

# Monthly Forecast

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## Overview

In March, Japan will hold the presidency of the Security Council.

Japan is expected to organise two signature events. One will be an open debate on “[Promoting conflict prevention – Empowering all actors including women and youth](#)” under the “Peace-building and sustaining peace” agenda item. Representatives of the UN Secretariat, academia, and civil society are expected to brief.

The second signature event will be a high-level briefing on [nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation](#) under the “Maintenance of international peace and security” agenda item. Japanese Foreign Minister Yōko Kamikawa is expected to chair the meeting. Secretary-General António Guterres is the anticipated briefer.

Additionally, Japan will organise an open debate on the Council’s [working methods](#) under the agenda item “Implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2017/507)”, referring to the most recent version of the comprehensive compendium of Council working methods.

In March, the Security Council will also hold its annual meeting on strengthening [EU-UN cooperation](#) under the agenda item “Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in maintaining international peace and security”. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell Fontelles is expected to brief.

Several African issues are on the programme of work this month, including:

- [South Sudan](#), meeting on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and renewal of the mission’s mandate;
- [Sudan](#), renewal of the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, briefing and consultations on the Secretary-General’s report pursuant to resolution 2715 of 1 December 2023—which terminated the mandate of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS)—and briefing by the chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee; and
- [Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\)](#),

briefing and consultations on the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO).

Middle Eastern issues on the programme include:

- [Syria](#), meetings on the political and humanitarian situations and on the chemical weapons track;
- [Yemen](#), monthly meeting on developments;
- “[The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question](#)”, monthly meeting on developments, with the possibility of additional meetings depending on developments in Gaza and Israel;
- [Lebanon](#), consultations on the implementation of resolution 1701, which was adopted in 2006 and called for a cessation of hostilities between the Shi’a group Hezbollah and Israel; and
- [Golan](#), meeting on the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF).

Two Asian issues are expected to be addressed in March. Regarding [Afghanistan](#), the Council will consider the renewal of the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and hold its quarterly meeting on the situation in the country.

The Council is also expected to renew the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 [Democratic People’s Republic of Korea \(DPRK\)](#) Sanctions Committee and to receive a briefing from the chair of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee on the committee’s work.

Regarding non-proliferation issues, the chair of the [1540 Committee](#) is expected to brief the Council about the committee’s activities. (Adopted in 2004, resolution 1540 aims to prevent non-state actors from obtaining access to weapons of mass destruction.)

As in past months, there are likely to be one or more meetings on [Ukraine](#) in March.

Other issues could be raised during the month, depending on developments.

**1 March 2024**

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# In Hindsight: The Security Council and Conflict Prevention

## Background

Conflict prevention is at the core of the UN Charter. As Secretary-General António Guterres remarked during his swearing-in ceremony on 12 December 2016, “prevention is not a novel concept—it is what the founders of the UN asked us to do”. Indeed, the charter’s first article says that a primary purpose of the UN is “to maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace...” and calls on all members to settle their international disputes by peaceful means. Chapter VI on the peaceful settlement of disputes provides the framework for the Council’s prevention work.

This month, Japan will make conflict prevention a focus of its presidency, with an open debate on promoting conflict prevention as one of its signature events. (For more information, see the conflict prevention brief in our March *Monthly Forecast*.) Members will continue to consider conflict prevention as they negotiate the Pact of the Future, ahead of the Summit of the Future in September 2024.

The draft Pact of the Future document under negotiation includes a section on international peace and security that incorporates ideas from the Secretary-General’s A New Agenda for Peace (NAfP). The NAfP calls for boosting preventive diplomacy by making greater use of the UN and its good offices capacities and building or repairing regional security architectures. It underscores that preventive tools, outlined in Article 33 of the Charter, have been underused. (Article 33 directs the parties to a serious dispute to settle it using peaceful means, including negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, and judicial settlement, among others. It further asserts that the Security Council “shall, when it deems necessary, call upon the parties to settle their dispute by such means”.) The NAfP also distinguishes between prevention at the global level and prevention at the national level.

As reflected in the NAfP, conflict prevention activities range from operational measures like the use of early warning and preventive diplomacy, to longer term structural interventions and peacebuilding that address underlying causes of conflict such as socio-economic inequality, ethnic discrimination and fragile state institutions.

Members agree that prevention saves lives and is more cost-effective than managing conflicts, addressing their attendant humanitarian effects, and rebuilding post-conflict countries. But geopolitical dynamics in a fragmented, multipolar world have made prevention even more complicated for the Council. The past decade or so has been particularly difficult: since 2011, the Security Council and the broader international community have been unable to prevent intractable conflicts or conflict escalation in the Central African Republic, Haiti, Israel-Palestine, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen, among others.

Although the Council has adopted several formal outcomes focused on different aspects of conflict prevention, including the importance of early warning mechanisms, these have, by and large, not gained traction. Members have often pushed back against upstream prevention, which tends to focus on situations not on the agenda, often sparking accusations of interference in states’ internal affairs, a particular impediment towards addressing intra-state conflict. Even after conflict erupts, states frequently try to block Council engagement.

## Examples of Council Prevention Tools

### Secretariat Briefings

The Security Council’s focus on conflict prevention is often through thematic debates rather than country-specific discussions. In the recent past, however, members sought more country-specific discussions through a prevention lens, including by “horizon-scanning” and “situational awareness” briefings.

Monthly, between November 2010 and March 2012, the head of the Department of Political Affairs (now DPPA) “scanned the horizon” for the Council with the aim of providing information that might allow for better conflict prevention, including preventive diplomacy. The initiative had come from the UK. But by late 2012, these briefings dwindled. Some members felt that they added little to what was in the public domain, while others took issue with the countries being discussed, at times attempting to limit the agenda.

In 2016, New Zealand initiated situational awareness briefings at a less formal level. These took place in the Secretariat and were chaired by a member of the Secretary-General’s Executive Office, which also set the agenda. They focused largely on situations on the Council’s agenda in the hope that this would be less controversial than discussing matters not on the agenda. These meetings presented a holistic picture of country-specific threats through briefings by senior representatives of UN entities, including DPA, DPKO, OCHA, and OHCHR. Reluctance grew on the part of the Secretariat, and the meetings became less frequent.

In November 2018 the ten elected members and the incoming five members carried out a démarche to the Secretary-General to request early warning briefings by the Secretariat. This led to a few such briefings in 2019 before they stopped altogether during the COVID-19 pandemic. A subsequent attempt by elected members led to two informal early warning briefings for E10 members, one at the end of 2022 and another in January 2023.

Other Council initiatives for informal and candid discussion of this nature include the Informal Interactive Dialogue format, which is a closed, informal meeting of Council members for which there is no record, and the Secretary-General’s monthly lunches with members are possible venues for quiet discussions. The so-called “sofa talks” created in 2019 (at a time of Council cleavages over a number of issues) to bring together Council permanent representatives for an informal discussion, lapsed with COVID-19 and have shown only limited signs of revival. The Secretary-General’s lunches have provided a discreet space for the Secretary-General to speak to the 15 members on issues that he sees as potential international peace and security concerns. These lunches can be seen as an indirect use of Article 99 of the UN Charter, which provides that the Secretary-General “may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security”. In the current geopolitical environment, more robust use of this article may be necessary.

### UN Regional Offices

The Council receives biannual reports and briefings from the heads of the UN regional offices in West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Central Africa (UNOCA) and Central Asia (UNRCCA), which may flag the risk of crises, as they have done in Burkina Faso, the Gambia,

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# In Hindsight: The Security Council and Conflict Prevention

Guinea and Nigeria. In such cases, the Council receives information on potential conflict situations not on the Council's agenda, including diplomatic efforts and responses to structural conflict drivers. UNOWAS briefings are also one way of keeping the Council informed of concerns pertaining to Mali, following the closure of MINUSMA and the termination of the Mali sanctions regime.

## Visiting Missions

Since the Council dispatched a visiting mission, consisting of three Council members, to Cambodia and Viet Nam from 26 June to 14 July 1964, it has used this tool for a number of purposes, including preventive diplomacy, gathering first-hand information, supporting peace processes, and mediation. (Under Article 34 of the Charter, "The Security Council may investigate any dispute, or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute, in order to determine whether the continuance of the dispute or situation is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security.")

Following the Cold War, Council members began making regular visiting missions, with three to five such trips the norm in the years before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Pandemic restrictions affected the Council's ability to travel; visiting missions resumed in late 2021, but at a much lower rate, with one in 2021, none in 2022 and two in 2023. Difficulty agreeing on the destination and a heavy workload may have contributed to fewer visiting missions.

## The Future of Conflict Prevention

The difficulties for the Security Council to delve into, and support, conflict prevention and resolution in country-specific settings has helped drive attention to structural prevention and the need to address the drivers of conflict and violence at the national and local levels, as

evident in its recent conflict prevention thematic debates. The NaffP proposes that all UN member states develop national prevention strategies that are grounded in "sustainable development" and are "multidimensional, people-centred and inclusive of all the different components of society". It also recommends a role for the PBC in supporting these national strategies, to which member states may be amenable as the PBC will only discuss countries with the consent of the government concerned.

Several Council thematic resolutions emphasise structural prevention, including resolution 2282 (2016) on the ten-year review of the UN peacebuilding architecture, which points out that a comprehensive approach to sustaining peace involves preventing conflict and addressing its root causes. Among other issues, it underlines the importance of strengthening the rule of law at the international and national levels, and encourages sustainable development, national reconciliation and unity, including through inclusive dialogue and mediation, good governance, accountable institutions and the protection of human rights. A critical Council role in prevention, including structural prevention, comes through its mandating of special political missions as well as peacekeeping operations that prioritise support to some of these measures. The Council has also, in recent years, paid more attention to root causes in its country-specific and thematic resolutions and presidential statements.

Council members may wish to bring greater attention to bear on structural prevention efforts, on planning visiting missions strategically around situations where it has the potential to encourage and support Article 33 activities (including enquiry and mediation), and on how best to use the Secretary-General's good offices role, including the efforts of special political missions.

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## Status Update since our February Forecast

### Myanmar

On 5 February, the Security Council convened for a private meeting on Myanmar (S/PV.9541). Newly appointed Special Envoy of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on Myanmar Alounkeo Kittikhoun and Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari briefed. The UK, the penholder on Myanmar, requested the meeting.

### Iraq

On 5 February, the Security Council held an open briefing on the 2 February US airstrikes in Iraq and Syria under the "threats to international peace and security" agenda item (S/PV.9542). The meeting was requested by Russia. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed.

On 6 February, the Council held an open briefing (S/PV.9543), followed by closed consultations, on Iraq. Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert briefed on recent developments in the country and on the Secretary-General's reports on

UNAMI (S/2024/96) and the issue of missing Kuwaiti and third-party nationals and missing Kuwaiti property (S/2024/95). Iraq and Kuwait also participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

### Ukraine

On 6 February, the Security Council convened for an open briefing on Ukraine under the "Threats to international peace and security" agenda item (S/PV.9544). Russia requested the meeting to discuss an incident that occurred on 3 February in which Ukrainian forces allegedly shelled the city of Lysychansk in the Russian-controlled region of Luhansk in eastern Ukraine. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed, and Ukraine participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

On 12 February, the Council held an open briefing on Ukraine under the "Threats to international peace and security" agenda item (S/PV.9546). Russia requested the meeting to mark the ninth anniversary of the "Package of Measures for the Implementation of the

## Status Update since our February Forecast

Minsk Agreements”, also known as the Minsk II agreement, adopted on 12 February 2015. Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas Miroslav Jenča and political activist and journalist Steve Sweeney briefed. Germany and Ukraine participated under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure.

On 23 February, the Council convened for a briefing on the situation in Ukraine, held at ministerial level (S/PV.9557). Ukraine, supported by Slovenia, requested the meeting to mark the two-year anniversary of Russia’s full-scale invasion of the country in February 2022. Secretary-General António Guterres briefed the Council. Ukraine and eight other European member states participated under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure. At the outset of the meeting, Russia raised a point of order objecting to the number of non-members of the Council from the EU participating in the meeting.

### Kosovo

On 8 February, the Council held an open briefing on Kosovo (S/PV.9545) under the agenda items “Security Council resolutions 1160 (1998), 1199 (1998), 1203 (1998), 1239 (1999) and 1244 (1999)” and “Letter dated 5 February 2024 from the Permanent Representative of Serbia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2024/134)”. Citing article 35 of the UN Charter, Serbia requested the meeting, with Russia’s support, to discuss rising tensions in Kosovo following Pristina’s decision to make the euro the only valid currency for conducting cash payment transactions. Special Representative and Head of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) Caroline Zia-deh briefed. Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić participated under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure, and Prime Minister Albin Kurti of Kosovo participated under rule 39.

### Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 12 February, Security Council members convened for closed consultations on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. Algeria requested the consultations to discuss the situation in Rafah following Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s 9 February announcement that he had ordered the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the Israeli security establishment to prepare a “combined plan” to evacuate civilians and to destroy Hamas’ forces in that area.

On 20 February, the Security Council voted on a draft resolution (S/PV.9552) on the war between Israel and Hamas authored by Algeria (S/2024/173). The draft text, which demanded an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, failed to be adopted owing to a veto by the US. All other members—except the UK, which abstained—voted in favour of the text. The vote marked the eighth time that the Security Council has voted on a draft resolution on the war. Only two of the eight draft resolutions on the crisis voted on by the Council thus far were adopted: resolution 2712 of 15 November 2023 and resolution 2720 of 22 December 2023. Neither of these resolutions called for a ceasefire.

On 22 February, 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.9556). Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland

and Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) Secretary General Christopher Lockyear briefed in the open chamber. Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security Gilles Michaud briefed during the closed consultations.

Following the meeting, Guyana, February’s Council president, read out press elements saying that the Council was briefed on the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the “extremely difficult and dangerous” working conditions for UN and humanitarian personnel operating in Gaza. Among other things, the statement said that Council members “stressed the importance of respecting deconfliction mechanisms for the safety and security of UN personnel and facilities, as well as access to appropriate security equipment”.

On 27 February, the Security Council held a briefing on food insecurity in Gaza under the “Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict” agenda item (See the [Conflict and Food Insecurity](#) status update for more information).

On 29 February, Council members held closed consultations on Gaza at the request of Algeria after an incident earlier on the same day in which dozens were reportedly killed and injured during a transfer of aid supplies.

### Climate Change and Food Insecurity

On 13–14 February, the Security Council convened for a high-level open debate on “The impact of climate change and food insecurity on the maintenance of international peace and security”, the signature event of Guyana’s presidency (S/PV.9547 and S/PV.9547 Resumption 1). President Mohamed Irfaan Ali of Guyana chaired the meeting. UN Secretary-General António Guterres provided opening remarks. The briefers were: Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Simon Stiell; Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Deputy Director-General Beth Bechdol; and Jimena Leiva Roesch, the Director of Global Initiatives and Head of Peace, Climate, and Sustainable Development at the International Peace Institute.

### Libya

On 15 February, the Security Council held an open briefing (S/PV.9549), followed by closed consultations, on Libya. Special Representative and Head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Abdoulaye Bathily briefed the Council on the latest political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country. Additionally, Ambassador Yamazaki Kazuyuki (Japan), chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, presented the periodic report on the committee’s activities. Libya participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure.

### Counter-Terrorism

On 8 February, Council members issued a press statement (SC/15583) condemning the 7 February terrorist attacks in Balochistan, Pakistan. The attacks were claimed by ISIL and killed at least 26 people and injured 45 more.

On 15 February, the Council held an open briefing (S/PV.9550) on the Secretary-General’s 18th biannual strategic level report (S/2024/117) on the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) to international peace and security.



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## Status Update since our February Forecast

Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism and Head of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) Vladimir Voronkov, Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) Natalia Gherman, and Secretary General of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) Jürgen Stock briefed the Council.

### Somalia

On 19 February, the Security Council held a briefing on the situation in Somalia (S/PV.9551). Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) Catriona Laing and Special Representative of the AU Commission Chairperson (SRCC) for Somalia and Head of the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) Mohamed El-Amine Souef briefed. Laing highlighted recent developments, including Somalia's admission to the East African Community (EAC), its attainment of debt relief after reaching the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative completion point, the Security Council's decision to lift the arms embargo on the Somali government, and the AU's endorsement of Somalia's candidature for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for 2025-2026. Souef spoke about the transfer of security responsibilities to Somali security forces and post-ATMIS arrangements. Somalia participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure. Its permanent representative, Ambassador Abukar Dahir Osman reiterated his country's condemnation of Ethiopia for signing a 1 January memorandum of understanding with Somaliland, a self-proclaimed republic in the northern region of Somalia.

### Central African Republic

On 21 February, The Security Council held a briefing on the situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) (S/PV.9554). Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the CAR and Head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) Valentine Rugwabiza briefed the Council and described the mission's efforts to fulfill its mandate

in protecting civilians and helping the CAR government in expanding state authority across the country. The CAR participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

### Colombia

Between 7 and 11 February, the Security Council conducted a visiting mission to Colombia, which was co-led by the UK (the penholder on the file), Guyana, and Switzerland. The visiting mission allowed Council members to assess the progress and challenges in the implementation of the 2016 Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace between the government of Colombia and the former rebel group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). It also afforded them an opportunity to learn more about the "total peace" policy promoted by the administration of Colombian President Gustavo Petro Urrego, which entails the promotion of dialogue with armed groups operating in the country as well as the implementation of the 2016 agreement. The visiting mission's co-leads briefed the Council about the visit on 22 February (S/PV.9555).

### Conflict and Food Insecurity

On 27 February, the Security Council held a briefing on food insecurity in Gaza under the "Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict" agenda item (S/PV.9560). Guyana and Switzerland, the Council's focal points on conflict and hunger, joined by Algeria and Slovenia, requested the meeting after OCHA sent Council members a white note, dated 22 February, on food security risks in the Gaza Strip. The white note estimated that at least 576,000 people in Gaza are "one step away from famine" and that Gaza's entire population of 2.2 million is experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity due to the armed conflict. OCHA Head in Geneva and Director of the Coordination Division Ramesh Rajasingham, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Deputy Director-General Maurizio Martina, and World Food Programme (WFP) Deputy Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer Carl Skau briefed.

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## Working Methods

### Expected Council Action

In March, Japan is organising an open debate on the Council's working methods. Japan, the chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions (IWG), is expected to circulate a concept note ahead of the debate. It will be held under the agenda item "Implementation of the note by the President of the Security Council (S/2017/507)", referring to the most recent version of the comprehensive compendium of Council working methods.

Japan does not plan to have a formal outcome but will produce an analytical summary of the proposals made at the open debate. It will also pay close attention to practical suggestions from the debate in the context of an updated Note 507.

### Key Recent Developments

On 5 September 2023, during the presidency of Albania, the Council held its annual open debate on its working methods. The Chair of the Informal Working Group, Ambassador Ferit Hoxha (Albania), briefed. In addition to Council members, 37 member states delivered statements. The discussion included how to ensure the full implementation of the Council's notes on working methods and their further development, including of the role of the Informal Working Group. Other topics included penholderships, the veto, meeting formats, the annual report, and the selection of subsidiary body chairs.

Council members have begun negotiating a new draft, prepared by Japan, of the compendium of Council working methods,

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON WORKING METHODS** Selected Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9410 (5 September 2023) was on the Security Council debate on working methods. **Selected General Assembly Meeting Record A/77/2** (30 May 2023) was the General Assembly discussion of the Annual Report of the Security Council for 2022 to the General Assembly. **Selected Notes by the President S/2023/945** (1 December 2023) was on penholderships. Other S/2023/1014 (30 December 2023) was a letter from the Chair of the Informal Working Group (IWG) on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions to the President of the Security Council, conveying the annual report of the IWG.

## Working Methods

commonly referred to as “Note 507”. Members have provided comments on an initial draft, and negotiations are expected to resume in April. Since the adoption of the latest Note 507 in 2017, the Council has issued 16 presidential notes on working methods. In 2023, the IWG adopted three presidential notes on: conducting a minute of silence, chairing subsidiary bodies if the chairs have not been agreed by 1 January, and penholderships. The note on penholderships was adopted on 1 December based on a Chinese draft that consolidated many elements from earlier drafts by France and the United Arab Emirates/Elected Members (E10).

The IWG met six times in 2023: on 24 February, 28 April, 27 June, 22 August, 17 November, and 22 December. This year it has met once so far, on 19 January. Since 2021, it has maintained a standing agenda item, “Strengthening and advancing the implementation of the Note by the President of 30 August 2017”, which has allowed presidencies to brief on the implementation of their working methods commitments and more recently allowed penholders

and co-penholders to elaborate on their experiences in drafting and negotiating.

The IWG issued its second annual report at the end of 2023, summarising its activities and presenting indicators that track the implementation of Note 507 and the more recent presidential notes. The indicators, which cover data related to the efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency of the Council, provide an overview of how the Council is performing and what gaps remain.

The General Assembly adopted resolution 76/262 on 26 April 2022: “the veto initiative”, which calls for the General Assembly to meet within ten days whenever a veto is cast and for the Council to submit a special report on the use of the veto to the General Assembly. Since the adoption of this resolution, twelve vetoes have been cast on nine resolutions and one amendment—four in 2022, seven in 2023 and one in 2024—triggering ten meetings of the General Assembly and ten special reports from the Council as at 4 March.

DATE	ISSUE	VETO(S)	SPECIAL REPORT TO THE GA
20 February 2024	The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question	US	
22 December 2023	Amendment to draft resolution on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question	US	A/78/691
8 December 2023	The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question	US	A/78/667
25 October 2023	The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question	China, Russia	A/78/556
18 October 2023	The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question	US	A/78/549
30 August 2023	Mali	Russia	A/78/341
11 July 2023	Middle East (Syria)	Russia	A/77/965
30 September 2022	Ukraine	Russia	A/77/551
8 July 2022	Middle East (Syria)	Russia	A/76/905
26 May 2022	DPRK (Non-proliferation)	China, Russia	A/76/853

On 16 January, for the first time, the General Assembly held informal consultations on the drafting of the annual report it receives from the Security Council. This meeting, chaired by General Assembly president Dennis Francis, was convened in response to members calling for this report to be drafted more collaboratively and analytically. The UK, the member responsible for drafting the introductory portion of the 2023 annual report, briefed on the work of the Council in 2023. (The introductory portion of the report, which presents a factual overview of the Council’s work, is prepared under the coordination of the Council’s July presidency of the previous year. The body of the Annual Report, which lists the outcomes under different agenda items discussed, is prepared by the Secretariat.) The UK circulated the introduction of the 2023 annual report on 24 January ahead of the 31 January deadline in Note 507. The Secretariat is expected to submit its portion by 15 March and members have a 30 May deadline for the adoption.

In respect of a key working method, visiting missions, the Council conducted only two in 2023: to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in March, and to Addis Ababa for the annual UN Security

Council-AU Peace and Security Council meeting in October. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council habitually undertook four or five visiting missions a year.

### Issues and Options

An immediate issue of concern is that some working methods may have become an impediment to the smooth functioning of the Council, rather than improving its efficiency. Considerable time is spent in meetings addressing issues such as invitations to member states (rule 37) and to briefers (rule 39), how quickly meetings should be convened, and reaching agreement on the programme of work. Informal guidelines on some of the more controversial issues may allow members to move past procedural squabbles to substantive matters.

The implementation of Note 507 and subsequent presidential notes remains an overarching issue. While a number of last year’s 12 presidencies made commitments on their implementation of Note 507, but only a few made these commitments public. Annexing such commitments to the monthly presidency assessments, as Switzerland did, is a possible option for improving the transparency of these

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## Working Methods

commitments. The assessments could also provide an analytical summary of how well the commitments were executed. Looking ahead, the IWG could identify under-implemented aspects of Note 507 and encourage presidencies to address them.

An immediate key issue is the adoption of a new Note 507 before the end of 2024, when Japan leaves the Council. Given the delicate negotiations needed for agreement on the presidential notes since 2017, some members seem likely to resist changes to the language of these notes. Likewise, attempts to include new substance or revise agreed language in Note 507 could complicate and prolong negotiations.

A continuing issue is reform of the informal system of penholder arrangements. The presidential note on penholders reflects a trend towards expanding penholders beyond the P3, including the pledge to make “enhanced use” of the expertise of the chairs of subsidiary bodies and members with regional perspectives, and to take this expertise into account when considering members who could serve as penholder or co-penholders. At this early stage of 2024, there has been no discernible shift towards selecting sanctions chairs or regional players as co-penholders. This may be due to the political sensitivities around the selection of some penholders as well as the resources a member requires to be an effective penholder. Incoming members who are keen to play this role may want to propose supportive measures such as being able to shadow current penholders and co-penholders during the three-month period leading up to their Council term.

The use of the veto remains an impediment to the Council’s ability to take effective action on some of the world’s major crises. With the success of the General Assembly’s veto initiative, and with veto abolition appearing unlikely in the near future, there may be interest in promoting greater accountability for the use of the veto.

In this connection, member states may seek more substantive reporting on the use of the veto, possibly in a stand-alone section of the annual report that also refers to the Council’s special reports. Overall, member states appear interested in receiving more information on the challenges the Council faced in 2023 and may call for greater analysis in the annual report.

A long-standing issue is the balance between open and closed meetings, and transparency and confidentiality. Since 2001, public meetings have been the Council’s dominant format, and its 290 public meetings in 2023 marked a five percent increase in the use of this format over 2022, following a 12 percent increase in 2022 compared to 2021, largely due to meetings on Ukraine. Consultations can be useful when there is a willingness to cooperate. In this context, identifying possible issues that could benefit from a closed discussion may be useful.

### Council Dynamics

The Council’s ability to work efficiently and take effective action has been hampered by deep divisions among some members, which has heightened their recourse to procedural means—working methods—to express unhappiness with the substantive positions of others. The bitter exchanges at the start of some meetings have at times distracted from more substantive matters.

The elected members, who continue to have a strong, shared interest in working methods, have delivered a joint statement at the last six working methods debates and are expected to do so again in March. Their interest in equitable distribution of work and burden-sharing led to the opening up of co-penholding positions for elected members in 2022 and an E10 draft on penholding in 2023. The P3 appear to have accepted the need for an expansion of this informal arrangement and seem to be working well with some of their co-penholders. China and Russia have publicly supported the expansion of the penholding system, although rarely opting to be penholders themselves.

Japan has been a leader on working methods since it compiled the existing notes into the first Note 507 in 2006. It is expected to work actively towards reaching agreement on a revised Note 507 before it leaves the Council at the end of the year. Council members Ecuador, Slovenia and Switzerland are also members of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT): as they have done previously, the ACT Group is expected to make a joint statement at the open debate.

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## Non-Proliferation

### Expected Council Action

In March, Japan plans to convene a high-level briefing on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation as a signature event of its presidency. The meeting will be chaired by Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs Yōko Kamikawa. UN Secretary-General António Guterres is expected to brief.

### Background

Article 26 of the UN Charter determines that the Security Council is to formulate, with the Military Staff Committee, plans “for the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments”, with the overall aim being “the least diversion for armaments” of the

world’s human and economic resources. In January 1947, the Council accepted, as one of its most urgent tasks, the global elimination of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in line with General Assembly Resolution 41 (1), underlining that the general reduction of armaments and armed forces was an important measure for strengthening international peace and security.

Early Security Council WMD initiatives were soon overtaken by the Cold War, however, and the dissolution of the Commission on Conventional Armaments and the Atomic Energy Committee in 1952 arguably marked the end of the Council’s substantive work on the regulation of armaments based on Article 26. The General Assembly stepped up and has been instrumental in the adoption of

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON NON-PROLIFERATION** Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2012/14 (19 April 2012) reaffirmed that the proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery constitutes a threat to international peace and security. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9112 (22 August 2022) was on “Maintenance of international peace and security: Promote common security through dialogue and cooperation”, initiated by China. General Assembly Document A/RES/78/40 (4 December 2023) was a resolution titled “Steps to building a common roadmap towards a world without nuclear weapons”.

# Non-Proliferation

treaties regulating WMD, including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2017.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the Security Council undertook several non-proliferation initiatives. Resolution 1540, adopted in 2004 under Chapter VII of the Charter, requires all states to establish controls over WMD and the means to deliver them and to enact and enforce the necessary national implementing legislation, with the objective of prohibiting terrorists and other non-state actors from developing, acquiring and using WMD. Following a spate of Council meetings in 2004-5, then-Council member Costa Rica convened a thematic debate on 19 November 2008 to consider Article 26 and the Council's duty to promote peace with the least diversion of resources for armaments. Additionally, in September 2009, the Security Council held a summit-level meeting on nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament, adopting resolution 1887 which, the UN noted, "affirmed its commitment to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and established a broad framework for reducing global nuclear dangers."

Since 2010, the level of Council engagement has fallen. Debates on general disarmament and its role in the maintenance of international peace and security are rare. In April 2012, the US convened a briefing on nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament and security, after which the Council adopted a presidential statement reaffirming that the proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery constitutes a threat to international peace and security. In September 2016, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the opening for signature of the CTBT, the Council adopted resolution 2310, which urged all states that have either not signed or not ratified the treaty to do so without further delay.

In January 2018, Kazakhstan organised a debate on WMD and confidence-building, and in February 2020, the Council held a briefing on non-proliferation with a specific focus on supporting the NPT ahead of the 2020 Review Conference. (More about NPT review conferences is below.) In September 2021, Ireland convened a briefing on the 25th anniversary of the opening for signature of the CTBT. In August 2022, China organised a briefing on promoting common security through dialogue and cooperation, during which Council members discussed the importance of nuclear disarmament to reduce strategic risks, particularly in light of the escalating tensions among major nuclear powers.

For more background information and analysis on this topic, see the [In Hindsight: The Security Council and Weapons of Mass Destruction](#) in our September 2022 *Monthly Forecast*.

## Key Recent Developments

The world's nuclear risks have grown in recent years, with extensive modernisation of nuclear arsenals reported in 2023 and overall global military expenditures reaching \$2.2 trillion, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. In January 2022, the five permanent members of the Security Council (P5) reaffirmed the 1985 declaration by US President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought, but nuclear signalling

by senior Russian officials has heightened threat perceptions in this regard, particularly in connection with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Following the invasion, the US halted its strategic stability dialogue with Russia. In February 2023, Russia announced its withdrawal from the 2010 New START Treaty, the last remaining nuclear arms control agreement capping Russian and US strategic nuclear forces. Negotiations for a successor to the New START treaty, which expires in 2026, were put on hold. The escalation of missile capabilities and increased plutonium production by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), along with Iran's uranium enrichment activities, have further intensified global nuclear tensions.

In August 2022, the NPT Review Conference convened, having been postponed for two years because of COVID-19. The aim of these conferences, which are usually held every five years, is for state parties to produce a consensus document that assesses the treaty's implementation, establishes updated commitments, and provides recommendations to advance the NPT's objectives. They have been contentious. After four weeks of negotiations, the most recent conference ended in failure on 26 August 2022 over Russian objections to language on the safety of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Russian-occupied Ukraine.

Since then, the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 NPT Review Conference, which held its first session in August 2023, has faced setbacks. Iran, with the support of Russia and Syria, objected to the inclusion of the chair's summary of the meeting as a working paper in the official document list, arguing that the summary inaccurately depicted the situation concerning the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme.

In Geneva, the Conference on Disarmament, a key multilateral forum for disarmament negotiations responsible for having shaped major nuclear arms control treaties such as the NPT and CTBT, remains deadlocked. Since 1996, with the exception of 1998 and 2009, the conference has failed to agree on a programme of work, preventing it from initiating substantive deliberations. Addressing the conference on 26 February, Guterres called for the body to be reformed, stressing that "the paralysis and deadlock that have come to define it is something that is not acceptable". In *A New Agenda for Peace*, released in July 2023, Guterres called on member states to "urgently reinforce the barrier against the use of nuclear weapons".

## Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council is how it can promote nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. A related issue is the need to build trust and reduce tensions among the nuclear powers.

With the nuclear weapons states tending to argue that the security environment is not conducive to disarmament, prospects today appear limited for the Security Council to advance the global regulation of nuclear weapons and the general reduction of armaments. Still, global security tensions are the very reason some Council members might search for innovative ways of pursuing this agenda.

One option for the Council would be to consider a presidential statement or resolution that outlines confidence-building mechanisms to reduce the threat of nuclear war and strategies for promoting nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The Council



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# Non-Proliferation

product could also encourage greater efforts to achieve equal, full, and effective participation of women in all decision-making processes related to disarmament, as recommended by the Secretary-General in his 2018 report titled “Securing our Common Future: An Agenda for Disarmament”. The Council could also request the Secretary-General to produce a report that proposes recommendations for how the Security Council, the General Assembly, and other parts of the UN system can work together more effectively to address nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament issues.

## Council Dynamics

Council members are generally supportive of overall non-proliferation efforts. Council dynamics vary, however, in country-specific situations. On Iran, for example, the P3 (France, the UK, and the US) remain concerned about Iran’s activities that contravene the JCPOA and the country’s lack of cooperation with the IAEA. China and Russia are more supportive of Iran, and both states have previously blamed the US for the collapse of the JCPOA, criticising it for withdrawing from the deal and imposing unilateral sanctions on the Iranian regime.

The Council also remains sharply divided regarding the DPRK. The P3 and other like-minded countries regularly condemn its ballistic missile tests and argue that they destabilise the Korean Peninsula and increase tensions throughout the region. China and Russia, on the other hand, blame the US for heightening tensions and accuse it of not doing enough to incentivise the DPRK to participate in denuclearisation talks. These two members have also contended that sanctions should be eased, citing their negative humanitarian impact.

All Council members are parties to the NPT. China and the US have signed the CTBT but have yet to ratify it. While Russia ratified the CTBT on 30 June 2000, it revoked its ratification on 8 November 2023, although it remains a state signatory. All other Council members have signed and ratified the treaty. Regarding the TPNW, three Council members—Ecuador, Guyana, and Malta—have signed and ratified it, while Algeria, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone have as yet only signed the treaty. The remaining nine members have not signed the TPNW.

The current Council membership includes several members of the Non-Aligned Movement—including Algeria, Ecuador, Guyana, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone—which has frequently criticised the P5 for not fulfilling their disarmament obligations under the NPT. Approximately 90 percent of the 12,500 nuclear warheads in existence are owned by Russia and the US.

Nuclear weapons have only been used twice in warfare, in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. As such, Japan attaches particular importance to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. In December 2023, a Japan-initiated resolution titled “Steps to building a common roadmap towards a world without nuclear weapons” was adopted by the General Assembly with the support of 148 member states. The resolution urges all states, particularly those possessing nuclear weapons, to make every effort to ensure that such weapons are never used again, pending the total elimination of nuclear weapons, and to refrain from any inflammatory rhetoric concerning the use of nuclear weapons, based on the recognition that all states have a shared interest in averting a nuclear war.

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# Syria

## Expected Council Action

The Council expects to hold two meetings this month on Syria: one on the political and humanitarian issues and another on the chemical weapons track.

## 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. During his briefing 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 “no venue in the region...is both on offer and attracts consensus”, while calling on member states to respect the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, and UN-facilitated nature of the Constitutional Committee. Pedersen 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 10 February, the Syrian government agreed to extend its consent for the delivery of humanitarian aid through the Bab al-Salam and Al Ra’ee border crossings at the Syria-Türkiye border by UN humanitarian agencies and their partners until 13 May. This follows the Syrian government’s 11 January decision to extend authorisation of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing at the Syria-Türkiye border until 13 July. In a recent statement, OCHA announced that these “extensions are crucial, as the UN’s cross-border operations remain a vital support system for people in north-west Syria”.

US forces in the Middle East have been increasingly targeted since the start of the Israel-Hamas war on 7 October 2023. On 7 February, Politico reported that over 160 attacks on US soldiers, mostly using drones and rockets, had been launched by Iranian proxies in Iraq, Jordan, and Syria since October. While these have largely been thwarted by US air defence systems, a US military facility known as Tower 22 in northeast Jordan was hit by an armed drone on 28 January. Kata’ib Hezbollah, a Shia militant group in Iraq supported by Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, carried out the operation, which resulted in the deaths of three US service members

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA** [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2254](#) (18 December 2015) focused on the political situation in Syria. [Security Council Meetings S/PV.9559](#) (27 February 2024) was a briefing on the Syria political and humanitarian situations. [S/PV.9517](#) (21 December 2023) was a briefing on the Syria political and humanitarian situations.

# Syria

and injured more than 40.

On 2 February, in response to the 28 January attack on Tower 22, the US launched retaliatory airstrikes against 85 targets in western Iraq and eastern Syria. In a statement, the US Central Command said that the strikes were conducted by numerous aircraft, including long-range B-1 bombers flown from the US, which dropped more than 125 precision munitions on several targets, including command and control operations centres; intelligence centres; rocket, missile, and uncrewed aerial vehicle (UAV) storage facilities; and logistics and munitions supply chain facilities used by Iraqi and Syrian militia groups and “their [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)] sponsors who facilitated attacks against US and Coalition forces”. The Iraqi government said that 16 people had been killed and 25 wounded, including civilians. In Syria, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights—a UK-based monitoring group with a presence in the country—said that at least 23 people affiliated with the militias had been killed.

On 4 February, a drone attack reportedly conducted by Iran-backed militias hit a training base of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a primarily Kurdish group opposing the Syrian government, at the al-Omar oil facility in Deir-ez-Zor governorate in northeastern Syria. At least six SDF soldiers were killed in the attack. While US personnel were present in the area, no casualties were reported among them. In a 22 February *Newsweek* article, Syria’s permanent mission to the UN was reported as saying that “the presence of U.S. troops on Syrian territory is illegal, illegitimate, and constitutes a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter and international law”.

On 5 February, at the request of Russia, the Council held a meeting on the 2 February US airstrikes in Iraq and Syria under the “threats to international peace and security” agenda item. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed and expressed concern about the tensions engulfing the Middle East since the start of the Israel-Hamas war on 7 October 2023. She reiterated the Secretary-General’s call for “all parties to step back from the brink and to consider the unbearable human and economic cost of a potential regional conflict”.

Airstrikes, allegedly by Israel, continue to target sites in Syria. According to media reports, airstrikes on 20 January killed five Iranian military figures—including the head of intelligence for Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force and his deputy—and several members of Syria’s security forces in Damascus. On 21 February, airstrikes killed two foreign nationals and one Syrian in the Kafr Sousa district of Damascus. While Israel has not commented on the January and February strikes, it has historically targeted sites associated with Iranian forces and affiliated militants in Syria.

On 22 December 2023, the Council received its most recent briefing on the Syria chemical weapons file. Adedeji Ebo, Director and Deputy to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, provided the briefing. He reported that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) had consulted with the Syrian authorities between 30 October and 5 November 2023, the first time such consultations had occurred in over two and a half years. Nonetheless, Ebo

observed that “gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies...remain[ed] unresolved in the declaration submitted by the Syrian Arab Republic” with regard to its chemical weapons programme.

On 27 February, Pedersen (via videoconference) and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths briefed the Council on the political and humanitarian situations in Syria, respectively. Pedersen said that the Syrian parties had been unable to agree to an alternative to Geneva as the setting for Constitutional Committee meetings. In the interim, while continuing to search for such a site, he said that he would issue invitations to a potential ninth round of Syria’s Constitutional Committee in late April in Geneva, appealing to the Syrian parties to respond positively. While declaring that “in 2024 Syria’s humanitarian outlook looks bleak”, Griffiths welcomed the Syrian government’s recent decision to extend its permission for the use of the Bab al-Salam and Al Ra’ee border crossings for aid delivery. He added that cross-line deliveries also “must be pursued with vigour”.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 13 February, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued a report on the experiences of Syrian returnees once they are back in their original areas and other host communities inside Syria. The report documents human rights violations and abuses against the returnees (particularly those returning from neighbouring countries) that are perpetrated by the Government of Syria, de facto authorities and other armed groups across the country. It also highlights the challenges Syrian women face, in particular, the discriminatory restrictions on their liberty to move freely and independently. The report calls on all parties to the conflict to fully respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

## Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Council is maintaining international attention to and support for the needs of the Syrian people at a time when international attention is largely focused on other crises, such as those in Gaza and Ukraine. As Griffiths noted in his 27 February briefing to the Council, the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan garnered less than 40 percent of the funding required, which is “the worst-funded response plan since the start of the conflict”. One option would be for Council members to emphasise the importance of increasing support for Syria’s humanitarian needs in their statements in the open chamber.

The need to break the underlying political impasse in Syria and support the Special Envoy’s work in this regard is another key issue. The Council could consider adopting a presidential statement which backs Pedersen’s efforts to reinvigorate the political process.

## Council Dynamics

Syria remains one of the most divisive files on the Council’s agenda. China and Russia are supportive of the Syrian government, emphasising the need to respect the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and drawing connections between unilateral coercive measures on Syria and the challenging humanitarian situation in the country. In contrast, the P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other like-minded members criticise the government for violating international humanitarian law and human rights law, arbitrarily detaining people, and not engaging meaningfully in political dialogue.

Switzerland is the penholder on the Syria humanitarian file.

# South Sudan

## Expected Council Action

The Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) before its 15 March expiration. Prior to this, the Council will hold a briefing, followed by consultations, on the Secretary-General's 90-day UNMISS report, released on 24 February.

## Key Recent Developments

Special Representative and Head of UNMISS Nicholas Haysom briefed the Council on 14 December 2023. He expressed concern that the conditions required for holding credible and peaceful elections, scheduled for December, are not in place. As noted in the Secretary-General's 24 February report, key issues that remain to be determined include, among others: the constitution-making process, the type and number of elections, an elections security plan, and an elections dispute mechanism. The report also emphasised the need for political parties to agree to a political code of conduct outlining the norms of legitimate political behaviour for the election.

In his briefing, Haysom maintained that a "critical mass" of such key issues must be addressed by April for peaceful and credible elections to be held by December, based on his discussions with electoral experts. He added that South Sudan could still decide to move forward with elections in December without such pre-conditions in place but cautioned that comparable experiences "suggest that elections are a likely trigger for relapses into violence in societies emerging from conflict unless adequate time, resources and confidence-building measures are invested in their preparation".

On 3 November 2023, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir Mayardit issued presidential decrees to begin the process of reconstituting South Sudan's National Constitutional Review Commission, National Elections Commission, and the Political Parties' Council. In an 8 February statement at the 34th plenary meeting of the Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (RJMEC), the body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the R-ARCSS, Haysom acknowledged the swearing-in of these institutions but cautioned that the "inability to finalize the Transitional Security Arrangements remains a threat to peace before, during and after the elections". In this regard, he said that it was critical for the parties to "agree on the middle command structure, advance the SDSR [Strategic Defence and Security Review] process in order to facilitate the commencement of security sector reforms, and to train and deploy the Necessary Unified Forces".

The security situation in South Sudan remains fragile. In his 12 December 2023 report to the Council, the Secretary-General highlighted several reasons for the grim security environment and its effects on civilians. These include the return of thousands of South Sudanese from war-torn Sudan, leading to land disputes; violence perpetrated by the National Salvation Front (NAS), an armed group that continues to fight government forces; the arrest by government forces of civilians suspected of supporting the NAS; and inter-communal violence.

In an 11 December 2023 press statement, Council members condemned violence in Warrap State in South Sudan and in the Abyei Administrative Area, a disputed territory straddling Sudan and

South Sudan, that led to the deaths of some 75 people in November 2023 and ten people in December 2023. In the statement, members called on the transitional government in South Sudan to "contain the violence and defuse tension between the affected communities".

On 1 February, 38 people died and 52 were wounded in inter-communal violence in an area of Lakes State that borders Unity and Warrap States. The fighting was sparked when herders from Warrap entered Lakes State in search of water and pastureland and clashed with local inhabitants.

Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa Hanna Serwa Tetteh visited South Sudan from 18-23 February to assess the implementation of the R-ARCSS and planning for the elections. At a press conference in Juba at the end of the visit, Lacroix underscored the UN's continued commitment to supporting South Sudan, notwithstanding crises in other parts of the world that were "overwhelming the media landscape", while Tetteh emphasised that elections "are not an exit strategy for ending a peace process...but the opportunity for people to focus their attention on the important task of nation building".

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 17 February, the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan concluded its twelfth visit. In a press release at the end of the mission, Yasmin Sooka, Chairperson of the Commission, said the Commission's investigations found that "the violence and gross human rights violations continue with impunity, with women and children being the main target of these crimes." The Commission called on South Sudanese leaders to end political and local conflicts and carefully navigate the conclusion of the country's political transition to achieve durable peace and prevent violence and gross human rights violations. During their visit, the Commission met with the President, the First-Vice President, senior cabinet ministers and legislators. Its members also engaged with civil society, victims and survivors, human rights defenders, and journalists.

## Women, Peace and Security

From 11 to 14 December 2023, members of the Informal Expert Group (IEG) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) undertook a visiting mission to South Sudan. 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 (UAE), participated in the visit, which was proposed by the two IEG co-chairs for 2023, Switzerland and the UAE. (In January, Sierra Leone succeeded the UAE as IEG co-chair after the conclusion of the UAE's Council term at the end of 2023.) Representatives from UN Women, which acts as the IEG Secretariat, also attended.

The visit took place mainly in Juba and featured several meetings with South Sudanese government officials and UN representatives in South Sudan. The participants also had the opportunity to meet with civil society representatives and women political leaders and to visit a UN Mine Action Service mine action demonstration site, where they met with women deminers. On 13 December 2023, IEG members travelled to Wau in Western Bahr el Ghazal State for a one-day visit.

On 16 January, Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl (Switzerland) briefed Council members on the visiting mission under "any other business", a standing item in closed consultations. This was the first Council meeting to be held to discuss a visit by IEG members. Field visits by the IEG on WPS are included in the 2016 IEG guidelines as an option to improve the flow of information on WPS to the Security Council. The visit to South Sudan marked the second visit undertaken by IEG members; the first was to Lebanon in June 2022.

**UN DOCUMENTS ON SOUTH SUDAN** **Security Council Resolution S/RES/2677** (15 March 2023) renewed the mandate of UNMISS until 15 March 2024. **Security Council Meeting S/PV.9507** (14 December 2023) was a meeting on South Sudan. **Secretary-General's Reports S/2024/188** (24 February 2024) was a report on UNMISS. **S/2023/955** (4 December 2023) was an independent assessment of the implementation of the UNMISS protection of civilians mandate. **Security Council Press Statement SC/15523** (11 December 2023) strongly condemned violence in Warrap State, South Sudan, and the Abyei Administrative Area in November and December 2023.

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## South Sudan

### Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council in March is how to approach the renewal of the UNMISS mandate. One option would be for the Council to adopt a technical rollover, renewing the mandate until the end of April. At that point, the Council could decide whether the mandate needs adaptation, depending on the status of South Sudan's preparations for the envisioned December elections and other outstanding tasks related to the implementation of the R-ARCSS. Another option for the Council would be to renew the mandate for the standard one-year period.

An additional important issue is how UNMISS can enhance its capacity to protect civilians, which is one of the mission's core mandated tasks. In keeping with the recommendations of the independent assessment of the implementation of the UNMISS protection of civilians mandate, the Council could encourage the mission to adopt a more proactive posture and expand its footprint by, for example, responding quickly to outbreaks of violence, systematically conducting patrols to protect women and girls carrying out subsistence activities (such as gathering firewood) at camps for internally displaced persons and at the Malakal protection of civilians site, and employing more community liaison assistants.

Another key issue is the ongoing restrictions on humanitarian access and violence against aid workers in South Sudan. One option in this regard would be for the Council president to conduct a démarche on behalf of all Council members to South Sudan, seeking its assistance in facilitating unfettered humanitarian access.

### Council Dynamics

Council members remain concerned about the delays in the implementation of the R-ARCSS, including preparations for elections. Some Western countries have maintained that a lack of political will by South Sudan's authorities is a key reason for these delays. Others are less critical of the government and advocate for enhanced international financial support to assist South Sudan in its political transition.

Differing views persist on the utility of the arms embargo on South Sudan. China, Russia, and African members have tended to view the arms embargo as counter-productive while others have seen this as an important tool in curtailing instability in the country.

The US is the penholder on South Sudan, while Ambassador Michael Imran Kanu (Sierra Leone) chairs the 2206 South Sudan Sanctions Committee.

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## Afghanistan

### Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is expected to consider the renewal of the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which is set to expire on 17 March. Prior to that, the Council will hold its quarterly meeting on Afghanistan. Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNAMA Roza Otunbayeva is expected to brief. A civil society representative may also brief.

### Key Recent Developments

Afghanistan continues to suffer from a multifaceted crisis, as the international community grapples with how to approach international engagement with the Taliban and to address the country's many challenges. The humanitarian conditions in Afghanistan, which is currently experiencing one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, remain a chief concern.

The 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP), launched in December 2023, estimates that approximately 23.7 million people—more than half the country's population—will require some form of humanitarian assistance in 2024. A 14 December 2023 Integrated Food Security Classification Phase (IPC) report projected that, between November 2023 and March, 15.8 million Afghans will experience either crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity. Due to funding shortfalls, the World Food Programme (WFP) has warned that it will be able to provide emergency food and nutrition assistance to around seven million people, less than half of those in need.

Human rights have continued to be curtailed in recent months,

particularly those of women and girls. Since January, UNAMA has been documenting a trend of arbitrary arrests and detentions of women and girls because of alleged non-compliance with the Islamic dress code related to the wearing of hijab. In an 11 January statement, UNAMA said that it was examining allegations of ill-treatment during the detentions and that ethnic minorities have been disproportionately targeted by such enforcement operations. Analysts have characterised the direct enforcement against women, rather than punishing male relatives or guardians, as a new tactic by the Taliban that signals an escalation of their crackdown on women's rights. The Taliban has rejected reports that women are being arrested and mistreated for not complying with the dress code, with the Taliban's chief spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, saying that "Afghan women wear hijab on their own [accord]".

A 16 February report of quarterly country-wide consultations with Afghan women conducted by UN Women, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and UNAMA reflects the detrimental effects of the Taliban's restrictive decrees against women and girls, noting that 50 such edicts have been issued since August 2021. It says that the strict enforcement of the hijab decree has deepened depression and anxiety among women, many of whom have been staying at home, fearing arrest. According to the report, the women consulted "did not accept the current plight as their future" and called on the international community to make women's rights a priority in their engagements on Afghanistan, including by linking international aid to better conditions for women and by facilitating opportunities for women to talk directly with the Taliban.

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON AFGHANISTAN** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2721 (29 December 2023) took positive note of the independent assessment on Afghanistan and encouraged member states and all other relevant stakeholders to consider the implementation of its recommendations. S/RES/2678 (16 March 2023) extended UNAMA's mandate until 17 March 2024.



# Afghanistan

Against this backdrop, UN Secretary-General António Guterres convened the second meeting of Special Envoys and Special Representatives on Afghanistan on 18 and 19 February in Doha, Qatar. According to Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric, the Doha meeting aimed “to discuss how to approach increasing international engagement in a more coherent, coordinated and structured manner, including through consideration of the recommendations of the independent assessment on Afghanistan”. The Taliban did not attend, partly due to their objection to the participation of representatives from Afghan civil society and women’s groups at the meeting. They have also expressed opposition to some of the recommendations of the independent assessment, which the Security Council requested in resolution 2679 of 16 March 2023, particularly the appointment of a UN Special Envoy who would focus on diplomacy between Afghanistan and international stakeholders and advancing intra-Afghan dialogue. (For more information on the independent assessment, see our *What’s in Blue* stories of 27 November 2023 and 8 December 2023.)

Speaking at a 19 February press conference, Guterres stated that there was consensus during the Doha meeting about the independent assessment’s “programmatic proposals”, while acknowledging that deadlock persists over an “essential set of questions”, including over the rights of women and girls. (For more information on the Doha conference, see our *What’s in Blue* story of 25 February.)

On 26 February, the Security Council held a private meeting in line with resolution 2721 of 29 December 2023, which requested the Secretary-General to brief the Council about the second meeting of the group of Special Envoys and Special Representatives on Afghanistan and about his consultations on the appointment of a Special Envoy for Afghanistan. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo briefed at the meeting, at which India, Iran, Pakistan, Qatar, and Türkiye also participated. Council members that have signed on to the Shared Commitments on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)—Ecuador, France, Guyana, Japan, Malta, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland, the UK, and the US—read a statement prior to the meeting. They called for “Afghan women’s equal, meaningful, and safe participation and leadership at all levels and stages of decision-making, including in all fora and mechanisms seeking to advance international engagement on Afghanistan”.

## Women, Peace and Security

Shaharзад Akbar—Executive Director of the civil society organisation Rawadari—briefed the Council during the 20 December 2023 open briefing on Afghanistan. She said that, since the Taliban’s takeover, her organisation has documented an alarming pattern of human rights violations, including the “repression of women’s rights in every conceivable sphere of life”. Among other recommendations, Akbar urged the Security Council to “be clear that the normalization of relations with the Taliban is not possible without swiftly reversing all restrictions on women’s rights” and Afghanistan meeting its international legal obligations, including under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). She further urged the Council to support justice and accountability for human rights violations by the Taliban and called on UN member states and UN bodies to investigate “the Taliban’s treatment of Afghan women as both gender persecution and gender apartheid”.

## Key Issues and Options

The main issue for the Security Council in March will be the

renewal of UNAMA’s mandate. The Council could choose to pursue a straightforward renewal of the mission’s mandate, which many Council members and civil society representatives view as robust. Looking ahead, if a Special Envoy is appointed, members could have an informal discussion with the UN Secretariat to discuss the division of labour and cooperation between the Special Envoy and UNAMA.

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is a significant issue for the Council. An informal meeting with humanitarian organisations working in Afghanistan could allow Council members to learn more about the problems facing those working to deliver aid in the country, while also providing an opportunity to consider whether there are steps that the Council could take to help manage these challenges.

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

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

Insecurity affecting children in Afghanistan is another matter of concern. The Secretary-General’s most recent report on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, which was released on 22 December 2023 and covers the period between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2022, noted that 3,248 children were killed or maimed during the reporting period, mostly from incidents involving explosive devices, which are ubiquitous throughout Afghanistan. Members could consider inviting a representative of UNICEF to brief in their quarterly meeting on Afghanistan to learn more about what the international community could do to address such issues.

## Council and Wider Dynamics

Although Council members are generally united in their desire to see a prosperous, peaceful Afghanistan free from terrorism and ruled by an inclusive government, they have been divided over how to achieve this goal. Some members, including the P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other like-minded states, have argued that the Taliban must adhere to international norms if they want to obtain international recognition and receive economic and development aid from the international community. Several of these members appear to favour maintaining pressure on the Taliban, particularly regarding their policies and practices that violate the rights of women and girls.

China and Russia, on the other hand, have contended that the international community should provide assistance to Afghanistan without linking it to other issues, such as human rights, and appear to prefer dialogue and engagement with the Taliban over increased pressure. China has sent an ambassador to Kabul, and on 30 January became the first country to accept diplomatic credentials from a Taliban envoy. Beijing has emphasised that it has not officially recognised the Taliban regime as Afghanistan’s government, however.

Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries have taken a similar approach, pursuing trade relations and cooperation to address issues such as poppy cultivation with Kabul. This has also been reflected

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# Afghanistan

in diplomatic engagement; the Taliban has participated in meetings held in regional countries, and on 29 January hosted its first international meeting in Kabul, titled “Afghanistan Regional Cooperation Initiative”, which was attended by representatives from neighbouring and regional countries, including China, Iran, Pakistan, and Russia.

Some analysts have suggested that some Western countries, including the US, are concerned that increasing cooperation between regional states and Afghanistan can weaken international leverage over the Taliban by giving it the economic benefits and appearance of legitimacy that it seeks.

There are also differences of view among Council members about the implementation of the independent assessment on Afghanistan. China and Russia have emphasised the importance of taking into account the Taliban’s views on the assessment, and have questioned the added value of a UN Special Envoy. Other members, including the US, have expressed support for the appointment of a Special Envoy, maintaining that such a position will be crucial in coordinating international engagement on Afghanistan. It seems that these positions were reiterated during the Doha meeting and the Council’s 26 February private meeting.

Although there is general support among Council members for UNAMA’s work, negotiations on renewing the mission’s mandate in the past two years were difficult. During the negotiations on resolution 2626 of 17 March 2022, which extended the mission’s mandate,

China and Russia contended that UNAMA’s primary focus should be assisting with efforts to address the humanitarian and economic crises in Afghanistan. Other members, including the P3, sought a more robust mandate for UNAMA spanning several additional areas, including the protection of human rights and the promotion of inclusive governance and gender equality. Such provisions were retained over China and Russia’s objection, leading Russia to abstain on the resolution. A contentious issue during last year’s mandate renewal negotiations was a provision requesting the Secretary-General to conduct an independent assessment, leading the then-penholders (Japan and the United Arab Emirates) to seek two separate resolutions, one addressing UNAMA’s mandate and another on the independent assessment. (For background, see our *What’s in Blue* stories of 17 March 2022 and 15 March 2023.)

It seems that many Council members, including several of the elected members that joined the Council in 2024—Algeria, Guyana, the ROK, Sierra Leone, and Slovenia—support retaining a robust mandate for UNAMA. During the upcoming mandate renewal negotiations, these members may express a preference for a straightforward renewal of the mission’s mandate and seek to insulate the discussions on UNAMA from more controversial issues, such as the appointment of a Special Envoy for Afghanistan.

Japan is the penholder on Afghanistan.

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## DPRK (North Korea)

### Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is expected to extend the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) Sanctions Committee. The panel’s mandate expires on 30 April.

Additionally, the Chair of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl (Switzerland), is scheduled to brief Council members in closed consultations on the 90-day report on the committee’s work.

### Key Recent Developments

The tensions on the Korean Peninsula have shown no signs of abating in recent months. The DPRK has continued to test its missile technology and other weapons in violation of Security Council resolutions. At the same time, an absence of meaningful diplomatic progress continues to characterise inter-Korean relations.

On 27 November 2023, the Council convened for an open briefing after the DPRK claimed that it had successfully launched a military reconnaissance satellite on 21 November. DPRK state media announced that a “Malligyong-1” reconnaissance satellite had been launched on a “Chollima-1” rocket from the DPRK’s Sohae satellite launch facility and had entered Earth’s orbit. At the briefing, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari noted that sovereign states have the right to engage in

peaceful space activities; however, he emphasised that Council resolutions strictly prohibit the DPRK from using ballistic missile technology.

On 18 December 2023, the DPRK launched a solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) towards the Sea of Japan. According to the Japanese defence ministry, the missile flew for 73 minutes and reached an altitude of more than 6,000 kilometres before falling into the sea west of Hokkaido, outside Japan’s exclusive economic zone. This was the fifth ICBM launch by the DPRK in 2023. A day later, the Council convened for an open briefing on the DPRK to discuss the launch.

The situation on the Korean Peninsula has remained volatile in 2024. On 5 January, the DPRK fired around 200 artillery shells towards Yeonpyeong Island, part of the Republic of Korea (ROK). According to the ROK military, the shells landed in the buffer zone between the two countries and did not enter ROK territory. ROK’s military has reported that the DPRK fired more artillery shells towards the island on 6 and 7 January. In response, the ROK conducted live-fire artillery drills south of the maritime buffer zone between the two countries.

On 14 January, the DPRK conducted its first ballistic missile launch this year. The DPRK announced that it had tested a new solid-fuel intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) equipped with a hypersonic warhead. According to media reports, the ROK’s Joint Chiefs of Staff announced that the missile was launched from an

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UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DPRK Security Council Resolution S/RES/2680 (23 March 2023) extended the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee until 30 April 2024. Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9514 (19 December 2023) was an open briefing on the DPRK. S/PV.9485 (27 November 2023) was an open briefing on the DPRK.

## DPRK (North Korea)

area north of Pyongyang. It travelled some 1,000 kilometres before landing in the Sea of Japan. On 18 January, Council members held closed consultations to discuss the incident.

The DPRK has also conducted five cruise missile launches so far this year, including a 15 February test of a new anti-ship weapon known as “Padasuri-6”. At that launch, the DPRK’s leader, Kim Jong-Un, reportedly told DPRK state media that the country would boost its deployment of surface-to-sea missiles and strengthen its maritime defence posture in a more assertive challenge to the Northern Limit Line—the de facto maritime border separating the DPRK’s and ROK’s territorial waters, which the DPRK disputes.

Those comments followed a recent change in the DPRK’s policy towards inter-Korean relations and unification. At the end-of-year meeting of the governing Workers’ Ruling Party in late December 2023, Kim classified relations between the two Koreas as hostile. Kim also instructed his military to prepare for war and the possible use of nuclear weapons in response to any attack by the ROK. Speaking in the DPRK parliament on 15 January, Kim called for constitutional changes that would classify the ROK as a hostile state. He also ruled out the possibility of Korean unification.

There are growing concerns among some countries over alleged arms transfers between the DPRK and Russia. On 6 January, the US, together with 49 other member states and the High Representative of the EU, issued a joint statement condemning the export of ballistic missiles to Russia by the DPRK and contending that these arms transfers contravene several Council resolutions. During a 10 January Council briefing on Ukraine, several Council members—Japan, the ROK, Slovenia, the UK, and the US—expressed concern over Russia’s alleged use of ballistic missiles from the DPRK in Ukraine. Russia rejected these claims and accused the US of spreading misinformation. (For more, see our *What’s in Blue* story of 9 January.)

On 27 February, the ROK and the US announced that the 2024 edition of the countries’ annual joint military exercise “Freedom Shield” would take place between 4 and 14 March.

### Key Issues and Options

The DPRK’s frequent weapons tests, many of which violate Council resolutions, remain a major issue for the Council. Sanctions evasion is also an important issue, as is the overall effectiveness of the sanctions regime, particularly given that the DPRK is widely believed to have increased its nuclear arsenal since the regime was introduced in 2006 and has shown little inclination to scale back its weapons programmes. Illustrating this challenge, a recent report by the UK-based investigative organisation Conflict Armament Research analysed a recovered DPRK-made ballistic missile that Russia fired against Ukraine in January and found that 75 percent of its components were linked to US companies and 16 percent to European companies, marking the first public identification of the DPRK’s reliance on non-domestic technology for its missile programme.

The Council may seek to address these issues when extending the Panel of Experts’ mandate. For instance, Council members could add language condemning the DPRK’s recent missile tests and urging member states to comply with existing sanctions. They could also request the panel to provide the 1718 Sanctions Committee with periodic briefings on the DPRK’s nuclear and ballistic missile

programmes. Further, members could add language clarifying that the panel may provide the committee with incident reports concerning specific events that might violate Council resolutions on the DPRK—an authority that has been subject to dispute under the current mandate. Given the allegations raised by the US regarding possible arms transfers from the DPRK to Russia, the committee could also consider specifically requesting the panel to investigate the US claims and provide a stand-alone report outlining its findings to the committee.

In addition, Council members may consider adding language addressing the potential unintended adverse impact of sanctions on the civilian population of the DPRK. In this context, they could note recommendations to the Council contained in the panel’s most recent midterm report, dated 12 September 2023. These include conducting more active outreach with civil society organisations providing humanitarian assistance in the DPRK to facilitate implementation of Council resolution 2664 of 9 December 2022, which established a standing humanitarian exemption to the asset freeze measures imposed by UN sanctions regimes, and considering exemptions for certain exports currently under sanctions, the proceeds of which might be used to finance humanitarian supplies.

### Council Dynamics

Deep divisions among Council members continue to shape its dynamics on the DPRK. The P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other like-minded countries take a more active role in drawing the Council’s attention to and condemning the DPRK’s ballistic missile tests, which they consider destabilising for the region. These members generally support using sanctions to manage the threat posed by the DPRK and call on member states to comply with existing Council resolutions. They often urge the country to engage in dialogue and abandon its weapons programmes while emphasising that it is responsible for escalating tensions. Some of these members also call for the Council to show unity and respond to the DPRK’s weapons tests and argue that China and Russia have emboldened it by blocking Council action on the file.

China and Russia, on the other hand, blame the US for heightening tensions and accuse it of not doing enough to incentivise the DPRK to participate in denuclearisation talks. These two members have also contended that sanctions should be eased because of their impact on the humanitarian situation and continue to express their support for a draft resolution circulated by China in October 2021 that would provide sanctions relief to the DPRK if adopted. They also repeatedly blocked attempts to issue a Council product responding to missile launches conducted by the DPRK throughout 2022 and 2023.

These dynamics prevented Council agreement on substantive changes to the Panel of Experts’ mandate during last year’s renewal, resulting in a straightforward extension. (For more on those negotiations, see our *What’s in Blue* story of 23 March 2023.) Despite the change in the Council’s composition this year, Council dynamics are unlikely to be affected significantly. Among the current non-permanent members of the Council, Japan and the ROK have a major stake in non-proliferation and security issues on the Korean Peninsula.

The US is the penholder on the DPRK.



# Sudan

## Expected Council Action

In March, the Council will hold a briefing on the Secretary-General's report on "UN efforts to support Sudan on its path towards peace and stability" in accordance with resolution 2715 of 1 December 2023, which terminated the mandate of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS).

The Council will vote on a draft resolution extending the mandate of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee Panel of Experts, which expires on 12 March.

Ambassador Joonkook Hwang (Republic of Korea), the chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, is expected to brief the Council on the committee's work.

## Key Recent Developments

Sudan is facing 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 Hemeti). During the conflict, the RSF has made significant advances, taking control of most of Darfur and western Kordofan and large areas of Khartoum and Omdurman. In mid-February, the SAF scored its first major victory of the war, retaking part of Omdurman, a city of 1.2 million people, from the RSF.

The fighting over the past ten months has had dire human rights and humanitarian effects. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), an organisation that collects conflict- and crisis-related data, more than 13,000 people had been killed since the onset of the conflict, as at 17 January. OCHA's 4 February Humanitarian Update noted that some 10.7 million people have been displaced in Sudan since the start of the conflict, including 1.7 million who have fled to neighbouring countries, including the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, and South Sudan. In addition, according to the World Food Programme, nearly 18 million people confront acute food insecurity in Sudan, including almost five million at emergency hunger levels.

On 18 January, the 42nd extraordinary summit of the Inter-governmental 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 in June 2023 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.

The Sudanese government decided not to take part in the summit, irked by IGAD's decision to put the situation in Sudan on the agenda

and to invite Dagalo to participate in the meeting. Sudan subsequently announced that it was suspending its membership in IGAD, severely hampering IGAD's ability to play a mediating and convening role in the conflict. Since late December 2023, Dagalo has visited several African countries, meeting with senior government officials in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda.

On 29 January, ICC Prosecutor Karim Asad Ahmad Khan provided the semi-annual briefing to the Council on the Court's Darfur-related activities. Khan said that the failure to execute arrest warrants for those indicted by the court had contributed to "the climate of impunity and the outbreak of violence that commenced in April and that continues today". He added that there is reason to believe that "Rome Statute crimes" are being perpetrated by both the SAF and the RSF in the current fighting in Darfur, although he did not specify which type or types of crimes he was referencing under the statute. (Under the Rome Statute, the ICC has jurisdiction over four crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression.)

The Expanded Mechanism for the Resolution of the Sudan Crisis—a diplomatic grouping that includes the AU, IGAD, the UN, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, and several African, European and Middle Eastern states—convened on 20 February in Addis Ababa. During the session, which was attended by Mohamed Ibn Chambas, the new chair of the AU High-Level Panel for Sudan, the participants emphasised the importance of achieving a ceasefire and coordinating different mediation efforts on Sudan. They also affirmed their support for the efforts of the AU High-Level Panel.

On 27 February, Council members discussed the humanitarian situation in Sudan under "any other business" at the request of the UK. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Martin Griffiths briefed members. He spoke about the adverse humanitarian effects of Sudan's decision on 21 February to close border crossings with Chad; while humanitarian aid was being delivered through these crossings, Sudan expressed concern that they were being used to transit weapons to the RSF. Griffiths also referred to the upcoming international humanitarian conference for Sudan and its neighbours, which is planned for 15 April in Paris and strives to raise funds to help civilians, to call for respect for humanitarian law, and to advocate for unfettered, safe, and full humanitarian access in Sudan.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 5 February, a group of UN experts issued a joint statement regarding the humanitarian situation in Sudan, noting that the country "is facing one of the fastest unfolding crises globally" since the fighting started between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in April 2023. Currently, about 25 million people, including over 14 million children, are in dire need of humanitarian assistance and support. The experts urged all parties to the conflict to facilitate the work of human rights defenders and cooperate with the International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan, which was established by the Human Rights Council in October 2023. They also called for increasing funding for humanitarian response to Sudan, which was only 3.1 percent funded as at 21 January.

## 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 that was released the same day and covered developments since 12 March 2023. The final



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# Sudan

report provided an extensive account of various aspects of the 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. (For more, see our February 2024 Sudan brief.)

In a 6 February press release, the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee reminded the conflict parties in Darfur to adhere to their responsibilities under international humanitarian law, including by protecting civilians from violence and children from recruitment in military forces. The Committee also reminded the parties that those violating international humanitarian law and committing other atrocities or violating the arms embargo may be subject to targeted sanctions.

## Key Issues and Options

A key issue for the Security Council is how to support efforts to achieve a ceasefire in Sudan. Council members could hold a private meeting with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and member states with influence over the warring parties to discuss the search for a mediated solution to the crisis. (A private meeting is a closed, formal meeting format; unlike closed consultations, non-Council member states are allowed to participate in this format.) An additional option would be for the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Sudan, Ramtane Lamamra, to brief on ongoing mediation efforts in the region and his interactions with different stakeholders in Sudan and the region in this regard.

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

Regarding the renewal of the Panel of Experts of the 1591 Sanctions Committee, the Council could decide to extend the panel's mandate for one year. Another option would be to extend 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.

## Council Dynamics

Council members share continued concerns about the ongoing conflict in Sudan and its severe humanitarian and human rights effects. Members have diverging views, however, on the tools that the Council should use to address the situation. For example, there are strong disagreements among members on the utility of the Sudan sanctions regime and the work of the ICC regarding the situation in Darfur. In last year's negotiations on resolution 2676, which renewed the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee until 12 March, China, Russia, and Mozambique, along with other member states that have since left the Council, supported instituting a sunset clause that would make the sanctions time-bound rather than open-ended. Nine Council members—Ecuador, France, Guyana, Japan, Malta, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland, Slovenia, and the UK—are state parties to the Rome Statute of the ICC, while Algeria, China, Mozambique, Russia, Sierra Leone, and the US are not. While the US is not a state party to the statute, it supports the court's work on Darfur. Russia is perhaps most vehemently opposed to that work, declaring at the Council's 29 January meeting that "The regrettable, if not outright tragic, effects of the Council's involvement of the ICC in the situations in Libya and Darfur teach us one thing only: the Council made a mistake by transferring these situations to the ICC, a mistake that must not be repeated. It is important to assess the damage that this entity has caused to specific countries".

The US holds the pen on Sudan sanctions, while the UK is the penholder on Sudan more broadly.

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# EU-UN Cooperation

## Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council will hold its annual meeting on strengthening EU-UN cooperation under the agenda item "Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations in maintaining international peace and security". Josep Borrell Fontelles, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, is expected to brief.

## Background and Key Recent Developments

Strengthening cooperation with regional and sub-regional organisations—as envisioned in Chapter VIII of the UN Charter—has become an increasingly prominent theme for the Security Council. The Council has maintained the practice of holding annual briefings on cooperation between the EU and the UN since 2010, although these briefings were not held in 2012 and 2018. Since 2013, Council members have also held annual informal meetings with members

of the EU Political and Security Committee. In 2014, the Council adopted a presidential statement welcoming the EU's cooperation with the UN and its contributions towards the maintenance of international peace and security and its involvement in international negotiations and mediation processes.

Council briefings on EU-UN cooperation have generally addressed areas of common concern between the two organisations, focusing on the EU's main foreign policy priorities and objectives and addressing current crises that overlap on the EU and Security Council agendas. This year, the war in Ukraine and the crisis in the Middle East, triggered by the 7 October 2023 attack on Israel by the Palestinian armed group Hamas, are expected to be a central focus of Borrell's briefing.

Two years into Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU remains firmly committed to supporting Ukraine. On 1 February, the European Council agreed to provide Ukraine with up to 50

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON EU-UN COOPERATION** Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2014/4 (14 February 2014) was a presidential statement on cooperation between the UN and the EU, highlighting the EU's comprehensive approach to the maintenance of international peace and security. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9268** (23 February 2023) was the annual meeting on strengthening EU-UN cooperation.

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## EU-UN Cooperation

billion euros in grants and loans until 2027. The financial aid package is considered crucial for supporting Ukraine's economy, providing predictable financing to help cover the cost of salaries, pensions, and public services. On 23 February, the EU adopted its 13th package of sanctions against Russia. Furthermore, in December 2023, the European Council decided to open EU accession negotiations with Ukraine.

Concerning the situation in Gaza, the EU has allocated an initial 125 million euros for humanitarian aid in 2024. Additionally, since 7 October 2023, EU member states have collectively contributed over 600 million euros in financial support to the occupied Palestinian territories. The EU and its member states are the largest donors to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Following allegations claiming links between some UNRWA staff members and the terror attacks of 7 October in Israel, however, some EU member states suspended their financial contributions to the agency. In a 4 February blog post, Borrell insisted that "defunding UNRWA would be both disproportionate and dangerous".

In addition to the contribution of troops and police from EU member states to UN peacekeeping missions, the EU fields its own missions through the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), some of which are mandated by the Security Council. The EU currently deploys around 4,000 personnel across 12 civilian missions and nine military operations. The EU has established several missions and operations since the Council's last briefing on EU-UN cooperation in February 2023.

In Europe, the EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA) was deployed on 20 February 2023 as a civilian mission with a two-year mandate. EUMA is responsible for observing and reporting on the situation on the ground, contributing to human security in conflict-affected areas, and building confidence between Armenia and Azerbaijan. On 24 April 2023, the EU Partnership Mission in the Republic of Moldova (EUPM Moldova) was launched to enhance the resilience of the security sector in the country.

In Africa, the EU Military Partnership Mission (EUMPM) in Niger was launched in February 2023 to enhance the ability of the Niger Armed Forces to contain terrorist threats. According to media reports, Niger's military administration—which assumed power after a coup d'état in July 2023 that ousted President Mohamed Bazoum—announced in December 2023 that it was withdrawing from EUMPM in Niger and revoking the 2012 EU capacity-building civilian mission EUCAP Sahel Niger, which was established to strengthen the country's internal security forces. In an 18 December blog post, Borrell described the move as a "hostile signal", cautioning that "history shows that expelling partner supporting efforts to improve security in Sahel results only in leaving more room for terrorism and insecurity".

In the post, Borrell also described the challenges facing EU

missions in countries such as Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) because of the region's shifting geopolitical configuration. He noted "a backdrop of increasing destabilization in the region, encouraged by foreign actors hostile to Europe", an indirect reference to Russia's expanding influence in the region. Nevertheless, Borrell stressed that many African countries are willing to work with the EU on security issues. In December 2023, the EU Security and Defence Initiative in support of West African countries of the Gulf of Guinea (EU SDI GoG) was established in partnership with Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Benin to complement the EU's ongoing support for maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

More recently, in the Middle East, the EU Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) Operation ASPIDES was launched on 19 February in response to the repeated Houthi attacks on maritime shipping in the Red Sea since October 2023. The aim of ASPIDES is to restore and safeguard the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, in accordance with Security Council resolution 2722, which 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.

The EU has been a major financial partner of the AU in supporting AU Peace Support Operations (AUPSOs). It welcomed the adoption on 21 December 2023 of Security Council resolution 2719 on using assessed contributions to support specific AUPSOs, 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.

Collectively, the EU and its member states are the largest financial contributors to the UN system. EU member states provide approximately one third of the UN regular budget, one quarter of the UN peacekeeping budget, and one quarter of all financial contributions to the UN's agencies, funds, and programmes.

### Council Dynamics

Under Article 34 of the Treaty of the European Union, EU member states on the Security Council are to act in concert to "defend the positions and the interests of the EU". Currently, three Council members—France, Malta, and Slovenia—are EU members. The UK, which has not been a member of the EU since 31 January 2020, has occasionally joined EU members in making joint statements.

The relationship between the EU and Russia deteriorated precipitously following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. At the June 2022 briefing on EU-UN cooperation, Russia described its relations with the EU as having reached a level "tunneling below rock bottom". At the latest briefing in February 2023, Russia remarked that there was "an abyss below that rock bottom," adding that its relations with the EU "essentially no longer exist".

# Conflict Prevention

## Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council will hold an open debate on “Promoting Conflict Prevention – Empowering All Actors Including Women and Youth”. Japan is organising the open debate, which will be held under the “Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace” agenda item, as a signature event of its Council presidency. Briefings are expected by representatives of the UN Secretariat, academia, and civil society.

## Key Recent Developments

The Secretary-General’s July 2023 policy brief, *A New Agenda for Peace (NAfP)*, which outlines his vision for the future of multilateralism and the UN’s work on peace and security in a changing world, calls for member states to prioritise and invest more in conflict prevention. The NAfP stresses the need for UN member states to recommit to multilateralism to prevent or resolve disputes. This is all the more critical, according to the policy brief, because of the world’s current geopolitical fragmentation and rising inter-state conflict. The NAfP calls for boosting preventive diplomacy by making greater use of the UN and its good offices capacities and building or repairing regional security architectures. It further underscores that preventive tools outlined in Article 33 of the Charter, remain relevant, even though they have been underused. (Article 33 of the UN Charter sets out tools such as negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, and judicial settlement, among others, which the Council can call upon parties to use to peacefully settle disputes.)

The NAfP also calls for increasing the focus on prevention at the national level, which can complement diplomatic action. It stresses that prevention at the national level is primarily the responsibility of nations and governments, who should address the drivers of conflict and violence in their societies. One of the NAfP’s innovations is the Secretary-General’s proposal for all UN member states to develop national prevention strategies. According to the NAfP, national prevention initiatives should entail “approaches grounded in sustainable development” and be “multidimensional, people-centred and inclusive of all the different components of society.” Such strategies should aim to prevent not only conflict but also violence committed by extremist groups, criminal groups, and armed gangs, as well as gender-based and domestic violence. According to the NAfP, this would be consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 16.1, in which all states, not just conflict-affected countries, are committed to reducing all forms of violence. The UN, when requested, can provide support for the development and implementation of such strategies. One of the NAfP’s recommendations is that the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) create a mechanism to mobilise political and financial support for national and regional prevention strategies.

The NAfP is one of several inputs, including the August 2021 report *Our Common Agenda*, that the Secretary-General has prepared for September’s Summit of the Future on strengthening global governance. In January, Namibia and Germany began co-facilitating negotiations among member states on a “Pact for the Future”, which world leaders may adopt at the summit. Meanwhile, the PBC, under the chairmanship this year of Ambassador Sérgio França Danese (Brazil), is beginning preparations for the 2025 review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture (PBAR). The upcoming PBAR will be

an opportunity for member states to make operational the relevant NAfP recommendations for the PBC.

On 6 December 2023, the Secretary-General invoked Article 99 of the UN Charter, a rarely used prevention tool that allows him to bring to the Council’s attention any situation that threatens international peace and security, when he wrote to the Council on the threat posed by the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

## Key Issues and Options

A key issue is how the open debate can help to generate ideas to strengthen prevention, given the number of ongoing conflicts, the increasing risk multipliers such as climate change, pandemics and food insecurity, and prevention’s cost-effectiveness compared to responding once conflict erupts. It seems that a focus will be placed on “comprehensive approaches”—which the NAfP says are required for effective prevention—that bridge the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, including by strengthening cooperation across the UN system. Related to such comprehensive approaches is the strengthening of institutions to identify and manage challenges that may lead to conflict and building countries’ resilience by empowering women and youth.

The open debate is expected to highlight, as another key issue, the challenges that states face in preventing conflict and its recurrence and how the international community, including the Security Council, can work in support of national efforts to address these challenges. This includes considering how to assist states in taking national ownership in identifying root causes of conflict and encouraging them to develop prevention strategies. In this regard, a key issue is how to improve synergies between the Council, the PBC, international financial institutions, and other relevant stakeholders. The debate is meant to contribute to discussions on the Summit of the Future and the 2025 PBAR.

Options for the Council to increase its engagement in prevention include making greater use of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa, considering an expansion of the geographic scope of the working group beyond Africa, and more regularly using the Secretary-General’s monthly luncheons with the Council to consider subjects with a preventive scope. Fact-finding or visiting missions to determine whether a dispute or situation is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, as foreseen in Article 34 of the UN Charter, is another option for increasing Council preventive engagement. The Council may also pay additional attention to states that are hosting large refugee populations and are suffering severe economic, environmental and security strains.

As part of supporting efforts for structural prevention, the Council can continue to strengthen its attention to peacebuilding and draw on the advice of the PBC during its deliberations and mandate renewals (for its part, the PBC should continue its efforts to improve the substance of its advice). The Council can also encourage closer coordination in information-sharing and early warning within the UN system.

**UN DOCUMENTS ON CONFLICT PREVENTION** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2282 (27 April 2016) was on the ten-year review of the UN peacebuilding architecture, emphasising that a comprehensive approach to sustaining peace involves the prevention of conflict and addressing its root causes. S/RES/2171 (21 August 2014) recognised the importance of early warning mechanisms and reaffirmed the Council’s commitment to taking preventive action. **Secretary-General’s Reports** A/75/982 (5 August 2021) was the Secretary-General’s report *Our Common Agenda*. S/2015/730 (25 September 2015) was the Secretary-General’s report *The United Nations and conflict prevention: a collective commitment*.

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# Conflict Prevention

## Council and Wider Dynamics

The Security Council has struggled to engage effectively in prevention, often because of concerns about interference in states' internal affairs, a particular impediment to addressing intra-state conflict. Past initiatives like "Horizon Scanning" and "Situational Awareness" briefings for the Council to identify potential conflict situations have failed to gain traction, partially because of these concerns. Even after conflict erupts, states frequently try to block the Council from discussing such situations because of sensitivities over internal interference and the stigma often associated with being on the Council's agenda. New geopolitical dynamics have made the Council's preventive engagement even more complicated.

Useful prevention tools that Council members all appear to value are the UN's regional offices for West Africa, Central Africa, and Central Asia (UNOWAS, UNOCA and UNRCCA), known for their early warning and good offices activities. These offices also support states and sub-regional organisations in developing responses to

structural conflict drivers and help promote common analysis and coherence among UN agencies, funds, and programmes for more conflict-sensitive development assistance.

Several Council members are interested in seeing the Council strengthen its engagement in prevention. Japan's organisation of this open debate is a further expression of its interest in prevention and peacebuilding: in January, Japan, along with Council members Guyana and Mozambique, organised an Arria-formula meeting on "Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace through Comprehensive Approaches". The UK has traditionally been a proponent of improving the Council's engagement in prevention.

Meanwhile, there appears to be rising interest among UN member states in having the PBC become more explicitly involved in prevention, given its mandate to address issues that lie between peace and development and the PBC's practice of discussing situations only with the consent of the country concerned. Some states remain hesitant, however, to endorse the PBC's serving as a conflict prevention platform.

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## Yemen

### Expected Council Action

In March, the Security Council is expected to hold a briefing, followed by closed consultations, on Yemen. UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg; the Head of the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA), Major General Michael Beary; and a representative of OCHA are expected to brief.

### Key Recent Developments

Attacks by the Houthi rebel group on commercial shipping following the outbreak of war between Israel and Hamas last October, and US and UK military strikes against the Houthis in response, have stalled—and risk upending—Yemen's peace talks. Speaking at the Council's 14 February briefing on Yemen, Grundberg said, "Until recently, we were making steady progress in our mediation." However, he continued, "The mediation landscape is now undeniably much more complex, and efforts to reach an agreement are being buffeted by different priorities and interests." Grundberg added that as much as he has tried to insulate the peace process from wider regional dynamics, "the reality is that mediation efforts in Yemen cannot be neatly cordoned off". He also raised concerns about "worrying developments" inside Yemen, flagging clashes and mobilisations along Yemen's front lines and growing threats by the parties to return to fighting.

Grundberg called for a regional de-escalation, reiterating UN Secretary-General António Guterres' call for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza and saying that he was engaging the Yemeni parties and relevant regional actors to support de-escalation in the Red Sea to protect the mediation space in Yemen. He underscored the need for the Yemeni parties to stop public provocations, refrain from military opportunism inside Yemen, and refocus on safeguarding the progress made to date in the peace talks.

The crisis in the Red Sea and the nearby Gulf of Aden continued, however, as the Houthis and the US and its allies exchanged attacks. On 18 February, at least one Houthi anti-ship missile struck a Belize-flagged, British-registered cargo vessel, called the Rubymar, near the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The crew abandoned the ship. The US military said in a 23 February statement that the vessel was taking on water and that damage to the ship had created an 18-mile oil slick. On 19 February, the EU launched a naval mission called EUNAVFOR ASPIDES—"aspides" is Greek for shield—"to restore and safeguard freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and the Gulf". The operation's headquarters will be in Larissa, Greece, under the command of Greek Commodore Vasileios Gryparis. Operation ASPIDES joins Operation Prosperity Guardian, a naval coalition formed in December 2023 of over 20 countries, according to the US, to deter and counter Houthi attacks. (The Prosperity Guardian military operation is separate, according to the US, from the strikes that it and the UK have conducted on Houthi targets in Yemen. These strikes have been supported by Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, and New Zealand.)

On 16 February, the US designation of the Houthis as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) group became effective. The US had announced the designation on 17 January but delayed its entry into force by 30 days to engage stakeholders, crucial to facilitating humanitarian assistance and the commercial import of critical commodities in Yemen, to mitigate the potential adverse impacts of the designation. In guidance on 16 February, the US set out exemptions to sanctions associated with the SDGT for non-governmental organisations, international organisations and businesses to continue to operate in Houthi-held areas. During the 14 February Council briefing, OCHA Director of Operations and Advocacy Edem

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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/2024/155 (8 February 2024) was a Secretary-General's letter containing a report, in accordance with resolution 2722, on Houthi attacks on merchant and commercial vessels in the Red Sea covering the period 10 January to 6 February 2024. S/2024/90 (22 January 2024) was from Russia, contending that recent UK and US 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 Record** S/PV.9548 (14 February 2024) was a briefing on Yemen.



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# Yemen

Wosornu took note of US plans to issue general licenses to maintain humanitarian activities and essential commercial imports. But she added that the UN still “fear[s] there may be an effect on the economy, including commercial imports of essential items”, stressing that aid cannot make up for gaps in supplies of commercial goods.

## Sanctions-Related Developments

On 23 February, the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee held informal consultations to discuss with the Yemen Panel of Experts its programme of work following the renewal of its mandate on 15 November 2023. The Secretary-General appointed three of the panel's experts (on armed groups, regional affairs and finance) by letter dated 9 January 2024. The appointment of the panel's arms and international humanitarian law experts remains pending.

## Key Issues and Options

The Red Sea crisis has complicated Omani-mediated talks between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia to reach a peace agreement and the UN Envoy's efforts to develop a road map for an inter-Yemeni political process. The roadmap apparently would set out a strategy for addressing security, political, and economic priorities as part of this process. Since the crisis, there have been new concerns that the Houthis could make a fresh bid to seize oil and gas fields in Marib and Shabwah governorates, while Yemeni government officials have urged the international community to support it in taking back territory under Houthi control. Fragile relations among 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 remain additional concerns related to political efforts.

The Houthi threat to commercial shipping and the continued exchange of attacks by the Houthis on vessels and by US-led forces on Houthi targets is a new key issue for the Council. Resolution 2722 of 10 January on the Red Sea crisis included a request that the Secretary-General provide monthly written reports through 1 July on Houthi attacks on merchant and commercial vessels to inform the Council's consultations. The first such report was issued on 8 February.

If peace talks remain stalled, one option for Council members is to issue a press statement to encourage the parties to protect the progress that has been made and continue engaging with the Special Envoy to develop his roadmap. Such a statement could call for parties to de-escalate the current Red Sea crisis and to refrain from

provocative actions or rhetoric. 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 and reiterate members' support for Grundberg to lead an inter-Yemeni political process for a comprehensive peace agreement.

The humanitarian situation in Yemen remains a key issue. OCHA's 2024 Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) projects that 18.2 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection services in 2024, compared to 21.6 million in 2023. In addition to last year's small improvements in the humanitarian situation, the response plan's budget of \$2.7 billion compared to \$4.3 billion in 2023 reflects this year's HRP's more targeted, prioritised, and risk-informed programming after donors funded less than 40 percent of last year's plan. The risk that regional conflict dynamics could reverse humanitarian gains and exacerbate needs is a key issue.

## Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the various mediation efforts. They have welcomed the Houthi-Saudi talks and stress the ultimate need for an inclusive Yemeni political process under UN auspices to achieve a sustainable resolution of the conflict. Members have also condemned the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and are concerned about the consequences for maritime security, freedom of navigation, and Yemen's peace process.

The Red Sea crisis, though, has created some Council divisions during its Yemen discussions. Russia and China, which abstained along with Algeria and Mozambique on the adoption of resolution 2722, have indicated that US and UK strikes in Yemen violate international law because they did not receive Council authorisation. The US and UK stress that their strikes are undertaken in self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter. In the Council, the US and Japan co-authored resolution 2722, which took note of the right of member states, in accordance with international law, to defend their vessels from attacks. The Houthis continue to hold the Japanese-operated cargo ship *Galaxy Leader* and its crew since capturing the vessel, linked to an Israeli businessman, last November. France has indicated that it will participate in Operation *ASPIDES*.

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

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# Lebanon

## Expected Council Action

In March, Council members expect to receive a briefing in consultations on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1701. Adopted in 2006, resolution 1701 called for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah. The Secretary-General's report, which is due on 7 March, will cover the period from 21 October 2023 to 20 February. Special Coordinator for Lebanon

Joanna Wronecka and a representative of the Department of Peace Operations are the expected briefers.

## Key Recent Developments

Following the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas on 7 October 2023, near-daily exchanges of fire across the Blue Line between Israel and Hezbollah and other armed groups in Lebanon

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON LEBANON** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/1701 (11 August 2006) called for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah. S/RES/1559 (2 September 2004) urged withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon, disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, extension of the Lebanese government's control over all Lebanese territory, and free and fair presidential elections.

# Lebanon

continue to give rise to serious concerns about a major escalation of violence in southern Lebanon as well as in the wider region. (For background on the war in Gaza, see the “The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question” brief in our January *Monthly Forecast*. The Blue Line is a withdrawal line set by the UN in 2000 to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon. While not representing an international border, it acts in practice as a boundary between Lebanon and Israel in the absence of an agreed border between the two states.)

The exchanges of fire—the most intense since the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah—have resulted in casualties among both combatants and civilians on both sides of the Blue Line. As at 22 February, 273 people have been killed in Lebanon since the escalation, including 42 civilians, while 16 people have been killed in Israel, including six civilians, according to data cited by the wire service Agence France Presse. Briefing the 22 February Security Council meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland said that approximately 100,000 Israelis and over 87,000 Lebanese have been displaced from their communities.

The recent intensification of the strikes, and statements by Israeli and Hezbollah officials, have caused concerns that brinkmanship may soon give way to open conflict. According to a 14 February statement by Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) reported “a concerning shift” in the fire exchanges between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and armed groups in Lebanon, “including targeting of areas far from the Blue Line”. On 15 February, IDF Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi reportedly said that Israel is “intensifying the strikes all the time, and Hezbollah are paying an increasingly heavy price”, while on 14 February, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah said that fire from southern Lebanon would end “when the attack on Gaza stops and there is a ceasefire”, adding that if Israel expands “the confrontation, we will do the same”.

On 25 February, Israeli Minister of Defence Yoav Gallant reportedly said that a temporary pause in fighting in Gaza will not apply to Lebanon, adding that Israel’s aim is “to push Hezbollah away from the Israeli border, either through a diplomatic agreement or by force”. On 26 February, Israeli airstrikes near the city of Baalbek, northeast of Beirut, marked their deepest strikes into Lebanese territory since the escalation, and were followed by Hezbollah firing 60 rockets towards an IDF post in the Israeli-occupied Golan. On 27 February, Wronecka expressed deep concern at the “gradual expansion in the exchange of fire across the Blue Line in scope, scale and intensity”, urging an immediate halt to the cycle of violence and a return to a cessation of hostilities.

Diplomatic initiatives by the US and France have focused on de-escalation and on bringing the parties to a negotiation process over disputed areas along the Blue Line as a way to promote diplomatic solutions and disincentivise military confrontation. However, these efforts have yet to bear fruit.

Against this backdrop, UNIFIL continues to work to implement its mandate, including through patrols in its area of operations and engagement with local officials and conflict parties. At the time of writing, no fatalities among UNIFIL peacekeepers have been

reported since the start of the escalation. Some peacekeepers have been wounded, however, and several of the mission’s positions have been hit.

The US and several other donor countries suspended aid to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)—which provides services in 12 Palestine refugee camps in Lebanon—after Israel accused 12 of its staff members of having participated in the Hamas-led 7 October 2023 attack. UNRWA fired the staff members associated with the allegations and, upon request of the UN Secretary-General, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the main investigative body of the UN, began investigating the allegations. In a 22 February statement, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said that, to date, Israel had not shared any evidence with UNRWA regarding the allegations against UNRWA staff. (Separately, the UN also mandated an independent review led by former French Minister of Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna on how UNRWA upholds neutrality principles.)

Director of UNRWA Affairs in Lebanon Dorothee Klaus recently stressed that the suspension of aid will leave the Agency without funding by the end of February and highlighted the dire consequences for the estimated 250,000 Palestine refugees in Lebanon, including in terms of schooling and healthcare.

Lebanon has been without a president for over a year since Michel Aoun’s term ended on 31 October 2022, with opposing politico-sectarian blocks unable to agree on a compromise candidate. The presidential vacuum is compounded by the fact that Lebanon’s government remains in caretaker status. To avoid an additional anticipated vacuum, the Lebanese parliament voted on 15 December 2023 to extend Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Joseph Aoun’s term for one year.

Almost two years since the April 2022 Staff Level Agreement between Lebanon and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Lebanon does not appear to be close to satisfying the preconditions set by the IMF to support the country with around \$3 billion.

Anti-refugee sentiment continues to be a source of concern in Lebanon, which hosts the largest number of refugees per capita in the world.

The investigation into responsibility for the 4 August 2020 Beirut port explosion remains stalled.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

Noting that “[k]illings in foreign territory are arbitrary when they are not authorised under international law”, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Ben Saul, and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Morris Tidball-Binz, recently condemned Israel’s alleged killings of a Hamas deputy leader and six others in Lebanon, “which would amount to extrajudicial killings and crimes of murder”. They added that “Israel was not exercising self-defence because it presented no evidence that the victims were committing an armed attack on Israel from Lebanese territory” and that Israel has not provided any legal justification for the strike or reported it to the Security Council, as required by Article 51 of the UN Charter. Saul and Tidball-Binz also emphasised that Lebanon “has a duty to prevent the use of its territory to prepare terrorist acts against Israeli civilians, and to investigate, arrest and prosecute or extradite suspects involved in terrorism in Lebanon or Israel, in accordance with human rights law”.

## Key Issues and Options

The continuing exchanges of fire across the Blue Line and the risk of the expansion of the war in Gaza to Lebanon and the wider region

# Lebanon

are major issues of concern for Council members. Open war in southern Lebanon would have potentially catastrophic effects on the country, where the inability of politicians to agree on a presidential candidate is normalising the paralysis of key Lebanese institutions and, in turn, decreasing the chances of addressing the country's ongoing socioeconomic problems.

Council members and UN member states may consider stepping up diplomatic efforts to emphasise to all actors involved that brinkmanship is likely to have disastrous consequences. The Council may consider issuing a statement calling on all relevant parties on both sides of the Blue Line to cease fire, make use of UNIFIL's liaison and coordination mechanisms, and adhere to resolution 1701. The statement could also emphasise the importance of respecting international law and stress that civilians and civilian objects must never be targeted.

Though not addressing the causes of the long-standing hostility between Israel and Hezbollah, a ceasefire in Gaza would likely contribute to quietening the situation along the Blue Line, possibly opening space for indirect talks between Lebanon and Israel. While the Palestinian question remains unresolved, however, the risk of a regional conflagration connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and involving Lebanon is likely to persist even after the end of the war between Israel and Hamas. The resumption of a political process between Israelis and Palestinians to move towards a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and achieve a two-state solution would have beneficial effects for the whole region, however remote the possibility currently appears. A key issue for Council members

and UN member states would be to build effectively on any political momentum in the region to better support Lebanon in overcoming its own multi-layered crises.

## Council Dynamics

Although the Council has not met on Lebanon since Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, and Slovenia joined in January, the arrival of these five members seems unlikely to change the Council's broad support for Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence, and security.

Members agree that a full-scale conflict between Israel and Hezbollah should be avoided. During the 22 February Council meeting on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question", several Council members expressed concern about the possibility for the war in Gaza to expand regionally, with members including Japan, Slovenia, and Russia referring specifically to the situation in Lebanon. France, the penholder on Lebanon, stressed that full respect for resolution 1701, by all parties and with the assistance of UNIFIL, is necessary to the stability of the country and the whole region.

Council members continue to have differences over Hezbollah. Some members distinguish between Hezbollah's political and military wings and have designated only its military wing as a terrorist organisation. Other members, including the UK and the US, have listed Hezbollah in its entirety as a terrorist organisation. In contrast, Russia sees Hezbollah as a legitimate sociopolitical force.

# Democratic Republic of the Congo

## Expected Council Action

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

## Key Recent Developments

On 20 December 2023, the DRC held presidential, legislative, and provincial elections. The electoral process was marked by irregularities, including controversies around voter registration and delays in the opening of polling stations, among other things. On 31 December 2023, the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) declared Félix Antoine Tshisekedi the winner with 73 percent of the vote, but the opposition contested the results and called for a rerun. The aftermath of the elections also saw protests organised by the opposition in Kinshasa, which turned violent when the Congolese police tried to disperse demonstrators. Following confirmation of the election results by the Constitutional Court on 9 January, Tshisekedi was inaugurated for a second term on 20 January at a ceremony attended by regional leaders.

On 19 December 2023, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2717, renewing MONUSCO's mandate for one year. According to the resolution, "the mission will withdraw its Force from South Kivu by the end of April 2024 and limit the implementation of its mandate to the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri from May 2024 until the end of the current mandate". The Council requested the Congolese government and the UN to provide an update on the implementation of this drawdown process by June 2024 to inform the next steps in MONUSCO's "gradual, responsible, and sustainable withdrawal" in accordance with resolution 2717.

Following the renewal of MONUSCO's mandate, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix visited the DRC from 1 to 7 February, where he discussed the security situation in the eastern part of the country, MONUSCO's gradual and responsible drawdown, and the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse in meetings with MONUSCO staff, government officials (including President Tshisekedi), the leadership of the South African Development Community Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC), and civil society representatives. Under-Secretary-General for Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance Catherine Pollard and Special Coordinator for Improving UN Response to Sexual Exploitation

**UN DOCUMENTS ON THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO** Security Council Resolution S/RES/2717 (19 December 2023) renewed MONUSCO's mandate for one year until 20 December 2024. **Secretary-General's Report S/2023/932** (30 November 2023) was on MONUSCO. **Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2023/5** (16 October 2023) was on the situation in the DRC. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9553** (20 February 2024) was on the situation in the DRC.



# Democratic Republic of the Congo

and Abuse Christian Saunders accompanied Lacroix on the visit. At France's request, Lacroix and Pollard briefed the Council on 12 February in closed consultations. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 12 February.)

Following the meeting, Ambassador Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett (Guyana), in her capacity as February's Council President, read out press elements in which Council members expressed concern about the escalating violence in eastern DRC and the ongoing tensions in the region. Council members condemned the offensive launched on 7 February by the Mouvement du 23 mars (M23) near Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, and the military activities of all other armed groups operating in the country. They also condemned the violence in Kinshasa on 10 February targeting UN personnel and other diplomatic missions and called for impartial investigations into the incidents.

On 20 February, the Security Council met again to consider the situation in the DRC. France, the penholder on the file, requested the meeting to discuss the deteriorating security situation in eastern DRC, and Keita briefed the Council on the matter. (For more, see our *What's in Blue* story of 19 February.)

The East African Community Regional Force (EACRF), which was deployed in eastern DRC under the framework of a regional initiative spearheaded by the East African Community (EAC) known as the Nairobi process, ceased operations when its mandate expired on 8 December 2023. The Congolese government chose not to extend the EACRF's mandate, apparently disappointed by the force's inability to neutralise the M23, and sought the support of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which decided on 8 May 2023 to deploy SAMIDRC in the eastern DRC. SAMIDRC—composed of troops from Malawi, South Africa, and Tanzania—has been deployed in North Kivu since December 2023, replacing the EACRF.

On 22 November 2023, SADC formally requested UN assistance for SAMIDRC, including facilities, equipment, air asset services, medical support, and information- and intelligence-sharing, among other forms of support. When renewing MONUSCO's mandate in December 2023, the Council indicated its intention to evaluate the circumstances under which "limited logistical and operational assistance could be provided to an AU-mandated regional force deployed within MONUSCO's operational area, in alignment with MONUSCO's mandate and within existing resources". It further requested the Secretary-General to submit a report in June, including his recommendations on this matter.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 7 January, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk released a statement on the DRC. He raised concerns about the rise in ethnic-based hate speech and incitement to violence, particularly in the provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu and in the Kasai and Katanga regions, after the December 2023 elections. He called on the authorities to thoroughly and transparently investigate all reports of hate speech and incitement to violence and to hold those responsible to account.

## Sanctions-Related Developments

On 20 February, the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee approved the request by France, the UK, and the US for the designation of six individuals under its sanctions list: two from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and one each from the Twirwaneho armed

group, the National People's Coalition for the Sovereignty of Congo (CNPSC), M23, and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).

## Women, Peace and Security

Sandrine Lusamba—the national coordinator of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix—briefed the Council during the 11 December 2023 open briefing on the DRC. She said that since she last briefed the Council in 2021, the security situation in the DRC had deteriorated. Addressing MONUSCO's drawdown, she said that civil society had received little information as to the disengagement plan for the mission. The mapping-out of the protection activities and capacities of the UN agencies that were identified under MONUSCO's mandate was insufficient "in terms of needs analysis", she added, and did not "take into account the contributions and participation of civil society", hence failing to enable the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and the inclusion of young people. Among other recommendations, Lusamba said that "women should be at the centre" of MONUSCO's and the UN Country Team's work. She also recommended that MONUSCO and the UN Country Team work with local and national NGOs to develop indicators measuring "the protection and promotion of women's human rights, including in the areas of gender-based violence, attacks on women human rights defenders, sexual and reproductive rights and the meaningful participation of women".

## Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members in March is the worsening security situation in eastern DRC and heightened regional tensions. The insecurity has also exacerbated the humanitarian situation because of the massive displacement of people from the ongoing fighting in North Kivu. Council members are likely to reiterate the need to find a political solution to the situation in eastern DRC and continue expressing their support for regional initiatives.

The implementation of MONUSCO's disengagement plan adopted by the Council pursuant to resolution 2717 is another key issue for Council members. They will be keen to receive updates on the mission's drawdown from South Kivu by the end of April 2024 as part of this disengagement process.

Also an issue of major concern to Council members is the misinformation campaign against MONUSCO that resulted in the recent attack on the mission. On 10 February, violent protests erupted in Kinshasa, with MONUSCO being a primary target. The mission reported that several of its vehicles were set ablaze during the demonstrations. Council members may continue to underscore the need to enhance the mission's strategic communication efforts to counter increasing challenges posed by mis- and disinformation.

A possible option is a presidential statement to respond to some of the major developments in the DRC, including the security situation in eastern DRC, heightened regional tensions, and MONUSCO's gradual and responsible drawdown.

## Council Dynamics

At the 20 February meeting, Council members expressed serious concerns about the deteriorating security situation in DRC and its broader ramifications for regional peace and stability. They called for de-escalation of tensions and the resolution of the situation through dialogue. Accordingly, Council members expressed support for regional initiatives, commending the role of Angolan President and chair of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) João Lourenço for convening a mini-summit on the situation in eastern DRC in Addis Ababa on 16 February on the margins of the AU Summit.



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## Democratic Republic of the Congo

Some members condemned the recent attacks by the M23 near Sake, a town located 27 kilometres from Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu. France condemned Rwanda's support for the group and the presence of its forces on Congolese territory. "A threshold has been crossed with the deployment and use on Congolese territory of anti-aircraft systems that do not correspond to the capabilities of a simple armed group", France added. The US also called on Rwandan forces to end their support to M23, withdraw from Congolese territory, and immediately remove all their surface-to-air missile systems. It further called for a serious evaluation of Rwanda's role as a major UN troop-contributing country.

Council members condemned the attacks against MONUSCO

and underscored the need to ensure the safety and security of peacekeepers. Regarding MONUSCO's disengagement process and its withdrawal from South Kivu in April, several Council members cautioned against leaving a security vacuum that could exacerbate the security situation. The members of the "A3 plus one" grouping (Algeria, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Guyana) expressed hope that SAMIDRC's support for the Congolese national army would prevent the advance of all armed groups and help stabilise the situation.

France is the penholder on the DRC. Ambassador Michael Imran Kanu (Sierra Leone) chairs the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee.

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## UNDOF (Golan)

### Expected Council Action

In March, the Council will hold its quarterly consultations on the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan.

### Background and Key Recent Developments

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

Carrying out the mandate entails monitoring violations of the 1974 agreement, reporting them, and liaising with both sides. Such violations regularly include unauthorised personnel and equipment present in the areas of separation and limitation, weapons fired, and drones and aircraft traveling across the ceasefire line.

There has been a significant rise in hostilities in the Middle East following the 7 October attack against Israel by Hamas, the Palestinian armed group and de facto authority in Gaza, and the subsequent response by Israeli forces, including airstrikes and ground operations in the Gaza Strip.

The Golan has not been spared from the recent tensions in the region. On 30 January, several rockets were fired from Syria towards the southern area of the Golan Heights. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) retaliated by launching airstrikes on Syrian military infrastructure around Daraa, southwestern Syria.

On 20 February, missiles struck a residential building in Damascus, killing at least two people. Syrian state media has reported that missiles were launched from the direction of Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Israel did not comment on the attack.

The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah launched 60 rockets at Israel's Nafah military base in the Golan on 26 February. The group said the attack was in response to Israeli air strikes near Baalbek, Lebanon. No casualties were reported from the rocket fire.

### Key Issues and Options

A key issue is restrictions on the movement and access of UNDOF personnel. In his 30 November 2023 report, the Secretary-General raised concerns over restrictions on UNDOF's movement in the area of operation, including at the Qunaytirah crossing.

Another important issue is ensuring that UNDOF personnel are equipped with the necessary resources to fulfill the mission's mandate, along with maintaining the safety and security of peacekeeping personnel.

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

### Council Dynamics

It remains unclear whether and how the recent escalation of conflict in the region will affect the Council's work on the Golan file in the future. But for now, the unanimous adoption of resolution 2718 on 21 December 2023, which reauthorised UNDOF's mandate for six months, illustrated that the Council remains united in its view that UNDOF plays an important role in regional stability. Despite deep divisions in the Council regarding the Syria file and opposing positions by the UNDOF co-penholders—Russia and the US—about who holds sovereignty over the Golan, as well as antagonism over the conflict in Ukraine, the two countries continue to consider UNDOF as a separate issue on which they agree. The difficult dynamics on other Council files were not evident during the straightforward negotiations on UNDOF's mandate in December, and no Council member felt that an explanation of vote was necessary following the adoption. Some Council members believe that the situation has turned into a protracted conflict owing to continued violations of the 1974 agreement by both sides.

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON UNDOF** [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2718](#) (21 December 2023) extended the mandate of UNDOF until 30 June 2024. [S/RES/350](#) (31 May 1974) established UNDOF. Secretary-General's Report S/2023/935 (30 November 2023) was the Secretary-General's report on UNDOF.

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