

# Monthly Forecast

- 1 Overview
- 2 In Hindsight: Does the Security Council Matter?
- 3 Status Update since our September Forecast
- 5 Lebanon
- 7 Women, Peace and Security
- 9 UN-AU Cooperation
- 10 Somalia
- 12 UNDOF (Golan)
- 13 Great Lakes Region (DRC)
- 14 Libya
- 16 Yemen
- 18 Colombia
- 20 Western Sahara
- 21 Anticipating the Impact of Scientific Developments on International Peace and Security
- 22 Haiti
- 24 Central African Republic
- 26 Syria
- 27 Sudan
- 29 Middle East, including the Palestinian Question
- 32 Kosovo

## Overview

In October, Switzerland will hold the presidency of the Security Council.

Switzerland plans to organise two signature events. The first is a briefing on “anticipating the impact of [scientific developments](#) on international peace and security” under the “Maintenance of international peace and security” agenda item. Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland Ignazio Cassis is expected to chair the meeting.

The second signature event is the annual open debate on [women, peace and security \(WPS\)](#), which will be titled: “Women Building Peace in a Changing Environment”. President of the Swiss Confederation Viola Amherd is expected to chair the meeting. UN Secretary-General António Guterres, UN Women Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous, and one or more civil society representatives are the anticipated briefers.

In October, the Security Council is scheduled to hold its annual briefing on [cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations, focusing on the African Union \(AU\)](#). The 18th annual joint consultative meeting between the Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) will also be held on 18 October. The annual meeting rotates between New York and Addis Ababa, the home of the AU headquarters. This year, the meeting will be held in New York, and it will be preceded by the ninth informal joint seminar of the Security Council and the AUPSC, which is set to take place in Tarrytown, New York, on 16 and 17 October.

The Security Council is also scheduled to hold its [annual private meeting with the President of the International Court of Justice \(ICJ\)](#), Judge Nawaf Salam.

African issues on the programme of work in October are:

- [Western Sahara](#), consultations on the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and the mandate renewal of MINURSO;
- [Great Lakes Region](#), the biannual briefing and consultations;
- [Central African Republic \(CAR\)](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central

African Republic (MINUSCA);

- [Libya](#), mandate renewal of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and briefing and consultations on UNSMIL and the work of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee;
- [Sudan](#), briefing on UN efforts to support Sudan on its path towards peace and stability pursuant to resolution 2715 of 1 December 2023; and
- [Somalia](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), mandate renewal of UNSOM, a private meeting to receive updates pursuant to resolution 2748 of 15 August on the overall mission design and financing options for the proposed successor mission to the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), and briefing by the chair of the 2713 Al-Shabaab Sanctions Committee. Middle Eastern issues on the programme include:

- [Yemen](#), monthly briefing and consultations on developments;
- [Golan](#), consultations on the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF);
- [Lebanon](#), consultations on the Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of resolution 1559;
- [Syria](#), meeting on political and humanitarian developments; and
- “[The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question](#)”, the quarterly open debate.

Regarding European issues, a briefing on the UN Interim Administration Mission in [Kosovo](#) (UNMIK) is anticipated, and one or more meetings on Ukraine are likely during the month.

Two issues in the Americas will be discussed in October:

- [Haiti](#), renewal of the 2653 Haiti sanctions regime and a briefing, followed by consultations, on developments in the country and the work of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH); and
- [Colombia](#), quarterly meeting on developments in the country and renewal of the mandate of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia.

Other issues could be raised in October depending on developments.

### 1 October 2024

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# In Hindsight: Does the Security Council Matter?

## Parting Reflections of Executive Director Karin Landgren

The six years I've spent as Security Council Report's (SCR) Executive Director have been eventful. SCR has observed and documented the Council's actions on dramatically changing situations including the COVID-19 pandemic, Ukraine, and Gaza, and on major policy shifts, such as the UN financing of AU peace support operations. Day in and day out, SCR has interacted with Council members, other member states, regional bodies, the UN Secretariat, academia, and civil society in order to produce impartial, nuanced and fact-checked reports on issues before the Security Council. I feel privileged to have held this position, in which I have learned a great deal. Stepping down, I offer some reflections on the Security Council's impact on international peace and security.

The world has suffered gravely from the Security Council's failure to have meaningful impact on the conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine—and in Sudan, Myanmar, and Yemen. Also in Afghanistan, where women are written out of public life and denied their human rights, and Haiti, where gangs rule.

These Council failures contribute to international law unravelling, normalising violations and impunity for them, and further weakening the universality of norms. The political cost of atrocity crimes is now shockingly low—even for plausible cases of genocide. The Charter presupposed that the Council's core members would stand up for its core values. Often, they have not.

In negotiations on Security Council products, references to international human rights law, international humanitarian law, the rights of women, and climate security routinely draw objections and may need to be deleted in order to secure agreement. In some of today's conflicts, states are turning to the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court in the face of Security Council inaction.

Does the Security Council matter if it can't change behaviours on the ground?

In the past, it was able to do more. When East Timor flared into violence, in 1999, Council members pressed for a lawful and rights-respecting solution. Their action, including a visiting mission by five Council members to Jakarta and Dili, was persuasive.

Between 2009 and 2015, when I headed three UN peace operations, the Council stood unanimously behind the 16 relevant resolutions setting out the functions of those operations. In Nepal with UNMIN, Burundi with BNUB, and Liberia with UNMIL, we could point confidently to a unified Security Council position, interpret the Council's intentions to the government, and meet with a supportive group of Council members represented locally. Years after the peace operations closed, these countries have not gone back to war.

Today, there is far less Security Council agreement signposting the political trajectory out of conflicts. In fact, countries in crisis now quickly attract involvement by states who see ways of leveraging that chaos—and those states often include Council members.

But I see areas where change for the better is within reach.

The first concerns the role of the ten elected Security Council members, who have greatly strengthened their collective identity (as the "E10"). They often lead the way in calling for respect for international law, the protection of human rights, and humanitarian access. They have worked hard to find common positions among

sub-groups – such as the three African members ("A3", lately joined twice by a member from the Latin American and Caribbean group), and cross-regional alliances, such as Ireland and Niger joining forces on a draft climate change resolution in 2021.

Elected members have found that they can apply pressure for issues to be discussed and drive political momentum. Notably, more elected members have stepped up to draft Council products: in March 2024, resolution 2728 calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza was attributed to all ten elected members, a first. With the 2021 Presidency Initiative on Women, Peace and Security, elected members pioneered monthly commitments, coordinated across successive presidencies, and drew in some permanent members. Elected members have subsequently initiated other pledges: Malta, Mozambique, Switzerland, and the UAE on climate, peace and security in 2023 that now has the support of 11 members, and just last month, a joint action on conflict prevention in support of *A New Agenda for Peace* launched by Sierra Leone, Slovenia, and Switzerland.

The burgeoning leadership by elected members is recent and responds to the permanent members' disunity as well as their shortcomings as caretakers of the UN Charter. It represents real change. On 23 September, the ten elected and five incoming members met at ministerial level, underlining the space that this cohort now occupies—a meeting cohosted by the governments of Slovenia, Ecuador, and Kuwait and by Security Council Report.

Many elected members prepare extensively for their Council terms, years in advance, and staff up significantly, at times including personnel lent by other countries or regional bodies. SCR has supported the preparation of some fifty incoming elected members since 2012. But there are challenges. Being an active, effective Council member is hard work. Among the most frequently asked questions at the annual 'Hitting the Ground Running' workshop—which Finland has organised since 2003, in cooperation with SCR since 2020—is how to measure success as a Council member. Several member states have told SCR that their country's Council terms could have had greater impact.

States could consider a careful review of how their region selects, and endorses, the country or countries that will compete for Council elected membership. (Every region does so differently, as explained in SCR's annual research report on the Security Council elections.) They might also look at expanding and regularising the ways partners, whether regional or bilateral, can provide practical support for countries joining the Council.

A second reflection concerns some Council members' stiffened resistance to receiving independent, factual briefings and reports.

Nearly a quarter century ago, in the specific context of peace operations, Lakhdar Brahimi called for the UN Secretariat to tell the Council what it needs to know, not what it wants to hear. Doing so has become harder across the board. In 2023 and 2024, the Panels of Experts reporting on Mali and on the DPRK were shut down by Russian vetoes. Council members seeking to discuss particular conflict situations, even behind closed doors, have been intimidated and even seen their diplomatic personnel expelled by the country in question. Civil society representatives have also faced threats after briefing the Security Council. OHCHR, too, has encountered pressure and staff expulsions, such as in Mali. Robust reporting now

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## In Hindsight: Does the Security Council Matter?

requires fortitude. The truth is on the back foot.

The belief that good information can empower better decision-making is core to SCR's work. And many issues on the Council's agenda are complex and long-standing. Not all elected members know these situations well. Moreover, every year one-third of the Council's members are new—and the group now makes far fewer visits to the field than it did before COVID-19.

SCR has described the Secretariat's practice of candid situational briefings to Council members, which started in November 2010. These largely ended in 2013, having become a Sisyphean task: as a senior Secretariat official reported in private, "Every time we do horizon-scanning, we get beaten up." Elected members have periodically sought to revive a form of early warning briefings at a less formal level.

The Council should as a minimum seek and receive factual and impartial information on situations of concern to the Secretary-General, and all the situations already on its agenda. The weight is on the UN Secretariat to convey political and operational field realities, to produce sound, impartial analyses and recommendations for action, and to help protect Security Council briefers from harm.

A third reflection is on the possibilities offered by a great hinterland of under-utilised elements in the UN Charter, in the Council's working methods, and in the role of the Secretary-General. SCR has written extensively about this trove of options. They include the Charter's Article 99 (invoked explicitly by the Secretary-General in December 2023 to warn the Council of an impending humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza); its Chapter VIII on regional arrangements (in the spirit of which the Council adopted resolution 2719, on UN financing of AU-led peace support operations); and Article 27(3) on abstention from voting, Article 33 on first steps in the peaceful settlement of disputes, and Article 34, on the Council's right to investigate any situation or dispute that might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute, in particular. In its entire history, the Council has only once used Article 96 (1), which enables it to request an advisory opinion from the ICJ on any legal question. There is also Article 94(2), allowing the Council to "make recommendations or decide" how to give effect to an ICJ judgment, if so asked by one of the parties to the dispute.

The General Assembly opting to play a stronger role in matters of international peace and security—for example, through its 2022 "veto initiative"—falls within this basket of issues. Arguably, so does the process of appointing the UN Secretary-General, which became significantly more transparent in 2016 after extensive civil society

campaigning, and will be more important than ever the next time around, in 2026.

As well, the Council's use of its strongest tools, peacekeeping and sanctions, is in decline; soon these too can fairly be termed under-utilised. 2024 marked ten years since the Council last launched a UN peacekeeping operation, in the Central African Republic (CAR). Its continued pullback from sanctions is also visible. Between 1990 and 2015, the Council created on average one new sanctions regime a year. But since the 2017 Mali sanctions regime (abolished by a Russian veto in 2023), sanctions have been set up only for Haiti, in 2022. And it has been difficult to add new listings, or new criteria, to existing sanctions regimes.

Non-UN-led efforts to keep the peace, such as the Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti and the Southern African Development Community (SADC)-led mission in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), today face serious difficulties. UN peacekeeping is imperfect, and sometimes the wrong tool. But there are decades of evidence in its support. Security Council members and the Secretariat—including the Secretary-General—would be well advised to keep UN peacekeeping capabilities well-oiled and forward-looking. Potential peacekeeping missions are being discussed in some quarters for some of the world's most desperate situations, including Haiti, Sudan, Gaza, and Ukraine. Peacekeeping has been an adaptable and flexible tool, and a ministerial-level meeting in Berlin in May 2025 is expected to explore a wide range of models.

At this time of war, polarisation, and desperation, one commentator after the next cites lines from W.B. Yeats' *The Second Coming*, of 1919:

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world*

Invoking this poem at every last crisis of the past century does not make it more true. Recently, I found a take I much prefer: that things fall apart if we let them.

Addressing the opening of the General Assembly last week, the Secretary-General named impunity as the greatest driver of global unsustainability. Impunity, he said, is politically indefensible and morally intolerable. But it is not written in the cards that international law will fall apart, and that impunity will reign. Rather, peace and its parts—including respect for international law—are an ongoing project. Keeping the project alive depends on people the world over. Not letting things fall apart—valuable and hard-won things, such as accountability for violations of international law—is up to all of us.

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## Status Update since our September Forecast

### Venezuela

On 5 September, Council members discussed Venezuela under "any other business". Ecuador requested that members address the situation in the country, where the results of the 28 July presidential election, in which Nicolás Maduro was announced the winner, have been strongly disputed by several national and international actors. Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas

Miroslav Jenča briefed. It seems that the discussion was contentious. While some members argued that it is a domestic issue that should not be within the Council's purview, others said that the situation in the country poses a risk to regional stability and therefore the Council should remain abreast of developments in order to fulfill its conflict prevention role. Ambassador José Javier De La Gasca (Ecuador) reiterated the latter argument in a stakeout after the meeting.

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## Status Update since our September Forecast

On 12 September, Panama, an incoming Security Council member, delivered a joint statement on Venezuela on behalf of approximately 50 member states and the EU. Panamanian Foreign Minister Javier Martínez-Acha Vásquez read the remarks, which urged the publication of the election results from all polling stations and the impartial verification of results by independent observers. The statement voiced alarm about the reported human rights violations and abuses following the elections and expressed support for a Venezuelan-led process to re-establish democratic norms in the country.

### Afghanistan

On 5 September, Council members issued a press statement condemning a 2 September terrorist attack in Kabul. The attack was claimed by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K).

On 18 September, the Council convened for an open briefing on Afghanistan (S/PV.9726). Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Roza Otunbayeva, UN Women Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous, and a civil society representative briefed. Slovenia's Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Tanja Fajon, chaired the meeting. On 20 September, Council members discussed the modalities used to deliver the civil society briefing under "any other business" following the briefing on Lebanon. It appears that the meeting was requested by Russia, who took issue with the modalities used for the delivery of the civil society briefing on 18 September. (The voice of the briefer, who was not in the Council chamber, could be heard, but she could not be seen by members.)

### UN Peacekeeping

On 9 September, the Security Council held its annual meeting on UN peacekeeping pursuant to resolution 2378 of 20 September 2017 (S/PV.9719). Slovenia convened the meeting in an open debate format under the theme "Strengthening Peacekeeping: Reflections for the Future". Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix; Comfort Ero, the President and CEO of the International Crisis Group (ICG); and Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the President and CEO of the International Peace Institute (IPI), briefed.

### Ukraine

On 10 September, the Security Council held a briefing on the situation in Ukraine (S/PV.9720). Ecuador and France requested the meeting following a barrage of Russian missile and drone attacks that targeted multiple cities across Ukraine in early September. In a letter dated 4 September, Ukraine said that these attacks had caused a significant number of civilian casualties and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure in cities such as Kyiv, Kharkiv, Sumy, Poltava, Zaporizhzhia, Lviv, and Dnipro, among others. Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya briefed the Council.

On 13 September, at Russia's request, the Council held a briefing under the "Threats to international peace and security" agenda item to discuss Western arms transfers to Ukraine (S/PV.9724). High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu briefed the Council.

On 24 September, the Council convened for a high-level briefing

on Ukraine (S/PV.9731). France, Japan, Malta, the Republic of Korea, the UK, and the US requested the meeting. Slovenian Prime Minister Robert Golob chaired the meeting, at which Secretary-General António Guterres briefed. Ukraine, represented by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

### Myanmar

On 19 September, Council members convened for closed consultations on Myanmar. Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari briefed. The UK, the penholder on the file, requested the meeting.

### Leadership for Peace

On 25 September, Slovenia convened a high-level open debate on "Leadership for Peace" under the "Maintenance of international peace and security" agenda item (S/PV.9732). Slovenian Prime Minister Robert Golob chaired the meeting, which was the signature event of his country's September Council presidency. The briefers were UN Secretary-General António Guterres; President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Mirjana Spoljaric Egger; and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a member of The Elders and former President of Liberia. The open debate focused on strengthening multilateral efforts to promote international peace and security. A presidential statement was adopted at the start of the meeting that reaffirmed the Council's commitment to international law, including the UN Charter, and the need for universal adherence to international law, (S/PRST/2024/5).

### League of Arab States

On 26 September, the Security Council held an informal interactive dialogue (IID) on cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States (LAS). Tanja Fajon, Slovenia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, chaired the meeting. Khaled Khiari, the Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific, and LAS Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit briefed Council members. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Iraq, the members of the Arab Summit Troika—a group of three rotating countries that monitor the implementation of resolutions and commitments adopted by the LAS—also participated at ministerial level.

### Democratic Republic of the Congo

On 30 September, the Security Council held a briefing and consultations on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), including the work of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the DRC and Head of MONUSCO Bintou Keita, the Chair of the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee Ambassador Michael Imran Kanu (Sierra Leone) and a Congolese civil society representative briefed. Angola, the DRC, and Rwanda participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

# Status Update since our September Forecast

## Counter-Terrorism

On 20 September, Council members issued a press statement condemning a 17 September terrorist attack in Bamako, Mali. The

attack was claimed by an Al Qaida-linked militant group known as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM).

## Lebanon

### Expected Council Action

In October, Security Council members are expected to receive their semi-annual briefing in closed consultations on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 1559. Adopted in 2004, the resolution called for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon, the disarmament of all militias, and the extension of government control over the whole Lebanese territory. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo is the anticipated briefer.

Council members are also likely to watch developments in Lebanon, Israel, and the region closely and evaluate whether additional Council action is required.

### Key Recent Developments

The armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah has intensified rapidly. On 17 and 18 September, a wave of attacks widely attributed to Israel detonated thousands of Hezbollah's electronic communication devices across Lebanon. The 17 September attacks, which exploded pager devices, killed 12 people, including two children, and injured over 2,323, while the 18 September attacks, which detonated two-way radios, killed 25 people and injured 608, according to figures provided by the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health. Explosions of communication devices were also reported in Syria, where 14 people were injured, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a UK-based monitoring group with a presence in the country. On 18 September, Lebanese Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants Abdallah Bou Habib condemned the "Israeli attack", adding that it "represents a blatant assault on Lebanon's sovereignty and its security".

The 17-18 September attacks came against the backdrop of the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas and near-daily exchanges of fire across the Blue Line between Israel and Hezbollah and other armed groups following the outbreak of the war on 7 October 2023. Hezbollah has been firing rockets into northern Israel in support of Hamas, while Israel has responded with airstrikes and the assassination of Hezbollah commanders in Lebanon, with the exchanges of fire intensifying progressively in recent months. (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, the Blue Line acts in practice as a boundary between Lebanon and Israel in the absence of an agreed-upon border between the two states. Any unauthorised crossing of the Blue Line constitutes a violation of resolution 1701, which in 2006 called for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah. For background on the war in Gaza, see the brief on "The Middle East,

including the Palestinian Question" in our October *Monthly Forecast*.)

Even before the current escalation, the exchanges of fire had displaced tens of thousands of people both in Israel and Lebanon and resulted in casualties among combatants and civilians on both sides of the Blue Line, with the Associated Press reporting on 19 September that over 500 people had been killed in Lebanon by Israeli strikes since the start of the escalation, most of them combatants but also more than 100 civilians, while at least 23 soldiers and 26 civilians had been killed in northern Israel by strikes from Lebanese territory.

On 18 September, a division of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) relocated from Gaza to the north of Israel and Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant announced that Israel was "opening a new phase in the war" to secure the return of its citizens to the north of Israel. In a 19 September speech, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah warned that Israel will face retribution. He said that Israel will not be able to return its displaced residents to their homes through military escalation, adding that the "only way" to achieve this "is to halt the aggression on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank". In an 18 September letter to the Security Council, Iran, whose ambassador to Lebanon was injured in the 17 September explosions, said that it would "follow up" on the attack by taking the "required measures deemed necessary to respond".

Following the 17-18 September attacks, Israel carried out large-scale airstrikes on 23 and 24 September, mainly in areas in southern and eastern Lebanon but also targeting some areas of Beirut, on what it said were some 1,600 Hezbollah targets. For its part, Hezbollah launched hundreds of rockets into Israel. According to figures cited by Lebanese Minister of Public Health Firass Abiad on 24 September, 569 people were killed in Lebanon on 23 and 24 September, including "[a]t least 50 children, 94 women and four paramedics". In a 24 September statement, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that one of its staff members and her son were killed in an Israeli airstrike, while a UNHCR contractor was also confirmed dead.

Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon continued on 25 September, while Hezbollah launched a ballistic missile directed at the headquarters of the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence service, near Tel Aviv. Israel intercepted the missile.

The Security Council discussed the escalation of hostilities in two meetings on 20 and 25 September called respectively by Algeria and France. The 20 September briefing was followed by closed consultations. At the 25 September briefing, France and the US announced that they had worked on a soon-to-be public proposal for a temporary ceasefire to allow for negotiations. In a joint statement issued the following day, Australia, Canada, the EU, France, Germany, Italy,

**UN DOCUMENTS ON LEBANON** [Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2749](#) (28 August 2023) renewed the mandate of UNIFIL until 31 August 2025. [S/RES/1701](#) (11 August 2006) called for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah. [S/RES/1559](#) (2 September 2004) urged the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon, the disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, the extension of the Lebanese government's control over all Lebanese territory and free and fair presidential elections.

# Lebanon

Japan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the UK, and the US called for an immediate ceasefire of 21 days “across the Lebanon-Israel border to provide space for diplomacy” towards the conclusion of a diplomatic settlement “consistent with” resolutions 1701 and 2735. (Resolution 2735 welcomed a ceasefire proposal for the war in Gaza announced by the US on 31 May.)

A ceasefire seems unlikely, however. On 26 September, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the Israeli military will continue hitting Hezbollah until all of Israel’s goals are achieved, while Foreign Minister Israel Katz said in a social media post that “[t]here will be no ceasefire in the north”. On 26 and 27 September, Israeli bombardments in Lebanon continued, with airstrikes also hitting what Israel described as Hezbollah targets in Beirut, including its headquarters. On 28 September, Hezbollah confirmed that Nasrallah had been killed in an Israeli airstrike the previous day. The attack levelled dozens of buildings in southern Beirut marking “the most intense Israeli strike since the 2006 war in Lebanon”, according to an update by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). While full figures were not available at the time of writing, the casualty rate of the attack is likely to be high given the scale of destruction. In a 28 September statement, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric called for the “cycle of violence” to immediately stop and urged all sides to “step back from the brink”.

On 30 September, Hezbollah deputy Secretary-General Naim Qassem reportedly said that “Hezbollah’s position ‘will not budge an inch’ on the connection between the front in Lebanon and that in Gaza” before adding that Hezbollah is “ready and prepared if Israel wants to launch a ground incursion”. Israeli airstrikes on Lebanese territory continued on 28, 29 and 30 September, with the Wall Street Journal reporting on 30 September that Israel has carried out intelligence-gathering raids in southern Lebanon both recently and in past months in preparation of a possible ground operation. Hezbollah has continued firing rockets towards Israel. Iran has vowed that it, too, will respond to Nasrallah’s assassination, but it has thus far refrained from doing so by force in a likely attempt to avoid being dragged into a direct military confrontation with Israel.

At press time, several media outlets were reporting that an Israeli ground invasion into southern Lebanon was imminent.

On 28 September, Iran, whose general Abbas Nilforushan was killed in the same airstrike that assassinated Nasrallah, called for an emergency Security Council meeting on Lebanon.

According to a 25 September OCHA update, Israeli airstrikes extended to regions previously untouched by the conflict, prompting mass movements of residents toward Beirut and other areas, and severely damaging water infrastructure in areas in eastern and southern Lebanon, cutting off access to clean water for at least 30,000 people. As at 27 September, over 70,000 displaced people were registered in shelters in Lebanon, according to Lebanese authorities. UNHCR said that the displacement is also affecting Syrian refugees in Lebanon, with hundreds of vehicles and large crowds reported at the Syrian border. On 30 September, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said in a social media post that the number of people, both Syrian and Lebanese, who crossed into Syria fleeing Israeli airstrikes had reached 100,000.

On 28 August, the Security Council unanimously adopted

resolution 2749, extending the mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for another year, until 31 August 2025. Against the backdrop of the escalation, UNIFIL has remained in contact with the parties, supporting humanitarian access and calling for de-escalation. While peacekeepers remain deployed in UNIFIL’s area of operation, most civilian personnel have been temporarily relocated north of the Litani River. At a 30 September press briefing, Dujarric said that while the peacekeepers remain in position, “the intensity of fighting is preventing their movements and ability to undertake their mandated tasks”.

The political situation in Lebanon remains unchanged. Lebanon has been without a president for almost two years since Michel Aoun’s term ended on 31 October 2022, with opposing politico-sectarian blocks unable to agree on a candidate. The presidential vacuum is compounded by the fact that, over two years since the 15 May 2022 legislative elections, Lebanon’s government remains in caretaker status.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

In an 18 September statement addressing the 17-18 September attacks, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk said that “[s]imultaneous targeting of thousands of individuals, whether civilians or members of armed groups, without knowledge as to who was in possession of the targeted devices, their location and their surroundings at the time of the attack, violates international human rights law and, to the extent applicable, international humanitarian law”. Türk appealed to all states with influence to take immediate action to prevent further escalation of the conflict. He also called for an independent investigation into the mass explosions, emphasizing that those who ordered the attack must be held accountable.

In a 30 September statement, over 30 UN independent experts warned that the escalating armed conflict “risks swallowing up the whole region in a humanitarian and geopolitical catastrophe”. The statement condemned “Israel’s use of the same destructive violence that was applied in Gaza to its attacks on Lebanon” adding that the airstrikes in densely populated areas in Lebanon “fail the tests of distinction, proportionality, precaution and necessity under international humanitarian law and may constitute domicile for mass destruction of homes”. The statement also expressed concern about the harm caused by rockets and missiles launched by Hezbollah into Israel since October 2023.

## Key Issues and Options

Returning to a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah and averting a full-scale regional conflagration in the Middle East are pivotal issues for the Security Council. All indicators from the ground point to a different direction, however, with IDF Chief of General Staff Herzi Halevi saying on 25 September that the recent Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon were designed to “prepare the ground” for a “possible entry” into Lebanese territory, and Hezbollah’s leadership remaining steadfast in its position that it will continue to fire at Israel as long as the war in Gaza continues.

More broadly, the non-implementation of resolutions 1559 and 1701 remains a key concern. Council members may consider issuing a resolution urging all relevant parties to immediately cease fire, protect civilians, respect international law, and implement Security Council resolutions 1559 and 1701.

That the root causes of the hostility between Israel and Hezbollah and of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remain unaddressed is a long-standing issue. At the same time, a ceasefire in Gaza—however remote the possibility continues to appear—would contribute

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## Lebanon

to de-escalating the situation in Lebanon and in the wider region. Council members could renew their efforts towards that end. (For options in this regard, see the brief “The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question” in our October *Monthly Forecast*.)

### Council Dynamics

Council members ostensibly agree that a full-scale conflict between Israel and Hezbollah must be avoided. However, difficult dynamics are likely to result in ineffective Council action, or inaction, on this file. During the closed consultations that followed the 20 September briefing on Lebanon, Council members discussed issuing press elements that would have condemned the 17-18 September communication devices explosions, called for a de-escalation and a cessation of hostilities, and emphasised the need to protect civilians. It appears, however, that members were eventually unable to agree on press elements due to opposition by the US, Israel’s key ally on the Security Council.

Sharp differences persist in Security Council members’ views of 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. On the other hand, Russia sees Hezbollah as a legitimate sociopolitical force in Lebanon.

Council members are broadly supportive of UNIFIL. Nevertheless, the negotiations on resolution 2749 proved difficult. The US sought at first to delete, and later to qualify, draft language directly demanding a restoration of the cessation of hostilities across the Blue Line, a move that some members interpreted as being motivated by wanting to avoid restricting Israel’s ability to fight against Hezbollah. Proposals from the US to reduce the length of UNIFIL’s mandate renewal from 12 to six months or, alternatively, linking a one-year renewal to expressing the Council’s intention to revisit UNIFIL’s mandate to “help enable the full implementation of any future diplomatic understanding between the parties” did not find support and were not included. Among other issues, several members were apparently uncomfortable with the Security Council linking UNIFIL’s mandate renewal to an agreement that is yet to materialise and the conditions and format to which they were not privy.

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## Women, Peace and Security

### Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council will hold its annual open debate on women, peace and security (WPS), which will be titled: “Women Building Peace in a Changing Environment”. UN Secretary-General António Guterres, UN Women Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous, and one or more civil society representatives are the anticipated briefers. The open debate will be chaired by the President of the Swiss Confederation, Viola Amherd, and is one of the signature events of Switzerland’s presidency.

It appears that Switzerland intends to focus the open debate on women’s participation in efforts to build and sustain peace—including as mediators and negotiators, and, more broadly, in peace processes—as a key part of the implementation of the WPS agenda.

### Key Recent Developments

The Secretary-General’s annual report on WPS—expected ahead of the open debate—will provide an update on the implementation of the agenda over the past year. This year’s report is expected to include a focus on financing for the WPS agenda, which is one of the “five goals for the decade” set out in the Secretary-General’s 2020 WPS annual report. In this context, it may document notable shortcomings in the provision of adequate and reliable funding for the implementation of the agenda.

The report is also likely to highlight the mounting pushback against women’s rights and gender equality in many parts of the world, and the privileging of military action and military spending over inclusive political processes to address conflict. Feminist and women’s rights organisations have highlighted similar concerns, with the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom criticising

Council members who express rhetorical support for the WPS agenda, human rights and the rule of law while “simultaneously contributing to violence and insecurity around the globe”, in its analysis of the 2023 WPS open debate.

Similarly, the 2024 NGO Working Group on WPS’ open letter to UN permanent representatives in advance of this year’s open debate warns that against a backdrop of record levels of armed conflict and assaults on international human rights and humanitarian law “[t]he WPS agenda’s vision of peace and equality has never been so important—or so under threat”. The letter urges the Security Council to undertake a series of actions, including committing to reform itself in order to deliver on the UN Charter’s promise of peace, and stopping arms transfers in several circumstances, including when weapons may be used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence, or when member states “have knowledge or should have known” that the arms may be used in the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes.

Council members retained WPS-related language in several resolutions and were at times able to strengthen it. For instance, resolution 2729, which in April renewed the mandate of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), contained a new reference calling upon parties to recognise the need to protect women human rights defenders from threats and reprisals. In June, the Council adopted resolution 2736 which, for the first time since the outbreak of the war in Sudan in April 2023, encouraged engagement by UN and regional actors to advance peace and an inclusive Sudanese-led political process with the “full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women”.

At other times, Council members struggled to include effective WPS language in Council outcomes. For instance, during the

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2242 (13 October 2015) expressed the Council’s intention to invite women civil society briefers to Council meetings. S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000) was the first Security Council resolution on WPS.

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## Women, Peace and Security

negotiations on resolution 2748, which renewed the mandate of the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) until 31 December, a proposal supported by several members to include a reference to women's participation and the need for a gender-responsive transition process in ATMIS' drawdown was opposed by China and Russia and not included in the final version of the resolution. Similarly, during the negotiations on resolution 2746, which authorised the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to provide operational and logistical support to the Southern African Development Community Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC), draft language was deleted at Russia's request that would have underlined the need to take into account a gender perspective in the implementation of all aspects of SAMIDRC's strategic concept of operations, "including by ensuring that gender analysis and women's participation are integrated into assessments, planning and operations". Instead, language was added indicating that MONUSCO's support to SAMIDRC in terms of technical advice and protection of civilians should include the protection of women and girls and the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).

Although resolution 2720 of December 2023 on the war in Gaza reaffirms the Council's concern at the "disproportionate effect that the conflict is having on the lives and well-being of children, women, and other civilians in vulnerable situations", the two following resolutions on the war (resolutions 2728 and 2735 of 2024) did not include any gender-related language except for a reference in resolution 2735 to "the release of hostages including women". A further example is resolution 2732, which renewed the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) for a final 19-month period until 31 December 2025. The resolution contained significantly less WPS language than the previous UNAMI mandate renewal in 2023 (resolution 2682), and included only some of the language on WPS proposed during the negotiations.

In recent months, women civil society representatives have briefed Council members on various situations on the Council's agenda, including Afghanistan, Yemen, and Sudan.

Since January, the Informal Experts Group (IEG) on WPS has met six times, with recent meetings focusing on Somalia, Libya, and Myanmar.

Council members Ecuador, France, Guyana, Japan, Malta, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland, the UK, and the US have given continuity to the Shared Commitments on WPS initiative, which was started in 2021 by Ireland, Kenya, and Mexico. It seems that these members held regular strategy meetings to coordinate their positions on key WPS issues. They have also held regular WPS-focused press stakeouts this year, most recently on Afghanistan and Libya. Some of these members have hosted informal briefings with women civil society representatives to draw members' attention to key WPS issues.

Engagement on some commitments remained uneven, however. It appears that commitment holders have yet to develop coordinated strategies to implement their pledge to draw attention to, and follow up on, "the recommendations and priority issues raised by civil society briefers in Council meetings".

Of the members that have signed on to the Shared Commitments

initiative, Malta, the ROK, Sierra Leone, and Slovenia encouraged Council members to focus on WPS issues in a mandated country-specific meeting during their presidencies in 2024; that is, the Great Lakes in March, Sudan in June, Libya in August, and Afghanistan in September, respectively. August's briefing on peace operation drawdowns and WPS, organised by Sierra Leone, marked the first time that a Security Council meeting focused specifically on challenges of accelerated drawdowns for the WPS agenda. In April, Malta focused the annual open debate on CRSV on demilitarisation and gender-responsive arms control, the first time that this annual open debate addressed this issue.

In July, Switzerland convened a two-day retreat with representatives of regional and Swiss women mediator networks in preparation for the annual open debate. According to a report summarising the key points raised during the retreat, participants stressed, among other issues, the need for gender-responsive conflict analysis, greater awareness of the risks and potential of digital technologies for peacemaking, and political and financial support for women-led peacebuilding and alliance-building. Participants also stressed the importance of establishing mechanisms linking processes along different tracks in order to counter challenges such as the fragmentation of the mediation space, the persistent hierarchy between different tracks, and the continued marginalisation of women at the track 1 level (that is, formal talks between the key political-military elites at the heart of conflicts).

That peace tables are based on "an increasingly narrow, issues-based, and piece-meal approach negotiated between 'a few men', and often focused exclusively on short-term fixes to ceasefire and security arrangements or humanitarian access" was identified as a further challenge and as a factor highlighting the need for "political processes designed for inclusivity, based on international norms and principles, and aspiring to achieve transformative peace".

### Key Issues and Options

The pivotal issue for the Security Council remains the full implementation of the WPS agenda and its impact on the ground.

A key issue for Council members supportive of the agenda is to preserve and strengthen WPS language in thematic and country-specific outcomes and to follow up on the implementation of these decisions. These members could continue to coordinate ahead of key Council negotiations and meetings and use the information from IEG meetings to address specific issues.

Council members could also ask UN briefers to provide substantive updates to the Council on specific WPS issues, such as women's participation in peace processes.

A recent Secretary-General's report on "Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights" says that five women civil society representatives reported reprisals in connection with their briefings to the Council in 2023. More recently, following a briefing by the Executive Director of the Israeli NGO B'Tselem, Yuli Novak, at the 4 September meeting on "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" a member of the Israeli parliament wrote to the Israel Police Commissioner demanding the opening of an investigation, claiming that through her briefing Novak had violated the Israeli



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## Women, Peace and Security

Penal Law provision on “aiding the enemy during war”, which is punishable by the death penalty or life imprisonment.

In line with resolution 2242 on WPS and the 1 December 2021 Statement of Shared Commitments on WPS, members should continue to invite diverse women civil society representatives to brief the Council regularly and follow up on their information and recommendations. It is essential that members and the UN take all possible measures to keep briefers safe, in consultation with the briever, including carrying out risk assessments, developing protection plans, and responding to any reprisals.

### Council Dynamics

Most Council members are generally supportive of the WPS agenda. However, Russia and China often oppose the inclusion of language

on WPS in Security Council products. This dynamic was recently highlighted by the negotiations on a press statement on Afghanistan which was critical of the release of “The Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice” on 21 August. The statement was blocked by China and Russia, but later issued as a joint statement by 12 Council members.

The prevalent assessment, including among several Council members and civil society actors, is that the dynamics on this file remain difficult and un conducive to the adoption of new WPS thematic outcomes, challenges exacerbated by the Council’s polarisation and ineffectiveness in the context of the wars in Gaza and Ukraine.

The UK is the penholder on WPS and the US is the penholder on CRSV. Sierra Leone and Switzerland are the co-chairs of the IEG on WPS. Malta is the coordinator of the Shared Commitments initiative.

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## UN-AU Cooperation

### Expected Council Action

In October, the Council is expected to hold a briefing on cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations, focusing on the African Union (AU). Special Representative to the AU and Head of the UN Office to the AU (UNOAU) Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations (DPPA-DPO) Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee and AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security Bankole Adeoye are the expected briefers.

### Key Recent Developments

The Secretary-General’s annual report on strengthening the partnership between the UN and the AU on issues of peace and security in Africa, including the work of UNOAU, serves as the basis for this meeting. The annual debate usually takes place under an African Security Council presidency. However, this year’s two African presidencies were in May and August, and the annual report was released in late August. Therefore, Switzerland will convene the debate to consider the report during its Security Council presidency in October.

The report describes the partnership between the UN and the AU in conflict prevention and peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace support operations, as well as peacebuilding and the rule of law. It describes the state of peace and security in Africa, including, among other things, the Sudanese crisis that has displaced more than two million people, the political impasse in Libya, the increasing tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia, the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the growing threat of terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel.

Additionally, the report provides updates on the implementation of resolution 2719 of 21 December 2023 on financing AU-led peace support operations. The UN and the AU have been consulting on

the resolution’s implementation through their joint task team. The team is organised along four workstreams: joint planning, decision-making and reporting; mission support; financing and budgeting; and compliance and protection of civilians. The joint task team had in-person meetings in Addis Ababa, the home of the AU’s headquarters, in May and in New York in July to elaborate a joint AU-UN roadmap on implementing resolution 2719 and its planning modalities, which will be submitted to the UN Secretary-General and the AU Commission Chairperson for adoption during their next UN-AU annual high-level conference scheduled to take place in October in Addis Ababa.

During the Swiss Presidency in October, the 18th annual joint consultative meeting of the Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) will also be held. The annual meeting rotates between New York and Addis Ababa; this year’s meeting will be held in New York on 18 October. The agenda items include the situation in Sudan; the situation in Somalia and security arrangements after the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) ends; the situation in the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin, including countering the threat of terrorism; and the situations in the Central African Republic, eastern DRC, and the Great Lakes region.

This meeting is expected to be preceded on 16 and 17 October by the ninth informal joint seminar of the Security Council and the AUPSC. The Swiss Presidency has proposed holding this seminar, for the first time, in a retreat format, in Tarrytown, New York. The two Councils aim to exchange views on several thematic issues during the retreat, including the implementation of resolution 2719; Youth, Women, Peace and Security; Children and Armed Conflict; the adverse effects of climate change; and implementing the joint working methods of the two Councils.

Over the last couple of years, the AU Committee of Experts has visited New York before the annual consultations to meet with Security Council counterparts and negotiate the draft outcome

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UN AND THE AU** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2719 (21 December 2023) was on the financing of AUPSOs. S/RES/2457 (27 February 2019) was on silencing the guns in Africa. S/RES/2378 (20 September 2017) was on UN peacekeeping reform. S/RES/2320 (18 November 2016) was on cooperation between the UN and regional and sub-regional organisations in the maintenance of international peace and security. Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2024/2 (23 May 2024) was on the maintenance of international peace and security. Secretary-General’s Report S/2024/629 (26 August 2024) was on strengthening the partnership between the UN and the AU on issues of peace and security in Africa, including the work of the UNOAU. Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9435 (12 October 2023) was a meeting on the cooperation between the UN and regional and subregional organisations in maintaining international peace and security.

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## UN-AU Cooperation

document. Last year, for the first time, Security Council experts travelled to Addis Ababa on 3-4 October in preparation for the 17th annual consultations and met with their AUPSC counterparts. This year, AUPSC experts are expected to arrive in New York on 13 October before the 18th annual consultations to meet with their Security Council counterparts and finalise the joint communiqué to be adopted at the end of the meeting. At the time of writing, Council members had already started negotiating the draft, which they are expected to generate as the meeting's host this year.

### Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members will be how to address the most pressing peace and security situations in Africa. Aside from specific conflicts, several thematic issues—including the growing threat of terrorism and violent extremism, the resurgence of coups, the increasing role of mercenaries on the continent, and the worsening humanitarian situation with massive human displacement due to ongoing conflicts—may draw the attention of Council members.

Council members could consider initiating discussions with their AUPSC counterparts on the modalities for joint visiting missions to conflict situations in Africa. The two Councils had agreed in principle to conduct such missions during their joint annual consultations in 2018. The “A3 plus one” grouping (currently Algeria, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Guyana)—particularly Mozambique as chair of the Security Council Ad-Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa—could take the lead in facilitating this discussion between the two Councils.

Another major issue is how to address the long-standing request for the financing of AU-led peace support operations (AUPSOs) from UN-assessed contributions. Council members are keen to receive updates from the UN Secretariat on implementing resolution 2719 before the annual consultations in line with a 23 May presidential statement.

### Council Dynamics

Council members are generally supportive of the cooperation and

partnership between the UN and the AU on peace and security, and the role of the A3 has been vital in this regard. In recent years, the A3 (and A3+) has enhanced its position in the Council through joint statements and coordination in negotiations on various Council products with a particular focus on Africa. It has also emerged as a cohesive negotiating bloc, significantly enhancing its influence within the Council. It is currently exploring the possibility of ensuring penholding or co-penholding on all African dossiers and dossiers of interest to Africa on the Council's agenda.

Regarding the implementation of resolution 2719, some Council members appear to have reservations about possible cases that could be considered for support under this resolution. Some members have discussed Somalia as an option, although the US—the largest contributor of assessed contributions to UN peacekeeping operations—has expressed reservations. In the context of discussions on the new follow-on mission to replace ATMIS, resolution 2748 of 15 August, which most recently renewed the mission's mandate, requested the Secretary-General, in collaboration with the AU Commission Chairperson and in consultation with Somalia and international stakeholders, to submit a report by 15 November outlining the overall mission design for the proposed successor mission and options for financing, including but not limited to resolution 2719.

In its explanation of vote during the adoption of resolution 2748, the US said that “resolution 2719 can only be realistically implemented after instituting an interim bridging approach over the course of the next two years, and provided that AU is ready to implement it”. The US added that it aims to avoid prematurely authorising resolution 2719 for Somalia without the required budgetary, accountability, and human rights frameworks.

It seems that preliminary discussions have started behind the scenes on a possible mission in Sudan, exploring various options from a lighter-footprint mission with military observers to a full-fledged AUPSO. However, this possibility currently appears remote, given the lack of progress in the ongoing Sudanese mediation process and the need for a ceasefire or a cessation of hostilities agreement as necessary preconditions for the deployment of any mission on the ground.

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## Somalia

### Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council will hold a briefing, followed by consultations, to discuss the situation in Somalia. In addition, the Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSAM), which expires on 31 October.

In accordance with resolution 2748 of 15 August, which reauthorised the African Union (AU) Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) until 31 December, the Secretary-General is expected to provide a comprehensive update by 11 October on the overall mission design and financing options for the proposed successor mission to ATMIS. The Security Council is expected to hold a private meeting to discuss this update with the AU and Somalia, with the participation of the UN Secretariat.

The Chair of the 2713 Al-Shabaab Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Kazuyuki Yamazaki (Japan), is also expected to brief on the work of the committee.

### Key Recent Developments

In a letter circulated to Council members on 3 September, the Secretary-General provided an update on the engagements between the UN and the Somali government on the modalities and timeline for UNSAM's transition to the UN Country Team (UNCT), in line with the Council's request in a 16 May letter. A joint technical committee comprising senior officials from Somalia's federal government and the UN has been established to outline the planning process for the transition, and has discussed, among other issues, joint programming

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2748** (15 August 2024) reauthorised ATMIS until 31 December 2024. **S/RES/2719** (21 December 2023) was a resolution on the financing of AUPSOs. **S/RES/2705** (31 October 2023) extended the mandate of UNSAM for one year.

# Somalia

between UNSOM and the UNCT, possible implications of UNSOM's transition for the financing of UN activities in the country, and the importance of resource mobilisation efforts. (For background, see the brief on Somalia in our June 2024 *Monthly Forecast*.)

The letter further shared a proposal from Somalia which envisions a two-year phased handover of responsibilities from UNSOM to Somali institutions and the UNCT, commencing in November. The proposal called for restructuring UNSOM's mandate with a limited scope that will include supporting state-building efforts, such as through inclusive constitutional review and electoral processes. It suggested a mid-term review for the mission after one year to make necessary adjustments and for the periodic Security Council briefings on Somalia to be reduced to an annual closed session.

On 15 August, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2748, which requested the Secretary-General, jointly with the Chairperson of the AU Commission (the organisation's secretariat) and in consultation with Somalia and international stakeholders, to submit a report on the overall mission design for the proposed successor mission by 15 November. It also requested that the report include an estimate of the required resources and costs for the follow-on mission and articulate a range of options for financing it, including support by international partners, the framework established by resolution 2719 of 21 December 2023 on the financing of AU-led peace support operations (AUPSOs), other suitable alternatives, or some combination of these options. (For background and more information, see the brief on Somalia in our August 2024 *Monthly Forecast* and 15 August *What's in Blue* story.)

Tensions continued between Ethiopia and Somalia, which were sparked by the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Ethiopia and Somaliland, a self-proclaimed republic in northern Somalia, on 1 January. The MoU reportedly allows Ethiopia, which is a landlocked country, to obtain access to the Gulf of Aden in exchange for formal recognition of Somaliland. In light of this agreement, several Somali officials have expressed the view that Ethiopia should withdraw its troops deployed in Somalia by the end of December, when ATMIS is set to complete its drawdown and exit. This position has led to disagreements, however, between Somalia's federal government and some federal member states, which have opposed this view underscoring the vital role that the Ethiopian forces play in maintaining security within their respective territories.

Türkiye mediated between Somalia and Ethiopia by hosting two rounds of discussions with the foreign ministers of both countries in Ankara. The talks, however, have yet to achieve a breakthrough. The third round of discussions, formerly expected to be held on 17 September, has been postponed indefinitely. (For background, see the brief on Somalia in our August 2024 *Monthly Forecast* and 28 January and 22 June *What's in Blue* stories.)

Amidst these developments, Somalia has sought closer ties with Egypt, which has offered to "contribute to the elements" of the follow-on mission to ATMIS, as welcomed by the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) in its 1 August communiqué. On 14 August, both countries signed a defence cooperation agreement, following talks between Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in Cairo; the details of the agreement have not been made public. In an 11 September interview

with Al Jazeera, Somali Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ali Omar confirmed that Somalia has received supplies of weapons and ammunition from Egypt. He indicated that Egyptian forces could be deployed in Somalia "shortly" to train Somali national forces.

Relations between Egypt and Ethiopia have been strained over the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The project heightened tensions stemming from concerns over its potential impact on the flow of the Nile River, a vital resource for both nations. (For background and more information, see the *In Hindsight* in our October 2021 *Monthly Forecast*, titled "The GERD and Water Security" and 15 September 2021 *What's in Blue* story.)

Meanwhile, Somalia and Ethiopia have continued to exchange hostile rhetoric. In a 28 August press statement, Ethiopia's foreign ministry described the ATMIS transition as "fraught with dangers to the region". The statement accused Somalia of "colluding with external actors aiming to destabilize the region" and called for the "legitimate concerns" of the troop-contributing countries to be taken into account while planning the follow-mission to ATMIS. On the other hand, media reports quoted Somali Foreign Minister Ahmed Moalim Fiqi as saying during an interview that Somalia could resort to establishing "contacts with armed rebels" in Ethiopia who are fighting against the government if Ethiopia attempted to implement the MoU it signed with Somaliland. He added, however, that the situation had not reached that stage, indicating that "there is a hope there will be a solution".

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 9 August, the independent expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia, Isha Dyfan, strongly condemned the 2 August attack at Lido Beach in Mogadishu carried out by Al-Shabaab, a terrorist group affiliated with Al-Qaida. The attack resulted in the deaths of 37 civilians and injured more than 210 others. Dyfan remarked that, "[t]his attack is unacceptable, and more so because the deliberate targeting of civilians is contrary to humanitarian principles and constitutes a serious breach of international law that protects civilians in times of armed conflict". She urged the Somali government to identify those responsible and ensure they are held accountable.

On 4 October, Dyfan is expected to present her report on Somalia's human rights situation to the UN Human Rights Council. Dyfan conducted two official visits to the country, the first from 6 to 19 November 2023 and the second from 5 to 11 May.

## Key Issues and Options

One of the key issues for Council members in October is the future of UNSOM, whose mandate expires on 31 October. In renewing the mandate, Council members are likely to be guided by the outcome of the joint technical committee and Somalia's proposal for UNSOM's transition to UNCT and the phased handover of responsibilities to Somali institutions.

A related issue is how to continue supporting the Somali government in achieving its national priorities, including the constitutional review and electoral processes. Some members might also raise the issue of maintaining regular reporting to the Security Council on the situation in Somalia. Additionally, addressing the increasing tension between the federal government and some federal member states is a matter of concern for several Council members.

The other important issue for members is the escalating tension between Ethiopia and Somalia, which may undermine regional

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## Somalia

peace and security, including Somalia's ongoing offensive operations against Al-Shabaab, and ATMIS' transition process. One option for Council members would be to issue a press statement encouraging the parties to exercise restraint and make efforts towards de-escalating tensions and support initiatives in this regard.

### Council Dynamics

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

Although Council members seem to agree on continuing security support for Somalia post-ATMIS, views differ on how such efforts should be financed. Somalia, an incoming elected Council member for the 2025-26 term, and several members have suggested financing the follow-on mission in accordance with resolution 2719. However, other Council members, such as the US, are apparently not keen

to consider the mission in Somalia under resolution 2719. In its explanation of vote following the adoption of resolution 2748, the US said that "resolution 2719 can only be realistically implemented after instituting an interim bridging approach over the course of the next two years, and provided that AU is ready to implement it". During the negotiations, some members argued that such a bridging mechanism could imply additional obligations for financial contributors to ATMIS. The European Union, a major financial contributor to ATMIS, advocates a sustainable financing model based on diversified contributions and a significant element of cost-sharing, including the possible use of the AU Peace Fund and Crisis Reserve Facility. (For background and more information, see the brief on Somalia in the August 2024 *Monthly Forecast*, and 9 and 15 August *What's in Blue* stories, and listen to our 8 July podcast episode.)

Council members remain concerned about the escalating tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia. In its remarks during the 24 June Council meeting, the US stressed the need to ensure that "regional tensions [do] not interfere with planning for and the deployment of a post-ATMIS mission". It also alluded to security and financial risks associated with any changes in troop contributors. (For background, see the 22 June and 18 February *What's in Blue* stories.)

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## UNDOF (Golan)

### Expected Council Action

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

The mandate of UNDOF expires on 31 December 2024.

### 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.

The Secretary General's 4 March UNDOF report, covering the period from 21 February to 20 May, observed that several violations of the 1974 agreement had continued, although the ceasefire between Israel and Syria in the Golan had generally held. Violations during this period included the presence of Syrian forces in the area of separation, and the "continued presence of unauthorized weapons and equipment in the areas of limitation on both the Alpha [Israeli] and Bravo [Syrian] sides, as well as the flying of aircraft and drones

across the ceasefire line and over the area of separation".

### Key Issues and Options

One key issue is the challenges that the mission faces in carrying out its mandate, such as the restrictions on the movement and access of UNDOF personnel.

Another key issue is whether unrest in the wider region will affect the situation in the Golan. Media reports from late September claim that some 40,000 mercenaries and militia fighters from Iraq, Syria, and Yemen have gathered in Syria near the Golan and could be deployed by Hezbollah against Israel. Council members may be interested in receiving more information about these reports during the October consultations.

Another issue for Council members is the ongoing violations of the 1974 agreement. Members may consider pursuing a presidential statement urging parties to adhere to their commitments under the agreement while expressing concern about the risk of escalation resulting from these violations and the potential danger they pose to the safety and security of peacekeepers.

### Council Dynamics

The unanimous adoption of resolution 2737 of 27 June, which reauthorised UNDOF's mandate for six months, illustrated that the Council remains united in its view that UNDOF plays an important role in regional stability. Despite deep divisions in the Council regarding the Syria file and opposing positions by the UNDOF

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## UNDOF (Golan)

co-penholders—Russia and the US—about who holds sovereignty over the Golan, as well as antagonism over other files such as 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 June 2024, 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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## Great Lakes Region (DRC)

### Expected Council Action

In October, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, Huang Xia, is expected to provide the biannual briefing to the Council on the implementation of the 2013 Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework (PSC-F) for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Great Lakes region.

### Key Recent Developments

Since the Council's last meeting on the Great Lakes region, the security situation in eastern DRC has remained volatile despite the 30 July signing of a ceasefire between the DRC and Rwanda in Luanda with Angola's facilitation. The agreement calls for the ceasefire, which took effect on 4 August, to be monitored by the Ad-Hoc Verification Mechanism established as part of the Luanda process—a regional initiative under the leadership of Angola's President João Lourenço to ease tensions between the DRC and Rwanda.

One week after the ceasefire entered into force, Lourenço met Rwanda's President Paul Kagame in Kigali on 11 August during the inauguration ceremony following Kagame's re-election. He then travelled to Kinshasa on 12 August to meet with DRC President Félix Tshisekedi. During his discussions with the two leaders, Lourenço reportedly followed up on the ceasefire's implementation and made further proposals to find a lasting solution to the long-standing conflict in eastern DRC. Subsequently, the foreign ministers of the DRC and Rwanda met twice, first from 20 to 21 August and then on 14 September, to discuss Lourenço's proposal. Between these two meetings, senior intelligence officials from DRC, Rwanda and Angola also reportedly met from 29-30 August in Rubavu, Rwanda, to discuss the details of Angola's proposal.

The Security Council welcomed the ceasefire agreement in resolution 2746 of 6 August. The resolution authorised the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to provide operational and logistical support to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC), which has operated in the eastern DRC since December 2023. On 17 August, SADC held its ordinary summit in Harare, Zimbabwe, and commended Angola for its role as a mediator.

Nevertheless, clashes between the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) and the armed militia *Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23)* rebel group continue to be reported in North Kivu, the epicentre of the conflict. The FARDC is supported by various armed militias known locally as Wazalendo (patriots) and SAMIDRC. Reports indicate that the M23 has expanded its control of several areas, besieging

Goma, the capital of North Kivu.

The East African Community (EAC) has also been engaged in a regional peace initiative (the Nairobi process) to address the situation in the eastern DRC. However, the Nairobi process has been stuck for some time. The EAC foreign ministers held a retreat in Zanzibar, Tanzania, from 6 to 8 July and recommended convening an EAC summit to revitalise the Nairobi process in coordination with the Luanda process. The ministers also reviewed interstate relations within the community, noting the rising tensions among its members and their negative effects on the EAC integration agenda.

During the retreat, the foreign ministers of DRC and Rwanda, which have been in a diplomatic stand-off because of the situation in eastern DRC, agreed to meet within the framework of the Luanda process, as they have now done several times. The foreign ministers of Burundi and Rwanda also agreed to meet on 31 October to address outstanding issues in their bilateral relations. Relations between the two countries have been especially strained since Burundi decided in January to close its border with Rwanda, accusing it of supporting Burundian armed groups—an allegation Rwanda has denied.

The Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes has been working on non-military measures to address the security situation in the eastern DRC, including through the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants. In this regard, a Contact and Coordination Group (CCG) was established in May 2021 composed of representatives from Burundi, DRC, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. In August, the Office of the Special Envoy, together with the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund, launched the DDR working group of the CCG to promote regional cooperation on DDR.

### Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members in October is the security and humanitarian situations in eastern DRC, which continues to be a source of tension among countries of the Great Lakes region. They are likely to reiterate their support for the ongoing regional initiatives under the Luanda and Nairobi processes to find a lasting solution to the situation. They may also be keen to hear from Xia on his diplomatic engagement with countries of the region in support of these efforts. A possible option is for Council members to adopt a press statement welcoming the progress in the Luanda process under Angola's auspices and urging the parties to stay engaged in efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace agreement.

The need to ensure coordination among the various regional

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## Great Lakes Region (DRC)

initiatives in the Great Lakes region has been a major issue for Council members. They could be keen to receive updates on the ongoing efforts under the quadripartite process initiated by the African Union (AU) at a summit in June 2023 and involving the EAC, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and SADC. In its 4 March communiqué, the AU Peace and Security Council requested the AU Commission to convene a second quadripartite summit to follow up on the implementation of commitments made during the first summit. At the time of writing, there was no indication when the second summit would take place.

Another important issue is the discussion about the revitalisation of the 2013 PSC-F to address the root causes of instability in the DRC and the Great Lakes region. Council members may wish to follow up on the decisions of the 11th meeting of the Regional Oversight Mechanism (ROM) of the PSC-F in Bujumbura in May 2023 and learn more about preparations for the upcoming ROM meeting in Uganda, which is planned for late 2024, although no date has been set.

Support for regional forces deployed in eastern DRC has been an ongoing issue. The Security Council requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of resolution 2746 and for SAMIDRC to report on its activities, including coordination with MONUSCO, by 15 November.

### Council Dynamics

Council members are broadly supportive of addressing the root causes and drivers of conflict in the Great Lakes region. They believe

the principles and commitments enshrined in the PSC-F remain relevant and should be respected by the signatory countries. They also support the goal of reinvigorating the PSC-F. Council members agree that there is no military solution to the situation in the eastern DRC and remain fully supportive of the efforts to find a political solution through the ongoing regional initiatives under the Luanda and Nairobi processes. They may welcome the role being played by Lourenço in facilitating talks involving the DRC and Rwanda to ease the tensions between the two countries.

Council members are concerned about the worsening humanitarian and human rights situation in the Great Lakes region, including the massive displacement of people due to the ongoing fighting and violations such as sexual exploitation and abuse in eastern DRC. Some members continue to call for full adherence to international humanitarian law and international human rights law and to stress the need to ensure accountability and justice for human rights abuses and crimes committed in eastern DRC.

The increasing level of hate speech and incitement to violence against Kinyarwanda communities in eastern DRC has raised significant concerns among some Council members.

Council members also continue to highlight the need to address the illegal exploitation of natural resources, which is fuelling the conflict in eastern DRC. They support the implementation of the UN Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention, and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region developed by the Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes. One of the key priorities of the strategy is to promote not only sustainable and transparent management of natural resources but also trade and investment.

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## Libya

### Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), which expires on 31 October.

Additionally, the Council will hold its bimonthly briefing on the situation in Libya. Deputy Special Representative and Political Officer in Charge of UNSMIL Stephanie Koury will brief the Council on recent political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country. The chair of the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Kazuyuki Yamazaki (Japan), is also expected to brief on the committee's activities.

### Key Recent Developments

The political impasse in Libya continues between the UN-recognised Government of National Unity (GNU), based in Tripoli and led by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Mohammed Dbeibah with advisory support from the High State Council (HSC), and the eastern-based Government of National Stability (GNS), led by Prime Minister Osama Hamad and backed by the House of Representatives (HoR) and the self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) under

the command of General Khalifa Haftar. According to the Secretary-General's most recent report on UNSMIL, dated 8 August and covering events since 9 April, the parties have not achieved any progress in resolving disagreements about proposed electoral legislation that would allow national elections to be held and reconcile the country's divided government. The main point of contention concerns the formation of a unified interim government to organise the elections, a move favoured by the GNS and HoR but opposed by the GNU and some segments of the HSC.

The long-running stand-off between the rival governments intensified on 13 August when the HoR voted to end the GNU's term and designate the GNS as the country's "legitimate government" until a unified interim government is appointed. The HoR also named its speaker, Aguila Saleh, the commander-in-chief of Libya's armed forces in a move that would supplant the Presidential Council, which was established under the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement to serve as the country's head of state and as "supreme commander" of its military. In a 14 August statement, UNSMIL noted that it was following with concern the recent "unilateral acts" by Libyan political actors, which it said "undermine trust and further entrench

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA** Security Council Resolution S/RES/2702 (30 October 2023) extended UNSMIL's mandate until 31 October 2024. **Secretary-General's Report S/2024/598** (8 August 2024) was the 120-day report on UNSMIL. **Security Council Press Statement SC/15804** (28 August 2024) expressed concern about recent developments in Libya and called on Libyan actors to refrain from any unilateral actions that increase tensions, undermine trust, and further entrench institutional divisions and discord in the country.

# Libya

institutional divisions and discord”.

Tensions escalated further on 18 August when Presidential Council leader Mohamed Yunus al-Menfi—who is considered a political ally of Dbeibah—issued a decree firing Central Bank of Libya (CBL) Governor Sadiq al-Kabir, who had led the bank since 2011. The CBL is the country’s sole depository for public revenues and is one of the few state institutions servicing both governments. Until recently, al-Kabir was also considered an ally of Dbeibah, but their relationship seems to have soured over the past year as al-Kabir appeared to become more amenable to public spending by eastern authorities, culminating in the HoR’s unilateral approval on 10 July of a supplemental \$18.3 billion budget for the GNS, which would be drawn from the CBL. The validity of the Presidential Council’s firing of al-Kabir was called into question, with eastern authorities as well as some analysts saying that it lacks legal basis.

The Presidential Council appointed one of al-Kabir’s former deputy governors, Abdel Fattah Ghaffar, as his successor on an interim basis. While Ghaffar gained control of Libya’s domestic currency transfers, the CBL under his leadership reportedly lost access to foreign reserves and balances held in international financial institutions, which were assessing the CBL’s legal standing. Additionally, in response to al-Kabir’s ouster, the GNS ordered the closure of oil fields and terminals under its control, reportedly causing the country’s oil exports—the largest source of state revenue—to fall by over 80 percent.

UNSMIL facilitated several rounds of talks involving the Presidential Council, HoR, and HSC to resolve the CBL crisis. On 25 September, the mission announced that the parties had reached an agreement on the “procedures, criteria, and timelines” for appointing new CBL leadership by consensus. According to the deal—which was signed the following day on UNSMIL’s premises—the parties agreed to nominate CBL Director of Banking and Monetary Control Naji Mohamed Issa Belqasem as new interim governor, while CBL Deputy Governor Mari Muftah Rahil Barrasi would be nominated to continue in his position. The HoR and HSC were given one week to approve the nominees, after which Belqasem would be given two weeks to nominate a new board of governors.

Regarding Libya’s security situation, the 2020 ceasefire agreement continues to hold, although the heightened political tensions have raised concern about the risk of violent confrontation. Most recently, following al-Kabir’s ouster, rival militias in Tripoli mobilised in support of both sides of the dispute, prompting UNSMIL to issue a 22 August press statement expressing grave concern about threats of the use of force to resolve the crisis. The statement called for immediate de-escalation and restraint, emphasising that “dialogue is the only solution to all issues”.

On the humanitarian front, September marked the one-year anniversary of Storm Daniel, which struck the eastern city of Derna and surrounding areas on 10 September 2023, leading to catastrophic flooding that killed nearly 6,000 people, displaced over 44,000, and left approximately 250,000 in need of humanitarian assistance. Reconstruction efforts have achieved considerable progress in the year since, but a 10 September joint statement by a group of international aid agencies warned that humanitarian needs in the area “remain alarmingly high”. Additionally, political corruption and competition pertaining to the use of reconstruction funds have

reportedly been one factor fuelling the increased tensions between western and eastern authorities.

In a 28 August press statement, Security Council members expressed concern about recent developments in the country. The statement called on Libyan leaders to de-escalate tensions, refrain from the use of force or economic pressure, and reach a consensus-based solution to the CBL crisis, while avoiding actions that could jeopardise the 2020 ceasefire agreement and the country’s “fragile stability”. The statement also emphasised the need for the Secretary-General to appoint a new Special Representative for Libya “as soon as possible”, as Special Representative and Head of UNSMIL Abdoulaye Bathily resigned in May.

Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo visited Libya from 8 to 11 September. During her trip, DiCarlo met with key Libyan political leaders, including Dbeibah, Menfi, and Saleh, with whom she raised concerns about the country’s deteriorating political and security situation, stressing the need to resolve the CBL crisis, advance a rights-based national reconciliation process, and hold credible and inclusive elections to break the country’s political deadlock.

Through resolution 2240 of 9 October 2015 and subsequent annual renewals, the Council has authorised member states, acting nationally or through regional organisations, to inspect and seize vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya that they had reasonable grounds to suspect were being used for migrant smuggling or human trafficking from Libya. The Council had initially been expected to renew the authorisation again in September, but it appears that France and Malta—the co-penholders on the authorisation—informed Council members that they had decided not to pursue a further renewal and would allow the authorisation to expire at the end of its current mandate on 29 September.

On 30 September, at Russia’s request, the Council held an open briefing on the situation of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean Sea. The Council was briefed by Sivanka Dhanapala, Director of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Liaison Office in New York, and Pär Liljert, Director of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Office to the UN in New York.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

In a report published on 30 August, UNSMIL and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) warn that the lack of accountability and years of impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses committed in the Libyan city of Tarhuna between 2013 and 2022 risk fuelling more instability and further division in the country.

The report details how Al-Kaniyat, a militia group that has been affiliated with both eastern and western authorities, came to exercise effective control of Tarhuna, a city of approximately 150,000 people located 90 kilometres southeast of Tripoli. It documents serious violations of international humanitarian law and gross violations and abuses of international human rights law committed by the group, including unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, forced displacement, and looting. The report emphasises the need for a comprehensive transitional justice and reconciliation process, with meaningful truth-seeking measures and effective reparations for victims – including legal aid and mental health support and guarantees of non-repetition – designed in consultation with those directly affected.

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# Libya

## Women, Peace and Security

As the Council's president for August, Sierra Leone elected to include a focus on women, peace and security (WPS) at the 20 August Council briefing on Libya. Several participants addressed WPS issues during the meeting. In her briefing, Koury noted that women comprise only 30 percent of registered voters in Libya's local elections, which are expected to take place in mid-October across 60 municipalities. She expressed concern that women's participation as candidates may also be low, with obstacles such as "intimidation, online violence and verbal attacks" discouraging them from running for office. Ecuador, Malta, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Slovenia, and Switzerland emphasised the importance of guaranteeing women's participation in political processes in Libya. Guyana, delivering a statement on behalf of the "A3 plus one" members (Algeria, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Guyana), condemned "threats, attacks and the killing of women who are participating in public life, including women human rights defenders" (WHRDs) and urged UNSMIL to prioritise "all activities related to the protection and promotion of human rights, including stronger coordination" in cases of reprisals against WHRDs. Malta also called for lifting any restrictions against women's freedom of movement and right to work while Switzerland highlighted the dire situation faced by women among Sudanese refugees in southern Libya, citing reports of human trafficking, exploitation and sexual violence.

## Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Council in October is the renewal of UNSMIL's mandate. As was the case for the current mandate in resolution 2702 of 30 October 2023, the Council is likely to retain the mission's core tasks as set out in resolution 2542 of 15 September 2020 and paragraph 16 of resolution 2570 of 16 April 2021. Council members may consider updating the mandate, however, to reflect the country's increasingly volatile political and security contexts,

drawing on agreed language from their 28 August press statement.

Additionally, while the Council is not expected to make major substantive changes to the mission's mandate, one point of uncertainty concerns the length of the renewal. While most members are expected to favour a regular one-year extension, some may call for a shorter technical rollover until the Secretary-General has appointed a new Special Representative to lead the mission.

## Council Dynamics

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

The upcoming renewal of UNSMIL's mandate in the absence of a Special Representative may rekindle older disagreements, however. When former Special Envoy Ján Kubiš resigned in November 2021, it took nearly a year to identify a successor, eventually leading to Bathily's appointment in September 2022. (Resolution 2629 of 29 April 2022 changed UNSMIL's leadership position from a Special Envoy to a Special Representative.) During this impasse, between September 2021 and July 2022, the Council renewed UNSMIL's mandate five times through short-term extensions, in part because Russia opposed a regular one-year renewal in the absence of appointed mission leadership. Similar dynamics may shape negotiations over this year's renewal.

The UK is the penholder on Libya.

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# Yemen

## Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council is expected to hold its monthly briefing and consultations on Yemen.

The mandate of the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) expires on 14 July 2025. The 2140 Yemen sanctions regime, which comprises assets freeze and travel ban measures, expires on 15 November, while the mandate of the Yemen Panel of Experts expires on 15 December. (The targeted arms embargo established through resolution 2216 of 14 April 2015 is open-ended.)

## Key Recent Developments

The political process in Yemen remains frozen amid regional fallout from the Israel-Hamas war. At the Council's latest briefing on Yemen, held on 12 September, UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg emphasised that the regional escalation continues to complicate his efforts to promote a sustainable resolution of the conflict in the country.

In recent months, the Houthi rebel group has continued carrying out attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea. The Houthis have threatened to continue these assaults until Israel ends its military campaign in Gaza, that followed the 7 October 2023 Hamas-led attacks against Israel. A 21 August Houthi-claimed attack in the Red Sea set ablaze the Greek-flagged crude oil tanker *MV Sounion*,

which was carrying 150,000 tonnes of crude oil, raising concerns about a potential environmental catastrophe. On 16 September, the EU naval mission EUNAVFOR ASPIDES announced that the *MV Sounion* has been towed to safety without any oil spill.

In a recent sign of the escalation of direct conflict between the Houthis and Israel, the rebel group claimed responsibility for a missile attack targeting central Israel on 15 September. The strike, which did not result in any reported casualties, marked the second time that a Houthi airborne assault reached central Israel, after a 19 July drone attack by the group on the city of Tel Aviv killed one civilian. A Houthi spokesperson claimed that the group used a "new hypersonic ballistic missile" and threatened more "strikes and specific operations" against Israel as the anniversary of the 7 October 2023 attacks approaches. Israeli officials told media outlets that the projectile was not a hypersonic missile and American officials reportedly said that the weapon did not represent a new military capability for the Houthis.

Following the attack, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that Israel "exact[s] a heavy price" for any attempt to harm it, while referencing the 20 July retaliatory strikes carried out by Israel in and around the Hodeidah Port in Yemen after the 19 July drone attack. In a 19 September letter to the Security Council, Israel denounced the 15 September attack, called on the Council to

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UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9723 (12 September 2024) was the latest monthly Council meeting on Yemen.



# Yemen

condemn the Houthis' destabilising activities, and accused Iran of providing the Houthis with weapons in contravention of the arms embargo imposed on the group.

On 27 and 28 September, the Houthis launched two separate ballistic missile attacks against Israel, which were intercepted by Israel's air defence systems. These attacks took place against the backdrop of an escalation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, which included the 27 September assassination of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in an Israeli airstrike. The Houthis threatened that "[t]hese operations will not stop until the aggression on Gaza and Lebanon stops". On 29 September, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced that they had carried out retaliatory attacks against Houthi targets in Hodeidah and Ras Isa, including power stations and a seaport. The strikes killed at least four people and injured 29 others, according to the Houthis.

Meanwhile, Yemen continues to suffer from overlapping humanitarian crises, including the effects of severe flooding that occurred in August and September, the spread of cholera, and growing food insecurity. A 10 September report prepared by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Yemeni non-governmental organisation (NGO) Building Foundation for Development argued that the heavy rainfalls that triggered widespread flooding in Yemen are not a "seasonal anomaly", but rather "a clear indicator of a rapidly worsening climate crisis". It urged international donors to increase funding and capacity-building assistance for climate resilience efforts in the country.

Relief efforts in the country continue to face multiple challenges, including shrinking space for humanitarian action and funding shortfalls. The Houthis continue to detain 13 Yemeni national staff employed by several UN agencies and offices and more than 50 NGO and civil society staff arrested by the rebel group in early June. In an 18 September statement marking 100 days since the arrests, regional directors from six UN agencies and three NGOs called for the immediate and unconditional release of all detained personnel. The statement emphasised that "[a]ttacks on humanitarian workers, including detentions and false accusations, violate international law, endanger safety, and severely hinder the support" that they provide to the Yemeni people.

At the 12 September Council meeting, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya noted that humanitarian partners reported 572 access incidents across Yemen in the first seven months of 2024. She said that the Houthis' new cabinet, which was formed in August, has provided assurances that it would work with the UN and humanitarian partners to address access constraints. Msuya also reported that the UN has undertaken a programme prioritisation exercise with the aim of minimising the exposure of staff to risk in Houthi-controlled areas. As a result, the UN decided to provide a narrower response focused on essential life-saving and life-sustaining activities, deprioritising broader activities such as capacity-building. Msuya expressed hope that the UN could resume its broader programmes once "minimum requirements are met" for the safety and security of UN personnel and other humanitarian workers.

## Women, Peace and Security

At the 12 September Council meeting, Linda Al Obahi, Senior Political Affairs

and Mediation Advisor representing the Peace Track Initiative (PTI) and the Women Solidarity Network, briefed on the deteriorating situation of women's rights in Yemen. She said that the imposition of a male guardian, dress codes, and restrictions on freedom of expression, especially in Houthi-controlled areas, impede women's ability to work, including in the humanitarian sector; to access healthcare and education, and to participate in public life. Al Obahi stated that Yemeni women human rights defenders and peacebuilders have frequently faced public defamation, online violence, and threats to their safety. Additionally, she expressed concern about the fact that, for the first time in 24 years, there are no women in government positions in Yemen, and that "women are completely absent from peace process negotiation committees, including those under UN auspices". Al Obahi stressed the importance of guaranteeing "the meaningful participation of women, youth, minorities, people with disabilities, marginalised groups, victims and survivors of rights abuses, human rights defenders and civil society" in all negotiation processes.

Citing reports from UN experts and Yemeni women's organisations, Al Obahi highlighted cases of arbitrary detention as well as torture, rape, forced confessions, mutilation, and forced abortion endured by women in detention. She also stressed that the recent arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances by the Houthis of UN, international, and national NGOs is "unprecedented" and appear to be "part of a broader strategy" to suppress the civic and political space in Houthi-controlled areas, create fear, and "threaten humanitarian operations in Yemen". Al Obahi urged the international community to set clear red lines on actions regarding aid distribution and engagement with civil society, consistently demand respect for international human rights and humanitarian law, and hold the Houthis accountable for their actions.

## Key Issues and Options

Insulating Yemen from destabilising regional tensions and reinvigorating the stalled intra-Yemeni political process are key priorities for the Council. Members are likely to continue to call on Yemeni parties to exercise restraint and to take confidence-building measures in order to create conditions conducive to the resumption of talks. In this regard, members could encourage implementation of the economic de-escalation agreement reached on 23 July between the Houthis and the Yemeni government. Although the agreement includes a pledge by the sides to hold meetings to discuss economic and humanitarian issues, no meetings have yet taken place.

How to promote compliance with the 2140 Yemen sanctions regime is going to be a likely focus for the Council this month, as it prepares for the renewal of the mandate of the Yemen Panel of Experts in November. The 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee held informal consultations on 19 September to discuss the final report of its Panel of Experts, which is expected to be made public in mid-October. Members are likely to soon discuss the possible implementation of the recommendations for the Council that are contained in the report.

An issue increasingly raised by some Council members is the need to address violations of the arms embargo on the Houthis. In this regard, on 6 September, the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee sent a letter to all member states, in which it encouraged the government of Yemen to establish a national mechanism—with the support of the international community, where appropriate—that would enhance its capacity to enforce the arms embargo, including through collecting evidence and conducting financial investigations. The letter was based on a recommendation contained in the Panel's mid-term report, submitted in mid-April.

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# Yemen

## Council Dynamics

Yemen is an issue on which Council members have maintained general unity in support of UN mediation to achieve a sustainable resolution to the conflict. The Red Sea crisis, however, has produced some notable divisions. The P3 members (France, the UK, and the US) have criticised the Houthis' destabilising actions, while Council members such as Algeria, China, and Russia emphasise that ending the conflict in Gaza is critical to resolving the crisis in the Red Sea.

Although Council members have expressed concern about the situation of the UN staff detained by the Houthis, they have been unable to send a unified message on the issue. In June, members failed to agree on a press statement proposed by the UK (the penholder on Yemen) due to concerns raised by China and Russia. Among other things, Russia was apparently uncomfortable with language in the draft statement condemning the arrests and calling for the detainees' release, instead preferring to call for access to the

arrested staff. Russia has been taking a similar approach in its statements in Council meetings on Yemen. It has also accused Western countries of double standards, arguing that although they call on the Houthis to release the detained staff, they fail to hold Israel accountable for its actions against UN staff in Gaza and the West Bank.

Some members that have convened side events on Yemen during the high-level segment of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly—such as a 25 September event hosted by the UK and the US about challenges to the provision of humanitarian aid, including the issue of the detained UN staff—have chosen to hold them in a closed format. This might be indicative of the difficulties in agreeing on unified messaging on the file.

The US and Japan have served as co-penholders on the Red Sea crisis. Ambassador Joonkook Hwang (Republic of Korea) chairs the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee.

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# Colombia

## Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing from Special Representative and Head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia Carlos Ruiz Massieu on recent developments in Colombia and the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on the mission, which was circulated to Council members on 26 September (S/2024/694). A civil society representative is also expected to brief. Switzerland, the Council's president in October, will apparently encourage a focus on issues relating to women, peace and security (WPS) at the meeting.

The Council is also scheduled to renew the verification mission's mandate ahead of its 31 October expiry.

## Key Recent Developments

The Security Council's latest quarterly briefing on Colombia, held on 11 July, provided a unique opportunity to assess peacebuilding efforts in the country. Colombian President Gustavo Petro Urrego represented his country at a Council meeting for the first time. The Council also heard a briefing from Diego Tovar, an ex-combatant from the former rebel group *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP)* and signatory to the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace concluded in 2016 between the government of Colombia and the former FARC-EP. This marked the first time that a former FARC-EP member briefed the Council in person.

The period preceding the July meeting witnessed frequent rhetoric from Petro about challenges in implementing the 2016 agreement, including accusations of a lack of cooperation from certain state ministries. These complaints also coincided with discussions about a politically contentious proposal by the president to convene a constituent assembly. (For background, see the brief on Colombia in our July 2024 *Monthly Forecast*.) Petro did not reference the proposed constituent assembly at the July meeting, and it appears that

discussions on the issue have tapered off.

In his remarks at the Council meeting, the President announced his intention to pursue a “rapid action response plan”, calling it a “faster method for enacting laws in Congress” that would allow him to accelerate implementation of the peace agreement. He named several key aspects of this plan, including purchase and distribution of land and investment in the development programmes with a territorial focus (PDET). Petro added that the 15-year timeframe envisioned for the implementation of the 2016 accord should be extended by seven years. The President's lengthy statement covered many other issues, including the difficult conditions faced by former combatants who laid down their arms. He referred to former territorial area for training and reintegration (TATRs) as “concentration camps”, noting that its inhabitants are closed off due to threats posed by armed groups that engage in illicit economic activity.

On 3 July, Petro announced that he had appointed Juan Fernando Cristo as Minister of the Interior and tasked him, among other things, with coordinating compliance with the 2016 peace agreement. Cristo had previously served in the same function during the administration of former President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, playing a key role in negotiating the 2016 accord and in the early stages of its implementation. Several interlocutors, including Council members at the 11 July session, welcomed the appointment as a positive sign of the government's renewed focus on advancing implementation of the agreement. On 24 September, Cristo said that the government will present the “rapid action response plan” to Congress in the following week.

The past quarter witnessed both progress and challenges in the implementation of the 2016 agreement. In August, Petro led a joint session of the National Commission on Security Guarantees (NCSG) and the High-Level Unit of the Comprehensive Security System for the Exercise of Politics (SISEP) to promote territorial implementation of the public policy to dismantle illegal armed

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UN DOCUMENTS ON COLOMBIA Secretary-General's Report S/2024/694 (26 September 2024) was the most recent 90-day report on Colombia.

# Colombia

groups and criminal organisations, which the NCSG presented on 7 September 2023.

A session of the Commission for the Follow-up, Promotion and Verification of the Implementation of the Final Agreement (CSIVI)—the main forum for dialogue between the parties on the implementation of the accord—was held on 10 September with the participation of government officials such as Cristo, Tovar (who represents signatories to the 2016 agreement at the CSIVI), and international interlocutors. Ruiz Massieu welcomed the session in a post on X (formerly Twitter) and called for “the regular operation of this highest instance of the architecture of the Agreement to give a definitive boost to its comprehensive implementation”—a message also conveyed by Tovar at the 11 July Council meeting.

Persistent insecurity continued to pose the main challenge to the 2016 accord’s implementation, including to the reintegration of former combatants. In August, 44 ex-combatants and their families were displaced from the Miravalle TATR in the Caquetá department. It was announced in June that the TATR is facing security threats from the dissident group of the former FARC-EP that identifies itself as the *Estado Mayor Central Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (EMC FARC-EP)*.

The government’s dialogue efforts with armed groups operating in the country, carried out as part of Petro’s “total peace” policy, continue to produce mixed results. Nine such dialogues are currently underway. The process with the guerrilla group *Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)*—which had been the most advanced to that point—stalled in May following the government’s decision to hold a regional dialogue with one of the ELN’s regional fronts. On 3 August, the bilateral ceasefire between the government and the ELN, which had been observed for a year, expired, absent agreement from the sides on its extension.

Talks have continued with groups characterised as political by the government, including several factions of the EMC, representing roughly 40 percent of the dissident group, as well as with the armed group Segunda Marquetalia, which consists of former FARC-EP dissidents who signed the 2016 agreement but took up arms again. The government has also established dialogues with groups characterised as criminal that focus on ceasing violence in exchange for judicial benefits. Two new such dialogues started recently with the *Autodefensas Conquistadoras de la Sierra Nevada (ACSN)* and the *Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC)*. Some analysts have emphasised that dialogue with the AGC—Colombia’s biggest criminal group with presence in 30 percent of the country—is crucial to the success of the “total peace” policy.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 4 September press release, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter, warned of Colombia’s vicious cycle of poverty and conflict, stressing that peace in the country can only be achieved by addressing class divisions and discrimination against the poor. Following his visit to Bogotá, Soacha, Ciudad Bolívar, Cali, and Buenaventura, De Schutter noted that poverty is fuelling conflict in Colombia, as limited job opportunities leave the poor vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups, and coca farmers have few alternatives but to cultivate illicit crops. He stated

that conflict, in turn, exacerbates poverty by hindering people’s access to education, work, and healthcare. The Special Rapporteur urged the full implementation of the 2016 peace agreement to address the illegal drug trade and help coca growers substitute crops. “[Farmers] also need improved access to credit and markets, and to obtain a decent price for their produce”, he said.

## Key Issues and Options

A key priority for the Council in October is to renew the verification mission’s mandate. Members could choose to adopt a straightforward renewal, without altering the mission’s tasks.

They may also consider if recent developments require any alteration to the mission’s mandate, including in light of the expiration of the government’s ceasefire with the ELN. Through resolution 2694 of 2 August 2023, the Council tasked the mission with monitoring and verifying the implementation of the bilateral ceasefire, approving 68 additional international observers to that end. The Secretary-General’s report notes that, even after the ceasefire’s expiry, the mission’s deployment in the field allowed it to continue to monitor and follow up on developments, to maintain contact with local communities, and to facilitate preventive action when situations of “imminent armed contact” arose. The report appears to suggest the importance of retaining such capacities, noting that they “constitute a key asset”, especially considering the current “delicate juncture in the peacebuilding process”.

An overarching priority for the Council remains supporting the full implementation of the 2016 peace agreement. As Petro reached the half-way point of his term in office, they increasingly emphasised the need to take concrete action to that end. There appears to be lack of clarity on some issues that the president raised at the 11 July meeting, including the details of the “rapid action response plan” and the extension of the period envisioned for the 2016 agreement’s implementation. Ahead of October’s Council session, Council members may choose to interact informally with Cristo or Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs Luis Gilberto Murillo Urrutia to receive further information on those issues.

## Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their support for the peace process in Colombia and for the verification mission’s work. Past negotiations on the extension and modification of the mission’s mandate have generally gone smoothly, although some issues required discussion. For instance, during the negotiations on resolution 2694, China raised concerns about possible budgetary implications that led to the authorisation of 68 additional observers, instead of the 70 initially proposed.

In negotiating resolution 2704 of 30 October 2023, which most recently extended the verification mission’s mandate, China and Russia opposed the addition of language proposed by some members on issues relating to women, children, and youth. This approach is consistent with other files, as China and Russia often challenge the inclusion of language on WPS and other thematic issues in Council products.

The UK is the penholder on Colombia.

# Western Sahara

## Expected Council Action

In October, the Council is expected to renew the mandate of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which expires on 31 October. Ahead of the mandate renewal, Council members will receive a briefing in consultations on the Secretary-General's annual report on the situation concerning Western Sahara, which member states anticipate receiving by 1 October.

## Background and Key Recent Developments

On 30 October 2023, the Security Council adopted resolution 2703, renewing MINURSO's mandate until 31 October, with 13 votes in favour and two abstentions (Mozambique and Russia). The resolution introduced new language welcoming Personal Envoy Staffan de Mistura's convening of informal consultations with Morocco, the Polisario Front (the entity representing the inhabitants of the Western Sahara region, known as Sahrawis), Algeria, and Mauritania, as well as with members of the Group of Friends of Western Sahara—France, Russia, Spain, the UK, and the US—from 27 to 31 March 2023 in New York. These informal bilateral consultations aimed to discuss lessons learned in the political process, deepen the examination of the positions, and continue to seek “mutually agreeable formulas” to advance the political process. (For background, see the brief on Western Sahara in our April 2024 *Monthly Forecast*.)

On 24 July, the Secretary-General submitted his report on the “Question of Western Sahara”, covering developments from 1 July 2023 to 30 June, pursuant to General Assembly resolution A/RES/78/85 of 11 December 2023. During the reporting period, the situation in Western Sahara was characterised by low-intensity hostilities between Morocco and the Polisario Front, creating challenges for MINURSO's operational environment. The report noted that, in late February, the Special Representative for Western Sahara and Head of MINURSO, Alexander Ivanko, and MINURSO's Force Commander, Major General Fakhru'l Ahsan, proposed a cessation of hostilities to both parties during Ramadan. Morocco reiterated its commitment to the 1991 ceasefire while “underscoring its right to respond to incidents”. The Polisario Front argued that a cessation of hostilities was tantamount to ignoring the current realities on the ground without addressing the “root causes” of the breakdown of the 1991 ceasefire. (In November 2020, the Polisario Front announced that it would no longer respect the ceasefire agreement following a military operation by Morocco in the buffer zone.)

During the reporting period, MINURSO was able to sustain its team sites more regularly and reliably after the Polisario Front committed to “provide safe passage, on an exceptional and provisional basis, to the [m]ission to conduct a logistical ground convoy to resupply its team sites” east of the berm. (The berm refers to an approximately 1,700-mile-long earthen wall that divides the Moroccan-administered portion of Western Sahara from that held by the Polisario Front.) Between September 2023 and June, MINURSO conducted an average of one ground convoy every month to its team sites east of the berm. (For more information, see the brief on Western Sahara in our April 2024 *Monthly Forecast*.)

In a 30 July letter to Morocco's King Mohammed VI, French President Emmanuel Macron announced France's support for resolving

the issue of Western Sahara under Morocco's autonomy plan. The letter said that this plan constituted the “only basis to achieve a just, lasting, and negotiated political solution, in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions”. (The plan, which Morocco submitted to the UN in 2007, calls for integrating the territory into Morocco, with the Sahrawi people managing their internal affairs while being represented externally by Morocco.) Previously, France had described Morocco's plan as “a serious and credible” basis for discussion but had not formally endorsed it. (Refer to the graphic below for trends in member states' position on Western Sahara.)

During his visit to Rabat in February, French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Stéphane Séjourné indicated that France supported Moroccan investments in Western Sahara. On 26 April, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire expressed France's readiness to participate in funding a three-gigawatt power cable linking the city of Casablanca to Moroccan-controlled Dakhla, a city in the Morocco-occupied territory of Western Sahara.

Responding to France's change in position, the Foreign Minister of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) Mohamed Sidati accused France of violating international law while supporting Moroccan expansionism. The Algerian foreign ministry also criticised France's decision in a 30 July press release as denying the right of self-determination to the Sahrawis, adding that France made the decision “without clearly measuring out all its potential repercussions”. The ministry announced its decision to withdraw Algeria's ambassador to France and reportedly also refused to accept its citizens who had been given deportation orders by French authorities. While some European countries, such as France and Spain, have explicitly supported Morocco's autonomy plan, the European Union (EU) has generally maintained a neutral position. According to media reports, on 11 September several members of the European parliament sent a letter to the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell Fontelles, denouncing France's position. The letter reportedly said that the “unilateral position of support for one of the parties may open a confrontation in this region, to which the EU is linked in terms of energy supply and the control of emigration”.

In another development, Chad opened a consulate in Dakhla on 14 August. Chad had announced its support for Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara in 2022. On 17 August, the Dominican Republic also announced its intention to open a consulate in Dakhla and reaffirmed support for Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.

## Key Issues and Options

An immediate issue for the Council is to renew the mandate of MINURSO and consider what changes to the mission's mandate, if any, are necessary. A key issue for Council members to consider is how to bring all parties to the negotiating table and reinvigorate the political process.

Significant obstacles remain in the peace process. The November 2020 decision by the Polisario Front to abandon the 1991 ceasefire has led to a rise in hostilities over the last few years. At the same time, Morocco controls more than three-quarters of the Western Sahara territory and has made substantial investments in the region,

UN DOCUMENTS ON WESTERN SAHARA Security Council Resolution S/RES/2703 (30 October 2023) renewed the mandate of MINURSO until 31 October 2024. General Assembly Document A/79/229 (24 July 2024) was the Secretary-General's report on the “Question of Western Sahara”, covering developments from 1 July 2023 to 30 June, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution A/RES/78/85 of 11 December 2023.

## Western Sahara

including a \$1.2 billion port project in Dakhla. Moroccan settlers account for nearly two-thirds of the approximately half-million residents of Western Sahara.

Another issue of concern for Council members is the human rights situation. Despite multiple requests by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for a visit to Western Sahara and strong encouragement from the Security Council in its resolutions on MINURSO for the parties to cooperate with OHCHR, it has not been granted access to the territory of Western Sahara since 2015. The Secretary-General's 24 July report noted that OHCHR continued to receive allegations of human rights violations, including intimidation, surveillance and discrimination against Sahrawi individuals. The report also raised concerns about the conditions for detained Sahrawi prisoners and the prevailing humanitarian situation in the refugee camps in Algeria's Tindouf province. In November 2023, the Sahrawi Refugee Response Plan was launched for 2024-25, which estimated that approximately 173,000 people living in the Tindouf refugee camps require humanitarian assistance.

### Council Dynamics

Council members differ starkly in their national positions on Western Sahara. The US, the penholder on Western Sahara, recognised Morocco's sovereignty over the region in December 2020 during the administration of President Donald Trump and committed to opening a consulate in the disputed territory. President Joe Biden's administration has continued this position. France has recently shifted its position to fully back the Moroccan autonomy plan as the "only basis" for achieving a political solution. The UK supports a "just, lasting, and mutually acceptable political solution, based on compromise, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara".

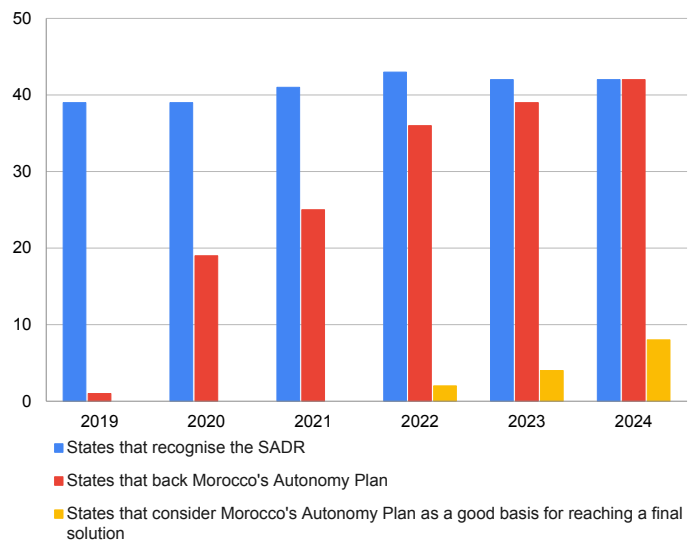
The three African members of the Council do not share a common position. Sierra Leone recognises Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara and established a consulate in Dakhla in August 2021. Algeria and Mozambique strongly support the right to self-determination for the Sahrawis and maintain diplomatic relations with the SADR. These members are likely to push for more negotiations to determine the status of Western Sahara and for a focus on the human rights situation in the region. Guyana, which is a member of the "A3 plus one" grouping, withdrew its recognition of the

SADR, dating from 1979, in November 2020.

MINURSO's mandate renewal has not been unanimous since 2017. The division among Council members was apparent during the adoption of resolution 2703. In its explanation of vote, Russia said that recent resolutions extending MINURSO's mandate have included amendments that "undermine the impartial and non-partisan approach to the problem of Western Sahara". Russia expressed support for direct negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front, emphasising that any final settlement of the issue should be based on mutually acceptable outcomes that provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

Some members, such as Algeria and Russia, have also opposed the roundtable talks—an initiative launched by former Personal Envoy Horst Köhler, which brought together Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, and the Polisario Front. Algeria perceives this initiative as potentially reframing the situation as a "regional conflict" instead of one between Morocco and the Polisario Front, with Algeria and Mauritania viewed as "concerned neighbours". Algeria insists that it is not a party to the conflict and that it cannot take the place of the Polisario in negotiations but is prepared to step up its role in the political process as a neighbouring state.

Trends in states' positions on Western Sahara



## Anticipating the Impact of Scientific Developments on International Peace and Security

### Expected Council Action

In October, Switzerland plans to convene a high-level briefing on "Anticipating the impact of scientific developments on international peace and security", under the "Maintenance of international peace and security" agenda item. This is one of the signature events of the Swiss presidency. Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland Ignazio Cassis is expected to chair the meeting.

### Background

*A New Agenda for Peace*, which outlines the Secretary-General's vision for addressing peace and security challenges and was intended to help inform the deliberations at the Summit of the Future, notes the effects of technology on the peace and security landscape. It states that "rapidly advancing and converging technologies have the potential to revolutionize conflict dynamics", adding that "developments

UN DOCUMENTS ON TECHNOLOGIES Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9381 (18 July 2023) was a high-level briefing titled "Artificial Intelligence: Opportunities and Risks for International Peace and Security", organised by the UK. S/PV.9039 (23 May 2022) was a briefing on technology and security convened by the US as one of the signature events of its Council presidency.

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# Anticipating the Impact of Scientific Developments on International Peace and Security

in artificial intelligence and quantum technologies, including those related to weapons systems, are exposing the insufficiency of existing governance frameworks”.

On 22 September, the General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/79/1, endorsing the Pact for the Future and the Global Digital Compact. In Action 27 of the Pact, member states acknowledged that rapid technological advances offer both opportunities and risks to maintaining international peace and security. They committed to leveraging the benefits of new and emerging technologies while addressing the potential risks stemming from their misuse. Member states requested the Secretary-General to keep them informed through his mandated reporting on current developments in science and technology and their potential impact on international security and disarmament efforts.

In recent years, the Security Council has periodically explored the potential of science to promote international peace and security. On 23 May 2022, the US organised a briefing on technology and security. The Council also convened its first formal meeting on artificial intelligence on 18 July 2023, a high-level briefing initiated by the UK titled “Artificial intelligence: Opportunities and risks for international peace and security”.

In addition, Council members have received briefings about the scientific data linking environmental factors to security concerns in both formal sessions and Arria-formula meetings. In this regard, Valérie Masson-Delmotte—Co-Chair of Working Group I at the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which assesses the physical science of climate change—briefed the Council in an Arria-formula meeting on the science of sea-level rise on 18 October 2021. In addition, Chief Scientist of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Pavel Kabat briefed the Council on 25 January 2019 in a meeting convened at the initiative of the Dominican Republic on “Addressing the impacts of climate-related disasters on international peace and security”.

This year, Switzerland organised two informal meetings of Security

Council members to explore how science can strengthen the Council’s response to global challenges. On 17 May, Switzerland convened an Arria-formula meeting on “Unlocking the potential of science for peace and security”. Thomas Gürber, State Secretary of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Confederation, delivered opening remarks and chaired the meeting. The briefers included Henrietta Fore, former Executive Director of UNICEF (2018-2022) and a board member of the Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator, a foundation co-founded by the Swiss government in 2019 that leverages science and technology to generate “inclusive and global solutions for a sustainable future”; Dr. Sascha Langenbach, a data scientist at the Center for Security Studies at the ETH Zürich University; and Lieutenant General Mohan Subramanian, the Force Commander of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). (For more information, see our 16 May *What’s in Blue* story.)

On 26 August, during the second day of an informal visit of Security Council members to Geneva, three sessions were held focusing on “Preventing emerging security risks through innovation, science, and technology”. The third session centred on the future implications of scientific advances on global peace and security. Briefers from the Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator provided a comprehensive overview of cutting-edge developments in AI, quantum technologies, synthetic biology, and neurotechnology. These fields were identified as crucial to future peace and security opportunities and challenges, with the convergence of these technologies expected to drive significant changes in the coming decades. (For more, see our 3 September *What’s in Blue* story.)

According to Switzerland’s Foreign Policy Strategy for 2024–2027, science can “contribute to diplomatic efforts in the context of good offices, peace promotion and global governance”. The strategy identifies “anticipatory science diplomacy” as seeking to “identify the implications of new scientific developments for the global common goods as early as possible and to make them of use to the general public”.

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## Haiti

### Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council is expected to renew the Haiti sanctions regime, which was established by resolution 2653 of 21 October 2022. Its current mandate expires on 19 October.

Additionally, the Council will hold its 90-day briefing on the situation in Haiti. Special Representative and Head of the UN Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) María Isabel Salvador will brief the Council on recent political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country and the Secretary-General’s latest report on BINUH. A representative of Kenya may also provide an update on the deployment of the Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission, which the Council authorised under Kenya’s leadership through resolution 2699 of 2 October 2023 to help Haiti combat

gang activity. The Council most recently renewed that authorisation for one year through resolution 2751 of 30 September.

### Background and Key Recent Developments

After the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021, Haiti descended into a multidimensional crisis characterised by political deadlock, extreme violence, and dire humanitarian conditions. Criminal gangs overran an estimated 80 percent of Port-au-Prince, the capital, employing brutal tactics such as kidnapping, sexual violence, and murder to subdue and subjugate the civilian population. The instability caused widespread displacement and acute food insecurity while exacerbating a governance crisis by preventing elections, which have not taken place in the country since 2016.

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON HAITI** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2751 (30 September 2024) renewed the authorisation for member states to form and deploy a Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission to Haiti to help re-establish security in the country and build conditions conducive to holding free and fair elections. S/RES/2743 (12 July 2024) renewed BINUH’s mandate for one year until 15 July 2025. S/RES/2700 (19 October 2023) renewed the sanctions regime on Haiti imposed by resolution 2653 of 21 October 2022. **Secretary-General’s Report S/2024/508** (27 June 2024) was the Secretary-General’s 90-day report on Haiti.

# Haiti

A new surge in gang violence starting in February prompted the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to facilitate an agreement among Haitian stakeholders on a political transition to stabilise the country's security situation and restore democratic governance. The agreement established a Transitional Presidential Council (TPC), which was formally installed in April; it comprises seven voting members representing political parties and the private sector and two non-voting observers drawn from civil society and the religious community. The TPC was charged with selecting a new interim prime minister, establishing a provisional electoral council and national security council, and collaborating with the international community to accelerate the deployment of the MSS mission. According to a political agreement signed by TPC members, the transitional period will culminate in the holding of presidential elections by February 2026.

The TPC has made some progress toward these objectives, including appointing former UN official Garry Conille as interim prime minister, selecting a transitional cabinet, and receiving the first MSS contingents from Kenya in June and July. Other aspects of the TPC's work have stalled, however, such as the formation of a provisional electoral council, which has reportedly been delayed because of internal disagreements among the civil society sectors expected to serve on the body. Moreover, the TPC itself has been the subject of controversy, as three of its voting members have been implicated in a high-profile corruption scandal that has complicated its work and challenged its perceived legitimacy.

Meanwhile, Haiti's security and humanitarian situations remain dire. According to BINUH's most recent quarterly figures, the mission recorded 1,379 victims of gang-related murders and injuries between 1 April and 30 June. This constitutes a decrease of 45 percent compared to the peak recorded during the previous quarter, although it remains a high figure by historical standards. The violence also continues to have serious humanitarian consequences: the International Organization for Migration (IOM) found that the number of internally displaced persons in the country increased by 22 percent from 578,000 to more than 700,000 between June and September (following an increase of nearly 60 percent between March and June), while the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) designated the country a "famine hotspot of highest concern" in their latest outlook report covering the period from June to October. In an 18 September press conference, Secretary-General António Guterres described Haiti as "one of the most disastrous humanitarian situations in the whole world".

On 30 September, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2751, renewing for one year the MSS mission's authorisation under Kenya's leadership. The mission is mandated to provide operational support to the Haitian National Police (HNP) to counter gangs, with the aim of building security conditions conducive to holding free and fair elections. Since Kenya deployed its two first police contingents in June and July, the mission has helped the HNP achieve some success in retaking critical infrastructure in Port-au-Prince that was previously under gang control, but it remains under-resourced, facing funding and equipment shortfalls that limit its ability to scale up its physical presence and take and hold additional

territory. (For more information on the MSS mission and resolution 2751, see our 29 September *What's in Blue* story.)

Resolution 2653 imposed a sanctions regime on Haiti, comprising targeted assets freeze, travel ban, and arms embargo measures. Resolution 2699 subsequently expanded the arms embargo from targeted measures applying to designated individuals to a territorial embargo covering the country as a whole, after which resolution 2700 of 19 October 2023 renewed the entire sanctions regime for one year.

The regime's designation criteria include engaging in or supporting criminal activities and violence involving armed groups and criminal networks; supporting illicit trafficking and diversion of arms and related materiel; obstructing the delivery of humanitarian assistance to and inside Haiti; and attacking personnel or premises of UN missions and operations or providing support for such attacks. On 27 September, the Security Council's 2653 Sanctions Committee approved the designation of two additional individuals: Elan Luckson, leader of the "Gran Grif" gang, and Victor Prophane, former member of the Haitian parliament allegedly involved in arms trafficking. While the sanctions committee had previously listed five other gang leaders under the regime, Prophane is the first designated individual from Haiti's political class.

The sanctions committee most recently met on 11 September to discuss the final report of its Panel of Experts. The report, which was not yet publicly available at the time of writing, apparently assessed that the arms embargo remains largely ineffective at preventing the flow of illicit arms into Haiti. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) previously issued reports in October 2023 and January 2024, submitted to the Security Council pursuant to resolution 2692, which described the main smuggling routes for firearms trafficking into Haiti, considered the regional dynamics of the illicit trade, and reviewed the domestic characteristics of the arms trade within Haiti.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 20 September, the UN Designated Expert on Human Rights in Haiti, William O'Neill, finished a 12-day visit to the country. In a press conference concluding his trip, he said that "all indicators remain extremely worrying", highlighting the country's security situation as the most concerning among them. He reported that sexual violence, used by the gangs as a weapon to control the population, has "drastically" increased in recent months, as has the forcible recruitment of children to carry out attacks against public institutions and the police. Additionally, O'Neill noted that only 28 percent of the country's health services are functioning normally, prisons are severely overcrowded, and almost five million people are suffering from acute food insecurity. With regard to UN sanctions, O'Neill said that "[d]espite an international embargo, arms and ammunition continue to be smuggled into the country, enabling gangs to carry out large-scale attacks and extend their control and influence over new territories".

## Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Security Council in October is to renew the 2653 sanctions regime on Haiti.

In light of the most recent findings by the regime's Panel of Experts and other UN actors concerning the efficacy of the regime's territorial arms embargo, Council members may consider new measures to further strengthen it. One option apparently recommended by the panel is to widen the scope of the embargo, which under

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## Haiti

resolution 2699 applies to small arms, light weapons, and ammunition. Council members could expand this list to include other kinds of military equipment, as well as technical assistance, training, and financial support related to military activities. In doing so, members could draw on previously agreed language from resolution 2653, which originally established the arms embargo—then in the form of targeted measures—with this broader purview.

Additionally, following the adoption of resolution 2751 renewing the MSS mission’s authorisation, Council members may continue to consider measures to secure more sustainable funding and support for the mission from the international community.

### Council Dynamics

Council members are united in their concern about Haiti’s multidimensional crisis and generally agree on the need for a Haitian-led political solution that addresses both security and socioeconomic challenges. Members are also broadly supportive of UN engagement in Haiti.

This consensus largely extends to the 2653 sanctions regime, which the Council established and renewed unanimously through

resolutions 2653 and 2700, respectively. However, the specific provision to expand the arms embargo from a targeted measure to a country-wide restriction was discussed separately during Council negotiations on resolution 2699 and proved more contentious. The provision was proposed by China and faced some opposition from the US—which is the country of origin for most of the arms illegally smuggled into Haiti, according to UNODC’s reports—although it was eventually incorporated into the text.

Another point of contention concerns the possible transformation of the MSS mission into a UN peacekeeping operation, which would grant the mission more sustainable funding through the assessed contributions of UN member states. During negotiations on resolution 2751, Ecuador and the US—the Council’s penholders on Haiti—apparently sought to include language expressing the Council’s intention to consider such a transformation, but this was opposed by China and Russia, which referred to the chequered history of past UN peacekeeping operations in Haiti and argued that the country’s political and security conditions were not conducive to a new operation.

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## Central African Republic

### Expected Council Action

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

The mandate of MINUSCA expires on 15 November.

### Key Recent Developments

On 27 June, Rugwabiza briefed the Council about MINUSCA’s efforts to expand its footprint to additional localities in southeastern CAR, paving the way for the extension of state authority in the region. She expressed deep concern over the continuous misinformation and disinformation campaigns against MINUSCA, which she said are further complicating the mission’s already challenging operating environment.

When renewing MINUSCA’s mandate in November 2023, the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to conduct an independent strategic review of the mission through broad consultations with the CAR government and other relevant partners, including UN agencies, member states, regional organisations, civil society, and independent experts. The purpose of the review was to provide detailed recommendations regarding the reconfiguration of MINUSCA’s mandate, including a possible transition plan for the mission’s drawdown when conditions are met.

On 26 February, the Secretary-General appointed Edmond Mulet—a former UN official who most recently served as the head of the Joint Investigative Mechanism set up under resolution 2235 of

7 August 2015 to investigate the use of chemical weapons in Syria—to lead the independent strategic review. Mulet visited the CAR in March and held several meetings with President Faustin Touadéra and other relevant stakeholders. The outcome of the strategic review was circulated to Council members on 14 August.

The review provided a contextual analysis of the national, regional, and geopolitical dynamics. It highlighted the proliferation of illegal weapons along the country’s lengthy and porous borders, which has compounded its security challenges and facilitated the exploitation of its natural resources. This situation has created a war economy for many of the armed groups operating in the CAR and the region. The review also noted Russia’s and Rwanda’s expanding influence in the CAR and the declining role of traditional partners in the security and development sectors.

Regarding the mission’s transition and reconfiguration, the review said that “there is currently no desire or request from the national authorities for the drawdown of MINUSCA”, while acknowledging the host country’s desire to see the mission’s mandate adapted to support the CAR government’s early recovery and development initiatives. It also assessed MINUSCA’s mandate as remaining relevant, stressing that its full and effective implementation requires sustained support from the CAR government and the Security Council.

The review recognised that the CAR finds itself at a crossroads—with an encouraging path towards stabilisation, but still facing the risk of a potential relapse. It said that “conditions on the ground do not justify a drawdown of MINUSCA in the short- to mid-term.” Therefore, the review recommended that the mission and the host country initiate discussions on a potential transition plan in 2026, following the presidential and legislative elections expected to take



# Central African Republic

place in 2025-2026. It added that a detailed technical assessment could be conducted at a later stage to support the transition plan.

Regarding the role of “other security personnel” (a term used by the UN to refer to the Africa Corps, formerly the Wagner Group, a Russian private security company), the review stressed the need to consider how to promote the accountability of such actors through what it called the “Respect, Protect, Remedy” framework for business and human rights as well as other existing voluntary international codes of conduct in situations of armed conflict.

The CAR is preparing to hold local elections in October for the first time since 1988. A budget shortfall remains an ongoing challenge despite recent financial commitments by some partners, such as the EU, to support the election. The Secretary-General’s June report on MINUSCA also mentioned the CAR government’s formal request to the UN to provide electoral assistance for the country’s 2025-2026 elections. In particular, the CAR government seeks MINUSCA’s support in mobilising resources and providing continued technical, operational, logistical, and security support for the local, presidential, and legislative elections.

## Sanctions-Related Developments

On 30 July, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2745, lifting the arms embargo on the CAR and renewing until 31 August 2025 the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2127 CAR Sanctions Committee (which will henceforth be known as the Panel of Experts pursuant to resolution 2745). The resolution also extended until 31 July 2025, and strengthened, all other targeted sanctions measures against armed groups and associated individuals.

While welcoming the lifting of the arms embargo, CAR’s Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie, and Central Africans Abroad, Sylvie Baïpo Temon, expressed readiness to support the panel’s work in addressing the proliferation of weapons and their illicit trafficking across borders.

## Key Issues and Options

In October, Council members will be interested in the outcome of the MINUSCA strategic review and its recommendations. The review is expected to inform the upcoming MINUSCA mandate renewal in November. In this regard, the following issues are likely to draw the attention of Council members:

- MINUSCA’s possible transition, drawdown and reconfiguration;
- restrictions on MINUSCA’s freedom of movement and the use of uncrewed aerial vehicles (since December 2023, the CAR government has restricted their use, which some Council members argue undermines the mission’s ability to enhance its situational awareness, protect civilians, and ensure the safety and security of peacekeepers);
- the implementation of the Status of Forces Agreement; and
- the role of other security personnel, notably the Africa Corps.

The political and security situation in the CAR continues to be a key issue for Council members. They will be keen to hear about

progress in implementing the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the CAR and MINUSCA’s support for extending state authority and the disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and repatriation of former combatants. They might also be interested in developments related to the local elections planned for October and the mission’s operational and logistical support in line with its mandate.

The dire humanitarian situation in the CAR, exacerbated by conflict, flooding, and disease outbreaks, is another important issue for Council members. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), an outbreak of the infectious viral disease Mpox in the CAR was declared in July with new infections reported in Bangui, the capital, and several other towns.

Human rights remain an ongoing issue. MINUSCA’s human rights division prepares an annual report on the human rights situation in the CAR. The last report was released only after the renewal of the MINUSCA mandate in 2023. Council members welcomed the June release of this year’s report in line with resolution 2709 of 15 November 2023, which requested that the report be made available before the next mandate renewal.

A possible option is for Council members to consider issuing a press statement highlighting the importance of local elections in advancing the country’s peace and political processes and expressing concern about the humanitarian and human rights challenges facing the CAR.

## Council Dynamics

Council members appreciate MINUSCA’s work and the Special Representative’s efforts in maintaining positive relations with host country authorities. Several members continue to raise concerns, however, about restrictions on the mission’s freedom of movement, particularly on its use of uncrewed aerial vehicles. On the other hand, Russia and the CAR have expressed concerns about armed groups operating drones, which they give as the reason the CAR government suspended all drone flights.

Some Council members, such as France, the US and the UK, have expressed alarm at the increasing disinformation campaigns against MINUSCA. At the Council’s June meeting, Temon, the CAR foreign minister, explained the government’s continued efforts to counter this trend but noted that it should be seen as an expression of public dissatisfaction with the mission’s inability to meet people’s expectations.

Regarding MINUSCA’s mandate renewal in November, Temon underscored the need to adapt it to new priorities and realities on the ground. China noted positively the strategic review’s “recommendations for optimizing and adjusting the mandate and staffing of the Mission, so as to ensure that MINUSCA performs its duties efficiently”.

France is the penholder on the CAR, and Ambassador Amar Bendjama (Algeria) chairs the 2745 CAR Sanctions Committee.

# Syria

## Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council will hold a meeting on the political process and the humanitarian situation in Syria.

## Key Recent Developments

On 20 September, Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen and Head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Geneva and Director of the Coordination Division Ramesh Rajasingham briefed the Council on the political and humanitarian tracks in Syria, respectively. Pedersen described the continuing hostilities in the country, including drone strikes by pro-government forces; attacks by the Security Council-listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham in the north-west; sustained attacks by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh); and continuing tensions and violence in the north-east and south-west. He stressed the urgent need for de-escalation throughout the country leading to a nationwide ceasefire and a cooperative approach to combat Security Council-listed terrorist groups.

With regard to the resumption of the Syrian Constitutional Committee, Pedersen said that efforts have continued in order to secure agreement from both Syrian parties and a host government on an alternative venue to Geneva. (The Constitutional Committee has not met since June 2022 because Russia, a close ally of Syria, opposed Geneva as the venue following Switzerland's imposition of sanctions on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.) Despite several appeals over time, his call for the Syrian parties to prepare for future discussions has not gained traction.

On 10 September, the Arab ministerial liaison committee that was established following Syria's readmission to the League of Arab States (LAS) on 7 May 2023 to liaise with the Syrian government and seek a solution to the Syrian crisis—comprising Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and LAS Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit—held its second meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Fayssal Mekdad in Cairo. In a post on X, the Jordanian foreign ministry announced that the committee decided to form a team of experts to study the issues on which the committee is engaging with the Syrian government, such as the return of Syrian refugees and drug manufacturing and smuggling. The team of experts is expected to meet in Baghdad, although the date of the meeting had yet to be decided at the time of writing.

In his remarks at the 20 September Council meeting, Rajasingham highlighted the impact of the prolonged conflict on children in Syria, noting that approximately eight million children in the country require humanitarian assistance. Since June, nearly a third of the 105 civilian deaths verified by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) due to hostilities and explosive remnants of war have been children. He described the recent work undertaken by the UN and partner agencies to deliver humanitarian aid across the country. In early September, the UN conducted a cross-line assessment mission to Al-Kisrah, on the eastern side of the Euphrates River in Deir-ez-Zor governorate, where more than 85 percent of the population needs humanitarian assistance, including more than 22,000 people living in displacement sites. (A cross-line mission goes across domestic conflict lines from Syrian government-held areas

into areas outside government control.) Humanitarian teams also conducted several cross-line missions to assess and begin repairs on the Alouk water station, providing water to more than 600,000 people living in Al-Hasakah governorate. He added that challenges persist in carrying out other cross-line missions, including to Idlib, Ras al-Ain, Tel Abiad, and Rukban.

Tensions have continued to intensify across the region against the backdrop of the Israel-Hamas war that erupted on 7 October 2023. The escalation has resulted in increased violence spilling over into Syria, where sites have frequently been the target of attacks. Israel and the US have historically targeted positions associated with Iranian forces and affiliated militants in Syria, and Iran-linked proxy groups have been accused of attacking US forces stationed in the region. On 17 and 18 September, thousands of electronic communication devices, primarily used by Hezbollah members, detonated across Lebanon, resulting in at least 37 deaths and over 3,400 injuries. Similar explosions were also reported in Syria, with some sources indicating 14 injuries, although the details remain uncertain. While Israel has not taken responsibility for the explosions, the attacks have been widely attributed to Israel. (For more information, see the brief on Lebanon in our October *Monthly Forecast* and 19 September *What's in Blue* story.)

On 8 September, Israel reportedly carried out airstrikes and a commando raid near Masyaf in Hama province, targeting multiple Syrian military sites and a weapons production facility. Media reports suggest that this facility is linked to Hezbollah and was staffed by several Iranian military experts involved in weapons production at the time of the attack. According to Syrian state media, 18 people were killed and 37 were injured in this attack. On 20 September, an airstrike that targeted a vehicle near Damascus killed Abu Haidar al-Khafaji, a commander of Kataib Hezbollah, an Iran-backed Iraqi militia. The group, known for its involvement in attacks against US forces in the Middle East, has vowed to fight Israel over the explosions of communication devices in Lebanon.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 10 September, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria (COI) presented its latest report during the 57th session of the Human Rights Council, covering the developments from 1 January to 30 June. The report noted that the COI has reasonable grounds to believe that the Syrian government "continued to commit acts of torture and ill-treatment against individuals in state custody", including practices resulting in death in detention, arbitrary imprisonment, sexual violence, and enforced disappearances, thereby confirming persistent patterns of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The COI urged the parties to the conflict to immediately cease all indiscriminate and direct attacks on civilians, cease torture and ill-treatment in all places of detention, and release all arbitrarily detained individuals. It also recommended that member states enhance support for humanitarian efforts in Syria and review their sanction policies to eliminate negative effects on humanitarian actors and civilians.

## Key Issues and Options

An important issue for Council members is the ongoing hostilities in Syria. Continuing violence and the lack of accountability threaten to destabilise the country further. The ISIL/Da'esh remains one of the key security threats in Syria. The deteriorating socioeconomic conditions in the country are also of concern.

UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2254](#) (18 December 2015) was the first resolution focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. It was adopted unanimously.

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# Syria

Determining how the Council can address the spillover effects of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and de-escalate rising tensions in the region, including in Syria, is also an issue of utmost significance for the Council.

As well, a key issue is how to alleviate the growing humanitarian needs throughout the country. The Syrian refugee crisis is also of paramount importance. Since the start of the civil war in 2011, approximately 6.8 million Syrians have sought refuge in third countries, including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye. Concerns regarding safety and security within Syria, as well as the lack of livelihoods, continue to be significant obstacles to the return of refugees. In addition, the recent escalation of hostilities in the region has left the Syrian refugees in peril. Since October 2023, 33 Syrian nationals are reported to have been killed and 113 injured by aerial strikes in Lebanon, which hosts approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees. In light of the recent Israeli strikes in Lebanon, which began on 23 September and had resulted in the deaths of over 500 people at the time of writing, UNHCR reported that thousands of Lebanese and Syrian people are fleeing Lebanon for Syria in desperation, including by foot. (For more information, see the 25 September *What's in Blue* story.)

One option would be for the co-chairs of the Informal Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians (Switzerland and the UK) to hold a meeting on the situation in Syria to receive briefings from relevant UN entities about the impact of the conflict on civilians.

The need to break the underlying political impasse in the country and support the Special Envoy's work in this regard is another key issue. The Council could consider holding a private meeting with stakeholders to discuss the impediments to the resumption of the Syrian Constitutional Committee, including the issue of venue, and support Pedersen's efforts to reinvigorate the political process. (A private meeting is a closed, formal meeting format; unlike closed consultations, non-Council member states are allowed to participate in this format.)

## Council and Wider Dynamics

Over the years, Syria has been one of the most divisive files on the Council's agenda. China and Russia are supportive of the Syrian

government, emphasising the need to respect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and drawing connections between unilateral coercive measures on Syria and the country's challenging humanitarian and economic situations. 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, not engaging meaningfully in political dialogue, and not creating conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees. Ensuring accountability for violence against civilians also remains a key issue for these members.

Council members also have diverging views on normalising ties with the Syrian government. While the US and like-minded members continue to oppose engagement with the government, China and Russia have voiced support for the normalisation of ties.

The US maintains that it would not normalise relations with the Assad government, absent authentic progress towards a political solution to the underlying conflict. It has called for any engagement to be focused on human rights and improving the humanitarian conditions and the security situation.

According to media reports, in July, foreign ministers of eight European Union (EU) countries—Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Slovakia, and Slovenia—sent a letter to the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell Fontelles, which suggested reviewing the EU's approach to Syria. The letter called for a “more active, outcome-driven, and operational Syria policy”, allowing EU countries to increase their political leverage and the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. The letter apparently identified ten areas for consideration, including appointment of an EU-Syria envoy, strategic exchange with Arab countries, further development of the EU's early recovery approach, and creating conditions for the return of migrants to Syria. In late July, Italy also announced its decision to appoint an ambassador to Damascus. At present, Damascus hosts six EU embassies—Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, and Hungary.

Switzerland is the penholder on the Syria humanitarian file.

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# Sudan

## Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council is expected to receive a briefing on the situation in Sudan. Pursuant to resolution 2715 of 1 December 2023, which terminated the mandate of the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS), the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to provide a briefing every 120 days on the “UN's efforts to support Sudan on its path towards peace and stability”.

In line with resolution 2736 of 13 June, the Secretary-General is also expected to present recommendations for the protection of civilians (PoC) in Sudan, ahead of the briefing in October.

## Key Recent Developments

The ongoing conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which began in April 2023, has triggered a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Sudan, including significant civilian casualties, mass displacement, dire food and water shortages, and the collapse of healthcare and essential services. As at 16 September, more than 23,015 people had been killed since the onset of the conflict, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, a non-governmental organisation that collects conflict-related data. Some estimates suggest, however, that the number of casualties may be significantly higher. The

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2750 (11 September 2024) renewed the 1591 Sudan sanctions regime—including targeted sanctions (assets freezes and travel bans) and an arms embargo—until 12 September 2025. S/RES/2736 (13 June 2024) demanded that the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) halt the siege of El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur state, and further called for an immediate halt to the fighting and for de-escalation in and around El Fasher.

# Sudan

war has displaced approximately 10.5 million people, 2.2 million of whom have sought refuge in Sudan’s neighbouring countries—the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, South Sudan, and Uganda—making it the world’s largest displacement crisis. (For background and more information, see the brief on Sudan in our September 2024 *Monthly Forecast* and listen to our 4 September podcast episode.)

El Fasher, the capital city of North Darfur state and the only capital in the Darfur region outside the RSF’s control, has been one of the main areas of strife between the warring parties, marked by intercommunal fighting since early April. According to media reports, the fighting in El Fasher escalated on 12 September as the RSF launched an attack on the city from multiple directions. The mid-term report of the Panel of Experts assisting the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee, transmitted to Council members on 7 August, confirmed that both sides possessed and were using heavy weaponry in El Fasher.

On 18 September, the Council held an open briefing to discuss the situation in El Fasher. Briefing on the humanitarian situation, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya reported heavy shelling and aerial bombardment in the city, affecting civilians and civilian infrastructure, including health facilities and camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). She expressed concern about reports of intense shelling in the central and western parts of the city and the deployment of additional forces. Msuya said that she was “horrified” by signs that the fighting might intensify as the rainy season draws to a close in the coming months. At the same meeting, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations (DPPA-DPO) Martha Ama Akyaa Pobe noted that “a dangerous new reality has now emerged in the wake of the El Fasher escalation with grave and unpredictable ramifications”. She stressed that the escalation risks widening and entrenching the armed conflict, deepening ethnic polarisation of Sudanese society, and further destabilising the region.

In a 21 September statement, UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed alarm about the RSF’s “full-scale” assault on El Fasher and called on its leader, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, to halt the attack immediately. He called it “unconscionable” that the warring parties had repeatedly ignored calls for a cessation of hostilities, warning that any further escalation could threaten to spread the conflict along intercommunal lines throughout Darfur. He stressed the urgent need to secure a ceasefire in El Fasher and across all other conflict zones in Sudan.

On 21 September, the members of the Aligned for Advancing Lifesaving and Peace in Sudan (ALPS) Group—Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the US, the African Union (AU), and the UN—convened virtually. (The group was established at the recent round of talks led by the US in Switzerland from 14 to 23 August.) The members welcomed the opening of the Kassala and Dongola airports for World Food Programme (WFP) humanitarian assistance flights. They also welcomed the reports that humanitarian operations had resumed across conflict lines from Port Sudan through Shendi to Khartoum. They called on the international partners to join efforts to reach immediate humanitarian pauses in the fighting in El Fasher, Sennar, Khartoum, and Al Jazirah states.

(For background and more information, see the brief on Sudan in the September 2024 *Monthly Forecast* and 5 September *What’s in Blue* story.)

## Human Rights Related Developments

On 6 September, the International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan, established by the Human Rights Council in October 2023, released its first report. The report found that the SAF, the RSF, and their respective allied militias, are responsible for widespread violations, including indiscriminate and direct attacks carried out through airstrikes and shelling against civilians, schools, hospitals, communication networks, and vital water and electricity supplies. The report concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that several established violations of international humanitarian law constitute war crimes committed by both warring parties. It further established reasonable grounds to believe that the RSF and allied militias have committed crimes against humanity, including murder, torture, enslavement, rape, sexual slavery, acts of a sexual nature of comparable gravity, persecution on the basis of intersecting ethnic and gender grounds, and forced displacement. The report recommended the deployment of an independent and impartial force with a mandate to protect civilians in Sudan. It further noted that there is a risk that those supplying arms to the warring parties may be complicit in grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

In a 10 September statement, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Nada Al-Nashif noted that the parties to the conflict have failed to adhere to declarations aimed at protecting civilians, as violations have continued unabated. Between June and August, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented over 864 civilian deaths resulting from attacks on residential areas across Sudan. Al-Nashif also expressed alarm over “the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war” since the conflict began, attributing 81 percent of sexual violence incidents to men in RSF uniforms and allied militias. She also pointed to credible reports of sexual violence attributed to SAF troops and allied armed movements.

## Key Issues and Options

The overarching issue for the Security Council is how to halt the ongoing fighting and support efforts to achieve a sustainable ceasefire across Sudan. A related concern is the situation in Darfur and the levels of intercommunal violence and insecurity throughout the country. In light of the continuing violence across the country, the lack of implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, and the failure of mediation initiatives to achieve meaningful breakthroughs, Council members face several questions, including:

- how to bring the Sudanese warring parties to a meaningful dialogue,
- how to protect civilians and enforce compliance with international humanitarian law,
- how to ensure accountability for past and ongoing crimes, and
- how to mitigate the regional spillover effect of the conflict.

One option for Council members would be to invite the Secretary-General’s Personal Envoy for Sudan, Ramtane Lamamra, to brief on his engagements with relevant stakeholders and the Secretary-General’s recommendations for protecting civilians in Sudan. Council members may also wish to hold a private meeting with the actors holding influence over the Sudanese warring parties to discuss the search for a mediated solution to the crisis and evaluate the implementation of the PoC recommendations.

Another avenue for further deliberations on the Sudanese crisis could be the annual joint consultative meeting between the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) and the UN Security Council, scheduled for 18 October.

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## Sudan

An additional issue for the Security Council is the humanitarian crisis and how to foster the continuous and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid while also securing the safety and security of UN officials and other humanitarian actors. The fact that aid at scale is not reaching people in need is a further concern for Council members. The humanitarian situation has been exacerbated by the spread of disease and the collapse of the healthcare system. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), at least 12 of the 18 states in the country are experiencing three or more simultaneous outbreaks of different diseases, while fewer than 25 percent of health facilities in the conflict-affected states are currently functional. Periodic briefings by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) could help keep the Council informed about the humanitarian situation on the ground.

Another option for Council members is to conduct a visiting mission to Sudan to assess the situation on the ground and engage with relevant stakeholders. This mission could also provide an opportunity for Council members to visit the refugee camps in neighbouring countries, particularly Chad.

### Council and Wider Dynamics

Most Council members share similar concerns about the dire political, security, and humanitarian situations in Sudan. Members have diverging views, however, on the tools that the Council should use to address these situations.

One of the points of contention during the negotiations on resolution 2750 of 11 September, which renewed the Sudan sanctions regime for one year, related to how to reference the central authorities in Sudan. Countries such as China, Russia, and the members of the “A3 plus one” grouping (Algeria, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Guyana) called for maintaining the term “Sudanese government”. On the other hand, the US (penholder on Sudan sanctions) and some other members strongly supported the use of term “Sudanese authorities”. Russia considers Sudan’s Transitional Sovereign Council, led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, head of the SAF, as Sudan’s highest legitimate authority. During the negotiations, however, some members argued that the SAF had lost territorial control over parts of the country and that the term “Sudanese authorities” encompasses the offshoots of the government body. (For background, see the brief on Sudan in our September 2024 *Monthly Forecast* and 10 September *What’s in Blue* story.)

Russia has maintained the position that Sudanese government forces remain responsible for protecting civilians. In a similar vein, it has argued that any cooperation and coordination on humanitarian assistance should be carried out via channels agreed with the Sudanese government as the sole entity responsible for aid distribution and relief assistance. It has also opposed any references that might imply that the Sudanese government is on par with any other Sudanese entity.

During a joint press conference with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty stressed the “importance of not putting the Sudanese army in the same equation of any other party, and the importance of working on activating the role of the Sudanese institutions in order for the Sudanese state to maintain the sovereignty of Sudan”.

The US considers that some political forces—such as former regime officials from the National Congress Party, which ruled Sudan under former President Omar al-Bashir—have undermined al-Burhan and efforts to end the war. During the 18 September Council briefing, however, Russia argued that “it is crucial to involve all influential political forces and the country’s main ethno-confessional groups, including authoritative regional leaders”.

Tensions have mounted between the Sudanese government and the UAE, considering the latter’s reportedly continued support to the RSF, including through the supply of weapons and equipment. Speaking at the 11 September Council meeting, Sudan accused the UAE of acting with impunity, leveraging its substantial fuel reserves and strategic importance. It called on third countries to exert pressure on the UAE to alter its course, including using possible sanctions. Sudan also called for a review of weapons export policies to the UAE, claiming these weapons are being used by the RSF to besiege Darfur. A 21 September *New York Times* article alleged that the UAE has misused the Red Crescent symbol, protected under international humanitarian law, as a “cover for its secret operation” involving drone flights into Sudan and weapons smuggling, citing US officials and satellite imagery. The article claimed that the UAE is using an airport in eastern Chad, which has been expanded into a military-style airfield, to transport advanced military drones for the RSF, which have been detected patrolling over El Fasher. The UAE has denied transferring weapons to the RSF, including in correspondence to *The Economist* sent by the UAE’s Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs for Political Affairs Lana Nusseibeh.

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## The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

### Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council expects to hold its quarterly open debate on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” (MEPQ). Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland is expected to brief.

Council members are likely to convene additional meetings during the month and evaluate whether further Council action is required.

### Key Recent Developments

Almost one year since the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas following the 7 October 2023 attacks and over three months since the adoption of resolution 2735, which welcomed a ceasefire proposal announced by the US, the prospects for a cessation of hostilities in Gaza appear remote.

While the world’s attention turns to developments in Lebanon, Israeli bombardment from the air and land continues to be reported

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2735 (10 June 2024) welcomed a ceasefire proposal announced by the US in May. S/RES/2720 (22 December 2023) requested the Secretary-General to appoint a SHRC tasked with establishing a UN mechanism for accelerating humanitarian consignments to Gaza. S/RES/2334 (23 December 2016) condemned Israeli settlements and called for immediate steps to prevent violence against civilians, including acts of terror.

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## The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

across the Gaza Strip, alongside ground operations, heavy fighting, and rocket fire by Palestinian armed groups.

The Security Council's resolutions on the war in Gaza (resolutions 2712, 2720, and 2728) remain largely unimplemented, as do the provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the context of South Africa's proceedings against Israel concerning possible violations in the Gaza Strip of obligations under the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Figures provided by Palestinian officials in Gaza cited by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) indicate that, as at 26 September, at least 41,534 Palestinians had been killed during Israel's military campaign, while over 10,000 remain under the rubble. A 30 July report by the World Health Organization (WHO) found that about 25 percent of all those injured (or, 22,500 people) are likely to have "acute and ongoing rehabilitation needs, including patients with extremity injuries, amputations, head and spinal cord injuries and burns". At least 1.9 million people are estimated to be displaced across the Gaza Strip, with a recent report by Cambridge University and the Centre for Lebanese Studies documenting the severe and long-lasting repercussions of the war on Palestinian children's learning.

According to figures provided by Israeli authorities cited by OCHA, over 1,546 Israelis and foreign nationals have been killed between 7 October 2023 and 27 September, the vast majority on 7 October 2023. As at 10 September, 101 hostages remained captive in Gaza according to Israeli sources cited by the UN.

Analysts have identified Israel's military campaign in Gaza as one of the deadliest and most destructive in recent history. Large areas of Gaza, including critical infrastructure, have been bombed to the ground, with about 63 percent of the total structures in the Gaza Strip estimated to be destroyed, damaged, or possibly damaged. According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), even if a five-fold increase in construction materials were allowed into Gaza, it would take until 2040 to rebuild completely destroyed housing units. But it could take "approximately 80 years" if reconstruction were to follow the same pattern as after previous escalations.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains abysmal. At a recent press conference, UNICEF Director of Child Nutrition and Development Victor Aguayo estimated that "over 50,000 children suffer from acute malnutrition and need immediate treatment", before warning of the ongoing risk of famine.

In July, six environmental samples of variant poliovirus type 2 (polio) were detected in Gaza. In response, the UN launched a two-round vaccination campaign for children under ten years of age across the Gaza Strip during localised humanitarian pauses. The first round was successfully completed on 12 September. A 20 August joint statement by humanitarian organisations and medical professionals noted that the reemergence of polio in Gaza was "a direct result of the destruction of water and sanitation infrastructure, and the Government of Israel's restrictions on repairs and supplies". These actions, together with "overcrowding, displacement, and a crippled healthcare system", created an environment ripe for the virus' spread, the statement said.

Humanitarian aid in Gaza continues to face significant constraints, with OCHA reporting that, as at 27 September, 87 percent of such movements between northern and southern Gaza coordinated with the Israeli authorities in September had been either denied or impeded. This follows the month of August, which OCHA had identified as the most challenging month for humanitarian access since January, with 46 percent of all humanitarian movements being either denied or impeded. In a recent statement, the Norwegian Refugee Council said that "[w]ith the amount of aid Israel is currently allowing into Gaza", it will take over two years to deliver the kits needed to prepare shelters south of Wadi Gaza for this coming winter.

Other constraints to humanitarian aid delivery often cited by UN officials include ongoing hostilities, the limited number of open crossing points, and the breakdown of law and order in Gaza leading to the looting of supplies. UN officials have noted that, as the occupying power, it is incumbent on Israel to "restore public order and safety as far as possible and facilitate safe humanitarian access" to Gaza.

Lack of security for humanitarians is another key factor contributing to aid not reaching Palestinians. Addressing the Security Council at a 27 September meeting on the MEPQ, Secretary-General António Guterres referenced two recent incidents in which clearly marked UN vehicles that were part of convoys that had been coordinated with the Israeli authorities were attacked by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) before underscoring that attacks on humanitarians are an "unacceptable assault" on UN values and "must stop".

Following the recovery on 1 September of the bodies of six hostages, who the IDF said had been killed by their captors as Israeli forces neared, Hamas announced that it was operating under a new set of instructions issued after Israel's rescue of four hostages in June in an operation that killed many Palestinians. A 31 July report by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) noted that Palestinian armed groups have prevented the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) from visiting the hostages. It added that released Israeli hostages had "described being beaten while being taken into Gaza, or seeing other hostages being beaten while in captivity".

The report also observed that thousands of Palestinians have been detained by the IDF, "most of them without charges or trial", since early November 2023, and that Israel has suspended the ICRC's access to all Palestinian detainees since 7 October 2023. The report added that released detainees reported being subject to forms of torture or other ill-treatment.

According to the nonprofit organisation the Committee to Protect Journalists, at least 116 journalists and media workers have been killed during the war, including 111 Palestinians, two Israelis, and three Lebanese. Foreign journalists remain barred from accessing the Gaza Strip without Israel's approval and an IDF escort. On 22 September, the Israeli authorities ordered the closure of Al Jazeera's Ramallah office for 45 days, a move that Amnesty International has identified as raising press freedom concerns.

On 31 July, Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh was killed in Iran's capital, Tehran. The attack has been widely attributed to Israel, although it has not taken responsibility for it.

In May, South Africa sent a letter to the Security Council

# The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

containing a dossier relating to Israel's "intent and incitement to commit genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza".

Resolution 2720 of December 2023, which mandated the appointment of a Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator (SHRC) for Gaza, requested the SHRC to report to the Council every 90 days until 30 September. At the time of writing, Council members were negotiating an extension of the reporting requirement established in resolution 2720.

Regarding the situation in the West Bank, Israel advanced or approved 6,370 housing units during the reporting period (11 June–11 September) of the latest Secretary-General's report on the implementation of resolution 2334. Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures continued. The report says that one Palestinian was killed by Israeli settlers while 160 were killed during Israeli airstrikes, "search-and-arrest operations, armed exchanges, demonstrations and other incidents", adding that in August, Israeli airstrikes in the West Bank "killed at least one Palestinian every day, on average". The report says that 14 Israelis were killed by Palestinians in "shooting, stabbing and ramming attacks and other incidents".

On 19 July, the ICJ rendered its Advisory Opinion on the "Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem". It reaffirmed that Israeli settlements "and the régime associated with them, have been established and are being maintained in violation of international law". The ICJ determined that Israel's policies and practices, such as its maintenance and expansion of settlements, are designed to "create irreversible effects on the ground" and, as such, "amount to annexation of large parts" of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). The ICJ also found that Israel's legislation and measures in the West Bank and East Jerusalem "impose and serve to maintain a near-complete separation" between settlers and Palestinians and, as such, constitute a breach of Article 3 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which refers to racial segregation and apartheid.

During the 17–18 September resumed Tenth Emergency Special Session (ESS) on "Illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory", the General Assembly voted—124 votes in favour, 14 against, and 43 abstentions—on a resolution on the Advisory Opinion tabled by the State of Palestine. The resolution demands that Israel, among other things, end its "unlawful presence" in the OPT in "no later" than 12 months, and that it immediately ceases all new settlement activity and evacuates all settlers from the OPT. The resolution calls upon UN member states to implement sanctions against those engaged in the maintenance of Israel's presence in the OPT and take steps towards ceasing the importation of products from the settlements and the provision or transfer of arms and munitions that may be used in the OPT. Several international NGOs have issued a similar call regarding the transfer of arms in a 17 September joint statement.

## Women, Peace and Security

A recent UN Women update estimates that 177,000 women in Gaza face "life-threatening health risks, including from non-communicable diseases and hunger and poor nutrition during pregnancy". The update says that women and girls are at heightened risk of exposure to certain diseases due to their

role in caring for sick family members in severely overcrowded shelters in the absence of adequate water and sanitation. It also reports that an estimated 155,000 pregnant and breastfeeding women "confront obstacles to antenatal and postnatal care".

## Key Issues and Options

The Council's failure to effectively expedite an end to the war in Gaza, prevent its regionalisation, and act to protect the viability of the two-state solution are issues of serious concern. That aid at scale is not reaching Palestinians in Gaza and that attacks targeting humanitarian personnel have continued are additional issues of concern.

The Council could consider a resolution that:

- Demands an immediate and permanent ceasefire;
- Demands the immediate release of the hostages;
- Demands the immediate release of Palestinians detained without charge;
- Requests the Secretary-General to establish a UN-monitoring mechanism in case of a ceasefire to verify compliance;
- Demands that the international community support an end to the violence by stopping the transfer of arms to Israel and Palestinian armed groups while there is a risk that they are used to commit serious violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL);
- Imposes sanctions on those who impede humanitarian access or attack humanitarian personnel;
- Imposes sanctions on Israeli officials responsible for advancing settlement activity;
- Imposes sanctions on Israeli and Hamas officials for violations of international law.

Any agreement on such a resolution is unlikely, however, given that the US remains steadfast in its political and military support of Israel.

Council members could invite briefings from some of the UN independent experts who issued a statement in June stressing that transferring weapons and ammunition to Israel "may constitute serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian laws" risking state complicity in "international crimes, possibly including genocide". The briefing could focus on the legal consequences of weapons and ammunition transfer when there is a clear risk that such weapons may be used to commit serious IHL and IHRL violations.

The ESS resolution decided to convene a conference during the current session of the General Assembly to advance the implementation of UN resolutions on "the question of Palestine and the two-state solution for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East". Members who have expressed support for such an international conference, like China and Slovenia, could start consultations to this effect.

## Council Dynamics

Before 7 October 2023, Council dynamics precluded effective action in response to the non-implementation of Security Council resolutions as well as a shared strategy to restart a political process between Palestinians and Israelis, with the US maintaining that the circumstances were not ripe for the re-ignition of such a process.

Difficult dynamics have characterised the Council's response to the war, which has been marked by contentious and prolonged

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## The Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

negotiations, with multiple failed adoptions. Council negotiations on this file have shown that it is not possible for the Council to adopt an outcome that the US does not largely support. On 12 September, for instance, the US blocked press elements proposed by Algeria that would have condemned the 11 September Israeli airstrike on a school sheltering displaced people that killed at least 18 people, including six employees of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The press elements would have also reaffirmed that humanitarian personnel should be protected in accordance with international law.

The position of the US on the war in Gaza has led to accusations of double standards in comparison to its position on the war in Ukraine, further deepening the divide among some Council members.

Recently, several members—including China, Guyana, Russia, and Slovenia—have expressed frustration at the lack of implementation of resolution 2735, with some arguing that the Council should move to consider its next steps. At the 27 September meeting, Slovenian Prime Minister Robert Golob said that he had instructed his ambassador to start consultations on “a possible new humanitarian resolution on Palestine”.

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## Kosovo

### Expected Council Action

In October, the Security Council is expected to hold its second briefing of the year on the situation in Kosovo. Special Representative and head of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) Caroline Ziadah will brief on recent developments and the Secretary-General’s latest report.

### Key Recent Developments

There has been no meaningful progress in implementing the commitments that Belgrade and Pristina verbally agreed to in Ohrid, North Macedonia, as part of the EU-proposed Agreement on the Path to Normalisation of 27 February 2023 and its Implementation Annex of 18 March 2023. The 11-point agreement stipulated that neither Kosovo nor Serbia can represent the other in the international sphere and that Serbia will not object to Kosovo’s membership in international organisations. In exchange, Kosovo committed to forming “specific arrangements and guarantees...to ensure an appropriate level of self-management” for the Serbian community in Kosovo. The annex notably emphasised the need for the parties to implement the agreement’s 11 points independently of each other. However, diverging views on the sequencing of the implementation have hindered concrete progress.

European Union (EU) High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell Fontelles invited Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Prime Minister of Kosovo Albin Kurti to Brussels on 26 June for a high-level meeting as part of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. The trilateral meeting, however, did not take place. In a press conference that day, Borrell explained that Kosovo had set three conditions for its participation: the formalisation of the Ohrid Agreement by having both parties sign it; the withdrawal of a letter from former Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabić to the European External Action Service, in which she argued that the Ohrid Agreement is “acceptable solely within the context that does not pertain to the de facto and de jure recognition of Kosovo”; and that Serbia hand over Milan Radoičić, the former vice president of the predominant political party in Serb-majority northern Kosovo, Serbian List, and his affiliates to Kosovo’s judicial authorities.

Radoičić and 44 others were indicted by Kosovo’s Special

Prosecutor on 11 September for their alleged involvement in the 24 September 2023 security incident near Banjska/Banjskë village in northern Kosovo. This incident, which saw armed clashes between assailants and Kosovo police, resulted in the death of one police officer, injuries to two others, and the deaths of three armed assailants. While Radoičić later admitted his involvement and resigned from his political position, Serbia has ruled out his extradition.

After the 26 June trilateral meeting fell through, Borrell remarked that Serbia was “not ready to fully meet Kosovo’s conditions, citing constitutional constraints”. He noted Vučić’s willingness to “explore options” regarding Brnabić’s letter and formalising the Ohrid Agreement “in line with past dialogue practices”. Borrell also said that, prior to the cancellation of the meeting, the EU presented a new proposal for the Ohrid Agreement’s implementation. He emphasised, however, that the parties’ views on how the normalisation process should proceed remain far apart.

The security situation in northern Kosovo remains fragile. On 15 May, the EU announced that Kosovo and Serbia had failed to reach a compromise during a trilateral meeting regarding the Central Bank of Kosovo’s new regulation mandating the use of the euro as the sole currency for cash transactions in Kosovo starting on 1 February. (For background information, see our 7 February *What’s in Blue* story.)

Following the failed talks, Kosovo police conducted several operations targeting banking facilities in northern Kosovo. On 20 May, they closed and confiscated six offices of the Serbian Postal Savings Bank in four northern municipalities, alleging in a press release that these institutions had been “operating illegally” and that the actions were taken to “establish law and order.” The following day, the EU described the operation as “escalatory” and said it contradicted the “spirit of normalisation.” On 31 May, Ziadah stressed the importance of avoiding “unilateral actions that could increase tensions, jeopardize stability and undermine trust among communities”.

On 5 August, Kosovo police shut down nine offices of the Serbian national postal service, Pošta Srbije, citing suspicions that these offices were operating without proper licensing and registration. The move was criticised by several international interlocutors, including the EU, the UN, and the US. The EU pointed out that, according



# Kosovo

to the arrangements regarding telecommunications reached in 2013 and the action plan agreed upon in 2015, both parties had committed to addressing postal services “at a later stage”.

On 30 August, Kosovo police closed several municipal institutions in northern Kosovo that it described as “illegal structures”. The closures were again met with international criticism. The EU stressed that the operation put “the fragile security situation on the ground at risk” and noted that the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) was deployed to monitor the conduct of the operation. Similarly, the US expressed disappointment with the “uncoordinated actions” taken by Kosovo authorities and cautioned that such actions “put Kosovan citizens and [Kosovo Force] soldiers at greater risk, unnecessarily escalate regional tensions, and undermine Kosovo’s reputation as a reliable international partner”. Ziadeh highlighted that such actions “undermine efforts to consolidate trust between different communities and to maintain security, stability and peace”.

## Key Issues and Options

The Council’s priority is to maintain stability in Kosovo and promote the de-escalation of tensions in the north. It will continue to monitor diplomatic efforts to advance the Belgrade–Pristina dialogue and any efforts towards reaching a final, legally binding agreement on Kosovo. To this end, the Council could consider pursuing a presidential statement calling on all parties to refrain from unilateral actions and to resolve outstanding issues through the EU-facilitated dialogue.

## Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members are united in supporting the EU-facilitated dialogue to establish conditions for the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina. Deep divisions among permanent members, however, continue to characterise the Council’s approach to the issue.

Among the five permanent Council members, France, the UK, and the US recognise Kosovo’s independence and tend to be supportive of its government; China and Russia do not recognise its independence and strongly support Serbia’s position and its claim to territorial integrity. Six elected members (Guyana, Japan, Malta, the Republic of Korea [ROK], Slovenia, and Switzerland) recognise Kosovo’s independence while three (Algeria, Ecuador, and Mozambique) do not. Kosovo says that Sierra Leone officially recognised its independence in June 2008. According to media reports, however, Serbia claimed in March 2020 that Sierra Leone had withdrawn its recognition, citing a note verbale on the matter from Sierra Leone’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Kosovo disputes the validity of the withdrawal.

The issue of modifying UNMIK’s mandate with a view to its possible drawdown is another point of contention among Council members. The US has been the most vocal advocate for reviewing UNMIK’s operations and ultimately phasing out the mission. Several other Council members—including Japan, Switzerland, the ROK, and the UK—have expressed support for a strategic review and potential modification of UNMIK’s mandate, arguing that the situation on the ground has changed significantly since the mission was established in 1999. Russia has opposed any changes to UNMIK’s mandate or budget reduction, maintaining that the mission continues to play a crucial role.

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