supplied UAVs to Russia for use in Ukraine and express concern at what they view as Iran’s destabilising behaviour in the region, including through its support for Hamas in Gaza and proxy militias in Iraq and Syria.

China and Russia are more supportive of Iran. Both states have previously blamed the US for the collapse of the JCPOA, criticising it for withdrawing from the deal and imposing unilateral sanctions on the Iranian regime. In September, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu met in Tehran with Iran’s top security official, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Akbar Ahmadian. During his visit, Shoigu said that “sanctions pressure on Russia and Iran shows its futility, while Russian-Iranian interaction is reaching a new level.” On 28 November, Iran announced that it had finalised a deal to purchase Russian-made Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets.

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## Syria

### Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council is expected to hold a meeting on the political process and the humanitarian situation in Syria.

### Key Recent Developments

Amidst rising hostilities in the country over the past few months, the humanitarian situation continues to worsen. According to OCHA’s 2 November situation report, the escalation of hostilities following an attack on the Syrian military academy in Homs on 5 October has resulted in over 70 civilian casualties—including at least 23 children, 14 women, and four aid workers—and the displacement of more than 120,000 people, representing the most significant escalation in violence in north-west Syria since 2019. The report added that the incidents have affected over 43 health facilities, 27 schools, and 20 water systems. (For more, see the Syria brief in the November Monthly Forecast.)

On 13 November, the Syrian government announced its decision to extend its authorisation for the use of the Bab al-Salam and Al Ra’ee border crossings at the Syria-Türkiye border—used by UN humanitarian agencies and its partners for conducting cross-border humanitarian operations—until 13 February 2024. Humanitarian operations have also continued through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing at the Syria-Türkiye border, which was authorised by the Syrian government following Russia’s 11 July veto of a Security Council resolution, until 13 January 2024. The vetoed resolution would have extended the Syria cross-border mechanism, which had

allowed the delivery of humanitarian assistance into non-government-controlled parts of Syria 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.)

Council members last met on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria on 30 October. Director of OCHA’s Operations and Advocacy Division Edem Wosornu and UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefed. Wosornu provided an overview of the increasingly dire humanitarian situation in the country and described the recent efforts of the UN and other actors to deliver humanitarian aid in Syria. She added that the funding shortages for relief efforts had significantly affected the ability of humanitarian organisations to provide assistance in the country. In some cases, she pointed out, these shortages had led to the reduction in food distributions, the closure of safe spaces for women and girls, and the scaling back of health services. At the time of writing, the humanitarian response plan for 2023 (\$5.41 billion) was only 29.6 percent funded.

In his remarks at the meeting, Pedersen described the intensified hostilities in the country and stressed the urgent need for de-escalation and restoration of calm leading to a nationwide ceasefire, along with a cooperative approach to countering Security Council-listed terrorist groups. In light of the crisis in Israel and Gaza, Pedersen said, “the Syrian people face a terrifying prospect of a potential wider escalation”, adding that the spillover of the conflict into Syria had already begun.

Pedersen further noted that “months of intensive efforts have still

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2672 (9 January 2023) extended the authorisation for the Syria cross-border aid mechanism for an additional six months until 10 July 2023. S/RES/2254 (18 December 2015) was the first resolution focusing exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. It was adopted unanimously. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9459 (30 October 2023) was a briefing on the political and humanitarian situation in Syria. Security Council Letter S/2023/526 (13 July 2023) was a letter from the Permanent Representative of Syria to the UN addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, authorising the use of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing.

# Syria

not yielded consensus on the venue for resuming the Constitutional Committee, or on its substance”. He added that he will continue to prioritise contacts with the members of the Astana format (Iran, Russia, and Türkiye) as well as Arab and Western countries, and to foster joint efforts towards de-escalation and advancing the political process.

On 15 November, Pedersen met Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Geneva. According to a post on X (formerly Twitter) by the Special Envoy’s office, during the meeting, Pedersen stressed the importance of protecting Syrian civilians, de-escalating violence, and containing regional violence. On 16 November, Pedersen met with the senior officials of the Syrian Negotiations Commission (SNC)—which represents the political opposition to the government. In a post on X, the Special Envoy’s office said that Pedersen had underlined that the current status quo in Syria is untenable and that lack of progress on the political front increases the risk of further escalation of violence. On the same day, Pedersen also engaged with the US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, Ethan A. Goldrich. Pedersen reportedly stressed that, in the context of heightened tensions in the region, it remains crucial for key actors to cooperate on Syria to de-escalate tensions and advance the political process.

On 17 November, Pedersen met with the German Special Envoy to Syria, Stefan Schneck, highlighting the growing regional instability and violence and emphasising the need to move forward on a meaningful political process in line with resolution 2254 of 18 December 2015, which focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. He also met the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell Fontelles on 19 November. At the meeting, Pedersen expressed grave concern about regional tensions and their wider implications, according to a post on X.

There has been an uptick in attacks against the US forces stationed in Syria and Iraq, following the 7 October attack against Israel by Hamas, the Palestinian armed group and de facto authority in Gaza, and the subsequent response from Israeli forces, including airstrikes and ground operations in the Gaza Strip. In a 16 November press briefing, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh confirmed that there had been 58 attacks against US service members since 17 October.

Against the backdrop of the increasing violence, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin said in a 21 October press statement that he had authorised the deployment of a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) battery, an anti-ballistic missile defence system; and battalions of Phased Array Tracking Radar for Intercept on Target (PATRIOT), a surface-to-air missile defence system, to locations throughout the region to increase protection for the US forces. The US has also deployed two naval strike groups to the region led by the aircraft carriers USS Gerald R. Ford and USS Dwight D. Eisenhower.

In a 9 November press briefing, Singh said that, on the previous day, the US had conducted a targeted strike in eastern Syria directed against a weapons-storage facility affiliated with Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and aligned groups. Singh further noted that the US holds Iran “accountable for the attacks on US forces and we expect Iran to take measures to direct its proxies to stop”. On 12 November, the US again targeted a training facility and

a safe house, allegedly used by the IRGC and affiliated groups, near the cities of Abu Kamal and Mayadin in eastern Syria, according to the US Department of Defense.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 16 November, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in its consideration of the case *Canada and the Netherlands v. Syrian Arab Republic* in relation to the application of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, rendered provisional measures, ordering Syria to “take all measures within its power to prevent acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and ensure that its officials, as well as any organizations or persons which may be subject to its control, direction or influence, do not commit any acts of torture or other acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”. The ICJ further ordered Syria to “take effective measures to prevent the destruction and ensure the preservation of any evidence related to allegations of acts within the scope of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment”. The judgment was pronounced with 13 votes in favour and two against. Decisions rendered by the ICJ on provisional measures under Article 41 of the ICJ Statute are legally binding.

On 15 November, the Third Committee of the General Assembly approved a resolution titled “Situation of human rights in the Syrian Arab Republic” (A/C.3/78/L.43). The resolution condemned “the continued widespread and systematic gross violations and abuses of human rights and fundamental freedoms and all violations of international humanitarian law by the Syrian regime, the government-affiliated militias and those who fight on their behalf”. The resolution further demanded that Syria and all other parties to the conflict allow and facilitate safe, full, timely, immediate, unrestricted, and sustained humanitarian access, including through the continuation of cross-border assistance. The resolution was approved by a vote of 86 in favour, 15 against, and 73 abstentions.

## Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members is the ongoing hostilities in the region and the risk of escalation.

Another important 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 throughout the country. According to OCHA, some 15.3 million Syrians—over 69 percent of the population—require humanitarian assistance in 2023. The deteriorating socioeconomic conditions are also of concern.

Periodic briefings from OCHA have helped keep the Council informed of the humanitarian situation on the ground. Council members could consider inviting representatives of Syrian humanitarian aid organisations to engage with them to explore avenues for improving and expanding aid-delivery mechanisms, including early recovery projects, in Syria.

Another key long-standing issue is finding a way to break the political impasse in Syria and to provide political support for the Special Envoy’s efforts in this regard. One option would be for the Council to hold a private meeting with Pedersen and interested member states with influence over the parties in Syria to discuss recent developments and ways to make progress on the political track.

## 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

# Syria

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.

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