

# Monthly Forecast

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## Overview

In February, Guyana will hold the presidency of the Security Council.

Guyana is expected to organise one signature event, a high-level open debate which will explore the effects of [climate change and food insecurity](#) on the maintenance of international peace and security. Guyanese President Mohamed Irfaan Ali is expected to chair the meeting. Secretary-General António Guterres is expected to provide opening remarks, while Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Simon Stiell, Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Deputy Director-General Beth Bechdol, and a civil society representative are the anticipated briefers.

Council members are scheduled to conduct a [visiting mission to Colombia](#) between 7 and 11 February.

Middle Eastern issues on the programme include:

- [Syria](#), monthly meeting on the political and humanitarian situations;
- [Yemen](#), the monthly meeting on developments;
- [“The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question”](#), the monthly meeting, with the possibility of additional meetings depending on developments in Gaza and Israel; and
- [Iraq](#), meeting on the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-party nationals and missing Kuwaiti property.

African issues on the programme of work in February are:

- [Somalia](#), meeting on the UN Assistance

Mission in Somalia (UNSOM);

- [Libya](#), meeting on the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and briefing by the chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee;
- [Central African Republic \(CAR\)](#), meeting on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA); and
- [Sudan](#), renewal of the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee.

The Security Council will also hold a briefing on [Afghanistan](#) in line with resolution 2721 of 29 December 2023, which, among other matters, requested the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Envoy on Afghanistan in consultation with a range of stakeholders, and welcomed the Secretary-General’s intention to convene the next meeting of the group of Special Envoys and Special Representatives on Afghanistan. The resolution requested the Secretary-General to brief the Council within 60 days on the outcome of these consultations and discussions.

The Council is also expected to hold a meeting on [Myanmar](#) early in the month.

February marks the second anniversary of Russia’s invasion of [Ukraine](#). The Council is likely to have one or more meetings on the country during the month.

The Council is also scheduled to hold a briefing on the Secretary-General’s biannual strategic-level report on the threat posed by the [Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant \(ISIL/Da’esh\)](#).

Other issues could be raised in February depending on developments.

### 1 February 2024

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# In Hindsight: The Financing of AU-led Peace Support Operations: Assessing Council Dynamics and Anticipating Future Action

## Introduction

On 21 December 2023, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2719 on the financing of AU-led peace support operations (AUPSOs).<sup>1</sup> In a 22 December statement<sup>2</sup>, Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed the Council's decision and expressed his commitment to working with the AU to implement the resolution. Chairperson of the AU Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat also welcomed it as a major development in the UN-AU partnership and commended the role of the three African members (the A3, then consisting of Gabon, Ghana, and Mozambique) for their efforts in shepherding the resolution to its conclusion.<sup>3</sup>

## Favorable Council Dynamics

Unlike in 2018, when the A3 (then consisting of Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, and Ethiopia) last attempted to present a resolution on the financing of AUPSOs, current Council dynamics were considerably more favourable. Constructive engagement by the US, which in 2018 had opposed a substantive resolution, made a huge difference. Had a draft text been ready, the US might have wished to see the resolution adopted during its August 2023 Council presidency.

In 2018, the US, then under the Trump administration, set out stringent conditions that made agreement impossible. Although Washington presented a detailed proposal on human rights compliance during the 2023 negotiations, it apparently relinquished some of these proposed provisions, including the demand for the deployment of "a UN civilian presence to support the implementation of the relevant human rights and conduct and discipline policies, including the UN human rights due diligence policy, and to monitor and report on the human rights situation in the area".<sup>4</sup> The US also did not insist on language asserting the Council's authority over command-and-control issues, as it had in 2018. At the time, it sought Council "primacy over planning, development, mandating, oversight, and accountability of any African Union peace support operation receiving financial support through UN assessed contributions, including operational details involving force commanders and the selection of troop- and police-contributing countries."<sup>5</sup> Instead, the US seemed to focus on finding a compromise, including on the difficult issue of burden sharing.

The vote on the financing resolution came against the backdrop of the Gaza crisis, which has increasingly diminished US diplomatic standing in the Global South. Consequently, it was not surprising that the US threw its weight strongly behind the financing resolution to show its support for Africa. US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan welcomed the adoption of resolution 2719 as a significant step demonstrating the Biden administration's commitment to Africa.<sup>6</sup>

China—whose contribution to the UN peacekeeping budget currently stands at 15.21 percent, second only to the US<sup>7</sup>—was also supportive of UN financing for AUPSOs, despite an initial sense by some Council members that it might be hesitant. Its concerns were mainly related to a reference in the draft text to the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP), which it viewed as superfluous to the financing resolution. China argued that the resolution's reference to the AU Human Rights Compliance Framework (AUCF), which aims to strengthen the AU's human rights system, was sufficient.

China would also have liked to see the resolution adopted during its Council Presidency in November. The draft text was circulated to Council members only in late November, however, with negotiations concluding on 15 December, allowing its adoption consistent with the AUPSC (AU Peace and Security Council) decision of 23 September 2023 calling on the A3 to present the "resolution for consideration and adoption by the UNSC before the end of December 2023".<sup>8</sup>

## Challenges

Council members were broadly amenable to the resolution. Although several issues were raised during negotiations, including the decision-making and authorisation process, and human rights compliance, the elephant in the room was always burden sharing, namely, what proportion of AUPSO costs would be financed by the AU. The July 2016 AU Summit in Kigali decided to endow the AU Peace Fund with \$400 million to finance its peace and security activities, including 25 percent of its peace operations budget.<sup>9</sup> The Consensus Paper on Predictable, Adequate, and Sustainable Financing for African Union Peace and Security Activities, adopted by the AU Summit in February 2023, explained that the 25 percent contribution was intended to finance all of its peace and security activities, not just AUPSOs mandated or authorised by the AUPSC and the Security Council.<sup>10</sup>

In December 2018, when the A3 (then Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, and Ethiopia) last attempted a financing resolution, they outlined the AU's commitment to funding 25 percent of AUPSO costs in their draft resolution placed in blue. However, in the negotiations on resolution 2719, the A3 (Gabon, Ghana, and Mozambique) pushed for 100 percent UN funding for AUPSOs authorised by the UN Security Council. This was apparently based on instructions from the AU, representing a departure from the AU Consensus Paper. Council members were surprised by this position and insisted on the need for the AU to assume some of the costs, which was a crucial factor in securing agreement on the draft resolution.

During the negotiations, the US initially proposed a formula of

1 For more, see our *What's In Blue Story* of 21 December 2023.

2 United Nations, "Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General – on Financing of African Union-led peace operations," 22 December 2023.

3 African Union Commissioner Moussa Faki Mahamat, "Statement on United Nations Security Council Resolution 2719," 22 December 2023.

4 United States Permanent Mission to the United Nations, "Copy of the US proposal on AU Human rights compliance," 2023.

5 United States Permanent Mission to the United Nations, "Copy of the US eleven-point proposal on the A3 draft resolution," 2018.

6 US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, "Statement on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2719," 23 December 2023.

7 United Nations Peacekeeping, How we are funded.

8 African Union Peace and Security Council, "Communiqué of the 1175th meeting," 23 September 2023.

9 African Union, "Decisions and Declarations 605-620 (XXVII)," 17-18 July 2016.

10 African Union, "Consensus Paper on Predictable, Adequate and Sustainable Financing for African Union Peace and Security Activities," 8 February 2023.

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75 percent from UN assessed contributions, 15 percent from the AU, five percent from voluntary contributions, and five percent for pre-deployment costs to be absorbed by troop-contributing countries (TCCs). When the A3 opposed this proposal, the US, as a compromise, offered to refer only to the 75 percent from UN assessed contributions, without specifying how the remaining 25 percent would be funded. The AUPSC discussed this compromise proposal on 7 and 18 December in Tunis, Tunisia, and Oran, Algeria, respectively, but apparently took a rigid stance in part because some members were worried that committing the AU to burden-sharing might increase their financial contributions to the AU budget. In addition, certain AUPSC members, including some TCCs to AUPSOs, did not appear to have a thorough understanding of the underlying context of the financing discussion in New York, namely, partial funding from UN-assessed contributions. This revealed a notable disconnect between the optimistic expectations in Addis Ababa and the actual discussion in New York.

During the Oran meeting, the AUPSC members were apparently critical of the A3 and maintained their position on seeking full funding from UN assessed contributions. At the same time, they apparently thought that the issue should be addressed during the next AU Summit scheduled for February 2024. However, some Council members recognised that deferring the discussion would be problematic: Council dynamics might be less favourable in 2024, given the change in its composition, and the 2024 US presidential election risked bringing fresh complications to the negotiations.

High-level consultations among some African leaders ensued (although not the urgent meeting of the AUPSC at Heads of State and Government level that some members had wished). In New York, the A3 did not have much room for maneuver, and indeed, they decided to proceed with the vote on the draft text in blue without addressing all of the Council members' concerns, notably the issue of burden sharing. This led the US to propose an amendment to the text in blue to advance its compromise proposal on financing. The amendment “[d]etermines that AU-led peace support operations that are authorised by the Security Council will have access to funding from the UN assessed contributions not exceeding 75 percent of their annual budgets, with the remaining amount to be jointly mobilized by the African Union and United Nations from the international community as extra-budgetary resources and commits to consider all viable options in the event of significant shortfalls in resource mobilization”.<sup>11</sup> The amendment garnered nine affirmative votes, the minimum required for adoption, with the A3, China, France, and Russia abstaining. Subsequently, with the amendment incorporated, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2719.

That the A3 maintained unity and cohesion until the end, despite

intense pressure both from Addis Ababa and New York, contributed to clinching this important decision. Some AUPSC members were disappointed, notably those who pushed strongly for 100 percent UN funding, but the adoption of this resolution in response to the AU's longstanding request will undoubtedly shape the future of UN-AU cooperation.

## What Lies Ahead?

The adoption of resolution 2719 is a major step towards the financing of AUPSOs from UN assessed contributions. Nevertheless, difficult discussions lie ahead when specific cases are presented for Council authorisation and support. The issue of burden sharing is likely to resurface, as the sourcing of the remaining 25 percent of AUPSO costs was left intentionally vague. France—which abstained on the US amendment—had proposed language during the negotiations that provided a breakdown of pre-deployment costs and other costs related to civilian personnel that it believed could be absorbed by the AU. While ultimately not incorporated in the resolution, its proposal may attract attention in future discussions. The AU Consensus Paper also indicates the possibility of progressively covering some of the costs related to the preparation stage of AUPSOs.

The EU has been a major financial partner of the AU in supporting AUPSOs. Unlike 2018, however, the EU did not seem closely involved in consultations on resolution 2719, although it welcomed the adoption of the resolution,<sup>12</sup> which was co-sponsored by many EU member states. The EU is expected to play a critical role in supporting the AU to cover the 25 percent of costs that will not be financed by UN assessed contributions. The EU-AU ministerial meeting anticipated later this year could offer an opportunity for the AU to secure a commitment in this regard.

The decision-making and authorisation process for AUPSOs, as outlined in operative paragraph 3 of the resolution, is also a likely focus of future discussions. Here, the immediate priority is completing a joint planning document expected to guide the process. Regarding cases that could be presented to the Council for support and authorisation under resolution 2719, discussions have started in earnest in respect of a follow-on mission to the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), which is intended to have a new name and smaller footprint. At the Somalia Security Conference held in New York on 12 December 2023,<sup>13</sup> participants voiced support for the follow-on mission, which is anticipated to be funded from UN assessed contributions; however, all the necessary conditions, including a joint strategic assessment, may not be fulfilled before the next mandate renewal of ATMIS in June.

Sub-regional organisations may also seek support for deploying their forces to address conflicts and crises in their respective

11 United Nations Security Council, “United Nations Security Council Resolution 2719,” 21 December 2023.

12 High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell Fontelle, “Statement on United Nations Security Council Resolution 2719,” 22 December 2023.

70 UN member states, including five Council members (then Brazil, China, Malta, Switzerland, and the United Arab Emirates) co-sponsored the resolution.

13 Somalia Security Conference, “Communiqué,” 12 December 2023.

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regions. For instance, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has already requested support from the UN for the SADC Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC), which started deploying in eastern DRC on 15 December 2023.<sup>14</sup> But this may be a challenge: resolution 2719 indicates that the Council will consider requests for support from UN assessed contributions only to those AUPSOs under the AU's direct and effective command and control.

Pursuant to resolution 2717 of 19 December 2023, which renewed the mandate of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the Council expressed its intention to evaluate the conditions under which “limited logistical and operational support may be provided to an AU-mandated regional force deployed within the area of MONUSCO's deployment, in furtherance of MONUSCO's mandate, and within existing resources”.<sup>15</sup> The Council's decision on this matter is likely to be informed by the Secretary-General's upcoming June report and recommendations, pursuant to resolution 2717.

There are two other cases of potential AUPSOs that, at this stage, still appear distant. The Secretary-General has been vocal in his support for a new generation of AUPSOs under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and with guaranteed, predictable funding, including through assessed contributions, emphasising the relevance of such initiatives for West Africa and the Sahel region, which faces a severe security challenge.<sup>16</sup> On 25 September 2022, the UN, AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (FC-G5S) jointly launched a high-level independent panel led by the former president of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, to conduct a strategic assessment

of “the underlying challenges in the Sahel”.<sup>17</sup> The Panel's report was expected to provide recommendations, including a possible AU-mandated regional response, but its work has been complicated by the Niger coup and other subsequent regional developments, such as the dissolution of the FC-G5S and the formation of a new alliance by the military juntas of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger; it is unclear when the report and recommendations will appear. In his 11 January briefing to the Council, Special Representative and Head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) Leonardo Santos Simão said that “the possible deployment of an African Union standby team as part of addressing regional security needs is to be welcomed”<sup>18</sup> in the context of implementing resolution 2719.

Another potential case is the deployment of an AUPSO in Sudan, contingent upon progress in the ongoing mediation efforts. A ceasefire or cessation of hostilities agreement between the conflict parties could necessitate the deployment of a third-party force tasked with monitoring implementation. Considering recent tensions between key Sudanese political actors and the UN, the deployment of an AUPSO might be an option. This prospect may prompt Council discussion, especially as some members tend to view AUPSOs through a limited lens, focusing on enforcement actions or counter-terrorism operations, although the AU doctrine on AUPSOs emphasises their multifunctional and multidimensional nature. In this regard, it says that AUPSOs may utilise various modalities and processes, including “dialogue and reconciliation, security initiatives as well as institutional capacity building and peacebuilding measures”<sup>19</sup> to implement their mandate.

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## Status Update since our January Forecast

### Mali

Council members issued a press statement on 5 January that took note of the closure on 31 December 2023 of the UN Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). The statement commended MINUSMA's efforts in Mali since 2013 and paid tribute to its 311 personnel who lost their lives. Council members, in the press statement, recalled the Mali transitional government's “commitment towards its citizens and international obligations” and encouraged dialogue between Mali and regional partners. They wished for the improvement of the security situation in the country and reiterated the centrality of the 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation, urging all parties to resume dialogue and commit to its implementation. Members further stressed the role of the UN Office in West Africa and the Sahel and the UN country team

including “on the basis of continued communication and discussion with the transitional government”. The press statement further stressed the need for full and continued cooperation from the transitional government, including its obligations under the status of forces agreement with MINUSMA (the latter being a reference to the liquidation process of the mission).

### Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 10 January, Security Council members held closed consultations on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. Malta requested the meeting to discuss the implementation of resolution 2712 of 15 November 2023. Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khari and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin

14 Southern African Development Community, “Deployment of the SADC Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” 4 January 2024.

15 United Nations Security Council, “United Nations Security Council Resolution 2717,” 19 December 2023.

16 United Nations, “Secretary-General's remarks to the Opening Ceremony at the 36th ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly [as delivered],” 18 February 2023

17 United Nations, “Note to Correspondents: High-Level Meeting on the Sahel: The United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS and the G5 Sahel formally launch the Independent Panel on Security and Development,” 24 September 2022.

18 United Nations Security Council, “Meeting records of the 9529th meeting of the United Nations Security Council,” 11 January 2024.

19 African Union, “Draft African Union Doctrine on Peace Support Operations,” 21 October 2019.

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Griffiths briefed.

On 12 January, the Security Council held an open briefing on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” (S/PV.9531). Algeria requested the meeting to discuss the threat of forced displacement of Palestinians in Gaza. Griffiths and Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris briefed.

On 23 January, the Security Council held its quarterly open debate on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” (S/PV.9534). UN Secretary-General António Guterres briefed. French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Stéphane Séjourné chaired the meeting.

In the lead-up to the open debate, Council members were apparently unable to agree on a draft presidential statement on the war between Israel and Hamas, which was put forward by Russia on 17 January. It seems that members could not find consensual language demanding an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and also condemning Hamas for the 7 October 2023 attacks. On 22 January, Russia withdrew the draft text from consideration.

On 30 January, Security Council members held closed consultations on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza Sigrid Kaag briefed. Following the meeting, France, January’s Council president, read out press elements welcoming Kaag’s appointment, expressing concern about the “dire and rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation” in Gaza, and emphasising the urgent need to “expand the flow of humanitarian assistance to civilians”.

On 31 January, the Security Council convened for an open briefing, followed by closed consultations, on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” (S/PV.9540). Algeria requested the meeting following the 26 January order issued by the International Court of Justice indicating provisional measures in South Africa’s proceedings against Israel concerning alleged violations in the Gaza Strip of obligations under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths briefed.

### West Africa and the Sahel

On 11 January 2024, the Security Council held a briefing (S/PV.9529) and consultations on West Africa and the Sahel. Special Representative and Head of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) Leonardo Santos Simão briefed, presenting the Secretary-General’s biannual report on West Africa and the Sahel (S/2023/1075). The Council heard a briefing by Lori-Anne Theroux-Benoni, Regional Director of the Office for West Africa, the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin of the Institute for Security Studies.

Before the start of the meeting, Council members that are signatories to the “Statement of joint pledges related to climate, peace and security” held a stakeout to present a statement on climate-security issues facing the region. Later in the month, on 26 January, the Informal Expert Group on Climate and Security held a meeting on West Africa and the Sahel, during which Special Representative Simão briefed. At the time of writing, the co-penholders on UNOWAS, Sierra Leone and Switzerland, were expected to resume negotiations, which have been deadlocked the past two years, on a draft presidential statement on West Africa and the Sahel.

### Colombia

On 11 January, the Security Council held an open briefing (S/PV.9530), followed by closed consultations, on Colombia. Special Representative and Head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu briefed on recent developments and the Secretary-General’s latest 90-day report (S/2023/1033) on the mission. The Council was also briefed by Yolanda Perea Mosquera, an Afro-Colombian social leader and defender of the rights of victims of sexual violence.

On 18 January, Council members issued a press statement (SC/15567) on Colombia, in which they stressed the importance of ensuring the comprehensive implementation of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace signed in 2016 between the government of Colombia and the former rebel group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). Among other issues, they welcomed recent progress in rural reform and the government’s signing of a pact pledging to complete 60 percent of the ethnic chapter’s implementation by 2026. Members also expressed grave concern about continuing violence, noting that conflict-related violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, continues to have a disproportionate effect on women and girls and on indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.

### Cyprus

On 30 January, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2723, renewing the mandate of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) for another year until 31 January 2025. The resolution welcomes the Secretary-General’s appointment of a Personal Envoy on Cyprus and encourages the two sides to engage constructively with the envoy in the search for common ground with the goal of returning to formal negotiations for a lasting settlement in Cyprus. The resolution requests the Secretary-General to submit four reports: two on his good offices, on 4 July 2024 and 3 January 2025, and two on the implementation of the resolution extending UNFICYP’s mandate, on the same dates.

### Women, Peace and Security

On 16 January, Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl (Switzerland) briefed Council members on the recent visit to South Sudan by members of the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security. The meeting was held under “any other business”. The visit took place between 11 and 14 December 2023. Representatives of France, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, Russia, Switzerland, the UK, and the US, as well as then-Council members Gabon and the United Arab Emirates, participated in the visit.

### Peacebuilding

On 22 January, Guyana, Japan and Mozambique convened an Arria-formula meeting titled “Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace through Comprehensive Approaches—Investment in People, including Empowerment of Women”. Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Mohammed Khaled Khiari; Administrator of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Achim Steiner; and Asif Saleh, the Executive Director of BRAC, a Bangladeshi civil society organisation, briefed. The co-organisers circulated a concept

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note ahead of the session.

### Haiti

On 25 January, the Council held an open briefing (S/PV.9535) on Haiti. Special Representative and head of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) María Isabel Salvador briefed on recent developments and the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2023/768) on Haiti. UNODC Executive Director Ghada Fathi Waly and Human Rights Watch Executive Director Tirana Hassan also briefed the Council. The Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Saint Lucia, on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

On 30 January, Council members received a briefing under “any other business” from Salvador on the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission authorised by resolution 2699 of 3 October

2023, which Kenya has agreed to lead. Russia requested the briefing after the High Court of Kenya issued a 26 January ruling that found the country's participation in the mission unconstitutional.

### Institutional Issues

On 30 January, Security Council members received a briefing under “any other business” from Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management Moses Abelian regarding “the financial situation of the organization”.

### UNRCCA (Central Asia)

On 30 January, Council members held closed consultations on the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA). Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNRCCA Kaha Imnadze briefed.

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## Ukraine

### Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council is expected to hold a meeting on the situation in Ukraine to mark the two-year anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of the country. Additional meetings on Ukraine are possible.

### Key Recent Developments

Nearly two years into Russia's full-scale military incursion, the war continues to have devastating consequences for civilians and far-reaching effects on the global economy. As at 21 January, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) had documented 29,731 civilian casualties, including 10,287 deaths, while noting that actual figures are likely to be considerably higher. The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine remains dire, with 40 percent of the population—14.6 million people—in need of humanitarian assistance. That figure includes 3.3 million people living in frontline communities, which are grappling with severe shortages of resources and constant bombardment. According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), approximately ten million people have been forcibly displaced by the war as at last month, including 3.7 million internally displaced people and 6.3 million refugees who have fled from Ukraine to neighbouring countries.

Hostilities have transitioned to a new phase characterised by positional fighting and a static front line, with both sides achieving occasional, slight territorial gains in some key areas. Coinciding with the onset of winter, Ukrainian forces have shifted to a more defensive strategy following the conclusion of their latest counteroffensive. Ukrainian forces have also reportedly begun scaling back operations due to a shortfall of artillery shells and uncertainties regarding the continuation of Western assistance to Ukraine. Meanwhile, Russian troops continue to engage in offensive operations along the Kupiansk-Svatove-Kreminna line and near the

cities of Avdiivka and Bakhmut in the Donetsk region, reportedly capturing the village of Krokhmalne in the Kharkiv region on 21 January.

Russia and Ukraine both continued air assaults throughout January. According to a 15 January OHCHR protection of civilians in armed conflict update, December 2023 witnessed a 26.5 percent increase in civilian casualties compared to November 2023, mainly due to intensified Russian missile and loitering munitions attacks. (Loitering munitions, also referred to as “suicide drones”, are aerial weapons that have the capacity to patrol over the battlefield before attacking a target in a self-destructive manner.) The update noted that 84 percent of civilian casualties and 92 percent of damage to education and health facilities occurred in Ukrainian government-controlled territory as opposed to Russian-held areas. The intensified air, missile, and drone attacks targeting military and civilian infrastructure in Ukraine have left millions of people without access to vital resources, including water and electricity, according to an 11 January OCHA humanitarian flash update. The flash update noted that these attacks have occurred as temperatures in parts of Ukraine dropped below zero.

In January, the Security Council maintained its regular focus on Ukraine, holding four meetings, consistent with its level of engagement in previous months. At the initiative of Ecuador and France, the co-penholders on humanitarian issues in Ukraine, Council members convened on 10 January for a briefing on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine. On 22 January, at Russia's request, the Council held a meeting to discuss the issue of Western weapons supplies to Ukraine. On 25 January, the Council held a private meeting, at which International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi briefed about Ukraine. After that meeting, there was an open briefing held under the “Threats to international peace and security” agenda item. Russia requested the meeting to discuss an incident that occurred this morning (24 January) involving the downing of a Russian military plane (For more, see our 9 January,

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON UKRAINE** Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9537 (25 January 2024) was an urgent meeting on Ukraine, requested by Russia. S/PV.9536 (25 January 2024) was a private meeting on the issue of nuclear safety and security in Ukraine, initiated by France. S/PV.9533 (22 January 2024) was a meeting on the issue of Western weapons supplies to Ukraine, requested by Russia. S/PV.9526 (10 January 2024) was a meeting on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, initiated by Ecuador and France.

# Ukraine

21 January, and 25 January *What's in Blue* stories.)

On 14 January, Switzerland hosted in Davos the fourth meeting of national security advisors and other high-level officials to discuss fundamental principles for restoring peace in Ukraine. This followed previous meetings on 24 June 2023 in Copenhagen, Denmark; on 5 and 6 August 2023 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; and on 28 and 29 October 2023 in Valletta, Malta.

The gathering in Davos saw participation from over 80 countries and international organisations. Russia was not invited. In a joint communiqué following the meeting, co-chairs Switzerland and Ukraine noted that “the meeting laid the necessary prerequisites for the preparation of a meeting of leaders of states and governments, which can give a start at a high level to establish a common and universal basis for achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for Ukraine based on the Ukrainian Peace Formula”. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova criticised the initiative on 16 January, calling it “meaningless and harmful” to the resolution of the conflict. She argued that discussing potential solutions to the crisis without including Russia and disregarding Moscow’s “legitimate security interests” was futile.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 22 January, OHCHR issued a statement regarding a 21 January attack on the Russian-controlled city of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, in which two local markets and a nearby residential area were struck. Russia has blamed Ukraine for the attack, an accusation that Kyiv has denied. The OHCHR statement deplored “the killing of civilians in an attack on the occupied Ukrainian city of Donetsk”. It noted that although OHCHR does not have access to Donetsk and other Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine, it is trying to gather more information on the attack, including verifying preliminary reports indicating that civilians were killed. The statement underscored the need for “thorough, prompt and independent investigations” to determine the facts and responsibility for this attack and ensure accountability.

During its 55th session, the Human Rights Council is expected to hold an interactive dialogue with the Independent International Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Ukraine on 19 March.

## 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 conflict’s mounting toll on civilians and civilian infrastructure and its 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 ongoing crisis in the Middle East, triggered by the 7 October 2023 attack on Israel by the Palestinian armed group Hamas, continues to divert attention from the war in Ukraine. Although Ukraine has remained a fixture on the Security Council’s programme of work, the escalation in conflict between Israel and Hamas has remained a central preoccupation of the Council.

The worsening humanitarian conditions in Gaza and in countries such as Sudan and Yemen have intensified competition for funding. At the 15 January launch of the UN’s 2024 Ukraine Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths acknowledged that while a year ago “it would have been all Ukraine...for the last many weeks, we have heard very little about it”. Griffiths noted that because of the multitude of crises globally, the UN has narrowed its focus to address those with the most urgent needs, thereby reducing the number of people it aims to assist in Ukraine.

Additionally, there have been arguments suggesting that the US backing of Israel might impede Western efforts to maintain political support for Ukraine within the UN. The US continues to offer Israel military and political support, including arms sales, and has opposed a ceasefire, arguing that it would enable Hamas to regroup and resume attacks. Some analysts have noted that for many countries in the Global South, the situation in the Middle East exposes perceived Western double standards: while Western countries have been urging member states for months to condemn Russian actions in Ukraine, some have concurrently expressed steadfast support for Israel, despite the significant civilian casualties and the extensive airstrikes on the Gaza Strip carried out by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Although Ukraine and its allies sought a General Assembly resolution in February 2023 to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the war, such an effort seems less likely this year, partly because of concerns that Arab countries might abstain from any draft resolution on Ukraine.

The prospects for a peaceful settlement between Russia and Ukraine remain elusive, with both countries continuing to rely on military means to influence the war’s outcome. Some Council members are increasingly concerned about the growing military cooperation between the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and Russia. On 6 January, the US, 49 other UN member states, and the High Representative of the EU issued a joint statement condemning the DPRK’s export of ballistic missiles to Russia. In a 22 January joint statement, Ukraine, 46 other countries, and the EU criticised Russia for initiating meetings on the issue of Western arms supplies to Ukraine, labelling it “another attempt...to distract from [Russia’s] war of aggression against Ukraine and its intensified campaign of systematic air strikes killing civilians and destroying critical infrastructure”.

# Climate Change and Food Insecurity

## Expected Council Action

In February, Guyana plans to convene a high-level open debate on “The impact of climate change and food insecurity on the maintenance of international peace and security” as the signature event of its presidency. President Mohamed Irfaan Ali of Guyana will chair the meeting. UN Secretary-General António Guterres will make remarks, while Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Simon Stiell, Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Deputy Director-General Beth Bechdol, and a civil society representative are the anticipated briefers.

## Key Recent Developments

On 3 August 2023, the Council held a ministerial-level open debate on famine and conflict-induced global food insecurity at the initiative of the US. The briefers were Reena Ghelani, United Nations Famine Prevention and Response Coordinator; David Miliband, President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Rescue Committee; and Navyn Salem, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Edesia, a global non-profit that combats global malnutrition. All three highlighted the interconnections among climate change, food insecurity and conflict. Ghelani maintained that: “Conflict-induced hunger is compounded by a toxic mix of climate change and economic shocks.” She added that addressing the climate and economic crises is necessary to promote lasting peace and prevent famine. Miliband observed that conflict is a major cause of food insecurity, which is worsened by climate change, and advocated for more climate financing to be directed to conflict-affected states. Salem said: “The two biggest contributing factors to hunger and malnutrition are climate change and conflict.”

As the outcome of the open debate, the Council adopted a presidential statement authored by the US that “reiterate[d] the need to break the vicious cycle between armed conflict and food insecurity”, noting that armed conflict in 2022 was the most significant driver of acute food insecurity for roughly 117 million people in 19 countries and territories. Echoing resolution 2417 of May 2018 on conflict and hunger, the statement condemned the use of starvation as a method of warfare and the unlawful denial of humanitarian access and depriving civilians of objects indispensable to their survival. The statement recognised that—in addition to armed conflict—economic downturns, gender inequalities, biodiversity loss, drought, and the adverse effects of climate change are among the key factors reversing the gains in fighting global hunger.

On 11 January, Council members that had previously joined the joint pledges related to climate, peace and security—France, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America—welcomed the new pledgers Guyana, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Slovenia in a joint stakeout. Through the pledges, these countries have committed to striving for the systematic integration of climate change, peace and security into the Council’s work.

The stakeout was held just prior to the Council’s briefing and consultations that day on the situation in West Africa and the Sahel and the activities of the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel

(UNOWAS). As a part of the stakeout, the pledgers issued a statement “express[ing] deep concern regarding the severe adverse impacts of climate change on peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel and call[ing] for urgent action”. In this regard, they argued that: “Conflict-sensitive climate adaptation, mitigation, and resilience actions backed by related funding are an important lever for peacebuilding and social cohesion in the sub-region.”

The Informal Expert Group (IEG) on Climate Change, Peace and Security, currently co-chaired by Mozambique and Switzerland, met on 29 January to discuss the implications of climate change on the security situation in West Africa and the Sahel. Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) Leonardo Santos Simão briefed. Simão reportedly spoke about how climate change generates competition over natural resources and increases social tensions in the region. He also highlighted that water security is a key challenge in West Africa and the Sahel.

## Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council is to develop an enhanced understanding of the interlinkages between climate change and food insecurity as well as strategies to sustain the Council’s engagement on this issue.

One option would be for Guyana to draft a chair’s summary that captures the key points of the meeting and to circulate it as a UN document.

Another option would be for those members that have joined the pledges related to climate, peace and security to conduct further joint stakeouts to highlight the interlinkages among climate change, food insecurity and conflict in conflict-affected regions where they are most prevalent.

Over time, the Council could consider entry points for introducing and refining language, where relevant, into mandates that address the security implications of climate-related food scarcity.

## Council Dynamics

Most Council members are supportive of the body’s work on climate change, peace and security. This is reflected by the fact that ten current members have joined the joint pledges on climate change, peace and security. Of members that entered the Council in 2024, Guyana, ROK, Sierra Leone and Slovenia are particularly strong advocates of Council involvement on this file, although Sierra Leone has yet to sign on to the joint pledges. Among the permanent members, France, the UK, and the US are currently supportive of the agenda, while China and Russia have strong reservations, expressing concerns that climate change is primarily a development issue that does not generally fall within the Council’s mandated responsibilities.

The difficult Council dynamics on climate change, peace and security have prevented the adoption of a thematic outcome on this issue in recent years; the sole such product issued was a short presidential statement in 2011. In contrast, the Council has adopted one resolution and two presidential statements on conflict and food insecurity, all since 2018.

In its 3 August 2023 presidential statement on conflict and

**UN DOCUMENTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE, PEACE AND SECURITY AND FOOD INSECURITY RESOLUTION** [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2417](#) (24 May 2018) was a resolution on the link between armed conflict and food insecurity. **Security Council Presidential Statements** [S/PRST/2023/4](#) (3 August 2023) was on conflict and hunger and highlighted the role of regional and subregional organisations in preventing famine and conflict-induced food insecurity and malnutrition. [S/PRST/2020/6](#) (29 April 2020) followed up on measures laid out in resolution 2417 and encouraged member states to support relevant early warning systems to provide information on food security. [S/PRST/2011/15](#) (20 July 2011) was on climate change. **Security Council Meeting** [S/PV.9345](#) (13 June 2023) was an open debate on climate change, peace and security initiated by the UAE.



# Climate Change and Food Insecurity

hunger, the Council was able to include language recognising the relationship between climate change and food insecurity in conflict situations following difficult negotiations. In this regard, the Council recognised that climate change, environmental degradation, ecological changes, and natural disasters adversely impact food security, water scarcity and livelihoods and stressed the need for long-term strategies to support stability and build resilience. An agreement

on having such language in the presidential statement was reached after amendments from then-Council member Brazil and China were included acknowledging the importance of implementing the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement.

Mozambique and Switzerland are the co-chairs of the IEF on Climate Change, Peace and Security.

## Iraq

### Expected Council Action

In February, the Council will hold an open briefing, followed by closed consultations, on the situation in Iraq. Special Representative and Head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert will brief the Council on recent developments in the country and on the Secretary-General's latest reports on UNAMI and the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-party nationals and missing Kuwaiti property.

### Key Recent Developments

The political and security situations in Iraq have grown increasingly volatile amidst regional spillover from the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas. Following Israel's invasion of Gaza in response to Hamas' 7 October 2023 attack, Iraqi militia groups—considered Iranian proxies forming part of the country's "axis of resistance" across the region—have launched dozens of attacks on US assets in Iraq. These include 2,500 military advisers stationed there as part of international coalition supporting the Iraqi government's counterterrorism operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh). In response, the US has launched several retaliatory strikes against the militias, including a 4 January drone strike in Baghdad that killed Abu Taqwa, a senior commander of the Harakat al-Nujaba militia, which is a member of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). The PMF is a coalition of armed Shi'a groups that formed in response to the ISIL/Da'esh insurgency and that is now officially part of the country's security apparatus, although the Iraqi military exerts limited operational control over the groups, which retain close ties to Tehran.

The Iraqi government condemned the 4 January strike as a violation of the country's sovereignty. In a statement the day after the attack, the office of Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani announced that the government is "setting the date for the start of the bilateral committee to put arrangements to end the presence" of international forces in Iraq. Subsequently, in a 25 January statement, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III announced that the US-Iraq Higher Military Commission—previously established in August 2023 to begin the process of phasing down the US-led military coalition—will start holding working group meetings in the coming days to "enable the transition to an enduring bilateral security partnership" between the countries. According to media reports, the US had initially demanded the cessation of Iran-backed attacks

against its personnel as a precondition for withdrawing its military presence, but it has since dropped that demand amid concerns about further escalation in the region.

On 28 January, a drone strike hit a US military outpost in north-eastern Jordan known as Tower 22, located close to the Iraqi and Syrian borders. The attack killed three US military personnel—the country's first combat fatalities connected to the current regional crisis—and injured over 40 more. US officials have identified another Iran-backed Iraqi militia known as Kataib Hezbollah as the likely perpetrator of the attack. In a statement, US President Joseph Biden said the country would hold those responsible to account.

Tensions have also risen between Iraq and Iran. On 15 January, Iran launched several ballistic missiles against a target in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), killing at least four civilians. Statements by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) claimed that the strikes targeted an Israeli "spy" facility and served as retaliation for the assassination of a senior IRGC commander in Syria in December 2023 that Israel is presumed to have carried out, as well as for a 3 January suicide bombing at a commemoration of Soleimani's death in southern Iran in which at least 84 people were killed. ISIL/Da'esh claimed responsibility for the latter attack, but Iranian authorities have continued to attribute it to Israel and linked it to the ongoing war with Hamas.

Iraq denounced the Iranian strike as a violation of the country's sovereignty, recalled its ambassador from Tehran, and summoned Iran's chargé d'affaires in Baghdad. UNAMI issued a 16 January statement on X (formerly Twitter) "strongly condemning" the strikes and asserting that "[a]ttacks, by any side, violating Iraqi sovereignty & territorial integrity must stop". In a 17 January emergency session, the League of Arab States also condemned the attack.

Regarding the domestic political situation, Iraq held provincial council elections on 18 December 2023. These were the first such elections to take place since 2013. The 2018 provincial elections were postponed for technical reasons and—following the 2019 anti-government protests—the Iraqi parliament passed electoral reform legislation in 2020 abolishing the provincial councils. At the initiative of al-Sudani's government, however, parliament voted in March 2023 to rescind the reform and reinstate the councils, paving the way for the December elections. These were dominated by a coalition of Shi'a political parties known as the Coordination Framework (CF), which supports the current government and is generally considered

**UN DOCUMENTS ON IRAQ Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2697** (15 September 2023) extended the mandate of the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Daesh/ISIL (UNITAD) for a final one-year, non-extendable term until 17 September 2024. **S/RES/2682** (30 May 2023) extended UNAMI's mandate until 31 May 2024. **Secretary-General's Reports S/2023/700** (26 September 2023) was the Secretary-General's 120-day report on UNAMI, which covered developments from May to September 2023. **S/2023/698** (26 September 2023) was the Secretary-General's report on the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-party nationals and missing Kuwaiti property.

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## Iraq

to be aligned with Iran. Candidates associated with the CF won 101 of 285 available provincial seats.

Meanwhile, parliamentary elections in the KRI remain in limbo. These elections were originally scheduled for October 2022 but were delayed because of disagreement between the two main Kurdish political parties over changes to electoral constituency boundaries and a subsequent legal dispute between the regional parliament and federal Iraqi courts. On 3 August 2023, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced that the postponed elections would take place on 25 February. On 3 January, however, Iraq's Independent Electoral High Commission informed the KRG that it would be unable to hold elections on the new date for reasons that have not been publicly announced. In a 9 January meeting with Kurdish officials, UNAMI Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance Claudio Cordone discussed "next steps to facilitate the holding of the KR Parliament's elections [as soon as possible]".

On 13 October 2023, Secretary-General António Guterres announced the appointment of Volker Perthes of Germany as head of the independent strategic review of UNAMI, mandated by Security Council resolution 2682 of 30 May 2023, which most recently renewed UNAMI's mandate. The review, which is due to the Council by 31 March, is tasked with: 1) assessing current threats to Iraq's peace and security and providing recommendations to optimise UNAMI's mandate in this regard; and 2) further assessing options to support the Iraqi government in strengthening effective regional cooperation on such issues as border security, energy, water, refugees, and the adverse effects of climate change.

On 4 December 2023, the Council received the biannual briefing from the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL in Iraq (UNITAD). This was the first UNITAD briefing to take place following the Council's adoption of resolution 2697 of 15 September 2023, which renewed the team for a final one-year, non-extendable term and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Council a report with recommendations on ways for UNITAD to share its collected evidence with Iraqi authorities. That report was due to the Council by 15 January.

### Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is to prevent the current regional crisis from further threatening the relative stability that Iraq has enjoyed since the current government came into power in October 2022. Domestic issues such as the pending elections in KRI could also raise tensions in this context.

Regarding UNAMI, this month's briefing is an opportunity for members to gain insight into the possible impact of the regional situation on the mission's presence in the country and potential implications for its future configuration.

If the situation escalates further, Council members could convene an additional meeting to discuss the specific issue of foreign airstrikes on Iraqi territory. Members could also consider issuing a press statement condemning such violations of Iraqi sovereignty, although they are unlikely to reach consensus on such a product given current Council dynamics (see below).

### Council and Broader Dynamics

Council members are broadly supportive of the Iraqi government and the assistance provided by UNAMI. Last year's adoptions of resolutions 2682 and 2697—respectively renewing the mandates of UNAMI and UNITAD—were unanimous.

The current regional situation, however, has exacerbated broader geopolitical tensions in the context of Iraq. American and Iranian strikes in the country have strained Baghdad's relations with both countries, while stoking concerns about a direct confrontation between the US and Iran in the region. The escalation may also further inflame relations between the US and both China and Russia, which have forged close ties with Tehran. In November 2022, Council members were unable to agree on a press statement condemning a series of missile and drone strikes that Iran launched that month against Kurdish-Iranian opposition groups in northern Iraq, because of disagreement between the US and Russia about language referencing Iran's role.

The Iraqi government routinely declares that it seeks a balanced relationship with regional and international security partners and does not wish to become a theatre for geopolitical conflicts.

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

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## Sudan

### Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, which is due to expire on 12 March. In accordance with resolution 2676 of 8 March 2023, the Council is supposed to review the panel's mandate and take appropriate action regarding its extension before 12 February.

The Sudan sanctions regime expires on 12 September.

### Key Recent Developments

Sudan has been grappling with the devastating consequences of fighting 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 Sovereignty Council, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary group led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (known as Hemedti). According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), an organisation that collects conflict- and

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN** Security Council Resolution S/RES/2676 (8 March 2023) renewed the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee until 12 March 2024. Security Council Letters S/2023/918 (24 November 2023) was from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council. S/2024/65 (15 January 2024) was from the Panel of Experts transmitting its final report.

# Sudan

crisis-related data, more than 13,100 people had been killed since the onset of the conflict, as at 12 January. At the same time, over 10.7 million people have been displaced across Sudan's 18 states since the conflict began, 1.7 million of whom have sought refuge in neighbouring countries—the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, and South Sudan—according to a 26 January press release by the International Organization for Migration.

On 11 January, the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Sudan, Ramtane Lamamra, embarked on a diplomatic mission in the region, stopping first in Cairo, where he met Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Ahmed Aboul Gheit, senior Egyptian officials and civil society representatives. On 13 and 14 January, Lamamra held meetings with al-Burhan, the Deputy Chairman of Sudan's Transitional Sovereignty Council Malik Agar and Sudanese Foreign Minister Ali Al-Sadiq in Port Sudan. Lamamra explored the possibility of a more active role for the UN in facilitating peace negotiations, according to a statement released following the meetings.

On 15 January, Lamamra met with Kenyan President William Ruto and National Security Advisor Monica Juma in Nairobi, according to a post on X (formerly Twitter). On 17 January, Lamamra met with Hemeti in Kampala, where the two discussed the prospects for achieving peace in Sudan and the role of the UN in strengthening those efforts.

In a 17 January statement, the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, announced the appointment of three members to the AU High-Level Panel on Sudan: Mohamed Ibn Chambas, AU High Representative for Silencing the Guns; Speciosa Wandira-Kazibwe, former Vice President of Uganda; and Francisco Madeira, former Special Representative of the AU Commission Chairperson for Somalia.

On 18 January, the 42nd extraordinary summit of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Heads of State and Government was held in Entebbe, Uganda. In a communiqué released following the meeting, the members:

- called on the warring parties to meet within two weeks; directed the IGAD Secretariat, in coordination with the AU Commission, to revise the Roadmap for the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of Sudan, adopted at the 14th ordinary session of the IGAD Heads of State and Government, with clear timelines; and
- directed the IGAD Secretariat to convene, within one month, a Sudanese-owned and Sudanese-led process aimed at establishing a democratic government in Sudan.

## Sanctions-Related Developments

On 15 January, the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee held informal consultations, during which it received a presentation about the final report of the Panel of Experts, which was released the same day and covered developments since 12 March 2023.

The final report provided an extensive account of various aspects of the ongoing conflict, including its dynamics, the financing of the warring parties, the humanitarian impact and violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), recruitment patterns of the warring parties, the proliferation of weapons and violations of the arms embargo, and its regional impact, among other things.

In West Darfur, the report noted, the RSF and allied militias targeted the Masalit community in particular and systematically violated IHL. Some of these violations may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, the report added. It said that the RSF and allied militias targeted gathering sites for internally displaced persons (IDPs), civilian neighbourhoods, and medical facilities, while also committing sexual violence

against women and girls. At the same time, the report highlighted that "the SAF was not only unable to protect civilians but also used aerial bombing and heavy shelling in urban areas in El Fasher, Nyala and El Daein".

The report indicated that since the onset of the conflict, the RSF had been able to secure new supply lines to and through Darfur for weapons, vehicles, and logistics, including through eastern Chad, Libya and South Sudan. The report noted that the accusations by Assistant Commander-in-Chief of the SAF General Yassir al-Atta in his 28 November 2023 statement that the United Arab Emirates and Chad had provided military support to the RSF through Amdjarass were found credible. Furthermore, the report found that, from July 2023 onwards, "the RSF deployed several types of heavy and/or sophisticated weapons including Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles (UCAVs), howitzers, multiple-rocket launchers and anti-aircraft weapons such as MANPADS [Man-Portable Air Defence Systems]", which had a massive impact on the balance of forces, both in Darfur and other regions of Sudan. The supply of arms and ammunition into Darfur constituted a violation of the arms embargo, the report added.

During the period covered by the report, the panel received verified reports that Musa Hilal, a Sudanese militia leader and a designated individual, travelled to Chad in November 2023 by road, and held private meetings in the capital, N'Djamena. The report said that Hilal's visit to Chad constituted a violation of the travel ban provisions.

Resolution 2676 requested the Secretary-General to conduct an assessment of progress achieved on benchmarks two and three as outlined in his 31 July 2021 report, relating to progress on transitional security arrangements in Darfur and on the national action plan for the protection of civilians, respectively. The resolution also requested the Sudanese government to report to the committee on progress in these benchmarks.

In a 24 November 2023 letter to the Council, the Secretary-General informed the members that since the initial report establishing the benchmarks, the country's political and security situation has changed significantly. The deteriorating security situation throughout Darfur made the region inaccessible for conducting an assessment: "[w]hile the war is ongoing in Sudan, and Darfur in particular, the implementation of the benchmarks and the assessment of progress made on them will not be possible", the letter said.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 18 January, the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Sudan commenced its work with an initial mission to Geneva. In a statement issued the same day, Mohamed Chande Othman, the Chair of the Fact-Finding Mission, announced that following discussions with officials and civil society organisations over multiple days, the investigations into human rights and violations of IHL were progressing. In the same statement, Joy Ezeilo, a member of the fact-finding mission, said that "[a]llegations of rapes targeting mainly women and girls and the alleged recruitment of children for use in hostilities are among the priority concerns for our investigations".

On 17 January, the UN expert on human rights in Sudan, Radhouane Nouicer, issued a statement in which he "deplored the grim human rights situation" in the country. The expert called on the leaders of the Sudanese warring parties to halt the violence, facilitate a shift towards civilian governance, and heed the pleas of victims for peace and justice. Nouicer emphasised that "despite several regional and international mediation initiatives, there is still no peaceful resolution in sight" and that "violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are continuing unabated".

In a 20 December 2023 statement, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk expressed alarm about the reports of "widespread abuses and violations of human rights" by the SAF and the RSF in Wad Madani. Türk noted that "[r]eports indicate that dozens of civilians including medical personnel were killed and many more injured in Wadi Madani between 15 and 19 December [2023]", adding that some of the attacks were allegedly ethnically motivated.

## Women, Peace and Security

According to a 19 December 2023 UNHCR update, "women and girls have borne the brunt of [the] consequences of the conflict" between the SAF and the RSF, with numerous cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) being reported. Women and girls fleeing Sudan have reported experiencing or witnessing violence while fleeing, including harassment at checkpoints, abduction, rape, sexual assault, and exploitation "allegedly perpetrated by parties to the conflict, but also by criminal groups active in Sudan". The update also says that women and girls report that gender-based

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# Sudan

violence remains severely under-reported because of fear of stigma and retaliation as well as difficulties in accessing services due to the ongoing hostilities.

On 26 January, the members of the Informal Expert Group (IEG) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) met on the situation in Sudan. Deputy Special Representative for Sudan Clementine Nkweta-Salami briefed. It appears that IEG members discussed several issues, including women's participation in political processes and accountability for CRSV, as well as concerns about a potential gap in monitoring and reporting on violations of women's human rights in Sudan following the termination of the mandate of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) by Security Council resolution 2715 of December 2023.

Ahead of the 29 January Council briefing by ICC Prosecutor Karim Asad Ahmad Khan on the ICC's Darfur-related activities, the Council members that have signed on to the Shared Commitments on WPS—Ecuador, France, Guyana, Japan, Malta, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland, the UK, and the US—delivered a joint statement expressing deep concern at the situation of women and girls in Sudan. Among other issues, the statement said that these members are appalled by the increasing levels of sexual and gender-based violence in the ongoing conflict in Sudan. The statement emphasised the importance of accountability and stressed that the parties to the conflict “must issue stronger command orders” prohibiting gender-based violence. It also called upon all parties to immediately cease hostilities and stressed the importance of women's participation and leadership for conflict resolution.

## Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council in February is renewing the mandate of the panel of experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee. Sanctions measures imposed on Sudan could be a major issue during the negotiations, as was the case last year.

While the discussion prior to April 2023 had been towards modifying, suspending or progressively lifting the sanctions measures in accordance with progress on the benchmarks, the ongoing conflict is expected to turn the discussion in a different direction.

Considering the information provided by the panel's 15 January final report, particularly on violations committed by the RSF, Sudan may push the Council to ease the restrictions on the SAF while seeking stringent measures against members of the RSF and allied militias and associated entities. In his statement during the 12 December 2023 Council meeting on Sudan, Sudan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Al-Harith Idriss Al-Harith Mohamed, “demand[ed] that an embargo on the transfer of arms and military equipment to the allies of the RSF and mercenary invaders, as well as [s]tates, be imposed by the Security Council, if Council members wish to safeguard peace and security in Darfur, and that the [Sudanese] armed forces be excluded from the arms embargo that has been imposed on them since 2004”.

One option for the Council members is to extend the panel's mandate for one year. Some members may also suggest extending

the panel's mandate until September, aligning it with the mandate cycle of the sanctions measures, as introduced by resolution 2676, and having a broader discussion on the sanctions regime and the panel in September.

Along with extending the panel's mandate, Council members could also encourage it to collaborate with other panels of experts, particularly those assisting the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee, the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, and the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee. In this regard, chairs of the respective committees could consider holding joint committee meetings in order to facilitate an exchange of information about the regional impacts of the conflicts in these countries.

Keeping in mind the information brought forth and recommendations of the panel's 15 January report, Council members may wish to have a substantive discussion about the sanctions measures, including, but not limited to, reviewing the benchmarks, expanding the geographical scope of the measures to the rest of the country, the designation criteria, and additional listing of individuals and entities under the current regime.

## Council and Wider Dynamics

Most Council members share similar concerns about the political, security, human rights, and humanitarian situations in Sudan. Although the members have had diverging views about the utility of the Sudan sanctions regime in the past, Council members are likely to be guided by the findings in the Panel of Experts' 15 January final report. It appears that the panel enjoys the broad support of Council members.

Since the start of the conflict, the US has imposed bilateral sanctions on several individuals and entities for exacerbating Sudan's instability, including Abdelrahim Hamdan Dagalo, deputy commander of the RSF and brother of Hemeti. The 15 January Panel of Experts report said that Abdelrahim played a pivotal role in the RSF campaign in Darfur, personally supervising the military operations in the five states of the Darfur region since October 2023. In its most recent round of sanctions, on 31 January, the US designated three entities for their role in undermining the peace, security, and stability of Sudan. The UK has introduced bilateral sanctions against six entities linked to the warring parties, in light of the current conflict.

Similarly, the EU also adopted restrictive measures against six entities responsible for supporting activities that undermine the stability and political transition in Sudan, according to a 22 January press release.

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# Yemen

## Expected Council Action

In February, Security Council members are expected to hold a

briefing, followed by closed consultations, on Yemen. UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg; and a representative of OCHA are expected

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN** [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2722](#) (10 January 2024) demanded that the Houthis immediately cease all attacks on merchant and commercial vessels and took note of the right of member states, in accordance with international law, to defend their vessels from attacks. [Security Council Letters S/2024/90](#) (22 January 2024) was a letter from Russia contending that recent UK and US strikes in Yemen qualified as an unlawful use of force. [S/2024/56](#) (12 January 2024) was a US letter informing the Council of its strikes against the Houthis. [S/2024/55](#) (12 January 2024) was a UK letter informing the Council of its strikes against the Houthis. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9532](#) (12 January 2024) was a briefing on the US and UK strikes against Houthi military targets in Yemen. [S/PV.9527](#) (10 January 2024) contained the explanation of votes on resolution 2722 and Russia's proposed amendments to the text. [S/PV.9525](#) (3 January 2024) was a briefing by Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari and Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization Arsenio Dominguez on the Red Sea attacks. [Security Council Press Statement SC/15513](#) (1 December 2023) condemned Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and demanded that all such attacks and actions cease immediately.

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# Yemen

to brief. The Head of the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), Major General Michael Beary is expected to brief during consultations.

## Key Recent Developments

Houthi rebel group attacks on commercial vessels have continued, significantly disrupting global maritime shipping by forcing many carriers to suspend transit through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal and instead travel the longer route around Africa. The attacks began in November 2023 as the Houthis sought to pressure Israel to end its military campaign in Gaza following the outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas on 7 October 2023. On 9 January, the Houthis conducted their largest attack when UK and US forces intercepted 21 drones and missiles targeting numerous vessels in the Red Sea.

On 12 January, the UK and the US, supported by Australia, Bahrain, Canada, and the Netherlands, conducted air and naval missile strikes on over 60 targets across Yemen. The strikes targeted at least 28 locations in Sana'a, Taiz, Hodeidah, Hajja, Sa'ada, and Dhamar governorates. According to the Houthis, five people were killed and six wounded.

The situation escalated as the Houthis continued their attacks and the US announced additional strikes. On 14 January, the Houthis fired an anti-ship cruise missile towards a US naval vessel in the southern Red Sea, which the US reported that it intercepted. On 15 January, a Houthi anti-ship missile for the first time struck a US-owned and -operated commercial vessel, the M/V Gibraltar Eagle, in the Gulf of Aden, and on 17 January, a Houthi drone struck the US-owned and -operated M/V Genco Picardy, also in the Gulf of Aden. That same day, the US announced strikes against 14 Houthi missiles that "were loaded to be fired". In strikes on 18, 19 and 20 January, the US similarly targeted anti-ship missiles, which were reportedly ready to be fired. The UK and the US, again supported by Australia, Bahrain, Canada, and the Netherlands, carried out a new round of strikes on 22 January. According to US statements, the operations were intended to "degrade the Houthis' capabilities to continue their reckless attacks on international and commercial shipping in the Red Sea, the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, and the Gulf of Aden". As at this writing, the sides have continued to exchange attacks.

In the lead-up to the US and UK strikes, the Security Council held an emergency briefing and consultations on 3 January on the Houthi attacks. That same day, 14 countries, including Council members Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), the UK, and the US, said in a joint statement that they were issuing their final warning to the Houthis to immediately end the attacks.

On 10 January, the Council adopted resolution 2722, authored by the US and Japan. The resolution condemned in the strongest terms the Houthi attacks on merchant and commercial vessels, numbering at least 24 since 19 November 2023, and demanded that the group immediately cease all such attacks. The resolution affirmed that the navigational rights and freedoms of merchant and commercial vessels, in accordance with international law, must be respected. It took note of the right of member states, in accordance with international law, to defend their vessels from attacks, including those that undermine navigational rights and freedoms. Resolution 2722 was adopted with 11 votes in favour and four abstentions (Algeria, China,

Mozambique, and Russia).

On 12 January, the Council held an emergency briefing at the request of Russia on the UK-US strikes. Addressing Russia's criticism about the legal basis for the military response, US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield stressed that the strikes were consistent with states' inherent right to self-defence as reflected in Article 51 of the UN Charter. Russia countered that such strikes on Yemen's territory were not an exercise of self-defence and that Article 51 cannot be invoked to ensure freedom of navigation. That same day, Saudi Arabia, which has been working towards a comprehensive peace agreement with the Houthis in talks that have lasted more than a year, called for "restraint and avoiding escalation in light of the events the region is witnessing".

Council members held their monthly closed consultations on Yemen on 16 January. Grundberg apparently indicated that the parties remained committed to peace talks, although the situation was becoming increasingly complex. In a 13 January statement, Grundberg reiterated the Secretary-General's appeal from one day earlier, "for all involved to avoid actions that would worsen the situation in Yemen, escalate the threat to maritime trade routes, or further fuel regional tensions at this critical time". Grundberg further highlighted the need to protect Yemeni civilians and to safeguard the gains of the peace efforts since the April 2022 truce.

On 23 December 2023, Grundberg announced that the Houthis and Yemen's internationally recognised government had committed to implementing a nationwide ceasefire, improving living conditions in Yemen, and engaging in preparations to resume an inclusive political process under UN auspices. He has since continued to engage the parties on developing a roadmap for an inter-Yemeni political process that would include implementing the 23 December commitments.

On 17 January, the US announced that it was naming the Houthis as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) group. The US had previously removed this designation as well as de-listing the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in 2021 amid concerns that the FTO label could worsen the humanitarian situation in Yemen.

## Key Issues and Options

A new key concern for the Council is the threat that Houthi attacks present to international shipping and maritime security. Resolution 2722 included a request that the Secretary-General provide monthly written reports through 1 July 2024 on further Houthi attacks on merchant and commercial vessels to inform the Council's consultations.

The risk that Houthi attacks on Israel and Red Sea shipping, and now the US and UK military response, might upend the 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

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## Yemen

process for a comprehensive peace agreement.

The humanitarian situation in Yemen remains a key issue. During 2023, 21.6 million people required assistance, while Yemen relief efforts faced a major funding shortage (receiving \$1.7 billion of \$4.3 billion required). Addressing Yemen's economic conditions is a related key issue to mitigate the humanitarian need. The impact of the Red Sea crisis on insurance and transportation costs for commercial vessels travelling to Yemen has yet to translate into higher prices for the goods that Yemen imports, such as food, but this is a risk that could worsen the humanitarian situation. The World Food Programme has not yet resumed general food distributions in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, which it suspended in December 2023 because of limited funding and disagreement with Houthi authorities over how to focus on the poorest there.

### Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the various 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 of the conflict.

Members have condemned the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea. They are concerned about the consequences for maritime security, freedom of navigation, and Yemen's peace process. In addition to its ongoing strikes against the Houthis, the US was a strong proponent for Operation Prosperity Guardian, a naval military coalition of over 20 countries set up in December 2023 to deter and counter the Houthi attacks. In the Council, it co-authored resolution 2722

with Japan. The Houthis continue to hold the Japanese-operated cargo ship, the *Galaxy Leader*, and its crew since capturing the vessel, linked to an Israeli businessman, last November. The US and Japan were also joined by Ecuador, France, Guyana, Malta, the ROK, and the UK in their request for the 3 January emergency session on the Red Sea attacks.

Algeria, China, and Russia, along with other Council members, have highlighted the importance of recognising the link between the Red Sea crisis and the conflict in Gaza, which they wanted to be made more explicit in resolution 2722. Council members also raised concerns about what they considered imprecise language in resolution 2722 on the right of states to defend their merchant vessels, which Russia argued was not language drawn from existing international law. These concerns contributed to the lack of consensus in adopting the resolution. Russia's unsuccessful proposal for amendments to the text included language specifying that the resolutions' provisions should not be construed as setting new precedents in international law and replacing the reference to the right of states to defend their vessels with a more general expression taking note of the applicable rights of member states under international law.

The US has countered that the right of states to defend their vessels is grounded in the right to self-defence. On 12 January, the UK and the US made this point in letters to the Council about the strikes against the Houthis that they said were undertaken in accordance with states' inherent right to self-defence in article 51 of the UN Charter.

The UK is the penholder on Yemen. Ambassador Hwang Joon-kiik (Republic of Korea) chairs the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee.

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## Libya

### Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council will hold its bimonthly briefing on the situation in Libya. Special Representative and Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Abdoulaye Bathily will brief the Council on recent political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country. The chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Yamazaki Kazuyuki (Japan), will also brief on the committee's activities.

### Key Recent Developments

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

In this context, both the UN and national actors have concentrated recent efforts on facilitating agreement on a new roadmap for national elections to unify the country's divided government. In March 2023, the HoR and the GNU-aligned High State Council (HSC) established a "joint 6+6 committee"—composed of six representatives from each body—to draft electoral laws to enable elections. In June 2023, the committee announced that it had reached agreement on draft legislation, which the HoR and HSC subsequently approved.

The proposed legislation proved to be controversial, with various political factions contesting several of its provisions and both UNSMIL and Libya's High National Elections Commission (HNEC) identifying technical shortcomings. In September 2023, the 6+6 committee submitted to the HoR an amended version of the draft legislation, which the HoR approved on 2 October and subsequently submitted to the HNEC for implementation, which the commission confirmed was technically feasible. On 4 October, however, the HSC rejected the revised legislation, instead endorsing the 6+6 committee's previous version and withdrawing its members from the committee.

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA** Security Council Resolution S/RES/2702 (30 October 2023) extended UNSMIL's mandate until 31 October 2024. **Secretary-General's Report S/2023/967** (7 December 2023) covered developments in Libya between 8 August and 7 December 2023. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9510** (18 December 2023) was on Libya.

# Libya

According to the Secretary-General’s most recent report on UNSMIL, dated 7 December 2023, the chairperson of the HNEC informed Bathily during a 10 October meeting that the commission would not begin to implement the electoral process until the outstanding political issues had been resolved. Similarly, in a 12 October statement, UNSMIL said that it had completed a “technical review” of the amended legislation, which it described as a “working basis” for holding elections while finding that it still contained “[c]ontentious issues that need to be addressed and resolved through a political settlement”. The most controversial provision concerns the establishment of a unified interim government to organise elections, which the HoR insists is necessary for the credibility of the ballot but which the HSC and GNU have rejected. Bathily supports the measure but has consistently stressed that the appointment of a new interim government requires political consensus and should not be done unilaterally.

In an attempt to break the impasse, UNSMIL announced in a 23 November 2023 statement that Bathily had invited key Libyan institutional stakeholders to a meeting to reach a settlement on the politically contested electoral issues. The statement said that Bathily had requested the HoR, HSC, LNA, and Presidential Council (established under the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement to serve as the country’s head of state) to designate representatives to attend a preparatory meeting to discuss the date, venue, and agenda of the meeting of their principals. Representatives of the GNS—which the UN does not officially recognise—were not invited to attend.

At the Council’s 18 December 2023 briefing on Libya, Bathily highlighted as a positive development that Libya now had in place a “constitutional and legal framework” for elections that is considered technically implementable by the HNEC. He lamented the entrenched political dynamics blocking its execution, however, and provided additional detail on his proposed meeting of institutional stakeholders and the complexities involved in securing full participation from the chosen actors, which he described as having “the capacity to either reach consensus and advance the political process or prolong the stalemate and prevent Libya from holding peaceful elections”. According to Bathily, the HoR has conditioned its participation on the meeting agenda, which it insists should focus only on the formation of an interim government to organise elections, and it has also rejected the participation of the GNU. For its part, the GNU has submitted the names of its representatives to take part in the meeting, but still rejects any discussion of a new government. Haftar will only agree to the GNU’s participation if the GNS also attends; alternatively, he would accept the exclusion of both governments. In his briefing, Bathily admonished Libyan political leaders for “continu[ing] to drag their feet” and reiterated his call for the formation of a new interim government “required by the electoral laws and welcomed by Libyan citizens on all sides”.

While the national political track remains gridlocked, there has been some recent progress in the AU’s initiative to support Libya’s

reconciliation process. The AU’s High-Level Committee on Libya, which is chaired by Republic of Congo President Denis Sassou Nguesso, has been leading efforts to convene a national reconciliation conference in Libya, which was originally expected to be held in May 2023 but was postponed. In December, the Preparatory Committee for the Inclusive Conference on National Reconciliation—a joint planning entity comprising AU and Libyan representatives—convened its third meeting, during which the participants unanimously agreed to hold the conference on 28 April in the city of Sirte.

## Women, Peace, and Security

Abeir Imneina—Head of the Washm Center for Women’s Studies in Libya—briefed the Security Council during the 19 June 2023 meeting on the situation in the country. She said that members of civil society have faced enforced disappearances, kidnappings, extrajudicial arrests, and accusations of immorality and espionage, with cases of arrests and torture “on the pretext of safeguarding established values”. Imneina described restrictions on women’s freedom of movement and privacy and the failure of Libyan authorities to enact laws combating violence against women. She called on the national institutions to accelerate the adoption of such laws, among other recommendations.

## Key Issues and Options

Supporting political momentum towards national elections to unify Libya’s divided government remains the key issue for the Security Council. In this context, an important objective for the Council is to help foster common political ground between the country’s rival legislatures to agree on electoral laws—a goal that Bathily has repeatedly urged Council members to support by wielding their influence on national stakeholders.

At February’s meeting, members may reiterate their call on Libyan actors to engage in good faith negotiations to finally achieve consensus on outstanding political issues and, in this context, urge them to participate productively in Bathily’s proposed meeting of institutional stakeholders. Council members could consider adopting a presidential statement or issuing a press statement delivering these messages.

## Council Dynamics

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

Broader geopolitical tensions still influence Council dynamics with respect to Libya, however. The US and other Western members remain concerned about the presence of the Wagner Group—the private Russian security company—in the eastern part of the country under Haftar’s control. For its part, Russia routinely blames Libya’s current instability on the NATO-led military intervention in 2011 and accuses Western countries of seeking to exploit Libya’s oil reserves for economic gain.

The UK is the penholder on Libya.

# Somalia

## Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council will hold a briefing, followed by consultations, to discuss the situation in Somalia. Members are expected to receive the Secretary-General's 120-day report on the situation in Somalia and implementation of the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) by 1 February.

## Key Recent Developments

On 12 December 2023, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mahamoud convened the Somalia security conference in New York, which brought together key stakeholders to facilitate discussion on Somali security sector reform. The conference was co-organised by the AU, the EU, the UN, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, the UK, and the US.

In a communiqué issued following the conference, the participating member states welcomed the Somalia Security Sector Development Plan presented by Mahamoud during the conference. Among other things, the plan proposed a new multilateral mission under the auspices of the AU following the withdrawal of the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) personnel, which is expected to be completed in December. The plan purportedly proposes that this mission's key tasks include a mandate to protect key infrastructure and strategic population centres at the national and federal member states' level, positing that this mandate would allow Somali security forces to fully address the challenges posed by Al-Shabaab, a terrorist group affiliated with Al-Qaeda, and enable them to provide humanitarian and stabilisation support to federal member states.

Al-Shabaab retains the ability to carry out asymmetrical attacks against civilians, civilian infrastructure, and state institutions. On 11 January, Al-Shabaab fired several mortars targeting the Aden Adde International Airport area in Mogadishu, which houses the UN compound. The attack resulted in the death of a Ugandan military personnel member deployed with the UN's Guard Unit.

In another development, Council members have been following closely the rising tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia since a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between Ethiopia and the self-proclaimed region of Somaliland on 1 January. While the exact details of the MoU have not been made public by either side, Somaliland announced that, "[i]n exchange for 20-kilometer sea access for the Ethiopian naval forces, leased for a period of 50 years, Ethiopia will formally recognise the Republic of Somaliland". On the other hand, Ethiopia said in a 3 January statement that the MoU allows it to "obtain a permanent and reliable naval base and commercial maritime service in the Gulf of Aden through a lease agreement". Regarding recognition for Somaliland, the statement notes that the MoU only includes "provisions for the Ethiopian government to make an in-depth assessment towards taking a position regarding the efforts of Somaliland to gain recognition".

In a 4 January letter to the Council, Somalia's Acting Foreign Minister Ali Omar stated that the MoU was "entered into without the consent or endorsement of the Federal Government of Somalia and effectively violates the country's constitution, while blatantly violating established international laws and norms". Omar further said that this development significantly endangered regional and

international peace and security and urged the Council to "swiftly condemn Ethiopia's flagrant violations and ensure their immediate compliance with international law, thereby respecting the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Somalia".

On 17 January, the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) met to consider the situation between Ethiopia and Somalia. In a press statement released following the meeting, the members expressed deep concern about the situation while referring to Somaliland as "the northern region of Somalia". The members reaffirmed their strong commitment and support for preserving the unity, territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty of all member states, including Ethiopia and Somalia. They further called on the parties to exercise restraint, de-escalate the situation, and engage in meaningful dialogue to find a peaceful resolution. Furthermore, they requested the Chairperson of the AU Commission (the organisation's secretariat) to deploy the AU High Representative for the Horn of Africa, Olusegun Obasanjo, to foster dialogue between the parties and provide regular updates to the AUPSC.

On 17 January, the League of Arab States (LAS) also convened a ministerial-level emergency session at the request of Somalia. The decision adopted at the end of the meeting, among other things:

- reaffirmed that Somaliland is an integral part of Somalia and rejected the 1 January MoU, declaring it void, unacceptable, and a violation of international law;
- said that this development threatened the national security of Arab states and navigation in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden; and
- requested Algeria, in its position as the only Arab member of the Security Council, "to mobilise necessary support to issue necessary resolutions affirming the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia".

On 18 January, the 42nd extraordinary summit of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Heads of State and Government was held in Entebbe, Uganda. The communiqué adopted following the meeting expressed deep concern about recent developments regarding relations between Ethiopia and Somalia. The communiqué reaffirmed respect for the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Somalia while noting that any agreement entered into should be with the consent of Somalia. It called on both parties to de-escalate tensions and engage in constructive dialogue.

On 29 January, Council members convened for closed consultations to consider the situation between Ethiopia and Somalia under the "Peace and security in Africa" agenda item. Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa Hanna Serwaa Tetteh briefed. (For more, see our 28 January *What's in Blue* story.)

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 19 November 2023, the independent expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia, Isha Dyfan, issued a statement at the end of her second official visit to the country. The expert expressed her encouragement at the Somali government's efforts to establish a National Human Rights Commission and to address corruption, including prosecution of various public officials accused of corruption and abuse of power.

Dyfan emphasised that the security situation in Somalia remains precarious, with civilians facing daily threats, targeted killings, and infrastructure damage from Al-Shabaab and various inter-clan conflicts. She expressed concern about the impact



# Somalia

on civilians and infrastructure of the ongoing joint military operations by the Somali National Army, local clan militias, and ATMIS personnel. She urged all parties involved to uphold their responsibilities under human rights and international humanitarian law and ensure the protection of civilians.

During her visit, Dyfan held discussions with the Chair of the Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn (SSC) Committee regarding the human rights situation in Las Anod, the capital of Sool region. She observed that the human rights situation in the region has deteriorated since the start of the conflict in February 2003 between Somaliland security forces and the local Dhulbahante clan. She added that this conflict has resulted in the killing of 81 civilians and left at least 410 people injured, while approximately 200,000 have been displaced. She reiterated her call for dialogue and urged all parties to avoid divisive rhetoric. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 6 September 2023.)

## Women, Peace and Security

In her August 2023 report to the Human Rights Council, Dyfan identified the deteriorating security situation and the “clan-based political system” among the main factors hindering the participation of women and minorities in political and public life in Somalia. She also noted that women in political positions continue to face intimidation, harassment, and violence. Dyfan recommended that, by 2024, the Somali government take urgent measures towards ratifying key international and regional women’s rights treaties and undertake a comprehensive review of the domestic legislation, “with a view to repealing discriminatory laws against women and girls”. She also provided several recommendations towards increasing women’s representation and participation in public life, including in electoral processes.

## Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members is how to support the Somali government in achieving its national priorities, including the constitutional review process and security sector reform.

The other important issue for members is the escalating tension in the region following the 1 January MoU between Ethiopia and the region of Somaliland, which may undermine regional peace and security, including Somalia’s ongoing offensive operations against Al-Shabaab. Council members may encourage the parties to exercise restraint and support regional and sub-regional organisations in their efforts to address this issue.

The persisting insecurity in the country and the ongoing offensive against Al-Shabaab are also important issues for Council members. Following the 26 August 2023 attack by Al-Shabaab in the Galguduud region, Somali forces suffered significant setbacks and retreated from several towns that they had recently taken. Although Somali security forces have continued their operations in Galmudug and Hirshabelle states, stabilising the liberated areas and providing basic services to the people remain ongoing challenges.

The ATMIS drawdown throughout 2024 is another issue for Council members. Members remain concerned about whether Somali security forces will be able to assume security responsibilities from ATMIS personnel by the end of 2024, particularly in light of the extensions requested by the Somali government during earlier phases of the ATMIS withdrawal. Resolution 2710, which extended ATMIS’ authorisation until 30 June, encouraged the Somali government to present a proposal for post-ATMIS security arrangements by 31 March. On 18 January, officials from ATMIS, UNSOM, and

the UN Support Mission to Somalia (UNSOS) met in Mogadishu to initiate planning for post-ATMIS arrangements in 2025. They discussed the implementation of the Somalia Security Sector Development Plan and the ongoing security transition, according to a post on X (formerly Twitter).

## Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members support the government’s priorities and recognise the many challenges facing the country, including the persistent insecurity caused by the terrorist activities of Al-Shabaab. They also support ongoing efforts to fight the group. Some members, however, believe that a security approach will not be sufficient and underscore the need to make progress in governance, justice, and economic reforms. Other Council members emphasise the need for progress in implementing the Somali Transition Plan, including national force generation.

Several member states (including the US, the UK, and China) and the EU have expressed concern about the rising tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia, while stressing the importance of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia. The signing of the MoU comes at a critical juncture when Somalia is confronting the challenges from its security transition and ongoing offensive operations against Al-Shabaab. In his remarks at the 18 January IGAD Summit, US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Mike Hammer said that “the MOU threatens to disrupt the fight that Somalis, along with Africans and regional and international partners—including the US—are waging against Al-Shabaab”, while noting reports about Al-Shabaab using the MoU to generate recruits. He urged both sides to “avoid precipitous actions, including related to existing Ethiopian force deployments in Somalia, that could create opportunities for Al-Shabaab to expand its reach within Somalia and into Ethiopia”. On 9 January, Mauritania, as the Chair of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, sent a letter to the Council, which stressed the need to respect Somalia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and to safeguard security, peace, and stability in the region. On 12 January, Bahrain, Chair of the Group of Arab States at the UN, also sent a letter to the Council (S/2024/57) conveying the position of the League of Arab States (LAS) on the matter. The LAS rejected the MoU and stated that such actions “violate international law and jeopardise the overall territorial integrity of the Somali state”.

In an explanatory note to the 17 January LAS decision, Algeria rejected any foreign interference in the affairs of Somalia while emphasising the need to respect the sovereignty and independence of all member states. Algeria also stressed the importance of refraining from any act that undermined the integration and strategic cooperation between the Arab and the African members. It highlighted the significance of resorting to dialogue and negotiation to resolve any dispute while taking note of the measures undertaken by the AU and the IGAD in this regard.

# Central African Republic

## Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council will hold a briefing and consultations on the Secretary-General's latest report on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). Special Representative for the Central African Republic (CAR) and Head of MINUSCA Valentine Rugwabiza is expected to brief.

The mandate of MINUSCA expires on 15 November. The CAR sanctions regime expires on 31 July, and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee expires on 31 August.

## Key Recent Developments

On 26 October 2023, Rugwabiza briefed the Council on efforts to advance the implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the CAR based on the Secretary-General's latest report. The reporting period was marked by some important developments, including the dissolution of 14 armed groups that were signatories to the agreement; the holding of a constitutional referendum on 30 July 2023 and the subsequent promulgation of a new constitution on 30 August; and the postponement of local elections, with the first round now scheduled for 13 October 2024 and the second round for 26 January 2025. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 25 October 2023.) On 15 November, the Security Council adopted resolution 2709, renewing MINUSCA's mandate for another year, until 15 November 2024. Fourteen members voted in favour and one member abstained (Russia). (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 14 November 2023.)

On 8 December 2023, the CAR government and MINUSCA jointly organised a seminar on resolution 2709 to discuss a coordinated approach towards its implementation, according to a MINUSCA press release. Representatives of the CAR government, the diplomatic corps, regional and other multilateral partners, and the UN system in the CAR participated in the seminar. Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix also visited the CAR for three days in December 2023, consulting with CAR authorities on the implementation of MINUSCA's mandate.

The security situation in the CAR has reportedly deteriorated recently, particularly in the western part of the country. Twenty-three civilians were killed following a deadly attack on 21 December 2023, reportedly by an armed group known as 3R, in Nzakoundou village in Lim-Pende prefecture. MINUSCA has deployed peacekeepers in the region to strengthen security and facilitate humanitarian assistance. On 15 January, an improvised explosive device killed one Cameroonian peacekeeper and wounded five others, including two seriously, in Mbindali, northwest of Paoua in Ouham-Pendé Prefecture, while on a patrol escorting a team from the International Organization for Migration.

In a statement the same day, the Secretary-General condemned the attack and called on CAR authorities to identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice. On 16 January, Council members also agreed on a press statement that condemned the attack and expressed particular concern about reports of illicit transnational trafficking networks that continue to fund and supply armed groups

in the CAR. They stressed the need to investigate the increasing use of explosive ordnance.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 30 November, the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons Siobhán Mullally issued a statement at the end of her 7-day visit to the country. The expert urged the government of CAR to intensify its actions in preventing human trafficking, including by addressing issues related to sexual exploitation, and child and forced marriages, among others. In her statement, Mullally commended the government on the "political will" to combat trafficking but emphasised that "authorities must strengthen prevention measures and improve protection and support for victims, including victims of conflict related trafficking".

## Sanctions-Related Developments

On 17 October 2023, the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee received a briefing on delivering life-saving assistance in the CAR from an OCHA representative on behalf of the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

On 4 January, the Secretary-General appointed four members of the Panel of Experts assisting the sanctions committee. Russia had put a hold on the appointment of the panel members and only lifted it in the last week of December 2023. An expert on finance/natural resources has yet to be appointed.

## Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) Developments

In a letter dated 10 November 2023, the Chair of the PBC's CAR configuration, Ambassador Omar Hilale submitted advice to the Council for the mandate renewal of MINUSCA. The Commission stressed the importance of dialogue, reconciliation, social cohesion, and inclusive governance in achieving peace, security, and sustainable development. It reiterated its concern over the persistent budgetary shortfall for local elections scheduled to take place in October 2024. The PBC also called for additional financial support to ensure access to appropriate and long-term reintegration programmes of armed groups and encouraged continued cooperation between CAR authorities and their partners to create synergy and complementarity, including with peace, development, and humanitarian actors as part of disarmament and demobilisation activities.

In addition, from 7 to 11 November 2023, Hilale visited Bangui. As set out in the terms of reference of the trip, the focus of the visit was to get a better overview, since Hilale's last visit in 2020, of the inter-linkages between the political, security, economic, and humanitarian challenges the country is currently facing, as well as to get an appreciation of the country's efforts to fight impunity and strengthen its rule of law and justice sector.

## Key Issues and Options

The political and security situation in the CAR continues to be a key issue for Council members. They may express concerns over the deteriorating security situation in the country and reiterate their condemnation of the recent attack that claimed the life of a peacekeeper.

Council members may welcome the spirit of cooperation between the mission and the host government. They may also look forward to the independent strategic review requested pursuant to resolution 2709 to assess the challenges to peace and security in the CAR and provide detailed recommendations regarding the possible reconfiguration of MINUSCA's mandate.

The other issue of interest to Council members is the work of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee. They may welcome the appointment of members of the panel but express concerns about the delay in the appointment process.

A possible option for the Guyanese Council Presidency is to invite Hilale to brief the Council about his visit to the CAR.

# Central African Republic

## Council and Wider Dynamics

While MINUSCA's mandate renewal negotiations in November 2023 were difficult, they were not as contentious as the 2022 negotiations, which were overshadowed by several controversial issues, including violations of the status of forces agreement. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 14 November 2023.) Nonetheless, as in 2022, Russia abstained on the vote renewing MINUSCA's mandate in 2023, expressing disappointment, among other things, over the rejection of a reference to “the role of the Central African Republic's bilateral partners as part of the country's stabilization”.

CAR's bilateral engagement with some of the Council's permanent members at the highest level—including France—seems to have contributed to the easing of tensions between these members and the CAR government. The relationship between the mission and the host country also appears to have improved significantly despite continued reports of violations of the status of forces agreement. While the US seems to have been seeking to engage with the CAR government, it considers the government's partnership with

the Wagner Group, a private Russian military group, an obstacle to improving relations. The US has been encouraging the government to strengthen ties with MINUSCA and “other responsible partners” as an alternative to its relations with the Wagner Group.

The issue of human rights was divisive during the mandate renewal negotiations in 2023. Some members were dissatisfied that MINUSCA's human rights division released the annual report on the human rights situation in the CAR only after the renewal of the CAR mandate in late 2022. Resolution 2709 requests that the next report be available before mandate renewal negotiations in November.

During the MINUSCA mandate renewal negotiations, China and Russia raised issues related to the 2127 CAR sanctions regime, alluding to the improved situation in the CAR and urging the Council to make adjustments accordingly. However, other Council members argued that this issue should be discussed in July when the 2127 CAR sanctions regime is set for an extension.

France is the penholder on the CAR, and Ambassador Amar Bendjama (Algeria) chairs the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee.

# Syria

## Expected Council Action

In February, the Security Council is expected to hold a briefing, followed by closed consultations, on the political process and the humanitarian situation in Syria.

## Key Recent Developments

The political track in Syria remains at a standstill, and the Syrian Constitutional Committee has not met since June 2022. Russia, a close ally of Syria, has been objecting to Geneva as the venue for convening the Constitutional Committee, following Switzerland's imposition of sanctions on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine. In his remarks at the 21 December 2023 Council meeting on Syria, Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen said that “[t]he blockage of the Constitutional Committee for a year and a half—largely over what should be a secondary issue, namely, the venue—has sent the wrong signal and has been a setback”. He added that “there is no venue in the region that is both on offer and attracts consensus”. He called on member states to respect the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, and UN-facilitated nature of the Constitutional Committee. He also appealed to members “to act in a manner that enables the Constitutional Committee to resume, at least initially in Geneva, and for reciprocal, verifiable and parallel confidence-building measures to be agreed and implemented”.

On 24 January, Pedersen met with several high-level officials, including from Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, the UK, and the US, in New York. According to a post on X (formerly Twitter) by the Special Envoy's office, Pedersen emphasised the need for maximum restraint and the importance of de-escalating violence in the region and in Syria. During the meetings, he also discussed the prospects for reconvening the Constitutional Committee and the need to move

forward substantively on the broader political process in line with resolution 2254.

On 11 January, the Syrian government announced its decision to extend its authorisation for the use of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing at the Syria-Türkiye border—used by UN humanitarian agencies and their partners for conducting cross-border humanitarian operations—until 13 April. Humanitarian operations have also continued through the Bab al-Salam and Al Ra'ee border crossings at the Syria-Türkiye border. The Syrian government's authorisation for the use of these border crossings expires on 13 February.

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. Pro-government air strikes have intensified in the region, along with shelling by government forces in Idlib. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)—an armed opposition group that is designated by the Security Council as a terrorist organisation and controls parts of Syria's north-west region—has also continued shelling and drone attacks in government-controlled areas.

In the latest round of attacks on 22 January, shelling in the city of Ariha in southern Idlib injured at least six civilians, including four children, according to a post on X (formerly Twitter) by the “Syria Civil Defence” (also known as the White Helmets). Hostilities since 5 October 2023 have resulted in over 100 civilian deaths, nearly 40 percent of whom have been children, and have injured more than 440 people. (For more, see the briefs on Syria in our December 2023 and January 2024 *Monthly Forecasts*.)

The situation in north-east Syria also remains volatile. According to an 18 January OCHA press release, multiple airstrikes in

**UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA** [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2254](#) (18 December 2015) was the first resolution that focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. It was adopted unanimously. [Security Council Letters S/2024/71](#) (16 January 2024) was from Iran to the President of the Security Council. [S/2023/1065](#) (29 December 2023) was from Syria to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council. [Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9517](#) (21 December 2023) was a briefing on the political process and the humanitarian situation in Syria. [Sanctions Committee Document S/2024/92](#) (29 January 2024) was the report of the monitoring team assisting the 1267/1989/2253 Sanctions Committee.

# Syria

Al-Hasakeh over the last few weeks have led to civilian casualties and caused significant damage to several civilian facilities, including power stations and oil production fields. A 22 January flash update from the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations reported that the ongoing hostilities have led to fuel shortages, which in turn pose significant risks to humanitarian response, staff movement, transport of essential goods, and the ability of health facilities to function.

Attacks against US forces stationed in the region have increased manifold 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 a 29 January press briefing, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh confirmed that there had been 165 attacks against US service members in the region, including 65 in Iraq, 98 in Syria and one in Jordan, allegedly by Iranian-backed militias, since 17 October. In the same statement Singh said that, on 28 January, a US military facility (also known as Tower 22) in northeast Jordan, was attacked using a one-way attack unmanned aerial system, adding that “[i]n terms of attribution for the attack, we know this is an [Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps] IRGC-backed militia [and] has the footprints of Kata’ib Hezbollah”. In an escalation of tensions in the region, this attack resulted in the deaths of three US service members and injured more than 40.

On multiple occasions, the US has conducted retaliatory strikes, both in Iraq and Syria. In the latest round of such attacks, on 23 January, the US military forces carried out strikes against the Kata’ib Hezbollah militia group and other Iran-affiliated groups in Iraq according to a statement by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin. He added that these strikes were “conducted in direct response to a series of escalatory attacks against [the] US and coalition personnel in Iraq and Syria by Iranian-sponsored militias”. In response to the 28 January attack on Tower 22, Pentagon Press Secretary Major General Pat Ryder during a 30 January press briefing that “[w]hile we do not seek to escalate tensions in the region... we will also take all necessary actions to protect our troops, our facilities, and our interests”.

There have also been reports of several airstrikes, allegedly by Israel, targeting sites in Syria. In a letter dated 29 December 2023, the Syrian government informed the Council members about two airstrikes in southern Syria. The Aleppo and Damascus airports have also been bombed repeatedly since 7 October. Although it has not commented on the strikes, Israel has traditionally argued that it carries out airstrikes in Syria to disrupt Iranian supply lines to its proxy groups. In addition, according to media reports, airstrikes also attributed to Israel struck Damascus on 20 January, killing at least five Iranian military figures, including the head of intelligence for Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds force and his deputy.

In a 16 January letter, the Iranian government informed Council members that earlier the same day, it had fired several ballistic missiles targeting positions of Da’esh (also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) and the HTS in Idlib. These strikes, the letter noted, were conducted in response to an attack in Kerman, Iran, on 3 January, in which more than 100 people were reportedly killed

and many more injured.

On 24 January, Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths briefed the Council members in closed consultations on political and humanitarian developments, respectively. It appears that, following the meeting, Slovenia proposed press elements, which would have expressed concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation and the threat of regional escalation, among other things. Russia apparently insisted on a written text and the elements were not agreed upon.

## Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members is the ongoing and escalating hostilities in the region. Determining how the Council can address the spillover effects from the situation in Israel and Gaza and de-escalate tensions is a fundamental issue for the Council. The violence in the country and lack of accountability threaten to destabilise it further. At the same time, Da’esh remains a key security threat in Syria. The latest report of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1267/1989/2253 Sanctions Committee, dated 29 January, said that Da’esh has intensified attacks in Syria since November 2023, conducting sporadic attacks, including in Sukhnah in the desert of Homs Governorate and in Rusafah in Raqqah Governorate. It further said that “Da’esh exploits any cessation or diversion of counter-terrorism pressure to resurge, capitalizing on local and regional geopolitical dynamics”, adding that Da’esh-related violence poses a heightened risk of spillover to neighbouring countries.

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 in the country are also of concern.

Periodic briefings from OCHA have helped keep the Council informed of the country’s humanitarian situation. 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 in Syria, including early recovery projects. The co-chairs (Switzerland and the UK) of the Informal Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians could also hold a meeting on the situation in Syria to receive briefings from relevant UN entities.

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 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

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and territorial integrity and drawing connections between unilateral coercive measures on Syria and the challenging humanitarian situation in the country. In contrast, the P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other like-minded members criticise the government for violating international humanitarian law and human rights law, arbitrarily detaining people, and not engaging meaningfully in political dialogue.

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 already difficult dynamics underlying Security Council discussions on the situation in Syria. While Algeria is expected to be supportive of the Syrian government, other members are expected to align themselves with the Western and other like-minded Council members.

Switzerland is the penholder on the Syria humanitarian file.

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