

# Monthly Forecast

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## Overview

In January 2024, France will hold the presidency of the Security Council.

The quarterly open debate on “[The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question](#)” is expected to be elevated to ministerial level this month. French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna is expected to chair the meeting. Secretary-General António Guterres may brief. Other meetings on this issue may be convened depending on developments in Israel and Gaza.

Additional Middle Eastern issues anticipated in January include:

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

European issues on the programme of work in January include:

- [Ukraine](#), a briefing on recent developments; and
- [Cyprus](#), a meeting with UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) troop-contributing countries, the semi-annual consultations on UNFICYP, and the renewal of UNFICYP’s mandate.

African issues that the Council is scheduled to address this month include:

- [West Africa](#), the semi-annual meeting on the work of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS); and
- [Sudan](#), the semi-annual briefing of ICC Prosecutor Karim Asad Ahmad Khan on the ICC’s Darfur-related activities.

Issues on the Americas that will be featured in January’s programme of work are:

- [Colombia](#), the quarterly briefing on the work of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia and recent developments; and
- [Haiti](#), the quarterly briefing on the work of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) and recent developments in the country.

The one Asian issue on the programme of work in January is the semi-annual meeting on the work of the [UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia \(UNRCCA\)](#).

Additional meetings on these and other issues may be scheduled during the month.

A wrap-up session is also planned for the end of January.

### 2 January 2024

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## In Hindsight: The Security Council in 2023

The Security Council has been severely tested by a multilateral environment in turmoil. In 2023, it faced the continuing effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the precipitous escalation of conflict in the Middle East, and pushback against UN peacekeeping in Africa as well as UN sanctions. The shifting global balance of power, the contrasting narratives about global priorities that emerged after the invasion of Ukraine, and the allegations of Western double standards over Israel's actions in Gaza have severely strained relations and deepened the atmosphere of distrust. The Council continued to come under public attack for its inability to address violations of the UN Charter.

The Ukraine conflict remained a fixture on the programme of work, although there has been less appetite for attempting outcomes, given the difficult Council dynamics. The escalation of the conflict between Israel and Hamas in October became a central preoccupation in the last quarter of the year. Elected members led the way in trying to find agreement on Council action but were often stymied by the entrenched position of the US, a veto-wielding permanent member.

The Council grappled with sudden terminations of key UN peace and security mechanisms in conflict situations. Host governments abruptly dismissed two peace operations, in Mali and Sudan, which were then brought to an end by the Security Council and had to draw down rapidly. The Mali sanctions regime was ended by a Russian veto, while another Russian veto shuttered the cross-border mechanism that was established in 2014 to ensure the delivery of aid into and within Syria.

At the same time, the Council was confronted with multi-dimensional crises in a number of long-standing situations on its agenda, including the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Myanmar, Somalia, and Sudan. It also addressed regular missile launches by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the flare-up between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Its level of engagement on these situations varied. For example, although the situation in Myanmar deteriorated rapidly over 2023, the Council met rarely: once in a private meeting, as required by the resolution adopted in December 2022, and two other times in consultations and under "any other business". On the other hand, as the situation in Sudan deteriorated, the Council met an additional seven times, outside the regular four annual meetings.

The women, peace and security (WPS) presidencies initiative, started in 2021, was taken up by most Council members in 2023: Albania, Brazil, Ecuador, France, Gabon, Japan, Malta, Switzerland, the UAE, the UK, and the US. Engagement on the commitments was uneven, however. The intimidation of and reprisals against a woman civil society representative who briefed at a January 2023 Council meeting on Mali had a chilling effect on invitations to women civil society briefers during the rest of the year.

### Plenty of Talk, Less Action

In 2023, the Council chamber continued to be the battleground for opposing narratives of the global order, as members sought to amplify their own worldviews. The Council held 288 formal meetings and 124 informal consultations compared to 292 and 127, respectively, in 2022. As it had the year before, Ukraine dominated the Council's agenda, with 39 formal meetings, one meeting in closed

consultations and two discussions in consultations under "any other business". Following the escalation of the conflict in Gaza, the Council held fourteen meetings between October and the end of December on "The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question", in addition to the regular monthly meetings on the issue.

Overall, the Council is spending more time in meetings. In 2022, meeting time increased by over a hundred hours compared to 2021, to 650 hours, largely due to the Ukraine crisis. In 2023, the Council spent over 690 hours or some six percent longer in meetings than in 2022. Besides the added time spent on urgent crisis situations, members tended to provide longer explanations ahead of and after their votes. Meetings have also been prolonged by procedural disputes at their outset.

In spite of the difficult dynamics in the Council, the number of resolutions remained steady in the years prior to 2023. The Council adopted 54 in 2022 compared to 57 in both 2021 and 2020. The 50 adoptions in 2023 are the second lowest number of resolutions in a decade. A slightly higher percentage of resolutions was adopted unanimously in 2023 (70%) versus 2022 (67%). While the level of unanimity is still low compared to the first two decades of the post-Cold War period, members continued to make significant efforts to strike agreement, albeit not always successfully despite protracted negotiations in which penholders were often open to incorporating suggestions. In some cases, improved relations between the penholder and the host government may also have allowed for less disagreement on resolutions. For example, the resolution initiating the drawdown operations of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) was adopted unanimously in December 2023 following improved relations between France and the DRC government.

There was a higher number of vetoes and of resolutions not adopted due to insufficient votes in 2023 compared to the year before, with an especially striking increase in the latter. Six vetoes were cast on five resolutions, three by Russia, two by the US, and one by China. The US also vetoed an amendment by Russia on a draft Gaza resolution. The vetoes were cast on a mix of issues: Syria humanitarian (a draft vetoed by Russia in July), Mali sanctions (a draft vetoed by Russia in August), and the war between Israel and Hamas (three vetoed draft resolutions, one by the US in October, a second by China and Russia in October, and a third by the US in December). On 15 November, the Council managed to adopt a resolution initiated by Malta on humanitarian pauses in Gaza with a particular focus on children. Following intensive negotiations, it adopted a second Gaza resolution initiated by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on 22 December, which requested the Secretary-General to appoint a Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator and that the Coordinator establish a UN mechanism for accelerating humanitarian relief consignments to Gaza. (The vetoes on Gaza in October 2023 prompted the resumption of the General Assembly's tenth Emergency Special Session on the Middle East and two GA resolutions.) On seven occasions, draft resolutions or amendments were not adopted due to insufficient votes. They included Russian drafts on the attack on the Nord Stream pipeline, Syria humanitarian, Mali sanctions, and two on the Gaza situation. Two amendments by Russia on a draft resolution on the Gaza situation were also not

## In Hindsight: The Security Council in 2023

adopted due to insufficient votes. The last year when seven or more Council resolutions failed due to insufficient votes was 1961.

The difficulty in obtaining consensus is also illustrated by the low number of presidential statements. The seven presidential statements in 2022, the lowest since the Council began using this format in 1994, were followed by six presidential statements in 2023. These were on transnational crime; hunger and security; Libya; the Middle East, including the Question of Palestine; and two on the DRC. This historically low number reflects the difficulty in achieving consensus, which is required for the adoption of presidential statements.

### The Politicisation of Working Methods

The pronounced procedural wrangling that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine continued into 2023. For the first time since February 2019, Council members were unable to reach agreement on the provisional programme of work for the months of August and September during the US and Albanian presidencies. Russia blocked these adoptions because Ukraine featured in the programmes. (Ukraine meetings generally are requested during the month by members rather than included in the programme of work at the start of the month.) Instead, a daily plan of work was circulated and published on the presidency's website.

Invitations extended to briefers and member states were also affected by this dynamic, with three procedural votes held to determine briefers or member state participation in meetings. In March 2023, a procedural vote was held on inviting Daria Morozova, Commissioner of Human Rights of the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic, whom Russia had proposed under Rule 39 as a brifer for a meeting on Ukraine. The Council voted against Morozova's participation in the meeting. In July 2023, a procedural vote was held after Russia objected to Ukraine's participation in a meeting on Iran and non-proliferation. The Council voted to allow Ukraine's participation at that meeting. Also in July, a procedural vote was held to determine if a civil society brifer suggested by Russia would be able to brief; in this case, he was not allowed to brief because of insufficient votes. Another procedural battleground in 2023 was the webcasting of Arria-formula meetings on the official UN channel. Eight Arria-formula meetings between March and July were not broadcast due to objections from Council members. Although this is an informal format, it has become established practice that the webcasting of Arria-formula meetings can be blocked if a single Council member objects.

The topics chosen for Arria-formula meetings reflected the impact of the Ukraine conflict on the Council's activities. Of the year's 22 Arria-formula meetings, eight were related to Ukraine, including all six convened by Russia. Members used these meetings to promote competing narratives on various aspects of the Ukraine conflict, including on accountability, the freedom of religion, and the situation of children. For instance, following Russia's 5 April 2023 Arria-formula meeting on "Children and Armed Conflict: Ukrainian Crisis. Evacuating Children from Conflict Zone", Albania, France, and the US, together with non-Council member Ukraine, convened an Arria-formula meeting on 28 April 2023 on the abduction and deportation of children during armed conflict, which mainly focused on Ukraine. Other issues covered in Arria-formula meetings in 2023

included women, peace and security; protection of civilians; and climate and security. The only two country-specific situations covered were the human rights situation in the DPRK and Myanmar.

In a positive development, the P3 penholders continued to be more open to sharing the "pen" with elected members. In 2023, Ecuador was the co-pen with the US on Haiti, and with France on Ukraine humanitarian issues; Albania continued to be the co-pen on Ukraine political issues with the US, and the UAE briefly assumed the co-pen role with France on Mali sanctions prior to the dissolution of the sanctions regime. Elected member co-penholderships were maintained, with Japan and the UAE leading on Afghanistan, Switzerland and Brazil on the Syria humanitarian file, and Ghana and Switzerland on the UN Office in West Africa and the Sahel.

A presidential note on penholders was agreed in December 2023, and sets out general guidelines for penholding.

### The Pushback Against the Use of Robust Tools

In 2023, UN peace operations came under great stress. MINUS-MA, the peacekeeping mission in Mali, was terminated, and further drawdown of MONUSCO in the DRC was set in motion. The special political mission in Sudan, UNITAMS, was closed as well. The Secretary-General appointed a Personal Envoy on Sudan, and the Council will hear periodic reporting on the country; expanded coverage of Mali can be expected via UNOWAS reports.

These developments may prompt members to reflect seriously on the future of peace operations ahead of the Summit of the Future in September 2024. In the New Agenda for Peace, the Secretary-General suggested that members need to consider alternative mission models that are more "nimble, adaptable and effective".

In this context, the role of regional organisations in addressing conflict situations in their area is expected to be a greater focus in 2024. The resolution on the financing of AU-led peace support operations authored by the A3 and adopted in December 2023 may emerge as a way forward for future peace support partnerships between regional organisations and the UN.

The end of the Mali sanctions regime in August capped a growing unease among some members with UN sanctions, or sanctions mechanisms, notably the panels of experts and their independent, detailed reporting. 2023 highlighted the stark differences among members over the effectiveness of sanctions and when conditions on the ground merit their easing. 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.

In 2023, panels of experts came under greater scrutiny and criticism. CAR Sanctions Committee appointments were put under a six-month hold by Russia in August 2023, not allowing it to function. The Russian veto on the extension of Mali sanctions appears to have been connected to Russia's unhappiness with reporting by its panel of experts.

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# In Hindsight: The Security Council in 2023

## The Year Ahead

Incoming members Algeria, Guyana, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, and the Republic of Korea have joined the Council at a critical time. The two major international crisis situations of 2023 have continued into 2024. If peaceful solutions are found, there may be opportunities for greater UN engagement, including by the Security Council. Robust discussions around the future of peacekeeping and the role of regional organisations are urgently needed. As missions draw down in the DRC and Sudan, and following the closure of the Mali mission, Council members will be keeping a watchful eye on the transition processes. Elections in fragile settings such as South Sudan also bear watching, as do continuing humanitarian crises in many

situations on the Council's agenda. Complicated negotiations on sanctions are likely and may lead to further adjustments to current sanctions regimes, including in CAR and Darfur.

The Council has failed fully to utilise the tools at its disposal in dealing with the interlocking threats facing the world today. In order to remain relevant in the emerging global order, the Council will need to take more determined steps to reach out to other member state bodies, while reflecting on its own unwillingness, or incapacity, to draw on a range of possibilities for action found within the UN Charter, most notably its tools under Chapter VII for responding to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression.

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## Status Update since our December Forecast

### Somalia

On 1 December 2023, the Security Council adopted resolution 2713, renewing for one year the sanctions regime on Al-Shabaab, including the authorisation for maritime interdiction to enforce the embargo on illicit arms imports, the charcoal exports ban, and the improvised explosive device (IED) components ban. The resolution also renewed the mandate of the Panel of Experts until 15 January 2025 and expressed the Council's intention to review the panel's mandate no later than 15 December 2024. The resolution was adopted with 14 votes in favour and one abstention (France).

In his explanation of vote, Permanent Representative of France to the UN Nicolas de Rivi re said that his country abstained on the resolution renewing the sanctions regime on Al-Shabaab because it did not refer to the territorial dispute between Djibouti and Eritrea. Arguing that this dispute still poses a threat to international peace and security, he said that "the Council must play its full role of prevention in the face of such threats and take account of all security risks in the region including territorial disputes". At the same meeting, Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Anna Evstigneeva said that during the negotiations on the draft Al-Shabaab sanctions resolution, Russia had questions about language in the text referring to the automatic exemption from the sanctions regime for arms transfers to "private military companies". She noted that "although the resolution refers to the fact that they must be licensed by the Somali Government, the Security Council still has no list of those". She added that Russia "trust[s] that Mogadishu will take a responsible approach to this process and prevent an increase in the militarization of the Horn of Africa".

On the same day, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2714, lifting the arms embargo on the Somali government, which was established by resolution 733 of 23 January 1992 and amended through subsequent resolutions.

On 1 December 2023, Council members also agreed on the contents of a letter responding to the letters received from Djibouti and Eritrea on 6 and 8 November, respectively. The letter noted that the Council continues to follow developments towards the normalisation of relations between Eritrea and Djibouti. It expressed regret

regarding the lack of progress on the outstanding issues between the two countries, including the settlement of the unresolved border dispute. The letter added that "[s]hould the situation change, or the circumstances warrant its attention, the Security Council will consider its options as it would in any other context".

### Iraq (UNITAD)

On 4 December 2023, the Security Council received a briefing (S/PV.9493) from Christian Ritscher, the Special Adviser and head of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL in Iraq (UNITAD). Iraq participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

### Transnational Organised Crime

On 7 December 2023, the Security Council held an open debate on "Transnational organized crime, growing challenges and new threats" under the "Threats to international peace and security" agenda item (S/PV.9497). President Daniel Noboa Az n of Ecuador chaired the meeting, which was the signature event of Ecuador's December presidency. The briefers were: UN Secretary-General Ant nio Guterres; UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Executive Director Ghada Fathi Waly; Melani Cammett, the Clarence Dillon Professor of International Affairs in the Department of Government and the Director of the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University; and Victoria Nyanjura, the Founder and General Director of Women in Action for Women (WAW), an organisation that supports women survivors of conflict in northern Uganda. In connection with the open debate, the Security Council adopted a presidential statement (S/PRST/2023/6), initiated by Ecuador and France, in which it expresses concern at the rise of transnational organised crime.

### Guyana and Venezuela

On 8 December 2023, Security Council members convened for closed consultations to discuss developments regarding a territorial dispute between Guyana and Venezuela over the Essequibo region in Guyana. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding

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Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed. Guyana requested the meeting in a 6 December letter to the Council (S/2023/961).

### Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 11 December 2023, the Security Council held a briefing and closed consultations on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), including the work of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) (S/PV.9500). Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the DRC and head of MONUSCO Bintou Keita and National Coordinator of Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix Sandrine Lusamba briefed the Council. DRC and Rwanda also participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. On 19 December, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2717, renewing the mandate of MONUSCO for one year, until 20 December 2024.

### International Criminal Tribunals

On 12 December 2023, the Council held its semi-annual debate (S/PV.9502) on the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT). The IRMCT's president, Judge Graciela Gatti Santana, and its chief prosecutor, Serge Brammertz, briefed. They met with the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals prior to the debate. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Rwanda, and Serbia participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

### UNOCA (Central Africa)

On 13 December 2023, the Security Council held a briefing and consultations on the situation in the Central African Republic region (S/PV.9505). Special Representative and head of UNOCA Abdou Abarry briefed the Council 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) (S/2023/934).

### South Sudan

On 14 December 2023, the Council held an open briefing on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) (S/PV.9507). Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan and Head of UNMISS Nicholas Haysom briefed on the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/976), which was circulated to Council members on 8 December and covered developments from 1 September to 30 November. Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang (Gabon), the chair of the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee, briefed on the work of the committee. Consultations followed the briefing.

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

On 14 December 2023, the outgoing chairs of subsidiary bodies briefed the Council on the activities of the committees and working groups during their chairmanships (S/PV.9508). The Council heard briefings by Ambassador Ferit Hoxha (Albania) on the work of 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; Ambassador Harold Adlai Agyeman (Ghana) on the 2127 Central African Republic Sanctions Committee, the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, and the Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations; Ambassador Michel Xavier Biang (Gabon) on the 1533 Democratic Republic of the Congo Sanctions Committee, the 2653 Haiti Sanctions Committee, the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals, and the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee; and Deputy Permanent Representative Mohamed Issa Abushahab (United Arab Emirates), speaking for Ambassador Lana Zaki Nusseibeh, who chaired the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee, the 2048 Guinea-Bissau Sanctions Committee, and the 1566 Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.

### Small Arms and Light Weapons

On 15 December 2023, the Security Council held an open debate on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) under the theme: "Addressing the threat posed by diversion, illicit trafficking and misuse of small arms and light weapons and their ammunition to peace and security" (S/PV.9509). Ecuador, December's Security Council President, convened the meeting to facilitate a discussion on the Secretary-General's most recent biennial report on SALW submitted pursuant to resolution 2220 of 22 May 2015, which was published on 1 November (S/2023/823). Ecuador's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility, Maria Gabriela Sommerfeld, chaired the meeting. High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu; Deputy Director of the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) Cécile Aptel; and Folade Mutota, Executive Director of the Women's Institute for Alternative Development (WINAD), briefed the Council.

### Libya

On 18 December 2023, the Security Council held an open briefing (S/PV.9510) followed by closed consultations on Libya. Special Representative and head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Abdoulaye Bathily briefed the Council on the latest political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country. Additionally, Ambassador Osamu Yamanaka (Japan), in his capacity as representative of the chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, presented the periodic report on the committee's activities. Libya participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

### Iran

On 18 December 2023, the Security Council held its biannual open briefing (S/PV.9511) on the implementation of resolution 2231 of 20 July 2015, which endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear programme (JCPOA). Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed on the Secretary-General's latest report on the implementation of resolution 2231, dated 15 December. The Security Council's facilitator for the implementation of resolution 2231, Ambassador Vanessa Frazier (Malta), reported on the Council's work regarding resolution 2231. The head of the EU delegation to the UN, Ambassador Olof Skoog, briefed on the work of the JCPOA's Joint Commission. The commission comprises the current parties to the JCPOA—China,

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France, Germany, Iran, Russia, and the UK—and the EU serves as its coordinator. Germany and Iran participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure.

### Afghanistan

On 11 December 2023, Security Council members convened for a closed Arria-formula meeting on “women’s perspectives on Afghanistan”. The meeting was organised by Switzerland and co-sponsored by Japan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the co-penholders on the file. Two representatives of the Women’s Forum on Afghanistan, a platform led by Afghan women leaders that aims to ensure the inclusion of Afghan women in the dialogue and decision-making of the international community on the future of Afghanistan, and two additional representatives of Afghan civil society briefed. Participation in the meeting, which was chaired and moderated by Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl (Switzerland), was limited to current and incoming Council members.

On 14 December 2023, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2716, which renewed the mandate of the Monitoring Team supporting the 1988 Afghanistan sanctions committee for a period of one year (S/PV.9506).

On 20 December 2023, the Council convened for its quarterly briefing on Afghanistan (S/PV.9515). The briefers were: Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Roza Otunbayeva; Head and Representative of OCHA in Geneva and Director of the Coordination Division Ramesh Rajasingham; and Shaharзад Akbar, Executive Director of Rawadari, an Afghan civil society organisation. Ambassador José Javier De la Gasca Lopez Domínguez (Ecuador) also delivered the annual briefing of the chair of the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee. Representatives of Afghanistan, India, Iran, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan participated in the open session under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure.

On 29 December, the Council adopted resolution 2721, which, among other matters, took positive note of the independent assessment and requested that the Secretary-General appoint a Special Envoy for Afghanistan. 13 members voted in favour, with China and Russia abstaining.

### UNDOF (Golan)

On 12 December 2023, Council members received a briefing in closed consultations on the Secretary-General’s latest 90-day report (S/2023/935), dated 30 November, on the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the implementation of resolution 338 of 22 October 1973. The report covered the activities of UNDOF from 21 August to 20 November. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed.

On 21 December 2023, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2718, renewing UNDOF’s mandate for six months, until 30 June 2024.

### DPRK (North Korea)

On 19 December 2023, the Council convened for an open briefing on the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) (S/PV.9514). Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific Mohammed Khaled Khiari briefed. Albania, Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, the UAE, the UK, and the US requested the meeting after the DPRK tested two ballistic missiles, including an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), on 17 and 18 December. The DPRK and incoming Council member the Republic of Korea (ROK) participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure.

### Arria-formula Meeting on “Artificial Intelligence: Its Impact on Hate Speech, Disinformation and Misinformation”

On 19 December 2023, Albania and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) convened an Arria-formula meeting titled “Artificial intelligence: its impact on hate speech, disinformation and misinformation”. The meeting was chaired by Omran Sharaf, the UAE’s Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for Advanced Science and Technology, and Ambassador Ferit Hoxha, the Permanent Representative of Albania to the UN. The briefers were: Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications Melissa Fleming; Rahaf Harfoush, digital anthropologist and member of the Secretary-General’s High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence; and Jennifer Woodard, co-founder of Insikt Intelligence—a start-up researching how to apply artificial intelligence (AI) to combat online harms.

### Arria-formula Meeting on Cooperation between the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission

On 20 December 2023, Brazil convened a Security Council Arria-formula meeting titled “Mind the gap: enhancing the dialogue and cooperation between the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission”. Council and Commission members heard briefings from Ambassador Ivan Šimonović (Croatia), the chair of the Peacebuilding Commission; Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support Elizabeth Spehar; Professor Adriana Erthal Abdenur, Special Advisor of the Presidency of Brazil; and Executive Director of Security Council Report Karin Landgren.

### Counter-Terrorism

On 13 December, Council members issued a press statement condemning a 12 December terrorist attack on Pakistan’s security forces’ post in Daraban, Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan (SC/15529).

On 16 December, Council members issued a press statement condemning a 15 December terrorist attack on the Rasak police station in the Sistan and Baluchistan province, Iran (SC/15534).

# Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

## Expected Council Action

In January 2024, the Security Council expects to hold its quarterly open debate on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. It appears that France, January’s Council President, intends to convene the open debate at ministerial level. Secretary-General António Guterres is the anticipated briefer. Council members may convene additional meetings during the month depending on developments.

## Key Recent Developments

Following the 7 October 2023 large-scale attacks against Israel led by Hamas, the Palestinian armed group and de facto authority in Gaza, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have carried out massive airstrikes on the Gaza Strip. On 27 October 2023, the IDF also launched a ground operation initially focused on northern Gaza and later extended to most other areas of the Gaza Strip. Analysts have identified Israel’s offensive as one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history.

Figures provided by Palestinian officials in Gaza cited by OCHA indicate that, as at 28 December 2023, over 21,300 Palestinians had been killed. Almost 1.9 million people in Gaza, nearly 85 percent of the population, are estimated to be internally displaced, including people who have been displaced multiple times. Entire neighbourhoods have been bombed to the ground, with over 60 percent of Gaza’s total housing units reportedly being destroyed or damaged. Many people are currently missing and presumed buried under the rubble. According to figures provided by Israeli authorities cited by OCHA, over 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals have been killed in Israel, the vast majority on 7 October 2023. Over 200 hostages were taken into the Gaza Strip during the 7 October attacks, of whom 86 Israelis and 24 foreign nationals were released during a seven-day pause in hostilities, which ended on 1 December 2023.

In the initial aftermath of the 7 October 2023 attacks, Israel imposed a “complete siege” on the Gaza Strip, which had already been under a 16-year-long Israeli-Egyptian blockade. While a small quantity of aid has trickled in despite the ongoing hostilities, it has been insufficient to meet the needs of the civilian population. The 21 December 2023 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report highlights the “catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity across the Gaza Strip”, with the risk of famine “increasing each day that the current situation of intense hostilities and restricted humanitarian access persists or worsens”. On 16 November 2023, over 30 independent experts of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) issued a statement saying that the “[g]rave violations committed by Israel against Palestinians in the aftermath of 7 October, particularly in Gaza, point to a genocide in the making”.

At the time of writing, Israeli airstrikes, fighting between the IDF and Palestinian armed groups, as well as the launching of rockets from Gaza towards Israel were ongoing.

Since 7 October 2023, Council members have held over 15 meetings and have voted on seven draft resolutions, adopting two of these texts; resolution 2712 of 15 November 2023 and resolution 2720 of 22 December 2023. (For more, see our 15 November and 20 December 2023 *What’s in Blue* stories.)

Several of the meetings that the Council has held on the war concentrated on specific concerns, such as the open briefings on 10 November and 22 November 2023, which focused, respectively, on attacks on hospitals in Gaza, and on the situation of women and children. More recently, on 29 December 2023, the Council held a meeting on the deteriorating situation in the West Bank and the viability of the two-state solution called by the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Some participants at the meeting referred to a report published on 28 December 2023 by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which documented, among other violations, the increase in the use of unnecessary or disproportionate force by Israeli security forces resulting in unlawful killings in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in the period following 7 October 2023.

According to OCHA, between 7 October and 28 December 2023, 295 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces in the West Bank, eight by Israeli settlers, and one either by Israeli forces or settlers, with “[h]alf of the fatalities [being] reported in operations that did not involve armed clashes”. The year 2023 saw “the most advancements or approvals of housing units in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem” since 2017, when the UN began to systematically track these advancements, according to the 14 December 2023 Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of resolution 2334 of 23 December 2016.

On 6 December 2023, the Secretary-General issued a letter appealing for a humanitarian ceasefire and urging Council members to “avert a humanitarian catastrophe”. The letter invoked Article 99 of the UN Charter, which states that “[t]he Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security”.

On 8 December 2023, the Council failed to adopt a UAE-proposed draft resolution which, “[t]aking note of and acting upon” the Secretary-General’s 6 December letter, demanded an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. The draft text failed to be adopted owing to a veto by the US. All other members—except the UK, which abstained—voted in favour of the text.

Following the Council’s failure to adopt the UAE-proposed draft resolution, on 12 December 2023, the resumed Tenth Emergency Special Session (ESS) of the General Assembly on “Illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory” adopted a resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire. The ESS resolution, which was largely based on the UAE-proposed draft Council text, garnered 153 votes in favour, 23 abstentions, and ten votes against. This represented a notable increase in the number of member states supporting an end to the fighting compared to an earlier resolution on the crisis adopted by the General Assembly in October 2023 during a previous ESS resumption. This earlier resolution, which called for a “humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities”, received 120 votes in favour.

Resolution 2712 of 15 November 2023 called for “urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors throughout the Gaza Strip for a sufficient number of days” to enable unhindered humanitarian access and further called for the unconditional release of all hostages. It requested the Secretary-General to identify “options

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2720 (22 December 2023) requested the Secretary-General to appoint a Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator tasked with establishing a UN mechanism for accelerating humanitarian consignments to Gaza. S/RES/2712 (15 November 2023) called for “urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors throughout the Gaza Strip for a sufficient number of days” to enable unhindered humanitarian access. S/RES/2334 (23 December 2016) condemned Israeli settlements and called for immediate steps to prevent violence against civilians, including acts of terror. **Secretary-General’s report S/2023/988** (14 December 2023) was the latest Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of resolution 2334.

## Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

to effectively monitor” its implementation, with Russia demanding in subsequent Council meetings that the Secretary-General either consider expanding the mandate of the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) to monitor the implementation of resolution 2712 or “propose an alternative”. In an 18 December 2023 letter (S/2023/1041), the Secretary-General identified three options for monitoring resolution 2712, while warning that monitoring “is heavily predicated on conditions on the ground being conducive to monitoring” and noting that “intense bombardment and hostilities on the ground, Israeli restrictions on movement, fuel shortages and interrupted communications make it virtually impossible” for the UN to reach most people in need. The three options are:

- deploying additional UN personnel to strengthen monitoring by UN agencies already present on the ground, such as the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), OCHA, OHCHR, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO);
- establishing a civilian observer mission mandated to monitor the implementation of resolution 2712, deployed by the UN or a third party, “with the consent or cooperation, as appropriate” of all parties; and
- deploying unarmed UN military observers to monitor “compliance with humanitarian pauses/ceasefires”, which would require either the expansion of the mandate of an existing mission, such as UNTSO, or the creation of a new mandate by the Security Council, as well as “the consent or cooperation, as appropriate” of all parties.

Following numerous postponements and changes to earlier versions of the text to avoid a US veto, on 22 December 2023, the Security Council adopted resolution 2720 with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (Russia and the US). The resolution called for “urgent steps to immediately allow safe, unhindered, and expanded humanitarian access and to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities”. It also demanded that the conflict parties “allow and facilitate the use of all available routes to and throughout the entire Gaza Strip, including border crossings” to ensure that humanitarian personnel and assistance reach the civilian population. The resolution also demanded the unconditional release of all hostages. In the lead-up to the adoption, several Council members participated in an informal visit to the Rafah crossing organised on 11 December 2023 by the UAE—the penholder on resolution 2720—where members heard first-hand accounts about the difficulties of delivering humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza.

Resolution 2720 requested that the Secretary-General appoint a Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator (SHRC) responsible for “facilitating, coordinating, monitoring, and verifying in Gaza, as appropriate, the humanitarian nature of all humanitarian relief consignments” that are provided to Gaza through states which are not conflict parties. The text also requested the SHRC to establish a UN mechanism for accelerating humanitarian consignments to Gaza through states which are not party to the conflict and demanded that the conflict parties cooperate with the SHRC. On 26 December 2023, the Secretary-General appointed Sigrid Kaag as SHRC for Gaza. She is expected to begin her assignment on 8 January.

Several humanitarian and human rights organisations have

sharply criticised resolution 2720 for its failure to call for a ceasefire. In remarks to the press delivered shortly after the adoption of resolution 2720, Guterres said that a “humanitarian ceasefire is the only way to begin to meet the desperate needs of people in Gaza and end their ongoing nightmare”. He warned that it is a mistake to measure the effectiveness of the humanitarian operation in Gaza based on the number of trucks that are allowed to unload aid across the border, saying that the “real problem is that the way Israel is conducting this offensive is creating massive obstacles to the distribution of humanitarian aid inside Gaza”.

### Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 10 October 2023 statement, the HRC’s Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and Israel, announced that it is collecting evidence of war crimes committed by all sides since 7 October 2023. As part of its investigation, the commission is inviting states, individuals, groups, and organisations to submit information regarding possible crimes committed by any armed actors, such as attacks against civilians and civilian objects; hostage-taking; use of civilians, including children, as human shields; collective punishment; and starvation. The commission has also issued a call for submissions concerning allegations of gender-based crimes, “with an emphasis on murder and hostage-taking, rape and other forms of sexual violence” committed by any armed actors on and since 7 October 2023. The findings of the investigation will be presented in the commission’s reports to the HRC and the General Assembly in June and October 2024, respectively.

### Women, Peace and Security

In a 14 December 2023 statement, over 30 experts of the HRC called for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza to “protect the rights and futures of women and girls” in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and Israel. The statement said that “Israel’s intense bombardment on Gaza has reportedly killed nearly 12,000 women and children” and destroyed access to essential services, with over 2,700 women becoming widows and new heads of households and leaving 1.1 million women and girls in dire need of humanitarian assistance. The experts noted that the disruption of schooling, collapse of the healthcare system, and the massive destruction of housing, among other factors, are making both short and long-term prospects for women of all ages and girls in Gaza dire.

The experts expressed serious concern over the hostage-taking of Israeli women and girls, calling on Hamas and other armed groups to release all hostages. The statement also called for accountability and expressed “alarm at increasing allegations of sexual violence perpetrated by Hamas and other armed groups against women and girls in Israel on 7 October, as well as sexual assault and threats of sexual violence against women” in the OPT since then. Finally, the experts warned that “no international crime justifies the perpetration of another”, urging Israel to immediately cease “its bombardment of Gaza and its mass displacement of Palestinians”.

### Key Issues and Options

In his 6 December 2023 letter appealing for a humanitarian ceasefire, the Secretary-General said that the “situation is fast deteriorating into a catastrophe with potentially irreversible implications for Palestinians as a whole and for peace and security in the region”. The most pressing issue for the Security Council is to determine how to respond to the Secretary-General’s appeal and other growing calls for a ceasefire. The fact that a veto-wielding member, the US, opposes any such calls continues to limit the Council’s options in this regard.

If Council dynamics continue to impede agreement on a resolution calling for a ceasefire, Council members who support such a measure could consider delivering a joint statement to this effect.



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## Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Council members with influence on the parties and other key actors may also exert diplomatic efforts towards that objective.

Members may evaluate the options for monitoring the implementation of resolution 2712 identified by the Secretary-General in his 18 December 2023 letter, while also bearing in mind the Secretary-General's warnings that the conditions for delivering humanitarian aid do not currently exist. Members might also consider steps the Council should take, should it be faced by non-implementation of resolutions 2712 and 2720.

Determining how the Council can facilitate the resumption of political negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians to move towards a resolution of the conflict and achieve a two-state solution remains the fundamental issue for the Council. The prospects for a two-state solution were waning even before the current escalation, and the longer the war continues, the more difficult it will be to rebuild a political horizon for such negotiations. Deterring developments that could further undermine the viability of the two-state solution—such as the destruction of Gaza, the forced displacement of Palestinians, the expansion of Israeli settlements, forced evictions and demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures, violence against Israeli and Palestinian civilians—also remains paramount for the Council.

At the 29 November 2023 Council briefing on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”, some participants, including China, Russia, and incoming Council member Slovenia, called for an international peace conference. Members supportive of this proposal could start consultations to this effect.

### Council Dynamics

Before 7 October 2023, Council dynamics precluded effective action in response to the non-implementation of Security Council resolutions as well as a shared strategy to restart a political process between

Palestinians and Israelis, with the US maintaining that the circumstances were not ripe for the reignition of such a process and investing its diplomatic capital in initiatives such as the now-stalled normalisation agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Difficult dynamics have characterised the Council's response to the current crisis, which has been marked by contentious and prolonged negotiations, punctuated by multiple failed adoptions. All Council members voted in favour of the 12 December 2023 ESS resolution calling for a ceasefire, with the exception of the US, which voted against the resolution, and the UK, which abstained. All five incoming members (Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, and Slovenia) cast votes in favour.

The US continues to provide Israel with military and political support, including through the sale of weapons, and its opposition to a ceasefire, which it maintains would allow Hamas to regroup and continue launching attacks. Although the US abstained on resolution 2720, its position on the war at the Council is unlikely to change substantively. In order to avoid a US veto, compromise language calling for “an urgent and sustainable cessation of hostilities” was further scaled down to an opaque call for urgent steps “to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities”, and a reference to indiscriminate attacks against civilians was removed from the text.

The UK has recently shifted its tone from only supporting humanitarian pauses towards calling for a “sustainable ceasefire”. While the exact scope of the phrase “sustainable” in this context is unclear, UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs David Cameron has indicated that a sustainable ceasefire does not amount to a “general and immediate ceasefire” and that it would require Hamas to “lay down its arms”.

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## Ukraine

### Expected Council Action

In January 2024, the Security Council may hold one or more meetings on the situation in Ukraine, depending on developments on the ground.

### Key Recent Developments

Hostilities remain concentrated in the eastern Donbas and southern Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine. In December 2023, Ukrainian troops continued operations on the eastern bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson. A 20 December intelligence update by the UK's Ministry of Defence said that Ukrainian forces are assuming “a more defensive posture along much of the front line”. Concurrently, Russian forces conducted offensive operations along the Kupyansk-Svatove-Kreminna line and near the cities of Avdiivka, Bakhmut, and Donetsk in the Donetsk region. In a 30 November 2023 interview, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the war in Ukraine has entered a new phase, with winter slowing the intensity of hostilities along the front lines. He also acknowledged that the counteroffensive

launched by Ukrainian forces earlier last year “did not achieve the desired results”.

In a 14 December 2023 op-ed, however, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba maintained that Ukrainian military objectives remain feasible despite Ukraine's counteroffensive having failed to “achieve the lightning-fast liberation of occupied land”. Kuleba identified three requirements for Ukraine to achieve victory: adequate military aid, including advanced weaponry and equipment; rapid development of industrial capacity in the US, Europe, and Ukraine to cover military needs and replenish defence stocks; and a principled, realistic approach to negotiations with Russia.

Meanwhile, Russia has intensified its air, missile, and drone attacks, targeting military and civilian infrastructure in Ukraine. On 13 December 2023, Russia launched a large missile attack on Kyiv, reportedly injuring at least 53 people and damaging critical infrastructure, including energy and water systems. A 14 December OCHA flash update said that the uptick in airstrikes is expected “to lead to a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in

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UN DOCUMENTS ON UKRAINE Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9501 (11 December 2023) was on the issue of Western weapons supplies to Ukraine, requested by Russia. S/PV.9494 (6 December 2023) was a briefing on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, requested by France.

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# Ukraine

Ukraine and impact the [UN's] response, similarly to last winter". It also noted that Ukraine's largest mobile network operator, Kyivstar, had been the target of a major cyberattack, affecting "millions of people's access to vital public services...including the banking system, postal services, as well as air raid notification systems".

In December 2023, the Security Council maintained its regular focus on Ukraine, holding five meetings, consistent with its level of engagement in previous months. At France's request, Council members convened on 6 December for a briefing on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine. On 11 December, the Council held a meeting to discuss the issue of Western weapons supplies to Ukraine at Russia's request. Russia also organised an Arria-formula meeting on 27 December, which focused on the history of Maidan. (The Maidan, or Euromaidan, protests in 2013 and 2014 led to the ouster of former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014.) (For more, see our 26 December *What's in Blue* story.)

On 29 December, Russia launched one of its largest waves of drone and missile attacks against Ukraine since the start of the war, reportedly killing over 30 civilians and damaging critical infrastructure. The Security Council held a briefing on 29 December to discuss these attacks. The meeting was requested by Ukraine with the support of over 40 member states. Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific Mohammed Khaled Khiari briefed. On 30 December, at Russia's request, the Council convened for a meeting to discuss an incident that occurred on 30 December, in which Ukrainian forces allegedly shelled the Russian city of Belgorod, reportedly killing 14 people and injuring at least 100 others.

Also in December 2023, Ukrainian officials expressed persistent concerns about the potential reduction in Western financial support for Ukraine as the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, triggered by the 7 October attack by the Palestinian armed group Hamas on Israel, continued to divert attention from the war in Ukraine. Furthermore, competing political agendas in the US and the EU continued to threaten the continuity of Western military aid to Ukraine.

In the US, additional aid to Ukraine has encountered opposition from members of the Republican party, who have demanded that the Democratic party agree to stringent restrictions on immigrants and asylum seekers at the US-Mexico border. In October 2023, 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. On 2 November, however, the US House of Representatives passed a \$14.3 billion standalone aid package for Israel, which was subsequently blocked by Democrats in the US Senate on 14 November. On 9 December, bypassing Congress, Biden authorised the emergency sale of \$106 million in tank ammunition to Israel. On 6 December, Republicans in the US Senate blocked a supplemental funding bill that included financial aid for Ukraine, insisting on stricter border regulation in exchange for their support.

Regarding the EU, Hungary vetoed a proposal for the bloc to provide 50 billion euros to Ukraine through 2027 during the final

summit of EU leaders in Brussels on 14 and 15 December 2023. This veto came shortly after the EU agreed to initiate membership talks with Ukraine. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán left the room during the vote, effectively abstaining from the decision. Zelenskyy lauded the EU's decision to open membership talks, describing it as "a truly remarkable result for Ukraine and for the whole of Europe". In contrast, Russia criticised the move, labelling it "an important step towards [the] self-destruction" of the EU. The EU is expected to hold an extraordinary summit on 1 February 2024 to reconsider funding for Ukraine.

## 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. Council members are also concerned about the mounting toll of the conflict on civilians and civilian infrastructure and the conflict's global repercussions. 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, leaving Russia in control of a significant amount of territory in eastern and southern Ukraine. Russia maintains that any settlement of the conflict must take current realities into account.

The advent of five new elected Council members in 2024—Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Sierra Leone, and Slovenia—appears unlikely to change the difficult dynamics underlying Security Council inaction on the situation in Ukraine. The direct involvement of a permanent member in the conflict will continue to limit the Council's options in this regard.

The five new members replaced Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which completed their terms in 2023. Albania informally assumed the co-penholdership, together with the US, on political issues in Ukraine following Russia's invasion. It has tabled three draft resolutions on Ukraine, including resolution 2623 of 27 February 2022, a "Uniting for Peace" resolution which established the 11th Emergency Special Session (ESS) of the General Assembly on Ukraine. It appears that Slovenia will assume Albania's co-penholder role in 2024.

# Ukraine

Vote	Algeria	Guyana	ROK	Sierra Leone	Slovenia
<b>A/RES/ES-11/1</b> 2 March 2022		Co-author	Co-author		Co-author
<b>A/RES/ES-11/2</b> 24 March 2022			Co-author		Co-author
<b>A/RES/ES-11/3</b> 7 April 2022			Co-author		Co-author
<b>A/RES/ES-11/4</b> 12 October 2022		Co-author	Co-author		Co-author
<b>A/RES/ES-11/5</b> 7 November 2022			Co-author		Co-author
<b>A/RES/ES-11/6</b> 23 February 2023			Co-author		Co-author
<b>A/ES-11/L.8</b> 23 February 2023				No vote	
<b>A/ES-11/L.9</b> 23 February 2023				No vote	

Vote in favour ■ Abstention ■ Vote against ■

The ROK and Slovenia are expected to align themselves with the Western and other like-minded Council members that have expressed support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity while voicing strong criticism of Moscow’s actions in Ukraine. In addition to imposing economic sanctions on Russia, both countries co-authored and voted in favour of all substantive draft General Assembly resolutions condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, they voted against the draft amendments to General Assembly Resolution ES-11/6 of 23 February 2023, proposed by Belarus and Nicaragua, which sought to remove the resolution’s sole critical reference to Russia and to include language calling on member states to refrain from sending weapons to the conflict zone.

Algeria is likely to adopt a position less critical of Russia. It has abstained on all substantive draft resolutions on Ukraine in the General Assembly except for a vote against resolution ES-11/3 of 7 April 2022, which suspended Russia from the Human Rights Council (HRC). Russia is Algeria’s leading arms supplier, accounting for 73 percent of Algeria’s total arms trade from 2018 to 2022.

Guyana has voted in favour of General Assembly resolutions condemning Moscow but has abstained on those seeking to impose

punitive measures against Russia, such as suspending the country from the HRC and establishing a compensation mechanism on reparations for Ukraine. This might suggest a departure from the position of Western and other like-minded member states on whether and how to hold Russia accountable for its invasion of Ukraine.

During its Security Council term, Guyana intends to position itself as a member of the “A3 plus one” grouping. While the three African members of the Council (A3) often vote as a unified bloc to project Africa’s voice in the decision-making of the Security Council, the A3 members have not held a shared position on the war in Ukraine. Gabon, for example, abstained on Security Council draft resolution S/2022/720 of 30 September 2022, which condemned the referendums organised by Russia in the occupied territories of Ukraine, while Ghana and Kenya (which served on the Council in 2021-2022) voted in favour. Unlike Gabon, these members also explicitly condemned the invasion.

The divisions among the A3 on the war in Ukraine are expected to continue into 2024. Members from the Global South are likely to continue pursuing a multi-aligned approach to the conflict, cultivating ties with both Moscow and Kyiv and its allies, to maximise their national interests in the midst of a shifting world order.

# West Africa and the Sahel

## Expected Council Action

In January 2024, the Security Council will hold its biannual briefing on West Africa and the Sahel. The Special Representative and head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Leonardo Santos Simão, is expected to brief.

## Key Recent Developments

On 26 July 2023, soldiers from Niger's presidential guard detained President Mohamed Bazoum, conducting the fourth coup d'état among member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) since 2020. Niger's coup perpetrators formed the National Council for the Safeguarding of the Homeland (CNSP) and declared that they overthrew Bazoum because of the "continuing degradation of the security situation and poor economic and social governance". General Abdourahmane Tchiani of the presidential guard was soon named leader of the CNSP. Unlike neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso, which saw years of worsening terrorist violence before their recent coups, the situation in Niger had appeared to be improving as fatalities from violence had been declining since 2021. Some reports suggested that Bazoum had been planning to dismiss Tchiani ahead of the coup.

ECOWAS and the West African Monetary and Economic Union imposed sanctions on Niger, and ECOWAS threatened the use of force if Bazoum were not restored to office. At a 10 August 2023 summit, ECOWAS announced that it was immediately activating the ECOWAS Standby Force to restore constitutional order in Niger.

On 16 September 2023, the military juntas of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger signed the Liptako-Gourma Charter, creating the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) as an architecture of collective defence and mutual assistance. The three countries committed to combatting all forms of terrorism and organised crime in their common area, as well as armed rebellion or other threats to their territorial integrity and sovereignty. According to the charter, any violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of one AES member will be considered an act of aggression against all members, who are obligated to assist one another.

On 2 December 2023, Burkina Faso and Niger announced their withdrawal from the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel). Mali had already withdrawn from the bloc, which was established in 2014 and in 2017 created the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S) to combat terrorist groups and organised crime. Chad and Mauritania, the remaining G5 Sahel countries, suggested on 6 December that they were prepared to dissolve the alliance, which according to its founding convention can be terminated at the request of at least three of its member states.

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has been withdrawing from Mali, with the objective of completing the process by 31 December 2023 in accordance with resolution 2690 of 30 June 2023, which terminated MINUSMA's mandate. The Council decided to end MINUSMA after Mali requested the mission's immediate departure on 16 June 2023. As at 11 December, MINUSMA had withdrawn 10,754 peacekeeping personnel out of 13,871. An 18-month liquidation period to repatriate remaining equipment is projected, according to an 18 August

2023 Secretary-General's letter.

The withdrawal has occurred amid the outbreak of hostilities between Malian forces, backed by the Russian security company the Wagner Group, and former separatist groups in the north. Host country restrictions on MINUSMA, which have included preventing the mission's use of surveillance and reconnaissance flights, have also complicated the withdrawal. Forty-five peacekeepers were injured by improvised explosive devices and, in one instance, small arms fire and shelling, while traveling in convoys after vacating bases in northern Mali. On 14 November, Mali and Wagner Group forces captured Kidal city, the stronghold of the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), which is one of the signatory movements of Mali's 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement.

On 26 November 2023, Sierra Leone repelled an attempted coup d'état after assailants broke into an armoury at a military base near the home of President Julius Maada Bio and then freed 1,890 inmates from a prison in Freetown. At least 19 people, including 13 soldiers, died in the violence. The coup attempt followed Bio's reelection in June 2023 after a disputed vote about which international observers and the US raised concerns because of a lack of transparency in the counting process. On 1 August 2023, authorities in Sierra Leone announced the arrest of several senior military officers for allegedly planning to use protests "to undermine peace".

On 1 December 2023, fighting broke out in the capital of Guinea-Bissau between members of the Presidential Palace Battalion and the National Guard. The National Guard, which is under the Ministry of the Interior, freed two government ministers who had been arrested for corruption, prompting the gun battle. President Umaro Sissoco Embaló described the shootout as an attempted coup d'état and dissolved the opposition-dominated parliament on 4 December.

At a 10 December 2023 summit of ECOWAS heads of state and government in Abuja, Nigeria, West African leaders announced the formation of a heads of state committee to engage with the CNSP of Niger to agree on a short-term transition roadmap for restoring constitutional order. ECOWAS said it would progressively ease its sanctions, contingent on the CNSP's engagement with the committee. West African leaders also directed the ECOWAS Commission to facilitate the deployment of an ECOWAS security mission to Sierra Leone to help stabilise the country. They deplored the unilateral decisions taken by authorities in Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali on the implementation of political transitions agreed with ECOWAS and requested the "Troika" (the presidents of Benin, Guinea-Bissau, and Nigeria) to re-engage the three countries on their transition programmes. West African leaders further "reject[ed] all forms of alliances that seek to divide the region and promote foreign interest in the region," according to the summit communiqué.

Liberia's incumbent president George Weah conceded defeat to challenger Joseph Boakai in a second round run-off election held on 14 November 2023. Senegal is preparing to hold presidential elections in February 2024. Popular opposition candidate Ousmane Sonko—who has faced multiple charges of libel and rape—was sentenced to a two-year jail term in June, which triggered deadly violence. Since his imprisonment, Sonko has been hospitalised due to a hunger strike. On 14 December, a court ordered that he be

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## West Africa and the Sahel

reinstated on the electoral register for the February election, from which he had been barred after his conviction.

### Key Issues and Options

The threat posed by terrorism to West Africa and the Sahel region remains a key issue. This includes the risk of Sahel-based terrorist groups expanding into coastal West African states, and the impact of the security vacuum being created by the withdrawal of MINUSMA. At its 10 December 2023 summit, the ECOWAS heads of state instructed the ECOWAS Commission urgently to resume efforts to activate the ECOWAS Standby Force to carry out counter-terrorism operations and for the Commission to intensify collaboration with sub-regional counter-terrorism initiatives, such as the Accra Initiative and the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad basin.

Another key issue is how to support ECOWAS' efforts in restoring constitutional order in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger. The surge in attempted coups in the region is a further issue of concern. A related key issue is the promotion of good governance, both to stanch the rise in coups and to address underlying drivers of conflict in the region.

Another key issue for Council members is how the Council can continue its engagement with the Sahel after MINUSMA's withdrawal, the termination in August of the Mali sanctions regime, and the end of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. The Secretary-General recommended in a 10 November 2023 letter ending the UN's reporting obligations on the FC-G5S, given that MINUSMA had stopped providing operational and logistical support for the joint force, which had been the basis for these biannual reports. There also continue to be questions about residual responsibilities, particularly the role of good offices, that UNOWAS could assume in Mali following MINUSMA's departure. Malian authorities apparently have rejected any role for UNOWAS related to the now seriously undermined 2015 peace and reconciliation agreement.

One option that Council members have been considering is to request UNOWAS to provide two additional annual reports focused on developments in the Sahel and different security mechanisms. Another potential avenue to stay informed on the situation in Mali is through the request in resolution 2594 on UN transitions (September 2021) for the Secretary-General to "provide updates on the status of transitions across relevant United Nations peace operations, including those that have transitioned within the previous twenty four months". The resolution adds that such updates should include information "from relevant Resident Coordinators and United Nations Country Teams as well as the view of the Peacebuilding Commission in his comprehensive annual briefing mandated by the Security Council under its resolution 2378".

Council members could also resume negotiations on a presidential statement on West Africa and the Sahel, which the Council traditionally adopted following UNOWAS briefings starting in July 2016 but which members have been unable to agree to in the past two years. Such a statement could underscore the importance of

restoring constitutional order in regional countries under transition, encourage cooperation among states of the region to address security challenges, and reaffirm the need for counter-terrorism efforts to respect international humanitarian and human rights law. A presidential statement could also reiterate calls for a comprehensive approach to tackle the region's security, peacebuilding, and development challenges, as well as express support for Simão, who was appointed head of UNOWAS in May 2023.

One option for breaking the impasse on the draft presidential statement, blocked because of disagreement over climate security language, is to convert the text to a draft resolution, which does not require consensus for adoption. Another option is to remove the reference to the impact of climate change on "security", and only note the impact on "stability" in the region.

### Council Dynamics

Council discussion on the region has become increasingly polarised since the deployment of the Wagner Group to Mali in late 2021 and Russia's growing bilateral military cooperation with AES states. Most recently, Russia and Niger agreed to strengthen their military cooperation during the visit of a Russian delegation to Niamey on 4 December 2023, the same day that Niger decided to terminate cooperation agreements with the EU. In August, Russia vetoed a draft resolution to renew the Mali sanctions regime.

Council members have long valued the good offices role of UNOWAS, especially in responding to electoral tensions and other political crises. Despite their support for the special political mission, members have not been able to agree for the past two years on what had been a customary presidential statement following UNOWAS briefings. The main source of disagreement has been over the text's climate security language. The Council's August 2021 presidential statement contained a reference to the impact of climate change on the region's security and stability, but since then, several Council members, including China and Russia, have opposed maintaining the "security" reference.

Members have also been considering how the Council can remain engaged on developments in the Sahel, given the end of its reporting cycles on Mali and the FC-G5S. While it seems that most members supported a French proposal in November 2023 for UNOWAS to provide two additional annual reports focused on the Sahel, Russia has contended that it is not a good idea to separate reporting on the Sahel from the broader West African context, given the interrelated challenges, and has further suggested that the Council can still meet on the Sahel should circumstances in the region warrant its attention.

Sierra Leone, which replaces elected member Ghana on 1 January 2024, will serve as co-penholder with Switzerland on UNOWAS. For press statements on coups d'état in Burkina Faso and Niger since 2022, the Council's three African members, known as the A3, were the penholders. Algeria also joins the Council on 1 January. It has led international mediation on the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali.

# Colombia

## Expected Council Action

In January 2024, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing from Special Representative and head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission, which was circulated to Council members on 26 December 2023 and covers the period from 27 September to 26 December 2023. A civil society representative may also brief.

Council members are also likely to prepare for a visiting mission to Colombia that is expected to take place in February. During a 21 December 2023 meeting under "any other business", the UK (the penholder on Colombia) announced its intention to organise a visiting mission to the country.

The verification mission's mandate expires on 31 October 2024.

## Key Recent Developments

The last quarter of 2023 witnessed several important events in Colombia, including the seventh anniversary of the signing of the 2016 Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace between the government of Colombia and the former rebel group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP) and the holding of the second municipal and departmental elections since the agreement's signing. The administration of Colombian President Gustavo Petro Urrego also continued to advance its policy of "total peace", which entails the promotion of dialogue with armed groups operating in the country, as well as the implementation of the 2016 accord.

Throughout the past year, pervasive violence continued to affect communities (including indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities), former FARC-EP members, human rights defenders, and social leaders. In a 24 November 2023 report, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP)—the judicial component of the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition established by the 2016 agreement—analyses the effects of the "total peace" policy, which resulted in the observance of bilateral ceasefires between government forces and several armed groups: the guerrilla group *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), the dissident group of the former FARC-EP that identifies itself as the *Estado Mayor Central Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (EMC FARC-EP), and a short-lived ceasefire with the *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia* (AGC).

The report notes that the policy has had mixed results in the first ten months of 2023. While fighting between government forces and armed groups has diminished, clashes among these groups remained at the same levels as in 2022, and increased in some areas. Although there has been a reduction in numbers of civilians killed or injured, reports of crimes linked to economic dynamics and social and territorial control—such as kidnapping, extortion, forced recruitment, and conflict-related sexual violence—have either remained the same or increased in some areas.

Insecurity facing social leaders and human rights defenders also remained a major concern in 2023. At least 163 such individuals were killed between January and November, according to Colombia's Ombudsperson. On 12 December 2023, Colombia's Constitutional Court declared an "unconstitutional state of affairs" after

reviewing petitions submitted by several social leaders and human rights defenders. The court issued orders to government entities, calling on them, among other matters, to develop a comprehensive plan to protect these individuals and to ensure sufficient resources for its implementation.

The Secretary-General's report says that the ongoing violence is hindering the implementation of several aspects of the 2016 accord, including rural reform, reintegration of former combatants, the ethnic chapter, and transitional justice processes. It adds that the government has approved several important security guarantee mechanisms stipulated in the 2016 agreement, such as the public policy to dismantle illegal armed groups and criminal organisations. Progress in the implementation of these mechanisms, argues the report, will be contingent on the allocation of adequate resources and upon interinstitutional coordination, including with newly elected authorities.

The SJP has continued to advance its work during the period covered by the Secretary-General's report. In a 19 December 2023 interview, the SJP's president, Judge Roberto Vidal, said that in the first quarter of 2024, the court expects to hand down the first sentences against defendants appearing before the SJP and the restorative projects that they will implement as part of their sentences.

The government has voiced criticism about the SJP's work on several occasions in the past year, including in a 19 October 2023 letter sent to the Security Council and in statements by Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs Álvaro Leyva Durán during the quarterly Council meetings on Colombia. At the Council's 12 July 2023 meeting, the foreign minister said that the SJP should address several matters, including to "remove obstacles" to paramilitaries gaining access to the court, the opening of a macro case on state responsibility in the armed conflict, and "improving the mechanism for selecting new magistrates to avoid the appearance of co-optation". (In accordance with the 2016 agreement, the SJP does not have jurisdiction over crimes committed by paramilitary groups.) In response to the 19 October letter, Vidal called for respect for the court's independence and autonomy.

In a notable development, on 17 November 2023, the SJP decided to admit under its authority Salvatore Mancuso, a former commander of the paramilitary group *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), after determining that he was "functionally and materially incorporated into the public force" between 1989 and 2004. In his 19 December 2023 interview, Vidal noted that the SJP has rejected the request of 1,700 people who wanted to be received as paramilitaries in the past five years, adding that the court reviews these requests on a case-by-case basis to examine their connections to public forces during the conflict.

Recent months have witnessed both progress and setbacks in the government's dialogue efforts with armed groups operating in the country. The process with the ELN faced a crisis in late October 2023 after the group kidnapped Luis Manuel Díaz, the father of professional football player Luis Díaz. The high-profile abduction of Díaz, who was released on 9 November 2023, sparked discussions about whether the ongoing kidnappings carried out by the group constitute a violation of the ceasefire protocols agreed between the sides, which only contain a general call to uphold international

# Colombia

humanitarian law. At the fifth round of negotiations between the government and the ELN, held in Mexico between 4 and 17 December 2023, the sides announced several key decisions, including to extend their bilateral ceasefire beyond January 2024 and the establishment of eight crucial locations for humanitarian action. Although it was announced initially that the ELN had also agreed to suspend ransom kidnappings, the group's commander, Antonio García, later reportedly said that the group will only do so if the government upholds its promise to finance projects that could provide the rebels with alternative sources of income. The next round of talks between the sides is set to take place in Cuba in January 2024.

On 16 October 2023, the government and the EMC FARC-EP began implementing a bilateral ceasefire that is in effect until 15 January 2024. The process has encountered several obstacles, including violence between the sides and the suspension by the EMC FARC-EP of the dialogue process in November 2023. Despite this, in December, the parties convened for a second round of talks and installed a mechanism to monitor the ceasefire's implementation. During the month, the sides reached agreements on several issues—including protocols covering the ceasefire's rules, the work of the monitoring mechanism, and the role of the international community in the negotiations—and the EMC FARC-EP announced that it would suspend ransom kidnappings. The next round of talks between the sides is set to take in January 2024.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 28 November 2023, Antonia Urrejola, the international human rights expert appointed to identify and verify obstacles to the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement, concluded an eight-day visit to Colombia. During the trip, Urrejola met with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Constitutional Court, and civil society, as well as former combatants in the process of reintegration, among others. Urrejola will present her report on Colombia to the Human Rights Council during its 55th session in March 2024.

## Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)-Related Developments

The chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), Deputy Permanent Representative of Croatia to the UN, Hrvoje Ćurić Hrvatinčić, briefed the Council at its 11 October meeting on Colombia. In his address, Hrvatinčić presented the PBC's advice for the Council's consideration. He encouraged the Security Council to support the government in ensuring that peace dividends reach all Colombians, including through the comprehensive rural reform, which he said is key to reinforcing state presence and providing development opportunities and public service in conflict-affected areas and historically marginalised regions.

Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support Elizabeth Spehar visited Colombia between 28 November and 1 December 2023. During the visit, Spehar discussed advances and challenges in the implementation of the 2016 agreement with representatives of the government, civil society, the verification mission, and the UN country team. She also had the opportunity to discuss and witness projects in Colombia that are supported by the UN Peacebuilding Fund, which has been investing in Colombia since January 2014.

## Key Issues and Options

The overarching priority for the Council is to continue supporting the full implementation of the 2016 peace agreement. During the Council's upcoming visiting mission to Colombia, members will be able to engage directly with Colombian actors and hear their views on how the international community can best support their peace

consolidation efforts. The visit will come at a crucial moment, as the accord's recent anniversary marked the halfway point in the 15-year timetable envisioned for its implementation. It will also serve as an opportunity for the Council's five incoming members—Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Sierra Leone, and Slovenia—to gain a close understanding of the file as they begin their two-year terms.

Supporting the work of the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition is a longstanding priority for the Council. Members have emphasised the importance of upholding the SJP's autonomy on numerous occasions, including through their press statements adopted following the quarterly Colombia meetings. The Council expressed strong support for the court when it came under attack during the administration of former president Iván Duque, including by meeting with the heads of the three bodies comprising the comprehensive system during their July 2019 visiting mission to Colombia. (For background, see our November 2022 research report titled "Transitional Justice: What Role for the UN Security Council?" and 13 July 2019 *What's in Blue* story.) Members may choose to meet with the head of the SJP during their upcoming visit. This will also allow them to gain a better understanding of the court's preparations for the handing down of sentences in 2024, a crucial—and potentially polarising—stage in the transitional justice process.

Council members may also soon discuss whether to expand the verification mission's mandate to monitor the ceasefire between the government and the EMC FARC-EP. Resolution 2694 of 2 August 2023, which expanded the mission's mandate to monitor the ceasefire between the government and the ELN, indicated the Council's willingness to consider doing so when the Secretary-General "confirms a ceasefire including appropriate verification protocols has been reached" with the armed group. It appears that Council members will wait to hear this confirmation before taking action on the matter.

## Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the peace process in Colombia and for the verification mission's work.

Council members have different views, however, about the appropriate level of Council support for the government's dialogue efforts with armed groups operating in the country. Some members, such as the US, apparently feel that a cautious approach is needed and advocate a case-by-case analysis of a possible UN role in such dialogue efforts. During the Council's October Colombia meeting, the US noted that the ELN, the EMC FARC-EP, and the armed group *Segunda Marquetalia* are foreign terrorist organisations under US law. It also argued that there should be more progress in the dialogue process with the EMC FARC-EP before the Council can consider another expansion of the mission's mandate. Other members would apparently like to see a more proactive approach from the Council in support of the dialogue processes. Council member Switzerland is an accompanying country in the dialogue process with the ELN and a guarantor country in the process with the EMC FARC-EP.

The advent of the five new elected Council members in 2024 may affect Council dynamics on Colombia. Guyana, which replaced Brazil in the Latin American and Caribbean Group

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## Colombia

(GRULAC) seat, apparently intends to position itself as the “plus one” member of the “A3 plus one” grouping. The Council’s African

members (the A3) have often sought to highlight issues relating to indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.

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## Yemen

### Expected Council Action

In January 2024, the Security Council will hold its monthly briefing on Yemen in closed consultations. 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 are expected to brief.

### Key Recent Developments

Talks continue between the Houthi 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 war in Yemen. At the same time, Houthi attacks against Israel and maritime shipping in the Red Sea since the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas on 7 October 2023 risk undermining these peace efforts.

On 14 November 2023, Houthi leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi announced that the group would expand its attacks on Israel—which to that point involved missile and drone launches targeting Israel—to target Israeli ships in the Red Sea. On 19 November, the Houthis seized a Bahamas-flagged cargo ship called the *Galaxy Leader*, associated with an Israeli businessman, and took its 25 crew members hostage. Announcing the seizure, Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sare’e said that all ships linked to or owned by Israelis would be targeted until Israel ended its campaign against Hamas. The intervention of a US Navy warship thwarted the attempted seizure in the Gulf of Aden of another commercial vessel linked to an Israeli company on 26 November. Security Council members issued a press statement on 1 December that demanded that all such attacks and actions cease immediately and called for the immediate release of the vessel *MV Galaxy Leader* and its crew.

But the maritime attacks have continued, and as a result, according to reports, the arrival of commercial ships at the port of Eilat in southern Israel had almost completely stopped by mid-December 2023. On 3 December, three commercial vessels came under attack in the southern Red Sea, according to the US military, as the Houthis claimed drone and missile attacks on two Israeli vessels in the area. The US said that the three vessels involved were the *Unity Explorer*, a Bahamas-flagged and UK-owned cargo ship; the *Number 9*, a Panamanian-flagged, Bermuda- and UK-owned and operated bulk carrier; and the *Sophie II*, a Panamanian-flagged bulk carrier. A US destroyer shot down three drones as it helped the vessels, two of which were struck by missiles and one of which was hit by a drone.

On 9 December 2023, the Houthis said that they would target all ships heading to Israel and warned all international shipping companies to avoid Israeli ports. “If Gaza does not receive the food and

medicine it needs, all ships in the Red Sea bound for Israeli ports, regardless of their nationality, will become a target for our armed forces,” Sare’e said in a statement.

An anti-ship cruise missile hit the Norwegian-flagged *Strinda* on 11 December 2023, causing a fire on the ship but no casualties. France’s Armies Ministry said its frigate *Languedoc* shot down a drone during the attack, which occurred near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the narrow channel between Yemen and northeast Africa that links the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden. The French frigate “then positioned itself to protect the affected vessel, preventing an attempt to hijack the ship,” the French military said. The vessel’s Norwegian owner said that the *Strinda* was coming from Malaysia and was bound for the Suez Canal and then Italy with a cargo of palm oil. Sare’e alleged that the ship was bound for Israel. On 13 December, Houthi forces tried to board a commercial tanker near the Bab el-Mandeb strait. After the attempted boarding failed, they fired missiles at the vessel, according to the US military. This tanker was loaded with jet fuel heading to either Rotterdam in the Netherlands or Gävle, Sweden, according to its owner, Ardmor Shipping. An American warship shot down a suspected Houthi drone during the incident.

On 15 December 2023, the major shipping firm Maersk instructed its container vessels to pause Red Sea voyages, one day after a near-miss attack against the vessel *Maersk Gibraltar*. Other shipping companies announced similar decisions over the following days. Attacks continued, meanwhile. The same day as Maersk’s announcement, the Houthis claimed attacks against two more vessels, the *MSC Alanya* and *MSC Palatium III*.

Houthi chief negotiator Mohammed Abdulsalam said on 16 December 2023 that ending Houthi naval operations was contingent on Israel ending its siege of Gaza and allowing the entry of food and medicine. “[A]ny genuine steps responding to the humanitarian situation in Palestine and Gaza through bringing in food and medicine would contribute to reducing the escalation”, he reportedly claimed. On 18 December 2023, the US announced the establishment of an upgraded multinational task force, called Operation Prosperity Guardian, that would start operating in the Red Sea to deter and counter the Houthi attacks. Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the Seychelles, Spain, the UK, and the US will participate in the initiative, which will operate under the umbrella of the Combined Maritime Forces, a multinational alliance tasked with defending the world’s shipping lanes.

On 13 December 2023, Security Council members held their monthly meeting on Yemen in closed consultations, receiving briefings from Grundberg, Beary, and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths. Grundberg had held talks

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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 Press Statement SC/15513 (11 December 2023) condemned recent Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and demanded that all such attacks and actions cease immediately.



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# Yemen

over the previous two weeks with Saudi, Yemeni, and Omani government officials, as well as with Houthi chief negotiator Abdulsalam, during multiple visits to Riyadh and Muscat from 29 November to 7 December. Grundberg expressed cautious optimism about the Houthi-Saudi talks, which he apparently reported are continuing to make progress. The envoy said, however, that regional developments are complicating the process. Members met under “any other business” in closed consultations on 18 December to discuss the threat that Houthi Red Sea attacks posed to maritime security. Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and Americas in the United Nations Department of Political Affairs Miroslav Jenča briefed.

The World Food Programme (WFP) announced on 5 December 2023 that it was pausing its operations in northern Yemen. The WFP said that it took the decision because of limited funding and following more than a year of inconclusive negotiations with the Houthis over how to direct food aid to the neediest recipients.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 14 November 2023, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued a statement “demanding [the] immediate release of staff detained” in Yemen. The statement noted that there had been no information about the status of staff members from the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and OHCHR who had been arbitrarily detained in 2021 and 2023. It called this a “profoundly alarming situation”, which demonstrates utter disregard for the rule of law. The statement concluded with the Director-General of UNESCO, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Executive Coordinator of the UN Volunteers reiterating their demand for the “immediate release” of UN staff members and others being illegally detained by the de facto Houthi authorities.

## Key Issues and Options

A new key concern for the Council is the threat that Houthi attacks present to international shipping and maritime security.

How the Council can support ongoing peace talks and a future inter-Yemeni political process under UN auspices remains a key issue. The risk that Houthi attacks on Israel and Red Sea shipping could undermine or stall Yemen peace talks is a related key issue. Other important issues linked to the political process are the fragile relations between the factions that form the Yemeni government’s Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) and how a political process should address some PLC members’ calls for a separate southern

Yemeni state.

In the event of a deal between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, Council members could issue a press statement to welcome or endorse any agreement. Such a statement could further reiterate members’ support for Grundberg to lead an inter-Yemeni political process for a comprehensive peace agreement, including for the UN Envoy to conclude his work on a roadmap to guide this process.

The humanitarian situation in Yemen remains a key issue. During 2023, Yemen relief efforts faced a major funding shortage, which forced humanitarian agencies to scale back programmes. As at 15 December 2023, the 2023 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan had received 38 percent of its required funding for the year (\$1.649 billion of \$4.344 billion). In 2024, amid other global crises, it is anticipated that relief efforts in Yemen will face similar financing challenges. Addressing Yemen’s economic conditions is a related key issue to mitigate the country’s humanitarian needs.

## Council and Wider 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.

Members have condemned the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and are concerned about their consequences on maritime security and freedom of navigation. The US was a strong proponent for establishing Operation Prosperity Guardian, and together with Albania, France, Japan, Malta, and the UK, requested the 18 December consultations on the attacks. US officials have said that they have not ruled out possible military action against the Houthis. Israel has reportedly refrained from intervening militarily to see what effect the multinational maritime task force will have once it starts operating in the Red Sea.

The UK is the penholder on Yemen. Ambassador Hwang Joonkook (South Korea) is expected to serve as the new chair of the 2140 Sanctions Committee. The United Arab Emirates, which has been a key member of the Saudi-led coalition, concluded its two-year Council term on 31 December 2023, and Algeria replaces it as the elected Arab Council member for 2024-2025.

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# Cyprus

## Expected Council Action

In January 2024, Security Council members are expected to receive a briefing in consultations on the situation in Cyprus. Special Representative and head of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) Colin Stewart is expected to brief. The Council is expected to renew UNFICYP’s mandate ahead of its 31 January 2024 expiry.

## Key Recent Developments

Over the past six months, there has been no meaningful progress on the political front and no direct formal engagement between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders in the context of unification talks, which have been stalled since the collapse of negotiations at Crans-Montana in July 2017. The two sides have maintained alternative positions on the appropriate framework for resolving the Cyprus issue: the Greek Cypriots remain firmly committed to a settlement

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON CYPRUS** Security Council Resolution S/RES/2674 (30 January 2023) extended the mandate of UNFICYP until 31 January 2024. **Secretary-General’s Reports S/2023/497** (5 July 2023) was on the UN’s good offices mission in Cyprus. **S/2023/498** (5 July 2023) was on UNFICYP. **Security Council Press Statement SC/15391** (21 August 2023) condemned an 18 August assault by Turkish Cypriot security forces against members of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus.

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## Cyprus

based on a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation (BBF) with political equality, as stipulated in previous Security Council resolutions, while Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar insists on a two-state solution based on sovereign equality.

In August 2023, skirmishes broke out between Turkish Cypriots and UN personnel in the buffer zone, resulting in several injuries. On 17 August, Turkish Cypriots began working on the construction of a road connecting the town of Pyla/Pile, located within the UN-controlled demilitarised zone known as the Green Line, to Turkish Cypriot-controlled areas. In a press statement the same day, UNFICYP expressed concern over the “unauthorized construction work” being carried out inside the UN buffer zone. As UNFICYP sought to halt the construction on 18 August in line with its mandate, Turkish Cypriot bulldozers reportedly moved in to clear the UN vehicles placed in the buffer zone. Three UNFICYP peacekeepers were injured during the incident.

The incident was criticised by several international interlocutors. Secretary-General António Guterres condemned the assault in an 18 August 2023 statement, stressing that attacks against UN peacekeepers may constitute serious crimes under international law. A joint statement issued on the same day by France, the UK, and the US urged Turkish Cypriot authorities to avoid further actions that could jeopardise the prospects of resuming settlement talks and to immediately halt any form of violence against UNFICYP personnel in the area. On 21 August, Security Council members held a meeting at the UK’s request on the situation in Cyprus under “any other business”. In a press statement following that meeting, the Council condemned the assault and reaffirmed its support for UNFICYP, particularly its mandated authority in and delineation of the buffer zone.

On 9 October 2023, Stewart announced that an understanding had been reached between the two Cypriot sides to resolve the situation in Pyla/Pile. Stewart said that while the specific modalities were still being discussed, the framework understanding would come into effect immediately. France, the UK, and the US welcomed the announcement in a 10 October joint statement, and Stewart briefed Council members on the details of the understanding during a 16 October meeting under “any other business”. Nonetheless, in November, both sides accused each other of breaching the understanding.

Cyprus has been without a UN envoy since Jane Holl Lute’s resignation in September 2021. Lute was initially hired as a UN consultant in August 2018, and was later referred to as a “Senior UN Official”, to conduct consultations with the parties on the Secretary-General’s behalf and to finalise the terms of reference for the peace negotiations.

Following Lute’s resignation, Guterres sought to appoint a UN envoy to assume her responsibilities. Guterres brought up this matter during a meeting with Tatar and then-Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades on 27 September 2021. However, the two leaders expressed differing preferences for the envoy’s terms of reference and title, specifically whether the position should be a special envoy or a personal envoy. (Special envoys are usually assigned to undertake special missions related to matters of which the Security Council or

the General Assembly are seized, while personal envoys undertake missions at the Secretary-General’s initiative.) Tatar objected to the appointment of a special envoy, arguing that such an envoy’s ability to find common ground would be constrained by being forced to operate strictly within the BBF framework outlined in Security Council resolutions. A personal envoy, he suggested, would have greater autonomy to explore new ideas, including his proposed two-state solution.

During an UNFICYP-hosted event on 11 December 2023, attended by Tatar and Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Christodoulides, Stewart confirmed that the two sides had reached consensus on a candidate, adding that an official announcement from the Secretary-General was expected “very soon”. Stewart emphasised that the selection of an envoy “is an important step in trying to see if a path can be found for a mutually-acceptable way forward”.

According to media reports, the candidate for the position of UN envoy is Maria Ángela Holguín Cuéllar, who served as Colombia’s foreign minister from August 2010 to August 2018. However, details regarding whether the role will be designated a special envoy or a personal envoy and the nature of any reporting obligations to the Council remain uncertain.

### Key Issues and Options

Since the collapse of the 2017 unification talks in Crans-Montana, the key issue for the Security Council has been the lack of meaningful progress on the political front and the diminishing prospects for a political settlement of the Cyprus problem. The anticipated appointment of a UN envoy appears to mark a significant step towards the potential resumption of dialogue. An option for the Council is to consider mandating the new envoy to brief the Council regularly on any efforts aimed at reviving the peace process. It is noteworthy that during Lute’s three-year role, she did not provide any briefings to the Council.

### Council Dynamics

Cyprus remains a low-intensity issue on the Council’s agenda. Council members with a vested interest in Cyprus include France, Russia, and the UK, which also serves as the penholder on the issue.

While the Council is united in its support for UNFICYP and a political process based on a BBF with political equality, members diverge on the conditions and timeframe for the unification talks. Some members have previously supported a comprehensive strategic review of the mission and timed benchmarks for an exit strategy tied to the political process. Russia remains adamant that there be no external interference or attempts to impose solutions or timelines that might influence the peace talks.

While Council members agree on the necessity of appointing a UN envoy, some have expressed preferences for specific terms of reference for the position. Russia, in particular, has supported the appointment of a special envoy or adviser who would be directly appointed by and accountable to the Council.

# Haiti

## Expected Council Action

In January 2024, the Council will hold its 90-day briefing on the situation in Haiti. Special Representative and head of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) María Isabel Salvador will brief the Council on recent political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country and the Secretary-General's latest report on BINUH.

## Key Recent Developments

Since the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021, Haiti has descended into a multidimensional crisis characterised by political deadlock, extreme violence, and dire humanitarian conditions. At the time of writing, the country lacks a single democratically elected official as the caretaker government led by Prime Minister Ariel Henry has been unable to reach a political settlement with opposition groups on the organisation of elections. Amidst the impasse, politically connected criminal gangs have overtaken 80 percent of Port-au-Prince, the capital, fuelling unprecedented levels of violence. According to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, at least 3,960 people were killed, 1,432 injured, and 2,951 kidnapped in gang-related violence in Haiti in 2023 alone—a sharp increase from the year before. While Port-au-Prince has long borne the brunt of this violence, a report published by OHCHR on 28 November 2023 found that it is increasingly affecting nearby regions such as Lower Artibonite.

The spiralling security situation has exacerbated the country's already dire humanitarian conditions. At an 8 December 2023 press conference, Deputy Special Representative and UN Resident Coordinator in Haiti Ulrika Richardson said that 5.2 million people require humanitarian assistance and that 4.35 million—two out of five Haitians—face acute food insecurity, while noting that the UN's 2023 humanitarian response plan for Haiti was only 33 per cent funded.

In October 2022, seeking to stabilise the country's security situation and stem the multidimensional crisis, the Haitian government appealed for the immediate deployment of an "international specialised force" to temporarily reinforce the efforts of the Haitian National Police (HNP) to combat gangs. Secretary-General António Guterres subsequently endorsed the request, recommending that "[o]ne or several Member States, acting bilaterally at the invitation of and in cooperation with the Government of Haiti, could deploy, as a matter of urgency, a rapid action force" to support the HNP. In July 2023, ten months after Haiti's initial request, Kenyan Foreign Minister Alfred Mutua announced in a statement that his country had agreed to "positively consider" leading a multinational force to Haiti and would contribute a contingent of 1,000 police officers to "help train and assist Haitian police [to] restore normalcy in the country and protect strategic installations". After Kenya's announcement, several Caribbean countries stated their intention to participate in the force, and the US pledged up to \$200 million in financial and logistical support.

Although the UN would not administer the proposed force, Kenya, Haiti, and other stakeholders sought authorisation from the Security Council prior to deployment. Consequently, on 2 October 2023, the Council adopted resolution 2699, authorising member states to form and deploy a Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission

to Haiti. The resolution authorised the mission for an initial period of 12 months, to be reviewed after nine months. It specified that the cost of implementing the operation would be borne by voluntary contributions from individual countries and regional organisations, and it established a UN trust fund for this purpose. In addition, the resolution requested the MSS mission leadership, in coordination with Haiti and other participating countries, to provide the Council with a concept of operations prior to deployment, including information such as the sequencing of deployment, mission goals, rules of engagement, exit strategy, number of personnel, and financial needs. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 2 October 2023.)

Kenya has since begun preparations for the MSS mission in collaboration with Haiti, the US, and other contributing countries. Kenyan officials have undertaken three assessment visits to Port-au-Prince, most recently in December 2023, and convened a joint planning conference with Haitian stakeholders in Nairobi. They have reportedly also prepared an initial draft of the concept of operations requested by resolution 2699 and are currently seeking input on it from partner countries. However, some domestic legal and political factors in Kenya are complicating the planning process. The High Court of Kenya has issued a temporary injunction against the deployment until it rules on its constitutionality, currently expected on 26 January 2024. In addition, Kenyan officials have insisted that no taxpayer money will be spent on the deployment and that it will not take place until it is fully funded by the international community. On 12 December 2023, at Russia's request, Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas Miroslav Jenča briefed the Council on the current state of planning for the MSS mission.

Meanwhile, Haiti's protracted political impasse remains a key concern and a driver of the country's deteriorating security and humanitarian situations. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has convened a series of talks between the government and opposition groups to agree on modalities for the organisation of elections. These discussions have been facilitated by CARICOM's Eminent Persons Group (EPG) on Haiti, comprising three former prime ministers in the region: Perry Christie of the Bahamas, Bruce Golding of Jamaica, and Kenny Anthony of St. Lucia. In early December 2023, after prior talks yielded limited progress, the EPG proposed its own draft framework agreement, which opposition groups rejected. In a 7 December 2023 statement, Guterres expressed his concern about "the limited progress in the inter-Haitian dialogue" and underscored "the importance of an agreement on the restoration of democratic institutions... to achieving sustainable rule of law and security" in Haiti.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 28 November 2023, OHCHR and BINUH issued a report detailing a "shocking rise" in gang violence and its expansion to rural areas beyond Port-au-Prince. The report, covering the period from January 2022 through October 2023, documents atrocities committed by criminal groups in the region of lower Artibonite, including executions of civilians and use of sexual violence against women and children, and underscores the urgent need for the deployment of the MSS mission. In a statement accompanying the report, Türk called the situation in Haiti "cataclysmic" and similarly emphasised that the MSS "needs to be deployed to Haiti as soon as possible".

From 23 October to 1 November 2023, William O'Neill, the UN Expert on Human Rights in Haiti, undertook his second official visit to the country. In a 30 October statement concluding his visit, O'Neill said he continued to be

**UN DOCUMENTS ON HAITI Security Council Resolutions** S/RES/2700 (19 October 2023) renewed the sanctions regime on Haiti imposed by resolution 2653 of 21 October 2022. S/RES/2699 (2 October 2023) authorised member states to form and deploy a Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission to Haiti to help re-establish security in the country and build conditions conducive to holding free and fair elections. S/RES/2692 (14 July 2023) renewed the mandate of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) for one year, until 15 July 2024. **Secretary-General's Report** S/2023/768 (16 October 2023) was the Secretary-General's 90-day report on Haiti.

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## Haiti

alarmed by the “worrying situation”. He underscored that sexual violence against women and girls continues to be “endemic” and noted that no progress has been made regarding access to services and justice for survivors since his last visit in June 2023. O’Neill emphasised his particular concern about the impact of insecurity and violence on children, noting that “an entire generation is seemingly being sacrificed by violence, and the future of a country is threatened by the dramatic situation faced by its youth”. He called on the authorities in Haiti to prioritise children’s needs, noting that a “vast majority” of the gang members are children who will require rehabilitation and reintegration.

### Sanctions-Related Developments

On 19 October 2023, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2700, renewing for one year the Haiti sanctions regime imposed by resolution 2653 of 21 October 2022. On 8 December 2023, the 2653 Haiti Sanctions Committee designated four additional individuals under the regime: Renel Destina, leader of the Grand Ravine gang; Vitel’homme Innocent, leader of the Kraze Barye gang; Johnson André, leader of the 5 Segond gang; and Wilson Joseph, leader of the 400 Mawozo gang.

### Key Issues and Options

The key immediate task for the Security Council is to monitor and support the deployment of the MSS mission, which is seen as critical to stabilising Haiti’s security situation. At January’s briefing, Council members may reiterate their gratitude to Kenya for assuming

leadership of the mission and welcome initial planning steps while underscoring the importance of swift additional progress towards full deployment, including the finalisation of the concept of operations to be submitted to the Council per resolution 2699.

Regarding the broader political situation in Haiti, Council members may reiterate their support for the EPG’s mediation efforts and call on national stakeholders to demonstrate the spirit of compromise necessary to reach consensus on the electoral transition.

### Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their concern about the spiralling situation in Haiti and generally agree on the need for a Haitian-led political solution that addresses both security and socio-economic challenges. Views vary, however, on appropriate Council action to support this process. For instance, China and Russia both abstained on resolution 2699, arguing that a national political consensus and more detailed operational information were required before the Council should authorise the MSS mission. It seems that Russia reiterated this view at the Council’s 12 December 2023 briefing, contending that little progress had been made towards deployment since the Council’s authorisation and that this vindicated Russia’s initial position.

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## Syria

### Expected Council Action

In January 2024, the Security Council is expected to hold a meeting on the political process and the humanitarian situation in Syria.

### Key Recent Developments

Following a 5 October 2023 drone attack on a Syrian military academy in Homs that reportedly killed at least 100 people, north-west Syria has witnessed a steep rise in hostilities, representing the area’s most significant escalation in violence since 2019. In the latest round of attacks between 15 and 17 December, shelling in residential neighbourhoods in Idlib and western Aleppo killed at least seven people and injured 24 others, according to a 19 December OCHA press release. Hostilities since 5 October have resulted in over 99 civilian casualties, nearly 40 percent of whom have been children, and have injured more than 400 people, as at 19 December. (For more, see the briefs on Syria in our November and December 2023 *Monthly Forecasts*.)

The situation in north-east Syria, particularly in the Deir-ez-Zor governorate, also remains volatile. On 27 August 2023, fighting erupted between Arab tribal groups and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a predominantly Kurdish group opposing the Syrian government, in Deir-ez-Zor. The clashes reportedly broke out after the SDF apprehended Ahmed al-Khubail, also known as Abu Khawla—the Arab leader of the Deir-ez-Zor Military Council, a local SDF affiliate—accusing him of involvement in several crimes. A 12 December OCHA press release said that clashes in Deir-ez-Zor

continue to result in civilian casualties and damage to critical civilian infrastructure, including water stations and schools. The press release added that approximately 27,000 people have been displaced since the onset of fighting. (For more, see our 27 September 2023 *What’s in Blue* story.)

Council members met on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria on 28 November 2023. Director of OCHA’s Operations and Advocacy Division Edem Wosornu and Deputy Special Envoy for Syria Najat Rochdi 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 apprised members of OCHA’s continued engagement with the Syrian government in an effort to promote the principled, sustained and predictable delivery of cross-border assistance in north-west Syria from Türkiye. She underlined the significance of maintaining an independent and robust oversight mechanism at the border points. She also highlighted that funding shortages for relief efforts had significantly curtailed the ability of humanitarian organisations to provide assistance in the country. At the time of writing, the Syria humanitarian response plan for 2023 (\$5.41 billion) was only 33.8 percent funded.

On 4 December 2023, the World Food Programme (WFP) announced that it will terminate its general food assistance programme in Syria, which provided assistance to 5.5 million people across Syria, because of funding shortages, starting from January 2024. Media reports, however, suggest that WFP will continue

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA** Security Council Resolution S/RES/2254 (18 December 2015) was the first resolution focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. It was adopted unanimously. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9487** (28 November 2023) was a briefing on the political and humanitarian situation in Syria.

# Syria

to support families affected by emergencies and natural disasters through smaller, more targeted emergency interventions. In July, WFP cut its assistance by almost 40 percent, ending food assistance for 2.5 million people, because of lack of resources.

In her remarks at the 28 November 2023 Council meeting, Rochdi described the intensified hostilities in Syria and stressed the urgent need for de-escalation and a nationwide ceasefire, along with a cooperative approach to countering Security Council-listed terrorist groups. She expressed deep concern about the potential for a wider escalation in Syria from the spillover effects of the crisis in Israel and Gaza. She said that “attention on Syria has ebbed somewhat given the terrible crisis in the region” while noting that “Syria is a piece of that puzzle too and the situation in Syria is too dangerous to be left unattended”. With regard to the envisioned resumption of the Constitutional Committee, she said that “Special Envoy [Geir O. Pedersen] is continuing to speak with all concerned [parties] about how, in these circumstances, the non-Syrian issues that have so far prevented reconvening the Committee in Geneva should be put aside in the interest of the process”.

On 11 December 2023, Pedersen met with the representatives of the Syrian Negotiations Commission (SNC), which represents the political opposition to the government. On 14 December, Pedersen met with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin in Geneva. According to a post on X by the Special Envoy’s office, Pedersen stressed that all stakeholders must prioritise de-escalation and re-commit to a genuine political process in line with resolution 2254 of 18 December 2015, which focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis, including reconvening of the Constitutional Committee.

Also on 14 December 2023, Pedersen met with the Director General of the Middle Eastern and African Affairs Bureau at the Japanese Foreign Ministry, Nagaoka Kansuke. According to a post on X by the Special Envoy’s office, both officials emphasised the significance of a renewed commitment from all parties to advance the implementation of resolution 2254 and to address the urgent humanitarian needs of all Syrians. Later that day, Pedersen also met Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib. At the meeting, Pedersen noted the dire situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and emphasised the need for urgent action and funding to address humanitarian needs. On the following day, Pedersen met with Syrian Vice Foreign Minister Bassam Sabbagh in Geneva, where he emphasised the importance of de-escalating violence in Syria and the region. On 21 December, Pedersen spoke by telephone with Senior Assistant to Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Asghar Khaji. Both officials discussed the “step-for-step” confidence building measures, including the resumption of the Constitutional Committee and the broader issues necessary to advance the implementation of resolution 2254.

There has been an uptick in attacks against US forces stationed in Syria and Iraq, following the 7 October 2023 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 the latest round of attacks, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a UK-based human rights monitoring organisation, reported that on 14 December, Iranian-backed militias attacked the international

coalition base in Al-Shaddadi town in the southern countryside of al-Hasakah governorate. Earlier the same day, the international coalition base in the Al-Tanf area and the Koniko gas field in the Deir Ezzor countryside also came under attack from a drone and rocket fire, reportedly by Iranian-backed militias. According to SOHR, since 19 October, there had been 57 attacks against coalition forces in Syria, as at 14 December.

## Women, Peace and Security

A report by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic published in August says that despite the negative consequences on women and girls of the protracted conflict in Syria – such as accessing health care, property rights as well as heightened levels of discrimination and violence – Syrian women’s rights organisations have continued to raise awareness about women’s rights, gender equality, and gender-based violence. The report notes, in particular, how the advocacy efforts of women civil society leaders and the families of the missing led to the establishment of a UN institution for the missing and the disappeared in the country; the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (A/RES/77/301). The report recommends that UN member states support and fund the institution.

## 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. 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 to find 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. (A private meeting is a closed, formal meeting format; unlike closed consultations, non-Council member states are allowed to participate in this format.)

## Council Dynamics

Over the years, Syria has been one of the most divisive files on the Council’s agenda. China and Russia are supportive of the Syrian government, emphasising the need to respect the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and drawing connections between unilateral coercive measures on Syria and the challenging humanitarian situation in the country. In contrast, the P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other like-minded members criticise the government for violating international humanitarian law and human rights

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## Syria

law, arbitrarily detaining people, and not engaging meaningfully in political dialogue.

It remains unclear whether any Council member will assume the

role of co-penholder on the humanitarian file alongside Switzerland, thereby replacing outgoing Council member Brazil, which served in this role in 2023.

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## Sudan

### Expected Council Action

In January 2024, the Security Council will receive the semi-annual briefing of ICC Prosecutor Karim Asad Ahmad Khan on the ICC's Darfur-related activities.

### Background and Key Recent Developments

Sudan is not a state party to the Rome Statute of the ICC. The Security Council referred the situation in Darfur, Sudan, to the ICC through the adoption of resolution 1593 on 31 March 2005. (Algeria, Brazil, China, and the US abstained on the resolution.) The Council requested the ICC Prosecutor to update it every six months on actions taken pursuant to resolution 1593. The investigations regarding Darfur focus on allegations of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Darfur since 1 July 2002.

More than 17 years after the Council's ICC referral, the first trial opened on 5 April 2022 with the case of *Prosecutor v. Ali Muhammad Ali Abd-Al-Rahman* ("Ali Kushayb"), which is ongoing. Abd-Al-Rahman, reportedly a former leader of the Janjaweed militia, is accused of 31 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed between August 2003 and approximately April 2004 in Darfur. The prosecution presented evidence from 81 witnesses during the trial and concluded its case on 28 February 2023. Subsequently, the defence for Abd-Al-Rahman made its opening statement on 19 October before Trial Chamber I of the ICC.

Four arrest warrants issued by the ICC remain outstanding—against Omar Al Bashir, former Sudanese President; Ahmad Muhammad Harun, former Sudanese Minister of State for the Interior; Abdel Raheem Muhammad Hussein, former Sudanese Minister of National Defence; and Abdallah Banda Abakaer Nourain, commander-in-chief of the Justice and Equality Movement at the time of the warrant. Pursuant to resolution 1593 and the subsequent orders of ICC judges, Sudan remains under an obligation to surrender the four remaining suspects in the Darfur situation to the court.

Sudan continues to grapple with the dire political, security and humanitarian consequences of the conflict that erupted on 15 April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, Sudan's military leader and chairperson of the Transitional Sovereign Council, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (known as Hemedti). The fighting, which was initially centred around Khartoum, has steadily engulfed several parts of the country, including Darfur, White Nile, Gezira, and Kordofan states. The inter-ethnic component of the fighting, particularly in Darfur, has raised alarm among several Council members. Some members

appear to be concerned about the potential for inter-communal fighting to spin out of control, recalling the conflict in Darfur in the 2000s that claimed the lives of approximately 300,000 people.

The Secretary-General's most recent report on the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), dated 13 November 2023, expressed alarm about the deteriorating human rights and protection situation in the country. During the period covered by the report, UNITAMS documented 345 alleged incidents of violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law affecting 2,672 victims, including 158 women and 105 children. The report noted that incidents of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), particularly rape and gang rape, continued to be a significant factor in the hostilities. As at 31 October 2023, the UN Joint Human Rights office had documented a total of 53 incidents of CRSV affecting at least 106 victims, including 85 women and 10 children.

The Secretary-General's 13 November 2023 report also highlighted the impact of the hostilities on the administration of justice in the country. Among other things, the report said that justice institutions in Khartoum and Central, North, South, and West Darfur States had ceased to function, and the absence of justice officials because of the ongoing conflict, notably in South Kordofan and East Darfur States, significantly limited the capacity of the formal justice sector to administer judicial proceedings.

In a 6 December 2023 statement, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that he had determined that members of the SAF and the RSF had committed war crimes in Sudan. He further determined that members of the RSF and allied militias had committed crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. This determination, Blinken said, "provides force and renewed urgency to African and international efforts to end the violence, address the humanitarian and human rights crisis, and work towards meaningful justice for victims and the affected communities that ends decades of impunity".

According to the ICC Prosecutor's latest report—submitted to the Council on 4 July 2023 pursuant to resolution 1593—alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed within the ICC's jurisdiction as part of the current fighting may be subject to investigation and prosecution by the ICC. The report added that, as part of its preliminary investigations, the Office of the Prosecutor (OPT) was closely tracking reports of extrajudicial killings, burning of homes and markets, and looting in Geneina, West Darfur, as well as the killing and displacement of civilians across several locations in Darfur. The OPT was also focusing on allegations of sexual and

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN** Security Council Resolution S/RES/1593 (31 March 2005) referred the situation in Darfur to the ICC. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9452 (25 October 2023) was the annual open debate on Women, Peace and Security. S/PV.9375 (13 July 2023) was the most recent semi-annual ICC briefing. Secretary-General's Report S/2023/861 (13 November 2023) was the 90-day report on UNITAMS.

# Sudan

gender-based crimes, including mass rapes and alleged reports of violence against children.

With respect to the investigations regarding other individuals subject to arrest warrants in the Darfur situation, the prosecutor's report noted that his office's work had been limited due to lack of cooperation from the Sudanese government. It added that three suspects—Bashir, Hussein, and Harun, who were in custody in Kober prison in Khartoum until the outbreak of fighting in April 2023—had been released.

The report also noted progress in several key areas, including:

- access to information relevant to the investigations with the support of third member states and other organisations;
- support for a Darfur-related investigation by national authorities of a third member state; and
- the launch of a dedicated online appeal for information regarding the situation in Darfur since 2003.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 30 November 2023 statement, a group of UN experts expressed alarm about the "escalation of violence in Sudan, particularly sexual violence committed in the conflict, primarily by the RSF". The statement said that gender-based violence, including sexual violence, is being used as "a tool of war to subjugate, terrorise, break and punish women and girls, and as a means of punishing specific communities targeted by the RSF and allied militias". The statement further noted that the incidents of violence are no longer concentrated in Khartoum or Darfur, but have spread to other parts of the country, such as the Kordofan region. The statement warned that victims and survivors of violence and sexual exploitation, in particular children, may suffer long-lasting traumatic impacts on their physical, mental, and sexual health and development. In this regard, the statement called for ensuring access to adequate support services as well as to gender-sensitive reparations for the harm and violations suffered by the victims. The statement urged that "[t]he world must not turn a blind eye to the atrocities and large-scale sexual violence unfolding in Sudan".

In a 18 December 2023 statement, the President of the Human Rights Council (HRC), Václav Bálek announced the appointment of three independent members to the international fact-finding mission for Sudan: Mohamed Chande Othman, former chief justice of Tanzania; Joy Ezeilo, a Nigerian senior advocate; and Mona Rishmawi, former head of Damascus office for the UN special envoy for Syria. The fact-finding mission was established by the HRC on 11 October 2023, through the adoption of resolution 54/2, with a mandate to investigate and establish the facts, circumstances and root causes of all alleged violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including those committed against refugees, and related crimes in the context of the conflict that started on 15 April. The mission is also mandated to collect, consolidate and analyse evidence of such violations and abuses and make recommendations, in particular on accountability measures. The resolution called on the mission to provide an oral update on its work during HRC's 56th session and to present a comprehensive report on its findings at HRC's 57th session. The resolution also called on the mission to submit this report to the UN General Assembly at its 79th session. (For more, see the Sudan brief in our November 2023 *Monthly Forecast*.)

## Women, Peace and Security

Hala Al-Karib—the regional director of the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa, a network of about 100 women's organisations from across the region—briefed the Council during the 25 October 2023 annual open debate on Women, Peace and Security. She stressed that the conflict in Sudan is the result of decades of violence against civilians that "has impacted nearly every aspect of women's lives". Al-Karib described several reports of atrocities, including conflict-related sexual violence, perpetrated by the RSF while noting that "[b]oth the SAF and RSF have committed serious

violations of international human rights and humanitarian law". Emphasising that Sudanese women and civil society are critical to peace-making efforts, Al-Karib urged the Council to demand an immediate cessation of hostilities and a comprehensive ceasefire in Sudan and called "for the meaningful representation of women, including feminist movements, at 50 percent". She also said that the Council should call on the parties to "ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access" and condemn "all attacks and threats against women human rights defenders and peace activists".

## Key Issues and Options

An underlying key issue for the Council is how to promote justice and accountability for past atrocities committed in Darfur, as well as the ongoing violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law by the Sudanese warring parties across the country.

Another key issue for the Council is how to enhance cooperation between the ICC prosecutor and the Sudanese government.

In the upcoming Council meeting on Sudan, several Council members, including the P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and like-minded members, may welcome the establishment of the independent international fact-finding mission for Sudan by the Human Rights Council during its 54th session and the appointment of its members. (For more, see the Syria brief in our November 2023 *Monthly Forecast*.)

In addition to receiving Khan's briefing, Council members supportive of the ICC's work in Sudan could consider requesting a briefing from the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide to spotlight the crimes being committed in the conflict.

## Council Dynamics

The Council is divided on the work of the ICC. Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, Switzerland, and the UK are state parties to the Rome Statute of the ICC. China, Mozambique, Russia, and the US are not. These distinctions, however, do not necessarily reflect how members view the court's work on Sudan. For instance, the US has long supported the ICC's efforts with regard to Sudan.

The advent of the five new elected Council members—Algeria, Guyana, Republic of Korea (ROK), Sierra Leone, and Slovenia—in 2024 appears unlikely to change the dynamics around Security Council discussions regarding ICC's Darfur-related activities. Guyana, ROK, Sierra Leone, and Slovenia, which are state parties to the Rome Statute, are likely to voice support for the ICC's ongoing investigations in Sudan. On the other hand, Algeria—a signatory, but not a party, to the Rome Statute—has long expressed reservations about what it views as the court's disproportionate focus on Africa.

At the last semi-annual briefing on 13 July 2023, wide-ranging views were expressed about the ICC's work in relation to Darfur. Most members welcomed the progress on Abd-Al-Rahman's trial, while calling on Sudan to cooperate more with the court, including by providing access to key witnesses. Some members, including Ecuador, France, Switzerland, the UK, and the US, also supported Khan's announcement that alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the current fighting may be subject to ICC investigation and prosecution. At the same time, Russia expressed the view that the ICC is "an obedient tool in the hands of the West". Calling the ICC a "politicized entity", it said that the ICC briefings "have long since turned into a theatre of the absurd".

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## Sudan

Russia's already negative view of the ICC hardened following the court's announcement on 17 March 2023 that it had issued arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and his commissioner for children's rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, for allegedly committing

the war crime of "unlawful deportation" and "unlawful transfer" of children from Ukraine to Russia.

The UK is the penholder on Sudan, and the US is the penholder on Sudan sanctions.

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## UNRCCA (Central Asia)

### Expected Council Action

In January, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and head of the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), Kaha Inmadze, is expected to brief Security Council members on UNRCCA's work in closed consultations.

### Key Recent Developments

Inmadze last briefed Council members in closed consultations on 10 August. Among other matters, he provided an update on UNRCCA's activities pertaining to counter-terrorism, transboundary water management, and the women, peace and security, and youth, peace and security agendas. Inmadze also highlighted the resolution on the role of UNRCCA that the General Assembly adopted on 17 February 2023, and discussed the finalisation of the border negotiations between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the border dispute between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and electoral developments in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as the effect that the Taliban's seizure of power has had on efforts to combat climate change in Afghanistan.

Since Inmadze's last briefing, tensions between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have continued to ease. According to media reports, Kyrgyz and Tajik officials recently announced that they had reached preliminary agreement regarding demarcation of more than 90 per cent of the disputed parts of the border between the two countries. Talks are expected to continue next year, with an 11 December 2023 statement from Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov reportedly expressing hope that the border issues will be resolved by the spring of 2024. The talks followed four days of fighting between Kyrgyz and Tajik border forces in September 2022, during which at least 100 people were reportedly killed and more than 130 others wounded.

The war in Ukraine has had a ripple effect in Central Asia, with several analysts noting that the conflict may have led to diminished Russian standing in the region and sparked increased diplomatic competition for regional influence among other member states. On 19 September, US President Joe Biden met with Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Japarov, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, Turkmen President Serdar Berdimukhamedov, and Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev on the sidelines of UN General Assembly high-level week. The meeting marked the first time that the "C5+1" format has met at the head of state level. In remarks delivered after the meeting, Biden noted that the leaders had discussed cooperation on counter-terrorism, regional economic connectivity, and a new initiative on disability rights. Less than two weeks later, on 29

September, leaders of the five Central Asian countries attended a summit with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Berlin. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have also travelled to Central Asia for high-level meetings in recent months, as has French President Emmanuel Macron.

The situation in Afghanistan continues to create challenges for Central Asian states. On 6 September, Tajik officials announced that Tajik forces had killed three members of a "terrorist group" who had entered Tajikistan from neighbouring Afghanistan. According to these officials, the three had crossed into Afghanistan intending to carry out a terrorist attack on 9 September, Tajikistan's national holiday.

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are also concerned about the construction of the Qosh Tepa irrigation canal in Afghanistan, a \$684 million project that completed its first phase in October. At a conference held in Tajikistan in September, Mirziyoyev reportedly warned that the canal could "radically change the water regime and balance in Central Asia".

On 28 November 2023, UNRCCA hosted the thirteenth annual meeting of deputy foreign ministers of Central Asian states. Participants exchanged views on options for addressing the challenges facing Central Asia, including climate change, transboundary water management, terrorism, and risks relating to the situation in Afghanistan. Attendees also discussed how UNRCCA can further support preventive diplomacy efforts, including through an increased role for women and youth in decision-making.

On 16 October 2023, UNRCCA participated in the regional forum on the implementation of resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security in Central Asia, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan. In his remarks, Inmadze emphasised the importance of resolution 1325 and called on a range of actors to address the gaps in its implementation across the region. Inmadze also highlighted the role played by the Central Asia Women Leaders' Caucus in advancing women's participation in efforts designed to counter transnational threats and peacebuilding processes in Central Asia.

Inmadze also participated in the fifth consultative meeting of the heads of state of Central Asia, which took place in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on 14 September. Attendees at the meeting discussed the prospects of expanding regional cooperation in trade, energy, security, transport, healthcare, and youth policy, among other matters.

### Key Issues and Options

One of the main issues for the Council is how to make the best use

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



# UNRCCA (Central Asia)

of the UNRCCA's expertise and whether there is anything else the Council can do to support the UNRCCA's efforts to facilitate preventive diplomacy and regional cooperation.

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

## Council Dynamics

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

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

Since then, however, Council members have again been unable to reach agreement on a UNRCCA press statement because of disagreements over referring to regional organisations. Press elements commending then-Special Representative and head of UNRCCA Natalia Gherman for her efforts and expressing support for UNRCCA's work were read out following the UNRCCA consultations in January 2023.

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