

# Monthly Forecast

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## Overview

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

The US plans to organise two signature events during the month. The first will be a briefing on [women, peace and security \(WPS\)](#) focused on the power of intergenerational dialogues and partnerships between young and senior women peacebuilders in advancing peace and security.

The second signature event is a briefing on [artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#) under the agenda item “Maintenance of international peace and security”.

There may be a ministerial-level meeting on a country-specific issue towards the end of the month, but the topic had yet to be confirmed at the time of writing.

The US also intends to convene a briefing on [Ukraine](#).

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

Council members are also expected to vote on a draft resolution extending the application of the standing humanitarian exemption created by resolution 2664 of 9 December 2022 to the [1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant \(ISIL/Da’esh\) and Al-Qaida sanctions regime](#). (While resolution 2664 applied to all other UN sanctions regimes indefinitely, it modified the 1267/1989/2253 regime for an initial two-year period.)

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

African issues that are expected to be discussed in December are:

- [The Democratic Republic of the Congo \(DRC\)](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and renewal of MONUSCO’s mandate;
- [Sudan](#), briefing by the chair of the 1591 Sudan Sanctions Committee;
- [Somalia](#), vote on two draft resolutions: one renewing the sanctions measures against Al-Shabaab and another on the successor mission to the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), whose mandate expires on 31 December;

- [Central Africa region](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the implementation of the UN’s regional strategy to combat the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA);
- [Libya](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL); and
- [West Africa and the Sahel](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).

Middle Eastern issues that will be addressed this month include:

- [Syria](#), meetings on the political, humanitarian, and chemical weapons tracks;
- [Iraq](#), briefing and consultations on the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI);
- [“The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question”](#), two scheduled meetings: the regular monthly meeting and a briefing from Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator (SHRC) for Gaza Sigrid Kaag in line with resolution 2720 of 22 December 2023;
- [Yemen](#), the monthly meeting on developments; and
- [Golan](#), consultations on the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and UNDOF’s mandate renewal.

The only Asian issue planned in December is [Afghanistan](#). The Council will hold its quarterly meeting on the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and renew the mandate of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee.

On the Americas, there will be a briefing by the chair of the 2653 [Haiti](#) Sanctions Committee.

Regarding [non-proliferation](#), the Council is expected to receive a briefing on the Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of resolution 2231 of 20 July 2015, which endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran’s nuclear programme.

Other issues could be raised in December depending on developments in contexts such as [Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territory \(OPT\), Lebanon, Syria, and Ukraine](#). Council members are also currently negotiating several draft resolutions, including on [Myanmar](#) and [children and armed conflict](#), which may be voted on during the month.

**2 December 2024**

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# In Hindsight: The Financing of AU-led Peace Support Operations: What Next?

## Introduction

On 21 December, it will be one year since the adoption of resolution 2719 through which the Council authorised support for African Union-led peace support operations (AUPSOs) from UN assessed contributions on a case-by-case basis. The adoption of this landmark resolution is widely regarded as a significant milestone in UN-AU cooperation.

Council members are expected to receive the first report on its implementation in December. Discussions within the Council on this issue have gained momentum, particularly regarding potential test cases to be considered under resolution 2719. This month's *In Hindsight* examines the prospects and challenges in this regard and anticipates what lies ahead.

## Laying the Groundwork

The implementation of resolution 2719 has been a major focus for the UN and the AU over the past year. They established a joint task force involving the relevant departments of the UN Secretariat and the AU Commission organised around four key workstreams to develop a shared understanding of the resolution and its implementation. These are: joint planning, decision-making and reporting; mission support; financing and budgeting; and human rights compliance and protection of civilians. The task force held in-person meetings in Addis Ababa, the AU's headquarters, in May, and in New York in July, to develop a joint AU-UN roadmap for implementing the resolution. The roadmap was endorsed at the 8th UN-AU High-Level Conference in Addis Ababa on 21 October, underscoring the commitment of both organisations to ensure institutional and operational readiness for any future authorisation by the Council of a new AUPSO under resolution 2719.

In their 20 May presidential statement, Council members requested an update on the implementation of the resolution ahead of their Annual Joint Consultative Meeting with the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC), which was to take place in October in New York. Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee provided the update on 2 October during the annual briefing on cooperation between the UN and regional and subregional organisations in maintaining international peace and security, highlighting the joint UN-AU efforts to operationalise resolution 2719.

Over the last couple of years, the financing of AUPSOs has been a recurring topic of discussion during the annual consultation between members of the two councils. This year, the topic was discussed during the informal seminar, held in a retreat format in Tarrytown, New York, from 16-17 October, preceding the annual consultation on 18 October. (For more, see the *In Hindsight* on *UN-AU Cooperation: A Path Toward Networked Multilateralism or Fractured Responses?* in our November 2024 *Monthly Forecast*.)

Additionally, the Security Council's Ad-Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa provided a platform for discussions on the implementation of resolution 2719. During its meeting in May, Council members engaged in a broad reflection

on the issue, and in June, they received updates on the work of the joint UN-AU task force regarding the development of the roadmap.

## Possible Test Cases

Since the adoption of resolution 2719, several potential test cases have emerged. The most attention has been given to Somalia, which appears to have the necessary conditions for the application of resolution 2719. In other cases, such as Sudan, certain conditions, such as a ceasefire or a cessation of hostilities agreement, may need to be in place before it can be considered a serious test case. Additionally, the deployment of a force in the Sahel region currently seems remote but remains under consideration.

## Somalia

The AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM)—which is expected to replace the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) when its mandate expires by the end of December—has been at the top of the list of potential test cases. The Security Council, pursuant to resolution 2748, requested the UN and the AU to develop a mission design and financing options for the new mission and submit their recommendations by 15. The deadline was moved to 30 November following a request by the Secretary-General for additional time to finalise consultations with the AU. The report was eventually circulated to Council members on 26 November.

While there appears to be broad agreement on the deployment of the AUSSOM, there is a divergence of views among Council members regarding how the mission should be financed. In particular, the US appears strongly opposed to considering the mission's financing under resolution 2719, arguing that it is premature to do so, especially given that some milestones outlined in the joint UN-AU roadmap are not expected to be implemented until mid-2025. They include those related to mission support in line with the AU Compliance Framework, which aims to ensure that AUPSOs adhere to international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and applicable standards of conduct and discipline, as well as other processes related to unit requirements for contingent-owned equipment, self-sustainment, and specialised assets. It seems that the US has circulated a non-paper outlining its position on the matter and proposing a two-year bridging mechanism to allow more time to put in place the necessary conditions for the implementation of the resolution. The US has also apparently indicated that it is considering all options, including vetoing any resolution that might prematurely trigger resolution 2719 on Somalia.

The UK, the penholder on Somalia, had been amenable to considering AUSSOM under resolution 2719, but its position seems to have evolved. Apparently, the UK has argued that it might be unrealistic to trigger the resolution before the end of this year and that instead an interim arrangement for at least one year should be considered. However, the AU has argued that there is nothing in resolution 2719 to suggest that a bridging mechanism should be used.

Although the US referred to needing to fulfill some milestones of the joint roadmap in explaining its position, both the UN and the AU made it clear that “the delivery of the joint roadmap should not be

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understood as a prerequisite for implementing resolution 2719, but rather as a framework for continuously strengthening overall performance and impact of the African Union and United Nations, based on decades of lessons, operational experience and collaboration”.<sup>1</sup> Pobebe also stressed this position in her 2 October briefing to the Council, reaffirming the UN and the AU’s readiness to support any specific peace support operation that the Council decides to authorise under resolution 2719.

Somalia, the host country and an incoming Council member, and the AUPSC (through its 28 October communiqué) have expressed a desire for a dedicated funding mechanism within the framework of resolution 2719 to avoid the financial challenges faced by previous missions. The AUPSC has also expressed a clear intention to “use part of the interest accrued from the AU Peace Fund investment and the Crisis Reserve Facility (CRF) to substantially contribute to the financing of AUSSOM”, demonstrating its commitment to sharing the financial burden.

Some African members have also maintained that waiting for ideal conditions to trigger resolution 2719 is neither realistic nor productive, while other members have emphasised the urgency of addressing the situation in Somalia, warning that any delay in action could lead to failure and undermine the resolution’s effectiveness.

## Sudan

Amid the ongoing conflict in Sudan and growing concerns for the protection of civilians, there have been calls for the deployment of an independent force with a mandate to protect civilians, including by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan in its early September report. In this context, some Council members have been considering a range of options, including the possibility of deploying an AUPSO, potentially authorised under resolution 2719.

The US, which opposes triggering this resolution in the case of Somalia and has voiced a preference for the first test case of resolution 2719 to be a new mission, appears to be a strong proponent of such action in Sudan. It has emphasised that “the international community should, in close collaboration with African partners, begin considering options to establish a compliance and monitoring mission—one that could strengthen the protection of civilians and support the implementation and durability of any future local or nationwide cessation of hostilities”. However, the Secretary-General, in his report to the Council pursuant to resolution 2736 of 13 June, which requested him to make recommendations for the protection of civilians in Sudan, stated that “at present, the conditions do not exist for the successful deployment of a UN force to protect civilians.”

Following the Secretary-General’s report, the UK and Sierra Leone co-facilitated Council negotiations on a draft resolution that, among other things, encouraged the Secretary-General to strengthen planning to support a ceasefire agreement, including through monitoring and verification together with other international stakeholders, particularly the AU. While several Council members supported this proposal, others expressed reservations, arguing that it is premature to discuss such mechanisms in the absence of a ceasefire agreement.

The text went through several iterations before being tabled for a vote on 18 November, but it was not adopted due to a veto by Russia, which argued, among other things, that the resolution was based on a flawed understanding of who holds primary responsibility for protecting civilians in Sudan. (For more, see our 17 November *What’s in Blue* story.)

## Sahel

Another potential test case under discussion is the deployment of a regional force in the Sahel region. One of the key reasons the Secretary-General has strongly supported a new generation of AUPSOs under Chapter VII of the UN Charter—with guaranteed and predictable funding, including through assessed contributions—is the relevance of such potential initiatives for West Africa and the Sahel, which are facing severe security challenges.

On 25 September 2022, the UN, AU, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (FC-G5S) jointly launched a high-level independent Panel, led by the former President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, to conduct a strategic assessment of “the underlying challenges in the Sahel”. The Panel’s report was expected to provide recommendations, including the possibility of an AU-mandated regional response. However, its work was complicated by the coup in Niger and other subsequent regional developments, such as the dissolution of the FC-G5S and the formation of a new alliance of military juntas in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

Meanwhile, on 7 July, the ECOWAS summit in Abuja discussed the possibility of activating a regional force to combat terrorism, including the establishment of a 5,000-strong force. In this regard, the summit directed the President of the ECOWAS Commission to consult with the AU, particularly within the framework of resolution 2719 and the outcomes of the review conducted by the Issoufou panel. Subsequently, the Panel’s report and recommendations were considered by the UN-AU High-Level Conference in Addis Ababa on 21 October, where both sides agreed to jointly advance the Panel’s key recommendations through their respective organs and institutional mechanisms. However, to date this case has not gained traction in the Security Council.

## What Lies Ahead?

Prior to the expiration of the ATMIS mandate on 31 December, members will need to decide whether its follow-on mission (that is, AUSSOM) will be authorised under resolution 2719. The upcoming negotiations will be informed by the joint UN-AU report, which recommended a hybrid implementation of resolution 2719 to support AUSSOM. First, this would entail a reconfigured and streamlined UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSSOS), which will continue to be financed through UN assessed contributions, providing logistical support to AUSSOM. Second, 75 percent of the AUSSOM troop reimbursements would be covered from UN assessed contributions. According to the joint UN-AU report, this option not only reduces the overall cost (it does not exceed the current cost for UNSSOS and

<sup>1</sup> Joint AU-UN Roadmap for the Operationalization of UN Security Council Resolution 2719 (2023)

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ATMIS), but troop reimbursements would be offset by the savings generated from the reconfigured UNSOS.

Based on the report, the UN and the AU hope this will persuade Council members, especially some financial contributors, who believe that applying resolution 2719 could increase the overall cost. A key issue is whether the US will continue to oppose a decision authorising AUSSOM under resolution 2719. Although the US has maintained the view that AUSSOM is not a good candidate for the application of resolution 2719, it supported resolutions 2741 of 28 June and 2748 of 15 August, thereby clearing the way for discussions on authorising AUSSOM under resolution 2719.

If the US position is inflexible, the penholder is likely to lean towards proposing a compromise that would maintain the current status quo at least until mid-2025. There are, however, serious concerns that with a change in the US administration taking place in January 2025, postponing this decision until next year could result in the fate of resolution 2719 remaining in limbo for the next four years.

The discussion regarding the case of Sudan is likely to continue

over the coming months. Despite the 18 November veto by Russia, some Council members, such as the US, appear keen to continue shining a spotlight on Sudan. Members may also continue to pursue an outcome on the humanitarian situation. (For more, see the brief on Sudan in our November 2024 *Monthly Forecast*.)

While the Secretary-General's first annual report on the implementation of resolution 2719, due by 21 December, may not provide much new information—since Council members already received oral updates in October—it could provide an opportunity to call for a meeting to discuss the resolution's future and the challenges ahead.

Resolution 2719 was a milestone towards acknowledging the need for more reliable and sustainable funding for AU-support peace operations. While there are several obstacles still to be overcome, only once a test case is chosen will members be able to determine if this is a model that has the potential to move the UN towards a new regional partnership in peace operations. In this regard, December may be another watershed moment as members decide if they are willing to take that critical step.

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## Status Update since our November Forecast

### Bosnia and Herzegovina

On 1 November, the Council held its semi-annual debate on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) (S/PV.9774) and unanimously adopted resolution 2757, renewing the authorisation of the EU-led multinational stabilisation force (EUFOR ALTHEA) until 1 November 2025.

### DPRK (North Korea)

On 4 November, the Council convened for an open briefing on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) (S/PV.9775). France, Japan, Malta, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Slovenia, the UK, and the US requested the meeting after the DPRK launched an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) on 31 October. Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Mohamed Khaled Khiari briefed. The DPRK participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

On 26 November, the Chair of the 1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl (Switzerland), briefed Council members in closed consultations on the 90-day report regarding the Committee's work.

### South Sudan

On 7 November, the Security Council convened for an open briefing on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) (S/PV.9778), followed by closed consultations. Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan and Head of UNMISS Nicholas Haysom briefed on the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report, which was published on 25 October and covered developments from 16 July to 15 October. Merekaje Lorna, Secretary-General of South Sudan Democratic Engagement, Monitoring and Observation Programme, also briefed the

Council. Kenya and South Sudan participated under rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

### “Threats Posed by Ransomware Attacks against Hospitals and Other Healthcare Facilities and Services”

On 8 November, the Security Council convened for a briefing on “Threats posed by ransomware attacks against hospitals and other healthcare facilities and services” (S/PV.9779). The meeting, which was held under the “Threats to international peace and security” agenda item, was requested by the US, with support from France, Japan, Malta, the Republic of Korea (ROK), and the UK. The briefers were World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and Eduardo Conrado, President of Ascension, a faith-based private healthcare organisation in the US.

### Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

On 4 November, Security Council members held closed consultations, at Russia's request, to discuss the implementation of resolution 2735, which welcomed a ceasefire proposal for the war in Gaza announced by the US in May 2024. Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Khaled Khiari briefed.

On 6 November, Council members held closed consultations on the healthcare system in Gaza and developments regarding the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus briefed.

On 12 November, the Security Council held a briefing under the “Protection of civilians in armed conflict” agenda item to discuss the risk of famine in northern Gaza (S/PV.9781). Guyana and Switzerland, the Council's co-focal points on conflict and hunger, joined by

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Algeria and Slovenia, requested the meeting after the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Famine Review Committee issued an alert on 8 November noting that there is “a strong likelihood that famine is imminent in areas within the northern Gaza Strip”. Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Joyce Msuya, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ilze Brands Kehris, and the Director of the Office of Emergencies and Resilience at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Rein Paulsen briefed.

On 18 November, the Security Council convened for a briefing titled “Ending the war and securing durable peace” under “The situation in the Middle East” agenda item (S/PV.9787). This was one of the signature events of the UK’s November Council presidency. Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland briefed.

On 20 November, the Security Council voted on a draft resolution (S/2024/835) on the war in Gaza, which was put forward by the Council’s ten elected members (E10). The draft resolution demanded an immediate, unconditional, and permanent ceasefire to be respected by all parties and reiterated the Council’s demand for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. The draft text failed to be adopted owing to a veto by the US. The remaining 14 members voted in favour.

On 25 November, the Security Council held its monthly meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question” (S/PV.9794). Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory Muhannad Hadi briefed.

### Counter-Terrorism

On 14 November, the Council convened for the annual open briefing on the work of its counter-terrorism-related committees (S/PV.9784). Ambassador Vanessa Frazier (Malta), chair of the 1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee; Ambassador Amar Bendjama (Algeria), chair of the 1373 Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC); and Ambassador Andrés Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador), chair of the 1540 Committee briefed.

### Central African Republic

On 14 November, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2759, extending the mandate of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) for another year, until 15 November 2025 (S/PV.9783). This was the first unanimous adoption of a resolution extending MINUSCA’s mandate in four years.

### Sudan/South Sudan

On 5 November, the Security Council held a briefing (S/PV.9777), followed by closed consultations, on the Secretary-General’s semi-annual report regarding the implementation of the mandate of the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) (S/2024/740). The report, covering developments from 16 April to 1 October, was circulated to Council members on 14 October. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, the Assistant Secretary-General for Africa in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, briefed the Council. Sudan and South Sudan participated in the meeting under rule 37 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure.

On 14 November, the Security Council adopted resolution 2760,

renewing UNISFA’s mandate for another year, until 15 November 2025. The resolution also extended for one year the mission’s support for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (JBVMM). The resolution was adopted with 14 votes in favour and one abstention (Russia), marking the first abstention on a UNISFA resolution since the mission’s establishment in 2011.

### Lebanon

On 19 November, Council members held a briefing in consultations on the Secretary-General’s report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (S/2024/817). Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert and Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix briefed.

### Haiti

On 20 November, the Security Council held an open briefing, followed by closed consultations, on Haiti (S/PV.9792). The meeting was requested by China and Russia to discuss a proposal by Ecuador and the US—the co-penholders on Haiti—to transform the Multi-national Security Support (MSS) mission authorised by resolution 2699 of 2 October 2023 into a UN peacekeeping operation. Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas Miroslav Jenča and Kenyan National Security Adviser Monica Juma briefed the Council, as well as two civil society representatives: Dr. Jean William Pape, Professor of Clinical Medicine at the Center of Global Health at Weill Cornell and the Director of the Haitian medical services provider GHESKIO, and Dan Cohen, an American journalist and documentary filmmaker.

### Myanmar

On 20 November, the Council convened for a private meeting on Myanmar (S/PV.9791). The UK, the penholder on the file and the Council’s president in November, scheduled the meeting. Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar Julie Bishop and Special Envoy of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Chair on Myanmar Alounkeo Kittikhoun briefed.

### Hitting the Ground Running

The 22nd annual workshop for incoming members of the UN Security Council, titled “Hitting the Ground Running”, was held on 21 and 22 November on Long Island, New York. The government of Finland convened the workshop in cooperation with Security Council Report (SCR) and the Security Council Affairs Division of the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (SCAD). Hanna Serwaa Tetteh, former Foreign Minister of Ghana and former Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa, gave the keynote address on 21 November during a “fireside chat” with members. On 22 November, Council members held three sessions on the work of the Council: “State of the Council 2024: Taking Stock and Looking Ahead”; “Working Methods and Subsidiary Bodies”; and “Lessons Learned: Reflections of the Class of 2024”.

### Protection of Humanitarian and UN Personnel

On 26 November, the Security Council held an open briefing on the Secretary-General’s recommendations on measures to

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prevent and respond to attacks against humanitarian and UN personnel, which the Council requested through resolution 2730 of 24 May (S/PV.9795). Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security Gilles Michaud, Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Director of Financing and Partnerships Lisa Doughten, and co-founder of Humanitarian Outcomes Abby Stoddard briefed the Council.

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### Syria

#### Expected Council Action

In December, the Council expects to hold two meetings on Syria: one on political and humanitarian issues and another on the chemical weapons track.

#### Key Recent Developments

Conflict escalated significantly in Syria in late November. On 27 November, anti-government forces led by the Security Council-listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), launched a major offensive in the north-western Aleppo governorate, resulting in significant territorial changes and the most intense fighting in the region since 2020. In the following days, rebel groups advanced into the city of Aleppo, seizing control of most areas, including the airport, amidst reports of a withdrawal by Syrian government forces.

Although the situation on the ground remains fluid, media sources suggest the rebels have established control in areas between Aleppo and the rebel-controlled Idlib province, capturing key towns south of Aleppo along the main Aleppo-Damascus highway. Rebel groups also claim to have seized the Abu al-Duhur military airbase in the eastern countryside of Idlib. At the time of writing, media reports suggest that rebel forces were advancing towards Hama, a government-controlled city south of Aleppo. The number of casualties from the recent hostilities remains unclear, with some reports estimating that over 327 people had been killed, including civilians and combatants from both sides.

Meanwhile, Russian and Syrian forces have intensified airstrikes in recent days, targeting rebel positions in Idlib and Aleppo. On 30 November, the SOHR reported that Russian and Syrian forces conducted 23 airstrikes in Idlib, killing four civilians and injuring 19 others. On the same day, airstrikes reportedly struck central Aleppo, resulting in the deaths of 16 civilians and 20 insurgent fighters.

The Israel-Hamas war has intensified tensions and violence in the Middle East, including in Syria. Israel has continued to strike positions in Syria that it claims are associated with Iranian forces and affiliated militants, including Hezbollah. Iran-linked proxies, in turn, have attacked US and allied forces stationed in the region, including in Syria. On 14 November, airstrikes reportedly hit residential buildings in the Mazzeh and Qudsaya areas of Damascus, resulting in at least 15 casualties. The Israeli military claimed that the strikes targeted military sites and the headquarters of Palestinian Islamic Jihad. On 20 November, Israeli airstrikes targeted multiple locations in and around Palmyra in central Syria, hitting key military sites, including a weapons depot. There were at least 79 fatalities, marking one of Israel's deadliest operations in Syria.

Israel's military operation in Lebanon, targeting Hezbollah

positions, has worsened the plight of Syrian refugees living in Lebanon. In her remarks at the 21 November Council briefing on Syria, Director of the Operations and Advocacy Division at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Edem Wosornu noted that over 540,000 people have fled to Syria from Lebanon since late September, more than half of them are children and two-thirds are Syrians who had been refugees in Lebanon. Wosornu highlighted the severe impact of airstrikes near Lebanon-Syria border crossings, allegedly conducted by Israel, noting that two of the five official border crossings are now impassable for vehicles due to damage.

On 27 November, Israel and Hezbollah agreed to a ceasefire, although both sides accused the other of violating it in the ensuing days.

In late October, Turkey intensified its military operations in northern Syria following the 23 October attack on the Turkish Aerospace Industries headquarters near Ankara, which killed five people and injured 22 others. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) claimed responsibility for the attack, prompting Turkish forces to target areas in the Kurdish-held Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). The strikes by Turkish forces reportedly targeted critical infrastructure, including water facilities, power and gas stations, and dispensaries, resulting in at least 17 deaths and 69 injuries.

According to media reports, Turkish airstrikes in north-east Syria have cut off access to electricity and water for more than one million people in a region that has experienced severe drought conditions in recent years. There were more than 100 attacks by Turkey between October 2019 and January, targeting oil fields, gas facilities, and power stations in AANES. Turkey has reportedly declared all infrastructure and assets associated with the PKK and Kurdish militia YPG to be "legitimate military targets".

Amid deteriorating security and humanitarian situations across the country, the political process remains at a standstill. The Syrian Constitutional Committee has not met since June 2022 because Russia, a close ally of Syria, has opposed Geneva as the venue for the talks following Switzerland's imposition of sanctions on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

On 11-12 November, members of the Astana format (Iran, Russia, and Türkiye) convened the 22nd high-level meeting in Astana. The representatives assessed the impact of regional developments on Syria and discussed the security, humanitarian, and economic situations on the ground, as well as counter-terrorism efforts.

Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen has continued his efforts to revitalise the Syrian political process, including through engaging with relevant regional and international stakeholders. During the Astana meeting, Pedersen held discussions with representatives of the Astana guarantors and the Syrian government. On 19 November,

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON SYRIA Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2254** (18 December 2015) was the first resolution that focused exclusively on a political solution to the Syrian crisis. It was adopted unanimously. **S/RES/2118** (27 September 2013) required the verification and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles.

# Syria

he met with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi in Jordan. In a post on X (formerly Twitter), the Jordanian foreign ministry highlighted Safadi's call to intensify efforts to end the Syrian crisis and address all its consequences, including by creating appropriate conditions for the voluntary return of refugees.

The 25 October report of the Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on the progress on the verification of and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile said that the 28th round of consultations between the Declaration Assessment Team (DAT) of the OPCW and Syrian authorities took place in Damascus from 10 to 18 September. Although inspections were scheduled for 18 to 24 September, the Secretariat recalled the inspection team due to deteriorating security conditions in the region. The report concluded that considering the unresolved gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies, the declaration submitted by Syria cannot be considered accurate and complete in accordance with the Chemical Weapons Convention.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

Addressing the 1 November meeting of the General Assembly's Third Committee, the Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, Paulo Pinheiro, warned that "Syria is being pulled into the catastrophic conflict that is engulfing the region". He highlighted the dire conditions faced by those fleeing hostilities in Lebanon and crossing into Syria. Pinheiro expressed deep concern about reports of displaced Syrians being subjected to abuse, arrests, and extortion by predatory armed actors at checkpoints.

He reported a resurgence of violence throughout Syria, including clashes in Deir-ez-Zor between government-backed tribal fighters and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a primarily Kurdish group opposing the Syrian government; mutual shelling between the SDF and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army in northern Aleppo; and increased attacks by pro-government forces in and around Idlib, resulting in civilian casualties and displacement. Pinheiro criticised the near impunity for crimes and violations in Syria over the past decade, saying that international acquiescence has normalised disregard for international law. He echoed calls for immediate ceasefires in Gaza and Lebanon, citing the grave implications for Syria and its people amid escalating regional conflicts.

## Key Issues and Options

A key concern for Council members is the ongoing hostilities across multiple front lines in Syria. Persistent violence and the lack of accountability on all sides threaten to destabilise the country further. A related issue is addressing the evolving security landscape in the country and its immediate and long-term implications. The recent hostilities in northern Syria have resulted in significant shift in frontlines, driven by advances by HTS and other armed opposition factions. The presence of terrorist and other armed groups remains a significant threat to the security and stability of the country. At the same time, the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions in Syria are a further strain on the population.

Addressing the spillover effects of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Lebanon—as well as de-escalating rising tensions in the region, including in Syria—is also an issue of importance for the Council.

One option would be for the Council to request a briefing from the Secretary-General addressing the recent advances of HTS and the impact of regional escalation on Syria.

Another critical issue is addressing the growing humanitarian needs across Syria. Compounding this challenge is the refugee crisis,

exacerbated by regional hostilities. In his 1 November statement, Pinheiro said that before current hostilities, only 1.7 percent of refugees expressed an intention to return to Syria in the short term, citing concerns about safety and security inside Syria as key obstacles.

Despite the escalating violence in the country and worsening humanitarian situation, the international community is not addressing the gravity of the situation. At the time of writing, Syria's 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), which called for \$4.07 billion, was only 29.4 percent funded. At the 21 November briefing on Syria, Wosornu said that the UNHCR-led inter-agency emergency appeal for the displaced from Lebanon to Syria, amounting to \$324 million, had only received \$55 million.

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 strategies for overcoming 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.

Another option is for the Council to issue an outcome that would:

- Express strong concern about the persisting violence across Syria, the spillover effects of regional escalation on the country, and the resulting humanitarian consequences;
- Call on relevant stakeholders to de-escalate tensions in the region and within Syria and make efforts toward a nationwide ceasefire;
- Call on all actors to uphold the obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure;
- Express strong support for the efforts of the UN and humanitarian actors on the ground;
- Call on the international community to scale up the humanitarian response in Syria, including through enhanced funding; and
- Express support for Pedersen's efforts to reinvigorate the political process and urge him to continue his efforts to find a new venue for the Constitutional Committee to meet.

## Council Dynamics

Syria continues to be 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 remain concerned about the spillover of regional violence into Syria and the plight of refugees and returnees fleeing Lebanon into Syria under adverse circumstances. While China and Russia highlight the measures taken by the Syrian government to facilitate the entry and movement of displaced people, others, including the P3 members, have expressed concerns about reports of abuses against returnees. These members maintain that

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# Syria

returns under duress do not indicate that conditions in Syria are conducive to the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of the refugees.

In light of the worsening humanitarian situation, several members have stressed the importance of sustained humanitarian access in Syria. Members, including Malta, the Republic of Korea, Slovenia, and the US, have highlighted the need to keep all cross-border and cross-line routes open, ensuring that aid delivery remains efficient and predictable for as long as necessary.

Russia has consistently criticised the presence of US forces in Syria, accusing them of contributing to the country's instability. China and Russia have also regularly condemned Israeli attacks in Syria and underscored the importance of respecting Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The US has asserted that its military deployment is solely aimed at combating ISIL/Da'esh. It has also criticised the Syrian government for allowing Iranian-backed militias

to operate within its territory. Additionally, some members, including the UK and the US, have condemned Syrian and Russian forces for targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, particularly in the north-west, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

With regard to the chemical weapons track, Council members have displayed starkly different views over the years on a range of related issues, including responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in Syria, the credibility of the work of the OPCW, and numerous procedural aspects of the OPCW's decision-making bodies. While several members have consistently expressed support for the OPCW's work, maintaining that it is credible and essential, other members, such as China and Russia, claim that its work is biased and politicised.

Switzerland is the penholder on the Syria humanitarian file.

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## Women, Peace and Security

### Expected Council Action

On 3 December, the Security Council will hold an open briefing titled "Investing in the Transformative Power of Intergenerational Leadership on Women, Peace and Security" (WPS). This is one of the signature events of the US' December presidency. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo and one or more civil society representatives are the anticipated briefers. No outcome is expected.

The briefing apparently intends to emphasise the importance of dialogue and partnerships across generations of women peacebuilders in advancing the WPS agenda. It seems that the US intends to highlight the perspectives, contributions, and challenges faced by diverse women peacebuilders from different generations, including the frequent exclusion of youth voices from peace processes, and identify strategies to strengthen partnerships and dialogue between young and senior women peacebuilders. It appears that the briefing will explore ways in which the Security Council can advance these issues and strategies for states, the UN, and other international organisations to better recognise the contributions, local solutions, and priorities of women peacebuilders from across generations.

Council members that have signed on to the Shared Commitments on WPS—Ecuador, France, Guyana, Japan, Malta, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Switzerland, the UK, and the US—are expected to deliver a joint statement ahead of the meeting.

### Background and Recent Developments

A recent University of San Diego study on intergenerational peacebuilding among women notes that crises involving inequality, violence, health, environmental challenges, and food and water insecurity affect people across generations, necessitating the involvement and leadership of people of all generations to address them and build lasting peace. The report stresses the importance of better recognising, supporting and encouraging the efforts and potential

of women's intergenerational peacebuilding at both national and international levels. Among other findings, the report concludes that working across generations improves effectiveness and reach, and stresses the importance of meaningful participation, recognition of legitimacy, as well as sufficient funding for intergenerational work. The report puts forward several recommendations for international organisations and funders, including incorporating an intergenerational lens into programming and events, integrating age into existing institutional frameworks on inclusion, and ensuring that women of all ages and experience levels can meaningfully participate and are not tokenised.

In May, the Security Council held a debate titled "Maintenance of international peace and security: the role of women and young people". The Council received briefings from DiCarlo, UN Women Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous, Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs Julio Felipe Paullier Olivera, and AU Youth Ambassador for Peace for West Africa Simone Mbode Diouf. In her briefing, Bahous said that intergenerational dialogues in conflict-affected countries "can have a powerful impact in communities searching for a way out of violence and division" and stressed the importance of ensuring representation of women and young women across decision-making bodies. She called for dismantling "power structures and harmful norms that hinder the full and meaningful participation of young women and girls and that diminish their voices and their crucial contributions as leaders in their own right". Diouf stressed the importance of empowering young women and recognising their potential as political actors. Among other recommendations, she called for encouraging collaboration and dialogue between young women and other stakeholders to bridge generational and gender gaps.

At the April ministerial-level debate on "The role of young persons in addressing security challenges in the Mediterranean", Sarra Messaoudi—Regional Lead of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Coalition on YPS—highlighted several challenges faced

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**RELEVANT UN DOCUMENTS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2493 (29 October 2019) reiterated the need for the full implementation of the WPS agenda. S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000) was the first Security Council resolution on WPS. It called for the adoption of a gender perspective in peace agreements and for the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence. **Secretary-General's Report S/2024/671** (24 September 2024) was the latest Secretary-General's annual report on WPS.



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## Women, Peace and Security

by young people such as “systematic barriers” to meaningful participation in peace, political and security processes. Noting the lack of implementation of Security Council resolution 2728 on the war in Gaza, she said that young people are questioning the international system, international law, and the veto power, as well as “the imposition of peace agreements that we didn’t participate in shaping and that do not meet our expectations”.

Women civil society representatives briefing the Security Council have highlighted patterns of exclusion and violence that cut across generations of women in several contexts on the Council’s agenda. In her briefing to the Security Council at the WPS open debate in October 2023, Hala Al-Karib—the Regional Director of the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa, a network of around 100 women’s organisations from across the region—described the ongoing war in Sudan as the “result of decades of violence against civilians, violence that has impacted nearly every aspect of women’s lives”. She noted that the military takeover during the transitional period which followed the ouster of former President Omar al-Bashir “illustrates how only paying lip service to the WPS agenda, without insisting on women’s rights and women’s meaningful participation in peace and political processes, is not enough to overcome the repressive patriarchal status quo”.

### 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.

The Council’s failure to take urgent action to expedite an end to the wars in Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan, among other situations, has had devastating consequences for women in these regions, with Council members, including the US and Russia, using the veto, or threat thereof, to stop action to facilitate a resolution of these crises. (For options on these situations, see the briefs on “The Middle East, including the Palestinian question” (MEPQ), Ukraine, and Sudan in our November 2024 *Monthly Forecast*.) When the General Assembly convenes in response to a veto in the Council, members could highlight the impact of the use of the veto on women in that situation.

Regarding the 3 December open briefing, Council members could in their statements request the UN to provide more information in regular briefings and reports on how UN peace operations support dialogue and partnerships across generations of women peacebuilders in the context of their work to deliver on the WPS mandate. As the briefing’s organiser, the US could prepare a chair’s summary of the meeting to capture salient themes of the discussion to be circulated in a Council letter.

Reprisals continue to be an issue of concern. The 2024 Secretary-General’s annual report on WPS says that five women civil society representatives reported reprisals in connection with their briefings to the Council in 2023. More recently, during the 21 November Security Council meeting on the situation in Syria, Russia and Syria

sharply criticised the participation of Sawsan Abou Zainedin, the Chief Executive Officer of the Syrian civil society network Madaniya. In a 21 November letter to the UK, the Council’s president for that month, Russia expressed “deep disappointment” with the presidency’s choice to invite Zainedin and further criticised her intervention (S/2024/848). Following a briefing by the Executive Director of the Israeli NGO B’Tselem, Yuli Novak, at the 4 September meeting on the MEPQ, 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 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. As continuing reprisals against briefers show, 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

While notable implementation gaps persist, most Council members are supportive of the WPS agenda. However, dynamics remain difficult, with Russia and China often challenging the inclusion of language on WPS in Security Council products.

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 on the wars in Gaza and Ukraine.

Russia has regularly argued that the Security Council should focus on situations that pose a direct threat to international peace and security and that its engagement on WPS should be limited to the consideration of “women’s issues in a context of the maintenance of peace and security and in connection to situations that are on the Council’s agenda”. Russia has also expressed scepticism regarding the youth, peace and security agenda, including at the May debate, arguing that “attributes such as age and gender cannot be the determining—and much less the only—criteria for involving certain individuals in decision-making processes, especially on such sensitive issues as the maintenance of peace and security”. Russia might express similar views at the December WPS briefing.

The UK is the penholder on WPS, and the US is the penholder on conflict-related sexual violence. Sierra Leone and Switzerland are the co-chairs of the Informal Experts Group on WPS. Malta is the coordinator of the Shared Commitments initiative.

# Ukraine

## Expected Council Action

In December, the US is expected to convene a meeting on Ukraine. Additional meetings on Ukraine are possible, depending on developments on the ground.

## Key Recent Developments

On 8 November, former US President Donald Trump was re-elected to the presidency, a development closely monitored by Kyiv due to its potentially significant impact on the conflict in Ukraine. As the US remains Ukraine's largest provider of military assistance, the election marked a critical juncture in shaping US foreign policy, with the leading candidates—Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris—articulating starkly divergent approaches to the ongoing conflict.

President-elect Trump has repeatedly claimed that he could end the war in Ukraine “in 24 hours”, although he has not provided specific details on how to achieve that goal. While Trump has criticised the scale of US military support to Ukraine, he has also suggested using such aid as leverage in peace talks. At an event in Florida on 14 November, Trump said that his administration will focus on the Russia-Ukraine war, emphasising the need for the war to stop.

Russian officials have expressed optimism that Trump's re-election could provide an opportunity to reset US-Russia relations. During a 7 November meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club, a Moscow-based think tank and discussion forum, Russian President Vladimir Putin affirmed Moscow's willingness to explore the possibility of improving relations with the US. Putin also reiterated Russia's readiness for peace talks with Ukraine but argued that negotiations must be based on “current realities” on the ground.

The prospect of the US reducing or ceasing military support to Ukraine has raised concerns in many European capitals. The US remains the largest military donor to Ukraine, having committed approximately \$57 billion in military assistance since February 2022. In a 16 November interview, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that he expects the war to “end sooner” because of the “change in the policy of the US”. He stressed that Ukraine's priority is to “defend a strong position” in preparation for any future negotiations.

Following the US presidential election, hostilities in Ukraine escalated as both parties sought to consolidate their positions in anticipation of potential policy shifts from Washington. On 18 November, the US reportedly lifted restrictions on Ukraine's use of US weapons, including the long-range Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS), enabling Ukrainian forces to strike targets inside Russia. Previously, the US had resisted easing these restrictions, citing doubts over their impact on conflict dynamics in Ukraine's favour. There were also concerns about provoking Moscow as Russian authorities have repeatedly warned that such actions could further escalate the conflict.

The US government has refused to comment on media reports regarding the lifting of restrictions on Ukraine's use of US weapons. During a 19 November press briefing, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh suggested that Russia had escalated the conflict by deploying troops from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to fight in the war. She underscored that US actions were focused on “ensuring that Ukraine has what it needs” to defend itself.

According to media reports, Ukraine deployed US-supplied ATACMS to strike targets in Russia's Bryansk region on 19

November and the UK-made Storm Shadow cruise missiles in Russia's Kursk region on 20 November. The UK government has declined to comment on reports regarding its lifting of restrictions, citing operational concerns as the reason. In a 21 November televised address, Putin warned that the use of Western weapons against targets inside Russia had introduced “elements of a global nature” to the conflict. He argued that such attacks could not occur “without the direct participation of military specialists from the countries producing these weapons”. Putin further cautioned that Russia would consider targeting military facilities of countries enabling the use of their weapons against Russian infrastructure. Putin also confirmed that, in response to these developments, Russia conducted an attack on the eastern Ukrainian city of Dnipro on 21 November using what he described as “a new conventional intermediate-range missile” with a speed of approximately 3 kilometers per second, rendering it effectively impossible to intercept.

On 19 November, Putin signed an executive order revising Russia's nuclear doctrine, effectively lowering the threshold for deploying nuclear weapons in response to a wider range of conventional threats. The updated doctrine states that Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear attack against it or its allies, as well as to aggression against Russia and/or Belarus using conventional weapons that pose “a critical threat to their sovereignty and/or territorial integrity”. Notably, the revised doctrine also states that “aggression by any non-nuclear state with the participation or support of a nuclear state shall be considered as a joint attack by them”. At a 19 November press briefing, Singh said that the US had no indications that Russia was preparing to use a nuclear weapon in Ukraine and noted that the development did not require the US to change its nuclear posture at this time.

The Security Council held two meetings on Ukraine in November. On 18 November, the Council convened for a high-level briefing to mark 1,000 days since the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The meeting was a signature event of the UK's November Council presidency. (For more information, see our 17 November *What's in Blue* story.) On 27 November, the Council convened for a briefing on Ukraine. Ukraine, supported by the US, requested the meeting in a 25 November letter, which said that Russia had used a new intermediate-range ballistic missile in a 21 November attack on the city of Dnipro.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 29 October, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine submitted a report to the General Assembly.

The report highlighted that sexual violence as a form of torture has been widespread in detention facilities under Russian control. This included rape, attempted rape, beatings, electric shocks, burns, forced nudity, threats of sexual mutilation, and intrusive body searches. The Commission also noted that Russia's continuous attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure have caused blackouts, affecting millions of civilians. These power cuts have severely impacted the rights to health and education, particularly for children, older people, and those with disabilities or medical conditions.

The report presented evidence showing that Russian services coordinated the acts of torture in Russian detention facilities, with a clear division of labour and orders from superiors. A sense of impunity among perpetrators was also noted. The Commission concluded that Russian authorities have implemented a policy encouraging torture against civilians and prisoners of war, constituting a crime against humanity.

The Commission recommended that Russia immediately cease aggression and all

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# Ukraine

acts of violence against civilians and prisoners of war in violation of international human rights and international humanitarian law; end the use of torture and other forms of ill-treatment against civilians and prisoners of war; and take necessary measures to prevent sexual and gender-based violence.

## Key Issues and Options

The overarching priority for the Council is to promote a solution to the conflict in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter and to facilitate dialogue among the parties to that end. One option is for the Council to issue a presidential statement recalling S/PRST/2022/3 of 6 May 2022, which expressed support for the Secretary-General's efforts in search of a peaceful solution. The presidential statement could encourage the Secretary-General to appoint a personal envoy to explore openings for a peaceful settlement to the war. While the Secretary-General has the authority to appoint such an envoy on his own initiative, the Council's request could provide important political backing. Such a draft presidential statement could be initiated by the E10, and members could consider discussing elements of such a product at permanent representative level in order to determine possible areas of agreement between Russia and the US before a draft text is produced.

The Council has held 102 formal meetings on Ukraine since the start of the war in February 2022 and approximately 98 percent have been public meetings. This has allowed members to present their positions on the conflict but not to discuss possible solutions. If there is interest in discussing current ideas for a ceasefire, members could choose to meet in a closed format, such as consultations, a private

meeting, or an informal interactive dialogue.

## Council and Wider Dynamics

The Security Council remains starkly divided on the conflict in Ukraine and the appropriate framework for achieving a peaceful resolution. Ukraine and several of its allies on the Security Council have advocated for a just peace, conditioned on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine's internationally recognised borders. Russia, in contrast, maintains that any settlement must reflect current realities on the ground, which, in its view, would require the withdrawal of Ukrainian forces from the four partially occupied regions in Ukraine: Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia.

Other Council members have emphasised the need for de-escalation, calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities without any preconditions. Such a move could effectively freeze the front lines, leaving Russia in control of substantial territory in eastern and southern Ukraine. Some of these members also call for inclusive dialogue that takes into account the security concerns of all parties.

During the Group of 20 (G20) Summit held on 18 and 19 November in Brazil, G20 members reached consensus on a joint declaration welcoming "all relevant and constructive initiatives that support a comprehensive, just, and durable peace", emphasising the importance of upholding the purposes and principles of the UN Charter to promote peaceful, friendly, and good neighbourly relations among nations.

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# Iraq

## Expected Council Action

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

## Key Recent Developments

The security situation in Iraq remains tense amidst regional fallout from the Israel-Hamas war. Following the outbreak of the conflict, Iraqi militia groups—considered Iranian proxies forming part of the country's "axis of resistance" across the Middle East—have launched repeated drone and missile strikes against Israel as well as US military assets in the region. The frequency of attacks against Israel has increased in recent months, including a 3 October drone strike on an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) base in the Golan that killed two Israeli soldiers and wounded 24 others. In addition, Iran has reportedly considered using the Iraqi militia groups to retaliate against Israel for its 25 October airstrike against Iran.

The militias belong to an informal coalition known as the Islamic

Resistance in Iraq, which has ties to Iraq's formal security forces, straining the country's relations with Israel. In identical letters dated 18 November addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, Israeli Minister for Foreign Affairs Gideon Sa'ar expressed concern about the increase in attacks conducted by the Iran-backed militias, which he described as a "blatant violation" of international law that "have the potential to further drag the region into a very dangerous escalation". The letter emphasised Iraq's obligation to prevent the use of its territory for attacks, invoked Israel's right to self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter, and called on the Security Council to take "immediate action" to address the situation. In response, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia'a al-Sudani called Israel's allegations a "pretext for aggression against Iraq" that would "expand the war in the region".

The regional situation has also raised tensions between Iraq and the US. After the US retaliated in February for previous Iraqi militia strikes against US military bases in Iraq, Jordan, and Syria, some Iraqi officials called for the withdrawal of the 2,500 US troops stationed in the country as part of the international coalition combating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh). In a 25 January statement, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III announced that the US-Iraq Higher Military Commission—which

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON IRAQ** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2732 (31 May 2024) renewed UNAMI's mandate for a final 19-month period until 31 December 2025. S/RES/2697 (15 September 2023) extended UNITAD's mandate for a final one-year non-extendable term, until 17 September 2024. **Secretary-General's Report S/2024/369** (7 May 2024) was the Secretary-General's 120-day report on UNAMI, which covered developments from January to May 2024. **Security Council Letter S/2024/270** (26 March 2024) transmitted to the Council the strategic independent review of UNAMI, prepared by Volker Perthes, requested by resolution 2682.

## Iraq

had been established in August 2023 to begin phasing down the US-led military coalition—would start discussions on the “transition to an enduring bilateral security partnership” between the two countries. Subsequently, in a 27 September joint statement, the countries announced a transition plan under which the majority of US coalition forces would withdraw from Iraq by September 2025. In a briefing call with reporters, senior US officials emphasised that the agreement did not constitute a US “withdrawal” from Iraq but rather a transition to a bilateral security relationship in which the US will “continue to advise and assist and enable [Iraq] in conducting necessary counter-[ISIL] operations”.

On the political track, parliamentary elections were held in Iraq’s Kurdistan region on 20 October. Of the 100 seats up for election, the region’s two main rival parties—the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)—won 39 seats and 23 seats, respectively. The elections were originally scheduled to be held in 2022 but were repeatedly delayed because of disagreements about election modalities between Kurdish and federal Iraqi officials and between the KDP and PUK. In a 23 October statement, Deputy Spokesperson for the Secretary-General Farhan Haq congratulated the region for successfully holding the elections “in a calm and peaceful manner” and commended the efforts of Iraq’s Independent High Electoral Commission in conducting them.

On 31 May, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2732, renewing UNAMI’s mandate for a final 19-month period. The renewal followed the completion of the independent strategic review of the mission requested by resolution 2682 of 30 May 2023—which had previously renewed UNAMI’s mandate—and a subsequent letter dated 8 May from al-Sudani addressed to the Secretary-General that requested UNAMI’s mandate to be “terminated definitively” by the end of 2025. Acceding to this request, resolution 2732 renewed UNAMI’s mandate for one non-extendable term until 31 December 2025 and directed the Secretary-General to streamline the mission’s tasks to focus on select priority areas during the transition period, including technical electoral assistance to Iraqi authorities; facilitating progress on outstanding issues between Iraq and Kuwait; and supporting a range of humanitarian and development activities.

The resolution also requested the Secretary-General to prepare a transition and liquidation plan by 31 December 2024 for the transfer of UNAMI’s tasks and the mission’s “orderly and safe” drawdown. According to the Secretary-General’s most recent report on UNAMI, which was circulated to Council members on 26 November, an integrated working group at the UN headquarters was established in June to provide strategic direction for the transition planning process. UNAMI has also undertaken a mapping exercise of its activities to plan for their transfer to other UN entities and partners, while the UN country team has taken steps to integrate relevant UNAMI tasks into the forthcoming 2025–2029 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Iraq.

On 5 June, the Council received the final biannual briefing from the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/ISIL in Iraq (UNITAD). The meeting followed the adoption of resolution 2697 of 15 September 2023, which renewed the team for a final one-year term at the Iraqi government’s request. At the June meeting, Acting Special Adviser and Head of

UNITAD Ana Peyró Llopis briefed the Council on the team’s 12th and last biannual report, dated 24 May, which covered UNITAD’s accomplishments over the course of its mandate and gave an update on drawdown preparations. On 17 September, the team concluded its mandate and ceased operations.

On 15 July, Secretary-General António Guterres appointed Mohamed Al Hassan of Oman as Special Representative and Head of UNAMI, succeeding Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert of the Netherlands, who had served in the position since 2018. Al Hassan assumed his duties in Iraq on 10 October.

### Human Rights-Related Developments

On 10 October, Amnesty International urged Iraqi lawmakers to reject proposed amendments to the country’s Personal Status Law, warning that they would “eliminate the current legal marriage age of 18 for both girls and boys, paving the way for child marriages, as well as stripping women and girls of protections regarding divorce and inheritance”. The proposed amendments would also grant religious councils of the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam the authority to create their own “code of Sharia rulings on personal status matters” within six months of the law’s passage, undermining the rights of women and girls and their equality before the law. Amnesty International stressed that the amendments violate international agreements that Iraq has ratified, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The organisation emphasised that “ensuring the safety, dignity and rights of women and girls is not only a state obligation under international human rights law but also a moral imperative that all Iraqi institutions must uphold”.

### Key Issues and Options

The key issue for the Security Council is to oversee UNAMI’s orderly and safe drawdown, in accordance with resolution 2732. To this end, December’s briefing will provide Council members with an opportunity to review progress on implementing the mission’s streamlined mandate and transferring tasks to other UN entities and partners. The simultaneous withdrawal of the international anti-ISIL/Da’esh coalition, UNITAD’s recent termination, and the volatile regional situation are additional factors for Council members to consider as the transition proceeds.

In this context, the Council could invite a civil society representative to the December briefing to provide additional perspectives on the potential impact that UNAMI’s closure and the phasing out of other forms of international support may have on Iraq’s political and security situation, including protections for vulnerable groups.

The Council could also consider convening a separate closed discussion on UNAMI’s transition and liquidation plan that resolution 2732 requested the Secretary-General to prepare by 31 December. That discussion could include briefers from the UN entities that will be taking over some of the mission’s tasks.

### Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members are broadly supportive of the Iraqi government and the assistance provided by the UN. In light of the relative stability that Iraq has enjoyed since al-Sudani assumed office in October 2022, members were also largely in agreement on accommodating Iraq’s request to draw down UNAMI, adopting resolution 2732 unanimously. During those negotiations, however, some members held diverging views about the extent to which the closure should be contingent on progress on indicators proposed by the independent

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## Iraq

strategic review. (For more information about the negotiations, see our *What's in Blue* story of 30 May.)

More broadly, the current regional situation has exacerbated geopolitical tensions, which have also affected Iraq. US and Iranian military operations in the country have strained Baghdad's relations with both Washington and Tehran while stoking concerns about a direct confrontation between the US and Iran in the Middle East. The escalating situation has also raised alarm about a possible retaliatory

strike by Israel on Iran-backed militias in Iraq, which could open an additional front in the regional conflict. The Iraqi government routinely declares that it seeks a balanced relationship with regional and international security partners and does not wish to become a theatre for geopolitical competition.

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

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## Democratic Republic of the Congo

### Expected Council Action

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

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

### Key Recent Developments

The security situation in eastern DRC remains fragile, with the *Mouvement du 23 Mars* (M23) rebel group further expanding its presence in North Kivu province. The Secretary-General's most recent report, published on 20 September, noted that the ceasefire between the Rwandan and Congolese military forces has largely held while clashes between the M23 and other armed groups persisted. Other armed groups operating in eastern DRC, such as the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the *Coopérative pour le développement du Congo* (CODECO), also continue to target civilians in North Kivu and Ituri provinces of eastern DRC.

Regional diplomatic efforts to address the security situation in eastern DRC and ease regional tensions, particularly between the DRC and Rwanda, are ongoing. The two countries have engaged in mutual recriminations over alleged support for their proxies in the conflict. The DRC accuses Rwanda of supporting the M23 while Rwanda asserts that the DRC supports the *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda* (FDLR), an ethnic Hutu armed group active in eastern DRC that was implicated in the 1994 genocide of Tutsis in Rwanda. The Group of Experts assisting the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee has corroborated these assertions in its reports.

On 30 July, the DRC and Rwanda signed a ceasefire agreement in Luanda under Angola's auspices, which took effect on 4 August. Based on the agreement, the ceasefire will be monitored by the Ad-Hoc Verification Mechanism established as part of the Luanda process—a regional initiative under the leadership of Angolan President João Lourenço to ease tensions between the DRC and Rwanda. Following the development of a concept of operations by technical experts from both sides, the reinforced Ad-Hoc Verification Mechanism was launched on 5 November at the border post in Goma in the presence of the foreign ministers of Angola, the DRC, and Rwanda.

Following the signing of the ceasefire agreement, the foreign ministers of the DRC and Rwanda have engaged in discussions on a peace proposal put forward by Angola, aimed at finding a lasting solution to the long-standing conflict in eastern DRC. These discussions have resulted in an agreement by the two parties to a plan to neutralise the FDLR. Rwanda would then ease what it has described as “defensive measures”. Difficulties have emerged, however, regarding the implementation of this plan. The Congolese government would like the international community to impose targeted sanctions on Rwanda for its alleged destabilising actions and is demanding the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of Rwandan troops from Congolese territory. Rwanda denies that its troops are in eastern DRC, maintaining that it has only implemented defensive measures to address security threats.

DRC President Félix Tshisekedi and Rwandan President Paul Kagame were in Paris to attend the Francophonie Summit on 4 and 5 October. French President Emmanuel Macron reportedly met with the two leaders separately to encourage them to continue to engage in dialogue to achieve a comprehensive settlement through the Luanda process. The foreign ministers of the two countries were scheduled to meet again in Luanda on 16 November under Angola's facilitation, but there is no indication that the meeting took place as planned.

Regarding the implementation of the disengagement plan agreed with the Congolese government and endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 2717 of 19 December 2023, MONUSCO concluded the withdrawal of its forces from South Kivu in June. The process faced some challenges, however, including a lack of adequate resources such as logistics and manpower and the deteriorating security situation. In resolution 2746, the Council “urged MONUSCO to consolidate the handover of responsibilities to the DRC government in South Kivu and to continue to jointly plan the next steps of the gradual, responsible and sustainable withdrawal of the mission before further moving forward”. According to the Secretary-General's 20 September report, MONUSCO has started the transition planning processes in North Kivu and Ituri through the provincial transition teams with particular attention to strengthening national institutions and capacities to protect civilians.

On 6 August, the Security Council adopted resolution 2746 authorising MONUSCO to provide operational and logistical support to the Southern African Development Community (SADC)

# Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mission in the DRC (SAMIDRC), operating in the eastern DRC since December 2023. SADC convened an extraordinary summit on 20 November to discuss the situation in eastern DRC and received an update on the progress of SAMIDRC one year after its deployment to the region. The summit, among other things, extended SAMIDRC's mandate by one year. Council members received the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of this resolution and a report on the activities of SAMIDRC, including coordination with MONUSCO, which were due by 15 November.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 5 November, the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group examined the DRC's human rights record.

Chambu Mwavita Chantal, DRC's Minister of Human Rights, outlined measures taken since the 2019 UPR. She reported that the DRC had ratified the AU Convention for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons. She also highlighted the establishment of the National Fund for reparations to victims of conflict-related sexual violence and other crimes, alongside a decree creating "One Stop Centres" to improve multi-sectoral services for sexual violence survivors.

On 8 October, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk presented a report (A/HRC/57/76) to the Human Rights Council on the activities of the UN Joint Human Rights Office in the DRC. He noted that the number of victims of human rights violations and abuses, and violations of international humanitarian law, continues to grow. Türk mentioned that detention conditions across the DRC are deteriorating, including in facilities run by the intelligence services.

On 7 October, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution (A/HRC/RES/57/34) on technical assistance and capacity-building in the DRC. The resolution condemned human rights violations and the illicit exploitation of natural resources, particularly in conflict-affected eastern DRC, where ongoing violence continues to displace significant populations.

## Sanctions-Related Developments

In December, the Chair of the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee, Ambassador Michael Imran Kanu (Sierra Leone), is expected to brief the Council on the committee's work. In November, the Chair accompanied by members of the committee visited Angola, the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda as part of the committee's regular engagement with countries in the region to exchange views on the peace and security situation in the eastern DRC and discuss the implementation of the 1533 DRC sanctions regime.

## Key Issues and Options

A key issue for Council members in December will be MONUSCO's mandate renewal. Unlike the past two years, the Congolese government is no longer pushing for the mission to leave. After MONUSCO's withdrawal from South Kivu, Council members also feel that the conditions are not yet favourable for the mission to draw down in North Kivu and Ituri, the two remaining provinces where the mission continues to operate. A possible option for Council members is to renew the mission's mandate for another year while also considering strengthening MONUSCO's capacity to support the development of DRC's national institutions and its capacity to protect civilians.

The other major issue is how to support ongoing regional efforts to find a lasting solution to the conflict in eastern DRC through diplomatic means. In their 25 October press statement, Council members expressed their unwavering support for ongoing mediation efforts through the Luanda Process, urged the scrupulous

implementation of the 30 July ceasefire agreement, and called on both parties to fully cooperate with Angola to accelerate the implementation of the harmonised plan for the neutralisation of the FDLR and the disengagement of foreign forces. In order to provide Council members with an update on the ceasefire agreement's implementation and ongoing discussions to achieve a comprehensive settlement through the Luanda process, a possible option would be for the US Security Council presidency to invite Angola to brief the Council in a private meeting. This could allow Council members to exchange ideas about how the Council can support this process. Another option would be to hold a meeting in the informal interactive dialogue format to bring together high-level officials from Angola, the DRC, and Rwanda for a discussion with the Council.

The logistical and operational support provided by MONUSCO to SAMIDRC is an impending issue. The Secretary-General's report will inform this discussion on the implementation of resolution 2746 and SAMIDRC's report on its activities, including coordination with MONUSCO.

## Council Dynamics

Council members remain seriously concerned about the security and humanitarian situation in the eastern DRC. They all seem to agree that the solution to this long-standing issue is political, and they continue to support regional efforts. In this regard, they welcomed the signing of the ceasefire agreement between the DRC and Rwanda within the framework of the Luanda process. Some Council members continue to call for external actors to stop supporting armed groups in eastern DRC. In particular, the US, France, Switzerland, and Slovenia remain vocal about the issue and regularly mention Rwanda's role in the region.

Council members also agree on the need to address the root causes of the crisis in eastern DRC. Some members have repeatedly expressed concerns about the illegal exploitation of natural resources and the proliferation of weapons, which help to fuel the conflict in the region.

Council members continue to stress that the MONUSCO disengagement process must be implemented in a gradual, conditions-based, and responsible manner. At the September meeting on the situation in the DRC, several Council members stressed the need to learn lessons from the withdrawal of MONUSCO from South Kivu, avoid leaving a security vacuum, and decide on the next steps based on the evolving security situation on the ground. Some Council members underscored the protection of civilians as a matter of priority in this regard. Others highlighted the issue of safety and security, condemning attacks against peacekeepers. In particular, China referenced attacks on "MONUSCO convoys, Global Positioning System jamming and other security incidents" mentioned in the Secretary-General's 20 September report on MONUSCO.

France and Sierra Leone are the co-penholders on the DRC. Ambassador Michael Imran Kanu (Sierra Leone) chairs the 1533 DRC Sanctions Committee.

# International Criminal Tribunals

## Expected Council Action

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

## Background and Key Recent Developments

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

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

Under resolution 1966, the IRMCT was mandated to operate for an initial period of four years and for subsequent periods of two years unless the Council decides otherwise. The Council most recently extended Brammertz’s term in resolution 2740, which was adopted on 27 June with 14 votes in favour and Russia abstaining. It incorporated several new elements, including requests for two reports from the Secretary-General by 31 December 2025: one regarding “the administrative and budgetary aspects of the options for possible locations of the archives of the ICTR, the ICTY, and the [IRMCT]”; and another concerning options for transferring certain remaining functions of the IRMCT, including supervision of sentences and the provision of assistance to national jurisdictions. Resolution 2740 also recalled the Council’s request in resolution 2637 of 22 June 2022 for “the production of clear and focused projections of completion timelines for all the [IRMCT’s] activities” and took note of the information that the IRMCT submitted to the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals in response to this request. (For more information on resolution 2740, see our 27 June *What’s in Blue* story.)

The Council’s most recent semi-annual debate on the IRMCT took place on 11 June. Gatti Santana and Brammertz briefed. In her briefing, Gatti Santana noted that active proceedings in the final core crimes cases before the IRMCT had ended and said that the IRMCT had therefore “completed its transition to becoming a truly residual institution”. She also provided an update on several of the IRMCT’s remaining tasks, including supervising the enforcement of sentences; managing, preserving, and facilitating access to the archives of the ad hoc tribunals and the IRMCT; and offering support to victims and witnesses who took part in proceedings.

During his briefing, Brammertz said that his office had now accounted for all of the fugitives indicted by the ICTR, thereby completing one of the residual tasks of the IRMCT. In this regard, Brammertz referred to the IRMCT’s 15 May announcement regarding the deaths of the remaining two fugitives, Ryandikayo and Charles Sikubwabo. The remainder of Brammertz’s briefing focused primarily on the IRMCT’s ongoing work assisting national authorities with pursuing accountability for crimes committed in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. He noted that his office had received 629 requests for assistance during the previous two years and had met with prosecutors from several different member states, including Belgium, Canada, Eswatini, France, Mozambique, South Africa, the UK, and the US.

The IRMCT’s Appeals Chamber began a review hearing in the case *Prosecutor v. Gérard Ntakirutimana* on 18 November. Ntakirutimana is seeking a review of his convictions after a witness allegedly recanted his evidence against him. On 8 November, IRMCT officials travelled to Belgrade and held preparatory meetings regarding the monitoring of contempt proceedings in the *Šešelj et al.* case.

## Key Issues and Options

Continuing to monitor the work of the IRMCT and the implementation of its mandate is a key issue for the Council. In this context, members could choose to use the closed format of the Informal Working Group on International Tribunals to have a frank discussion with Gatti Santana and Brammertz regarding the next phase of the IRMCT’s operations. Members could also use this format to seek more information about the IRMCT’s completion timelines. Members may also ask if there is anything the Council can do to help with the IRMCT’s ongoing work, including the tasks referred to by Gatti Santana and Brammertz during the 11 June semi-annual briefing.

## Council Dynamics

Council members generally have a positive assessment of the IRMCT and the progress it has made, with the exception of Russia. During the semi-annual briefing on 11 June, Russia strongly criticised the IRMCT, saying that its reports had failed “to answer to the key question as regards the ultimate and reasonable timeframe for winding down the IRMCT and/or transferring all its functions” and instead “retain vague references to the year 2052, which cannot be considered reasonable”. Russia also argued that the “IRMCT should have closed long ago” and called for the transfer of its remaining functions to national authorities and UN entities. Other Council members expressed positive views regarding the IRMCT and its work during this meeting.

Russia has regularly criticised the appointment of Brammertz, who was the ICTY prosecutor from 2008 until its closure in 2017, and it has abstained on the bi-annual resolutions appointing him as prosecutor since 2016. Russia was also consistently critical of the ICTY.

The negotiations concerning resolution 2740, which most recently extended Brammertz’s term, were lengthy, difficult, and contentious. Russia apparently objected to many aspects of the draft text, provided comments on almost every paragraph, reiterated the criticisms of the IRMCT that it raised during the semi-annual debate, and pushed strongly for a concrete timeframe and deadline for the

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## International Criminal Tribunals

transfer of the mechanism’s remaining functions. While some of Russia’s suggestions were supported by China, they were largely opposed

by other Council members. (For more information on the negotiations, see our 27 June *What’s in Blue* story.)

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## Yemen

### Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council will hold its monthly meeting on Yemen. UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg and a representative of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are expected to brief.

The mandate of the UN Mission to Support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) expires on 14 July 2025.

### Key Recent Developments

On 13 November, Council members held their monthly meeting on Yemen in closed consultations. Grundberg and OCHA Head in Geneva and Director of the Coordination Division Ramesh Rajasingham briefed. It seems that the Special Envoy reiterated his concerns about the escalating regional tensions amid fallout from the Israel-Hamas war and their negative effects on his mediation efforts. One permanent Council member apparently argued that the Yemeni government and the Houthi rebel group were willing to sign a political roadmap and questioned the link between the regional escalation and the internal political process. Grundberg is said to have responded that even if a political roadmap is signed, its implementation would be difficult given the situation in the wider region. At the same time, he emphasised that an agreement between the sides was still possible, while reiterating that support from the region and the international community more broadly was needed in order to re-open the space for mediation.

As the political process stalls, the economic situation in the country continues to deteriorate, pushing many Yemenis into poverty. A 31 October World Bank report noted that the Houthis’ ongoing blockade of oil exports had contributed to a 42 percent drop in fiscal revenues for the Yemeni government in the first half of 2024, preventing the government from providing essential services to the population. In light of the volatile environment in Yemen—including the effects of the regional escalation and the economic warfare waged by both sides against each other—the prospects for resuming oil exports and restoring unrestricted internal transport, trade, and finance “appear remote”, according to the report. It emphasised, however, that “a durable truce and peace agreement could pave the way for swift economic recovery, supported by external assistance, reconstruction efforts, and post conflict reforms”. At the 13 November meeting, Grundberg apparently referenced his efforts to prepare the groundwork for potential progress on economic recovery in the future, including the resumption of oil and gas exports and the resumption of pension distributions to civil servants.

Another area of discussion during the 13 November meeting was the Houthis’ ongoing detention of national UN staff and other personnel from civil society organisations. The briefers and many Council members apparently reiterated calls for the immediate and

unconditional release of the detained staff and expressed concern regarding the reported referral of some personnel for “criminal prosecution”. It seems that Rajasingham updated members about OCHA’s programme prioritisation exercise that aims to minimise staff exposure to risk in Houthi-controlled areas. He is said to have noted that OCHA and the UN Country Team in Yemen are reviewing the programming in Houthi-controlled areas with utmost care to ensure that life-saving assistance continues to reach all in need. Rajasingham apparently also reported that OCHA is consulting extensively with donors to finalise the list of activities that will be de-prioritised, while noting that some programmes have already been suspended.

Prior to the closed consultations on 13 November, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2758, a straightforward renewal of the 2140 Yemen sanctions regime—comprising targeted financial and travel ban measures—for another year, until 15 November 2025. (The targeted arms embargo on the Houthis established through resolution 2216 in April 2015 is open-ended.)

On 18 November, Council members issued a press statement marking one year since the 19 November 2023 Houthi attack and seizure of the MV *Galaxy Leader*, a Japanese-operated vessel affiliated with an Israeli businessman. The statement demanded the immediate release of the vessel and its 25 crew members. Among other things, members condemned the continued Houthi attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden and stressed the importance of the UN targeted arms embargo in “curbing risks to the maritime security of vessels along the coast of Yemen”. The text was authored by Japan and the US, the co-penholders on the Red Sea crisis.

### Key Issues and Options

Insulating Yemen from destabilising regional tensions and reinvigorating the stalled intra-Yemeni political process are overarching priorities for the Council. Members are likely to continue to call on Yemeni parties to exercise restraint and to take confidence-building measures 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.

The conflict’s harmful effects on children in Yemen are another matter of concern. The final report of the Panel of Experts supporting the 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee, dated 11 October, said that the Houthis had recruited large numbers of Yemeni youth and children, with confidential sources reporting 142 cases of recruitment and use in Yemen between 15 September 2023 and 31 July. The report also noted the Houthis’ use of “summer camps”, where children “are indoctrinated with jihad ideology and trained in combat skills”. It referenced reports of children being shot by Houthi forces in or near these camps and incidents of sexual violence against

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UN DOCUMENTS ON YEMEN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2758 (13 November 2024) renewed the 2140 Yemen sanctions regime. Security Council Press Statement SC/15904 (18 November 2024) marked one year since the seizure of MV *Galaxy Leader* and called for the release of the vessel and its crew.



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# Yemen

children in the camps. An option for the Council would be to invite to its next Yemen meeting a briefer who can discuss ways to address violations committed against children, such as the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Virginia Gamba or a UNICEF representative. This session could be held in closed consultations to allow for a frank exchange. The 2140 Yemen Sanctions Committee could also invite Gamba to brief the committee. Her last such briefing took place in June 2022.

## Council Dynamics

Council members remain united in their support for achieving a peaceful solution to the conflict in Yemen. However, some divisions have deepened since the eruption of the Red Sea crisis in November 2023. The P3 members (France, the UK, and the US) have criticised the Houthis' destabilising actions, while Council members such as Algeria, China, and Russia have emphasised that ending the conflict in Gaza is critical to resolving the crisis in the Red Sea.

Some of the Council's permanent members have exchanged recriminations during Council meetings on Yemen, with the US alleging that Russia is considering transferring weapons to the Houthis and Russia saying that retaliatory strikes by the UK and the US against the Houthis were destabilising the situation in Yemen. The UK and the US have also been calling for the Council to take further action to impede Iran's supply of arms to the Houthis, including by strengthening the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM), which inspects ships travelling to Houthi-controlled ports to ensure compliance with the arms embargo against the group.

The UK, the penholder on Yemen, apparently chose to pursue a

straightforward renewal of the 2140 Yemen sanctions regime because of the complex Council dynamics on the file in the past year. After the adoption of resolution 2758, Russia argued that a straightforward renewal was "optimal in the current circumstances", since it helped to preserve Council unity against the backdrop of heightened regional instability. Some aspects of the negotiations were apparently difficult, as the US made several proposals aimed at strengthening the text that were unpalatable to some other members. These included a provision imposing an assets freeze on the Houthis as an entity. Speaking after the vote, the US regretted the Council's inability to adopt further measures that could help curtail the Houthis' destabilising activities in the region and urged the Council to use all the tools at its disposal, including targeted sanctions, to address the threat posed by the group. (For more information, see our 12 November *What's in Blue* story.)

It seems that some members have opted to pursue options outside the Council to strengthen support for Yemen. For instance, the US has noted that it has provided one million dollars to UNVIM and has called on other member states to make additional contributions to the mechanism. Additionally, on 19 November, the Permanent Mission of the UK to the UN hosted an event to launch the "Yemen Maritime Security Partnership", a multinational body chaired by the Yemeni government through which member states could support the Yemeni Coast Guard. As part of this initiative, the UK announced that it will provide boats, training, and assistance to the Yemeni Coast Guard to help it protect Yemen's coasts, which will help guarantee the freedom of navigation and "contribute to the limitation" of the UK's involvement in the Red Sea.

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# Sudan

## Expected Council Action

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

At press time, a meeting on the situation on Sudan more broadly is possible.

## Key Recent Developments

Since launching its offensives in late September, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) has made significant progress in reclaiming strategic locations in Khartoum and surrounding areas from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Despite these advances, the conflict remains intense, with both sides engaged in fierce urban warfare. In October, the SAF intensified its military operations in Al Jazira and Sennar states, achieving notable successes, including the recapture of Dinder, a strategic town linking Sennar and Gedaref states and the Jebel Moya mountain region. On 23 November, the SAF reportedly regained control of Sinja, the capital of Sennar state, after five months of RSF occupation. (For background and more information, see the brief on Sudan in our November 2024 *Monthly Forecast* and

11 November *What's in Blue* story.)

On 12 November, the Council held a high-level briefing on the situation in Sudan. Briefing at the meeting, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) Rosemary DiCarlo strongly condemned the RSF's attacks on civilians and the SAF's indiscriminate airstrikes in populated areas. She stressed that both parties bear responsibility for the ongoing violence, highlighting that a cessation of hostilities is the most effective way to protect civilians. DiCarlo pointed to the continued escalation of military operations, the recruitment of new fighters, and intensified attacks by both sides, enabled by "considerable external support," including a steady influx of weapons into the country. She criticised the role of external actors in fuelling the conflict, describing their involvement as "unconscionable" and "illegal".

DiCarlo said that the Personal Envoy of Secretary-General Ramtane Lamamra is considering the next phase of his engagement with the warring parties, including another round of "proximity talks" focused on commitments related to the protection of civilians. She urged immediate action to implement the Jeddah Declaration, signed by both parties on 11 May 2023 and highlighted the importance of a

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON SUDAN** [Security Council Resolution S/RES/2736](#) (13 June 2024) demanded that the 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. [Security Council Meeting Records S/PV.9786](#) (18 November 2024) was the record of a meeting on the adoption of the resolution proposed by the UK and Sierra Leone. [S/PV.9780](#) (12 November 2024) was a high-level briefing on the situation in Sudan, organised by the UK. [Other Document S/2024/826](#) (18 November 2024) was the draft resolution, proposed by the UK and Sierra Leone, aiming to advance measures to protect civilians in Sudan.

# Sudan

compliance mechanism to hold the parties accountable to their commitments. She underlined the need to make progress on achieving local ceasefires that could create avenues for dialogue and potentially lay the ground for a more comprehensive agreement. (For background and more information, see our 11 November *What's in Blue* story.)

On 18 November, the Council failed to adopt a draft resolution, co-authored by the UK and Sierra Leone, which aimed at advancing measures to protect civilians in Sudan. While 14 Council members voted in favour, Russia vetoed the draft resolution, citing concerns about undermining Sudan's sovereignty and stressing the need to consult with the Sudanese government before taking any actions on the ground. The General Assembly discussed the situation in Sudan in a plenary session on 26 November, in accordance with General Assembly resolution A/RES/76/262, which states that the General Assembly is expected to convene "within 10 working days of the casting of a veto by one or more permanent members of the Security Council... a debate on the situation as to which the veto was cast".

On 13 November, the Sudanese central authorities extended the authorisation for the Adre crossing at the Chad-Sudan border, allowing cross-border humanitarian operations to continue for an additional three months. On 22 November, the World Food Programme (WFP) announced a major scale-up in its operations in Sudan, with over 700 trucks delivering 17,500 tonnes of food aid to support 1.5 million people, including 14 high-risk "hotspots" facing severe food insecurity and risk of famine. On 22 November, the first aid convoy reached North Darfur's Zamzam camp, where famine was declared in August, marking the first delivery of assistance to the camp since the famine conditions were confirmed.

On 24 November, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Tom Fletcher travelled to Port Sudan in his first visit after assuming this role in mid-November. In his meetings with Sudanese authorities, he discussed ways to address constraints to the delivery of aid, the need to increase the presence of humanitarian personnel in areas worst affected by the hostilities to scale up the response, and how to increase the delivery of aid across borders and across conflict lines. Fletcher also visited Chad to meet with Sudanese refugees and the host communities, as well as local Chadian authorities and officials of the humanitarian agencies.

On 25 November, al-Burhan announced the decision to permit all relevant UN agencies to establish supply hubs in El Obeid in North Kordofan, Kadugli in South Kordofan, and Ad-Damazin in Blue Nile. The decision also allowed UN personnel to accompany aid convoys and oversee the distribution of humanitarian assistance.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

In a 5 November statement, several UN experts condemned the escalating violence against civilians in Sudan, as the ongoing conflict has driven the humanitarian crisis to catastrophic levels. The experts voiced deep concern over the systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war largely by the RSF, particularly in Al Jazira state and across conflict-affected regions. This widespread campaign of abuse, primarily targeting women and girls, includes rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and human trafficking, accompanied by extreme violence amounting to torture.

On 29 October, the Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Seif Magango, underscored Commissioner Volker Türk's deep concern

about escalating hostilities in Al Jazira state, which are further exacerbating the risk of attacks against civilians, ethnically motivated violence and atrocity crimes. The statement highlighted that on 25 October, at least 124 people were reportedly killed in an RSF attack on Al-Seriha village. This followed two other RSF assaults on the nearby towns of Tamboul and Rufaa. Reports suggest that hundreds of people were killed in Tamboul amid widespread looting. Additionally, there were at least 25 reported cases of sexual violence in several villages in Sharq Al-Jazira locality, including assaults on three medical personnel. The statement reiterated Türk's call on all parties to strictly adhere to their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, emphasising the critical need to protect civilians and prevent further atrocities. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix, over 340,000 people have been displaced from Al Jazira State to neighbouring states since the conflict re-escalated there on 20 October.

## 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. The levels of intercommunal violence and insecurity throughout the country are a related concern. In light of the continuing violence, the lack of implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, and the failure of mediation initiatives to achieve meaningful breakthroughs, Council members need to address several questions, including:

- how to bring the Sudanese warring parties to the negotiating table;
- how to protect civilians and enforce compliance with international humanitarian law;
- how to ensure accountability for past and ongoing crimes;
- how to stop the flow of arms into the country, fuelling the conflict, and
- how to mitigate the regional spillover effect of the conflict.

Council members could continue efforts to adopt a product that:

- strongly condemns the ongoing violence across the country and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure;
- demands an immediate and permanent cessation of hostilities;
- reiterates the Council's demand to the RSF to halt the siege of El Fasher;
- expresses deep concern about the dire humanitarian situation and urges the parties to the conflict to ensure rapid, safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access for the delivery of life-saving assistance for civilians in need;
- demands that all parties to the conflict ensure the protection of civilians, including by fully implementing the 11 May 2023 Jeddah declaration; and
- builds on the Secretary-General's recommendations for the protection of civilians, contained in his 21 October report, and expresses support for locally negotiated ceasefires and humanitarian pauses as well as for establishing a monitoring and verification mechanism in case of a ceasefire.

The US, as Council president for December, may consider holding a high-level briefing on Sudan, inviting inputs from DPPA and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Additionally, it may invite a Sudanese civil society representative to provide insights, among other things, on the critical protection challenges faced by civilians.

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## Sudan

Another option for Council members could be a visiting mission to Sudan in early 2025 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 Dynamics

The negotiations over the draft resolution proposed by the UK and Sierra Leone, and Russia's subsequent veto, unveiled critical divisions within the Security Council regarding the crisis. At the outset, members converged on the need to respond to the deteriorating security and humanitarian situations, although their positions were shaped by differing priorities and approaches to key issues. These disagreements were evident in discussions on protecting civilians, implementing ceasefire mechanisms, and addressing accountability for violations of international humanitarian law. (For background and more information, see the brief on Sudan in our November 2024 *Monthly Forecast* and 17 November *What's in Blue* story.)

In its 18 November explanation of vote, Russia argued that the draft resolution was based on what it perceived as “false understanding” as to who bears responsibility for protecting civilians in Sudan and for control and security of the country's borders, as well as who

has the authority to invite foreign forces and determine engagement with UN officials to address challenges and coordinate assistance. On the possibility of deploying an independent force in Sudan, it cautioned that proceeding without the consent of Sudanese central authorities, amid an active and widespread conflict could lead to negative consequences and undermine Sudan's trust in the UN. It rejected external accountability mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court, as ineffective and emphasised that justice should remain a sovereign prerogative of Sudan. Furthermore, Russia accused some countries of applying “double standards” by advocating ceasefires and civilian protection in Sudan while overlooking violations of international humanitarian law in Gaza.

The US accused Russia of months of obstruction and manipulation within the Council, and of advancing its own political objectives by playing both sides of the conflict. It also condemned Russia's inconsistency, noting that while it claims to support African nations, it voted against a resolution supported by African countries. Such actions, it argued, disregard the urgency of addressing the world's worst humanitarian crisis. In a broader critique, the US rejected Russia's accusations of hypocrisy, pointing to egregious violations of Ukrainian sovereignty and targeting of civilian infrastructure.

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## Somalia

### Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council is expected to renew the 2713 Al-Shabaab sanctions regime, including the provision for maritime interdiction, which expires on 15 December. In addition, the Council will decide on the mandate of the Panel of Experts supporting the 2713 Al-Shabaab Sanctions Committee, which expires on 15 January 2025.

The Council is also expected to decide on the successor mission to the African Union (AU) Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), whose mandate expires on 31 December. In line with resolution 2748 of 15 August, which most recently extended ATMIS' mandate, the Secretary-General, jointly with the AU Commission Chairperson, submitted his report on the overall design of the follow-on mission and a range of options for financing it, on 26 November. In a 13 November letter, the Secretary-General requested additional time to finalise consultations on the report, which was due by 15 November. Responding to this, the Council extended the deadline until 30 November.

### Key Recent Developments

On 2 October, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud convened a high-level meeting of the National Consultative Council (NCC), which brings together the leaders of the federal government of Somalia (FGS) and the federal member states (FMS) to advance the Somali government's priorities. (Puntland has not participated in the NCC meetings since January 2023, when it declared its intention

to act independently until the finalisation of a new Somali constitution.) During the meeting, the FGS presented its plan to implement universal suffrage for national and regional elections to end the indirect clan-based election system. The meeting ended in a stalemate, however, after Jubaland President Ahmed Madobe withdrew from the meeting, rejecting the FGS' plan in light of upcoming regional elections. (In July, Jubaland's parliament approved a constitutional amendment removing the two-term limit for the presidency.)

The NCC reconvened on 27 October without the participation of Jubaland and Puntland, concluding its session on 30 October. The communiqué adopted following the meeting established a single electoral committee under federal supervision and noted that a new electoral bill would be introduced in the parliament. It said that the NCC would schedule local elections for June 2025 and regional elections for September 2025.

In a 9 November statement, the FGS condemned Madobe's decision to appoint an electoral committee to organise indirect elections in Jubaland state. The statement asserted that the decision violates agreements reached between federal and regional leaders to unify national and regional elections, implement direct elections, and establish a single border and election commission. In response, on 10 November, Jubaland announced its decision to suspend working relations with the FGS, becoming the second FMS, after Puntland, to take such a step.

On 19 November, Somaliland's electoral commission declared

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON SOMALIA** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2748 (15 August 2024) extended the authorisation for ATMIS until 31 December. S/RES/2719 (21 December 2023) was related to the financing of AUPSOs. S/RES/2713 (1 December 2023) renewed for one year the sanctions regime on Al-Shabaab, including the authorisation for maritime interdiction to enforce the embargo on illicit arms imports, the charcoal exports ban, and the improvised explosive device components ban. Security Council Letter S/2024/751 (15 October 2024) was the progress report on the benchmarks set out in the 15 September 2022 technical assessment report. Sanctions Committee Document S/2024/748 (15 October 2024) was the final report of the Panel of Experts assisting the 2713 Al-Shabaab sanctions committee.

# Somalia

Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi of the Waddani Party as the winner of the presidential election, defeating incumbent Muse Bihi Abdi. (Somaliland is a self-proclaimed republic in northern Somalia.) The presidential elections had been delayed twice since 2022. Following the announcement of results, Somali President Mohamud reportedly expressed his commitment to reconciliation talks with Somaliland. The most recent round of discussions between Somalia and Somaliland concluded on 29 December 2023 in Djibouti. Those discussions, mediated by Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh, marked the first high-level engagement between the two parties since 2020. However, the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Ethiopia and Somaliland signed on 1 January significantly heightened regional tensions. 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 expected to complete its drawdown and exit. In October, President Mohamud visited the capitals of the other four ATMIS troop-contributing countries—Burundi, Djibouti, Uganda, and Kenya—and met with their respective heads of state to discuss their potential support for Somalia's security transition. However, he did not visit Ethiopia.

Amid strained relations with Ethiopia, Somalia has continued to strengthen its military ties with Egypt, which has offered to contribute to the elements of the follow-on mission to ATMIS. Media reports suggest that on 3 November Egypt delivered heavy weaponry to the Somali government in Mogadishu. This was the third delivery of military support since the two countries signed a defence cooperation agreement on 14 August. (For background and more information, see the brief on Somalia in our October 2024 *Monthly Forecast* and 2 October *What's in Blue* story.)

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 10 October, the Human Rights Council (HRC) adopted a resolution (A/HRC/RES/57/27) on providing assistance and capacity-building to Somalia in the field of human rights. The resolution expressed concern about the heightened risks of violence, abuse, and human rights violations faced by internally displaced persons, particularly vulnerable groups such as women, children, young people, persons with disabilities, and marginalised communities. It urged Somalia to end the culture of impunity by holding perpetrators accountable through prompt and thorough investigations and by committing resources to justice sector reforms.

On 7 October, Isha Dyfan, the Independent Expert on the human rights situation in Somalia, presented her report (A/HRC/57/80) to the HRC. She highlighted concerns about arbitrary arrests, detentions, and extrajudicial killings by Somali security forces. For instance, on 2 March, Somali police reportedly opened fire to disperse protesters from the Abgaal/Hawiye clan in Mogadishu, killing one man and injuring three women.

Dyfan also highlighted other issues, including the lack of accountability for human rights violations and significant weaknesses in Somalia's justice system. She recommended strengthening reconciliation mechanisms to mitigate clan violence, establishing a civilian casualty tracking system to enhance transparency, and improving women's access to justice by enforcing the 30 percent quota for women's representation in elected and administrative positions within the justice system.

## Sanctions-Related Developments

The 2713 Al-Shabaab Sanctions Committee held informal consultations on 11 October to receive a briefing from the Panel of Experts on its final report, dated 15 October. The report noted that Al-Shabaab remains the most significant threat to the peace and security of Somalia and that its ability to carry out complex attacks against the Somali

government, ATMIS, and international forces remains undiminished. The report highlighted that attacks on bases, diversion of weapons from the Somali National Army and ATMIS bases, spillovers from regional conflicts, and illicit trafficking networks remain the key sources of resupply for Al-Shabaab.

The Secretary-General released a report on 15 October that showed overall progress in achieving the indicators on the ten benchmarks in the Secretary-General's 15 September 2022 technical assessment report on Somalia's weapons and ammunition capacity had been incremental at the federal government level. It noted that an urgent challenge is extending the weapons and ammunition management frameworks, processes, and structures to the federal member state level, considering the different needs, priorities, and perspectives of each state. It added that countering the illicit flow of arms and ammunition into Somalia also remains a critical issue.

## Key Issues and Options

One of the key issues for Council members in December is the extension of the 2713 Al-Shabaab sanctions regime and the mandate renewal of the Panel of Experts supporting the committee. Members may draw on the findings of the 15 October progress report and the recommendations contained in the panel's 15 October final report. The likely option for Council members is to renew the measures outlined in resolution 2713 and extend the mandate of the Panel of Experts for another year.

An important issue for Council members is Somalia's security transition—the drawdown of ATMIS and the establishment of the follow-on mission, which is expected to assume responsibilities from 1 January 2025. A related issue is the financing for the follow-on mission, given the divergences among Council members on the possible funding options. At press time, members had just received the Secretary-General's report and were considering the various options. Members will need to make a decision ahead of ATMIS' mandate expiry on 31 December. If they are unable to agree to the post-ATMIS security arrangements by then, one option would be to extend ATMIS for a limited period of time.

Also, a pertinent issue is the escalating tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia, which may undermine regional peace and security, including Somalia's ongoing offensive operations against Al-Shabaab, and the ATMIS transition process. One option for Council members would be to issue a press statement encouraging the parties to exercise restraint and make efforts to de-escalate tensions, while expressing support for initiatives in this regard. Another option is for members to request a briefing in consultations from the Secretary-General on the potential for this situation to undermine Somalia's security transition and regional peace and security.

Another issue is how to continue supporting the Somali government in achieving its national priorities, including the constitutional review and electoral processes. Additionally, addressing the increasing tension between the federal government and some federal member states is a matter of concern for several Council members.

## Council and Wider 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, including the implementation of sanctions to degrade Al-Shabaab.

Although Council members agree on the need to provide security support for Somalia post-ATMIS, views differ on how such

# Somalia

efforts should be financed. Somalia, an incoming elected Council member for the 2025-26 term, and several current members have suggested financing the follow-on mission under resolution 2719 of 21 December 2023 on the financing of AU-led peace support operations (AUPSOs). However, other Council members, such as the US, are apparently not keen on this option. In its remarks at the 3 October Council briefing on Somalia, the US emphasised the importance of establishing the necessary mechanisms to effectively implement the framework outlined in resolution 2719. It cautioned against what it views as the “premature application” of this framework.

It appears that the US has produced a non-paper to explain its position. Apparently, it notes that the milestones outlined in the AU-UN joint roadmap for implementation of 2719 are not expected to be completed before mid-2025. (The roadmap was endorsed at the eighth annual AU-UN conference, convened on 21 October.) Against this backdrop, the US has proposed a two-year bridging mechanism to provide additional time to develop the 2719 framework and address budgetary and logistical challenges. This proposal, however, has elicited differing views. The UK appears to support the view that applying the 2719 framework in Somalia before the end of the year would be premature and has therefore supported the establishment of a bridging mechanism. It seems that the Council’s EU members (France, Malta, and Slovenia) are concerned that such a mechanism could imply additional obligations for financial contributors to ATMIS. The AU has apparently argued that resolution 2719

does not envisage a bridging mechanism.

Another area of debate is whether resolution 2719 could be applied exclusively to specific financing obligations or should be all-encompassing. Some Council members and the AU seem to be supportive of selective application of resolution 2719, such as for troop reimbursements, while continuing the logistics support for the follow-on mission through the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS), which is financed through UN-assessed contributions. It appears that the range of options for financing developed by the AU outlines a set of approaches through which resolution 2719 could be applied in Somalia. The US non-paper, on the other hand, apparently argues that support extended to AUPSOs under 2719 encompasses all categories of support, including logistics. (Please see this month’s *In Hindsight* for more information on the application of resolution 2719.)

Council members remain concerned about the escalating tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia. At the 3 October Council meeting, several members, including Slovenia, Switzerland, and the US, expressed deep concern over the increased tensions. In its remarks, the US stressed the need to ensure that regional strains do not disrupt the planning and deployment of a post-ATMIS mission. It cautioned against security gaps that could aggravate the humanitarian crisis and alluded to the additional costs associated with changes in troop contributors. (For background, see the brief on Somalia in our October *Monthly Forecast*.)

## Afghanistan

### Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council will convene for its quarterly open briefing on Afghanistan. Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Roza Otunbayeva; Ambassador Andrés Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) in his capacity as the chair of the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee; an official from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); and a representative of civil society are expected to brief. Closed consultations are scheduled to follow the briefing.

The Council is also scheduled to renew the mandate of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee in December.

UNAMA’s mandate expires on 17 March 2025.

### Key Recent Developments

Afghanistan continues to grapple with one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. According to OCHA’s September update, 23.7 million Afghans—approximately half of the country’s population—require humanitarian assistance. Despite the scale of the crisis, the Afghanistan Human Needs and Response Plan for 2024 remains critically under-resourced, with only 40 percent of the required

\$3.06 billion funded at the time of writing. OCHA’s October update notes that this shortfall has left 3.7 million people without access to healthcare services, impacted emergency housing for those left without shelter following floods and earthquakes, and affected the provision of food assistance.

The human rights situation in Afghanistan also remains dire, particularly for women and girls. UNAMA’s latest report on the human rights situation in the country, which covers July to September and was published on 1 November, notes that the Taliban have continued to impose restrictions on the freedom of movement of Afghan women and to deprive both women and girls of secondary and tertiary education. It also describes steps that Taliban officials have taken to implement the “Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice” since it was ratified in late August, such as sending letters instructing female staff of public hospitals to be accompanied by a male relative when travelling to and from work and deploying officials in different locations to monitor compliance. The Taliban have also continued to carry out public executions and publicly flog individuals accused of committing crimes.

Several UN officials have recently commented on the restrictions imposed on women and girls by the Taliban. On 23 September, Secretary-General António Guterres demanded that the

**UNDOCUMENTS ON AFGHANISTAN** Security Council Resolutions S/RES/2679 (16 March 2023) requested that the Secretary-General conduct and provide an independent assessment on Afghanistan. S/RES/2681 (27 April 2023) condemned the ban on Afghan women working for the UN and called on the Taliban to swiftly reverse the policies and practices that restrict the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls. S/RES/2721 (29 December 2023) requested the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Envoy on Afghanistan in consultation with a range of stakeholders, welcomed the Secretary-General’s intention to convene the next meeting of the group of Special Envoys and Special Representatives on Afghanistan, and encouraged the meeting to discuss the recommendations of the independent assessment on Afghanistan. S/RES/2727 (15 March 2024) extended the mandate of UNAMA until 17 March 2025.

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# Afghanistan

Taliban “remove all discriminatory restrictions against women and girls immediately”. In an 11 October statement marking the International Day of the Girl, Otunbayeva called on the Taliban to reverse their ban on educating girls over the age of 12, saying that “as each day passes, even greater damage is being done to the lives of women and girls. Afghanistan is being taken backwards, not forwards, in its quest for peace, recovery, and prosperity”.

In late September, Australia, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands announced that they had taken formal steps to call on Afghanistan to cease violating the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). On 26 September, 22 additional member states issued a joint statement expressing support for the initiative, which is being pursued under Article 29 of CEDAW. Pursuant to this provision, any dispute between parties to CEDAW regarding the interpretation or application of the Convention that is not settled by negotiation shall be submitted to arbitration and, if the parties cannot agree on the organisation of that arbitration within six months, they may refer it to the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Against this backdrop, the Taliban have continued to pursue greater engagement and closer relations with the international community. On 10 October, Uzbekistan accepted the credentials of a Taliban-appointed ambassador, becoming the third country to do so after China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Taliban officials have reportedly agreed on a “cooperation roadmap” with Kazakhstan aimed at boosting economic relations and increasing trade, and have also sought to participate in a recent BRICS summit and reiterated their interest in joining China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

Representatives of the Taliban attended the 29th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan from 11 to 22 November. The conference marked the first occasion that Taliban officials have participated in UN climate talks since August 2021, when the group returned to power.

On 3 September, Guterres announced the appointment of Georgette Gagnon as his new Deputy Special Representative (Political) for Afghanistan.

## Human-Rights Related Developments

In a 1 November statement, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan Richard Bennett warned that “the lack of a strong, cohesive response from the international community has already emboldened the Taliban”. He expressed deep concern about shrinking civic space; the situation of minorities, journalists, former government and security officials, judges, and lawyers in Afghanistan; the use of corporal and capital punishments; and credible allegations of sexual violence. He also urged the international community to adopt and implement a comprehensive human rights-centred action plan for managing the situation in Afghanistan.

In his latest report covering developments from January to August 2024, Bennett noted that the Taliban have “further entrenched and intensified their institutionalised system of gender oppression and exclusion of women and girls”, repressed civil society and the media, and disregarded principles of justice, non-discrimination, equality and the rule of law. The report calls on the Taliban to reverse their policies and practices that violate Afghanistan’s international obligations and urges states to ensure that normalisation of engagement with the Taliban is based on measurable and independently verified improvements in human rights. It also recommends that member states support the codification of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity.

## Key Issues and Options

The Taliban’s ongoing refusal to adhere to many of Afghanistan’s

international obligations, especially those concerning women and girls, is a major issue for the Council and directly undermines the recommendations set out in the report of the independent assessment on Afghanistan requested by resolution 2679 and the related Doha format. (For more information on the independent assessment, see our 27 November 2023, 8 December 2023, and 28 December 2023 *What’s in Blue* stories.) Council members could decide to hold a closed Arria-formula meeting with a representative of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) to receive an update on the independent assessment process and discuss possible next steps in light of the Taliban’s actions. Such a meeting could also give members an opportunity to ask questions about the working groups on the private sector and counter-narcotics that participants in the third Doha meeting agreed to establish. At the time of writing, it appears that the working group on counter-narcotics is scheduled to begin work shortly.

Extending the mandate of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee is another issue for Council members. The Council could choose to extend the mandate for another year without making any substantive changes, as it has generally done in recent years. The Council could also consider reviewing the 1988 Afghanistan sanctions regime more broadly. Apart from the humanitarian exception established by resolution 2615, the regime has not been updated since the Taliban seized power in August 2021. Such a review could analyse whether the regime is fit for purpose and whether it needs to be updated in light of current circumstances.

The threat of terrorism emanating from Afghanistan remains an issue. According to the latest report of the Monitoring Team assisting the 1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, which was issued on 22 July, there is heightened concern among member states regarding the threat posed by terrorist groups based in Afghanistan, particularly the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K)—ISIL’s Afghan affiliate—and Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Council members could hold an informal meeting with a counter-terrorism expert, which would give members a chance to discuss possible options for bolstering the Council’s efforts to manage this threat.

## Council Dynamics

While Council members are generally united in their desire to see a prosperous, peaceful Afghanistan free from terrorism and ruled by an inclusive government, they have been divided over how to achieve this goal.

Some members, including the P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and other like-minded states, have argued that the Taliban must adhere to international norms if they want to obtain international recognition and receive economic and development aid from the international community. Several of these members appear to favour maintaining pressure on the Taliban, particularly regarding their policies and practices that violate the rights of women and girls.

China and Russia, on the other hand, have contended that the international community should provide assistance to Afghanistan without linking it to other issues, such as human rights, and appear to prefer dialogue and engagement with the Taliban without any increased pressure. China has sent an ambassador to Kabul and, on

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# Afghanistan

30 January, became the first country to accept diplomatic credentials from a Taliban envoy. Beijing has emphasised, however, that it has not officially recognised the Taliban regime as Afghanistan's government. The Taliban recently attended the sixth meeting of the Moscow format consultations on Afghanistan in Russia, where Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov held a separate meeting with Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi. Russia has also reportedly decided to remove the Taliban from its list of designated terrorist organisations and has called on western countries to lift relevant sanctions.

The divisions among Council members were on display in late August when Japan, the penholder on the file, circulated a draft press statement criticising the “Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice”. While the draft press statement was supported by a majority of members, it was blocked by China and Russia. In opposing

the draft, both members apparently made several arguments, including that the law was an internal matter that was still being studied by UNAMA, that women's rights had already been mentioned in several Council products and that other issues also required attention, and that the press statement could jeopardise future engagement between the international community and the Taliban.

There are also different viewpoints among Council members regarding the implementation of the independent assessment on Afghanistan. China and Russia have emphasised the importance of taking the Taliban's views on the independent assessment into account and have questioned the added value of a UN Special Envoy. Other members, including the UK and the US, have previously expressed support for the recommendations of the independent assessment, including appointment of a UN Special Envoy.

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## UNDOF (Golan)

### Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council is expected to vote on a draft resolution renewing the mandate of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), which expires on 31 December. Ahead of the mandate renewal, an official from the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) is expected to brief Council members in closed consultations on the Secretary-General's latest 90-day report on UNDOF, due on 2 December, and the most recent developments.

### Background and Key Recent Developments

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

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 travelling across the ceasefire line.

The Secretary-General's most recent report on UNDOF's activities, dated 24 September, noted that the ceasefire between Israel and Syria generally held during the reporting period of 21 May to 20 August. It said, however, that violations of the 1974 agreement persisted, observing that the overall security situation in UNDOF's area of operations remained volatile, and raised concerns about the safety and security of the military and civilian personnel of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan (OGG)—comprised of military observers from the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO).

The report added that UNDOF maintained its assessment that UN personnel in its area of operations faced a significant threat from “explosive remnants of war, including unexploded ordnance and

mines, as well as a probable threat from localized violence, including the possible presence of sleeper cells of armed groups”. It further observed that although the security situation in the northern and central parts of UNDOF's area of operations on the Bravo side (Syrian Golan) generally remained calm, the southern sector continued to be volatile, with security incidents reportedly occurring within the area of limitation, including along UNDOF patrol routes in Syria's south-western Daraa Governorate.

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

The Golan has not been spared from the rising regional tensions, driven by the ongoing Israel-Hamas war that erupted on 7 October 2023, and the recent escalation of hostilities along the Israel-Lebanon border. These developments have heightened concerns about broader instability in the region, with the Golan experiencing increased security risks and the potential for spillover violence from neighbouring conflicts. On 3 October, a drone attack targeted an Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) base in the Golan, killing two IDF soldiers and injuring 24 others. While Israeli media reports have attributed the attack to the Iran-backed Islamic Resistance in Iraq, some reports have disputed this claim.

There have also been reports of instances in which missile strikes, allegedly conducted by Israel from the direction of the Golan, targeted locations around Damascus. In a 7 October letter to the president of the Security Council, Syria alleged that Israel conducted airstrikes on 1-2 October in the Mazzeh neighbourhood of Damascus, which killed six civilians and injured 12 others. On 5 November, Israeli airstrikes targeted areas south of Damascus, which it claimed belonged to Hezbollah, while Syria alleged that the strikes targeted civilian

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## UNDOF (Golan)

sites in the Sayeda Zeinab area and had caused some damage.

During the 23 October Council meeting on Syria, Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen said that the IDF has been carrying out some construction activity in the Golan in the vicinity of the area of separation. As part of this activity, UNDOF observed an Israeli battle tank and excavators cross the ceasefire line into the area of separation. Media reports suggest that the construction, which began in July, includes extensive earthworks and the building of trenches and embankments, with Israeli troops and equipment encroaching into the demilitarised zone.

### Key Issues and Options

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

Another key issue is the challenges the mission faces in carrying out its mandate amidst continuing violations of the 1974 agreement by the parties, such as the restrictions on the movement and access of UNDOF personnel. Since early March 2020, the IDF have restricted the movement of UNDOF and OGG personnel through the Alpha gate at the Quneitra crossing, requiring advance notice of the movement, thereby hindering the operational and administrative activities of the mission. The Secretary-General's 24 September report noted that the access restrictions imposed by the IDF have hampered the

progress on the reconstruction of UN observation post 52 on the Bravo side, in particular following the events of 7 October 2023.

A related concern is the ongoing hostilities in the region and the risk of a broader escalation. Members may consider issuing a press statement urging all parties to uphold international law and their obligations under the 1974 agreement. The statement could also express concern over the potential escalation stemming from these violations, the risks posed by localised violence, and the threat of spillover from neighbouring conflicts to the safety 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 co-penholders—Russia and the US—about who holds sovereignty over the Golan, as well as antagonism over other files such as Ukraine and Gaza, 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, 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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## UNOCA (Central Africa)

### Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council will hold a briefing and consultations on the Secretary-General's semi-annual report on the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the implementation of the UN's regional strategy to combat the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Special Representative and Head of UNOCA Abdou Abarry is expected to brief. The mandate of UNOCA expires on 31 August 2027.

### Key Recent Developments

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) held its Ordinary Summit on 18 October in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. The summit, among other things, considered reports on the political and security situation in the central African region, including the transition processes in Gabon and Chad. In this regard, the summit received reports from Faustin Archange Touadéra, President of the Central African Republic and the ECCAS Facilitator for the transition in the Gabonese Republic, and Félix Tshisekedi, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo and ECCAS Facilitator for the transition in the Republic of Chad, who was represented at the summit by his minister of regional integration.

Following the August 2023 coup in Gabon that led to the

overthrow of President Ali Bongo Ondimba, who had ruled the country since 2009, ECCAS suspended the country from all its activities. It also temporarily relocated the ECCAS headquarters from Libreville to Malabo. On 31 August 2023, the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) suspended Gabon from all activities and organs of the AU until constitutional order is restored.

The Gabonese transitional government has made serious efforts to show its commitment to restoring constitutional order. In November 2023, it announced plans to hold elections in August 2025 and convened a national dialogue in April in which more than 600 people participated, including opposition and civil society representatives. Several recommendations were submitted to the transitional government at the conclusion of the meeting, including a two-year transition period that could be extended for another 12 months under exceptional circumstances, and a seven-year presidential term, renewable once. At its ordinary summit, held in Equatorial Guinea on 9 March, ECCAS decided to lift the suspensions imposed on Gabon. The summit also instructed the ECCAS Commission President to undertake an advocacy mission to explain this decision to the AU and the UN.

Members of the AU Peace and Security Council visited Gabon from 12 to 14 September as part of their direct engagement with countries suspended from the AU because of unconstitutional

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON UNOCA Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2024/7** (1 November 2024) expressed the Council's full support for UNOCA. **Secretary-General's Report S/2024/420** (30 May 2024) was the semi-annual report on UNOCA. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9648** (10 June 2024) was a meeting on the situation in Central Africa.



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## UNOCA (Central Africa)

changes of government. In accordance with the communiqué adopted following the field visit, the AUPSC members reaffirmed their solidarity with the Gabonese authorities for “their commitment towards the completion of the transition process and the return to constitutional order in line with the adopted Transition Roadmap to be completed by August 2025”. On 16 November, Gabon conducted a referendum on a new constitution, which, according to provisional results, had widespread support from the population. In an 18 November press statement, the Chairperson of the AU Commission congratulated the Gabonese transitional government and people on the referendum, which is expected to pave the way for the return of constitutional order.

Chad conducted a presidential election in May, marking the conclusion of a transition period that began following the death of President Déby Itno in April 2021. Announcing the provisional election results, Chad’s electoral commission declared Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, the late president’s son, the winner with 61 percent of the vote. Chad is set to hold legislative, provincial, and municipal elections in December, marking the first such elections since 2011. However, elements of the Chadian opposition that have contested the outcome of the presidential election are threatening to boycott these elections.

On 28 October, 40 Chadian soldiers were killed in a terrorist attack targeting a military base located in Chad’s border region with Nigeria. Media reports indicate that Boko Haram, a terrorist group operating in the Lake Chad region, was behind the attack. Chad’s President Mahamat Idriss Déby reportedly threatened to withdraw from the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which was composed of forces from Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria that are fighting against the terrorist groups Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the Lake Chad Basin. Niger’s decision to suspend its participation in the MNJTF following the July 2023 coup in that country had already raised concerns about creating a security vacuum that could result in an upsurge in terrorist attacks. Déby apparently accused the MNJTF of failing to eliminate the security threats posed by terrorist groups.

Cameroon is set to hold presidential elections in February 2025. There has been anxiety and speculation about the health of the country’s long-serving president, Paul Biya, who marked 42 years in power in November because of his recent absence from the public eye. It appears that he was in Europe, where he reportedly spends much of his time. Many of his supporters are encouraging him to run for re-election. Religious leaders have called for his resignation, however, citing concerns about his age (91) and health, and have urged him to allow a new generation to assume leadership of the country. Cameroon continues to be plagued by violence in its Anglophone northwest and southwest regions.

### Key Issues and Options

The political and security situations in several parts of Central Africa continue to be key concerns for the Council. Council members are therefore likely to be interested in hearing Abarry’s assessment of transition processes and elections in the region. The recent

constitutional referendum in Gabon and the upcoming elections in Cameroon may be of particular interest to Council members. A possible option for the Council in December is to invite an ECCAS representative to provide additional insights into these situations based on the outcome of the recent ECCAS summit in Malabo.

The continued threat of terrorism in the Lake Chad basin remains a matter of serious concern. Council members recognise the important role played by MNJTF in fighting Boko Haram and ISWAP there. They will likely condemn the recent attack in Chad and underscore the need to continue supporting the MNJTF in neutralising these groups.

A related issue is how to address the root causes of the conflicts in the region. Council members continue to support the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin developed by the Lake Chad Basin Commission with the support of the AU and to call for expediting its implementation.

### Council and Wider Dynamics

Council members support a holistic regional approach to addressing the peace and security challenges in Central Africa, based on cooperation between UNOCA and the various regional mechanisms. Several members tend to underscore challenges in the region related to political transitions; humanitarian crises, including the rising number of refugees and internally displaced persons; the threats posed by terrorism and violent extremism; and the adverse effects of climate change.

The issue of unconstitutional changes of government remains contentious within the Security Council, with some members arguing that such changes do not always lead to instability. A more pressing concern, however, is the challenge faced by the AU and its regional mechanisms in addressing the rising tide of coups across the continent. In the case of the central African region, the Chadian transitional authorities have defied the AUPSC’s decision, barring them from standing in elections. The AUPSC appears to have refrained from reacting to the situation, which analysts warn could set a dangerous precedent for other transitional processes, including in Gabon, which is set to hold elections in August 2025, undermining the AU’s principles and norms on unconstitutional changes of government.

During the UNOCA mandate renewal in August, China and Russia apparently broke silence over the Secretary-General’s draft letter, which contained strong human rights and gender language. (UNOCA’s mandate was established and is renewed through an exchange of letters between the Secretary-General and the Security Council rather than through the adoption of a resolution). Eventually, Council members reverted to the Secretary-General’s 3 August 2021 letter that last renewed UNOCA’s mandate to achieve the necessary consensus.

Following UNOCA’s mandate renewal, Council members revived discussions on the UNOCA draft presidential statement, which they had been negotiating over the past three years but on which they were unable to agree, apparently because of differences on several issues, including references to climate change. Finally,

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## UNOCA (Central Africa)

after long and arduous negotiations, Council members agreed on the draft presidential statement in November, which expresses support for the regional office's work. (For more, see our 1 November

*What's in Blue* story.)

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

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

### Expected Council Action

As is customary in December, the outgoing chairs of the Council's subsidiary bodies are expected to provide a briefing on their experiences. The representatives of the five members completing their two-year terms on the Council at the end of 2024 and the subsidiary bodies they each chaired are:

- Ambassador Pedro Comissário Afonso (Mozambique)—the Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa;
- Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl (Switzerland)—the 1718 Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Sanctions Committee;
- Ambassador Vanessa Frazier (Malta)—the 1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict;
- Ambassador Andrés Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador)—the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee and the 1540 Committee (non-proliferation); and
- Ambassador Kazuyuki Yamazaki (Japan)—the 1970 Libya Sanctions Committee, the 2713 Al-Shabaab Sanctions Committee, and the Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions.

### Background

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

### Key Recent Developments

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

Ambassador Pedro Comissário Afonso (Mozambique) may highlight the work of the [Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa](#) in facilitating the annual consultative meeting between the Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council in the past two years. He may also mention the Working Group's contribution to facilitating discussions in May and July on the

implementation of resolution 2719 on the financing of AU-led peace support operations. Additionally, he may refer to the joint meeting with the Working Group on peacekeeping operations held in August to provide Council members with the opportunity to discuss the draw-down, reconfiguration and exit of UN peace operations.

As the chair of the [1718 DPRK Sanctions Committee](#), Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl (Switzerland) is likely to mention that the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the Committee expired on 30 April after Russia vetoed a resolution that would have extended the mandate in late March. She could also refer to the Committee's June 2023 decision to update its guidelines for obtaining exemptions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Ambassador Vanessa Frazier chaired two committees during Malta's Council term. Regarding the [1267/1989/2253 Islamic State in ISIL \(Da'esh\) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee](#), Frazier is likely to refer to the adoption of resolution 2734 of 10 June, which extended the mandates of the 1267 Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team and the Office of the Ombudsperson for another three years, until June 2027. Frazier could also mention the findings of the latest report of the 1267 Monitoring Team, which was issued on 22 July. Among other matters, the report indicates that there is heightened concern among member states regarding the threat posed by terrorist groups based in Afghanistan. It also says that contiguous territorial gains by ISIL affiliates in the Sahel have continued to threaten regional security and stability and notes that groups in West Africa have improved their coordination.

In briefing about the [Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict](#), Ambassador Frazier might highlight the unprecedented levels of violence perpetrated against children in armed conflict in the past year. In this regard, the Secretary-General's latest annual report on children and armed conflict, dated 3 June, documented 32,990 grave violations against children, of which 30,705 were committed in 2023 and 2,285 were committed earlier but verified in 2023. Frazier might emphasise that the conclusions issued by the Working Group play an important role in encouraging conflict parties to take concrete action aimed at preventing and ending violations against children. The Working Group has adopted conclusions on 11 country situations during Malta's two-year chairmanship. Frazier may stress the importance of the Working Group following up on the implementation of its conclusions, including through holding videoconference briefings with relevant UN Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMRs) and by conducting country visits. In this regard, Frazier may note that the Working Group travelled to Nigeria

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UN DOCUMENTS ON SUBSIDIARY BODIES Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9508 (14 December 2023) was a briefing of the outgoing chairs of the subsidiary bodies.

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

in July 2023. At the time of writing, the Working Group was scheduled to conduct a visit to Colombia in early December.

As part of his briefing, Ambassador Andrés Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) will cover the work of the [1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee](#). He might highlight the findings of the latest report of the Monitoring Team assisting the Committee, which was issued on 8 July. According to the report, member states remain concerned by the Taliban's ability to manage the threat posed by ISIL-K and are also worried about Al-Qaida's activities in the country.

Ambassador Montalvo has also chaired the [1540 Committee](#). He is expected to highlight the important role that resolution 1540 plays in the global non-proliferation architecture. (Adopted in 2004, resolution 1540 aims to prevent non-state actors from obtaining access to weapons of mass destruction and encourages enhanced cooperation in this regard.) He may refer to the importance of voluntary national implementation action plans, which are intended to help member states identify their priorities for implementing resolution 1540. During this year's annual briefing from the chairs of the counter-terrorism-related committees, Montalvo said that 38 states had submitted a total of 47 national implementation plans to the 1540 Committee. He added that nine states had designated their national points of contact to the Committee this year, bringing the total number to 155 countries. Montalvo is also likely to cover the Committee's outreach activities, such as the open briefing for member states mandated by resolution 2663 held on 9 and 10 October. (Resolution 2663 was adopted on 30 November 2022 and renewed the 1540 Committee's mandate for ten years.) In 2024, the Committee participated in 32 outreach events organised by member states and international, regional and subregional organisations and relevant civil society.

Ambassador Kazuyuki Yamazaki will speak about the three subsidiary bodies Japan has chaired. He may describe the [1970 Libya Sanctions Committee](#)'s continued work in support of the Council's overall objective of securing peace and stability in Libya, including through sustained engagement with the Libyan Investment Authority about the possible reallocation of the fund's investments. Yamazaki may also offer his reflections on the upcoming renewal of the sanctions measures and the mandate of the Panel of Experts assisting the Committee, which is expected to take place in January 2025.

Ambassador Yamazaki may also describe his experience serving as the chair of the [Al-Shabaab Sanctions Committee](#) established pursuant to resolution 2713 (2023). He may note that the Committee met four times in informal consultations this year, including a meeting on 11 October to deliberate on the Panel of Experts' final report, which was circulated to Council members on 25 October. The report noted that Al-Shabaab remains the most significant threat to the peace and security of Somalia and that its ability to carry out complex attacks against the Somali government, ATMIS, and international forces remains undiminished. Of the 18 recommendations provided in the report, 15 are under Committee consideration. Yamazaki is also likely to highlight the Committee's decision to add three individuals to its sanctions list on 21 May.

Japan has also been the chair of the [Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions \(IWG\)](#) since

1 January 2024. As part of his briefing, Ambassador Yamazaki is expected to cover the activities of the IWG over the last year. The IWG held formal meetings every four months or so, holding three meetings so far in 2024. Yamazaki is expected to brief on the progress made in updating Note 507 (this is the note of the Security Council containing the compendium of its working methods) to incorporate the presidential notes adopted since 2017. Members continue to negotiate the draft updated Note 507, and at press time it was unclear when the IWG would adopt the revised Note 507. Kazuyuki may also cover the debate on working methods held during Japan's presidency in March, which focused on the implementation of Note 507.

### Council Dynamics

The divide over sanctions is particularly stark between the P3 (France, the UK, and the US) and others, on the one hand, and China, Russia, and African countries, on the other. The P3 often maintain that measures like arms embargoes and targeted sanctions, such as asset freezes and travel bans, are essential for mitigating violence and supporting the implementation of peace agreements. In contrast, China, Russia, and African members of the Council acknowledge sanctions as a useful tool but criticise cases where sanctions remain in place for years without adjustments to account for progress. Russia and others have also accused Western countries of downplaying the humanitarian impacts of both Security Council sanctions and those imposed outside the UN context.

In the past two years, the Council's discussions on sanctions have been particularly challenging when major powers have strategic interests at stake. In March, negotiations to renew the mandate of the Panel of Experts of the 1718 DPRK Committee were long and contentious, with Russia advocating for annual renewals of the sanctions regime and China proposing changes including reduced reporting frequency—several of which other members found unacceptable. The draft resolution that would have extended the mandate of the Panel ultimately failed to pass due to Russia's veto.

Several other sanctions-related draft resolutions also failed to achieve unanimous adoptions. On 31 May, a resolution extending the authorisation for inspecting vessels on the high seas off the coast of Libya for an additional 12 months received six abstentions from Algeria, China, Guyana, Mozambique, Russia, and Sierra Leone. On 10 June, Russia abstained on a resolution reviewing and extending sanctions targeting ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida. Resolution 2731 of 30 May, which renewed the South Sudan sanctions regime until 31 May 2025, was also adopted with a vote of nine in favour and six abstentions (Algeria, China, Guyana, Mozambique, Russia, and Sierra Leone). However, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2745 of 30 July, lifting the arms embargo on the Central African Republic (CAR). The Security Council unanimously adopted resolutions renewing the sanctions regime on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, and Haiti for one year.

At the time of writing, the new appointments of chairs for the Council's subsidiary bodies for 2025 had not been finalised. After the annual Security Council elections were moved forward from October to June in 2016, there have been significant changes in

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

how chairs of the Council's subsidiary bodies are appointed. In July 2016, Council members agreed on a presidential note concerning the preparation of newly elected members during the transitional period between the election and the beginning of their term, including the selection and preparation of chairs of subsidiary bodies. The note established a more consultative process for the chairs' appointment, co-led by a permanent member and the chair of the IWG, and stipulated that the appointments should be completed by 1 October. That deadline has so far never been met, although in 2023, members were able to agree by mid-October. The Council

agreed on a presidential note on 21 August 2023 (S/2023/615) that if the appointment of chairs and vice chairs have not been agreed to by before 1 January, "as a contingency measure, the responsibilities of Chairs of all of the subsidiary bodies of the Council during the month of January shall devolve to the President for the month of January". While the permanent members hold the pen on most sanctions mandate renewals, elected members chair all sanctions committees and other formal and informal subsidiary bodies of the Council. Elected members have called for permanent members to share the responsibility of chairing these bodies.

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### Libya

#### Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council will hold its bimonthly briefing on the situation in Libya. Deputy Special Representative and Political Officer in Charge of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Stephanie Koury will brief the Council on recent political, security, and humanitarian developments in the country and on the Secretary-General's most recent report on UNSMIL. 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. The parties remain deadlocked over proposed legislation to hold national elections that would reconcile the country's divided government. A key 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 prolonged stalemate between the rival governments—which has persisted since the indefinite postponement of the 2021 elections—is a root cause of Libya's political, security, and economic instability.

In August and September, the stand-off further escalated due to a dispute between the GNU and GNS over the leadership of the Central Bank of Libya (CBL)—the country's sole depository for public revenues and one of the few state institutions servicing both governments. The disagreement, which affected Libya's domestic oil production and access to foreign currencies, was eventually settled through an UNSMIL-mediated process that led to an agreement on compromise candidates to lead the bank. In a 9 October press statement, Council members welcomed the agreement, called on the parties to take steps toward establishing a unified national budget

to ensure the stability of Libya's financial system, and reiterated their support for a Libyan-led and Libyan-owned political process to enable the holding of free and fair elections "as soon as possible". On 21 October, the HoR formally approved the CBL's new board of directors, which held its first meeting on 10 November.

While the country's rival governments remain deadlocked over national elections, Libya's High National Election Commission (HNEC) organised the first round of municipal elections on 16 November. Polls were held in 58 municipalities, with voter participation reaching 74 percent. In remarks that day at HNEC's headquarters, Koury described the elections—which were the first since 2014 to be held simultaneously across the western and eastern parts of the country—as a "significant milestone in Libya's journey toward democracy" that "showcases the potential for a peaceful transition of power". The second round of elections for an additional 58 municipalities is expected to take place in January 2025.

Regarding Libya's security situation, the 2020 ceasefire agreement continues to hold, although recent political tensions raised concern about the risk of violent confrontation. Notably, during the CBL stand-off, rival militias in Tripoli mobilised in support of both sides of the dispute, prompting both UNSMIL and Security Council members to issue press statements, dated 22 August and 28 August, respectively, calling on Libyan leaders to refrain from the use or threat of force, exercise restraint, and de-escalate tensions. During a 17 October meeting of the Security Working Group of the International Follow-Up Committee of the Berlin Process—the UN-supported negotiation track that facilitated the 2020 ceasefire agreement—Koury proposed establishing a "formal joint deconfliction/communication mechanism within Libya" to "help to ensure that 'misunderstandings' do not threaten peace, security and lives".

On 31 October, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2755, extending UNSMIL's mandate for three months, until 31 January 2025, with a "further automatic extension" of an additional nine months, until 31 October 2025, if a new Special Representative and head of UNSMIL has been appointed by 31 January 2025. The leadership position has been vacant since May when then-Special Representative Abdoulaye Bathily stepped down. (For

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON LIBYA** Security Council Resolution S/RES/2755 (31 October 2023) extended UNSMIL's mandate for three months, until 31 January 2025, with a "further automatic extension" of an additional nine months, until 31 October 2025, if a new Special Representative and head of UNSMIL has been appointed by 31 January 2025. **Security Council Press Statement SC/15848** (9 October 2024) welcomed the agreement reached between Libyan actors on the Central Bank of Libya and its endorsement by the House of Representatives and High State Council.

# Libya

more information on resolution 2755, see our 30 October *What's In Blue* story.)

On 19 November, the International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor, Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, gave his biannual briefing to the Council on the ICC's Libya-related activities. The meeting followed the court's 4 October decision to unseal arrest warrants for six individuals allegedly affiliated with the Al Kaniyat militia, which controlled Tarhuna—a city of approximately 150,000 people located 90 kilometres southeast of Tripoli—from 2015 to 2020. In his briefing, which he delivered virtually from Libya, Khan requested the support of national authorities and the international community in executing the arrest warrants to bring the charged individuals to justice and indicated that his office was preparing to file warrants for additional individuals before his next Council briefing in May 2025. He also detailed progress that the court has made on its roadmap to transition from the investigative phase to the judicial phase of its activities in the country by the end of 2025.

## Key Issues and Options

Supporting political momentum towards national elections to unify Libya's divided governments remains the key issue for the Security Council. In this context, an important objective for the Council is to help foster common political ground between the country's rival governments to reach an inclusive agreement on electoral laws, including the possible establishment of a unified interim government to organise the elections.

Council members could consider holding a closed Arria-formula meeting with representatives of the rival governments for a frank discussion on potential ways to break the longstanding political impasse.

Another option in the future would be for the Council to undertake a visiting mission to Libya to get a better understanding of the situation on the ground to inform its decision-making. The Council has not visited Libya in the post-Cold War period, despite the Council's significant engagement on this file in recent decades and the deployment of UNSMIL in the country since 2011.

Another issue for the Council is the appointment of a new Special Representative and Head of UNSMIL. Filling this position is an important condition for maintaining the credibility and effectiveness

of the UN's mediation role in Libya, in part because resolution 2755 made a full one-year renewal of the mission's mandate contingent on the appointment. Council members have urged the Secretary-General to take swift action on this issue, although positions diverge on the appropriate candidate for the position, which has delayed the appointment process.

## 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 recent extension of UNSMIL's mandate in the absence of a Special Representative rekindled 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. During negotiations on this year's renewal under similar circumstances, Russia again opposed a one-year extension, referring to the previous short-term extensions as precedent. This resulted in the compromise solution whereby resolution 2755 renewed the mandate for a three-month period that may be automatically extended by an additional nine months upon the appointment of a new Special Representative.

More broadly, geopolitical tensions also influence Council dynamics with respect to Libya. The US and other Western members remain concerned about Russia's growing presence in the eastern part of the country that is under Haftar's control, while Russia routinely blames Libya's current instability on the NATO-led military intervention in 2011 and accuses Western countries of seeking to exploit Libya's oil reserves for economic gain.

The UK is the penholder on Libya.

# Iran

## Expected Council Action

In December, the Security Council is expected to convene a briefing on the Secretary-General's biannual report on the implementation of resolution 2231 of 20 July 2015, which endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme.

The Council will also receive reports from its 2231 facilitator, Ambassador Vanessa Frazier (Malta), and the Joint Commission, which was established to oversee the implementation of the JCPOA and comprises the current parties to the agreement: China, France, Germany, Russia, the UK, and Iran. Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo, Frazier, and

a representative of the European Union (EU) in its capacity as coordinator of the Joint Commission are expected to brief the Council.

## Background

In May 2018, then-US President Donald Trump announced that the US, which was originally a signatory to the JCPOA, was withdrawing from the agreement and went on to impose unilateral sanctions on Iran. Although Iran formally remained in the JCPOA, it took steps that directly contravene its terms, including enriching uranium to levels beyond the JCPOA-mandated limits and removing cameras and monitoring equipment required by the agreement.

**UN DOCUMENTS ON IRAN** Security Council Resolution S/RES/2231 (20 July 2015) endorsed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran. **Secretary-General's Report S/2024/471** (19 June 2024) was the Secretary-General's biannual report on the implementation of resolution 2231.

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## Iran

In August 2020, referring to those violations, the US tabled a draft Security Council resolution that would have indefinitely extended the arms-related restrictions on Iran that were set to expire later that year under resolution 2231. After the draft resolution failed to garner the requisite number of votes for adoption, the US claimed that it had triggered the “snapback mechanism”, which is a provision in resolution 2231 that allows any party to the agreement to reinstate the UN sanctions against Iran that were in place prior to the JCPOA. Other Council members argued that this move was invalid because of the US withdrawal from the agreement, however.

Following the election of current US President Joseph Biden, the US, Iran, and other parties to the JCPOA began talks in April 2021 in Vienna to revive the agreement. Those discussions progressed until August 2022, when the EU circulated what it described as a final draft agreement. Iran reportedly insisted as a condition for accepting the deal that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) close its investigation into traces of enriched uranium that it had discovered at three undeclared sites in Iran in 2019. The US and European parties to the JCPOA objected to this demand, which they viewed as a separate issue related to Iran’s obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the country’s NPT Safeguards Agreement, which every non-nuclear NPT state party is required to conclude with the IAEA to ensure that its nuclear activities are for peaceful purposes. In a November 2022 resolution, the IAEA Board of Governors censured Iran and directed it to comply with the IAEA’s investigation. In response, Iran announced that it had started enriching uranium to 60 percent purity at its Fordow nuclear facility, approaching the roughly 90 percent level required to produce a nuclear weapon and well above the 3.67 percent limit imposed by the JCPOA.

With negotiations to revive the JCPOA stalled, Iran has continued to expand its production of highly enriched uranium and its cooperation with the IAEA has grown increasingly strained. After the IAEA’s February 2023 quarterly verification and monitoring report said that the agency had detected traces of uranium enriched to 83.7 percent at the Fordow facility—a near weapons-grade level that Iran claimed was accidental—the IAEA and the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran issued a 4 March 2023 joint statement permitting the IAEA to conduct additional “verification and monitoring activities”, but little progress has been made since then in implementing those commitments. Additionally, in September 2023, Iran withdrew the designation of several IAEA inspectors assigned to conduct verification activities in Iran under the NPT Safeguards Agreement.

### Key Recent Developments

At its June quarterly meeting, the IAEA Board of Governors adopted a new resolution censuring Iran, put forward by France, Germany, and the UK (known within the Joint Commission as the “E3” countries). Referring to the above disputes, the resolution called on Iran to fulfil its NPT-required safeguards obligations, implement the 4 March 2023 joint statement, and re-certify IAEA inspectors, among other actions.

The IAEA’s most recent verification and monitoring report, dated 19 November, documented a further increase in Iran’s uranium stockpiles. It estimated that the country held a total of 182.3 kilograms of 60-percent enriched uranium, an increase of 17.6

kilograms from the agency’s previous report and enough to reduce the country’s “breakout capacity”—the amount of time that it would take to produce enough fissile material for one nuclear weapon—to “one week or less”, according to a 21 November technical analysis of the IAEA’s findings by the non-partisan Institute for Science and International Security. However, the IAEA report also noted that during high-level discussions between the agency and Iran in mid-November, Iranian officials discussed the possibility of halting the country’s production of 60-percent enriched uranium and later took preparatory steps to do so at two of the country’s nuclear facilities.

In a joint statement at the November meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors, the E3 described Iran’s proposed concession as “long overdue” yet still insufficient and called on Iran to also “immediately dispose” of its existing stockpile of highly enriched uranium and to comply with its obligations under the NPT, JCPOA, and 4 March 2023 joint statement. The E3 then introduced another resolution censuring Iran, which referred to the country’s “continued failure” to cooperate with the IAEA and requested the agency to produce a “comprehensive and updated assessment on the possible presence or use of undeclared nuclear material in connection with past and present outstanding issues regarding Iran’s nuclear programme”. The resolution was adopted with 19 votes in favour, three against (Burkina Faso, China, and Russia), and 12 abstentions.

On 28 July, Masoud Pezeshkian assumed office as President of Iran, following elections to succeed former president Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a 28 May helicopter crash. A former surgeon and lawmaker who is considered a political moderate, Pezeshkian has expressed greater interest than his predecessor in resuming nuclear talks with the West. In his 24 September address at the general debate of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly, he said that his country was “ready to engage” on the issue, and that “[i]f JCPOA commitments are implemented fully and in good faith, dialogue on other issues can follow”. In response to the November resolution adopted by the IAEA Board of Governors, however, Iranian officials announced that they would launch a new series of advanced centrifuges, which would further increase the country’s enrichment capacity. It remained unclear at the time of writing whether Iranian authorities still intended to implement their commitment to halt production of 60-percent enriched uranium.

While JCPOA negotiations remain dormant, continued regional fall-out from the Israel-Hamas war has sharply raised geopolitical tensions and further weakened prospects for reviving the deal. In April, Iran and Israel engaged in direct military confrontation for the first time when Iran launched drone and missile strikes against Israel in response to the latter’s bombing of the Iranian consulate in Damascus. Israel retaliated by striking an air defence battery in Iran. Subsequently, following Israel’s assassinations of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran in July and Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut in September, Iran conducted another attack against Israel on 1 October, launching approximately 200 ballistic missiles at the country, most of which were intercepted by Israeli and US air defence systems. On 25 October, in retaliation for that assault, Israel launched airstrikes that hit Iranian missile manufacturing plants and air defence systems, as well as an undeclared nuclear research facility, according to media reports.

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# Iran

The Security Council held meetings on 14 April, 2 October, and 25 October to discuss the exchange of attacks.

## Human Rights-Related Developments

On 1 November, Mai Sato, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, presented her first report to the Third Committee of the General Assembly, identifying three priority areas for her mandate: transparency, gender, and the right to life. Sato emphasised her commitment to adopting a gendered and intersectional approach in assessing the human rights of all Iranians. She also voiced concern over the state's response to the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement and over the Bill to Support the Family by Promoting the Culture of Chastity and Hijab. Regarding the right to life, she stated that her examination would focus on "not only the use of the death penalty, but also on the lethal use of force by State agencies, deaths in custody, laws that condone or excuse the killings, and practices that fail to properly investigate potential unlawful deaths". The Special Rapporteur called on Iran to engage in direct communications and grant her unhindered access to the country.

In a 13 September press release, the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) on Iran warned that the Iranian government had escalated its suppression of the fundamental rights and activism of women and girls—two years after the unlawful death in custody of 22-year-old Jina Mahsa Amini sparked the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement. The FFM stated that security forces had intensified entrenched patterns of physical violence, "including beating, kicking, and slapping women and girls who are perceived as failing to comply with the mandatory hijab laws".

On 2 September, UN experts raised alarm over a surge in executions in Iran, with at least 93 individuals executed in August—double the 45 executions reported in July. The experts noted that 41 of these executions were for drug offences, contravening international standards that limit the use of the death penalty to the "most serious crimes". They urged Iran to immediately stop the execution of individuals sentenced to death.

## Key Issues and Options

As the prospects for reviving the JCPOA grow increasingly remote, the key issue for the Security Council is how to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Analysts have suggested that Iran's actions since the US withdrawal from the agreement, including its uranium enrichment activities, are likely to make a return to the original terms of the agreement and full compliance with those terms difficult. This is in part because of the institutional knowledge acquired by Iran's nuclear programme and the IAEA's diminished monitoring capabilities, which prevent it from establishing a new baseline against which to measure compliance with a future agreement. The Iranian

government's apparent support for Hamas in Gaza and the Russian war effort in Ukraine have also made reviving the JCPOA politically difficult—if not impossible—for Western countries.

In this context, it appears that a scaled-back deal offering Iran more limited sanctions relief in exchange for more modest restrictions on its nuclear activities may be the most plausible negotiated option currently under consideration by JCPOA parties.

Alternatively, if Council members decide that no agreement is viable, they could initiate the snapback mechanism. The P3 countries—France, the UK, and the US under President Biden—have typically maintained that their "red line" for initiating the snapback is the detection of weapons-grade uranium in Iran, but that calculus may change if geopolitical tensions continue to rise and as the October 2025 expiration of the JCPOA approaches.

The comprehensive report on Iran's nuclear activities requested by the IAEA Board of Governors at its November meeting could inform Council members' decision on whether to pursue a new agreement or initiate the snapback.

## Council Dynamics

The P3 and other Western countries remain concerned about Iranian activities that contravene the JCPOA, the country's lack of cooperation with the IAEA, and what they consider to be its destabilising support for its proxy groups in the Middle East and for Russia in Ukraine. While these countries assert that they remain committed to a negotiated deal if Iran takes steps to alter its behaviour, Western unity could fracture upon Trump's return as US president next year, as his administration may be less willing than the current one to consider diplomatic efforts to curb Iran's nuclear activities.

China and Russia, for their part, remain supportive of Iran. Both countries have previously blamed the US for the collapse of the JCPOA, criticising it for withdrawing from the deal and imposing unilateral sanctions on the Iranian regime. They have also consistently voted against the censure resolutions adopted by the IAEA Board of Governors.

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# West Africa and the Sahel

## Expected Council Action

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

## Key Recent Developments

Simão's latest briefing to the Council on the situation in West Africa was on 12 July. During the session, he expressed concern about rising insecurity and humanitarian crises in West Africa, as well as a lack of cooperation among countries in the region to address these challenges. He referred in particular to the difficult relations

between some countries in the region and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In this regard, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger—three countries led by military juntas that came to power through coups d'état—created the Alliance of Sahel States or l'Alliance des États du Sahel (AES) in September 2023 and jointly announced on 28 January that they were withdrawing from ECOWAS. The decision reflected deteriorating relations between the three countries and ECOWAS in recent years, as the regional bloc sought to pressure military authorities to restore constitutional order. On 6 July, the leaders of the three AES countries convened in Niamey for their first summit, during which they signed a treaty designed to strengthen military and economic ties among them.

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**UN DOCUMENTS ON WEST AFRICA AND THE SAHEL** Security Council Presidential Statement S/PRST/2024/3 (24 May 2024) welcomed the appointment in May 2023 of Special Representative Leonardo Santos Simão, highlighted the importance of addressing the underlying conditions conducive to terrorism; and underscored the importance of the timely, nationally owned transition process and restoration of constitutional order in concerned regional countries. **Security Council Meeting Record S/PV.9685** (12 July 2024) was a meeting record on "Peace consolidation in West Africa".

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## West Africa and the Sahel

Terrorist attacks continue to undermine stability in the Sahel. According to Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), a non-profit research organisation which gathers and assesses data on political violence globally, reported fatalities across the AES countries reached a record-high 7,620 in the first half of 2024—an increase of 9% compared to the same period in 2023, 37% compared to 2022, and a staggering 190% compared to 2021. The AES countries are also losing large swaths of territories to terrorist groups. This appears to be the case in the Malian regions of Gao and Mena-ka and in Burkina Faso, which has reportedly lost almost half of its territory to terrorist groups. Al-Qaida affiliate Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) killed approximately 200 people in Barsalogo, Burkina Faso, on 24 August. On 17 September, JNIM attacked a police academy and the international airport in Bamako, Mali, killing scores of people. Council members condemned these attacks in Burkina Faso and Mali in press statements issued on 29 August and 20 September, respectively. At least seven military personnel from Russia's Africa Corps reportedly died in clashes with JNIM in central Mali on 22 November.

Mali continues to face political instability. On 20 November, President Assimi Goïta, Mali's military leader, fired his prime minister, Choguel Kokalla Maïga, following a 16 November speech in which Maïga criticised the government for postponing the holding of elections to return Mali to democratic rule. Goïta appointed Major General Abdoulaye Maïga as the new prime minister on 21 November. Some analysts see the appointment of General Maïga, a Goïta ally unrelated to his predecessor, as a sign that the military is consolidating its control over the country. Issa Kaou N'Djim, a Malian politician, was detained on 13 November after he claimed that the military leaders in neighbouring Burkina Faso had fabricated evidence of a failed coup attempt in that country. He was reportedly charged with disparaging the leader of a foreign state.

On 25 May, Burkina Faso's military leaders extended the country's transition to civilian government by an additional five years, starting on 2 July 2024, following a national consultation in Ouagadougou—which most political parties boycotted. When the head of the country's military junta, Captain Ibrahim Traoré, took power in a September 2022 coup, he had promised to return Burkina Faso to civilian rule by 1 July 2024.

In keeping with Niger's announcement in March that it was ending its military cooperation with the US, the US completed the withdrawal of its 1,100 military personnel in Niger in mid-September. The US had operated two airbases in the country, conducting counter-terrorism operations. At the same time, the Nigerien government has established military ties with Moscow, with Russian forces arriving in Niamey in April.

On 7 July, the possibility of deploying a regional counter-terrorism force was discussed during the ECOWAS summit in Abuja. In this regard, the summit directed the President of the ECOWAS Commission to consult with the AU, particularly within the framework of resolution 2719 (on financial support for AU peace support operations through UN-assessed contributions) and the outcomes of the review conducted by the Issoufou panel that was launched in 2022 to conduct a strategic assessment of "the underlying challenges in the Sahel". Subsequently, the panel's report and recommendations

were considered by the UN-AU High-Level Conference in Addis Ababa on 21 October, where the two organisations agreed to jointly advance the panel's key recommendations through their respective organs and institutional mechanisms.

### Key Issues and Options

The threat of terrorism in West Africa and the Sahel region is a key issue. There seems to be growing concern about the stability of the AES countries in the face of terrorist groups intensifying their attacks and expanding control of territories. There is also the risk that Sahel-based terrorist groups will expand into coastal West African states. How the Council might support counter-terrorism security mechanisms—such as the AES, the Accra Initiative, and the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad basin—to counter this threat is a key issue.

The political transitions and restoration of constitutional order in Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger is another key issue, as is the region's surge in attempted coups d'état.

Addressing structural conflict drivers in the Sahel, such as poor governance, under-development, and climate change, through the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) or other avenues remains a key issue.

The humanitarian situation in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin and violations against civilians by Sahel countries' militaries also remain significant concerns.

One option for the Council would be to request a briefing from the Secretary-General on options for enhancing security in the Sahel region. This could include, for example, proposals for the deployment of an AU peace support operation largely funded through resolution 2719 or developing a mechanism for the provision of logistical and operational support for regional counter-terrorism initiatives (such as the Accra Initiative or the Multinational Joint Task Force in the Lake Chad Basin). The Secretary-General could convey to Council members the contents of the report of the Independent High-level Panel on Security, Governance and Development in the Sahel (that is, the Issoufou Panel), which focuses on strategies for tackling security and development challenges in the Sahel. The report has been shared with the UN Secretariat, but Council members have not had access to it.

Council members could also consider holding a closed Arria-formula meeting or an informal interactive dialogue with ECOWAS representatives to discuss strategies for how the Council can most effectively collaborate with this sub-regional body to enhance security in West Africa and the Sahel.

Given that the Council meets less frequently on the Sahel region since the closure of the UN Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the termination of the Mali sanctions regime in 2024, another option is for members to request ad hoc briefings when developments in the Sahel warrant Council attention.

### Council Dynamics

There is broad concern in the Council about the threat of terrorism and the dire humanitarian crises affecting West Africa and the Sahel. However, Council discussion on this region has become increasingly divisive in recent years. The US and European members are worried



## West Africa and the Sahel

about Russia's growing influence in the region and its ties with the military juntas. While Russia supports the views of the AES states in the Council, several members are troubled by the unconstitutional changes of government in the region. Sierra Leone, a West African country, is among those members who believe it is important for the Council to maintain attention to the region, including how it might support regional efforts to prevent terrorist violence from expanding into coastal countries.

Sierra Leone and Switzerland are co-penholders on UNOWAS.

### Security Council Report Staff

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**Design** Point Five, NY

**Security Council Report**  
711 Third Avenue, Suite 1501  
New York NY 10017

**Telephone** +1 212 759 9429  
**Web** [securitycouncilreport.org](https://securitycouncilreport.org)

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